

Mastering Mounting



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Coatings, Mounting, and Unglazed Art

The world of digital art is flourishing, Internet shopping continues to grow, and the art and framing world as framers have known it is becoming a thing of the past. I recently received an e-mail ad announcing the addition of a YouFrame application to the iPhone. Just snap, crop, print on your computer, then gallery wrap, and hang. New technologies continue to replace familiar methods, just as the typewriter replaced

hand lettering and acrylic paints challenged traditional oils. Calligraphy and oil painting are both still around but are different now.

The Internet has greatly impacted the way people shop for art, what they purchase, and how they

purchase it. Not only do they now know more about their favorite artist, but they are also able to track down out-of-print images and purchase prints at the lowest price from around the globe. The days of shopping local—or in a real store at all—are changing fast.

Today's buyers want things new, different, and to their specifications. The Internet and wide format technology allows for printed art upon demand in custom sizes on the substrate of choice and at a price the consumer is willing to pay. More and more home and office interiors are displaying decorative digital artworks printed on acrylic,

metal, and fabric over traditional paper-based art. The trend is shifting away from framed and glazed art to non-glazed replicas on diversified media that are sometimes framed, sometimes not. Gallery wraps are a prime example.

Sealers and Coatings

Framers know never to apply sealers, fixatives, or coatings to art. The only person who should seal or coat art is the artist or publisher. Framers need to keep up with the times and to be knowledgeable about materials that artists are using so they can best enhance and protect new artworks and media, however. The trend toward non-glazing is evidenced by the plethora of spray finishes and coatings available to artists and print professionals to sidestep the use of glass in the final presentation. One company alone, Krylon (a Sherwin Williams Company), offers synthetic Kamar Varnish for water and oil paintings, Matte Finish to eliminate gloss, Acrylic Coating (gloss and matte), UV-Resistant Clear to protect from fading, Make It Last! clear sealer for outdoor use, and more. All are very different in their chemical components (MSDS) and all alter the original medium. The long-time argument over whether or not to glaze a digital canvas is only the tip of the iceberg.

Breathing Color has a post-print coating specifically for inkjet canvases called Glamour II Veneer. This non-yellowing, water-based canvas varnish enhances the color of pigmented and ultrachrome inks on matte media and increases resistance to image fading. The company also claims it conveniently doubles as a wet glue for mounting, perhaps

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like PVA or acrylic medium. Bulldog Products offers BullDogUltra as a solvent-based, semi-gloss vinyl top coating specifically for use on digital canvases with a swellable receptor layer and dye pigments.

Walk down any aisle in a well stocked art supply store and there will be numerous coatings claiming to be acid-free and archival, designed and sold as protective barriers against smearing, fingerprints, scuffing, moisture, and/or UV rays. Blair Digi-Finish Clear Protective Coating, Krylon Preserve It!, Hahnemuhle Protective Spray, and Lumijet Image Shield are all sprays marketed to artists to help extend the life of their digital art and eliminate the need for glazing. It may be



Photo 1: Thicker coating gels are best for texturing surfaces; medium ones are for smoother surface protection and adhesive use. Digital sprays help protect the surfaces from scratching, moisture, and UV rays.

a good thing to add a coating to help protect the delicate surface of digitals, but eliminating glazing is a trend of decorating fashion that is not good practice.

Texturing is yet another type of finish achieved by brush stroking water-based media and gels onto an image surface. Golden, Grumbacher, and Fredrix are among the manufacturers that produce products that can be used as both adhesive and texture gel (Photo 1).

Glazing—A Thing of the Past?

Over the years there have been galleries interested in showing my original art but want me to contact them when I start producing art that does not require matting or glass. Consumers want contemporary looks, which may or may not include glazing. Acrylic sandwiches, hardboard cradles, and gallery wraps remain very popular. Many manufacturers have risen to the call and developed commercial painting surfaces designed with strength, durability, and versatility. The basic Ampersand Hardbord is marketed



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as 1/8" flat panels for standard framing, 3/4" cradled panels for canvas style framing, and 2" deep cradles for support and frame all in one. There's not only no glass but in some cases no frame, either.

Ampersand's Archiva-Seal™ technology for sealing high density, moisture-resistant, formaldehyde-free hardboards claim to be archival, acid-free, and non-yellowing. They have an acid-free clay coating and are ready-to-use with no additional preparation required (Photo 2). Ampersand Claybord is designed for mixed media-water-based paints, ink, collage, pencil, and digital. There's also Gessobord for oils and acrylics, Aguabord for watercolor and gouache, Pastelbord for soft and oils



Photo 2: Ampersand Hardbord, Gessobord, Aquabord, and Claybord (l to r), all marketed as ready-to-use painting boards, do not require mounting, glazing, or framing.

sticks, and Scratchbord with a coating of India ink. All are marketed as "seal your work with spray fixative...and frame it without glass" (Photo 3).

These new painting panels are said to be endorsed by conservators and have a tested life of 200 years,

and artists are painting on them. As a result artists may also be requesting frames with no glass as stated in the advertising. It might be a good idea to show Museum Glass as a glazing alternative. Since "the customer is always right," give the clients the option of framing it their way—with no glass—and offer to reframe with glazing later if they change their minds. Stress that glazing installation at a later date will only cost for unfitting and refitting along with the glass of choice.

