



Workshop at Home: *Stenciling*

Why not try a stencil quilt yourself?

In this workshop you will learn the historic and charming, yet somewhat forgotten quilting technique of stenciling.

'*Workshop at Home*' allows you to enjoy the process of stenciling at your own pace with a step- by -step pictorial guide as well as detailed instructions.

By Esther Aliu

Welcome

Stenciling is a rewarding technique which meets you at your own skill level, whatever that may be.

Whether you are interested in creating your own entirely original quilt, printing your own fabric or just trying something new, stenciling is a great technique to know.

It's interesting and challenging—allowing you to turn your ideas and sketches into printed motifs for use in designs or alone.

In this workshop you will learn the technique of stenciling, at your own pace. The step by step pictorial guide allows you to track every step in the stenciling process as you work through the technique.

The pattern you will be using 'Tulip' is simple enough for beginners with enough technique in the cutting out and shading option for you to begin experimenting with.

When you have established your stenciling skills, you will be able to turn any line drawing into a stencil and any piece of cloth into an original fabric print.

CAUTION: *This technique is addictive!*

OK, Let's Get Started

INSPIRATION FOR STENCILS	PAGE 3
COLOR USE IN STENCILING	PAGE 4
MATERIALS LIST	PAGE 5
ABOUT THE MATERIALS YOU CHOOSE	PAGE 6
HOW TO USE STENCIL PATTERNS WITH FREEZER PAPER	PAGE 7
HOW TO STENCIL	PAGE 8
HOW TO STENCIL STEP BY STEP PICTORIAL GUIDE	PAGES 9—11
FAQ	PAGE 12
TULIP LINE DRAWING STENCIL PATTERN	PAGE 13

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INSPIRATION FOR STENCILS:

The question I most get asked is, where do you get your stencil ideas and inspirations from?

For me, it all comes down to color. I get my drive to do something creative in quilting after I've enjoyed something beautiful - and that always happens after spending time appreciating nature.

My work rarely ends up looking like what I've enjoyed (I *have* created a few pictorial wall hangings) however this is not my usual creative process. Generally I have an idea or a desire to explore a texture or color range and I simply make a start. From there I start sketching in my journal and those sketches turn into entirely new ideas and designs.

It may take a few hours, an afternoon or sometimes months or years: but once I decide on what I want to do - then I just let it brew into an idea in it's own time. I always prefer to feel a certain way about color and let it evolve and choose its own scheme. I've settled on taking my inspiration from nature and matching it to a color chart afterwards. I have never found inspiration in simply 'selecting' harmonizing colours - I like to experience the colors in their natural setting and work from there.

When I created my first single color quilt, I had previously disliked the color purple. I didn't have the color purple in a quilt, table runner or wall hanging! That all changed one evening when I was out in the garden and everything took on a beautiful deep lilac shadow before sunset... and I was instantly inspired. **Looking anew at previously 'left alone colors' is definitely a challenge worth trying.**

Everyone is creative: quilter's especially so in my opinion, so don't hesitate in making your own stencils.

If you want to create original sketches for stenciling and don't know where to start, I always recommend something simple and rewarding to get your creativity flowing: examine your favorite fabric print: select a motif or pattern in the print and enlarge it via tracing or photocopying. Then, turn the singled out motif into a freezer paper stencil. At this stage you can alter the motif or elaborate on its key design. Blend a complimentary color and complete the stencil, then incorporate it into a quilt block. Its as simple as that!



A rich cake with chocolate leaves, fresh peonies or a day by the ocean... everything I love is an inspiration

Make a list of your favorite things, what colors most dominate? For me, the ocean in winter is one of my favorite palettes: rick rockery browns, neon moss greens, gloomy grays, sea wave yellows and blues, unexpected pinks and peaches, bone white on dull ginger colored sand...I can almost see a quilt right now!

- ✻ Keep a journal
- ✻ Sketch daily
- ✻ Take a fresh look at the reoccurring themes in your favorite things
- ✻ Start today

Esther Aliu's Workshop at Home: *Stenciling*

COLOR USE IN STENCILING

If you enjoy using color instinctively, then keep doing so. I have made many quilts this way and I find that the experimentation of not having any set ideas is a great way to discover new color matches that I would not have otherwise considered.

As you use color more and more, you will develop the interest you need to get your hues 'right' to match your improving skills.

Many of us are already familiar with the most basic color rules—many quilters have an instinctive feeling for color that translates well into their designs.

