

The Textures and Colors of Canvas Transferring

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF



Throughout the 90s, increased customer awareness has created a demand for art images with the look and feel of original paintings that still maintain the economy of an inexpensive duplicate. I first wrote about the process of canvas transferring in "Photos to Canvas to Cash," *PFM* 1991, but the process has been used throughout the photographic industry for many years prior to that. It has only been during the past five years that canvas has really begun to make an impact on the framing industry.

Through both open edition publisher runs, and the Gicleé craze, canvas transferring (aka canvas bonding) and canvas imaging is stronger than ever.

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. Any open edition, poster, print, or studio portraiture requires the approval of the artist or publisher prior to its transfer to canvas.

Currently it is still 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 in your gallery. Because of the volatility of the copyright issue, I predict that all states will eventually end up establishing their own precedents concerning this topic.

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. The express consent of the artist, photographer or publisher must be obtained prior to transferring; only then will all royalties and acknowledgements be made.

The entire issue comes back to the original artist and publisher having 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 catalogues, 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.

In-house Application or Commercial Services

There are numerous commercial com-

panies that offer the service of transferring. They too will be concerned with copyright issues, and may require permission prior to completing a given job, or may be forced to refuse a job. They often offer everything from the initial transfer to stretching, aging, crackling, and adding brush strokes, all for an extremely reasonable price. Commercial prices for transferring will vary between companies, but all are competitive.

There are a couple of things that set in-house transferring apart from the work done by a commercial service. First is the technique itself. Commercial transferring is often done chemically, whereas in-house it may be achieved with a heat press and laminating film, or acrylic coatings and a cold frame. Second is turn around time. When completing a project in your own shop, it can, technically, be completed the same afternoon the order is taken if all of the materials are on hand.

Material and production costs will also vary when working in-house. Just as buying length moulding or mat board in volume has its advantages, purchasing canvas and laminates in rolls will greatly reduce the cost per square foot. Check with individual distributors for material prices.

Generally, the retail charges to a customer will run as low as \$1.50 per united inch (UI), but add to that \$.50 per UI for stretching, plus \$1.00 per UI for brush strokes, and the transfer price can easily reach \$3.00 per UI, and often runs upwards of \$5.00 per UI, depending on the market. An 11" x 14" in-house transfer has hard costs of under \$5.00, while it retails for \$75.00 to \$125.00. And remember, this is all prior to moulding and fitting charges.

Surface Laminates and Techniques

In past issues I have covered the step-by-step application and transfer of laminate to canvas. For addition information or review to see *PFM* 1991, "Photos to Canvas to Cash", or the three-part series "Canvassing Photos, Pro-



Photo 1: There are numerous options open to the framer when it comes to materials for canvas transferring.

jects and Paper Prints", *PFM* October, November, and December 1994. It is also detailed in my book *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook*, available through *PFM*. This time, however, I want to discuss the various materials and options when transferring in-house rather than the process (photo 1).

The surface laminates used are lined vinyl, available on rolls. It is the same film used over posters and photographs as a substitute when glass is not desired or allowed. Laminates with smooth finishes (i.e.; Gloss, Satinex, Luster, Super Matte, Satin Matte, Matte, Mat-tex, Ultra Matte...) rather than textures are preferred so the woven texture of the canvas substrate will be allowed to press through the decal from the back. The pattern on textured films (i.e.; assorted products such Canvas, Deep Canvas, Fine Linen, Coarse Linen, Sand, Canvastex, Linentex, Emerytex...) have a tendency to fight with the actual fabric it is mounted to and becomes more distracting than visually enhancing. The determining factors in selecting your laminate will most likely be price, convenience, manufacturer, distributor technical service, and whether you want the roll perforated or prefer to hand perforate for select projects.

Canvas Textures and Weights

There are numerous canvas textures available through

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many manufacturers as seen in photo 1, and one manufacturer may offer more than one weave or color (photo 2). Texture will vary from coarse to fine weave (photo 3), 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 (photo 4), which gives a more even appearance to the transfer.

The selection of a particular weave is often a matter of individual taste. Some people, and often artists, prefer very even, symmetrical patterns in the canvas, while others enjoy the lumpy, uneven asymmetry of knobby threads. There is no right or wrong; it is purely subjective. The only thing to watch out for when using knobby textures under portraits is that the biggest lump in the canvas always



Photo 2: Various textures and colors of canvas may be available from one manufacturer, check with your distributor for availability.



ends up in the middle of the subject's face.

