

# How to Frame Bead Embroidery

Robin Atkins

## Introduction

During the past 28 years of stitching beads on cloth, I've veered away from making necklaces, bracelets, bags, and purses, mostly creating *wall art* pieces. Thus, I've had lots of opportunities to experiment with various methods of finishing and framing my work, to make it suitable for display.

There are many acceptable ways of framing beadwork and other textile arts; this is just one of them. I hope that at least some parts of this tutorial will be helpful to you.



Some of my bead embroidery, displayed in my studio.

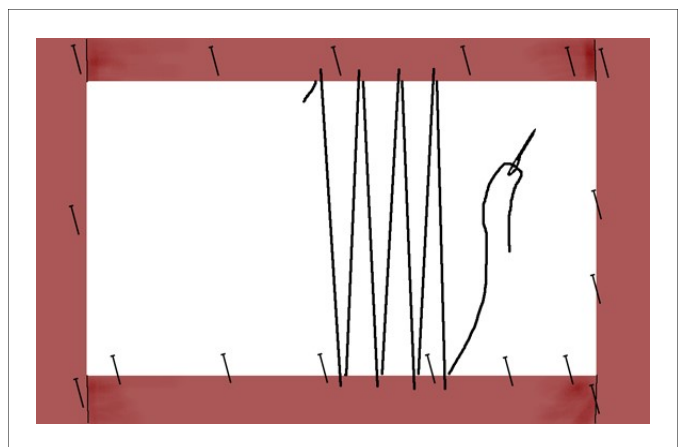
My way of doing bead embroidery is to work on cloth backed by acid-free paper as a stabilizer, so that the work doesn't pucker. I am in the habit of leaving ample fabric margins surrounding the actual beaded area, giving me lots of options for finishing or framing. However, if you bead on stiffened felt or some other material, even if you don't have a margin around your beading, much of the following will apply to framing your work as well.

If you do leave fabric margins around your beadwork, one simple finishing method is to wrap the extra fabric around the sides of a manufactured painting-canvas, and lace the fabric snugly across the back, as in the diagram below. After covering the back with paper, the work can be hung on a wall, in the same way as a painting, or displayed on a stand.



*Nature*

2.5 x 3.5 inches, Robin Atkins, 2012



Lacing Diagram: Begin at center of longer side; lace to end; then start again in center and lace to other end. Repeat this process on the short side.

But the problem with this method, of course, is that the surface of the beading is exposed to dust and air-borne grime, which over the years may spoil the fresh look of the beading, aging the piece prematurely. So we look to frames and glass to protect our work.

Among the various methods for covering (and protecting) beadwork with glass, the following is the one I use the most, and like the best. It's not very expensive, or particularly difficult, although it does take a bit of time. Even if you already know about frames, please take a look at the section called *Preparing Your Bead Embroidery for Framing* below.

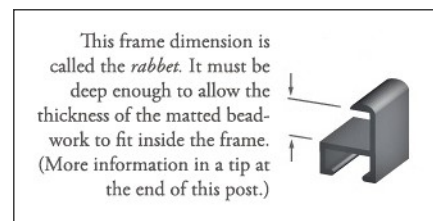
## Choosing a Frame

This tutorial assumes the beaded work has straight sides, and will be framed in a square or rectangular frame. Although, with slight modification, the same methods can be used to frame an irregularly shaped piece of bead embroidery.

The frame size, color, and style are important considerations. Wanting viewers to look at my beading and not be distracted by an overly fancy, gaudy, or large frame, I generally select a plain, narrow frame in a color that complements my beading without competing for the viewer's attention. Sometimes I choose a stained, wooden frame if it seems to fit the theme of my beadwork better than a metal frame. Depending on the size of my beadwork, I generally size my frame at 2-3 inches more on each side than the beadwork.

