

Float Mounting With Pressure Sensitives

By Chris A Paschke, CPF



Mounting photographs is a topic that will never be put to rest: whether they're Ilfochrome Classic, resin-coated (RC), or fiber based (silver gelatin), they have our attention as concerned framers. Our fears perhaps stem from the fact that we know so little about them. (Taking a snapshot at the family picnic is a far cry from developing negatives.) Still, for anyone who has taken Photography 101, the concept of float mounting a photo onto the center of a neutral black, grey or white mount board for presentation should be old hat.

TOPIC REVIEW

This month the topic is float mounting using pressure sensitive adhesives (photo 1).

In August ("Pre-Mounting for Float Mounting") I reviewed pre-mounting with heat tissues in preparation for float mounting. Two separate dry mounting procedures were required for a quality end result. When using pressure-sensitive adhesive films, the concepts are similar but the reasons and applications are different. So why address float mounting again, or pressure-sensitives, for that matter?

The translucency of clear pressure-

sensitive adhesives, which allows for the control of ghosting is only part of their potential. The use of pressure-sensitives goes way beyond the fact that films are clear. If that was the only criteria then sprays, wet glues and heat films would also be options. Sometimes the issue is the possibility of heat sensitivity or the smoothness of the mounted end result.

ORANGE PEEL

The rough, ripply, uneven texture of an actual orange peel (photo 2) gives its name to the distorted surface of any mounted photo because of the similarity in appearance. It is generally created by the relaxation of the photo's emulsion onto its new substrate.

The interesting thing about photographs is the extreme of their heat tolerances. An Ilfochrome Classic will not "melt" until somewhere around 325°F, but its polyester will relax and conform to the contour of any substrate at 160°F, resulting in some degree of orange peel. Fiber based photos have less tendency for orange peel — most likely the result of their heavy, thicker backing paper.

The major offender of orange peel is the RC photo. It's the one we handle, dry mount and complain about the most. Mounting alternatives will help control the unwanted texture but may sacrifice mounting longevity, depend-

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ing upon your process and available equipment. The white reflection area of photo 2 illustrates the greater control of orange peel when cold adhesives are used for float mounting photos.

PRESSURE-SENSITIVES TO THE RESCUE

If matting and framing a photo, any pressure-sensitive board or foam would suffice as a substrate. But if the photo is slated for competition or laminating, then pressure sensitive films are in order, not for their clarity but for their self-shaping and orange peel control.

Whether pure pressure sensitive film or film with a carrier is used (see "Ghosting" PFM September 1996) the procedure will vary slightly but the benefits are the same. Since some of the available films are too new to tell what might happen in 20 years, longevity is still based on application. In any case, the best pressure sensitive mounting will be achieved in conjunction with a cold vacuum frame.

PURE PRESSURE SENSITIVE FILM

The first of the two films I'll discuss here is pure pressure sensitive film adhesive sold on rolls with one release liner (ie: 3M Position Mounting Adhesive). Place the photo onto the sized, exposed adhesive sheet, cover with the release page (photo 3) and burnish with brayer, squeegee (photo 4) or run through pressure rollers to transfer adhesive to the photo back.

Notice the self-shaping nature of the adhesive as the photo is peeled from the roll liner (photo 5). It separates at the division point, but be careful not to allow adhesive to split while lifting from the main sheet. This could leave non adhesived areas which might later bubble due to humidity and moisture.

The close up detail in photo 6 illustrates the normal edges of the pure p-s film after positioning. This is easily removed by lightly rubbing the exposed edge with a gloved finger.



Photo 1: Pressure-sensitive adhesives are available as mounted boards and films. Shown are 3M's PMA (left) and Crescent Perfect Mount Film (right), both great for float mounting photographs.



Photo 2: Orange peel is the ripply uneven surface of a mounted photo, avoided here when pressure-sensitive films are used for float mounting.

