



The Gilding Arts Newsletter

...an educational resource
for Gold Leaf Gilding

CHARLES DOUGLAS
GILDING STUDIO
Seattle, WA

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Douglas

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February 25, 2016

Project Spotlight...

6kt White Gold Glass Gilded Vanities

The beginning of Seattle's recent Autumn months brought a beautiful project requiring the glass gilding of a set of custom fabricated residential Vanities. Designed by [Northwest Custom Interiors](#) I had the pleasure to once again work with Brian Martin and Steve Bolanos at [New Dimensions Frame & Mirror](#) in Bellevue, WA who designed the multi-glass panels.



Fabricated by New Dimensions, Bellevue WA; Gilded by Charles Douglas Gilding Studio, Seattle, WA

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The various panels ranged from 3" to 3', each gilded in 6 kt White Gold Leaf. The glass was gilded in the traditional form of *verre églomisé* using gelatin dissolved in distilled water and liberally applied to the well-cleaned glass. The gold leaf was laid on the flowing gelatin water, or *size*, and allowed to dry. The next day the leaf was gently rubbed with 100% sterile cotton.

Much of gilding is the combination of craft and art: the craft guides you to achieve a stable foundation and layer of leaf to a properly prepared surface; the art is how the leaf is laid and what to do with it once it's applied. When glass gilding the cleaning of the glass is an essential part of the craft; the back of the glass where the leaf is gilded is first cleaned with a commercial glass cleaner followed by a rubbing of whiting and alcohol (or bon ami and water if one can find the cake form which is no longer manufactured). Once dry, the powder is removed with sterile cotton, usually about about half an hour later. The powder rub is often done several times or until the dried powder on the glass is removed easily with the cotton. All traces of the powder must be removed to avoid any remaining particles along the edges of the glass from mixing with the gelatin size.

The artistry of glass gilding involves certain subjective decisions such as what pattern the leaf should take when applied to the glass and the final overall appearance of the gilding. In the case of the Vanities, I prepared a test sample of 6kt white gold where the leaf was laid in

symmetrical squares and moderately abraded with sterile cotton and light use of pumice to reveal the underlying layer of flat black enamel which was sprayed on top of the white gold on the back of the glass after gilding. This allowed the black to be seen through the abraded white gold leaf seen from the front of the glass. The intention is not to necessarily replicate an old mirror but to create a look of black and silver *Art Glass*.

Art, of course, is often experimental with a certain amount of risk involved; with the vanities part of the risk was whether the look of a 6 inch sample would carry to an entire project. I appreciate that New Dimensions had the vision; my job as the gilder was to maintain a certain consistency of abraded leaf that would flow between each section and from one unit to the next without being contrived, the white gold and black playing off each other, sometimes from memory as the pieces needed to be fitted the moment the gilding was done! And that's the balance of the creative and business-side of many creative ventures.

Coming in February - a 6kt White Gold matching glass table top! ~

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Greetings from Charles Douglas Gilding Studio

Dear Friends,

Amazing to think we're almost to March! And welcome to the new members who have joined our gilding arts newsletter community. Happily I have had the chance to meet some of you so far this year as we explore our art and paths and I look forward to meeting more of you as the year unfolds, whether in a class in New York or Seattle. Or under a Tuscan sun?



Rome, 2015

I hope you enjoy our first issue of 2016 and wish to draw your attention to some of the class revisions in the year-long schedule, a few adjustments made to best meet the needs of students. Of note is the addition of a one day Crackle Gesso workshop immediately following the Traditional Water Gilding class in NY in May. A brief but worthwhile technique both for those who will be attending the water gilding class as well as those who may wish to learn this alternative approach to gesso-making for an intriguing aged appearance.

There is much still to be read here so I will leave you to it. Until soon!

Peace, Health, and Clarity

~ *Charles*

"The painting has a life of its own. I try to let it

come through."

Jackson Pollack, 1912 - 1956

~

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Goings on...in the Gilded Artworld

Contest Winner!

In the December issue of the *Gilding Arts Newsletter* the question was asked: '

Who invented the first gold beating machine?

