

# Possum News

The Quarterly Newsletter for Kurrara Designs



July 2016: Issue #3

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## Introduction to Possum News

*Hi Everyone,*

*I hope this newsletter finds you well and keeping the winter chills at bay. I've been spending the last few weeks outside in my garden and studio, dyeing fabrics for the upcoming Peninsula Quilters Patchworkers Quilt-In next month.*

*Trying to launder and mordant fabrics and threads in bulk is much more tricky in the winter, as everything takes longer to dry, but so far so good. I'm happy with my naturally-dyed fabrics, threads and ribbons (some of which are shown above) and I'm very excited to see how my Procion MX dyed fat quarters and printed panels come out when they get their final washing and pressing. More details on dyeing in bulk will be in August's Textile Talk.*

*For anyone who is interested in patchwork and quilting, it would be lovely to see you at the Quilt-In which is being held at the Peninsula Community Theatre, in Mornington on Saturday 6th August, (for more details, please see the diary of events page) and you'll be able to see how all the fabrics and threads turned out, as they'll be for sale in the foyer.*

## Contact

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*In this quarter's edition I share my thoughts on the art of free machine embroidery and will be running a workshop in September to practise some of the techniques discussed in this article and also used in my Monet wrap, as featured in the last edition of Possum News.*

*Having noticed that the Brother ScanNCut has come down a bit in price in the chain stores recently, I thought it might be an ideal opportunity to introduce you to this nifty*

little machine. If you're curious as to what it can do, or were thinking of taking the opportunity to purchase one, you might be interested to read an overview of how it works. If you have one already, but are not sure how to use it, I hope it might encourage you to have a go and I've included an easy card project for you to try out to get started.

I've taken on board all your feedback on the workshops and, overall, the 2-day workshops proved to be more popular, as we were able to cover everything in greater detail and take each day at a much more leisurely and relaxed pace. As a result, I've been working on a number of new 2-day courses for the Spring and Summer where I can share lots more textile and crafting ideas and techniques with you (along with the old favourites of natural dyeing). These are listed on the workshops page and if you are interested in any of the new courses, please email me and I can forward more details to you.

Till next time, stay warm and cosy!

*Tina Whiteley*

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## The Art Of Free Machine Embroidery

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Most modern domestic sewing machines use a lock stitch, with a needle that has the ability to swing from side to side. This enables us to do straight and zig zag sewing. Straight stitch and zig zag stitch are the basis of the utility stitches on the sewing machine that enable you to join pieces of fabric together, hem a seam, repair a hole, create folds, tucks and pleats, attach a button and make an accompanying button hole, as well as many other useful functions. They also form the foundation of

heirloom, decorative and pictogram stitches, available on a wide range of sewing machines today.

Many of these non-functional stitches are not always employed to their full potential and of the hundreds of decorative stitches available across the range of machines, only a limited few are used on a regular basis. For those with the time and inclination, often a good way to get confident with your new sewing machine is to stitch out every stitch available on your particular model to give you an idea of what

you can achieve with built-in stitches.

Within the stitch design parameters, you can vary the stitch length and width or you can combine a series of built-in stitches to create different pattern combinations and effects, you may even be able to flip rows of stitches for mirror image designs. As a precursor to free machine embroidery, playing with built-in stitches encourages you to think about how stitches are formed and what you can do with just straight and zig zag stitches.



All the time you are

using the pre-programmed stitches for decorative work, the presser foot is down, to hold the fabric in place and the feed-dogs under the machine are engaged. Working with the presser foot, feed dogs help to guide the fabric from the front to the back of the machine, so that the fabric feeds evenly in a straight line. You can manipulate the fabric a little bit by hand, even with the feed dogs engaged. Sometimes you might need to raise the presser foot if you want to change direction on your work, but not lose continuity of stitching, so raising the presser foot allows you to pivot your work, with the needle in place, rotate it up to 360 degrees, lower the presser foot again and carry on stitching.

