

Drawing on Fabric

Simple Surface Design Techniques Give Your Garments a Personal Touch

BY DIANE ERICSON



ested in discovering a new way to think about something ordinary, with all the magic that process brings to my table.

The shirt featured here started with a plain linen blouse that I wanted to re-fashion. I was inspired to draw on the fabric by some decorative papers I found in a kitchen store, sold in tablets and used as placemats and serving papers for hors d'oeuvres and desserts (see next page). I was very attracted to the line art on this particular tablet—made up of very simple thick and thin lines and a leafy scroll—and wanted to draw some onto my blouse.

Once I started with the drawing, I decided to remake the linen blouse by adding pieces of a pinstripe cotton men's shirt. Next, I added pieces of a Japanese cotton fabric with irregular stripes and dots as accents. This third fabric created a nice balance between my hand-drawn design and the evenly-striped cotton print, and it inspired the change of buttons, some hand-stitching, and the addition of more jumbo dots, randomly placed, to bring the design together. I also drew thin stitching lines to emphasize some of the sewn tucks as the new garment emerged. This kind of play with a garment is like cooking; you start with a little collection of things and you think you're going in one direction, and it pops out into another direction.

Inspiration is everywhere and there are numerous ways to approach drawing on fabric that don't require elaborate or expensive tools. With a set of fabric markers, you can transform the unlikeliest of ideas into beautiful, wearable garments, translate your pattern and texture inspirations into custom fabric prints, or draw into existing prints to highlight details or create contrasting accents. Experiment and play, and with a little ingenuity even the most hesitant of scribblers can create uniquely gorgeous hand-drawn fabrics.

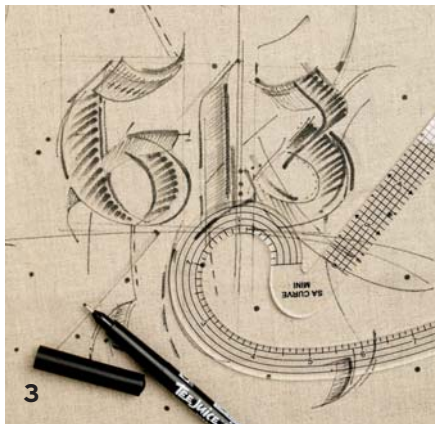
We met Diane Ericson, a passionate artist and teacher working in Ashland, Oregon, through her friend and colleague Marcy Tilton, who calls her the master of upcycling. We have since discovered that in addition to conducting creative workshops and retreats and designing a line of sewing patterns and stencils, Ericson has provided art and design classes for public schools and guilds, teacher training programs, and art therapy workshops. We recently saw a

blouse project Ericson was working on and asked her to share some of her techniques and inspiration sources with us. Here's what she had to say.

Remaking a garment is a different kind of sewing for me. It is a casual, playful exploration into the relationship of what was, what I know, and what might be. I continually revise my plans as I watch the process unfold and ideas present themselves. I allow the 'what ifs' to lead me instead of the 'tried and true,' knowing that I have my arsenal of technical tricks to rely on. I am most inter-

EARRINGS AND BRACELET: YELLOW LOTUS





MATERIALS

To create the samples shown here, I used Tee Juice Fabric Art Markers by Jacquard. (1) These pigment-based inks are acid-free, archival, and lightfast, and are permanent and washable after heat-setting with a home iron. They come in assorted colors and in three sizes: thin, medium, and a broad tip. I most frequently use my gray-scale set, which includes black and gray pens in each size.

The surface texture of your fabric is a big factor in how the drawing will look. I like a smoother fabric for more defined drawing, while a more textured surface works well for a bolder, more abstract approach. I suggest making samples from your stash to find what you like. The amount of ink in the pen, how much pressure you use, and how quickly you work will all play into your results. Work with a fabric surface (not plastic) under your drawing to absorb extra pigment so it doesn't smear. I store new pens flat and keep the partially used pens (which give a 'drier' look) separately so I can take advantage of the different effects they produce.

DESIGN IDEAS

If you're looking for ideas for your first project, here are some techniques that are easy enough for even beginners to get great results.

My personal preference is to draw freehand. For my white linen shirt on the previous page, I used decorative paper as my inspiration to draw a very similar design. (2) If you don't feel confident drawing freehand, you can trace a design. Place your fabric over the printed design and copy the image using a lightbox or by taping the design and fabric against a window. There are websites devoted to copyright-free images to explore. (Type "free clip art images" into your search engine.)

