

# STRETCHING & STEAMING

WHEN HANDPAINTING SILK AND OTHER FINE FABRICS

During painting, the silk must be fully suspended so it does not touch any surface. This requires the use of a frame. For some techniques the silk is easier to work on if it is very taut and for other techniques the silk may be looser. A frame may be constructed in many different ways. An old wooden picture frame, artists stretcher bars, an embroidery hoop, a batik frame, an adjustable frame, or bamboo fabric stretchers (called shinshi poles) are all possible frames for stretching silk.

The choice of frame will largely depend on the size of the silk you will be painting. The advantage of adjustable frames is that several sizes of silk can be done on one frame. Pieces which have already been cut and shaped or finished garments are difficult to paint — it is much easier to work with an oblong or square piece of silk.

## Constructing A Frame

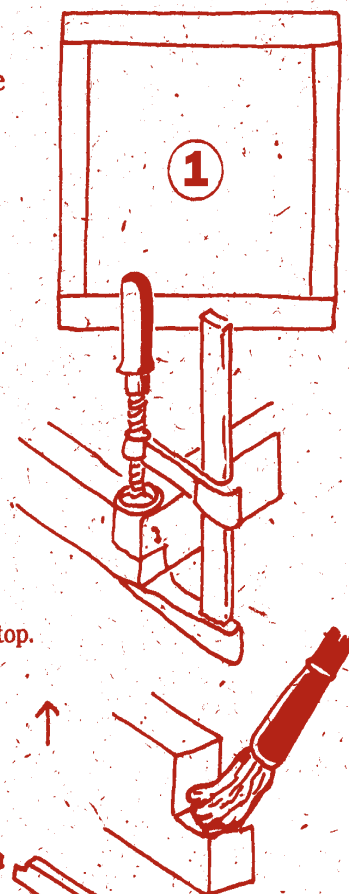
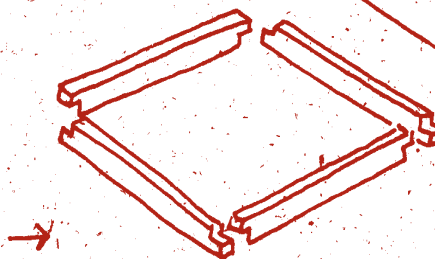
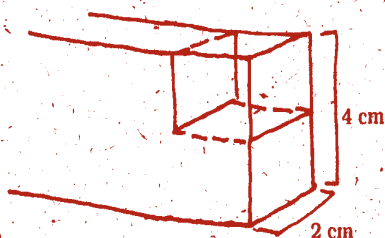
*Note: Choose a wood that is soft enough to allow pins to be pushed into it and strong enough not to twist while the silk is stretched.*

