

Bobbin Lace

Bobbin lace is a lace textile made by braiding and twisting lengths of thread, which are wound on bobbins to manage them. As the work progresses, the weaving is held in place with pins set in a lace pillow, the placement of the pins usually determined by a pattern or pricking pinned on the pillow.

Bobbin lace is also known as **pillow lace**, because it was worked on a pillow, and **bone lace**, because early bobbins were made of bone or ivory.

Bobbin lace is one of the two major categories of handmade laces, the other being needlelace, derived from earlier cutwork and reticella.



Origin

A will of 1493 by the Milanese Sforza family mentions lace created with twelve bobbins.¹ Bobbin lace evolved from passementerie or braid-making in 16th-century Italy. Genoa was famous for its braids, hence it is not surprising to find bobbin lace developed in the city. It traveled along with the Spanish troops through Europe. Coarse *passemments* of gold and silver-wrapped threads or colored silks gradually became finer, and later bleached linen yarn was used to make both braids and edgings. The making of bobbin lace was easier to learn than the elaborate cutwork of the 16th century, and the tools and materials for making linen bobbin lace were inexpensive. There was a ready market for bobbin lace of all qualities, and women throughout Europe soon took up the craft which earned a better income than spinning, sewing, weaving or other home-based textile arts. Bobbin lace-making was established in charity schools, almshouses, and convents.

In the 17th century, the textile centers of Flanders and Normandy eclipsed Italy as the premiere sources for fine bobbin lace, but until the coming of mechanization hand-lacemaking continued to be practiced throughout Europe, suffering only in those periods of simplicity when lace itself fell out of fashion.

Structure

Bobbin lace may be made with coarse or fine threads. Traditionally it was made with linen, silk, wool, or, later, cotton threads, or with precious metals. Today it is made with a variety of natural and synthetic fibers and with wire and other filaments.

Elements of bobbin lace may include toile or *toilé* (clothwork), *réseau* (the net-like ground of continuous lace), fillings of part laces, tapes, gimp, picots, tallies, ribs and rolls. Not all styles of bobbin lace include all these elements.



Contemporary Laces

The advent of machine-made lace at first pushed lace-makers into more complicated designs beyond the capabilities of early machines, then simpler designs so they could compete on price, and finally pushed them out of business almost entirely.

The resurgence of lace-making is a recent phenomenon and is mostly done as a hobby. Lacemaking groups still meet in regions as varied as Devonshire, England and Orange County, California. In the European towns where lace was once a major industry, especially in Belgium, England, Spain (Camariñas and Almagro), northern and centre Portugal, France and Slovenia lacemakers still demonstrate the craft and sell their wares, though their customer base has shifted from the wealthy nobility to the curious tourist.

Still new types of lace are being developed such as the 3D Rosalibre and a colored version of Milanese lace by borrowing rolls from Duchesse lace to store various shades and colors. Other artists are giving grounds a major role by distorting and varying stitches, pin distances and thread sizes or colours. The variations are explored by experimentation and mathematics and algorithms. The lace maintaining its shape without stiffening is no longer a requirement. Inspiring journals, guilds and foundations show that old techniques with a new twist can challenge young people to create works that can definitely classify as art. A Dutch design graduate in 2006 discovered bobbin lace was a technique to make a fancy fence. The first fences became museum pieces. The fences are now produced in Bangalore by concrete rebar plaiters.

Tools

The major tools to make bobbin lace are a pillow, bobbins, pins and prickings. The part laces also require a crochet hook, very fine types of lace require very fine hooks. There are different types of pillows and bobbins linked to areas, eras and type of lace.

Bobbin

Bobbins, which are traditionally made of wood or bone, are used to hold the thread. They come in different shapes, often associated with certain types of lace. The parts of a bobbin are the neck, which is where the thread is wound, a head, where thread is hitched to keep it from coming unwound, and the shank, which is used as a handle. Bobbins from England may also have a beaded spangle at the end of the shank, which makes the bobbin heavier and helps with tensioning the thread. Bobbins are usually 3 1/2 - 4 inches long, though they may be shorter or longer. Bobbins are wound and used in pairs.

There are many types of bobbins, including:

Belgian bobbins: They have a single head and a bulbous rounding near the end of the shank that helps with tensioning threads.

Binche bobbins: The bulbous rounding near the end of the shank is small, making these bobbins good for fine, straight laces.

East Midlands bobbins: These double-headed bobbins are slender and spangled. They are also called Bucks or Midlands bobbins.

Honiton bobbins: Honiton bobbins are straight below the single head, and the end of the shank comes to a blunt point, which helps with sewing.