Diaphanous Leaves by Sally Orgren on September 14, 2008 – weavezine – transparency: translucent fabric with areas of opaque inlay designs

photo by Gretchen Hildner

Creating this scarf doesn't require a big floor loom and lots of harnesses.

I dusted off my little eight-inch Structo table loom, and wove this on just two shafts! (You could even try this on a rigid-heddle loom.)

The weaving technique is called transparency and renders a lacy, translucent fabric with areas of opaque inlay designs.

Intrigued? Here's how to get started...

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Project details

I envisioned a flowing, light-weight scarf in silk noil that could wrap around my neck several times and/or hang down to mid-thigh.

Warp

I used 25/1 silk noil (12,500 ypp) set at 30 epi. I wound a pattern of random stripes in olive, tan, and gray. For added interest and shine, I used occasional shots of peach and burgundy 10/2 Tencel® in the warp.

An alternative warp yarn would be 20/2 pearl cotton (8,000 ypp), set at 18-20 epi.

Whatever yarn you use, set it more widely than normal to create the lacy background canvas.

For this "Dr. Who" length scarf, I wound a warp four yards long and eight inches wide. This gave me enough warp to make the scarf and a twelve-inch sample.
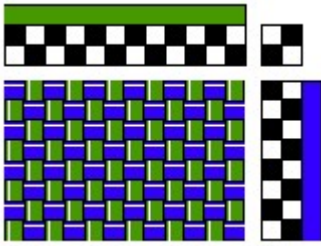
Ground Weft

Same as the warp yarn. In my case 25/1 silk noil.

Inlay Weft

Use yarn with a grist twice as thick as your warp thread. For my project, I used 10/2 Tencel singly, and 20/2 pearl cotton (doubled) for the image areas.

Threading & Treadling
Straight draw threading. Tabby treadling (to weave the ground cloth).


Weave an inch or more of plain weave to start. You may need to practice to achieve a loose, balanced weave. Your weft should be "placed" at the fell line, not "beat."

A table loom is an advantage when weaving transparencies, as it will slow down and soften your beat.

The basic idea behind this technique is that the design inlay is woven into the open spaces of the loosely woven background cloth.

