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(54) **CLEAR DISPLAY ITEM FRAME**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

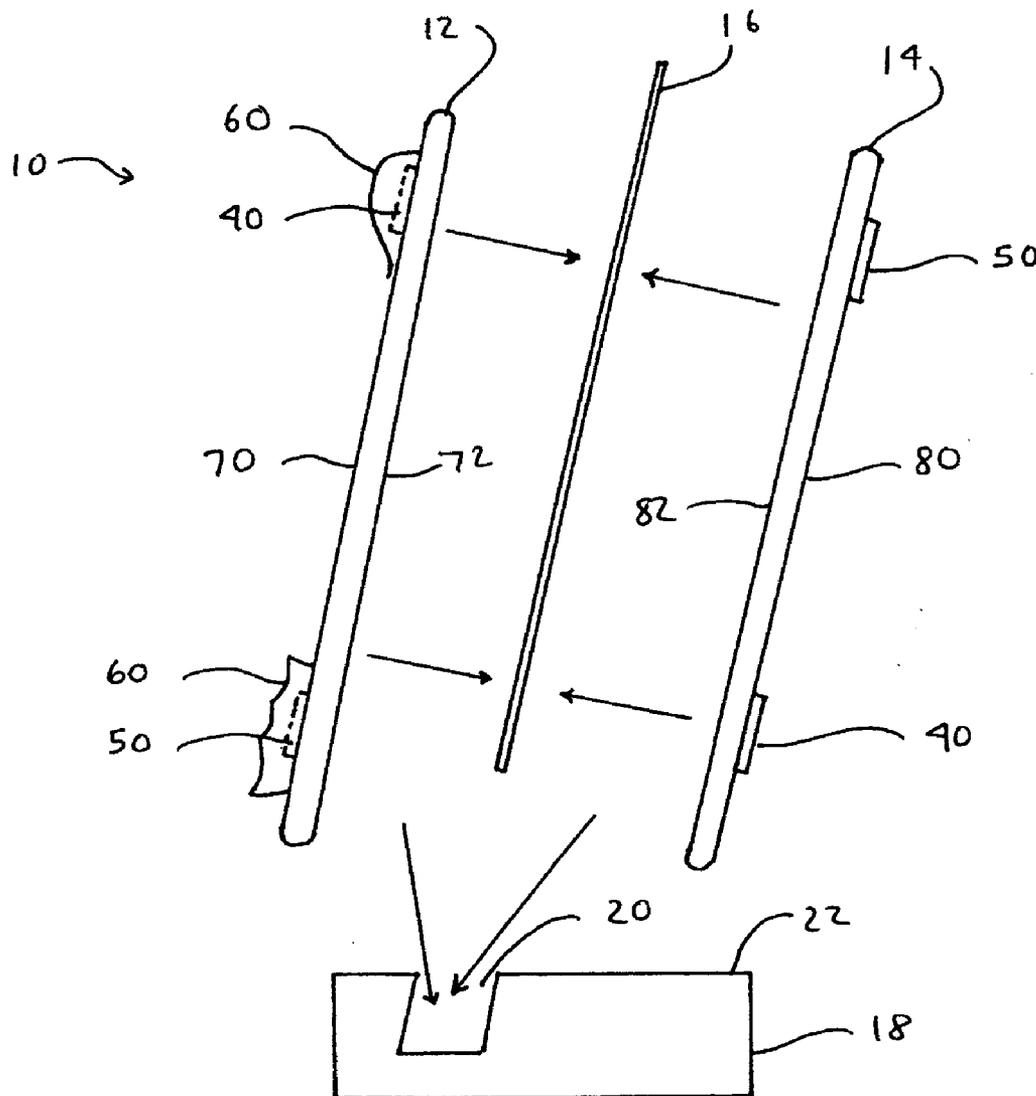
A display item frame with a front member formed of a transparent material; a rear member; at least one magnet attached to the front member or the rear member and at least one magnetic material attached to the rear member or the front member, respectively, wherein the magnet and the magnetic material cooperate to hold the front member and the rear member together; ornamentation located on the front surface of the front member and covering the magnet or magnetic material; and a block support for supporting the front member and the rear member in a viewable configuration.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/763,488, filed on Jan. 30, 2006.



