

## **Background Fills and Coloring Techniques Class**

### **Tips and hints for creating a smooth finish (this works for all the methods listed)**

1. Since the block will be taped to a surface, cut the block out larger than necessary so the taped edges can be cut off once the block is finished. For example, if you desire a finished 10 inch block, cut the uncolored fabric block to 11-12 inches.
2. Remove all excess stabilizer from around the pattern first. If you leave the stabilizer on, it will create a textured background (which can be desirable on occasion).
3. Tape your block down with painter's tape to make sure it is flat and won't shift while you are coloring. Make sure to tape the block on a piece of plastic or foam board.
4. Work on a smooth surface with no lumps or bumps so that your coloring doesn't inadvertently pick up textures. The goal is to create a very smooth finish.
5. Once all the fabric medium has been applied, use a dry brush (preferably a thick headed makeup brush) to blend between each one of the colors. Using a dry brush will help meld the colors together and get rid of any streaks or harsh lines created by the crayon. The brush will also absorb excess fabric medium. As it does you may find the brush becomes too damp and doesn't blend as well. Make sure to have several makeup brushes on hand.
6. Make sure to have paper towels, cotton pads, or stiff paper or plastic sheeting to protect the design from getting wet. If the design is already colored, additional fabric medium will not hurt it however, the background color could potentially bleed into the colored design. If the design is not already colored, it needs to be protected from any of the background colors or fabric medium used. If fabric medium dries on an uncolored area, it can leave blotchy areas that will be quite pronounced once you begin to color the design.

### Method 1 – Using Caran D’Ache Crayons and Fabric Medium

This is the easiest technique to use to get a quickly colored background with seamless transitions between each color used. The following picture is an example of the use of Caran D’Ache crayons with fabric medium:



The reason I favor this technique is that the color goes on easily (these crayons do not streak as much as a watercolor pencil); it's easy to blend from one color to the next; it's easy to blend with the fabric medium and there is a wide range of colors to get the light to dark effect as seen in the picture above.

Colors used for this exercise include:

1. Pale Yellow
2. Sahara Yellow
3. Yellow
4. Golden Yellow
5. Orange

Start by applying the pale yellow color closest to the outline of the design and extend the color out by at least one inch. Overlap the next color by 1/4 of an inch and again all around the design. Repeat with each color until the entire background is colored. Then starting with the lightest color first, apply a thin coat of fabric medium all around the design making sure that the first color is completely coated with fabric medium. Repeat with each color making sure not to blend the darker color too much into the previous lighter color. If necessary, work away from the design, pulling the lighter color into the darker color. Excess fabric medium can be removed by using cotton balls and cotton pads dabbing and slightly rubbing the affected areas. Try not to take off too much color as it will begin to look blotchy if too much color is removed.



## Method 2 – Using Pigment Paints with Caran D’ache Crayons or any other watercolor wash



In this example the techniques used start as in method one. However rather than using multiple colors of the crayons, use the lightest crayon colors such as the pale yellow or Sahara yellow or a combination of both and color the entire background first, apply the fabric medium across the entire background.

While the background area is still damp with fabric medium, dip your brush into the dry pigment powder and apply to the wet background. Initially the background will appear blotchy but continue to work the powder across the background until it is evenly applied. Once you are satisfied with the amount of pigment powder used, apply more fabric medium on top of the dry pigment powder and blend. Alternatively, you can mix the pigment powder with a small amount of fabric medium and create a thick paint. Apply with a brush dampened with the fabric medium. If the thickened pigment powder looks blotchy or uneven, blend with additional fabric medium directly on the background fabric.



### Method 3 – Using Cotton balls, Q Tips or Makeup Sponges to Apply Layers of Paint/Dye



This method works either on dry or wet fabric. If used on wet fabric, make sure the fabric is not sopping wet. You can dampen the fabric with either water or fabric medium.

Pour tinted fabric medium or paint into a paint palette (start with the lightest color first). Determine how large of an area you want to do and the size of the circle that the sponge or cotton ball or Q-tip will make (in the case of a Q-tip you can substitute with a small makeup sponge or brush). Dip your tool into the paint and squeeze out the excess paint. Begin near the design and work outwards towards the edge of the fabric work all around the design with the lightest color of paint. If your next color is complementary to the first color you can start with a second color immediately if your second color is a strong contrast to the first color, let the first color dry thoroughly. You can use an iron or a hair dryer to speed up the drying process. Once the first layer of color is dry, spray the fabric again with either water or fabric medium,

then dip your tool into the next color of paint and squeeze out the excess. Dab the second color in a random pattern throughout the work making sure not to completely cover the first color layer. Repeat with all colors until the background is completely covered.

