

Creating a Pattern Stacey Coffee Textile Collage



The Brook Trout is the State Fish of Michigan. I drew this pattern last year for the Mackinac Island QAS. It is one pattern, created in two different ways. The one on the left has a pieced background attached to a muslin foundation. It has not been quilted in this photo. The Brookie on the right was created and attached to 1 piece of cloth. The background is a ¼ yard map of Lake Huron that I ordered from Spoonflower.com. Yes, I cut all those tiny little polka dots by hand.

Your completed pattern will look like a coloring book page. Each piece will fit together like a puzzle. Each shape will be closed, meaning you'll be able to cut it out. You won't be "sketching" or trying to add any shading or details to your pattern. Be careful not to create any donuts. You must have a path to reach each piece and cut it out.

How big should the pieces be?

The larger the pieces are, the less photorealistic your piece will look. If you have a large complex shape, break it into smaller pieces. The smaller the pieces are, the more detail you can include.

In reality, it comes down to this...

What are you willing to cut out? - How good are you at free motion quilting?

I'm better at selecting the right fabric, fussy cutting small shapes and not relying on the quilting to do all the work. But, I often draw a pattern that's way too complicated and have to go back and combine 2-3 shapes into one. An extreme amount of detail is not always necessary. Create shapes that are organic. Avoid straight lines by adding a gentle curve.

If you're a prolific quilter, you can cut simpler shapes, rely less of the fabric pieces to tell the story and add lots of realistic detail with thread.

Should the pieces all be the same size?

Each piece of fabric doesn't have to be the same size but you definitely want to create a sense of balance in your work. You don't want your eye to land on a specific area simply because a large piece of fabric looks out of place compared to the smaller ones around it.

With a pet, you'll have a significant amount of smaller pieces around the eyes. You'll trace the eyeball, the upper lid, lower lid, the area between the eyebrows, the eyebrows, etc. As you get closer to the edges of the animal, it's likely that the area will allow for larger pieces. It's important to make sure the pieces are balanced from one side to the other. If you're creating a landscape, the land may be much larger than the trees. Look for ways to break up the larger areas or consider how quilting can add drama and interest on the larger pieces so you can still direct your viewer through the collage.

Anatomy is extremely important.

Every mouth has an upper and lower lip. Every nose has nostrils. Ears attach to the face, they're not a continuation of the forehead.

You may not be able to see details clearly in your photo, but you'll need to create them.

When this happens you can use the internet to help you. For example, if you're creating a Golden Retriever and you're having difficulty with the nose, search for images of a Golden Retriever nose. You can use what you've found to help draw the details you need.

You won't create a pattern piece for every strand of hair on a furry animal, instead you'll add thread to create the details of the fur. Remember, thin strips and long narrow points will be difficult to cut out. Pay attention to the direction of the fur. Take advantage of areas where you can create interest... a tiny tuft of hair on the forehead or a long swooping curl under the chin.

Remember... Value is more important than color.

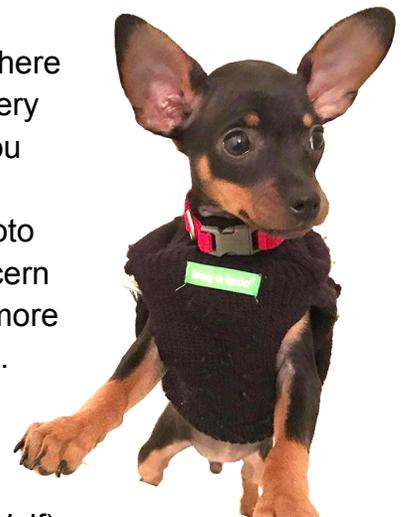


You'll want to notice where the value shifts from very light to very dark as you trace your photo.

Your black & white photo will often help you discern these value changes more than the original photo.

This is my dog Kevin.

(He's 70% Min Pin,
17% Chihuahua,
2% Rat Dog and 1% Wolf)



Where do you begin?

You have several ways to approach drawing a pattern.

- Start with what's easiest to see. You might want to begin by outlining the face to separate it from the background. The next easiest piece may be tracing the outline of the ears. Pay special attention to every opportunity to add interest to a shape.
- Divide your space by value. If you can clearly see areas that are black and areas that are clearly white, you could start by isolating them. Where are your highlights - lightest lights? Where are the shadows - darkest darks?
- Work on individual objects. When creating a landscape, you might want to outline the pine trees before the reflections in the water and then the water itself.
- Begin with the focal point, in an animal portrait this will be the eyes. Fully concentrate on making each piece as accurate as possible. Work out from there towards the nose, then up the forehead.



This photo has sharp focus and a good amount of contrast.

Any distracting background has been eliminated. Your viewer will know exactly what you want them to focus on.

There's added interest by having the design go off the page on one or more sides.

In this photograph the center of the flower could be the center of interest since it's larger and your eye is drawn in by the spiral pattern. However... the ladybug is super cute, the bright red color attracts your eye and there's high contrast between the black head and the white flower petals.

When creating your pattern you can move the Duralar film around until you've placed your focal point right where you want it.

