

Mastering Mounting

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Mounting the Millennium

No matter how high-tech the framing industry becomes, no matter how many computers run a shop, calculate prices, or complete framing jobs online, there will always be the need for mounting. Regardless of conservation or decorative applications, the need to understand all versions of glues and adhesives—wet, spray, pressure-sensitive and dry mounting—will prevail. In order to achieve that we need to pay attention to all the resources available to us.

Walk Down Memory Lane

Back in January 1996 I wrote “What’s Wrong With This Picture?” In it I dismantled a framed postcard my dad had completed in the mid 70s, some 20 years earlier. It wasn’t surprising to find tape, chip board, and incorrect matting methods used. The materials and techniques used 20 years ago may have been state of the art then, but aren’t today. Evidence of materials that can harm artwork often show up over time. Yes, it is true that new research is constantly being completed to improve products, but isn’t that why we attempt to train customers to bring their framed art back in for periodic check-ups?

My Damaging History

I have a story to tell you—one I’m not very proud of. This is not a skeleton in my closet, and it’s nothing I did wrong. It is

an historic account of damage I did to a customer’s collectibles. In 1993 I was brought a series of keepsakes to frame in a shadow box format for a gentleman’s wife as a gift to her. It included Broadway tickets, a theatre program, dinner menu, and postcard of Times Square. I was given total freedom in the designing of the project and no monetary limit was set; I had carte blanche.

A beautiful design was created using spacers, tiered mats, deep wrapped bevels, and numerous innovative techniques that wonderfully showcased her special evening in New York. The problem? I used silicone adhesive in the mounting of the pieces. In 1993 the damaging nature of silicone had not yet been established, but by 1998 there was visual paper damage resulting from the adhesive chemicals. What appears to be yellowed oil stains have soaked through and are discoloring the items. The customer is very unhappy (brokenhearted would say it better) and there is nothing I can do to repair the damage.

It has also been identified in recent years that most theatre tickets are very heat-sensitive due to their thermographic origin. They were already very gray when I originally framed them, probably due to being stored by the husband in a warm place (his hip pocket wallet) until

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the surprise. Not realizing the heat sensitivity issue in 1993, I never warned the customer about what could happen to these items if placed in contact with direct sun or excessive heat. I only mention this because it would be my duty today to point out to any customer wanting to frame thermographic materials of their fragile nature.

The point to this confession is to stress the need for each of you to keep up with the development of materials and techniques in our industry. Accept that what appears to have been a framing mistake (resulting in damage) in 1998 was indeed an accepted "state of the art" practice in 1993. The mistake would be to use silicone adhesive in a shadow box design *today!* My father was using masking tape and corrugated cardboard as state of the art in 1972. Is he liable for those techniques today simply because we are aware of the damage they cause? This is a judgment call that can only be settled in court.

Education Is Key

We have always prided ourselves for being a state of the art industry. But what good is being on the cutting edge if the new concepts are not understood; or worse, are misused? Whether high-tech computerized mat cutters are being taught, or design aspects, conservation, or simply the fun and profit of creative mounting and laminating, education is everywhere! Education comes in numerous forms, some positive, some not so positive. Lessons are often learned through trial and error or by repairing mistakes.

We should learn by continuing our education, which is perhaps the most productive method. Tech-

niques for cold and hot mounting have been around for a very long time, but the items being mounted have changed (thermographics, inkjet, certificates), procedures have improved, and materials have been researched to more realistically help determine equipment and adhesive limitations (like silicone). It's the explanation or education surrounding the use of the procedures that truly progresses the industry and makes one a cutting edge framer.

Keep up with
developments
in materials
and techniques
in the
industry.

Articles are written, classes are taught, and technical assistance is available throughout the industry. Open houses offer regional opportunities for educational lectures and hands-on workshops as well as manufacturer representatives to showcase new products and updated technical information. It is your job to stay in the know through your individual continuing education.

Education At Your Fingertips

A valuable resource available to framers is the PPFA Online Exchange. Thanks to Merrill

Grayson, Picture Perfect of Nona Corners, Indiana, the originator of the email list, it is a resource for all members that is worth the price of admission alone. It is an e-mail network that allows online help from other framers and industry educators. Pose any question and a plethora of answers will come swarming into your e-mail box within days, often overnight.

