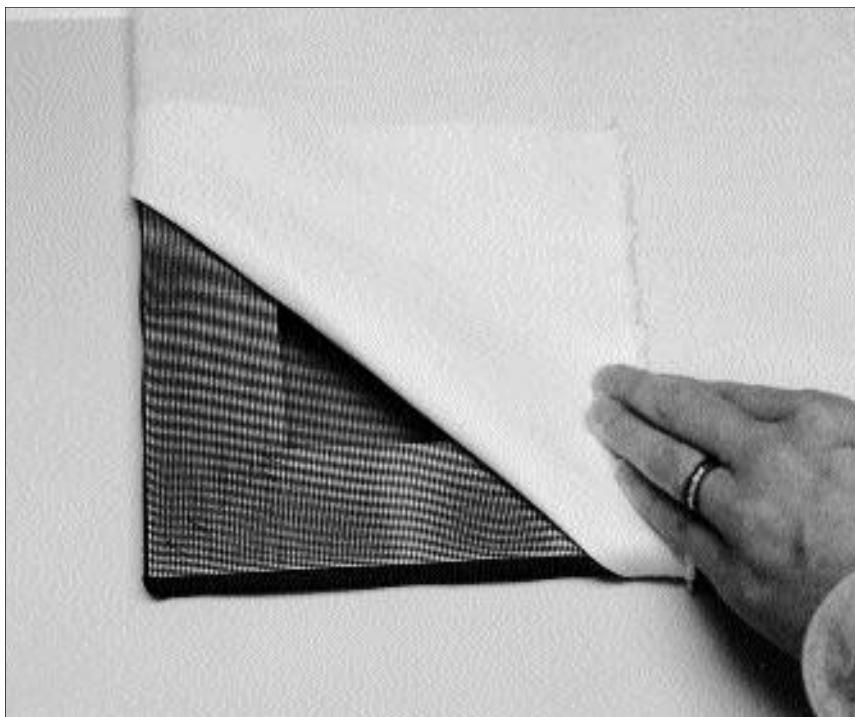


A Stitch in Time: Mounting Textiles

by Shan Linde, CPF

The first seven years of my picture framing career were spent in the midwest town of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. (A great place.) Immediately after I moved East, I noticed that there were several distinct differences in the picture framing market in the two locations. I am not sure why, but there was an abundance of needleart in the Midwest. Perhaps it is the long, cold and hard winters of Wisconsin. Of course, it was not until moving East that I realized there were other ways to treat and handle needleart and textiles. Shockingly I had stapled more crewel, petite point, counted cross stitch, bargello and latch hook rugs to strainers and Upson™ board panels than I care to remember.



For proper support, some needleart pieces need to be mounted to a strainer covered with screening and a natural fiber fabric.

Staples, you say! Well, this was 20 years ago when the Professional Picture Framers Association was only five years old with a limited selection of classes. And, long before there were professionals such as Ruth Burman, CPF, Kaye Evans, CPF, or William Parker, CPF, out sharing techniques about how to handle these objects and letting framers like myself, know that lacing needleart was the preferred method of mounting.

Lacing needleart projects is just the beginning of understanding the care of fabric art and textiles. In the conservation world there is a specific category for the care of fabrics, tapestries, rugs or garments—textile conservation. Perhaps there is room in the commercial framing world for a specific category: textile preservation.

