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CRAFT Textile

Master's degree project // spring 2016

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NOT ON THE FABRIC

BUT IN THE FABRIC

whitework embroidery & the grid
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Appendices (I, II, III, IV)
Welcome into the grid. Not on the grid, not next to the grid, but in it. In drawn-thread embroidery, selected threads of the woven fabric grid are removed, and others are wrapped and embellished. I have selected two embroidery techniques called Hardangersaum and Hedebosyning which are all white, and where the grid is distorted and reorganised - before it reappears as an even clearer, magnified structure that can be seen with the naked eye. I also introduce classical techniques of goldwork embroidery.

In this project I lean heavily on the traditional techniques but I will isolate them from their historical baggage. I am largely ignoring what they have been used for in the past, in my aim to approach the techniques from an angle different than the ones I know of already. After extensive research into the many topics I found in white embroidery, I have decided to focus on the grid of the fabric, the cutting and manipulation of it and the subsequent reinforcement and embellishment of the remaining threads that make up Hardanger and Hedebo work. As a tool for understanding the grid, I will present some viewpoints from art theorist Rosalind Krauss and art historian Hannah B. Higgins. I will outline my artistic method, with the traditional craft techniques being at the center of the process. I will describe questions of scale and presentation that have emerged during the project and I will show how digital animation has played a major role in both the development and the communication of the embroidery work.

Research question

*How can I work with drawn-thread whitework in a contemporary context? How do the traditional techniques relate to the grid as an idea?*
background

Trained in many different textile crafts, I never identified with embroidery. I identified with textiles at large - systems, technology, information - but never the surface decoration of embroidery. I was always attracted to any technique that rests upon the grid - weaving, knitting, repeat patterns, the occasional cross-stitching, drawing at pixel level in MS Paint at 800% zoom - if it involved calculations, precise counting and structural limitations I was captivated. I shied away from techniques that were seemingly without organisation, without algorithm - the mere thought of felting or free-form embroidery still sends a shiver down my spine and I will break out the graph paper at any given chance.

As a consequence of this love of information and math, I went through an uncomfortable phase of producing animations and the occasional physical object based on data from currency fluctuations, corporate branding and economic theory. I made up systems, numbered sequences, algorithms for how to process information. I purchased secrets from strangers and reduced them to coordinates in grid patterns. I analysed currency trade, transformed it into shapes and cleansed it of meaning, or so I thought. But the physical grid was always there, lurking beneath the surface, and eventually I returned to fabric, specifically whitework embroidery. After researching notions of femininity, cleanliness, domestic crafts, even the colour white - I finally understood what was so captivating - I was in the grid. Not creating the grid, as in weaving and knitting, not decorating its surface as in printing and most other embroidery. I was in it - and suddenly my field was defined to the rather specialised area of drawn-thread embroidery.
There are only grids, grids on top of grids, grids that affect other grids. Grids hidden by grids. Grids within grids. If you watch close, history does nothing but repeat itself. What we call chaos is just grids we haven’t recognized. What we call random is just grids we can’t decipher. What we can’t understand we call nonsense. What we can’t read we call gibberish. There is no free will. There are no variables.¹

¹ Quote adapted from Chuck Palahniuk. I have taken the liberty of exchanging every occurrence of the word “pattern” with the word “grid”. The original quote appears in Palahniuk, Chuck: “Survivor”, W. W. Norton & Company, 1999 p. 118

Centrifugal - Centripetal

In her seminal essay simply titled “Grids” from 1979, art theorist Rosalind Krauss somewhat polemically argues that the grid is emblematic to art of the twentieth century, that it has created a barrier between visual art and language, and that the grid is “what art looks like when it turns its back on nature”.² The grid is a mode of withdrawal from the real, whose popularity and power stems from its ability to contain the seemingly contradictory values of science and values of spirituality at the same time. The two-faced and mythic nature of the grid, its ability to make us think we are dealing with materialism and science while we are just as much dealing with belief and fiction, is what makes the grid intrinsically modern to look at, according to Krauss. The text makes departures into the realms of optical science and the use of perspective screens which are topics I am also interested in, but what mostly resonates with my work is the two different readings of the grid, as either centrifugal or centripetal³.