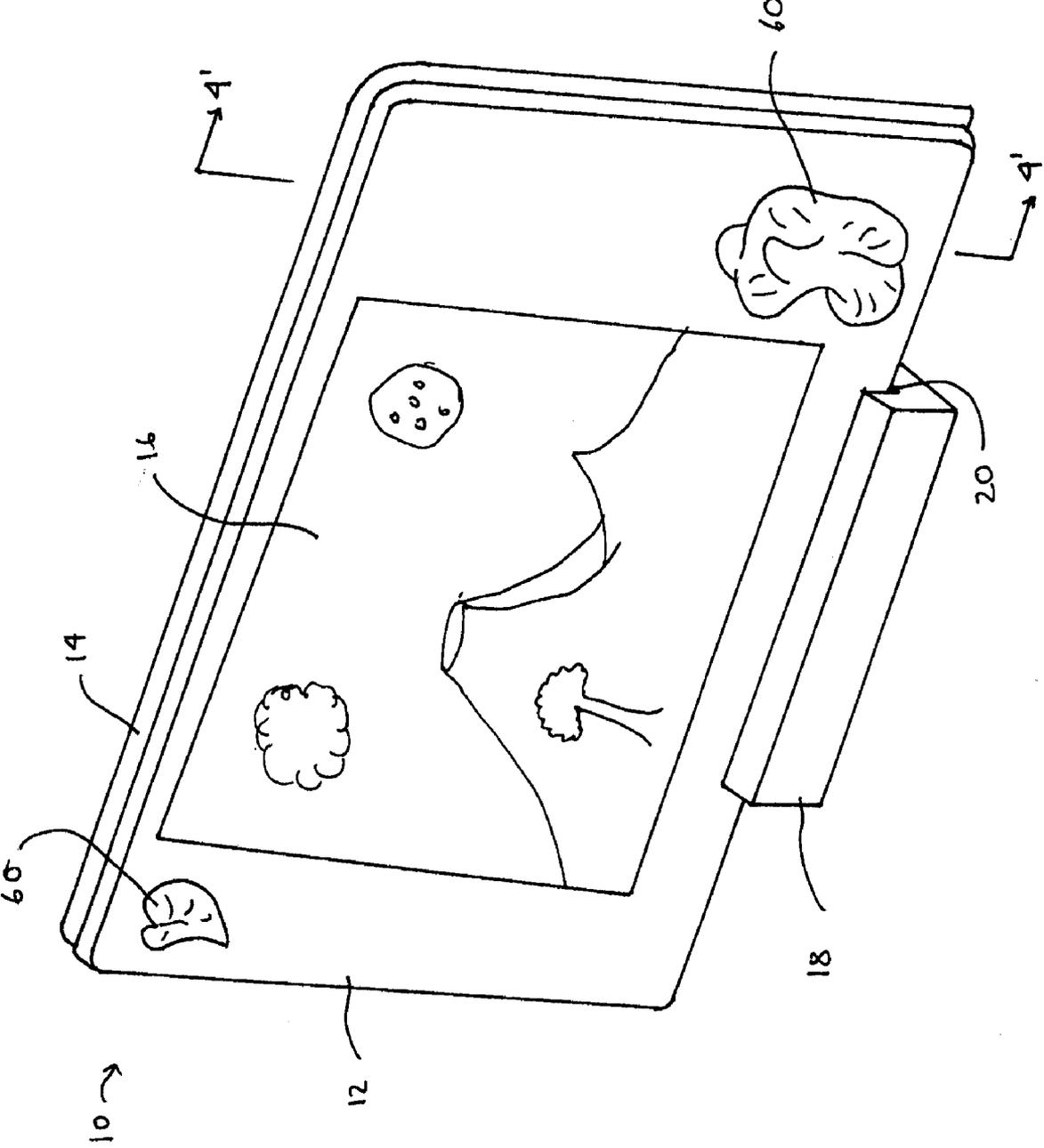


FIG. 1

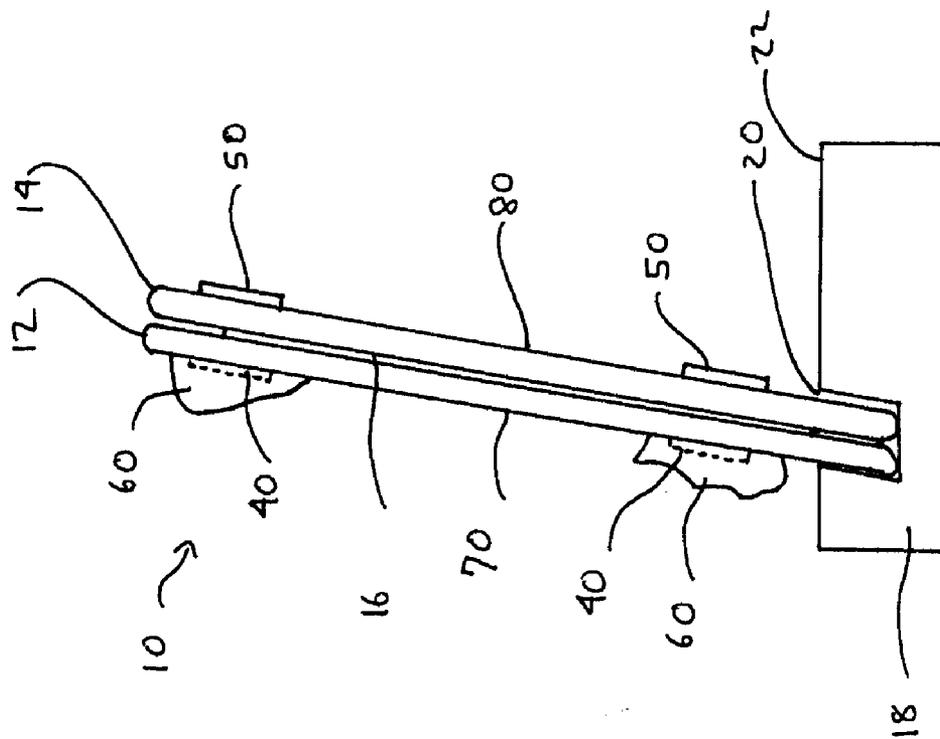


FIG. 2

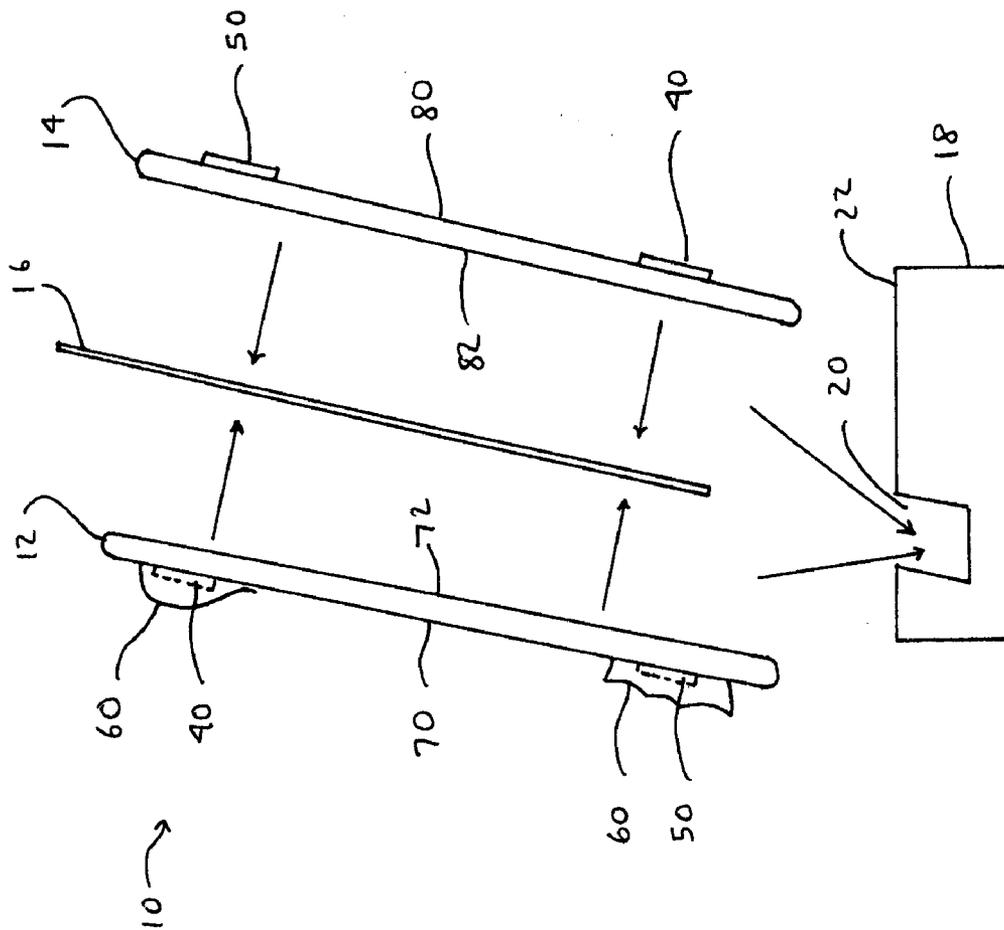


FIG. 3

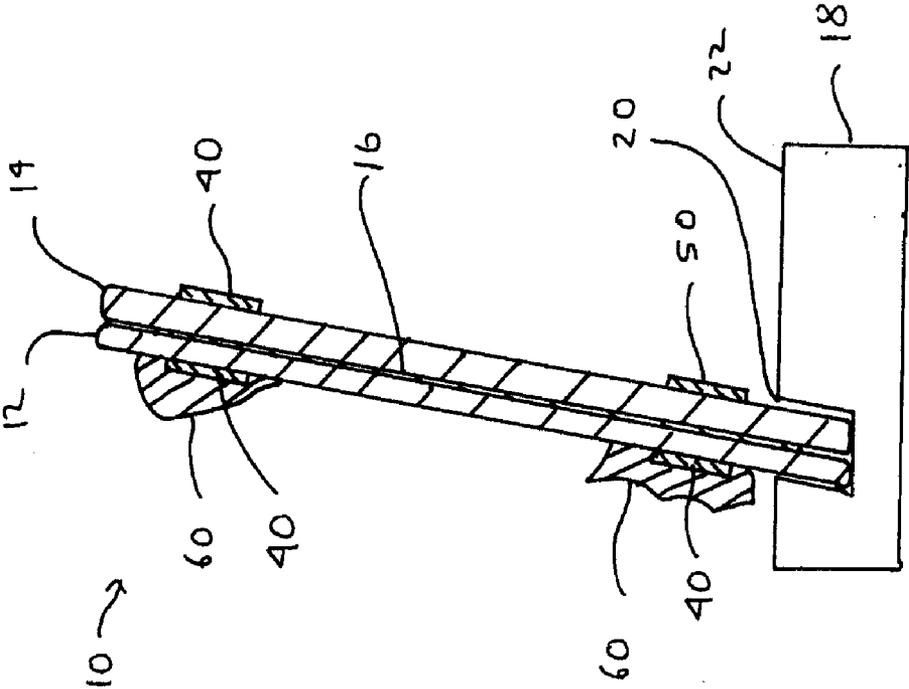


FIG. 4

CLEAR DISPLAY ITEM FRAME

STATEMENT OF RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a nonprovisional patent application based on and claiming priority on U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60763488 having a filing date of 30 Jan. 2006, which is incorporated herein.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Technical Field

[0003] This invention generally relates to display item frames, and more particularly relates to display item frames having flat glass front and back plates, between which a photograph or other display item is contained, and in which magnets or magnetic materials hold the front plate to the back plate. Further, decorative items, such as sculpture, can be attached to the front plate so as to add aesthetics to the frame and to hide the magnets. Thus, the glass itself not only provides the clear cover through which the display item can be viewed, but also forms the frame.

