

# "The Technique"

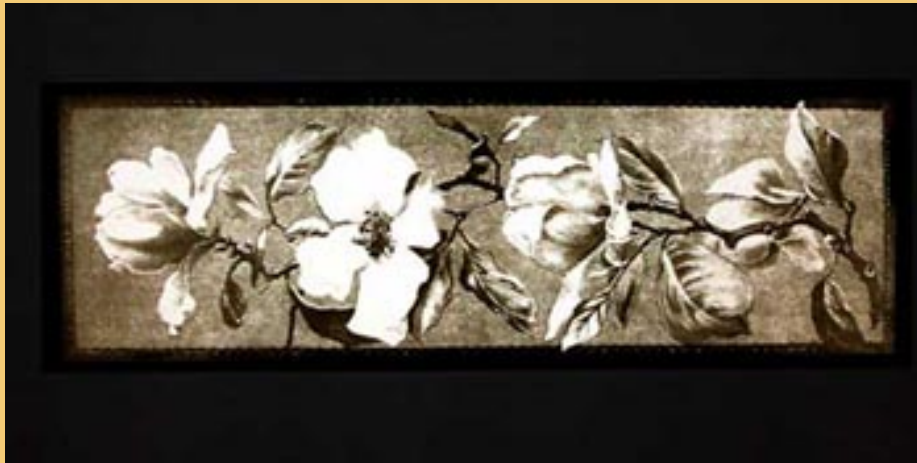
A step-by-step explanation of the technique developed over the years by Bill Stockil for creating artwork on leather.



- Step One: Preparing the leather
- Step Two: Tracing the picture to the leather 'canvas'
- Step three: Adding colour
- Step four: Beveling
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## Step One: Preparing the leather

With the same mountboards that framers use and ordinary contact adhesive, I prepare my leather by gluing a backing onto each piece.



Black and white photo-copy that has been printed onto the leather mounted "canvas" using lacquer-thinners, as described in step two

## Step Two: Tracing the picture to the leather 'canvas'

The principle of getting your initial image onto your leather project or, in this case, your blank leather 'canvas' remains the same, that is, you either trace it on in the old-fashioned way or use craft-aids. However, this is where my first big break-through occurred, discovered eventually by continuous trial and error:

- Make a black and white photocopy of whatever picture you would normally have traced from, varying the light and dark settings to get maximum effect.
- Lay this face down, as you would your tracing, onto your prepared leather board. · Fix it here and there with tape to stop it sliding around.
- Wet some tissue paper with lacquer-thinners and apply directly onto the back surface of the image and immediately apply even pressure - I have a small press that I use for this purpose.
- Lift the paper off, and there you have your image.

A couple of notes:

- You will get quite a variation of image results, but at least you are getting the image quicker and more accurately than you would with a tracing.
- This image obviously reflects as a mirror image, so for anything that needs to be technically correct, you would start off with a reversed photocopy.
- Not all pictures lend themselves to effective photocopies, so sometimes we have to trace it the old way.
- There is a natural aversion by most leatherworkers of the world to the very thought of purposely aiming to create "permanent" black marks of any sort onto your leather project... horrors! I fully understand this, but the point is this at the end of the exercise, the black marks will be painted out anyway.

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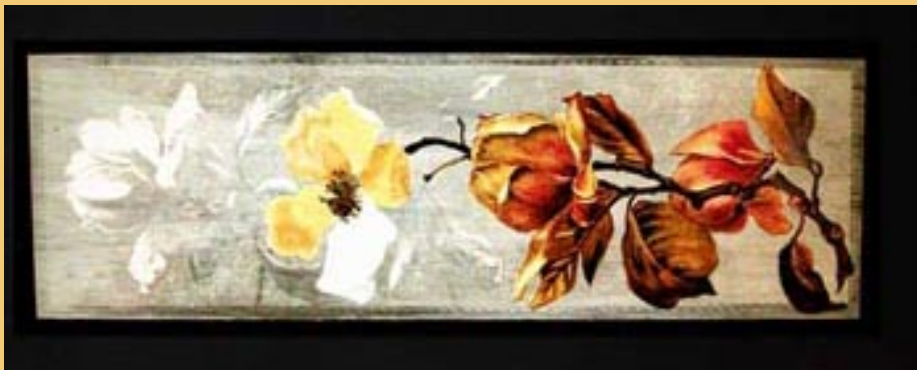
## Step three: Adding colour



A light wash of diluted white acrylic over the entire print....

The next step is certainly the hardest for me; adding colour to create the finished painting.

- I always put down a white acrylic wash first, diluted to various strengths to suit different paintings
- Then start the slow and patient process of layer upon layer of sometimes very diluted colours, mainly spirit dyes, but in the last eighteen months I seem to be using acrylics more frequently. I use mostly a dry brush principle, realising that you can always go darker, but you can seldom come back - so work slowly through it until you reach the desired colour-values.



The slow process of layer upon layer of thinned down colours [spirit-dyes.]  
Fill in the background colour, in this case a lovely gold from  
Windsor-Newton`s "Finity" range of acrylics used full strength from the  
tube, and then finish with a border of dark-brown spirit dye...

