

# The GOLD RUSH! *Gilding for the 21st Century*

## HOW TO GILD WITHOUT GOING TOTALLY CRAZY OR GETTING LEAD POISONING!

I know you've heard about the mystic art of "laying" gold... it's enough to make you run away in terror! You have to learn how to make slaked plaster, how much fish glue, white lead and other arcane ingredients need to be mixed at what mysterious ratios, and on a day of a full moon when the raven flies north! ... or something similar to that!

Since starting the year with the Reggie classes, his students have been exposed to a new and EASY way to use REAL gold to gild various calligraphic pieces! The ingredients are simple and easy to use and the results are almost as good as results using the arcane gesso method. However, nothing will completely replace the nuances allowed by traditional gesso gilding.

---

**INSTACOLL** - is described as an architectural gilding base. It is designed to cover very large areas: walls, ceilings, statues, enormous signage. In this architectural sense it is a two part process. In the first step a large area is painted entirely with the gilding base (the one we use for calligraphic purposes). Because it is a time sensitive liquid and when too dry not useful, a second coat or "activator" is painted over it to allow it to once again become sticky so the gold leaf will stick. For our purposes, we only use the base coat. In most instances of nor-

mal "humidity" you will have anywhere from 30-60 minutes that the base will be receptive to allow the gold to stick reliably. Using the classic "heavy breathing" method will help to some extent, but once it's too dry a 2nd coat will need to be applied then continue the gilding process.

No technical information is given by the manufacturer as to its composition. It behaves like an acrylic. It can be thinned with water and once dry is impervious to moisture.

---

### TOOLS & SUPPLIES

---

- 1 small pointed brush for acrylics - use only for Instacoll
- popsicle or chopstick to stir Instacoll
- small mixing pan to prepare Instacoll
- Pointed pen such as Brause EF66
- Distilled water
- Glassine paper
- Letraset "spoon" shaped burnisher

- 1 square of soft SILK for burnishing (about 4-6" square)
- Clean sharp scissors
- Acetone to clean tools (*find in nail polish aisle - make sure it says 100% acetone!*)
- Large, soft, clean watercolor brush to brush off excess gold
- A good calligraphic paper such as 90-140 lb Arches Hot press or Arches Text Wove for your masterpiece!

- 
- Turn all fans OFF! (very important!)
  - To begin your gilding experience set up your workspace with all your supplies at hand and ready to go.
  - Clean your scissors with a paper towel doused with Acetone and lay it on a clean piece of paper toweling. (*let the paper towel air dry to avoid spontaneous combustion*)
  - Have your paper with the design you wish to be gilded drawn on it very lightly with a hard lead pencil (*use a guard sheet under your hand to keep the oils and dirt off your artwork. You may also use a larger clean sheet of paper and cut a window the size of your gilding to lay over your project and protect it*)
  - With a clean popsicle stick, stir the Instacoll in the jar DO NOT SHAKE. Put a small amount in a section of your mixing pan. Fill 2 or 3 sections in the pan with more distilled water to clean your brush as you work.
  - Thin the Instacoll with a drop or two of distilled water if necessary. It should be easily flowable like lettering gouache.
  - Wet your small acrylic brush and then begin to paint the outline of the design with the Instacoll. Let this outline serve as a corral for the Instacoll as you flood the inside of the area with more Instacoll. It should mound up like a pillow.
  - Use the pointed pen to add definition and build up more fluid to sharpen corners and thin areas that need more body. Use the pen to "pull" the liquid, do not touch it to the paper as it will pull paper fibers loose.
  - Rinse your brush out often in the distilled water of your mixing pan otherwise it will quickly gum up and dry in your brush. Constantly stir and mix the Instacoll.
  - It will take about 10-20 minutes for it to dry enough to add your second coat of Instacoll. You will notice the Instacoll

may have a slight dimple in the middle when dry. You can try to fill in the dimple with a 3rd application by carefully smoothing on another coat in the dimpled area.

