Week Fourteen

String Art - Part 1

This is a fun and easy craft which appeals to both boys and girls. Children as young as five can make something to be proud of, with a bit of help, and from 10 to adults can produce an original work of art in a couple of hours, or start a lifetime obsession!

Patterns:

There are many patterns, both free and for a few dollars, available on the internet. See the Resources at the end of this sheet.

For small children, choose a simple outline shape – draw it yourself, or find one online. Heart shapes are always popular – see the pattern on page 2.

Another fun idea is to use a name. I have used Oscar, but all you need to do is change the name. Note that names, or anything which is a more complicated shape, can be quite fiddly, and therefore too frustrating for small children. See the example of a "name" pattern on page 3.

Print two copies of the pattern, or if you have drawn your own shape, make a copy of it – the reason for this is that one copy will be torn apart, and you need one to guide you as you work.

Materials and equipment:

You will need:

- a base board 30 x 30 cm, or sized to suit your pattern: cork tiles are easy to work with, but any type of wood can be used. It needs to be at least 20mm thick so that the nails or pins don't stick out the back – you can glue several cork tiles together, or make a sandwich of cork tile, square of thick foam, cork tile. Use a strong glue such as Liquid Nails for this.
- fabric or felt to cover your base board, 50 x 50 cm or sized to cover your board and fold over to the back (optional)
- strong thumb tacks and/or staples to attach the fabric to your base board, if used

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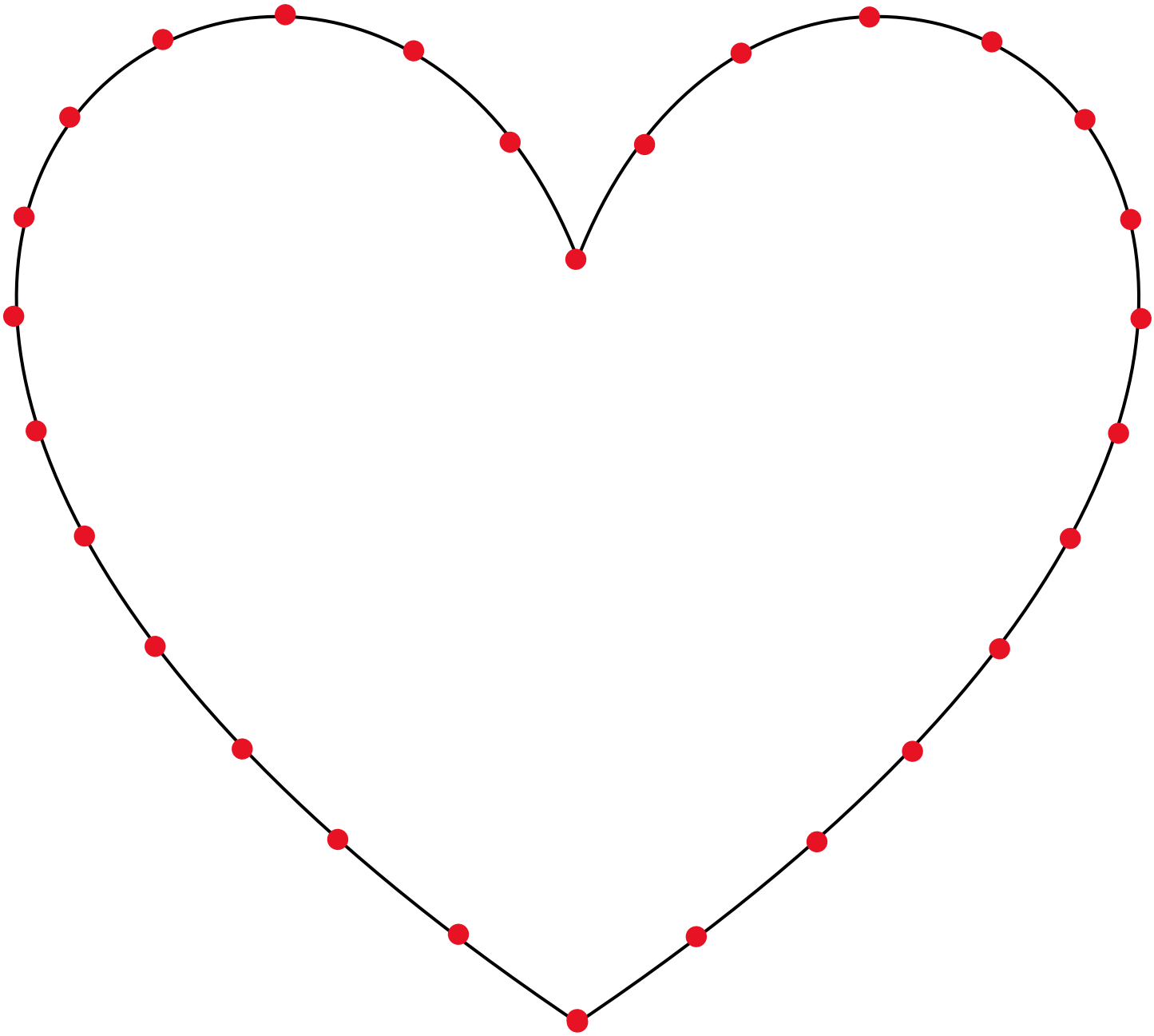

