

# MUSEUMS AND CONTRACT FRAMERS: THOUGHTS ON COMMUNICATION

By Dr. Jennifer Booth, Fine Art and Museums Business Manager and Yadin Larochette, Museum and Conservation Liaison

Increasingly, museums and fine art institutions are contracting out for framing of art works and heritage items. The aim of this article is to help define the information needed from both the institution's and framer's perspectives, in the hopes that improved and stream-lined communication can lead to both a better framing package and potential savings in cost and time.

The priorities of an institution and those of a contract framer may not always coincide. Contracting for framing can be a time consuming process for both parties. Framers may spend many hours preparing a quote, taking into consideration both conservation issues and frame durability and longevity. Museums often require multiple quotes which are reviewed by different departments, each with their own parameters and budgets. There can be frequent back-and-forth questions from both sides, and framers will often differ in their methods and approach, resulting in quotes that can vary widely. These multiple layers of information, or lack thereof, can lead to mixed results. In some situations works can end up needing to be re-framed due to structural failure of the frame or, in more extreme cases, damage to the art work itself. One framer estimates that around 70% of works entering their workshop require conservation treatments prior to framing due to issues arising from past framing decisions.

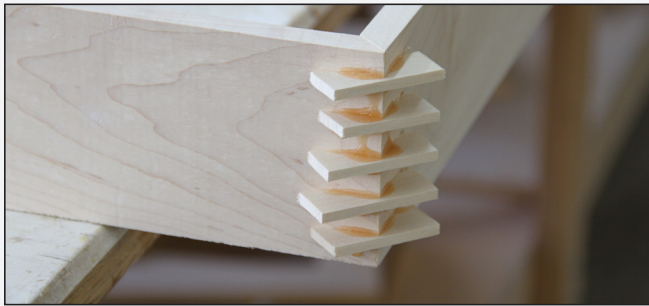


Sealing frame interior with Marvelseal  
Photo courtesy of Bark Frameworks

Full and open communication between customer and framer can reduce this risk. Critical information, such as high quality images with a ruler included for scale, and the type and current condition of the work, plays a large role in the success of the framing process. The material a work is made from, and its age and origin, may also dictate framing decisions. These could include, among other things, the moulding style and whether or not the interior of the frame should be sealed. Display location and lighting conditions may also influence glazing choice and package design. Although all of these details may seem extensive and excessive, sharing complete information from the beginning could save time in the long run. The outline below is designed to help get the conversation started, with the understanding that there may be other critical details specific to projects that are not included here.

Framing Topics for Discussion			
What is being framed?	Plan for display	Envelope considerations	Moulding/Frame considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description</li> <li>• Materials: media, support, adhesives</li> <li>• Date, if known</li> <li>• Where it was made</li> <li>• Exhibition history</li> <li>• Artist preferences, if known</li> <li>• Dimensions</li> <li>• Condition</li> <li>• Value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary or long-term</li> <li>• In-house or loan</li> <li>• One location vs. multiple venues</li> <li>• Humidity and temperature control</li> <li>• Lighting                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source</li> <li>• Level</li> <li>• Location</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glazing                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glass vs. acrylic</li> <li>• Low reflective</li> <li>• UV protective</li> <li>• Anti-static</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Mount systems</li> <li>• Backboard materials</li> <li>• Hinges                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiber type</li> <li>• Adhesives</li> <li>• Application systems</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Monitoring systems (optional)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wood (species)</li> <li>• Metal (aluminium, brass)</li> <li>• Other?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Profile style and dimensions</li> <li>• Finish                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gilded</li> <li>• Stained</li> <li>• Polished</li> <li>• Other?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Join type                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welded</li> <li>• Splined</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Taking all of the parameters listed above into consideration, basing the decision on who should frame the art work solely on cost can be a mistake. One framer may charge 20% less than another, but the quality of the work and materials used may be far inferior. Two aspects that can greatly influence cost and structural stability are the type of moulding joint (pin joints are cheaper, splined joints are stronger) and the type of glazing (thinner glazing might reduce the price, but may be structurally less stable).



Glued splines for splined joints before trimming  
Photo courtesy of Bark Frameworks

Scheduling can also play a large role in the overall cost. The earlier a framer is aware of a project, the easier it will be for them not only to source materials at the lowest price possible, but also plan ahead and budget work hours for the multiple employees needed. This can include designers, fabricators, fitters, and others involved in the project.

Continued communication with a framer after receiving a higher quote is recommended. Most framers want to know why their quote was rejected, and are often open and willing to work within budget constraints once they are aware of them, in order to better serve their clients. By continuing to communicate with the framer one may end up with a better product at a lesser cost.

As more and more institutions are contracting for framing, an increased understanding of how both museums and framers work can help facilitate the experience and offer the best quality framing package possible within budget. Looking at numbers alone can be misleading. Framing materials and construction choices may be based on quality and not necessarily reflect the lowest cost possible. A client shopping around should keep this in mind, especially if the decision to go with one framer over another is based on price alone. It is highly recommended to ask specific questions from each framer that is providing a quote to understand the reasons behind their choices.



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