Mounting Textiles

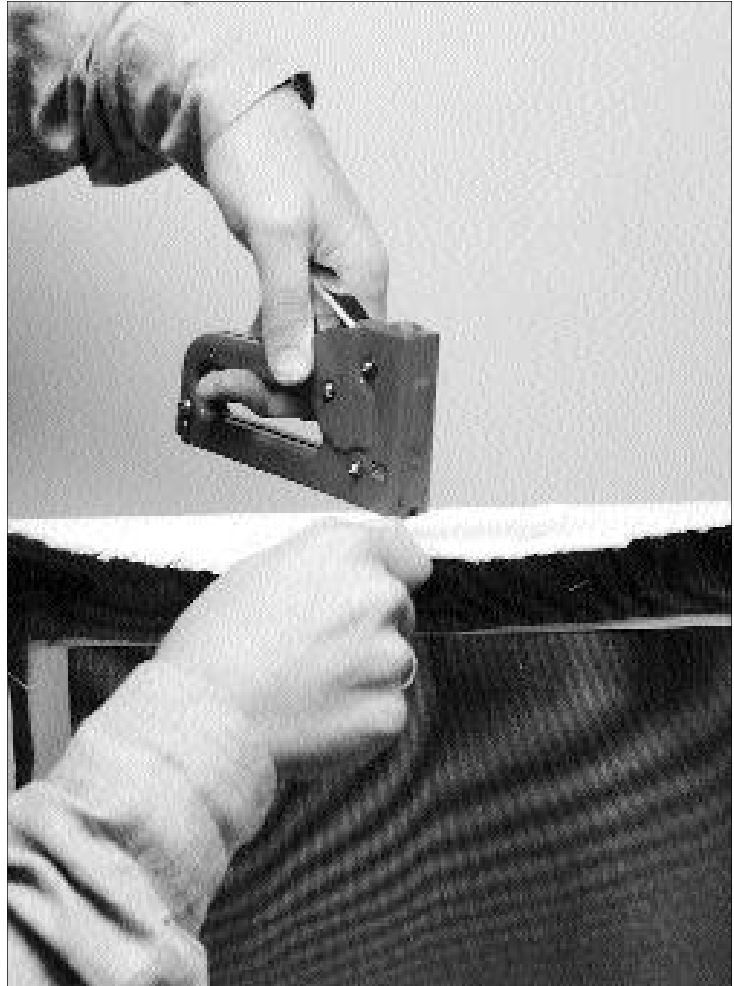
Several weeks ago (I was in bed sick—really, don't tell anyone that I watch daytime TV) on a very popular talk show, I watched as a guest demonstrated how to frame a 50-year old handmade lace napkin. The guest actually adhered the napkin to the “acid-free” matboard backing using two-sided tape to keep it flat. As a person that has cherished hand-crocheted lace made by my great-grandmother and as a picture framer that practices preservation principles, I was horrified to think of the damage that was going to occur to the framed napkin.

As with paper art, elements in the environment affect the life of textiles: humidity, exposure to ultra violet and florescent light, excess heat poor handling, and proximity to poor-quality materials. In addition, one of the greatest harms to textiles can be insects.

Some of the most devastating damage done to textiles is from staples or brads. Damage can also be done by using threads to sew textiles to a mount that are stronger than the threads of the art object. When hinging paper art, the hinge paper is of a lighter weight than the paper of the object, and so the thread used to sew a textile object in place should be of a lesser strength than the threads of the ready-to-frame textile.

For years, monofilament thread (fishing line) has been the salvo of many a framing project. The problem is that it is too strong and it has very sharp edges that can cut delicate fibers. Similarly, polyester threads are strong and seemingly less of a threat to the art object, but this is not the case. They can cut the delicate fibers of many natural fabrics such as silk, wool and cotton.

Designing frames for the support of textiles is an art unto itself. The elements that need to be incorporated are fairly simple in concept, but making them work together can at times be tricky. The rabbet of the frame needs to be both deep enough to handle the strainer and also have sufficient depth to keep the glazing off of the surface of the art. Using more than one moulding and stacking them can be an easy solution. Spacers in a deep moulding can be used to keep the glazing off of the surface of the art.



You can attach the screening and backing fabric to the strainer with staples—but not the needleart!

