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PAINTING WITH GOLD

Discover how gold has been used in art to create effects of light and sacredness, thanks to the skill of goldbeaters and ancient application techniques.

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Welcome!

Since the earliest civilizations, gold has always been considered the most precious metal due to its unique brilliance and incorruptibility, becoming a symbol of wealth, social prestige, and eternity.

In Christian times, gold appears in the halos of saints, in the backgrounds of panel paintings, in the folds of garments, buttons, and clothing details.

This richness gives an aura of preciousness and refinement that refers to a higher, divine reality to be admired and worshipped. Figures, solemnly immersed in gold and detached from earthly elements, appear transfigured in the light of Paradise.

Since gold is not a color that can be created, it has always been the most sought-after and desired element. Due to its malleability, it can be reduced to thin sheets by artisans once called "goldbeaters."

To fix the gold leaves to surfaces, various adhesives were used, based on egg white, honey, gum, and plant juices, called "water mordants," meaning water-soluble.

materials

To carry out the activity proposed in this sheet, you will need some imitation gold leaf and gilding glue, both available at stationery stores or online. Also get a fine-tipped brush and a large-tipped brush.

**BE
GREEN**

You can do the activity
by printing only
page 5!



Artist Marcel Duchamp once said:

*"Art is not what the
artist sees, but what others
can see through him".*

Let's begin

Carefully observe these three artworks, created in different periods, and discover how the artists used gold in their creations by answering the questions. Scan the QR codes to view the works in high resolution. You can learn more about the role of gold in the paintings through the artist notes.

Where is the gold in each painting? Is it used on large surfaces or only in small details?

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Reflect on its meaning: does the gold serve to make the figures sacred, enhance their beauty, or create contrast with other colors?

.....

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Zanobi
Macchiavelli,
*Madonna con
Gesù Bambino*,
c.1450



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Vincenzo Simone,
*Notturmo anche
 se è giorno,*
 2021

Now it's your turn

After observing how gold was used in different eras and understanding its meaning, it's time to try the technique yourself. As you can see, the golden areas have been removed from Zanobi Macchiavelli's *Madonna con Gesù Bambino* on the next page: with the help of an adult, follow the instructions to complete the painting!

What to do?

1. Apply a thin layer of glue to the areas to be gilded using the fine-tipped brush. Make sure to cover every area completely: if there are gaps, the gold won't stick properly! Note: check the glue instructions, as it may need to be diluted or left to sit before applying the gold leaf.
2. Take a gold leaf and gently place it on the glued surface. Use the larger brush to gently tap the gold leaf so it adheres well. Be careful: the leaf is very fragile!
3. Let it dry for the time indicated on the materials' packaging. Depending on the glue, this could take from half a day to a full day.
4. Once dry, use the large brush to gently remove the excess gold. The final result will be stunning!

Gold's resistance to corrosion has allowed gilded panel paintings to reach us with their original brilliance. The golden inserts, with their reflections, also add a special dynamism to the viewing experience!





About the Artists

- ▶ **Zanobi Macchiavelli** (Florence, 1418 – Pisa, 1479) was a 15th-century Florentine painter and miniaturist. His works are known for their elegance and refinement. His luminous painting style began with the study of Masaccio and evolved with brighter colors and well-defined shadows to create a more realistic pictorial space. In Medici-era Florence, he received important commissions and praise for his attention to precious details.
- ▶ **Vincenzo Simone** was born in Belgium in 1980. He currently lives in Bologna, practicing and experimenting with painting techniques on various supports. The artist believes in a strong connection between Art and Life, linking the past to the present. By referencing the great masters of Art, he creates a bridge of dialogue that eternally expands their message.