Mastering Mounting

by
Chris A. Paschke,
CPF, GCF

Canvas: Part III

Illusionary Boxes and Other Canvas Alternatives

Though the topic of this article may not be directly related to this month's topic of textiles, canvas remains a textile and illusionary boxes are somewhat a poor man's approach to the look of gallery mounts. In the March and April issues, I've discussed the evolution, and in turn, the changes required for mounting, stretching, and framing canvases and canvas look-alikes. I realize there will continue to be many schools of thought behind these techniques, along with some confusion, so this month I am adding yet another apple to the pie and mixing it up even more.

To punctuate this and the past two columns, I've included a chart for reference that might help clarify some of the canvas confusion (See chart on page 40).There are many types of canvases from original, painted artworks to open edition prints coated with canvas-textured vinyl. There are many ways to create a canvas appearance, involving an assortment of mounting techniques and materials.

The chart is designed to help identify a few of the more common names and types of canvas images, as well as their origin and/or printing technique. It is meant to be a starting point for better understanding the variables of canvas materials and their assorted similarities and differences. The chart does not include every option or material combination, but rather represents a general listing of the types of canvas images and how they have evolved in our industry. The important thing is for a framer to attempt to identify what they are dealing with prior to deciding how to mount and/or frame it for their customer.

Canvas Look-Alikes

The public's desire for canvas look-alike images has abounded for years. Hence the emergence and overwhelming successes of gicleés as limited edition canvases and the canvas transfers offered by major open edition reproduction companies for at least the past 10 years. There are three concepts I will discuss this month involving canvas imagery: wrapped canvases; wrapped substrates; and illusionary boxes. All three have the potential to appear as a canvas.

A wrapped canvas, also known as a "gallery wrap," is a print that has been oversized to allow for the image to be stretched and wrapped around strainer or stretcher bars as a traditional canvas might be.

The second, a wrapped substrate, is simply a mounted and laminated image on a ½" to 2" thick substrate that is then edge wrapped for a finished look. For years, framers have bevel cut the outer edges of 3/16" foamboard to create a finished appearance for college students' and kids' rooms. This is a step up from that.

Third, an illusionary box, is a mounted laminated image that is designed so it appears to have been affixed to a deep box rather than just a board. Yet, it is hollow on the backside.

Wrapped Canvases

I discussed gallery wrapped canvases in last month's column but feel strongly we need to revisit this topic briefly this month too. Additional information gleaned during conversations with manufacturers at the West Coast Art and Frame show in January brought new information into view. I spoke with a number of publishers including Craig Andersen, sales manager for Bentley Publishing Company; and Keith Circosta, president/CEO Top Art Fine Art Publishing about their canvas images.

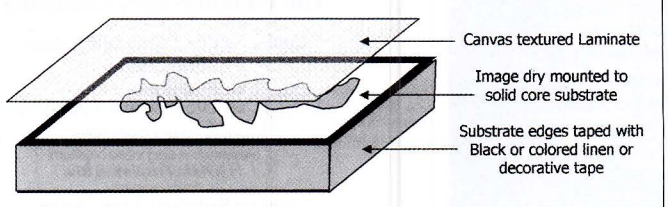
Since both companies have offered canvas reproductions for years, it stands to reason they are not digital images, but rather actual canvas transfers. Since they are transfers they may be pulled tightly and wrapped around bars without the fear of inks cracking, splitting, or flaking off the canvas. They are being printed oversized to allow the 1½" to 2" required for the wrapping around the outer edges of the bars for stapling on the back. They then may be placed into either a canvas float frame or hung as a gallery wrap. These are unlike the Wild Apple digital images featured last month.

Wrapped Substrates

A wrapped substrate is a thick solid substrate dense enough to allow for a decorative tape to be applied to the four sides creating a somewhat finished edge for short-term display. Quite simply, the image is mounted to the substrate and surface laminated with a canvas like texture. Then, the substrate sides are wrapped with black linen or decorative tape to finish off the edges (see Diagram 1).

