

Paint on silk

Use a resist to create artistic designs with dye

Watching beautiful colors spread through lustrous silk is a fascinating experience. With silk fabric as the canvas and liquid dyes as the paint, you can create unique textiles for garments, accessories, or art pieces.

Liquid dyes on silk create a transparent effect and the opportunity to blend or layer colors. Dye becomes part of the fabric, instead of sitting on the surface like paint, so the silk's natural luminosity shows through and the fabric retains its softness and fluid drape.

Serti is a silk-painting technique in which a viscous, gummy substance called "resist" is used to create outlines and prevent dye colors from bleeding. The resist penetrates the silk, dries, and forms a border. Resists also preserve white space in a design. In this article, you'll learn the serti process, including how to chemically fix a dye-painted design.

Gutta, made from latex, is the resist traditionally used in serti, but water-based gutta-like resists also are commonly used. The methods described here deal with water-based resist only, because it is far more approachable for inexperienced silk painters.

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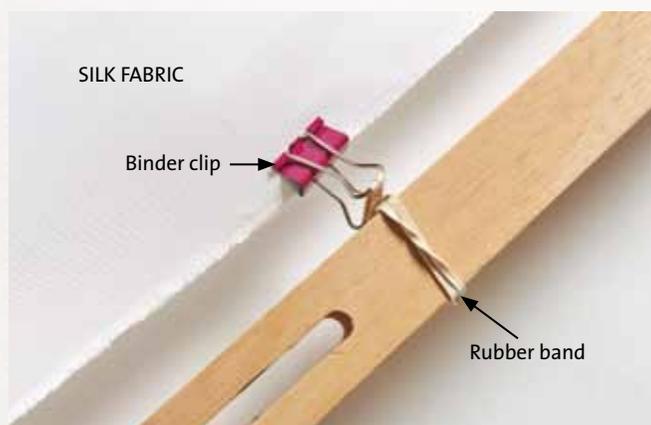
Maintain silk's fluid drape with liquid dyes instead of fabric paint.



Prepare and stretch the silk

Different silk types absorb dye differently, and their permeability to resists varies. A smooth, light- to medium-weight silk, such as 8 momme or 10 momme habotai, is best for first-time silk painters (momme or mommie is the weight measurement for silk). Wash the chosen silk in warm water with detergent to remove residues that may hinder dye absorption.

Stretch the silk taut in a frame to keep it suspended above the worksurface. I prefer to use wooden canvas stretcher bars and binder, bulldog, or silk clips because they leave no holes in the silk and enable painting to the fabric's edge. This is best for painting art pieces or prehemmed scarves and shawls. Purchase two sets of stretcher bars, and assemble them into a frame; the inside measurements should be a little larger than the silk's width and length. Attach clips around the frame: Affix one end of a rubber band to a clip, loop the rubber band's other end around the frame, and slip the clip through the loop.



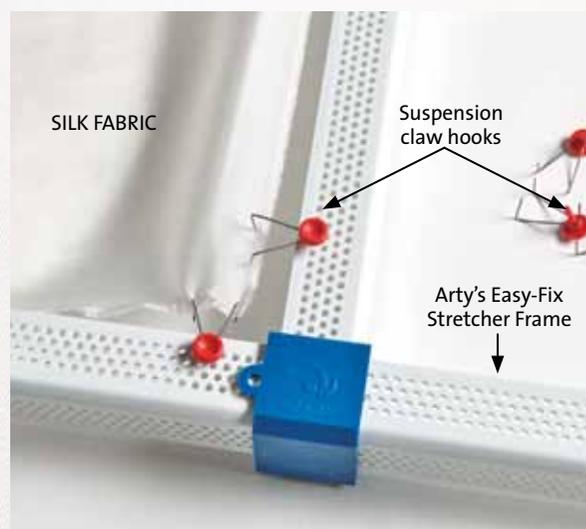
Premade stretcher systems, such as the adjustable Arty's Easy-Fix Stretcher Frame shown below, also are available for purchase from art supply stores. Other quick, inexpensive silk stretchers include picture frames and embroidery hoops for small pieces.



