

Product Reviews

We've tried out some fabulous products in this issue and have found great ways of using them with each other.

Fosshape

Fosshape is a synthetic felt that can be heated and moulded into shape. Used predominantly for costume design, it comes in two sizes – 300 and 600 - with 600 being the heavier weight. It has the look of thick, white felt.

I wanted to explore the difference in weights so firstly, made a couple of pieces with the heavier 600 weight. A leaf stencil was designed and used as a basis for the shape of a collar. To dye the felt, I used a Coral Acid Dye (for synthetics). This is a hot water dye. The heat from the hot water started to react and the felt started to stiffen up. This didn't cause problems with stitching but it was probably a little tougher than if I'd painted or sprayed the felt. Once coloured, the leaf design was stencilled on with Soft Form Relief Paste using two colours - Shimmering Red and Gold. The piece was hand-stitched (using some Mulberry Silks threads) and beaded. To cover the stitching on the reverse, the leaf design was stencilled onto coral crystal organza which was cut out and Bondawebbed onto the back of the collar. I was careful when bonding the organza not to melt the Soft Form Relief Paste (a sensible person might want to do this after the fusible is applied, but I was on a roll and good sense had already bid me goodbye). Once this was done, I completed the edging with blind cord that was wrapped in Colinette Tagliatelli and Giotto yarn, hand-stitching it around the collar shape (below).



At this point, it was ready to shape. Using a heat gun on the reverse, I carefully heated from a little distance away (so as not to scorch the felt) and tried to heat and shape one leaf at a time.

It was a pretty straightforward process and despite all the previous (some accidental) heating, I managed to get a good overall shape. You can see it here on a dress form.



I also created a cuff using similar techniques but this time, I covered the surface with Soft Form Relief Paste in Shimmering Turquoise and Shimmering Aquamarine, using a Clarity Large Leaf Stencil. I machine-stitched between the pattern and edged it with some trim which I had sprayed with Dyelusions Bubblegum Pink - a good match for the blue and green paste. Again, I used a heat gun to soften the felt for moulding, from the reverse this time, and shaped it so that it would fit around my wrist and flare out in two corners. I added eyelets to the other corners so the cuff could be secured with a machine-stitched cord (right and below).



Moving on to the 300 weight, there is an obvious difference in thickness and having bought a very cheap polystyrene head on ebay (it got slightly battered in the post), this was a perfect mould. I had some Embellisher Fabric to play with (see review below) and this seemed a good place to start. I wanted to make a simple hat so cut out a piece of Fosshape and applied shapes cut from the Embellisher Fabric. I stitched more decoration into the felt including the two 'prongs' that I had cut out as part of the piece (below).

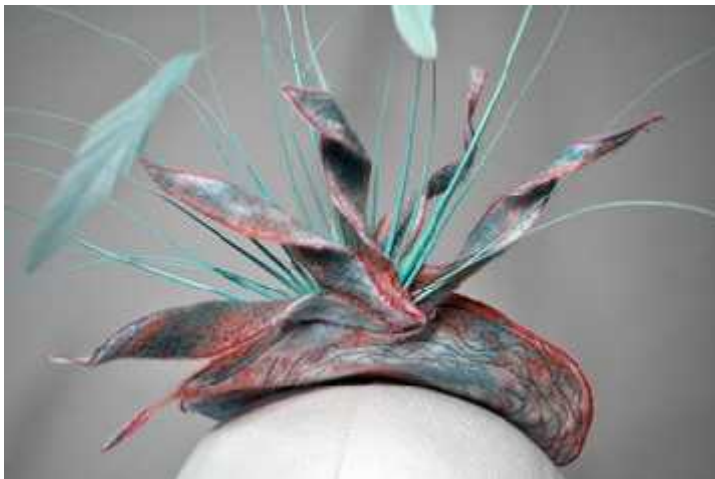
When it came to heating, I used the steam iron rather than the heat gun (as this piece was white, I didn't want to scorch it). I used plenty of steam and then placed the felt over the polystyrene head (I had covered this with foil so it didn't melt). I worked in two parts, doing the cap part of the hat first, then heating one prong at a time to curl it.





The second hat was made using an oval piece of felt which was again embellished with two different colours, machine-stitched and heated.