[0004] 2. Prior Art

[0005] A wide variety of picture frames are found in the prior art. The essential elements of most known picture frames include a frame, a transparent member, and a backing mounted to the frame, which can retain the work under the transparent member and can facilitate upright display of the framed display item. The display item is sandwiched between the glass and the frame back and is held in place in part by the compression of the glass to the backing member and in part by the frame member, the display item typically being approximately the same dimensions as the backing member. Alternatively, the display item can be attached to the frame back or backing member. Mechanical fasteners, or other fastening means, secure the backing member to the frame member. The conventional frame member can be made of four lengths of molding mitered together, or can be made of a single piece of material with a cutout to accommodate the glass and backing member.

[0006] Another type of frame construction includes a clear plate or plates clipped or otherwise attached to the backing member without using a conventional frame member. In such frame construction, the display item is sandwiched between the clear plate and the backing member and held in place by the compression of the clear plate to the backing member that is created by a clip. The clear plate and the backing member typically have generally similar dimensions.

[0007] Yet another type of frame construction includes at least one clear plate and a backing member having generally similar dimensions removably or releasably mounted in a base. In such frame construction, the display item also is sandwiched between the clear plate and the backing member, the clear plate and backing member are inserted into a slot on the base, and these components are held in place by the compression of the clear plate to the backing member that is created by the slot.

[0008] Frames can be plain or ornamented. Specifically, the frame member can range from plain moldings or plates, to formed molding or plates, to moldings or plates having ornamentation thereon. Additionally, frames can be made of many different materials including woods, metals, ceramics, resins, porcelains, glasses, and plastics. Further, the various

frame components can be held together by various means such as screws, clips, adhesives, and mounting blocks.

[0009] Although each of the frame constructions mentioned above may be satisfactory for their specific purposes, none appear to combine the elegance of a transparent front member with the ease of securing a display item using magnetic connectors. Additionally, none appear to provide this combination along with sculptural artwork on the front member and the simplicity of a slotted base for supporting the frame construction. Further, none appear to provide this combination along with allowing for the hiding of the magnetic connecting means by the sculptural artwork.

[0010] Accordingly, there is always a need for an improved framing device that is aesthetically pleasing, securely holds a display item, and is easy to use. There also is a need for an improved framing device in which the framing components are reduced and are held together in a simple yet secure manner, with the means for holding the framing components together hidden from view. It is to these needs among others that the present invention is directed.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] Briefly, the present invention is a clear display item frame with a magnetic closure. The invention comprises a front member formed of a solid transparent material, such as glass, that has a front surface and a back surface; a rear member formed of a solid material, such as glass, metal or ceramic, that also has a front surface and a back surface, and that can be transparent, translucent or opaque; magnets or magnetic members mounted in or on each of the front member and the rear member for securing the front member to the rear member; and a support block for holding the front member and the rear member, with the display item sandwiched therebetween, in a position such that the display item can be seen by a viewer. The front member preferably is structured such that a desired portion of the display item can be seen therethrough.

[0012] In preferred embodiments, both the front member and the rear member are similarly sized and dimensioned pieces of a transparent material. For example, each of the front member and the rear member can be rectangular pieces of $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick glass having the same length and width such that when the front member is placed over the rear member such that the back surface of the front member corresponds to the front surface of the rear member, the side edges of the front member line up with the side edges of the rear member.

[0013] Also in preferred embodiments, the front member and the rear member are releasably secured to one another, e.g., by the use of magnets and magnetic materials. For example, the front member can have one or more magnets secured thereto at a location that will not interfere with, or at least will not substantially interfere with, the viewing of the display item. The rear member also can have one or more magnets or magnetic materials secured thereto at a location that cooperates with the magnet(s) or magnetic material(s) on the front member, such that when the front member and the rear member are juxtaposed with each other, the magnet (s) or magnetic material(s) on the front member is(are) in magnetic proximation with the magnetic material(s) or magnet(s) on the rear member, thus allowing the front member to be held magnetically against the rear member. Preferably, the front member and the rear member have two or more magnets or magnetic materials, with the magnet(s) or mag-

netic material(s) being secured to the front surface of the front member and the back surface of the rear member.

[0014] Additionally in preferred embodiments, a slotted base is provided to support the front member and the rear member. Such a slotted base can be a solid block of material, such as glass or Lucite® thermoplastic resin material, having a slot cut in the top. The slot should be of a size and shape so as to generally snugly fit both the front member and the rear member therein.