**Frame:** Often I use a painted, metal frame with a cross-section similar to the one shown on the right.

I either buy it as a kit (pre-cut pieces, plus required assembly hardware), assembling it myself, or buy it from a frame shop. The advantage of buying from a framer is that you will be able to see samples, and the pieces can be cut to non-standard lengths. Also, the framer can cut an accurate mat, foam core insert, and backing board for you, and can supply the needed risers. If you decide to work with a framer, I suggest you print this post (to show the framer how you will be preparing your work for the frame), or take the prepared bead embroidery with you to the frame shop.



Cross-section of metal frame.

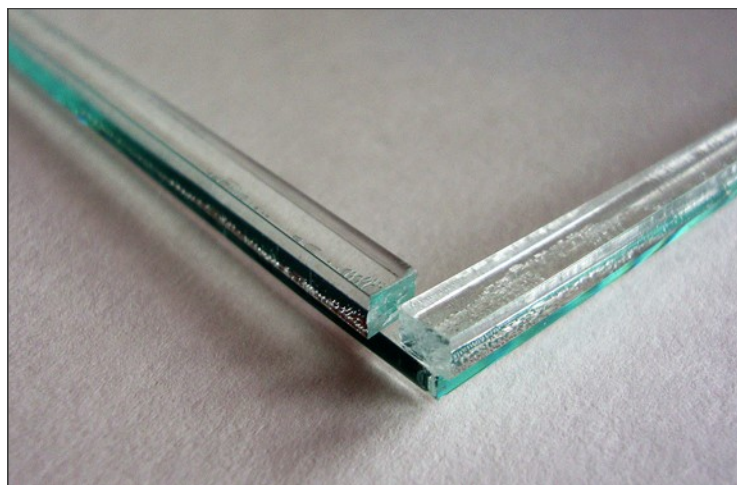
**Glass:** I believe in using the highest quality glass, even though it is a lot more expensive than ordinary glass. The UV resistance is good, but the primary reason for using premium glass is its clarity, which allows the viewer to see the details of your work without any distortions or color shift, as if there were no glass at all. Note: do not use non-glare glass. It only works if it lies directly on the surface of the art. You will be putting risers under the glass so it sits above the uneven surface of your bead embroidery, not touching any of the beads; even at a slight distance from the beadwork, non-glare glass will look frosted and obscure the details of your work.

## Other Framing Materials You Will Need

**Mat:** Choose a simple, acid-free, neutral-colored mat, either warm or cool white, depending on the emotional message and colors in your work. All those beautiful samples in the framer's palette are appealing, but for most bead embroidery, there is color and texture enough in the beads, and no value in adding more with your mat choice. If you do not have a mat cutter, a framer can cut your mat. Although I have not ever used a double mat (because I find them distracting, bringing my eyes away from the beadwork to the edges), it could be a way to gain a little more space for the glass above the beadwork.



**Risers:** Dense, plastic rods, called risers, are 1/8th inch square in cross-section, with an adhesive surface on one side. Use a wire nipper to cut the rods to fit along the outer edge of the glass; remove the paper strips covering the adhesive from the risers, adhering them to the glass along the edges, as shown to the right. They prevent the glass from touching your beadwork, by resting on the outer edge of the mat, thus holding the glass above the beaded surface. If the surface height of your beadwork is greater, you can adhere two rods together, making a quarter-inch of space. If the depth is more than a quarter-inch, you might want to consider mounting your work in a shadowbox frame.



Plastic risers, attached to frame.

**3/16th Inch Foam Core Board:** Since your beadwork will be mounted directly into a foam core board, be sure to use the white, acid-free, buffered, slightly more expensive variety. You can buy it at art supply or frame shops, in person or on-line. You will need a piece at least 3 inches larger than your bead embroidery on each side.

## Preparing Your Bead Embroidery for Framing

The piece to the right is the example used in the steps which follow. It's a small piece of bead embroidery, measuring only 1-3/4 inches wide by 2-1/4 inches high. The mat is 2 inches larger on each side. Numerous folks have surprised me with high offers to buy this piece (which is not for sale), illustrating that nicely framed bead embroidery can be sold at a favorable price.

