

# Mastering Mounting



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## *In-House Canvas Transfers*

With the recent printing of a very informative article on commercial canvas replications of paper posters (“Canvas Transfers: How These Money-makers Are Made,” *PFM*, November 2001), it seemed timely to revisit the in-house lamination methods of canvas transferring available to the individual framer. As some of you framing historians and those who can’t let go of old issue magazines may know, in *PFM*, May 1991, I authored an article, “Photos to Canvas to Cash,” which showed the

step-by-step process of transferring a photo. At that point canvas transferring was being offered by photographers for their portraiture to emulate the look of hand-painted oil portraits. In fact, back then the process and the materials were not even being offered to picture framers by manufacturers who had developed the lamination and texturing processes.

Once I began demonstrating canvas transferring for Seal Products, Inc. (*Editor’s note: recently renamed Bienfang*) at our industry trade shows, I was told transferring photos was fine but it would never work with paper prints. Well, never say never. As a 20-year veteran of the craft industry familiar with découpage techniques, I knew that once the surface of a paper image had been coated it could very well be peeled and glued down to pick up the texture of its substrate. Testing followed, demonstrations



Photo 1: Completed Transfer—(clockwise from upper right corner) Seal perforator; small 4x6" RC photos for transfer; completed framed canvas transferred photo; unlaminated 8x10" photo; photo trapped in perforated laminate envelope ready for mounting; and stripped laminated decal.



Photo 1a: Above Detail—Detail of transferred photo showing quality of texture achieved with in-house laminate process.



Photo 2: Canvas Textures—There are numerous canvas textures available from many manufacturers. Textures vary from coarse to fine weave, which is determined by the thickness and/or tightness of the threads in the fabric.

continued, and in October and December 1994, I released two articles in *PFM* showcasing the transferring processes of both photographs and prints.

### *Similarities and Differences*

Both commercial and in-house processes of transferring create a similar end product (see Photos 1 and 1a). The former is shipped out to a professional company; the latter may be completed in your backroom. One is designed for large scale “over the sofa” home interiors; the other will accommodate that home interiors image, but will also work well for the small 4x6" backyard shot of Grandpa and little Johnny during last summer’s family reunion.

In the November 2001 article I mentioned earlier, Art Ernst wrote at length about the technical aspects of seizing (not sizing), peeling, and mounting poster images. He also mentioned the in-house

methods of using heat-set laminates to achieve the process using a heat press. Both dry mount vacuum or mechanical presses may be used with equally successful results, but so can wet mounting with cold vacuum frames.

Perforated vinyl films are required for laminating photographs and non-porous prints, but non-perforated films work fine with any porous image regardless of paper weight. Though it is possible to use raw canvas and heat-activated (HA) film adhesive (i.e. Acid Free Mounting Film, Fusion 4000, Flobond) in a heat press to bond the transfer as mentioned in the Ernst article, it is not recommended.

The potential for wrinkles during bonding greatly increases due to the multiple layers of loose materials (stripped decal, adhesive, canvas) that can shift and crease during vacuum draw. Therefore, specially prepared HA canvas, or wet glue on raw canvas is preferred.

### *Types of Laminates*

Surface laminates used in canvas transferring are those rolled vinyls used by framers with HA adhesives already applied to them. It is the same heat-set film used over posters and photographs as a glass substitute. Smooth finishes (i.e. Gloss, Satinex, Luster, Super Matte, Satin Matte, Matte, Mattex, Ultra Matte), rather than textures, are preferred when transferring so that the threading patterns of the canvas substrate will be allowed to press through the decal from the back. Textural films (i.e. Canvas, Deep Canvas, Fine Linen, Coarse Linen, Sand, Canvastex, Linentex, Emerytex) have a tendency to visually “fight” with the actual fabric it is mounted to and becomes more distracting than enhancing.

### *Textures and Weights*

There are numerous canvas textures available from manufacturers, and each manufacturer may offer more than one weave or color (see Photo 2). Textures vary from coarse to fine weave, which is determined by the thickness and/or tightness of the threads in the fabric. These patterns also vary from knobby uneven threads to even refined threads, which create a more even geometric appearance to the transfer.

