

MASTERING MOUNTING

Canvassing Paper Prints

by Chris Paschke, CPF



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This is the final segment in my three part series on transferring images to canvas. In October, I covered transferring RC photographs. In November I gave project ideas just in time for the holiday season and back to school photos. This month I'll offer basic techniques for stripping and transferring paper prints to canvas.

Appropriateness Of Subject

In order to emulate the look of an original painting, paper prints are converted to canvas and stretched onto bars. Although both photographs and prints may be stripped from the backing papers and transferred to canvas, not all reproduced images are best presented as canvas look-alikes.

It is important to pay close attention to the texture and media used by the artist in the creation of the original artwork; transferring a washed watercolor to canvas is a bit of a contradiction in terms. Reproductions of oils from the "old masters" are perfect since they were originally painted on canvas and often show the actual canvas texture in the print reproduction. Generally, most reproductions of acrylic paintings also make reasonable transfers, especially if brush or palette knife strokes are visible.

Adhesive Alternatives And Variations

Vinyl laminate film, adhesive and open weave canvas are the basic materials required for this process. Since heat is required to mount any laminating film, then it's likely a heat mounting process would also be used

to mount the peeled print to canvas.

There are alternative methods of adhering a peeled decal to canvas using wet glues and untreated canvas. Though not specifically designed for transferring, they are similar in outcome, although occasionally the resulting canvas texture may be slightly less evident. I prefer working with a commercially prepared canvas, impregnated with pure film adhesive and release paper backing (e.g. Seal CanvasMount). This type of product produces a permanent bond, is clean, easy to use, and is extremely time efficient.

It's best to use only the available finishes (matte or gloss) rather than any of the textures (linen or canvas). The finishes are slightly thinner, allowing for a greater degree of texture to push through from the canvas backing. Additionally, the smooth finish is less likely to fight with the newly created canvas texture.

Basic Paper Procedures

The perforation process used to laminate photos requires varying the time and temperature when using a vacuum press, but not for a mechanical press. Pre-perforated films may be used, but no perforation is required when laminating a print, since the paper will be able to breath during the mounting process. Therefore, the temperature settings of 185 degrees F to 225 degrees F will remain constant, varying only by manufacturers specifications.

Cut the film large enough beyond the dimensions of the print to allow for the covering of the entire canvas and later stretching (photo 1). This

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will seal the entire decal/canvas unit and will cover any exposed adhesive, protecting overlay foam from damage. Then laminate the chosen print in the mounting sandwich of release paper, print, laminate film, overlay foam, and release paper using no substrate. Mount for approximately three to five minutes.

Soaking The Print

The primary difference between the transfer process of photos and paper is the need to soak the print in water after laminating and prior to peeling! Soak the laminated print in water for about 15 minutes to adequately saturate the paper. By soaking it rightside or laminated side up, the paper will remain in contact with the water for more even saturation.

Remove the print, shake off the excess water (photo 2), and place it on a smooth, hard surface. Glass or Formica works well, but I prefer to use the top of my vacuum press, especially on oversized pieces. The warmth of the press top helps accelerate drying the peeled print in preparation for mounting. The damp print will hold itself in place, allowing for wrinkles to be smoothed out before peeling.

Stripping or peeling may be done with the print either face up or face down (photo 3). Though the result is the same, it takes more time and creates more of a mess when rubbing off from the back (photo 4). This process works best to remove any additional unwanted paper remaining on either prints or photo backs after the initial peeling. Working face up is quicker, cleaner, and more efficient. The additional laminate extending beyond the print acts as a stabilizer, preventing the print from rolling up when wet.

