Mastering Mounting

Mounting Issues of 2005

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A look at some of today's common mounting questions that the framing community is still trying to resolve.

As another year comes to a close, it's time to look back at accomplishments, lessons learned, and issues that remain unanswered. Go to PFM Forum, PPFA Hitchhiker Archives, or the Grumble and you'll find mounting issues that range from photo surface damage to stretching vs. mounting canvas giclees, vintage posters, and silk paintings.

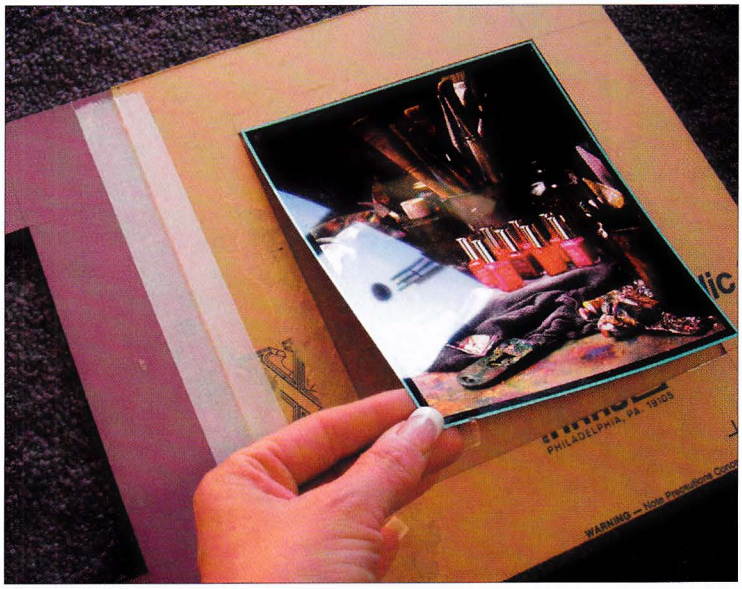

Photo 1: This small 5"x7" Cibachrome has been "V" flange hinged across the top to the acrylic sheet substrate, with the paper cut away to allow the natural static to hold this polyester image in place. The window mat has been cut to overlap the photo 1/4" all around to help hold the edges down, also helping to maintain the static charge.

While the questions surrounding these topics have evolved, the answers remain unresolved. Some of these issues are addressed here, while others will be receiving further treatment during 2006, beginning with the canvas mounting debate.

Why are my oversized photo images coming out fogged or blotchy?

More information is needed before this query can adequately be addressed, as the reaction could be the result of two very distinct causes, one with a traditional RC photo, one with a digital inkjet photo.

Traditional RC Glossy Photos: Surface scuffing occasionally occurs when mounting traditional high gloss RC (resin coated) photos. Scuffing looks like small abrasions across the gloss that are almost like small, sanded areas. This is a result of the photo emulsion reacting to the silicone release material. By placing a thin sheet of clear Drytac overlay foil-acetate sheet between the surface of the photo and the release paper, the silicone cannot come in contact with the

image, and the scuffing is controlled. The acetate sheet will stick to any exposed adhesive surrounding the photo but will gently peel off once the sheet is cool. Since the acetate is very thin, it may only be used once at the original size because of surface indentation marks. However, these sheets may be used on progressively smaller photos.

Photo 2: These inexpensive silk paintings from China were bought at a tourist outlet and the airport. They are on thin, sized silk that feels like tissue paper, are very translucent, and tolerate the heat of dry mounting just fine. Thick paints, sheer fabrics, folded fabrics, and wrinkled silk could all pose additional problems.

Wide Format Digital Photos: When this question is accompanied by photo dimensions of 28"x85", this indicates that it is a wide format digital photo, not a garden variety RC photo. These type of images may actually have been printed using traditional RA-4 developing, chemicals, and RC papers (see "Digital, Digital, Digital," *PFM*, September 2005). So is the fogging in these images caused by the same silicone reaction mentioned above? Maybe—and maybe not.

When scuffing occurs, a wide format printer using RA-4 glossy photo papers could simply be reacting to the silicone, but a wide format inkjet printer image could also be clouding because insufficient time is being allowed for the inks to dry prior to mounting. "Dry down" is the amount of time it takes printer inks to fully cure after printing. Though some printer companies claim their images are immediately dry to the touch when printed (Epson), this does not necessarily mean they are fully dry beneath the surface.