That was certainly the case for me when I started out and because I was happy enough with my color choices, I didn't feel the need to refer to or even use color guides



After seeing my quilts in a different light however (literally on Show under spotlight), I noticed that some of the undertones of colors in a few of my quilts just weren't right. This interested me, and as I was stenciling and handling primary pigments on a weekly basis, understanding color became an accompanying interest to my stenciling.

It was then that I decided to follow the 'color rules' and put them to the test in my own work. I set out to obediently observe the 'correct' charts when color mixing - the whole time I wanted to rebel and just do it my own way, but I stuck to it and the resulting quilt's color scheme is not only 'correct', but (and I almost hate to say it) is the most successful harmony of color in any of my quilts to date.

Learning the basics of color use can help every stenciller —whatever level they are working at.

There's so much that can be said about color options—and so many great resources on the market. My advice is to invest in a good quality color wheel (available from Quilt and art supply shops) to help you as you learn to use color in your stenciling.

If you find yourself stuck for colors in a design and just feel swamped by all the choices available, consider decorator 'themed' swatches —the great thing about quilting is that the color rules work everywhere. **Or simply follow the color dots that appear on the selvage line of your chosen print fabric and incorporate these colors into choosing your paint swatches.**

I love using color and once you start mixing a palette it's easy to want to use more colors than you intended, so another rule I follow is to always exclude one color. If you use all colours in a theme, your stencil may lose visual impact. Staying with a harmonized range works best. Again, having a color wheel can greatly assist you with this. Whatever colorings you choose, make sure it has enough contrast. In my opinion, contrast is one of the most important visual rules in stenciling.

Experiment freely with your stencils, especially when it comes to color

Esther Aliu's Workshop at Home: *Stenciling*

Materials List

General stationery and quilting supplies:

Cutting matt
Tracing pencil
Permanent fine marker
Craft cutting knife or scalpel
Sharp scissors
Paper towels
Stubby paint brushes for stenciling: I like using round brushes, size 8 & 10
Small containers for mixing up colours
Freezer Paper (I use Reynolds Brand)
Acrylic or textile paints (textile medium if applicable)
Extra fabric for experimenting

Plain background to be stenciled, approx a 12 ½inch block, however the size isn't as important as this workshop is focusing on technique.

In this Workshop You will...

- ✿ Learn how to use Line Drawing Patterns as stencil patterns
- ✿ Learn how to cut stencils from freezer paper
- ✿ Learn fabric preparation / color mixing & mediums
- ✿ Stenciling— ‘ How To’
- ✿ Fixing to set the paint
- ✿ Outlining technique for stencils

Esther Aliu's Workshop at Home: *Stenciling*

About the materials you choose...

FABRIC SELECTION

Simple Muslin is best. That is, 100% cotton in a light tone. Always pre-wash to remove sizing. When pre-washing please do not use fabric softener as it may affect the paint colours. Iron before using. Do not use starch or any fabric sprays when ironing.

Some interesting results can be obtained from light cotton fabrics with a textured print on the surface. With these fabrics, experiment to obtain results.

If you want to stencil on a dark background, there are 'opaque' paints you can use. These work by creating an opaque white layer which you then re-paint in your desired colours. My personal experience with this has been successful with 'Neo Opaque' range by **Jacquard**, however there may be other quality paints available to you depending on your location.

WHAT PAINT TO USE:

The most available acrylic paint is the 'Jo Sonja' range of products used in conjunction with the same brand of textile medium and when necessary, paint retarder. I have used this combination successfully with great results. **Paint Retarder** is used to slow down the drying time of paint when applied to fabric. If using another brand, ensure that it is compatible for fabrics. I don't always use fabric retarder as I work relatively fast, whether you use retarder is entirely optional.

Whatever acrylic paint you choose, ensure that you use Textile Medium unless specified otherwise by the paint manufacturer.

Textile Medium helps paint adhere to fabric—for better setting, and is always recommended.

There are many fabric paints on the market, so take your time in deciding which paint best suits your needs and budget. I stencil a lot, so I'm always trying new things. The latest paint I have been working with has been the 'Permaset' range of colours. This fabric paint range is used by screen printers and the pigments are very vivid. The range of colours is somewhat limited however and there are always rules about color blending that have to be adhered to for best results, so always follow the manufacturers instructions. With this range there is no need for textile medium as it is already set into the paint.