*Highly raised areas of Instacoll are fine for broadsides, but you will want to keep the gilding base thinner for books to avoid damage when closing & opening.*

- You have a window of opportunity of between 30 and 60 minutes while the Instacoll will be receptive of the gold. It's a good idea to write down the time you lay the Instacoll.
- With the clean scissors carefully cut a piece of the gold on the receiver sheet. It should be large enough to cover the area you're looking to gild. Work in small "batches" to avoid the Instacoll drying too quickly if you're gilding a lot of words or items.
- Skin oils are the bane of gilding so keep your tools on clean paper towels when not in use and clean when necessary with Acetone
- Patent gold is easier to handle as it is lightly "tacked" to the carrier sheet & won't float away so easily. The loose gold takes a little more practice to get it to settle on the Instacoll with ease but will have a somewhat brighter affect.
- You will need to work on a hard surface when burnishing
- Lean close to your work and breath deeply on the area you will gild. Breath deeply from the lungs to get moisture on the Instacoll
- Once you have gently layed the gold onto the Instacoll, press it down thru the tissue with the fleshy part of your finger.
- Take away the tissue carrier sheet and carefully cover the gold with a piece of Glassine (about 5" square). Stretch it

- tautly between your thumb and finger and use the fleshy part of your finger to press the gold down into the Instacoll
- Then use your finger nail and burnish as much as you can. It's not so much how hard you burnish but how attentive you are to make sure to get all areas burnished down.
  - Once you've burnished well with your nail, use the tip of the burnisher to tuck into and around the edges, then use the spoon shaped part of the burnisher to burnish over the surface area of the gilding. Be sure you burnish the whole area.
  - Take away the glassine, have another piece of gold ready for the second layer of gold.
  - If you note areas not gilded, breathe deeply on the surface. Although gold will stick to gold, you might be able to activate any areas un-gilded. Carefully add the second layer, or if some of the excess gold can be "backfolded" over the area use the edge of the glassine to coax it back over the area.
  - Repeat the burnishing tactics discussed earlier.
  - Once you are sure you've burnished every area and especially the edges, wrap the piece of silk around your finger and gently rub away the excess gold - VOILA! Done!
  - Check to see if there are spots where the gold didn't adhere by laying a piece of glassine over the gold. Ungilded places will show as dark spots.
  - Once you've burnished with the silk, you can't go back and add more gold. You will need to lay another coat of Instacoll over areas that need a bit of repair.
  - The more gold layers and burnishing with the Letraset burnisher the shinier and brighter the gold will be.

- Always use at least TWO layers of gold for the best affect.
- Gold sticks to gold (before burnishing with the silk) so by activating the first layer of gold by breathing on it, this should allow the next layer to stick. If it doesn't want to adhere, you will need to add another layer of Instacoll and repeat the steps discussed earlier.
- Brush off any excess from your piece with a very soft large watercolor brush. Be careful to go softly so as not to let the bristles scratch the delicate gold.

*Do not think that more burnishing with the silk will make the gold shine more. You can go too far and actually rub off the gold. If you want it brighter, add another layer of Instacoll and lay on a 3rd layer of gold before burnishing with the silk.*

**REPAIRS:** If a bit of gold sticks outside the gilding area you can gently remove it by using a clean white vinyl eraser or Xacto. (The thin vinyl kind can be cut to a point to get close to the edges of the gilding.) For more stubborn areas you can gently scrape it off with an Xacto knife if necessary. Then use the vinyl eraser again to lift off any remnants of gold.

It's best to gild before painting as the gold will stick to anything that is in any way tacky or sticky. Some gouaches, paints or inks may have enough binder in them to cause the gold to stick to them. Gilding first avoids this problem.

You can set off the gilding by painting around the gilded area with darker colors causing the gold to really "pop".

---

## SUPPLIERS

---

- **Paper, Ink Arts / [www.paperinkarts.com](http://www.paperinkarts.com)**  
[www.paperinkarts.com/en-us/dept\\_50.html](http://www.paperinkarts.com/en-us/dept_50.html)  
Papers, Glassine, pen nibs, Instacoll, gold leaf, burnishers and other calligraphic supplies.

- **Instacoll:**

**The Gold Leaf Company:**

[www.goldleafcompany.com](http://www.goldleafcompany.com)

Steve Martinez at (718) 815-8802

**GOLD LEAF:** Right now thru October 29 Jerry's Artarama is having a sale on "genuine Gold Leaf" 23.9 K \$26.99 / this is a good price. Jerry's also carries various composite metal leaf choices that can be used with Instacoll.

[www.jerrysartarama.com/art-supply-stores/online/895](http://www.jerrysartarama.com/art-supply-stores/online/895)

The best hand-beaten gold leaf in the United States is in Chicago - Wehrung & Billmeier

<http://storefront.dexonline.com/w-b-gold-leaf-wehrung-billmeier>

**PLEASE NOTE:** the minimum amount of Instacoll you can generally purchase is 100 ml at most outlets so you may want to team up with other interested people as that much Instacoll will be enough to cover your bedroom wall!