If an image is not allowed a two-week minimum to dry down, the remaining inner moisture could cause the gloss to cloud due to steam created when heat is applied. I have waved newly painted, glossy, dry-to-the-touch fingernail polish through the steam from a stream of hot tap water only to lose the gloss of the nail coating. The same concept applies here. Since steam develops at 212°F, lower temperatures are more desirable for mounting digitals. But this is just a theory. This is also digital technology, so there very well could be yet another reason for blotching.

What adhesive and substrate should I use to mount long digital photos?

Allowing at least two weeks dry down prior to mounting might remedy the clouding issue, but mounting long images raises additional questions. "What substrate is long enough?" and "What adhesive should I use?" are the two most common.

1. The Substrate. If the biggest issue is length, then sheets of ½" thick foam board, ½" Gatorfoam, ½" polyflute, acrylic sheeting, Lexan (flexible plastic), Sintra, or Dibond (aluminum composite) are all options for oversized images (see "New Products, New Trends: 2005" January 2005 PFM). Some of these may be available in lengths of more than 4'x8' to accommodate photos that are more than 96" long. If porosity, rigidity, and/or weight are also issues, this can somewhat limit your selection. Substrate selection is best determined most by the application and longevity requirements of the mounted image. Acid-free foam boards and polyflute are porous; clay-coated foam board, Gator, plastic, and composite boards are not. Foam boards, polyflute, and composite are more rigid; plastic boards are not. Foam boards and polyflute are lightweight; Gator, plastic, and composite are not. And then there is the cost factor and adhesive compatibility to consider.

2. Adhesive Compatibility. Adhesives must be compatible with the wide format image, substrate, and intended use of the mounting.

Low temperature (150°F), short dwell time, heat activated foam boards like SpeedMount, ArtCare Restore, and Single Step Plus work well for images that fit completely in a vacuum or mechanical press in a single bite, but they may not the best choice for multiple bite applications. When multiple biting an image too long for your mechanical press, the adhesive you use must be a higher temperature, permanent film or tissue that will not release when reheated with subsequent bites. And, when a project cannot be dry mounted because of size limitations, then cold alternatives may be the only answer. These include wet, spray, and pressure-sensitive mounting. Pressure-sensitive mounting with a roller laminator and high tack film is currently the best choice, though high tack pressure-sensitive adhesives like Neschen Gudy 870 or Gudy 831 may also be applied by hand.

Photo 3: This image has been mounted to a 3/16" foam backing with the intention of reverse bevel cutting at the outer edge of the print so it appears to float in the framed field. When trimmed right to the edge of the image, it is called flush mounting, or mounting flush to the edge of the mount board. If an image had been mounted with a border of the board surrounding all edges of the art it would be called flat mounting, or mounting the image flat to the center with the mount board visible surrounding it.

What is static mounting and how is it done?

There have been plenty of questions about this topic lately. Ilfochrome Classics, a.k.a. Cibachromes, are photographs printed on a 100 percent polyester media, which is very conducive to creating and maintaining static electricity. The process of static mounting uses that static energy to hold the image in place to an acrylic substrate. An attached window mat offers extra support to hold it in place.

Here's the static process in a nutshell: Cut a sheet of acrylic as a mount board to the desired size. Then cut a window mat, allowing 1/4" of the mat to cover all sides of the Cibachrome photo. Cover the acrylic sheet with protective paper. With a gloved hand, center the photo on the paper-covered acrylic and trace a pencil line around the edges of the photo. Score the protective paper about 1/64" larger than the pencil lines, then peel away the center of the protective paper from the acrylic. Apply an acid-free pressure-sensitive flange hinge across the top of the photo or on the bottom corners, along the edge strip, or use an Art Saver shelf to help keep the image from shifting during transport. This method is totally reversible, non-invasive, and will hold the image until removal, if ever desired. For additional details on static mounting and Ilfochrome Classics, see "The Mounting Issue of Ilfochromes" *PFM,* October 1992; "Static Mounting: A Conservation Variation," *PFM*, February 1997 ; or *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook, second edition*, pages 66-68.

