

An introduction to Batik

Batik is one of the oldest forms of textile surface decoration. Instead of painting colour onto fabric, wax is used to repel dye from specific areas. Traditionally you start with a white background; hot wax is then painted onto the areas you wish to remain white. The fabric is then dyed the palest shade, dried and the waxed again to retain this layer. This process is repeated until the darkest shade is dyed. Finally the wax is removed to reveal the finished design.

Waxes

Most commonly used is a purpose blended wax made from paraffin wax & beeswax. Some batik artists make their own blends depending on how much crackle they wish to achieve. If less crackle is required they will add more beeswax if more crackle is wanted they will add paraffin wax

Tjantings

Tjantings are a traditional tool used to create lines and patterns in batik. For a tjanting to work well the metal bowl has to be hot, so it is advisable to leave the tool in the hot wax for a couple of minutes before using. The thickness of the lines created can be varied by the speed that you use the tool.

Adding Colour

As wax melts with heat any dye process used must be cold. The most common synthetic dye to be used is Procion MX. These dyes work best if the fabric is not submerged in the dye for too long as over time the colours will penetrate the wax. The recipe below can either be used as a dip dye or as paint.

Dip dye recipe

- 1) Dissolve 1 level teaspoon dye in 100mls warm water.
- 2) Dissolve 1 level teaspoon Soda Ash in 50mls hot water.
- 3) Mix these solutions together and use as quickly as possible. (The mixture will lose its ability to react with the fibre over a period of 1-2 hours.)
- 4) Immerse the fabric in the dye and soda solutions and ensure dye penetrates throughout.
- 5) Squeeze out fabric to remove excess dye.
- 6) Loosely roll fabric and place in polythene bag or cling film.

Thin dye recipe – for painting on specific areas

1 litre warm water
1 level teaspoon **Calgon**
10 level tablespoons **Urea**

Mix the above ingredients together. Don't worry about making too much as they will store indefinitely.

To make up the dye mix 1 level teaspoons of **soda ash** (fixative) in a little water. Add 1 teaspoon of **Procion MX** dye powder. Make up the solution to 250mls with the urea solution. This will cover roughly a square metre of fabric so you will need to adjust the amounts according to requirements. It is also important to remember that by adjusting the amount of dye powder will create different strengths of colour. The amount of Soda Ash should remain the same.

Fixing

After painting these dyes on to the fabric it is best to keep the fabric damp by covering with polythene for two hours to allow the dye to penetrate and chemical bond to take place. Do not leave your work soaking in a Procion MX dye solution as soaking in a solution that contains soda ash will undermine the wax and allow the colours to penetrate where you do not want them.

Removing wax from Batik

This can be done three ways:

- 1) In a saucepan. Mix a little washing powder with very hot water, place the saucepan on the hob and put in your fabric, after a couple of minutes remove the fabric and plunge into cold water. The wax will then brush off. Repeat with clean water as necessary.
- 2) Iron fabric between sheets of newspaper. Small amounts of residue can be removed by squeezing it in a bowl of white spirit, and then washing.
- 3) Using Batik Wax Out – a product that removes the wax very simply and effectively without the hard elbow work of traditional methods.
- 4) Dry cleaning – if you are on good terms with the owner!