



**Newsletter Archives**

**Technique of Batik Art**

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# Technique of Batik Art

## Article of the Month – February 2000

Batik is a medium that lies somewhere between art and craft, and is believed to be at least 2000 years old.

### The Batik Process

The technique of batik is a demanding one. In general, the final design must be conceived before the picture is begun. The batik artist works intimately with color; if he wishes parts of his design to be light yellow, for example, all these parts must be waxed at the same time before any subsequent dyeing. He cannot isolate one part of his design and complete it before moving on to the others as an artist in oils or watercolor may; he must create his design in stages, each of which encompasses the whole picture.

The basic process of batik is simple. It consists of permeating an area of fabric with hot wax so that the wax resists the penetration of dye.

If the cloth we begin with is white, such as bleached cotton, linen, or silk, then wherever we apply hot wax that area will remain white in the final design. After the first waxing the fabric is dipped into a dye bath whose color is the lightest tone of those to be used. When the piece has dried, we see an area of white and an area of cloth that is the color of the first dyeing. Wax is now applied to those parts in which we wish to retain the first color, and the entire fabric is immersed in the second dye bath whose color is darker in tone than the first. This process is repeated until the darkest tone required in the final design has been achieved. When the fabric, now almost wholly waxed, has dried it is placed between sheets of absorbent paper and a hot iron applied. As the sheets of paper absorb the wax they are replaced by fresh sheets until the wax is removed. At this point the final design is seen clearly for the first time.

### Materials for Batik

The tools and materials used in batik are simple and readily available.

Any tool that can efficiently transfer hot wax from a container to the fabric will serve to produce a design on cloth when it is dyed. At the simplest level, a lighted candle can be used to distribute drops of melted wax on the fabric. A variety of objects such as bent wire or the rim of a tin can, can be dipped in melted wax and pressed onto the cloth to make a design. However the serious artist uses the brush. The best to use is about a Number Twelve water-color brush. The brush needs to have a large enough tip to retain a good quantity of wax. A larger brush for waxing out large areas of cloth is very useful as is a small brush-a Number Six is about as small as one can use-for delicate work.

The selection of waxes is important to the quality of the finished batik. Paraffin and beeswax are the two waxes most commonly used in batik and are usually combined in different proportions.

Because of its ready availability the best fabric for most batiks is cotton. The weave of the cloth should not be too close, and the fabric should be translucent when held in front of a light. For the best results, the fabric to be waxed should be stretched on a frame in a taut manner to prevent wrinkles which may cause the wax to run in an unpredictable way.

Wax is an inflammable substance, so the wax container should not be placed directly on the source of heat. It should sit in boiling water, and care should be taken to see that the water is replenished as it evaporates.

As with painting, color is an integral part of batik. A painter uses pigment; a batik artist uses dyes. The Painter can, if he chooses, completely obliterate an undesirable color by covering it with another color. Perhaps he must wait until the unwanted color is dry, but there is no doubt about it, he has another chance, he can cover up his mistake.

In batik the correction of mistakes, in most cases, is impossible. The Painter is not limited in any way in the variety of colors he uses and juxtaposes. In batik, however, each color used is significantly changed by the preceding color; or at least it is certainly affected by the color "underneath". The only pure color is the first one, so all other colors used are mixtures, determined largely by the first color, or the first strong color.

Batik paintings from a renowned Indian Batik Artist - S. M. Krishna, can be viewed at our Batik Art Gallery: <http://www.exoticindia.com/paintings/Batik>.

***This article by Nitin Kumar.***

We hope you have enjoyed reading the article. Any comments you may have will be greatly appreciated. Please send your feedback to [feedback@exoticindia.com](mailto:feedback@exoticindia.com).

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