

# Mary Fiore batiks

## Background

Becoming a batik artist was not planned. It had its beginnings in the chaos of taking twenty credits while trying to finish an art degree at Tulsa University before a planned move back to Arizona when I was a young mother. "Crafts" was on the list of requirements, and having never done a batik before, but with no time in my already full class schedule, I chose that as an independent study class to fulfill that specific requirement. I immediately fell in love with the process, one which can be controlled but which has an element of the unexpected and requires flexibility.

## Process

"How do you do that and how much time does it take you to finish one batik?" are questions frequently asked. It is not as complicated as one may think, but it is a bit messy and requires several wait times during the process. Batik is a resist form that is created on fabric with hot wax and dyes. The initial step is the subject matter, a beautiful scene, a place, a face, all from photos I have taken, often with a batik in mind.

From my photo, I sketch the drawing onto paper, heavily outlining it with a marking pen, then lay the cotton fabric over it and trace the lines of the design. The fabric is then stretched taut onto a wood frame (my first ones were stretched over the top of a cardboard box) and hot wax (a mixture of paraffin and beeswax) is painted directly onto the lightest color of the fabric and working to the darkest. The wax penetrates the fabric, resisting any dyes, and all areas to remain white are waxed first. The fabric is then removed from the frame and dipped into the first dyebath (the lightest color) with additives that allow the dyes to adhere to and permanently bond with the fabric. The piece is then allowed to dry, rinsed, left to dry, and the entire process is repeated (stretching it over the frame and painting hot wax over the areas to remain the color that was just dyed). The process requires planning and a knowledge of color, for the dyes are overdyed with one another (yellow overdyed with red produces orange, then overdyed with blue produces brown). This process continues until the dipping of the final and darkest color. Because some colors do not overdye well, it is good to know the color wheel. Once the hot wax is painted onto the fabric, it's a done deal. There is

no going back, no correcting—there is only the opportunity to take that accidental drip and incorporate it into the finished product, a kind of “I meant to do that.”

The major characteristic of a batik is the “crackle,” the dark spider web lines that appear throughout the design. That is obtained by bending or “scrunching” the fabric right before the final dyebath and creates cracks in the wax, which allow the dye to penetrate. This can be controlled, depending on the amount of scrunching as well as the kind of wax (paraffin is more brittle and results in more crackle, while a higher level of the more pliable beeswax results in less crackle).

After the final dyebath, the piece is nearly covered in dried wax and difficult to see. The wax is then removed, ironing it between many sheets of newsprint, which soak up the wax. The piece is then stretched onto a backing, matted, and framed.

Mostly, I love batik because of the result—when the entire piece is nearly covered with wax, removing it in the final step is an “unveiling” of sorts, and can result in a great sense of satisfaction (or sometimes in a great disappointment), but it’s always a learning process and a little bit of a surprise. I like that.

### **Subject Matter**

My choice of subject matter is mostly defined by my observations of life as it is—the beauty of ordinary days, of the places and people that inhabit our world, scenes of life that surround me. Because I lived in Arizona for 20+ years, I have found that the desert plants are good subject matter – thus, so many prickly pear cacti. Most recently I have done pieces that relate to the beautiful Wisconsin prairies that surround us

Along with batik, I enjoy watercolors, pen and ink sketches, and creating photo cards. I pay attention to faces, landscapes, animals, whatever is right here, in my

world. We tend to think that the interesting things in life are far away, in other cultures and places, when in fact we are surrounded with it all right here.

I have participated in the Art Walk for several years, and although it makes me happy to have someone love a piece enough for it to grace their home, just as much I enjoy meeting people that come to see my work and to learn more about the process.

Welcome to the Marquette Art Walk!

*Mary Fiore*

Note: I do not have a website but can be reached through email ([mffior@charter.net](mailto:mffior@charter.net)) or cell (608-609-1844)