

Mastering Mounting



by
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Think Outside the Shadowbox

In spite of the high price of gasoline keeping people out of their autos, the ease of international travel has not kept them from flying abroad. This has brought about the growth of framing opportunities for the custom framer. Tourist collectibles,

vidual sets: four 4"x4" small children, three 7"x7" medium children, two 4"x9" fish, and three 4"x9" florals (all sizes have been rounded off for simplicity).

During the analysis stage of design, a project like this must be assessed for problems, issues, and difficulties. All paintings were flange-hinged across the top with a narrow line of starch paste and were mounted to cheap imprinted double black-lined backing papers to resemble mini scrolls (Photo 2). The artificial scroll backings on the florals varied in weight and texture. The fish, plum blossom, and bamboo paintings were all mounted on a porous uncoated bright-white single-ply backing material, while the purple flower actually matched the



Photo 1: There were 12 collectibles: four 4"x4" small children; three 4"x9" florals; two 4"x9" fish; and three 7"x7" medium children. They could be broken into four different sets for variety.

often of very low monetary worth but very high in emotional and sentimental value, are the subject of shadowboxes and framed vacation memorabilia.

Project Analysis

My dentist's brother brought her back a series of adorable original Chinese watercolor paintings from his year-long teaching venue in China (Photo 1). There were 12 pieces in four different sizes on two different paper backgrounds, which turned into four indi-

children on a glossy clay-coated off-white poster board. The plum blossom image had also fallen off, and the purple backing wasn't the same size as the two other florals (Photo 3). The children had their own set of issues: the paintings were generally all misaligned, and the backing papers varied as well (Photo 4).

Mounting Removal

I decided to remove all the paintings from their "make the tourist happy"



Photo 2: All paintings had been flange-hinged across the top with a line of starch paste to cheap imprinted double black-lined backing papers to resemble mini scrolls.



Photo 3: Problems with the florals included a plum blossom painting that had fallen from its backing, brighter-white porous backings and off-white glossy clay-coated single-ply in the same set, and two of the florals had different backing sizes. There were also proportion variations in heaven and earth in the two front florals.



Photo 4: The alignment of the top left painting is too close to the left side, and the lower right set is too close to the top and has twice the width on the left.

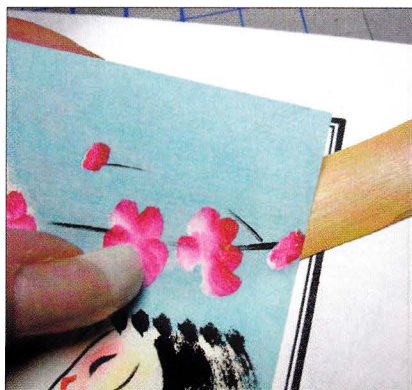


Photo 5: A sharpened bamboo knife was used to slide between the backing and the art to pop off the unsealed starch paste strip.



Photo 6: The top 2" and bottom 10" of the backing were torn off, leaving a 2" strip hinged to the painting.

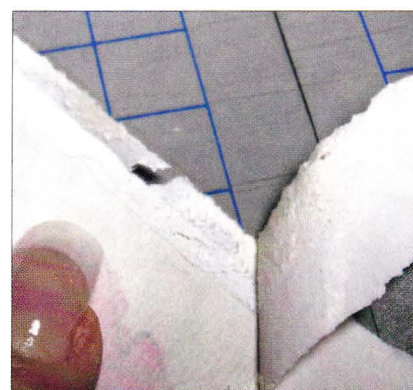


Photo 7: Always remove the discarded layers from the keeper portions during dry removal, and pull the portion to be discarded in the opposite direction for maximum removal of bulk. This only delaminates the clay-coated material and comes nowhere near the actual painting.

artificial scroll backings, then museum-hinged, matted, and framed them to showcase each set as small elegant little images. Even though these paintings are inexpensive, they are all originals that have been signed and sealed with chops by each artist.

The first step was to remove each painting from its backing. The starch adhesive on the porous off-white backing easily popped off by sliding a sharpened bamboo knife between the painting and the backing (Photo 5). The adhesive had been very haphazardly applied and spotty, which is why the plum

blossom floral had already fallen off.

The clay-coated poster board was not as accommodating, so the removal process became much more time intensive. Water was first used to attempt to soften the adhesive, but the clay coating held fast and there was undue stress on the top edge of the painting when wet. I decided to use a dry peel approach in which the bulk of the clay paper is removed first by detaching the top 2" and bottom 10" of the backing, leaving a 2" strip to hold the painting intact (Photo 6).

Peeling the Backing

Always dry peel the backing from the art, not the art from the backing. The backing boards will delaminate in layers, so you can gently peel the unwanted layers from the art until you get to the last layer closest to the art. That layer can then be treated easier in whatever manner is required for safe removal.