### Choice #1

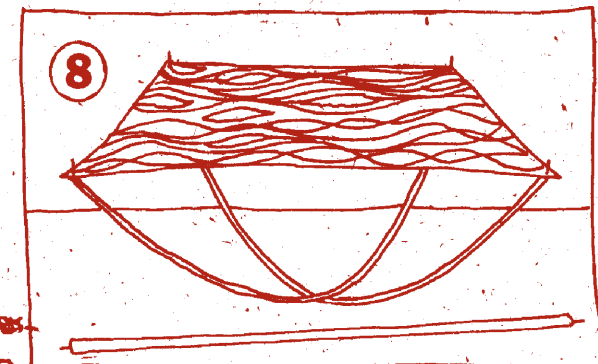
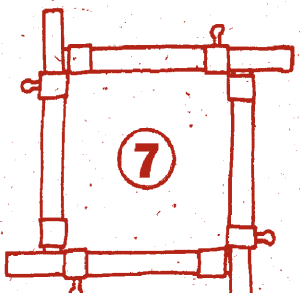
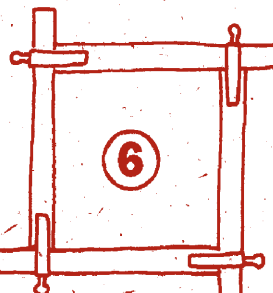
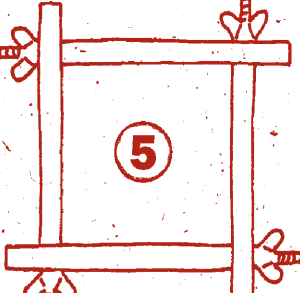
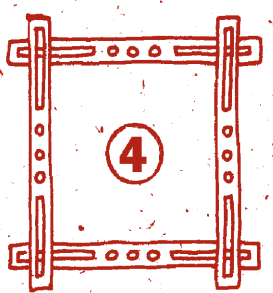
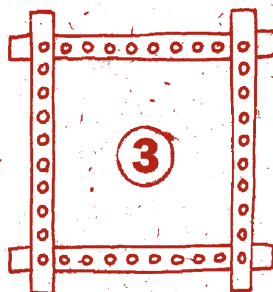
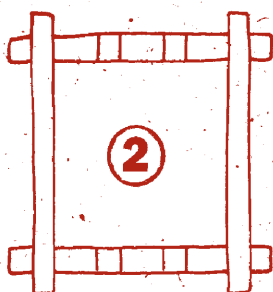
This is an easy way to make a solid wood frame. First, using wood with a cross section of approximately 2 cm x 4 cm, cut a square cube from each end.

Lay the pieces of wood in a square — they should be flush on top.

Put glue on the sawn ends and hold with a clamp. If the pieces of wood are longer than 46 cm (18 inches) you will need to reinforce the glued ends with a nail or screw.



- continued...



#### Choice #2

This frame has slots sawn out on each strip of wood to make the frame adjustable. No glueing or nailing is required. Just fit the slots together and then stretch the silk. This type of frame is not as stable as the solid frame but allows for size variations

#### Choices #3 and #4

These two adjustable frames can be made from wood with holes and/or slots and wing nuts. Sometimes metal shelving material can be found at hardware stores with holes or slots and this can also be used. It helps to purchase rubber protective caps for the wing nuts to raise the frame and hold it steady on a table. This type of screen is very easy to construct, however the silk is not stretched on one level.

#### Choices #5, #6, and #7

These three screens are constructed from wood and different joints available at hardware stores. #5 uses wing nuts bolted through slots on the side. The frame is altered by tightening or loosening the wing nut. #6 joins the four sides with metal corners fixed with screws. #7 joins the four pieces with metal guides fixed with screws

#### Choice #8

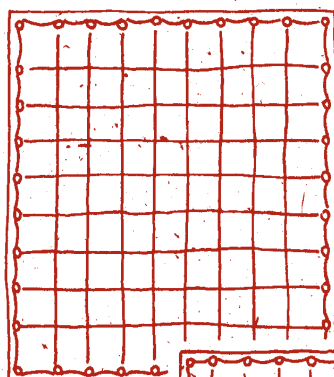
This method of stretching silk uses the Japanese bamboo fabric stretchers called shinshi poles. These are available at Maiwa Handprints in several sizes. The poles are thin, very flexible, and have tiny pins at either end. They are stretched across the bias of a square piece of silk or may be used from selvage to selvage on long pieces.

This method is very fast and allows for many variations in silk sizes but the silk will not be as tight as with a frame.

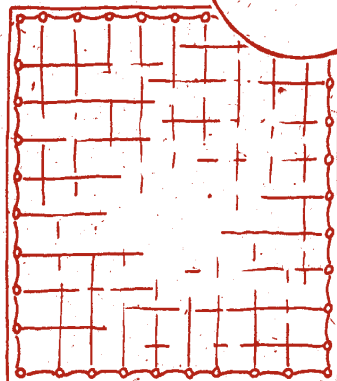
#### Attaching the Silk

Silk can be pinned directly into the frame. If this method is going to be used the frame should be varnished well so that dye can be wiped off. Any type of push pin may be used but the best kind are the three prong pins as they distribute the tension and lessen the chance of the silk tearing.

