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"Floating Deck-Edged Watercolors"

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Watercolor papers are sold with both clean cut edge—as from a watercolor block--and a ragged deckled edge as single sheet. The mounting choices are simple, use a traditional window mat a sink mount (mat), or float it. In order to allow the beauty of uneven deckled edges to remain visible as part of a framing presentation float mounting is the only choice and there are three hinge styles used for float mounting, V-hinge, S-hinge and pedestal—or platform. The major visual difference is the distance from the backing to the art, which in turn impacts the required depth of the frame with glazing.

Preservation Materials

When framing any original or irreplaceable art only noninvasive preservation materials should be used. That means cotton rag boards, UV-protective or museum glazing and a reversible mounting technique such as cooked paste starch hinges. Which even when applied correctly are meant to be the weakest link. In the event a frame falls to the floor or is dropped during transport, hinges are designed to break before the art tears.

Commercial hinging tapes have been widely available for years with water activated gummed and pressure-sensitive (P-S) adhesives, in a variety of weights from sheer mulberry paper to heavy threaded linen. These tapes may be suitable for lesser valued items but should never be used for any original art.

Pressure-sensitive adhesives (PSA or P-S) are a permanently tacky substance that bonds at room temperature, with the application of manual pressure. P-S tapes should never be placed in direct contact with artwork regardless of whether they are acid free or not, as damage can occur from all P-S adhesives over time.

Starch Pastes

For preservation use only natural starches to make water soluble, noninvasive, neutral pH adhesive paste for Japanese paper hinging. Gluten free wheat and rice vegetable-based starches are best for preservation hinging with rice starch forming a medium strength bond and wheat starch forming the stronger bond necessary for float mounting. Both wheat and rice are available as ready-to-cook powder, precooked powder, and precoated paper strips, so there is no excuse for not hinging original art with natural starch and Japanese paper hinges rather than commercial pressure-sensitive hinging tapes.

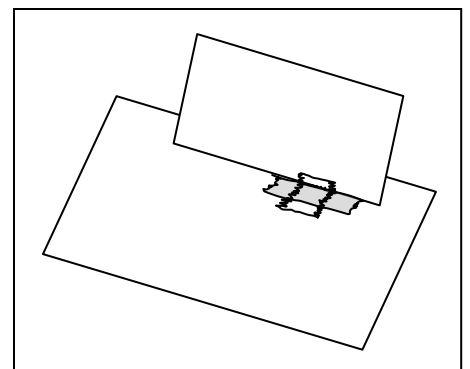
Wheat Starch Recipe (as possible sidebar)

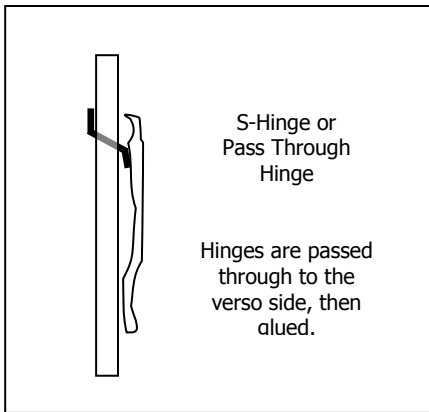
Purified, uncooked, wheat starch powder is easily prepared by mixing 1 part starch to 5 parts distilled water.

1. Place 1 teaspoon powdered wheat starch in a clean, microwave-safe container.
2. Add 5 teaspoon of distilled water, stir, and place the mixture in a microwave oven.
3. Microwave on a high setting 20 seconds, remove the paste, and stir.
4. Microwave another 20 seconds, remove and stir again.
5. Repeat this process several times until the paste is stiff and translucent.
6. Paste should be cooled to room temperature for use.

