

NEEDLEART:

T i p s f o r S t r e t c h i n g

by Kaye Evans, CPF, GCF, CMG



Needleart is certainly a treasure in the eyes of the needle artist but it is also a “cherished memory” to someone who is given a precious piece from a loved one. Over the years, many questions about needleart have surfaced and answers to them have been placed into my portfolio. By reading and analyzing the following questions and the researched solutions, the professional framer will be empowered to frame each and every piece of needleart as a “treasure” and not a trial...



What is the best method of stretching needleart to support preservation standards? Just as rice paper and wheat paste have, over the years, proven to be the safest method to mount most paper art, certainly “lacing” and “couching” are time tested and proven to be methods that provide the best application for most needleart.

Lacing is the process of mounting needleart to a support by folding the excess fabric to the backside of the mounting board; then adhering it from the backside by sewing from one opposite edge to the other. This is repeated for the other two sides, so that there are two sets of perpendicular lacings on the back when done.

Couching is often used when you desire the edges of the needleart to be visible. It’s more commonly used when framing textiles other than needleart (such as a sports jersey), but it works for needleart as well. In this technique, the piece is stitched, on the front side, along the edges to a substrate.

Not every piece of paper art is best handled using Japanese hinges and every piece of needleart may not be best served with lacing; gratefully couching is typically the answer. Creating a reference book that identifies the type of needleart, gives the preferred method of mounting, and fit and finishing solutions can prove to be invaluable in the shop.

Are there other methods of stretching needleart besides lacing and couching? Understanding that probably the best methods for preservation are lacing and couching, there are other methods. The first is pinning onto a foamboard; the board should still be preservation-quality. Size the board, stretch the needleart over the edges, and position pins into the edges of the foamboard. The problem with this technique is that the pins could, over time, shift or move within the foam of the mount board and can cause the needleart to ripple.

Another method is the “Newberry Method.” In this technique, the foamboard is cut as a sink mount and the center is placed on the work surface. The needleart is placed over the center, and the sink mount is positioned over the center and needleart. Carefully push the sink mount down over the needleart to stretch between the center and the sink mount. This will sandwich the needleart between the center and sink. A potential problem is the tension created in the

Editor’s Note: In the May 2004 issue, Kaye Evans addressed questions about the blocking process for needleart. Blocking, which is performed to bring the fibers of the needleart into “square,” precedes the stretching and other mounting methods she writes about in this article.

corners and sides of the needleart trapped between them.

If needleart is being stretched over a board, how do I size the mounting board? The outside dimension of the board should be the same as the frame. Placing an opening in the support or mount board that is $\frac{1}{2}$ " larger than the matting is the best solution. This secures the "sink mount" under the mat opening with $\frac{1}{2}$ " on each side of the opening.

What is the best type of board to use when stretching needleart? The needleart should not "bow" when stretched around the board. Matboards that are alphacellulose or 100% rag are good to use when preservation is an issue. The 8- and 12-ply matboards on the market can be good supports for needleart. If the needleart is relatively small (such as 5"x6"), then 4-ply boards may be rigid enough.

One may ask, "What about foamboards?" Typically, foamboard is not rigid enough to resist bowing when large needleart is used for mounting (see Question #2 on previous page.). However, it can be used if you deem it appropriate.

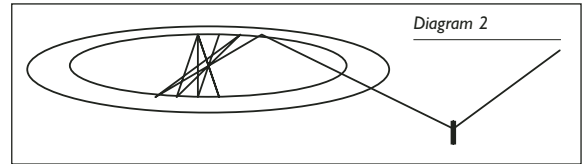
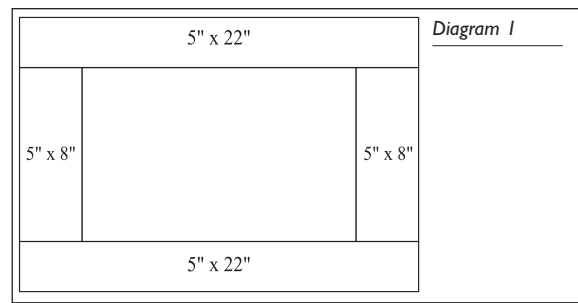
What is the best thread to use to lace needleart? There is a simple rule to follow, "like to like." In other words, use the same type and size of thread as the fiber being laced and the safety of the needleart will be more assured (i.e.:If the substrate fiber is linen then linen would be the best choice for lacing or couching.) Most importantly, never use a thread that is stronger than the fiber.

