

GUIDELINES FOR FRAMING CANVAS PAINTINGS IN TRADITIONAL FRAMES WITHOUT GLAZING, PART I

Gayle F. Clements
Conservator
Gilcrease Museum

Introduction

Canvas paintings are usually mounted with tacks or staples to auxiliary supports called stretchers or strainers. "Stretcher" supports are adjustable and allow vertical and horizontal movement of the stretcher bar members. "Strainers" are fixed supports that are not adjustable and are held in place with nails, screws, or corner braces.

Glazing is a protective covering sometimes placed over a painting's surface for ultraviolet filtering capabilities, as a vandalism deterrent or for microclimate control. Glazing can consist of glass or various brands of acrylic sheets.

Traditional frames are frames with the flat back of the frame rebated. The lip left by rebating is the rabbet. The stretcher or strainer rests against the rabbet.

Frame Requirements

Check the frame to ensure that it can support the painting and repair loose fitting joints by reinforcing with steel corner angles on the frame's reverse. Use a miter vise and Titebond adhesive to repair frame corners which are misaligned or broken.

Rabbets which are too shallow for the painting's stretcher or strainer can be modified by adhering "finished" molding strips to the frame rabbet.

Frame Preparation

Coat or cover unsealed wood of the rabbet and rebate to deter offgassing of dangerous chemicals. Use either Marvelseal 360 vapor barrier strips adhered with heat from a tacking iron or water-based polyurethane.

If the painting is not square and does not fit the frame, chisel out the frame's rebate with a flat gouge or bull nose rabbet plane. Smooth the area with sandpaper and seal with Marvelseal 360 strips or water-based polyurethane.

Minimize rabbet rub (paint loss due to rabbet abrasion) by lining the rabbet's inner surface with a cushioning material. Use either an acrylic felt (Decco-felt with acrylic adhesive) or Ethafoam backed with double coated tape (use 3M Brand #415 tape; apply tape to Ethafoam which has been cut into thin strips).

Preparing the Painting for Framing

Dust the painting's surface using a soft sable brush to dislodge surface dirt or dust particles. Begin at the painting's top and let gravity work for you. With light, gentle strokes, move the brush down the surface. Continue the motion moving from left to right until the entire surface has been covered. Use only a soft sable brush on a painting's surface. Only the ends of the brush hairs should come into contact with the painting.

Dust the painting's reverse using a 3M Newstroke disposable paint brush. Discard the brush when it becomes soiled.

Protect the painting's edges from abrasion and paint loss by using either black painted metal stripping mounted to the edges with screws (cut strips with miter cutter) or twill tape stapled over the painting's edges (use bronze or stainless steel staples). Edge protection is not necessary if paint loss is not extreme.

If tacks holding the canvas on the stretcher or strainer are rusty, replace with copper plated steel canvas tacks. If blued upholsterer's tacks are used, isolate the tacks from the canvas by cutting acid free blotting paper on a hole puncher and mounting the tacks through the blotter circles before placing tacks in the canvas edges.

Fitting the Painting into the Frame

If the frame has ornamentation, place on padded blocks to cushion

areas that might be damaged by pressure applied during frame installation.

Fit the painting into the frame and check the image or sight area. Check for any shifting of the stretcher in the frame. If shifting is possible, fit lateral or vertical shims or spacers on the sides. Shifting causes rabbet abrasion and results in paint loss and unsightly edges. Reinforce with acid free mat board strips, balsa strips, or Coroplast strips. Strips can be glued to the frame, reinforced with brass escutcheon pins, or held in place with brass mending plates. If strips are adhered with glue, use conservator's approved Titebond glue adhesive.

Secure the painting in the frame using four hole brass mending plates (do not use two hole plates) and brass screws. Bend the plates on a vise to conform to the contours of the frame and stretcher or strainer. The plates should extend over the frame and onto the stretcher or strainer by approximately 1 1/2". Do not use nails to secure a painting in a frame. Nails can puncture the painting and tear the canvas edges. More importantly, frame vibrations are directly transferred to the painting when nails are used to hold it in place.

If the painting's frame is small or too thin for longer length screws, mount single hole nickel plated offset clips into the frame instead of mending plates. Four hole brass mending plates are preferred if the frame's width and depth will accommodate longer length screws.

Mount mending plates or offset clips into the frame only. Do not place screws into the stretcher. Screws placed in the stretcher restrict movement of the stretcher bar members. Position the mending plates according to the painting's "wallhanging" position. Place more plates on the bottom and sides with fewer plates across the top. Paintings usually shift from side to side and downwards, so

additional support is needed in those areas.

