

Window Dressing

A Cross Stitch Article by:
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Cross stitch is a traditional type of embroidery formed by two stitches in the shape of a 'X' and it is these crosses that make up the desired picture or pattern.

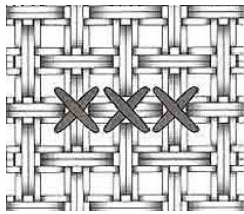


Fig 1. Cross Stitch Pattern.

There are two types of cross stitch, first where the pattern or design is printed on the fabric and second, counted cross stitch whereby the embroiderer transfers the design from a chart onto the fabric by counting the position of the stitches. Base fabrics include linen, even-weave but by far the most popular is Aida. The size of the weave is called the count and described as the number of holes per inch of fabric i.e. 18 count would equate to 18 holes for each inch of fabric and basically, it is the count that determines the final size of the work.



Fig 2. Original Frame.

A regular customer brought a piece of cross stitch that had been framed some years ago and asked if it could be reframed, stating that the work had some sentimental value and that she had never been really satisfied with the framing in the first place! The work was counted cross stitch using linen thread on a bleached linen base fabric of approx 24 count.

In my opinion the cross stitch had been poorly framed; the frame and mount design were poor, the cross stitch appeared cramped in a single mount, cut from standard mountboard, which left insufficient space between the work and the glass. After removing the masking tape and backboard I found that the work had been cut to size and stuck to a poor quality indefinable board using double sided carpet tape; this was then taped over with brown adhesive tape.

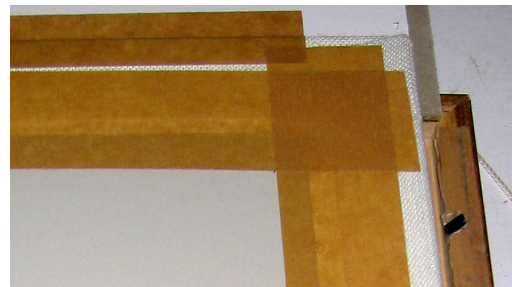


Fig 3. Back Showing Brown Adhesive Tape.

After carefully removing the work it was found that the edges of the linen fabric were sticky and beginning the yellow as a result of the adhesive tape, the actual cross stitch looked slightly dirty especially those areas that weren't stitched and there was a small stain possibly due to handling. Dirty fabrics are acidic and in damp or humid conditions attract mould and insects thereby increasing the acidity and

causing long term damage to the fabric and threads. I suggested that the customer should wash the work to remove the dirt and adhesive residue which would also return the work to a neutral pH. It is a good policy never to wash a customer's work as this could cause many problems specifically with shrinkage and the bleeding of colours should the threads not be colourfast.

When the customer returned the appearance of the work had significantly improved, the adhesive residue had gone although there was still some slight yellowing of the linen fabric, the small stain had reduced in size and the threads had returned to their vibrant and full texture - a great improvement.

After discussing the frame and mount design with the customer I had to decide how I to secure the work. My preferred method of securing fabric art to its support would be to lace but because previously the edges of the mount had come to the edge of the stitching and the linen had been cut at the back it did not leave a great amount of material with which to work. My problem was to achieve the correct tension of the fabric and to stretch it evenly around all four edges of the support but the edges of the linen had frayed and I was concerned that lacing would pull the linen apart consequently; I opted to use pins and foam board.



Fig 4. Securing Pins and Tape Residue.

Whilst this method of support is not particularly suitable for large, heavy items it is popular with cross stitch of up to this size, providing adequate support and holding the work securely in place.

I cut a piece of 5mm foam board slightly larger than the aperture of the window mount and in order to correctly align both the work and support I marked the centre of each outer edge of both, in pencil, on all four sides. I positioned the fabric onto the support using the marks, lining up the weave and support as best I could; I then inserted stainless steel ball point pins, purchased from the local needlework shop, at the centre of each edge and into the core at the edges of the board. Working outwards from each centre, in turn, I placed the pins around 10mm apart ensuring that the weave was straight and in this case the fence post was vertical. The pins were left sticking out slightly so that I could adjust them, if necessary, later. They were only to be pushed in firmly when I was content with the positioning of the work and that I had achieved the correct tension. The pins were then pushed fully into the foam and the four corners were neatly folded and a pin inserted across the diagonal to hold the corner down.