### Mounting Your Bead Embroidery in Foam Core Board

As per the recommendations in the **frame** section above, draw the frame size (which will always be designated by the inside dimensions, the size of the artwork) on a piece of 3/16th inch foam core. Use a mat knife and ruler to accurately cut out this shape.

Then, measuring carefully, making sure it is exactly centered, draw lines to indicate the outline of your bead embroidery, adding 1/2 inch on each side.

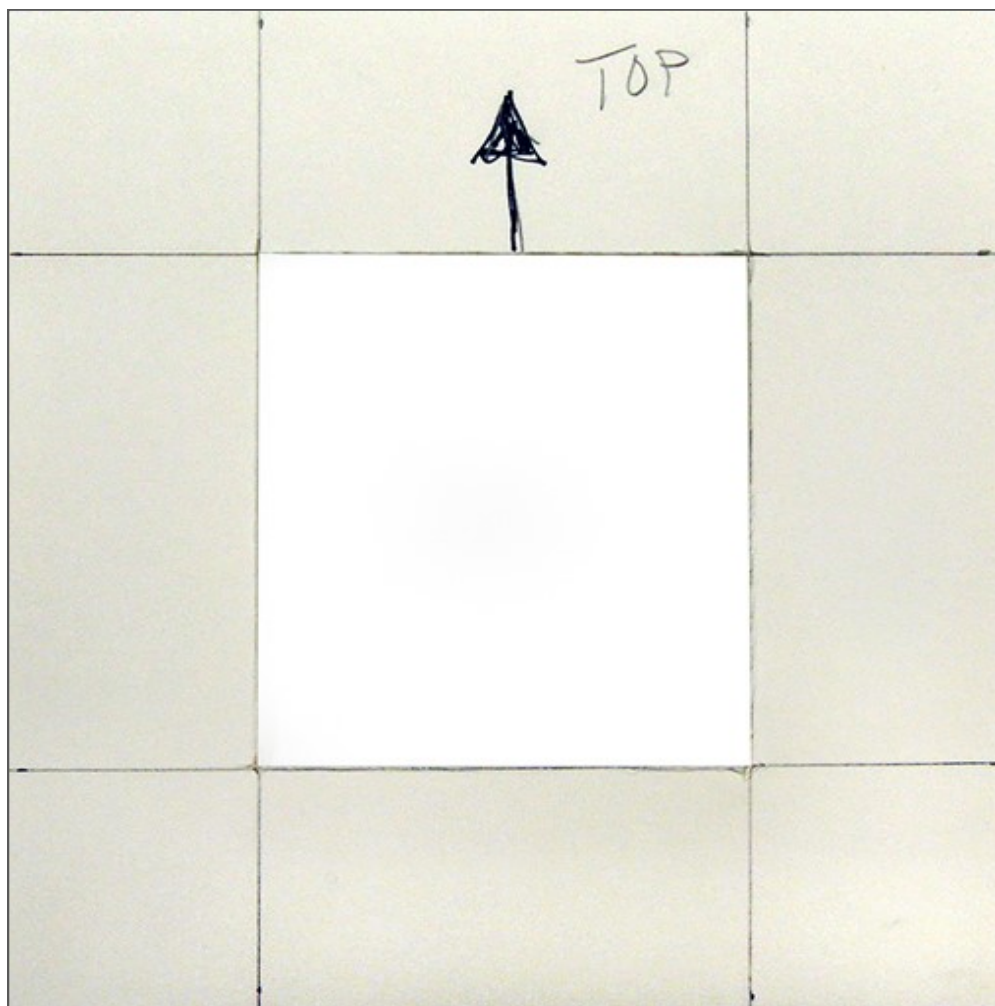


*Summer Breeze*

Beadwork: 1.75" x 2.25", Frame: 5.75" x 6.25", Robin Atkins, 2006

For example, if your beaded area was 2 inches wide, you would draw your lines 3 inches apart. Designate one edge as the top, and mark. Draw a vertical arrow from the top through part of the center. With a mat knife, cut out the center, being careful not to damage it or the outside frame. The cut out center will eventually be placed back in the hole by aligning the arrow segments drawn on the back.

