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"Framing a Zardozi Embroidery"

Subhead: A museum approach to 'first do no harm' with a challenging 3-dimensional gold embroidery from Dubai.
February 2027

Zardozi comes from two Persian words zar meaning 'gold', and dozi meaning 'sewing'. Also known as Zari, this gold embroidery was once favored by Mughal emperors and used extensively to adorn their clothes, chambers and curtains. Historically hand embroidered master artisans of Agra created wall art, which continues today by their descendants using the age old method on a rectangular wooden frame and hooked needles. Authentic Zari used real gold wires as embroidery threads, while today golden polished copper wires may be used. It is basically a brocade of tinsel thread meant for weaving and embroidery manufactured by winding or wrapping a flattened metallic strip made of pure gold, silver or metallized polyester film, on a core yarn, usually of pure silk, cotton, nylon, polyester, or wire. Today, it is divided into three types: real zari, imitation zari, and metallic zari.



Real zari is made from fine silver or gold thread, drawn from silver or gold alloys, which is flattened by passing it under equal pressure rotating rollers. The flattened silver threads are wound on the base yarn that is usually made of silk. These spools with silk and silver threads are further flattened for electroplating. The threads are then plated with gold by the process of electroplating. The luster of the gilded threads is further increased by passing them through a brightener. These threads are then wound on a reel. **(photo 1)** Imitation zari is made when copper wires are drawn from copper alloys, undergoing a similar process, except they are electroplated with silver and then wound around the base yarn, and reeled. Metallic zari is a modernized version replacing traditional metals like gold, silver and copper. It is durable and lightweight, non-tarnishing and maintains its luster for a considerable period

3D Wall Hangings
Zari jewel wall hangings are artisanal textile pieces intricately sewn into fabric to form elaborate patterns. These pieces frequently incorporate semi-precious stones such as onyx, corals, and lapis, adding sparkle and dimension to the embroidery, making them suitable as statement wall décor. The designs often depict floral motifs, peacocks, elephants, and traditional Indian geometric patterns, blending cultural heritage with luxe home styling. Artisans hand stitch onto silk, velvet, or cotton, following very intricate patterns. The addition of semi-precious stones, beads, and padding beneath enhances the visual richness, creating a luxurious, textured appearance that complements both modern and traditional interiors. They are difficult to clean and must be dry cleaned if unframed and displayed on a decorative rod avoid brushing or exposing to water to preserve metallic threads and stones.

The 3D Tapestry
In 2026 I was brought a Zardozi tapestry to have framed. It is a typical pattern of a large vase—this one almost 1-1/2" deep--of flowers with semi-precious stone centers. The embroidery was 30-1/2"x 48" with 3" of gold wire fringe around the outside edges, and though it had three tabs at the top designed as a free hanging wall piece, they wanted it in a deep shadowbox with all the wire turned back and hidden from display sight. It was padded with 1/2" foam inside a velour facing and a thin lightweight silk backing. All the embroidery was sewn through the front velour and padding, while leaving the backing unsewn, simply encasing the stitches and knots.

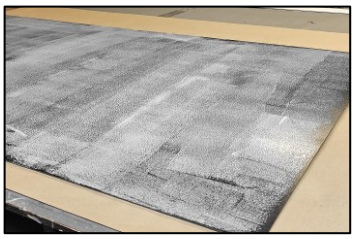
Materials & Trim Turning
A narrow Cranbrook Dark Walnut frame was selected to match with the Kismet Chocolate silk shadow stripe fabric for the backing and spacers for the mounted tapestry when done. The moulding was slightly shallower than preferred for fitting a piece this size, but it was just deep enough to accommodate the dimensions of the tapestry. A 1/4" black Gatorfoam board was chosen for its rigidity and as a dark color under the darker silk.

The client wanted the wire trim to be hidden, so in order to get an accurate measurement for the backing, Optium, and frame, all of the decorative filagree needed to be turned back and covered with a 4" wide fabric version of bias tape. This took hand stitching twice to complete, first to sew the bias fabric to the edges of the velour where it met the pink backing, and second, to tack down the covered wires which also allowed for some of the loose backing to be gathered a bit. A temporary backing of 3/16" foamboard was cut slightly larger than the anticipated finished size as a support during the initial sewing of the bias fabric and the final covering of the wire. **(photo 2A-B)**





Wet/Dry Mounting
Once the wire trim was sewn back, final measurements could be verified for the substrate by adding 2-1/4" around the tapestry for a 35" x 52-1/2" shadowbox. The Gatorboard was cut to size and three layers of sponge brayered PVA—Frank's Fabric Glue—were applied and allowed to dry between coats. **(photo 3)**