TOOLS AND MATERIALS

- Binder or bulldog clips, plastic clothespins, silk clips, or suspension claw hooks
- Dyeset: Jacquard Dyeset Concentrate
- Paint palette
- Resist applicator: Squeeze bottle with no. 5 metal tip
- Round brushes with pointed ends
- Rubber bands (long, medium thickness)
- Rubber or latex gloves
- Silk fabric or scarf; look for those labeled PFD (prepared for dyeing)
- Silk dyes: Jacquard Silk Colors, Green Label
- Stretcher frame
- Water-based resist (clear or colored)
- Water-soluble fabric marker

Whichever frame you choose, start by attaching the silk to the frame at one corner. Stretch and attach the silk to the opposite corner; repeat for all corners. Then attach the midpoint of each side and the points in between to the frame. The silk should be taut, but not at risk of tearing.



tip

Prevent smearing. To avoid smearing the resist, start applying the resist in the fabric's upper left corner if you're right-handed; reverse this if you're left-handed.

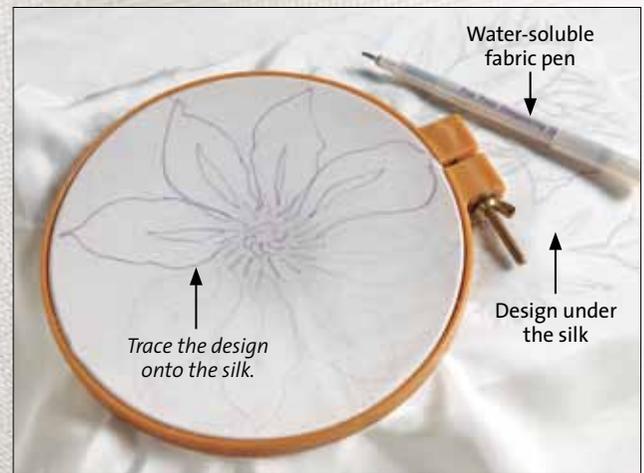
Apply the resist

Use transparent water-based resist that washes out, or a colored, opaque resist that creates a raised line on the fabric and becomes part of the design. Choose a transparent resist for creating more painterly effects; choose a colored resist to highlight the design's outlines.

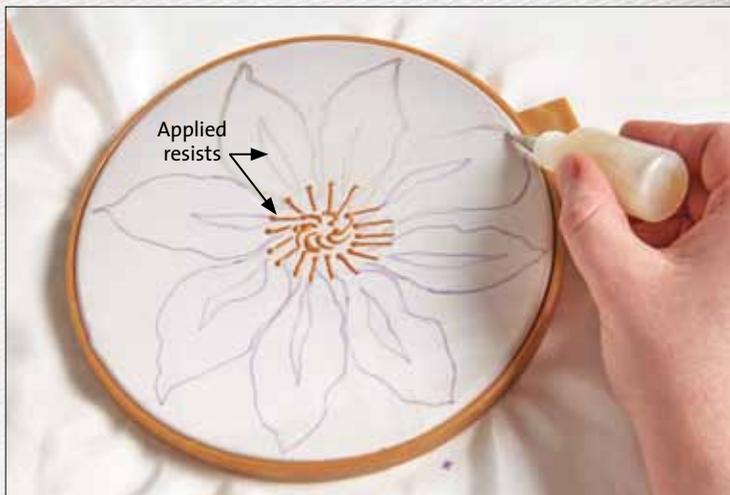
1 Shake the resist bottle well. Pour the resist liquid carefully into a squeeze-bottle applicator. Close the bottle and push a metal dispenser tip firmly onto the spout.



