

# Mastering Mounting



by  
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## *Trends and Fallacies 2007*

**T**rends are the general course or prevailing tendency of how things are done. And new trends are the most current style or hot, innovative way to do things differently from how they were done last month, last year, or perhaps last decade.

But trends are often surrounded by fallacies, and this is especially true for the world of digitals, mounting, preservation, and conservation.

Over the past three decades, mounting practices have

evolved and grown. Beginning with masking tape and corrugated cardboard, framers now strive for preservation materials and techniques that are non-invasive to the artwork. The advent of the digital movement has also hugely impacted the art industry by changing the rules and stretching traditional thinking. So here are a few thoughts on current trends.

### ***Fallacy #1: Preservation framing relates only to materials in direct contact with the art.***

While it is possible to use partial preservation framing techniques, it's not a good practice. Not only must the materials that

touch the art be neutral, sealed, or museum-sound, but every part of the framing package needs to be as well. When marketing preservation framing as museum treatment, all correct procedures must be followed. It is not complete preservation framing to use rag backing, mats, and hinges and then add a brown Kraft paper dust cover or regular clear glazing.

### ***Fallacy #2: Preservation framing should be practiced on all art.***

Not all framed art requires full museum treatment. All framing practices should enhance and protect the art it frames without accelerating or encouraging deterioration of the art or collectible. But there are many replaceable open edition prints that don't require paste hinging or rag materials. The bottom line is that a poster is a poster, and replaceable images do not require full museum framing techniques. A perfect example is the mounted and laminated poster for a dorm. Short-term display does not require long-term framing practices.

### ***Fallacy #3: All art is created equal.***

This is actually a true statement in that anything can be considered art and, with the digital revolution, art images and photographs are being printed on high-end desktop printers at home by both artists and for family enjoyment. These may not be printed on high end 300# Hanhemühle fine art paper, but they are valued by the owner.



Photo 1: This double handprint is poster paint on construction paper. The heavier paper kept the paint from cockling the prints, but it has been stored loose in a box with a lot of other things allowing it to get crushed. It will need to be flattened and could be hinged or sponge mounted.

Scrapbooking has swept the nation, and crafting has always been home art. There is also all the children's art, from handprints to macaroni on construction paper (Photo 1).

Another truth is that it is easier than ever for anyone to acquire photos for their scrapbook or framing via a simple e-mail. In the case of the newspaper clipping in Photo 2, a JPG in full color of Santa with Aunt Daisy was obtained from the freelance newspaper photographer for office printing. It was then test printed on both Epson and HP printers using Kodak dye/pigment photo paper for use in the frame with the original clipping (Photo 3). The HP was selected for color and clarity.

Digital art, giclées, and reproductions are also sweeping the internet, with both limited edition and open edition images stepping aside for the concept of print-on-demand imagery. In today's market, decorating the home is becoming an even more unique and personal experience, allowing art to be selected, sized, purchased, and then printed on the paper or canvas of choice for delivery, all from the convenience of home. Catalog sales are strong, but internet shopping for customized art is the hot new concept. The iPod generation wants everything to be immediate and personalized, with everything from their cars to their art. And with the advent of new shopping and art technology comes the need for framing evolution.

***Fallacy #4: Archival tape is a preservation mounting variation.***

It's true that framers no longer use



*Photo 2: A request was sent to a photographer for a reprint to be framed. A JPG was attached to the email allowing for the digital image to be printed at a couple of sizes and to test for image clarity and color on different printers.*



*Photo 3: The 4"x6" digital reprint was dry mounted while the clipping was polyester encapsulated then placed in a holiday-flavored frame design.*



*Photo 4: The surface of this digital photo printed with all HP materials shows the surface's sensitivity to damage. There is a fingerprint at top center and multiple scratches in the middle.*

masking tape for hinging as they did in the 1970s, but many framers still use "acid-free" pressure-sensitive tapes. "Acid-free" is a term that has been overused in marketing for years, and archival seems to be the new acid-free. The definition of "archival" refers to materials kept in a special area for long-term storage, such as an archive. The actual term is used to

imply long-term permanence and chemical stability, though there is no agreeable standard definition nor scientific method to verify any material's actual archival quality. Hence, any pressure-sensitive or water-activated tape does not equate to true museum hinging methods despite having "archival" in its name.

Archival tape may use museum quality materials and have a neutral pH and inert adhesive. These qualities make it non-harmful and may not accelerate damage or deterioration, but they may not allow the hinge to be reversible. Pressure-sensitive tapes may very well be a neutral pH 7.0 or higher, but the fact that adhesive would always left behind within the image when removed precludes it from being a true archival hinging technique. The problem lies with the use of the word "archival" in the marketing of these tapes.

According to ISO 18902:2001, "The term 'archival' is no longer used in International Standards for defining optimum storage conditions and enclosures, because the meaning has become too ambiguous. In common usage, 'archival' has been used to mean that documents can be preserved 'forever'. The new terms, when applied to the storage standards are 'extended-term' and 'medium-term'. Likewise, enclosure materials should not be referred to as 'archival', but rather as meeting the specifications of this International Standard and ISO 18916, the PAT test." The framing industry would be advised to follow suit.

***Fallacy #5: Heat sensitive digital bleed when heat is applied.***

A 2006 forum discussion clearly

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Photo 5: This wax-based ink chart melted when half of it was placed in a dry mount press. The left sheet is the release paper, which the image was transferred to. The right side shows the damaged image.



