MEG BROWN, MODERATOR

Book Exhibition Issues Discussion

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ABSTRACT

This article summarizes a discussion on book exhibition issues, especially the construction of cradles to support books on exhibition, that took place at the Book and Paper Group Session of the 30th Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation in Miami, Florida, 2002. Demonstrations included a polyester film cradle designed at the New York Academy of Medicine; Brigham Young University wedges created by Pamela Barrios; V-shaped acrylic book mounts used at the Palace of the Legion of Honor; exhibition mounting for a display of Russian avant-garde books at the Museum of Modern Art; and 10-point Mylar supports for miniature books at the Lilly Library, Indiana University. Additional observations from the participants and notes assembled by the moderator are included.

Following is a summary of the discussion on book exhibitions that took place at the Book and Paper Group Session of the 30th Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation in Miami, Florida, 2002. Discussion focused on the construction of cradles to support books on exhibition and related issues. The session was organized around several informal demonstrations followed by observations from the participants. Additional notes assembled by the moderator are included at the end.

This open discussion took place on June 10, 2002, during the AIC 30th Annual Meeting, June 6–11, 2002, Miami, Florida. The moderators organized and led the discussion and recorded notes. Readers are reminded that the moderators do not necessarily endorse all the comments recorded and that although every effort was made to record proceedings accurately, further evaluation or research is advised before putting treatment observations into practice.

ELAINE SCHLEFER: POLYESTER FILM EXHIBIT CRADLE

Pamela Barrios demonstrated a polyester film exhibition cradle, created at the New York Academy of Medicine by Susan Martin. (Elaine Schlefer had originally volunteered to demonstrate the construction, but she broke her arm just before the event.) This is the classic M-shaped cradle that we have all been making for years out of binder's board or folder stock, but conservators at the Academy of Medicine decided they wanted a cradle that was less visible as well as quick and inexpensive to fabricate. They decided to make the M out of 4- or 5-mil polyester film—which you would think would be very flimsy, but it turns out that when you fold it (lengthwise) in thirds, it becomes quite rigid. Susan Martin has published detailed information about the construction of the cradle in the *Abbey Newsletter* and as a National Parks Service *Conserv O Gram* (Martin 1990, 1993); the cradle will also be described in a forthcoming manual by Nelly Balloffet and Jenny Hille (Balloffet and Hille [2003]).

Why would you like this cradle? Old books have boards but they aren't always flat; if you make the traditional M out of binder's board, you have an argument between the old board and the new board. Polyester film flexes, so whatever your book's boards want to do, the polyester film will allow them to do. One important hint: be sure that you make your creases in the film exactly where you want them the first time—any secondary folds will weaken the structure. Also, a nice benefit of this cradle is that you can collapse it afterwards for storage and re-use it later. Make a few cradles in standard sizes and use them over and over.

Start your measurements with the spine folds: Pam makes these the width of double-stick tape; it will usually spread to accommodate the spine of the book. Make your next folds to conform to the shape of the book in its exhibit position. Decide the degree of opening you want for the book and mark the polyester film with a tiny pinch, then

crease it sharply with a folder. Pam believes the support can be one-half inch smaller than the book and still give proper support; this also makes the support less visible in the exhibit case. Put double-stick tape on the underside of the cradle's spine to attach it to the base for greater stability. If you feel that the polyester film is not quite sturdy enough for a heavier book, you can slide a piece of 4-ply mat board into the "legs."

This is a very accommodating book support—it's something to experiment with that can do a lot of different things. About fifteen pounds is the heaviest book it will hold. You can use 5-mil polyester film, but this is quite thick and you will have to watch your folds.

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PAMELA BARRIOS: BYU WEDGES

A new job at Brigham Young University (BYU) involving more exhibition work spurred Pam to investigate the process carefully. Individual made-to-measure M-cradles out of board and cloth were taking almost two hours apiece, and in the end some didn't fit well, or wouldn't fit in the case. She began to look closely at wedges and designed some really simple wedges to use on any book in conjunction with a board (fig. 1). She described her system in detail in an article in *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship* (Barrios 1998). These cradles are so easy and take so little time that instead of spending time making cradles the conservator can use the time to talk to the curators about lighting and other decisions for the exhibition. The wedges can be made out of any appropriate cradle-making material, such as board, Coroplast, or even Plexiglas. They can also be used to tilt the book. Where necessary a Mylar strap can be run through the wedge to hold the page open.