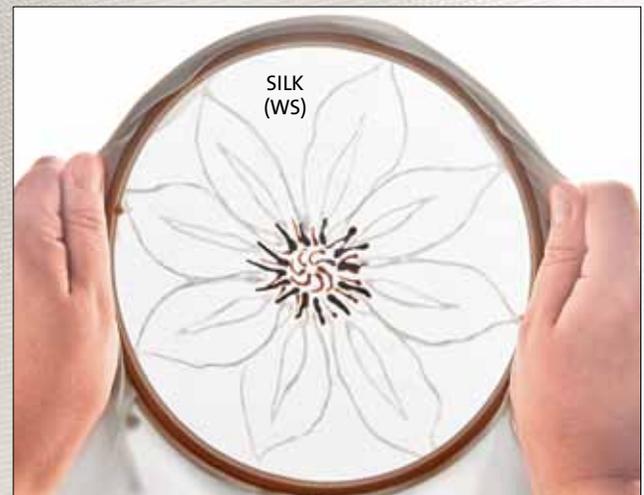
2 If you're copying a design drawing, place it under the silk. Raise it closer to the silk with a book or other object if necessary. Trace the design, or draw it freehand, onto the fabric with a water-soluble fabric marker.



3 Apply the resist to the traced lines. Hold the applicator like a pencil, squeeze gently, and apply firm pressure to the silk. You should hear the metal tip scraping against the silk as you draw. Move slowly to make sure the resist penetrates the silk without gaps.



4 Turn the frame over and inspect the resist lines. Reapply the resist to any areas where it didn't penetrate completely. Let the resist dry (about 30 minutes); use a hair dryer to decrease drying time.



SOURCES

Silk fabrics and silk-painting tools and supplies can be found at these online vendors:

DharmaTrading.com

ThaiSilks.com

JerrysArtarama.com

DickBlick.com

Michaels.com

Paint with dyes

Silk-painting dyes spread quickly on silk, and the painted piece will lighten considerably as it dries. Chemical-set silk dyes, such as Jacquard's Green Label, don't change the fabric's hand, unlike heat-set dyes, which stiffen fabric. Use a small brush to fill in small shapes and a large brush for larger areas. A sumi brush's thick-packed bristles hold plenty of dye, and its fine tip helps control application.

PAINT THE DESIGN

Brush on. Pour the dye into a palette, dip the brush in the dye, and wipe off the excess—unless you're painting a large area; a little dye goes a long way. Brush the dye gently onto the silk to fill in the resisted shapes. Keep the brush away from the resist lines, and let the dye spread to the edges by itself to avoid "flooding" the resist lines. Work quickly so that each resisted area is completely painted before the dye dries.

Blend. Blend colors into each other while the dye is still wet for translucent effects. You can increase blending by scrubbing a clean, dry brush or dry finger over the area you want blended.

Layer. For more layered color effects, allow the first color to dry completely or partially before applying the second. Painting wet dye over a portion of a dry dye section creates a hard-edged line. This can be either a nuisance or a beautiful design element.

Texturize. Sprinkle rock salt onto still-wet dye for texture. The salt crystals absorb the dyes, creating a bleached, speckled, or mottled effect. This is an excellent way to cover up mistakes in the painting or to add depth. Leave the salt on the fabric until the dye dries; brush it off before setting the dye.



SET THE DESIGN

Allow the dye-painted design to dry completely, about 24 hours. If you used a colored resist, heat-set it with a dry iron before fixing the piece; press a warm, dry iron on the fabric's wrong side.

Mix Jacquard Dyeset Concentrate solution according to the instructions on the bottle. Use a container that is big enough for the painted piece to move in freely.

Wear rubber or latex gloves, and submerge the silk in the solution. Stir or agitate for five minutes. Remove the silk from

the solution and rinse away excess dye with mild soap and water. Rinse until the water runs clear. The silk is now washable and dry-cleanable.

If you used a clear resist, it should wash away completely. If the resist lines feel gummy, hold the silk under water and firmly rub over the resist lines with your finger to remove the residue. Lay the silk flat to dry and, if necessary, iron it with a steam iron to remove wrinkles.