



HOW TO PAINT A

DENIM JACKET

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How to Paint a Denim Jacket_ Tanya Alexander

Denim is a fantastic material to work with... it crosses generations, looks great in many timeless styles and lends itself well to painting. Denim jackets in particular tend to have quirky characteristics, such as interesting seaming or unusual cuts, that inspire custom handpainted ideas. Here's a "Metallic Botanicals" project that looks a lot more difficult than it actually is, and which utilizes a variety of textile painting techniques. Featuring Jacquard's Textile Color for underbase and linework, and showcasing Jacquard's Lumiere metallics palette, this is a really fun way to re-purpose a well-worn jean jacket! —

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MATERIALS

- Denim Jacket (see below for tips on selecting)
- Design idea (feel free to use mine, or come up with your own!)
- Jacquard Textile Color: 220 Super Opaque White, 122 Black, 123 White & 100 Colorless Extender
- Jacquard Lumiere: 549 Metallic Rust, 550 True Gold, 553 Brass, 564 Metallic Copper, 566 Metallic Russet, 569 Pearlescent Violet, 570 Pearlescent Blue
- Royal Langnickel Majestic Gold Taklon 1/4" angled chisel brush
- #2 Golden Taklon long fineliner brush
- #0 Gold Taklon short liner brush
- Paper & pencil
- Fabric pencil or white drawing pencil
- Paper towels or clean cotton rag
- Water cup
- Palette tray



ABOVE: Brushes used in this project: 1/4" angled chisel (for crisp edges on larger elements and drybrushing), #2 long fineliner (for clean linework) and #0 short liner (for filling smaller areas and dot work).

SELECTING THE PERFECT DENIM



I tend to use clean, re-purposed/upcycled denim for paint projects. The lived-in look and feel is nice to work with, and worn-in fabric takes the paint especially well. New denim tends to be very stiff/coarse, and in many cases is over-dyed and/or starched, which requires multiple wash cycles to prep for painting.

Sourcing denim for projects is as easy as asking family and friends for pieces that no longer fit, or hitting up a local thrift store for something awesome. Denim pieces tend to be fairly timeless in overall cut and style, and any little tears, stains or imperfections only add to the finished project. Plus, re-purposing is eco-friendly! 🌱

SUGGESTIONS BEFORE GETTING STARTED

- Make sure you are working on a clean flat surface, in a space with good lighting.
- Eliminate digging for the right paint mid-inspiration by keeping only the supplies you need for the project out.
- Prevent unwanted color mix-ups by dabbing a small amount of paint (and labeling it) on your project sketch.
- Always rinse your brushes well between color changes and during breaks.
- If you want a little thinner consistency, mix paint with a small amount of water.

For this project, I chose to paint some of the back panel insets, but feel free to change this up, based on your jacket's styling and your design concept. Sleeves, front panels, collars, cuffs or random placement all work well on most denim jackets!

INSTRUCTIONS

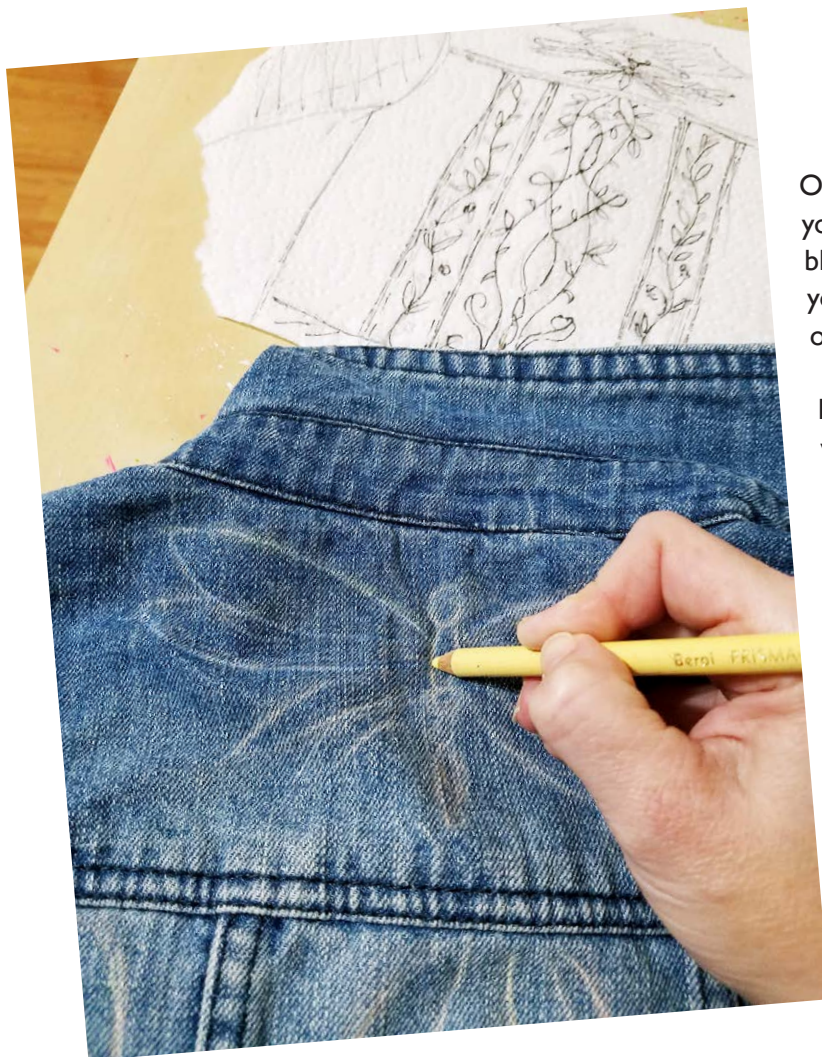
1 Using pencil and paper, sketch out a preliminary project design.