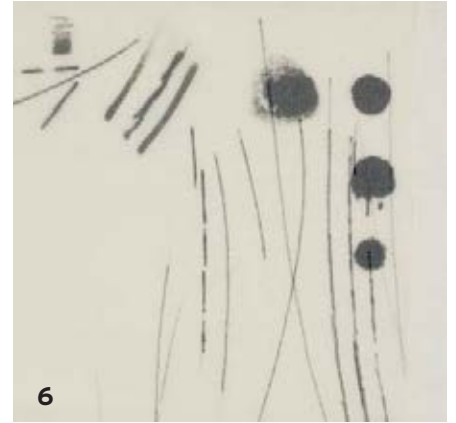
Words, numbers, and writing also make appealing images on fabric. Try writing out a favorite text or focusing on a few letters or numbers. There is a typeface to fit any style; the fonts on your computer are a good place to start. I drew some freehand letters and numbers on linen using my sewing curves for

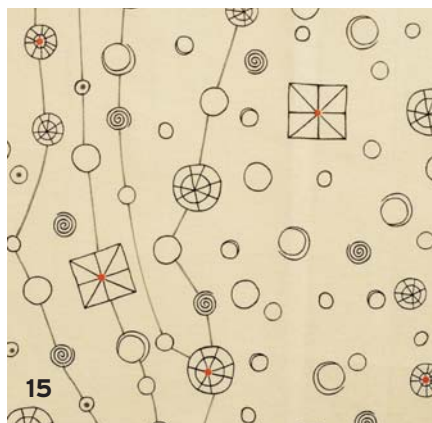
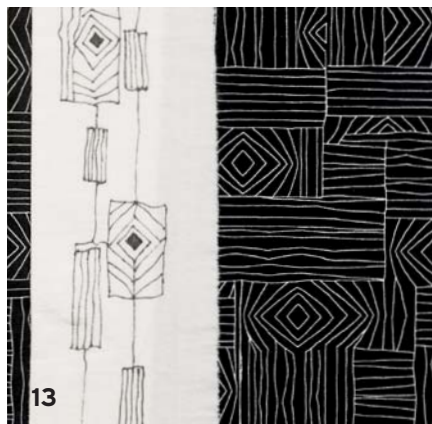
some of the lines (3). I keep my curves and straight edges handy and use them regularly as drawing tools. You can also create your design on the computer, print, and trace. After drawing or tracing, you can redraw some of the lines and add more lines in different size pens to add interest.

There are endless ways to create surface design with just lines and dots. You can create a design with tiny dots from a fine tip marker for a pointillist effect. (4) Or, use a broad tip marker to create large squiggles. Or, make a combination of broad strokes outlined with a fine line, accented with dots. (5) Or, try something like my double layer design, where I drew some dots and lines on linen then topped it with a piece of silk organza and added a few more lines for extra depth. (6)

This lilac dot shirt is another re-make using a very simple idea, jumbo dots. (7) It started as a camp shirt with a traditional collar (the collar was removed and became the godets in the side seams). I moved the breast pocket to the hem, closed the front with a shaped seam, and added a bias silk organza detail to the collar. Finally, I added jumbo dots. I started with the dots on the back and along the side of the garment to get used to how the ink responded to the fabric. Experiment on fabric scraps to determine how much pressure to use, if a 'push and twist' technique works best, and how close together you want the dots. You could mark your garment with dressmaker's chalk to work out the dot placement, but I like things less structured. I usually start with a general theme like 'dot all over with less at the top' or 'only down the center front and across the back yoke' and adjust as I go.

Drawing into a printed fabric is a great way to build confidence and expand your design options. Some prints are reminiscent of a coloring book, just waiting to be filled in with your own colors. Filling in sections of a black and white paisley gives it a different focus and adds definition to the design. (8 & 9) Rather than adding color to the entire piece of fabric,





you may want to do the coloring after you cut out pattern pieces so you can see what part of the garment you're decorating. Remember that you don't have to embellish enough fabric for a whole garment; the areas you color can simply adorn a hem edge or accent details like collars, pockets, button tabs, or covered buttons. This is where your creative touch comes into play.

Another way to add color to an existing print is to color over what is already there. I highlighted a black-on-white print with a yellow wide-tip marker. (10) On the brown batik fabric I colored over the motif using a brown marker (11) for one area and a gray marker (12) for a second area. This shows how the change can be subtle or pronounced. Again, this would be a great way to create a border print effect once the garment is sewn.

You can create a positive/negative effect by reversing a white-on-black design to a black-on-white design. I copied parts of a geometric design onto smooth white fabric to make my own contrast piece. (13)

I also embellished several different prints by doodling and drawing with different size pens. This cream and black novelty print had lots of circles and squares with a few lines running through them, and a few tiny orange dots. On one section of the sample I enhanced the design with thicker lines, more shapes, and more dots in orange and black. (14) The other section just has thin lines added, connecting the dots of the design. (15) Either of these designs would make great contrasting details on a garment.

For anyone interested in putting pen to fabric, the biggest hurdle is getting started. Celebrate the mark you make, appreciating that you have your own unique style. Even if you are new to drawing images, drawing is no different than writing. Your squiggle will be uniquely yours—especially on your first shirt. ☺

For more information on Diane Ericson's artwork, classes, patterns and retreats, visit www.dianeericson.com.