Since the adhesive was a water soluble starch, it could be moistened for removal once it had been taken down to the thinnest layer. Layers of backing poster board were peeled from the painting dur-

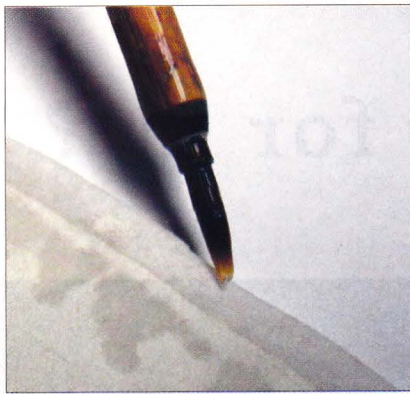


Photo 8: The remaining strip of attached adhesive was moistened with clear water and a soft, clean brush to soften the adhesive, breaking the bond for final removal.

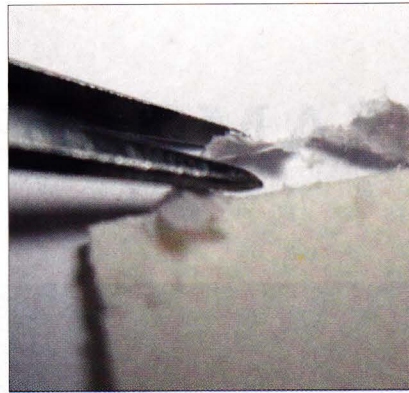


Photo 9: Once saturated, the clay-coated layer could be pushed to loosen it from the paper with a bamboo knife and lifted from the edge with tweezers.



Photo 10: One of the smallest paintings was visibly cockled along the flange hinge and had to be removed and rehinged.



Photo 11: After the dry peel and wet adhesive removal, the painting was flat and ready to be museum hinged.



Photo 12: With the completion and flattening of the cockled image, the set of 12 were ready to hinge like the others.



Photo 13: All the paintings were hinged with small pendant hinges using Nori paste and mulberry paper.

ing first stage of bulk dry removal. Then the remaining strip was peeled slowly at 180 degrees in the opposite direction of the bond for maximum removal (Photo 7). This step only involves delaminating the clay-coated material and is not near the paper of the actual painting.

Once the dry peel was done, the remaining strip was moistened with clear water to soften the adhesive for final removal (Photo 8). Once wet and fully saturated, the clay-coated layer was lightly pushed with the blunt side of a bamboo knife to loosen it, then easily lifted from the edge of the painting with pointed tweezers (Photo 9).

Cockled Flange Hinge

Fortunately, only one of the paint-

ings was visibly cockled along the flange hinge (Photo 10). This condition also contributed to the decision to remove and reHINGE the paintings. The dry peel was done in exactly the same way as described above, and the excess clay-coat strip was removed with bamboo knife and tweezers. After the painting was allowed to thoroughly air dry, it was placed under a warm press platen to relax and fully flatten it (Photo 11).

Museum Hinges, Ready to Frame

After the cockled image was removed and flattened, the set of 12 paintings were finally ready to hinge (Photo 12). All the small paintings had already been backed

by the artist as shown in "Scrolls, Part 1" (PFM, July 2005), so they had enough stability to withstand removal and rehinging for formal Western framing.

A small pendant hinge was applied to each painting, attached by $\frac{1}{8}$ " at the top back of each using Nori paste and mulberry paper hinges (Photo 13). Then the paintings were mounted to the new rag backing.

Basic Designs

Each set needed to work as an individual grouping while still working in a unified design with the other sets (Photo 14). Two mouldings were selected, both by Omega. A narrow $\frac{3}{4}$ " dark walnut bamboo with red highlights



Photo 14: The differences between each set were created by the basic variations in size and subject matter and by the subtle differences in color, texture, and design of the matting.



Photo 15: The top mat of rice straw paper on Alpharag #8656 Natural White creates a surface-tiered mat for the three florals. It is also under-tiered using two sheets of Bar Harbor Gray Crescent colored art paper against an inner mat of Alpharag #8640 Antique White.

(#78872) was used for the two sets of children and the good fortune fish, and a dark $\frac{3}{4}$ " whistler (#10394) for the three florals.

Each set had its own look while still working together with the others. The differences were created not only by the size and subject matter of the images but

also by their separate approaches to color, texture, and matting design. Maintaining the feel of an Asian scroll was part of the design, so highly textured rice straw and silk papers and tiered matting were used.

Three Florals

The top mat for the three florals was surface-tiered with a pH neutral, natural colored, rice straw paper onto Bainbridge Alpharag #8656 Natural White. The same top mat was also under-tiered with two sheets of Crescent Colored Art Paper in Bar Harbor Gray to act as a gentle contrast against the inner second mat of Alpharag #8640 Antique White (Photo 15). The narrow, soft gray was soft enough to not overpower the paintings while still allowing for the little sparkle at the bottom of the bevel. Because of the long scroll design of the florals, the mats were cut using Asian proportions to maintain the elongation of the art. The side width of the mats are only $1\frac{1}{2}$ ", while both heaven and earth are $2\frac{3}{4}$ ". That includes the $\frac{1}{4}$ " inner mat reveal.

