

by Hugh Phibbs



Works On Paper With Fragile Surfaces

Works on paper which have fragile surfaces, such as pastel, graphite, chalk, or unstable paint, should be housed in deep window mats. If such works were framed with a spacer and no matting, the glazing would be unsupported everywhere but the edge at which it touches the spacer. Since such fragile works should be stored or shipped flat, the minimal support a spacer gives poses a serious problem.

When deep mats are used to cover the edges of the sheet being framed, they can provide the same gentle, steady support that an ordinary window mat can. This is especially useful for materials such as animal skins, which are likely to cockle if their edges are left unrestrained.

A technique for creating deep window mats can be found at pictureframingmagazine.com, under the heading "Preservation Supplements," in the supplement on preservation matting. (*Editor's note: This supplement was printed with our February 1997 issue.*) This technique employs a window with an opening expanded to the appropriate dimensions, bevel strips that are affixed to back edges of the opening, fill made of

acid-free corrugated board, and a two-ply back liner.

If deep mats are to be most useful, they should be made to fit within the budget of most customers. This means that their manufacture should be as quick and accurate as possible, that they be designed so that they economize on materials needed, and that those materials are accepted as preservationally sound.

Deep mats made with conservation-quality boards, acid-free corrugated

board, and PVA glue use nothing which is not already found in many conservation-quality mat boards. The mat and corrugated boards are made of cellulose, and

the PVA glue is commonly used to laminate the plies of conservation-quality board. This type of window uses only the board required for its face and backing, while all its other components can be made from scrap.

Since most items can be safely accommodated in windows which have a thickness behind the face mat of $\frac{1}{4}$ ", bevel strips $\frac{3}{8}$ " wide can be made in batches and held to expedite future work. A window of this thickness will use two pieces of $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick acid-free corrugated per side to fill it com-

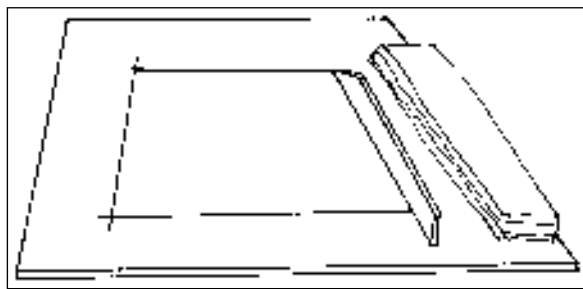


Figure 1: In order to keep the window mat flat when lifted, create a stiffener by gluing wood or strips of board and temporarily attaching it to the back of the board with a double-sided pressure-sensitive adhesive.

Hugh Phibbs is the coordinator of graphics conservation services in the Department of Exhibition and Loans, Conservation Division, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. He has a B.A. in philosophy from Cornell University and an MFA in painting from the University of Michigan. He has taught workshops for the AIC, the conservation programs at Winterthur/University of Delaware and the State University of New York at Buffalo, New York University, the Smithsonian Resident Associates Program, and preservation/conservation seminars for the Professional Picture Framers Association. He co-compiled the matting and framing section of the Book and Paper Group Outline.

pletely. A problem which does affect the assembly of this type of window is accurate placement of the bevel strips so that they are aligned with the edges of the face window.

The simplest method of aligning the bevel strips would be to apply them to the back of the edge of the window, while looking at the window from the front. The difficulty here comes from the fact that when the window mat is lifted off the worktable, it is no longer flat.

This can be overcome if a stiffener is made from a scrap of wood or stacked strips of board which have been glued together. This stiffener can be temporarily stuck to the back side of the face window with double-sided pressure-sensitive adhesive so that when the mat with its glue in place is lifted from the table, the side being worked on will stay straight and the bevel strip can be easily installed (see Figure 1). This should enable even those who are not familiar with this technique to make beautiful, accurate alignments.

When the bevel strips are secured and dry, the corners of the assembled bevel must be trimmed, aligned, and glued together. Previously, the material recommended for holding the corners together was linen tape. There is a simpler and stronger method, which uses only the excess portion of the strips themselves for making the joints.

Since the bevels are assembled in a pinwheel pattern, each corner will comprise the end of one strip meeting the side of its neighbor which extends past the corner. The strips should be positioned so that their topmost edges are aligned and the strip which runs past the corner should be cut twice. It should be cut

through so that when it is folded around its neighbor, it will fit onto the back of that neighboring strip.

It should also be cut part way through along the line where it meets the end of the other strip. This

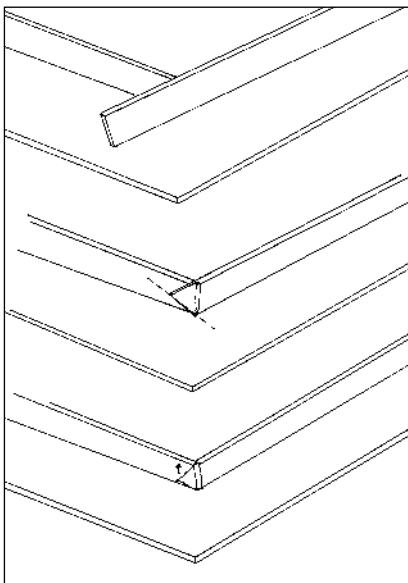


Figure 2: The corners of the bevel strips should be cut twice as shown in the center illustration above. That way, they can be folded neatly.

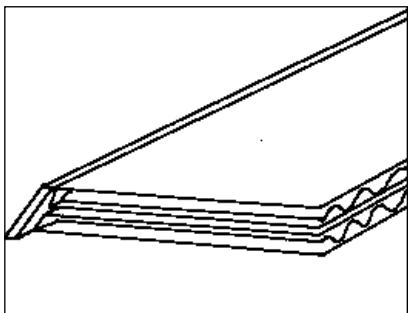


Figure 3: The end of the bevel strip, which has been cut across at a 55° angle, should extend slightly beyond the end of the stacked corrugated strips.

will allow some of the plies of board to be safely removed from the back of the strip and will create a tab which can be folded around the corner and glued to the back of the other strip (see Figure 2). This type of corner will be stronger and less likely to come open than the previous design.

It is also possible to combine the bevel strips and the backing

material to make a rigid component before the bevel is added to the window. The acid-free corrugated board which will serve as both fill and stiffener, can be cut in strips, wider than the sides of the window mat, with a bevel cut along one of the sides of each strip.

If two corrugated strips are to be added to the back of the bevel strip, PVA glue can be applied to the top of one of the corrugated strips and to the back of the bevel strip before assembly begins. Since the PVA dries quickly, the assembly must be rapidly, but carefully, executed. The components should be aligned so that the strips of corrugated board are stacked with their beveled sides together so that the bevel strip can be affixed to that surface.

The end of the bevel strip, which has been cut across at a 55° angle, should extend slightly beyond the end of the stacked corrugated strips. If the parts have been properly sized and assembled, the resulting supported bevel strips can be easily aligned and glued to the back of the window opening which has been prepared with the appropriately expanded opening (see Figure 3).

Deep bevel mats can be created with decorative fabrics, papers, or painted surfaces to enhance their appearance and increase profitability. The central role in preservation for this type of mat, however, comes from its critical ability to separate the glazing from the art while it supports the outer portions of the glazing. It can also support and restrain the edges of works on paper when it has been sized to serve as an overmat and should be a part of the technical repertoire any shop which concentrates on preservation framing. ■