

Circus Lion

How to create great machine applique



Creating great machine applique isn't hard – and it's such fun to do as you get really quick results. A design that would take hours to sew entirely by hand takes less than an hour or two using your machine – and it's still fun to add the final touches by hand.

This Circus Lion pattern is quick and easy to create – and along the way I'll give you some great hints and tips for achieving a really professional look.

Materials

To make the circus lion you will need:

12" x 10" artists canvas block to mount your finished picture (optional)

15" x 13" background fabric (this allows for turning to the back of the block)

54" (1.5m) yellow jumbo ric rac braid

6" square beige felt for lion's body and head

Small pieces blue, gold and cream felt

Scraps of red fabric (can use felt) for cushion, pale gold textured fabric for mane and tail, bright patterned fabric for mane and stand.

4 tiny beads for crown

Bondaweb/spray fabric adhesive

Embroidery floss in black, white, gold and red (very small amounts)

Machine thread in black for needle and dark grey/another dark colour for bobbin thread.

Embroidery hoop if using (good to start with one)

Hint: Using two different colours makes for a softer line – just black makes a very harsh and heavy line. I don't know why this should make such a difference as you can't really see the bobbin thread – but it does! Using a combination of two colours gives you a softer line – rather like drawing with a pencil or crayon. Other good combinations are pink and cream or dark blue and green.

Method

Cut out the pieces using the template at the end as a guide. Use Bondaweb if you like this method – it's good where you have long thin pieces like the tail as it provides extra strength. Fabric adhesive is better for the mane and shapes that sit on top of felt as it can be difficult to press the Bondaweb with enough heat to fuse it without scorching the felt.

Hints:

Using Bondaweb: First print the lion in reverse. Then place your template beneath the Bondaweb with the paper side uppermost. With an ordinary marker trace the pattern onto the paper.

DO NOT CUT AROUND THE PATTERN YET.

Iron the Bondaweb onto the reverse of your fabric. Now cut around the shape. (see notes on cutting in the next paragraph).

Try positioning your shape and when you're happy with how it looks, peel the backing paper off the Bondaweb and press the shape onto the base fabric.

It's really important to avoid your shapes slipping when you run the piece through your machine, so if you can't achieve good adhesion this way then you may want to tack your pieces into place and remove the tacking later.

Cut the two layers of the lion's head as two separate pieces – no need to make a hole in the centre, his face will just sit on top.

Hint: Use large shears when you want to cut smooth edges like the lion's body and tail – open as wide as they will go and try to cut the whole edge in one smooth motion.

It is best to hold the shears still and move the fabric around as you cut so avoiding having to cut at awkward angles. If you're not used to this technique then try it out on a little scrap fabric first.

Cutting your shapes in this way avoids jagged edges and hiccups where you stop and re-open your scissors. Use small scissors for the mane and crown where you need sharp points and jagged edges

Fold your background fabric into four so you can centre your design. Don't press as these creases will not be permanent.

Position the base of the lion's stool, then the two triangles of patterned fabric and finally the stool top. Secure with Bondaweb/adhesive or tacking.

Hint: When applying shapes always work from the bottom layer upwards. Allow a little extra on the edge of the lower piece so it will be overlapped by the top piece.

Now you are ready to start your machine applique:

Your machine

Thread your machine and change to a darning foot. This will help to keep your fabric from puckering whilst protecting your fingers as you move the fabric around under the needle.

Thread your machine with black or very dark grey thread in the needle and grey in the bobbin. I usually use ordinary all-purpose thread.

Drop the feed dog feet in the machine base plate. If you're not sure how to do this then refer to your manufacturer's handbook – all machines are slightly different.

I find I don't usually need to alter the tension in my machine foot, but you may like to loosen the upper tension a little.

Your project

Remember, when you put your fabric in the hoop, put it in upside down, or the opposite way to hand embroidery. This makes sure that the fabric stays flat on your sewing machine. If you're using a hoop then make sure your fabric is nice and tight, but not so much that you distort or mark it.

Hint: A hoop is essential for lighter weight fabrics.

Let's start stitching

Slide your hooped up fabric under the machine foot – remember it's the other way up to hand embroidery so your fabric should lie flat against the base plate of your machine.

Position your needle where you want to start stitching and lower the foot (if you forget to do this you'll be in a mess as the upper thread isn't tensioned until the foot is lowered).

Start your machine needle moving quite quickly and use both hands to move the hoop around. Go around the edges of the pieces first. A double outline looks very attractive – as though you've "scribbled with your machine" - don't try to be too neat, wobbly lines look fine.

Hint: If you haven't tried this before, then I would recommend trying the technique on some scrap fabric first. It's really easy once you get the hang of

it, but at first it feels really odd that the machine isn't pulling the fabric through for you – and you can stitch in all directions!

You will notice a line of gold stitching around the top of the stool – on the cushion – this was worked by hand using a single strand of metallic gold floss.

Now cut out your lion's body and the tuft at the end of his tail. Cut the tail complete and apply the tuft over the felt – this way you'll avoid any ugly gaps. Use the same technique to machine around him as above. Go all the way around him once, then on the second circuit add claws and leg lines to his body. Don't worry if it goes a bit wrong – check out my lion's back paws – definite wonkiness there – but I think that only adds to his charm!

Hint: when working around fiddly points, use your stitch ripper to hold down tiny bits of fabric.

Smaller stitches will prevent too much fraying. Move your hoop slowly and stitch quickly for small stitches – and the reverse for longer ones!



Cut out his mane shapes and face. Apply on top of each other. You may need to tack the patterned fabric and felt in place if you've used a textured fabric for the base layer of his mane.

Hint: Make sure your patterned fabric is quite tightly woven so it doesn't fray too much at the points as you stitch.

Remember your work doesn't have to look very neat and structured, in fact providing you don't go too far the other way, it looks much better if it's not!!.

Stitch two lines around the edge of his face as before. This will anchor everything firmly into place. Now stitch a lot of zig-zags around his face for his mane. Don't simply go around the edges as this simply won't look right.

Take a look at the picture on the next page and you'll see what I mean.

Then apply his crown and muzzle, machine stitching as shown.

You will have to work his nose, whiskers and eyes by hand unless you are very very expert with your machine. Use 1 strand of black floss and back stitch around his felt nose. Work small French knots for his whiskers and stitch his tongue in satin stitch in red floss – 2 strands are fine for this. Now for his eyes....

Cut squashed semi-circles in white felt and secure around the top curved edge with small straight stitches in 1 strand of black floss. Stitch pupils as shown in picture.



You're nearly done!! Just add the crown – you may need to tack. Add beads to the points to represent jewels.

Now press your design from the back.

Hint: This will make sure you don't squash your applique too much or damage the fabric through too much heat or catching stray threads causing puckering.

If you want to mount your lion on an artist's canvas block, make sure your design is quite dry, particularly if you pressed with a steam iron. Place it right side down on a flat surface. Mark the centre point on each side.

Take your canvas block and mark the centre point on each side – on the reverse, then place the block right side down on top of your work, aligning your marks.

Simply fold the fabric back over the block and secure in place, mitring the corners.

Hint: If you're using a fabric with a distinct pattern then be sure that it's properly aligned so the pattern doesn't "run off" the sides of the block.

When you're happy with the placement secure firmly with staple gun and trim excess neatly.

Position the ric-rac braid. Secure one end at reverse with staple, stretch slightly and secure the second end at the reverse. Repeat for all four sides.



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