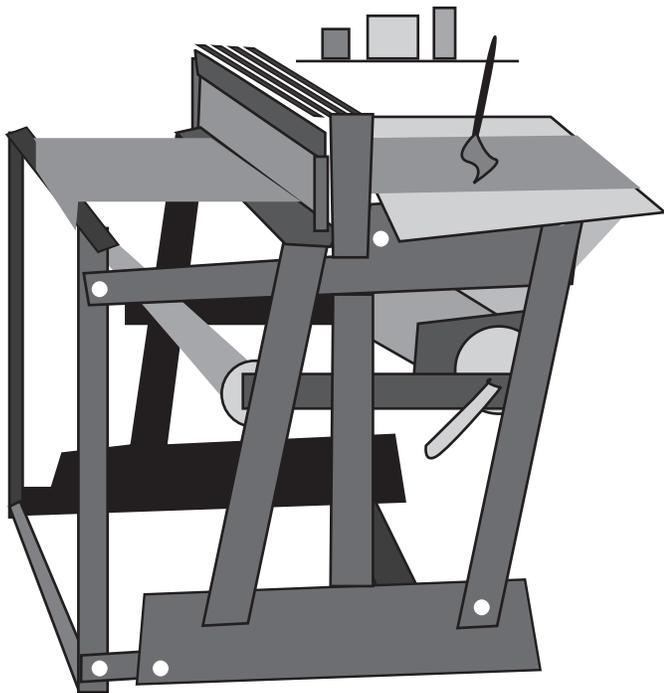


WARP PAINTING

The mechanics of warp painting are pretty much the same no matter what paint or dye is used. A light- to medium-weight yarn makes the best warp for painting—one you can set for plain weave at 12 ends per inch (or more). The stronger and smoother the yarn, the better; it receives a fair amount of abuse being moved back and forth on the loom. A light-colored yarn that doesn't conflict with the paint colors, the same color all the way across the warp, will show the painting best. Wash the yarn before it goes on the loom, either before the warp is made or as a warp chain. Be sure the fiber content of the yarn is compatible with the paint you're using.

It is most usual to paint the warp in sections after it's on the loom. But some weavers prefer to stretch the warp between two dowels, and paint before warping. This method is not as precise, because each warp thread has an extra opportunity to slide relative to its neighbors, but it gives access to longer stretches of warp.

Warp painting is not restricted to plain weave, but chose a pattern that is at least as much warp-faced as it is weft-faced, since your design will be painted on the warp, and the weft just holds the piece together.



Most looms don't have much space between the harnesses and the back beam. Give yourself working room by moving the harnesses up and out of the way (remember that the warp has been threaded), or by extending the path of the warp from the heddles out beyond the back beam. Because every loom is different, you'll have to design a system that works on yours. You need a firm, flat surface under the warp threads to press against as you paint. A piece of plywood covered with plastic-wrap can be made to fit most looms. Wide enough to bear against the castle, instead of against the heddles, is best. Place a cartoon of your design between the board and the plastic to help you keep track.

Because it's impossible to keep warp threads in order while sliding the plywood in and out, you'll have to straighten them each time. A set of lease sticks can be put into the plain-weave sheds, behind the harnesses, and pulled gently toward the warp beam before you start to paint.

The paint can be applied in many different ways. A flat, stiff brush dabs paint in distinct areas, a softer one produces a water-color effect. Do all of one color, and then the next; or go back and forth from color to color as you paint. Remember the other side of the threads. It's difficult to cover the threads completely; some un-dyed spaces seem always to remain. As with crackle in batik, you can think of this as a flaw, or as a feature of the technique.

Wetting the warp before you paint helps penetrate the thread backsides, but also causes the colors to wick up through the warp and blurs the design. Moistening the warp with your brush *after* the paint is applied, has the same dual effect: better coverage, more blurring. Simply pressing paint into the threads with your brush does help. Or you can use a darker warp color so that unpainted spaces show less contrast; but the warp color will affect the colors of the paint. Leave some areas unpainted and the skips in the painted areas are less stark. Remember that in the end, the weft yarn will soften all aspects of the design.

Once you have painted a section let it dry without moving anything. This can take 24 hours. A hair dryer can shorten the wait, and also help set the dye.

After the warp is dry, separate any stuck together threads. Lift one harness at a time and gently loosen the threads from the board, working from the heddles back to the warp beam. Once the threads are loose and separated, pull the painting surface out from under the warp. Gently put every thing back where it belongs, tighten the warp, and weave out that section.

Picking the right dye or paint to use will depend on your design preferences, and on the fiber you use. Procion Dyes thickened with Keltex work well on cotton and silk, produce strong clear colors and can be controlled easily. But they require more time to prepare than liquid fabric paints, and you must take into account the reaction time (just 1–2 hours of dyeing time). The Deka Permanent Paints are especially easy to use—a wide range of colors, a great deal of control. Thin the paints with at least 25% water so they won't stiffen the fabric. More water gives a water-color effect. The Deka Silk Paints are too thin for fine detail, but give good wash effects.

All the above dyes must be heat set. This can be done by ironing: surround the piece with clean cloth- or paper-towels to protect both your work and your iron plate. Use a heat-setting that's appropriate to your fiber, iron both sides. Rinse off excess dye in running water, wash thoroughly with a mild soap, rinse well, hang to dry.

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