



"FEEL THE FABRIC...EMBRACE THE CULTURE"

Kuba Appliqué

designed by Lisa Shepard Stewart

Practice your appliqué skills while you incorporate the creative concepts of KUBA CLOTH, a textile art found in the Congo region of Central Africa. Kuba is made from the raffia fibers of palm trees. The stiff, woven cloth is first hemmed and softened to make it suitable for various end uses. To soften it, the fabric makers pound the cloth in a large wooden mortar. This softening process is so rigorous that holes often appear in the cloth. It's widely believed that the use of appliqué developed as a means of repairing the cloth, restoring it to full usability.

Kuba cloth has had a worldwide influence on art and design, as evidenced by some of the works of Matisse, Picasso, Klee and others. The unique look and labor-intensive technique makes it a highly valued piece in the collections of many art & textile collectors. Now creative sewers can enjoy a similar look with easy-to-find materials. This simplified version of the technique involves the use of linen or burlap (also called jute). These fabrics have a coarse look and feel that approaches that of real raffia cloth. You can further embellish your project with scraps of leather, suede, mudcloth, couched yarns & cordings and interesting found objects!

YOU'LL NEED:

- beige burlap for background (large enough for your intended project)
- additional burlap in contrasting colors - tan, black, brown, etc.
- optional: leather, suede, mudcloth, grass fibers, cordings, yarns, beads, etc.
- paper-backed fusible web
- contrast color thread for edge stitching (choose a heavy weight, such as buttonhole twist)
- iron and sewing machine

1. Apply fusible web to the appliqué fabrics according to the web manufacturer's directions.
2. Cut shapes from the appliqué fabrics. The shapes are simple to cut free-hand. The most common resemble the letters L, T, X, Y, boomerang, and circular shapes. Try a few variations, laying out and fusing appliqués to test scraps of background fabric, experimenting with a variety of stitch selections and threads. Stitch around each shape with hand or machine stitching. Try a slight zigzag stitch to add a bit more depth to the stitching. Double needle stitching will also heighten the effect, as will some of the decorative stitches. Save samples for reference as you begin the actual project. .
3. Arrange and fuse appliqués into place as you did for the practice pieces. Remember to leave a border area free of appliqués along the edges for your seam allowances, well hanging casings, or other finishing options.
4. Finish the raw edges of the appliqué block according to the end use. Turn under all edges plus a top casing for a wall hanging, sew on a backing and insert a pillow form, or stitch the block to the front of a canvas tote bag.

(Excerpted from [AFRICAN ACCENTS: Fabrics and Crafts to Decorate Your Home](#))

Lisa Shepard Stewart is an author, designer and instructor based in New Jersey. In her how-to project books, Lisa encourages others to express themselves creatively through culturally relevant techniques and materials. She promotes her work through workshops, trunk shows and special events both in the US and internationally. Visit www.CulturedExpressions.com; call 1-866-MUDCLOTH; or write PO Box 356, Rahway, NJ 07065

FREE PROJECT SHEET

