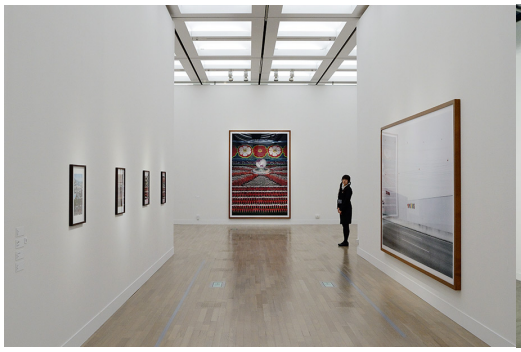
Guidelines for Framing and Mounting Images

Although photography provides a number of different options for display, framing or mounting work so that it can be hung on gallery walls is very much the mainstay of the photographic exhibition. These guidelines will discuss some of the dos and don’ts of the practice and hopefully help with your decision-making. Names of good suppliers of display and framing services will be provided and a list with links posted on Moodle.

Image Choice – Number, Scale, Edit & Sequence

It is worth discussing your options with staff (primarily those running modules and projects with an exhibition outcome) and other students. You should have an idea of the space available although you should be ambitious: third years may not all have as much space as they would like in Swansea but could show more prints in London.

Some work lends itself to substantial scale; other work is better small and intimate. Scale options may be based on format, convention and the space the work is going into. Conversely, the scale may dictate where your work is placed when it’s curated. Traditionally, photography tended to be framed and displayed quite small – frames from 8x10inch to 20x24. The increasing importance of photography in the art gallery has seen a shift to larger display sizes so that the work can be dominant in a large, high-ceilinged space (think of work by Andreas Gursky or Thomas Struth). It would be fair to say that the trend to larger print sizing is quite pervasive, yet work that demands that the viewer walks up to it to view at close range is no less valid (as in this image of Lewis Baltz’s work in a gallery). Scale should be appropriate to what you want to communicate.



Andreas Gursky

Lewis Baltz

Sometimes work may be placed into grids or double-hung for reasons of communication, sometimes for expedience (in such a case, with the possibility of a different hang in the London exhibition). Again, we may suggest that because you need a substantial number of prints, a double-hang or a grid or a looser salon-style hang (with prints often at varied sizes) may work. The single row - or museum hang - allows work to be looked at in a more individual way; salon hangs, more as a totality. Consider and discuss these options.

You hang the work to make sense. Staff will help with the sequencing options to maximize the impact and communication of the work.

Finishing Options:

Printing

Exhibition prints should be of the highest quality achievable whether made in the darkroom or digitally on photographic or inkjet paper. The industry requirement for saleable printed work is that the work has the appropriate print and archival qualities.

In standard display conditions* Fuji Crystal Archive paper has a steadfastness rating of 60 years. Epson Ultrachrome K3 pigment ink, 108 years for colour, 200+ for black and white.

**This is an environmental standard that allows comparison between different products: images kept in an archival box may last indefinitely, images displayed in a strong UV environment, much less.*

You can print on the Epson printers at university to the highest standard available. Although we no longer have a c-type colour printing option, many labs print onto c-type paper using digital, laser-based printing. This will usually be advertised as digital c-type, Lightjet, Chromira or Lambda printing (named after the respective company's names for the equipment).

Giclée

Many labs advertise their inkjet printing as Giclée printing. Giclée is a name for a specific, early type of inkjet process - the first to find acceptance in the artwork resale market - but is now generally used as a legacy term for the superior, modern pigment ink systems provided by Epson, Hewlett Packard and Canon.

Photographic Paper or Inkjet?

The latest inkjet printers are widely accepted in the gallery world for their quality and superior longevity. Some people prefer c-types and black and white darkroom prints because they seem to have more 'depth' – not 'sit' on the paper as inkjet prints tend to. This is a very subjective criticism but inkjet has some advantages too.