If you follow the manufacturers directions, the stencil quilts you create today have the same pigment resistance and durability as printed fabrics—so don't be afraid to stencil an heirloom quilt (or any quilt you want to last). Take the time to get to know your paints.

BRUSHES:

Bristle or stubby 'stencil' brushes are best. I use a flat bristled brush from my local art store in 2 sizes (8 & 10). There are many stencil brushes available, experiment with these to see which suit you best. Simply wash clean in warm soapy water.

Esther Aliu's Workshop at Home: *Stenciling*

How to use stencil patterns with Freezer Paper

A stencil pattern is what you create when you cut out selected segments (holes) from a design according to a line drawing. This creates either a 'positive' or 'mirror' image, depending on which area you cut away. *To visualize a positive/negative stencil design without cutting, some photocopiers allow you to copy images in positive/negative prints.*

All **Esther Aliu** stencil patterns are original line drawings which you trace onto freezer paper and then cut out to create the stencil. This allows you to enlarge / reduce easily. You can also create your own line drawings or adapt popular motifs.

Look over the design. If you want to make any changes such as sizing or design details, copy the original line drawing and make changes as desired.

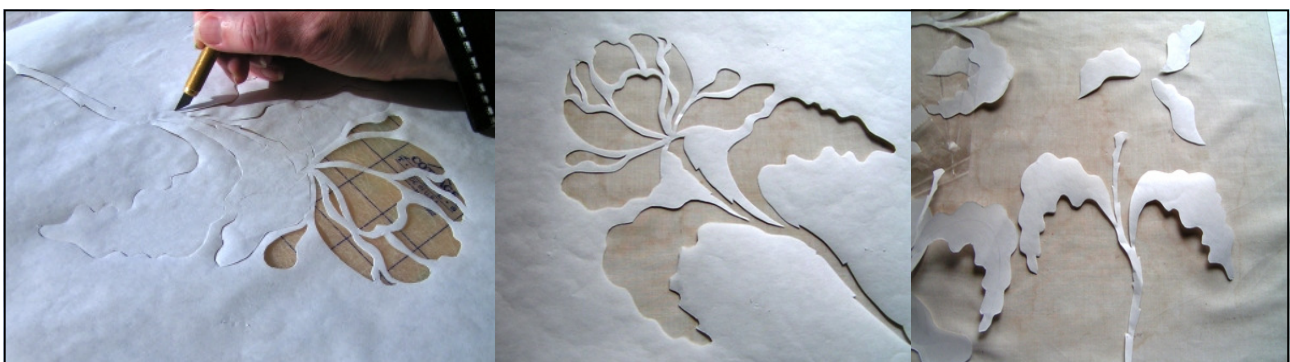
When ready to create the stencil, trace a copy of your line drawing onto freezer paper (this will be your stencil). Simply cut out all areas between the immediate design lines.



Starting with the line drawing that you want to turn into a stencil, trace this line drawing onto freezer paper. (use a light box if required).

Position freezer paper on cutting mat.

Then carefully cut out the design with a craft knife.



When cutting out your design, allow plenty of time. I find working with a scalpel best, however some people prefer sharp thin bladed decoupage scissors—use whatever method you are most comfortable with. You do not want to rush the cutting out as the lines will show up in your stenciling—jagged edging shows. If your work is neat, keep all the 'cut outs' separately for use later.

Esther Aliu's Workshop at Home: *Stenciling*

HOW TO STENCIL

With modern techniques, stencil cutting can be easy and time effective. All you need are simple drawing skills, freezer paper, a cutting board, scissors and a Stanley knife.

CUT:

Freezer paper stencils are easy to use. Simply cut your desired shape from the freezer paper using a cutting board and stencil knife.

Please note that freezer paper stencils can be used multiple times. Simply peel off stencil and re-fuse onto the fabric with ironing each time.

The paint build up which occurs on the stencil simply makes the stencil stiffer, and does not prevent re-use.

IRON:

Iron the selected fabric you wish to stencil.

Arrange and iron the freezer paper onto the fabric.

Choose the paint colors you wish to use.

STENCILING:

Choose and blend your colors. Test the color on a paper towel, blotting excess paint from your brush.

Test the paint on a patch of freezer paper to ensure the brush is not too wet.

Then: apply paint to stencil area, lightly dabbing from the outside of the stencil working inwards. Work your brush in a gentle movement of circular shapes, do not apply pressure. *You will develop your own method as you go along.*

DO NOT overload your brush. Your brush should be somewhat dry.

