

Needleart Preservation Through Framing

Or How to Answer the Question: Can You Frame My Needleart, Inexpensively?

By Kaye Evans, CPF

As I travel the country, teaching and consulting for various clients, I'm asked many questions. One that's always at the top of the list is "How do I frame needleart?"

Why is this such a common question? Because textiles differ so much from paperborne artworks. The framing of works of art on paper has accepted, standardized archival methods, the components of which are often referred to as the "art and matting sandwich." According to such standards, the glazing product used has a minimum of 97% protection against UV damage. The mats, mount boards, backing boards, filler boards and dust cover paper are also of archival quality, and may even have the new "micro chamber technology." (Editor's note: Please refer to the October issue of *PFM* for the complete FACTS standard for Maximum Preservation of Works of Art on Paper.)

But what about those small pieces of fabric, covered with elaborate stitches, brought to the professional framer? They are no less a work of art than one created on paper. Some of these come to the professional framer as fine family heirlooms; other have no known value. Nevertheless, each item should be considered for preservation framing. As professional framers, we must not yield to our customer's uneducated wishes for an "inexpensive" framing design, nor should we fail to use the best materials and techniques available to us, just as we would for a work of art on paper. If we simply staple the needleart to the backing board, are we giving the customer what they truly want?

I can hear your responses now. Some of you will say, "I want to do the best framing possible for my client, but I know they won't pay the price for preservation framing." Other will say, "My customers tell me right off that they want their needleart piece frame nicely, but stress that it must be done economically."

My answer to that is: Why not expect comments like that from your clients? After all, the average consumer knows very little about custom framing.



Specialty cuts will increase the perceived value of framed needleart. Be sure to have samples hanging in your shop.



Double mats serve both preservation and aesthetic needs when framing needleart.

Whenever I travel I ask flight attendants, cab drivers, ticket agents, hotel personel and whoever else I meet if they have ever heard of custom framing.

(The weight of my luggage is usually the introduction to this topic. "Hey, this suitcase is heavy, you got rocks in here?" "Not rocks, just framing supplies. Have you heard of custom framing?")

Their response is usually, "Boy, picture framing is really expensive!"

This is about the only thing consumers know about custom framing. They don't understand the difference in the value of mouldings, the differences in types of glazing, or the variety of matting. They expect custom framing to be expensive because that's what someone told them. When they finally have something framed for themselves, they consider it their task to try and prevent the sale from being expensive.

Only when these consumers understand the value in custom framing will they appreciate what it is worth. Only when they understands the value of their needleart can they understand the quality that preservation framing will bring to their

presentation. As a professional you can help the client understand this value and understand how preservation framing can extend the life of their artwork.

As professionals it is important to give our clients what they want. Yet we hesitate—with good reason—to do this to the detriment of the artwork. We need to remember that requests for an inexpensive or economical frame design come from people who often have no knowledge of preservation framing standards and the threats of improper framing. Don't let the client's request drag you (and your framing standards) down. Educate your customers and overcome their objections; bring them up to your level. It's true that this approach

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runs the risk of the client walking out, in search of a cheaper frame, and the framer losing the businesses.

It might seem like a Catch 22 proposition, but think about it a little more. Is cheap, inexpensive, below-standard framing the type of business you want at your shop?

Determining Needleart Value

The first thing to educate your customers about is the value of the needleart itself. It may also help to explain what causes the price of needleart preservation framing to be more expensive than standard needleart framing.

Let's break down the standard and archival framing techniques and materials necessary to frame a piece of needleart, such as the one shown at the beginning of this article.

Generally, the needlework artist has little knowledge of the value of their needleart. This is true whether they bring in something they stitched themselves or done by someone else. It's always a good idea to help the artist establish the value. Not only is this useful to determine what the replacement worth would be if the textile is damaged in framing, but it would also be helpful for the client to understand the true worth of the needleart.

Typically, a piece of needleart is valued at \$8 per hour of work it took to complete. A textile of average size would take approximately 65 hours to complete, if the artist is accomplished. The materials would then be added to this amount and the total would be the total value of the piece.

