

The Batik

BY HILDA L. FROST

THE making of a batik is one of the most difficult and delightful projects that I know. Yet the gradual unfolding of bewilderingly beautiful effects through the cracking wax is incentive enough for any real craftsman. Once one has mastered the process, and taken care to be guided by rules for color and good design, the path of adventure is open. The beginner may experiment on something as simple as a handkerchief, but once he has caught the wonder of color he will be ready for bigger things. Contrary to general conception, it is easiest for anyone to work large. My first batik was three feet by five. It took months to complete it. I toiled over the original sketch, enlarged and painted it on beaver board, whence I traced it on the silk that became the final result. I moved in a daze through wax-scented rooms with hands that I thought would be stained for life. But when it was finished and I dropped it in a pan of gasoline to remove the stiff wax, I felt as if I had moved a mountain. And when it was dry I wanted to assemble multitudes to witness my triumph.

A batik is made by dipping a piece of cloth in successive dye baths from light colors to dark. The wax for "resist" is painted on with a brush and used to preserve any part of the design desired in a particular color before it is plunged in a darker hue. During the process the wax cracks, allowing darker dyes to thread their way over the lighter parts, giving a "crackled" or marble effect. Color harmony is secured by choosing a few adjacent colors

on the chart. The first hue used naturally affects all the others, giving a saturated harmony. The drawing should be prepared not only with a thought of its pictorial value, or its prospective position in a room, but with a thorough understanding of its design. A batik is a decoration and should be planned accordingly.

The creator should think in masses and values rather than line. As one of my former instructors said, "To make a good design, touch on all four sides and leave a rest space."

For materials you will need a pair of rubber gloves, half a dozen large round baking pans, ordinary paraffin wax with a pan to heat it in, brushes, and some silk with a body to it; a large frame or old stretcher minus the canvas is helpful but not absolutely necessary. My dyes (in powder form) came from Eagle Batik Dye Co., 25 Broadway, New York City. The *School Arts Magazine* advertises for Batik Dyes, Bachmeir and Co., 436 West 37th Street, New York City. I used an inexpensive dye, "ALJO," for camp



work which I obtained at B. L. Makepeace Co., Boston. A small quantity of the dye goes a long way, so you need not buy large amounts.

Perhaps it will be simplest and clearest if I take one of my batiks, that of the castle sketched in color, and tell step by step how it was made. From my original sketch in color I make an enlargement on a piece of white wrapping paper in a heavy ink line. Placing the silk on this I traced it in pencil heavy enough to show up after several dippings. All the parts that were to be kept white, stars,



domes, border lines, were painted with melted wax. The wax spreads freely when it is steaming hot, so it must be spread on swiftly. If the cloth is tacked on a frame it facilitates matters considerably and keeps the silk away from any surface that would soak up the hot wax. Since I wanted my sky blue, I outlined the castle with wax next and painted that in yellow, as well as some of the grass and cliff in the foreground. I also painted in the red and orange parts, since these came only in small quantities. Wherever dye is painted on in this fashion a wax outline must be put on first to keep the liquid from running out into the rest of the design. Once the yellow was dry I waxed over the whole castle; the towers I wanted to keep red, orange and yellow, the red in the border and the red and orange parts of doors and windows. I wet the whole cloth, folded it cautiously to keep the wax from cracking too much and dipped it in blue dye. That gave me a blue sky, blue cliff, green grass, green shadows on my domes and in the recesses of the windows, and

wherever I had left the yellow dye exposed a green surface. The next step consisted of covering all the blue and green parts I wished to save with wax, which I did before dipping the whole cloth in purple dye.

After each dipping I dried my batik by shaking it gently so I would not lose time nor loosen the wax too much. At the end I squeezed it out in gasoline which loosened the wax which made it stiff as a board after the last coating.

I used ordinary paraffin because I like the cracks it gives, but if you prefer to eliminate these the beeswax is said to be firmer. Often a lining of a different color silk will set off your finished product to advantage, though you may create a border as you work by planning it ahead of time.

If you grow discouraged after your first attempt to make a batik, remember that Rome wasn't built in a day. I have learned something new from every batik I have made. If you only do one you will have a new decoration to dominate a particular room. Today, when tapestries and hangings are coming back to their own, you will find a batik will turn a bare wall into an area of rest and lasting beauty.

