

THE RAMP MOUNT

*A mounting panel which compensates
for changes in a paper support which has been previously
attached at the edges to an open stretcher frame.*

By Holly Maxson

The panel described here was developed while working on a number of pastels on paper supports which had been wrapped around the edges of a wooden stretcher frame. In some instances, the primary paper support had been glued at the edges or overall to a secondary paper or fabric support. The damage to the paper is usually similar to that of a stretched canvas painting. The reverse of the work is unprotected and vulnerable, and the fabric or paper support is stretched out of plane, having relaxed into the center of the open stretcher frame. There is often abrasion to the media where the support rests against the inner edges of the wooden stretcher bars, despite the fact that the wooden bars are usually planed towards the inner opening. The paper in contact with the acidic wooden stretcher is frequently degraded and brittle.

To treat the pastel effectively, it is usually necessary to remove it from the stretcher. When the edges of the paper support are going to be preserved and the pastel returned to a panel or stretcher of the same thickness as the original, the conformation of the creased margins is maintained. The creases can be reinforced with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste or with other adhesives as appropriate. This step and subsequent treatment steps can often be accomplished with the pastel face up.

After conservation treatment, one must decide whether to replace the original open stretcher with another open frame or with a solid panel. To prevent further damage to the vulnerable paper support, I usually prefer a rigid, solid support, but have observed that a completely flat surface can be detrimental to the object. The flexible paper support has adapted to the concave opening in the stretcher frame for so long that it cannot be forced to lie flat. If one attempts to wrap the margins around the edges of the panel, the additional tension can cause even greater distortion in the paper support.

My solution for this problem has been to construct a panel which compensates for the natural, hammocked shape of the paper support. I add a gradually sloping ramp along each edge of the solid panel which allows the stretched paper support to bow slightly toward the center of the panel. The inclined borders consist of several layers of two- or four-ply mat board strips created by gluing progressively narrower strips towards the outer edge of the mount. The inner edges of these strips are bevelled and the corners miter-joined.

When dry, the slope can be sanded and covered with a layer of acid free paper to produce a smoother transition across the stepped incline. A strip of acid-free paper can also be glued along the honeycomb edge of the panel to produce a finished effect. The final thickness of this construction should match the thickness of the original wooden stretcher frame.

To reattach the pastel to the new mount, wide hinges of Japanese tissue are adhered to the underside of the reinforced margins of the paper support. The pastel is positioned on the mount, and the hinges are either glued or T-hinged, starting at the center of each edge, and alternating from side to side, as if stretching a canvas on the new ramp mount.

