

Using Padded Silky Fabric Backing in Pressed Flower Pictures



by Barbara Hallman, NatureGifts

I love using silky fabric backings for my show pictures as they add a luminescence that provides a classy extra dimension and depth to the picture. I also use padding behind to put pressure of the piece against the glass, for a finished, almost vacuum-sealed effect. This also helps hold the flowers in place as well.

Although fabric is a little more expensive than paper backing, it's well worth the extra pennies. This fabric runs about \$7-\$8 a yard, and a yard makes lots of pictures. Whenever I am in the fabric store, I check the remnant bin for pretty silky pieces that might work as an extra savings bonus. The best are those with lots of body, such as the ones that have kind of a soft flannel type backing. They are easiest to work with because they have weight and heft, making the fabric easy to handle. Favorite colors to use are champagne, black, burgundy, and pale yellow. Champagne is my very favorite for its versatility. The darker colors are striking with light or white flowers though.



Barbara lives in Alexandria, VA with her husband Ron and her creative cat Lexy. She has been doing pressed flower art for about 10 years, primarily donating it for sale to her annual church bazaar. She also loves creating unique pieces of art for friends and acquaintances for the fun of it. Pressed flower art is a love and a passion.

Here are some samples of champagne and black silky fabrics. Can you see the beautiful sheen?



And here is the padding I use. It's fluffy polyester fiberfill. I get it from the fabric store when on sale. I don't have the brand, but it comes in big puffy bags and can be found in the quilt section. Take your % off coupon!

Some artists prefer to use foam rather than this fill. I'd like to experiment with the foam some day and decide for myself which works best for me. The foam holds promise of giving a more even pressure which is good. The idea of both the fill or the foam backing is to provide a soft pressure backing to the fabric to push it up tightly against the glass.

Many artists have written about use of padded fabric backgrounds, so I in no way am unique in using them. But here are some tips based on my experience.

First, cut a piece of your fabric to the exact size of the frame you wish to use, using the glass of the frame as a guide. You can lay the glass right on the fabric and drag a pen around the outside to get your guidelines for cutting just like you do when framing paper-backed pictures. Then, cut out your fabric piece. If you are like me and you don't have a good pair of scissors to your name, you might reach for the meat cutting scissors which just happen to be the best I have at the moment. Test to make sure you have cut perfectly: Place the glass back into the frame and lay your cut fabric in to make sure it perfectly fits. Trim as necessary. Here is a photo where I am checking the fabric to make sure it is a perfect fit to the 12 x 12 inch frame I will use.



Note: As with paper-backed pictures, it is best if you can do the cutting of the backing after you glue down your flower material so that you can choose exactly the best composition. But when starting out using fabric, it is easier to cut the fabric to the exact frame size first. Later you can become more daring and cut after gluing. It's tricky to cut the slippery stretchy fabric to the right size with the delicate flowers already glued on. Save the daring for later when you feel more confident using fabric. Also, best to start with a small picture to build confidence.

Second, after ironing the fabric to make sure it is perfectly smooth, make your composition and glue it down. For your first pictures, start small and keep the composition fairly simple. Beauty in simplicity! Make sure to place nonstick material under your fabric as you glue down, because with fabric, the glue will surely seep through the fabric and will stick to whatever is under the fabric. I use foil or plastic wrap underneath. I learned this the hard way-- as I lifted my first fabric piece up after gluing and up came annoying tiny bits of newspaper stuck to the back of the picture, a lot like the little tissue pieces you might see on a man's chin after shaving cuts. Not a pretty sight! Also, take special care to keep your hands clean and try really hard not to get any stray glue anywhere on the fabric. Any glue will show terribly on the sheeny fabric and will ruin your picture. If you do happen to get some glue where you don't want it to be, be prepared to find a creative way to cover it with pressed material to salvage the picture. Don't be nervous...just be careful!

Third, set your composition aside to "cure" or rest and dry under *light* pressure, such as a newspaper just to make sure the glue has bonded just as you do with your paper-backed pictures. During this time you can reorganize your work area, clean your glass, drink a cup of coffee, whatever! I have never signed one of these, but you could experiment with a thin permanent black marker on some extra fabric to practice and to make sure it won't bleed. *Hmm, good idea, Barbara...try it some time!*



Here is a photo of my daffodil composition just sitting in the frame backwards to double check that the piece is cut to the correct size. You can see the rough edges around the fabric edges because this is not framed; it's just sitting on the glass facing backwards. I hope you can see the sheen! When under glass, the picture will be perfectly flattened and the lovely sheen will still come through. The contrast of the matte flower material against the sheeny fabric is nice.

