

Displaying Shadowboxes

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Displaying memorabilia in a frame enjoys tremendous popularity. Sport objects, collectors plates, medals and clothing pieces are just a sample of the huge number of objects regularly displayed. Retail stores abound with examples of completed shadow boxes which usually command high prices due to the originality of the display. Finding frames for artwork and photos is easy, with standard sizes available everywhere.

Shadow box frames are a different story. Many require odd shapes, and the depth necessary may be anything from a fraction of an inch to several inches. Some of the larger Art supply outlets and Craft stores carry a limited supply of shadow box frames.

Custom frame shops can design one to your requirements, but the cost can easily run to several hundred dollars for larger frames.

Shadow box frames can be divided into 3 categories

1. Shallow frames, ranging up to 1/2 inch or so. These can often use "off the shelf" frames. Objects such as coins, metals, ribbons etc. usually do not require more than 3/8 to 1/2 inch of depth, and many normal frames will accommodate this. Some frames also come with a "double" rabbet and are usually for oil paintings. These can allow up to 1 1/2 inches of depth. Standards size "off the shelf" frames are relatively inexpensive.

2. True shadow box (solid wood) frames. These will allow depths of 4 inches or more, depending on the design. A rabbet is usually put on the bottom of the frame for installation of the back. Shadow box frames take a lot of high quality wood, are difficult to obtain, and generally quite expensive. The inner sides and back usually need to be decorated with a covering material, often matboard or similar materials.

3. Display boxes which fit into "off the shelf" frames. Display boxes are made to fit into the rabbet of a normal frame. They normally come pre-lined with mat or paper materials and you can add your own lining if required.

If used with a true Shadow box frame, the steps of decorating the sides and back are eliminate, and disassembly is easy. The advantage is that a very nice frame can be turned into a shadow box of any depth quite inexpensively.

The back of the display box will jut out from the back of the frame used, so a wide frame is desirable. Display boxes are normally manufactured for specific purposes, and thus are difficult to obtain.

Lining the Shadow box frame

- 1.** If mats are to be used, the sides of the frame may not be seen. Also, the glass and mats can be held in by using framing points. Thus no work is required on the sides.
- 2.** If mats are not used, the sides should be lined first with foamcore, and then with matboard or some other decorative material. (Wall paper, colored paper etc.) The top edge of the foamcore will press against the glass and hold it in place. Double sided tape or glue will hold the foamcore and lining in place. Be sure the foamcore and lining is not thicker than the width of the rabbet, or it will be seen from the front of the frame.
- 3.** The rear of the box requires a material less than 1/4 inch deep, or the width of the rabbet at the bottom of the frame. Thin plywood or a similar material is fine, but 3/16" foamcore is one of the better materials. It is very smooth, and easy to attach to a lining. Use matboard or a similar material to line the back and attach it with double sided tape or glue. Using window mats with shadow boxes
Any shadow box can be used with or without a single or double mat. If mats are used, any number of openings can be placed to effectively display several objects.
The mats can even be placed at different levels to add to the "3D" effect. If mats are used, the sides of the frames do not usually need to be decorated as they are not seen. The type and color of mats should match the color of the backing board.

Attaching objects within a Shadow box

How to attach the object to the box deserves careful consideration. If the object has little value in itself, and will probably never be removed, the job is easier. Paper and other flat objects can use many glues.

Heavier objects can use epoxy. Bathtub caulking compounds are great in that you can build up a fraction of an inch of compound to create a large gluing area. A long drying period is necessary but the result is excellent.

Sewing objects to the backing is excellent for any type of clothing. Baseballs can be sewed from the stitching through the backing board. Sewing allows the object to be removed later without damage. Velcro can be attached to softer articles and attached to the backing. Little if any damage is done to the article when removed.

Glues that can be dissolved with chemicals can be used, but be very careful with this one. Some imagination can work wonders.

Foamcore can be cut out to the shape of the object, and the object imbedded to stop it from moving. This is time consuming and tricky, but the object remains in a pristine condition.

There are literally hundreds of ways to attach objects, and many books and articles written about them. Art Supply stores, Craft retailers and libraries are be a good source of information.

Foamcore is an excellent product as an aid to attach objects. The back of plates have a rim which

makes them difficult to glue. A 3 x 3" piece of foamcore can be attached to the back of the plate with caulking compound and then caulked to the back of the box in order to give a larger gluing area. You can also add to the "3D" effect of the display by using several layers of foamcore.

Summary

Shadow box frames can take those treasured articles out of a drawer or box and put them on a wall to be admired every day. Customized frames, both in size and depth, can be made to frame anything from a baby's soother to a full size baseball bat, complete with the uniform. For small businesses, customized displays can be very reasonably priced when purchased in bulk, and high markups are attainable.

Craft stores giving classes can make make a very high quality and fun project at a reasonable cost. Please click on some of the examples shown to give a larger view of the frame, and a full explanation of how the display was constructed.

About MatShop

MatShop has been supplying mat and framing supplies to photo retailers for 10 years, and through the WEB for 6 years. Its customers are artists, photographers, manufacturers and others who require volume purchases of these products. The purpose of the MatShop.com page is to supply background information on all products, and to suggest how mats and frames can benefit the specific needs of its customers. MatShop is a Division of Island Art Publishers, (www.islandart.com). Island Art markets art cards and other products throughout the United States and Canada using the exact products we recommend to our MatShop customers.