

# CUSTOM ROUND FRAME HELPS TELL ARTWORK'S EMOTIONAL STORY

*A coordinated effort between an artist, framer, and supplier leads to a stunning custom design.*

*By Myrna Dow*

It is not often that I am offered the opportunity to design an entire framing project from start to finish. When I am afforded the freedom to choose a subject matter that evokes emotion and portrays beauty, it is a chance to design a frame around a piece of art that will showcase my skills. As a show piece, it can be an example of unique techniques and framing options that capture my customers' attention.

I strive in all my framing projects to tell a story and engage the customer while still pleasing the eye. My ability to talk about all the components that go into a design allows my clientele to understand and appreciate the intricate details that go into custom framing. For this project, I thought about a simplistic approach at first, but knew I needed to dig deeper to create a design I felt would express the emotions surrounding cancer. There are many different layers to this disease and the path it takes someone on. Unfortunately, hair loss is often a side effect of cancer treatment. Artistically drawn henna tattoo crowns provide a healing experience for people with cancer by changing a side effect into something beautiful and soothing. Once I made the decision to incorporate the henna tattoo, I was able to begin the process of designing the frame. I felt the impact of the artwork and frame choices would prompt in-depth conversations with customers regarding our shop's skills, design process, and dedication to our craft.



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For this piece, the circular frame motif was a fundamental aspect in the cohesiveness of the design. A circle acts as an embrace for the image and allows for continuity between all components. The hard edges of a rectangular frame would have felt too harsh around the person in the image, the cancer ribbons around the edge, and the henna tattoo crown. By using a circular design, it allows the eye to stop, take a rest, and examine the artwork. In addition, the unique shape makes the piece stand out from others in the showroom. After deciding on the circular design, the artwork could then be created. In essence, it was like being an art director and frame designer all in one.

The artwork showcases a woman in a reflective position with a henna tattoo on her head where hair loss was present due to her cancer treatment. We were able to use all our skills in the frame shop to create the image for the artwork. The position of the woman was extremely important to the overall expression and success of the piece. We asked an employee to pose for a photo with the arms and head in a position that was introspective and contemplative. We then took that photo and used Photoshop to remove the hair. After we printed the image, another employee drew the henna tattoo.

Then this photo went to June Jaeger, a nationally renowned quilt artist in Central Oregon. I was sure June was the best person for this piece because of her natural skill and artistry. I knew her techniques would represent the message throughout the piece. June created the artwork by painting on fabric and quilting the image. The background is of soft trees to represent the beautiful area where we live that is often a solace and a place of quiet reflection. I loved the opportunity to utilize so many different individuals in the shop and the community to create a memorable and one-of-a-kind piece. After receiving the artwork, I was able to proceed with the framing design.

I felt the design should be sophisticated but have interest and subtle flares throughout. With the permission of the artist, we scanned the image to create the back-



● After we printed the image, another employee drew the henna tattoo.

ground for the artwork to be attached. This part was tedious because the color needed to be soft and true while still lining up with the image. When we had the trees in the correct position to continue the pattern in the artwork, we added words such as endurance, fear, bravery, and support that might be thought of or said around someone that has cancer.

I wanted the wording to be quiet but add impact at the same time. The font and color itself had to be just right. The background of the trees and verbiage was printed with our Epson P9000 printer onto fabric to maintain consistency with the quilted piece. The printed fabric was then mounted to a 4-ply matboard using fabric glue and a heat press. Then came the preparation of the artwork to attach it to the background custom fabric mat.

In order to “do no harm” to the quilt and mount it in a completely reversible fashion, it took some engineering. It was important that the quilt held its position and did not sag in the center. To begin, I cut a round 8-ply mat on my computerized mat cutter. Then, I pierced holes around the perimeter in order to sew the quilt onto the board. The quilt was couched to the matboard with a running stitch by weaving it through the fabric then through the holes on the mat. It worked out nicely and the piece was supported around the entire edge. The 8-ply rag board was selected to give the artwork a slight lift creating a shadow around the image, thus adding another subtle layer of interest. The artwork that had been stitched to the 8-ply board was then attached to the fabric board with PVA glue and a bit of ATG for the initial hold. With glue and ATG only on the verso of the 8-ply board, the fabric artwork was able to be mounted completely with conservation methods.

In order to continue the perception of depth without a lot of color, a custom liner from Frank’s Fabrics was selected. Moises at Frank’s Fabric worked to create a round liner in the perfect size and shape. The fabric that was chosen had a bit of color that created a nice transition with the additional items in the frame package. When ap-

plying the fabric to the liner, I used two applications of glue, then used an iron with a pressing cloth to set the fabric to the liner. When securing the fabric to the rabbet, I have found it very helpful to apply the glue to both the liner and the fabric. Using this technique, the fabric adheres nicely to the prepared glued rabbet and creates a smooth circle that will not fail. When cre-



● Background artwork was painted on fabric of soft trees to represent a place of quiet reflection.

ating a unique piece, nothing screams custom more than a one-of-a-kind acrylic Prisma frame from Bella Moulding.

Designing the Prisma frame was a challenging yet fun experience. There were many different frame components and they all needed to fit into the available depth of the Prisma frame because of its unique backing. I started designing the frame by choosing a pattern that would incorporate the theme of the artwork while still remaining subtle and captivating. It was a process to research the pattern for the design in order to find the proper cancer ribbon that was possible for Prisma's machinery to execute on the acrylic. The dots were added to visually connect the pattern in the artwork to the frame.

I submitted a black and white image to Mark at Bella Moulding to confirm the possibility of execution. When the

ribbon was approved, the colors were then chosen by using the acrylic chips provided by Bella for the field and pattern. The designers at Prisma and I worked in conjunction with one another to iron out the details; we all had an unspoken understanding that it must be perfect. We realized there would not be enough room in the package for all of the layers, so an addition-

al frame was added to the back to allow more room. This created a depth of 1 1/4" instead of 5/8" and really added to the dimension of the frame allowing it to stand off the wall. Also, a surprise benefit: when viewing the piece from the side, the ribbon and dot pattern in the frame creates a lovely three-dimensional effect and seems to glow. Last but not least, the artwork and matting were protected with custom-cut Tru Vue Optium Museum Acrylic.

This piece is in my showroom and commented on regularly by my customers. They love to hear the story of how it was created and it is often an emotional experience. Even though they love the story, they also know that our shop is unique and realize how important the design aspect is for the final presentation. It gives our customers the confidence that we have the ability and knowledge to

tackle and execute difficult designs and will work with them to create a unique experience and a frame to last a lifetime. **PFM**



### Myrna Dow

Myrna Dow, owner, director, and professional picture frame designer of High Desert Frameworks!, has a background in the arts and framing industry spanning 30 years. Earning a BFA in graphic arts from Portland State, Dow first started in the graphic arts field working for several large agencies and type houses. In the early 1980s, she began her career in the gallery business as a sales associate and gallery manager. After several years, she migrated to the custom framing environment and mentored with an accomplished professional picture framer. In 1999, Dow relocated to Central Oregon and soon thereafter established High Desert Frameworks!.