Preparing the Inlay Design
I selected a leaf shape and traced it onto one-inch grid pattern paper called <u>Tru-Grid™ by Pellon</u>, available from most fabric stores. I outlined my leaves with a Sharpie pen on both sides of the paper, so the line art was clearly visible and I had several options for positioning the leaf on the fabric. For your first attempt, you might want to pick a simple shape like a circle or triangle. If the design is small—less than three inches across—a simpler shape will look better.
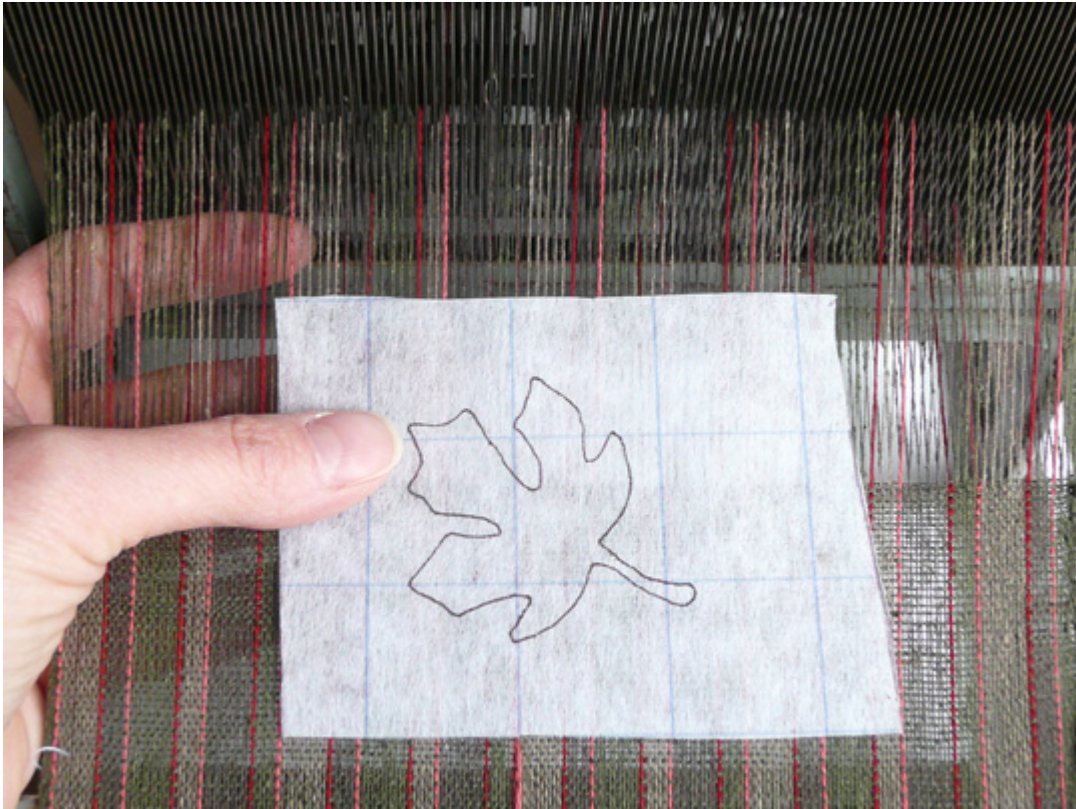
Attach the cartoon securely to the underside of the fabric. I used flat pins to anchor it to the previously woven fabric.
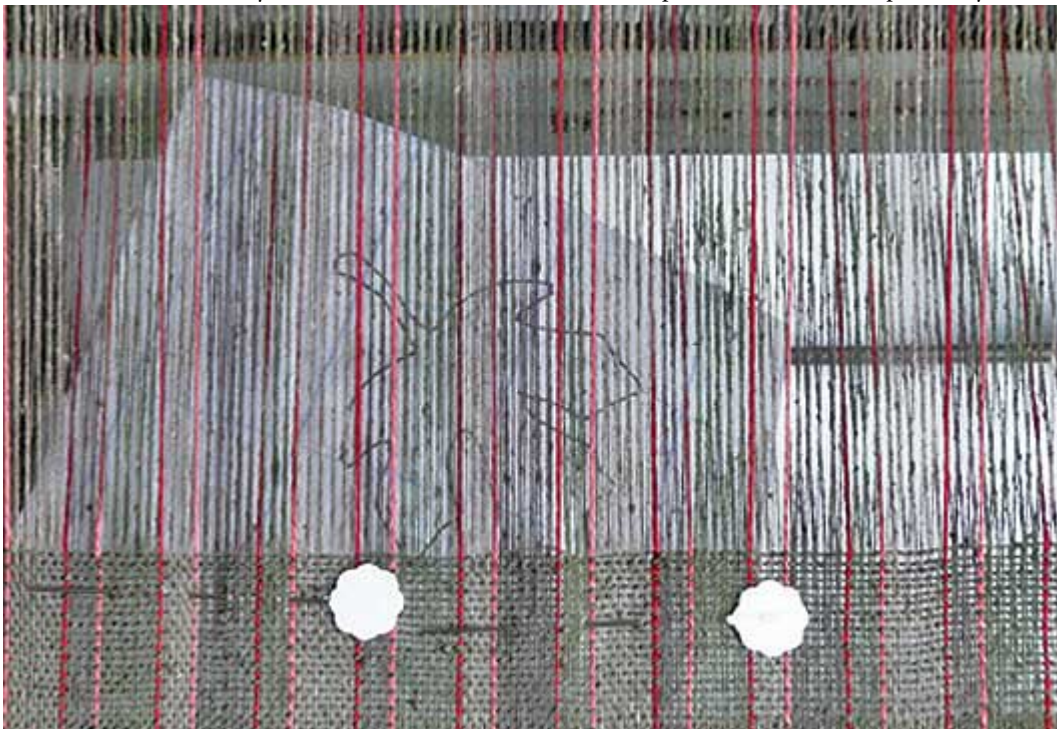

Weaving

Thread a blunt tapestry needle with your pattern weft. (Or wind your pattern weft onto a small stick or netting shuttle.)