There are a large variety of papers that have a tactile and handling quality that outstrips c-type and fibre black & white. The weight of the papers is usually much better for handling and finishing.

The weight of even the standard Harman Crystaljet paper is 260gsm (about the same as double-weight fibre-base black & white paper), the higher quality baryta and photo rag papers are around the 320gsm weight, more akin to light card.

The thinner the paper, the more careful the handling has to be to avoid any dents or creases that will show when the work is displayed. Roll large prints and when handling smaller prints, try not to keep them flat, hold them curved or they will kink more easily.

Other factors

If getting a lab to print, inkjet will tend to cost more that c-type. Printing at university is much cheaper.

If intending to get your print laminated (if mounted), the surface quality of the paper will not matter.

Crystaljet is significantly cheaper than Baryta or rag papers and has the appearance of a resin coated photographic paper.

Baryta has an appearance more akin to a fibre-based darkroom paper.

Photo Rag papers have a textured finish similar to high quality art papers.

Gloss and lustre papers exhibit deeper blacks (gloss more than lustre); matt papers are flatter but can suit softer, more ethereal work.

Resin gloss papers like Crystaljet are very shiny (similar to c-type) – lustre is the most popular finish; baryta gloss is closer to a fibre darkroom paper. Rags tend to have a matt or semi-matt finish.

Finishing

Options are framing, mounting to a substrate or hanging work un-mounted.

First things last: either hanging work from bulldog clips or nailing it to the wall can have its own reasons and language, but that is a very specific language and you need to be very persuasive in your reasoning to not appear to be doing it for pragmatic reasons. And by pragmatic I mean cheap. If you feel your work would benefit from this method, discuss this with the tutors.

Framing

Framing is the most popular method of display there is and this pervasiveness means that it is an option you have to consider. The popularity of using frames varies cyclically but for many photographers it is a 'not broken so why fix it' option.

What is a Gallery Frame?

You should, with very few exceptions that you can justify in your proposals, use what's often referred to as a 'gallery' frame. This is a flat-fronted, sharp-edged, usually hardwood frame that has a narrow frontal profile and deeper sides. The 3 most common finishes are black, white and natural wood. Black or white frames may be smooth and laminated, or stained with some wood-grain texture apparent.

Above: Metro Imaging's Frame Options

The quality of framing varies enormously. We will expect you to find a quality option that does not draw attention to any perceived cheapness that would detract from the work. If you care about your work, present it well. This does not mean that, at this stage in your photographic careers, you can always justify spending several hundred pounds per unit to get a frame maker to supply beautifully made, hardwood frames. Nor should you take your spare change to Wilkinson's hoping that £2 of off-the-shelf mediocrity will do justice to your work. There is a middle way.

Off-The-Shelf

You can buy off-the-shelf frames that are okay. They are available in many sizes that will match your work.

Avoid places like Ikea, Wilkinson's and The Range. Machine-made, the quality generally - and from frame to frame - varies. The materials are poor and the frame will often bow. Many do not use glass but have plastic, which is a totally inadequate material. We will **not accept** 'plastic' glass in your exhibitions and nor should you.

Try frame specialists instead, and look for hardwood, gallery style frames.

High Street Framers

There are plenty of frame shops and I have listed a few that seem reasonable. They will make frames of decent quality and offer a variety of gallery mouldings.

Swansea:

Ocean/Kerry Evans

Shop has gone, Kerry Evans details below.

Tel.07792122606

studio@kerryevans.co.uk

Sturk Framing

Alan Sturk
46 Bernard Street
Uplands 01792 465934

alansturk@me.com

House of Frames

Unit 11, Mannesman Close
Llansamlet
SA7 9FD 01792 310777

Llanelli:

In The Frame

17 Station Road 01554 772349

Contact: Clive Martin
clive@itframe.co.uk

Photographic Specialists

Many professional labs offering high quality printing also offer framing services. The images above are samples showing the mouldings and finish offered by Metro Imaging in London. These companies produce framed work for many professional photographers and they tend to be more expensive than high street framers although the quality of the frames and finish can justify this. I will list the details after the section on mounting.

