

# Mastering Mounting

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## Establishing the Value of Mounting

Having completed the series on the four basic types of mounting, I thought it was time to concentrate on how mounting an item affects its value. This can help to determine whether the item should be mounted or not. While it's true that attaching an item or object in some way to the backing board is usually required; whether it should be mounted with a wet, spray, pressure-sensitive, or dry mount adhesive is the question.

*Webster's Dictionary* defines value as the attributed or relative worth of something; an inherent quality based upon its merit or usefulness. Most items have a monetary value—how much money it would cost to replace it. They may also have an emotional value—which could actually be more than the monetary especially if an item is irreplaceable.

### Emotional Value

Let's look at emotional value to the customer first. A child's finger painting is an item that will often have an emotional value. It is a rare, irreplaceable piece that may never be duplicated. It is priceless because no amount of money would make the parent part with it. But it has been said that all things have a price. Indeed, they do. If that child's artwork were damaged or destroyed while in your possession, a lawsuit or insurance claim would demand a dollar value be attached to it, or at least punitive damages.

Emotional value can be attached to a keepsake as simple as an inexpensive souvenir paper-cutting purchased in a street market in Japan. The item may not be lavish, but if it is a memento of a once in-a-lifetime trip for a 25th anniversary, it can be priceless. It can have a huge emotional value. Items we may commonly encounter in this category are molas from Mexico, and paintings on papyrus from Egypt. While they can be mounted with the methods mentioned above, they shouldn't be.

### Monetary Value

Recently, I had the pleasure of attending the Salvador Dalí exhibit at a museum in Hartford, Connecticut. Pieces on display dated from 1929 to the 1960's and were mostly stretched canvases and canvases on board. There were a few sketches on newsprint paper, as well as paintings on wood panels.

As I walked the show, studying Dalí's works and examining the way they had been framed, I began to think about their presentation and value. All appeared to be framed conservationally, but that will not prevent Dalí's materials from deteriorating. The highly acidic wood panels may have had sealer or gesso primer applied to them prior to painting, but nonetheless they are still degradable materials. All of these pieces, regardless of the materials used, had a monetary value.

It's true that, like a child's finger painting, both the paintings and the sketches are irreplaceable originals. Yet

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they have been assigned a monetary value, while the finger painting may not. Still, it does not make the finger painting any less valuable to the parent of that child.

Monetary value is really only as much as an item can be sold for. As an artist, I truly understand this concept. I could price an original piece of my art at \$5000, but unless I can sell it at that price, it cannot truly be considered to be worth that much. The \$5000 would be my perceived value, or what I thought it was worth, while the actual (market) value turned out to be the \$1000 it was sold for.

Original artworks have an intrinsic value that may increase over time. The age of an original, combined with its physical condition, helps to determine the value of an artwork. Will the intrinsic value of the child's finger painting escalate over time? It too will become more emotionally valuable the older the child gets. If damaged, the punitive damages would no doubt be higher twenty years later than if it were completed yesterday.

## Maintaining Value

We have been taught over the years to consider each object we frame, and to never do anything to a piece of artwork or collectible that will accelerate its deterioration. We originally labeled that as conservation framing which by definition means "to keep from loss, decay, waste, or injury." But what is to be done with a Salvador Dalí oil on wood board? Obviously the art itself will begin to deteriorate over time. We are still responsible for taking care of the art we frame, but there are times we can't protect something from itself. Preservation framing means "to maintain or keep safe from harm or injury." That's different than the goal of keeping the item from decay which may originate from within itself; we are responsible to maintain its current state and not contribute to future damage.

As successful framers, many of us have reframed old items. Materials have faded, tapes let go, and frames broken. Sometimes these artworks or antiques are highly valued pieces that have been mounted to acidic materials for decades. After a conservator has been contacted and the

framing has begun, sometimes the only mounting we can do is to encase the degrading original into the best environment possible to attempt to slow down deterioration. This would be the case with a Dalí, or a brittle, yellowed child's finger painting created 40 years earlier.