[0015] In preferred embodiments, the front member both serves as a viewing glass for displaying the display item and also forms a surrounding decorative frame without additional frame elements. Sculptural artwork can be attached to the front surface of the front member both for aesthetic purposes and to hide the magnet(s) or magnetic material(s) from view.

[0016] This invention thus relates to decorative display devices, such as display item frames, and in one preferred embodiment is more particularly related to a flat glass plate frame, in which the glass itself not only provides the clear cover through which the display item can be viewed, but also forms the frame. The invention is not limited to glass, but can be made of any reasonably transparent and preferably rigid material, such as acrylic or Lucite® thermoplastic resin material. The display item frame can be of any size and shape, and is not limited to traditional square or rectangular shapes.

[0017] The above features and many other features and advantages of this invention will become apparent from the ensuing description of selected preferred embodiments, which should be read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a display item frame according to an embodiment of this invention.

[0019] FIG. 2 is a side view of the display item frame of FIG. 1.

[0020] FIG. 3 is a side assembly view of the display item frame of FIG. 1.

[0021] FIG. 4 is side section view of the display item frame of FIG. 1 along line 4'-4' of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0022] FIGS. 1 to 4 illustrate one of many preferred embodiments of a display item frame 10 with magnetic closure 20 of this invention. FIG. 1 is a perspective view of the display item frame 10 showing the structural relationship of the component parts. FIG. 2 is a side view of the display item frame 10 of FIG. 1 showing additional detail of the structural relationship of the component parts. FIG. 3 is a side assembly view of the display item frame 10 of FIG. 1 showing how the display item 30 is located within the display item frame 10 and how the various components are placed together to form the complete whole. FIG. 4 is side section view of the display item frame of FIG. 1 along line 4'-4' showing the structural location of the magnets 40 and magnetic materials 50 and the sculptural artwork 60. As disclosed below, the display item frame 10 need not be of any specific size or shape, but can be sized and shaped to suit to a desired purpose, or for displaying a particular display item or other article.

[0023] FIG. 1 illustrates display item frame 10 according to one embodiment of the invention. In this embodiment, display item frame 10 comprises rectangular clear front member 12, rectangular rear member 14, and support block 16. Display item 18 is sandwiched between front member 12 and rear member 14, and the combination of front member 12, rear member 14 and display item 16 is supported by support block 18. Support block 18 has slot 20 into which front member 12 and rear member 14 fit, and so block support 18 acts as an easel-type device. Front member 12 can comprise sculptural artwork 60 both for aesthetic purposes and to hide magnets 40 and magnetic materials 50 from view, as disclosed below in connection with other figures.

[0024] In this embodiment, display item 16 can be a photograph, drawing, or other flat artwork that can be displayed. As shown in this embodiment, the viewing area for display item 18 is generally centered relative to front member 12. However, in other embodiments the viewing area could be displaced towards one side, or towards a corner. Additionally, display item 16 can be a non-flat item and, consequently, front member 12 and/or rear member 14 then should have some type of contour to cooperate with the display item 16. For example, if front member 12 has the contour, the contour should be concave towards the rear member 14, and if rear member 14 has the contour, the contour should be concave towards the front member 12. Alternatively, both front member 12 and rear member 14 can be contoured. In certain situations, front member 12 and rear member 14 can be contoured in the same direction.

[0025] FIG. 2 illustrates a side view of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1. In this view, magnets 40 and magnetic materials 50 (material attracted to a magnetic field) can be seen, as well as the structural relationship between the sculptural artwork 60 and the magnets 40 and magnetic materials 50. Front member 12 and rear member 14 are shown juxtaposed to one another with display item 16 sandwiched therebetween. Magnetic materials 50 are secured to the back surface 80 of rear member 14 by an adhesive or the equivalent. Alternatively, slots or other niches can be formed into the back surface 80 of rear member 14 to accommodate magnetic materials 50 if a smoother back surface 80 of rear member 14 is desired. Similarly, magnets 40 are secured to the front surface 70 of front member 12 by an adhesive or the equivalent. Alternatively, slots or other niches can be formed into the front surface 70 of front member 12 to accommodate magnets 40 if a smoother front surface 70 of front member 12 is desired.