I placed the supported work on white core backing board and cut lengths of 5mm foam board which were stuck to the backing to hold the supported work in place. This would also act as a filler around the work to compensate for the thickness of the fabric and foam board in order to keep the window mount level with the work.



Fig 5. Secured work with Filler.

The window mount was designed not to encroach on the cross stitch but I was restricted because of the amount of fabric available; however, I managed to leave around 10mm of unstitched fabric around the work. I consider that image size is particularly important as I do not like the work to appear cramped in the mount; normally a good rule of thumb is to leave between 5% and 10% of unstitched fabric as a surround. This is of course dependent upon the boldness and size of the work and the texture of the stitches. The double mount was cut from a combination of white core and conservation quality mountboard and hinged along the long side of the supported work. Whilst I would have preferred to use conservation mountboard only the customer wished to use the coloured white core in order to enhance the work. Once assembled the thickness of the window mount, supported work and undermount was around 10.5mm; this combined with the thickness of the glass and backboard and the space between the mounted work and the glass was greater than that of the depth of the moulding rebate and the backboard; consequently I decided to use a small box frame.



Fig 6. Double Mount and Box Frame.

After constructing the box frame using 13mm FrameBox (Arqadia 206.400.000) I positioned the work such that its rear edge was level with the back rebate of the box frame and measured the distance from the glass to the front edge to determine the depth of the spacers. The spacers were made from 5mm foam board with mountcard glued to the front; because of the thickness of the spacers they protruded from the moulding rebate and to prevent them being visible I used a small window mount placed directly against the glass.



Fig 7. Glass, Window Mount and Spacers.

The moulding chosen was Mainline Moulding 503-0048 which I had used to frame cross stitch on a number of occasions and knew that it complemented this type of work extremely well; it also fitted in very well with the choice of mountboard. It was

mitred, glued and pinned, the glass and backing board were cut and all that was left was assembly.

A note regarding the glass. I had previously discussed the advantages of using glass with ultra-violet protection with the customer and knew that she would want to protect her work accordingly. She also mentioned that she intended to hang the work in her office that had fluorescent lighting, not a particularly good lighting environment and one that would necessitate the use of UV glass if she wanted, as expected, to protect her work. Finally, I explained that if diffused glass was used there could be a loss in definition as the work was a small distance from the glass and that this distance was necessary to maintain air flow around the work, to prevent the threads being crushed against the glass and finally, should any condensation form on the inside of the glass it would prevent the threads and fabric getting wet thereby causing either rotting or the formation of mould. The glass chosen was Tru-View conservation clear.

Regarding the assembly, the glass was cleaned and placed with the window mount into the moulding rebate. The spacers were stuck in place using ATG Tape; first, the spacers along the top and bottom and then the side spacers. They were placed in this order such that the side spacers would offer support to the top spacer should the tape fail. The mounted work was then checked to ensure it was completely clear of loose threads etc and then placed into the frame; the MDF backboard was then placed in the frame and secured using Framers Points. The finished work was then finally checked for debris before the FrameBox was fastened to the moulding using Framers Multipoints and the back sealed using gummed tape.

In its original condition poor frame and mount design had resulted in a good piece of cross stitch looking very mediocre. Furthermore, poor framing techniques had damaged the fabric and if left in its original frame further damage would have undoubtedly occurred to both fabric and threads due to the condition of the work when originally framed, ultra-violet light and the materials/techniques used.

Once re-framed, the transformation was complete and the customer was particularly happy with the finished work - it certainly had that 'wow' factor. Finally, I was content that the framing of the cross stitch was fully reversible and that there would be no damage to the work from the materials and techniques used.



Fig 8. Finished Frame.