Photography Department Frames

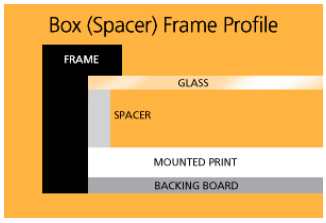
We have a selection of square, hardwood frames: mainly 21x21inch, a few 23inch and a few 30x30. Clearly these suit square images: if your pictures are rectangular, I would certainly suggest getting your own frames. After years of use, finding a consistently good set is also becoming difficult but you can re-spray them.

Types of Frame

Apart from the standard gallery frames mentioned above, there are a number of other choices that all have there own specific influence on how they communicate the meaning of your image.

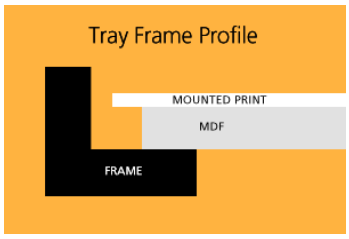
Box Frame

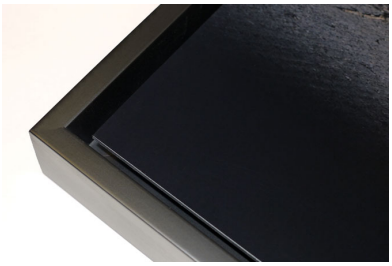
The photograph is mounted onto Foamex, foam board or Kapa foam board. It is separated from the glass and held at the back of the frame by a filet or spacer. The viewer looks into the frame.



Tray Frame

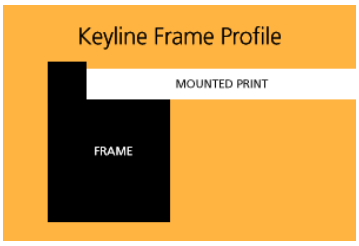
The image is mounted and then stuck to a slightly smaller but deeper substrate (often MDF) and mounted in an open frame with a slight spacing between the image and the frame edges. The surface of the image is visible and the picture seems to float in the frame.





Keyline Frame

Another glassless method similar to the tray frame but rather than floating, the mounted image is tightly enclosed by the very narrow frame edge.



Lightbox Frames

Above is an example of Metro Imaging's standard lightbox frame. The development of compact sheets of LED lighting has allowed the development of illuminated frames that are no deeper than standard frames. Of course, they cost (contact Metro etc. for prices), both for the frames and printing onto Duratrans or similar materials.

Mounting and Window Mount

You have a number of options as to how your print sits in the frame. Traditionally, a window mount would be used to separate the image from the glass, as much for archival as aesthetic reasons. Still popular with black and white images, less so with colour, it allows one to frame an un-mounted print. Framers will cut and window-mount your images or you can cut these at the university. Full-bleed prints in frames offer an arguably more contemporary look but the print should be mounted to avoid cockling (see below).

Advice

Ensure that the blade is sharp or the cut will not be clean.

Avoid over-cuts: these will be visible and look unprofessional – measure twice, cut once.

Use archival mount boards such as museum mount or conservation board if you want your print to last. The board should be bright white, not off-white

Use Filmoplast P90 tape or similar, not masking tape. It's acid-free and designed for this purpose. If you have to use masking tape it will do the job but is not archival.

Do not tape around each edge of your print. As atmospheric conditions change, the image will try and move and you will notice gaps between the mount and the print. Tape the top edge only, like a hinge. The print will find its own space.

The larger the print, the less chance of an un-mounted print working – some cockling (see below) will occur.

Framed Prints – To Mount Or Not To Mount?

Many specialist framers will cold dry-mount or, if using traditional black and white papers and mounting board, heat-press prints onto a substrate before framing. Substrates include mount board (less commonly used these days), foam board, Kapa foam board and Foamex. Dry mounting avoids problems that you get with un-mounted prints, primarily 'cockling'.

