

# DRAMATIC BACKGROUNDS PRIMITIVE STYLE



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When I hook rugs that have a dramatic background, I often use a technique that I want to explore, one that I think will create a unique relationship between the motifs and the background. The idea is that the two elements of background and motifs will together in partnership tell a story. The background is not overpowering, but supportive to the main motifs. The interplay of how the background is hooked supports the motifs and creates a dramatic effect that pulls the whole design together in an eye-catching way.

Many of these techniques that I use have been around since our foremothers began creating hooked art. I enjoy studying old rugs and textiles. I often try to emulate a style that I find interesting and want to use in my own work to create drama, interest, and uniqueness in my backgrounds. Perhaps you have used some version of these technique already; if not, maybe you will want to give them a try, too, to create your own dramatic background.

When I hook a rug with a dramatic background, I use a primitive folk-art style of rug hooking and a time worn palette, that I find compelling. I use it in a way that creates a sort of harmony, or connection between the background and the motif. The interplay between the unique

backgrounds and motifs are meant to be delicately complex and understated. My backgrounds do not command impact through the use of vivid colors that will catch your eye, but rather through how colors and values are either blended or used to purposefully stand out and how they play off the motifs. With this approach, a little drama goes a long way.

For these rugs, I used four techniques to create energetic, lively backgrounds. I refer to these techniques as: a patchwork style background, a variation on hit and miss, pairing warm and cool colors in similar values, and the use of long strips of wool in a strikingly different value from the background to create movement or a unique effect.

In addition to these four techniques to hook a background, in all my rugs I also use a style of pulling up the loops in hooking that is referred to in many ways, some may know it as messy, non-directional hooking, others call it *higglety-pigglety* or *squidgy-midgy*. All these terms describe the technique of pulling the hooked strip up in loops that turn in all directions, looking squished together, rather than in neat rows. I will refer to this loop pulling technique as *messy hooking*.

**1** The first technique I use is the patchwork style of hooking which creates a dramatic, yet subtle and flowing background. It uses the

## Four Techniques For Creating Energetic, Lively Backgrounds:

- 1 Patchwork Style
- 2 Hit and Miss Variation.
- 3 Pairing Warm and Cool Colors of Similar Values.
- 4 Using long strips of wool in strikingly different values.

technique of hooking patches of the background in colors of similar values. Each patch is hooked with one color then the next patch with another color and wool etc.

*In The Heart of Winter* displays the patchwork technique used for this background with dark colors. Each patchwork section of the background uses different colors and textures, from black to brown to grays using mill dyed, hand dyed, and marbled wool. Because these wools are all similar in value, they blend so that the change in wool texture for each patchwork area of color is not too “jumpy” or distracting.

This patchwork style of hooking the background creates more drama than if I had used just one wool texture, or if I had hooked neat rows echoing around the motifs. I like how these patches of



***In the Heart of Winter 12.5" x 14.5"***

*Designed and hooked by Marijo Taylor. A bird is encircled by a heart. Summer flowers have gone to seed, set against a patchwork of darkening sky as night falls. Hooked in 8.5 cut, bird accents 6-cut.*

color surround the little bird, each color suggesting a succession of the dark nights of a long winter. The bird remains secure, safely encircled in the aura of a heart-shape, and summer's flowers gone to seed are a reminder that winter will give way again.

The next page shows another example of the patchwork style with *Hydrangea*. You can see that the background, is hooked in several soft muted tones, all light to medium in value. They vary from a warm green to grays and oatmeal colors hooked in patchwork. These patches of muted tones are an interesting foil for the hydrangea and the arching branches, leaves and small flowers that surround it.





*Hydrangea* 12" x 12"  
 Designed and hooked by Marijo Taylor.  
 Hooked in an 8-cut,  
*Hydrangea* accents 6-cut.

the murky, blended part of the hit and miss, then I added lighter value neutrals in beige, dulled oatmeal, and camel, to be hooked as lines at an angle to create the movement. An assortment of the bolder red wools finished the variation on hit and miss, with all of the parts standing on their own, but showcasing the main motif. The background serves as the support behind the main actors.

( On some of the motifs I also hooked in a narrow outline or beauty line. I use an 8 or 6-cut strip of wool and cut it in half lengthwise giving me a narrow strip. I first hook the motif and background. Then I hook in the narrow beauty-line spacing the loops farther apart than usual hooking and sometimes pulling those narrow loops a little higher than the rest of rug, too. I hook in random fashion and do not uniformly outline everything.)

*Examples of wools used in the background of Find Your Anchor.*

2 The second technique I use to create interest in a background is the variation on the hit and miss technique. Instead of using rows of wool, each differently colored to create a repeating pattern as in the typical hit and miss, this variation uses groupings of messy hooked lines in similar value or color that blend together. These lines are then interspersed with hooked lines that angle or curve. I bunch and almost blend the similar colors and values together to create “rest” for your eye. Meanwhile the angled or curved lines hooked with lighter or darker values of bolder colors create the movement or drama. I see it as purposeful visual chaos.

In the rug *Find Your Anchor* there is already a lot going on with the different motifs. I could have hooked the background in a solid medium or light value wool and it

would have been lovely. However, I wanted to create a background that would be striking in appearance. That’s where the variation on hit and miss comes into play.

The whale, anchor, and wording were all going to be a dark neutral. The hearts just had to be red, so having a green background to compliment the reds seemed like an easy choice. I used many greens ranging in hues of olive to khaki. I added a lot of neutral wools: gray, taupe, and tan in similar values to the greens. These wools I hooked next to each other to create





Another example of using the variation on hit and miss to create a dramatic background is the piece ***Follow Your Heart***.