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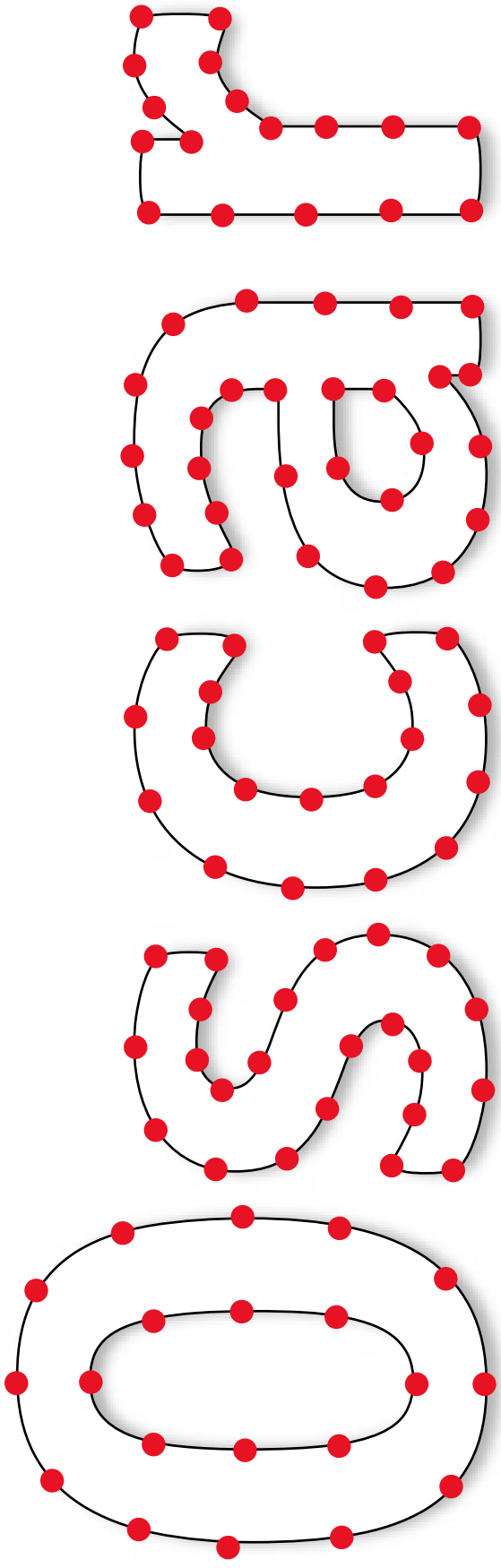
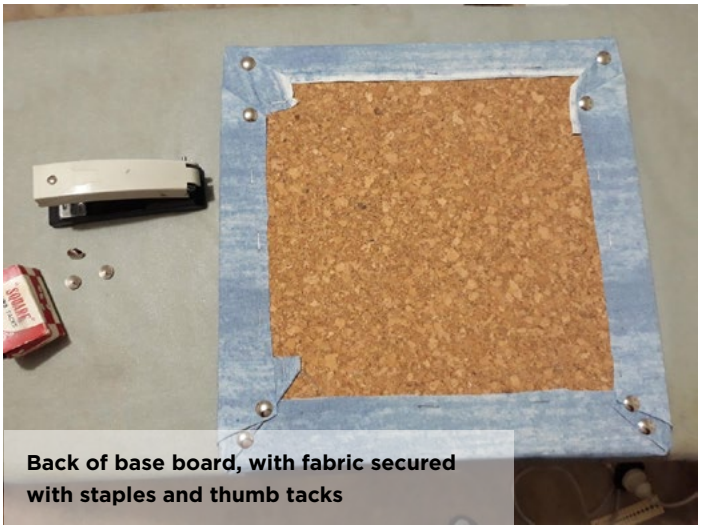