Stitching with the feed dogs engaged is still a very satisfying way of

being creative, as there are so many combinations of stitches and designs that you can make as embellishments, but it is the ability to move the fabric freely that really gives you spontaneous and expressive freedom.

As I explained in an earlier article in the first edition of Possum News, starting out in free machine embroidery can be quite daunting, as you must lower the feed dogs and take control of the fabric motion. Your hands become the feed dogs that guide the fabric, not just backwards and forwards, but also from side to side, giving you a full 360 degrees of movement. Once you are comfortable with how to synchronise the speed of the sewing needle with the speed and direction of the moving fabric then you are ready for endless possibilities for creative stitching – this comes with practice and experimentation.

The other requirement is an appropriate stabiliser for the job. The current range of fabric stabilisers, particularly the water soluble varieties, have helped to advance free machine embroidery in leaps and bounds. Early free motion embroidery was worked over stretched/hooped net, or fine muslin. For making lace, a vanishing muslin was used, that could be heat-melted away. It was

not always easy to completely remove the muslin backing and the stitching itself was also vulnerable to burning.

Today we have access to water soluble stabilisers that help to add body to the fabric being embroidered, but can easily be washed away without ruining the stitching. Stabilisers help to lessen distortion, particularly where dense stitching is required and prevent more sheer fabrics from puckering or being pulled into the machine. Using a hoop to help keep the fabrics taut is also a good idea when you're first starting out – helping to keep projects small and manageable. You can use unhooped stabilised fabric, but it does take its toll on your wrists after a while and you should take regular breaks, get up and move around, so that you don't become too stiff!



With the feed dogs lowered, you can now use your sewing machine in a much more animated and sensitive way. You, are now the sewing artist who can choose to sketch or outline a design, using thread as if it were a pencil or stick of charcoal.

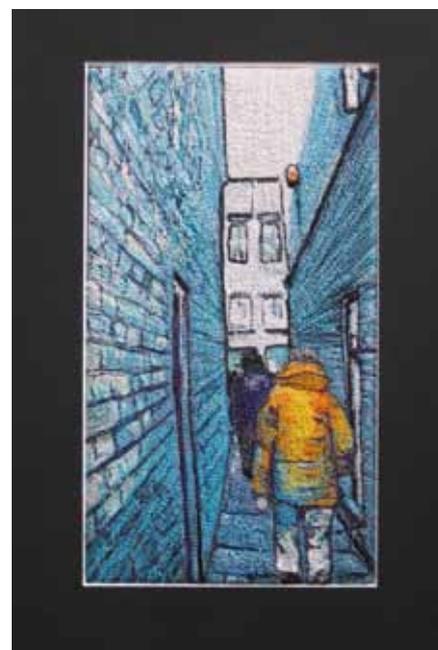
You can choose colours from your palette of threads for fill-in stitches, blending them together, almost like cross-hatching or painting, for subtle shading, or use variegated tonal threads to add contrast and drama. Changing the rhythm, density or direction of the threads can create areas of light and shade, enhance form, introduce drama and ultimately adds to the lifelike or dynamic quality of your work.

Once you decide what fabrics and threads to use, these choices will determine the size of the needles required. For lightweight fabrics use a lower sized needle such as a number 11. For heavyweight fabrics size 14 or 16 is suitable. If using a metallic thread, look for a topstitch needle with a bigger eye, which will reduce heat friction and make stitching easier.

You can mix and match top and bobbin threads and tensions, sewing from the front or the back of the work, varying your stitch appearance for a range of texture and pattern options, adding a further tactile quality.

The work shown below features a digitally printed cotton fabric, which was worked over with a variety of polyester and rayon threads in straight and zig zag stitch, to highlight complementary colour pairings. Colours were graduated by thread painting, using progressively lighter and darker toned threads together. In parts, two threads were used in one needle and bobbin thread and top thread were paired and varied to give the illusion of blended colours.

