



# Preparing and Gilding Textured Surfaces

*By Barrie Lynn Bryant*

**A**s usual, my wife was right about how I should design my frame for her 19" x 39" oval-shaped drawing, "The Twisted Swarm." While shopping at a local Goodwill store, she handed me a bundle of tightly-woven mesh trim material and said, "Use this." I said, "What on Earth for?"

A few weeks later in my studio, I discovered how to adhere the 1 ¼" wide material to my frame and then gild it. That discovery opened the door to abundant new frame design possibilities using gilded, textured surfaces.

## HOW GOLD INSPIRES DESIGN

Since my wife treads the unconventional, she often challenges me with more than framing just the typical square or circular artwork. Such was the case with "The Twisted Swarm." Since this oval-shaped artwork would be paired with a rectangular frame, I cut a spandrel insert that defined and followed the contour of the art.

The large, triangular shapes of the spandrel were an important factor in creating the overall design, as I didn't want the result to be overpowering. Especially when gilded, a wide surface area could've been too much. The weave in the mesh

trim material helped break up the design, and using three types of gold on the frame added dimension to the overall framing package. I used Giusto Manetti 22K deep gold for the spandrel, Wehrung & Billmeier 22K moon gold for the sight edge surrounding the spandrel, and a 2" roll of Hastings & Co. 23K for the main frame legs. Both the Manetti and Hastings golds have a typical appearance, with the higher-karat product being slightly richer. The moon gold, which is an alloy of gold and platinum, has a softer, fainter appearance.

To use the three effectively together, I situated the moon gold element between the spandrel and main frame legs. Since I planned for the spandrel and main frame legs to be textured surfaces, I designed the moon gold surface to be polished smooth. These juxtapositions broke up the monotony and helped focus the viewer's eye on the artwork.

## PREPPING THE TRIM MATERIAL

To plan the details of the design, I drew everything to scale using ⅛" grid paper. The frame for this piece measured 28" x 48", so I taped together four 11" x 17" papers and graphed the frame out at half-scale, or 14" x 24".

Graphing helps me see the geometry of a frame and establish all the measurements involved in its making. Since I was planning to adhere 1 ¼" trim material to add surface texture all over the spandrel and main frame legs, graphing also helped me plan how many strips to cut, how long to cut them, and how to configure their layout. With my plan mapped out, I began the texturing process by preparing to adhere the trim material to the spandrel first.

## PREPPING THE GILDING SUPPLIES

Arguably the best technique for preparing wood surfaces for gilding involves mixing, making, and using your own glue and shop-made gesso. One of my favorite things to do is to make what Marty Horowitz of Gold Leaf Frame Makers of Santa Fe calls "tea glue." (Rest in peace to our mentor, Marty, who died on my birthday, July 2.) I combined 26 grams of rabbit skin glue pebble to 10 ounces of warm distilled water in a wide-mouth jelly jar, stirred it a little before putting a lid on it, and set it on a sunny windowsill.

After several hours in the sun, the pebble completely absorbed the water and, with stirring, dissolved to make a solution. I made three of these at once so I could use one as a primer and the other two for gesso. In this case, I also used the glue for adhering the trim material to the spandrel and frame legs. One note on this method: be careful not to overheat the rabbit skin glue solution, as doing so will ruin its strength. I never let my glue temperature rise higher than 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit) and keep a close eye on the temperature of the liquid in each jar.

With the warm glue solution taken off the windowsill, it was time to make gesso with two jars' worth of solution, some gilder's whiting, and a little denatured alcohol. I poured the glue into a small mixing bowl, sifted in two cups of whiting, and carefully stirred to combine. I transferred that mixture back into the glue jar by pouring it through a fine mesh strainer, mashing down any lumps that appeared. The mixture was then poured through the strainer again to transfer it into a new, clean jar.

Finally, I added a tablespoon of denatured alcohol and stirred lightly before sealing the jar with a lid and setting aside for later use. (If you do not plan to use your mixture within 24 hours, store in the refrigerator.)

## GLUING THE MESH TRIM

Borrowing from my knowledge of making fabric-wrapped mats, I laid out my pre-cut strips of mesh trim along the edge of my spandrel and submerged two of them into the

warm glue solution. Using my favorite 1" flat Gold Taklon brush, I also primed the spandrel surface on both sides with rabbit skin glue before applying the mesh trim strips one by one, side by side.

