

Mastering Mounting



by
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There Are No Bad Adhesives... Only Bad Judgements

There are no bad adhesives or mounting techniques, only bad judgements in the selection of the adhesive, technique, or misidentification of the image in any given mounting project. I am not going to say there is no such thing as a mounting disaster, as mistakes do happen. *Webster's Dictionary* defines "disaster" as a noun for "a calamitous event causing great damage or hardship, a tragedy, or catastrophe." A true disaster probably cannot be repaired, and the customer will hear about that!

A mistake, on the other hand, is "an error caused by lack of skill, attention, knowledge, or a wrong judgement." Granted, a mounting mistake may result in a degree of upset, frustration, and anger, but tragedy and catastrophe sound a tad extreme. I recently had the privilege of teaching a revised edition of "Mounting Disasters" at the West Coast Art & Frame Show in Las Vegas. The challenge was to create and repair a series of mounting mistakes and then show how to correct them.

Any time a mistake has been made and a correction been instigated, the purity and integrity of the project is tarnished. We have all made tiny mistakes that have ended up turning into horrific issues. For some reason, mistakes usually do. I recall a small glass scuff (yes, one carelessly made) on the top edge of a white museum mat that showed up once it was framed. The

piece was taken apart, and the scuff was lightly burnished to flatten it in an attempt to blend it back into the surface. It became a shiny burnished spot. From there on, it seemed everything I did to improve the



Photo 1: Thermal Transfer on Film—The digital image on right in this photo was printed using a Tektronix Phaser 240 thermal transfer system on film for overhead projector. The upper half of the film has melted and destroyed the image. The half sheet of single sided release paper to its left shows the ink residue that melted and transferred. This is a disaster that cannot be repaired.

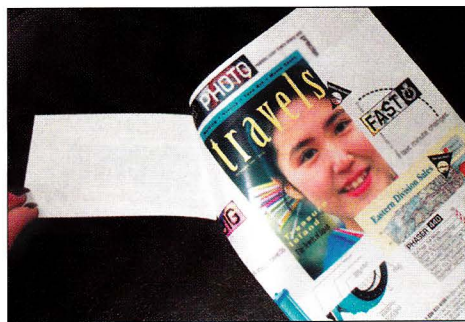


Photo 2: Dye Sublimation—Another sample of a thermal transfer image, dye sublimation shows a hint of ink transfer to the release paper, but no visible damage to the image itself. This is Tektronix Phaser 440 printer. This paper has a somewhat pearlized film appearance, still extremely difficult to identify.

damage only made it worse.

After an hour of shop time, frustration, and the anger mentioned above, I simply cut a new mat blank and began anew. Alas, the problem was solved. In the past, honest mounting mistakes could often be corrected. But with the advent of digital images, true mounting mistakes are generally disasters that need to be replaced.

A Disaster Waiting To Happen: Digital Photos

Asking the right questions at the design counter helps to ward off potential mistakes. In addition to asking about the color of the client's room and the style of his or her furniture, we need to better identify the source of the image, particularly photographs. Digital photos are no doubt one of the biggest sources of headaches and mounting disasters. Most mistakes made with digitals will not be fixable.

I have listed a few questions, along with a brief explanation, to consider adding to your design table dialogue. Keep in mind the first step to controlling mounting mistakes is at the front counter and not while completing the project.

Is this a traditional photo or a digital photo?

A traditional photo is one shot with a camera using a roll of film that requires developing to produce the image. A digital photo is one taken with a digital camera using no film and requiring no developing. All images are, in turn, electronically transferred to a computer and printed on an accompanying printer.

You can also ask, "What type of camera was used?" This is not a

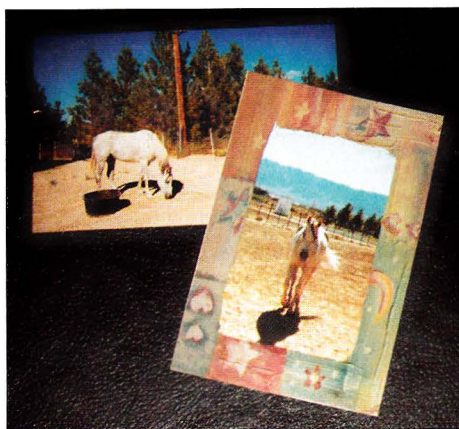


Photo 3: Traditional vs. Thermal Transfer—Both photos were shot from the same roll of film in a traditional camera. The top left photo is printed on Kodak Royal Paper; the image on right was scanned into a thermal transfer dye sublimation kiosk and manipulated to trim and add the decorative border. The back of this image says Kodak Image Maker Paper.

question of manufacturer such as Canon, Kodak, or Minolta, but rather an inquiry to determine traditional versus digital print. Sometimes the above question will negate the need for this question, but the point is to get the basic information. If it was shot with a digital camera, ensuing questions will be better targeted.