By stitching in various directions, distortion was minimised and helped to keep the overall



picture shape rectangular. Sometimes, if you stitch very densely, the stitching can pull the fabric in a particular direction, causing it to shrink and warp. This can be used to great effect if you want to make a more sculptural piece, but for flat work, it's best to make sure the understitching is worked in all directions for even shrinkage.



As with painting, you have to work out which elements are underneath, which are on top, which are to the fore and which are in the background, to make the work believable. Perspective lines have to be followed and colour tones chosen wisely for receding and advancing elements. It's not absolutely necessary on all textile work, but for a figurative or representational work, it helps to achieve the believability.

One of the more exciting things that free motion work enables you to do is to make your own fabric from heavier weight fabrics to floating sheers. Washaway stabilisers enable you to effectively sew over thin air and create lacelike surfaces which you can further embellish.

This machine embroidered bowl was a more stylised piece, so the main element was the line work. Black straight stitching was worked backwards and for-

wards several times, over a flat fabricated ground of loose threads, Angelina and silk fibres, sandwiched between two layers of sticky water soluble stabiliser. Once the stabiliser had been partially dissolved, the flat fabric piece was shaped around a mould, in this case a round glass bowl. The stitched lines took shape around the bowl and appeared to be stitched around corners. That is the other great thing with free machine embroidery - it is very pliable and can be manipulated to form whatever shape you require.

When stitching over a washaway stabiliser, remember that when it's washed away there is no longer any foundation for your stitches to hang on to, so it's vital you make the stitches connect together in a grid formation so they don't unravel. That grid may be a rigid network of parallel and criss cross lines or it can be a more informal series of interconnecting spirals

or stippling.

Stippling and decorative motifs can also be worked on a fabric ground from the front or the back, depending on the thread used. If thick thread is required for a more textured look, then the line work is done on the back of the work and the underneath thicker thread, which is hand wound onto the bobbin will be pulled up through the fabric, in various ways, depending on top and bobbin tension settings.

This trend for surface embellishment is apparent in the modern sewing and craft fairs where displays of patchwork and quilting, for example, have expanded from pieced block designs to include dyed, painted or photo printed backgrounds lavishly stitched and embellished with free motion embroidery and echo quilting. Each part of the quilt construction is carefully considered to reinforce and enhance the whole design con-

cept. The elements and principles of art and design are very much in the forefront of quilt design, almost taking a more important role than the perfection of the stitching.

Accomplished free machine art quilters embellish with different kinds of threads and fibres, incorporating them as couched elements, using thicker threads or thin ribbons in the bobbin to make raised stitches that can appear like flowers or foliage. From a distance, a beautifully executed stitched work might look like a painted canvas. It's only when you get up close and personal that you can see the lines of stitches that give texture and rhythm to the work. Another added bonus of machine stitching is that we can add appliqué elements to our work, either with full or partial attachment, which can give a wonderful 3D quality. It's very hard to resist the temptation to touch a textile work, as that is part of its charm. It is so tactile and inviting that we just want to feel all those different surfaces. How many of us want to take a peek at the back of the work to see how it has been finished off? I wonder how many of us would dare to do that with a painted artwork?

As with other art forms, free machine embroi-

dery is also a valid medium for telling personal stories, documenting history, painting portraits and for making comment on social, environmental and political issues. Some of my favourite contemporary free machine embroidery textile artists include Annemeike Mein, Alice Kettle, Carol Shinn, Jan Beany and Jean Littlejohn. These artists have pushed the free machine embroidery boundaries, following on from the early pioneers, Dorothy Benson, Rebecca Compton, Constance Howard and Audrey Walker. Their work is exciting, inspiring and liberating for any aspiring free motion embroiderer. Alice Kettle in particular is creating free machined art works of a huge scale which would be at home in any art gallery.

The liberating element of free motion embroidery is the fact that it is essentially like your own handwriting or your signature. The way in which you write, draw or paint with a pen, pencil or brush is unique to you and the more you practise, the more proficient you become and the more distinctive your creative style. The same is true for free motion embroidery. After a while it all happens spontaneously and you are not so much thinking about the technicalities of making the stitch, but more about how the stitch itself can be used expressively. Creatively speaking, it doesn't necessarily matter how naïve, how loose or how precise you are with your mark making or filling stitches, as long as the stitching matches the integrity of your intended design then it will be a successful and satisfying piece of artwork.