For the next step, you will need at least a 1.5 inch margin of un-beaded fabric all around your beadwork. If you have less than a 1.5 inch margin, cut strips of cotton fabric (re-purposed sheet or shirt fabric). Using a zig-zag stitch on the sewing machine, and placing the strips under the margin of the beaded fabric (wrong side), stitch the strips to the margins, extending them to a total of 1.5 inch from the edges of your beadwork on the top, bottom, and both sides.



3/16th inch acid-free, buffered foam core board. Cut centered hole 1/2-inch larger on each side than the beaded area of embroidery. Mark an arrow from the top to mid-center.



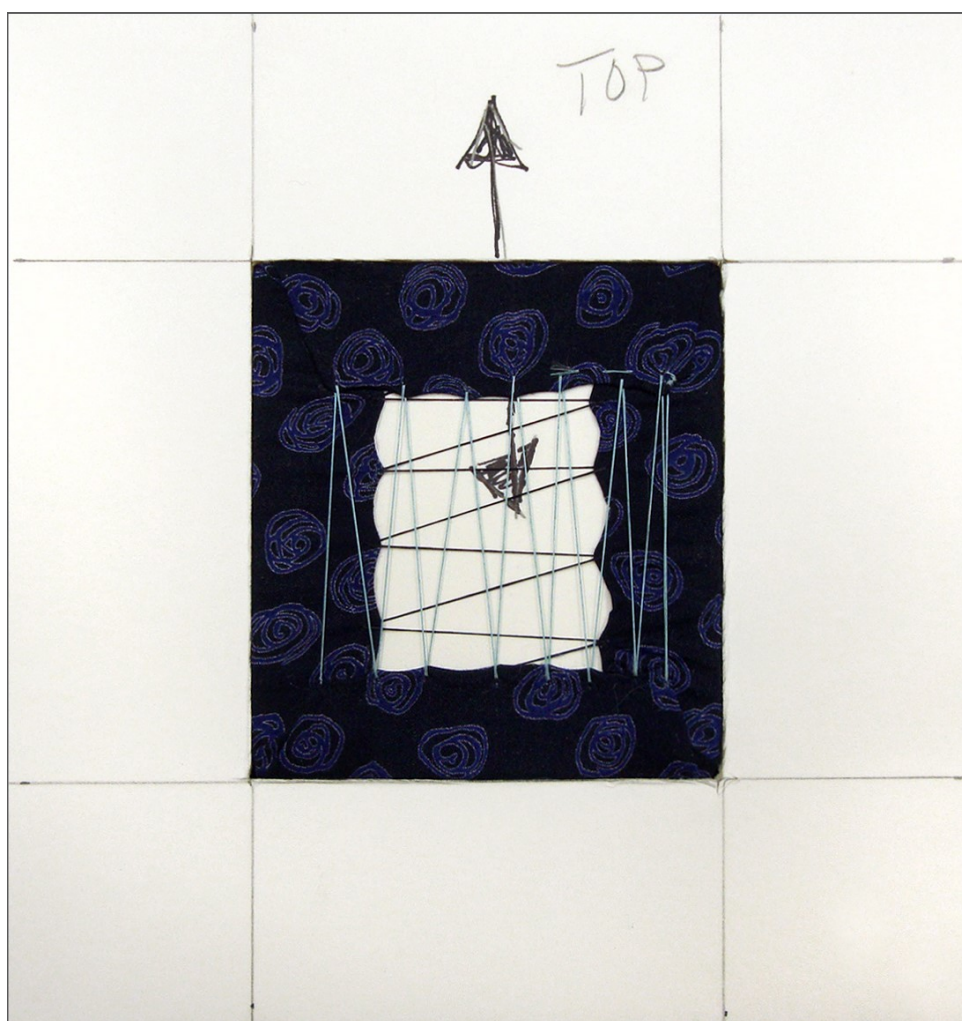
Beadwork laced around foam core center piece.

