

# Mastering Mounting



by  
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## Mounting, Chinese-Style

Mounting artwork is certainly not exclusive to the U.S., and wet mounting with starch paste has been practiced in Asia for thousands of

Jinni Gallery (spiritual images); Original draw (-ings); Match frame (making custom frames); Paperhanging picture (mounted scrolls); and Atr artide (art supplies).

*A mounting equipment tour of Chinese frame shops reveals some interesting differences and similarities to equipment in the U.S.*



Photo 1: This sign notes the offerings from the shop within Jinni Gallery (spiritual images); Original draw (-ings); Match frame (custom frames); Paperhanging picture (mounted scrolls); and Atr artide (art supplies).

### Gallery Walk Shanghai

Many shops in Shanghai look very much like those in the U.S., with clean store fronts, window displays, and general marketing appeal.

The Vantaly Gallery

is in the heart of Shanghai on a busy main street and features both Western and Asian framing. Detail (Photo 2) shows moulding corners on the back wall, bins with art prints, showcases, and framed art similar to an American frame shop.

Half a block down from there is the Shanghai Shengshi Gallery, which was a real find. Not only did they have a full line of very familiar Western matted and framed decorative open edition art and framed oil paintings, but they also had framed and double matted pieces of my Asian look art from Wild Apple.

### Beijing Galleries

In Beijing there are wonderful old galleries and shops with high-end collectible and tourist quality memorabilia along the street of Liu Li Chang. There are also traditional art and supply shops for the locals here. You

years. Many also realize that the dry mount mechanical press has been around a very long time, having hit the scene at the beginning of the 20th century in England. But since then numerous companies in many countries have been attempting to improve on or duplicate that fabulous little piece of mounting equipment.

While studying scroll mounting in China, I spent my off time searching out local frame shops, galleries, and art supply stores. What I found most entertaining were the English translations of their Chinese characters on storefront signage (Photo 1). I just loved the sign, which notes the offerings of the shop within as a



Photo 2 illustrates moulding corners on the back wall, bins with art prints, showcases, and framed art found at the Vantaly Gallery in Shanghai.



can find stacks of large sacks of dry powdered starch and the red buckets alongside for scroll mounting (Photo 3). Or you may find both Western framed and scroll mounted art side by side. The noticeable lack of English translation on the signage indicates a true local supply shop.

The most exquisite art supply shop in Beijing is also its oldest, Rong Bao Zhai, which opened in 1672 (Photo 4). It features historic replica scrolls, fine art supplies, paper, brushes, inks, paints, signature chops, and ink stones as well as custom framing and scroll mounting. On the second and third floors are fine art galleries with high-end scrolls and original art by noted artists.

## Mounting Equipment

In different galleries you can also see a number of large mechanical presses being used for mass production. In the same way that Americans would mount production projects, the Chinese also capitalize on the quick and easy when turning out scrolls and art mounted to brocade for placement in a frame.

One such piece of equipment is a 48" wide mechanical press made in China that is very much like a Bienfang press (Photo 5). It uses an oversized felt sheet to cover the bottom foam pad. A rag is used for wiping down the press between mountings. The clutter on the cooling table leaves a lot to be desired, but the clear acrylic sheet covering the red fabric makes it easy to clean.

Just across the street and down a few doors is another gallery with an open workroom allowing for shoppers to watch the framing fes-



Photo 3: In the art district of Beijing the stores are traditional for the locals and not the tourists like those in Shanghai. Note the stack of dry powdered starch and red buckets for scroll mounting just inside the door. And on the right hand wall can be seen both Western framed and scroll mounted art.



Photo 4: The oldest art supply shop in Beijing is Rong Bao Zhai, established in 1672. It currently features historic replica scrolls, fine art supplies, paper, brushes, inks, paints, signature chops and ink stones, as well as custom framing.



Photo 5: This is a Chinese manufactured 48" wide (equivalent) mechanical press very much like the Bienfang presses in the U.S. They have a felt sheet covering the bottom, and there is a rag that is used to wipe down the press between mountings. It has a sponge pad layer like those used here.

tivities. It has another large, wide mechanical press, this one from a different manufacturer. It has a sheet of well-used and very tired release paper covering the bottom sponge pad, and mulberry paper is

stuck to the upper corner of the platen. Both of these indicate that this poor press is suffering from long hours and little routine maintenance, as the platen needs cleaning and the release materials should be replaced.

All the ink paintings on the wall behind the frame have been mounted to the same type of paper-backed sheer brocade silk used in scroll mounting, but these were then framed. Most of these samples do have glazing, but often they are framed with no glass at all. This alternative method of matting should actually be done using the same pieced format as when building a scroll by adding separate pieces to the top, bottom, and sides. But when dry mounting is used to speed up the process, the art is flat mounted to the center of the brocade.

## Same Press, Different Location

At a local Cloisonné factory, a number of artisans were working throughout the factory store. Two of them were using the same model press as at the previous location, but this time it was in the middle of the shopping floor surrounded by artwork and furniture for purchase.

This press was clean and well kept with the sponge pad covered with an additional homemade, wrapped pad. There were brocade strips next to the press ready for mounting. Two young women were quietly mass-producing small scrolls for the tourists. All the pieces had been backed with adhesive and cut to size ahead of time, and basic scroll assembly was all that was needed. It was essentially a one-person assembly line since each





Photo 6: Just as U.S. framers tack images to the backing board of choice, these production framers attached brocade strips to the color accent trimmed original painted image, which will then be placed in the press for final fusion.

woman was working on her own stack of scrolls (Photo 6).

