Costuming Tutorial

Dyeing Silk with Alcohol Inks by Deb Wood

Join Deb and learn how to create your very own custom fabrics for costuming
Welcome! In this tutorial I will share with you my techniques for dyeing silk fabric, without having to go through the trouble of preparing a dye bath.

We will be working right on your desk top or work surface, that you will protect before we start. I work on glass, which is easy to clean up.

To the left you see the simple supplies needed. I am using Jacquard Pinata alcohol inks, you can find these in craft stores or on the internet. They come in sets or you can select your favorite colors to purchase.

In addition to the Jacquard Pinata dyes, I have a spray bottle filled with rubbing alcohol, in a 70% solution. 91% is fine too but not necessary. Additional alcohol will be needed for cleaning brushes too. Also, later in this tutorial I will show you how I do a simple drape costume, and to help with that I use Stiffy— which is a fabric stiffener. A couple large paint brushes, scotch tape and silk is all you will need. For the silk, I buy it from Dharma Trading Company, online—and I buy the 3mm silk gauze. Check it out! Pinata Inks  3mm Silk Gauze
These photos show you the mid way point of my process, and then final result below. It’s a lot of fun to do.

You might want to also have a pair of latex or plastic gloves so you don’t get ink all over your hands. It’s permanent so it takes time to wear off.
The photo directly above shows the tape on the edge of the fabric. I am working with a piece of fabric about 12 x 15” (30.48 cm x 38.1 cm)

To the left, a drop of the dye is placed on the paper plate. I work with two or three colors at a time. It dries very quickly, so don’t put too much out at one time, and a little goes a long way.

Alright, we’re all set up and ready to go. In these photos you see the glass surface on my work desk, (you could tape down plastic to protect your surface) the inks I will use. The alcohol in the spray bottle; some paper plates to use as palettes and the brushes.

If you look closely, you can see the tape on the table, the silk is there— and it’s taped down to the glass. It might not stay put, but this helps a little bit, anyway, as you are applying the inks.

Tip:
Be sure to have everything ready in one spot before you begin, it’s a messy job and it’s best to keep everything in one place. And don’t forget gloves if you want your hands to stay clean.
Next I will dampen the silk with the spray bottle. Spray the whole piece of silk so it’s wet. This helps transfer the colors, much like water does on a water color painting.

Next, spray a little alcohol on the inks on the plate as well, this dilutes them.

**Tip:**

When you get the alcohol on the silk, the tape might let go—it’s ok, it’s just there to help you keep the silk down on the work surface. Once it’s damp with the alcohol, it does stay put pretty well.

Then using soft brushes like water color paint brushes, begin dabbing the inks onto the fabric. More about this in the next pages.

Our goal here is to just apply random splotches of color on the silk.

Do you see the bubbles here? Those are fine and actually make for an interesting design in the fabrics. I will show you in a little bit what I mean!
I continue to add color to the silk, dabbing the dyes here and there. Once there is a good bit of color down, I can diffuse it and dilute it with additional alcohol. Just dip your brush into a bowl of alcohol and drop it onto the silk to spread the colors around.
The top image is the silk from the previous pages. I am working my way out to the edges of the silk.

I did a second piece, the lower photo, and added in a few more colors and then diluted them down even more.

Anything is fine— as long as you don’t completely blend all the colors, then it will become a muddy color and you probably don’t want that. So get the colors blended nicely and then we’ll move on to the next steps.
Ok! Now the fun part comes, to see what we get!

You can just allow this to dry naturally if you wish, or you can use a heat gun or a hair dryer to set the colors and evaporate the alcohol. I am using my Genesis heat gun on high, moving the gun around as the fabric dries.

Here are the two pieces.

One is more subtly colored and once has more intensity.

Also, you will notice where those bubbles were, those marks dried right into the fabric.
Before I continue with the process, I am going to get my model ready for costuming. This piece, “Fallon”, was costumed in white silk with crystal glitter paint along the edges of her costuming. I wanted to use her for my Venetian Accessories class so I needed to add some dynamic coloring to her costume. I decided to be brave, and dye her already applied costume, right on her body. But first, I had to protect all the surfaces. To do this, I first placed her base in a plastic bag and secured that, then I wrapped her lower body with Glad plastic Press n Seal wrap.

Then I simply ‘painted on’ the colors! It was fun— and the glitter paint took on some color too!
In this photo you can see the Press n Seal wrapping on her arms too—it works nicely because it sticks to the clay.

I used lighter, more diluted colors near the top of her costume, and filled in with more layers of color as I worked my way down on her dress.