Don't get hung up on the details at this point; this is just a basis for your design... details and fine-tuning happen during the painting process.

If you know what colors you want to work with, label small paint daubs on your sketch for reference.



2



Once you've finalized your basic design, you'll need to do a quick sketch of the basic blocking onto your denim project. Using your fabric pencil, draw the main concept out into the panels you wish to paint.

HANDY TIP: If you aren't comfortable with freehand sketching, you can always use a fabric tracing paper to mark out your design.

Remember, this is a simple reference sketch... don't worry about trying to draw in any detailing, as it will just get covered up when you lay down your base layer of paint. When you're finished, you should be able to easily see the main shapes, which you'll use as a guide for painting.

3.



Use Textile 200 Super Opaque White to block in your white underbase layer. This is essential for making the colors really stand out on the denim background. Block in the larger shapes with the 1/4" angled chisel brush, using solid coverage on areas where you want the color to really pop, and fading out to areas where you want more subtle color coverage. Use the #0 liner for filling in smaller areas, and the #2 long fineliner for laying down linework. Allow the white underbase to dry thoroughly.

HANDY TIP: Textile Color Super Opaque White can be a little thick to work with for fine linework. To thin, simply add a small amount of water or 100 Textile Colorless Extender and mix with paint in a palette.



RIGHT: Blocking in smaller-size main shapes with white underbase, using #0 liner.



LEFT: Detail shot of white underbase of dragonfly element. Wings blocked in using 1/4" angled chisel brush.



ABOVE: White underbase block-work in progress.



LEFT: Finished white underbase of the basic design, blocked out. Vines were painted with #2 long fineliner.

4.

Next, start blocking in your color elements. In my example piece, I used the 1/4" angled chisel brush to fill in the larger elements first, working one color at a time and allowing the piece to dry between colors. I switched to the #0 liner to fill in smaller elements.



HANDY TIPS:

- Work from top to bottom to avoid smearing your work as you paint.
- If you get paint where you don't want it, use a clean brush dipped in clean water to wet the area, then dab with clean paper towel to remove the color. Be sure to work quickly - if you wait too long, it will not come out.
- The textured surface of fabric, especially denim, can lead to paint not perfectly minding your guidelines (despite your best intentions), and scrubbing out larger areas you feel are "mistakes" can mean ruining the piece. When painting on textiles, it's best to think like Bruce Lee: "Be water, my friend." Painting is supposed to be fun! Rather than beat yourself up about "mistakes," just go with the flow and incorporate unexpected elements into your design.
- When using the #2 long fineliner, work on the brush tip, being careful not to overload the brush; less is more! The same applies to pressure - pressing lightly results in a thinner line and lighter paint coat, pressing harder expands the bristles and allows more of the brush load to disperse.

5.



Once all of the element base colors have been blocked in, it's time to start detailing. Using the #2 long fineliner and working with a very small paint load on the tip of the brush, outline all of the main elements. Again, be sure to work from top to bottom to avoid smearing.



Once the element linework layer is dry, carefully paint in the main vine work. In some of the curve sections, I went over the vines twice to smooth out any rough edges.

Patience is key when painting vine elements or floating lines – you get one shot to get it right, otherwise you will need to improvise by alternating the line thickness throughout the line (ie: thicker on loops, where holding a steady thickness with a long fineliner can get tricky).



HANDY TIP: Rest your pinky finger on your work (making sure the area is dry) to maintain a steady hand and consistent pressure of paint application when working with a long fineliner.

6.

After completing black linework, you'll want to add gradient shadow blending and drop shadowing. These techniques help give more contrast to the base color, and make the work look much more dimensional.



Skim a small amount of paint along the outline and in areas you want more shadowing.