Price of the materials:

# 14 Aida Cloth	\$ 9
Threads to Complete	\$15
Needles	\$5
Hoop	\$6
Book (with design)	\$12
Total For Materials	\$56
65 hours of stitching @ \$8/hour	\$520

Total Value Of Needleart \$576

A simpler method of calculation would be to value it at 10 times the cost of the supplies. This method is used

in the needleart industry to value needleart for the purposes of insurance claims. The above example would therefore be 10 times the cost of the supplies, \$56, or \$560. This price is close to the amount given in the other method of calculation.

Certainly most consumers would consider a work of art on paper, such as a signed and numbered print, that carried a value of \$ 560.00 to be of significant value.

Developing the Design

The best time to help the client understand that better framing is necessary for the safety of their needleart is when they are at the design counter. I have always considered show and tell to be the easiest way to make a sale.

Show your client a framed needleart sample with damage—fading, stains, pulls or tears, etc. Leave the needleart in its frame to show why the damage occurred. Ask your customer, “Mrs. Jones, wouldn't you be upset if your needleart were damaged or destroyed in three, four, or five years?” This should make your client think twice about what may be needed to protect their needleart.

Take control of the sale. Help your client understand that by providing preservation framing you are insuring the life span of their needleart. Remember, most needle artists do not understand that their artwork or the artwork of someone they care about will be damaged in time by paper mats and standard framing practices. As professional framers, it is our responsibility to present the best options to our clients. Knowing how to overcome objections and showing that you care about the longevity and value of your customer's piece will go a long way with the client. You might not be able to sell every client with a piece of needleart a preservation package, but maybe you'll sell one today, two tomorrow, and three the next day. Before you know it you will have a reputation for quality work and the majority of the needlework framing sales in your area. Best of all, these sales will be in the best interest of your clients.

Understanding the Materials

Knowing what materials are necessary to create a preservation framing package for needleart will help the framer to understand the costs and selling prices better.

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Additionally, the framer will be better able to relate the differences in value to the client and be able to determine ways of overcoming resistance to pricing. Remember, we're all better at selling the things we know and understand. Keep in mind that when things are done everyday, as part of the typical technique or routine, even the most expensive technique becomes less expensive to accomplish both in labor (due to increased skill) and in materials (due to larger volume orders).

Moulding: In framing needleart it is often necessary to use deep rabbeted frames to safely house the mounted needleart. Stacking mouldings—wood or metal or a combination of both—are a good way to create a housing deep enough to safely allow the needleart to breathe. This added depth also allows the needleart to be kept away from the glazing.

Glazing: It is becoming common knowledge—among both framers and their customers—that standard glass will not protect the needleart from UV damage. The consumer is now very familiar with reduced-reflection glass and has little resistance to it. (In fact, the professional framer may have more resistance to it than the consumer does!) An easy method of selling preservation quality glazing products is to compare the price of preservation glass to reduced reflection glass; it closes the gap in the price difference.

Matting: A minimum of two window mats is necessary to maintain a safe distance between the needleart and the glazing materials. This is not simply a whim, it is a necessity, and if the piece has beads or longer fibers it may be necessary to add additional space between the glazing and artwork (with additional mats or spacers) to insure its safety. Standard matboards will not protect the artwork from harm and especially not from today's pollutants. An alphacellulose, rag, or Micro-Chamber board of preservation quality is needed. Some pieces of needleart contain materials in their fibers that may contain harmful pollutants. If these can be brought under control (by the use of Artcare board, for example, the life of the needleart will be extended tremendously.)

Mounting: The lacing technique is the method of choice for preservation framing needleart. (The couching technique is also acceptable for pieces which should have their edges exposed, such as a doily.) A preservation qual-

ity foam board is an acceptable choice for a mounting board. Acid-free, rag-covered, and Artcare foam boards are all available.

Backing: Once the mounting board is used to hold the needleart it then becomes a part of the artwork. Therefore it is necessary to add an additional backing or filler board to bring protected space between the needleart and the elements outside the frame. This can be a board of foam or a rigid matboard. Additionally archival corrugates have been introduced to the industry, some of which will actively protect the back of the artwork from external pollutants.

Dust Cover: This is not merely a cover to give the back of the frame an attractive appearance—but it serves a very necessary purpose. The dust cover protects the artwork from the elements and keeps insects from migrating into the frame. Dust is an additional pollutant that needs to be controlled and the use of a pH neutral product is necessary to insure that the back door of the artwork is protected. Additionally, Micro-Chamber technology is available in a backing paper.

