

The Quilt as a Canvas

Weaving a Quilt Base By Jude Hill



Figure 1 free woven base. vintage linen and composted cotton scrap

The Quilt as a Canvas

It seems whenever it came to quilt making, I was always starting where everyone else left off. To me a finished quilt wasn't the end of something, it was only the beginning. I developed my style of story cloth over a period of time, working atop of what others called patchwork. I think the attraction was those little squares. Little boxes to put things in, to use as frames, easy to mark corners and instant horizons and right angles. To me, the grid helps me compose. It is a necessary component in design and planning. Even if I cover it up, it just makes things easy to line up, to measure, to center and to balance. A great place to start and then depart.



Figure 2 "broken" abstract silk appliqué on woven base

When you find yourself with a visual idea, the first thing you want to do is find a canvas, a base to work on. Since I like to work with fabric and I am a hand stitcher, I often start by finding or most lately, building a patchwork quilt base. I like to work on a multi fabric grid, and that usually means piecing which can be quite time consuming. A while back I asked... what if I weave the base? Yes! This has been a big step in my work. Weaving a quilt base has had many advantages. It is easy, it comes together quickly because there are no seams to sew, it has marvelous organic texture and it gives me that framework I crave. You can mix many fabrics and use up lots of small scraps. It's grid is a natural ground for design.

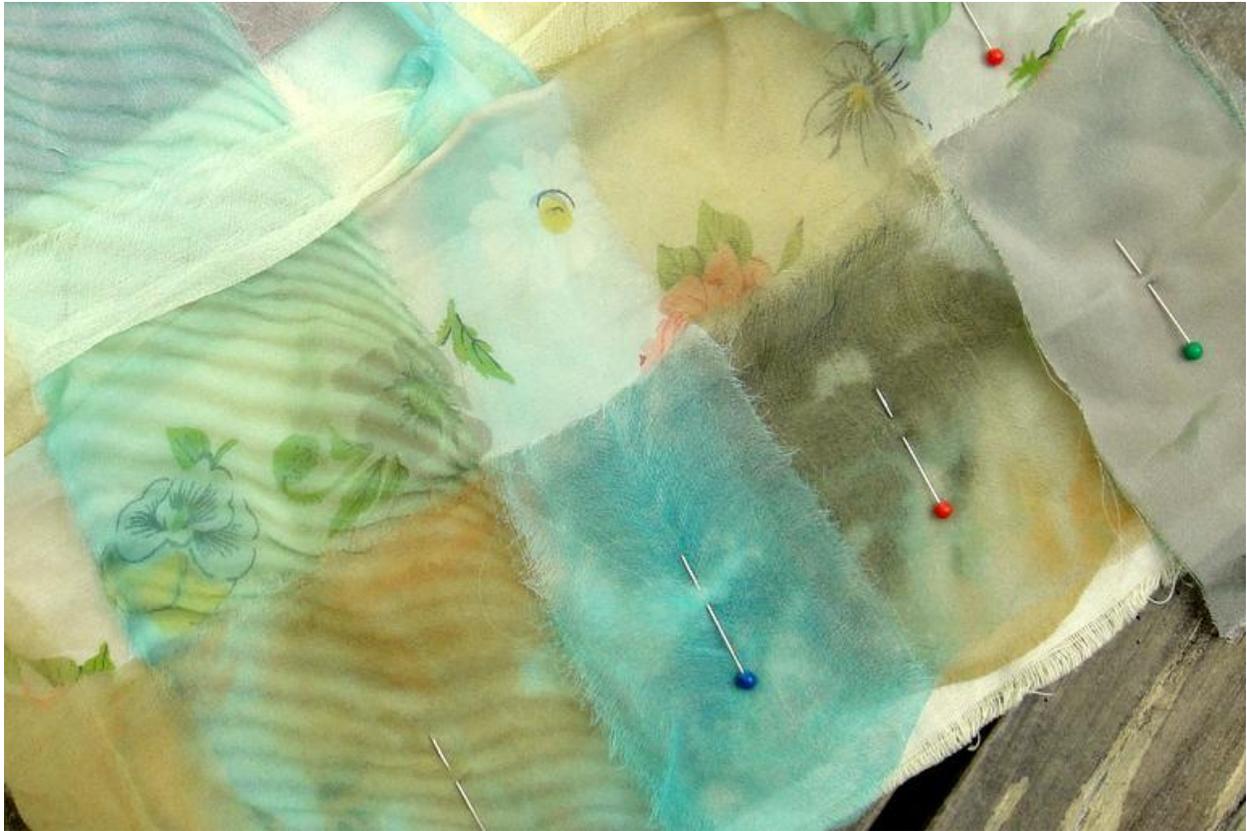


Figure 3. garden base. quilt weaving in sheer silk gauze. hand dyed by glennis dolce

Simply sensible

The method I have developed is really quite simple. I call it foundation weaving. It is worked on a background, put together with any kind of fabric and it can be prepared in a flash. I like the way it looks and feels, and it lets me get right to the embellishing which I enjoy so much. Still, it is a satisfying hand technique with its own beauty and appeal, common sense and thrift. A kind of contemporary boro.... it hold fabric together as a unit in the most efficient and wonderful way.