Fourth, now's the time to take a photo of picture. I get so excited about the final product that I sometimes rush to frame mine and then have take them apart again because I forgot to get that all important photo! You have never done that before, have you? ;) In any event, you want to avoid taking one of these apart as they are quite fragile and you will want to handle them as little as possible. Here is a photo of the dogwood on burgundy picture prior to framing:



fabric or some Viva towels), and then the padding. Distribute the polyfill as evenly as possible over the backing as shown in these photos. If you are using a mat, concentrate your filling primarily behind the opening in the mat so as to push the composition up to the glass for a tight fit. Pack it in as tightly and evenly as you can but make sure you can still close the backing of the frame. Here are photos of the distribution of the fiberfill on the champagne daffodil and the burgundy dogwood pictures:

Fifth, so AFTER YOUR PHOTO, it's time to frame. You can vacuum seal with the fiber fill in the vacuum, or you can frame the old fashioned way. And you can use a mat or not. I frame the old fashioned way. I put the glass in and then the mat if using a mat and then the artwork. Then I turn the frame over carefully to inspect for floaters and other annoying flaws and specks. Once you are satisfied it's perfect, it's time to close it up. So over the fabric art I add a smooth paper backing to provide even distribution of the backing (I sometimes use the paper that comes with the frame if it doesn't show through the



Sixth, Put the back cover on the picture, and flip over to see the picture to make sure everything is still perfect. Make sure there are no wrinkles in the fabric and that the filling has done its job of pressing the artwork to the glass. Repeat procedure redistributing filling if necessary to get a perfect effect.

Here are some other recent examples of work I've done using silky backgrounds. I tried to capture the sheeny backgrounds in the photos but that's best seen in person.



Dogwood on Black--very popular here in Virginia as Dogwood is the State flower. Great goodbye gifts for those leaving the State.



"Nancy's Pansies"--glorious against the black silky background which is not showing well in this photo. But in person, it is an eye-popper thanks to these incredible pansies from Nancy. What a great picture for a fall show. But I am keeping this one for me!



Here is one with deep blue clematis on cream colored silky material done with a mat. I concentrated the filler right behind the opening of the mat so as to push the fabric out and cause the flowers to be pressed up against the glass. Provides a nice padded effect. Note how the botanicals just seem to sink into the fabric.

Here is a sampling of some of my first pictures using silky backgrounds last year that I sold to benefit church. These spring flowers sold very well in April. As you may note if you can see the price tags, I keep my prices pretty low as I do charity sales. But this year I will be going up in price especially for the ones I really love. If not sold, I am happy to use as gifts and for me! The pink cherry blossom picture was sold to a person looking for a gift for someone leaving to live in Arizona! It was to be a memento of life in Virginia. (The Dogwood pictures were already sold...)



My first attempt at daffs which was a great seller at a spring show last year. Although they are light colored, they still look good on the light background since it is a different texture and has sheen in contrast to the matte botanical materials. This 12 x 12 inch picture was so popular I had to make more on order. It helped that the daffs were from the garden of a parishioner so I named it "Craig's Daffodils".

And here are deep almost black hellebore for a dramatic and rich effect against champagne silky fabric.



Photos: Note that all photos have to be taken unframed; the picture once framed looks better of course. No way to take a good photo of a framed picture, so all photos here are of unframed pictures which have not had the benefit of the pressure of the glass against the picture.

Colorizing: I colorized all the greens in last year's pictures using sap green/brown watercolors. I colorized the greens and the Dogwoods in this year's pictures using Pan Pastels. Very white dogwoods are striking against the burgundy and black backgrounds.

Painting on silk: I painted all branches shown in these pictures using either watercolors or acrylics; a blend of sap green and brown watercolors, and a pearl cream acrylic. No way to press a branch, so they were painted on. Very fun to do! Just pick a real branch and use it as your model.

Have fun! I will be glad to answer any questions and hope you will try a picture. And there are many other ways to do fabric pictures so please feel free to share your way or experiences to the good of the Guild.

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