The first person who answered correctly

would win a booklet of 12kt Italian White Gold Leaf. A number of interesting responses came in, even supposing it may have been a trick question! But no, the answer is Leonardo DaVinci and congratulations goes to Elisabeth Caron. I asked Elisabeth a little about herself as a gilder:



12k white gold leaf on glass with gelatin infused water colors

"I turned to gilding in 2010 after a career as an educator, translator and manuscript editor. My first mentor was the Paris gilder Bruno Toupry, a partner in the City of Paris restoration and gilding programs. Bruno's techniques, tools and materials are, therefore, absolutely traditional. I also learned a great deal from SOG instructors whose techniques I found at times different from those used in Europe, yet just as sound. A freelance gilder working alone, I buy damaged antique frames at auctions in France and restore and regild them in Chicago. My preference goes to 18th-century mirror frames."

Manv thanks to Elisabeth and to all those who took a

chance with their best guess. A little piece of history relayed to me by Lorenzo Manetti and Peter Sepp.

Meanwhile... The Seattle Art Fair returns August 4 - 7, 2016 for its second year featuring 75 top galleries including those from New York, Paris, Seattle, Tokyo, San Francisco, and Vancouver. Laura Fried, a former Curator at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis is in the newly created role of Artistic Director to develop the curatorial vision and programming of the Fair.

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Gilding in...

Florence, Italy



Last September I had the special privilege of spending several weeks in Florence and Rome, to experience a part of this beautiful country and to absorb what I could of historical Italian gilding.

My time was mainly centered around a period of

advanced study with gilder Alison Woolley, owner of FlorenceArt.net, who acquainted me with the Florentine method of gilding during a weeklong study at her Florence Studio along Piazza Santa Maria Novella. It was here that we immersed ourselves in traditional water gilding from the historical Italian perspective with ventures into pastiglia as raised gesso on paper; glass gilding, gesso incising, and toning treatments. Through Alison I was introduced to other sought-after talents in the world of Italian craftspeople and artists, from

the exquisite artistry of Marco Cavallini, the keen eye of gilder and restorer Roberto Passeri, to the gentle artistic proficiency of Giovanna in her works of gold on paper.



Alison Woolley and Marco Cavallini

The many hours spent walking along the alleyways and corridors of this bustling but surprisingly calm city led me to not only charming cafes, restaurants, and the unexpected but to the Uffizi Gallery, Galleria dell'Accademia, and the Palazzo Pitti that lies across the Arno River. The



23k water gilded with burnished pigmented RSG panel (now hanging in my Seattle studio!)

sheer amount of gilding that these three museums hold is daunting but beyond the appreciation of the beautiful art contained in these walls, the gilder must take the opportunity to study the detail involved, from the movement and depth of the lines of gesso incision, the crackled patterns of gesso eight centuries old the handwork of leaf laid and

rubbed through after years of exposure to hands and elements of the environment. All these tell a story that a gilder can imagine and learn from, whether in new work to be created or if called upon, to replicate or reproduce.



A special thank you to Peter Sepp whose inspiration for this trip will be remembered as well as those he introduced along the way including Piero, owner of

Tassinari, the maker of the gesso punches and wheels I now use and whose tiny storefront can be found tucked away in Santa Maria Novella. Stop by and he's sure to invite you for an espresso!

The long term vision now is to bring (a very fortunate!) small group of students on a return trip to Florence - to explore this charming city of art while together we practice the art of gilding. Once the details of this next great adventure are worked out you'll be the first to know (promise!).

Yet, there is more to come. The next issue of *The Gilding Arts Newsletter* will tell the story of my visit to Manetti, the goldbeaters of Florence who were gracious in their hospitality in opening their doors to Alison and I as we explored their world, paved with gold and silver...and Tuscan lunches...



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2016 Gilding Workshop Highlights



Seattle

~

Introduction to
Traditional Water Gilding

March 17-19, 2016

(Class Fee: \$650)

[Pay Now](#)

New York City

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Introduction to
Traditional Water Gilding

May 24-26, 2016

(Class Fee: \$650)

[Pay Now](#)

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The Art of
Crackle Gesso

A special one day workshop

*Learn to prepare and apply gesso as seen on
13th c Florentine Panels*

May 27, 2016

(Class Fee: \$250)

[Pay Now](#)

~

Gold Leaf Gilding
***for Works of Art on Paper,
Canvas, & Panels***

...a Study for Fine Artists

June 21, 2016

(Class Fee: \$250)

[Pay Now](#)

~

Glass Gilding:
Mirrors & Glass Art

...exploring the realm of Verre Églomisé

June 22 - 23, 2016

(Class Fee: \$450)

[Pay Now](#)

Antiquing & Toning for
Gilded Frames & Furniture

June 24, 2016

(Class Fee: \$250)

[Pay Now](#)



Crackle Gesso, Reminiscent of 13th
- 15th c Florentine Gilded Panels

Visit www.gildingstudio.com for additional Gold
Leaf Gilding Workshops and Registration!