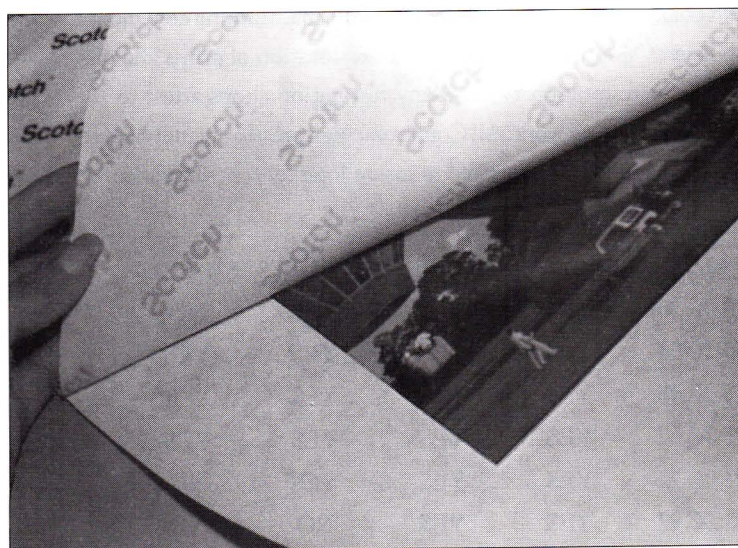


Photo 3: Trap the photo between the sized adhesive sheet and release sheet to apply film.

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PRESSURE SENSITIVE FILM WITH CARRIER

The second film sampled is a tough sheet of adhesive film between two release liners (ie: Crescent Perfect Mount Film). This is sold in pre-cut sheets and full 32"x40" mat sizes. The adhesive is extremely smooth, sheer and tolerates a great deal of handling without disintegration because of the thin carrier. It is sandwiched like an Oreo cookie, with a sheer mylar layer in the center with pressure sensitive adhesive applied to either side (photo 7).

Peel back the top liner to expose the adhesive film (photo 8), position the photo on the adhesive, lay the top liner down to protect the photo during adhesive application (photo 9) and burnish with brayer or squeegee to apply. Since the film with carrier is incapable of self-shaping, it must be carefully trimmed to size or desired shape prior to float mounting (photo 10).

THE ACTUAL FLOAT

Once the photo has been prepared with adhesive, position it onto the selected, sized mounting board. The sample is an 11"x14" Crescent Photographic Competition Board #6888. Mark the corners lightly with pencil to establish center and align into position (photo 11). Cover with the removed adhesive release liner (photo 12), and burnish to set prior to weighting (photo 13).

The process is quick, clean and easy. The amount of pressure applied to the mounting will determine the degree of potential orange peel. Earlier I stated it could be avoided by using pressure sensitive adhesives, but too much aggressive pressure may indeed still create a slight appearance of orange peel. Moderation is the key.

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Pay attention to the elements of mounting. Even pressure-sensitives require a bonding time under a weight. The temperature effects the overall bonding time also: items will often bond in a shorter time at higher, drier temperatures and require a longer time when it is colder.



Photo 4: Squeegee the top of the unit to apply adhesive to the photo back in preparation for float mounting.

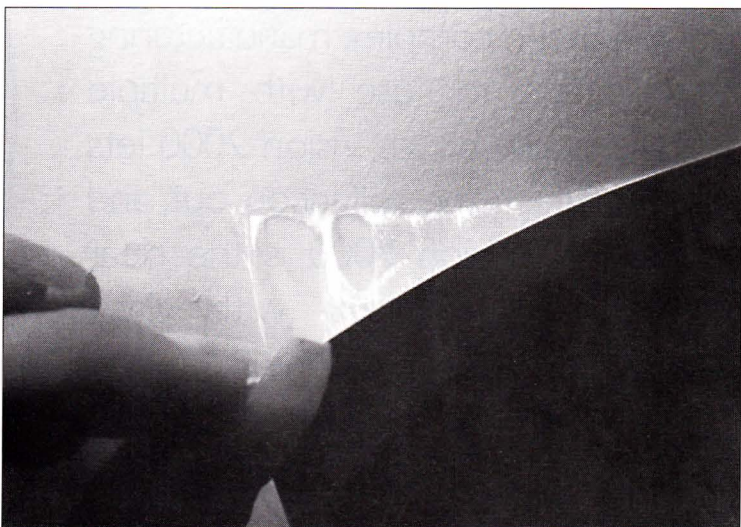


Photo 5: Notice the self-shaping nature of the adhesive as the photo is peeled from the roll liner.