- nails or pins: if using cork tiles, you can use ordinary dressmaking pins; harder woods will need nails – I used 25mm plain shank, flat head nails for Oscar and pins for the yacht in Part 2.
- yarn or thread in colours to suit your design: I used No. 5 Perle Cotton crochet thread, but wool, stranded cotton, string or almost any kind of thread will work – experiment to see the different effects you get with different threads.
- shadow box or frame (optional) – if you plan to frame your work, remember that you need to allow space for the pins/nails sticking out at the front of your board, so you need a frame with a deeper than usual inset. Before you start work, make sure your board will fit into your frame, and if necessary trim it to fit.
- hanging hardware so that you can hang your work of art
- scissors, tape measure, hammer (if using nails) or thimble (if using pins), sticky tape, tweezers, clear craft glue



Back of base board, with fabric secured with staples and thumb tacks

Preparing your board

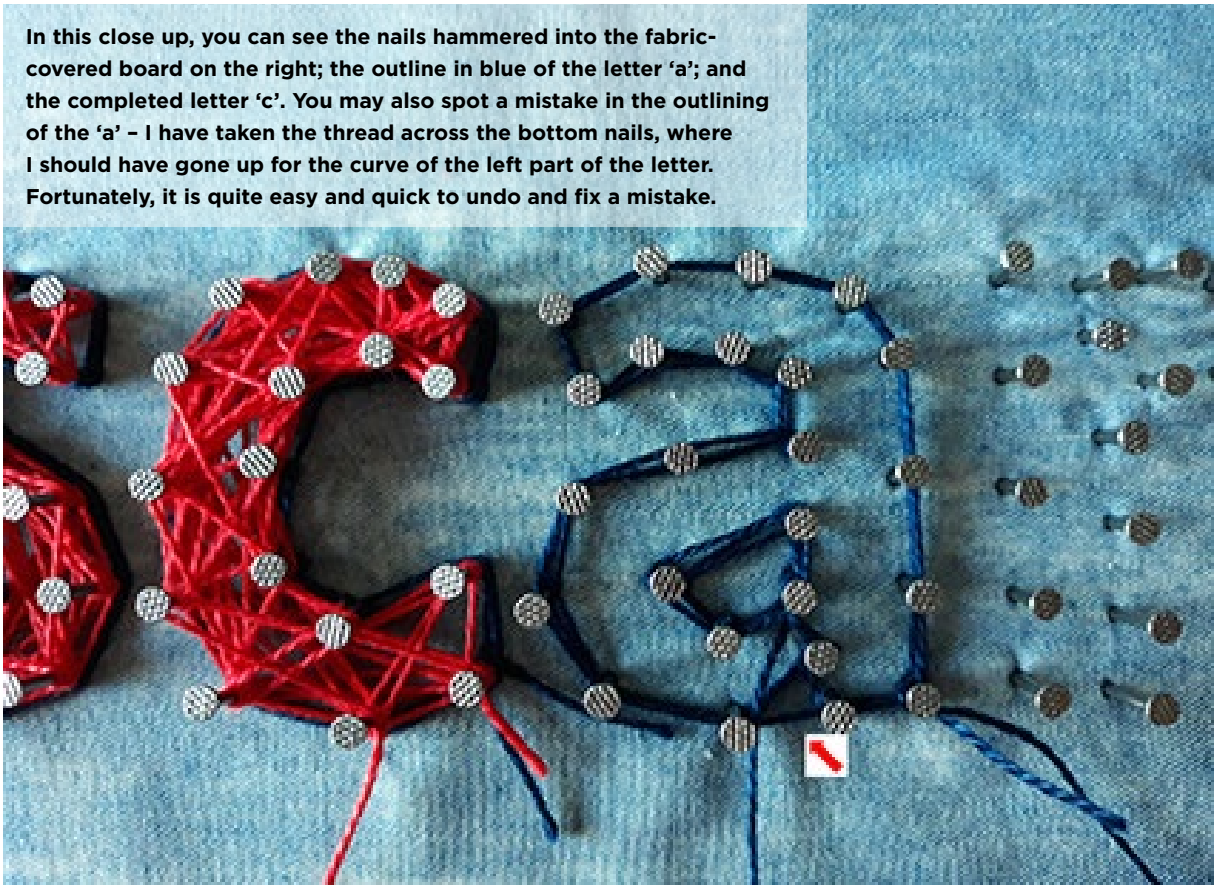
1. Check that your board will fit into your frame or shadow box, if you plan to use one. Trim to fit using a utility knife ("Stanley knife"). If you plan to cover your board with fabric or felt (Step 2) allow a little extra space for this.
2. (Optional) Cover your board with fabric or felt, or paint it the colour you choose – this step is optional, as the natural wood or cork can be very attractive. If covering, put the fabric face down on a flat surface. Put the board face down on top. Fold the edges of the fabric to the back of the board, and secure with staples, glue, thumb tacks or a combination.
3. Position your pattern, face up, on the front of your base board, and secure with sticky tape so it does not move while you are putting in the nails/pins.
4. Push in a pin or hammer in a nail over each dot on the pattern. If you are using your own design, put pins/nails about every 1.0 to 1.5 cm around the outline, making sure you put one at each corner or angle. If using pins on a cork board: Push the pins in with your fingers, using a thimble to press the pin down so that only about 1.0 cm is showing. If using nails: hammer in so that only about 1.0 cm is showing.