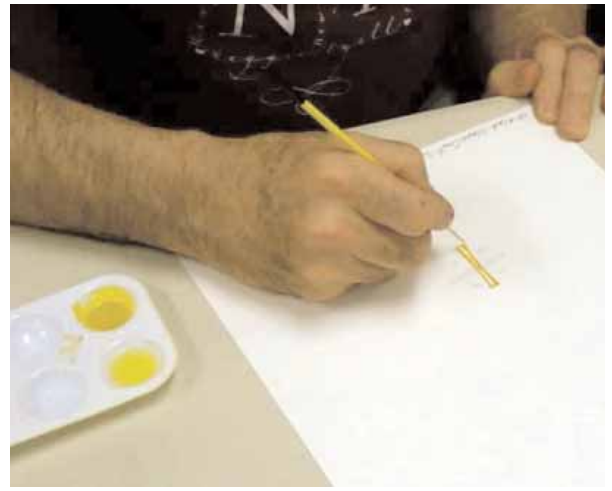
---

Types of Gold & Metal Leaf for Gilding

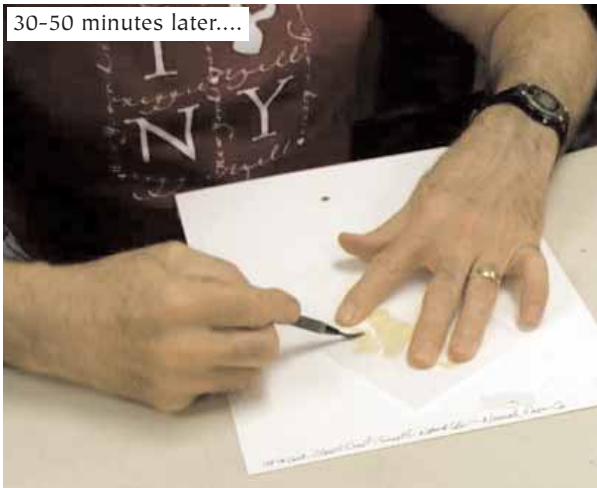
- 24K purest leaf - thinnest and most susceptible to "fly away" some say they can see a brighter difference from 23K.
- 23K gold leaf - patent and looseleaf uses the same gold / the patent is attached to the carrier sheet (23K - actually is 23.9K)
- precious metals are 3" square, cheaper composite metal leaf is 5 1/2" square
- 22K gold leaf - looks greener and is cheaper; pay the extra for 23K and see the superior results.
- Lemon gold - sweet color! sign painters on glass will often put lemon and traditional gold near each other for contrast.
- White gold - will tarnish; cover with a coat of gloss medium to prevent tarnishing. (do not thin medium with water)
- Silver leaf will tarnish and is thicker and harder to get adherence than is loose or patent gold.
- Palladium - similar in appearance to other white gold or silver leaf and more \$\$
- Aluminum - not precious metal; really thick; difficult to stick; cheap and doesn't oxidize; will stick if Instacoll layer is slightly tacky - acceptable alternative for silver if price is an issue!
- There are various colored metal leaf that can be used. They are thicker and the Instacoll will need to be slightly tacky for good adherence (these are made of oxidized metals such as copper)



After you've stirred (*not shaken*) the Instacoll put a small amount in a paint palette and also put distilled water in 2 or 3 places in the palette to clean and thin the Instacoll.



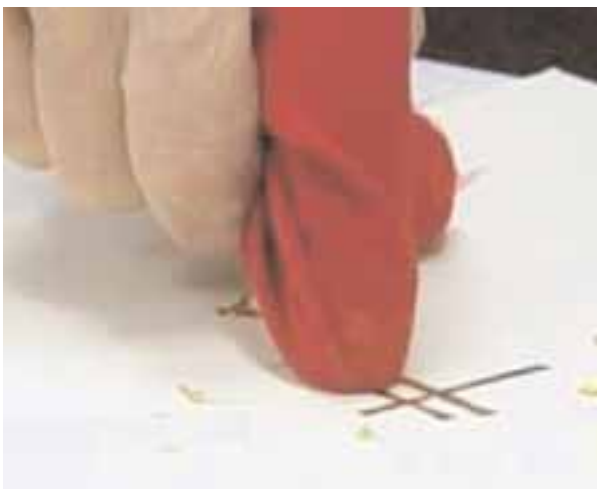
Wet a small acrylic brush in distilled water before dipping in the Instacoll & outline the area you will be gilding then flood the interior area. Use a pointed pen to "pull" wet Instacoll to make sharp corners and edges, etc. Clean brush often. Add 2nd coat after 1st coat is dry.



