



FORMAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONTEXTS OF TRADITIONAL CROSS-STITCH TECHNIQUES IN CONTEMPORARY ART AND INSTALLATION EXAMPLES

Scientific Paper

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ABSTRACT: *Traditional cross-stitch, one of the heritage handicrafts, dates back to ancient times. The earliest examples of this embroidery are found in Asia, from where it is known to have spread to Europe. The methods of use, application areas, and meanings of cross-stitch vary across every civilization. Having historically found wide application in garments, home textiles, and accessories, cross-stitch embroidery has begun to gain new meaning within contemporary art. Cross-stitch is an embroidery technique consisting of superimposed and juxtaposed needlework patterns formed by shapes that intersect each other in an X form. Depending on the characteristics of the fabric applied, it is a type of embroidery performed either by counting the threads of the fabric itself or, on fabrics where threads cannot be counted, by counting the strands of a canvas mesh used as an auxiliary tool. The sustainability of traditional arts and their transmission to new generations represent a significant potential for today's contemporary art and installation. Within the scope of this research, the adaptation of cross-stitch as a cultural heritage element onto textile surfaces and works intersecting at the innovation of "from craft to art" have been examined. Document analysis was utilized as the data collection technique for the research methodology. Reinterpreting traditional cross-stitch motifs, harmonizing handicrafts with industrial designs, and establishing advanced communication between technology and cultural heritage are necessities of our age. New formal and conceptual interpretations of cross-stitch will provide futuristic perspectives to contemporary art.*

Keywords: *Cross-stitch, Textiles, Installation, Cultural heritage, Conceptual art.*

FORMALNI I KONCEPTUALNI KONTEKST TRADICIONALNIH TEHNIKA KRSTASTOG VEZA U SAVREMENOJ UMETNOSTI I PRIMERIMA INSTALACIJA



APSTRAKT: Tradicionalni krstasti vez jedan od tradicionalnih rukotvorina, datira iz antičkih vremena. Najraniji primeri ovog veza nalaze se u Aziji, odakle se, kako se zna, proširio u Evropu. Metode upotrebe, oblasti primene i značenja krstastog veza razlikuju se u svakoj civilizaciji. Nakon što je istorijski pronašao široku primenu u odeći, kućnom tekstu i dodacima, krstasti vez je počeo da dobija novo značenje u savremenoj umetnosti. Krstasti vez je tehnika veza koja se sastoji od preklopljenih i suprotstavljenih uzoraka veza formiranih oblicima koji se međusobno seku u obliku slova X. U zavisnosti od karakteristika primenjene tkanine, to je vrsta veza koja se izvodi ili brojanjem niti same tkanine ili, na tkaninama gde se niti ne mogu brojati, brojanjem niti platnene mreže koja se koristi kao pomoćni alat. Održivost tradicionalnih umetnosti i njihov prenos na nove generacije predstavljaju značajan potencijal za današnju savremenu umetnost i instalacije. U okviru ovog istraživanja ispitana je adaptacija krstastog veza kao elementa kulturnog nasleđa na tekstilne površine i radove koji se presecaju na inovaciji „od zanata do umetnosti“. Analiza dokumenata je korišćena kao tehnika prikupljanja podataka za metodologiju istraživanja. Reinterpretacija tradicionalnih motiva krstastog veza, harmonizacija rukotvorina sa industrijskim dizajnom i uspostavljanje napredne komunikacije između tehnologije i kulturnog nasleđa su neophodnosti našeg doba. Nova formalna i konceptualna tumačenja krstastog veza pružice futurističke perspektive savremenoj umetnosti.

Ključne reči: krstasti vez, tekstil, instalacija, kulturno nasleđe, konceptualna umetnost.

1. INTRODUCTION

The earliest examples of cross-stitch embroidery are found in Asia, from where the technique is understood to have spread to Europe. The functions, application areas and motif meanings of cross-stitch differ across civilizations. Historically used in clothing, home textiles and accessories, cross-stitch has recently begun to regain its former cultural and aesthetic importance [1].

Cross-stitch is an embroidery technique made of superimposed and side-by-side needlework forms that intersect each other diagonally (Figure 1). In Europe, the technique is known by the term “cross stitch”, which corresponds to the Turkish meaning of “çapraz dikiş” [2].

Although it is not possible to state with certainty when and where the art of embroidery first emerged, archaeologists have identified various findings related to embroidery in Hittite, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Assyrian, Iranian, Greek and Anatolian civilizations. Many artefacts from Central Asia also indicate the long historical presence of embroidery practices [2].