Japanese Hinges

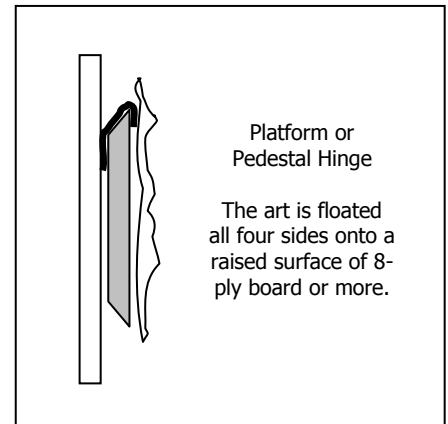
The basic V-hinge is a small strip of folded Japanese paper attached to back of the art on one edge then held to the backing board with the opposite hinge edge. As the weakest of the three hinge types for floating it can peel from the mount with gravity and the weight of the art if not properly mixed and applied. A reinforced V-hinge adds a supportive cross piece—using the same hinge paper and paste--which makes it stronger, but gravity may still pull the art from the backing (**diagram 1**).



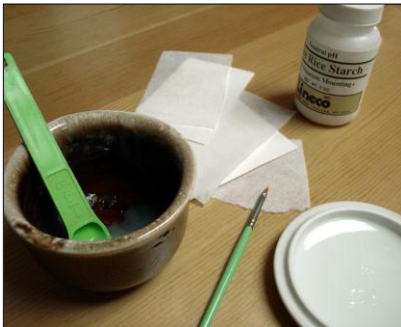


The S-hinge—or pass-through hinge—is very strong when the framed art is held and transported upright at all times, but is subject to peel failure if the frame is rotated or mishandled and the weight of the art is allowed to pull against the hinge side attached to the back of the art. The S-hinge is first mounted to the back side of the art, weighted and allowed to dry. Slots are cut in the backing board at the proper height and just slightly wider than the hinge. The sharp edges of the backing must be rounded to prevent cutting the rice paper hinges either when they are being passed through or during handling of the framed image. They are then glued to the back of the mount board above the slit **(diagram 2)**. This method has no spacer or lifter behind the art and watercolor rests directly on the backing.

The raised platform or pedestal hinge allows free floating of artwork mounted to a raised platform which in turn is fused to the decorative backing board **(diagram 3)**. The platform is reverse bevel cut smaller than the art so it will not be visible at the edges and hinges are pasted around the top edge of the back of the art, then loose hinges are located at sides and bottom just to help prevent flopping and movement of the art. Hinges are always weighted and allowed to fully dry. The dried hinges are then pasted over the edge of the platform to the back, also weighted during drying. When dry the platform is fused to the decorative backing with PVA. This method allows the art to hover above the backing and float inside the window mat.



Step-by-Step Platform



Assemble wheat starch powder, squares of blotter paper and spun polyester (Pelon interleaving), teaspoon, microwavable dish, natural bristle brush and plate for applying paste to hinge. **(photo 1)** Cook paste as directed and tear hinges in preparation.



Apply hinge to the top of the back of art set in 1/4-1/2" to line up with the top edge of platform. Smooth out paste and feather edges with the natural bristle brush. **(photo 2)**



From bottom to top layer blotter, spun polyester, art, wet hinge, spun polyester, blotter and weight, then let fully dry. The polyester prevents the blotter from sticking to the art and the blotter soaks up moisture. **(photo 3)**



Apply 2 or 3 hinges across the top **(photo 4)**—depending on size of the art--beginning about 1" from each corner. Add one along each side and two looser ones across the bottom.



Align the pedestal on the back of the art and paste the hinges around to the back of the pedestal. These top hinges should be snugly set to fit the rag board edge so the hinges hold the art when vertical. **(photo 5)** Layer polyester, blotter and weight then allow to fully dry.