Last year I attended a gallery opening where an artist had a beautiful set of small 6"x6" pastels applied to Pastelbord with sealer and mounted unglazed in a float frame. Yes, unglazed, unmatted pastel. The

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soft, brilliant colors of the flowers were breathtaking but they were exposed to the open air. As a framer, it terrified me. This year I saw a few of the remaining pieces from that show that had been reframed with glass above a linen liner. Though no glazing seemed like a cutting edge presentation of the pastel, it turned out not to be the best solution.

Mount It Yourself

As if the lack of glazing and a frame weren't enough, a company called Art Boards has recently launched a line of mount boards conveniently called Archival Mounting Panels. These 1/4" thick Natural Maple and 3/8" thick Natural Fiber panels are coated with BEVA heat-activated adhesive allowing artists

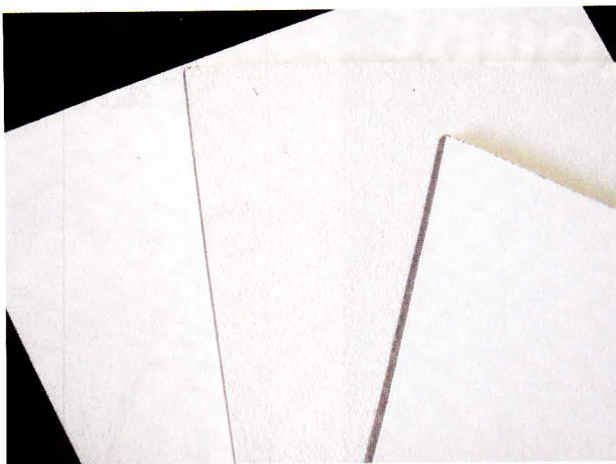


Photo 3: Among new alternatives to single-sheet art paper and mounting boards are (L to R) Gessobord, Aquabond, and Claybord. These 1/4" panels would require sink mounting if traditionally framed.

and photographers to mount paper and canvas to a rigid surface. These boards are marketed as "fully archival and foolproof." Heat them in a "conventional oven, toaster oven, or use household iron to activate...the adhesive. Quickly place the artwork, paper or canvas on

top...Apply pressure using a brayer or soft rag, and the bond is made." At least they're following proper TTPM techniques—sort of.

A sidebar refers to BEVA as a widely used adhesive by conservators and museums because of its removability without the use of solvents or damage to the paper surface. What isn't mentioned is that there will be adhesive saturation that remains forever. Gustav A. Berger, the inventor of

BEVA 371 adhesive, states that it has a melting temperature of 150°F to 185°F, is absorbed by the materials to which it is applied, and that it was formulated especially for the impregnation of paintings for relining and support. The application might result in staining the art as



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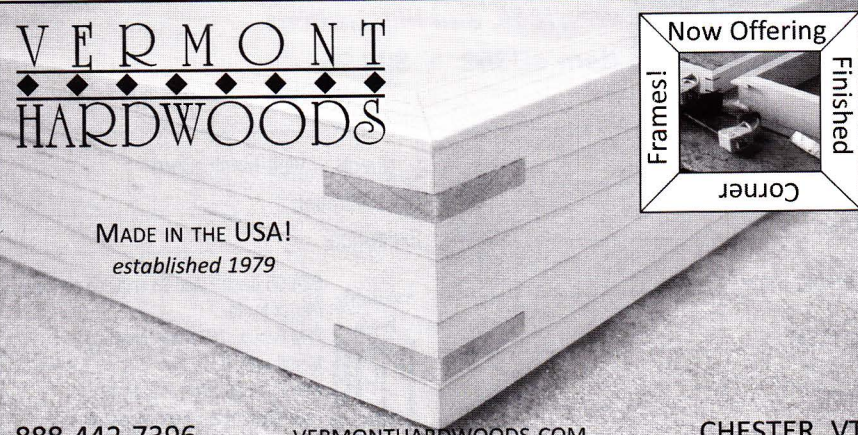
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with other wax hot-melt adhesives. BEVA readily bonds paper, cotton canvas, textile, film, and wood.

Some artists will attempt to mount their own art, and there is a potential for unsuccessful mounting, bubbles, or lifting if not fully fused. Framers may be needed after all to try to remove and remount these works if they are not evenly melted or cooled under pressure.

Final Mount

Artists as well as framers are trying to cut corners to make ends meet, but throwing the baby out with the bathwater isn't the best plan. I've heard artists say that they don't worry about selling original art on paper unmatted and pressed up against the glass, since it is no longer their problem. If artists don't see the value in proper care of their originals, how will framers ever get through to collectors?

I first reported artist use of Aquabond and Claybord during a class on Float Frames for Encaustic and Canvas last year. Encaustic art uses wood panels as the substrate of choice,

and this medium does not require glazing. Pastels yes, encaustics no. Framers need to be well aware of all types of materials used by artists today, from traditional to digital as well as the use of contemporary materials.

Digital art has always had a surface delicacy issue that is currently being controlled by sealing, coating, or laminating. But that might not be the best for all media. Art materials are also evolving, and framers need to understand new products; hear the desires of their artist customers; and be prepared to discuss framing options, preservations, and glazing issues with them. ■

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.



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