

Catherine Jordan

by Cheryl Sharp



Nautical Box by Catherine Jordan

“Every day I feel inspired just by looking around me.”

Holder of a Masters in Psychology, shepherdess, black belt in martial arts, dyer, designer, webmaster, teacher and accomplished needle artist—how many individuals do you know who have accomplished so much? These diverse roles help distinguish Catherine Jordan from other designers.

Jordan increases and improves her skills in multiple areas. She has explored spinning, dyeing, quilting, knitting, painting, scrapbooking, and a variety of needlework techniques. Her résumé reveals her continual quest to learn, to explore, and to share her knowledge. While teaching classes in dyeing, fabric painting, drawn thread, pulled thread, silk ribbon, counted thread, felting, and finishing, Jordan constantly seizes opportunities to increase her knowledge of fiber. She writes, “Having a strong knowledge and skill basis has been a priority for me.”

A career in human resources was balanced by Jordan’s rural lifestyle. Living twenty miles outside Richmond, Virginia, on thirty acres and tending sheep and goats for many years has provided her with an opportunity to fully connect to nature. Jordan says, “Every day I feel inspired just by looking around me. The landscape, especially the trees and flowers and the endless change of light during the day, is beautiful. Each day is different even within a single week. On a morning walk, the colors of the sky can range from white to light blue, pink and blue on another day, or violet or any of a variety of subtle grays on foggy or rainy days.”



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Catherine Jordan's Autumn's Promise

After retiring in 2004, Jordan turned her love of needlework into a full-time creative process. She says, "I wake up excited about the day ahead and what the day will bring." Throughout the day, she interweaves a variety of needlework activities from dyeing linen and threads, felting, painting, stitching, and designing, with her work on the computer, including graphing, managing her website, and completing paperwork related to her artwork, retail business, and classes. When she is home, she cooks dinner every evening so she and her husband can share the end of the day.

Jordan often works in a series, expanding on a project and making the next one better or different. *The Arrival of Autumn* was inspired by the goldenrod along the fence in her yard. The bright yellow flowers foretold the approach of autumn in Virginia.

Jordan knew that nature's cycle would also be the theme for her next box, *Autumn's Promise*. Nature's cycle is similar to the phases of our lives. Both have a beginning, ending, and repetitive events that are full of change and/or promise for what the future holds. Jordan observes, "The passage of time is a compelling concept for me and could easily become a path for more ideas."



Above and top: details from Autumn's Promise. According to Jordan, Goldenrod announces the approach of autumn's promise of change. She says, "Our lives reflect these changes with repetition, cycles, beginnings, and endings."



Arrival of Autumn



A Knot Garden is inspired by a botanical garden from 1545 in Padua. Paint and counted and surface embroidery were applied to hand-dyed linen to enhance the bird's-eye view of the garden reminiscent of renderings in period books.



Map commemorating the 200th year anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. This map was part of Step 3 of Jordan's Master Craftsman in Design program.

While many of us profess that we don't have time to work on a growing stash of projects, Jordan has found time to complete several certificates in the Master Craftsman program. Her mother, an EGA member, enrolled Jordan in the Counted Thread program while Jordan was working full time and had all the responsibilities of tending to the land and caring for her animals. Jordan finished steps in counted thread, blackwork, Hardanger, and pulled and drawn threadwork, completing this program in 1989.

Often, embroiderers proficient in counted techniques shudder at the thought of surface embroidery, but Jordan became interested in traditional Japanese embroidery. She studied with Mary-Dick Digges in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Afterwards, she enrolled in the Master Craftsman program in Crewel Embroidery. Crewel embroidery techniques inform the surface embroidery now prominent in Jordan's current work.

Jordan has spun and dyed wool from her sheep and dyed linen fabric and threads since 1980. Her work in the Master Craftsman program in Color for Needlework brought color theory together with the hands-on skills she had developed. She reports that working on the program moved her into exploring more of the advanced color areas such as shadows, highlights, nightscapes, and reflections.

Upon finishing the Master Craftsman program in color, she realized that she wanted to improve her design skills. Recently, she enrolled in the Master Craftsman program in Design for Needlework. Step one was *A Knot Garden*, which received a first place in the multi-stitch sampler category at the Woodlawn Plantation Exhibit in March 2009.