Once cut to size the silk was aligned to the substrate with a hand iron to initially set it and to make certain the lines stayed straight during bonding. The iron needed to be set to 200°F to activate the PVA which should be the Nyon setting. A little hotter would also work, but if it reaches 225°F it would melt foamboard. Fortunately this is wood veneer coated Gatorboard which tolerates a slightly higher range. Beginning from the center of the board, work outward to all the edges making sure the adhesive is melted enough to activate. At the edges of the board the iron should mount and dent the fabric edges **(photo 4)** where you can test if it is bonded by gently trying to lift that edge.



Since Gatorboard was used, once fully dry there was no visible warping of the support substrate. The fabric was sized with to two selvage edges left intact, while the other edges were cut to size using pinking shears. This silk was very unforgiving when it came to raveling, even when pinked, so it was clear that all edges would require gluing and/or taping to support the bond. Once properly aligned, set, and cooled, it needed to be reinforced in a mechanical or hot vacuum press. I prefer a mechanical press, even when I must use bites. It also allows oversized projects to be mounted when a vacuum may not. **(photo 5)** After all bites have reinforced the surface, it was laid face down and the fabric was edge wrapped to the back and raveling edges sealed and burnished to the substrate with Lineco Abaca.sa tape.





Sewing the Tapestry
Dritz 56D Soft Sculpture 3 inch needles were necessary in order to get through the bulk of the substrate, padding, and layers of fabric for stitching. After tacking the vase to the backing to keep it aligned, then the time intensive stitching began. **(photo 6)** I selected a thin metallic gold embroidery thread that exactly matched the art, but opted to use it 8x its size to strengthen it, which easily threaded through the larger craft needle. I used 8 yards at a time (folded in half to 4 yd, in half to 2yd, then through the needle to 1yd) per threading, which was actually only 1 yard, and I began to sew. **(photo 7)**



By depressing round yellow headed pins from the top through the board the 3" needle could be fed back up through the substrate as the pin was backed out to indicate where it was needed. **(photo 8**) The entire perimeter of the embroidery was running stitched (only 4-6 at a time) hiding all the stiches in the cabling surrounding the vase. This fully attached the unit allowing the outer 3" of padded velour to remain supported without sewing down.

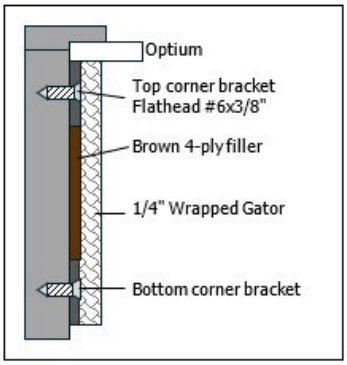


Frame & Reinforcements

The frame was built with standard 1/16" allowance. The Cranbrook wall is only 1/2" thick, which was a concern because of the potential weight, even with it being acrylic. The completed box would fill the entire depth of the box with only little more than a 4-ply space allowed as an extra support to protect sewn threads. It was decided to set 90-degree corner brackets at the top and bottom of each inner corner to support the frame joints.

Since spacers were to be added the 4-ply equivalent of the bracket needed to be balanced with 1-3/4" spacer strips cut out to fill in around each bracket the length of each side. That way the final spacers would be evenly flush the entire length of the sides, top and bottom of the box. **(diagram 1** – not to scale**)**

Diagram 1



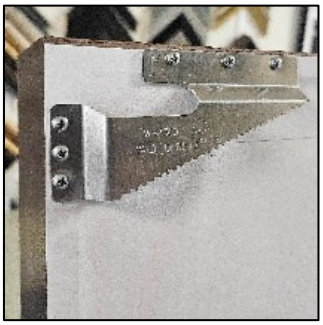
Spacers
Once the substrate size was verified the spacers could also be cut from the remaining Gatorboard. They needed to be the same 1/4" thickness as the substrate to support the weight of the Optima, and 1-3/4" wide to allow maximum space between the acrylic and the substrate for the vase depth. Their actual fitted lengths would be trimmed later. Once the frame was reinforced, and the 4-ply spacers added, the fabric wrapped spacers could be fitted and cut to the exact size to fit the frame sides on top. They needed to be exactly 1-3/4" high so there were no gaps between the Optium or the substrate when fitting. The Gator was sanded smooth and matched all side widths. **(photo 9)** Then a thicker single brush coat of the same PVA was applied, coating both sides and the edges, as all would be heat set before installation.



