

Monday 10 March 2025 online talk

Tanya Bentham – Medieval Embroidery for the 21st Century

This talk about Medieval Embroidery showcases Tanya's passion for embroidery and the historical imagery found in manuscripts, textiles and paintings and her skill in capturing the cartoon style found in medieval art. She has taught herself to replicate the maidens, knights and dragons and other animals, incorporating these with humorous story-telling and in the style of Wallace and Gromit. She replaces historic symbols with contemporary items and juxtaposes figures with comic intent, resulting in risqué compositions.



Tanya has an unusual delivery style, showing viewers around her studio by moving her computer from place to place and enabling some close-up views of her stitching whilst describing methods



and uses of underside couching and split stitch, commonly found in Opus Anglicanum examples (English work). Images were often rather blurred, but it was good to see the embroidery in detail. She also explores laid and couched work, rejecting the name Bayeux stitch because it suggests that it was only used to stitch the Bayeux Tapestry. It has wider uses than that.

She has a detailed knowledge of all things Medieval, and references actual pieces often drawn from 13th and 14th century art. She has developed stitches from medieval sources and experimented with types of silk and gold in order to discover how the textile would have looked at that time. She explained that underside couching created subtle patterns in the backgrounds and the technique provided a flexible textile whilst silk filament reflected light and gave sheen to the surface of the stitching. She uses only natural dyed threads and fabric in line with that used during Medieval times and limits her colour palette to madder, woad, indigo, walnut and cochineal. White is always unbleached.

During her talk Tanya mentioned many historical works that have inspired her but unless one has detailed knowledge of medieval embroidery, with images in mind, many would not be familiar or memorable.

This was a spirited talk, delivered at pace and with humour, showing a lifetime of stitched work based solidly in knowledge and research. It demonstrated what can be achieved with due diligence and continuous grafting.



Tanya Bentham <https://www.opusanglicanumembroidery.com/>

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