

The Sacrifice by James Nachtwey

Gallery Installation of a 32 Foot Photograph with Flexible Magnets



By Stephen Heer, Sarah Freeman, Marc Harnly, Lynne Kaneshiro, Ernie Mack, and Ron Stroud

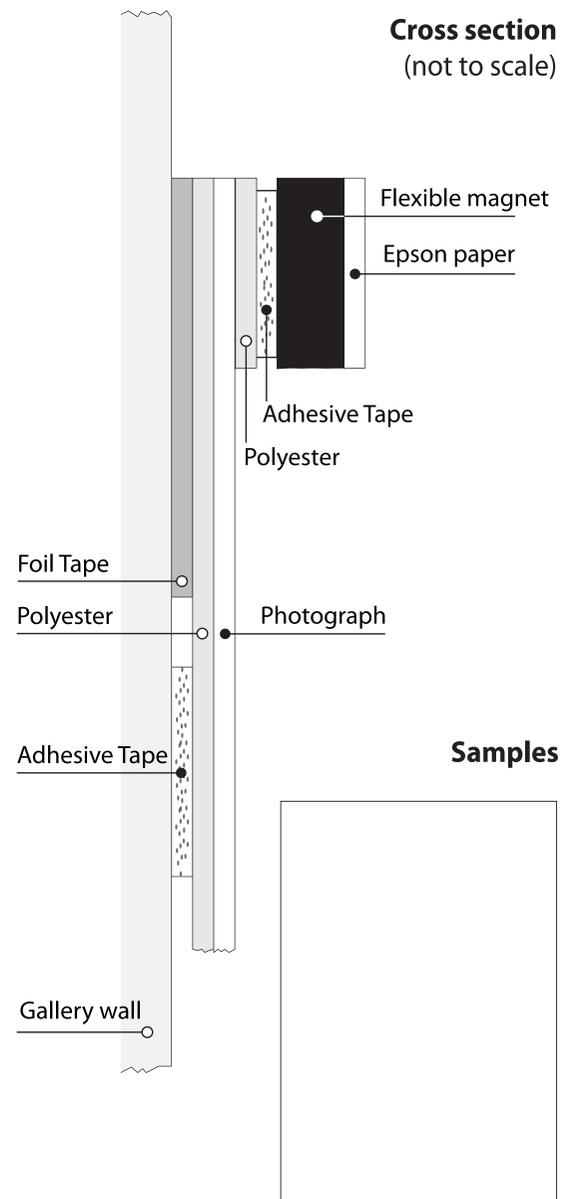
The Sacrifice, a large, single-sheet inkjet print by photojournalist James Nachtwey, was included in the exhibition *Engaged Observers: Documentary Photography Since the Sixties* in the Center for Photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2010. The *Sacrifice* measures 32' 3" in length by 44" in height and is printed on a continuous roll of Epson Premium Luster Photo Paper. It is a composite of 60 images arranged in three rows of 20 and surrounded by a 2 1/2" white border on all sides (**Image 1**). To display the photograph, alternatives to standard framing were required due to its extraordinary size and other criteria established by the artist, conservators, and exhibition curator.

Criteria

The method for mounting and displaying *The Sacrifice* needed to meet several conditions considered essential by the artist and the museum staff. Nachtwey specified an aesthetically minimal, if not invisible, mounting system ideally absent of glazing. The mount could not incur permanent change to the sensitive image and support surface and, because the print was a loan to the Museum, the use of hinge attachments or fasteners to the paper support was precluded. The mount system needed to be safely and feasibly installed by the conservation and preparation staff and remain secure for the 19-week exhibition period. Of the several mounting alternatives considered, a system using flexible magnets was found to meet these criteria.

The System

The mounting system is illustrated with the **cross-section** diagram and materials **samples** to the right. A steel foil receiver tape (Adams Magnetic, #27FT002) was first attached to the gallery wall. Clear polyester (DuPont Teijin Films, Melinex, .003 mil.) cut to the size of the print was then mounted to the wall with double sided adhesive tape (3M, #415). A polyester barrier attached to the reverse of the magnet served to isolate it from direct contact with the print.



The Magnet

A 1" wide thermoplastic flexible magnet roll with low pull-strength available in 100' lengths was used (Adams Magnetic, #27B0023). Tests of the magnet over Epson Luster paper samples did not leave an impression on the support surface. The magnet was camouflaged with Epson Luster paper attached to the front and the sides were painted with white acrylic paint. Corner joints were made by overlapping paper from the side magnets over the top and bottom magnets (**Image 2**). The attachment of polyester and paper to each magnet lessened flexibility

and limited tolerance for bending. Broad foamcore wheels with steel foil receiver tape and polyester barriers attached were fabricated for its storage and handling.

Installation

The physical installation of the print required the use of three rolling units fabricated from available equipment in the conservation studio. A vertical rolling spool for the rolled print was created from an office chair stand (**Image 3**). The two foamcore wheels with the 32 foot magnets were mounted to a step

ladder and a cart (**Images 4,5**). Those were outfitted with plastic plumbing fittings, clamps, and cardboard tubes to feed the top and bottom magnets to the appropriate installation heights.

The print was simultaneously unrolled and mounted to the wall first with short, temporary strips of magnet, approximately 16" to 24" long, inset from the margin edges (**Image 6**). These were removed after the final paper-covered magnets were aligned with the edge of the photograph. On the day of the installation, a practice run with a full length of blank Epson Luster paper (**Image 7**) preceded installation of the actual photograph (**Images 8,9**).



Conclusion

In summary, a simple and low-cost but very effective system of using flexible magnets to secure *The Sacrifice* to the gallery wall was designed, tested, and implemented. By modifying commercially available magnets, the mount technique successfully met the criteria laid out by the artist, conservators, and exhibition curator and proved a reversible and viable

alternative for mounting an oversize photograph. Some distortion in the print support developed over the course of the exhibition, but was not a distraction in gallery lighting.

Photo Credits: J. Paul Getty Museum



The J. Paul Getty Museum
Paper Conservation
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The Sacrifice, negative 2006-2007; print 2010
James Nachtwey (American, born 1948)
Inkjet print. Sheet: 111.8 x 983 cm (44 x 387 in.)
Collection of Carole Littleton and John Bailey
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