

Irresistible Texture

Working with Resists

The Lure of Resists

A resist is a substance applied to fabric that blocks a subsequent layer of dye or paint from penetrating the fabric. They can be used to achieve an endless array of effects, from an overall crackle pattern to a finely detailed representational image.

Resists appeal to our playful side - their serendipitous nature means that you never really know what the end result will be until you wash off the resist. The outcome may not be as expected, but it is usually striking.

A wide variety of substances are used as resists, some commercially prepared and some that are readily available in local stores.

Fabric Preparation

When working with resists, it is a good practice to scour the fabric prior to use. Most fabrics, even PFD (prepared for dyeing) fabrics, have some type of sizing or starch to keep them looking smooth and crisp on the bolt. Some resists can permanently bind with the sizing, leaving the fabric stiff.

Scour the fabric by washing in hot water with ½ tsp. Synthrapol and ½ tsp. soda ash. Machine or line dry.

Work Surface

Use a plastic tablecloth or drop cloth to protect your work surface. Heavy vinyl, available in the upholstery section of fabric stores, is even better. It is stiff, so wax residue can be easily scraped off and other resists can be wiped off with a damp cloth.

Top Tips for Working with Resists

Leave your expectations behind and enjoy the serendipity of the process. The thrill of working with resists is in the unveiling of the cloth after the resist is washed out. You never really know exactly what the end result will be. Rather than trying to control it, delight in the unexpected!

Try a variety of approaches with each resist. It is easy to limit ourselves to one or two common techniques. For example, many textile artists are familiar with using flour paste to achieve an overall crackle pattern. Other techniques, such as stenciling or monoprinting with flour paste are less common. The resists are so versatile, take advantage of their full potential!

There are no rules - let your imagination soar and explore the possibilities. Other than safety guidelines, there are few imperatives when working with resists. Remain open to using the ingredients in an unconventional manner. You never know what you will discover!

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Gel Glue

Washable gel glue is an inexpensive, easy-to-use resist. It is very versatile and, if applied in a thin coating, dries quickly.

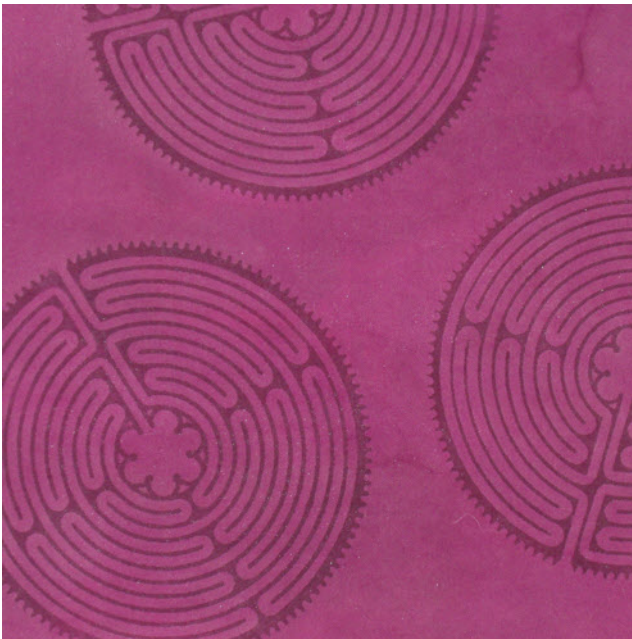
Gel glue can be applied in a variety of ways. Use the following ideas as a starting point.

- Squeeze on with a bottle or syringe
- Apply with sponge stamps or found objects
- Create a leafprint by applying glue to a leaf and then pressing the leaf onto the fabric
- Apply through a stencil
- Use a silkscreen or thermofax
- Create a design with glue on a Plexiglas plate, then lay the fabric face down on top of the plate

You may find it helpful to pin your fabric to the work surface every 8-10”.

