The Art of Silk Fusion

by Tamara Leberer

Sponsored by Bernina of America, eQuilter.com, Treenway Silks, Sew Steady, Dharma Trading Co.

I discovered silk fusion when I was searching for new and interesting textiles to use in my art quilts. My world all but exploded after discovering it!

Silk fusion is a fabric made from silk fibers. It is vibrant, bright, and luscious to stitch. It offers a rich, luxurious shine and intense colors while preserving a soft supple tactile experience. As an artist, working with a fabric you create from raw fibers is incredibly rewarding.

Silk fusion can be used alone or combine it with your favorite fabrics and textiles. Each piece is exciting and original. It is the perfect material for fusible work and machine appliqué because it does not fray when cut. It can be quilted, manipulated, and molded into bows and vases. The surface can be stenciled, painted, stamped, beaded, and used in collage, jewelry, and book covers. It also provides a fantastic drawing surface for inks, oil pastels, and acrylic paints.

This article will show you how easy the process is by demonstrating how to make a beautiful abstract landscape.

Directions

Prepare the base

1. Cover the work surface with a plastic drop cloth.
2. Cut 2 pieces of fiberglass screen. The screens should be at least 2" larger on all sides than the final desired piece of silk fusion.
3. Pull off (don’t cut) a section of silk roving, 8”–12” long. Hold your hands 8”–12” apart. Separating a section of silk fibers should feel smooth. The silk should slide through your fingers. Now separate this section into 3 or 4 workable segments about the diameter of a pencil.
4. Holding a segment of fibers in your right hand, place 1 end of the segment down on the top of the screen. Use 2 or 3 fingers or the palm of your other hand to hold this end of the fibers against the screen, and gently pull the fibers horizontally across the screen.
small wisp of silk fiber (a small part of the hank in your primary hand) will be left on the screen. Continue this process moving down the screen, slightly overlapping fibers as you go. This should create a column of fibers about 18” long.

5. Create a second column of fiber alongside the first, overlapping by 1”. Continue adding columns of fiber until the piece is about 10” wide. The screen should be barely visible beneath the silk.

Add layers of silk

1. Select the colors of silk roving you want to use. Lay the fibers at right angles to the un-dyed layer. Cover the entire piece again in the same manner as before, this time dividing the piece in thirds with different colors (if desired). I used Vesuvius Bay, Sunset, and Duck Creek in the sample shown.

Tip: Do not let the long segments of fiber fall from your hand and drag across the first layer of silk when placing subsequent layers of silk fiber. Hold excess silk securely in your hand.

2. Add other decorative fibers such as silk sari threads and Angelina fibers.

When the top is thoroughly wet, turn the sandwich over and repeat the wetting process on the bottom screen. The screen and silk sandwich will darken and become very flat with no air pockets when the water has soaked through.

3. Blot excess water from the sandwich with a sponge or towel. Rub a finger along the surface of the sandwich. If a bead of water forms, there is still too much water on the silk, blot until no beads form but the silk still seems saturated.

Apply textile medium

1. Measure approximately 2–3 ounces of textile medium into a cup. Pour approximately half of the medium directly on top of the screen and spread it evenly and thoroughly onto the wetted silk with a paintbrush. It should create an even, milky look. Apply firm pressure with the brush to encourage the adhesive to move through all layers of silk.

2. Turn the sandwich over and apply the rest of the textile medium in the same manner.

3. Leave the sandwich to sit for 5–10 minutes, allowing the textile medium to soak through all the fibers.

4. Blot excess textile medium with a sponge or towel with light pressure. Rub a finger along the surface of the sandwich. If a bead of liquid forms, there is still too much textile medium on the silk.

Tips for Working with Silk Roving

It is not strictly necessary to apply layers perpendicularly—they can be applied at any angle you desire—but your piece will hold together better if the direction of the fibers alternates.

Any air movement from a fan or a breeze (not to mention pets and briskly walking family members) can cause the fibers to fly away. Keep all fans off and doors/windows closed during the first steps.

Silk fibers are a poor conductor of electricity and are susceptible to static cling. Keep a dryer sheet close by to rub static off of your hands and clothing.

1. Add mild soap to warm water at a ratio of approximately 1 quarter-size dollop of soap to 1 cup of water. Liquid hand soap or dish soap both work fine. Wet the silk by pouring the soap and water solution over the screen and then moving the liquid around with a paintbrush to evenly wet the fibers. The fibers must be thoroughly wet. Since silk naturally repels water, soap is necessary as a surfactant, helping the fibers accept the water and, later, textile medium.

2. Apply pressure to the wet screen with the brush to ensure water penetrates all layers of the silk.
5. Create a small area of selvedge by lightly pushing 1” of the loose edges into a thicker roll or handle.

6. Lay the sandwich flat to dry. Turn the piece as it is drying. Drying times vary according to the thickness of the piece and humidity; expect 8–10 hours of drying time.

**Note:** Do not dry the piece in direct sunlight, as it is destructive to silk.

**Release the silk**

1. Freeing a piece of silk fusion from the screen is a magical moment! When the sandwich is completely dry, slowly peel the screens away, 1 at a time. If the piece is not completely dry, it will be difficult to separate it from the screen and the fiber layers will pull apart. Dried silk fusion is amazingly strong and you can apply quite a bit of pressure pulling it from the screen. Start from the selvedge edge you created as a handle.

   **Note:** After about 3 uses, I usually throw my screens away and start with fresh, clean screens as they get stickier with each use.

2. Set the textile medium. Press the fusion piece on the silk setting of an iron. Always use a pressing sheet or parchment paper to prevent sticking. Now that you have a piece of silk fusion, the fun has just begun! What will you do with your piece? To complete this landscape, I pinned it to a black felt background, free-motion quilted it to my heart’s content, and couched down some vibrant embellishments—silk sari ribbon and yarn as well as scraps of fabric and cotton/wool yarns.

tamaraleberer.com

**Resources**

- Silk Roving, Recycled Silk Thread, La Sonja Textile Medium
- Silk Fusion
- tamaraleberer.com

Examples of silk roving