I heated this with a steam iron and shaped it around the head, curling it up on one side to attach more decoration. I cut out tendrils from the embellished felt and stitched these onto a line of real feathers. I stitched them all together and heated them separately, twisting them whilst hot, finally attaching it to the hat base (right and below).



I absolutely loved experimenting with Fosshape and am keen to take it further. The 600 is much stiffer but you have more options in terms of shaping with the lighter weight. Having launched myself into it and made a few mistakes on the way, I would suggest avoiding using too much heat on the felt before you are ready to shape it!

Fosshape is available from Vena Cava Designs www.venacavadesign.co.uk
Prices are £12.35 per 0.5 metre for 300 weight and £14.84 per 0.5 metre for 300 weight. Both are 114 cm (45 in) wide so you do get a large piece of Fosshape with the 0.5 metre piece.

Soft Form Relief Paste

These water-based pastes have been created by Colourcraft and come in over 20 colours (plus a transparent paste). The colours are bright and vibrant and hold their colour well when dry.

When creating the Fosshape collar and cuff, I scraped the two colours used for each on with a credit card and blobs of both were added to the stencil. As these were scraped through, they blended and I have found that the colours I used mixed really well together.



Another characteristic of the pastes is that they dry with a plastic finish, which is flexible and can be hand stitched. With a thinner layer of paint on felt (as with the collar, below left), you have the benefit of the colours and the ease of application, but it does soak quite well into the felt and doesn't have the very shiny surface that you get when you apply it onto a non-porous surface. Beware machine stitching, as I broke a few needles doing this as it's a very dense surface. The stencilled pattern works well, as you can stitch around it.



There is a video on You Tube from Chanel showing couture embroidery in the Spring/Summer 2015 Collection, where paint was marbled then flower shapes cut from the plasticised sheet of paint. I did a similar thing with the paste. I spread some paint out, left it to dry (it took ages) and then cut out the dried sheet of paste with the Sizzix machine, using both negative and positive shapes, then hand-stitching them (below and right).



Soft Form Relief Paste is available from Colourcraft www.colourcraftltd.com for £7.40 per pot.

Embellisher fabric

This fabric by Jennifer Gail is 100% cotton, wonderfully soft and dyed in a variety of beautiful colourways (with more being added all the time). Each piece is unique in its surface colour and many have a subtle difference to each side. I had two pieces to try, one a lovely purple and the other, a powdery sky blue.

The first piece was embellished both with wool fibres and onto the fabric directly to make a pattern. I found that it embellished really well, although it needs some stabilising underneath if you then machine-stitch into it. It wasn't strong enough (even in a hoop) to sew evenly. I embellished some leaves and stems but didn't want to over do it as the fabric pattern was so lovely, I didn't want to cover it up.



I used the second piece with the Fosshape hat (see review above). I cut petal shapes out of the blue fabric with a rotary cutter and used the embellisher to bond it to the Fosshape. I could only do this by embellishing from the reverse, as the fabric caught up in the needles when worked from the front.

Embellisher Fabric is available from Jennifer Gail Threads. Please email Jennifer to discuss your requirements.

Each piece costs £2.30 (approximately A4 size) and postage of £2.80 for up to three pieces.

Email jenny@jgthreads.com or phone 01202 735251.



iDye

Jacquard has created two different types of iDye Natural (suitable for all natural fibres, 100% silk, cotton, etc.) and iDye Poly (suitable synthetic fibres). I had three packets to try: Chartreuse and Kelly Green in Natural and Gun-metal Grey in Poly. Each iDye packet can dye 2-3lb/1-3kg of fabric.



iDye is incredibly easy to use as it comes in a soluble packet which you drop into your pan of water, adding salt and fabric, and let it simmer away. There are some very good instructions on the Jacquard website which gives you more information (for example, how much salt to add). This makes it all very user-friendly, especially for those nervous about the whole process of dyeing. For fabrics with a blend of both natural and synthetic fibres, you can combine the dyes in the pot.

The aim here was to start off with some pretty straightforward dyeing. I tried Chartreuse first, which is a lovely bright green. As I wasn't dyeing up to the weight limit of fabric, I cut the packet and poured the dye powder into my pan, wearing a mask for this.