Canvases are also available in various weights. Generally 10 oz. or 12 oz. cotton are found in the framing and photo industries. These canvases may sometimes feel thicker not because of the fiber weight but due to the

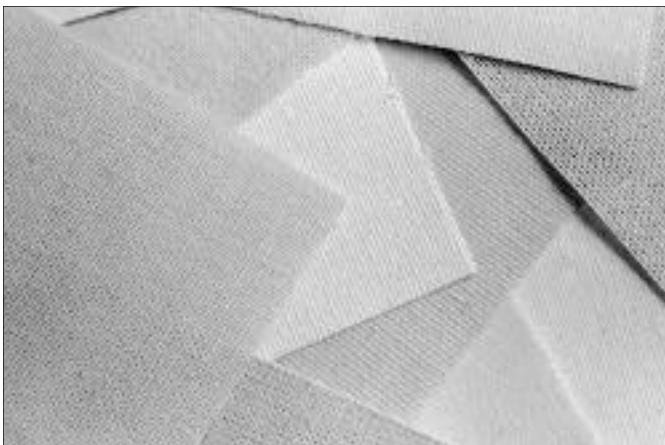


Photo 3 :Coarse to fine weave canvas, and everything in-between, may be found. Shop around if you are looking for specifics in pattern and color.

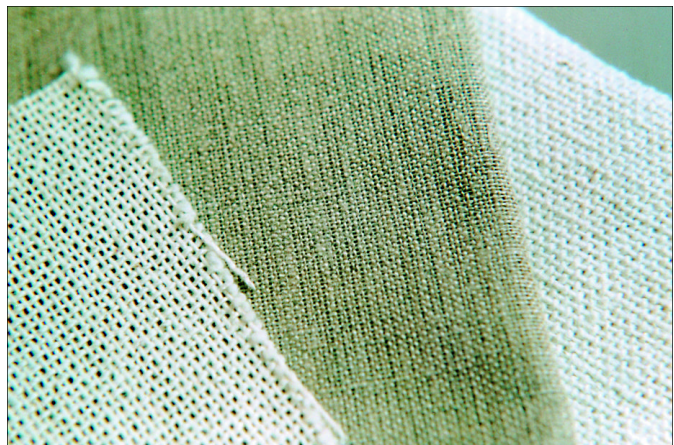


Photo 4: This detail of natural colored fabrics illustrates (from left to right) "Modern", raw linen, and "Traditional" canvas. ("Modern" and "Traditional" are the company names for these patterns.)

stiffness of the fiber. Stiffness, or fabric body, is also determined by the addition of sizing, a stiffener added to natural soft fibers. It only stands to reason that the more a naturally soft fiber is bleached, sized, and treated, the stiffer it may become. This makes some canvases more difficult to stretch.

The Colors of Canvas

Canvas, regardless of its weave, is available in various colors. In its natural state, raw canvas is generally (photo 5) a neutral cream color and often unbleached. It is also found bleached and white. Even natural cream and white colors can vary. There are bright, cold, hard whites and warmer, grayer whites (photo 6).

White canvas is required when transferring wedding portraits or light posters to canvas. Darker, natural colored fabrics will color tint through stripped decals, darkening the white highlights and making whites appear dingy. White canvases are available as bleached natural or natural cream. Fabrics are sometimes painted with a white heat-activated adhesive or may be acrylic gessoed with white as a size to alter the natural color.

The process used to alter the canvas color will definitely effect the stiffness of the resulting transfer for later stretching.

Adhesives and Canvas

If specially treated, sized, variable thread weight, weave pattern, and/or color options are desired for truly customized transferring, then material sources outside the framing industry might need to be enlisted. Within the industry there are numerous companies offering both natural and white canvases, many in raw and heat-activated varieties.

Raw or uncoated canvas is also available from some manufacturers (Drytac and McDonalds) as well as local art stores and fabric shops. They may be prepared for



Photo 5: These are both "Modern" canvases of the same thread pattern, only the left sample is natural cream while the right sample is bleached white.