Open a new shed. Place the pattern weft in the shed, but *only* in the area indicated by the underlying cartoon. Next, throw the background shuttle while the shed is *still* open, all the way across. Change sheds, and gently press the inlay and background wefts into position.

Continue this process— throw the inlay weft first, then follow with the background weft before changing sheds and beating gently.
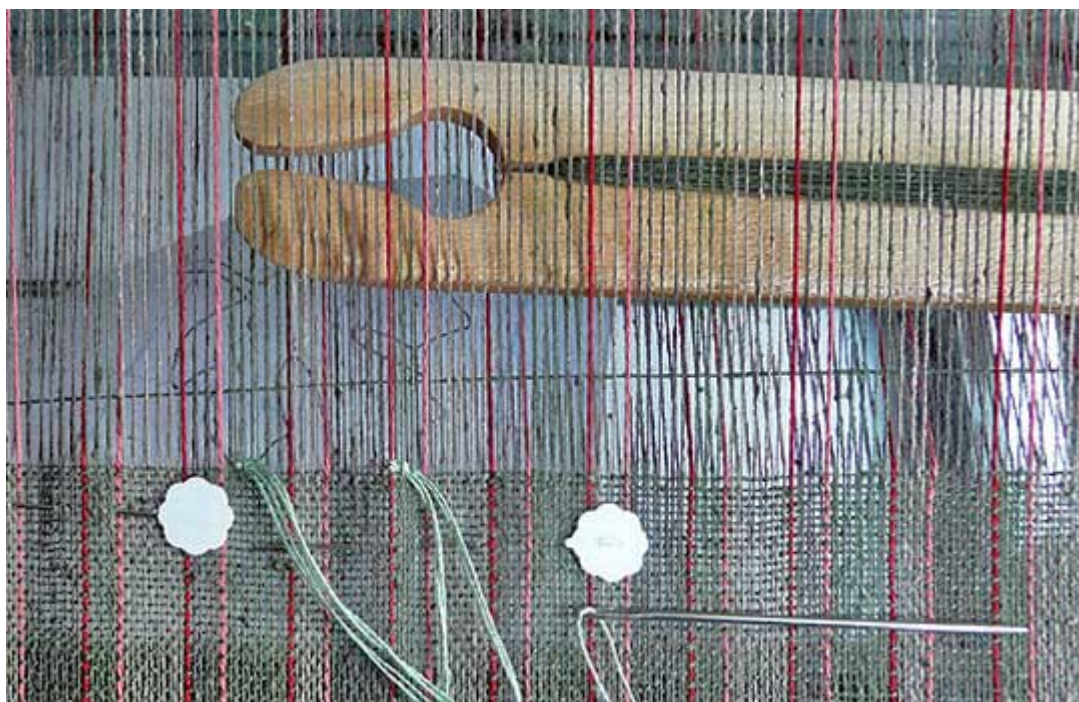
Every time you introduce a pattern weft, follow the direction of the background shuttle. This will help you eliminate mistakes because your wefts should all travel in the same direction when you complete a pattern and background pick. If your shuttles start going in opposite directions, you'll know you forgot a step somewhere.

When beginning or ending a pattern weft, leave at least a three-to-four-inch tail. This allows you plenty of room to weave the tails back into the pattern area, so the final fabric is reversible!


With overlapping images or detailed shapes such as my leaves, your project may require several shuttles. I used up to three tapestry needles to complete just one two-and-a-half-inch leaf.

I also use small, handmade cardboard shuttles that hold 20-30 inch lengths of pattern weft. They are one-half-inch wide by four inches long with slits on each end. My favorite cardboard for this purpose is illustration board, available from a local arts or crafts store.