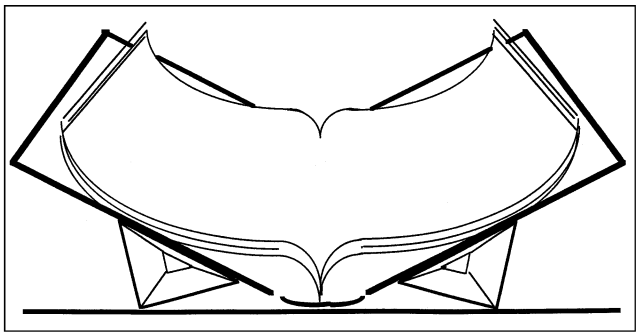

Fig. 1. Instructions for using wedge-shaped book supports: place the wedges under each book board with the broad flat side toward the board. Allow the weight of the opened book to determine the placement of the wedges by moving them toward the spine or away from it, until the book is balanced.

Gravity and friction between the cloth lining the case and the cloth on the wedges hold the book in place. It may seem precarious, but the book stays in place. Pam reported that only once has she seen a book fall off its wedges from someone bumping the case, in a case that was next to an entry gate.

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JANICE SCHOPFER AND MICHELLE FACINI: BOOK INSTALLATION TECHNIQUES USED AT THE LEGION OF HONOR

Aided by slides and models, Janice Schopfer and Michelle Facini presented book installation techniques being used at the Legion of Honor Museum. Many innovations were developed for the installation of about two hundred books in the recent exhibition, Artists' Books in the Modern Era 1870-2000. The highlight was the "V-Shaped Acrylic Book Mount."

In the display of books, there are times when it is desirable to feature both the binding and the text in an upright display, especially in exhibition cases that are viewed in the round. This type of display can make a book exhibition more visually lively in addition to enabling visitors to see more aspects of the books. A simple low-cost "wedge" is made of two pieces of acrylic sheet, welded together to form an angle. This V shape eliminates the need for unsightly strapping and provides excellent support. If constructed precisely, the acrylic actually seems to disappear.

Variations of the V-shaped acrylic support include the following:

- Used upright for single and multiple openings in both small and large books.
- Laid flat (single or in tandem) to enable simultaneous viewing of text and cover while the book is displayed flat.
- Modified with an acrylic wedge at the bottom (used when it's necessary to accommodate the square of a book).
- Used for the display of unbound books.
- Used in conjunction with an easel type mount to enable viewing of the cover and multiple page openings in an unbound book.

Other tips presented include:

- Pins and clips used to secure books to V-shaped acrylic mounts.

- Acrylic rods and polyester film used to roll back bound-in interleaving sheets.
- Computers in galleries displaying digital photographs of all the illustrations in all of the books on view.
- Storage and database inventory for mounts.
- Design details for the small Reva and David Logan Gallery of Illustrated Books, including visitor-activated fiber-optic lighting, pin-able surfaces, mount and box storage beneath cases, and a computer carrel for viewing digital images of book illustrations.

A publication is being prepared that will present the V-shaped book support in detail, with illustrations. Portions of the recent book exhibition may be viewed by visiting the following web site: <www.rollingorange.com>. Click on "Work" then on "Logan Collection of Artists' Books." Note that this is just a sample of a web provider's work and was configured for PC. Mac users have limited access.

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SCOTT GERSON: RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE BOOKS AT MOMA

Scott Gerson, a Mellon Fellow at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, spoke and showed slides of an exhibition of approximately three hundred Russian avant-garde books from 1910 to 1934. The earliest books included in the exhibition were made of ephemeral materials, such as newsprint. Every page in a given book could be different; some had friable media and many had collage elements. These were "books" but they really were works of art on paper bound together in small editions by artists and poets working together very informally. Of the earliest books, most were staple-bound rather than sewn, and, as a result, many of the books wouldn't open fully.