If there is too much paint on the brush it may run under the edge of the stencil, creating a blurred messy image.

For deeper color, repeat this process.

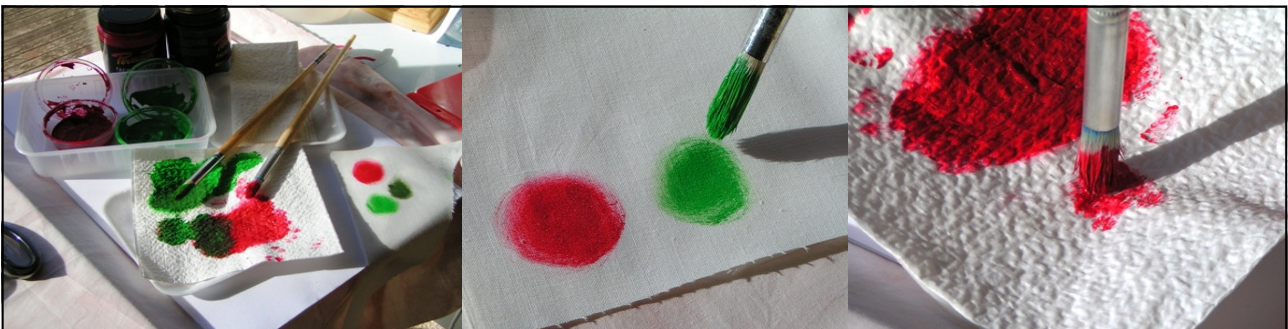
*The most common mistake is applying too much paint.
Remember that less is better!*

*When you begin stenciling, it can be hard to judge how much color is enough, and when to stop. You want to 'build up' stencil color, **not** saturate your stencil. Your stencil should always be somewhat dry to touch when working. When re-using your stencil, it can be hard to judge how much color you have used due to the paint build up on the freezer paper. Is it too dark? Too light? Will it be visible? **Don't worry! Magic Happens!** When you peel back the freezer paper you will see that the whirls of color above have been transformed into something beautiful beneath.*

Esther Aliu's Workshop at Home: *Stenciling*

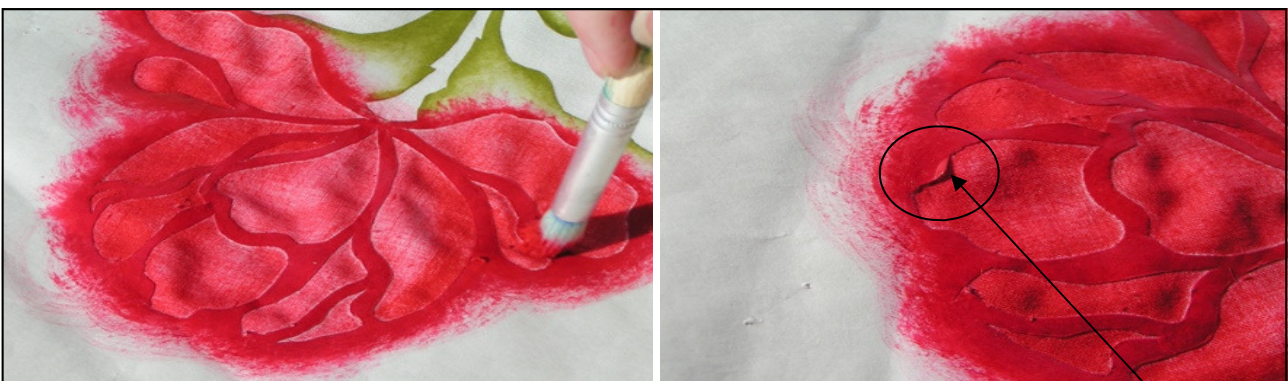


Iron your fabric and position your freezer paper stencil. On a mid heat, iron down the freezer paper. Do this carefully and ensure that all the lines are firmly ironed down as you do not want edges coming loose and lifting up when stenciling!



Set up your paints and pre-mix the colours you want to use. For this workshop, I used green and red and **to create a darker green for shading, I simply blended the two together**. Use a new brush for each color. There will be no need to rinse your brushes during stenciling.

