

Mastering Mounting

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A Decade of Mounting Questions

I have been writing for *PFM* since 1991, and every December since 1995 I've recapped the year by revisiting the most asked mounting and laminating questions for that year. These are questions I've received from phone calls, at trade shows, and during workshops, and it seems the same questions have come up again and again. Partly because it is difficult to reach volumes of people when an answer is given one on one, but also because we don't often pay attention to an issue unless it's our own problem. So the same questions keep resurfacing and ultimately a couple of things have become very clear. First, there is much more help available and second, mounting scares framers to death!

Education On The Rise

Over the past decade there has been a significant increase in help for framers. Back in early 90s there were trade shows and magazines, but not like today. Having just returned from ABC Atlanta, hosted for the first time at the Georgia World Congress Center, I must say we have truly come a long way as an industry. Not only have booths gotten taller and showier, but many of them feature educational venues as well as PPFA's classes. If education is indeed on the rise, why haven't we learned it all yet?

In 1997 I released my first book, *The Mounting & Laminating Handbook*, with the hope that it would give framers a place to locate a potential answer. Although the

book and other sources has helped, there are still thousands of framers who don't take advantage of all the training, information and technical help until the question has bitten them in the butt.

Mounting Scares Most

Over the past decade, one thing has definitely not changed—the general framer's fear of mounting. Mounting has been around for thousands of years. Beautiful Chinese scrolls are still in mint condition after having been conservationally wet mounted with starch pastes onto silk and paper. Shouldn't we be able to learn from that? Indeed. So, why haven't we? It seems that anything to do with gluing down a customer's project scares us. Although we need to respect the damage potential that can be associated with mounting images to a fixed substrate, once the basic concepts are understood, the fear should be relieved.

Remember, when all else fails, a conservation approach to holding an image suspended in a frame is always reversible and therefore non-damaging. If there is fear of incorrectly mounting anything, don't mount it and never laminate it. Mounting should be a process of holding something within a mat window without damage. When there is a true understanding and mastery of proper technique there should be no fear. The mounter will always know what to expect from the process. If there is any question about how an image will react to a mounting process

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sure, don't mount it. If there is any question about the technique itself, perhaps it is best left to a more experienced mounter.

Questions From This Year

Looking back over the past 10 years of article topics and questions, an interesting pattern has developed—questions keep coming back. Once again the top three asked questions of this past year involved mounting laminated (encapsulated polyester) posters; controlling emulsion scuffing on the surface of high gloss photos; and why canvas transfers weren't looking very textured. So, let's address these individually.

1) *What's the best way to mount encapsulated polyester (laminated) posters?*

Although a two-sided laminated map or poster may be placed into a heat press and dry mounted using any porous adhesive and substrate, it will never have the desired longevity. Polyester films will not absorb any adhesive and therefore the bond will be undependable. Even when a mounting looks good at the beginning, it is likely to bubble over time due to the lack of adhesive absorption.

The best way to mount this type of nonporous laminate is using a high-tack, pressure-sensitive adhesive and roller machine. Contact any large format equipment company for the nearest machine large enough to accommodate the project and subcontract the bonding to a photo lab or reprographics house.

2) *How do you prevent scuffing on the surface of high gloss photos?*

After years of personal studies and tests and hours of discussion with the major film companies, it appears that although heat and pressure can impact the look of a mounted photo, it is the silicone on the release paper that damages the emulsion during heat mounting. By selecting a slightly used release paper envelope the silicone is less damaging.

Another solution is to overlay the high gloss photo with a protective sheet of acetate film to protect it from the silicone during mounting. There are two commercial acetate products available that I'm aware of to protect

these delicate surfaces. Seal Products sells Gloss Release Film, which is a product used during the texturizing of their product called Exhibitex. And Hot Press Supplies sells Overlay Foil-Acetate Film. Acetate will, however, adhere itself to any exposed adhesive surrounding the photo during mounting, so all layers need to be cut and tacked to size.

3) *Why do canvas transfers lack good texture after mounting?*

There can be a number of reasons for a lack of texture. Not having a board stiffener beneath a vacuum press mounting; not moistening paper prior to stripping; and mounting to self-prepared raw canvas using a pure film adhesive, among others. Dry paper fibers or unevenly peeled separations, causing thicker layers, will not allow the decal to compress evenly into the canvas pattern. By moistening any paper on the back of a photo and always peeling the 15-minute soaked poster face up when separating this can often be remedied.

My newest book *Creative Mounting, Wrapping & Laminating* has a detailed chapter on image transferring, which covers canvas and watercolor transfers.

Questions Of The Decade

Although I could recap numerous other questions that were commonly asked during this past year, I felt in honor of the whole decade I'd rather look back and determine the most-asked questions for the whole decade. Just for a moment, let's take a walk down memory lane.

I've selected one question from each year, thinking also about current industry trends. Don't be surprised at the ones that keep resurfacing, even now.