Depending on the characteristics of the fabric, cross-stitch may be applied by counting the threads of the fabric itself or, when the fabric threads cannot be counted, by using a canvas mesh as an auxiliary counted surface. In the cross-stitch process, the needle is brought up from below and inserted diagonally upward to create slanted thread movements (Figure 2).

The process continues until the end of the row, and the return pass is completed by crossing over the previous stitches [2].

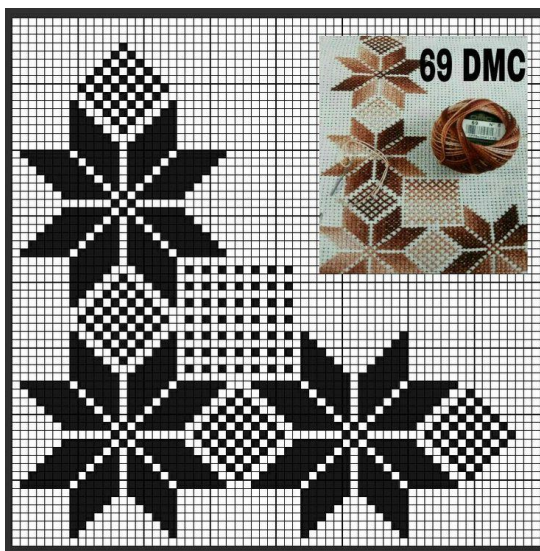


Figure 1: Cross-stitch example [3]

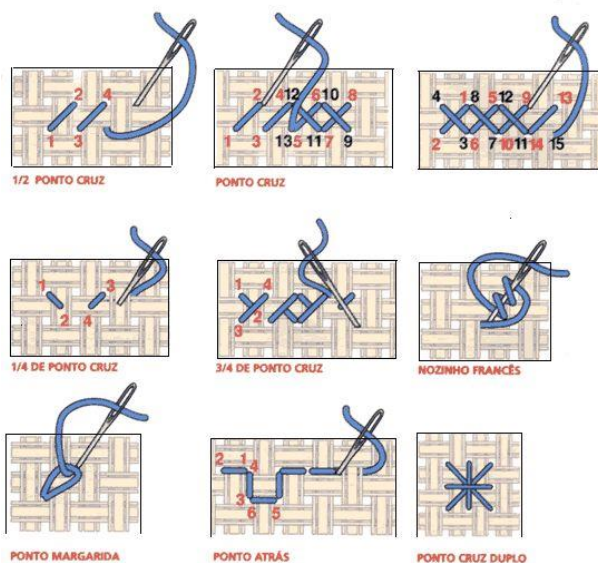


Figure 2: Cross-stitch embroidery technique [4]

This paper evaluates contemporary interpretations of traditional cross-stitch embroidery as practices that can provide new, future-oriented perspectives for textile, fashion and installation art. Reinterpreting traditional motifs, aligning handicrafts with industrial design and contemporary art, and establishing a more developed dialogue between technology and cultural heritage are central concerns of the present age.

2. TRADITIONAL CROSS-STITCH ART, CONTEMPORARY DESIGNS AND INSTALLATION

Fashion's sustained interest in creativity and production encourages designers to renew and develop their practices continuously. In the designs of Zeynep Tosun, where cultural, local, ethnic, eclectic and traditional references meet, it is possible to observe both the innovative character of fashion and the modern reflection of tradition [5].

By carrying colors and traditional motifs into her collections in a contemporary manner, Zeynep Tosun has contributed to the transmission and visibility of cultural values. She has transferred motifs that convey the feelings and thoughts of Anatolian women into her collections through cross-stitch embroidery techniques [6].



Figure 3: Zeynep Tosun 2016-2017 autumn/winter collection with cross-stitch motifs [7]

In addition to meeting functional needs, a textile product should also possess design value. This value can be assessed through the aesthetic response created by the product. A product designed for aesthetic quality should be original, visually distinctive among comparable products, innovative and contemporary. These criteria strengthen design value and support the product's commercial relevance and preference [8].

Ana Martin, a Portuguese textile artist known as Aheneah, works at the intersection of traditional textiles and contemporary art. She produces new textile structures by using fibers, bioplastics and unconventional materials, and has created public art installations across Europe as well as exhibitions in Europe and the United States.

The installation works of Lisbon-based artist and designer Ana Martin become visually clear when the viewer steps back from the surface. Using only wool and nails, the artist creates large-scale cross-stitch compositions on walls and buildings. When observed closely, the work appears as a carefully arranged accumulation of colors and fibers on a grid; from a distance, it becomes a legible figurative image. The pixelated appearance of these works is not accidental, since Martin aims to make cross-stitch more appealing to the digital generation.

