

# Painted Quilt Canvases

by Nanette S. Zeller

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp with Nanette S. Zeller

## Materials

- Lightweight, cotton fabric (I used white muslin.)
- Fabric scraps
- Low- or mid-loft quilt batting, 1"–2" larger than muslin
- Backing fabric, 1"–2" larger than muslin
- Binding fabric
- Basting spray
- Glue stick
- Stiletto or chopstick
- Gesso
- Acrylic paints
- Small sponge paint roller
- 2"–3"-wide house paint brush
- Small paint brush or old toothbrush

## Optional

- Metallic or pearlescent acrylic paints

Shortly after starting my quilting journey, I began exploring mixed-media art. I spent a lot of time experimenting with acrylic paints and surface design. At some point, it occurred to me that since an artist's canvas was just heavy fabric, why couldn't I just paint a quilt with acrylics. I tried it and I found out I could.

Using lightweight muslin and leftover fabric scraps, I constructed a free-motion quilted quilt top. Using that as my "canvas," I prepared the top with gesso, just like I would have prepped an artist's canvas. The result is a quilted canvas ready for surface design.

## DIRECTIONS

### Create the quilt top

1. Press the muslin to remove wrinkles. Baste the muslin to the batting with basting spray.
2. Rip or cut fabric scraps into various sizes of rectangles and squares at least 2" wide.

**Tip:** The look of frayed fabric—especially when the scraps curl, fold, pleat, or ripple—adds to the surface texture. Be as precise or messy as you like! Or, skip the fabric scraps altogether. Quilt the muslin and batting together, then move on to Let's Paint.

3. Arrange the scraps on the muslin, securing the pieces with a dab of glue stick. The muslin does not need to be completely covered. (figure 1)
4. Quilt the collaged muslin top to the batting. Stitch slowly to capture the edges and corners of the scraps. If needed, use a stiletto to hold down the edges while stitching over them.

## WHAT IS A PAINTED QUILT CANVAS?

Most of us are familiar with an artist's canvas—a single piece of cloth framed or backed ready for painting. Nanette emulates this substrate by creating a collaged background covered in gesso, painted, and quilted—hence, a painted quilt canvas.

**NOTE:** Yes, you can quilt without a backing! Work slowly—the needle may catch on the stiff surface and cause skipped stitches. For best results, use a 90/14 (or larger) topstitch needle and use both hands to hold down the fabric near the needle while you sew. Clean the lint from your bobbin case when finished.

## Let's paint

1. Place the quilted top on a protected work surface. Things will get messy.
2. Use a sponge paint roller to cover the quilted top with a light coat of gesso. Use enough pressure to apply the gesso into nooks and crannies, needle holes, and under the fabric folds of the quilted surface. Allow the gesso to dry completely. (figure 2)


**Tip:** I used 2 coats of gesso in this example.

## DRY BRUSH PAINTING

- Use a paint tray, rag, paper towel, or plate to remove excess paint from the roller or brush. This allows for a light application of paint with soft, uneven coverage.
- Apply the paint with light pressure to keep the paint from filling in all the crevices. This makes the quilted details stand out.
- If the paint seems thick, thin it with a bit of water.

3. Apply the base paint color. Load the paint roller just enough to create a semi-dry roller. Using light pressure, gently roll the paint over the gessoed quilt top. Allow the paint to dry. Apply a second coat, if needed. (figure 3)
4. Use a house paintbrush to add more depth with a secondary layer of paint. Use a dry brush technique and apply strokes of accent color over the painted quilt surface. (figure 4)
5. If desired, splatter, dry brush, or smear shimmering accents with metallic or pearlescent paints. (figure 5)

## Finishing tips

1. If desired, add appliqué elements to the finished painted quilt canvas. Use a firm fusible stabilizer with the appliqué to provide extra support over the bumpy quilted surface. Add fusible web to the backing fabric and adhere to the finished quilt. Finish the edges with traditional binding.
2. To avoid permanent creases, never fold a painted quilt canvas. Hang or use the quilts flat or loosely roll them for storage. When unrolled, the quilt might maintain a curl, but will gradually relax and flatten when hung. 

[nanettesewz.com](http://nanettesewz.com)

## TIPS FOR MAKING A PAINTED QUILT CANVAS

- Cut the base fabric at least 2" wider than your final artwork to allow for trimming; any size larger than 12" x 12" works well. I frequently start with 1 yard of fabric and then cut it into smaller pieces for several artworks.
- Make a fabric scrap collage to create texture. Use those unloved pieces from your stash. The gesso covers most prints except very bright or dark fabrics.
- Use low- to mid-loft batting. Thicker batting adds more texture, but the painted quilt will be stiffer and harder to maneuver under the sewing machine.
- Use any type of acrylic paint. I use artist acrylics or craft paints, but even latex house paint works for this technique.



figure 1



figure 3



figure 2



figure 4

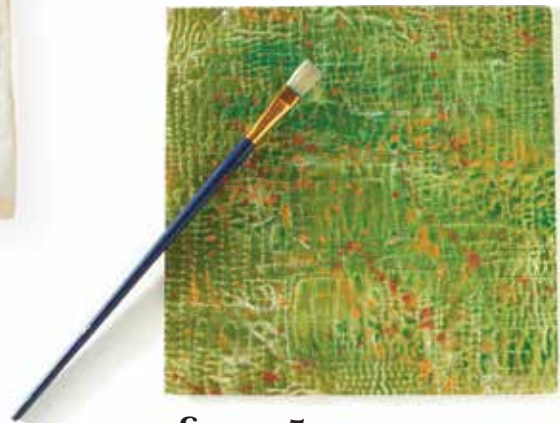


figure 5