There is no book conservation lab at MoMA; the art on paper conservation lab sometimes deals with books. The exhibition curators did not want the mounts to show at all so the conservators and exhibition designers devised mounts using Plexiglas supports, which were fitted to the exact size of the book so as not to be visible. This was also important because the paper was often so brittle that trimming the support even slightly smaller would have created a breaking point. The Plexiglas was screwed to a mount constructed of medium-density fiberboard painted the same color as the deck inside the cases. Mat board was adhered to the surface of the Plexiglas supports to cover the screws. Electrostatic charge from the Plexiglas was not a problem.

The books were displayed in cases at an angle of forty-five degrees, which necessitated spending a lot of time designing individual mounts for each book. Readily available, self-adhesive polyester channel mounts (sold by Talas) were strong enough to hold lightweight books to the cradles. In these instances, all the pages except the one on display were clipped to the cradle. For heavier books and those that wouldn't open fully, traditional polyethylene strapping was used.

Some books were displayed standing, using stationary pins sheathed with Mylar inserted within the text block to provide support. The book was then strapped to itself. "Reverse cradles" were constructed for some books as an alternative to displaying them standing. These were constructed in the same way as the other cradles; however they were designed to support the book so that the covers were displayed uppermost. Some of the books, for instance a group made of wallpaper, had very little internal support and required additional support from mat board inserts. Some books were framed and shown flat on the wall. For these the museum framer strapped the books to the backboard of the frame package. To prevent shifting, side wedges were designed.

Three computers in the exhibit space gave visitors a virtual glimpse inside six or seven of the books. Digitization was a last-minute effort made because the curators wanted to show more images from the inside of selected books. Digitization was a good solution to the desire to disbind some of the books. The conservators were able to avoid disbinding altogether for this exhibition.

In the discussion that followed, Scott elaborated on the creativity required to arrive at a good design solution that incorporated the curators' vision of the show and the conservators' concerns for the safety of the extremely fragile books. The challenge was multiplied by the fact that the exhibition was going to travel.

Scott showed some slides of packing the exhibition for travel. The books were placed in individual Tyvek envelopes stiffened with conservation board. The packed envelopes went into individual slots in trays, and the trays stacked into crates. The mounts for the books also traveled and were separated and packed according to the section of the show. As the exhibition was disassembled, the conservators recorded how each of the volumes was strapped so that they could be reinstalled at future venues. One conservator traveled with the exhibition.

In response to a question about lighting and the stress of multiple exhibition sites, Scott explained that the col-

lection was a special gift from the Judith Rothschild Foundation. The books are generally in excellent condition. The gift was stipulated upon the agreement that the collection would travel and that the light levels would be slightly higher than the normal MoMA standard (5-7 footcandles) during the New York display. Although there are multiple copies of some of the books, rotating copies at different venues was not an option because the mounts are so specific: even a slightly different copy wouldn't fit.

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JIM CANARY: LILLY LIBRARY MINIATURES EXHIBITION

The Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, has a collection of sixteen thousand miniature books, a gift from one collector, and was committed to an exhibition. Jim thought that would be fine—until he realized that they were going to exhibit one thousand books! The conservation staff had the normal amount of prep time, but they had to figure out how to make cradles for so many books.

Jim showed slides of miniature M-cradles made from the 10-point Mylar used by LBS/Archival Products to make pamphlet binder covers. The 10-point Mylar can be bent by hand, without heat, but it still has some strength: it holds its shape but can be moved a little if the angle is not right. Jim and his colleagues used mock-ups made from scraps of 10-point board. They slid the plastic into the board shear, clamped down and folded it. If the cradle was not right they simply made another one because it was cheap! Probably the whole cost for materials for all of the books was under ten dollars.

Jim also had to raise some books to different heights in the exhibit case so he mounted and angled cradles. Jim bends the bottom edge of the cradle up to support the tail of the book, and the back edge can be bent as well to display the book tilted at an angle. One can also just staple the plastic to a back support. In other contexts Jim has found the 10-point Mylar especially good for fold-out maps for exhibition (for books of regular size) and for comic books.

Applying straps to keep the miniatures open was the longest time issue. He had to cut the polyethylene strapping in half, sometimes in thirds, because of the size of the books. During the exhibition cleaning nose prints off the glass became an issue because the books were so small and hard to see.