Apply some paint to your blotting tissue. Now blot off any excess paint. **It is important that your brush remain somewhat dry**. Remember that you are **building up** color. When applying paint to your stencil, buff the color in with quick circular movements—with stenciling you are building up color, almost as if you were dry painting. **DO NOT SATURATE THE STENCIL.**



Colour is blotted into the fabric with a dry brush. This allows you to go over areas and build up stronger color where desired, creating shading effects.

If you saturate your brush, or if you did not iron down completely, parts of the freezer paper will lift—and this will lead to color seeping through and smearing. **THIS IS TO BE AVOIDED**

Esther Aliu's Workshop at Home: *Stenciling*



When you reach an edge of color, such as red meeting green—use a plastic template as a barrier to keep colors separated. The stencil is now stenciled. Lift up your fabric. The painted stencil should be dry to touch and NOT leaking through the fabric. Leaking, seeping & blurriness mean too much wet paint!



To create 2 color shading effects on a leaf, return to your earlier cut outs and re-position half of the **leaf** cut out back onto the flower. Iron down the freezer paper piece on top of the paint. Iron down both leaf pieces.



Painting the darker hue: Use the same circular dry method of stenciling. You are only covering half the painted leaf—you are covering the half you do **NOT** want painted a darker hue. Now, using a darker green, paint the top of the leaf. The freezer paper acts as a barrier to protect the color beneath. When dry, peel off the freezer paper to reveal two tones of color.



Carefully peel back the freezer paper stencil. Allow stencil to dry. Turn over and iron on wrong side of fabric. Turn to right side and iron over stencil to heat set.

HEAT SETTING THE FABRIC:

Wait until the first layer of paint is dry to touch (approx 2-3 minutes) and carefully peel off the freezer paper stencil.

Cover ironing board with pressed cloth or paper and heat set the paint by ironing on the back of your stencil with a dry iron set on cotton. Ironing on the back of your stencil sets the paint most successfully (3 -4 minutes)

Turn the fabric over and now iron the front of your stencil.

I use fine paper over the stencil to protect my iron against staining.

PEN WORK—optional

Even the most basic stencil can be transformed before your eyes with simple pen work. This can bring life to your stencil, outline, define and highlight the strengths of your selected design.

*I personally use and recommend both
Faber –Castell PITT artist pen in waterproof Indian Ink
and **Copic Permanent Ink in Fine point** which are readily available from most art retailers.*

Whichever brand you opt for, first test for color fastness by washing.



Simply outline the stencil 'lines' of your design
Practice first on scrap fabric to adjust to the feel of drawing smoothly over cotton.

FAQ

Why do you stencil?

I really enjoy the process of creating my 'own' fabric, based entirely on my own sketches or ideas. Being 100% in control of your work is addictive!

What got you started on stenciling?

When I started quilting, I fell in love with needle turn appliqué, and that got me thinking about embroidery and traditions/memories of handwork when I was growing up. The more interested I was in quilting, the more I wanted to know about its history—and about the women who had quilted before me.

I learned that the early American settlers from Europe brought 2 very interesting things with them: a culture of quilt making and a craze for stenciling. At some point the two merged—probably out of necessity— and a quilting technique was born. Always wanting to try something new, I decided I would attempt a stencil quilt....and since that afternoon, I haven't stopped.

I'd love to stencil, but it looks so complicated!

Stenciling is a technique and it can be learned. It is as easy or complicated as you would like it to be. The stenciling learning curve means that once you have a good foundation (understanding of how to stencil) you can build on what you know to create more complex designs, if that is what you want from your quilting. Simple blocks look great stenciled too!

Does stenciled fabric last?

Yes. If you follow the manufacturer's directions and use the appropriate textile/fabric paint, then stenciled fabric lasts as long as commercially printed quilting fabric. Concern about longevity of stenciled quilts is no longer a valid concern.

Is it quicker to stencil a quilt than to piece or appliqué?

That depends on your design. If you are stenciling a 'ready' stencil block to fit into a design, then yes it will be a quicker process, generally speaking. However, my stencil quilts take me as long to create as my appliqué quilts do—and sometimes longer. It all depends on the design and what you are using your stencils for.