The centrifugal grid extends outwards from the work and beyond any frames or borders of the object. To impose boundaries on it is arbitrary - the centrifugal grid will stretch in any direction, endlessly. The work of art is merely a fragment, “cropped from an infinitely larger piece of fabric”. The centrifugal grid thus acknowledges the universe that lies outside of the frame of the work and cloaks everything in its mesh.

² Krauss, Rosalind: “Grids”, October vol. 9, summer, MIT Press 1979, p. 50
³ Ibid., pp. 60-63
In contrast, the centripetal grid is limited to the object we are looking at and is contained inside the frame. The grid operates from the borders and inward, it is implosive rather than explosive, its extent is known and it is isolated from the world beyond it. The outer limits of the object are the outer limits of the grid, the painted surface of the grid is the object. In Krauss' 1986 book “The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths”, she expands her dissection of the grid and finally mentions what I was wondering reading “Grids” - the weave of the canvas that the grid is painted onto. The painted grid duplicates the woven surface and maps the structure of the cloth onto itself. This, Krauss claims, is proof that the originality of the grids is false - no matter how many waves of abstract artists claim to “discover” it. The grid can only be repeated, and it will be, forever.

Once a grid is invented, it never disappears
The inescapability and repetitive nature of the grid is something that art historian Hannah B. Higgins is also considering. In her 2009 book, she relates the grid to a number of milestones in human technological development, such as bricks, maps, screens and networks. She agrees with Krauss that the grid has completely infiltrated modern art, but shows how grids have emerged from prehistoric times to today and argues that the construction and perception of grids are fundamental to human cognition. In her chapter about the Box, Higgins neatly wraps up almost every topic I have been interested in during all of my master's education. She demonstrates how the invention of the manufactured cardboard box, and later the shipping container, plays a major role in the system of mass production, mass consumption and advanced capitalism

that we live in today⁵. She goes on to examine the skyscraper and the housing of humans in boxlike structures, with modernist architect Le Corbusier’s utopian and almost fundamentalist dreams of the clean, white, rational and highly efficient city as the most extreme illustration of this. Transparency in the form of glass facades would make light flow into the buildings, aiding intellectual enlightenment as well as practical rationalisation of private and public life⁶.

A darker approach to this ideal of unlimited transparency Higgins finds in Michel Foucault’s analysis of the panopticon, a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century. Built as a watchtower in the center of rings of cells, the panopticon allows for the guards to constantly surveil the prisoners. By shining a light from the point of surveillance, the prisoners can not know if they are actually being watched and should thus regulate their behaviour and act as if they are - at all times. Foucault, ahead of his time in 1975, aligns the panoptic supervision of prisoners to the now normalised state of universal surveillance which has expanded into all areas of human life⁷.

⁶ Ibid. pp. 211-212
⁷ Ibid. p. 212. Higgins refers to Foucault, Michel: “Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison”, Gallimard, 1975. Few actual panopticons were built, but Foucault built his concept of panopticism around the idea.
Crafting discipline
All embroidery, but especially whitework as a craft performed by girls and women, carries with it a long history of gender ideals and discussions. It is well-documented how the teaching of white embroidery has been used as a disciplinary tool in the upbringing of girls and this still shapes how the field of whitework is perceived today. I touch on this in my contribution to the CRAFT! exhibition catalogue (appendix III) and will not describe it further here. I recommend the work of Minna Kragelund in her PhD thesis “Opdragende håndarbejde. En undersøgelse af håndarbejdsfaget, dets metode og dets bevidsthedsdannende virkning i almueskolen ca. 1880-1910” (1990, in Danish only) and Rozsika Parker’s “The Subversive Stitch” (1984), to learn more about the implications of embroidery on women’s lives.