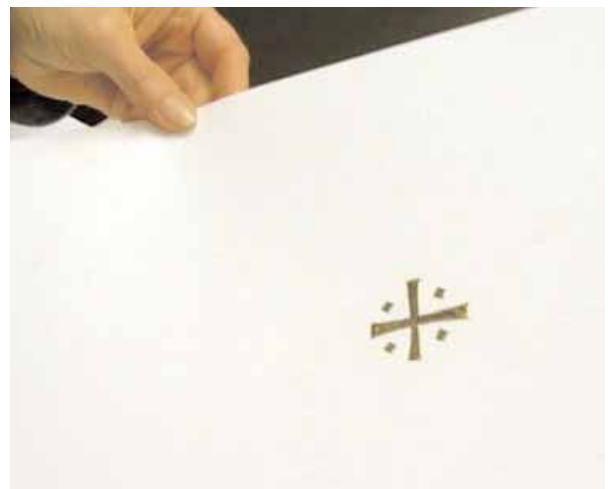
After breathing on Instacoll, press gold onto base with finger. Cover with glassine paper. Burnish with finger nail then spoon-shaped burnisher. Make sure to burnish with the tip around edges then the surface with the spoon shape of the burnisher.



Remove glassine.... breathe heavily again on layered gold and place a second swatch of gold on top of first layer, burnish as before. Although gold will stick to gold, breathing on any un-gilded areas may help in adherence of the 2nd layer.



Wrap a piece of silk around index finger and burnish off the excess gold....don't get too carried away and rub the gold off, however! Check for missed areas by putting a piece of glassine over the gilding. Missed areas will appear dark.



VOILA! Your gilding is done!

## PATENT GOLD LEAF

### Process for applying flat patent gold leaf

1. Make your design with very light pencil. It is best to trace it onto your final smooth paper so as not to have erasers on the final work. If you have to erase it will lift some of the fibers of the paper and leave lumps under your gold leaf that you will not see until it is applied.
2. With a very fine brush drop some of the Instacoll or Ormoline into the design until you have a bubble of fluid – you will then gently pull it out to the edges of your design adding more fluid as needed to complete the task. This has to be done in a fairly quick time frame because you do not want it to start drying until you have covered the design completely.
3. Let dry – you can see that the surface becomes a bit more matte in appearance when it has dried – 20-30 minutes.
4. Apply another coat of Instacoll or Ormoline and let that dry as well.
5. When ready to apply the gold leaf, you must have everything ready at hand, which includes: a tube for blowing onto the surface of the size, the patent gold leaf, clean scissors, silk for burnishing, a clean brush to get rid of excess gold around the edges, and clean dry hands.
6. After burnishing you can emboss onto the surface of the gold with a very fine embossing tool over glassine. It is also recommended to go around the edges of your design to “finish” the edge and make it stand up just a little.

#### Notes:

Gold will stick to any size and since gouache has a sizing agent, it will stick to that too unless you mask off everything except the area that you are gilding. Gold is generally applied last after you have finished doing the calligraphy work.

Instacoll can be applied over sculpted medium base after that has dried. Instacoll is a little thicker and used for more raised gilding, whereas Ormoline is thinner and more for flat gilding.

*Brushes used for gilding should not be used for anything else.* Wash out the brush for applying the liquids immediately after using to get all of the sizing removed from the brush.

Patent or Transfer Gold Leaf means that the gold has been pressed onto a thin sheet of glassine or tissue that “holds” it until you are ready to apply it. It makes handling gold leaf a lot easier than loose gold leaf, which requires more tools and care in handling. Loose gold leaf can be applied over both Instacoll and Ormoline, and is generally shinier.

Both Instacoll and Ormoline are available on line from John Neal Bookseller.

Patent (transfer) gold leaf is available from many art suppliers in the US including Wehrung & Billmeier in Chicago, and in the UK at Cornelissen & Sons.