Protective Backing

Attach a protective backing to the painting's reverse. The backing should cover the painting's stretcher bars and canvas. Backings provide "impact resistance" and serve as a buffer against the environment, dust and dirt. Materials of choice are 4mm thick Coroplast or single wall construction acid free corrugated board. Standard brown corrugated cardboard should not be used because its acidic properties and lignin content could damage the painting. To avoid snagging, trim the corners to the inner edge of the stretcher bar members without exposing the painting's canvas.

Mount the backing to the stretcher with steel screws and nickel plated cup washers. Place the screws and washers through the backing using an awl to make the holes. Additional screws and washers are sometimes necessary to make a tight fit between the stretcher and the backing.

Hanging Hardware

Mount hanging hardware to the vertical frame members (not the stretcher or strainer) using nickel plated hangers with a two or three hole design. The use of two and three hole hangers provide a second screw which anchors the hanger and deters pivotal action. Screw eyes should not be used to hang paintings. Measure the frame's entire height and place hangers one-third the distance down from the top.

Match screw coloration with the hanging hardware. For example, use steel screws with nickel plated hangers. Be consistent and neat even though the painting's reverse is not highly visible.

Refrain from attaching braided wire through the hangers. More support is possible if the painting is hung on two wall-mounted picture hooks that latch onto the two or three hole frame mounted hangers. This two hook hanging method is "museum standard practice" and provides more support since stress is distributed over the two hooks. Braided wire can break at the apex where it rides over a single picture hook.

Supplies and Product Sources

United Manufacturers Supply, Inc.
80 Gordon Dr.
Syosset, NY 11791
800/645-7260
FAX 516/496-7968

Steel corner angles
1/2" x 3" brass mending plates
and screws
Nickel plated offset clips
Brass plated picture hooks
Double or triple hole nickel
plated hangers
Brass escutcheon pins
Balsa wood strips
Bull nose rabbet plane
Blued upholsterer's tacks
Steel staples

Testfabrics Inc.
200 Blackford Ave.
Middlesex, NJ 08846
201/469-6446
FAX 908/469-1147
Twill tape (acid free)
Decco felt rabbet liner with
acrylic adhesive

Edco Supply Corp.
Brooklyn, NY 11232
800/221-0918
FAX 718/788-7481
Marvelseal 360 for sealing
rebate of frames

Coroplast
4501 Spring Valley Rd.
Dallas, TX 75244
214/392-2241
FAX 214/392-2242
4mm Coroplast protective backing

Conservation Materials Ltd.
PO Box 2884
Sparks, NV 89431
702/331-0582
FAX 702/331-0588
Titebond Glue

American Excelsior Co.
5011 W. Reno
PO Box 270786
Oklahoma City, OK 73127-0311
405/946-0512
Ethafom to use as a cushioning
material for rabbet liner

Decco-Felt Corp.
PO Box 156
Glendora, CA 91740
800/543-3226
FAX 818/914-2734
Decco felt rabbet liner with
acrylic adhesive

Putnam Distributors
PO Box 477
Westfield, NJ 07091
800/631-7330
FAX 908/232-6709
Finished molding strips to
widen rabbet

Local hardware store
3M Newstroke disposable
paint brushes
Metal stripping for edge protection
(paint with flat black paint)

Light Impressions
PO Box 940
Rochester, NY 14603-0940
800/828-6216
Blotting paper for reinforcing
blued upholstery tacks

Utrecht
33 Thirty-Fifth St.
Brooklyn, NY 11232
718/768-2525
FAX 718/499-8815
Magnetic tack hammer
Copper plated steel canvas tacks
Staple gun

S & W Framing Supplies, Inc.
PO Box 340
New York, NY 11040
516/746-1000
FAX 516/746-6877
Nickel plated cup washers for
steel screws

Brainerd Manufacturing Co.
East Rochester, NY 14445
716/586-0028
1/2" x 4" brass mending plates
Solid brass corner plates

Duo-Fast Corp.
3702 River Rd.
Franklin Park, IL 60131-2176
800/752-5207 for nearest distributor
Stainless steel and bronze staples

Archivart
PO Box 428
Moonachie, NJ 07074
201/804-8986
Acid free corrugated board

Rawl Plug Company, Inc.
Two F.B. Powers Square
New Rochelle, NY 10802
914/235-6300
Framing hardware

Dow Chemical Co.
Midland, MI 48674
800/258-2436
Water-based polyurethane