Canvases are also available in various weights. Commercial transfer companies often use artist grade 7oz. canvas, while generally 10oz. or 12oz. cottons are found in the framing and photo industries. These heavier grade canvases may sometimes feel thicker; however it’s actually not the fiber weight but the stiffness (sizing) of the fiber that is the determining factor.



Photo 3: Canvas Colors—Canvas is also available in various colors from neutral unbleached cream to bleached white to sized, gessoed white.

### *The Colors of Canvas*

Regardless of its weave, canvas is also available in various colors (see Photo 3). In its natural state, raw canvas is generally a neutral, unbleached, cream color. It is also found as bleached white, and gessoed (coated) white. White canvas is best when transferring wedding portraits or light colored posters to canvas. Darker, natural-colored fabrics will color tint through stripped decals darkening the white highlights and making whites appear dingy.

### *Adhesives and Canvas*

Within the industry there are numerous companies offering both natural and white canvases, many in raw and HA varieties. *Raw or uncoated canvas* is available from some manufacturers (Drytac and Tara/McDonalds), as well as local art stores and fabric shops. They may be prepared for transferring by applying commercial wet glues, such as Acid Free Mounting Glue (from Tullis Russell Hot Press) to their surface,

and then mounting the peeled print or photo to it with a cold vacuum frame.

There are also HA wet glues that may be applied and allowed to dry, thereby preparing the raw surface for later bonding with a peeled, laminated print or photo in a mechanical dry mount press, or heat vacuum system. Wet glues proven to be activated by the application of cold vacuum or heat include Berto (Corona), Lamin-all (McDonalds), and

VacuGlue 300 (Hunt Corp.).

*Heat-activated or coated canvas* is raw canvas that has already been commercially coated with an adhesive, which bonds the transfer to the fabric when placed within a heat press. These may be found as both tacky adhesives with a liner applied to protect the adhesive from dirt, and unlined with a dry, non-tacky, coated adhesive. If specially treated, sized, variable thread weights, weave patterns, and/or colors are desired to truly customize transferring, then material sources outside the framing industry may need to be enlisted.

### *Step-by-Step Photo Transfers*

Begin by selecting and cutting to size all materials. Canvas should be sized large enough to accommodate either stretching or dry mounting onto foam after the transfer. In turn, the laminate must be larger than the sized canvas so the adhesive will not adhere to the foam overlay during the lamination process.

Trap the pre-dried photo

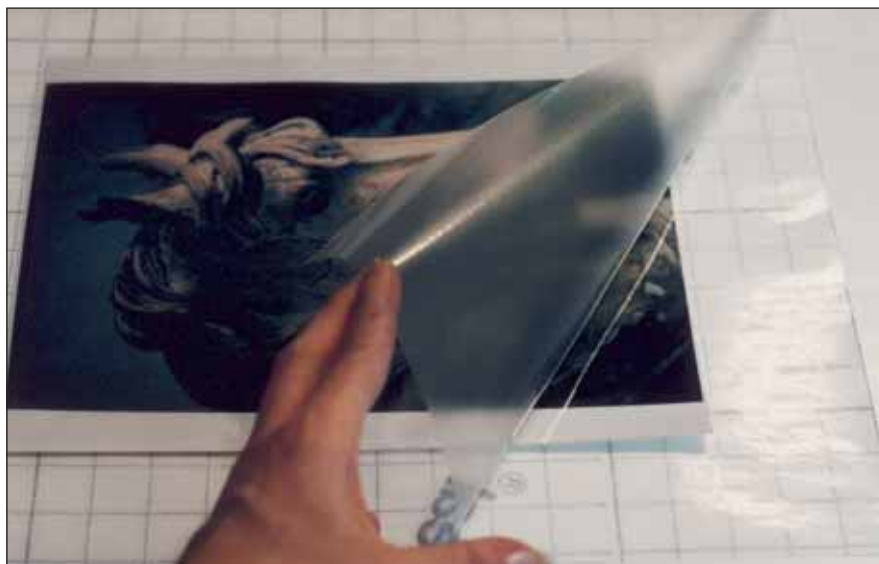


Photo 4: Aligned Photo in Envelope—The RC photo has been centered in a perforated laminate self-envelope to be laminated without a substrate.



