

# Another Ornament Challenge: Snowshoes

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It's ornament-making time again, and as she has for the past couple of years, my friend Louise has given me a new challenge as she comes up with ideas for everyone on her list. This time it's a snowshoe-themed ornament!

Louise doesn't usually specify exactly what kind of ornament to make; she just tosses out a theme, and leaves me to it. So how should I approach this one?



As I kicked around some ideas, my thoughts naturally turned to my 2 1/4" button machine. Maybe I could make an ornament with an iconic illustration of snowshoes, with an appropriate caption. That could work. . . .

Or maybe a "Snowshoe Crossing" sign, in either a decoupage hardboard version or an embroidered felt version. How cute would that be on the tree?



But despite the appeal of both of these, I couldn't quite shake the idea of making a pair of miniature snowshoes, along the lines of this image that I found on line. But I puzzled over how to create them.

I'd need a mesh of some kind and a frame that would be stiff enough to hold its shape. What materials should I use? Cardboard? Felt? Chenille stems? Polymer clay? Window screen? Nylon net?

I toyed with all these possibilities for several days before finally making a decision that probably should have been obvious from the get-go. You guessed it: embroidery.



At the same time that I was thrashing around my snowshoe ideas, I was also busy creating an on-line catalogue of ornament suggestions for my sibs and friends to refer to, which includes my adorable freestanding lace lobster.



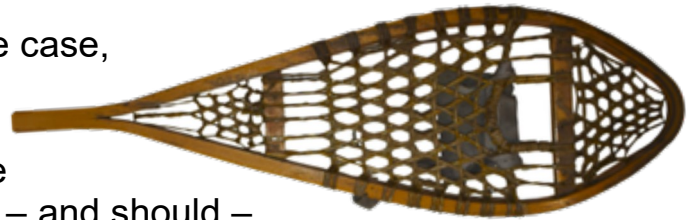
In addition, I've started my Christmas crafting, which includes a set of Sonia Showalter's beautiful freestanding lace Christmas angels.



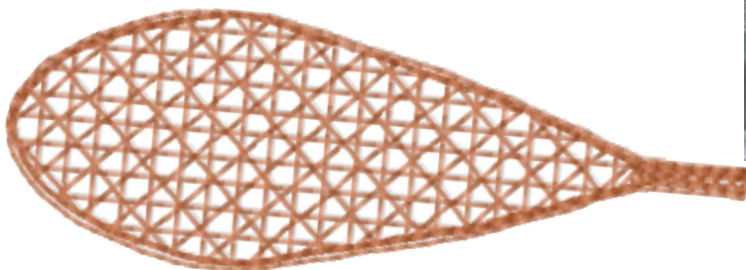
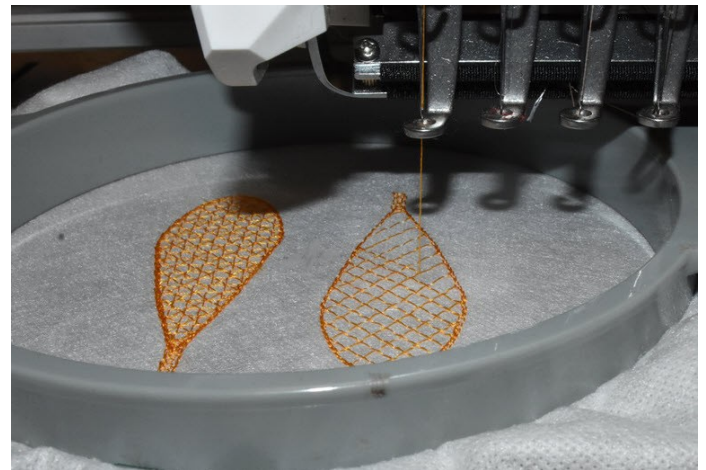
I love freestanding lace; in fact, I've been fascinated with FSL designs since

I bought my first embroidery machine nearly thirty years ago, and when I started digitizing, freestanding lace was one of the techniques I most wanted to conquer.

As is so often the case, the solution to my snowshoe conundrum was staring me in the face. One look at a traditional snowshoe confirms that *of course* this ornament could – and should – be made of freestanding lace. Now all I had to do was digitize it.



