

Sheer Mats

by Kathy Mann

The first time I got to see “Lady’s Mantle” by Carol Rowan, it was like a test case for color theory class. The blue color affected my mood, attitude, even my heart rate! Not only is this blue my favorite color, but I love the contrast between the blue and the soft yellow in the background. I felt that the framing design should focus on this color contrast.

I love the light feeling that Carol achieves with the pastels, and I wanted to keep that feeling with the framing treatment. I found the coolest fabric at my favorite discount upholstery store. It’s the same soft blue that is in Carol’s piece. I got so attached to it, that I found myself hugging it as I walked around the store. With love like that, I had to buy lots of it.

And just so you know that I’m not crazy, once I got the fabric back to the shop, my assistant did the same thing. She carried that fabric all over the shop! I finally had to take it away from her and tell her to get back to work. But I digress. Once I got the fabric back from my co-worker I had to figure out what to do with it.

The challenge here is that it is a polyester sheer that was designed to be used as a window treatment. So I used it on a mat... that qualifies as a window treatment, right? I always like to give the print the same feeling as the original would have in the framing process. So when thinking about the framing of this piece, I kept in mind that the original is a pastel.

When framing a pastel, it is necessary to create a deep air space between the artwork and the glazing. This is to keep the delicate work intact, but also to allow for the natural falling of pastel dust to go behind the mat



Photo 1

instead of all over its surface. In this case, of course, there is no pastel dust to worry about. I just used the framing depth for added drama. If this were a real pastel, I never could have used the polyester sheer right next to it, as the electrostatic charge from the fabric would have sucked the image right off the page!

As I looked at the piece, I saw that there are many shades of blue, which I wanted to emphasize. So how



Creating several shades of blue using only one shade of fabric was achieved

could I create more than one shade of blue with only one color of fabric? Layers.

There are three mats involved in the frame designs shown in Photos 2 and 3, along with a double layer of foam board between the top and middle mats, which allows the sheer fabric to “breathe.” I had to be very relaxed with wrapping the sheer around the mats, as getting too tense about exact placement (a common framer’s trait, I’m afraid) would have ruined the soft look. Fortunately, it is a polyester sheer, so it doesn’t fray as easily as a silk would have. However, if it had started to fray, a small—and I do mean small—touch with white glue in the corner would stop it.

The exterior measurement of all three mats is $30\frac{3}{4}$ " x $35\frac{3}{4}$ ". Usually when I cut a multiple mat, I cut the bottom two about $\frac{1}{2}$ " smaller than the top one, so I’m using the same outside edge of the top mat as a guide in the mat cutter. This eliminates much of the variance when the difference in the mat that shows is only $\frac{1}{4}$ ". But in this case the difference between each mat win-

dow is $\frac{1}{2}$ " or 1" so any slight variance would not be seen and I needed that outside edge to tape the whole thing together.

The mat closest to the image has margins of 4" on the top and sides and 5" on the bottom. The middle mat $3\frac{1}{2}$ " top and sides, $4\frac{1}{2}$ " on the bottom. The top mat margins are $2\frac{1}{2}$ " top and sides and $3\frac{1}{2}$ " on the bottom. I cut all three mats first, before starting on the fabric.

Since only $\frac{1}{2}$ " of the fabric shows on the bottom mat, I placed the first layer of sheer over the face of the mat, but only went in from the window a few inches. Using a line of ATG tape, I attached the fabric to the right side first and, keeping it as smooth as possible,



Photo 2

drew it across the window to another line of ATG tape on the left side of the window. There is also a line of tape across the top and bottom of the mat, to hold the sheer in place.

I then ran a line of ATG tape all the way around the outside edge of the bottom mat and attached the middle mat to the bottom mat securely. I waited to cut the window out of the sheer until I could cut both layers together. As I attached the blue sheer to the middle mat, I had

to keep in mind that there was going to be 1" of this mat visible, plus the added depth created by the foam board strips. Therefore, this blue sheer must go almost all the way to the outside edge of the mat—just in case anyone looks under the top mat, like I always do!

Once the sheer was attached to the middle mat in the same fash-

ion as the bottom mat, I could turn the whole package face down on a very clean surface. From the back, I cut the window of fabric out as if it were any wrapped mat, leaving about 2" inside the window for wrapping around to the back of the mat and cutting diagonally into the corners. The biggest difference here is that I did not

wrap the sheer tightly around the bevel of the mat, but left about 1/4" of fluffed-up fabric. And though I cut the window from both layers of fabric together with a very sharp knife blade, I wrapped the layers back one at a time and attached each to the back of the bottom mat with ATG tape.

To create the depth between the middle and top mat, which allows the two layers of blue sheer to stay fluffy, I used foam board scraps. I cut strips of foam board 2" wide and attached them with ATG tape to the face of the second mat, lining them up with the outside edge of the mat. I used two layers of 1/8" thick foam core. The top mat is then attached with ATG tape to the top of the foam core strip layer. And that's it!

The most difficult part was staying relaxed when dealing with the sheer fabric, which seems to have a mind of its own. Deep breathing exercises might come in handy here.

The print is dry mounted to foam board, and trimmed after the mats are finished, so it can be centered inside the fluffiness of the sheer fabric. The frame that I used perfectly matched the background color in the print. I used regular white paper mats for all three mats and I used acrylic for the glazing.

Enhancing Texture

Once I got started with the sheers I couldn't stop! My next project presented itself when I needed something to show off the very light textural quality of "Wildflower Collage" by Jane Moss Designs (see Photo 3).

I found a “sparkly” beige sheer fabric that matched the tones in the piece. I applied this to a corrugated mat and this time used only one layer of foam board strips to keep the top mat off of the fluff of the wrapped sheer.

The mat dimensions are 11"x13½". The bottom mat margins are ¼" for top and sides and 2¼" for the bottom. The top mat margins are 1¼" top and sides and 1¾" for the bottom.

Again, I mounted the print to foam board, and then trimmed it after laying the mat on top since the fluffed mat changes how the mat lines up.

The frame I used is of my own design, basically a 1" flat profile with silver metal leaf with several sponging techniques applied. (But that’s a whole other article!)

Making It Shine

My third application of sheer fabric on a mat was for “Corn On



Photo 3

Embroidery” by Deborah Schenck (see Photo 4). Here, I used a metallic mat. This time I did not use a spacer or top mat, which squished the sheer, so this made it a tighter wrap around the window edge. It made the metallic color shine through even more.

The frame I used is a beautiful walnut with a natural oil finish. The mat dimensions are 9¼" x 11½" with top and side margins of 2" and bottom margin of 2½". The sheer used for this piece is the same fabric as on the Moss print mentioned in the previous project. I love how the look is so easy to alter, just by what is under the sheer.

So the biggest thing to remember when playing with these sheer fabrics is to relax and enjoy. By the way, I gave a few of the scraps of that blue sheer to my coworker. I think she sleeps with it. ■



Photo 4