Mastering Mounting

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF

Stretching Your Limits

Mounting comes in all forms. Sometimes it can be flat; at other times it is 3D. Shadowboxes are perfect for housing valued collectibles, but there are times when glazing and traditional framing techniques are not the answer. This was the case for a long-time customer and collector of ancient Asian artifacts who desired bases for his collection of Bi disks for personal display.

A bi is an ancient Chinese circular jade artifact dating mainly from the Shang, Zhou, and Han dynasties. It is a flat jade disc with a hole in the center and ornate surface carvings. Both the front and back of the disks are carved, but the back generally has a much simpler pattern. The client's disks averaged 11" to 14" in diameter and were 3/8" to 1/2" thick. The surface carvings ranged in depth from incised to 1" deep. Fortunately, the deepest disk had edges that were narrow enough to fit into a universal stand.

Subcontracting special projects, such as custom-welded bases for a collection of jade disks, can enhance your reputation and take your services to a new level

A Bi is an ancient Chinese jade disc with a hole in the center and ornate surface carvings. These three very different disks illustrate the range of jade color, style, and decoration.

The client wanted custom stands created to fit any disks from his private collection of more than 100 so he could rotate them for display with the change of the seasons. The stands needed to be heavy enough to totally support any disk without tipping. He had researched options on the Internet, but brought the project to me so he could have more involvement in the creation, including approval of the prototypes.

Subcontracting a Metal Sculptor

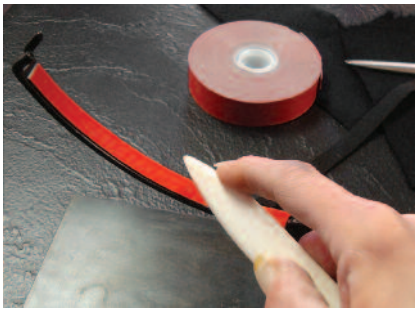
As it turned out, this was a two-part project. He needed 10 interchangeable single-pole steel bases for the disks and one customized artifact base to support an eight-pound, carved stone mask that measured 6"x 9"x4". Acrylic was far too light weight and would have needed a large footprint. The bases had to support the disks, which were prone to tipping front and back, as well as the mask, which was offset from center balance. Plus, all these were to be displayed open air and not in display cases.

Because welding was required, the creation of these bases needed to be outsourced. After researching available object and display resources online, a well-known local sculptor, Leon Leigh of Contemporary Art in Metal of Tehachapi, CA, was contracted to cre-

The back of a Bi disk is also carved, but with a simpler pattern decoration. The entire disk is always fully carved and decorated.

The surface carvings may be rather flat or very dimensional, up to 1" deep.

Bases were 4"x11-1/2" on 1/2" metal steel plate. The vertical support rod was 3/8" steel at varied heights of 2", 2-1/2", and 3".



Industrial strength, high-tack sponge adhesive was used to line the curved support. The tape is aligned and burnished with bone for full adhesive activation.

The plastic release liner is peeled off prior to adding flange felt.

Each of the front metal flanges is backed with a felt pad. The flange pads are attached prior to aligning the felt in the curved support and after the liner has been removed.

The Value of Subcontracting

Developing relationships with other companies, framers, artists, and skilled professionals is as much a part of being a custom framer as knowing how to cook starch paste or correctly dry mounting. Back in the early 1980s, I regularly subcontracted my wet mounting projects to a person in town with a cold vacuum frame, and my customers never knew I wasn't mounting them myself. A few years later, when I purchased a 40"x60" hot vacuum press, I became the only framer in town with dry mounting and laminating abilities. I became the go-to framer, received subcontracting work from other framers.

Today, subcontracting is quite common for framers who need to mount wide-format digitals and don't have a hot or cold roller laminator. Subcontracting project elements to others who specialize in certain areas should be considered routine. A service should always be offered even if you are not doing the work in-house. Framing has become so diversified that you cannot be everything to everyone. If you are considering a new piece of equipment--such as printer, wide roller laminator, or hot vacuum press--also think about the added subcontracting work and profit it might lead to.

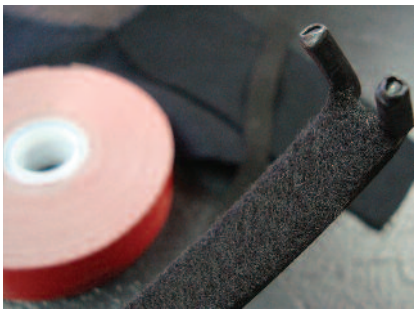
For this project, I didn't need a metal artist to create bases, but I'd seen Leon's work and sold his sculptures. I knew he understood the value of finishing, detailing, and creating a piece of art for a customer. He builds bases for his sculptures and galleries all the time, and though these would be considered a high-end solution for bases, they were all unique. Offering that special treatment and personalization to a client was priceless.

ate what the collector wanted.

I would purchase all the materials, keep track of time and travel for on-site meetings, and handle all contact and invoicing with the client. Once paid, I would deduct the cost of materials, on-site and travel expenses, my finishing time for padding the bases, and would take 15 percent as a finder's fee from the total invoiced price.