See the www.digitaltmuseum.no, Item HFU.EBM.042 for this picture of the sewing circle.
method

My way of working with the techniques has been to attempt to learn them as they have been done traditionally and to identify what connotations they hold historically. I then try to disassociate them from this and apply another frame for understanding, in this case theory about the grid. The switching back and forth between concepts on the white grid and physical work inside it has helped shape my ideas, informing both the practical work and the communication surrounding it.

Drawn-thread whitework

Whitework differs from other embroidery in the way that it relies completely on light and shade, texture and grades of transparency - compared to when colour contrasts make up the composition. As a consequence of this, most whitework techniques consist of different ways of making holes in the fabric, building raised surfaces that catch light and cast shadow or by making areas of the fabric less transparent by densely covering them with stitches. This type of embroidery can be said to have a lot in common with lace, where the difference between material and open space is what makes the composition.

In drawn-thread work, selected threads are cut and removed from the fabric, usually threads in both directions of the weave (warp and weft). Using a needle, the remaining threads are then wrapped or “woven” with another thread, following different systems depending on the technique in question. During this process, the pure wrapping of the threads may be complemented with embellishments such as picots and decorative stitch combinations filling the holes (called needle lace). Traditionally thread of the same colour of the fabric is used, to draw attention to texture rather than colour. For background information about Hardanger and Hedebo embroidery, please see appendix I.

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8 Some stitch combinations are of newer date than others but I have decided to not make sharp distinctions.
I have learned most of what I know about drawn-thread whitework during my master’s degree. My method for this has been to follow written and drawn instructions and study photos of historical embroidery. I usually make a new 5x5 cm sample for each technique and cut away the excess fabric around it without securing the edges as is usually practiced. This is a deliberate decision which can be related to the idea of the centrifugal grid that extends endlessly, the object being cut from an infinitely larger system. I also strive to leave part of the fabric intact, to make the initial state of the fabric apparent and to show that I have changed it. The method of making many small samples of different techniques is common for when the goal is a larger end product. However, this way of working is inherent to my process and I do no longer see them as samples but objects in their own right. It is my experience that having a number of objects encourages the viewer to identify the differences and similarities, and this together with a high level of detail are tools I use to draw the audience in.

Materials and tools
For materials, I have decided on fully bleached even-weave linen fabric of 12 and 14 threads per cm, and fully bleached lace making thread in weights 60/2 and 60/3. The techniques require few tools, a tapestry needle, tweezers and very sharp, pointy scissors being the most important. The linen produces a clearly defined grid, and the thread is relatively shiny (but less shiny than the commonly used mercerised cotton). Linen as a fiber interests me for a number of other reasons, flax being the earliest known fiber to be made into thread. It is laborious to both grow and process flax, and for this reason linen is relatively costly; the elite status of linen is recorded in cuneiform writings (another type of grid!) from ancient Mesopotamia. Linen fiber itself constitutes part of the material of banknotes in some countries (cotton being the main component). Linen is associated with cleanness, as the fiber is resistant to dirt and stains due to its smooth surface and traditionally, the whiteness of linen has been achieved through bleaching in sunlight.

