

# Creative Mounting Object

By James Miller, CPF



*For every object mounting challenge there is a range of possible solutions. This framed violin could be held in place with supports made from polyflute board, formed acrylic rods, or even shaped brass mounts.*

Object mounting is among the most challenging tasks of custom framing because the objects to be mounted and the frame designs around them are infinitely variable. Even if the design is simple, the object has no market value, or longevity is not an issue, we must still deal with the complexities of three-dimensional design such as the adhesion of dissimilar surfaces and textures, avoiding damage to delicate surfaces, structural integrity, tensile strength, and gravity. Of course, if the object is to be preserved in its original condition, or if it is to be removable from its mount, then the challenge increases. Framers who acquire the knowledge and develop the skills to do these jobs well enjoy the benefits. And besides, it's fun work.

## Special Parts?

Suppliers of conservation tools and materials sell specialized mounts for items such as books to be held open, as well as special-purpose pedestals and unique, unobtrusive holding devices. All of these specialized parts are useful, but there are many unpredictable jobs for which nothing prefabricated will work.

Sooner or later we are asked to frame objects that call for creative mounting ideas—not only for presentation, but also for preservation. Whether it's a bicycle seat post, a bison's hip bone, a rock, a well-worn pair of shoes, or a collection of Grandma's personal effects, our customers seem to believe we can handle their one-of-a-kind jobs with something we find laying around in the backroom. And they may be right, which is where the fun comes in.

## The Challenge

Custom formed object mounts can be made from any number of materials. I'll discuss six that are readily available, cost-effective, and adaptable: sheer mesh fabric, clear film, polyflute, acrylic, brass, and wood. And let's choose three objects that could be challenging, but not impossible: a violin, a whole newspaper, and a good poker hand. Also, just to make it interesting, let's say all of the mounts must be at least moderately concerned with preservation—reversible and non-invasive. (Some of the mounts illustrated on the following pages are made for easy removal and replacement of the objects. Those mounts are best suited to object frames that can be easily opened and re-closed.)

Once we get the creative juices flowing, it might seem that we could frame anything. However, framing some objects may be ill-advised or impractical. Food and other fresh organic things come to mind, along with anything containing nasty chemicals, aggressive caustics, or explosives. Let your imagination be your guide, but exercise reasonable restraint based on your training, common sense, and experience.

## Sheer Mesh Fabric

Nylon tulle, popular for wedding veils, is readily available from local fabric stores. It is suitable for objects requiring a moderate level of preservation. Be aware that the mesh has microscopically sharp edges that might cut into some objects, and the nylon will deteriorate over time.

When the job requires a higher quality fabric, consider materials such as Crepeline or Stabilitex. Crepeline is fine-woven silk organdy from France that is delicate enough for the most fragile surfaces. It is very sheer and nearly transparent when used as a wrapping material. Stabilitex, imported from Switzerland, is longer lasting than Crepeline. Made of 100% polyester,

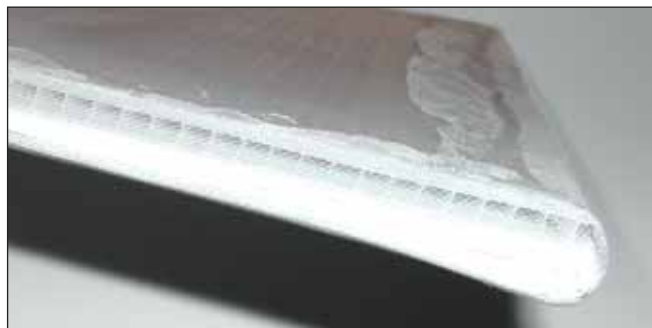


*Individual cards are wrapped, then backed and mounted in a group.*

this fabric is resistant to UV radiation, decay, bacteria, acids, and oxidizing agents. It is inert, chemically stable, and suitable for maximum preservation jobs.

Sheer mesh fabric comes in colors that blend with many objects, and it may be almost invisible when used as a covering or wrapping. The edges are usually terminated under the mat, or overlapped and bonded to the back of a mount board. Hot-melt glue works well with the stretchy material, and so does 3M's Mini-Weld glue system. Sheer fabric can also be cut into strips and used to strap some lightweight objects in place.

