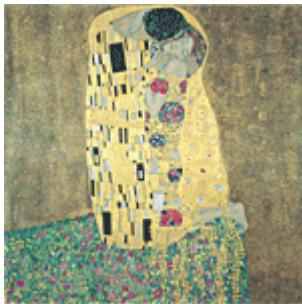


Applying Gold Leaf to Artwork

Gold leaf has been used for the decoration of tombs and statues, cathedrals and temples, fine books and picture frames since Egyptian times. Artists like Gustav Klimt are renowned for incorporating gold leaf into their paintings.



The Kiss, by Gustav Klimt

Gilding is a skilled craft, which requires careful attention to detail for the best results. The addition of metallic leaf whether precious metal or imitation provides a lustre that paint alone cannot match. Why not just use gold paint? The reason is because gold paints are not really gold. Some of the newer paints will not tarnish, but even so, the resemblance to real gold is remote, at best. Despite the ease of applying paint, its visual and physical properties are inferior to those of gold leaf. The only thing that lasts like gold and looks like gold and is tough like gold is gold.

Leaf can be applied to nearly any non-porous surface. The usual technique involves applying a thin layer of gesso or an adhesive to the surface to be decorated. This adhesive can be applied in any desired pattern, if the entire surface is not to be covered. The sheets of gold are then lifted by static electricity using soft brushes. The gold

is so thin that any moving air or excess static electricity can cause unsatisfactory results. The decorator then gently lowers the leaf onto the surface, where it is held in place by the adhesive. The goal is to apply the thinnest layer needed, as mistakes with gold are often costly.

The sheets often wrinkle when placed, which is generally the desired appearance. The surface of the gold leaf after application will have many different facets and creases, giving a diffuse luminance rather than a smooth, reflective surface.

Gold, silver and copper (and imitation) leaf provides an opportunity for artists to add rich embellishments to their mixed media works. Leaf is a very fragile product to handle, so these guidelines are intended to assist you to successfully apply it to your artworks.

Applying the Size Paint gold leaf size on the precise area where you intend to position the leaf. If adding leaf to a painting, painting medium may be used as glue. Test the tack of the size before adhering the leaf. As your size dries, it naturally goes from a wet to a dry state. Test for the tack of size by lightly touching it with the tip of your knuckle. If it sticks, to your skin it is ready for the leaf to be applied. The function of size differs in the process of gilding from its use in oil painting. In oil painting it is applied in an extremely diluted form to the surface of a support to reduce absorbency and make it more receptive to the application of a painting ground.

Applying the Leaf Placing a book of leaf in your hand, carefully fold back the protective paper to expose the gold leaf. Lay the leaf onto the sized area and 'roll' out the leaf. Hold it

firmly yet carefully. Attach leaf to surface.

A little-known secret is putting talcum powder on the surrounding area. Sometimes little bits of gold leaf may stick onto areas that have just been painted. The talcum powder keeps the gold from sticking to the paint. You can thoroughly wipe and vacuum the gold powder off yet there is still some left, even though you may not see it.

Burnishing the Leaf After the leaf is laid on, rub gently and thoroughly with a soft brush such as a squirrel mop to ensure complete adhesion. Any leaf laid over un-sized surface, will lift away. Brushes of different textures can also work the leafed areas after being applied. This gives the surface a pattern, and is a common finishing technique.

Touching Up Touch up any areas that are missing leaf due to lack of sufficient sizing or from leafed areas that may have torn away during burnishing.

Imitation Gold leaf (also known as Dutch Metal leaf or Shlag Metal). Imitation leaf is exactly as it sounds. This is a considerably cheaper version of genuine gold and silver leaf, which imitates the same metallic qualities. However, as reflected in the price it is no substitute for genuine gold leaf in the majority of restoration techniques and is mainly used for less prestigious projects.

The metals used to create the imitation gold leaf are an alloy of copper and zinc. Aluminium leaf is an alternative to silver leaf and whereas imitation gold leaf has to be varnished to prevent it from tarnishing, aluminium leaf needs no protection at all.

Metal leaf is thicker than genuine gold leaf and therefore a lot easier to handle.

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