*All classes provide the use of studio tools and materials.
For those who wish to own their own Gilding Kit visit
the new website*

Store at www.gildingstudio.com



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Gold Leaf Gilding... A Conversation

Questions Submitted by our Members

from around the World.

Hi Charles ,

I have been gilding for some years and still have some questions and still having difficulties. I work as a framer in Sydney and so gild modern mouldings only.



Traditional Water Gilding using the agate burnisher

Is it OK to use only yellow bole as a base colour ? It worked , but I was disappointed with my burnishing.

I have used shellac to seal the frames but what is your opinion of just using Museum Wax ?

How wet is your surface when you apply the leaf ?

I find my leaves distress patchily. I tamp down carefully, mindful of the area of overlap as sometimes I get a strip of bole showing just ahead of the overlay.

Thank you for your time - your website is wonderful - loved reading about the interlagger as cracking corners have been frustrating me over the years. I use a Japanese silk , close weave , but worry about the amount of gesso it takes to cover them.

Sadly . we don't see ornate mouldings at all. so all my

mistakes are on show to those who recognize them!

*~ Olwen
Sydney, Australia*

A. Dear Olwen, Thank you for writing. Yes, water gilding can be challenging but it also keeps us interested and on our toes! And you're right, modern mouldings don't give us much to hide behind so our mistakes or areas left unattended are left for all to see. Gilding a ¾" flat moulding with a gentle modern rub can be one of the most difficult finishes to achieve. But it *can* be done so hang in there.

Although yellow bole isn't necessarily intended to be burnished it will still burnish, perhaps just not so brilliantly. And it does add another tonal option for picture framing; 12kt white gold with a burnished yellow bole and medium rub may be a little unconventional but can be very attractive with the right painting. Some clays work better with gold and some with white gold (e.g. Amalfi Blue bole is very nice with white gold but not so much with 22kt and above although Latium Blue is wonderful with both). You may find that the more exotic colors like the blues or green will need to be gently sanded with a 1,000 grit sandpaper before gilding to make these clays more burnishable.

As to why your yellow bole was disappointing in its burnish, it may or may not be that you are more used to seeing the higher burnish of the traditional reds. Yellow may burnish softer and will look best under more subdued light. (Feel free to follow-up with photos).

When you ask about using shellac or wax to seal your frames, it depends on whether you are referring to 'sealing' as the initial 'sizing' of your frames before gessoing or sealing the final gilded finish. I imagine you mean the gilded finish in which case either wax or shellac can be used over the leafing but it also depends on what kt leaf you use. I'd recommend shellac, especially if you are using anything lower than 22kt for greater protection against the silver or copper in the leaf from oxidizing. The other consideration is what you want your overall finish to look like. You can build up layers of antique toning directly over the unprotected gold but using shellac as a barrier can give you more flexibility with its added protection. Museum wax can give you some protection against handling of the gilded frame and play a part of a distinctive patina. All that said, I tend to use shellac first before building a patina unless I am seeking to reproduce a gilded finish where shellac would not have been used.

Regarding the amount of water used in applying gold leaf in traditional water gilding, you ask a good question! I apply several liberal layers of water to pre-wet the clayed surface (which also helps deal with any potential small pinholes in the gesso although those I tend to eradicate during the initial gessoing stage); after this, follow with a very thin layer of water just before laying the leaf; too much water allows it to creep up over the gold and stain it. If that happens, apply a little ethyl alcohol over the damp spot before burnishing and do this several times, the stain will tend to work itself out if done carefully. And yes, tamp the leaf down carefully but make sure you wait a few minutes so you don't simply spread water over your gilding; this takes practice and proper timing due to weather conditions and also what may appear as an air bubble may actually be a water bubble.

Lastly, I'm glad the interlagger has proved helpful to close the corners on your frames. It does take sufficient gesso to cover the fabric to keep it from reading-through the gilding. Once the fabric has been glued to the wood in the frame corners I sand the edges of the fabric after it has dried and then re-size it before applying the gesso.

Thanks for your note - hope this helps!