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Tiny

The nature of embroidery seems to be that it is small - the tools are small, the movements are small and the stitches are small (relative to many other crafts). When I visited the “Whitework” exhibition at the Royal School of Needlework south of London, the visitors including myself admired the extremely fine stitches, some were even made on miniature clothing. Attending a class in goldwork at the London Embroidery School, I observed the same idealisation of smallness. When the instructor brought out finer needles than the ones we were using, the participants displayed awe and doubt that they would be able to thread them. The ability to precisely embroider with a small needle and thin thread is held in high regard, and I could challenge this by “making it bigger”. This is a seemingly common strategy for textile work, but I have no interest in embroidering with industrial tubing or rope (for now). Instead I have decided to “keep it tiny”, being aware that the needles and materials I use are much smaller than the materials used by most contemporary hobby embroiderers but in fact much larger than in historical whitework.
Goldwork
Additionally to the whitework I have learned about goldwork. Goldwork is embroidery with different types of metal thread and differs from whitework in the way that it is very much on the surface of the fabric. The threads are costly and weighty, so historically techniques have been developed to keep as much of the thread on the front as possible. It is a discipline heavy with tradition and conventions and goldwork is mainly associated with church vestments and military uniforms. Aesthetically, it is very different from whitework, obviously in colour, but especially in the organic plant shapes and swirling ornamentations that are most common. I have never seen any examples of goldwork working in the grid and neither have I seen it combined with drawn-thread whitework. Mixing the goldwork with the whitework also creates a contextual contrast between crafts and materials of high and lower status, the goldwork being reserved for institutions of power and wealth, and whitework being more of a peasant craft, situated in a domestic and female sphere.

Animation
During my degree I have experimented with digital frame animation and I have made use of this for my embroidery work too. In 2D animation, there is no perspective, no shadows cast, no material friction. In the beginning the animations were not presented, but only served as a sketching medium for myself. However, it is my experience that the added layer of information that animation provides is helpful when trying to communicate my thoughts about the embroidery. The breath-like repetition of an endlessly looping animation, zooming in and out and back in, illustrates the repetitiveness of both the embroidery process and of the infinite grid. It imitates the enlargement and reinforcement of the grid, and it helps direct the interpretation of the embroidery toward grids, vision, optics and repetition.
Presentation

Deciding how to display the embroidery has proven one of the most challenging aspects. From my previous projects I have learned that I want to show the embroidery from all sides, to emphasise my ideas of being in the grid and not perceiving the embroidery as flat fabric with embellishment on top. I also wish for the viewer to move close, to see detail in material and stitching, but the embroidery is lightweight and sensitive to touch, stains and dust.

- Exam work

For my examination I show an untitled work where I have made 16 small pieces exploring different techniques of Hardanger and Hedebo, combined with a small amount of goldwork in the spaces of the grid. The squares range in size between 2 and 6 cm and are mounted between 8 square layers of acrylic sheet of 11x11 cm. I hang the object from the ceiling horizontally, approximately 90 cm above the ground, and with same distance to the wall. Additionally I make an animation of a white grid on black background, expanding and compressing in a rhythmic manner. The animation is projected onto both the wall and the floor, and since the black colour is not projected the animation is essentially a grid of light. I install the work in Vita Havet at Konstfack, a large and open room which is passed by many students, staff and visitors. The animation catches the eye from a distance, makes viewers curious and persuades many to go to the installation where they discover the hanging embroidery and start making connections between the two components.

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14 See appendix II for a short description of the two projects Dispositional Hypnoid States 1-9 and Panoptical White.
Linen, acrylic, metals, animation
11x11x3.5 cm
Photo by Eric Claesson
• **Spring Exhibition**

As the project continually evolves it is natural to make and show new work for the Konstfack Spring Show / Vårutställning 2016. The new piece is titled *not on the fabric but in the fabric* and consists of 28 new embroideries all in the same format of 2½x2½ cm squares.

Mounting the embroidery for display has become a craft in itself, requiring precision and very specific tools. I mount the embroidery between, but this time also on, acrylic sheets of 7x7 cm. They are digitally drawn to fit the embroidery exactly and cut with laser. Some now have square holes that align with the holes in the embroidery, and I also introduce a thicker acrylic sheet of 8 mm along with the 3 mm sheet. The thicker sheet and the holes add three-dimensionality and new details to the side views, and the material reflects light from many angles onto the embroidery. The holes are meant to further integrate the acrylic in the embroidery and to display the needlelace fillings that appear in the holes of some of the grids. Layering the sheets allows for the embroideries to be placed at different layers and on top of each other. This times I make four objects, which have different numbers of layers. I hang them at 4 different angles (vertical, horizontal, side and 45 degrees) from holders that I mount on top of the exhibition wall. The hanging is determined by the length of the wall, the objects are spaced by a distance that is doubled at every interval (2, 4, 8).