Peeling And Transferring

Begin at the corner by turning the laminate 180 degrees back onto itself (photo 5). The print will naturally

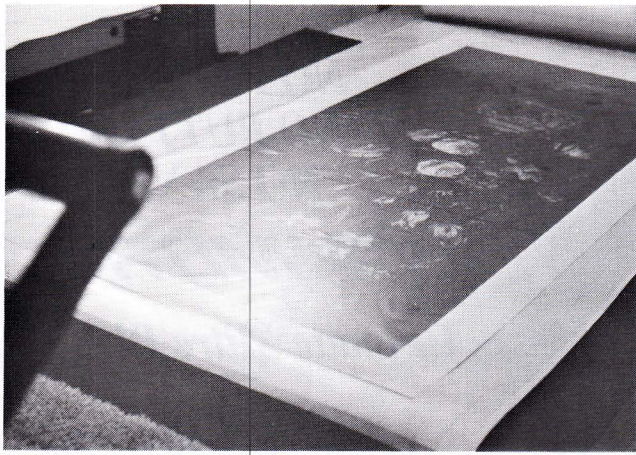


Photo 1: Allow for extra laminating film to extend beyond the print for covering all of the self-adhesive canvas in the transfer step, and ultimately for stretching.

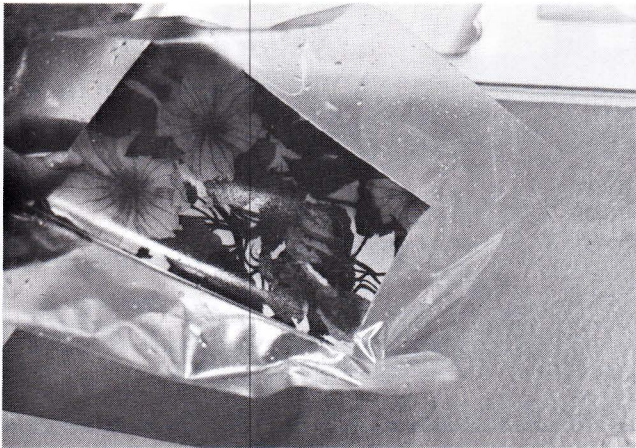


Photo 2: Soak the print about 15 minutes, shake off the excess water, and place on a smooth, hard surface such as glass or the top of your vacuum press.

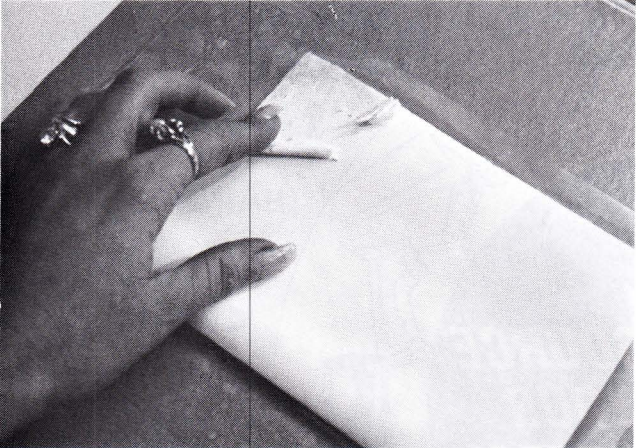


Photo 3: Peeling may be done either face down, as seen here, or face up. Either works, but this method is more time intensive for initial paper removal. This method is best reserved for removing any additional paper residue.

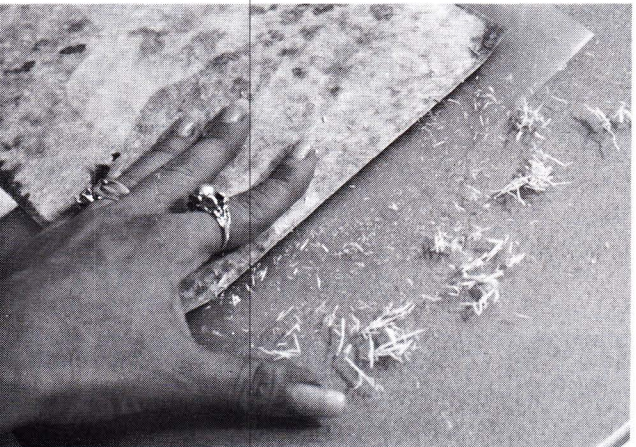


Photo 4: Removing all backing paper face down is very messy, and not nearly as predictable for ensuring even paper removal.