How long ago was this image printed?

Since the dry down time of a digital image can take up to a week, image colors can change during that time making mat matching (et.al.) an issue. Moreover, the heat sensitivity of a newly printed image is greater than that of one even just 24 hours dry. It is safest to mount and frame after one week.

Did you modify this traditional

35mm photo in Adobe PhotoShop before printing? Even if a photo was shot using a traditional film camera, the print may have been scanned into a computer, manipulated in Adobe PhotoShop, and printed on a desktop printer. The resulting photo is now a digital photo and may be of either piezoelectric technology which

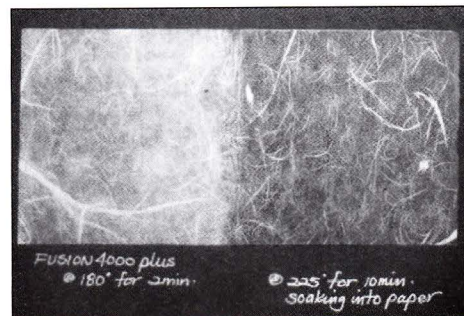


Photo 4: Adhesive Saturation—The rice paper has been mounted with a thermoplastic removable adhesive, which would use heat as a solvent to break the bond. The higher degree of adhesive saturation on the right would make this rice paper difficult to remove from the backing without damage. Plus the translucency would only increase with subsequent mountings.

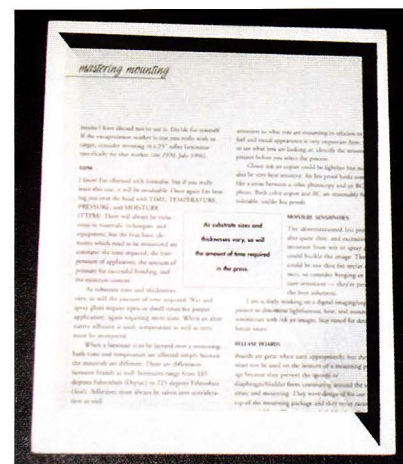


Photo 5: Ghosting—The magazine page is mounted half on white mount board and half on black. There is black text with red image on the back which both bleed through when reflected against the white backing board.

may tolerate heat, or thermal inkjet which may not.

Was this image modified at a local one-hour photo lab kiosk?

A traditional film print may be scanned into a machine to crop, enlarge, manipulate, take red eye out, and then printed. This is different technology from home scanned images of piezo or thermal bubble-jet in that the resulting photo image is a digital using a thermal transfer method. This technology may or may not be heat sensitive. Thermal transfer technology encompasses dye sublimation, dye transfer, and dye diffusion processes.

I have tested images that have been both sensitive (see Photo 1) and not sensitive (see Photo 2) to heat. There is additional information in "The Mounting and Laminating Handbook" (second edition, pages 63-65) that I have authored.

Do you know the type of printer this was printed on? Knowing the actual brand of the printer, or location so you can call, will help determine the technology and its sensitivities. An Epson will be a piezo inkjet, a Hewlett Packard will be bubblejet inkjet. As mentioned above, one type of print tolerates more heat than the other does (see Photo 3).

A Kodak kiosk will probably be a dye sublimation thermal transfer image. By the way, this one will look so much like a traditional photo you may not be able to tell otherwise. Check the writing on the back of the paper.

Did you print this digital photo yourself? If the image was printed by the customer, then a second copy should be readily available from them. Even though the cost of

printing your own photos on the best digital photo paper can be pricey, that expense should be one the customer needs to understand is part of digital framing. By obtaining a second image to test, you can ensure the best possible mounting to make that image look its best and treat it properly.

This is when you can ask, "May we have a duplicate to test prior to framing?" The request for a duplicate should be stressed not because of a potential disaster, but rather to test to prevent that disaster. This new technology is creating learning situations for everyone. Note the following case history.

Recent Case History

A framer in California was recently concerned about the mounting of a large digital photo for a long-term, fine art photographic customer of his. This photographer revered him as the framing expert, and vowed to take all his artwork to him. The framer realized his traditional photo mounting techniques may not be suitable for this image, so he called me for moral support and advice.

As we attempted to track down the technology, printer (et.al.), the photographer said that after years of traditional shooting and film developing, learning how to handle this animal called "a digital photo" was a struggle for him too. He understood the framer's apprehension and need to know all the details prior to attempting to heat mount this item. It only confirmed the framer's professionalism and expertise.