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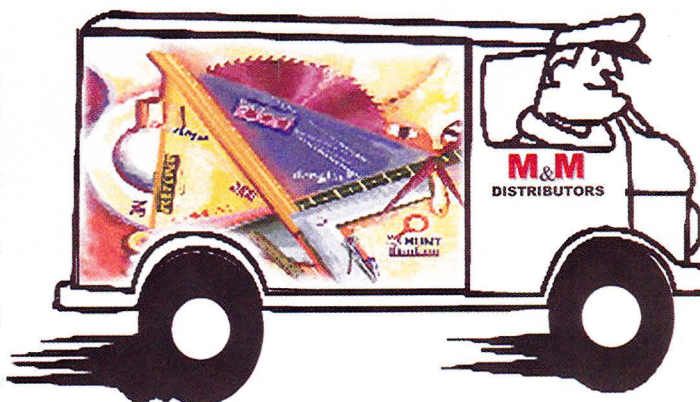
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Photo 16: The same rice straw paper was surface tiered for the two fish, this time over Alphasag #8640 Antique White. This was under-tiered with one sheet of Crescent Raven Black colored art paper. The bottom mat is Alphasag #8667 Colonial Cream.



Photo 17: For the four children, Khadu Bombay silk paper was surface tiered to Alphasag #8656 Natural White with two sheets of Raven Black under-tiered. The 1/2" reveal of the bottom mat is also Natural White.

Two Fish

Though the color variation is difficult to detect in the photo, the same rice straw paper was surface tiered for the two fish, but this time it was placed over Alphasag #8640 Antique White. It was under-tiered with one sheet of

Raven Black Crescent Art Paper to the back of the top mat. The bottom mat is Alphasag #8667 Colonial Cream. The florals had enough color for the inner mat to make more of a visual statement, with the darker tone picking up the color of the pieces of rice in the surface

mat. See "Tiered Kitten," (PFM, February 2005) for more details on tiered matting. The fish are very clean, basic in black, gray, vermilion, and white, so one tiny stripe at the bevel bottom was perfect to help draw the eye down into the fish from the rather busy surface texture of the top mat (Photo 16). The mat widths remain the same as with the florals, using elongated narrow sides with an exaggerated heaven and earth.

Four Small Children

The four small children were matted with surface-tiered mats featuring a sheet of pH neutral Khadu Bombay Silk paper in a soft light beige tone with white silk fibers throughout. It was surface-tiered to Alphasag #8656 Natural White, with two sheets of Raven Black

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paper under-tiered behind it. The inner mat was another sheet of Natural White with a ½" reveal (Photo 17). The extra wide reveal of the off-white inner mat matched that of the art paper and gave the illusion of enlarging the paintings. The top mat width was only 1¾" all around, with no weighted bottom.

Three Spacey Children

The final group is a 7"x7" set of three children—larger versions of the 4"x4" set. The same tiered top mat was selected, using Bombay Silk paper on Natural White. But since the colors in the paintings were actually darker tones of the same colors, which used a more yellow coloring, the bottom mat selected was Crescent #1105 Desert Sand. There is only a ¼" reveal, but there is also a ⅛" spacer between the top and bottom mat for visual intensity

and variation. This sets the larger version of the children visually apart from the smaller ones. Total mat width on these pieces is 2¼" on all sides for the liner mat, with 2" all around for the top mat.

Unique Designs Pay Off

Only solid core museum mat boards were selected for this project, as is generally the case when I do tiered matting. The papers mounted to the board surface were all pH neutral and lightfast, and the adhesive is inert dry mount film, all mounted in a Bienfang 210M mechanical press at 200 degrees. Japanese hinging and UV glazing completed each custom frame design.

While these sets could also have all been framed in small multiple-opening mats, shadowboxes, or acrylic boxes like mini scrolls,

using creative matting and high-end materials can greatly increase the price of any project. These 12 small custom-framed pieces range from about 8"x8" to 7"x15" and had an invoice total of \$1,800. And the best part is that, after dropping them off at the dentist's, I came back with another truck full of inexpensive tourist collectibles to frame. ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, 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." She can be contacted at www.designsinkart.com.

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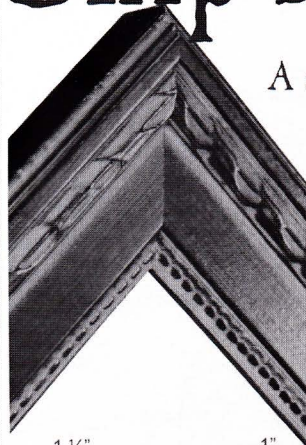
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