

WORKS OF ART FOR THE FLOOR

Painted and varnished floorcloths were among the first floorcoverings used in this country. The origin of this style comes from oil cloths, dating back to 14th century France, which were used as wallhangings and table-covers. These evolved into floorcloths and were brought to America by the English in the 18th century.

Floorcloths were substitutes for more costly carpets or expensive flooring such as marble or wood.

They were extremely popular and favored in households modest and grand until the late 1800's when linoleum came into style.

Today, craftspeople and decorators are taking a new look at this old craft. Painted floorcloths offer decorative and creative possibilities unequalled in many other mediums.

A properly primed and painted floorcloth is extremely durable, even in high traffic areas. They will also stand up well as a runner on stairs.

Floorcloths can become cherished and exquisite art pieces and yet, they are easy to clean. All you need to do is wipe with a sponge. From time to time, a cleaning solution may be used.

New developments in paint products have made it unnecessary to use slow drying and strong smelling oil based products. Fast drying water based paints and finishes are far easier, and leave no lingering smell.

Over the past few years, we at Maiwa Handprints have been researching and experimenting with floorcloth design. It has been an exciting process filled with discovery and new direction.

In this newsletter, we outline procedures, ideas, and techniques which have been successful for us.

*A question we often hear when
someone first sees a floorcloth is,
"Can I walk on it?"*

The answer is a definite yes!

Floorcloths are simply... primed canvas, painted any number of ways, then varnished many times for protection and to make them long lasting. **YOU WILL NEED** canvas, gesso, acrylic or fabric paints, assorted brushes, sponges, stencils, design materials (keep a box of stuff), bottles (spray, squeeze, pipettes), rags, acrylic varnish, and Soluvar.

Canvas

There are many types of canvas available. Our suggestion is to try various kinds. There is duck canvas, sahara, twills, ect. As long as you start with a medium to heavy weight fabric, different weaves and structures will offer interesting variation.

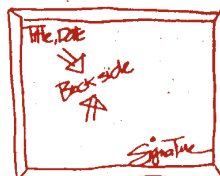
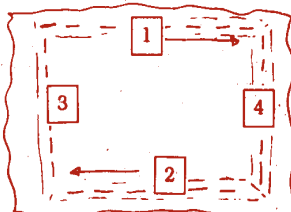
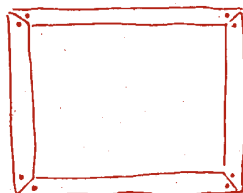
Prepare Your Canvas

We coat our canvas with Gesso. Gesso is primer or base coat for acrylic. It will protect natural fibers of the canvas and create a receptive surface for paint. We have found that by using Gesso we use less paint and the paint flows easily; therefore, we can achieve some very exciting and innovative effects. • *Remember to use a cheap synthetic brush for Gesso as it is very hard to wash out.* Gesso is available in colors as well as the traditional white. This offers the artist a color saturated ground that retains the absorbency, drag, and tooth of regular white Gesso. Colored Gesso gives the effect of old world masters tinted foundation, yet retains a controlled brushing surface. Colored Gesso can be wet sanded for a marbled ground effect. White Gesso can also be tinted with acrylics and Setacolor Fabric Paint.

North American women in the 1830's and 40's were instructed in homemaking magazines to stretch and nail their cloth to the south side of the barn, then let the priming coat dry for two weeks and the final coat for at least two months!!

Stretching Canvas

Canvas wrinkles and slightly distorts when the paint is wet, then shrinks as it dries. At Maiwa, we cut and hem some of the cloths and then Gesso. At other times, we will rip the canvas and fray the edges, then Gesso, allowing the slight distortion.



Using 2x4 plywood, make a frame to the size you want. Inner edge will be the size of the finished floorcloth.

Staple canvas to frame. Start in the middle of one side (#1), then staple across from it (#2), then #3, then #4. Staple from #1 to the right and alternate with #2 and to the left, etc. Pull tightly as you go.

Gesso, paint, and varnish canvas on the frame. Take off frame with a staple remover.

Turn to backside. Cut an inch from finished edge. Cut excess from corners at an angle. Fold edges over and glue down. Roll over it with a rolling pin. Weigh the hem down overnight.

Turn over to front side. Apply a final coat of varnish. Wait full drying time and apply Soluvar.

The Paint

Many kinds of paint can be applied when painting a floorcloth. In the studio, we choose a very high quality fabric paint called Setacolor, by Pebeo of France. We also use Liquitex acrylic paints. Both products are of superior quality and come in an excellent range of colors. If you want to use other paints, test them first. Check for lightfastness, cracking and drying time.