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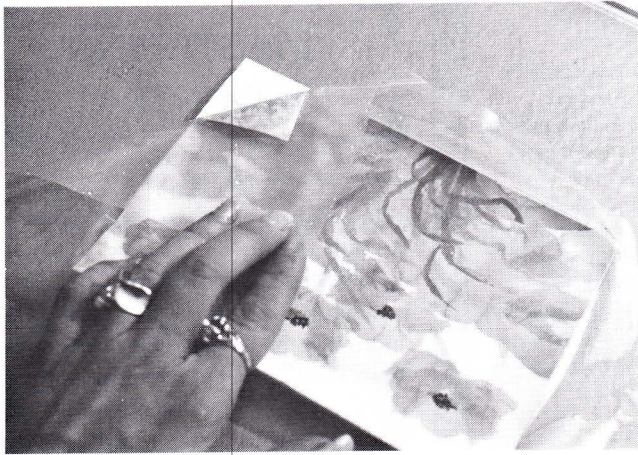


Photo 5: Once the wet print is smoothed out onto the stripping surface, begin peeling at the opposite corner and pull gently across the top.

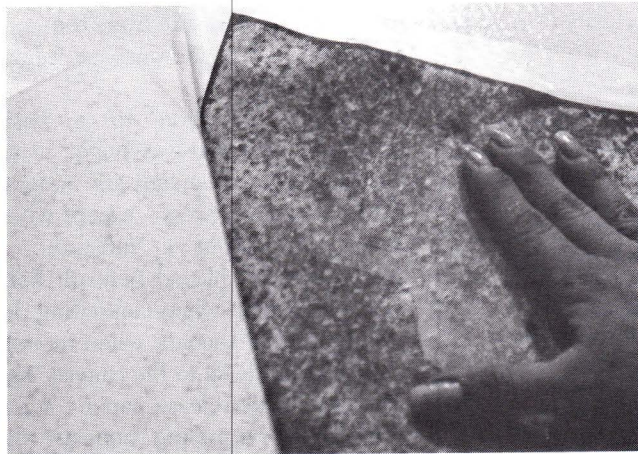


Photo 6: Gently drift the fingers of your hand in a smooth motion across the turned print decal. The saturated backing paper easily allows the tougher laminated surface decal to peel back at 180 degrees. No additional paper needs to be removed.

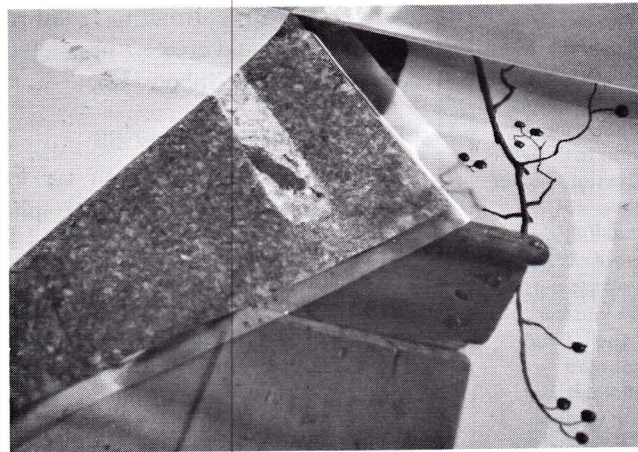


Photo 7: Any portion of unsoaked paper will resist peeling. Notice the unsaturated 1" wide strip around the upper right print corner, this then split during peeling. This print was soaked laminated face down in the water bath to promote this problem.