Center your beadwork on the cut-out piece of foam core board. Hold in place using map or sewing pins, pushed straight through the beading down into the board. Wrap the fabric snugly around the board and pin from the back. Remove the pins from the front. Check to make sure the work is still centered accurately. Re-pin if necessary. Using a sewing needle and beading thread, stitch from side to side, lacing the fabric around the foam core, as in the example on the left. Start with the longer sides. Knot when finished. Then do the same on the shorter sides.

**Tip:** I rest the beaded side face down on a thick, folded, bath towel while I am lacing the back. The texture of the beading sinks into the towel, allowing me to push on the foam core while lacing.



This is how the bead embroidery looks after being laced around the foam core board on the back. If I had not wanted to frame this piece, I could have used double-sided, archival tape to adhere a heavy, acid-free, paper backing over the laced area on the back; it could then be displayed on a small stand similar to *Nature*, shown on page 1.

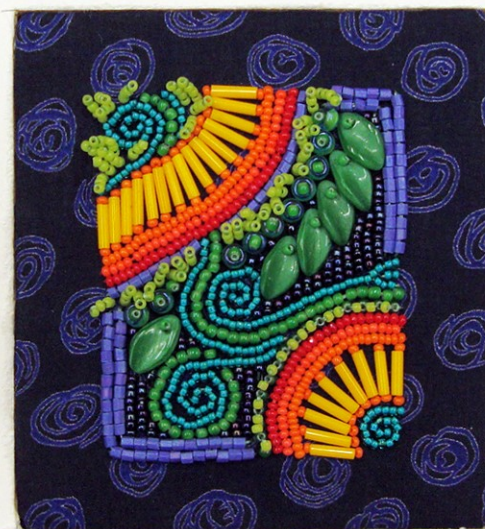


This is how it looks on the back, when it is placed back in the original hole cut into the foam core board. Notice how the arrows match up, insuring a perfect fit.

**Tip:** Rest the foam core on a folded towel, back side up; press the laced beadwork into the hole from the back.

This is how it looks on the front when the laced beadwork has been put back into the hole in the foam core board.

At this point you can see a margin of fabric surrounding the beaded area. However, the hole in the mat will be cut exactly to the size of the beadwork, so that when it is placed over the beadwork, you will no longer see any of the fabric margin. (See page 7.)



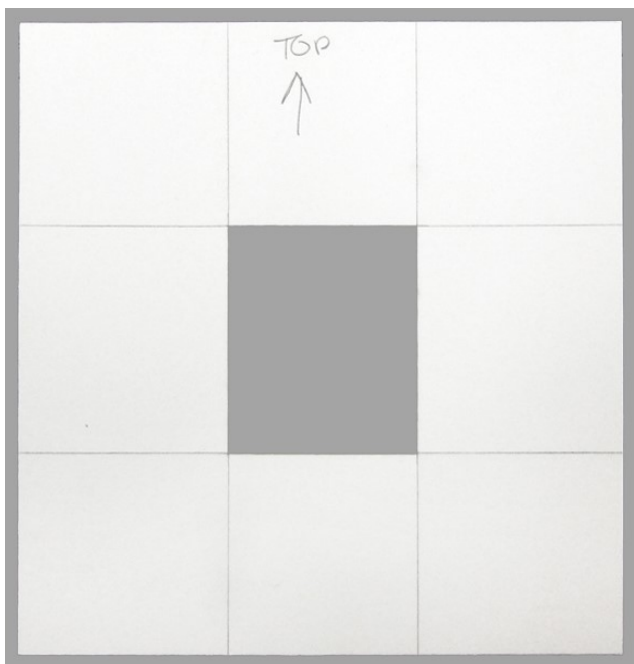
### Assembling a Bead Embroidery *Sandwich*

Now it's time to make a *sandwich* with the foam core board between two pieces of acid-free, mat-board, one which has a beveled hole cut in the center, the other which is solid and goes on the back.