Can I mount a silk painting?

The only reason this question keeps coming up is the increased travel to Asia in the past few years. "Handling Silk Paintings," *PFM*, May 2005, should address a lot of the queries about these items. The answer to mounting silk is a series of additional questions. Is this a painting or an embroidery? What type of paint is it? Is it ink or watercolor? How large is it? Has it been folded or rolled? Is a customer willing to send it to a conservator? Or does that customer just want it glued to a board, placed under a mat, and glazed as a way to remember a trip to China?

This one is a judgment call. Stretching over batting and rag board as any fine art textile is one method, but many silk paintings are very thin and feel like brittle paper because they are sized for painting. Scarves and unsized silk may easily be laced, but silk paintings are often meant to be scroll mounted using starch pastes and wet methods. Thick commercial PVA wet glues can bleed through, sprays will fail over time, and dry mounting films might damage or melt the paints. Always test portions of the painting with a tacking iron before doing anything in a press, and always consider saturation issues. This said, many of the silk paintings from Asia are disposable, inexpensive images that are heat tolerant, in which case dry mounting is a viable option. I would suggest using a low temperature, reversible, HA board like

ArtCare Restore to ease your conscience and do no harm while still mounting the painting.

Sub-mounting vs. Flat Mounting

In *PFM's* June 2005 "Mat Doctors," the question of the month addressed how to prevent hooked corners on a blunt cut or a reverse bevel trimmed, "sub mounted" image to a colored backing board. I would like to add some comments regarding the actual mounting of the image (See Step 2, "Mount your image").

Mounting a centered image to any colored backing board that will be used as a decorative mount is known as flat mounting rather than sub-mounting, which involves pre-applying an adhesive to the back of an image so it might be centered on a colored board with no sign of an adhesive showing around the edges of the image. A dry mount tissue or pressure-sensitive film adhesive may be pre-mounted to the verso side of the image and is then trimmed exactly to the desired size to remove any sign of outer edge adhesive before being adhered to the colored backing. Flat mounting is this two-step method of applying the adhesive first to an image back before a pre-mounted image is mounted to a colored mat backing.

"Flat mounting is a two-step method of applying an adhesive first to an image back before the pre-mounted image is mounted to a colored mat backing."

Applying Coatings to Artwork

I would like to reinforce a few very important issues raised by Hugh Phibbs in "The Danger of Coatings," Preservation Practices, in *PFM*, June 2005. Under "Polymer Coatings," he touched on the need for giclées to be protected and says that a "digital atelier or framer" may coat these images. While Hugh points out that the risks involved in coating giclées are indeed assumed by an atelier or framer, it's important to understand the importance of that risk. Spraying any kind of fixative onto

pastels by framers has been frowned on for decades, and the same goes for coating giclées. It is not the job of a framer to assume the risk or responsibility for sealing digital images. Regardless of whether it's paper or canvas, if the printer or artist has not already coated a giclée, just accept it because that's the way it is. Know your limitations, and this is one of them.

Lamination

Under "Lamination," Hugh discusses the use of plastic laminates over the surface of artwork. Plastic laminates break into two categories. There are both heat-set adhesive and cold pressure-sensitive polyesters of variable thickness, applied by roller laminators, designed as surface coatings or for encapsulation. There are also vinyl surface laminates used in picture framing, mounted with heat presses, designed for use as a glass substitute or decorative coating. Though they do offer some level of UV protection, they were not designed to be sold as such. While the mentioned cracking, yellowing, or fogging has never been a problem in any of the images I have had the past 20 years, these are designed to be used only over disposable open edition images.

Drawing the Line

Questions are vital to doing the right thing. Framers must do their best to help customers but also need to know when to pass on a demand. The customer is always right only until they hear all the facts. Never put your shop in jeopardy over any job or your client's artwork in harm's way. Whether you're handling an oversized digital photo or an Ilfochrome Classic, silk painting, uncoated giclée, or poster for a child's bedroom needing a surface laminate, know what you can and cannot do, what you should do, and when to say, "I don't know; let's call a conservator or mounting specialist." ■

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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.