For this installation I also show a different animation, adapted to the exhibition space. This animation shows a grid that simply moves to the left, pauses and then moves to the right in an endless repeat. It is projected in a rectangular shape that follows the hanging of the embroidered work.
not on the fabric but in the fabric
Linen, acrylic, metals, animation
4 pcs of 7x7x1,2-2cm
Photos by Eric Claesson
discussion

Seen in retrospect after examination and exhibition, the application of theory about the grid has been of artistic inspiration for myself, but I think other theory could have proven more relevant, for example theory directly related to craft, the exchange of craft knowledge, working with tradition and other topics. The method of applying theory from fine arts and architecture is a way of testing a different framework around a discipline that have very established conventions and connotations, both to me and to everyone I have spoken to, and in that way it has been successful, since it has helped me find new ways to work with and display the embroidery, and new ways to communicate about it.

However, one of the most common reactions to my work so far has been about the use of a traditional technique in combination with the newer medium of animation, which of course is a very basic interpretation. But thinking I can “free” the embroidery from its history is an illusion and some of the readings I myself present do require knowledge about its historical context, for example the connotations that goldwork and whitework hold respectively.

When I present my work to exhibition visitors I finally realise that it also holds a strong element of reappraisal of traditional female craft. Placing my focus elsewhere in making and presenting is not an attempt to ignore this, on the contrary it is a way of displaying the value I think the craft holds by offering new lenses to look at it through, to awaken curiosity in new audiences. When someone who never has had any interest in textile crafts suddenly finds himself looking closely at traditional whitework, I think I have succeeded, and the same can be said when an expert in the field is surprised by the way I have chosen to work with the craft.

If I were to do this project again, I would have been in even more contact with other practitioners and visited local archives of Hardanger and Hedebo work. If I was to re-exhibit the work displayed at the graduation show, I would make a more informative text to accompany the work, realising that the history and tradition surrounding the work should actually be communicated clearly (see appendix IV for the rather cryptic text that accompanied the work in the exhibition).
conclusion

I set out to explore how I can work with the traditional techniques of Hardanger and Hedebo embroidery from a different perspective than the ones I already know of. The obvious context to place white embroidery in is one of tradition and women’s history and my work will always hold that connotation, but I apply theory from other fields, in this case visual arts and architecture, to create new knowledge about an established discipline. I think that this worked well as artistic inspiration and as a guideline when making decisions, but that it otherwise can seem forced and even unnecessary.

I have experimented with combining the whitework with goldwork and found that this can be read both as adding to the value and preciousness I am trying to communicate, but also as highlighting the contrast between two areas of embroidery that have very different statuses and are used in different contexts and parts of society.

I have combined the whitework with digital animation as a way of directing the gaze in an exhibition and to direct the focus onto topics of optics, light and repetition which I also discovered in the embroidery process. Displaying the embroidery has been my biggest challenge and during the past year I have used the digital fabrication technique of lasercutting transparent sheet in shapes that support the embroidery. The plastic material acts as a support and protection for the textile but also works as a prism that reflects light and as a lens to look through.

Combining the main field of drawn-thread whitework with goldwork, animation and plastics has been my method of bringing forward a craft that is getting more and more invisible but which deserves reappraisal, along with many other crafts that are either being forgotten or deemed irrelevant.
list of references

Print:

Web:

Images:
img 1. Courtesy of Hardanger & Voss Museum, HFU.EBM.042 (found here: http://digitaltmuseum.no/021015588136)
img Ia. Reinsfelt, Anne-Lise / Norsk Folkemuseum. NF.2000-0260 (found here: http://digitaltmuseum.no/011023236755)
img Ib. Courtesy of Greve Museum (found here: http://hedeboosning.dk/udstillingstekstiler/5-4-knaedug)

