

by Hugh Phibbs



## Copper Mounts for Objects

Previously, we've considered acrylic sheet or other plastics to create supports for objects being framed. One disadvantage of this approach is the amount of material needed. The plastic may need to be as much as 3/8" to 1/4" thick to provide the necessary strength. When heavier objects are supported, they may need a rather bulky piece of plastic extending in front of them, which can be unattractive. Members of the museum-going public may be accustomed to seeing objects secured with painted brass mounts. These mounts can support the objects on display with a relatively small portion of the mount showing. The creation of such mounts requires considerable training in brazing and fabrication with a metal which is strong and somewhat inflexible.

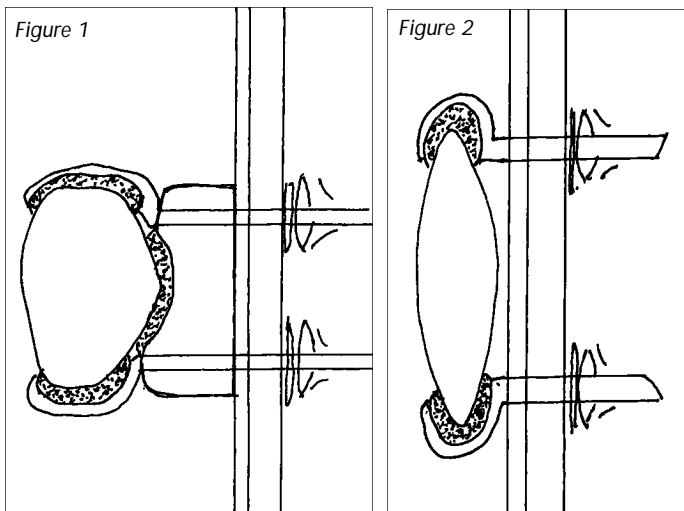
Copper is not as strong as brass, but it is very malleable and easy to work. Thick copper wire can be used to make supports which can approximate the dimensions of the type of supports used in museums.

Nothing should be permanently secured with such supports because an object could break if it became loose in the frame. The object's weight will be concentrated on a few points and even if it does not come loose, the shock and vibration which might result from movement of the frame could cause abrasion at the support points. If such a frame were jolted, the mount might

well give way, allowing the object to have potentially catastrophic contact with the side of the frame. Objects which cannot break and have resilient surfaces are more appropriate for supports made of metal.

A support made from copper wire begins with the wire laid on a large, flat metal surface, such as the back side of a vice, and pounded until one of its ends has flattened to the desired degree. The more the metal is thinned, the more flexible it will be. This will allow for it to be shaped more readily, but will also mean that it will be less able to carry significant weight.

Once the end of the wire has been pounded to the appropriate thickness, it can be bent with pliers to fit loosely around a portion of the object. There should be enough room left between the inside of the support and the edge of the object so that the support can be lined with a non-reactive, soft, plastic foam, such as Volara or Plastizote. The foam can be secured to the inside of the support with a pure polyvinyl acetate glue. The glue should be applied to



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# Preservation Practices

both the inside of the support and the foam, and should be allowed to dry in the air almost completely before the surfaces are pressed together to allow for a prompt bond. Since copper is a vapor barrier and the foam will inhibit drying, they would have to be held together for a considerable time if the air drying were not employed.

When the foam liner is secured, the mount can be tested on the edge of the object to ensure that it fits properly. Any unnecessary material remaining at the front edge of the mount can be trimmed away with diagonal pliers or a metal file. The mount can now be painted with artist's acrylic paint to match the object it is supporting. When all of the mounts are finished, the object can be positioned on its back mat/backing board and the locations of the holes needed for the mounts ascertained.

The strength required in a backing board to hold an object securely can best be achieved with a backing board made of acrylic sheet faced with the appropriate conservation-quality four-ply board. The matboard should be mounted overall to the acrylic sheet with PVA glue so that it will not cockle. The use of the acrylic sheet means that the holes for the supports will have to be made with a drill. The supports can be secured on the backing board with speed nuts (See Figure 1).

If there is a significant space between the back mat and the object, the copper wire may be too flexible to provide adequate support. In such instances, a combination of plastic and wire can be used. The plastic can be cut to the appropriate shape and drilled for the wire at one end and a screw at the other. Its surface, which will be next to the object, can be lined with the appropriate plastic foam and its sides can be painted with acrylic. When installed, it will look like Figure 2.

The proper use of this support must be learned through practice before it is used with clients' objects. It cannot replace all uses of commercially available mounts and should not be used for fragile ones. It is, rather, one technical option with which skilled framers can meet the challenge of the materials which the public wants framed. The framer's inventive resourcefulness, tempered with a thorough knowledge of preservation issues, will be critical in tailoring each frame to the needs of the object. ■