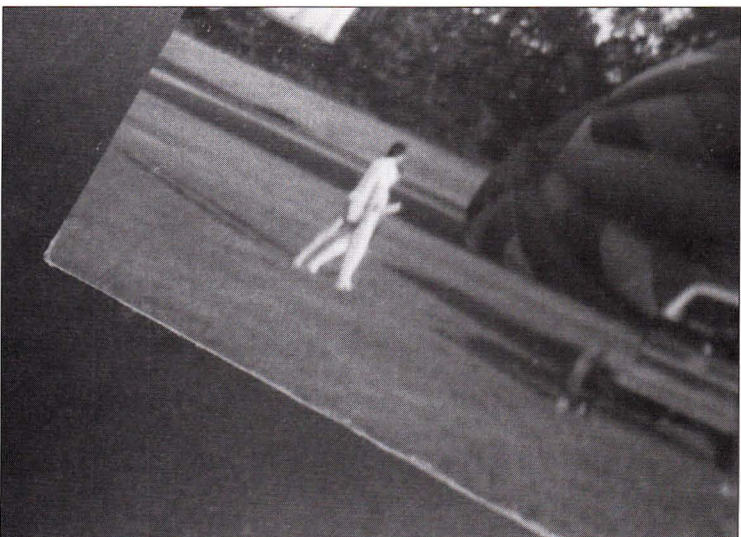


Photo 6: The extra lip of adhesive at the edges is easily removed by lightly rubbing with a gloved finger.

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Temperature extremes should be controlled so all mounting items are acclimated before, during and after mounting: at least 24 hours. Framing shouldn't be completed until 24 hours after pressure sensitive mounting and weighting.

The biggest problems associated with pressure sensitive adhesives, as with any mounting, is humidity. Too radical a change in environment may cause bubbles. Paper expands when damp and contracts when dry. Thus pressure and moisture work hand in hand as does time and temperature during pressure sensitive mounting.

BACKING BOARDS FOR PHOTO FLOATING

Obviously, any board you select will be in line with the conservation requirements and longevity required for the particular project. Keep in mind however, that there are boards developed specifically for use with photographs. Regardless of their costs, the best presentation should determine your selection decision.

Samples of boards designed for specific photo use include Crescent's Photographic Competition Mounting Boards, which have buffered acid-free surfaces and meet all PPA competition requirements concerning size and thickness, and are available in white and black. Still, they are often not the best choice for conservation framing.

Archival Photomount Boards are non-buffered, 100% rag boards that meet Library of Congress Purchase Specifications for art requiring low alkaline environments. They are more rigid than their 4 ply Museum Board counterparts because of being two 2 plys fused together, thus better able to protect a photo.

Check with other companies for boards specifically designed for use with photographs -- and always offer the best to your customer.

MORE COMPARISONS

Pressure-sensitive adhesives vary with their basic composition. Final visual product will be affected