SETACOLOR — Setacolor is one of the most versatile fabric paints on the market with a wonderful palette of colors. It comes in transparents, opaques, and metallics. Setacolor has a very high pigment count, making the colors rich and vibrant. All the Setacolors can be watered down. Opaques become grainy and textural. Leftover paint can be scooped into bottles with water and used for spraying, spattering, and washes. All the colors are intermixable. Usually Setacolor is made permanent by heat setting. You can use an iron or blowdryer or the Maiwa heat machine. When painting floorcloths, although it is a good idea to heat set, it is not always possible on very large pieces. Make sure you allow enough time for the paint to cure before varnishing. We suggest 3 or 4 days. Some colors such as black need longer curing time than others.

LIGUITEX — Liquitex acrylic paints also come in opaques, trans-
parents, and metallics, as well as interference and opalescents.
The Liquitex metallics are superb and look like true metals —
gold, silver, stainless steel, copper, and bronze. They require no
heat setting but need time to air cure. We've found you can
intermix Setacolor and Liquitex paints. **Note:** if you intermix,
remember to heat set or wait for the Setacolors to cure.

Interference and Opalescents — The pigment of these paints is
made with many thin coats of titanium on mica flakes. When
applied on a white surface or over other colors they refract the
complimentary color. The effect is like a thin coat of oil floated
on water. On a white surface, the interference colors appear
sparkly with a tint of color. Interference colors can be mixed with
varnish and painted over colors as a glaze. This effect works best
over colors of middle to light value. You can mix interference
paints with other colors; in this case, they act like the irrides-
cents or bronzing powders, giving a soft sheen to the color.
Interference on black or dark surfaces become pastel iridescent;
they do not show their complimentary color.

Note: Setacolor paint needs to sink into the fibers for permanen-
cy. Applying paint too thickly can cause problems such as crack-
ing and peeling. If you apply thick dots or lines that sit on the
surface, allow 3 days to dry. The outside skin dries first.
Hurrying drying time with a heat source may cause the paint to
wrinkle. (Although, this may be an effect you'd like to try.)

For an aged appearance, add some raw umber to the final coat of varnish.

**A folk art look can be achieved by white washing over the final coat of
paint — just add white paint, water, and varnish. After white washing,
apply subsequent coats of varnish.**

Tried and Tested Approaches

There is no limit to the possibilities. Painting floorcloths gives
you tremendous freedom creatively and technically. On a single
floorcloth, we may combine background washes, silkscreening,
freehand drawing, blockprinting, and spattering. Following
are some suggestions and explanations of tried and tested tech-
niques we use.

SPRAY BOTTLE — Use a spray bottle such as the kind used to
mist plants. You can fill it with diluted paint and spray a mist of
color, or fill sprayer with water and move the paint on your floor-
cloth before it dries.

WATERCOLORS — Thin paint with water for desired flow. Once
the underneath color is dry, multiple washes can be overpainted
without picking up the underlying color. Overlapped transpar-
ents create a see-through result adding dimension to the work.
Watered down opaques create an interesting grainy effect. Try
applying washes by various means: large brushes, odd brushes —
make your own, rags, spray bottles, sponges, etc.

AIRBRUSHING — Both Liquitex and
Setacolor can be thinned for an ideal air-
brushing consistency. Airbrushing on floor-
cloth offers wide design possibilities.

STAMPING — Stamps or blockprints can be
made from virtually anything. This is a won-
derful method to try. The look you achieve
is nearly always elemental and non-graphic;
and that simplicity is appealing.

Collect a box of inspiration. Photos, mag-
azine pictures and articles, cards... anything
that inspires you. You will find this box to be
a real help when it's difficult to conjure up
ideas. Try... sprockets, nuts, bolts. Bike tires,
cookie cutters, kitchen gadgets, terry towels,
chamois. Vegetables, fruit, leaves, shells,
bark, stone, styrofoam, rope, string, wood,
sponge, bottlecaps, cork, lace, textural fabric,
rug, underlay, soles of shoes. Buttons, noo-
dles, chopsticks, tiles, mini toys, puzzle
pieces. Anything at all! Anything... Really...

MAKING BLOCKPRINTS

- Glue things onto wood blocks.
- Cut designs from lino.
- Draw simple designs into styrofoam with
a thin brush and lacquer thinner. The
lacquer thinner eats away the styrofoam.
The block will be very non-graphic.
(go outside — it stinks)

It helps when stamping to put a soft pad
of cloth underneath. This gives the block
something to sink into, making the print
more vivid.

