

Mastering Mounting



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Japanese Scroll Mounting: Part II The Rest of the Story

Last month we embarked on an introductory tour and flash course in the history of Japanese scrolls. Now let's examine the materials, put on our yellow belt, and begin to explore the

glue. The black sumi ink used in calligraphy and painting is soot and burned vegetable oil or pine wood, mixed with animal glue. Unlike watercolors, both are generally waterproof when dry and cured.



Photo 1: The honshi is laid face down and moistened with a wide soft hake brush.

martial art and technique of scroll mounting. So now, here's the rest of the story.

Materials for Scroll Mounting

Pigments

The honshi is a painting or calligraphy done on silk or paper. (Sometimes instead of a painting, embroidery on silk is used as the honshi.) The paint used in traditional Asian painting is powdered pigment mixed with animal

Decorative Front Papers

Either solid or patterned papers may be used for the decorative portions of the scrolls. Bamboo and gampi papers are favored for the solids. Woven silks, gouache-painted (opaque watercolor) crumpled papers, patterned block prints, and hand-painted papers are used for the patterns.

Fabrics

Any fabric may be used for the front of

the scroll, but silk is most common. Gold leaf is often added. Gold brocade, silk gauze with embroidery, plain woven silk, and satin are all favored.

Backing Papers

All backing papers are handmade using strong, long-fibered plants. Kōzo is the first backing layer because it is soft but strong. Misugami is the second layer which is very thin and soft. It is often used as the first layer when backing silk. Udagami (also from kōzo fibers) is thick and contains chins clay for the final layer of backing. Hanshi (from bleached kōzo) is used for backing paintings on paper. The final backing layer, Uwamakiginu, is a plain, woven, thin, silk that is dyed lightly with indigo. This is often used for the top part of the final backing.

Note: There is a right and wrong side to all handmade Asian papers. The paper is dried on a smooth surface and brushed flat to these surfaces while it is wet, making the front the smoothest surface.

Adhesives

The standard paste to use (Ginjōfunori) is wheat starch paste. The base formula is one part wheat starch to four parts water. This may be thinned as needed during different stages of mounting.

Traditional cooking methods take 30 to 40 minutes, stirring constantly as the milky white paste becomes thicker and harder. It then turns transparent



Photo 2: The first layer of backing paper is aligned and will be aggressively brushed to assist the adhesive in penetration and to smooth out all air from between the sheets.

and loses its stiffness. It must then be strained and mashed with a paste brush. Water is mixed in during the mashing process to dilute and thin the paste.

Numerous other natural adhesives are also used, including rice flour paste or seaweed. Today, however, chemical adhesives are often used in lieu of rice flour. The chemical adhesives are a mixture of polyvinyl acetate (white glue emulsion in water), polyvinyl alcohol

(medium viscosity and water soluble—soluble in water at 80°C/176°F), and carboxymethylcellulose (high viscosity). This mixture (which has been used in Japan since WWII) is removable with water and is slow to react to climatic changes.

Different consistencies of this adhesive are mixed for different layers of the scroll. The first layer of backing is one adhesive to one water; second layer is one adhesive to twenty-four water; third layer is one adhesive to twelve water.

Traditional Mounting Technique

First Layer of Backing (Hadaura)

A testing of the inks and dyes in the art must be completed prior to any application of water during wet mounting. The artwork is then placed face down on a hard table, moistened with a water brush (hake or mizubake), and allowed to sit for five minutes in order to evenly saturate (see Photo 1).

A layer of adhesive is brushed to the front of the first layer of backing paper which is then lifted



Photo 3: The reinforced artwork is then lifted from the table with the support of a bamboo rod or stiff brush, and transported to a safe place to dry.

from the table beginning at the lower sheet corner. Just before the upper corner lifts free, the edge is supported by a stiff brush or bamboo rod as it is transported to the intended artwork.

The first layer is then gently positioned onto the painting and is brushed with a wide, stiffer, nadebake smoothing brush (see Photo 2). If the material being mounted is fabric, the entire backing sheet should be gently tapped with a tapping brush to establish better contact.