I prefer to weave my tails back into the image area while the warp is still under tension, because the loom holds the cloth taut, like the world's best embroidery hoop!
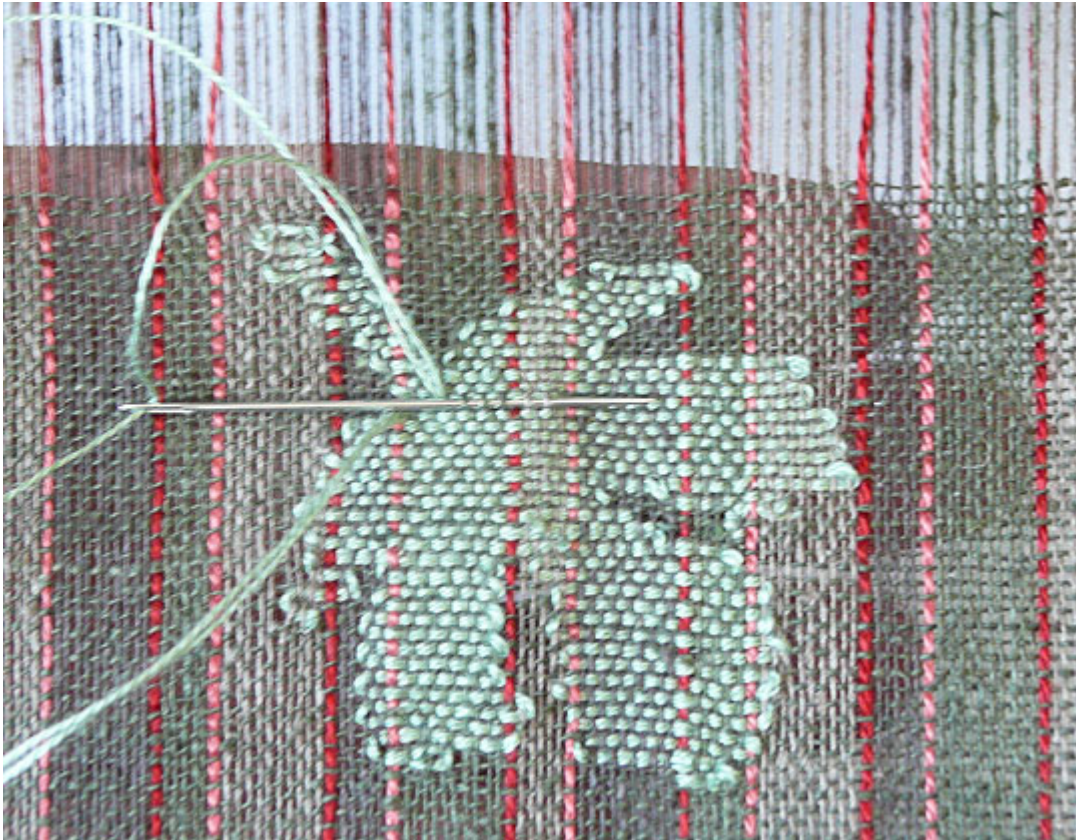
To make your woven-in tails less visible, separate the two yarns (or split the plies) before working them back into the design.
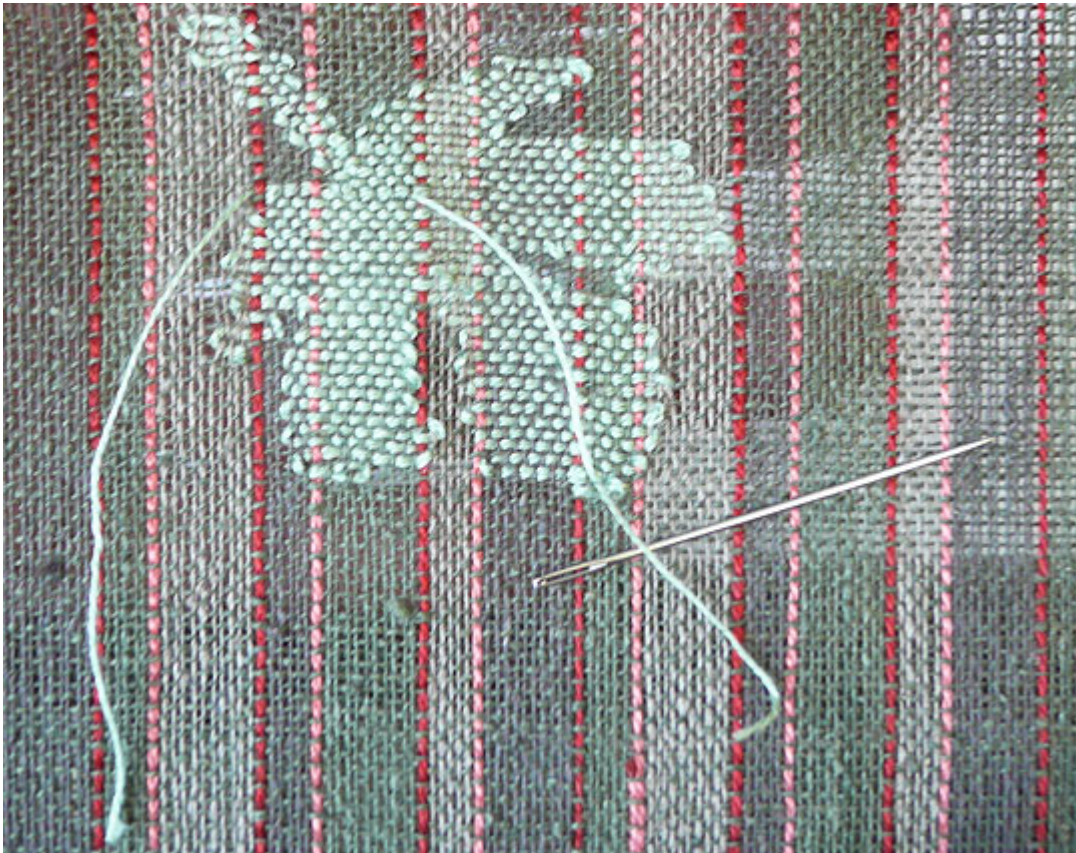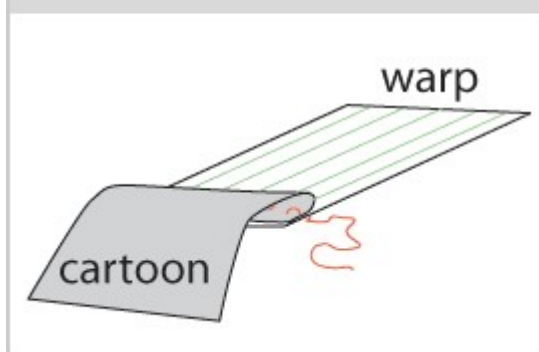
Finishing