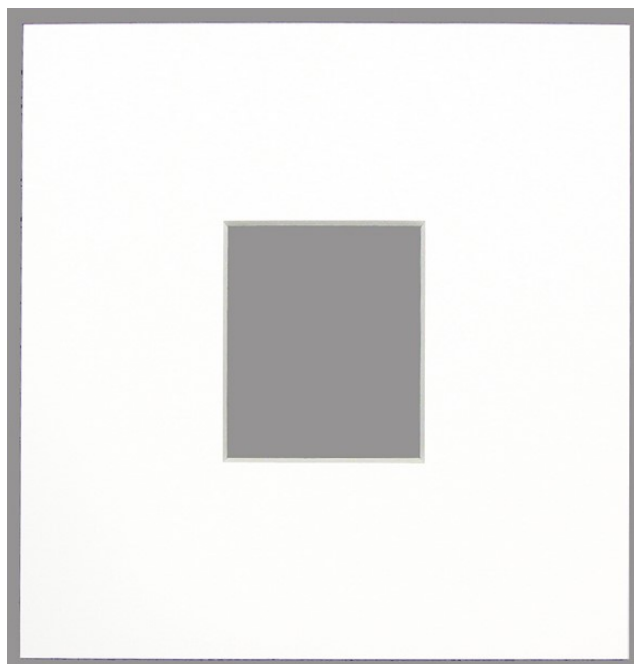
To make my own mats, I first cut the mat to the same outer dimensions of the foam core. Next, I measure and draw the exact outline of my bead embroidery centered on the wrong side of the mat (see page 7). I always mark the top, because sometimes the work is not exactly square or rectangular. Using a special mat-cutting tool, I then cut away the center area, where the beading will show. The blade in this tool is at an angle, which makes the beveled edge you see on the front of the mat. If you don't have access to this tool, give the beadwork and mat dimensions to a frame shop, and have a professionally-cut mat made for your beadwork. These days, most framers use a computer-controlled laser cutter for beautiful, precise cuts.

**Tip:** One way to get an exact measurement of the beaded area is to make a 100% copy of it on a scanner or copy machine. Cut out the copy with a ruler and mat knife; test it by holding it over your beadwork. If it is exact, use it as a template to mark the hole on the mat board. This method works well for irregularly shaped beadwork, where the hole in the mat is not square or rectangular, but cut to follow the contour of the beadwork. If the mat is hand-cut, the hole does not have to be precisely square or rectangular.