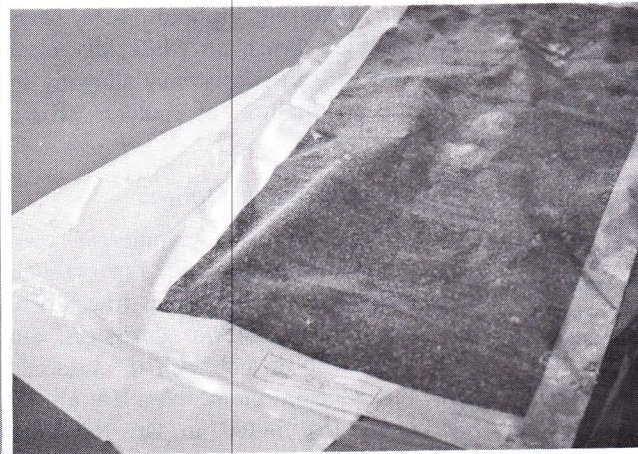


Photo 8: This large 20" x 40" floral print begins to air dry almost immediately after stripping. This view is looking through the back of the inked/laminated surface. Notice how well the saturated backing paper holds flat due to excess moisture to the smooth surface.

separate at the first layer of laminated paper and very easily separate by a gentle pulling of the laminated surface layer with your hand across the damp paper backing (photo 6).

Any portion of the paper that has not been evenly saturated will be likely to resist peeling and can be easily damaged (photo 7). The stripped print will begin to dry almost immediately (photo 8), while a properly soaked print will leave a lot of water on the table or glass after stripping and the backing paper will be heavily saturated (photo 9).

Cut the canvas slightly smaller ($\frac{1}{4}$ " all around is fine) than the outside of the laminating film to prevent its adhesive from sticking to the overlay foam during the final mounting. Fold down the top edge of the release backing of the pre-adhesived canvas about $\frac{1}{5}$ th the length of the print. Align the peeled film decal over the canvas, hold in place and remove the remaining release paper with your right hand, trailing after with your fingers on your left hand to smooth the decal as you go (photo 10).

Place the prepared canvas/laminate/decal into the press one last time, remembering the overlay foam and release papers to protect the press. Mount about five minutes at recommended temperatures, depending on the overall print size.

Exceptions To The Rule

In basic TTPM (time, temperature, pressure, moisture) guidelines (a series will be featured in early 1995), all moisture must be eliminated from mounting materials prior to mounting to ensure good bounding. Well, here is an exception to that rule.

The mounting of a peeled laminated print decal achieves its best result when mounted damp (photo 11), and it works equally well in either a mechanical or hot vacuum press. It appears that the laminate and paper combination conforms more readily into the texture of the

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niques used are very different from the laminated procedures I have been presenting. There are times when the subcontracted commercial transfers may remain the best option—for when attempting these procedures yourself there are some limitations.

Crackling And Aging

Those of you who have frequented craft shops are probably familiar with the process of crackling and aging coated prints used in conjunction with more traditional decoupage techniques. The option of having the canvas transfer crackled and aged is also often available through these commercial companies.

I tried a number of assorted crackling and aging products to create the effect by layering them over the appropriate bases, but to date have been unable to locate the right combination of compatible products to achieve the desired effect. My theory is that the vinyl film is too pliable to allow the shrinkage to crack the acrylic medium base. But I'll keep trying.

In Conclusion

Obviously, stretching canvas onto bars is the way these projects were meant to be done. The beauty of an original painted canvas may readily be reproduced and often enhanced when prints are transferred, textured, and stretched. Each additional design alternative offered to your customers allows for greater specialization and service, not to mention more fun and ultimately greater profits. Higher priced gold leafed moulding are definitely an option when designing with a stretched canvas rather than a print.

Now don't forget to canvass the issue of canvas transferring with your customers! It might just be that creative edge you've been looking for to ring in the new year. Happy New Year and the best for you in '95! 🍀



Photo 13: The hump created during the initial laminating stage of mounting is the result of no solid substrate or release board support when using a heat vacuum press. Wrinkles in the rubber bladder or felt can imprint into the art. This will disappear during the second canvas transfer mounting as long as a board is used beneath it.



Photo 14: Clear acrylic mediums and varnishes work well as a thin washed texture. Always use a gloss medium with gloss film and matte with matte film.



Photo 15: Heavier mediums still apply white but will dry clear. Tube gels apply clear and go on very thick for the greatest degree of texture. This is a gloss Mod Podge used on a gloss laminate.