One of Martin's works, titled Freedom, includes technical references to cross-stitch and was exhibited in an urban art festival context, expanding the technique from domestic and textile surfaces into public space.



Figure 4: Close-up of an Ana Martin work inspired by cross-stitch technique [9]



Figure 5: Passage, exhibited in Vila Franca de Xira, Ana Martin, 2018 [9]



Figure 6: Freedom, exhibited at an urban art festival, Ana Martin, 2021 [10]

In the work of ceramic artist Caroline Harrius, embroidery finds a different material ground. Harrius frequently addresses gender hierarchies within craft history and their effects on contemporary artistic practice. In one of her ceramic vase works, she uses the cross-stitch technique on a ceramic surface. Before firing, the surface is pierced according

to the needle movements of embroidery; after firing, colored threads are used to complete the motif. Through such combinations of ceramic and embroidery, Harrius seeks to highlight cultural heritage and make it visible to new audiences [11].



Figure 7: Caroline Harrius, 2022, embroidery on ceramic, thread/cross-stitch embroidery [11]

Screenwriter and artist Raquel Rodrigo has brought her cross-stitch installation works, produced with thick, rope-like colored yarns, into the streets of Madrid. The installations are created by applying cross-stitch techniques to wire meshes with rope-like threads. These decorative pieces operate as playful, pixelated textures that can appear very different when viewed from close range and from a distance [12,13].

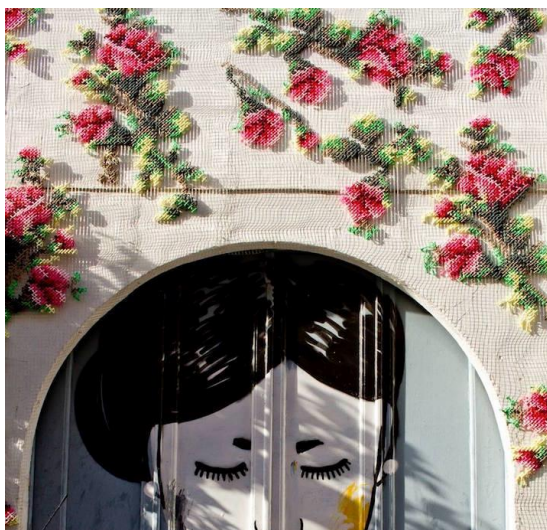


Figure 8: Raquel Rodrigo's ArquiCostura technique combining architecture and embroidery [13]



Figure 9: Cross-stitch technique applied by Raquel Rodrigo using rope-like colored yarns [13]

In contemporary art, it is possible to speak of an approach in which disciplinary boundaries are increasingly fluid and different materials and concepts are used together. In any new discourse developed around a cultural or traditional term, the decisive element is the new narrative created by the artist. The combined use of concepts from different disciplines produces a new artistic practice and an alternative language within art [14].

3. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that traditional cross-stitch is not merely a decorative technique belonging to the past, but a powerful expressive language within contemporary art and design disciplines. In its historical trajectory from Asia to Europe, cross-stitch was once largely associated with clothing and home textiles; today, however, it operates as an interdisciplinary bridge. The basic X form of cross-stitch establishes an aesthetic parallel with the pixel logic of the digital age. As seen in the example of Ana Martin (Aheneah), the transfer of small-scale traditional embroidery into large urban installations redefines cross-stitch within the context of public art. Spanish artist Raquel Rodrigo similarly moves colorful, large-scale cross-stitch installations into the streets of Madrid through wire mesh and thick, rope-like yarns [13].

The synthesis of traditional cross-stitch techniques and motifs with futuristic forms in Zeynep Tosun's fashion collections creates a modern interface for transmitting cultural heritage to younger generations. The integration of handicrafts into industrial design is important for a sustainable cultural cycle. The work of artists such as Caroline Harrius, who combines embroidery with hard surfaces such as ceramics, blurs the sharp boundaries between craft and art. This transformation shows that cross-stitch, traditionally coded as domestic women's labor, can become a conceptual instrument that questions gender roles



and craft hierarchies within contemporary art. Through its mathematical structure and universal visual language, cross-stitch will continue to occupy a productive position at the intersection of technology, art and craft. Such innovative reinterpretations of tradition offer future-oriented perspectives for art while also supporting the preservation of cultural memory.

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