Cockling: the formation on a print of waviness or buckling – not always visible when looking at a print straight on, but visible against the light at an angle. It is a sign of poor framing. A print may look fine when first framed but will start to cockle after a few days or weeks.

Causes:

The print is slightly too large for the frame.

When deploying a window mount, the print is taped on all, or more than one edge. It will have no room to move and will buckle.

Prints (paper) are susceptible to changes in atmospheric conditions. Over a period of time the print will move as the moisture content of the paper changes.

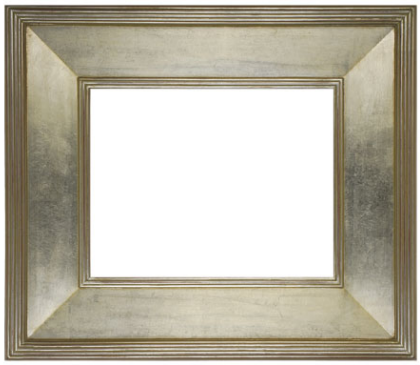
Prints will alter too. Inkjet prints take about 24 hours for the ink to dry, longer to completely settle. There are similar issues for fibre-based darkroom paper

(the paper itself drying). Resin prints are more stable but inappropriate for gallery presentation (at least for black and white; colour c-type, including digital c-type, is resin coated paper).

Hanging

The mirror plate is the standard and most stable way of mounting frames on a wall; avoid hooks, wire etc. as you will not be able to ensure that frames are straight and secure. Mirror plates should be painted to match the wall.
What to Avoid:

This is not a quality frame at any price. Front profile too wide *and* curved.

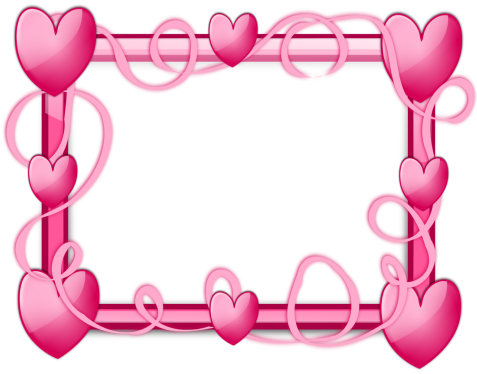


No. Not flat, too wide, stupid carving.

Baroque and stately home-ish; and it’s not even straight! No!

No! Nothing like this should ever be near a photograph (except, maybe in a sports club pavilion).

Er … this arrived two centuries too late. If your camera shoots oval-shaped pictures, perhaps.



Ahem …

Depends on your age and interest in football. Generally no.

The only caveat here is the use of decorative frames that conceptually carry the work, for example connoting domesticity. However, every year I see examples of this at graduate exhibitions so you need a sophisticated argument to support such a framing strategy.

Mounted Prints

The alternative to framing is direct mounting onto a substrate and hanging the picture full-bleed and unframed. Unframed work is usually full-bleed (no border) – bordered work is always better framed.

This guide emphasizes the variety of framing options available to you and it is true that the frame is still often the first choice for any photographer with printed work. However, the main alternative to the frame – direct mounting of prints onto a substrate – is popular and may be the best choice, dependent on your work.

Firstly, materials such as **foam board**, **Kapa board** (below, left) and **Foamex**/**PVC** (Below, right) are not suitable substrates for direct wall

mounting. Within a photographic context they are ideal for mounting prints prior to framing, but they are aesthetically displeasing, look cheap, are too delicate, and are not rigid enough for direct display.

Appropriate Substrates For Mounting

The materials listed below are fine for direct, cold dry-mounting and companies that offer a direct mounting service, will offer most if not all of these options.