Photo 5: Peeling Photo Emulsion—Begin peeling the laminated emulsion from the corner of photo, taking care not to split the image at the edge.

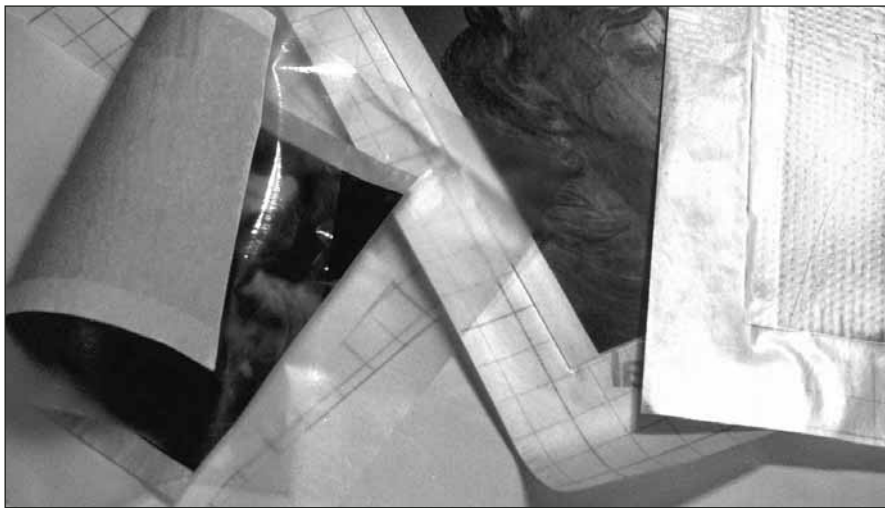


Photo 6: Completed Peel—Beginning at right is the self-envelope laminate with photo ready to laminate, the completed lamination, with the peeled decal at left.

laminated surface emulsion from the backing paper (see Photo 5). As you peel the laminate from its backing paper, peel it against itself in a sharp hairpin turn. Once you have begun to peel, continue at a smooth and steady speed and pull as evenly as possible holding the remaining RC paper and backing paper firmly with your free hand.

Be sure to separate the very top layer of emulsion and perhaps one single layer of paper, because any paper left on the emulsion will reduce the amount of overall texture achieved. The stripped photo emulsion should be extremely thin and look very much like a decal (see Photo 6, far left).

*If using a lined HA canvas,* fold back the top one or two inches of the release backing paper to expose the adhesive. Square the photo laminate from the bottom to ensure proper alignment (since once the two adhesives come in contact with each other they are securely stuck). Slide your hand up from the bottom to the top and carefully smooth down the laminate onto the exposed canvas

between the removable liner backing and the perforated laminate as a self-envelope for laminating to the photo (see Photo 4). A perforated laminate must be used to allow all air to escape from between the laminate and non-porous RC photo. Place in a 185°F to 220°F press for five to 10 minutes, depending upon the instructions of the specific laminate manufacturer.

Remove the laminated photo from the press, lay it face up on a hard surface and remove the



Photo 7: Heat-Activated (HA) Canvas With Liner—Fold back the removable liner a few inches to expose sticky adhesive. Square up decal from the protected bottom edge and align up sides to the top.



*Photo 8: Removal of Liner—Once the decal comes in contact with the sticky adhesive, it holds aggressively. Gently remove liner from beneath remaining decal.*



*Photo 9: Heat-Activated (HA) Canvas Without Liner—If canvas has a dry adhesive with no protective liner, simply square up the sides of the decal with the liner.*

adhesive (see Photo 7). Carefully lift the lower unattached photo/laminate, remove the remaining protective release paper from the canvas, and smooth the laminate into place (see Photo 8). *If using a non-linered HA canvas, simply square up the edges and press to hold in place (see Photo 9).*

Prior to final bonding, make sure no canvas adhesive is exposed, as it will bond to the overlay foam during mounting. Trim any exposed adhesive prior to placing it back into the press (see Photo 10). Insert the photo/laminate/ canvas

unit (complete with sponge foam overlay on top) into a release paper envelope (see Photo 11). Next, place it in the dry mount press for a final five to 10 minutes at 185°F to 220°F. Upon completion of the above steps, the newly transferred photo may then be stretched and framed as desired.

