

Creating X-ray Images with Sheers

by Enid Gjelten Weichselbaum

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp with Enid Gjelten Weichselbaum

Materials

- Prepared quilt sandwich with light-color solid or tone-on-tone fabric background quilted with matching or invisible thread
- Sheer fabric, such as organza, in a solid dark color (*Can't find the color you want? Dye it yourself!*)
- Thread to match sheer
- Duck-billed appliqué scissors or fine curved-edge scissors
- Sample flower, leaf, or image to use as inspiration

Inspiration for art comes from so many places. But I never expected it to come from a shower curtain.

Paging through a catalog, I came across a picture of a shower curtain with a beautiful flower on it. But it wasn't an ordinary flower; it was an X-ray of a flower. The sheerness showed every vein and layer in subtle monochromatic beauty. Enthralled, I found many more such images online. Could I do this with sheer fabric?

Trial and error—several errors—got me to a process that works well.

PREPARATION

I begin with a light, solid or subtle tone-on-tone background. I prepare a quilt sandwich with this background fabric and quilt the sandwich with matching or invisible thread. The quilting design should echo the design on the image you plan on making or be a simple pattern.

In either case, the quilting should not detract from the sheer image.

Choose an image for inspiration. There are lots of gorgeous images online but even without an X-ray, if you study a flower you can create an image like an X-ray. Which petal is on the back of the flower when you look at it? How is the petal attached at the stem? How far does the stamen extend? Do the petals overlap? Can you see the veining in the petals? All of this structure will appear in an X-ray.

I have often used a lightweight fusible web when working with sheers. I love layering different colors together. I love the new colors formed with these layers. Organza—silk or synthetic—and other sheers fray easily and are hard to needle-turn, so fusing is a great way to appliqué them. On these X-rays, I chose to skip the fusible web and use a different process.

CREATING THE X-RAY IMAGE

I begin with the petal that appears farthest in the distance. I use a piece of sheer fabric larger than I need. Keeping the fabric flat, I free-motion stitch the outline of the petal. I use a matching color thread, which will show well against the sheer. The fabric appears lighter with the light background showing through. When I have completed the outline of the petal or leaf, I use a duck-billed appliqué scissors, or curved-edge scissor to trim




away the excess fabric very close to the stitching. Once the petal is done, I stitch in any veining that would be visible in an X-ray.

Some petals may be seen from the side. In this case, I stitch the side that is behind on the flower, leaving one side of the fabric loose. I trim the stitching only to the edge that is under the fold or overlapping part of the petal. I then fold the fabric back over the first layer and stitch that layer. If I need a little fold, I fold and stitch. All of this is possible because there is no fusible

web on the sheer and because I begin with a larger piece of fabric, making it easier to manage and manipulate the

fabric. After each petal or section, I trim the fabric right up to the stitch line.

For stems, which appear darker in an X-ray, I use a length of fabric wider than the stem. I sew the length on both sides of the stem, and fold the fabric back over the stem and stitch is again along the length. Layering and folding in this manner gives the shading and depth that you see in an X-ray.

You will find that stitching each petal or part of the flower including veining and folds or wrinkles from the back to the front will result in a beautiful layered effect closely resembling X-rays of plants. 

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