

## **Water Gilding: Information from Larson Juhl, The Art of Water Gilding**

From the dawn of framing making to today, gilding has been applied to wood frames to make them seem like solid gold. It is a process that has remained virtually unchanged over the centuries. “While the steps are well-established, gilding has always been very much of an art. After preparing the surface, a gilder applies thin layers of gold leaf, then burnishes, distresses, and adds patina to the gold to create the look of an historic, period frame.”

Water gilding is the most common method of applying leaf to frame. It lets the gold show its full luster. Here is a quick glance of the process.

- Wood: The moulding shape is milled from premium quality kiln-dried wood.
- Gesso: (JESS-oh) is a mixture of whiting and glue. Eight to ten layers are brushed on the wood to create a smooth surface.
- Compo: Any additional decorative ornamentation is embossed with a carved steel wheel and carefully laid on the moulding by hand.
- Clay: Coats of liquid clay and glue binder are brushed over the compo and gesso to prepare the surface for water gilding. The clay is generally red in color.
- Leaf: The clay is dampened with water, and thin sheets are laid over the moulding, each piece slightly overlapping.
- Burnish: An agate stone is used to burnish (polish) areas of the leaf to a luminous sheen. A highly burnished sheen and overlap leaf lines are marks of quality on a water-gilded frame.
- Distress: Pumice powder and steel wool are used to gently scratch through areas of the leaf to reveal subtle tones of the clay below.
- Patina: Two coats of varnish are applied to protect the leaf. A liquid patina is added as a soft, matte antiquing to accent the burnished gold.

The result is a beautiful gilded frame that you would be proud to own. It becomes even more special when you realize the amount of craftsmanship required to create it.