Questions or comments to this project?
Reach me at ida@ida-johansson.com

Other sources who have shaped this project:
Pelse Asboe, embroiderer and educator, Denmark
Margareta Djoos, Gesäll & Mästare i vitbroderi, Sweden
Pearl Haslam, instructor at London Embroidery School, United Kingdom
Agnete Sivertsen, managing director of Hardanger & Voss Museum, Norway
Yvette Stanton, author about several books on Hardanger embroidery, Australia
Amica Sundström, adjunkt at Konstfack, textile techniques, Sweden
Anonymous members of the Facebook group Hardanger Embroidery
Most whitework embroidery techniques are richly documented in literature and museums. I will very briefly describe the two techniques that are used in this project but will refer to existing material for further reading.

Both techniques follow the weave of the fabric and therefore has a geometric appearance with motifs composed of block components, and both involve the cutting and removal of selected threads while others are wrapped and embellished in various ways. The two techniques experienced their first wave of popularity during the 1500s and 1600s and have developed regionally in Scandinavia, but are thought to have roots in the Italian reticella technique (reticella meaning “little net”).

1 Svennås, Else: “Brodera Vitt på Vitt”, ICA-Förlaget, Uppsala 1962, p. 34

Hardanger

Hardangerwork is an embroidery technique that has evolved in the Hardanger Fjord region in western Norway. The isolated nature of the area allowed the technique to develop a very distinct expression which is well preserved.

Hardanger is worked with linen or mercerised cotton thread on even-weave or basket-woven fabric, also in linen or cotton. An area of the fabric is enclosed with stitches and 4 threads are cut and removed, while the next 4 stays. This is repeated in both directions, and the remaining threads are then woven with needle and thread.

The traditional use has been for aprons, blouses and headdresses but has later been expanded to tablecloths, doilies and other household items, along with ecclesiastical textiles such as altar cloths. Hardanger still enjoys popularity and is worked by mainly hobby enthusiasts around the world, something that can be witnessed in a Facebook group dedicated to the craft.


Hedebo

Hedebo work is associated with an area on Eastern Sjælland in Denmark, called Heden. Here, the soil was fertile and the families accordingly wealthy, which allowed for the women to develop and refine this embroidery technique.

Hedebo is worked with linen thread on even-weave linen. The technique has many variations but I work the style where 4 threads are removed, and 2 threads are left. These are then wrapped, not woven. This gives a net that is more open, but less stable.

The traditional use for has been for blouses, collars and the stolpe cloth - a long piece of linen used to dress posts and beams inside the house on special occasions. The technique is now quite rare but Greve Museum has made a big effort to communicate it on the website Hedebosyning.dk.

4 http://hedebosyning.dk/ (accessed May 16 2016)

Ida Johansson // CRAFT Textile // Master’s degree project // Konstfack 2016
Dispositional Hypnoid States 1-9

During 3rd semester where I arrived back at white embroidery, I created the installation shown below, in Hardangerwork and acrylic sheet. The hanging was made to persuade the viewer to look through the embroideries, instead of only looking at them, and to view the many layers at once. It also made the back of the embroidery visible. The embroideries follow a pattern building a spiral sequence, in the attempt to make the audience look for the system. Later, the work was installed at the Digital Art Center (DAC) in Kista, where it took on a different character, being surrounded by projections and screens and being a physically crafted object in a digitally flickering environment.

Panoptical White

As a consequence of researching white embroidery, I became very interested in whiteness and cleanliness. To explore this I created a concept dubbed Panoptical White: a fictional product which can cleanse, bleach and whiten anything as desired. I produced text, a graphic identity and performed a robot-like reading at a presentation to illustrate what I then saw in the white grid - a totalitarian cleansing of the mind, the public and private spheres. This way of working helped me form a clearer idea of what I want to communicate - that white is not just a neutral colour of purity and innocence, and that the grid is not just a rational framework for organisation. A series of the pictures below where shown with set intervals at the reading.
What do you think of when I say white embroidery?

