

Raised Gilding 101

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Introduction

The purpose of this class is to get you familiar with the process of raised gilding, and to show you that it isn't as scary as it might seem. In this handout we are going to go over the materials and equipment needed for this process and then we will work through the steps of raised gilding. Each student creates a sample of what they learned.

Materials and equipment

- Patent Gold/Loose Leaf Gold, 24k sheets
- Sharp scissors
- Soft bristle brush
- 3x5 card, rolled into a tube and taped
- tweezers
- gesso
- fish glue
- burnisher
- paint tray, egg tray, etc.
- Water bottle
- Cup/dish for cleaning brushes
- Pencil
- Manuscript Pen
- Tracing paper
- Glassine
- Angular/Cutting brush
- Round head mop brush
- Exacto knife, round head

Basic Gesso Recipe (Secreta)

- Gesso Sottile
 - A traditional gesso commonly used for the raised gilding of manuscript illumination. Its properties are flexibility and strength. It can support the movement of turning pages without cracking or de-aminating. Its binder is

usually fish glue and old recipes for Gesso Sottile include white lead, which renders them poisonous. Acrylic gesso sottile is available today and is considered an acceptable replacement.

- White Lead*
 - A heavy white poisonous powder, essentially basic lead carbonate, used in paint pigments.
- Rock Sugar
 - the ultra fine grain size is much much finer than regular sugar. The fineness is necessary so it mixes, blends and melts more evenly. It's painstakingly screened to make sure the crystal size is remarkably uniform and ultra-refined for the highest grade of purity available.
- Armenian Bole
 - also known as bolus armenus or bole armoniac, this is an earthy clay, usually red, native to Armenia. It is red due to the presence of iron oxide; the clay also contains hydrous silicates of aluminum and possibly magnesium.
- Fish Glue
 - gelatinous substance obtained by boiling skins fins and bones of fish.
- Water

***Warning: White lead is a cumulative poison: Wash hands thoroughly after using this item. Do not swallow or breathe in its dust. Keep brushes out of your mouth.**

Now to get down to work!

First - prepare the design – trace, transfer, and ink it. Use a crow quill and ink, or manuscript pen, then erase pencil lines on the support.

Second – Taking care to keep inside the work area, softly burnish the area to be gilded.

Third – In your paint tray, add enough fish glue to complete the job at hand, mix with water to about the same consistency as your gouache. With a brush sized according to the work area, apply a puddle coat to the area to be gilded. The fish glue will allow the gesso to adhere more securely to the support. Let the fish glue dry completely. You will only want to work with an amount of what you can gild to completion in one working period. Once dry, burnish the area with the fish glue, making sure to smooth out any bubbles.

While your fish glue is drying, take a small measure of your prepared gesso (dried) and put it in a small clean dish; add a small amount (1 tsp) of water. Use enough water to give the gesso the consistency of heavy cream.

Fourth – using a clean brush suitable to the size of the work, apply the gesso to the support, making a small puddle in the midst of the area to be gilded. Pull from the center to the edge trying to keep it even as you fill the area. You need to add enough gesso to keep the entire area fluid. Wash your brush directly afterward. This must dry completely before anything else can safely be worked further.

Fifth - now that the gesso is completely dry, you will want to **very carefully** burnish this area. Start with your burnisher between your thumb and forefinger and allow it only its own weight to press on the gesso initially. This will take some practice, and a great deal more patience. Slowly increase the pressure, making sure to keep the burnisher clean, using your big brush if needed to keep the support clean. The more you can get the area of gesso to shine, the more your finished product will be.

Take a break, stand, stretch.

As you prepare to begin working with your gold, go ahead and wash those hands one more time. Clear away any other items from your work area, all you will need at this point is your packet of gold, your scissors, tweezers, a small piece of glassine and your rolled tube.

Sixth - carefully remove one of the sheets of gold from the book. With the scissors, cut a piece of the gold from the sheet that will just cover the area you want to gild. With the tweezers, grab the small piece you cut at the very edge, turn it upside down. Place the tube in your mouth, (do not drool down the tube), hover closely over the area to be gilded and exhale through the tube onto the gesso, immediately place the small piece of gold over the gesso, making sure to adjust it to cover all the area, before setting it down. Remove the tube, place your glassine over the piece of gold, wait, patience. With everything now out of your hands, use one hand to hold down the edges of your glassine, use one finger of the other hand to gently rub over the area with the gold (be careful of your fingernails). This is where practice will make perfect, if your area is too wet when you do this step, the moisture will bleed through the gold and your glassine will stick to the surface and bad things will happen. If your area was too dry, your gold will not stick.

Repeat step six until all the gesso is covered.

Seventh – After burnishing with your finger, you will carefully remove the piece of glassine. Using your tube again, you will gently exhale again over same area with the gold, as you are doing this, take your angular brush and gently fold the edges of the loose gold back on top of the gilded area. Gold inherently will stick to itself, and/or anything else it touches. Once again place the glassine over the area and re-burnish with your finger. Remove the glassine, gently use your mop brush to sweep away any small pieces of gold. (You can save these to make shell gold someday if you wish, or give them to your branch's lampworker).

Eighth – once again place your glassine over the gilded area. With one hand hold the glassine in place, with the other hand use your burnisher to gently burnish the area, rotating the burnisher in your hand, slowly, gently going over all areas of the gilded area. As you work around the piece, gradually apply more pressure to the burnisher (this will also take time and practice to get the hang of how much pressure you can use).

Take a break, stand, stretch.

Ninth – Now you will remove the glassine, and work directly on the gold with the burnisher. You must be very careful here, use your mop brush in one hand, as you continue to burnish keep the area clean of any loose pieces of gold. This is where if you are not careful you can

scratch the gold.

You can clean up the edges of your gold with a rounded exacto knife, be careful to scrape away from the gilded area. A manuscript pen will allow you to clean up any ragged edges.

It is up to you on how you plan your work; it is best to work in stages, finishing all of your fish glue work first. Now you can stop at this point if needed. Keep in mind you must gild within 4-6 hours all of your burnished gesso.

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