Mastering Mounting

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Platforms, Lifters, and Spacers

The twenty-first century world of art has embraced illusion and loves eclectic materials and panels that appear to hover in space. Platforms, lifters, and spacers are all names for the same thing: a mechanism for creating a gap, opening, or distance between two parts. This is considered part of a mounting process regardless of whether you are mounting art in a float frame or installing a wall panel.

Mat and Frame Spacers

In matting, a spacer also creates a gap between two layers (Photo 1). To be properly inserted it should be cut and fitted the full length and width of the mat it is under and not merely a small centered scrap. In the sample a 3/16" foamboard was used to elevate the top mat, spacing it away from the bottom mat, but 1/8" foam, 8- or 4-ply board may also be used (Diagram 1). The spacer is attached to the back of the mat and needs to be set back from the edge of the mat window so it is not visible when viewed from the front. Apply the strips as a pinwheel with a reverse bevel at one end so that it can nest snuggly against the neighboring bevel (Diagram 2).

Mat spacers can be glued with a bead of PVA glue, but generally ATG tape is fine to adhere spacers to the mat and the pieces all into a unit. Since all layers should retain the same basic perimeter, the individual mat pieces and spacers will become a secure mat unit when assembled and taped together.

In float framing, a spacer—or lifter—is a short piece or strip of wood that is screwed to the base of a float frame beneath a painted panel to raise the art. This both brings it closer to the frame face and helps create the illusion that it is floating within the frame (Diagram 3). A short block spacer is an inexpensive alternative to the full strip, which raises a painted panel but gives no additional support to the frame (Diagram 4).

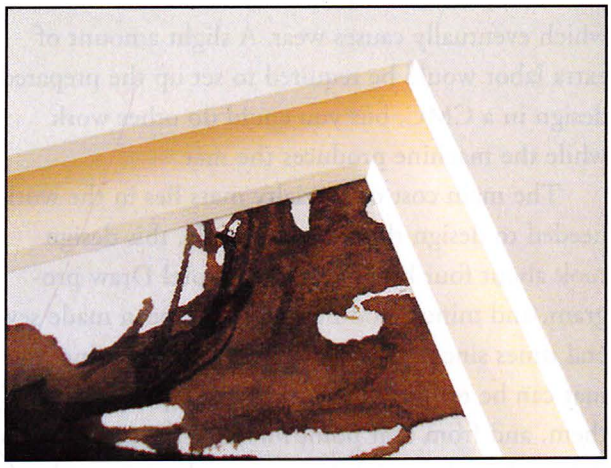


Photo 1: A 3/16" foamboard was used to elevate the top mat, spacing it away from the bottom mat.

As with mat spacers, any float frame design is best served when the lifter extends the full length of each frame leg. They are meant to provide a full-blown support, not merely a block that suspends a few inches on each side. Though the idea is to raise the painted panel so it is within a specific distance from the frame face, it also evenly supports the art as it suspends. Short blocks just cannot achieve that. In extreme humidity, the thinner, lifted panels can still warp on either side or end of the mounted block spacers. So the best support is a constructed inner lifter with mitered corners or a full platform.

Platforms

A solid board that is screwed to the entire inside perimeter of a frame is called a platform (Photo 2). It is smaller than the art panel—allowing it to float—yet larger than the opening in the bottom of the frame. Use of a full platform rather than lifter or spacer strips allows thinner

Photo 7: All lifters are built to size, painted, and ready to be installed for a permanent mount.

1Photo 8: Assorted diameters and heights of polished and brushed stainless steel as well as brass and black stand-offs are available to accommodate any desired thickness of acrylic and space away from the wall.

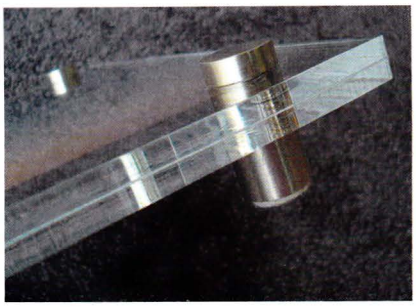
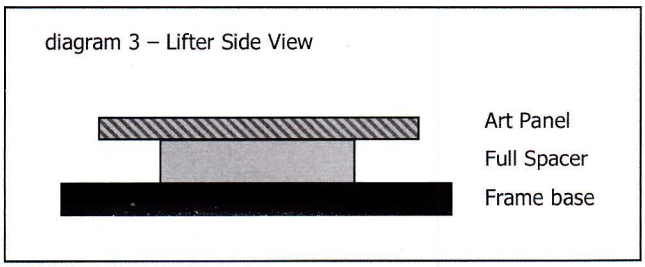
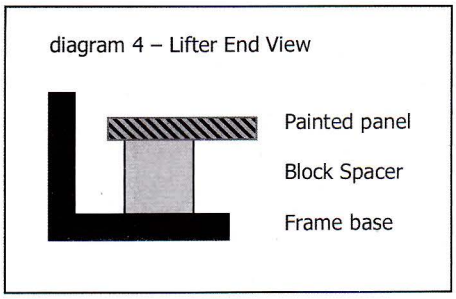


Photo 9: This acrylic post package from Lion Supply features both front and back acrylic sheets with posts to lift artwork from the wall.





