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## **An Overview of Gilding**

### **Traditional Water Gilding:**

Traditional Water Gilding has been around for thousands of years. It is only for interior application, usually on decorative pieces or furniture. You may only use genuine gold or silver leaf with this process – no imitation leaf. Basic Procedure:

1. Raw wood is given a coat of rabbit skin glue and allowed to dry.
2. The piece is then painted with gesso – made of whiting powder and rabbit skin glue solution. 6-8 layers of gesso may be needed depending on the surface.
3. When gesso has been smoothed, clay bole is brushed on and then polished. Bole is made of organic, colored clay and rabbit skin glue solution. Yellow clay for matte areas of gold, red for highlights.
4. Just before gilding, gilder's liquor is prepared. This is mostly water with a tiny amount of glue and alcohol. The clay surface is flooded with the liquor using a brush. Once the loose gold leaf is applied to the flooded areas, it begins to attach itself to the clay as the water evaporates.
5. Once dried to exactly the proper level, gold may be burnished with an agate burnisher. This is the only method of gilding which allows the use of this tool to compress the gold into the Bole to produce a mirror-like reflection.

There is a modern system which simplifies the above process called *Kolner Burnishing Clay*.

Tools for traditional water gilding:

- Gilder's tip to pick up the gold leaf
- Gilder's pad to cut leaf on
- Gilder's knife to cut leaf to desired size
- Squirrel mop to apply the gilders liquor and tamp and skew leaf

Sealers: oil-based or shellac.

### **Oil Gilding:**

Has been for thousands of years. Usually an organic or synthetic resinous varnish. Oil gilding depends on a different kind of timing for applying gold. In this case, one applies an oil mordant that gives shorter or longer amounts of time to gild. You also have to wait a certain amount of time for oil size to be ready to receive leaf. Oil gilding can be used indoors (genuine or imitation gold leaf) and outdoors (for exterior use 23kt gold or higher).

## **Oil Gilding** – Basic procedure is as follows:

1. Prime substrate (wood, plaster, fiberglass, metal) appropriately and smooth.
2. Apply oil size. Allow to come to tack. Some require less than 1 hour, some require 12 hours or more. “Quick” sizes give less time to gild, “Slow” sizes give you an extended time.
3. Apply loose, patent, or ribbon leaf.

### Tools for oil gilding:

- Gilder’s tip to pick up the gold leaf
- Gilder’s pad to cut the leaf on
- Gilder’s knife to cut leaf to desired size
- A squirrel mop to tamp and skew leaf. Brushes for shellac, primer, size.

Sealers: shellac, or tested water-based products. Shellac can be used as a barrier coat before applying another medium. Oil size with genuine gold leaf provides a shinier gild than synthetic water-based size (see below) with genuine gold leaf.

## **Synthetic Water-Based Gilding:**

Developed in the last 25 years. Synthetic gilding also depends on a “window of opportunity” for gilding. It is only for interior use – genuine or imitation gold leaf can be used. Basic procedure:

1. Prime substrate (wood, plaster, fiberglass, metal) appropriately and smooth.
2. Water-based size can be brushed or sprayed. It comes to tack in about 15 minutes and can receive genuine gold or imitation leaf for 24-36 hours.
3. Apply loose, patent or ribbon leaf.

Sealers: shellac, tested oil-based sealers. Shellac can be used as a barrier coat before applying another medium. Water-based size generally produces a more matte finish than oil size with genuine gold leaf.

Gold sizes have different requirements for waiting before applying a sealer over leaf. All products should be tested together to determine compatibility. Cotton gilding gloves are especially important for handling imitation leaf, which stains easily.