The newspaper and the poker hand are good candidates for sheer mesh fabric wrappings, and the violin can be strapped with it.



*A folded newspaper is wrapped in tulle, then backed with polyflute. The tulle is glued to the backing with hot melt glue and the package will be framed with a sink mat.*

## Clear Film

Mylar-D, Melinex 516 (both DuPont-Teijin brands), and Hostaphan 43SM are all tested and approved for use by the U.S. Library of Congress. (Such approval may be



(At left) A detail of the texture of the tulle used to wrap the newspaper. (At right) The Crepline mesh has a finer texture than the nylon tulle.

taken as an indication of quality, but the LOC does not endorse products for specific applications.) These clear films are suitable for objects that can be wrapped or strapped to the mount board. They have high clarity; are incredibly strong, resist stretching, and are chemically inert (suitable for maximum preservation jobs).

Avoid clear films made of styrene, acetate, polyethylene, or other materials of questionable composition. They may deteriorate over time, and they may be chemically invasive inside a closed-up frame. Also, they are all less clear than the aforementioned films, and may be too brittle or too stretchy for dependable object mounting.

To secure clear film to itself, use a quality, double-sided tape such as 3M #889. To secure a clear film strap to the back of a mount board, tape half of its length to the board with double-sided tape; apply another layer of the tape and fold the strap back over itself, in “Z”



The entire card need not be wrapped in clear film; a T-shaped piece like this one gives adequate support.

configuration, with double sided tape between the folds. Cover all exposed tape adhesives with single-sided tape, and burnish thoroughly.

Clear film is easily adaptable for all three of our sample objects. Clear film straps hold our violin gently, yet securely. The newspaper and the poker hand are suitable for clear film wrapping.

## Polyflute

Otherwise known as double-wall corrugated plastic sheeting, this polypropylene board is most commonly used in the sign-making industry. It has big potential in framing applications as well. Since it is still new to the framing industry most of our regular suppliers don't yet stock it, but it is available from local sign supply distributors in 48"x96" sheets, in several thicknesses and colors. If purchased in quantity the cost may be quite economical.

Polyflute's surface is smooth, but not completely flat due to the corrugations, and its cut edges may be sharp enough to damage some fragile items. It has a good



(At left) This clear film backer overlaps the card by just 1/16". (At right) Clear film can back a group of cards then wrapped in fabric.



Using clear film often allows the object to be float mounted, as this newspaper is here.

strength-to-weight ratio, so it is suitable as a reinforcement, backing, or filler board. It is structurally stable and will not warp easily. Polyflute has good rigidity perpendicular to the flutes, and may be bent parallel to them. Softer than acrylic, it cuts easily with a sharp blade, and it bonds securely with Mini-Weld and most hot-melt glues.

Colored polyflute usually has UV-inhibitors and additives that improve it for sign making. Those features are not desirable inside a maximum preservation frame, but it is still better than most of the board products that it might replace. Standard polyflute is suitable for moderate preservation jobs. “Archival” polyflute, made without recycled plastic, colorants, or other additives, is inert and chemically safe for direct contact in maximum preservation projects. However, it is not suitable for direct mounting of paper art, due to the wavy surface texture; instead, use it to reinforce 100% rag/alphacellulose mount board.

This material makes a good mount for our violin. It is also good as a structural, undersized backer for our expanded mesh mounts of the newspaper and the poker hand. (Off the topic for a moment, 4 mm polyflute is also handy for making storage folders and boxes, and is a great worktable covering.)

