

Sheer practicality

a multi-purpose conservation mount for paper negatives

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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

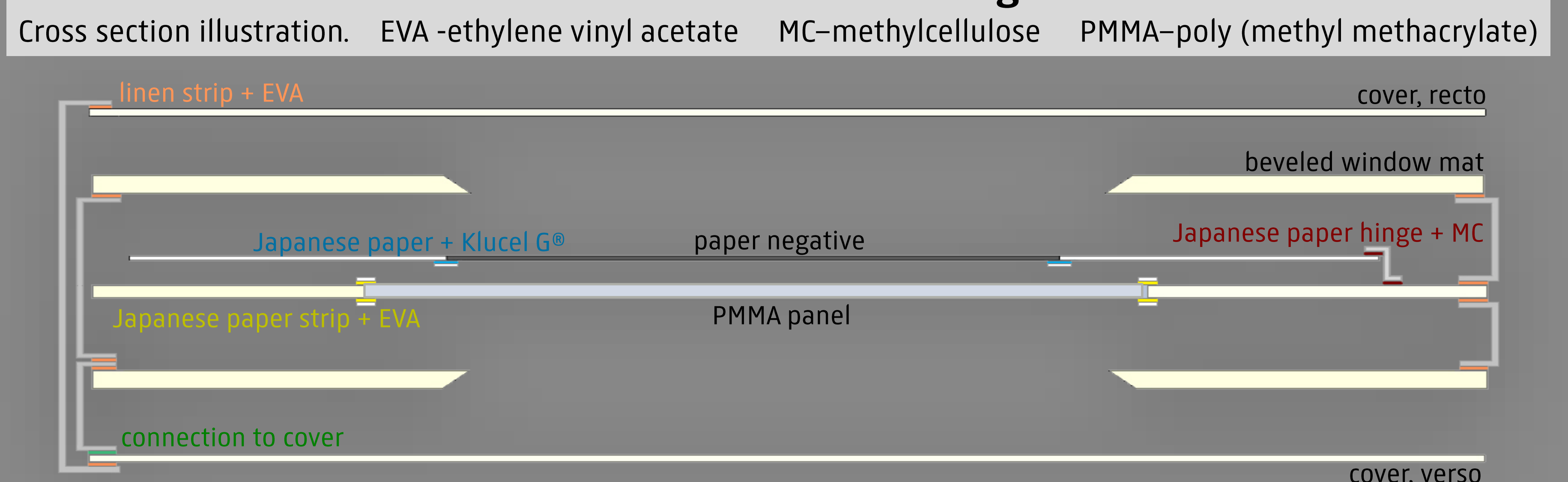
Advantages

- 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

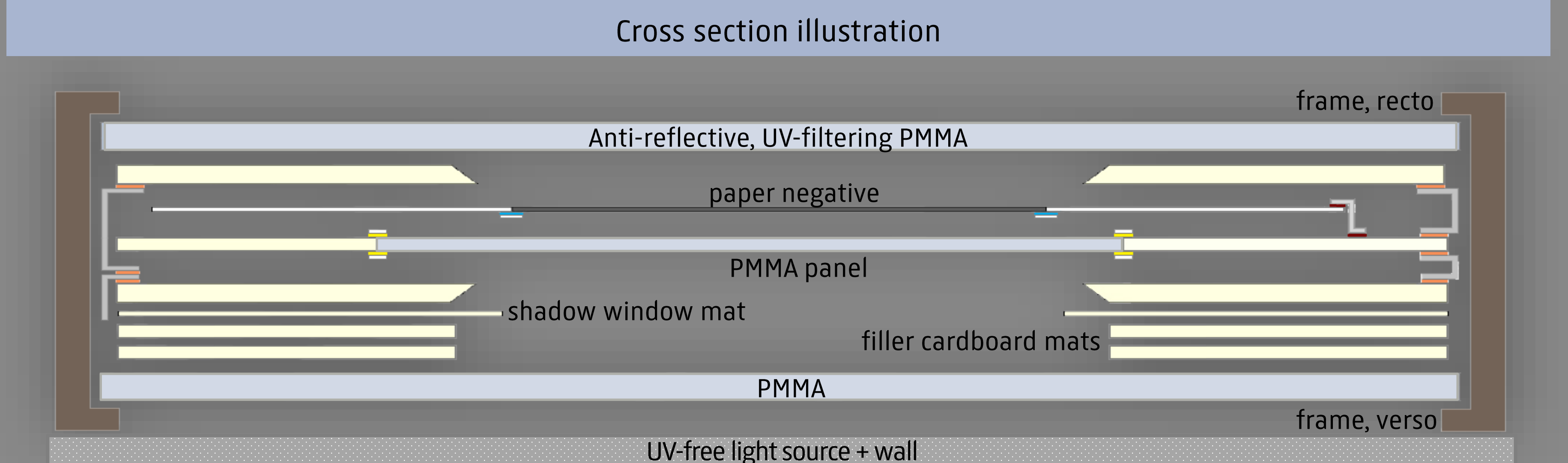
- More information can be obtained from dark image areas when using transmitted light
- To improve the final printed image, negatives could be retouched with different types of media on either side