Nails hammered in over pattern

5. Gently tear the paper pattern away from the pins/nails, making sure you do not pull out the pins/nails as you do so. It's easiest to do this by tearing the paper in several places at the edges, and removing it in pieces. If you end up with any scraps of paper you can't easily reach with your fingers, use tweezers to remove them.

Working your design (random patterns): Heart, Oscar

1. Your design is a random pattern if you are not working in a set sequence, like the geometric patterns, Yacht and Star in Circle (See String Art - Part 2.)
2. Start by fixing the thread to the first pin/nail with a knot. This can be secured with a small drop of clear drying glue. Unwind enough thread from the ball to work with comfortably, about 40-50 cm at a time, but do not cut the thread off the ball. It doesn't matter where you start.
3. Wrap the thread around the pins/nails to create an outline of your design. At inside corners or curves, go right round the pin/nail before going on to the next one; this is not necessary on straight lines or outer curves. To make the outline stand out, you may choose to use a contrast colour, and/or wrap the thread round the outline two or three times. Secure the thread round the last pin/nail with a knot, and after you have added a small drop of clear drying glue on the knot, trim the thread ends close to the knot.
4. If you are using a contrast colour to fill the outline, start the new thread in the same way, with a knot. If you are using the same colour, there is no need to start a new thread – just keep going.
5. Take the thread across the inside of the outline, round a pin/nail on the other side, and on to a different nail – keep repeating in random directions until you are have used every pin/nail and are happy with your design. Make sure you don't take the thread outside the outline, or your design will not stand out. This is the main aspect where small children may need guidance.



In this close up, you can see the nails hammered into the fabric-covered board on the right; the outline in blue of the letter 'a'; and the completed letter 'c'. You may also spot a mistake in the outlining of the 'a' – I have taken the thread across the bottom nails, where I should have gone up for the curve of the left part of the letter. Fortunately, it is quite easy and quick to undo and fix a mistake.

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6. Secure the ends of the thread with knots and drops of glue, as per Step 3, and trim all ends neatly.
7. Attach hanging hardware to the back of your board, and put it on display!

Resources

Books:

DIY String Art: 24 Designs to Create and Hang by Jesse Dresbach, Penguin 2016

Big Book of String Art Templates: Animal Edition by Emalie Eaton, CreateSpace 2018

Curve Stitching: The Art of Sewing Beautiful Mathematical Patterns by Jon Millington, Tarquin 1999

The Beautiful String Art Book: 100 Projects You Can Create by Raymond Gautard, Sterling 1978

Websites:

stringartfun.com Many free patterns, and many more reasonably priced ones.

https://www.momtastic.com/family/diy-for-moms/682097-diy-string-art-tutorial/

A very straightforward tutorial for how to do string art with a small child

architectureartdesigns.com/30-creative-diy-string-art-ideas/

30 creative ideas for string art

Google “string art” on youtube for instructional videos.

More to come next week in String Art - Part Two!