



# One Step After Another

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DESIGN – The one word that more often than not sends needleworkers screaming from the room. “No, No, No and we say again, No! We can not and will not have anything to do with that awful word ‘design’.” That poor little word seems to be responsible for more panic attacks than all the “phobias” in the world.

“Design? not me – why I can’t even draw a straight line!” This standard “straight line” excuse is the one most often proffered when faced with the idea of designing. In rebuttal, I would direct attention to Dolores Andrew, NAN’s second Director of Judges’ Certification and herself a successful professional artist and art professor of long standing. She says that she cannot draw a freehand straight line herself and if that task be the sole criterion for the designation of artist or designer, then most of those in the art world would soon lose their title. If straight lines are your passion or goal, then perhaps it would be better if you considered a career in drafting or engineering.

Believe it or not, all needleworkers are involved in design, whether they are aware of it or not. According to Webster, one of the explanations of the word is “to conserve or execute a plan”. When we are given a painted canvas, one of the first things we do is plot out our colors, threads, and stitches. In other words, we put together a “design”. We conceive a vision of the finished piece and lay out or “design” a procedure to interpret the project to the best of our ability.

We use our knowledge of color theory, texture and size of fibers and threads and patterns produced by various stitches to define and illustrate thus in the end producing an interpretive design. The stitcher has interpreted the lines and forms set down by another artist and added his or her own stitching to create a separate yet joint design. I do believe I hear a reluctant “okay, stitchers may be able to design with their stitches and color choices but what about the underlying pattern? That’s where we fall apart and start to hyperventilate”. Well, strap on your oxygen masks and follow me!

Webster further defines design as an “arrangement of elements that make up a work of art... or “decorative pattern”. There are only four basic shapes in the world: a cube, a sphere, a cylinder and a pyramid. One can possibly include a fifth, a cone, but it is really a pyramid on top of a sphere. Even the most artistically challenged can draw these shapes and everything else is merely an addition or a composite. When this fact hits home, I predict a great sigh of relief and a true “light bulb moment” will ensue: Aha! I think perhaps I can design.

And you really can if you merely keep in mind a few basic principles of design: Unity, repetition, focal point, balance, proportion, movement and rhythm. Exploration of these principles are an ongoing study (and another article) but if you simply start at the beginning with the basic shapes and arrange them and continue adding on to them utilizing the principles of design, voila! you have a design and you are designing!

Now, I think I hear a few soft grumblings of that’s all well and good for her but I’m still not sure about how mere shapes and principles can turn me into a designer. I believe it is wise to heed the following advice of Antoine de St. Exupéry – “one step after another”. And that is how I approach design for I have also been right where you are in terms of trepidation and fear. But, by starting at the beginning of the yellow brick road, I can reach the Emerald City of design. Take up your shapes and principles of design and follow me – one step after another!