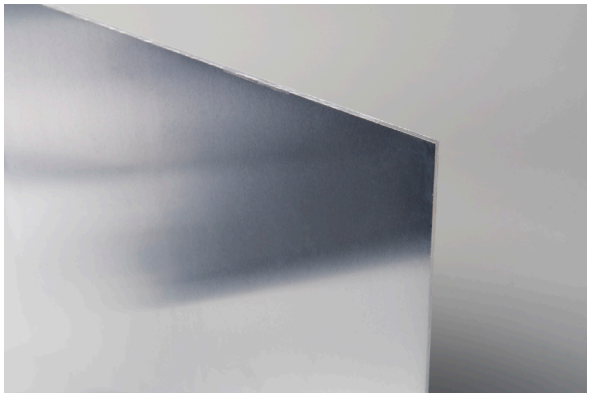
MDF

The cheapest option, Medium-Density Fibreboard, in not an archival material, therefore not appropriate for work produced to a gallery standard when archival materials are required. It is rigid enough for short-term applications and the thickness of the board should be appropriate for the image size: 6mm would be fine for A4 or A3 prints but for A2 or above 9 or 12mm would be better. Metro in London for example, only provide the option of 9mm and 12mm.

The edges will usually be painted white or black and, when ordering, ensure that the edges are painted. Black edges will show the white edge of the paper; be aware of this – white painted edges may be a better option. MDF is heavy, so factor this in, especially for large prints. Mounting on the wall is usually achieved with split batons providing an impression of the print floating slightly forward off the wall; mirror plates can also be used.

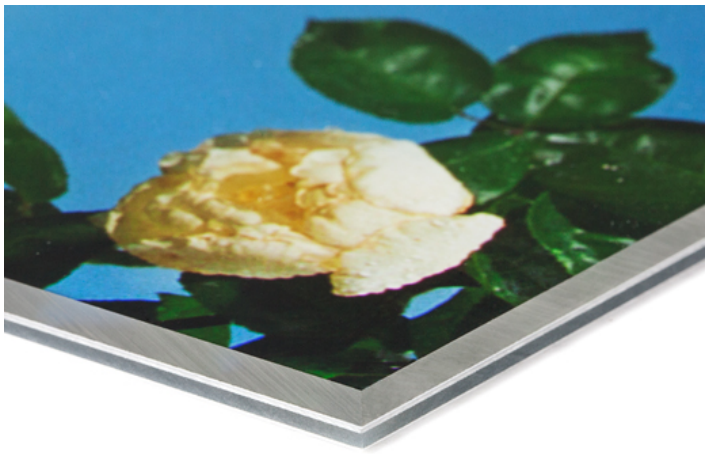
Over time, MDF does not wear well as it's prone to warping, the influence of moisture and handling damage. For these reasons MDF is rarely used as a substrate by established artists. The reason it is used at all is largely down to cost, as a cheaper alternative to aluminium or Dibond.

Aluminium



Usually about 3mm thick, aluminium is a very rigid, lightweight material for mounting. It is more expensive than MDF but will last much longer and weighs much less. It can be wall mounted with split batons or via a sub-frame.

Dibond



This picture shows a section of a face-mounted print. The image is mounted onto the Dibond substrate, then reverse mounted onto Perspex. Images can be mounted and hung on Dibond by itself as a lighter alternative to aluminium. Dibond, comprises a core of plastic sandwiched between two thin sheets of aluminium. It maintains the rigidity of aluminium but with less

weight. It is however, more expensive.

