

Proper framing aids preservation of fine art

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Photos: STEPHEN CANTRELL

What goes on inside a framed work of art may determine the longevity of the art as well as its future value. Cardboard is not just cardboard and glue not simply glue.

Both often contain acid that can have a disastrous effect on the art itself. Mark M. Weglarski, award-winning painter, economics professor at Macomb County Community College and framer at the Troy Art Gallery, has had what he terms "some unreal experiences" when he takes artworks apart to reframe.

"I have found prints that have been taped, glued to the cardboard, even a Picasso cut to fit the frame."

TO A PURIST framer like Weglarski, these are horrors akin to finding moths in a Siberian sable coat. He has encountered gross errors committed by artists who frame their works themselves as well as professional framers.

For fine works of art which a collector or investor wants framed in the best possible way, Weglarski recommends conservation framing—more

expensive, but worth the money in terms of preservation.

According to Weglarski, prints or other art should never, absolutely never, be glued to a backing, nor should they be taped down.

In his conservation framing, Weglarski uses all acid-free materials. He makes his own hinges to attach the art to a backing. These are torn strips of Japanese mulberry paper. He makes the paste himself from rice starch, distilled water and fungicide and insecticide chemicals. He doesn't urge others to try to make the mixture because the chemicals used are poisonous.

Although strong, the paste is water-soluble and is easily removed if reframing is necessary or requested.

For his conservation framing, Weglarski uses 100 percent rag neutral pH mounting boards and mats. He attaches the mat to the mounting board on one side with linen tape, so it looks like a magazine cover. Mat and board should be exactly the same size.

OTHER MOUNTING BOARDS have a center which contains acid and when the mat edge is cut, the exposed center portion will be next to the art. Ordinary cardboard also contains acid

as do clear and paperlike tapes.

Even if a print is taped against cardboard, Weglarski said the acid from that backing will get to the print.

GLASS IS another important concern. Essentially there are three kinds, the standard clear, non-glare and plastic. A plastic is recommended for large framing because it is lighter than glass and non-breakable.

While glare or non-glare glass is up to the buyer, Weglarski doesn't recommend non-glare for conservation framing.

"To look right, non-glare glass has to be right on the image."

He explained the glass should be away from the image because in some instances the media used may stick to the glass, leaving a ghost on it. This is particularly true of pastels.

A mat will keep the image away from the glass and allow the paper to breathe as well, an important consideration.

Pastels and pen and ink drawings should be double matted to keep them as far as possible from the glass," he said.

If a mat isn't used, often the case with a watercolor or large print, there is a type of frame available which is

designed to keep the glass separate from the image.

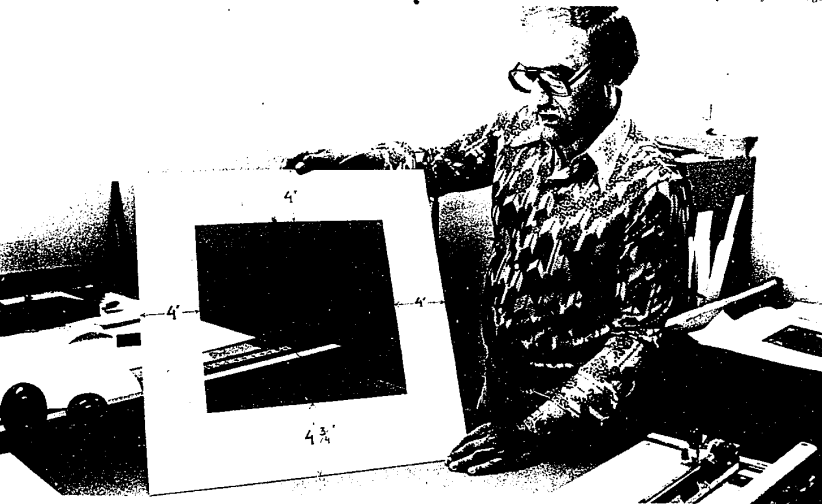
The ultimate framing as far as Weglarski is concerned for a fine artwork would be all acid free materials, the best frame that maintains separation and a special plastic which screens out ultraviolet rays.

COLOR MATS trouble him somewhat because he believes all art looks better against white or off-white mats. He will use the limited range of color mats in acid free materials or he will use a color mat in addition to a white one so the color doesn't come in contact with the image.

His preference on the frame itself is to keep it simple—ornate frames detract from the art. In very damp climates, metal may be preferable to wood, because it won't warp or attract insects.

He stressed the importance of proper hardware—appropriate wire for hanging, bumpers at the bottom to prevent wall marks and let air flow between wall and back of frame and anchor screws rather than nails for putting into the wall.

Yet, even well-framed and hung, there is still the possibility of damage.



The lower portion of the mat should be wider than the other three sides, even when matting a square picture. Mark Weglarski shows the proper measurements.

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