Michael Detlef Petersen
When I hear “white embroidery” I think about girls’ schools in the past, where there was an emphasis on cleanliness and rules. That is the first thing I think about. That cleanliness I also see as something beautiful and a thing of contrast, because in purity there is always something dirty lurking in the shadows.

I have read about this too. How needlework teaching 100-200 years ago actually was just as much about shaping girls into good, conscientious housewives, as it was about teaching them a craft. For instance, that it was important to wash your hands before starting to embroider, so the white fabric stayed neat and clean.

Mette Holst Skov
I have read about this too. How needlework teaching 100-200 years ago actually was just as much about shaping girls into good, conscientious housewives, as it was about teaching them a craft. For instance, that it was important to wash your hands before starting to embroider, so the white fabric stayed neat and clean.

I think physical purity as the embodiment of moral purity. In one experiment, a group of subjects were asked to think about something unethical they had done, and another group should think of something ethical. Afterwards they were asked to finish words like _ _ _ P and W _ _ _ etc. The ones who had recalled an ethical action would maybe write SHIP and WISH, while the ones who had recalled something unethical were much more likely to write SOAP and WASH and similar words having to do with cleansing and hygiene.

IJ
No light without shade… that theme of cleanness and cleanliness is actually something I have been researching lately - the cleanness of the embroidery as a marker of the woman’s purity, mentally, morally, bodily. And that needlework was something every girl should learn, in school or from her family. I just learned it from some old books.

Mette Holst Skov
I have read about this too. How needlework teaching 100-200 years ago actually was just as much about shaping girls into good, conscientious housewives, as it was about teaching them a craft. For instance, that it was important to wash your hands before starting to embroider, so the white fabric stayed neat and clean.

IJ
What is your take on the fact that the embroidery had to be so clean?

Mette Holst Skov
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IJ
I read some research about the connection between the perception of cleanliness and morality.

Mette Holst Skov
I have read about this too. How needlework teaching 100-200 years ago actually was just as much about shaping girls into good, conscientious housewives, as it was about teaching them a craft. For instance, that it was important to wash your hands before starting to embroider, so the white fabric stayed neat and clean.

IJ
What did it say?

Mette Holst Skov
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IJ
I agree. Sometimes I have been irritated when the only response I get is “oh, that must have taken such a long time to make” - implying that the only thing required is time, while skill and knowledge isn’t really acknowledged. But I have started to see it more as an expression of value, just as you say - and as a key to start understanding the craft and the object.

Mette Holst Skov
I have read about this too. How needlework teaching 100-200 years ago actually was just as much about shaping girls into good, conscientious housewives, as it was about teaching them a craft. For instance, that it was important to wash your hands before starting to embroider, so the white fabric stayed neat and clean.

IJ
And that if you feel clean yourself, e.g. you just washed your hands, then you are more forgiving towards others’ immoral actions, which is opposite to what I would have thought. Maybe I will become a more forgiving person when I make clean white embroidery? [grin emoticon]

Mette Holst Skov
I have read about this too. How needlework teaching 100-200 years ago actually was just as much about shaping girls into good, conscientious housewives, as it was about teaching them a craft. For instance, that it was important to wash your hands before starting to embroider, so the white fabric stayed neat and clean.

IJ
Possibly!
NOT ON THE FABRIC BUT IN THE FABRIC

= | = | = | = | =
= | = | = | = | =
= | = | = | = | =
= | = | = | = | =

NOT ON THE FABRIC BUT IN THE FABRIC

a white grid inside a white grid inside a white grid

| remove 4 threads | leave 4 threads | remove 4 threads |
rotate 90 degrees
| remove 4 threads | leave 4 threads | remove 4 threads |
wrap threads with thread
not on the fabric but in the fabric

Ida Johansson
Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm 2016