Face-Mounting

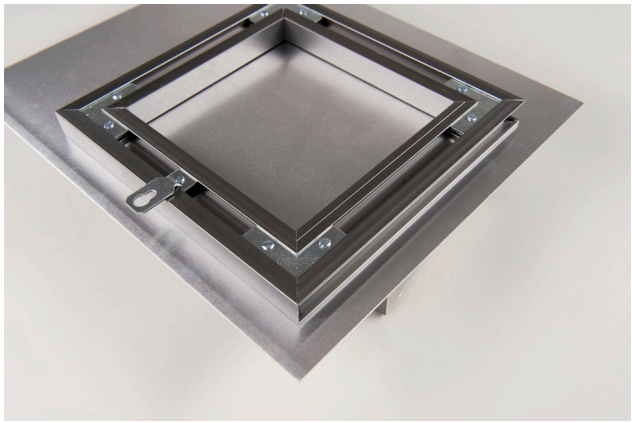
This suits quite specific work and might suggest a commercial gloss or be appropriate for slightly sterile subject matter. Also referred to as ‘reverse mounting onto Perspex’ (or glass). This needs to be done well. I have experience of students bringing in images mounted in this way by companies that do commercial display but not exhibition work: in one case, with images not properly mounted to the Perspex, in another, the images not actually mounted to a substrate. It is such a clinical process that the slightest fault will show. Only use companies like Metro, Genesis and Spectrum that are used to producing mounted work for photographers.

Mounting Work to the Wall

When getting work mounted to a substrate, you will need a means to fix it to the wall. Split baton fixing is a standard method that suits all of the aforementioned substrates. The usual alternative offered is for a sub-frame to be mounted to the back of each print, then mounting to the wall with corresponding fixings. Sub-frames are more expensive than split batons.

MDF (9mm or thicker) can be mounted to the wall with mirror plates. This is cheaper (although some mounting services include the cost of split batons in the price) but you lose the ‘floating’ quality you might prefer when the print isn’t flush with the wall.

Split Baton



Sub-frame

Do not hang work with Velcro.

I haven't counted the number of times I've seen work fall off a student exhibition wall, even with work mounted on a substrate as light as foam board, but let's just say it's plenty of times.

Laminating

Mounting companies offer lamination options. This provides a protective layer on the print surface and is worth consideration as unprotected prints are easily marked. Lamination includes a range of finishes from high gloss through various semi-gloss, semi-matt and matt finishes.

Consider this option carefully: the laminate becomes the surface of the print therefore if you have carefully selected a specific paper for its intrinsic aesthetic quality, this will largely be lost when the print is laminated. This has become more of an issue in recent years as students are choosing quality inkjet papers such as baryta and photo-rag. If you want the peace of mind that lamination provides, choose a laminate that is sympathetic to the print quality you desire.

Handling

With the previous heading in mind, maximum care must be taken when handling any framed or mounted work. Standard frames are easier to handle as the print is protected by glass but care is required when hanging the work. Measure carefully before screwing work to the wall: a badly driven screw through a mirror plate can 'pull' at the frame, causing it to bow. The best method when screwing into 'boarded' walls is to use a narrow bit to drill a pilot hole through the centre of the mirror plate hole. With small and/or light frames, you can – with care - screw straight into plasterboard. With heavier frames, you will need specific plasterboard fixings – if in doubt, ask. Solid masonry requires the use of wall plugs.
When handling mounted work, or glassless frames where the surface of the print may be vulnerable, it is a good idea to use gloves. Cotton gloves may seem like a good idea but make it difficult to get a firm grasp, vinyl or latex gloves are better but do not use gloves that are powdered as the powder will get on your prints or in the frames.

Logistics

Good mounting and framing, even at the lower end of acceptable, is expensive: save up or set aside sufficient funds early on.

Take into account timescale: check with printers, framers and mounters to ascertain when you will need to supply your work to them for it to be ready in time. 10 working days is common and you will need to factor in delivery times. Turnaround can increase during busy periods – the run-up to degree shows for example.

You may need to deliver and collect; if you don't have your own car, make sure you are on good terms with someone who does. In the past, we have had students with their own transport doing runs of their own and other students' work to Semaphore in Cardiff, for example.

Check for updated information from suppliers. Do they have the moulding you want in stock or do they have to order it? Does face-mounting have a longer turnaround than mounting onto Dibond only? Semaphore in Cardiff used to mount prints brought to them but now (I understand) will only mount work that they themselves have printed. Spectrum used to do framing and mounting but now only mounting (in addition to their main business – printing)?