Free-standing lace is stitched onto vilene wash-away stabilizer, over a mesh foundation that is stitched as part of the design itself. The finished stitch-out is then rinsed in warm water to remove the stabilizer residue, leaving only the stitches in place.



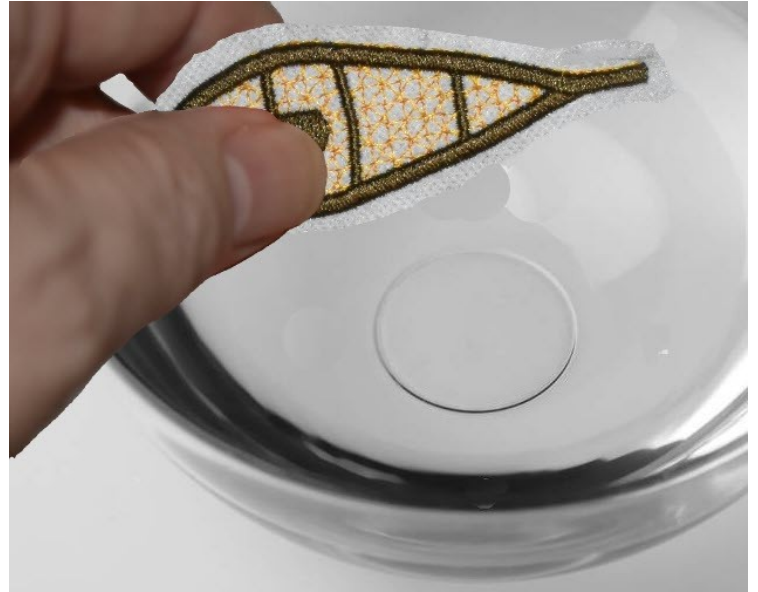
This mesh foundation is basically a crisscrossing pattern of straight stitches going in four directions. Once laid down, the dense mesh serves in place of fabric to support the rest of the design details. In turn, the design stitches must have a solid base of linked underlay stitches, to keep the design from falling apart once the stabilizer is rinsed away.

Freestanding lace is something of a challenge to digitize, but once you get the hang of the technique, it produces quite a lovely result. It's the perfect technique for something like these mesh-based snowshoes.



As I digitized, I made sure that the design details – the dark brown borders and internal support strips – were given a solid base of underlay over top of the mesh foundation. Then I stitched out my snowshoes onto the vilene wash-away stabilizer and cut them out.

The moment of truth: rinsing away the stabilizer will reveal whether the design has been given sufficient underlay to hold together.



Success! My mini snowshoes are holding together nicely, and don't they look just like the real thing?!

I've haven't rinsed out all of the stabilizer; the residue acts as a kind of starch, to give the lace a bit of body, so the snowshoes will be stiff enough to hang as ornaments.

I've noticed that over the years, lace stiffened with stabilizer residue may soften as it absorbs humidity from the environment. To help prevent this from happening, I now like to treat my lace ornaments with fabric stiffener. I soaked the brown borders with the stiffener liquid, then set the shoes aside to dry once more.



To finish my ornament, I overlapped the two snowshoes and glued them together along the brown borders, using a small amount of Fabri-Tac adhesive, which has a quick grab. I pressed the shoes together with my fingers, then set them aside to dry completely.



For extra hold, I also ran a line of machine stitching in the mesh area just between the two snowshoe borders, using invisible (nylon filament) thread. This stuff is perfect for this purpose: it sinks into the mesh with hardly a trace, and it's almost impossible to detect. Now the snowshoes are secure enough to last for years without coming apart should the glue dry out.



The finished ornament. OMG, aren't they adorable?!

As always, I'm grateful for the digitizing challenge Louise threw my way, and tickled pink with the result. I'm sure there were other methods I could have used to make a successful snowshoe ornament, but I'm really happy with this one.

With the hook (or a string, if you prefer) passed through the mesh top of one of the snowshoes, the ornament will hang on a slight angle – kind of a jaunty look, don't you think?

This ornament looks just as good from the back as from the front, and the nylon filament stitching is all but invisible. I'm just chuffed, and I'm sure Louise will be too. I just hope her peeps like them as much as I do!