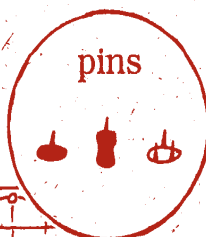
When stretching the silk in the frame, first fasten the four corners, then secure each side. The pins should not be placed directly opposite each other but staggered. This prevents stretching lines and keeps the silk flatter.



↑ pins even  
Wrong Way



pins staggered  
Right Way  
→



Silk may also be stretched onto a frame using tape or elastic bands and pins (illustration A). This method allows for greater flexibility of silk size and also keeps the dye from getting onto the frame. Place push pins along the sides of the frame. Wrap an elastic band around each push pin and attach it to the silk with a straight pin. Another way is to pin masking tape to the edge of the silk and attach it to the frame.

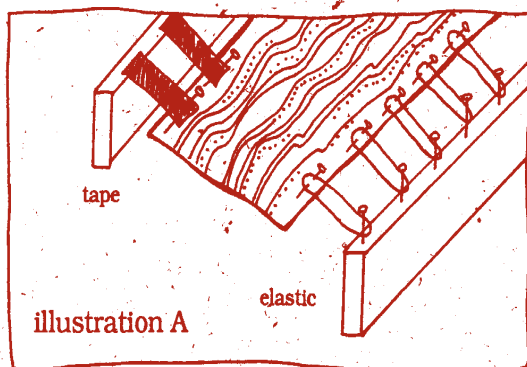


illustration A

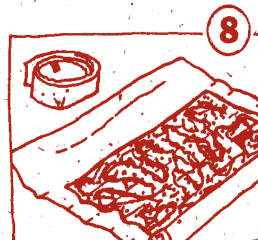
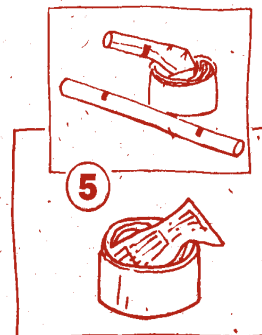
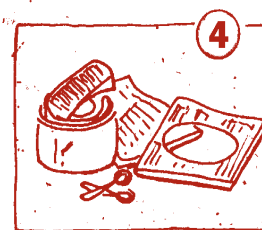
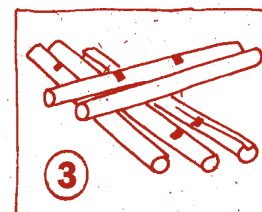
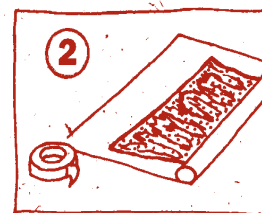
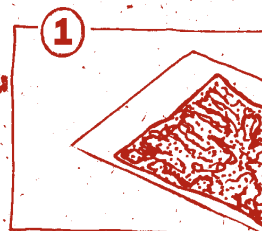
## STEAMING

Many fabric dyes require steam fixing to make them colorfast. Ideally, for consistent results, this should be done in a steamer. Dyes can be set with a steam iron or with a chemical fixative, however steaming brings out the colors more beautifully and vividly than any other method.

### STEAMING SMALL PIECES

This method is good for steaming pieces up to two square meters or yards.

