

Conservation Mounting by Paul Mitchell

What is conservation mounting?

A mount and frame should always be selected to protect as well as enhance a picture. Unfortunately, some mounting and framing techniques not only fail to protect, but are potentially damaging to works of art. 'Conservation mounting' is a term used to describe the use of materials and techniques which provide protection your photographs. There are different levels according to the quality and specification of the materials used.

Because the picture is in direct contact with the mount, the choice of mount board is crucial to protecting your work. As a guide, there are three main categories of mount board.

Standard quality mount board (such as Daler-Rowney Studland, Colourmount or anything referred to as 'value board')

This is made from unpurified wood pulp. Unpurified wood pulp will gradually break down and release acidity, thereby damaging the picture. Some board also contains 'lignin' (a complex polymer occurring in certain plant cell walls which make the plant rigid) which will cause the core to turn brown with time. This standard of board is not really suitable for conservation mounting.

44" x 32" board will cost between £2.00 & £3.50

Conservation quality mount board

This refers to board made from chemically purified wood pulp and then alkaline buffered. The core and facings must meet certain criteria such as light fastness, pH ranges and quality of lamination adhesives. The core starts white and will remain white. I use this for the majority of my print mounting.

Daler Conservation Pro @ £4.60 per sheet

I use Colourmount Conservation @ £4.35 per sheet (Lion)

Museum quality mount board

This is usually solid core, made from 100% cotton fibre - which is a traditional paper making material and has proven stable over hundreds of years. It can be un-buffered (neutral pH) or buffered (an alkali deposit which prolongs the stability of the board and provides some extra protection but not recommended for photographs). I use this standard of board for prints to sell.

I use Alphasag Artcare (un-buffered) @ £6.99 per sheet (Nielsen)

Attaching the photo to the mount

Ideally the picture should never be stuck down to a backing card (i.e. Spraymount). This restricts movement and can be detrimental. A simple hinge should allow the picture to hang safely; they should be applied to the top edge of the mount or adhered to the backing board.

For the backing board I tend to use a thinner version of the same grade of front mount.

Adhesives used must be easy to remove at a future date, and must neither stain nor darken with age. Pressure sensitive tapes, such as Sellotape and masking tape should be avoided if at all possible. They can cause permanent damage to the picture by staining are difficult or even impossible to remove and can also damage other prints if stacked.

I use a water-soluble conservation gummed white paper mounting tape which is acceptable but are still not recommended for use directly on the picture.

Other materials used

- Conservation tape £7.15
- ATG Tape £2.60
- Hinging tape £20.80
- Mounting corners £4.10
- Mounting strips £12.25

Useful website links

www.lionpic.co.uk

www.nielsenonline.co.uk

www.diyframing.com