

# PAINTING PICTURES WITH FILIGREE

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Filigree techniques with Art Clay Silver syringes are still in their infancy and many artists shy away from the use of syringes because a steady hand and a certain amount of practise is necessary to achieve high quality results. This presentation is to show how to use syringes for maximum control to create artwork in your silver that has realism and depth.

## 1. Holding the syringe

The key to successful syringing is how you hold the syringe. The Japanese technique is often suggested – holding the syringe like a brush for Japanese or Chinese brush painting. I do not consider that this gives sufficient control unless you are a Chinese brush painter! The technique that I have developed is shown here. This has proved a great success in workshops at all levels. The following instructions are for a right-handed person. Please reverse them if you are left-handed.

1. Hold the syringe in your left hand and use the thumb of that hand to depress the plunger.
2. Grasp the syringe as though it was a pencil or brush with your right hand, holding it below the left hand as shown.
3. Your right hand is used to draw with and guide the syringe while the left hand applies the necessary pressure to extrude the slip. This avoids the same hand having to apply pressure as well as draw which can cause shaking and lack of control.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL SYRINGE LINES:

- Work on a tile so that you can turn the piece as you work for the best angle for your hand.
- Always pull the syringe towards you as you extrude a line.
- For the thick and medium tips (grey and green), begin each line with a dab down to anchor it, then raise the tip of the syringe about 5mm (1/4in) in the air and extrude, letting the clay line fall into place and stretching it slightly. Do not stretch too much or the line will be too fine.
- For the fine tip (blue), anchor the line at the beginning and end in the same way, but work closer to the surface, or even with the tip touching the surface, in order to control the line.
- Finish the line with another dab down to anchor the end and sever the line of clay.
- Mistakes are best corrected with a damp paintbrush.
- Use a hair drier or heat gun to set the syringe lines every few minutes so that they retain maximum relief.

## DEMO – TYPES OF SYRINGE LINES

Straight lines, curved lines, scrolls and spirals, dots and dashes, zigzag, borders, outline and fill.

### 2. Syringing on a flat clay sheet

This is the easiest technique. Roll out a sheet of ACS about 1mm thick. Dry and refine as required. Sand over the surface as you will not be able to do this after syringing. Draw your design on the surface lightly with a pencil. Mistakes can be sanded off. Apply the syringe lines over your pencil lines. There is no need to wet the surface first – the syringing sticks firmly to the backing clay sheet. Single fine lines are possible with this method as they are supported by the underlying clay sheet – there is no need to apply several layers of lines.



### 3. Openwork Syringing

This is the most spectacular type of syringing and is also the most fragile. Thoroughly clean a white ceramic tile and transfer your design to this with pencil so that you work directly on the tile. Use either the thick or the medium tip for the outline. Use the fine (blue) or green tips for the interior lines. Work in the following order:

1. 1 layer of outline
2. 2 layers of internal lines (or more if using a fine tip).
3. Final layer of outline (thick tip) or two layers for medium tip.

Dry the piece thoroughly – I like to place it in the domestic over for 30 minutes on 150°C (300°F). When dry the piece should slide easily off the tile and can be fired by torch, gas hob or kiln. Instead of using syringed lines for the outline, you can also use fine logs of clay. These can suggest branches, reeds, leaves etc.



## EMBELLISHING IDEAS

### **POLYMER CLAY**

This is an ideal way to colour the background of a piece of filigree – and the polymer clay provides support for the silver as well. Roll out polymer clay about 1mm thick.

### **BLEND**

For tiny blends, lay several logs of different colours together and roll them flat in the direction of the logs (or pass through a pasta machine). Fold in half across the resulting stripes and roll again. Continue until the bands of colour begin to merge where they meet into a gradual blend. (Note: A Skinner blend produces bands that are too wide for small pieces such as this.)



### **MARBLING**

To make a sheet of beautiful detailed marbled swirls to back silver filigree, first press together several small logs of contrasting colour. Roll them together into a single log, fold in half and repeat until the lines of colour are very fine. Flatten the log into a pancake and roll flat.



### **RESIN**

Resin works very well with metal clay. My favourite brand is Envirotex Light. This can be coloured with oil paint to make an amazing range of colours. It is more transparent than enamel and can give deep pools of colour.

- Mix up the resin following the instructions – usually one part resin to one part hardener.
- Let the resin thicken a little so that it is less likely to bleed under the syringe lines
- It is best to do a transparent base coat first to fill any small gaps in the syringing. Alternatively you can varnish the piece.
- Mix tiny quantities of oil paint into the resin. Use a tile and a palette knife so that the oil paint is fully mixed in.
- Use a thick needle or toothpick to drip the resin into the different areas. You can apply different colours to the piece and drag a needle through to create multicolour effects.
- Cover the piece with an up-turned cardboard box and leave to set. Envirotex sets touch dry in about one hour and fully overnight.
- Check the piece during the first hour to ensure that the resin has not crept into unwanted areas.
- The resin can be filed and sanded if required but the top surface is a wonderful glassy sheen so this is rarely necessary unless unwanted drips have formed.
- Clear resin can be used over polymer clay backed pieces.

