

A Stitch in Time

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. 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.

Any cross-stitch that you are asked to frame, needs to be treated with the utmost care and consideration. Whether the work is new or old, cross-stitch can be very delicate and there are many things you must think about in order to make sure it is protected for many years to come.

Poor Framing

Older cross-stitch examples are often poorly framed, and you may find that you are sometimes asked to reframe them in order to restore their former glory. Common signs of poor mount design include where the cross stitch appears cramped in a single mount with insufficient space between the work and the glass; poor quality indefinable board has been used; or dirty fabrics have framed attracting both mould and insects which cause long term damage to the threads. In the case of the latter, 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. However, in some instances, this could be the only advisable action as it will remove any dirt or adhesive residue which could also return the work to a neutral pH.

Preferred Framing

A preferred method of securing fabric art to its support would be to lace it in, but if there is not a great amount of material around the edges with which to do this, other approaches will be needed.

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If this is the case, to achieve the correct tension of the fabric and to stretch it evenly around all four edges of the support, you could try using pins and foam board. Whilst this method of support is not particularly suitable for large, heavy items it is popular with cross stitch, providing adequate support and holding the work securely in place.

Here is a quick guide:

- 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, mark the centre of each outer edge of both, in pencil, on all four sides.
- Position the fabric onto the support using the marks, lining up the weave and support as best you can.
- Insert stainless steel ball point pins at the centre of each edge and into the core at the edges of the board.
- Working outwards from each centre, place the pins around 10mm apart ensuring that the weave is straight. Leave pins sticking out slightly so that you can adjust them later if necessary. Only push these in firmly when content with the positioning of the work and sure that you have achieved the correct tension.
- Push pins fully into the foam, neatly fold the four corners and insert a pin across the diagonal to hold the corners down.
- Place the supported work on backing board and cut lengths of 5mm foam board and stick to the backing to hold the supported work in place. This could 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.

Considerations

Remember, image size is particularly important and the work should never 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.

Once at mounting stage, Conservation quality mountboard and tape is highly recommended especially for older works although it can have benefits maintaining the quality of newer works in

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the long term. Glazing is also a particularly important consideration, as using with ultra-violet protection will protect work accordingly, especially in areas with fluorescent lighting.

Poor framing and mount design can result in a good piece of cross stitch looking very mediocre, and lead to extensive fabric damage. Left long term, this damage might be irreversible but careful use of materials and techniques can completely transform any cross-stitch, and have it looking glorious once again.