Gel Glue Tips

Gel glue is water soluble, so a thicker coating and one that completely penetrates the cloth will act as a stronger resist. Often the dye penetrates the glue, leaving a paler version of the dye color. Sometimes a very thin coating of glue results in the opposite of what you expect - it seems to wick in the dye and leave a darker image .(See photo bottom left)



Gel glue applied with a silkscreen



Gel glue applied with a squeeze bottle

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Soy Wax

Soy wax is a great alternative to paraffin and beeswax. It melts at a low temperature, therefore it can be removed by washing in hot water. It works well for immersion dyeing and hand painting.

A variety of tools can be used to apply soy wax.

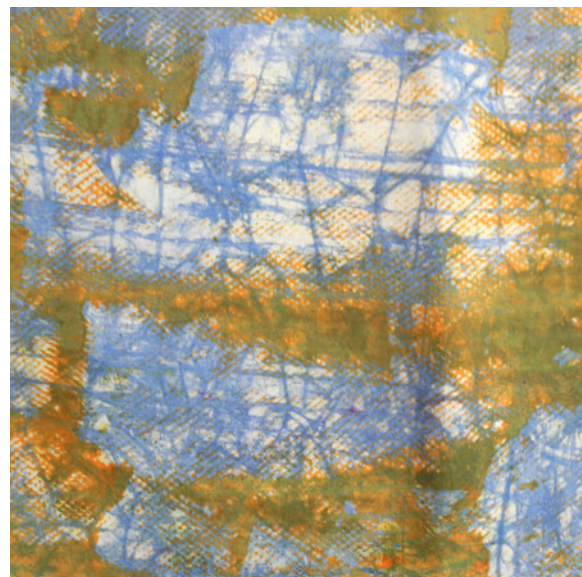
- Use a tjanting, a tool used in traditional batik, to create lines, dots and free-hand drawings.
- Fold the fabric and dip the edges into the wax.
- Create your own stamps from a sponge.
- Brush the wax on with a bristle brush.
- Create a stencil with interfacing

Safety Guidelines for Working with Soy Wax

- *Soy wax is flammable, so never melt it over an open flame.*
- *Do not leave hot soy wax unattended.*
- *Although soy wax is non-toxic, when heated to a high temperature it emits an oil mist which can be harmful to the respiratory system. Keep it at the lowest temperature setting that will keep it melted. If the wax is bubbling or smoking, set it to a lower temperature.*
- *Clip a candle thermometer to the melting pot to ensure that the temperature does not get too hot.*
- *Use caution when working with melted soy wax, it can burn if it touches exposed skin.*
- *Read the Material Safety Data Sheet for complete safety information. This is available from the supplier.*



Three layers of soy wax, immersed



Soy wax brushed through plastic mesh

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Confectioner's Sugar

Confectioner's sugar can be used to create a syrup that works well as a resist. It is inexpensive and readily available, although it does take a little preparation.

To make the syrup:

Mix equal parts sugar and water. Bring to a boil over medium heat, reduce heat and simmer 20-25 minutes. The volume will be reduced by 1/3 to 1/2 and the consistency will be somewhat thicker.

The syrup can be refrigerated and stored for a couple of weeks. To use, bring to room temperature or heat in a microwave.



Sugar syrup applied with spoon



Sugar syrup applied with notched spreader

Wet-on-Wet Technique

Sugar syrup can be used in the same manner as gel glue, however it takes longer to dry and remains sticky. It also dissolves more easily. One of the best uses is to apply liquid dyes while the syrup is still wet. The dye blends with the syrup and produces a unique effect.

- 1. Pour, drip or spread the syrup on the fabric. (It is helpful to pin the fabric to the work surface every 8-10 inches.)*
- 2. For best results, do not cover the entire cloth with syrup - leave some blank areas.*
- 3 Apply liquid dye or paint (use a thin paint, such as Dye-Na-Flow) with a pipette. Allow the colors to mix and blend with the syrup.*
- 4. Allow the fabric to sit for 4-24 hours before washing.*

Variations:

Drag a brush or notched spreader through the syrup to create a pattern before adding the dye.

Lift one edge of the fabric to allow the dye and syrup to drip down the cloth surface.