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## Working With The brother ScanNCut

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For those of you who haven't heard of a the Brother ScanNCut machine, it is essentially an electronic cutting machine, that will scan, cut, score and draw on paper, card, fabric, thin plastic and a variety of other materials. Why is it such a great machine and why would you fall in love with it?

It has revolutionised the hobby and craft markets, because it enables us to create our own appliqué shapes, templates, patterns, banners, labels, stickers, stamps and stencils at home, rather

than having to rely on commercial or industrially cut designs. This has all sorts of implications and applications for card makers, scrap bookers, patchworkers, quilters, dressmakers and designers, or people who love to make soft furnishings or toys. Even if you want to make lots of wedding or party invitations, place settings or bunting, this machine can help you reproduce all the cut-out elements in far less time than it would take to complete them by hand.

There are several electronic cutting machines

on the market that have been around for quite a few years, but they need to be connected to a computer and are reliant on computer software to power them. The Brother ScanNCut machine is a stand-alone cutter that is very simple to operate and you don't need a computer to be able to use it. It can, however, work alongside a computer and even has a free Brother Cloud-based software design package, called ScanNCut Canvas that you can use if you choose to, giving you the option to save your designs on a USB stick, which you can plug into the ScanNCut machine.



There are only five buttons that you can press on the ScanNCut and most of the main functions which are displayed on the small flip

up screen can be learned within a few hours of setting it up. It's plug-in ready from purchase and there are a number of cutting designs built into the machine, including basic geometric, fashion and floral shapes, decorative borders, text and lots of template blocks for quilting to get you started. Each of these designs can be resized up or down, to give you lots of scaling possibilities. Each of the designs can also be drawn in outline with the pen accessories that accompany the machine.

You can simply turn on the machine, press the home button (which looks like a house) and decide if you want to cut out a built-in pattern, retrieve picture or text designs from the machine's memory (when you've had a chance to create your own cutting files) or search for designs on a plug in USB (such as those designs

created and saved using ScanNCut Canvas.

You also have the option to scan a new design or image and then turn it into a cutting file, cut it out there and then, or save it for later. For example, if you have a stamped image, you might want to cut around the outside of it. This is especially useful if you do a lot of découpage or 3D work and you can uniformly cut out all your stamped or printed images.

You can play with designs on the attached small screen, with more options to manipulate and alter the shapes even further. You can save the resulting designs or delete them.

The machine comes with various accessories, including sticky-coated 12 x 12 inch mats onto which you place your paper or material to be cut. The relevant design is called up and, using the scanning feature, the

the screen to correspond with the location of the paper to be cut. This is useful if you have a large sheet of paper that's already had shapes cut out of it and you want to cut out the remaining piece(s). Alternatively, if you have a smaller piece of paper you can place it on the mat to correspond exactly with your screen image cutting file or vice versa. This is a good way to use up scrap pieces.

For your découpage cut outs, they will first need to be scanned so that the machine can determine what the outline shapes are in order to make the correct cut. You have the option to cut them out directly there and then, once the shapes have been recognised, or you can choose to scan and save the image on the screen as a cut file in the machine's memory that you can recall at a later time. Saving is useful if you have lots of the same thing to cut out, as you can come back to the de-

signed in a eucalyptus leaf and my possum logo for my scarf box tags. The possum design was then reduced to fit into the leaf. I added in a small circle from the geometric shapes menu, at the top of the leaf for threading ribbon or twine and saved all three elements as a grouped or unified design. The machine



gives you the option to resize, flip, rotate and make duplicates of each shape, so I replicated the design enough times to cover the whole mat and saved it, so that one mat's worth of cuts would give me around twelve leaves, ready to decorate the boxes. Each time I need new cardboard leaves, cutting them out on the Brother ScanNCut saves me hours of fussy cutting with scissors and a knife. My hands are not as dextrous as they once were, so this machine is also ideal to save straining your hands, if you have to do lots of cutting.

