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Caring For Needlepoint Works In Progress

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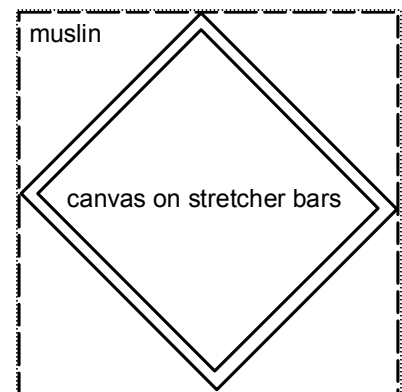
While recently admiring others’ works in progress, I’ve noticed that the way many of us travel with our projects compromises the quality of our work. For example, the already-stitched threads acquire a fuzziness due to accumulated wear, or the canvas has a hammock-style sag on the stretcher bars.

When you’re not working on it – whether it’s sitting at home or traveling with you – your stitching project needs to be protected! You invest many precious hours on each work; it’s only appropriate to show proper respect for your efforts by treating your works as the valuable objects they are.

Below I’ve outlined one approach to caring for your works in progress. This is not a method for storing UFOs indefinitely; that’s a topic for another article.

Step one. Purchase or assemble the following supplies. Once you have them on hand, you can go to them every time you need to wrap a project and not have to make a special purchase. That enhances the probability of actually getting the wrapping done!

- a. A few yards of unbleached muslin. Any fabric store should have it. It’s cheap, usually under a dollar a yard on sale. When you get it home, machine-wash and machine-dry it. No need to iron; just fold it up.
- b. A few yards of acid-free light-weight batting (also inexpensive if bought off the bolt and not in a bag).
- c. Plastic bags large enough to accommodate most projects. A few years back I bought a supply of 16” x 18” flat poly bags from Veripak (www.veripak.com). They’ve proven to be invaluable, and not just for wrapping needlepoint projects.
- d. A card or spool of $\frac{1}{8}$ ” or $\frac{1}{4}$ ” string.
- e. A collection of moderate-sized boxes or pieces of heavy corrugated cardboard that can be cut up.



Step two. Cut a piece of the batting large enough to cover the design area of your canvas.

Step three. Cut a large piece of the muslin. It should be big enough that you can lay your frame down on it as shown at right, and flip the 4 corners over to cover the other side entirely.

Step four. Put the batting over the front side of the design area, and then put the canvas, batting side down, on the muslin. Fold the four corners to cover the back of the piece completely.

Step five. Place the wrapped piece in a plastic bag large enough to hold it, but don’t seal it – you want some air to circulate to prevent mildew or insect infestation.

Step six. Cut a piece of cardboard that is the same size as or slightly larger than your frame; then put it against the “canvas” side of the bagged piece. Tie a string or cord around the entire “sandwich” to secure it.

Why go to all of this effort? Unless we’re extremely vigilant, when a project is tossed into a bag we tend to forget about its fragility. Other items are casually added to the bag: cards or spools of thread; cases that hold stitching implements; other projects on frames; project instructions. As you carry the bag, these items rub against your project, and the friction creates wear on the stitched threads. Even if you “stitch in the ditch” with the stretcher bars on the front of the canvas, the surface is still vulnerable if it’s not covered.

Furthermore, it’s easy to prop a bag up against another surface and then lean something against it, or to lay a bag down and set something on it. An unprotected canvas will deform to accommodate the pressure, and in the process acquire strange bulges or develops a significant sag. I’ve made the mistake of laying a frame down with the front of the canvas up, turning my back, and turning around again to find a cat standing on it! “Trampoline stitching” – when a canvas is loose enough in the frame that it moves up and down as the thread moves through it – is not conducive to even tension, making your work look lumpy and uneven.

The detailed wrapping I’ve described may sound like a lot of work. I **always** cover my projects with batting and muslin, but there is a shortcut I use if I’m lazy, or if I’m working with something that’s so oddly shaped that finding an appropriately sized bag or piece of cardboard is difficult: Get a large bag, measure it, and have three or four pieces of foam core board cut to fit in it (any art supply store can do this for you). Put the boards into your bag so the boards make compartments similar to a portable file. Segregated into separate compartments, multiple canvases or ancillary stitching items can be carried without risking damage to your stitched work.

All of this may sound like a lot of effort, but once you assemble the supplies and get into the habit of protecting your work, you’ll be pleased with the results. It’s actually easier to travel with an appropriately packaged project, and you may find that projects you hadn’t previously considered mobile can readily be transported to and from class or a stitch-in with friends without worry – and we all know that projects get done faster with more opportunities to stitch on them!

About the author: Denise has served on the Board of the St. Louis Gateway Chapter ANG as Newsletter Editor, Program Director, and President. In 2002, she chaired the ANG Workshop By Mail program, and in 2003-2004 served as the ANG Director for Educational Services. She is a contributor to the 2002 ANG Chapter Handbook, and the 2003 and 2005 ANG Chapter Project Books. She welcomes your comments and questions at denise@beusen.net.