Where Wild Flowers Bloom!

inspired by "Roots and Refuge" by Valerie C. White
Featured Artist: Valerie C. White

Valerie C. White lives in Denver, CO, and has been creating mixed media art quilts for more than two decades. Her work can be found in numerous publications and private collections internationally. This includes recently appearing as the featured artist in the Studio Art Quilt Associates journal; BY HAND 2019, a look book featuring artists from around the country; a featured artist in Art Quilting Studio Journal (Summer 2017); The Lowry Aviator (2016), a community-based publication; and FABRICASM 2021, a publication dedicated to lovers of African Textiles. Valerie’s work also has appeared in several books by acclaimed author, curator, and artist Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi.

In 1998, Valerie retired from the District of Columbia Public Schools in Washington, DC, after 25 years of committed service as an Art educator and Guidance Counselor. Valerie earned a B.F.A. from Howard University in Washington, DC, and an M.A. in Guidance and Counseling from Virginia Polytechnic University in Blacksburg, VA.

She continues to share her passion for textiles presenting lectures, teaching nationally, and devoting her time to creating art in her home studio.

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I appreciate and enjoy working in a series. For me a series provides an opportunity to explore different aspects of an idea or subject. In this “Roots and Refuge” series I’m encouraging one to consider roots as metaphors. Roots, like people, are intertwined and connected. My intent is to challenge the viewer to see the beauty and complexity of roots. The process of layering in cloth is what particularly attracts me. I’m attempting to creating cloth that is mysterious; the idea of seeing almost invisible images created by color and stitch intrigues me.
In this tutorial you will learn how to use a common household material to remove color from fabric to create soft designs that are permanent. As far as selecting a discharge agent there are many choices. I used a gel bleach pen with a teaspoon of Clorox liquid bleach to create February’s block. Most cleaning supplies that contain bleach as the major ingredient will yield good results. The more bleach the quicker the change will occur.
Materials

Supplies

• A cleanser that contains bleach like Bleach Pen, Soft Scrub, Clorox and 1 tsp. of liquid bleach
• A dark Batik fabric 13” square minimum
• T pins
• Blue masking tape
• Sponge Brushes (small)
• Decorative Stencils (not a quilting stencil)
  Some stencils have adhesive on the back.
• Rubber Gloves
• Hydrogen Peroxide for a good bleach stop
• Small Bowl for your bleach solution
• Plastic to cover the press side of your cutting mat - I use a dollar store plastic white table cloth that I cut to fit
• Light Tack Spray to hold your stencil in place. A good spray adhesive is 404 Spray and Fix (optional)
• Derwent Inktense Ink pencils (optional)

Selecting a Stencil

The stencil I used is from “Stencil Girl Products” a company that specializes in stencils. It is made from a plastic-like material and holds up well with repeated use of paint and discharge agents. With that said many local hobby/craft stores sell stencils.

I have found some great ones at the dollar store. I personally don’t use freezer paper because the designs don’t hold up well for repeated use or bleach discharge.

My stencil measures 9” x 12” with an inside margin of ½” (half an inch) around the inside which allows space to fill in the entire 12.5” X 12.5” composition.

Selecting Fabric

For this block we will use a batik fabric. Batiks will retain a waxed-in pattern while the background changes significantly. Please use 100% cotton. Blended fabrics that contain 50% cotton and 50% polyester will not discharge.

Batiks have a very unique and beautiful quality. The results are more varied than black fabric. Most black fabric will give you values of orange. Select a dark fabric for best contrast. The samples I used are navy blue and a deep red to start. Avoid using a light fabric to start. Once discharged a fabric that is pale or very light won’t show a very strong contrast. Unless that mono-color is the intent I would avoid very pale colors. Tip: It’s always a good idea to test your fabric first.
Instructions

1. Wash and press your fabric first to remove all sizing and chemicals that could get in the way of the bleach and affect removing color.

2. Cut a 13” x 13” square piece of fabric. This wholecloth block will be squared up to 12.5” at the completion of this project.

3. My work bench is covered with layers of felt which makes it possible for me to use T pins to secure fabric to keep it steady and fixed when applying wet or dry media.

You can create a mini version by first covering a 14” x 14” press and cut mat with plastic on the press side. The plastic will keep your pressing mat dry (Photo 1).

4. Cover the plastic with a piece of felt, again on the pressing side of the mat. (Photo 2).

5. Next, pin the edges of the 13” x 13” piece of fabric to the mat. You can also use tape to help hold it in place (Photo 3).
6. Place the Stencil on top of the fabric using the blue tape to hold it securely in place or you can spray the adhesive and allow to sit for a few minutes to ensure it’s tacky (Photo 4).

**IMPORTANT: MAKE SURE YOU HAVE GOOD VENTILATION WHEN APPLYING THE BLEACH ONTO THE FABRIC!**

7. Open the bleach pen and empty two tablespoons of the pen into a bowl. Next add the teaspoon of liquid bleach.

   Here’s another way: Pour a teaspoon of Clorox bleach into a bowl then add the Soft Scrub. This is very fast acting.

8. Dip a small sponge brush into the bowl. If the brush has too much liquid it will run under the stencil. Go slow.

9. Continue to add more of the bleach solution to the brush as you work. Keeping the brush semi-wet with bleach will produce a sharper image if that’s what your intention is. I feel the soft edges add a lovely look.

   Allow the bleach to sit for no more than 5-8 minutes. Keep in mind the longer it sits the more color will be removed and changed.
Instructions

Removing the Bleach

10. Wash your fabric with cool water repeatedly. For the final rinse allow the piece to sit in a full cup of Peroxide. The goal is to remove the bleach and stop it from continuing to remove color, as well as removing the odor (Photos 5 & 6).

Both of my blocks used the same stencil, but have discharged to different colors.

11. To add color, I applied Derwent Inktense water-soluble Ink Pencils. The color pencils do enhance the overall design and create some interest. The red block can stand on its own. Both are an attractive example of bleach discharge (Photo 7).

12. Square up your finished block to 12.5” x 12.5” size.