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Adding Color

Once the resist is dry (unless using the wet-on-wet technique), you may choose to hand paint the fabric with paint or dye or immerse the cloth in a dye bath.

Thickened dye works well for hand painting because it is less likely to breach the resist than liquid dye. See instructions for mixing thickened dye below.

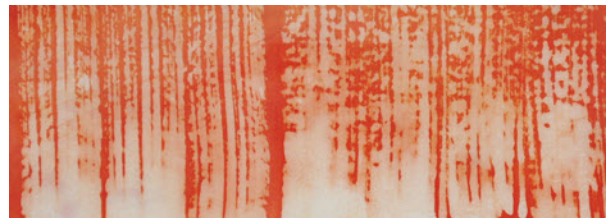
Immersion in a dye bath is also an option, but keep in mind that most resists will break down in the water. This generally leaves a softer edge and less white space on the fabric. For best results, use a low-water immersion dye bath, in which a small amount of dye is poured over the fabric and any excess dye is poured off.

Dyes Vs Paints

Both dyes and paints can be used to apply color on top of a resist - it is a matter of personal choice. If using paints, keep in mind that heat setting is not compatible with many resists. You will end up with a sticky mess if you heat-set over a gel glue or sugar syrup resist! Most paint manufacturers have a recommendation for "passive" setting, usually 7-14 days. This means to let the cloth sit for a period of time before washing, to let the paint set. The alternative is to wash out the resist sooner, which may result in less vibrant color.



Soy wax resist - hand painted



Soy wax resist - immersed

Safety Guidelines for Working with Dyes

Fiber reactive dyes are non-toxic, however continued exposure to the powder can cause respiratory problems. Soda ash is a caustic substance, so avoid breathing the powder or coming into direct contact with soda solution. Always use the following precautions:

- *Wear a dust mask while the dye is in a powdered state*
- *Wear rubber gloves to protect your hands*
- *Do not mix dyes around food or food preparation areas*
- *Read the Material Safety Data Sheet (available from the supplier) for complete safety information.*

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Mixing Thickened Dye

First mix the print paste: 1 quart water, 1/3 c urea, 1 ½ - 2 T sodium alginate (SH). This will be lumpy at first. For best results, let sit a few hours or overnight for the sodium alginate to fully dissolve. Or mix in a blender or with a hand blender to remove lumps. Add less sodium alginate if you prefer a thinner consistency. This can be kept in the refrigerator for several months.

Mix the dye: ½ c print paste, ½ t soda ash, ½ t dye powder. Use less dye to achieve a lighter value. This mixture has a limited life (3-4 hours) once the soda ash has been added, so only mix what you will use in your dye session.

Low Water Immersion

Mix the chemical water by adding 1 cup urea and 1/3 cup soda ash to 1 gallon hot water. Stir until thoroughly dissolved. This solution will keep for months.

Mix the dye by adding 1 tsp dye powder to 1 cup of this solution. Use less dye to achieve a lighter value.

Place fabric in a flat plastic container, (i.e. a kitty litter pan or other plastic storage bin), pour dye on top of fabric. Only pour enough dye to wet the fabric, do not leave the fabric sitting in a pool of dye. Allow to sit for 4-24 hours before washing.

Washing Out the Resist

1. Soak the fabric in warm water for 15-30 minutes. Sugar syrup quickly dissolves in warm water - gel glue may require a bit of rubbing if a thick coating was applied. Soy wax washes out more easily if soaked in hot water with a few drops of Synthrapol .
- 2.) Rinse in warm water.
- 3.) Wash in the washing machine in hot water with a few drops of Synthrapol to remove all excess dye.

Is Synthrapol Really Necessary?

Use of Synthrapol is a personal choice. Its main purpose is to aid in the removal of excess dye and to prevent dye in the water from attaching to the fabric (backstaining). It also aids in the removal of soy wax.

A readily available alternative is Dawn dishwashing liquid (the original blue version). It acts as a surfactant and will help prevent light colors from being muddied by darker colors in the same wash load.