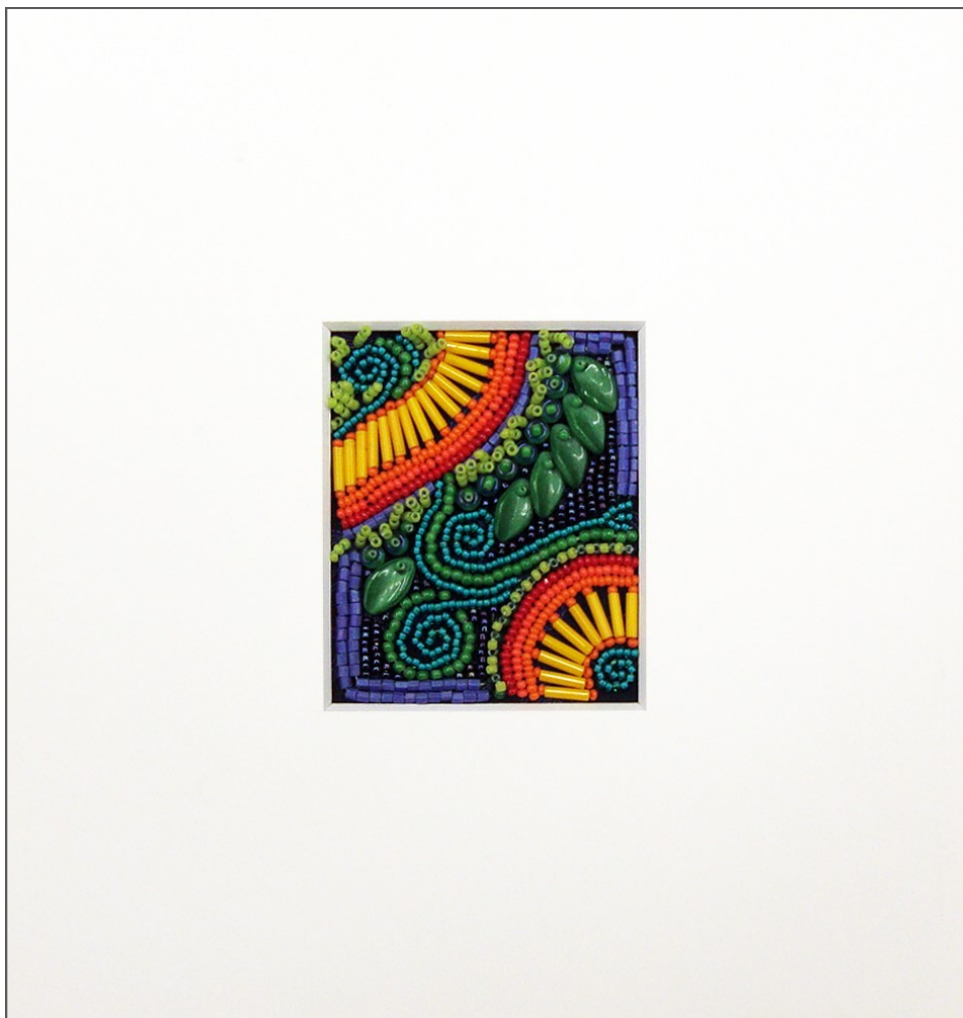




Mat board, back. Hole is marked and cut from the back.



Mat board, front. The hole cut in mat board fits over the beadwork, covering fabric margin.

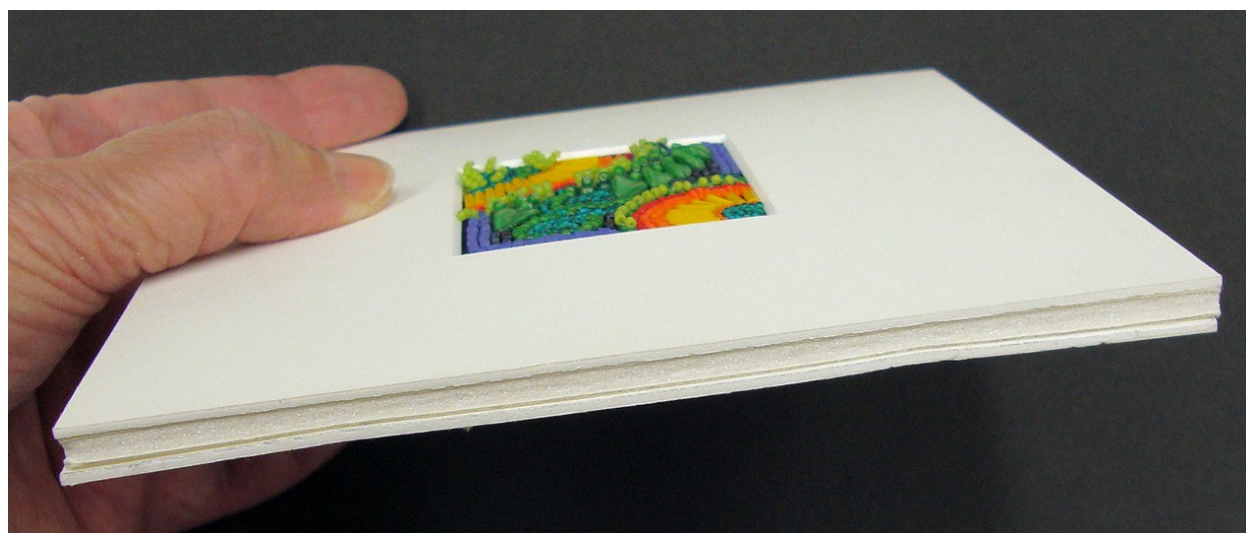


This is how the top and middle of the sandwich looks, with the mat placed on top of the foam core board, which has the beadwork placed properly in the cutout hole.