I washed my silk scarf with gentle hand-agitation in warm water using clear Ivory dish detergent. I hung it to air dry and then pressed with a steam iron on the "silk" setting. Take-up and shrinkage was less than 10%.

A Special Technique for Table-Loom Weaving

On a table loom, there typically isn't much weaving space in front of the castle. So if you anchor the cartoon under the web, you'll have to move the cartoon each time you advance the warp. My guild mates recommended a technique taught by [Nadine Sanders](#) where the cartoon is stitched to the top surface, face down, at the beginning of the fabric. This method allows the weaver to easily roll the section of the image needed right up to the fell line.
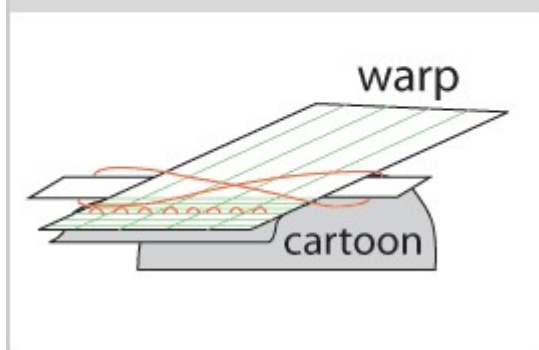
With the cartoon on top of the warp, however, you see your pattern upside down and/or in reverse. I found that difficult, so I came up with the "sling" method for suspending the drawing below the warp. I used a lease stick with a looped string over the ends as a sling to hold the drawing in place. You still stitch the drawing to the web, but the sling allows you to easily slide the stick toward the castle and back again, revealing the part of the drawing you need to see directly under the weft pick you are about to weave.

Traditional Transparencies

Transparencies are traditionally woven in white inlay on a white background. Below is a project woven with 40/2 bleached line-linen warp (6,000 ypp) set at 24 epi. The weft was 8/2 Homestead Cotton.

Resources

[Sheer Delight: Handwoven Transparencies](#) by Doramay Keasbey

WeaveZine: an online magazine for handweavers—Archives