

Fiber Art Techniques and Terms

Airbrushing – A process of using compressed air for spraying liquid paints. Textile airbrush paints can be used with any standard airbrush and may be used with or without stencils.

Appliqué – A process of adding another shaped piece of fabric to the original fabric. The appliqué shape can be applied by stitching or fusing.

Batik – A process of using wax as a resist, and then dyeing to create a design. Typically many layers of wax and dyes are used. Most batiks have a crackled finish where the wax has cracked during the dyeing.

Beading – The application of beads to fabric to further embellish it. The beads may be sewn, wired or glued on.

Cellulose Fiber – Any fiber produced by a plant; having a chemical structure that can react to fiber reactive dye molecules.

Collage – A process of layering many cut-out designs to create a new design.

Crazy Patch Work – A technique of piecing irregular shaped different fabrics together to create a new fabric. Very popular in Victorian times, the seams are often decorated with fancy hand or machine embroidery stitches. Other embellishments may also be added.

Crochet – process of creating fabric from yarn, thread, or other material strands using a crochet hook at one end for drawing the thread or yarn through intertwining loops.

Cure – The process of permanently fixing dyes or paints to fabric. This can be achieved through heat, time, or steaming.

Discharging – Removing or stripping the color from fabric. Typically this is done to black or dark fabric and uses either bleach or special discharging products. It is always a surprise what color is revealed when the top color is removed. Occasionally if a printed fabric has been over dyed, the print is revealed where the discharging agent is applied.

Embellishment – The process of adding three dimensional items to the fabric surface, such as beads, yarns, other fabrics, charms, etc. If it can be applied, it can be used!

Fabric Manipulation - A process done by textile designers and artists using a variety of processes and techniques such as: pleating, folding, appliqué, layering, gathering, trapunto and other relevant textile techniques to come up with innovative designs and work that can be applied to creative textile, fine art or a fashion scenario.

Felting – Felt is the oldest known textile still in use. It is made today using techniques very similar to those used to create ancient textiles. Most felt is made from sheep's wool, but fibers from llamas, alpacas, rabbits, etc., can be used. The wool is washed, carded and laid out in a design, and the felting is accomplished through the use of moisture, soap and agitation.

Foiling – Fabric glues are used to adhere foil to the fabric, giving an incredible shine and richness to the surface.

Hand – A term that describes the weight, texture, and drape of a fabric.

Hand-dyeing – A process of dyeing fabric to change its color using a variety of dyeing techniques. The resulting fabric may be one overall color, mottled or textured, or a number of different colors. This one-of-a-kind fabric then may be further manipulated using other techniques.

Hand Painting – All heat-set, water-based textile paints or textile airbrush inks can be used for hand painting either thinned or thick.

Immersion Dyeing – Immersing fabric into a bucket of water or washing machine filled with water, dye and chemicals.

Knitting – A fiber art in which loops of yarn are woven together using specially designed needles.

Mola – A Guatemalan colorful intricate reverse appliqué design.

Mud Cloth – A traditional African fabric created by dyeing using mud. Often it is only available in thin strips.

Needle Felting – A newer technique of felting that uses dry wool and a felting needle to embed it into the fabric.

Nuno Felting – Using felt making techniques, a minimal amount of wool is layered on a fine weave fabric. The fabric is light-weight, drapes well and is suitable for warm climates.

Over Dyeing – A process that adds color on top of a colored or patterned fabric.

Piecing – The process of cutting and rejoining sections of fabric to create a new pieced fabric. Often involves many of the techniques from the quilting world.

Photo Transfer – Any method by which a photographic image is transferred to fabric.

Resist – Anything used to prevent penetration of the dyes into the fiber. For example, wax, tape, flour paste, glue, stitching, gutta.

Salting – A method of dyeing in which salt is applied to the fabric surface, causing the dyes to spread differently and creating an interesting finish.

Sashiko – A traditional Japanese hand-stitching technique. Traditionally this is done in a heavy white thread on an indigo background.

Scour – This process removes excess wax, oil, dirt and surface finishes, often required to all the dyes to penetrate.

Shibori – A traditional Japanese dyeing technique that involves tying the fabric prior to dyeing to create patterns in the fabric. Many different tying techniques can be used, from tying onto poles with string, sewing designs, pleating, folding or manipulating the fabric. Rubber bands, stones, sticks, clamps or almost anything at hand can be used in this process. Where the fabric is folded or tied, the dye cannot penetrate and so creates a pattern.

Silk Fusion - Washed, carded, and dyed raw silk fibers are laid out in different directions on a base layer. Soapy water and a textile medium are painted on this surface and allowed to dry.

Silk Screen – A process of adding paint or dye to fabric using a screen covered with synthetic or silk mesh that has an image emulsified onto it.

Stamping – A stamp is a raised surface design that can be painted and then transferred to fabric to create designs and texture.

Stenciling – A stencil is any thin, flat surface material used to prevent paint or thickened dyes from spreading into a protected area.

Textile Paint – Any paint identified as water-based textile paint. It can be permanently set into the fabric.

Thread Lace – Creating fabric by stitching thread on a water-soluble stabilizer that is removed to leave a very light and airy fabric. The threads must overlap sufficiently to prevent unraveling.

Thread Painting – A technique in which designs are “painted” using thread and stitches rather than paint.

Viscose Rayon – Rayon made from wood fiber, a cellulose fabric.