Mounting Textiles

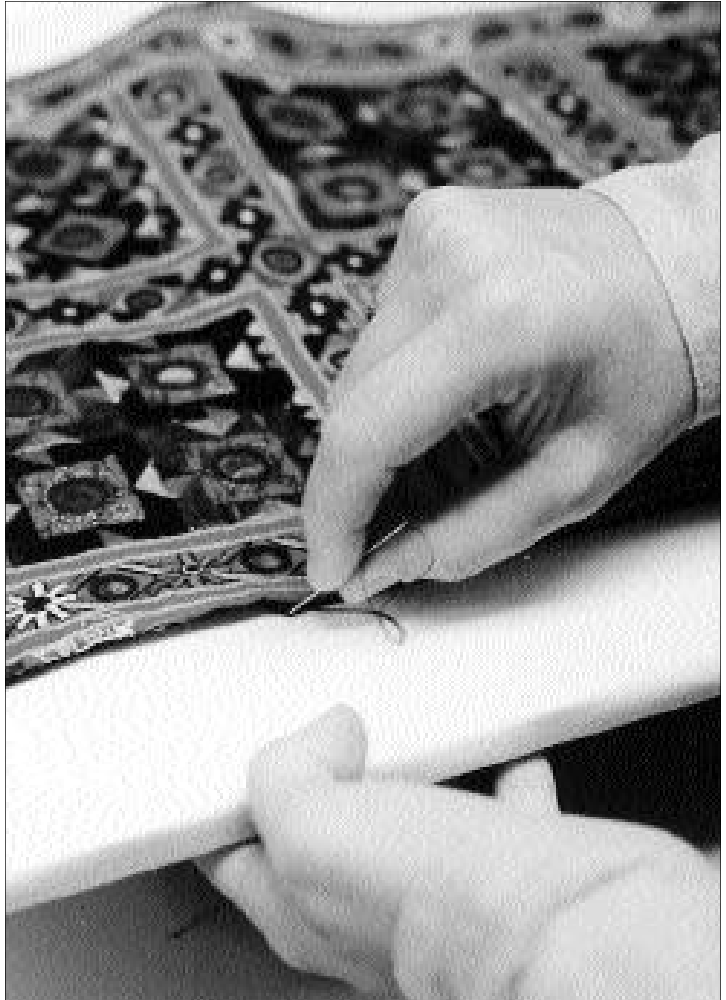
Attaching textile art to a support is one of the more important elements to protecting the art. One of the methods that is most useful in a commercial frameshop is understanding that many textile objects need supportive backing fabrics. The backing should be of a natural fabric such as undyed linen or cotton muslin that has the sizing and commercial coatings washed off. One can purchase fabric like this or can buy commercially available material and wash it three times (yes, three times).

Most likely the strainer will be made of wood. The wood needs to be sanded lightly and sealed before it is covered with the mounting fabric. Some textile conservators prefer that the strainer be covered with 4-ply, 100% rag matboard after it has been sealed. For large textile pieces that have a tendency to sag, putting a layer of Fiberglas® screening on the strainer first works effectively for the mount fabric. When sewing the textile art to the mount, sew through all of the layers into the Fiberglas screening. The Fiberglas does not shift and move like ordinary fabric.

I love to sew, but I have found that mounting large tapestries, molas, batiks and rugs that way can be very time consuming. I found it most beneficial (and most profitable) to hire outside sewers for these projects. I look to my needleart customers to do the sewing on contemporary textiles such as molas or new batiks from the Far East. By providing the strainer, stretched with the mount fabric, the proper silk, linen or cotton thread, and the correct needles the sewer can sit and enjoy the process of mounting the textile.

The stitch that is commonly used to mount the textile art is a couching stitch—small stitches taken at regular intervals. If done properly they are virtually invisible or at least blend well into the art. It is important to support the piece throughout the surface—tacking it every couple of inches, so that the weight of the piece is distributed evenly throughout the art object.

Fortunately, many contemporary embroideries, quilts and reverse applique



Small couching stitches will be almost invisible once the item is framed. For large needleart pieces, you might ask your customers to do the sewing.

Mounting Textiles

textiles come to framers with fabric support already sewn to the object. This can be used to sew it onto the mount.

For antique pieces that will be framed for display it may be necessary to consult a textile conservator or technician before deciding on a mounting treatment. Sometimes the conservator can add tabs or fabric to an antique piece that makes it easy for the framer to mount.

Preservation of art and textiles takes thoughtful consideration. Think about where the art will be displayed. What is the proximity to heat and air conditioning vents? Are there extreme temperature differences? What type of light will the object be exposed to? What is the best way, without altering the artwork, to mount the object? How

can all of these considerations be incorporated into a framework that enhances that art?

Customers like good design. Production workers in frameshops like design that incorporates their needs too. When designing frames for mounted textiles be sure to consider the depth requirements of the rabbet. Realizing that the glazing needs to be kept off the surface of the art and that a wood strainer, spacer and glazing make a substantial package both in weight and thickness.

Needleart and textiles are wonderful additions to any art collection. Preservation framing will enhance the art and ensure that the textiles are available to see now and long into the future. ■