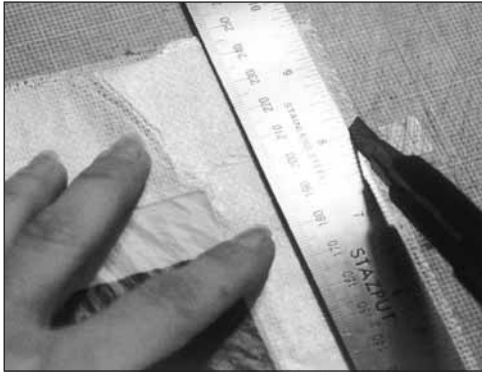
### ***Print Transfer Variations***

The above steps, times, and temperatures remain the same when working with a poster print. However, with a print, the laminate may not require perforation if the

image is porous. The primary difference between a photo and a paper print is the need to soak it in water after laminating, and prior to peeling.

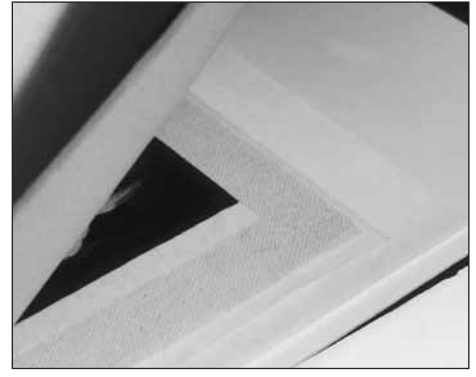
### ***Soaking***

Soak by submerging the laminated print in water for 15 minutes in order to adequately saturate the backing paper. By soaking it right side (or laminated side) up, the paper remains in contact with the water for a more even saturation. Then remove the print, shake off excess water, and place it face up it



*Photo 10: Trimming—If any HA canvas remains uncovered by the laminate decal, it must be trimmed off prior to placing in the press for final mounting. Otherwise, it will adhere to the foam overlay.*

*Photo 11: Mounting Package—Place the laminate/decal/canvas unit into release paper envelope covered with a sheet of overlay foam for final bonding. In a vacuum system, place a piece of mat board scrap (a little larger than the transfer) beneath it to make up for the lack of a rigid substrate.*



on a smooth, hard surface. Glass or Formica® works well.

The damp print will suction itself in place, which will allow it to peel smoothly with little effort (see Photo 12). Stripping or peeling may be done either face-up or face-down. Removing the paper from the back (rather than the image from the front) is the traditional découpage method. It is more time-consuming and a great deal messier (see Photo 13).

### *Stripping*

Begin at the corner by turning the laminate 180° back onto itself. The print will naturally separate at the first layer of laminated paper and very easily separate when you gently pull the laminated surface layer with your hand across the damp paper backing. Any portion of the paper that has not been evenly saturated is likely to resist peeling and can easily damage the inked paper surface. The stripped print will

begin to dry right away, while a lot of water will remain on the table or glass after stripping as the backing paper will be heavily saturated.

After you have completed this step, you can proceed as described for the above transferred photo on page 116. Align the stripped decal onto the prepared canvas and place the still damp laminate/decal/canvas unit into the press with overlay foam and release papers to protect the press. Mount for five to



*Photo 12:  
Face-Up Paper  
Removal—The  
damp print will  
suction itself in  
place, allowing  
you to smooth  
out any wrinkles  
prior to peeling.*

10 minutes at recommended 185°F to 220°F temperatures, depending upon overall print size.