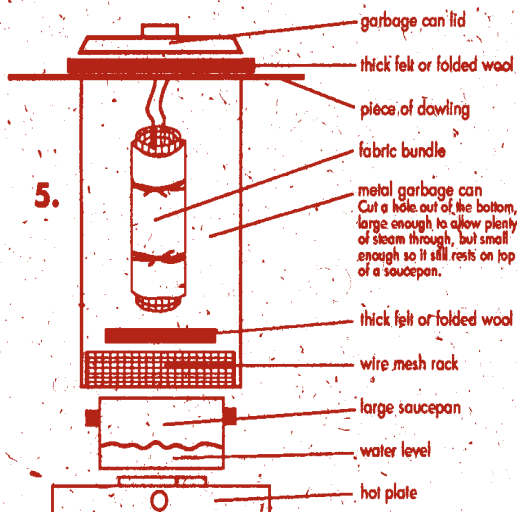
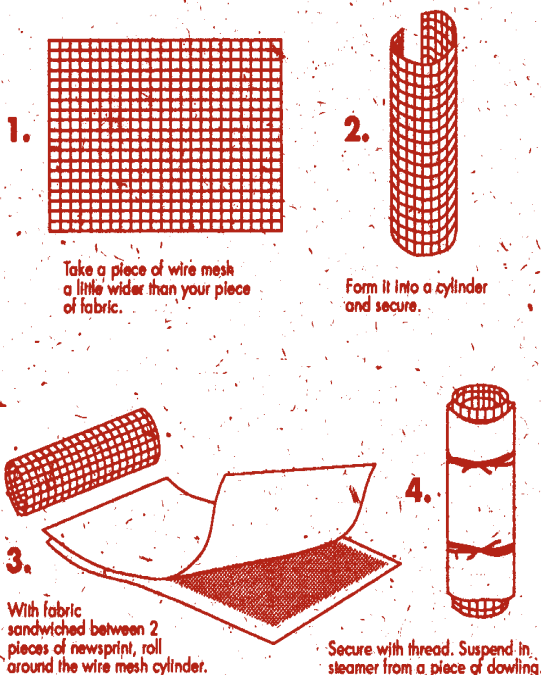
1. Lay dry silk on newsprint.
  2. Roll up so no part of the silk comes into contact with another part.
  3. Secure the paper with tape.
  4. Line the base and sides of a metal vegetable steamer with a thick layer of newsprint. (This prevents condensation forming and dripping onto the bundle of silk). A bamboo steamer may be used and this does not require lining with newsprint.
  5. Place the rolls of silk in a spiral shape in the steamer.
  6. Place a thick layer of newsprint on top of the steamer.
  7. Place steamer on top of a pot of boiling water. Steam for the duration required for the dye used. Make sure the water is always boiling and the steam is hot.
  8. Unroll silk immediately after taking out of steamer. Allow to cool and then rinse according to dye directions.
- Steaming continued...





## STEAMING LARGER PIECES

This method is good for steaming pieces larger than two square meters.



## STEAMING IN A MICROWAVE

Certain types of steaming may be done in a microwave. In cases where the fabric can remain wet throughout the steaming process, a microwave is an easy way of fixing dyes.

To steam in a microwave you will need a microwaveable container that is just used for dyes. For doing small pieces of fabric such as a silk scarf, place the fabric into the container. Sprinkle dyes onto the fabric, cover with a lid, and microwave for between 3 to 4 minutes on high.

For setting dyes in yarn, simply paint the dye onto the yarn, wrap in saran wrap, and place in microwave for 4 to 6 minutes on high. This is the method Malwa Handprints Studio uses for all our variegated yarn dyeing. We use the Pebeo Silk dye for our wool and silk yarn. We presoak our skeins in a mixture of 50% vinegar and 50% water for approximately one hour. We gently squeeze the skeins out and then handpaint anywhere from 2 to 8 colors onto them. We then wrap the skeins in saran wrap so no two areas are touching, and microwave for 6 minutes. We carefully take the skein out of the saran wrap and allow them to cool down. We then go through the rinsing process.

It is important to remember that with a microwave fabric must never go in dry. Do not use resist on fabric except for ikat (tie and dye). Always use containers designated just for dyeing rather than food containers. Always do tests as microwaves vary in power.