I advised the framer to obtain the printing information from the photographer and call the printing lab directly to attain any available info, and to request a small tester photo from the photographer. To make a long story short, the piece was dry mounted using a tissue adhesive at the lowest temperature available while being covered with Tullis Russell Hot Press Overlay Foil to protect the high gloss surface from the release paper silicone. After four minutes of the framer holding his breath, the mounting turned out perfectly.

Other Digital Mistakes

Digital technology began with light sensitive, water-based dyes as ink. That makes them water sensitive, and although many publishers are coating their images with a sealer, the inks are still sensitive. As technology improves, inks are becoming more pigmented, lightfast, and water resistant; still they remain dominantly water-based. Wet glues and sprays may saturate, run, or fuzz ink edges; dry mounting may heat-damage the surface gloss. Safe alternatives are pressure-sensitive adhesives and hinging.

More Familiar Mistakes

I am not saying digitals are the bane

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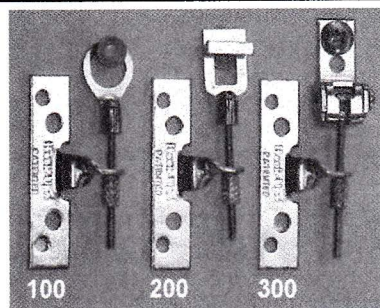
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of our existence, but rather the most recent segment of images that (although maybe open editions applicable to wet, spray, pressure-sensitive, or dry mounting) are unlikely to fit into traditional molds. They need to be understood as I mentioned in the January 2003 installment of "Mastering Mounting."

Outside the realm of digitals, there are mounting mistakes involving other materials that we framers have been making for years. Newspapers being mounted wrong side up,

warped mountboards, adhesive saturation, and ghosting, to name a few. Many of these mistakes can be avoided with some forethought. Mounting is very much a study in common sense. The point is to think first, then act. It is far easier to change the plan of attack than to try to remove, regroup, and remount. Following are a few common mistakes with possible remedies.

Wrong Side Down. There is little excuse for mounting a clipping

wrong side down other than not paying attention. Ninety-nine percent of the time the mistake is operator error. The quickest solution to this dilemma is to obtain a new clipping and start again. If it is an irreplaceable clipping, it should be placed between Mylar or sleeved in a recto/verso mat in the first place.

Counter mounting. Warped mounting boards are the result of surface tension. The only way to compensate for fiber expansion on the surface of the mountboard is to apply the same degree of tension or expansion to the back of the mountboard. Counter mounting is the technique of applying a mounted paper or photo to the verso side of the substrate to counter the tension created by the front mounting. This simple solution should be considered when pricing the original project rather than as a corrective afterthought.

Adhesive Saturation. All adhesives saturate porous mountings. When applying wet glues, controlling the amount of adhesive during application, as well as the pressure or weight applied during drying, will heavily impact the saturation. If a wet glue is applied too thickly and/or wet, it can saturate a porous or very thin mounting. This most often occurs when mounting thin rice papers or sheer fabrics and very absorbent fabrics such as cottons, linens, or wools.

Spray adhesives, like wet glues, can soak through when overly applied. In a mounting press the heat source is the platen or glass top. As the mounting package is heated to required bonding activation, the adhesive is drawn toward that heat source up into a porous paper



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mounting. The longer a porous project remains in the press the more it will saturate the paper.

It's difficult to correct an over-saturated material. The adhesive has soaked into the project making it somewhat translucent. Often the removal technique with water soluble glue and thin rice paper will do additional damage to the art. Sprays might be removable with heat application as will thermoplastic dry

mount tissues, but even with safe removal the saturation damage may not be correctable (see Photo 4).

Ghosting and Bleeding. Unlike the above adhesive saturation, ghosting or bleeding can often be repaired. Ghosting is the undesirable bleed through of text or pictures from the verso side of a mounting. The most commonly framed source of ghosting comes from newspaper clippings

or magazine articles (see Photo 5).

The paper used for printing those items is inexpensive, porous, and thin enough to readily see the printing from the back side through to the front. The solution is to remove and remount with a clear adhesive onto the same color surface as the dominant color on the back of the clipping, usually black.

Removal Techniques

Before illustrating actual removal techniques in this column, it was important to first explain that most mounting problems can be avoided if thought through prior to attempting the mounting technique. Disasters are most likely just that, a ruined project that needs to begin from a replacement image.

A correctable mistake is often the result of carelessness. In discussing the potential problems we face with digital imagery, I'm not suggesting that it is undesirable. I'm suggesting that these images are where we will no doubt take the most risks and make the most mistakes. And it usually will be by assuming a print is something it is not. Identifying while at the design counter is half the battle and the very best way to deter mounting disasters. Next month we will look at actual removal techniques. ■

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