When dry, the top and bottom 4" wide, pinked cut, fabric strips were laid flat on paper and the Gator spacers were centered on each. **(photo 10)** Note the excessive raveling at the edges of the cut fabric, and care was taken not to trap threads beneath fabric when mounting. The fabric was fused from center face to the ends with a hand iron to activate and bond the adhesive. Once cooled the edges were also ironed, then the fabric was rolled to the back and bonded leaving no bubbles or gaps. Abaca.sa tape was applied over the raw edges to prevent threading, by centering over the seam and burnishing to fully activate.



Fitting & Hardware
Once the spacers were glued to the 4-ply and dried the bottom substrate with art was fitted into the box. All stitches, running threads and knots on the back of the Gator were also covered with Abaca.sa and burnished to activate the adhesive. Points were installed all around the back edges, then an additional 4-ply backing was inserted to cover the thread stiches and knots, and the back was papered.



Originally French Cleats were going to be across the top to hang it, but with the mounting only being 1/2" it just felt like too much stress on the corners for the size and weight. Wall Buddies for a 60# piece were ordered instead as they would hold the corner as well as redistribute the weight between top rail and both sides. Plus placement of the screws also worked well around the existing corner brackets. **(photo 11)**



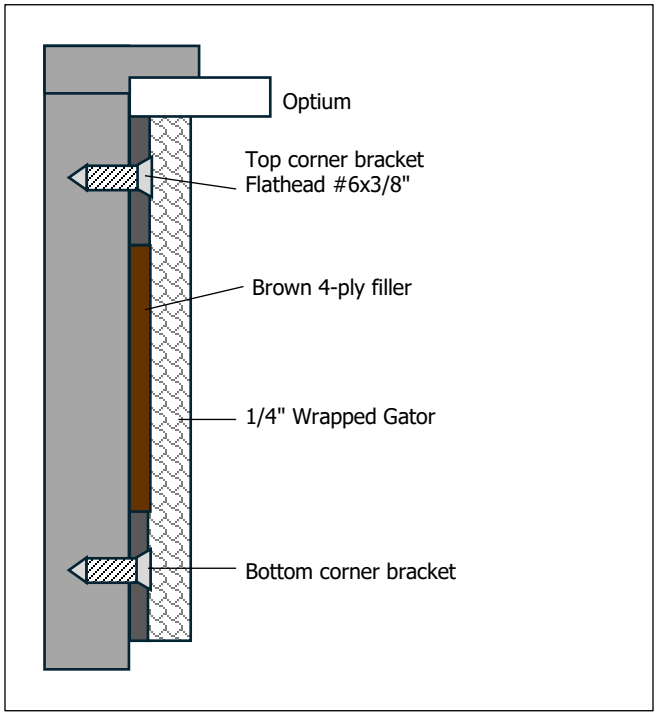


Finished frame **(photo 12)**, corner detail **(photo 13)**
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Photo 1 – A sample of the gold wire fringe often seen on traditional Zardozi wall embroidery.
Photo 2A/B - Gold wire trim turned to the back and covered with 4" wide linen bias strips.
Photo 3 – Shows a first coat of PVA applied and drying.
Two more coats should be applied, each in opposite directions and dried to mount.
Photo 4 – Mount the fabric clear to the edges indenting the fabric to verify setting.
Photo 5 – Dry mount the fully aligned fabric to reinforce the bond, at 200°F for a minute each bite
Overlapping to make sure the entire substrate has been bonded again.

Photo 6 – Centered on substrate the sewing began, tacking the center vase first
so the sponge beneath could be adjusted.
Photo 7 – The thin gold embroidery thread was 8x the single thread to increase its strength, it matched perfectly.
Photo 8 – A round yellow headed straight pin pushed through the board from the top allowed the needle to be
fed up through the substrate to where it was needed for support stitching.
Photo 9 – Gator was cut exactly 1-3/4" and sanded to smooth and match all side widths.
Photo 10 – The fabric was fused to the face, then the edges and back side.
Abaca.sa tape was burnished over the raw edges to prevent threading.
Photo 11 – Wall Buddies for a 60# frame were applied to reinforce upper corners.
Photo 12 – The completed Cranbrook Dark Walnut shadowbox frame is 35"x 52-1/2".
Photo 13 – Detail inner corner of completed shadowbox.

Diagram 1



References:
"Zari", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zari
"Zari Jewel Wall Hangings", https://www.bing.com/copilotsearch?q=Zari+Jewel+Wall+Hangings&FORM=CSSCOP