Poster art and photographs may be easily mounted and laminated onto either black or white centered foamboard in thicknesses up to ½", from an assortment of manufacturers. GatorBoard is available in thicknesses up to 1½" when more rigid surfaces are required for larger pieces. This thickness offers a rigidity which makes it less likely to warp when requiring 4'x8' sheets and a smooth mounting surface receptive to high tack pressure-sensitives. However, there is a cost factor to consider, as well as cutting difficulty because of the tough epoxy-coated surface.

Diagram 1



The beauty of a wrapped substrate is the inexpensive aspect of a framing presentation for students and short-term display. It looks nicer and more finished than an image just mounted to 3/16" foamboard because of the additional bulk of the substrate. Also, when using a thicker substrate the possibility of needing to countermount to add strength is often eliminated.

The concept of wrapped edges had been used for years at trade shows for display images to be easy to ship, look great during for the three days of the show, and could easily be tossed with little extra expense. Today it is still a viable possibility for presenting open edition images—and when using a cold mounting method with digital images.

Illusionary Boxes

In 1993, I developed a creative application for the display of mounted and laminated, open edition prints–"illusionary boxes." At that time, the commercial application of wrapped substrates was quite popular but since GatorBoard was not a product used by many framers, I set out to find an alternative solution.

I tested the box theory using posters for my son's room and also mounted a few large reproductions of Kline and Pollock works. Not only did they hold up very well, but when I relocated from Connecticut to California in 2002, nine years later, the images looked as good as the day they were created. In fact, at that time, I tore them apart and pulled the top layer of laminated paper from the existing illusionary box, rolled up the images and took the 3'x4' prints with me for remounting in California (see Photo 1).

Materials

An illusionary box is created using 3/16" or ½" thick foamboard as the substrate, with ½" thick foamboard strips cut to the desired width to create or build the illusion of a box. Required materials include the image, adhesive, surface laminate, substrate of choice, decorative strips for edging, permanent adhesive to affix the side strips, and 3M #3797-TC Jet Melt (see Photo 2).

The decorative tapes are used to enhance the edges of the completed box. Their availability and adaptability to this process of box design will vary with their thickness

Photo 1: This completed 3'x4' illusionary box using a Kline reproduction looked as good the day it was dismantled as it did the day it was created. It was reinforced with two inner cross pieces running vertically down the substrate.

and width as well as pattern and color. The wider the sides, the more substantial the box will appear. Therefore I prefer at least a 1" wide tape. Also the lighter the color and thinner the tape (in mil thickness not width), the more likely the seams of the foam will show through at the corners. Tape choices range from linen to paper to metallic manufactured by many different companies in the industry (see Photo 3).

Photo 2:The basic materials for the box besides image, adhesive, and laminate include ½" foam strips for the sides, decorative tape of choice, and hot glue.

Wood strips, rather than foamboard, can also be used to create the surface and/or sides of the box. In this case, Formica trims and wood veneers found in home improvement centers can be used to wrap the sides rather than the above listed tapes.

Construction

Once the image has been mounted and laminated, and the tape or trim for the sides has been selected, determine the width of the side pieces to be cut. Add the thickness of the substrate (3/16" or ½") and the thickness of the materials mounted to the surface (approximately 1/16" for adhesive, image, and laminate). Then subtract this figure from the width of the tape being used to determine the width of the foam strips to cut for the sides of the box. The sides would turn out about 1" wide for a 1¼" black linen tape (see Photo 4).

Photo 3: Decorative tapes range from linen to paper to metallic and are manufactured by many companies in the industry.

The strips for the sides should be miter cut at the corners. When using rigid Gator or ½" thick foamboard, these may often be gently chopped with a sharp chopper. This way there will be no ragged corners or uneven ends to deal with. Butt joints do not visually fit well and should be avoided. Cut all four sides, miter them to proper length, then permanently affix them to the back edge of the completed lamination using the 3M #3797-TC Jet Melt. On large pieces (over 11"x14"), glue the sides in place, then reinforce the adhesive by running a bead of hot glue all along the inner corner seam (see Photo 5). Though it's very strong, unsightly globs of hot glue along the inner seams may appear offensive and unprofessional. Apply the glue smooth and cleanly or opt for strips of pressure-sensitive linen tape to reinforce the seams.