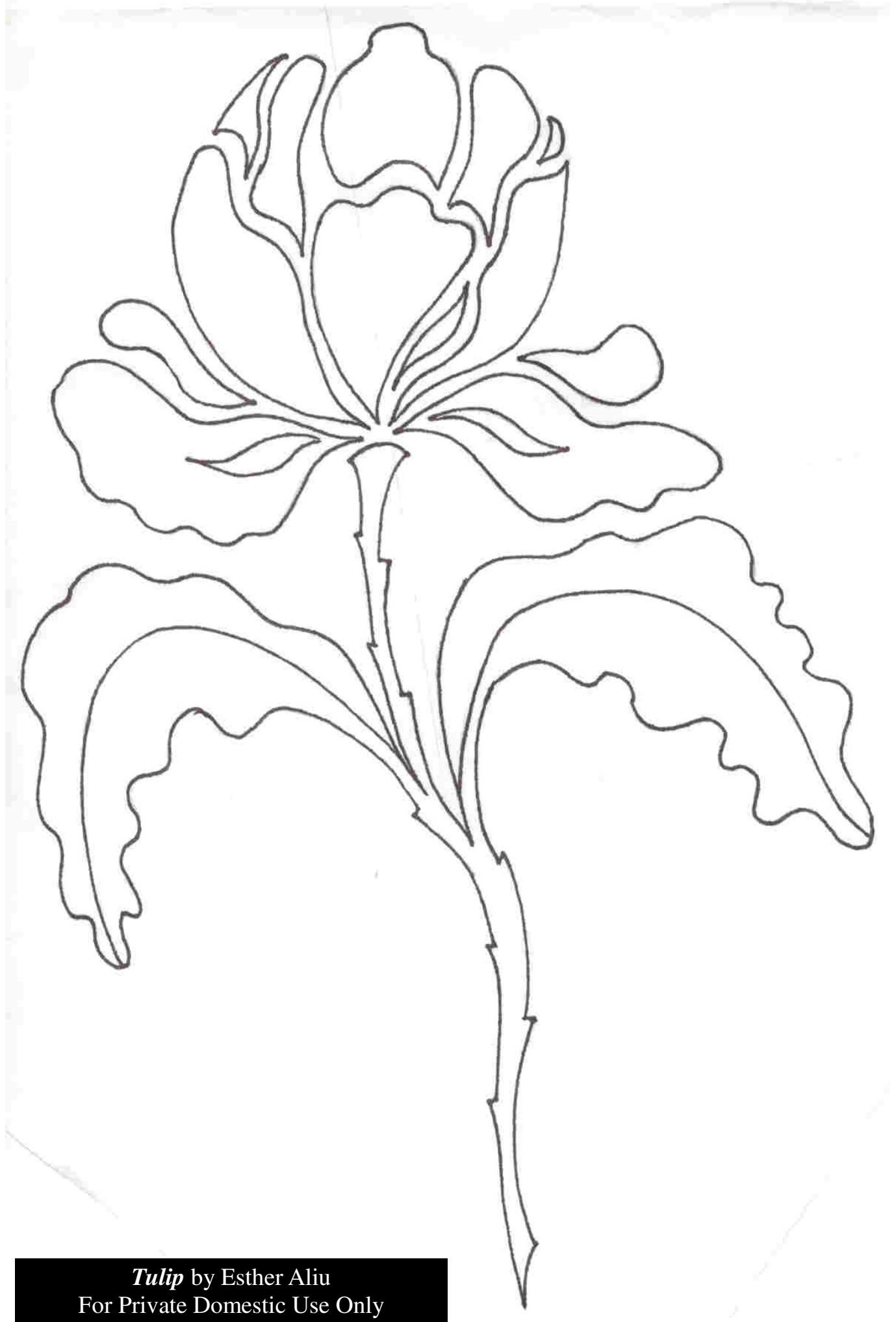
Is stenciling cheaper than purchasing quilting fabric?

No, it generally isn't. I have made valuations on my expenses and in creating quilts and I have invested as much in stencil quilts as I have in non stencil quilts.

Whilst it's true that once you have a paint selection and tools set up it becomes cheaper to stencil—it is a technique that requires maintenance and I find that I often purchase items relating to stenciling like new brushes, paints, etc. It is my opinion however that stenciling fabric is currently undervalued and perhaps perceived as a cheaper option. However, on metre by metre I have calculated that it works out the same in materials and resources.

Why haven't I heard of stenciled quilts before?

Unfortunately, the paints used by the early settlers were designed for furniture or walls and were corrosive (and damaged the fabric) or made from food dye and weak (and faded out) so we don't have as many examples around as we should. I think that this has led to an 'out of sight out of mind' idea on stenciling. There is no doubt that stenciling is a very old technique, and we know that it was used in quilting but its not featured as commonly today because it has simply fallen out of practice as a technique.



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