***Hi Charles.** (Regarding Glass Gilding /ed.) Mostly I have been using aluminum or imitation gold with gelatin size. When I try engraving either of two things happen: the leaf adheres to the surface even though I've tried to remove it, OR it splinters and chips and more comes off than I wanted. I will take the plunge and use the silver and gold I purchased. If I use oil size with aluminum and imitation gold, can I still engrave it or is the adhesion too strong?*

*~Randi
New York*

Hi Randi,

Basically, églomisé with gelatin water is intended to be used with gold or silver leaf. While brass or aluminum leaf can technically adhere to glass, the more finer technique of etching into the leaf on the reverse side of the glass is better served with genuine gold or silver. You may even want to consider trying white gold. The thinner, more malleable gold will give you the best results as far as a clean engraving is concerned, aluminum is much thicker than gold leaf and so that's likely why you're getting ragged edges. Also, engraving is a technique best used with gelatin size, not oil size. You can experiment with the oil ground but my hunch

is that it will not come away as clean as it would with gelatin.

It is often the desire for someone to want to practice with the less expensive base metals like aluminum or brass but one can only build the finesse and dexterity of working with genuine gold by working with gold. Handling imitation versus genuine gold is very different. Your best bet would be to use a more cost-effective brand of gold leaf; some gold leaf is manufactured with value in mind for projects that don't require a virtually pinhole free layer of gold.

Thanks for writing! ~

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An Interview with artist Alessandra Maria

Like gilding itself, incorporating gold leaf into works of art has a history spanning centuries, whether we're speaking of the spirituality of Russian iconography or 13th Century Italian Panels, Gustav Klimt or the contemporary paintings of such artists as [Fred Wessell](#) and [Brad Kunkle](#).



Last November during Seattle's Artwalk I made my way to [Roq la Rue](#), an enchanting Seattle Gallery which focuses on Pop Surrealism, the kind of distinctive art you'll find in contemporary art magazine [Hi Fructose](#). It

was here that I spotted the work of emerging artist Alessandra Maria including a piece called *Beatus* which is reminiscent

of the early icon use of gesso punchwork in patterns of halos on a gilded background.

I caught up with Alessandra in her Brooklyn studio to talk a bit about her use of gilding in her work as a fine artist. Look for this intriguing conversation in the next issue of *The Gilding Arts Newsletter*.



Beatus

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Gilding Opportunities...

Sales Position

"Sepp Leaf Products, Inc. a New York based gold leaf & decorative materials supply company, is seeking an individual for a sales & customer service



position. The position requires knowledge of gilding products and technical support. The applicant must have ability to manage sales tasks from callers and visitors. Please contact Lauren at 212-683-2840 for further details."

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Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Kansas City, MO
by The Gilders' Studio, Inc.

Vase created by Scott Potter
Photo by Robert Diamante

THERE ARE NO SMALL IDEAS IN LEAF.
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Gold Leaf Gilding



Gilding: Using the Gilder's Pad
~ Charles Douglas Gilding Studio

Workshop Summaries

Glass Gilding: Mirrors & Art Glass...exploring the realm of Verre Églomisé

Offered as one or two day intensives as an introduction to the art of glass gilding, the basis for verre églomisé. Learn to apply genuine 12kt white gold, preparing glass for gilding, making gelatin size, & creating special effects including candle-smoked glass, abrading gold leaf, and the combined use of water color additives.

Introduction to Traditional Water Gilding

Traditional Water Gilding is an ancient craft that goes back over 4,000 years ago to the early Egyptians. This popular workshop is an intensive, hands-on class that introduces the student to each step in the water gilding method as used on furniture, picture frames, and architectural detail. Learn to prepare gesso & clay bole grounds & lay & burnish genuine 23kt gold leaf. A field trip to the [Frye Art Museum](#) to view and study the gilded frame collection is included.

Gilding for works of art on Canvas, Paper, and Panels...a Study for Fine Artists (New!)

Gold leaf has been used for centuries as both a component and surface background for works of art. From the earliest examples of iconography & 18th c Peruvian painters to Gustav Klimt and the modern day works of contemporary artists. This long-awaited one day intensive introduces the student to the methods & options available for the use of genuine gold leaf as a component within works of art.



Crackled gesso with 23k water gilded Pastiglia
(raised gesso) on Canvas

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Class Size limited to 8 Students

For more information visit www.gildingstudio.com

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Back Issues of *The Gilding Arts Newsletter* Available in an Online Archive

New Member? Missed an Issue?

The [Gilding Arts Newsletter](#) periodically publishes technical information concerning the various methods of gold leaf gilding.

Some of these topics are in series formats such as the series on Traditional Water Gilding.

All Newsletters are available online in an Archived format. Simply go to the www.gildingstudio.com website. The *Gilding Arts Newsletter* can be found on



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