I will be adding an additional layer of silk over the top of this so I wasn’t overly concerned about coloring all the silk at the top of her bodice.

It shows nicely below, how the color deepens as it goes down her costume.

As I mentioned she was already dressed with this draped silk, so the shape of these layers were already in place.

They were also already stiffened with the Stiffy product from when I first created this doll. All of this worked to my advantage and the color took beautifully as you can see. It softened while it was wet.

I let this dry fully before continuing. When it dried, the Stiffy hardened up again.
Next I will experiment with how the additional layers of silk will go. I simply place the piece of silk up against her to check for draping. I always have the fabric on the bias, which means the straight of the grain goes on a diagonal across her body, so the points at the hem are on the bias. This allows the fabric to drape nicely. (See the diagram below)

So, just playing around with this- I will decide how the costume will be.

Below, I tinted some of the surface of her base as well. This stone is alabaster and will take on color.
Using a needle and thread, I take a few short stitches at her waist to gather and anchor the fabric in place. I am stitching it to the under layer, that I dyed earlier. It works great as a base for the new layers of silk.

At this point, it’s all about imagination. I play with the fabric, bringing it up and seeing if I like the look. Whatever I do now, can be set permanently with Stiffy—so at this point it’s just to play with the fabrics.

Below, I brought up the corner, and gathered it at the small of her back and stitched that down too.

Notice how subtle and pretty the colors are!

And as you now know, this took absolutely no planning at all, just make sure you don’t completely blend the colors. Leave them separate a little bit.

**Tip:**

Of course you CAN completely dye a piece of fabric with the alcohol inks if you need to, it’s perfectly fine to do so. But that’s not what this tutorial is about.
I just love this product. It is so helpful in designing costumes. And it’s strong!

And here’s the nice part. If you change your mind— or if you have to ship a piece and the silks get a little crumpled in shipping, all you need to do is spritz the fabric with a mist of water. Stiffy is water based. This will soften the fabric right up so it can be reshaped— and once it dries, it is right back to being stiff again. No need to apply more product.

For full stiffness, apply full strength. For softer draping, you can mix it up to 50/50 with water. I sometimes put a little water in the Stiffy, but usually I use it full strength.

You can also try making your own, simply mix a white glue like Elmer’s with water so its to the consistency of milk. Use that— but experiment on a piece of scrap fabric first to make sure you are satisfied with the results.
Here she is, all ready for her finishing touches.

Notice the marks on the front of her gown, those are the bubbles that I pointed out earlier. I actually like the way they look, they will look even more interesting when she’s finished.
These steps are a little messy, but it’s ok, the Stiffy washes off your hands. And your doll is hopefully still covered with the plastic wrap so she is protected from the product getting on her.

Simply use a big brush and brush the product onto the silk. I do saturate the fabric in this step. You will not want to leave any areas not dampened with the product— as this step causes the silk to shrivel up a little bit— and you will want that look to be uniform throughout.

So continue to dampen the silk with the Stiffy.

In the photo to the right, you can see the white of the product on the fabric. Don’t worry, it dries pretty clear.

Once all the silk is wet with the stiffener, we’ll fine tune the draping.
These photos show the costuming after it’s dried.

I love the subtle coloring!! And also how the Stiffy got the silk to conform to her figure. It’s no longer just floating out around her, now it looks more like a beautifully flowing, draped gown.

Also, while on her first layer of costuming, I used glitter paint on the edges of the silk, for these final layers I just left the edges of her costuming raw. The Stiffy holds the fabric so it won’t unravel.

Again, to the right, notice those bubbles again. Now they almost look like texture in the fabric, don’t they? It reminds me of moiré fabric, or ‘watermarked’ fabric, usually shown in taffeta.

And finally, on those loose ends of fabric along the hem, you can take that edge between your finger and thumb and stretch and roll it tightly. The Stiffy will hold that in place as well and add some interest to the hemline of the costume.
This piece of Venice lace will be added to her bodice. I will also do some beading on this, as well as on her shoulders etc. That will come later, but I just wanted to give you an idea of what the finished costume will look like.

She still has to dry completely, so I am at a stand still for now. I hope you have enjoyed seeing this process and you will give it a try also! Enjoy!

Tip:

In the photo here—she will stay wrapped with the Press n Seal until her costume is completely dry.

If you do get some dye on the clay, you can try to get it off with alcohol, or acetone will take it off, but do be careful.
Fallon is now complete. This was a lot of fun to do! Giving a sculpt a new look is challenging and rewarding. I love the results!

Her wings are part of my Venetian Accessories Class. For more information you can reach me at: debi@debwood.com Thanks for being here with me!