I believe there are two basic categories of framed art—disposable art and everything else. Disposable art includes posters and anything that can be replaced; items with little or no intrinsic value. These items will not escalate over time. Originals, limited editions, antiques, and collectibles all fall into the other category. (*Editor's note: Can items that were once mass-produced become valued collectibles years later? Yes. Vintage posters and postage stamps are perfect examples. Can the framer guess what will be a collectible tomorrow, and what will be junk? No. So keep our limited view of future value in mind.*) So the next question is, when preservationally framing these valued items, how do I mount them?

## Value and Mounting

So when we ask a customer the value of the item to be framed, we are actually asking them three questions: What they think it is worth; what they actually paid for it (if applicable); and what it might be worth in future years. Chances are they wouldn't have given this a thought, particularly if it is an item with mostly emotional value.

As you discuss the way it is to be framed, such as the colors of the matboards, the depth of the shadowbox, and the glazing protection, the mounting method should also be an issue. Somehow this piece must be suspended in the frame and attached to a backing.

The customer may say dogmatically, "I want it flat! Mount it down." Often the framer's first thought is, "Can I mount this?" But it also must be, "Should I mount this? Will mounting damage it?" And, equally important, "How will mounting affect its value?"

## Dalí vs. Limited Edition

I won't go into the mounting limitations when dealing with something like a Dalí original, but the same care

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should be taken when considering the mounting of a limited edition. The same respect and awareness must be held for a diploma, an antique daguerreotype, or limited edition. I will never condone mounting an item just “because the customer wants it that way.” Many things will tolerate heat or glue, but, in terms of ethics, just shouldn’t be mounted.

The entire preservation approach to mounting, including Mylar corners, edge strips, Japanese paste hinges, or flat gluing are available to avoid mounting things solidly down. Signed documentation of conservation refusal is not guaranteed to keep you out of court. Remember the punitive damages mentioned earlier? It may help your case, but doesn’t guarantee victory.

When a customer demands “flat,” it is up to you to explain to them why it would be better not to permanently mount. By permanently mount, I mean solidly and flatly affixing to a surface. I refer to all aspects of wet, spray, pressure-sensitive, and dry mounting, regardless of removable or not, acid-free or not, buffered or not, heat-bonded or not. All adhesives leave residue when the item is removed, affecting its potential value.

Be prepared to take a stand on framing procedures, such as mounting, when a valuable piece is at stake. Be prepared to turn away the job when a customer continues to demand it be glued down if you know that is not the best course of action. Often by telling them you are prepared to lose the job may very well convince them to rethink conservation instead. But if they push, you will have to make a choice.

## Exceptions to the Rule

There are no exceptions to the rule. There are situations, however, when an ethical decision must be made. A good example would be someone who wants to put a limited edition in their summer home at the beach on the Cape of Massachusetts. Because of humidity and temperature changes, even limited editions will often buckle. I will not mount any limited edition, no matter

how large the run.

But, say the customer has purchased and owns much higher valued originals in the \$20,000 range for their home in Boston. Then perhaps a \$200 limited edition would be of relatively equal value as a short term poster would be in a home with less costly artwork. Should it be mounted? The answer is still no. Its value will be frozen if not dropped as a result. Will its value be affected by the salt air, high humidity, and extremes of ice and heat? Probably. So what’s the thing to do? It’s a decision you will have to make and be prepared to stand by.

## Valued Customers

This month’s article about value has a multitude of meanings. Lectures and articles are routinely offered on the value of return customers. They are monetary in value. The value we establish with these customers is emotional as well. They are trusting us with their treasured possessions and valued artwork to take the very best care possible and to make the presentation beautiful. We often add emotional value to these customers because long-time returning patrons become friends, too.

In the case of customers, the perceived value is, if they walk through our door with a project, we will make money. The actual value of these customers to us is that we stay in business and may make friends as well. Value your customers and if you treat all of their projects like a Salvador Dalí, they, in turn, will value you! ■