[0026] Sculptural artwork 60 or other ornamentation can be placed over magnets 40 on front surface 70 of front member 12 to hide magnets 40 from view. Alternatively, sculptural artwork 60 can be placed on other locations on front surface 70 of front member 12. Thus, sculptural artwork 60 acts both for aesthetic purposes and for hiding magnets 40.

[0027] Slot 20 extends lengthwise across the top surface 22 of block support 18, generally from one side to the other side and has a depth sufficient to hold and support front member 12 and rear member 14 securely but releasably. Thus, the length of slot 20 preferably is equal to the length of top surface 22 of block support 18, the width of slot 20 is approximately equal to the width of the combined thicknesses of front member 12 and rear member 14, and the depth of slot 20 is approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch deep, which

has been found to be a sufficient and acceptable depth for securing front member 12 and rear member 14 within slot 20. Of course, shallower or deeper slots 20 can be used depending on the size and shape of front member 12 and rear member 14. Slot 20 also may be angled slightly such that front member 12 and rear member 14, when placed in slot 20, are not perpendicular to the surface on which display item frame 10 is placed, so as to enhance the viewing angle.

[0028] FIG. 3 is a side assembly view of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1 shown from the point of view of FIG. 2. Display item 16 is placed between front member 12 and rear member 14. Front member 12 and rear member 14 are brought together such that back surface 72 of front member 12 corresponds to front surface 82 of rear member 14, thus sandwiching display item 16 between back surface 72 of front member 12 and front surface 82 of rear member 14. Magnets 40 thus are in magnetic alignment and communication with magnetic materials 50 and hold front member 12 and rear member 14 together. The combination of front member 12, rear member 14 and display item 16 then is inserted into slot 20 of block support 18. As the width of slot 20 is the same as or slightly larger than the combined thicknesses of front member 12, rear member 14 and display item 16, slot 20 can releasably hold and support the combination of front member 12, rear member 14 and display item 16 is a viewing and viewable configuration.

[0029] FIG. 4 is a sectional side view of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1 also shown from the point of view of FIG. 2. In this view, the structural location of magnets 40 on front member 12 and as covered and hidden by sculptural artwork 60 can be seen in more detail. Preferably, magnets 40 are completely covered by sculptural artwork 60 such that magnets 40 are not viewable when viewing display item frame 10 from the front. As magnetic materials 50 on rear member 14 are located generally immediately behind magnets 40 when viewed from the front, magnetic materials 50 also are not viewable when viewing display item frame 10 from the front. As used herein, the phrase from the front means when viewing the display item frame 10 from a direction generally perpendicular to (or at least not parallel to) the plane of the flat surface of display item 16 on which the image to be viewed is contained.

[0030] As used herein, the term magnetic material is used to refer to any material that a magnet will be attracted to, such as iron or steel. Magnetic material need not have magnetic properties itself, but only needs to have the property that a magnet will be attracted to it. Magnets 40 and magnetic materials 50 can be interchanged with each other. For example, magnets 40 could be on front member 12 in which case magnetic materials would be on rear member 14, magnets 40 could be on rear member 14 in which case magnetic materials 50 would be on front member 12, a magnet 40 could be on each of front member 12 and rear member 14, or a magnet 40 and a magnetic material 50 could be on each of front member 12 and rear member 14. It is only important that a magnet on either front member 12 or rear member 14 cooperate with either another magnet 40 or a magnetic material on rear member 14 and front member 12, respectively. For example, if a magnetic material 50 on front member 12 was placed in the cooperative relationship with a magnetic material 50 on rear member, and the magnetic materials were not magnets, front member 12 and rear member 14 may not attach to each other in a magnetic relationship.

[0031] As an alternative, the front member 12 may be of any desired shape, such as round or oval shape, triangular or square, or any geometric shape. In other embodiments, acrylic, Lucite® thermoplastic resin material, or another clear plastic or material can be used for front member 12 instead of glass. This construction can be useful for various display item frames 10 where overall weight may be a consideration. Alternatively, instead of a photograph or artwork being the display item 16, the back surface 70 of front member 12 or one of the front surface 80 or back surface 82 of rear member 14 may be silvered so that the display item frame 10 becomes a mirror. Also alternatively, a clock and clock face may be positioned at an appropriate location.

