

Berlin Wool Work

Berlin Wool Work, as we know it today, was developed in Germany in the 19th century for the amateur stitcher, based on hand-painted charts of Cross Stitch patterns that were worked with a very soft wool that was spun in the city of Saxe-Gotha, located in the central German region of Thuringia. The wool was taken to Berlin where it was dyed and packaged with the charts which were also printed and painted there. The first charts were released in 1804, and within the next forty years, at least 14,000 different designs were produced. When the brightly-colored wools became commercially available in 1820, it was accorded the name Berlin Work; these wools actually began to replace crewel, lambswool and silk threads that had been popular materials. The wool was dye in brilliant colors reflecting popular German taste. In addition to the standard Cross and Tent Stitches, a new stitch called the Surrey Stitch, created a thick dimensional pile that added to the richness and reality of floral designs. As if this were not enough, some designs even called for the inclusion of colored glass beads as accent.

The most popular Berlin Work designs were wreathes or bouquets of flowers, birds, ribbons, landscapes and lush pictorials. In the 1830s and 1840s, the design was most often stitched on a light ground, but by the 1850s the use of black or a very dark color was more popular. Some of these floral designs became quite elaborate, depicting flowers spilling out of cornucopias or displayed in elaborate arrangements. The pictorials, popular from the mid-19th century, stressed exaggerated emotion reminiscent of large oil paintings of the day that relied on classical subjects for inspiration. Animals were also a popular theme, especially pet dogs and birds. Another common theme was domestic situations, such as homey kettles burning on a hearth or a still life arrangement of foodstuffs and dead game animals.



Berlin Birds



Berlin Pattern

By the late 1860s, the usual Berlin Work floral designs began to be replaced by ornamental and geometric designs, no doubt in response to the growing Art and Crafts Movement. Gigantic blossoms and very bright parrots were replaced by calm and subtle Greek key borders, folded ribbons, tile-like diaper patterns, controlled ornamental scrolls and arabesques, and formalized acanthus leaves and vines. Neo-Classical design elements relied on simplicity and repetition to achieve the less florid look.

It developed into a suitable occupation for women with time on their hands and as a means to beautify their home environments often when surrounding environments were fast becoming adversely affected by industrialisation. Women would have needed a source for their Berlin wool kits which is where it would appear that Maria and Patience White as dealers became involved. Professional embroiders also embellished clothing and articles for the military and churches.

<http://www.needlepoint.org/Archives/01-01/berlinwork.php>

Taken from Pat Bremer's article *Berlin Work* on the American Needlepoint Guild Inc. site