

Framing Techniques for Digital Prints

As digital art becomes commonplace and consumers increasingly display this media, it's important for framers to be educated about it. Knowing how to identify, handle and store these works of art enables you to assist your customers in deciding how to frame their items.

Firstly, it's important to be able to identify the specific type of digital print your customers bring in, as the framing options may be significantly different. Compared to traditional fine art and photo prints, digital fine art and photographic prints have a variety of characteristics you need to understand in order to frame them correctly. As the printing processes of digital art continue to evolve, keeping abreast is an ongoing process.

New papers and inks are constantly coming on line as manufacturers seek to create prints with outstanding reproduction qualities. Here's an overview of the main types of ink and media:

- Fine art prints may be printed on traditional watercolour paper, treated watercolour paper, canvas, fabric or even transferred to hardboard.
- Every combination of ink and paper has different longevity and characteristics. These can be affected by the amount of visible light, temperature, humidity and atmospheric pollutants in the environment where the print is hung.
- The two main kinds of ink are dye-based and pigment-based. Pigment-based inks generally have greater Longevity, but the colours are usually not as strong as for dye-based inks.
- Inks and papers for digital photographic prints are may not be as colourfast as some fine art digital prints. There's a great variation in digital photographs due to the proliferation of inks and paper for home printers.

Digital prints on watercolour paper (whether treated or untreated) made with dye-based inks need to be handled with the utmost care. They are even more sensitive to water than traditional watercolour paintings and must be framed with the same care and consideration as the best watercolour painting, keeping in mind that visible light can fade the inks as much as ultraviolet rays do. Pigment-based inks are less vulnerable to water.

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Digital photographic prints are largely just as susceptible to problems with moisture as are traditional photos. Home digital printers vary in the kinds of inks they use. Many use water-based inks, although some use more durable pigment-based inks.

No matter what kind of digital print you're working with, it is important to find out how and where it was printed. Ask where the customer purchased it, look on the back to see if it has any printing information or see if it came with a certificate of authenticity. If it was printed using a home computer, find out what kind of printer was used.

As a general rule, when framing digital prints it is advisable to stay away from heat related mounting techniques, especially the use of a dry mount press, or any kind of water-based mounting process.

One alternative is to use a cold laminating system to mount the image. Another is to use hinging and conservation framing techniques, including the use of UV-filtering glazing.

So how do you keep up to date on the current and new types of digital prints? Manufacturers and distributors of papers, canvas, inks and digital printing equipment often post the latest information on their specific products on the web or can send you any available information. Manufacturers of preservation framing supplies can also keep you up to date on recommended materials and techniques for digital prints.