### ***Moisture and Substrate***

For best results when mounting a peeled decal, it should be mounted damp. This works equally well in a mechanical or hot vacuum press (see Photo 14). When dealing with moisture in a mechanical press, leave it in the press a little longer than usual to cook out any

moisture. The additional moisture will cause the release materials to wrinkle more than usual, and these should be reserved specifically for future canvas transferring of prints.

### ***Contouring and Crackling***

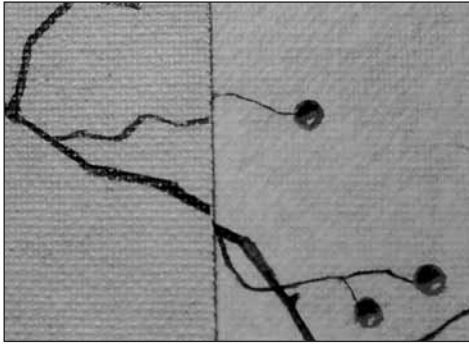
Brush strokes may be added to canvas transfers to achieve an oil painting effect using acrylic varnishes such as McDonalds Acrylic Texturing Gel; Grumbacher; and Winsor/Newton Acrylic Impasto

*Photo 13:  
Face-Down Paper  
Removal—Removal  
of the paper from  
the back (rather  
than the image  
from the front) is  
more time-consuming  
and messier.*



Paste. All of these are thicker mediums that work well for heavy contours. Some are thick enough for palette knife application while others will need several layers with an artist brush (see Photo 15). Acrylic mediums designed for sealing a matte or gloss shine onto paintings are thin and best selected for basic low level brushing.

Be sure to match gloss varnish with gloss laminate and matte with matte finishes. Unfortunately,



*Photo 14: Mounting Moist—Mounting of the peeled decal achieves the best result when mounted damp, and it works equally well in either a mechanical or hot vacuum press*

*Photo 15: Brush Strokes—Brush strokes may be added to the completed transfer by using artist mediums and varnishes. Some are thick enough for palette knife application while others will need several layers with an artist brush.*



aging and crackling is not possible when using pliable vinyl finishes. If this effect is desired, either commercial techniques or traditional découpage techniques will be necessary.

### ***Respecting Copyrights***

Whether the image selected for transfer is to be completed in-house or sent out to a commercial company, the issue of copyright remains at the core of the project. It remains legal to offer the service

of canvas transferring to a customer, but it is not legal to purchase a series of prints specifically with the intent of transferring them for display and resale. If an open edition image is available from a publisher as either a print or canvas image, when a customer requests canvas it must be purchased that way and may not be transferred by a framer. Consent of the artist, photographer or publisher must be obtained prior to transferring, for any royalties and acknowledgements to be made.

The entire issue comes back to the original artist and publisher and their ownership of the image and the right to control the form in which it is displayed. Despite copyright laws, it has become increasingly difficult to prevent illegal infringement of artwork. Photocopiers and computer scanners have made it easy to duplicate, modify and enlarge pages from books and catalogs, encouraging creative framing practices by transferring them to canvas.

Copyright infringement is an illegal practice and ignorance is no excuse. For additional information on copyright issues contact the Lawyer for the Arts office in your state.

### ***Final Transfer***

Keep in mind that not all images make a good canvas transfer, and always consider the image itself. For instance, common sense should tell you that a watercolor image would look out of media on canvas. So consider the option of image transferring to 140# or 300# rough watercolor paper instead.

Canvas images appear to be thriving whether as custom canvases (images printed directly onto the textural canvas backing) or as canvas transfers. Whether you decided to offer the service in-house as a laminated transfer or send it out to be commercially and professionally transferred, there are additional profits to be made from this process. The consuming public has shown their interest in the look. It's your decision to increase your sales by offering it one way or another. ■

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*For additional information on the materials available for in-house transfers and assorted techniques, see the PFM 2002 Annual Directory. Also see PFM articles "Textures and Colors of Canvas Transferring" (May 1998), and "Watercolor Transfers" (June 1998).*

*Also see pages 119-126 in "The Mounting And Laminating Handbook," and pages 117-132, Chapter 9: Image Transferring in "Creative Mounting, Wrapping and Laminating," available from PFM PubCo.*