Simplifying the Framing Technique

Learning the simple steps to quick mounting techniques will enable you to complete the framed piece more quickly, and therefore more profitably. (Follow the steps given in this article to insure the lacing technique is accomplished in a safe and quick manner.)

To make sure you are charging an appropriate amount, do an analysis of the time it takes you to lace a piece of needleart. Break down that amount into quarter hours. If the framer charges \$40 per hour at retail for his labor, this would be broken into 4 units or \$10 each. So, while one unit would be \$10, three units would be \$30.

Lacing Needleart

Supplies

- Metal moulding in profile of choice
- Cotton Covered Polyester Button or Carpet Thread
- Preservation Glass, cut to size
- Spool Holder (for holding a spool of thread)
- Double mat, cut from a preservation-quality mat board

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- Tapestry Needle
- Preservation-quality Foamboard, 3/16" thick
- Burnishing Bone
- 3 pieces of scrap matboard (for filler)
- 1 pair disposable latex gloves
- Preservation-quality Corrugated board
- Inert Linen Hinging Tape

1. Size the project as follows:

	Horizontal x Vertical
Design Size	_____
+/- Open Size	_____
= Inside Dimension	_____
+ Mat Size	_____
= Frame Size	_____

2. Cut a double mat from your matboard for the project.

Cut a board matching the size of the double mat from the foamboard. Cut at least two filler boards from scrap matboard. It's important that it is clean but the color is unimportant as it will not be seen. Cut a backing board of corrugated board.

3. Inspect the needleart to insure it has been laundered and all the string have been removed from the front and back.

4. Cut an opening into the foamboard with the opening 1/2" larger on each side than the opening size of the double mat. This is done so the mounting board will not fall through the opening of the mat. This must be accomplished on the straight side of your mat cutter. Make sure to intersect the corner of the cuts.

5. Place the foamboard on the work surface. Position inspected needleart under the Artcare mat. Make sure to position the needleart into the exact center of the mat. Once centered place both over the top of re-assembled foam board.

6. Place a pin into each of the four centers of the mat, as close to the bevel of the mat as is possible but not touching it. Carefully remove the "sink" mat and place aside for later use.

7. One by one move the pins out to pierce the cut of the

mounting board. Pull fabric off the mounting board. Make sure the four pins stay in the fabric. Flip the fabric over making sure not to dislodge the pins.

8. "Score" the fabric along this line using the blunt point of the tapestry to crease the fabric. Remember to pull the fabric while holding the tapestry needle stationary.

9. Place the fallout of the mounting board into the pocket created by the "scoring". Thread a #18 Tapestry needle with cotton-covered polyester button and carpet thread. Do not cut the thread from the spool.

10. Start with the corner and tie two diagonal corners together and out of the way of the lacing process. If you have three threads lying side by side and a know on each corner the procedure has been correctly achieved. Repeat the opposite corners to complete tying off the corners of the needleart.

11. Begin lacing the sides in the lower right-hand corner of the fabric. Thread #18 tapestry needle with a continuous thread. Insert the needle 1" from the edge of the fabric. Try to maintain the needle in a parallel row of Aida. space the stitches approximately 1/2" apart. When you reach the opposite edge of the needleart, make sure you end on the upper left side. Tie off the thread in a double-loop knot.

12. Starting at the knotted end, begin pulling up the slack tension on the thread. Be sure to hold the tension as you "walk" the excess thread across the fabric. Retain this tension as you cut thread from the spool, making sure to allow ample thread to be able to re-thread onto the needle. Tie off on the lower right corner, but make sure not to loosen the tension of the thread.

13. Repeat the previous steps to lace the short sides. Then place a latex glove on your hand to move the fabric against the edge of the mounting board to straighten the grain of the fabric. Position the mat against the rows to insure the grains are straight in both directions.

14. It will be necessary to trim the foamboard "sink" mat to accommodate the mounted needleart. Position sink mat under the straight side of the cutter and trim a sliver of foam from the board. Insert the mounted needleart into the sink mat. Place the pieces of the project together to complete the "sandwich". ■