

Gilded Bevels

By Elida Scola

We are in the presentation business. Today, if we are working on one frame at a time, the client expects something special from us.

They can go anywhere to buy a frame and throw something in it, but what you, the experienced professional, can do is make the framing wonderful. You have the vision, and with sample corners and framed examples on your wall, you might be surprised at the willingness of your clients to try new techniques.

Most of us became picture framers because we love to create with our hands. Gilded bevels on 8 ply mat board add something that sets your framing apart. When you offer a special touch that requires time and skill, you are conveying your respect for the piece to be framed. You can be proud of this. Clients are looking for something from you that they cannot get everywhere.

Gold leaf (22K) is magic in sheet form. It is so thin that light can pass through it, but when attached to a very smooth surface and burnished, it looks like solid gold. Real gold leaf can turn an ordinary piece of wood into a reflecting surface like no other. To get the full impact of this amazing material, I recommend watching a YouTube video on how solid gold bars are made into leaf. 22K leaf is sold in books of 20 sheets each. One sheet of $3\frac{3}{8}$ " x $3\frac{3}{8}$ " gold leaf costs about \$1.50 for one sheet. Check YouTube to watch how gold is beaten in different countries. Much of the process is still done by hand, using wooden mallets to thin the gold. The videos make me wonder how it is so inexpensive.

There are many techniques to apply gold leaf, but generally we can divide them into two categories: oil gilding and water gilding. The traditional method of laying gold leaf is called water gilding. There are many methods of gilding on a bevel. Closed corner frame makers like Rhonda Feinman and Marty Horowitz use the water gilding process on frames, and on mat board, too. They cook whiting and rabbit skin glue in a pot to make gesso. They then spray the gesso onto a frame surface, followed by lots of sanding. Next comes the clay mixed with more hide glue and slathered over the gesso layer, creating a colored



A certificate with a gold seal, like this one that is owned by a client of Elida Scola, is a perfect object to frame with a gilded bevel.



The oil gilding method has fewer steps than its traditional water gilding counterpart, making it a time-saver for framers.



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Before applying gesso, sand the sharp edges off the 8-ply bevel.

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basecoat. This color is dictated by the period of the frame. They gild the bevels of mats using the same steps.

The oil method, which I will walk you through in detail in this article, has fewer steps, making it much faster. You will need a clean work area for this project.

Mat Cutting

Cut a window out of an 8-ply mat board. If you have access to a pneumatic mat cutter, it will give you a steeper angle on the bevel and thus more surface area to gild. We put a top mat over the one we gild, so you do not have to mask or worry about getting it perfect. Cut the top mat slightly larger than the bottom one to show a bit of gold over the edge of the under mat, if you like that look.

Gesso

Before applying gesso, sand the sharp edges off the 8-ply bevel with 800-grit sandpaper. You will be applying gesso to the surface area of the bevel, and it will be impossible to preserve the sharp edges. Using a flat brush, apply three or four coats of acrylic gesso to the surface of the sanded bevel and a bit over the edge of the bevel onto the face of the mat board. This will assure that the bevel is well



Using a flat brush, apply three to four coats of acrylic gesso to the sanded surface.



The smoother the application of the gesso, the less sanding will be needed.



For this project, I used Old World Art brand gold leaf basecoat.

covered and you will have a bit more gold surface area to show under the top mat, if you like. It takes a little practice to perfect the technique of applying gesso without leaving brush strokes. The smoother the application, the less sanding needed.

Sanding

You can lightly sand between each layer of gesso, or wait until it dries and then sand with 320-grit sandpaper. Feel it frequently to see how

smooth it is. Every line and flaw will be visible under the leaf. When you can no longer see or feel brush strokes or bumps, sand lightly with 800-grit. After you sand an inch or so, feel the difference between that area and the rest of the bevel. Good light is very helpful. I have two lights in the area where I gesso and gild.

Basecoat

You can buy a synthetic bole in any art supply store. I use Old World Art

brand gold leaf basecoat. Be sure to stir the contents before using. This product is an acrylic version of the red clay used in the water gilding process. Once again, good light and a smooth application of the basecoat will assure a good lay of the gold. I put two coats on the bevel, wait for it to dry, then sand it lightly with 800-grit. It should be dry in about one hour. A good trick for a very smooth result is to burnish the basecoat before applying gold size. A burnisher

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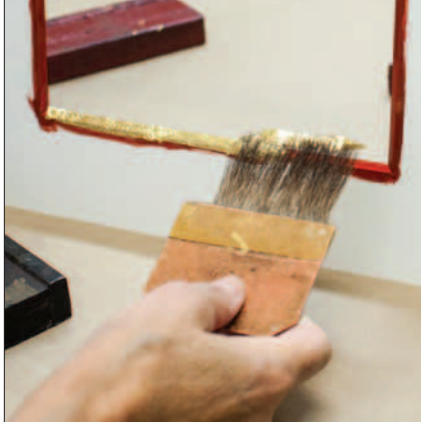
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I used quick-drying, oil-based DUX size to attach gold leaf to the surface.



Next, 22K sheets of yellow gold were used for the gilding.



I use shellac, available in hardware stores, as a sealant for gilded bevels.

is a gilders tool composed of a wood-en handle with a smooth agate head. They come in many shapes to conform to the curves of carved frames. If you have a bone burnisher, that will work well, too, since you are smoothing a flat area. When you rub the dry red coat, you will be eliminating bumps and irregularities.