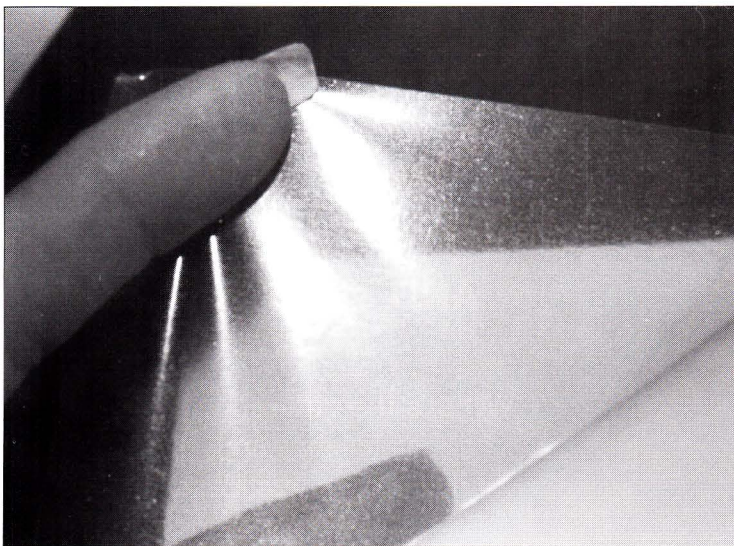


Photo 7: Notice the durability of the pressure sensitive film with a carrier, able to support the layers of adhesive.

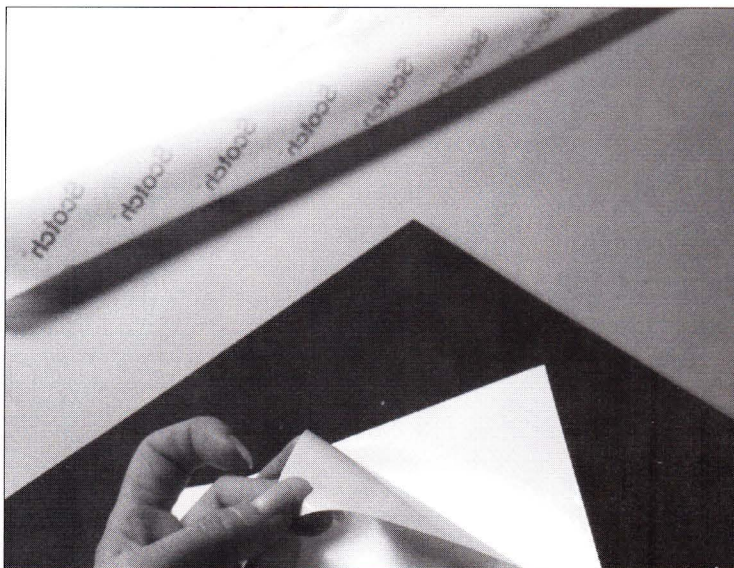


Photo 8: Peel back the top liner to expose the film sheet



Photo 9: Trap the photo between top liner and adhesive for film application, then burnish to affix film.

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by smoothness of the original adhesive itself, application technique, thickness of mounting and selected substrate.

The one-step ease of a self-shaping pressure sensitive film (PMA) might allow for voids where the adhesive may not have remained intact, and lumps might result from poor application technique. The durability of handling when a film with carrier (Perfect Mount) is used means that it generally applies very smoothly and stays intact, but must be hand trimmed afterwards..

Which is better? It's always up to the user. Try to remember, we'd like to blame the manufacturer when it's often our technique, lack of familiarity or carelessness that creates a problem. If you own a heat press it's unlikely that pressure-sensitives will be in your future for photos, but for dyed in the wool spray and wet glue users it is a viable option and strong alternative to consider. Of course, there is always the orange peel issue, Ilfochrome classics and those iffy color copies.

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, owns Designs Ink, Oxford, Connecticut, featuring commercial and custom framing, product consultation, design and education. Specializing in mounting, matting and design creativity she works with numerous industry leaders including Bienfang, Crescent Cardboard, Fletcher-Terry, Larson-Juhl, PFM, PPFA, and Seal Products.