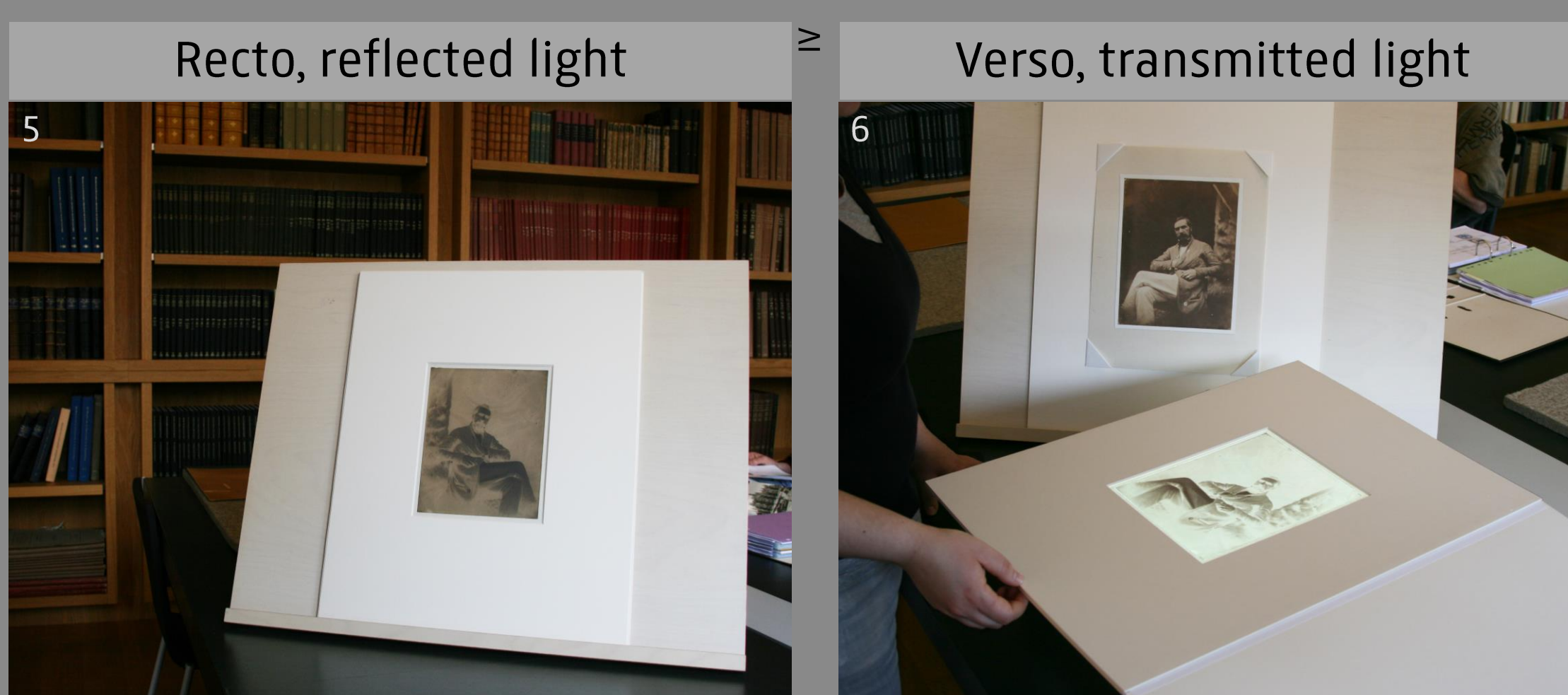
Mount with cover – storage



Mount without cover – exhibition



In the museum's print room



“Self-portrait”, Louis-Rémy Robert, ca. 1852-1854
Waxed paper negative, 228 x 181 mm. Placed on viewing stand (no. 5), on top of light box (no. 6) and framed in front of LEC light panel (no. 7)
Salt print, 228 x 175 mm. Placed on viewing stand (no. 6) and framed (no. 7)

During exhibition



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