The entire reinforced artwork is then lifted from the table, being supported by a bamboo rod or stiff brush (see Photo 3). It is then carried to a drying blanket or smooth wall (see Photo 4).



Photo 4: The honshi is smoothed against a hard vertical wall to aid in the gravity drain of excess water and to allow to hang until dry.

Second Layer of Backing (Mashiura)

The now dry first backing layer is now remoistened, face down, with a water brush as was done in the

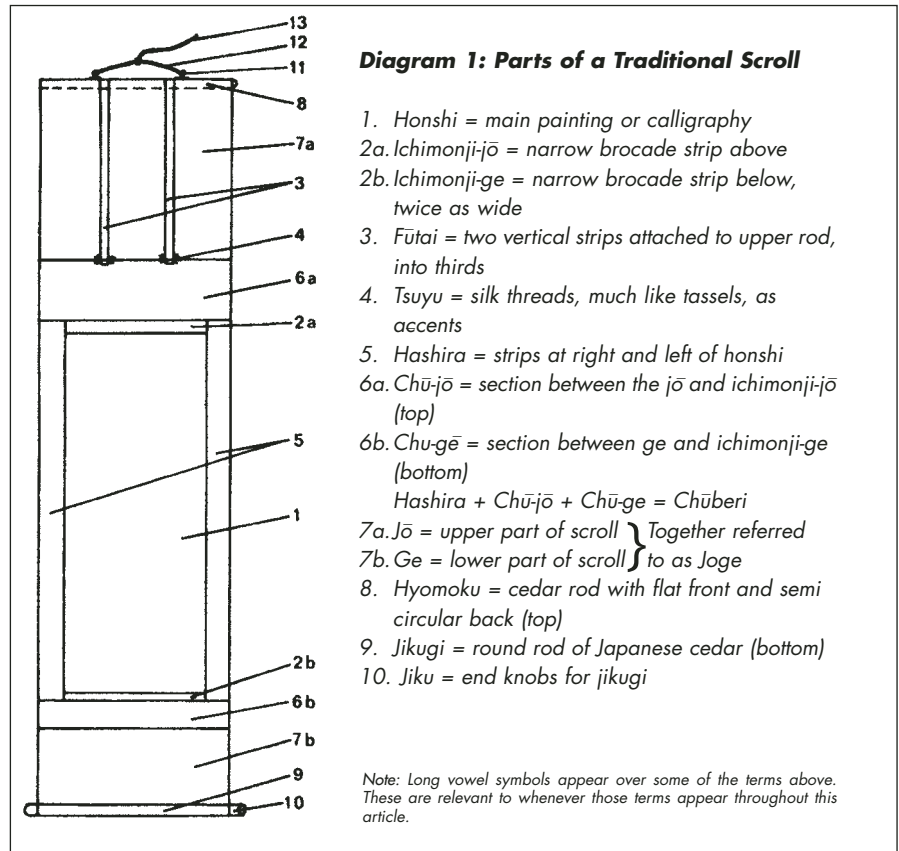
first step. A strip of misugami is placed face up on the mounting board or table. Thin paste is applied to this paper while it remains on the pasting board. It needs to be brushed two or three times to both roughen the paper by lifting the fibers and drive the paste into the paper.

This backing layer is then lifted with the brush or bamboo rod and gently aligned onto the back of the painting and first backing unit. It is tapped and smoothed as was the first backing layer, then lifted and repositioned to a drying blanket or smooth wall.

are squared. Adhesive is brushed along the back edges of the top and bottom trim pieces and they are positioned, tapped in place, and trimmed.

Next the hashira is sized, pasted, aligned, and trimmed. The chu-ge is pasted and overlapped onto the ichimonji-ge next, followed by the ge.

The same process is then applied to that of the chu-jo to the ichimonji-jo, and the jo to the chu-jo. The then entire scroll is allowed to dry. Any excess papers will be trimmed after it is dry, but *prior* to final backing.



