

Art Clay – Silver Leaf Impression

Deborah E. Love Jemmott © 2000

This technique can be used with leaves or other organic items that will burn away in a 1600°F kiln.

- Choose a leaf with veins that protrude on the backside of the leaf. Feel the veins to make sure that they are tactile, not just visual. Be sure the leaf is not too fleshy or waxy. Leaves that are fuzzy on the backside will result in a more “frosty” look. Leaves that are slick will have a shinier surface. If the leaf is fuzzy, rubbing it gently with a toothbrush before coating may help. Ruffled edges or bug holes can add a great design element to the piece. Long, narrow leaves can roll or curl. Leave the stem on the leaf to provide a “handle” while you are working.
- Place the leaf face down on a paper or card stock with your name on it. Mark each coat of the Art Clay- Silver Paste as it is painted on the leaf.
- Have a film canister half filled with distilled or r/o water. This is used to rinse the brush and keep the silver residue. Eventually this will become paste.
- Use the Art Clay- Silver Paste to paint the back of the leaf. The paste will settle out quickly. Stir the paste well before painting it on the leaf. CAUTION: Stirring too vigorously will cause bubbles and result in pits in the silver coating on the leaf. The first coat or two should be on the thin side. Additional coats should be thicker (about the consistency of yogurt). Use water to thin the paste.
- Coat the back of the leaf 7 – 10 times, letting the paste dry completely in between coats. The larger the leaf, the more coats are needed. The art clay on an average leaf should be about 1mm thick to make it strong and durable. Drying may be hastened by using a blow dryer or by setting the pieces on a warming tray (set on low). If the warming tray is too hot, the leaf may curl.
- If pits or holes are visible in the coatings on the leaf, allow the paste to dry completely. Then use a toothbrush or fine sandpaper on the area. The “dust” will fill in the pinholes. Use a thin coat for the next coat. This should result in a smooth surface.
- Clean any art clay residue from the front side of the leaf before firing. Use a toothbrush, dental tool or x-acto knife to gently scrape any residue. All of the Art Clay – Silver Paste should be removed from the front of the leaf before firing, otherwise, it will fire into the leaf pattern on the front of the finished piece.
- Place on a kiln shelf. Use kiln prop if the leaf needs support (if it is not flat). Fire at 1600° F for 10 minutes (Ramp 5).
- After firing, finish and patina if desired.

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FINDING THE PERFECT LEAF

Pick a fresh leaf for your project. It can be kept fresh in a plastic bag with a spritz of water until you are ready to use it. Remember you will be painting the back of the leaf.

SHAPE

1. The general shape of the leaf should be interesting. Less interesting shapes can be combined into groups. Contrasting shapes and sizes make beautiful collage pieces.
2. Ruffled edges or bug holes can add a great design element to your piece.
3. Be careful of sharp points on the leaf edges. When they become solid metal they can scratch or tear clothes.
4. The leaf should be firm. Weak, limp leaves do not hold their shape well.
5. Long, narrow leaves can roll or curl.
6. Keep the stem on the leaf to provide a handhold.

TEXTURE

1. The vein structure gives you a beautiful texture. The veins should be pronounced. Feel the veins to make sure that they are tactile, not just visual. Sometimes the leaf may look interesting but the clay will not pick up the texture if it is not defined. When you cannot feel the texture of the leaf, the clay will reflect that fact. Make sure you can feel the veins.
2. Leaves should not be too waxy or hairy. These are difficult to coat with paste.
3. Thick, moisture-filled leaves may split during firing.

COLOR

1. The leaves can be beautiful in bright silver. However, most people enjoy coloring the leaves with liver of sulfur. The color of the leaves can range from gold to green, blue, purple and black, depending upon the length of time the leaf is exposed to the liver of sulfur solution. The darkness also accents the vein structure of the leaf and gives depth and dimension to the pendant. Going over the edges with a burnisher strengthens the leaf and gives it the look of finely finished jewelry.
2. Pods make interesting pieces. Remember that they can split open during the firing but that may be a great place to set a stone.

REINFORCEMENT

1. A single leaf should be 1 mm thick to make it strong and durable. If you make the leaves thinner, they can bend. You can group leaves into a collage to strengthen them or add clay design reinforcements.

HINT:

Make up several leaves and set them aside. A leaf makes a great accent on jewelry, to set stones or on pottery, etc.

[PRECAUTIONS]

- Some silver settling may occur at bottom of the jar. Stir the paste well with a brush or metal spatula before use..
- To dilute the paste, take out the necessary amount of and place it in a different container. Then, add necessary amount of water to dilute. Do not dilute it directly in the bottle.
- This product is water-based and can dry up. Always keep the container tightly capped.
(If it dries up, add a little water to recover its original texture.)
- Wash the paste off your hands with water after work.
- Some kilns show a different temperature from the actual one. It is known that silver will melt at 1769°F. It is recommended that your kiln firing does not exceed 1652°F.
- During firing, oxygen can be consumed or smoke and gas emission may result with some remaining inside the kiln. Always be sure to ventilate the workroom.
- Keep the paste indoors out of direct sunlight (Do not keep it in the refrigerator).
- Keep the paste out of reach of children. Be careful not to splash the paste into your eyes or swallow. If this happens, see a doctor for consultation.
- Use the paste within 3 months from your purchase.

[DIRECTIONS]

- Place the necessary amount of paste in a small container. Dilute it with water if needed. Diluting it at the ratio of two parts paste to one part water would be recommended.
- Paint the mold evenly and thickly with a paintbrush. Let it dry. Then paint it again several times, allowing it to dry between each layer. Build up general layers so that it is thick and strong. A minimum of 8 layers is recommended.
- When the paste is used as an adhesive, apply it to both of the pieces until they fuse together without a seam.
- The piece should be fired only after complete drying. Dry the piece for more than 24 hours at room temperature or for about 30 minutes at around 210°F. (Using a hair dryer would expedite the drying process)
- Place the piece in the kiln. (If you are firing more than two pieces, make sure the pieces are not touching each other)
Fire the piece in a kiln at 1472°F for 30 minutes, or 1600°F, for 10 minutes.. Then switch off the kiln. When the temperature falls below 1112°F, take out the piece from the kiln and cool it to room temperature. (During firing, the piece contracts 8 to 10%)
- The surface of the fired piece has a matte and white color due to crystallization of the silver, but luster can be obtained by polishing.(example: a metal brush, sandpaper, burnisher, silver polish, etc.)
- The completed piece is pure silver □99.99%□.
If the fired piece is deformed, it can be bent back into shape with a rawhide mallet or gentle pressure with jeweler's pliers.