

Cyanotype printing

Requirements

1. Fabric. Any natural fabrics which are absorbent i.e cotton, linen or wool.
2. Cyanotype dye. This is available from a number of sources but I would recommend the Jacquard kit as it provides storage bottles for the chemicals and reduces handling. The chemicals used are potassium ferricyanide (part A) and ferric ammonium citrate (part B). The instructions I give will assume you are using this kit but can be adapted for any other.
3. Measuring containers - You will want one for each chemical and another to mix them.
4. A flat bottomed tray to treat the fabric - I recommend a cat litter tray
5. Sponge for treating fabric - one on a stick is the easiest to use
6. A frame to clamp materials together - an old picture frame or glass held to a board with bulldog clips. The glass must not be UV resistant
7. Gloves - It is best to avoid contact of the chemicals with skin
8. Materials you want to print i.e. plants, feathers etc
9. Hairdryer (optional)

Method

Fabric preparation

1. Fill bottles A and B with water (tap water is fine). Shake well and ideally leave for 24hrs before use. As long as the two chemicals are kept separate they are stable for years.
2. Cut your fabric into the sized pieces you want to use. Remember they need to fit flat into your frame.
3. Working in subdued lighting measure out equal volumes of part A and part B then mix. Only make up small quantities at a time as they need to be used within 2-4 hours (I usually make up 30-40ml at a time)
4. Place your first piece of fabric flat in the cat litter tray, and using the sponge coat it with the dye mix. Make sure it is saturated.
5. Take your second piece of fabric and use it to thoroughly blot the first. Avoid wringing the fabric as it gives uneven distribution of the dye. If the fabric is left too wet you will get some brown staining.

6. Thoroughly dry your first piece of fabric. You can either do this overnight in a dark cupboard or use a hairdryer. Store the dried fabric in a light proof box until ready to use (I use an old shoe box).
7. Treat the second and subsequent pieces of fabric as with the first until you have enough to work with.

Dyeing

1. In subdued light place your fabric on your backing board and smooth as much as possible (The dried fabric will appear pale green and slightly stiff)
2. Arrange the materials you want to print. You will want to clamp it tightly together with the glass so be careful not to use very lumpy materials. Leaves, grasses and objects such as feathers paper cutouts and lace work very well. Flowers can be difficult to press sufficiently flat. If the objects are not clamped tightly light will seep around the edges giving a blurred image. You can work without a clamped frame if you are using heavy and bulky object such as a mug but remember if the bottom is not flat against the fabric you will get a fuzzy image.
3. Clamp the frame closed and place out in the sun for 5-30 minutes depending on the weather. As it takes effect the exposed fabric will change from pale green to a silvery grey.
4. Bring the frame back into the subdued lighting and dismantle. Place the fabric in plenty of cold water and wash well for at least 5 minutes. I recommend at least one change of water. The exposed areas of fabric will start turning Prussian blue while the unexposed area will return to white.
5. Leave to air dry as the oxidation process will continue and the blue colour deepen. This can be done in normal lighting.



6. Pre exposure



Post exposure



Post wash

Photographs

Photographic negatives can be used to produce beautiful effects but are considerably harder than using fresh objects.

The exposure time is critical and, I find, usually requires several attempts to obtain a good image

You will need a digital photograph converted to a negative image. This then needs to have dramatic enhancing of contrast before being converted to greyscale and printed onto an acetate sheet (available from stationers). I use Photoshop Elements.