Figure 4 " spring moon" silk gauze and applique on woven cotton base

Materials.

- A base cloth, any size,
- Torn or cut fabric strips or scraps
- Needle and thread
- Straight pins and or safety pins
- A clear gridded straight edge.
- A gridded cutting mat

There are 4 basic steps to creating a quilt woven base.

preparing the backing: if you have large cloth, you can tear or cut the size you need. I often piece together smaller scraps to make the base. You can piece them on a machine or by hand in any kind of random arrangement and then cut to size.

preparing the weaving elements: there are 2 approaches. You can plan ahead or tear as you go. this is a personal preference and really depends on how much cloth you have and how confident you feel. In the beginning, I found it easier to have strips pre-torn or pre-cut to the approximate length of my block or smaller. (they can always be combined).

Tip-Most plain cotton and silk fabrics tear easily, fancy weaves and linen are a bit more difficult. I usually start the tear by cutting into the fabric about 1" with a scissor. This gives you something to hold on to and starts the tear process more easily. The nice thing about a tear it makes fringe. If the tear is difficult, move to a shear or a rotary cutter.

Choosing fabrics You can use a variety of fabrics, all different weights and fibers, patterns, and colors. Lately I just love sheer silk. Because there are no seams here, fabrics can move around and find their comfort zone. You can mix weights and you will be able to feel whether it is working or not before securing. Since this is a layered technique, make sure to test your needle through all fabrics first, and don't use the ones that are not stitching friendly. It's not worth it no matter how beautiful they look.

Tip-Pull all the obviously loose threads from the raw edges. You can continue to pull the loose thread as you work on the piece. Eventually, after weaving and stitching, they will stop fraying.



Basic Weaving Find a flat surface to work on. I prefer a table and to work standing up for this part of the process. put a gridded mat under you to protect any good surface from pin marks and to use in lining up you elements as you work. Select the strips for the vertical set and lay them flat, edge to edge until your base is covered.

Start form the center. Place your straight edge, about halfway down across your block. This is the edge you will weave against. Pick up every other strip and pull back toward you to open up

the path for the first horizontal strip. Place the first horizontal strip snugly against the edge. Return the strips down to their original position. Pick up the alternate strips and lay the next horizontal strip. Repeat this process until you reach the top of the block. Fold strips to size if there is less room when you reach the end.

Making sure all strips are in the down position, remove the straight edge and rotate your block 180 degrees so the unwoven section is again on the top. Replace the straight edge to where the weaving ends and repeat the above process. Make sure all strips are in the down position and remove the straight edge. Now you have a woven block. If you like it, go ahead to secure it. If not, take it apart and start over.



Figure 5. weaving a landscape base

Free weaving This is a nice and more relaxed variation. Place vertical elements on your background leaving spaces between them. Pin the top and bottom of each element. Use other scrap, strips, and pieces to weave in and out, over and under your vertical set. Be free about it, catching them here and there to make a pleasing but secure web. For this method, your background will be part of your canvas, so consider that in your choice.

Securing the edge...Every woven strip needs to be secured to the backing at both ends in order to keep the weaving from coming apart and shifting. Pin and hand stitch or machine stitch around the perimeter catching the ends of all weave strips in both directions.... remove pins. The block will hold together.

Securing the center Sometimes it is a good idea to do some initial tacking to keep the web in place. the smaller the block, the less necessary this is. take a few stitches in place in the center of each square. OR use a small running stitch and stitch down the center of each strip in both directions. Additional tacking can be done as you embellish.



Now you are ready to create. I like to choose some framing points from the boxed lines created by the weaving. You might just pick out a nine patch of squares in the center and fill them with tiny treasures of fabric too tiny to use for anything else. Maybe pieces that bring back memories. Or you might just want to "paint on your canvas with some sheer colored silk .

Figure 6. nine patch memory quilt on woven patchwork base.

You might place a central motif and then build a story around it. While working your collage, the weaving gives a nice guide for placing elements. There are endless games you can play with your grid. Make a bunch of them and have them on hand. You never know when you will need a canvas.



Figure 7. "bee keeper". gifted treasures on a honey colored free woven base. shibori and stitched bee by Suzanne Klein.

I am basically a hand stitcher, but these bases can be used for any type of embellishing, not just hand stitching. A great start for any art quilting technique.