A Non-traditional Reversible and Transparent Display Mount for a Thangka with Significant Inscriptions on the Back of Primary Image

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ABSTRACT: A completely reversible display mount is described for a thangka that has significant inscriptions on the back. The transparent rigid support allows both primary and secondary information on the thangka to be viewed, and protects the thangka while being housed in a conventional display frame.

Introduction

A completely reversible display mount was devised for a thangka that has significant inscriptions on the back. A transparent rigid support was created - to allow both primary and secondary information on the thangka to be viewed, and to protect the thangka while being housed in a conventional display frame. The mount features an aluminum panel, with a rectangular opening corresponding to the sight and sewing lines of the original thangka mount. This aluminum frame provides the support for a transparent scrim, to which the thangka is affixed by sewing through existing sew holes. Decorative elements are added to complete the display for conventional framing, yet remain isolated and reversible. A fully supported and protected thangka mount was produced, with all original information and aesthetics entirely visible.

Method

The support mount for a thangka was made by creating a mount structure consisting of three main elements:

1) A 3/16th inch thick powder-coated aluminum panel (Figure 1a), with interior rectangular cut-out dimension to correspond to the original sewing line of the thangka.

2) For more dimensional stability, a 1/2” x 1.2” wood stretcher (Figure 1b) is attached to the aluminum panel. This stretcher is sealed and sanded before use, and screwed to the back of the aluminum panel with counter-sunk, flat-head stainless steel screws. In addition to increasing dimensional stability, this wood stretcher provides a medium to which the support scrim can be attached.
3) The third element is hand-dyed transparent silk (Figure 2), toned light brown to blend with the color of the back of the thangka. This new silk is stretched and attached to the mount structure with stainless steel staples. Polyester Stabiltex could also be used. Silk was used in this instance because a particular color was required, so silk was dyed to match.

Once the support scrim is attached to the frame, the thangka is placed into position upon the transparent support scrim, and sewn into position through existing sewing holes (Figure 3). The two side verticals, and the top horizontal edge are sewn. The bottom horizontal edge is allowed to remain free and unstitched to the support. A fine polyester sewing thread, Skala by Guterman, was used for this purpose.
As per client specifications, decorative details of conventional art framing are now added to the display mount without impacting the thangka. These elements are secured to the support scrim or stretcher.

Inscriptions on the back of the thangka show through the scrim on the reverse of the mount (Figure 4). A line of sewing, where the thangka is attached to scrim, appears along the interior edge of the aluminum panel (Figure 5).

A decorative band of gold silk is laid down, following the outside line of the painted thangka surface, covering the fine stitch line that attaches the thangka to the scrim. Completely separate from the thangka, it is positioned and hand-sewn to the scrim on all four sides.

An acid-free museum board mat is covered with a complimentary silk chosen by client, and applied over the gold silk edging to frame the thangka for display. This fabric-covered mat floats over the top of the face of the mount, and additional material along all exterior edges is brought around to the back of the mount, and also secured with stainless steel staples to the supporting stretcher frame.

The mount is complete, and ready to be glazed and framed, per client specifications. The thangka can be easily removed from this non-traditional mount by simply removing the sew lines, clearly visible on the back of mount.

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