

Preservation Concerns for Oversized Frames

by Hugh Phibbs

As the size of the work being framed increases, the problems encountered in the framing multiply. This is especially true in the case of oversized works.

There is no simple definition of when a work being framed becomes large enough to be classed as oversized, but since matboard is not commonly available larger than 40" x 60" it may be useful to think of frames larger than that as oversized. In planning for framing such large material, one must consider the availability of appropriate materials, space, labor, and transportation. More importantly, proper handling techniques and storage facilities must be in place before the work arrives in the shop.

The handling of large works on paper must be undertaken with the caution appropriate to an operating room. Though an aseptic environment is not necessary, the space must be as clean as possible and examination surfaces large enough to support the work in its entirety are needed. Clean sheets of backing board such as 4' x 8' acid-free corrugated or polystyrene foam-board, can be used to enlarge the tops of existing tables.

If the work comes in a tube, it should be removed with gloved hands

since it will be necessary to touch its front surface. Unless the work has been rolled around an inner tube which has a diameter significantly smaller than the outer tube, it cannot safely be removed from the outer tube without rolling it tighter. This requires clean cotton gloves and practice.

Once the work has been removed from the tube, it can be weighted on the examination table for measurement and the consideration of framing components. Hinging weights and clean blotters can be used to hold it open, but the tendency of the paper to curl will require more than one skilled pair of hands to ensure that no handling dents are created. It may be necessary to delay this operation until after normal hours so that interruptions can be avoided. If the work is valuable, the client should understand that any inconvenience this may create in scheduling is done to benefit the preservation of the work.

Once the work has been unrolled, it should be stored flat. If a work on paper such as a map or a movie poster comes in folded, it should be unfolded with the same caution accorded the unrolling process and it should also be stored flat without any refolding. Since this work is larger than the material normal to the shop, the ordinary flat file cannot be expected to provide safe storage. Here, too, the clean sheets of



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backing board can be extremely useful.

If two such sheets are spined with linen tape along one edge, they can form a folder. If the sheets have been aligned so that their convex sides form the inside of the folder, there will be a modest pressure created when the folder is securely closed. The inside of this folder can be lined with fresh interleaving tissue to cover the face of the work. If loops or tabs of linen tape are secured to the top edge of the folder, it can be pinned to the wall through those loops or tabs and safely stored while materials for the frame are procured. Hinges can be attached to the edge of the work and taped to the folder to enhance its security.

Frame moldings are not commonly available in the 2- to 3-inch depth necessary to support the weight of the glazing. These can be custom milled in hardwood and finished in the shop. Adding a backing layer to an ordinary molding may not provide enough strength. Strainers can be made of any soft wood which is mitered, then glued and stapled (use strong staples) together at the corners. If the wood is milled in 1/2" x 2" size, it will give good dimensional stability and will fit well into the back of most frames.

When a very deep spacer is used, the glazing will be suspended well in front of the strainer and its weight can place considerable stress on the frame. If the frame is screwed together with deck screws which come up from the bottom and down from the top, they will help to relieve this stress while remaining above and below the viewer's line of sight. More support can be added if screws are run through the top and bottom of the frame into the strainer, out of sight, while the screws on the sides can be run from the back of the strainer throughout and forward into the inside of the frame.

Next month, we will look at the problems of glazing, supporting, backing, and fitting oversized works.