The gray green heart surrounds the smaller, cool pink heart in a more subdued green/red compliment color scheme. The little heart-like weather vane with the dove within is meant to remind you that, no matter how the winds of life blow you about, remember to take heart and FOLLOW YOUR HEART! Fly straight as an arrow through those ups and downs in your life.

The hit and miss background around the main motifs create that controlled chaos meant to represent those up and downs. The dirty whites, creams and taupes that were used in the dove, now pull your eye out to the background that surrounds the heart. These light neutrals are hooked near each other, to be the more blended part of the hit and miss. The darker hues hooked as

***Find Your Anchor*** 10.5" x 28"  
Designed and hooked by Marijo Taylor. Hooked in 8.5-cut with accents in 6-cut or smaller.

curved lines and angled lines create the movement to make the background unique.

③ The third technique I find especially appealing and energetic is pairing warm and cool colors of similar value for a unique background. The way the

***Follow Your Heart*** 14" x 17"  
Designed and hooked by Marijo Taylor. 8-cut primarily with 6-cuts for accents in the border.



background colors flow using a tight range of warm and cool colors in the same value reminds me of the look of paint brush strokes on a canvas. This technique makes me feel like I'm truly "painting" with wool.

In these two examples, I've also used the hooking style of messy hooking to hook the background in mostly messy hooked vertical columns.

This design, *Flying Flying Fox*, has a happy, self-assured fox. There is just enough color and texture differentiation hooked in him to add interest to his "black" silhouette. The antique blacks are in the blue-black, purple and brown range of color, which are

***Flying Flying Fox***  
14" x 26" Designed and hooked by Marijo Taylor. Hooked in 8.5-cuts with narrower cuts for accents.

perfectly complimented by the warm-orange background colors!

The background is hooked in mostly medium value colors of warm peach, tan, tawny, and camel tones. The interest and



drama is added with the usage of similar value cool grays that lean toward blues and mellow soft purples.

I would like to point out that the ghost-like dandelion seeds that almost dance across the background are hooked in a light neutral that almost blends into the background. I use a very narrow line of a faded red-orange beauty line to give them just a little bit of visual punch.

*Spring Arrives* is all about the movement and purposeful color blending of the background wools. If

***Spring Arrives***  
Designed and hooked by Marijo Taylor.  
12.5" x 14.5" 8 and 8.5-cut



### *Doves Ascending*

11" x 30" Designed and hooked by Marijo Taylor.  
8-cut is used with the exception of the hearts where  
a 6-cut was needed..

you look closely you can see why this technique is one that makes me think of each color as a stroke of paint on a canvas. Warm orange-pinks and the cool blues and grays are similar in values that attract attention. The technique of messy hooking, hooking vertical columns interspersed with horizontal lines, creates a backdrop for the bird and budding branches. It could be dawn or a setting sun with scattered clouds and a warm orange-pink glow that is almost encouraging the bird to take flight. The movement in the background compliments the prominent buds that are a hopeful promise of the beautiful flowers soon to come.

4 The last technique uses repetition of lines to create movement or to be striking in appearance and is what these two rugs convey in *Doves Ascending* and *True Blessing*. This technique uses repeated long rows of wool in a starkly different value or color than the rest of the background to show movement or to create attention around the motif.

Although these next two examples of hooked rugs are very different because of the differing amount of repetition of hooked rows to create the effect, I still grouped them together because I wanted to emphasize how on one rug even just a few long hooked lines of repetition can create an impact and when this technique is used in total for the whole background it creates an impressive, stunning effect.

In the rug, *Doves Ascending*, the idea for this design was to create a rug using motifs that are all associated with hope to create a love-filled message. The word "love" is written in a scrolling font to mimic the scrolling hearts that cut across the middle and top of the design. The doves are positioned in between the love and heart motifs, ascending towards the heavens, lifting the messages of hope upward.

The way the doves are positioned at an angle makes it seem like they are flying upward with the background repetition lines hooked with the loops also at an angle, seeming to push the doves along. Those repetition lines were hooked in a value lighter than the rest of the





**True Blessing**  
20.5" x 23"

*Designed and hooked  
by Marijo Taylor.*

*Hooked in an 8.5-cut.  
Lettering is a 6-cut,  
dark background lines  
and other accents are  
hooked in a 6-cut and  
smaller.*

background so that they would be noticed but not overtake the doves' prominence.

In, **True Blessing**, the repetition of lines used in the background create a bold impact using wool that is in totally different colors and values. The light background strips are cut wide in an 8 and 8.5-cut, while the darker warm brown repeated lines that the light wool alternates with, are cut in a 6-cut and below. The several hearts within a heart are blended in varying values using the messy hooking technique so that it stands out from the background as the focal point. The leaves with the lettering are hooked with blending golds so that they are a quiet spot, enabling the words to be clearly read.

All of the leaves are first outlined with the narrow warm brown background lines, then followed by the wider cut light background color. The heart and flower stems and buds are first outlined with the wider cut light background color, followed by the narrow warm browns. I really love what an aged and unique look this technique gives to my work.

When I am in the process of creating a design, the main motif and the negative space, the background, are equally important. The interaction that I want to communicate between the motif and the background are what drives the final choices of the design. When I use any of these four techniques as part of my process, I know it will be fun and challenging

to hook. As I strive to create a dramatic background I hope to show a unique relationship between the motifs and the background. It is a wonderful and satisfying feeling to try a new technique and to see where it may lead. I'm always so grateful for the experience of getting to explore a new to me technique in my rug hooking experience and to learn something new along the way.

I hope, you will feel encouraged and excited to try these techniques in some of your future projects as you create your own dramatic backgrounds.



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