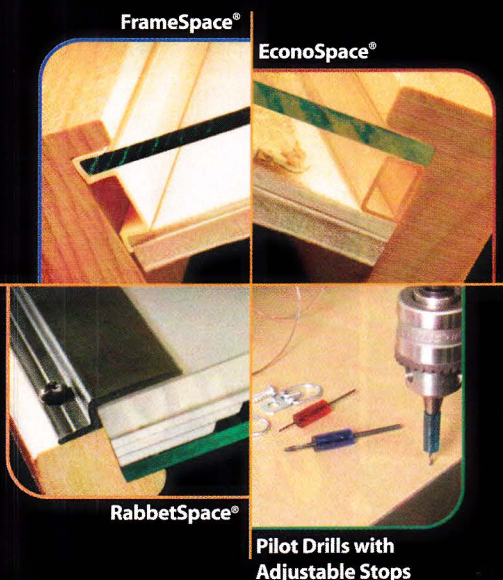
Photo 6: The four boldly colored digital photos are bright and crisp. The uncoated art paper at lower right is paler and has less distinction.

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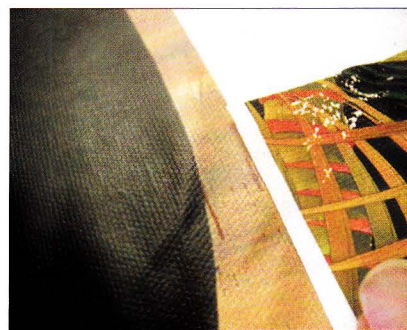


Photo 7: The canvas (left) has been matched so all of the materials are compatible for stretching. The sample at right showed cracking and flaking after it was tested for stretching.

illustrates how a little knowledge can be dangerous. The query was about mounting a digital print, probably a photograph. Framer #1 wished to mount it using archival adhesive. Framer #2 advised the first framer to be very careful of inkjet heat sensitivity—which was a very good warning. But Framer

#2 continued to state that he feared that sensitivity could result in ink bleeding.

The truth is that heat does not cause inks to bleed. Bleeding would involve a diffusion of the outer edges of a line due to water spreading or expanding the line colorant. True heat sensitivity results in the surface of the digital image becoming visibly mottled and showing an uneven finish (Photo 4). A wax-based solid ink (a.k.a. phase change) inkjet would actually melt if placed under heat because it is a wax pigment, but it still would not bleed (Photo 5). Visible surface damage of a piezo pigment or thermal dye inkjet involves neither melting nor bleeding.

**Fallacy #6: Digital photo papers are heat safe, art paper is not.**

Any inkjet print, regardless of photo or fine art, will react the same under heat. A swellable coating on an RC paper for an inkjet photo is heat sensitive, while a porous coating used with pigmented inks is not. Also be aware that there is a dry-down time required for inks to set. Porous coatings are often referred to as instant-dry because they are resistant to smearing when first printed. Swellable coatings smear very easily when printed and dry to the touch in 10 minutes or so, but they require two weeks to fully dry. It's the receptor coating placed on the paper that is heat sensitive.

Then there are the digital photos printed using RA-4 technology, chemicals, and photo paper. These may be printed from traditional film, CD, or photo card onto real

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photo paper and cannot be produced on your home printer. They are only available from a local photo lab and may be treated like any RC photo (Photo 6).

Fine art papers used for digital reproduction may either be coated or uncoated, but the later will produce pale images with more line distortion. In this case, the inks are bleeding because there is no receptor coating. Coated fine art papers not only look better, but also mount and react like the digital photos mentioned above.

### ***Fallacy #7: Stretching digital canvases is the best presentation method.***

In early 2006 I conducted a comparison study of stretching vs. mounting canvases, which was covered in this column in October. This controversial topic of dry mounting open edition digital canvases with either low temperature heat activated or high tack pressure-sensitive adhesives or adhesive boards will no doubt continue, but the results of the study support mounting over stretching.

Since receptor coatings are required to allow inks to be applied to canvases without feathering or spreading, the canvas dynamics have been altered drastically—from a gesso-primed oil painting to a print made with a water-based ink on a coated surface. The canvas has multiple layers of ink, coating, and sealer, all applied to the basic cotton fiber. All layers have the ability to absorb and dry at varying rates, which is what causes a stretched canvas to buckle or sag when exposed to humidity and temperature changes. The most frustrating thing is that restretching and/or using corner keys will not correct or maintain the desired stretch. Though it is true that well-matched canvas, coating, and inks may not ever sag, the gamble remains.

Mounting with a neutral pH preservation-grade adhesive film in a dry mount press or using a high tack pressure-sensitive film with a roller laminator to affix the artwork to a neutral rigid substrate of choice is the best choice for digital canvas. Besides, not all digital

canvases can be stretched.

If the option of stretching does win out over mounting, aside from potential sagging issues, there is the issue of splitting, cracking, and flaking of ink (Photo 7). If the canvas, coating, inks, and printing have all been tested and are compatible, they may stretch without much issue. But remember: the ink is a surface layer on top of a coated canvas. When that canvas is bent 90 degrees, the unpainted canvas beneath will show white. Digitals, the wave of the future, are not without their challenges.

See you in Vegas at the West Coast Art & Frame Show. ■

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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* and can be contacted at [www.designsinkart.com](http://www.designsinkart.com).



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