

Tatting Explained

Tatting is a form of lacemaking made up of knots, which are done over a carrier thread. The knots are then formed by the carrier thread into rings and chains. Usually a shuttle is used to form a stitch, but you can use your hands only or a needle as well. For more complicated patterns two shuttles are needed, but special techniques require 3 shuttles or more.

A shuttle is basically a bobbin in a special form, which keeps the thread from unwinding itself. Simple shuttles today are made from plastics, and are about 4-8 cm long. Shuttles made from wood, metal, silver, bone, horn and other materials are available. In earlier times shuttles were often profusely ornamented. During the 18th century, when tatting was mostly done with thick cord or ribbon, big shuttles were used, which were made from costly materials and studded with precious stones. For some time it even was en vogue to have your portrait painted showing you with a shuttle.

Tatting is a craft which is not very old, at least not in the form we know it today. The invention of chains dates back to the middle of the 19th century, while split rings are an invention of the 20th. And the development hasn't stopped yet. There are still new elements of tatting being invented. The basics of tatting, however, date back almost to the beginnings of humanity. Knots were used in most cultures. The knots were first formed with the fingers. Knotting as a craft was done as early as 15th century. Coarse thread or ribbon was knotted and then couched to a background fabric. During the 18th century the first rings were invented, along with the picot, although it wasn't used to connect rings at that time.

Industrialization brought the spinning mills with much more evenly spun threads, especially cotton threads. These are essential for fine tatting, because you can't close rings when there are lumps in the thread. The 19th century brought the invention of the chain. Many patterns were published, but about the turn of the century the craft was almost forgotten again. During the 20s of our century there was a revival with many new patterns dating from that time. The Josephine knot was introduced (Therese de Dillmont), the onion motif (Tina Frauberger) and the split ring (Ann Orr). The newest additions to the technique of tatting are the widespread use of split rings (Tery Dusenbury), Cluny tatting (Monica Hahn, Jay Botchelet), and Creative Tatting (Helma Siepmann). These are just a few.

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