

Big Paper, Big Problems: Preservation Issues of Large Format Works on Paper

ABSTRACT

Only fifteen years ago conservators wrestled with the problems of oversize works on paper, such as the framing of Robert Rauschenberg's 72 by 36-inch print *Booster*. In many collections today this particular work is no longer considered "big." Artists are now creating works on paper that are billboard or wall size and often beyond the boundaries of any kind of framing. Such works certainly present challenges for installation in exhibits. They also create serious storage difficulties, especially when it is necessary to fit them into holding systems designed prior to the big size boom in art. The Kress Foundation has made possible a yearlong in-depth study of the preservation issues surrounding large format works on paper. This presentation and a subsequent publication provide a collection of storage and exhibition techniques currently in use for large format works on paper.

Practical storage solutions, for both unlimited and shoe-string budgets, were presented. Housing methods include shelving, flat files, rolled systems, screen storage, and upright bins. Appropriate materials for protecting objects in storage were also considered. Limitations presented by the sizes of available materials and cost comparisons were discussed in addition to providing information about suppliers. Exhibition methods discussed in the presentation included modifications of traditional framing systems as well as more contemporary techniques, some of which do not include glazing. Current exhibition aesthetic, and sometimes the preference of the artist, often calls for works to be displayed directly against wall surfaces. This requires non-traditional methods of attachment, such as non-aqueous and/or pressure-sensitive adhesives, staples, pushpins, Velcro, magnets, rigid support panels, and cleat systems.

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This study has depended on information gathered from museums, archives, individual conservators, and framers in the United States and abroad. The conservators and keepers of collections who generously contributed their time and experiences to this project are enthusiastically credited. Their willingness to share information so that others may benefit made this project possible. The outcome has been a rich compendium of methodology, which should be useful to conservators and others who are charged with the preservation of big paper.

MICHELLE S. FACINI
Samuel H. Kress Foundation Paper Conservation Fellow
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
San Francisco, California
mfacini@att.net

DEBRA EVANS
Head of Paper Conservation
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
San Francisco, California
devans@famsf.org

See also the poster report by Stephanie Lussier and Michelle S. Facini, "Big Paper, Big Problems: Solid Support Options for the Mounting and Display of Large Format Works on Paper," on pages 111–117.