Joining the Trim Pieces

All materials are sized and readied for the trim pieces of joge and ichimonji-jo, ichimonji-ge, and chūberi. (See Diagram 1 for the parts of a traditional scroll.) Any backing paper that extends beyond the art is trimmed as needed and all pieces

Third Layer of Backing (Ageura)

The dry, decorated scroll is again placed face down on a work table and moistened with water as is done in preparation for the first two backings. A thin layer of paste is applied to the back of the first

backing, which is then brushed several times to lift the fibers. The final, third backing is prepared using a thicker paste, then positioned onto the double backed scroll, which is smoothed, tapped, and smoothed for good contact. It is then left to dry overnight.

The above process is an extremely abridged yellow belt version of the very elaborate method of the art of scroll mounting. Many of the steps during preparation, application, and finishing have been eliminated for brevity, but it is safe to say this is an art and not merely a mounting technique.

Displaying Scrolls

Once mounted as a scroll, the

question here in the Western world is how to frame or display it. We must always remember the reasoning behind the origination of the scroll, and perhaps maintain the thoughts behind that origin. History has taught us that Asian homes were often built of thin rice paper walls and screens as room dividers. If art was to be displayed, it needed to be very lightweight, durable, and easy to transport.

A scroll is considered a completed (framed) piece of art ready to display. In order to maintain their original dignity they should be either hung as is, or encased in an acrylic box (see Photo 5). The three scrolls in the photo were in the Chinese Art Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in

New York City this past December. They clearly show one of the best ways to protect an ancient or contemporary scroll while maintaining the integrity of the original design.

Back to the Beginning

In the upper left of Photo 6 is a rubbing from The Stone Forest, Xi'an, China. After it was purchased by a shop, it was aggressively folded for easy transport as is common practice. Since the mounting technique described above involves moistening of papers, wrinkles will be brushed out as the paper is smoothed.

To better illustrate that fact in the mounting class that I attended, prior to adding the first backing, the painting was crumpled into a



Photo 5: Acrylic boxes display antique scrolls in their naturally designed presentation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Photo 6: Upper left is a rubbing from The Stone Forest, Xi'an, China. It was folded by the shop for transport as is common practice. At center right is a wrinkled piece of rice paper that will indeed smooth out and mount as the scroll Tao is in the center.

small ball just as I have done to the piece of rice paper center on the right in Photo 6. All the creases and wrinkles will come out during the traditional wet mounting method.

Now let's readdress the question about silk type paper that appeared on the Hitchhikers forum. The original question was about the removal of creases in a silk embroidery brought over from China. It was suggested to steam it flat. This is not a good idea since the water-based adhesive is likely to release. Next, it was suggested to place it into a heat press. This is also not a good idea because the creases could be permanently set. A warm hand iron might provide more control but would still not solve the problem.

Based on the teachings in

China, the inks and dyes generally used become permanently set and waterproof over the course of a few weeks as the animal glue in them cures. Traditional techniques would include moistening the honshi (silk artwork) face down on a hard table, and applying the reinforced paper backing layers to create a scroll as described in this article. Since however, we cannot be certain of the process nor the exact materials used, perhaps the best choice would be to seek the help of a qualified conservator.

Wet gluing techniques may appear simple enough but the logistics, skills, and basic knowledge required is nearly overwhelming. Part of the job of a picture framing professional is to know his or her own limitations. Traditional scroll mounting takes years of

training. In light of the fact our job is to "enhance and protect," call for a skilled scroll conservator to tackle this silk embroidery problem.

To become a third level black belt in scroll mounting would mean you have studied this art since high school, and even though I am a second generation framer who has been in the industry for thirty years, I've yet to be anywhere near any black belt in scroll mounting. Sayonara. ■

Note: In the April issue, the last sentence of "Mastering Mounting" on page 92 was inadvertently incomplete. It should have read, "Consider yourself to be 10 years old and ready to absorb whatever you can, even if it's only to realize that this is a form of karate way over our heads."

