

BIO



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Alessandro Scola is Senior Book Conservator at the Department of Conservation & Preservation of the Sheridan Libraries and Museums, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. He trained in Italy at the Centro di Formazione Professionale in Cremona, and then worked in Italy, Spain, and Northern Ireland in private practices and public institutions before migrating in the US in 2012. After short experiences as contractor in New York City and as intern in Washington DC at the Folger Shakespeare Library, he joined the Johns Hopkins University Libraries in late 2013.

ABSTRACT

A New Approach to Mountmaking for Library Material: Modular and Re-usable Book Cradles for More Sustainable Exhibits

The traditional practice of making cradles for books in-house is time-consuming and wasteful since each cradle is custom designed around the artifact and not re-usable. Off-the-shelf mounts are available on the market, but they are expensive and their design lacks some of the features required for proper displays.

With the goals of simplifying the exhibition preparation process, reducing the mountmaker's workload, minimizing the handling of the artifact, and making our exhibits more sustainable, a new design for book cradles has been developed at the Sheridan Libraries of Johns Hopkins University. Particular attention has been dedicated to display arrangements featuring a book open and tilted forward. The new design departs from the common practice of mirroring the unique profile of an open book, as seen from its bottom edge. 'Profiling' is practically challenging, often not needed, and theoretically questionable: book spines are frequently asymmetric, either originally or as a result of gravity pulling the text-block down and making the top of the spine flatter and its bottom more curved. Which profile should the mount follow?

Our innovative design, applicable to a variety of materials, consists of two re-usable components: a custom V-shaped support and a standard base. The former matches the dimensions of the displayed volume. The latter comes in three predetermined sizes, dictates the opening and tilting forward angles, and provides a platform to support the bottom edge of the tilted book. The V-shaped support stably seats on the center of the base without any mechanical or adhesive-based attachment. We build our cradles with the thermoplastic Vivak® (polyethylene terephthalate glycol-modified or PETG) because it is stable, easily machinable (it can be cold-bent), cheap, and transparent.

The standardization of the bases makes them readily re-usable. The simplicity of the custom V-shaped supports makes them fast to produce or modify for re-use. Since the adoption of the system, we have experienced a substantial decrease in the spending for raw material, in the time dedicated by our staff to mountmaking, and in the amount of plastic disposed at the end of each exhibit. In addition, the new geometries reduce the handling of the artifact because only a few simple measurements of the object (done on a 'measuring cradle') are necessary. Finally, the improved efficiency of our system doesn't compromise on the aesthetics of the volume/cradle combo once on display. The transparency of Vivak® and the modular design minimize the physical presence of the cradle while allowing a 360° view of the artifact.