I added the dye, salt and fabric and left it while I poked and stirred for the duration. I was happy with the colours I got here. When done, I washed it in the washing machine with some Metapex,



Next, I tried the Kelly Green which is darker than Chartreuse. This time, I added some of the Chartreuse-dyed fabric, loosely scrunched with rubber bands, and sat it on the top of the fabric so that some of it would be left untouched. This created a simple Shibori pattern, below.



iDye Poly was equally easy. I had some synthetic fibres to experiment with rather than lengths of polyester or nylon fabric. I used Lutradur, Evolon, Lace, sheets of paper stabiliser and Tyvek.

With the iDye Poly, you work in pretty much the same way, except you add Colour Intensifier to the mix rather than salt. I wasn't sure whether any of the synthetic fibres would melt, as you needed to boil them for 30 minutes to an hour, but it worked. I used the leftover dye as a weaker solution to dye with.

You can see the results (right). I dyed lace, Tyvek (it came out purple), Lutradur, Stitch 'n' Tear and Evolon.

The iDye Poly is smelly, so remember to open windows and doors while it is boiling away.

My Shibori was more exciting with the Evolon - one piece had been previously coloured with transfer paints (below left and right).



Overall, these were very easy to use and for anyone wanting a straightforward colourway, this demystifies the dyeing process. As seen with the overdyeing (albeit in a very simplistic way), you can experiment further if you wish. The range comes in 30 colours for Natural and 24 for Poly and there are all the colours of the rainbow in there. I will definitely use these again.

iDye and Metapex is available from Art Van Go www.vycombe-arts.co.uk
iDye Natural and Poly both cost £4.25 for 14g each; Metapex 38 is £3.95 for 250ml.

Lynda Monk's Thermofax Screens

Lynda Monk has made some fantastic Thermofax Screens for her article in this issue (also available as our Kit - see Lynda's article and News for further details).

I was at the Art Van Go 'In Residence' with Lynda, Claire Bullock and Sharon Osborne (see News) and I took along some images to see if Lynda would print them into screens for me.



As the images of trees and branches were very detailed, we weren't sure how well they would translate onto screens. I took some straight prints using screen printing inks (below left) and then used more random printing using DeColorant and the Kelly Green iDye fabric from the previous review (below right). The random printing came out particularly well, although it did fade slightly once properly cooled.



If you would like to see the Thermofax machine producing these images, we will shortly be adding a video on our members' only Facebook and Blog.

Lynda Monk will make Thermofax Screens to order using stock pictures or your own design. Please email for details and prices: purplemissus@aol.com

Stix2 Pen Storage Bag

For those of you who bought an assortment of Spectrum Noir Alcohol Markers following our review in the June issue, this will come in very handy. Stix2 have produced a rather smart bag to store them in. It opens out flat with little pockets for holding the pens (a snug fit - but it means they won't be spilling out when carrying them around. To close, you roll the bag up and hook the elastic hoops around. This is great - the only problem I can see is that all those empty pockets make it very tempting to add to the collection.

Pen Storage Bag, price £8.99 from www.stix2.co.uk



Spectrum Noir – Spectrum Aqua Artist’s Markers - Floral

Aqua Markers are watercolours in pen form. They are dual-tipped with a brush pen and fine-tipped nib for both the ability to cover larger areas with colour or focus on fine detail. They can be used in a more painterly way when water is added. There is so much flexibility in how to use these to colour, blend and apply to a surface.

They come in four packs – Essentials, Nature, Primary and Floral. I used Floral for this review.

The colours are blendable and this can be achieved in several ways. If applied to a piece of card with a small gap between, a wet brush can be used to mix each colour together, seamlessly melding them (below left). For a more graduated blend, you can draw on a craft sheet with both colours and use that as an intermediate colour between the two. This creates possibilities for a much larger colour palette than you initially start with. It also prevents muddying up the tips of the pen with a darker colour.



You can also colour in stamps with these pens. Green was added to a foam stamp and then the shape of the motif was filled in with yellow pen (above right).

I used these pens to colour in some of a Millie Marotta page (see Book Reviews) and by blending the colours on a non-porous craft mat, I increased the colour palette from a limited number of pens (right). I painted these colours on with a fine paintbrush, making sure that the brush was damp, not wet. The colour didn't bleed through to the other side.



Spectrum Noir Aqua Markers are available from www.crafterscompanion.co.uk
Priced at £19.99 for a pack of 12 pens.