Sheer practicality
a multi-purpose conservation mount for paper negatives

The Rijksmuseum’s paper negatives
Among ca. 150,000 photographic objects, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam has a small but important collection of paper negatives, including:
- a calotype by W. H. Fox Talbot
- 13 waxed paper negatives by Charles Nègre
The process was first patented by Talbot in 1841 and was mostly in use until the late 1850s.
A new mounting system for these negatives was developed to improve their handling, especially when viewing them with transmitted light. This mounting system was used in the temporary exhibition “Chiaroscuro in Photography” (Feb. 12-May 17 2015).

Preventing handling damage
Paper negatives can easily tear or crease. That is the main reason why they should not be handled directly. Before rehousing them, negatives were treated from the non-image side (verso). Tears were repaired with Berlin tissue (2 g/m²) and Klucel G® (in ethanol). Each negative was connected to a Japanese paper sheet using the strip inlay method. An opening was cut out from the sheet to fit the negative’s shape. The border between the negative and cut out sheet was contoured with water cut, narrow strips of Japanese paper (5 g/m²) and adhered with Klucel G® (in ethanol).

Rehousing
The paper negatives were mounted into standard sized folders made with museum quality materials. The folder’s core - the mount - combines:
- Window mats in different thicknesses. For presentation purposes, the outer windows have bevel cut edges
- A thin PMMA panel (1.5 mm thick) that gives the negative a flat, rigid and transparent support
To complete the folder, the mount is attached to a protective cover. The separate boards are connected with linen strips and adhered with EVA

Use in exhibition
- The mount can be placed inside a frame or a showcase
- The protective cover can be folded back or removed from the mount (and later reattached)
- The mount can be shown in front of a transmitted light source
- A shadow window mat, with an opening matching the negative’s shape, can be used to reduce the transmitted light’s halo effect around the inlay
- Extra window mats can be used to fill up the frame

Mount with cover – storage
Cross section illustration
- EVA - ethylene vinyl acetate
- MC - methylcellulose
- PMMA - poly (methyl methacrylate)

Mount without cover – exhibition
Cross section illustration

Advantages
- Compatible with multiple purposes - storage, study and exhibition
- Access to both sides of the object to view applied retouching, annotations, etc.
- Simultaneously protective and user-friendly
- Compatible with the different types of reflected and transmitted light sources
- Reduces the need for repeated rehousing after exhibitions
- Adjustable to objects with similar conservation and display needs

In the museum’s print room

During exhibition

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