I wrapped each of them over the sight edge and pressed them firmly to the bevel and underside of the spandrel. I used a standard hair dryer to help evaporate the water and stiffen the glue so the mesh wouldn't buckle up and delaminate from the surface. Using a shrink packager heat gun will also work, but too much heat on animal glue will blister it. Blistering can be a worthwhile distressing technique to explore with gilding, but was not appropriate for this frame, as I wanted to establish a uniform, seamless field of rippled texture on the spandrel surface.

I set the spandrel aside so it could dry overnight and continued applying the primer coat of rabbit skin glue and mesh trim to the main legs of the frame, which was much simpler than working with the spandrel. Before setting this aside to dry overnight, I also primed the smooth part of my frame where the moon gold would go with the glue solution.

While using the glue for an extended period of time during priming and texturing, keeping the solution at blood-warm temperature required heating it with the double-boil-



● Gilding a frame with a textured pattern offers customers that "wow" factor when framing certain artworks.



● Loosely knitted or tightly woven lace and trim fabrics create unique gilded surface textures.

er method. To do this, I filled a saucepan with water, placed it on a portable stove burner, submerged the jelly jar in the hot water, and paid close attention to the glue solution's temperature. I removed it from the hot burner when it reached about 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

## GESOING, SURFACING, COLORING & GILDING

Back to work on the frame in the morning, I warmed my cold gesso using the double-boiler method just like I did for the glue solution. Once it reached the appropriate temperature, I removed it from the burner and began applying it to the spandrel surface and then the frame. I repeated



● Straining shop-made gesso made with rabbit skin glue and calcium carbonate (gilder's whiting).

this process several times once the previous gesso application was nearly dry, careful not to apply too much gesso overall, since I did not want to fill in the unique textured effect.

The gessoed spandrel and main frame legs' surfaces were inspected for blemishes and non-uniform appearance and lightly sanded in places with 320-grit fine mesh sanding paper to smooth the dry gesso. A textured surface such as this can also benefit from being lightly rubbed with a damp, lint-free cloth or sponge. Be careful not to rub too much; rubbing with water can remove gesso very quickly, as there isn't much there.

I chose to use the mordant size oil

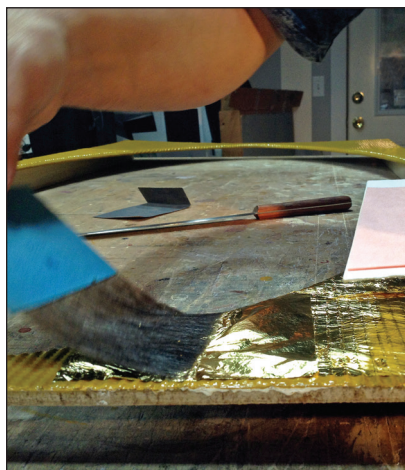


● Attaching glue-saturated fabric strips to spandrel by starting at the center and working outward.

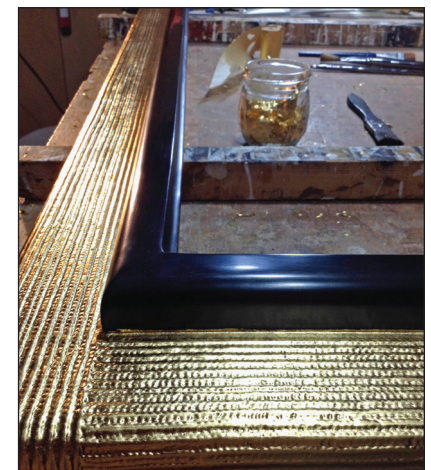
gilding method for this entire frame instead of completely water gilding it or using the methods in tandem. Coloring underneath oil gilding can either be with traditional clay bole, Dux Paint Co. Burnish Sealer, casein paint, or pigmented shellac. I have often found it necessary to use a light sealing coat of shellac over whatever colorant I use besides the pigmented shellac because it keeps the oil size from absorbing into the surface and unevenly coming to proper gilding "tack." (Using a light coat of shellac means not putting very much on the surface, and using a thin cut of shellac means the solution has more solvent alcohol in it by volume.)



● Applying several uniform coats of gesso without overfilling and obliterating the fabric texture.



