

TRANSFER PRINTING ON CANVAS



Softly blowing grasses on a hot summer day sway invitingly, beckoning to passing dragonfly. Accepting the invitation, he takes hold of a tall sliver of fragrant grass to rest, shaded from the sun by the long, slender stalks. This serene moment in time, captured forever through the lens of a camera, was the inspiration for *Summer Dreams*, a melding of traditional needlework and computer technology.

This union of photography and threads, computer chips and canvas, creates a new and exciting design tool for embroidery. A camera can, in an instant, seize a moment or a fleeting image and, through the magic of computer technology, transfer that image onto canvas, creating a dazzling background for the application of threads and stitches.

Creating The Canvas....

Photographic images can create an unlimited number of background effects from realistic to abstract. A view from a window, a prairie landscape or a field of wildflowers are images that can be used as a guide for the placement of stitches. The entire background can be covered with stitches or only part of the background can be stitched, allowing some of the photo image to show through as part of the overall design. Extraordinary backgrounds for abstract or

geometric designs can be created by photographing unusual things. Anything that inspires the imagination from fabric prints and ironwork to ancient script and paving stones, can be utilized for their color, pattern and texture.

The process of transferring photographic images to canvas, or to fabric for that matter, is a relatively simple one and the initial steps require nothing more than capturing what your eye can see through the lens of a camera using either a digital or a still camera.

Once the picture has been taken it needs to be transferred to a computer and the method in which the image is transferred depends on the type of camera used. A digital camera stores the images on a memory card rather than on film. These cameras have the advantage of letting you view your photo images instantly through the monitor on the camera, either as whole pictures or as a series of small thumbnails. If you don't like what you see, you can erase the image and take another. The images are transferred directly from the camera to the computer, from which they can be printed on a color ink jet or laser printer using either plain or special photographic papers.

A digital, 35mm or other film camera can also be used to capture an image. These images are stored on film and must be taken to a photo lab to process the negatives and print the photographs. Once you have a print, it needs to be transferred to the computer through a scanner. Scanners will convert a photograph into dots or pixels. The quality of the image depends on the resolution at which it is scanned. The lower the resolution, the lower the quality of the image produced. The higher the resolution, the larger the file space required to store the image. Scanning at 300 dpi (dots per inch) will produce a good quality image with a reasonable file size.

If you are familiar with photo editing software you can make changes or adjustments to the image whether it was scanned or taken with a digital camera. It can be cropped, sharpened, rotated, skewed or completely altered using special effects filters. The color can also be adjusted to allow for more or less contrast and/or to change the tonal values.

The final image is then printed onto iron-on transfer paper. This is a special paper that allows you to transfer photos and images onto cotton fabric using a hot iron. These papers can vary depending on whether you are using an inkjet or a laser printer, so be sure to match the correct paper to your printer. The image can either be printed directly from the photo editing program or it can be imported into a page layout or word processing program and printed from it. Some programs will allow you to adjust the printer's quality settings, which can produce a variety of different results. Clean, sharp images are obtained using the highest quality setting while a draft setting can be used to soften an image.

Canvas is typically 100% cotton and its firm body allows the ink or toner to bond cleanly and evenly in the transfer process. But because canvas has a much coarser thread count than the T-shirt cotton that the iron-on transfer paper was design for, the transferred image will not be as sharp as the original.



To illustrate this point, I have taken a digital photograph (left image) and transferred the image to #18ct Mono canvas (center image) and to #24ct Congress Cloth (right image). As you can see, the detail of the transfer increases with the mesh size of the canvas. A higher thread count will have more threads per square inch on which to transfer the image.

When using transfer paper you must also take into account the mirror image effect that occurs during the transfer process. If direction is important to the design, especially if lettering forms part of the design, the image needs to be reversed before it is printed onto the transfer paper. The images above illustrate the mirror image effect. In the original image, the small pink flowers are at the upper left. In the two transferred images, they are at the upper right.

To transfer the photograph to canvas, trim away any unprinted paper around the image that you do not want to transfer. The unprinted paper will leave a residue that is apparent on the surface of the canvas. Depending on the type of transfer paper you are using, follow the manufacturers directions as to the heat setting required for that particular paper. Lay the transfer paper face down on the canvas, lining up the edge of the paper with the horizontal and vertical canvas threads. Use a dry iron, working in a rotating motion across the back of the transfer paper, being careful that the iron crosses the entire area of the paper. While the paper is still fairly warm, lift a corner and pull the paper away from the canvas revealing the transferred image underneath. Once the paper has cooled, the coating hardens and may stick to the surface of the canvas in clumps. If this happens, place a piece of parchment paper over the transfer and iron. The parchment paper will absorb and lift any residue remaining on the canvas.

The canvas, with its photo image applied, is now ready to be worked using whatever threads, stitches and techniques you feel will enhance the image and bring it to life. It is a good idea to make two canvases, using one canvas to practice and experiment with stitches and techniques. Reverse stitching over and over in an area may dull the ink and needle marks may be visible. The color of the thread you are using may be altered by the colors from the background, forming what is called an optical mix. The color of beads, metal and metallic threads may also be altered by the undercolor. What may be perfect on a white canvas may not look the same when worked over a colored background. The same can be said for the canvas itself. A white canvas will produce the purest color transfer while a colored canvas will alter the colors of the original image.

Consider leaving some of the canvas exposed, allowing the ink to color and shade the background. This will allow the stitches in the foreground to appear higher and more pronounced. When choosing stitches, let the image on the canvas guide your choice. Look for areas that require texture and those that appear to be smooth. Working with few types of stitches often produces a more unified design than working with a larger number of different types of stitches.

A final word for those of you who may not have access to a computer or a scanner. A copy or print shop can photocopy an existing photograph on a color photocopier and make a transfer for you. The new color photocopiers can produce some amazing results. With imagination and enthusiasm, everything is possible!