Tape the piece of Duralar film on top of your enlarged color photograph to keep your pattern from slipping. Don't tape it to the table, you may want to move it around while tracing it.

Consider the Rule of Thirds:

It's a simple way to improve your composition. Divide your space into 9 squares. Place your subject at the intersection of those lines for greater impact. If you're creating an animal, consider placing one of the eyes at one of those intersections.

In the end... it's just a guideline. Create the design that you enjoy most.



When tracing your pattern, be sure to use a Permanent Ultra Fine Point Sharpie. It will dry immediately on your Duralar, where a regular Sharpie will smear. Any unwanted marks can be removed with 91% alcohol and a Q-tip.



Trace a 1 inch border all the way around the photo. You're going to either need a seam allowance to sew on a binding or you're going to need enough fabric to wrap around the Peltex to attach it to your stretched canvas frame. For now... just draw the inch border and worry about fully understanding why... later.

Begin tracing your pattern pieces. Be sure you trace them off the photo to the edge of the border.

Keep the drawing relatively simple. You can mark a little * to remind yourself of where the lightest lights are. Add a + where the darkest darks are if that will help you.

You're looking for where you see changes in color and value. Notice the center of the sunflower, the pattern is drawn to highlight some of the little dots (discs that create seeds) but not all of them. It's much more interesting than having rounded shapes.



Start to think about where you're might add thread to add details to the piece. Is it likely that you are going to stitch around every one of those little seed circles? Not at all! So you'll want a fabric that is fun enough that you don't have to.

When you think you're finished, untape the photo and turn it over so you have a flat white surface. Lay your pattern on top of it to evaluate your pattern.

On the left side, the petals are drawn requiring 1 piece of fabric for each petal. The petals closest to the ladybug have additional interest with the shadows being drawn on the petal. It's not balanced from side to side.

Write "front" on the front of the Duralar. Flip it over and write "pattern" on the back. (more on why... later)



Put the Duralar Film back on top of the photo. Take a closer look at the photo and see if you can add a little more interest to the petals on the left by recognizing the change in values. If you're simply looking at color, all you will see is a white petal. Include the shadow created by the ladybug to give the piece more dimension.

Ignore the background at this point. You don't have to decide yet whether you're going to use 1 piece of fabric and fuse the completed flower to it. You might want to piece the background with a variety of green fabrics. A pieced background is created the same way as the flower. The pattern is drawn and each piece of fabric is cut and fused like a puzzle.



Before you determine if you're done, look at how the shapes relate to each other in size.

Item A - It's pretty big compared to what's next to it. It's an interesting shape since it's not just a solid circle, it has little jagged edges on the left side and an organic border on the right. I like it because it gives your eye a spot to rest.

Item B - It's a really big piece, the biggest on the whole collage. If I had a fabric with lots of visual interest, I'd be ok with leaving it as is. I like how it draws your eye from the ladybug to the top of the flower without interruption. I'm not sure I'd want to break it into pieces, but you could. Pay attention to the really dark value to the right of that piece. It adds depth and creates a 3-D effect. Don't miss that. This would be considered your darkest dark.



Item C - It's a long straight piece. In this case it helps to draw your eye down the petal so I think I'm good with it.

Item D - do you like the drop shadow on the ladybug?

I chose a yellow polka dot fabric for my first piece. I want you to notice that the yellow is not the same color as that spot on the photo.

But more importantly, **it is not the same value**. You can immediately see in the black & white photo that I'm getting off to the wrong start. That first piece should not be the same value as the petals. Those fabrics should not be interchangeable. The center of the flower is much darker in value. The petals to the left of it are your lightest lights, and even tho' that piece is yellow, it reads as if it's white.

If you have a difficult time noticing value, take a photo with your phone and convert it to black & white. You can take a photo of your pile of yellows and sort them in value from light to dark. You can also take photos as you work to see if you're capturing the value correctly. To give your white petals more interest, you could add silver for the shadows instead of grey. You can add white floral or white polka dot fabric to contrast a white solid.

Final Review:

Look for balance...

Examine it closely for pieces that don't make sense and edges that are too difficult to cut out. Compare one side of the pattern to the next... are the pieces generally close in size and approximately the same in number. You don't want the left side to have 6 large shapes and the right side to have 12 small ones. Even it out a bit to be generally more appealing to look at.

Check the anatomy...

Do you see 2 eyebrows, 2 upper eyelids, 2 lower eyelids? Are the ears clearly attached to the head? Is the head separate from the neck? Do the pattern pieces flow in the direction of the fur?

Edit...

Are there any pieces that can be combined to make one piece? Are there any large areas that need to be further divided?

Review the values...

Are the darkest areas of the photo clearly represented?

Once you understand the role value plays, you can see how easy it is to replace one color for another.

This collage is a bit wonky because I chose to only use Kaffe Fassett Fabrics. It wasn't always easy to have the exact right value I needed. I wanted the Classic Spots to be in each ear, so I had to sacrifice the best value with the best option.

This piece is 24 x 36.

I created each individual 12 x 12 "Kevin" in a different color and then attached each one with Lite SAS 2 to the background.

I'm a huge Andy Warhol fan...
this one is "Kevin Warhol".