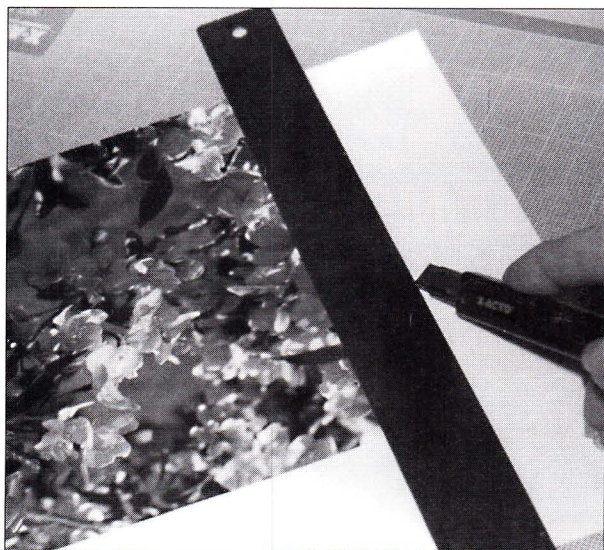


Photo 10: Trim the excess adhesive film/liner to size in preparation for floating.

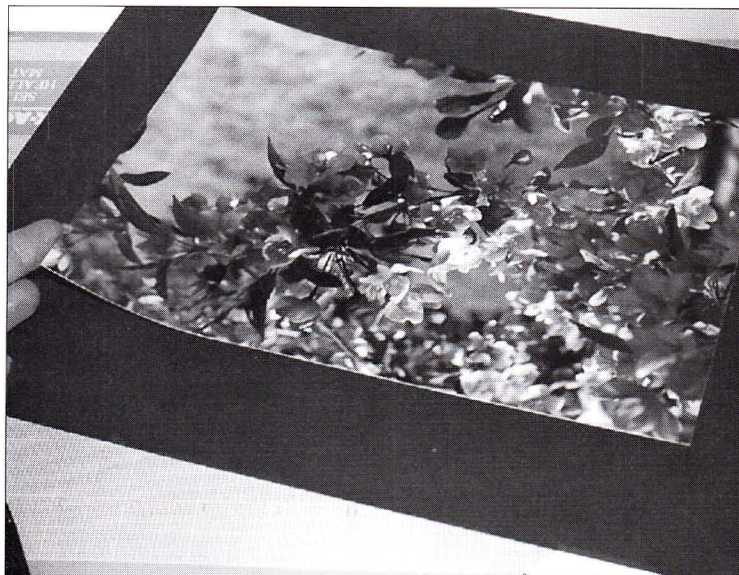


Photo 11: Align the photo onto the selected photo mount board; this sample is a Crescent All Black Mounting Board #6088.

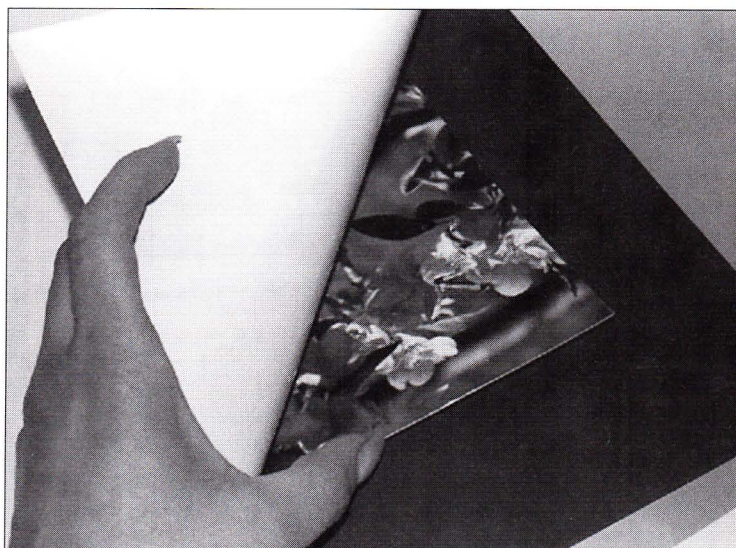


Photo 12: Cover the centered "floated" photograph with the release liner sheet. Repositioning is still possible until burnished into place.



Photo 13: Burnish with squeegee or brayer, being careful not to slip liner over photo surface or it may scratch.