A Knot Garden is one of a series of needlework maps that Jordan has designed recently. Her first map commemorated the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown Settlement in Virginia, the first permanent English Settlement in North America. Her second map came at the behest of her inner voice. Texas beckoned her, and her map of Texas appealed to gifted storyteller Hester Hemmerling, who asked that Jordan's map become the cover of her CD, *Texas Stories*. More maps have followed, some inspired by color techniques and others by request.

Jordan uses her hand-dyed linen and threads for her maps and for many samplers. She comments, "The dyed linen resembles old parchment and with the dyed folds and uneven coloration, the vintage look is carried through the design." Her variegated threads contribute to the antique look of the maps, mirroring the fading and discoloration that can occur over time. Jordan is concerned about needlework conservation, so she removes the excess dye and mordant with a final rinse in distilled water to make her threads as colorfast and neutral as possible.

Jordan says, "I love the variety of techniques, materials, and projects that needlework offers. I usually have three to six new and on-going projects at any time. Some are easy and fun, and others are more challenging. I try to work on what I am most interested in at any one time so it continues to be interesting for me. However, I do my best work first thing in the morning, so that is usually reserved for Master Craftsman projects or things that will be judged or entered in an exhibit."

Jordan's work has been juried into Fiber Forum as well as the 19th National Exhibit. *Carpe Diem* received a Juror's Award in the exhibit. Her painted and embroidered box, *Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining*, received the Mid-Atlantic Region Award. It was featured in the Challenge article in *Needle Arts* in September 2006. Photos of the embroideries can be seen at www.egausa.org in the National Exhibit section and in *Through the Needle's Eye: 19th National Exhibit* catalog available from EGA.

Quality is important to Jordan. She continually strives to perfect basic skills. Her interest in fine craftsmanship is what led her to complete so many Master Craftsman programs. Some of the classes she teaches focus on a technique which she explains in detail, giving tips to make it easier to accomplish. A patient teacher, she is pleased when she has the opportunity to give to others what she has learned, thereby ensuring that needlework will continue to be passed on. She says, "You never really know the impact you have on others, who especially will be touched by your work, and who will embrace what you have to share and work it into something even more spectacular."

The evolution of ideas and designs inspires Jordan. The choices for landscapes, seasonal colors, species of trees, and other details are endless. She keeps a notebook at hand to jot down ideas while teaching, selling at merchandise events, and traveling. She also works through ideas in several journals at home. Her ideas come from sources as diverse as frames, material, paint, pictures or techniques. Designs from her journals often result in several projects related to the original inspiration.



A counted and surface embroidery map of San Francisco with hand-painted shorelines covering a small journal. The journal is being offered as a class for Seminar 2010.



Map of the Great Lakes



Point Bonita Lighthouse, box by Catherine Jordan

Jordan says “My ultimate goal is to share my knowledge and gift of embroidery with others and to encourage creativity, originality, and innovation using the highest standards of needlework. My vision is for the design and embroidery of our century to be remembered as having a strong technical and artistic impact on the history of needlework.”

Catherine Jordan invites you to introduce yourself if you ever see her selling her dyed linen and threads, kits, and booklets.

You can see more of Jordan’s work on her website www.catherinesdesigns.net. ■

Cheryl Sharp has been an EGA member since 1981 and is a past president of the Washington DC Chapter. She was chair of the 17th National Exhibit.

More information on Catherine Jordan’s work can be found in the following *Needle Arts* articles:

“Challenge? Or Challenge with a Twist?” September 2006, pp. 43-44.

Christian, Cheryl. “The 19th National Exhibit,” December 2008, pp. 1, 12-15.

Gulick, Judith. “Our 2003 Needle Arts Sampler,” December 2003, pp. 14-21.

Jordan, Catherine. “Contemporary Drawn-thread Embroidery,” September 2003, pp. 22-23.

Jordan, Catherine. “Designing Contemporary Samplers,” March 2006, pp. 18-22.

A SHORT WALK

by Catherine Jordan

For *A Short Walk*, the embroiderer will paint the ground and embellish it with counted or surface stitches or a combination of the two. It can be mounted in a 1½ x 1 inch necklace frame or enlarged to suit the stitcher.

To receive a copy of this pattern, send check for five dollars made payable to EGA to Brad Cape, Designers Across America, EGA, 426 West Jefferson Street, Louisville, KY 40202. Please provide the address to where the instructions should be sent. This pattern is available until December 1, 2009. Orders received thereafter will be returned. Previous designs from the Designers Across America series are no longer available.