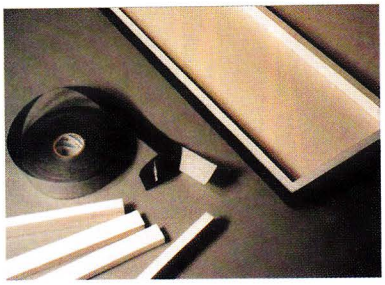


Photo 4: View of Back–This sample is mounted to 3/16" foam with 1/2" sides and 11/4" wide black linen tape.

Photo 5: On large pieces (11"x14" and up), glue the sides in place then reinforce the adhesive by running a bead of hot glue all along the inner corner seam. Note tape on the right and glue on the left seams.

On large pieces, cross-bracing will effectively reinforce the substrate to help prevent warping if a thinner 3/16" board has been selected for the face (see Photo 6). Countermounting is an option, but defeats the purpose of this process being a less costly alternative to frames. If wood strips are being used for the sides of the box, this allows for the use of the aforementioned Formica strips to be used to cover the raw material sides. This also helps to keep the foam from warping.

Taping The Sides

Once the sides are cleanly constructed the tape may be applied. Begin the tape slightly around the top corner. You can end up with a double layer of tape over the beginning. This prevents the possibility of a gap of white or black foam showing at

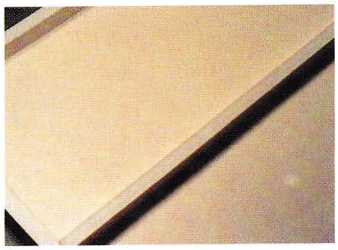


Photo 6: On large pieces, cross bracing will effectively reinforce and stabilize the substrate to help prevent warping if thinner 3/16" boards have been selected as a mountboard.

the very edge. Wrap the tape around the perimeter of the box on one continuous strip overlapping about 1" at the end (see Photo 7). Burnish the entire tape strip to activate the pressure-sensitive adhesive to the board.

Finishing

When selecting the proper method for hanging, consider the size and weight of the overall project. It is not advisable to hang the box using the upper edge or its sides for support. We've all seen thin mouldings warp from the weight of the framed package, exposing the raw edges of the inner glass. Wire and poster hangers should be glued to the inner back of the box. Again, do not attach wire to the outer side pieces of the box because it places too much stress on the glue seams.

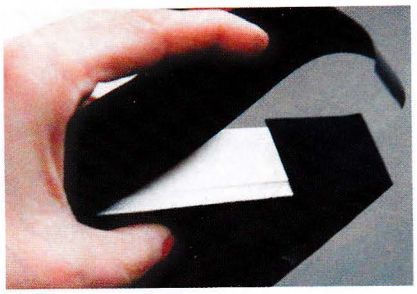


Photo 7: Wrap the tape around the perimeter of the box in one continuous strip overlapping about 1" at the end.

The end product will be a laminated poster or photograph flush mounted to a box, or at least the illusion of a box. Pricing this project would include mounting and laminating charges plus an hourly design charge for estimated shop time.

Identifying The Players

Regardless of the type of canvas or canvas-like item that you encounter, it remains your job as the framing professional to know how to handle it and the best way to frame it. Being able to identify the item at hand will direct you to the limitations and possibilities to best enhance and protect that canvas for your customer.

Turn to page 40 to view the chart on identifying and handling the various canvas and canvas-like images discussed in the March, April, and May editions of "Mastering Mounting." ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF,
Mounting Editor, owns Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, featuring commercial custom framing, fine art/graphic design, and industry consulting. Specializing in mounting, matting, design creativity, and fine art, she works with industry leaders and has taught for the National Conference. She has written two books on mounting: The Mounting and Laminating Handbook (now in its second edition) and Creative Mounting, Wrapping, and Laminating. She can be contacted at www.designsinkart.com.