What makes this machine so useful for

textile artists is that it also cuts fabric. Those built-in shapes are useful for appliqué work, quilting or general sewing. There is also a larger 12 x 24 inch mat available and the new ScanNCut model enables you to scan larger images, opening up possibilities for cutting out pattern pieces. For sewing designs, you can add a seam allowance, drawing the sewing line with an erasable marker, for easy to follow stitch lines. The added feature of a new pen-holder, allows you to use any suitably-sized pen to make your lines and drawings, even text messages, such as birthday or festive greetings and you can personalise gifts by adding names in joined up phrases or individual letters.

The most important thing to remember with this machine is to make sure that any paper, card, fabric or other suitable material to be cut is properly stuck to the mat, with no air bubbles and loose edges. This is particularly important for fabric, as it lifts very easily.

Assorted mats with different amounts of tackiness are available for each type of material, with the high tack mat being used for fabric. Generally, fabric needs to be stabilised or starched to make it stiff like paper for trouble free cutting. It will cope with most fabrics from cotton



machine can tell where the paper is on the mat, ensuring that you can move your design on

sign and line it up every time for exact cutting.

As an example, I've



to felt to leather. It even cuts thin plastic, which gives you the ability to cut your own template shapes, stencils and even stamp blocks.

The settings menu is easily accessible, being one of the five buttons on the operating panel (the spanner) and this gives you access to the cutting blade settings from the point of view of pressure and cutting speed. The actual depth of the cutting blade is controlled by the blade holder which can be rotated to give a depth of 1 – 12, depending on the material to be cut. The lighter the material, the lower the cut depth number. For really thick or dense materials a deep cut blade is available as an add-on accessory. The pen holder pressure and speed of drawing can also be adjusted in the settings menu. Here you can also change the unit of measurement from millimetres to inches and vice versa.

Most of the features mentioned above are used regularly when operating the machine, which is why you very quickly learn what the various buttons and screens can

do, but there are also more advanced features.

If you wish to keep things simple you can achieve a great variety of basic cutting tasks on the ScanNCut, but if you want to start using the online ScanNCut Canvas software, you can then modify and refine your designs, design from scratch, trace new designs using jpg files or directly import svg, (scalable vector graphic) design files. Combine this with other computer design software and even machine embroidery digitising software and the sky's the limit!

The machine is available from Spotlight, Lincraft, some specialist sewing stores and online retail outlets. Prices and machine models may vary, so it's worth shopping around and I'm happy to give you advice on which machine would suit you best. There are lots of videos on You Tube to give you more of an idea of what it can do. If you are interested in learning more about the Brother ScanNCut, and want to try it out for yourself, or if you have one already (and are too scared to get it out of the box!),

I'll be holding some ScanNCut crafting workshops later in the year where you will have the opportunity for hands-on practice, to see just how much fun you can have with it.

I love working with this machine and, alongside my Janome 15000 sewing machine and my laptop computer, it would be the next thing I put in the car if I had to evacuate in a hurry!

## Quick and Easy Greetings Card Project

To give you more of an idea of what the ScanNCut can do, I thought I'd run through a little card making project I created recently.

I mentioned earlier the geometric shapes menu

Two card bases can be cut from one sheet of 12 x 12 inch cardstock. The blue arrow key, outlined in yellow below, enables you to alter the height and width independently or proportionally.



and in there you will be able to select rectangle shapes for the card base and insert. You can also select a square shape to cut out the mat and layer which fit on top of the card.

Determine initially how big you want your card to be. I chose a 5¾ inch square card size. This size was doubled (as the card was folded) to give a rectangle shape measuring 11½ x 5¾ inches, to just fit inside the 12 x 12 inch piece of coloured cardstock on the Brother ScanNCut mat.

