

How to Finish Composition Ornaments

Our appliques can be finished almost any way you want, from craft paint to 22K gold, either before or after they are applied.

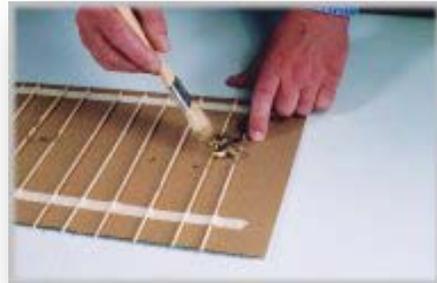
Certified Professional Framer (CPF) Linda Wassell shared her instructions on how she gilds and applies our composition ornaments to picture frame molding that is already finished. The supplies mentioned here can be found at artist supply stores or through framing supply companies on the internet.



Gilding

Basecoat: Painting the ornaments with a basecoat creates a smooth surface on which your leaf will be applied. Any kind of acrylic works well to seal the compo and give it color. If you are trying to match an existing finish, look carefully at the molding to determine what colors had been used in the finishing and try to repeat them in the compo. The most common choices would be reddish brown, black or yellow ocher.

Apply size: I suggest using an acrylic type of size. It should be diluted with water to a 50/50 ratio. Brush the ornaments with a very thin coat and let dry until it's clear. The size will remain very tacky for several hours allowing a long "open time" in which the leaf can be applied.



Applying leaf: Any type of leaf will work. Try to choose one that is similar to the frame's finish, although contrasting colors are often interesting. Composition leaf is available in gold, silver, copper and shades of variegated. Also you could choose 22K gold or 12K white gold with a wide range of varying colors. Drop a piece of the leaf onto the ornament and tamp the leaf down with soft cotton (pieces of an old t-shirt works good). Tamping will press the leaf onto the ornament. Try to get the leaf into all the crevasses. After the skewings are brushed away, you can dust the ornament with mica powder to fill all the "holidays."



Rub: To give the look of age, you can rub away some of the leaf with some fine steel wool and a small amount of water. GO SLOWLY! You can easily remove too much of the leaf very quickly.

Seal and tone with shellac: I use shellac to seal the finish as well as to tone or give patina to the leaf. Two thin coats are sufficient to keep the leaf from tarnishing. Each coat deepens the color of the leaf. It is available in a variety of colors that can be mixed with each other to create the perfect match.



Shellac has a relatively short shelf life of about six months. When it gets too old, it will fail to dry and remain tacky. The best and easiest way to prevent this is to purchase flakes. The flakes have an indefinite shelf life and can be made in very small batches to ensure freshness. They are easily mixed in a glass container. Put flakes into the clean container and fill with denatured alcohol just until the flakes are saturated and covered. Let it sit overnight until dissolved. This results in roughly a 3 lb cut. This is then cut once more by adding 50% more alcohol.

Applying finished ornaments to a frame

You will need the following:

- Hot plate, electric skillet or pan on a burner for water to provide steam
- A screen made from a small frame stretched with canvas or cotton
- Spatula or putty knife for handling ornaments
- Tools for cleaning up excess compo (dental or nail grooming tools)
- Small brushes



Bring the water to a boil and then lower the heat to a simmer that maintains the steam. Place the stretched cloth frame over the steaming water. It helps to brush or mist the top of the screen with water. Have all your tools assembled and ready to go. Place one ornament at a time on the screen. They will soften very quickly and can melt. The ornament should only melt enough to activate the glue within the compo and become pliable. This may only take a few seconds for small pieces. Never leave steaming ornaments unattended. In some cases it may be necessary to build up an area to provide a "bed" for your ornament. This can be done by melting some scrap pieces of compo for filler.



When the ornament has reached the desired softness, carefully slide a spatula or pallet knife under it and gently lift it off the screen. Be careful not to stretch or bend it too much. Place the ornament into position on the frame. Apply pressure to create a bond between the molding and compo. Some compo may ooze out and that's OK. It can be cleaned up easily after it has cooled just a bit. The important thing is to get it into the proper position and tightly seated before it cools and begins to harden. After all the ornaments have been applied and begin cooling, you can clean them up with the wooden stick and a bit of hot water. At this point it is still very soft and can be damaged. Ideally the compo should set a couple of hours before continuing with the toning process.

Add dusting and fly specks: Finally this last step will blend together the finishes on the ornaments and the frame molding and create a unified look to your finished frame. You will need to use a different product for each step of this final process. They are:

- Back Patinating Wax - applied straight from the tin with a soft brush then buffed away
- Paste wax mixed with dry pigment - applied with a soft brush then buffed away
- Asphaultum - thinned with naphtha and applied sparingly to the ornament then wiped to a thin coat
- Black/Brown acrylic paint - If speckling is appropriate, a black/brown acrylic can be mixed and spattered onto the corners with a toothbrush Modern Masters wiping stain (an acrylic rottenstone color) - Use this wiping stain to give the look of dust settled into the recesses of the frame and ornament. It can be very useful in blending. Carefully brush on and then gently wipe away leaving trace amounts in the recesses. With many finishes, a light dusting or rottenstone completes the look.

