Outline of Framing Without Glass
By Judith Hummer

Why should we consider doing this?

- View your work without glare from glass
- Great for plein air painting
- Appeal to buyers and gallery owners
- More competitive shows are allowing for this type of presentation

There are a few different ways to mount watercolor paper to a panel but I will demonstrate What works for me. Follow me along with a step by step process.

Step One - Decide the type rigid substrate on which to mount your paper
Using for Plein air? Want to put it in a frame? Frameless? Your choice
- Wooden cradled panel varying depths are available - need to prime first
- Aluminum composite material (ACM) - archival
- Gatorbord 3/16" depth
- Gessoed board - already primed
- Raymar has panels you can purchase that have Fabriano Artistico already mounted

Step Two – Prepare panel as needed
- Unprimed wood panels and hardbord panels should be primed with gloss medium to seal the wood panel. May require light sanding before sealing.
- Protect and prepare the cradle if desired
  You may seal cradle first with gloss medium, front and back and sides. Then it might require a light sanding. Then paint the sides as desired.
- Cradle can be left in a natural state as well, recommend to just seal with cold wax later

Sealing the natural wood helps keep any bleeding from the wood grain getting into the paper and also provides a barrier from moisture or warping. Some products may need a light sanding with 220 grit fine sandpaper.

Step 3: Mounting a finished painting

* When mounting an unpainted piece of watercolor paper, the process is the same; you just don't have to center the paper. I still recommend leaving a little that extends beyond the edge of the panel so that you will have to trim later.

Cover your work area with layers of newspaper/newsprint, so that soiled layers can later be removed exposing a fresh layer of newspaper.

- **First – Centering a finished painting on the panel**
  When I need to crop my work for the wood panel, I trace around the edge of the wood panel with a pencil on a piece of tracing paper. Then I move the tracing around til I get the desired cropped location. Push a pushpin through the tracing AND your watercolor paper at each corner. Flip the watercolor paper over and using a ruler, connect the pinhole dots. This will provide the exact location for positioning your work on the panel.

  Another method for centering your image over your panel is to lay the painting on top of the panel and bend the edges to make a light 'crease' so you can see where to position it later.

- **Second – prepare the adhesive for the wood panel**

  Make sure your surface is clean with layers of newspaper underneath
  BE CAREFUL - to not get medium on the front of your painting.
  Apply soft gel medium or heavy gel medium to the wood panel.
  Scoop out with a palette knife. (I use a piece of cardboard so I can just throw it out later).
  Spread it evenly over the wood panel. Make sure to get enough on the edges to insure a good adhesion. Want an even distribution of gel over the surface of the panel.

- **Third – apply wood panel to the painting**

  Have your painting face down on a clean newspaper. Place the wood panel within the penciled area. Press gently all over to get its initial adhesion. Then pick up the piece so That the painting is now face up. Use a brayer gently from the center working your way outward to get rid of any air bubbles. Be careful to make sure the brayer does not Get soft gel medium on it.

- **Fourth – let sit overnight**

  After the brayer, lay the tracing paper on top of the painting. Flip it over - so your painting is sitting on the tracing paper, and the back of the wood panel is facing up. Make sure you do this where it can remain undisturbed overnight. Take a tissue and wipe away any soft gel medium that may have seeped out from using the brayer. Make sure your wood panel is between your guidelines – you still have a little bit of time to make adjustments if necessary. Then place a board or rigid flat item on top of your panel. Make sure that the board is larger than your wood panel. Place some heavy objects evenly distributed over the board and let it sit overnight.

- **Fifth – check it out next day and trim**

    If a corner did not seal overnight, use a small brush (or a toothpick) and soft gel medium squeezed into the loose area. Then weigh it down for 2 hours to get it adhered.

    Trim any overhang with utility knife (or exacto knife)

Step 4: Varnishing your work

If you did not sign you painting yet, do so now before sealing.
We must seal your finished painting before considering it as done. Watercolors must be sealed with a spray varnish first, not a brush on varnish. There are many spray varnishes available, make sure you get one that is UV and archival.

- **First – Two coats of Krylon UV archival gloss spray varnish**

    We need to use gloss spray varnish as the first step in sealing your piece. Spray in one direction, then the other in a well ventilated area. Wait about 15 minutes then repeat with a second coat. Gloss varnish seals the paint and the color so it can not be disturbed. Work that is sealed with just matte varnish may have a slight color distortion, beginning with gloss varnish prevents this from happening.

- **Second – two coats of Krylon UV archival matte spray varnish**
    Spray at least coats of the matte varnish, starting in one direction, then the other.
    After about 15 minutes repeat.
    This is considered completely dried after 2 hours.

Now your painting is completely protected! Nothing will disturb the paint underneath. It is protected from moisture and UV damage.

Step 5: Finishing Touches – How to Present your Painting

Wanna be done?
Your painting can be considered as finished now because it is sealed. It can be placed in a frame or just attach proper wiring to the back of the cradled wood panel.
If you left your cradled sides naked before, I suggest protecting them with cold wax – then you can be done.

Want to add cold wax?
It is a personal preference if you want to add 2 coats of Dorland's Cold Wax over your finished piece. The wax gives the painting a lustrous finish. Apply with a soft rag, let sit a few hours, reapply. Let sit overnight, then buff with a clean soft cloth.

References

wood panels

Seal the wood panel

Adhesive

Spray Varnish

Cold Wax

Other references
Brienne M Brown: YouTube
Framing Watercolors without glass
www.matthewbird.com/ blog