I repeated the process for the insert piece, reducing it slightly to measure 11 inches by 5½ inches. It was cut from a piece of decorative flecked cream paper. Each rectangle was folded in half and the insert was glued along the underside of the folded edge with a sticky tape gun and pressed into the centre of the card base to secure it along the fold.

If you want to decorate, write or print greetings onto your insert, this should be done before you cut and stick it into the card.



Both the flower and butterfly shapes were cut out on the ScanNCut machine, which again saved lots of time. Having the shapes saved on the machine, means I can go back in and cut more flowers and vary the sizes if I make larger or smaller cards.

and cut them out manually, but if you make lots of cards, particularly at Christmas time, think how quickly you can put all the pieces together if you already have them pre-cut in advance, without having to measure each individual element.

Some of the other embellishments shown on the card were cut out using a die-cutting machine, but there are suitable built-in designs and lettering that could be substituted and cut on the ScanNCut.

Accompanying envelopes can also be designed and cut on the ScanNCut machine, which is very useful, as sometimes it's difficult to find square envelopes and we'll be covering how to do this in the Christmas ScanNCut workshop, along with how to make some lovely cards, gift tags, Christmas crackers and decorations.

Of course you can make these types of card in the traditional way, measure

The square mat and layer pieces measured 5½ x 5½ inches and 5 x 5 inches respectively. The mat piece of card only shows as a thin frame underneath the layered piece which will be your background on the card. This can look effective in black or a metallic colour. My coloured square mat was adhered to the card base and the coloured designer series paper (DSP) layer was added on top of the mat. The layer could equally have been cut out from plain paper and decorated with inks stamps or paints to make the card totally unique. The layer is now ready for embellishing.

file on the ScanNCut, so that I could recall them to make more cards of the same size, without having to worry about measuring any more pieces. Each rectangle and square would be identically cut, with perfect right angles at the corners, which would mean that all the cards would be uniform.

By combining geometric shapes you can make a variety of other shapes, including traditional tags or labels which can be cut and stuck to the back of the cards or used for matching gifts.

In my latest [online tutorial](#), I explain how to make some of the flower embellishments, as seen on this card.

I saved each card shape as a separate cutting mat



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## Workshop News

### July - December 2016

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#### **Saturday 17th & Sunday 18th September, 2016**

Drape and Sculpt - Free Machine Embroidery  
2 day workshop: All Levels

#### **Saturday 15th & Sunday 16th October, 2016**

Fun With Mixed Media - Papercraft  
2 day workshop: All Levels

#### **Saturday 19th & Sunday 20th November, 2016**

Natural Dyeing With Plants  
2 day workshop: Beginners

#### **Saturday 26th & Sunday 27th November, 2016**

Natural Dyeing With Plants  
2 day workshop: Beginners

#### **Saturday 3rd & Sunday 4th December, 2016**

Cutting it Fine For Christmas - Papercraft  
2 day workshop: All Levels

For more information about these and other workshops between now and April 2017, please visit the Workshop page on the website or email me if you have any queries.

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## Diary of Events

### July - December 2016

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#### **Friday 22nd July - Sunday 6th November 2016**

Making the Australian Quilt 1800 - 1950  
NGV Australia, St Kilda Road  
Level 3 Temporary Exhibitions  
Open 10 am - 5 pm

For more details: <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/making-the-australian-quilt-1800-1950/>

#### **Thursday 28th - Sunday 31st July 2016**

Melbourne Craft and Quilt Fair  
Melbourne Exhibition Centre, South Wharf  
Open 9am to 4.30pm

For more details: <http://www.craftfair.com.au/wp/Melbourne/tickets/>

#### **Saturday 6th August 2016**

Peninsula Patchworkers Quilters Quilt-in  
Peninsula Community Theatre  
91 Wilsons Road, (Cnr Nepean Hwy & Wilsons Road Melway 145 E2)  
Open 10 am - 4 pm

For more details: <http://www.mppi.org.au/pages/mornington-peninsula-patchworkers-quilt-in-2016>