[0032] The foregoing detailed description of the preferred embodiments, examples and the appended figures have been presented only for illustrative and descriptive purposes. They are not intended to be exhaustive and are not intended to limit the scope and spirit of the invention. The embodiments were selected and described to best explain the principles of the invention and its practical applications. One skilled in the art will recognize that many variations can be made to the invention disclosed in this specification without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A display item frame comprising:

- a) a front member formed from a transparent material;
 - b) a rear member;
 - c) a magnetic attachment means for holding the front member and the back member in a removable manner; and
 - d) a decorative member capable of covering the attachment means,
- wherein a display item is held between the front member and the rear member.

2. The frame as claimed in claim 1, wherein the magnetic attachment means is at least one magnet and at least one magnetic material; and the magnet and the magnetic material cooperate to hold the front member and the rear member together.

3. The frame as claimed in claim 2, wherein the at least one magnet is attached to the front member.

4. The frame as claimed in claim 2, wherein the at least one magnetic material is attached to the rear member.

5. The frame as claimed in claim 2, wherein the at least one magnet is attached to the rear member.

6. The frame as claimed in claim 2, wherein the at least one magnetic is attached to the front member.

7. The frame as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

- e) a block support for supporting the front member and the rear member in a viewable configuration, the block support comprising a slot into which the front member and the rear member can fit when the front member and the rear member are magnetically held together.

8. The frame as claimed in claim 1, wherein the rear member has approximately the same dimensions as the front member.

9. The frame as claimed in claim 8, wherein the front member is at least partially transparent and the rear member is opaque.

10. A display item frame comprising:

- a) a front member formed of a transparent material;
- b) a rear member;

- c) at least one first attachment means attached to the front member and being selected from the group consisting of magnets and magnetic materials;
 - d) at least one second attachment means attached to the rear member and being selected from the group consisting of magnets and magnetic materials; and
 - e) a decorative member capable of covering the first attachment means such that the first attachment means is not viewable from a frontal viewing angle, wherein the magnet and the magnetic material cooperate to hold the front member and the rear member together, and a display item is held between the front member and the rear member.
- 11.** The frame as claimed in claim **10**, wherein the at least one magnet is attached to the front member.
- 12.** The frame as claimed in claim **10**, wherein the at least one magnetic material is attached to the rear member.
- 13.** The frame as claimed in claim **10**, wherein the at least one magnet is attached to the rear member.
- 14.** The frame as claimed in claim **10**, wherein the at least one magnetic is attached to the front member.
- 15.** The frame as claimed in claim **10**, further comprising:
- f) a block support for supporting the front member and the rear member in a viewable configuration, the block support comprising a slot into which the front member and the rear member can fit when the front member and the rear member are magnetically held together.
- 16.** The frame as claimed in claim **10**, wherein the rear member has approximately the same as the front member.
- 17.** The frame as claimed in claim **16**, wherein the front member is at least partially transparent and the rear member is opaque.

- 18.** A display item frame comprising:
- a) a front member formed of a transparent material having a length, a width, a thickness, a front surface, and a back surface;
 - b) a rear member having a length approximately the same as the length of the front member, a width approximately the same as the width of the front member, a thickness, a front surface, and a back surface;
 - c) at least one magnet attached to the front surface of the front member or the back surface of the rear member and at least one magnetic material attached to the back surface of the rear member or the front surface of the front member, respectively, wherein the magnet and the magnetic material cooperate to hold the front member and the rear member together;
 - d) a decorative member capable of covering the magnet or magnetic material attached to the front surface of the front member such that the magnet or magnetic material attached to the front surface of the front member is not viewable from a frontal viewing angle; and
 - e) a block support for supporting the front member and the rear member in a viewable configuration, the block support comprising a slot into which the front member and the rear member can fit when the front member and the rear member are magnetically held together.
- 19.** The frame as claimed in claim **18**, wherein the front member is at least partially transparent and the rear member is opaque.

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