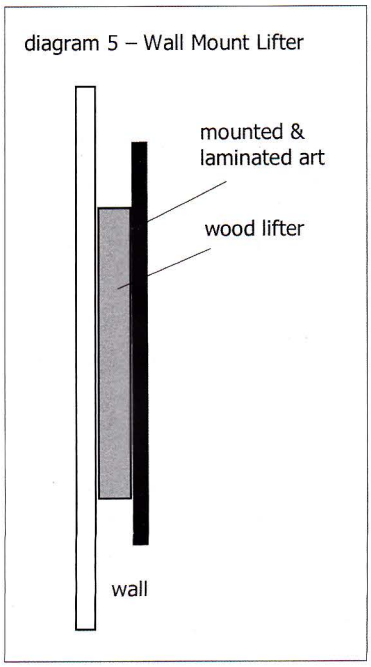
could be wired with D-rings and hung using two hooks for horizontal stability. The displayed pieces are illuminated with spotlights on a highly textured neutral-colored wall, and the lifters give each a dramatic floating effect (Photo 6).

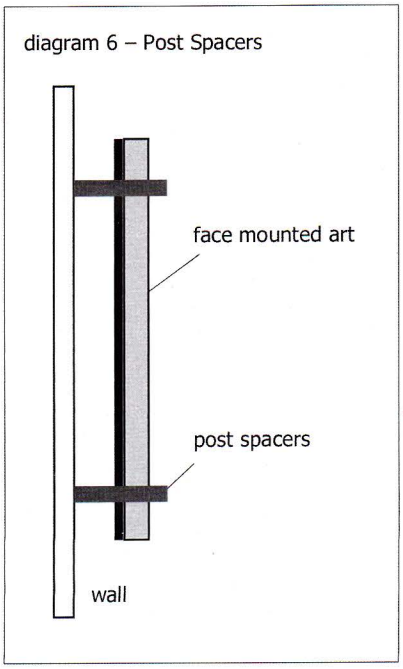
Since these images could not be permanently mounted to the museum walls, they were hung from wire screwed to the lifters that were attached to the back. A practical use of lifters was illustrated in "Peel Proof Photos" (October 2010). By designing the photo plaques with 3/4"x1/2" full frame lifters, they were transformed into a professional contemporary presentation that could be permanently mounted to the wall for security. The lifters were individually sized for each photo then chopped, built, and painted (Photo 7). Each lifter was installed by nailing it to the wall, then the plaques were adhered to the wall mounted lifters (Diagram 5).

Rather than using adhesive, wood spacers and platforms are screwed to the frames so they can be easily removed and they are less invasive. It also allows them to be altered for the thickness of any given art panel. Wall lifters also vary in width and thickness depending on the size and weight of the panel they are reinforcing and the space from the wall.

Posts and Stand-Offs

Face mounting is the permanent adhering of a sheet of poly (methyl methacrylate) (PMMA)—Plexiglas—acrylic, clear polystyrene, or polycarbonate to the surface of a silver-halide, Ilfochrome Classic (Cibachrome), or digital image with double-sided, clear pressure-sensitive adhesive (PSA). The process provides a rigid support and protective glazing, while protecting from fingerprints, mold, air-borne pollutants, and ultraviolet radiation. It has been used for the display of Cibachromes and transparencies—Duratrans—in advertising as backlit displays and lightboxes for decades. For additional information on face mounting see "Face Mounting Basics" (October 2008).





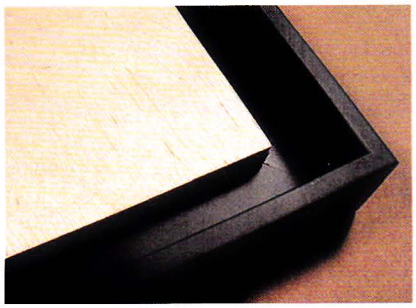


Photo 2: The platform is a solid Baltic birch plywood board that is screwed to the entire inside perimeter of a frame.

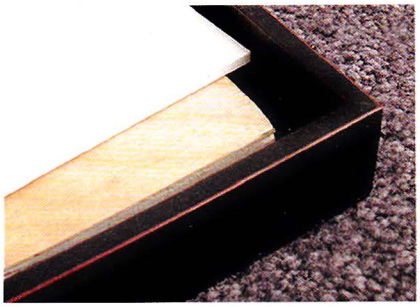
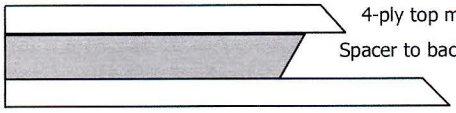


Photo 3: The platform is smaller than the unpainted 8-ply rag board, so once it is completed and glued to the art it will float within the perimeter of the frame.

diagram 1 – Mat Spacer

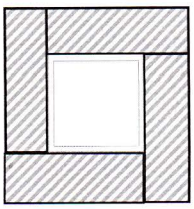


1/8" hardboards, 1/4" plywood, and 8-ply rag art panels to be glued to it, which aids in its support so it won't sag or warp with fluctuations in temperature and humidity. Not only does a platform support the entire painting, but it also adds rigidity to the frame. The platform is smaller than the unpainted 8-ply rag board, so once completed and glued to the base the art will float within the perimeter of the frame (Photo 3). Additional information on floater frames and the installation of platforms may be found in "Encaustic in Floater Frames" (February 2008).