● Pulling karat gold leaf directly from the book of gold with a gilder's tip.



● Black bole ready for gilding with moon gold. Juxtapositions break up monotony and pique visual interest.



● *Shaping the untempered standard spandrel by ensuring the curve never straightens along its continuous path.*

For the “Twisted Swarm” frame, I colored the spandrel and main frame legs with yellow ochre casein paint. Once that dried, I applied a light coat of shellac to seal it. Since I wanted the smooth part of the frame to be ultra-smooth, I prepared a black clay bole mixture of rabbit skin glue with Selhamin cone clay that I had finely ground and wetted. I applied the bole as if I were preparing to water gild this surface. The elasticity in the glue combined with the clay just establishes an almost plastic surface on which to gild. I sealed it with a very thin cut of shellac, which I applied with a shop-made pad instead of a brush. That gave me ultimate control over how much shellac would actually be spread on the surface, and it worked very quickly with a single pass.

I used Dux Paint Co. Slow Set Oil Size and worked with this in three stages. The very light coat I applied came to proper tack in eight hours and stayed open for four hours. Since the surfaces were not large, I waited a few hours once the size reached proper tack before gilding. The longer you wait to apply gold to the surface, the brighter and more radiant the gilding will be; but wait too long to gild and the size might not have any tack.



● *Due to the odd shape of the art, this project required the use of the palm and faith guided Dexter mat cutter.*

Once I accomplished the main gilding and patched the holidays, I set the project aside for about a week to allow all the surfaces to properly cure and harden before sealing them with a light coat of shellac. The rule of thumb about sealing gilded surfaces is that applying anything on top of gold makes it look a little less golden—sometimes even dull.

I encourage you to experiment with gilding textured surfaces like this one. It can offer a new dimension to your gilding repertoire and, when added to the right project, can provide that “wow” factor your customers are looking for. **PFM**

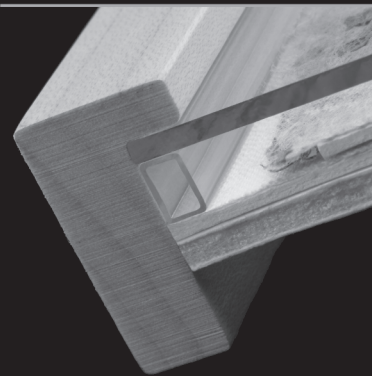


#### ***Barrie Lynn Bryant***

Barrie is a multidisciplinary artist with innovations in frame design, woodworking, gilding, digital imaging, and photography. He began designing and making picture frames for his wife's artworks

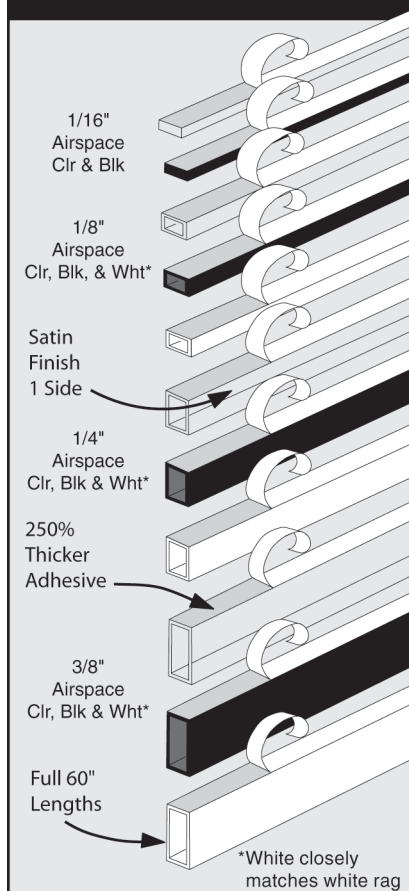
in 1995 as a means to save money. When he discovered gilding in 1999, he broke open his piggy-bank, spent all of his savings on karat gold leaf, and began gilding some of the frames for her art on his own. Together he and his wife have won more than 100 cash awards in juried art shows throughout the US as well as seven grants from Wyoming Arts Council (four for development in gilding practices). Attend Barrie's classes to learn how to go “all-in” on your projects and to experience what colleagues refer to as “infectious enthusiasm”. See Barrie's website at [merglennstudios.com](http://merglennstudios.com) and Instagram @BarrieLynnBryant.

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