1990 *Why do I get air bubbles when I mount?*

Although there may be other reasons, the biggest cause of air bubbles is trapped moisture between the substrate, adhesive and mounted image. This can be the result of putting two nonporous layers together that don't allow all the air to be compressed from between all layers prior to bonding. The outer edges of a mounting can sometimes begin to adhere within a hot vacuum press prior to the full draw of the vacuum.

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It can also be the presence of moisture on the surface or inner layers of the mounting unit. This moisture can expand and convert to steam at higher temperatures. Steam expands and can create trapped air also. This all boils down to remembering the four basic elements of TTPM (time, temperature, pressure, moisture) that I introduced back in 1991. If all of these are understood and controlled appropriately, the mounting will be a success (see *PFM* April-May 1992, Jan-April 1995).

1991 How do you mount a Cibachrome?

Never put a Cibachrome (Ilfochrome Classic) into a heat system. In fact, never mount one using any cold or hot mounting method. Although they are 100% polyester and can easily withstand the abuse of heat presses, they will also pick up the texture of any substrate they are solidly mounted to.

The best and totally reversible way to present an Ilfochrome Classic is by static mounting it onto a piece of acrylic as a substrate and a mat to hold it in place. This even works on oversized images (see *PFM*, February 1997, or *The Mounting & Laminating Handbook*).

1992 Can I flatten artwork in a dry mount press?

As an artist, I create watercolor and Sumi ink images that I dry and flatten in my mechanical press all the time. Using two pieces or an envelope of Kraft paper, place the dry item between the sheets and close the press for a few minutes.

Some valuable items may not be suitable for heat applications due to sensitivities, so be careful. Sometimes rolled posters may be very lightly misted or moistened by wicking humidity from a wet blotter onto their backs and placed into a warm press to flatten. Remember to cool under a glass weight to ensure they stay flat once out of the press.

1993 What's the best way to mount photographs?

This is often a question with another meaning. Like, how do you get rid of orange peel? If dry mounting is the process of choice, then the selection of the appropriate substrate will make a big difference. An RC photo is

plastic-coated top and bottom and will not absorb adhesive. It will, however, pick up the undulating or "orange peel" texture of any board it is mounted to.

This can be best controlled by selecting the most rigid and smoothest board possible, like a designated non-buffered photo board or Crescent Super Smooth, bonding at the lowest average temperature of 175°F to 185°F and making sure the pressure is not too aggressive and is set correctly when using a mechanical press (see *PFM*, October-November 1997 and October 1999).

1994 Are "archival" dry mount tissues conservation?

Any adhesive that saturates into the item being mounted, besides cooked starch pastes, are not considered conservation or archival. They all soak into the mounting and will leave some degree of adhesive residue. Because they are never considered reversible, but only removable, they cannot be used in conservation mounting.

All dry mount adhesives are inert, meaning they are stable and will not react with another element to create a new chemical reaction. So, although they will never accelerate deterioration, they will never pass as archival (see *PFM*, February 1993 and February 1998).

1995 Why do I get scuff marks on high gloss photos?

Funny, wasn't this in the top three asked questions for this year, too? What did I tell you? (See *PFM*, October 1998).

1996 Can raw canvas be used with film adhesive to transfer photos?

It sounds logical that pure film adhesives could be used with raw canvas to mount transferred decals, but it won't work that easily. Film adhesives are self-leveling and will fill the small textural canvas gaps in the thread pattern of the canvas rather than sucking the decal down into the pattern.

In order to use raw canvas, a heat activated wet glue is suggested. Apply the glue, let it dry, then apply the moistened, peeled poster decal, then place overlay foam into a release envelope and into the press (see *PFM*, October-December 1994 and June 1998).

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1997 *Can I mount a giclee?*

No. Actually, a "giclee" means sprayed ink, and some inkjets are heat tolerable. Heavy papers could also take wet, spray or pressure-sensitives, but a real giclee, as in limited edition, must never be mounted. Use only conservation methods.

1998 *Can I dry mount and/or laminate a digital image?*

I wrote an article about the basic differences between all digital images, and although most are heat tolerant, two types are not. Most often your customer will not know what type of printer was used for their image. Therefore, my advice is if you do not really know what you are dealing with (color copy, inkjet, thermal transfer) use only cold methods of mounting (see *PFM*, March-April 1997 and December 1998).

1999 *Do I still need my dry mount press?*

I know I've repeatedly warned you about heat-sensitive

items, digital images and certificates, but that should never prevent you from considering the rest of the story.

Laminating and creative applications both add to mounting to round out the profit picture and will continue to label you as a truly custom shop capable of doing anything a customer may need. Even in this computer age of high-tech everything with computerized mat cutters and digital desktop offices there is still a need for equipment.

A Toast To The Millennium

OK, enough soap boxing. There are resources available—hotlines, technical services, books, and class workshops. Which means there is truly no excuse for being unable to locate the answers to any mounting question. Besides, I plan on being here for you forever...or at least as long as my readers and *Picture Framing Magazine* will have me! Happy New Millennium...I love my job. See you in Las Vegas! ■

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