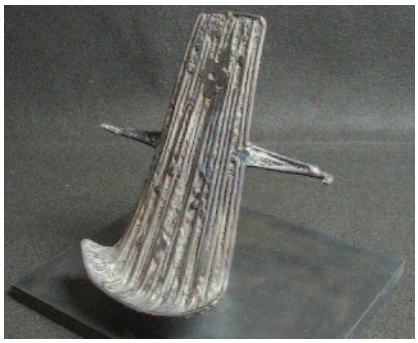
Disk Stands

A series of the disks were available for initial structure and design roughs at my location. Then, the first prototype was taken on-site to test the fitting to numerous other disks in the collection. The metal sculptor and I collaborated on the structure, weight, counter-weight, and finishing concepts. They would be created with welded steel techniques to maintain the weight required to support the disks. They would also be finished



The end teeth are capped with shrink-to-fit plastic for additional padding and support.

The sponge and felt padding also helped in making minor adjustments for variations in disk thickness while filling in highs and lows of the scalloped edges.



Steel rods were welded together and shaped to create a cradle that fit the back of the mask hollow.

The holes in the mask allowed for brackets to be aligned, fitting into the holes for maximum security.

Sponge tape and felt lined the bottom of the chin rest for support and to prevent scratching.

The sponge and felt padding also helped in making minor adjustments for variations in disk thickness while filling in highs and lows of the scalloped edges.

with a warm-tinted patina and rubbed with metal wax as a final polish.

The bi disk bases were designed to be 4”x11-1/2” out of 1/2" metal steel plate. The vertical support rods were 3/8” steel, and 1/8”x1/2” wide flat steel strips were used to contour to the curvature of the disks. At the client’s request, rod heights varied at 2”, 2-1/2”, and 3” for display flexibility and to allow the light from the window to reflect through the disks when on the display table. Short, vertical 1/2” teeth were welded at either end of the curved rest for exterior stability, and 1/2'”x1/2” pieces were welded center, front, and back and shaped into rounded tabs for disk alignment. The prototype was then taken to the client for making slight modifications, verifying the design, and getting approval for the rest of the stands to be created.

Step-by-Step Finishing

Once the stands were completed, they needed to be fully padded. They were lined with 1/2" high tack, industrial strength, sponge-backed adhesive and applied to the curved support. Rolls of this material are readily available at home improvement stores. Sponge tape was selected for the additional cushioning beneath the felt. The tape was cut to length, then aligned and burnished with a bone for full adhesive activation before the release liner was removed. The release liner was removed prior to padding the front and back metal support flanges. Removing it later could have gotten in the way of the side flange padding. Also, the bottom felt pad needed to be applied after the tab felt. The trimmed-to-fit strip of polyester felt along the bottom support was aligned and fully burnished again to activate the newly exposed adhesive.

The metal teeth at each end were fitted with black shrink-to-fit plastic tubing for security and padding, which was applied prior to aligning the sponge tape and felt. The sponge/felt liner helped contour the padding for added support, filling in minor variations in the scalloped edges of the disks.

Stone Mask Base

The stone mask needed to be displayed at about a 35-degree angle and had to appear to be floating for full 360-degree viewing. Because of

the weight, it required a base that was fully contoured to the curvature of the stone. Plus, a large bottom ledge lip needed to cup the chin for maximum support.

Because of the uneven nature of the back of the mask and its concave shape, beginning with a steel plate would have required a great deal of fabrication. Instead, steel rods were welded together side-by-side and shaped to create a contoured cradle that fit the back of the mask with a cup at the bottom as a chin rest. The contour support ranged from 2" wide at the top to 3" the bottom, cupping enough to fully allow the head to rest on the shelf. Since the client lives in earthquake country, it was important that both the disks and the stone mask be seated well enough on their bases so they could withstand a strong tremor. There were two holes on either side of the back of the stone mask--one through each ear--that may have originally held earrings or small inlaid gemstones. These openings provided grip holes for additional metal support, two welded steel arms that extended from the cradle and hooked into the holes.

As with the bi disk stands, sponge tape and felt lined the bottom of the chin rest for support and to prevent scratching of the stone. The completed base measured 7"x8"x1/2" thick to support the weight of the stone. The larger footprint of the base was required towards the back of the mask to offset the frontal weight of the angled stone, so the back of the base extended beyond the actual mask by an additional inch for counterbalance.

All of this allowed the mask to be viewed nicely from all angles without needing to be picked up, even though it is not physically attached to the base. It stands on a pedestal under a designated spotlight in the client's foyer and is stunning.

Anything like this that can be done to increase the perceived value of your framing and services is always a good marketing idea. Since Leon is a well-known sculptor in Southern California who has international collectors, each of his custom-welded bases are engraved with his signature on the bottom as a uniquely created piece of art to accompany the client's collection. ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF, CMG, mounting editor, owns Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, featuring custom framing, fine art/graphic design, and consulting. Specializing in mounting, matting, design, and fine art, she teaches at The National Conference. She has written four books on mounting including *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook* (third edition) and *Creative Mounting, Wrapping, and Laminating*, available from PFM PubCo. She can be contacted via www.designsinkart.com.