## Wood

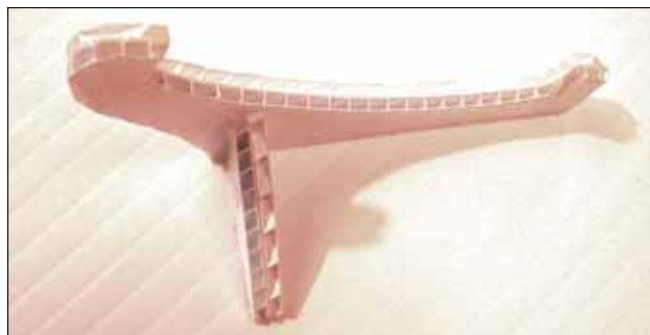
You have some of that, right? Wooden dowels and other small dimension wood



*Polyflute is easily cut to form supports of various shapes.*



*A series of polyflute supports are welded to a backer of the same material. It can be covered with fabric, then the violin placed inside.*



*The multiple pieces of polyflute here (both 4mm) give the additional support needed for some objects.*

products are readily available, inexpensive, and easy to work with. Wooden mounts can be cut, shaped, and fastened with common tools. Special woodworking skills are handy, but may not be required, for good results.

On the downside, a wooden mount may seem bulky for some objects, and it has somewhat unpredictable structural limits. Grain is important; it is strongest in one direction, and weakest in the other direction. For most object mounts, fine-grained hardwoods are best. The grain direction should be carefully chosen for each mount in order to maximize the strength of the wood.

Wood mounts may be finished in a number of ways—stained, painted, or fabric covered, for example. Wood is an inherently acidic material, and should be avoided in maximum preservation jobs where off-gassing or chemical reactions inside the closed-up frame package may cause damage. In those cases, sometimes wooden mounts can be sealed with a gas-impermeable barrier such as glass or metal, or water-borne polyurethane varnish.

Wood is a good choice for our violin, but not for the newspaper or the poker cards.

## Acrylic

Acrylic is readily available from local suppliers in sheets, rods, bars, and in various colors. It may be more expensive than wood, but that is less a factor than labor, which usually is the main cost component of custom mounts. Acrylic is generally acceptable for all levels of preservation. When neatly formed, acrylic mounts have a clean, uncluttered look that often suits object frame designs. Mounts may be fashioned by cutting, filing, sanding, scraping, or bending when heat is applied. Heat is also a good way to restore the clear, smooth finish of acrylic's surface after it has been worked, or it may be polished with abrasive compounds.

When an item is retained under a sheet of clear

acrylic, it is important to provide an insulating air gap between it and another outer glazing, which may be UV-filtering glass. Otherwise, ambient changes and condensation could be destructive.

Acrylic mounts may be used for all three of our sample objects.

## Bent Metals

Brass or steel rods, bars, flat stock, and sheets make excellent mounts for objects that require support at specific points, such as a gun, a hand tool, or our violin.

Aluminum is not recommended for most bent metal mounts because forming it may cause fatigue failures at the bends. While forming steel mounts requires more muscle than brass, steel would be best for heavy objects, so long as rust and corrosion do not cause preservation concerns.

That said, brass is the metal of first choice. It is easily shaped with common pliers and homemade bending jigs, and suitable for any degree of preservation, with one caveat: The edges of the metal must be

finished so that they cannot scratch or abrade the object being mounted. One way to provide an unobtrusive, protective covering is to put heat-shrink tubing over the mounts. I prefer matte black for most jobs but it comes in colors too, from most electrical supply distributors.

To secure a bent metal mount, it is usually best to run it through to the back of the mount board, bend the end upward, and encapsulate it with hard-setting glue such as Mini-Weld or hot melt.

Obviously, this kind of mount isn't suitable for our poker hand or newspaper, but works well for the violin.

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*Try these mounting materials and methods for your projects. With a little practice you can make dazzling mounts with better preservation attributes than the more common mounting alternatives. For information and answers about specific object mounting challenges, consult the framers on PFM's *Framer to Framer* forum ([www.pictureframingmagazine.com](http://www.pictureframingmagazine.com)); PPFA "Hitchhikers" email list ([www.pppfa.com](http://www.pppfa.com), must be a PPFA member); or "The Picture Framers Grumble" ([www.thegrumble.com](http://www.thegrumble.com))."* ■



These acrylic mounts have been shaped with heat. A series of acrylic mounts are adhered to a backing board.



Acrylic mounts have a clean, unobtrusive appearance and are suitable for most objects requiring preservation.



(At left) The brass mounts are inserted, then glued, through the backer. (At right) The tubing over the brass mounts provides a more subtle look.