

Preservation Practices



by Hugh Phibbs

Lashed Window Mats

Anyone who has matted works on paper will be familiar with the holding power of the window mat. A closed window mat which overlaps the edges of the matted item will provide enough frictional resistance so that the item cannot be moved unless the window mat is raised.

The need for repeated lifting of the window during the positioning of the item can be a bit tedious. It can also cause the window mat to play the role of supporting matted items without hing-

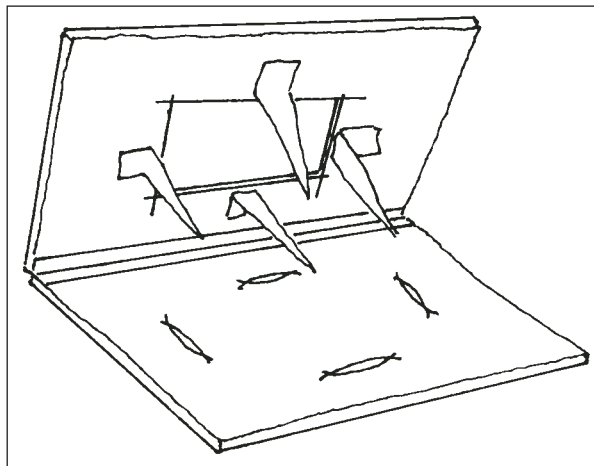


Figure 1: Lashings can be made with a diagonal cut across a strip of linen tape so that two are created from one strip of tape. They will have a pointed end that will facilitate insertion through the slit.

ing. The window mat can only fulfill this role if it can be kept securely closed and can also be opened without any disruptive force.

One method for securing windows depends on the use of linen tape lashes that are attached to the back of the window, fed through appropriately placed slits in the back mat, and then secured to

the back of the back mat. The first step in creating these lashings is placing the work in its proper location on the back mat. This allows the position of the slits, (at least $\frac{1}{4}$ " outside the margins of the item), to be marked on the back mat.

Once the item has been removed, the slits can be cut with two strokes which are intersecting arcs and the scrap between the cuts can be removed. The window/back mat combination can now be turned face down and a dull blade can be pressed onto the back of the back mat through the slits to mark the place at which the linen lashings will be secured.

The lashings can be made with a diagonal cut across a strip of linen tape so that two will come from one strip of tape and they will have a pointed end that will facilitate insertion through the slit (see Figure 1). Previously, this strategy has been suggested for items which were set in sink mats. If the frictional potential of the matboard surface can be increased, it may be possible to use this same technique for securing items such as fragments of textile, paintings on canvas that lack tacking margins, or other items which have back surfaces with a rough texture.

Central to this type of support is the creation of a rougher, or more nappy surface, for the inside surfaces of the window mat package. This can be achieved if the inside of the mat is lined with conservation-quality board which has been split. Conservators frequently split boards as they seek to diminish their mass during the process of dry removal of a poor qual-

ity mount board from a work on paper. Generally, they take the board off in small pieces. Many boards can be successfully split in an even fashion along one of the plies, between the glue layers that bind the plies together. Different boards should be tested so that the best candidates can be ascertained.

When a board that splits readily has been found, one corner of it can be opened by hand. The board can then be placed on a clean work surface and the splitting can be accomplished with a bamboo or soft plastic knife.

A tube can also be used. In this case, the bottom portion of the open section of the board can be taped to the work surface and the upper portion can be held tight to the tube so that the rolling of the tube across the board will exert an even pressure and the board will be cleanly split.

The split board can be glued to the surface of the back mat, evenly and overall. It should not be glued to the back of the window before cutting, since that would produce a window with a shaggy-edged bevel. Rather, when the window has been cut, its opening can be marked on

the unsplit side of the board and an opening slightly larger than the markings can be cut.

When this has been glued to the back of the window, the mat package can be assembled. Since the linen tape spine will be adhered to the split board surface, it must be wet with warm water and should be given extra pressure and attention to ensure that it has bonded properly.

The creation of the lashings can be done as described for use with a sink mat, with one exception. Here, unlike with the sink mat, there must be lashings at the upper edge of the item at all times, even when the window is wider than it is high and the spine runs along the upper edge. Since the intent here is to create gentle, steady pressure all around the item, (with special attention to the hold along the upper edge), those lashings must have the most secure hold.

Relatively rigid materials such as paintings on canvas or papyrus are likely to maintain their position well in this sort of secured window mat. However, textiles can be more difficult to house in this manner. Those which are sized to the point

of rigidity may behave like a painting on canvas. Textiles which have little rigidity and degraded margins are poor candidates for vertical display in a frame. Such materials can be secured in this type of window to which a cover board has been added for flat storage in a drawer or box. This will create a safe handling structure that will allow for the examination and appreciation of these textiles.

Many other textiles which are neither stiff, nor very flexible, may be displayed in this sort of window. However, that should only be attempted when the framer has considerable experience with the technique and can predict performance.

As with any new technique, those who begin to use it should practice with varying boards and test subjects to find the limits and proper uses of the technique. It is impossible to prescribe the exact amount of pressure and friction needed to secure delicate materials in a housing. The practiced manual knowledge of the preservation framer is critical to the success of this or any other support technique used in preservation. ■