In the past few months topics have included mounting encapsulated posters, spray adhesives, static mounting Cibachromes, alternative mounting for oversized pieces too large for a vacuum press, Chinese paper cuts, and what dry mount adhesive to use for what. A truly wonderful source for immediate help.

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Yes, you must be a PPFA member to use this service, but that in conjunction with chapter affiliation should make joining simply part of your new millennium resolution. Quite honestly, if you have an e-mail address and still elect not to be a part of this online source you must not care enough to give the very best. Ignorance is no excuse. If you have damaged a customer's art because of industry betterment that's one thing, but if it is damaged due to lack of education, you will be in the wrong.

The Computer Age

Computers are here to stay. Computerized mat cutter (CMC) companies and POS programs are everywhere. You wouldn't consider purchasing or leasing a CMC without proper education both prior to the sale and as technical service. Lectures are formally given at shows and most of these chairs are routinely full. Does this tell you something of the wave of the future?

Framing has indeed reached into the 21st century. Over half the framers have computers in their shops, while still only a quarter have dry mount equipment. The pace for the next millennium is being set and it appears to be very high-tech. But why do we continue to ignore some of the more basic techniques, like dry mounting? Probably fear or lack of education.

Mounting Computer Art & Other Digital Nightmares

I have written about gicleés and their limited edition nature precluding them from being mounted, but other digitals that are cleverly camouflaged as RC photos (digital photos) or offset litho posters (inkjets) still should be

handled carefully. If you can't identify it, don't mount it with heat, spray or wet glues. The papers are often thin and will easily cockle. Glossed color copies created with dry toner will be damaged by heat, too. The best solution in both cases would be pressure-sensitive until further notice—that education issue again.

Certificates—do not mount them, they are considered one-of-a-kind originals. Furthermore, they could be heat-sensitive inkjet prints that could transfer to the release paper.

As we head
into the next
millennium,
let's remember
the basics.

Mounting Progress...Or Is It?

In the 30 years I've been a picture framer I have seen hinging and fitting materials improve from corrugated cardboard and masking tape to conservation paste hinges and 100% cotton boards. In turn, dry mounting equipment has evolved and materials have been modified to reflect more conservative approaches.

In the world of dry mounting, high temperature adhesives have been lowered in temperature from 225°F to 190°F in an attempt to be safer for the items being mounted, and non-silicone-coated acetate products have been developed to aid in the protection of high gloss photo emulsion during dry mounting.

OSHA has decided to save us from ourselves by teaching us the dangers of inhaling toxic fumes from spray adhesives and solvents, so now we have spray booths with fans and vents to remove the health hazards. Over the years pressure-sensitive films have become more dependable and in some cases repositionable, making them a very favorable mounting alternative. But pressure-sensitive "acid-free" tapes are still

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applying adhesive to the artwork, so they will never be true conservation.

Wet glues go as far back as the ancient Chinese scrolls. If cooked starch pastes are used, they are inert,

permanent over the long term, and conservation-quality. Prepared wet glues require water to mount, so the techniques to master them often include countermounting (PFM, August 1999) and practice.

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Closing With Education

The industry has been soapboxing for years that by educating the consumer we can upgrade framing jobs by selling more preservation materials and techniques. Education appears to be the best way to reach not only the consumer, but the framer as well. If the framer doesn't understand or agree with current industry trends he/she will never attempt to pass that on to the consumer, hence lower individual ticket sales and potential misuse of materials. You decide.

As Blanche DuBois said in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, "Don't hang back with the brutes." Get back on that cutting edge, understand the techniques and materials, get the education, read all the trade magazines, take classes, attend trade shows, join PPFA (if for no other reason than the online exchange), and you will march into the new millennium armed with all you need to succeed!

There is no excuse for lack of education. See you in Las Vegas at the West Coast Art & Frame Show & Conference, 9-12 January 2000. There are 48 classes being offered—what an opportunity. I am teaching five of them, from "Mounting Basics" to "Handling Photos, Copies and Inkjet Prints." Help us ring in the new millennium right! ■