During discussion Jim observed that he tends to keep supports for future exhibitions. He categorizes cradles by sizes and basic shapes, but he thinks that a database is a good idea to get organized.

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MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

Meg summarized some items of interest she found when researching a bibliography for this discussion group.

- Harry Campbell at Ohio State University wrote an internal document with directions for a hybrid cradle: the cradle is Plexiglas with a Mylar sling. He made about thirty at once and uses them all the time. He said they are fast to make and fairly flexible. The general idea is that if the Mylar sling isn't strong enough you can have the added support of the Plexiglas under it. Contact Harry for more information (Campbell [n.d.]). Members of the audience observed that you can also add a Mylar sling to the Benchmark product if you want to change the opening. You can use the heavier plastic to extend the size of the Benchmark.
- The Gutenberg project in Germany has a Web site which shows a cradle designed to support each page as it is being photographed for digitization (in German and some in English): <http://www.gutenbergdigital.de/technik.html>. The Library of Congress has a similar cradle.
- Enrico Flaiani and his assistant Jim Neal emailed that they are using their CXD AG Kasemake 503A with modified software parametrics to produce in-house custom cradles. Enrico is willing to share this information with anyone interested, contact him at: <vpr-archivio@secarch.va>. Enrico and Jim work at the Vatican Secret Archives in Italy. More information on the Kasemake is available at <www.conservation-by-design.co.uk/coards/boards32.html>.
- For images of an inventive book cradle made from wood (text in German) see Manfred Mayer's work at <http://www.kfunigraz.ac.at/ub/sosa/buchpult.html>.
- The best published article in Meg's opinion is written by Helen Shenton, then at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Shenten 1997). She led a session at a conference in England to try to discuss the best practice for book exhibition, and this article is a culmination of that discussion and many years of exhibition work on her part. The article has great breadth and is thoughtful. One image from this article is the Clarkson wedges. Christopher Clarkson designed these but they

are now available from University Products and Conservation by Design.
- Meg showed a slide of a microfilm cradle redesigned for exhibition and another of a pillow that you can suck the air out of to keep the object in place. This pillow is used primarily for conservation treatment.

Further discussion followed:
- Members of the audience showed slides of cradle variations and a mount for vellum pages using wheat starch paste and Japanese tape.
- One person had observed that heavy books tend to weight the Benchmark mount open—the opening spreads over the course of the exhibition. Lightweight books do fine. Someone commented that the hinge mechanism should be replaceable. Another observation was that the Benchmark mount requires a very deep case: measure your cases before purchase.
- Conservation by Design (Stuart Welch) has a lightweight wedge that folds flat which is made of stiff black foam.
- Another question came up about those closets full of old Plexiglas mounts. Are they ever really re-used? Is there any way to recycle the plastic? No one had an immediate answer.

SUPPLIERS

Archival Products
PO Box 1413
Des Moines, IA 50305-1413
800-526-5640
http://www.archival.com

Benchmark
P.O. Box 214
Rosemont, NJ 08556
609-397-113
http://www.benchmarkcatalog.com

Conservation by Design
Timecare Works
5 Singer Way
Woburn Road Industrial Estate
Kepston, Bedford, UK MK42 7AW
(01234) 853555
http://www.conservation-by-design.co.uk/

Talas
568 Broadway
New York, New York 10012
212-219-0770
www.talasonline.com

University Products
P.O. Box 101
Holyoke, MA 01041-0101
800-628-1912
www.universityproducts.com

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at: <KBen@slv.vic.gov.au>.
Campbell, Harry. n.d. Adjustable Plexiglas exhibit cradles. Harry will share his instructions; email him at <Campbell.12@osu.edu>.
Primanis, Olivia, and others from Conservation at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. Variety of Materials about book exhibition done for in-house workshops and an AMIGOS workshop. Titles include "Selecting Books for Exhibition," "Instructions for Display: Polyethylene Straps," "Thoughts during an Exhibit Assessment," "Book Cradles and Supports," "Display Cradles for Books," "Plexiglas Cradles" and "Plexi Display Cradles for Unopened Books." Olivia will be putting together an updated version of these sheets onto the web site for HRC: <www.hrc.utexas.edu/about/conservation>.

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