Next, a cut a second piece of mat board for the back of the sandwich. Cut it exactly the same size as the front, but without the hole in the center. As long as it is acid-free, you can use scrap mat board for the backing.



The photo above shows a piece of mat board cut for the *sandwich* back (on the right). Note that I've drawn around the laced beadwork, and cut away a layer of the mat board to make space for the laced fabric in the *sandwich*. Do this by gently cutting along the drawn lines, being careful not to cut very deeply into the mat. Then, use a knife to lift one corner of the inside area and peel it back creating a shallow empty space.



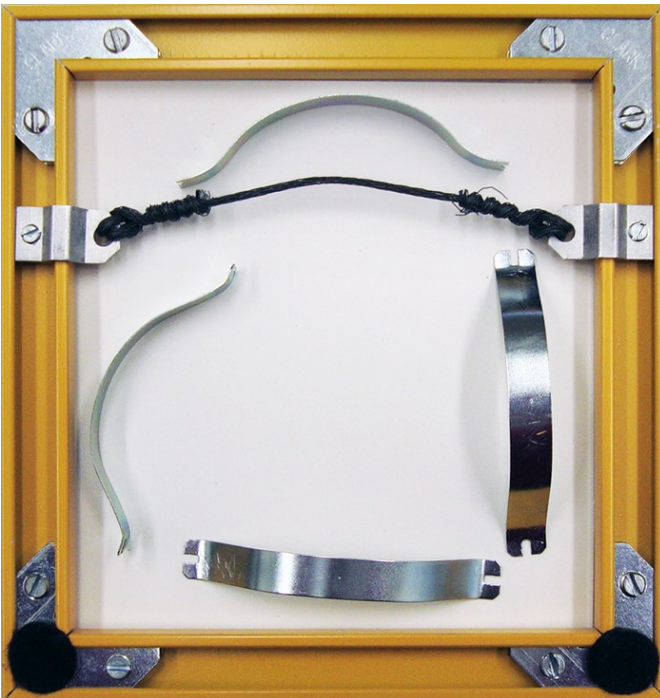
This is what the completed *sandwich* looks like. The beading is supported well in the foam core board between the two pieces of mat board, and can't shift when hung. No glue or tape (to later fail or chemically alter the mat or beading) is necessary in this process. And it looks so neat and professional!



## Assemble the Frame

With the more challenging steps already completed, the final assembly of the frame goes very quickly!

Assemble the bottom and sides of the frame by inserting the metal corner plates, and tightening the tension screws. Insert and tighten the corner plates into the top of the frame. Make a *double-decker sandwich* by putting the glass with the attached risers on top of the mat. Be sure the glass is clean and clear of any finger prints. Slide the complete *d-d-sandwich* into the obvious slot in the bottom section of the frame, as shown on the left. The hanging wire can be added now or later.



Slip the corner plates at the top of the frame into the slots on the sides, and tighten the tension screws. You should have gotten metal spring strips with your frame kit. Lay them out on the back, spaced evenly around. Push down on the center of a spring and slide it under the edge of the frame, between the backing mat and the frame. Do the same with each of the springs. If you haven't already, add a hanging wire. Add a felt or rubber wall-bumper to each of the lower corners. That's it! You are finished... your bead embroidery is ready to hang on your wall!

**Tip:** Whether using a metal or wooden frame, the depth of the frame is an important consideration because the *d-d-sandwich* will be thicker than a photograph or most paintings. The measurement of the depth, or space inside the frame structure to accommodate the thickness of the artwork, is called the *rabbet*. The *rabbet* measurement on the above metal frame is 9/16th of an inch, which is adequate with a single riser under the glass. But it's a tight fit, the springs having to be nearly flat when inserted. If I had used a double riser, I would need a frame with a deeper *rabbet*. I've found it rather difficult to find small, narrow, simple, plain, wooden frames with a deep enough *rabbet*.