

Fabric Book

By Andrew Thornton

(with contributing examples by Kecia Deveney, Lynne Suprock, and Kelly Russell)

Materials:

Canvas (or heavy material)
Large Eyelets or Grommets
Thread (Optional)

Tools:

Scissors or Roller Razor
Steel Block
Hole Puncher
Ruler
Hammer
Eyelet Setter
Sewing Machine (Optional)

These directions show how to create the base of the book pages. From there, the sky's the limit! This is an ideal project for swaps and trading.

1. Carefully measure out 8"X10" piece of cotton canvas. You can use other materials, like denim, but the canvas is a good, sturdy foundation that can be painted on, collaged on, and sewed on. It can also support the weight of found objects and still remain flexible.
2. Using a sewing machine, run a zigzag stitch along the edge of the fabric. It doesn't have to be perfect. You can leave this step out if you don't have access to a sewing machine, but the stitch around the edges prevents the fabric from unraveling. If you do not sew the edges, make sure to apply gesso or acrylic medium to prevent fraying.
3. Loosely place your eyelets on the corners. Measure ¼ inch from the top and side. (It's okay if it goes through your stitches.) Use a marker to indicate where the hole should be. If you don't have a die for the exact size of the hole, use a hole-puncher to "eat away" where the hole should be. Fold it over and trim with scissors for a cleaned up edge.
4. Using an eyelet setter, sandwich the fabric through the hole with the two parts of the eyelet. Place that over the bottom part of the setter. Make sure that your setter is on a hard surface like a steel block or on a concrete floor. If your table is not secure, make sure that the block is over a leg of a table. If your table is not sturdy and the block is in the middle of the table, your blows will bounce and it'll be extremely hard to set the eyelet. Line up the bottom eyelet setter piece, the sandwiched eyelets, and the top portion of the eyelet setter. Firmly strike the setter until the two pieces are firmly secure. Wear eye protection, if desired.

Once the blank pages are finished, the options are really unlimited. The original idea of this book came from a sampler book of techniques with pages that I swapped with another artist. The idea of the swapping is a good way to create a mini-art collection. The pages can be hung on the wall, bound in a book, or strung up to create peace flags. It's a great way to showcase different artists' work.

Ideas for collaboration:

1. Round Robin: Sit around with your artist friends with your favorite art supplies. Give each participant a page to work on. Set a designated amount of time for each artist to work and then pass the page to the next person once the time has run out. Continue until you receive the original page that you worked on. This way each page will have a little contribution from each artist.
2. Exquisite Corpse: Divide up each page into equal sections. Each artist will get a section. This works well for groups of two or three. Use a piece of paper and some painter's tape to cover the sections that are not currently being worked on. Each artist starts with the "head" and make indicators on the dividing line to the next artist where the "neck" is. Keep in mind that each artist should work in a way that the other participants can't see what they're doing. Once they're finished, each artist covers their work (making sure that the indicator lines are showing), and reveals the blank space below. The page is passed to the next artist and they create the "torso". When done, the "torso" is covered and the area that is designated for the "feet" is revealed and the page is passed again. At the end, the "head" and "torso" are uncovered, revealing the entire, completed image. The sections can be as figurative and literal as one wants, or be completely abstract. The end product is a hybrid surprise for all!
3. Prompts: A group of artists can create pages enough for each participating artist. For instance, if there's a group of six artists, each artist will make six pages. That way, when it comes time to swap, each artist will get a book comprised of a page made by each artist. One way to get the creative juices flowing is to have each artist write a word on each page as a prompt or an affirmation. This will be used to help guide the artists to create images illustrating or that are inspired by the words.
4. Material experiments: The original book started out as a sampler of different techniques. This is a great way to preserve and keep a journal of techniques. Determine what each "book" should be about and what material your group would like to focus on. For instance, one book could be designated to acrylic techniques, or another might be dedicated to collages in a specific color. It helps to add limitations to see how far an artist can explore an idea or material.
5. Bigger Picture: Instead of making individual pages first, one large canvas can be shared amongst artists. The large-scale finished piece is then cut up and each artist will get a puzzle-piece section. Together they create a bigger picture!

Being an artist can be a very solitary activity at times. Collaborating with other artists pushes your sensibilities and challenges each artist to be open to new ideas and not be afraid of letting go of a piece. It's easy to claim ownership over an idea, concept, or motif. But when working collaboratively, you've got to be open to the fact that the next person may take what you deem perfect and possibly "ruin" it. Equally, they may take your idea and build upon it and make it better. It's a cycle of growth and an excellent tool to push boundaries and explore new ideas. This also boosts artist generosity and promotes an open dialogue about unexpected discoveries.

For more information visit
Andrew-thornton.blogspot.com/