When should padding or support be used beneath the needleart? Typically, padding is used to add dimension to the needleart. When knots on the backside become a problem, padding can be a great solution. The real question is: What type of padding? It is best to use an archival material and this would be one of 100% polyester with "heat" bonding and not "chemical" bonding. Most of the quality manufacturers use heat bonded methods; just refer to the packaging to find out how the bonding was done.

What is wrong with using foam underneath? Most foam products are made of foam chemicals and therefore they contain plasticizers that are very damaging to the needleart. Ever notice how the foam yellows on the rack in a sewing store? This will happen under the needleart.

Can glue be used to mount needleart? What about duct tape, masking tape, or staples? Any glue, whether pressure-sensitive or wet, is typically *not* archival and/or *not* reversible. Preservation guidelines (Fine Art Treatment Standard Guidelines) indicate that artwork should be placed outside the boundaries of any irreversible materials.

Don't use duct tape or masking tape either. These materials typically are not archival and also not stable. Over time, they will lose their adhesion, or it will change and become



extremely sticky and move off the front of the tape.

Staples should not be used to adhere needleart either. Ever read the label on a box of staples that are used in a JT-21 or T-50 stapler? They state they are "chisel point," meaning that they have a very sharp chiseled point and therefore are capable of cutting the fiber of the needleart.

What is the best method of mounting an antique stitchery that is old and slightly brittle? Will it withstand the tension of lacing? Antique fibers are typically fragile and as they age they become slightly, or sometimes, brittle from lack of proper care. For this reason, lacing typically puts too much tension on the antique and a better method would be couching. For the lacing process, select a "like" fiber as the substrate fabric for under the needleart. For example, if the needleart is a linen fabric, select linen in a "like" color and texture.

Launder to remove the sizing, press to bring the linen back to pristine, and stretch the linen over a temporary stretcher bar. Once the substrate fabric is temporarily stretched, the antique stitchery can be placed into the center of the stretched fabric. Pin the stitchery to the substrate fiber and carefully "couch" it to the substrate underneath. Sew up from the bottom up and tack with a single thread no stronger than the antique. This package can now be safely removed from the temporary stretcher bar and laced over a mounting board as the tension will not be on the antique but on the substrate fiber. This technique is really a combination of "couching" and "lacing." *Note:* Do not use fishing line for this technique. The material is too strong for needleart and will create undue tension.

When is it okay to trim needleart? One would never trim a signed and numbered print and, in the same vein, one would typically not trim needleart. Always use judgment. If the client brings in a small needleart approximately 6"x8" that is stitched in the corner of a 16"x20"

substrate, then by all means explain that the best framing solution would be for *them* to trim the excess fabric.

Always have a sharp pair of fabric shears on hand for this.

What can be done when the opposite problem is present; the needleart stitching almost touches the edges of the fabric?

You can flat sew extensions of like fabric to each of the sides (see Diagram 1). For example: You have a needleart that measures 8"x12" and it

needs five additional inches per side for proper sizing to lace it onto a mounting board.

Use a "flat sew application" (rather than "seam" sewing) and "skirt" the needleart by first cutting two pieces (5"x8") of "like" fabric sized to the short sides of the needleart. Flat sew these to the needleart as shown in the diagram. Next, measure the two long sides (5" + 12" + 5" = 22") and cut two pieces

5"x22" for the remaining two skirts. Sew these to the two long sides as before to create a "skirt" completely around, which will allow the edges to be stretched around a mounting board. Now it is safe to proceed with the lacing technique.

How can one mount an oval or round piece of needleart? If the oval or round needleart is to be framed in a square or rectangle frame it is not necessary to mount it on an oval or round mount board.

However, if an oval frame is to be used, then it is necessary to cut an archival mounting board to the size of the oval or circle. Do this first by tracing a pattern of the opening using a piece of tracing paper placed under the open frame and trace the edges of the rabbet.

Then secure the edges so they will not ravel (a process called "serging" may be applied here). Temporarily use pins to secure the piece over the mounting board and work in a counterclockwise manner (see Diagram 2) using thread and a tapestry needle to lace the oval or circle just as the rectangle would be done except that there will only be one side and it will travel all the way around the artwork at the back. ■

Kaye Evans, CPF, GCF, CMG, is a noted educator in the framing industry. She has worked with numerous suppliers and associations around the world, including the PFFA, to elevate framing techniques through education for retailers. As a consultant to manufacturers, Kaye strives to bridge the gap between supplier and retailer.



To read more about the lacing technique, read the following article on the PFM website: www.pictureframing-magazine.com. "Lacing Needleart," by Kaye Evans, CPF, December 1999.