

Soft, Calming Design Wins PPFA PRINT Competition

By Karen Fox



● *This triple-matted, square-cut framing project aimed to reflect the subtle sepia characteristics of the nature print.*

Karen Fox, of Art Heads Custom Framing & Gallery in Lake Oswego, OR, became the winner of the 2018 PPFA International Framing Competition, PRINT Category after judges selected her clean, earth-toned design. Fox drew on her four decades of framing experience, as well as the inspiration that came from viewing the print, to execute her vision. Here, Fox offers her own personal background as well as her step-by-step framing process for this piece.

I started my framing career in San Francisco, where I worked for several high-end frame shops and utilized my prior experience in gilding, oil paint restoration, frame restoration, and woodworking. These skills transferred quite nicely to my current job at Art Heads Custom Framing & Gallery in Portland and Lake Oswego, OR. I came to work there in 2010 after moving from San Francisco eight years prior.

Art Heads was founded in Portland in 1997 and quickly became a “Portlandia”-style fame shop, meeting the framing needs of its famously eclectic neighborhood. The business expanded to Lake Oswego in 2002. While the original shop serves the urban framing demand in that district, the Lake Oswego shop provides excellent framing in a suburban neighborhood.

In 2009, Art Heads was purchased by Bob Zobrist,

whose youthful enthusiasm for excellence transformed the vibe of the stores. The idea of hosting art shows for local artists was embraced by him, and his excitement toward change and new ideas inspires me in my own work.

Another great thing about my position at Art Heads is that it enables me to curate art shows. From my very first job in this field, I found that curating art shows was something I loved. I have been involved in art shows at almost every shop where I’ve worked. It is a great connection with the community and gives artists a venue to show their work. Supporting local artists remains one of the most important endeavors of mine. Working with this year’s PPFA competition print evoked the same level of emotion I experience when curating artwork.

This piece was my first-ever entry in the PPFA competition. Truthfully, I am the least competitive person I know, but I was inspired to enter by one of my colleagues at Art Heads Custom Framing & Gallery, Roger Combs. Roger’s enthusiasm was infectious, and soon I found myself immersed in the project.

Normally when approaching the design for a piece, one must take into consideration the client’s needs—and many times, the cost of the project. Framing a piece for a competition, on the other hand, lends a lot of de-

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● *Cutting the mats*

sign freedom without cost concerns. It also gives framers a chance to celebrate the creativity of their profession and foster connections with others in the framing community.

When I first looked at this year's competition print, I was inspired by the calmness it brought out in me. Being a city girl, my idea of communing with nature is reading National Geographic; but this print evoked that same peaceful feeling that many people experience when camping or hiking.

What struck me immediately were the subtle sepia tones and textural elements in this sublimation print. My frame design concept aimed to highlight and enhance those elements. I selected Crescent 5862 Pewter parchment as the top mat, incorporating the mat's understated shimmer. The mat was cut 4" wide without an offset base. When working on square pieces, I often weight the bottom quite a bit; but

in this case, I wanted to maintain the artist's vision and keep it square.

With the addition of two inner mats and a fillet, there was a lot going on around the small print. By using a larger width on the top mat, it really gave the piece room to breathe and helped bring the viewer's focus back to the art. A reverse bevel for the top mat was needed to give a sharp, clean look to the fillet, without any distraction. This also gave the added depth needed to be able to float the piece using a pedestal float.

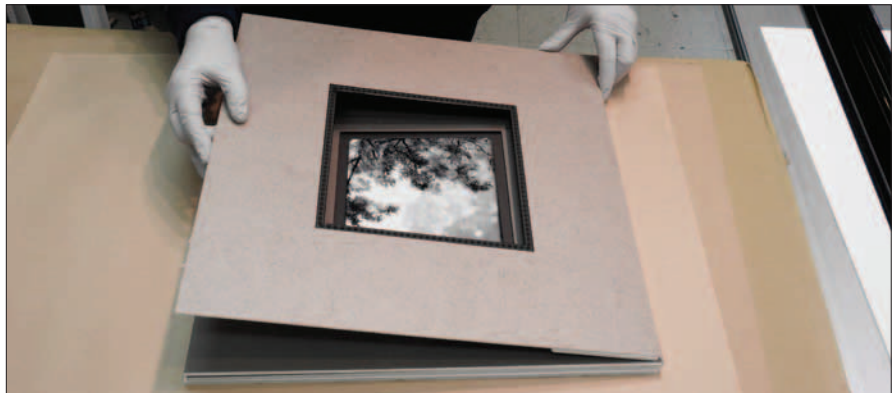
The beaded fillet (Larson-Juhl 151/B) worked to enhance the texture in the trees, drawing the eye into the artwork. I cut the fillet to fit the mat and adhered it with gold ATG tape on the mat back, then used PVA archival adhesive glue on the corners of the fillet to secure them. I adhered strips of 4-ply rag to help hold the fillet in place

and give structure to the mat and fillet. The back of the fillet was lined with aluminum barrier tape.

Next, the middle mat (C1575 Copley Grey) was cut with a reverse bevel, extending a quarter of an inch beyond the fillet. I raised this mat with strips of 8-ply to give a little extra depth. To attach the art, I decided to use a pedestal float. A piece of 4-ply mat was cut a quarter of an inch smaller than the artwork.

I hinged the artwork at the top with archival linen tape, pulling it around the back of the artwork and securing it with linen tape. The gold ATG was used on the back of the 4-ply rag back, and PVA archival glue was placed on top of the bottom mat (B8442 Kona), showing 1/2". I weighted the art with bean bag weights for about an hour.

Cutting and joining the frame was the next step. It would have been



● *I wanted to maintain the artist's vision by keeping this piece square. The top mat, Crescent 5862 Pewter, was cut 4" wide without an offset base.*

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● *The finished product*

very easy to overwhelm this soft piece—even warm silvers just didn't look right. After trying some combinations, Nurre Caxton 3150 moulding caught my eye. It had the same organic feeling of the art and mats. The middle and bottom mats reflected the subtle gradation of color found within a print medium that produces an enamel-like surface. The gray mat, and the frame as well, reflected the same soft greys in the art. It all just worked.

The frame was cut on our Morso chopper, then joined. I lined the frame with aluminum barrier tape, glazed it with Tru Vue Optium Museum Acrylic, and backed it with 40-pound, acid-free kraft paper.

Upon completion of the piece, I thought to myself that I see art all day long, but every once in a while, I see something I would love to have in my home. This framed print is one of those things. It would be so calming hanging by my bed, catching the morning light. I was thrilled to win this competition with a piece that I had so much fun making. **PFM**



Karen Fox

Karen has over 40 years of experience in the custom framing industry. She began working in her current position at Art Heads Custom Framing & Gallery in Lake Oswego, OR, in 2010.