

Gilding on Fabric

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Materials Used

23K Patent Gold Leaf
Aleene's OK to Wash-It fabric glue
Fabric without a significant pile

Tools Used

Stencil Template (quilting stencil material)
Foam dauber
Timer
Soft natural haired brush
Stone Burnisher
Xacto knife

Gilding on Fabric in the Middle Ages

This process of gilding on fabric is both simple and stunning! There are a number of illuminations, like Figure 2, that show patterns that could have been stamped, embroidered or gilded (the technology to weave complex brocades had not yet been introduced to Europe), but little evidence showing how this had been done. Figure 1 shows a scrap of silk, believed to be from a cotehardie, showing a gilded fleur-de-lys.

The process is based on a description from Cenninni in *Il Libro dell'Arte*:

“Now let us speak about how to work on cloth, that is, on linen or silk. First take some of this gesso sottile, and temper this gesso with a little white of egg and size, and lay a coat on the part on which you want to gild. Let it stand for a day or so. Lay your gold just as you do on panel, and burnish it, holding a very smooth and solid board underneath this cloth.” (Cenninni, pg 103).

Our process will use modern, washable fabric glue in place of the gesso, but the process is similar.

Sources

Cenninni, Cennino d'Andrea. Translated by Daniel V. Thompson. *The Craftsman's Handbook "Il Libro dell'Arte"*. Dover Publishing. 1960.

Musees Des Tissus, *Fleur de Leis 14th Century on silk*. 2003



Figure 1 – A piece of silk, believed to be part of a male cotehardie. Musees Des Tissus. 14th century, France



Figure 2 – 1338-44, French. From the Romance of Alexander

Process

TEST THIS PROCESS ON SCRAP BEFORE YOU TRY ON YOUR FINAL PIECE!!!

1. Create a stencil with the desired shape
 - a. If you are doing many repetitions, you will want to have multiple stencils. The glue will build up on one and you can switch to another while the glue dries. The glue can then be peeled up easily.
2. Lay your fabric on a smooth, hard surface.
3. Place the stencil in the desired location on your fabric.
4. Load glue on your foam dauber. You don't want enough glue to be sloppy but you want a good coating.
5. Holding your template down with one hand, daub glue throughout and up to the edges. Do not squish the dauber too heavily into the edges or the glue will leak under the template, making the outline less clean.
6. Wait approximately 5 minutes. (Your mileage may vary: I live in a dry climate!) The glue should be tacky to the touch but not slippery.
7. Apply the patent gold leaf.
 - a. For a complicated shape, it would be a better use of your gold to cut the sheet into strips and to gild the design piecemeal.
 - b. If there are visible cracks or gaps, fill in now.
 - c. Don't be too critical of this. What looks like hell at 3" away looks pretty darned good from 3' away!
8. If the glue was still slippery, pause here for a minute or two.
9. Use the soft natural hair brush to gently brush away at the edges. Do not brush hard! The gold is not yet set in the fabric!
 - a. At this time, you can try to collect the extra gold to make a batch of shell gold, or you can brush it into your increasingly valuable carpet.
10. If gold adheres where you don't want it, at this time, use the xacto knife to *gently* scrape away the excess gold. There will likely be a small amount of glue residue but, once again, it'll look great once you back up a bit.
11. Place a piece of smooth paper over your gilding. Use a burnisher and rub firmly across all of your design. This works the glue and the gold into the weave of your fabric and sets the design.
 - a. Hold the paper down so it doesn't move as you rub. This can scratch the gold.
12. Lather, rinse, repeat.
 - a. Once you have a feel for how quickly you can lay the gold, you can likely be working 2-3 spots at once: Letting the glue dry in one spot while you lay the gold in another. 5 minutes is not an exact time. You do have a window.
13. Do **NOT** let the glue dry without laying the gold and burnishing. Best to do this when you can focus on it!
 - a. Sometimes, you might just have to let the baby cry for a minute.

Washing: I have not had the opportunity to test this myself, but the person who taught me has washed her outfits and they still show the gilding. I think that she is crazy and would recommend dry cleaning. Better yet, use the test piece that I'm sure that you did and try that one out first!!