Have your work ready at least 2-3 days before the opening. If the opening is on Friday, we will curate it – with the work present – on Wednesday morning at the latest; having the work ready on Tuesday is better.

Ensure that you have all the fixings for the work as described, mirror plates, screws etc. The framer should be able to supply appropriate fixings with your

frames but they also need to be appropriate for where the work is going, e.g., you will need different screws for a particleboard wall as opposed to a masonry wall. A framer should be able to mirror plate your frames in advance – this will save you the fiddly job of drilling out loads of pilot holes – but you should ask for this service as it may not be a given.

You do not need to bring power tools as we will provide them - we also have tape measures and spirit levels that can be booked out of stores - but some useful items will be at a premium so I would suggest that you obtain the following:

A pencil for marking up the position of your work
A tape measure: we have them but you will save time if you have your own to prepare your wall

If you have a decent spirit level, bring it to the hang. Although we supply them, you may end up waiting

An eraser to remove pencil marks

Other tools such as screwdrivers or narrow gauge drill bits for preparing frames for mirror plates, or drilling pilot holes into particleboard walls: anything specific to your hang

Connotation

Whether you frame or mount work; whether it is in a line, a double-hang, a grid or freestyle (salon) hang; how large or small you scale it; whether you use a white or black or natural moulding etc., carries or communicates a meaning about your work. Think carefully about these options so that your final presentation does the maximum justice to your work.

Framing and Mounting Specialists

All the companies below are photography and art specialists. Most offer large format printing on inkjet or digital c-type and framing and mounting on a wide range of substrates including aluminium, Dibond, face-mounting (reverse mounting onto glass or Perspex) and a variety of frame types from standard gallery to tray and keyline frames.

Although more expensive, the quality speaks for itself, and most will offer student discounts.

Spectrum* - (Brighton and Hove)

www.spectrumphoto.co.uk

01273 708222

*Mounting but not framing

Metro Imaging - (London)

www.metroimaging.co.uk

0207 865 0000

The Print Space – (London)

www.theprintspace.co.uk

0207 739 1060

Genesis Imaging – (London)

www.genesisimaging.co.uk

0207 384 6255

John Jones London (Quite high-end: they work with many London galleries and their work is priced accordingly)

http://www.johnjones.co.uk

T +44 (0)20 7281 5439

E info@johnjones.co.uk

Darbyshire

19-23 White Lion Street

London

N1 9PD

enquiries@darbyshire.uk.com

02078 121 200

Pendragon Fine Art Frames Ltd

1 – 3 Yorkton Street

London

E2 8NH

020 7729 0608

enquiries@pendragonframes.com

Framejunkie (workshop)

274 Poyser Street

Bethnal Green

London

E2 9RF

+44 (0) 20 7012 1059
+44 (0) 7866 532 101

info@framejunkie.co.uk

Director: Simon Quinn
simon@framejunkie.co.uk

PETER WATKINS FRAMING.

Studio 1.08, Limehouse Arts Foundation,

Towcester Road, E3 3ND

Tel: +44 7883 015205

Cardiff-based Mounting and Framing:

Semaphore Printing and Mounting onto substrate

Bessemer Road
Cardiff
CF11 8BA

http://www.semaphoredisplay.co.uk

Email: info@semaphoredisplay.co.uk

029 2022 411

Peter Taylor

Peter is an independent framer based in Cardiff. His work is very good and reasonably priced but you will need to negotiate turnaround as he works by himself and therefore at busier times, his normal two-week timescale might be extended. He can frame and mount (on a variety of substrates including Dibond) up to a maximum of 1 x 1.5 metres.

Email: taylorframing@yahoo.co.uk

029 2061 7673

Swansea-based Printing and Mounting:

Memento Fine Art Editions Printing and mounting onto substrate

Exchange Building
Cambrian Place
Maritime Quarter
Swansea

01792 293200

Contact: Nigel Williams