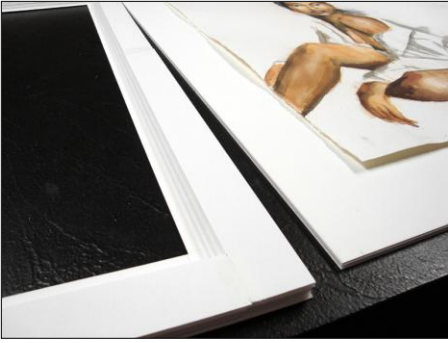
Bottom hinges are set at 1/3 and 2/3, and must remain looser to allow for paper expansion. **(photo 6)**



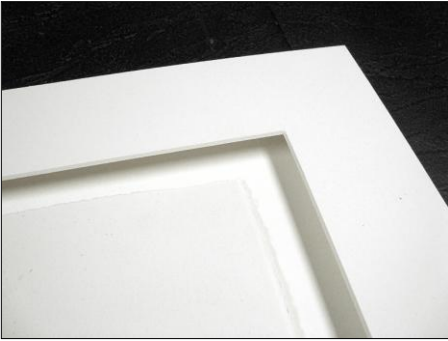
When dry turn the hinged art face up and align inside the window mat. **(photo 7)**



Cut the window mat to the desired width and add reverse bevel cut spacers of foam or 8-ply rag--behind to make it taller than the floated art on its platform. **(photo 8)**



Book hinge the full length of the window mat to the backing using strong P-S linen tape or Abaca-sa tape and burnish fully for maximum adhesive activation. **(photo 9)**



If the watercolor is at all cockled, the window mat must still be above the highest point of the watercolor and the selected frame must be deep enough to accommodate the entire thickness of the frame package. **(photo 10)**



Once placement is confirmed, glue the mounted art/pedestal to the backing—inside the window—using thick PVA white glue. Press firmly and weight to dry. **(photo 11)**



Starch hinging does indeed have a learning curve, but so does painting with watercolors. If floating a deckle edge painting is desired the platform version is the easiest to mount and align. The white window mat allows a 1/2" float space between the farthest point of the uneven paper deckle and the mat. The original used in this demo is 22x30" full sheet watercolor is by artist Bob Rowland, New Orleans, LA and was done on 140#CP Kilimanjaro natural white watercolor paper **(photo 12).**

Additional Tips

Lineco is a good source for preservation materials including wheat and rice starch powder. Lineco Hayaku is a long fiber hinge product with a dry, acid free, water activated, starch adhesive on one side capable of holding up to 15 pounds of weight when properly mounted. Always allow the water to naturally soak up into the hinge from beneath, rather than brushing water directly onto the adhesive, as you can actually remove adhesive during the brushing application process. Lineco Abaca.sa is a very strong long fibered, manila hemp tape with an acrylic adhesive that is permanent and non-yellowing. Though not for hinging art it is perfect for book hinging window mat to backing board, and always fully burnish all P-S tapes for proper activation.



A relatively flat watercolor—one with only gentle waves—is the best candidate for a float mount, and a pedestal float is the most dramatic and easiest to achieve. On the other hand, highly cockled papers that have been painted without pre-stretching may not lie flat enough for float mounting (**photo 13**). If the edges of the watercolor paper are too wavy for a traditional window mat or a float mount to be used, then a sink mount may be the only option.



Gummed tapes are easily removed after dry by reactivating with water, but are far too strong to tear if the frame were to fall and should never be used for hinging. Even water activated linen—considered preservation quality for hinging by many—can buckle and damage paper over time as seen in the damaged sample (**photo 14**). Also note that when anything other than water is required for hinge removal—such as mineral spirits or chemical solvent—it is not a preservation product and should be avoided. Even water soluble tapes only remove the tissue carrier and not adhesive saturation when removed. In as short as ten years time adhesives can chemically react and cross-link with atmospheric pollutants rendering the new adhesive insoluble and nonremovable, impacting the value of the art forever.



Though a float space between top window mat and art should be at least 1/2" it is visually enhanced and easier to be seen when placed over a contrasting background (**photo 15**). This sample was also matted using elongated Asian proportions so the top and bottom spaces are wider than the sides in order to maintain the elongation of the original 10"x30" art.

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Original watercolor shown courtesy of artist Bob Rowland, New Orleans, LA.

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