Sizing

The term "size" is used to describe the many adhesives used to attach

leaf to the surface to be gilded. For this mat, I used DUX, quick-drying size from Sepp. It is an oil-based product. There are many types of size or glue used to stick metal leaf to a surface. Generally, a slow-drying formula yields better adhesion. In this case, we are using quick size, since we will not be burnishing or handling the gold leaf after it is on. It reaches a tack in one to three hours, depending on the weather. You can test for readiness by touching the surface of the

mat close to the bevel rather than the bevel itself. Use your knuckle for the test. Ideally, you will feel the stickiness, but not leave a mark when you lift your knuckle. This is known as a whistling tack.

Gilding

There are many types of metallic sheets available for this process. Both gold leaf and metallic leaf come in sheets and rolls. Patent gold used for sign gilding is another form in which

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the gold is firmly attached to paper. The gold leaf releases when you use your fingers to rub the back of the sheet against a sized area of glass or gesso. Patent gold sheets are larger than those of loose leaf. The paper can be easily cut into smaller pieces for more cost-efficient use. For this example, I used sheets of 22K yellow gold. It is available from Easy Leaf, Sepp, online, and at art supply stores. The smallest quantity you can purchase is a book. For a 16x20 bevel, you will need three sheets. A suede gilders pad is very useful, but not a necessity. If you have one, you can lay a full sheet from a book onto it before cutting smaller strips with a gilders knife. Marty Horowitz, of Gold Leaf Studios in Santa Fe, uses a shortcut method. He holds a book of gold in his left hand. He puts a square of mat board the size of a book of gold under the top sheet in

the book. After using the sheet, he flaps the backing paper behind the book, revealing the next sheet. He uses his fingernail to cut the leaf into smaller sizes with the mat board as a support.

For the rest of us, a gilders pad is necessary. If using a gilders pad, open the book, exposing the first sheet of gold. Static holds it to its paperback. Turn the book over, laying the book against the leather pad. When you lift the book, that sheet will stay on the pad. You will need a cutting instrument or gilders knife to cut the sheet into strips that are slightly wider than the dimension of the bevel. The flat brush pictured is used to transfer the gold from the pad to the sized surface you have prepared. A small amount of Vaseline rubbed on the back of your hand or a static charge will both work. I pass the hair of the brush over the back of my hand, then sus-

pend it over the strip of gold on the pad. The leaf will jump onto the brush and stay there as you move it to the sized surface. Hold the leaf over the bevel, lowering it onto the size. By gently touching it to the surface, it will stick. Let each strip of leaf slightly overlap the preceding strip to make sure the whole area is covered. If you miss any, just take a small piece of leaf and lay it on top of the holiday. When you are finished, use the gilders tip or a very soft brush to gently push the leaf against the bevel, making sure it has stuck. Using a cotton ball, go over the whole bevel with a gentle rubbing motion. This gives the leaf a shine.

I am always amazed by this, despite having done it many times. There is nothing like gilding—it is magical. No wonder we are still doing it. We are using the same water gilding materials and processes from

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ancient times. There are many examples of gold leaf-covered statues and surfaces from at least 3,000 BC made by the Egyptians. Hand-beating gold with wooden mallets is still a common practice in Indonesia.

Sealing

I use shellac as a sealant for gilded bevels. You can buy a small can in any hardware store, and it is available in clear and amber. Use amber if you want a little warmth added to the sealant. Shellac is very easy to make if you have shellac flakes and denatured alcohol. Both the flakes and the mixed shellac have a shelf life—if you have shellac on hand, make sure it is fresh. You can test it by putting it on a surface and observing how fast it dries. It should dry very quickly. To make it, put some flakes into a glass jar. Do not use metal. I use a canning jar with a rubber washer and a glass

lid. It does have a metal clip to close it, but that does not come in contact with the mixture. The jar must close tightly, as alcohol evaporates very quickly. Cover the flakes with denatured alcohol and shake it to mix. Leave it overnight. If the flakes dissolve by morning, they are fresh. Premixed shellac is fairly cheap and is dependable from batch to batch.

Samples

There is no way to tell who will buy a gilded bevel, and there is nothing more compelling than having an example on hand for a client to see. The one demonstrated in this article was for an old certificate presented to one of my clients. She is retired and is currently going through her collected treasures, deciding what to keep and what to pitch. This accolade is important to her. She wants it to look special, so a gold bevel it is. A gold

bevel is the perfect upscale accompaniment to historical documents, original renderings, certificates carrying a gold seal, and more. We recently put them on a series of small monoprints that were framed for our client's first show. The client wanted each print to have a very special look, so I made a sample mat with sections in white gold, aluminum metal leaf, silver, 22K yellow gold, and some nicely tarnished skewing from old leaf. Each bevel tied together her artwork and the frames she chose. Try it! You may be surprised by the response to a framed example on your wall. **PFM**

Elida Scola is the owner of Galleria Scola. Since 1983, the shop has been on Grand Avenue in Oakland, CA. Her handcrafted frames can be seen on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. and in fine local homes and businesses throughout the San Francisco Bay area. She has written for Picture Framing Magazine, Decor, and Art World News and taught classes for the PPFA and The National Conference.



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