I must mention here that I have had and continue to have all the help and hints on this "colouring-in" stage from my wonderful wife Mary, who is clearly the finest water colourist in the field of fine art on this planet. That's a pretty brave, broad and arrogant sort of statement but please believe me - it is absolute and true, and without her input, my results would simply be nothing more than mediocre.

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## Step four: Beveling

Now that you have a completely finished and beautiful piece of artwork in front of you, the fun really starts. First, remove your artist's hat and coat, put on your leatherworker's outfit, pick up your beveling tool and mallet, pump up the volume and get ready to rock `n` roll! From here on in it's pretty plain sailing for any reasonably competent leather crafter. Here comes the next big turn-around - remove all traces of water and sponges from the room, because you won't ever use water again in this story! Start beveling directly onto your painting exactly as you would in the old way, the perception of your paint breaking up is just not true...try it. Once you've been around the whole picture you will have noticed that you are certainly not getting the desired depth. Don't worry, what you are effectively doing is creating an impression, the importance of which becomes evident in the next step...creating the plugs.



Beveling just as described in step four

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## Step five: Creating the plugs (1)



Peel off the leather from the mount-board and defining the "plug image" directly from the pressure indents on the mount-board, just as described

- Peel the leather from the mount-board, you will notice that the pressure point outline has transferred itself through onto the board, and this is your guiding light from here on in.
- Some of the outlines may be a bit vague so it's an idea to go over the whole lot with a black pen.
- By now you would have looked at your picture enough to have decided where the foremost or highest point of the layout is. Just remember of course that for a while you are now working in reverse.
- Cut out your plug shapes from the original backing board, doubling or tripling up where necessary.
- Skive the edges of the plugs, then using contact adhesive, stick all those pieces in their right order and place on the back of your leather painting. It's quite hard to lose your way because you have the pressure-point image on the back of your painting.



Cut out and skive the edges of the plugs, doubling-up and tripling-up wherever necessary, then stick on to the back of the leather painting....again using the pressure lines as points of reference...Complete all the steps as described in Step Five

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## Step five: Creating the plugs (2)

- There is obviously a limit as to the number of plugs you can stick on top of each other, and much depends on the thickness of your leather. Having tried many different thicknesses, all I ever use nowadays is a thing that the tanners in this country call "goat-crust". It sounds horrendous, but works like a dream. As far as I can ascertain, it's sort of half way between what we leather crafters know and love as veg or oak tanned, and the more commercial chrome tanned stuff the furniture and car upholsterers use. So bang goes the theory that we can only use veg or oak for this kind of work. Goat-crust is very strong, it takes any colour you can throw at it, and its ability to stretch and take shape around three layers of plugs is phenomenal.
- Once the plugs are all safely tucked into their beds, glue your second and final piece of mount-board over the back, turn your picture face side up and start whacking [beveling] all over again!

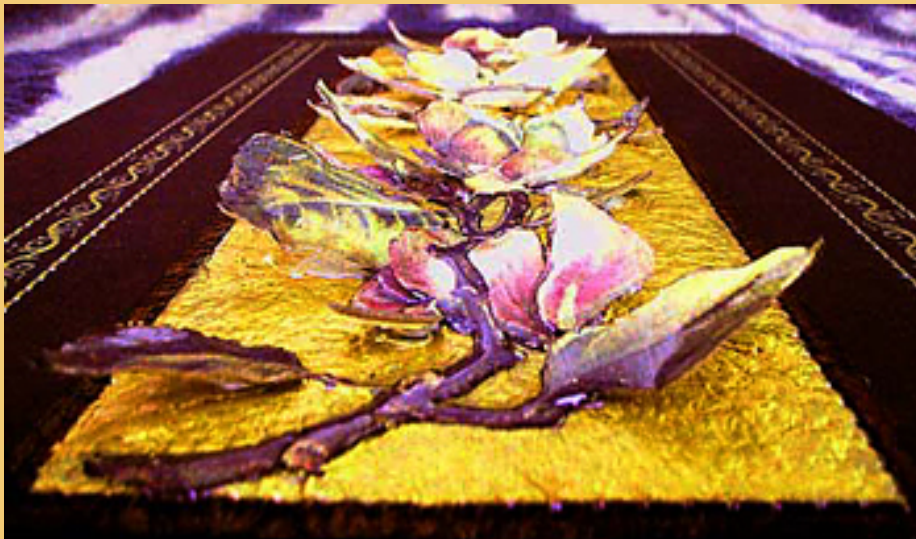
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## Step six: Finishing up



The final beveling and background texture [in this case I used a foliage stamp]

- Finish as you normally would, with background and texture tools.
- When all is done, and if the picture is one of those that lends itself to this final step, get in there with your scalpel and just push in, cut and lift any feathers, scales, petals, leaves or loose folds in garments.



Lifting of petals and leaves

- A final coat or two of varnish, either matt or gloss or a combination of both, et voila... another masterpiece! (photograph of finished work on next page)

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Fine-tuning and completion of the mount, in this case black mount-board with a black and gold scrolled border. Finally, set your result in a decent frame.....and sell!

So there you have it - I think it would be fun for you to try something with nice clear graphic lines and bright colours at first - a butterfly springs to mind. This will give you an idea of how the whole thing works. I really hope that you have a great deal of fun and get some exciting results!



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