### Production Scroll Mounting

Each original painting is trimmed with a narrow 1/4" strip of dark colored silk, which acts like an inner liner mat in Western framing, then the side, top (heaven), and bottom (earth) pieces are aligned and tacked to that trim piece. Since the

brocade pieces have all been backed with dry mount adhesive first, it is just a matter of getting the pieces straight before heat tacking (Photo 7). After the small pieces are all aligned and tacked in place, the scroll is placed on another backing sheet and placed in the press for final fusion of all the pieces and to the new backing (Photo 8). You can actually see the



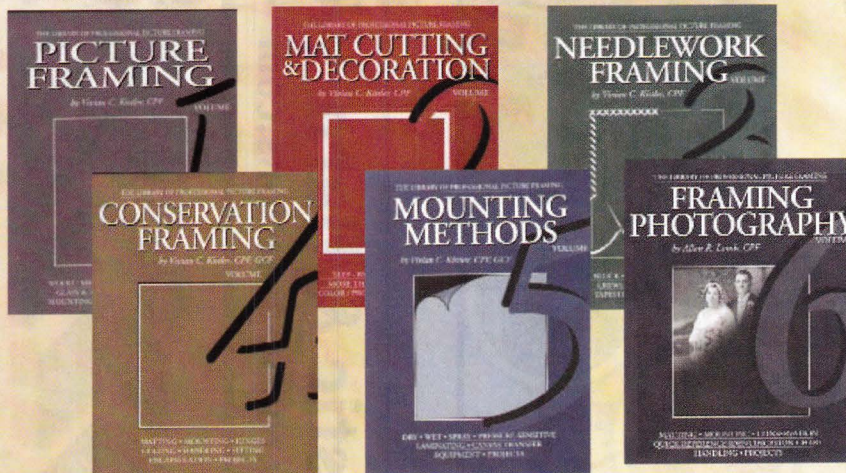
Photo 7: All the pieces for scroll assembly are first backed with adhesive then cut to size ahead of time. The basic scroll assembly was all that was needed to be completed.

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backing paper sticking out above and below the brocade silk of the scroll just before the press is closed for mounting.

This clean press is the same as the one with the well-used release paper and the mulberry paper stuck to the platen, but it is well taken care of. The bottom of the press has a pad wrapped and covered by homemade release paper to protect the sponge beneath it. Cut brocade strips are also placed by the press, ready for mounting. Cleaning these Asian presses would be the same as for a Seal or Beinfang press. The hinges at the sides of the press can be unbolted to open it like a book to clean the platen. These presses are also wider and a little narrower than 500T versions. They looked to be 40" to 48" wide and about 24" deep compared to the 26"x34" maximum found in the U.S.



## Hydraulic Dryer and Mount Press

Hydraulic driers are commonly found in production scroll shops. They appear to be nothing more than modified dry-mount presses. Unlike heated 4' x 8' mechanical presses, these hydraulic systems are felt covered top and bottom to flatten and dry delicate paintings on mulberry paper to the heavier backing paper that is used for scroll mounting.

If the top felt sheet on such a drier were to be removed, the large unit could easily be converted to a large scale press for mounting oversized artwork to backing boards using tissue or film adhesive rather than starch paste (Photo 9).

Also, unlike vacuum presses with hinges along the back side that open like a book, these drop straight down to compress the artwork being dried. This unfortunately allows the top of the unit to easily become a storage space that gathers clutter.



Photo 8: This clean press is well taken care of. The bottom of the press has a release paper covered, homemade, wrapped pad to protect the sponge beneath it. Note the cut brocade strips the left of the press ready for mounting.

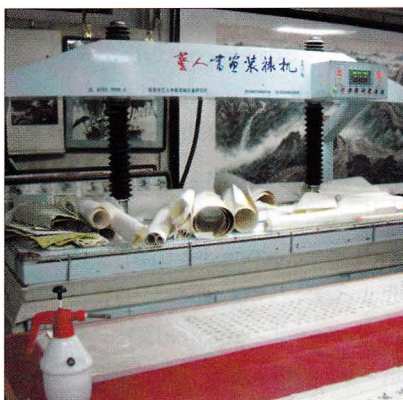


Photo 9: Unlike 4'x8' vacuum presses, these hydraulic systems are felt-covered top and bottom to flatten and dry delicate paintings on mulberry paper to the heavier backing paper for scroll mounting. Unlike vacuum presses, which have hinges along the back side and open like a book, these presses drop straight down to compress the artwork being dried, which allows the top of the unit to easily become a storage and space that gathers clutter.

## Different Country, Same Mounting

Mounting continues to be an international practice, whether using wet paste or dry mount equipment.

Framing and preserving memories is important all over the world. Whether it is a German tourist purchasing a small mounted scroll in the Cloisonné factory in China or an American framing a diploma and graduation portrait at a local frame shop, mounting materials and equipment are important. There will always be the need for production equipment and for preservation treatments as long as people value art and cherish their memories. ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPE, 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](http://www.designsinkart.com).

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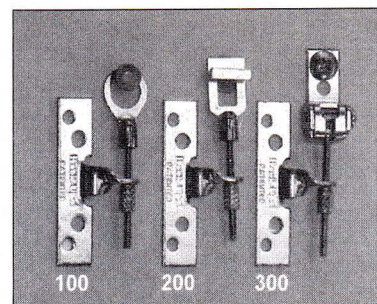
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