

# Image Transfers Using Gel Medium



## *Supplies:*

Matte Medium (Golden or Liquitex)

Matte Gel Medium (Golden or Liquitex) Stay away from Heavy Gels, they are too hard to roll evenly.

Matte Acrylic Varnish

Deft (Nitro Cellulose Lacquer)

Xerox copies of your images on good paper.

Clean, fine 3-4" foam roller

Plastic, glass or ceramic plate. 8" x 8" piece of plexi works well.

Hard rubber brayer (used for printmaking).

## Preparing your wood and image

- Use Xerox copies of your images for transfers. Ink Jet or Laser prints may work, I don't use them so do samples first! I use only Kinko's color copies since other places sometimes use thinner cheaper paper and that is harder to work with. I also make color copies on the B/W setting for black and white images. Remember to mirror your image since you are putting them down, image side first. This is especially important if you're using text.
- Prepare your wood as if you're going to paint it (sand to 120 or 180). Or paint the surface using acrylic or latex paint. Make sure there are no brush strokes in the paint since that will hinder the image from being "glued" down evenly and will cause the image to rub off in areas.
- Using a very clean, fine foam roller, roll on a thin layer of *Matte Medium* or *Gel Medium* on the wood surface. This will create a thin barrier and stop the wood from immediately absorbing the gel medium when doing the transfer. If you are transferring onto a painted surface, the paint will act as the barrier.
- At the same time, roll a very thin layer of *Matte Medium*, or *Gel Medium* onto the image side of your copy. Make sure there is no visible or tactile texture left by the roller. Keep rolling until texture is gone. For both the preparing of the wood and image *Matte Medium* is my preferred medium, but if you only want to purchase the *Gel Medium*, that can successfully be used for both.
- Let both wood and image dry completely. Arkansas: half a day, California: half an hour....

### "Gluing" down the image

- Have all your materials ready when you start since you only have a minute or so of open time with the gel. Work on an extremely clean surface. Any dirt or dust will be permanently embedded in your surface.
- Put a couple of table spoons of Gel Medium on your plate and start rolling your roller through it. Your roller should be completely saturated with gel. Yes, it feels wasteful but it's the only way.
- Roll a good, solid layer of Gel onto your WOOD, not image! You should see a white layer all over your wood. However, you don't want to go overboard and have so much Gel that you create ridges under the paper when you start pressing the paper down. Again, make samples... Pay special attention to edges and corners.
- Immediately position your copy, image side down on your wood. Press it down with your hands to remove the worst bubbles, then use the brayer to press down the paper until the paper feels smooth and no air pockets, bubbles, dirt or other debris can be felt. If something goes wrong and you have to lift up the image you may be able to reposition it if the gel is still wet. Most likely though, you have to start over. Should this happened, scrape all gel off right away using a card scraper, or it will take a lot of effort to sand it off later when the gel is dry and start over.
- After a couple of minutes, check your edges and corners by very gently pulling on them. If they peel away immediately, go in with a small brush and add Gel and press the paper down again and repeat your check. If an edge or corner isn't glued down properly, the image will peel off right away.
- Let dry overnight.

### Washing off the paper

- Use a cotton rag, wash cloth, old (clean) sock or sponge to wash off your paper. Clean and un-dyed is key since you may otherwise rub another color or dirt into your wood. Soak the rag and start to gently soak the paper. When the paper is completely soaked and you can see the image, start to VERY GENTLY rub the paper in a circular motion. The paper should peel off in little rolls. Do NOT attempt to grab the paper and pull it off since that will ruin your transfer. Be especially patient around edges and corners. Continue to rub the paper and adding a little bit of water if it starts to run dry. You want to make sure that you're not using so much water that you are compromising your wood, but enough to soak the paper. This step will have to be repeated 4-10 times or until all traces of paper is gone when the wood is dry. If the image looks at all cloudy or you can feel a pulpy substance while rubbing it with wet fingers you need to continue. If you leave paper on the wood it will show up in the finish.

### Problems that may occur and how to fix them

- Part of the image rubs off: If it is just a very small section you can do one of two things. You can either finish removing the paper completely then find the section that rubbed off on the same image (always keep a back-up copy) and very carefully glue down just the missing section with Gel. Make sure you don't overlap since that will cause colors to be darker. A bit tricky and takes patience and practice. Or you can bring out your set of acrylics and simply paint in the missing information.
- You are rubbing off the paper and notice an air pocket (the whole image feels loose and just held together by the Gel): Stop immediately! Let everything dry and then very gently lift the image and insert gel or Matte

*Medium* under the image, glue it back down and let it dry. If you can't lift it you can use an exacto knife to cut a small incision and inject *Matte Medium*. Works sometimes. Sometimes not.

- The whole image starts to rub through and starts to look "rusticated" or "antiqued" or just simply awful depending on your own personal aesthetic taste: Well, you probably either had brush strokes in the gel on the wood, or didn't use enough gel to glue down the image (or gel was too dry when image was applied) and now you're paying the price. Like what you see, work with it. You can apply a slightly tinted layer of *Matte Medium* over the image to further this weathered look. Or sand it off and learn from your mistakes.

### Applying Finish

- If the surface will be used, or touched at all you need to apply a finish coat. I prefer a very thin layer of *Matte Medium* or *Matte Acrylic Varnish* followed by *Satin Deft* (*Nitro Cellulose Lauer*) after *Medium* is completely dry. If two surfaces are going to touch each other, such as a cabinet, the *Acrylic Mediums* will act as a glue if heat is introduced (storing, shipping etc) and a cabinet can be glued shut, hence the *Deft* topcoat. Regardless of the *Deft*, it is always a good idea to put wax paper on these surfaces when they are stored or shipped. Bubble wrap can leave "bubbles" in the finish.