Wall Lifters

Occasionally lifters are required for more than visual aesthetics. Two large wide-format digital images—one 37"x48" and the other 27"x40"—were mounted using tissue adhesive in a hot vacuum press. Prints this size would normally require at least 1/2" foamboard or Gatorboard, but 3/16" foamboard was selected because the prints were to be displayed in glassed showcases firmly and permanently attached to the back wall (Photo 4). The thin foamboard was selected to keep the price down, and since they were to be permanently fused to the wall any warping would be eliminated. Then the plans changed, and both required surface heat lamination because they were to be displayed on public walls outside the showcase. Once laminated, the surface stress of the print, adhesive, and laminate forced the thin foamboard to warp badly.

diagram 2 - Pinwheel Mat Spacer



To stabilize and flatten the warped boards, an inner lifter frame of 2"x1/2" pine was mitered and built as a support and full lifter. A cross brace was also needed to fully flatten the laminated piece. The lifter was set inside the back 3" on all sides, the edges painted black, and the lifter fully adhered to the back of each print using 3M 3797-TC Jet-Melt hot glue (Photo 5). Since there was now a wood lifter frame solidly affixed to the back, the prints

Photo 4: Two large digital prints on standard wide format sign weight stock were mounted to lightweight 3/16" foam.

Photo 5: A 2"x1/2" pine frame lifter was built, cross braced, painted, and fused to the back of the 3/16" foamboard using 3M 3797-TC Jet-Melt hot glue.

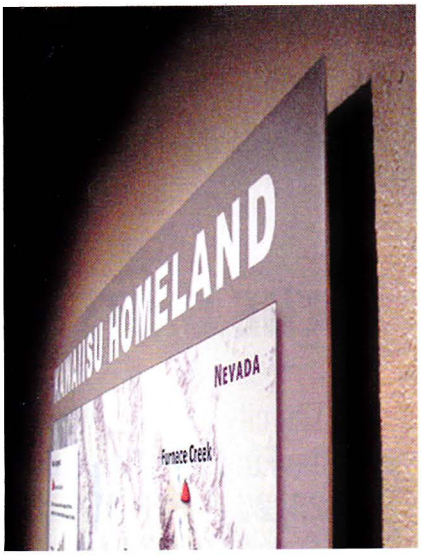


Photo 6: When displayed with spotlights, the lifters give it a dramatic floating effect with lovely shadows creating additional depth.

Digital images using eco-solvent and pigmented inks are also being applied directly to the same type of acrylic sheet, metal, and composite materials. Most of these contemporary art applications never end up in traditional frames but rather floated unframed off the wall using lifters or posts.

Stand-offs is the name commonly used for the tall round posts that are used to space a face mount or digital printed acrylic away from the wall (Photo 8). Assorted diameters and heights of polished and brushed stainless steel as well as brass and black are available to accommodate any desired thickness of acrylic and space from the wall. These posts are fed through holes made in the acrylic and are mounted right into the wall (Diagram 6).

Packages are now being offered from numerous suppliers featuring acrylic sandwiches, sink mounts, and face mounting that all use posts to suspend the presented art from the wall (Photo 9). Superior Acrylic Frame, Lion Picture Frame Supplies (U.K.), and Gemini Moulding are among the sources for the sheets and posts. Many print publishers also offer digital images printed directly to acrylic, wood, and metal sheets to meet the demands of today's wall decor trends.

What to Expect

Spacers have been used to lift and separate mats for decades and should be considered as much a part of any custom framer's repertoire as fillets. Float frames are available in numerous depths to accommodate canvases from 3/4" to 2" deep are now able to frame thin 1/4" encaustic painting and 1/8" hardboards with the use of lifters and platforms. Lifters and spacers may provide solutions for display challenges and as additional support for painted panels in float frames, while posts dramatically display contemporary art allowing room light to become an integral part of the viewing presentation. Who knew that leaving spaces and separating layers could ever be a profitable and common design element? ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF, CMG, mounting editor, owns Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, featuring custom framing, fine art/graphic design, and consulting. Specializing in mounting, matting, design, and fine art, she teaches at The National Conference. She has written four books on mounting including *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook* (third edition) and *Creative Mounting, Wrapping, and Laminating*, available from PFM PubCo. She may be contacted through www.designsinkart.com.