**TIP:** using the Q-tip or small sponge can give the background a mottled or dotted look which can be desirable particularly in creating large areas of leaves or fields of wildflowers.



#### Method 4 – Color wash Using Sprays



This method can be quite messy; so cover your work surface to protect against overspray. You can place your work inside a pizza box to protect from the overspray. If your work has a design, use cotton pads or layers of paper towels to protect the design from the overspray as well.

TIP: Use Golden's GAC 900 fabric medium for the spray. It is very thin and watery and can be sprayed easily. Other fabric mediums may be too thick to spray.

Begin by spraying the exposed background area with the fabric medium. For this technique to work best, work quickly without taking a break between colors. The fabric must be kept damp until finished. Using a small sprayer, use an ink or fabric dye (such as Dy-Na-Flow) in a random pattern over the background. Overlap colors to get complete coverage. If some of the color goes on too strong, dab with cotton balls to pick up excess color then spray with fabric medium to keep color diffused.



## Method 5 – Color Wash using Wet And Dry Brushes



If your work has a design, use cotton pads or layers of paper towels to protect the design from inadvertently getting fabric medium or color on the design itself. It can be easier to stay 1/8 of an inch from the edge of the design. Brush the exposed background area with fabric medium and a large brush. Any fabric medium can be used, it does not have to be thin. For this technique to work best work quickly without taking a break between each color. The fabric must be kept damp with fabric medium until finished.

HINT: it is easier to start out with a very light tinted fabric medium and cover the entire background first.



Once the entire background is covered with the fabric medium using a large foam brush or large regular bristle brush, dip the brush into a translucent color mix such as ProChem's color concentrate mixed with fabric medium and remove the excess off the brush. The key is not to get too much color on the brush so that when you first apply the color it does not go on blotchy. Spread the color around quickly. Repeat with each color desired until the background is covered.

To blend the colors seamlessly use a dry brush (preferably a makeup brush with a large head) over the areas between each color the brush head will not only pick up the excess color but blend at the same time. If you notice that the color no longer blends, use another dry brush. You may need to use multiple brushes if you have strong contrasting colors.

There are many variations that can be used with this technique. You can use two different colors at opposite ends of the background and gradient the colors towards the middle.

Another way to add texture to this technique is to use salts. Applying salts to a wet fabric surface will give the background a mottled look as the salt draws the excess color out of the fabric. The best salts to use are Silk Salts although any salt (including table salt) can be used.

To use salts, wet the fabric background with water or fabric medium. Use inks or dyes for the color and place the color randomly throughout the background. Once the color combination is acceptable, sprinkle the salt on the surface of the damp fabric using your fingers, a small spoon or a shaker. If you are doing a large area, split your work up into fourths and sprinkle salt on each section rather than waiting until all the sections are done.

Fabric must not be disturbed for at least 30 to 45 minutes so that the salt can absorb the color. When the fabric is completely dry, tap the salt off into a trash can, making sure the fabric is completely clean of the salt.

## Final Tips on Achieving the Perfect Seamless Background Color

1. Choose a palette to complement your main design. For example, if your main design is a bouquet of flowers use a pale blue or green that would mimic a sky or field color. Always start with a very light tint; you can always go darker. Also, grays, beige and cream colors make great starter background colors as they are neutral with just about all color combinations. Refer to a color wheel if you are uncertain about what complements your design colors.
2. A damp background is easier to work with than dry fabric. Dry fabric tends to “grab” the color which effectively makes blotches. A damp background allows the color to “glide” over the surface and minimizes blotchiness.
3. Using two tones and the sponging/dabbing method (sometimes referred to as “Bokeh”) covers up any possible “boobos” that may have occurred outside of the design. A batik look or “mottled” look can also cover just about any mistake.
4. Splashy, abstract and nebulus-cloudlike coloring can also be an effective background. Use the cotton ball or big fat brush to achieve this look.
5. As basic as this sounds, watch YouTube videos on how watercolor backgrounds are created. The process of watercolor comes the closest to coloring on fabric and you will be able to glean tips from how watercolor is used on backgrounds that are applicable to fabric painting.
6. Finally – do not beat yourself up if you don’t achieve exactly what you want the first time. Background painting is actually the most difficult to achieve of all the fabric coloring techniques. If you are worried about messing up a piece of artwork; practice on plain fabric until you feel you have mastered the process.