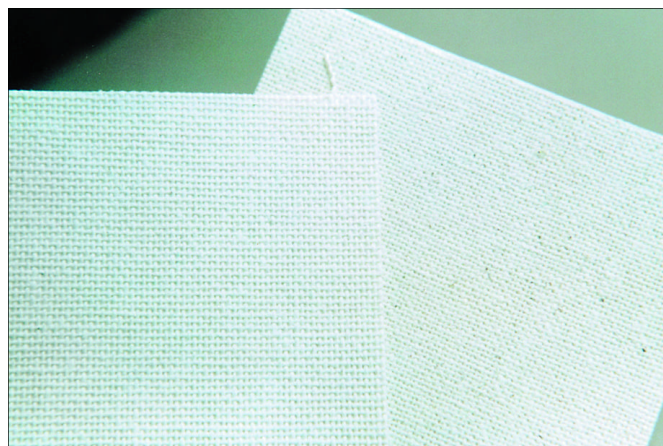


Photo 6: The two canvases show an open weave cold bright white on the left, and an uneven weave of a softer grayer white on the right.

transferring by applying commercial wet glues to their surface such as Acid Free Mounting Glue (Hot Press), then mounting the peeled print or photo to it with a cold vacuum frame. There are also heat-activated 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 that have been proven to be activated by the application of cold vacuum

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or heat include Berto (Corona), Lamin-all (McDonalds), VacuGlue 300 (Seal), and LION Liquid Heat Seal Adhesive (LION UK).

It is also possible to use raw canvas and heat-activated film adhesive (i.e.; Fusion 4000, Flobond...) in a heat press, either mechanical or vacuum. The potential for wrinkles during bonding, however, greatly increases due to the multiple layers of untacked materials (stripped decal, adhesive, canvas) all being allowed to shift or crease during vacuum draw. One solution is to bond the adhesive first to the decal, then in a second mounting to bond it to the canvas, thereby eliminating some of the loose layers.

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, coated adhesive (photo 7).

The advantage of the lined products (Seal, Hot Press) are the light tack that helps hold the decal in position on the canvas during set-up, placement into the press, and during draw of the vacuum. Since the canvas has a temporary pressure sensitive tack for positioning, it becomes a bit more user friendly and reassuring during bonding.

Nonlined HA coated products (Drytac, Seal, MacDonalds) have the potential for decal shifting during the transfer bonding process within the vacuum press. If the surface laminated stripping process has been used to prepare the poster or photo for stripping, the peeled decal has a slight tackiness remaining on the back of the laminate. This will help hold the stripped decal in position during final bonding.

Wrap Up

Once the materials have all been selected and matched to the desired hot or cold system, it is simply a matter of

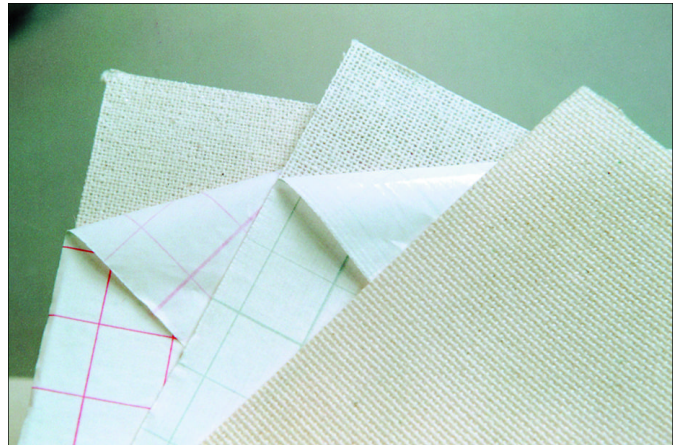


Photo 7: The two left adhesives are lined natural and white. Though it's tough to tell, the right sample is a plain unlined heat activated coated canvas.

promoting the concept and selling the service. Canvas transferring is a natural addition to any photographer or framer's custom services. It will increase specific custom sales while also raising the average ticket sale and profit dollars.

Just as with laminating and other creative applications, this process may need to be promoted to launch its campaign through advertising, sales counter promotion and in-store framed samples, but the interest in canvas transferring also comes straight from the customer. This is an age of image, and desire for originals. What better to sell than something your customers are already clamoring for?

Next month I'll examine mounting options and the process for transferring watercolor images (obviously unsuitable for canvas) to watercolor paper. ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF, owns Designs Ink, Oxford, Connecticut, featuring commercial and retail custom framing, product consultation, design and education. Specializing in mounting, matting and design creativity she works with numerous industry leaders, and has just released her first book The Mounting and Laminating Handbook, available through PFM.