STENCILLING — Many precut stencils are
available or you can cut your own with a
good sharp knife. Cut stencils from heavy
paper, oaktag, or mylar. Apply paint using
a sponge, stencil brush, or roller. Use an up
and down stippling motion or a smooth
stroke starting in the middle so no paint
seeps under the edge. Work very, very dry.
This is the key to successful stenciling.

RAGGING & SPONGING — Crumpled rags or
any variety of sponges work marvelously for
textured backgrounds. Dip the sponge or
rag in paint and print. Or, rag/sponge wet
paint off the surface.

MARBLING & OTHER FAUX EFFECTS —
Faux techniques are very popular and work
extremely well on floorcloths. The tech-
niques are too comprehensive to go into in
this newsletter but Maiwa does offer an in-
depth two day workshop on these tech-
niques. We also carry some excellent books!

Tried and Tested Approaches — continued

SILKSCREENING — Silkscreening is another workshop that Maiwa teaches. During the Floorcloth Workshop, you have the opportunity to use the studio's screens and you will receive instruction on using them. A Silkscreen Workshop or a Faux Workshop would be very compatible with the Floorcloth Workshop. In the studio, we have been experimental with screening onto floorcloths. Studio artists have taken a section of screens and layered the images to create completely new effects. We have sprayed paint through the screen. We have squeegeed partial images. Areas of the screen can be masked off with tape and only a small section of the screen need be printed. Use the screen as the focal point, or for a repeat border or screen an image on and paint over it.

COLLAGE — Anything is possible with a floorcloth!! When embellishing or collaging be sure not to create any rough or sharp edges. Remember these cloths are to walk on. Add fabric — sew it on with colorful threads. Sew bits and pieces onto ungessoed canvas. Paint/print your patches. Paint around them! Cut out shapes — weave in and out of the shapes. (Be careful: large cutouts may not lay flat. Edges may be sharp!) Fray your edges, tie in some knots and colorful threads.

The Varnish

Once your floorcloth is painted and dry, it must be varnished to protect it and allow it to be walked on. Remember to heat set the Setacolors and allow paint to cure before varnishing. Doing so, ensures no paint smears or lifts. After much experimentation we found Liquitex Acrylic Varnish to be the best product and now we use only this for varnishing. Liquitex Acrylic Varnish comes in matte and gloss or they can be mixed to make semi-gloss. Varnish can be tinted with a bit of paint and water for glazes. After glazing, apply coats of varnish. **We recommend 3-5 coats of varnish.** Acrylic varnish is, for the most part, a suspension of solid plastic particles in water. The particles refract light and are milky in appearance. When the water evaporates and the acrylic particles come together, the varnish becomes clear. When brushing on varnish, the artist should keep two important things in mind. #1: do not overwork an area. There is a critical point when the particles come together and make a film. If you disturb this process by brushing the drying acrylic, it will cause clouding. #2: apply varnish, then leave it. When applying more than one coat, work quickly before the first coat begins to dry. If an area was missed, wait until varnish is completely dry before touching up any spots. On a large piece, you will have to wait between each coat. Don't apply varnish vigorously, particularly over textured areas as this will cause bubbles to form and dry in the work. Acrylic varnishes can be applied with a brush, paint pad, synthetic brush, or sprayed. Simply clean-up with water.

Solovar

This durable, non-yellowing varnish is an important final coat for pieces near a heat source or in high traffic areas. Solovar, the most advanced removable varnish on the market, comes in matte and gloss. Liquitex Acrylic Varnishes can be pressure sensitive in hot, humid weather causing your floorcloth to feel sticky. A coating of Solovar will prevent this. With time, your floorcloth may need cleaning beyond wiping. Remove the Solovar with a rag soaked in mineral spirits. This won't damage the underlying paints/varnish. Removing Solovar does require elbow grease. Re-coat with Solovar. Your cloth will be renewed.

Finishing The Edges and Caring For Your Floorcloth

Anyway is okay... hemmed or frayed. Gesso up to a line, then glue edge under. Roll the edge with a rolling pin to keep it down. Weigh it down while it dries.

Roll, don't fold your cloth. Acrylic paints and varnishes become brittle in cold weather. Don't flex floorcloths or roll and unroll in temperatures below 60°F. They should be placed on a hard surface, rather than carpet. If placed on carpeting, the floorcloth may eventually suffer small surface cracks. Day to day cleaning involves sweeping or sponging off. From time to time you may use a mild cleanser. Varnish both sides of a floorcloth that will get damp (in the bathroom/on the deck). To keep it lying flat on the floor use: two-sided tape, rugbacking, velcro, hot glue, small finishing nails, weights in the hem.

Other Nifty Ideas

Canvas umbrellas, outdoor canvas chair covers, cushion covers, table runners, placemats, stair runners, a painted canvas room divider, window panels.