Use clean/dry 1/4" angled chisel brush to blend out the black gradient in the element.



View of leaf element with outline and inner gradient shadow blending.

For Gradient Shadow Blending:

First, use the #2 long fineliner to skim a very small amount of Textile Color 122 Black along an element's existing black outline, and drag a small amount into areas inside the element where you want more shadow emphasis (in the photo example, one of the leaves). Then use a clean, dry 1/4" angled chisel brush and work in small areas off the wet line to blend out the black gradient within the leaf element.

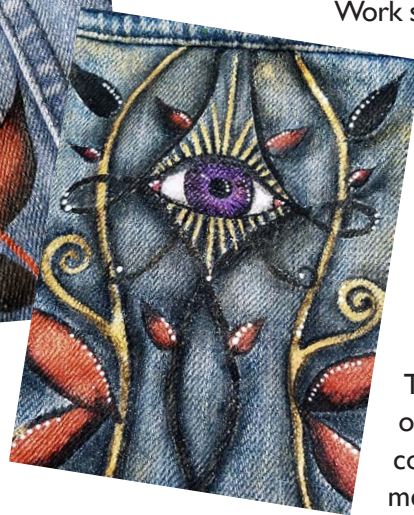
For Drop Shadowing:

The process for dropshadowing elements is very similar to gradient shadow blending within elements; the only difference is that instead of blending the gradient within the bounding lines of the element, you pull the wet edge down in the direction you want the drop shadow to appear. Keeping the brush clean and dry and working small areas at a time is essential; a wet brush will pick up the paint and move it, rather than blend it out over a space.



TOP: Examples of completed black inner gradient shadow blending in leaf elements.

RIGHT: Example of black drop-shadowing of elements.



HANDY TIPS: These techniques aren't difficult to do, but do take some patience. If you haven't drybrushed denim before, it's a good idea to test out the technique on a scrap piece of denim first, to get a feel.

When drybrushing, work with small amounts of paint at a time... you can always add more to intensify the effect, but removing over-saturated areas can be difficult.

Work small areas at a time for best results, otherwise the paint will dry and not blend easily (or at all).

If you feel your shadow is too dark: use a clean wet brush and work the area, rinsing and wiping the brush off to remove some of the paint load.

Dropshadowing looks awesome... and is also a great way to blend out any mishaps in your linework! :)

These same technique can also be used to highlight or add glow surrounding elements. Simply use a light color in place of black (I added golden highlight shimmer in the space between elements).

7. Once you've completed all of the shadow work, you can move on to fine detailing. Using the #0 liner, you can add small white dots throughout your work with Textile Color 123 White. I tend to favor the 123 White over the Super Opaque White for dotwork. The thinner consistency makes it easier to control the dot edges when building, for a more uniformly-shaped dot result. Allow to dry thoroughly.

HANDY TIPS: The best dot work consists of clean-edged circular dots. Keep the paint load on the tip of the brush. Rinse and replenish the paint load often for consistently clean dots. Also, hold your brush at a 45° angle so you can have clean placement but still be able to see what you're doing. If a dot goes bad: use a clean wet paper towel to blot the majority of the paint, then a clean wet brush to wipe off the remaining excess paint and try again.



ABOVE: Close-up of dot detailing. Note the different patterns used: larger single dots to draw the eye, sequentially-sized lines of dots and random patterning placements all add visual interest and highlight elements. You can also see where I drybrushed golden highlight shimmers into spaces between some elements from the previous step.

8. To protect your work, apply a thin coat of Textile 100 Colorless Extender to all painted areas and allow to dry overnight. To complete your piece, you'll need to heat set it. Simply iron the reverse side of the jacket with a dry iron (no steam) using a denim-friendly setting for 30-60 seconds and allow to cool.



9. **CARE INSTRUCTIONS:** To keep painted jackets looking their best, I recommend turning inside out and either hand washing in cold water, or machine washing in cold on a gentle cycle, using a mild detergent. Do not use fabric softeners, bleach or color boosting additives. To dry, either hang up and air dry, or machine dry inside out on air dry/no heat cycle. —

FINISHED PROJECT



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Hello, my name is Tanya Alexander. I am a Graphic /Web Designer at Jacquard Products. I'm also a lifelong fine artist working in a variety of mediums, including: traditional acrylic canvas work, pen and ink, ceramics, textile art, face/body painting, large format muraling and artistic neo-traditional tattooing. I've enjoyed experimenting with a wide variety of new mediums while working at Jacquard, including Silk Colors, Piñata Alcohol Inks, Textile Color, Lumiere, Neopaque, Pearl Ex Powdered Pigments, Cyanotype, Indigo and more. You can find me on Instagram, Etsy and the Web: artbytanyaalexander. —