

# Thermofax Screens

## How to use your Thermofax Screen

### Setting up your workspace

- You need a printing surface that is not too hard, not too soft. A piece of plywood covered with two layers of acrylic/polyester felt (stretched and stapled to the back) makes an excellent print surface. It can be as big as you like (or have room for). If this is not possible, you could improvise by taping felt or an old blanket to your table or kitchen work surface. Make sure the surface is smooth as any creases will leave their mark on the fabric.
- Cover your print surface with a drop cloth to absorb excess ink/dye and to help prevent the image from blurring (calico, cotton drill or an old bed sheet would all be suitable). N.B. The drop cloth should be washable. Plastic drop cloths can be used but can be slippery and excess ink/dye can 'pool' under the fabric, spoiling your work.
- You will need access to water for washing the screens immediately after use. In an ideal world this will be a nearby sink but if this is not possible, a couple of large plastic boxes or washing-up bowls of water and some old towels will be fine.

### Gathering tools and materials to get started

The basics:

- Thermofax screen(s)
- Lightweight squeegee(s)
- Print media – eg textile screen ink/fabric paint, thickened procion MX dye, discharge media (see separate page, Choosing Print Media for further information).
- Cloth or paper to print on
- Pins to secure the cloth/paper to the print surface
- Plastic container eg cat litter tray to keep your workspace tidy and to protect your work from unwanted drips and marks - place containers of media, squeegees, etc in the tray.

Useful extras:

- Kitchen paper and masking tape – these are useful for temporarily masking part of a screen or to avoid picking up ghost images (see getting the most out of your screen on page 2).
- Freezer paper or sticky backed plastic – these can be applied to the fabric to make positive or negative temporary resists (see getting the most out of your screen on page 2).
- Ruler / measuring tape - useful if you need to print images in particular position.
- Thread - stretch between two pins to create a guide line for the edge of the screen if you want to print rows of images.

### Printing Technique

- Place the thermofax screen in position with the shiny plastic-coated side of the mesh face down (you should be able to see the words THIS SIDE UP on the frame).
- Spoon or pour a 'bead' of the print media onto the taped area at one end of the screen (the end furthest away from you).
- Hold the edge of the screen with your left hand (if right-handed). Pick up the squeegee with your other hand, and position it behind the print media. Draw the squeegee towards you for the best results, using a smooth action and keeping the squeegee almost upright - if you angle it too much you may get blurred prints. Light to medium pressure is generally sufficient. Practise on spare cloth or the drop cloth to perfect your technique.
- When you get to the bottom of the screen, scoop up any unused media with the squeegee and deposit it back at the top of the screen. Sometimes one pull of the squeegee is sufficient, and at other times, two will be necessary. If the squeegee is narrower than the design you will need two or more pulls.
- Lift up the screen carefully and reposition it for the next print.
- Keep the print media flowing across the screen and don't let it dry in the mesh. Take particular care with screen inks (especially opaque and pearlescent inks) and glues as they can dry very quickly, especially in warm conditions. If allowed to dry they will seal the mesh permanently, spoiling it for any further printing.
- If you want a layer of printing to dry before printing the next layer, you should wash and dry the screen while you wait (see Cleaning your Thermofax Screen below).

### Cleaning your Thermofax Screen

- Wash Thermofax Screens in cool running water with a soft sponge – avoid power spray-washers and never use brushes or abrasive scourers as they will damage the mesh. Screen inks and dyes may cause staining of the mesh but as long as the water is running clear the screen should be clean.
- Squeeze the edges of the tape to make sure none of the media has crept underneath and then wipe the edges of the frame thoroughly.
- Pat the Thermofax Screen gently with an old towel to remove excess water and then leave to dry thoroughly.

## Storing your Thermofax Screens

- The screens are best stored upright and out of direct sunlight. Extreme heat (eg leaving in a car on a hot day) can cause the frames to warp.
- Wait until screens are thoroughly dry before putting away. Storing damp screens can cause the plastic coating to peel off.

## Thermofax Screen Maintenance

- With care you will get many hundreds of prints from a Thermofax Screen but they do not last forever. The design, the media you use, how they are used (eg for a few prolonged sessions or frequent short) and how carefully they are washed and dried will all affect their longevity.
- Minor repairs can be made if the plastic coating starts to lift or break down around the edges of the design. The repairs can be made with small pieces of duct tape or by filling in an edge with acrylic paint (paint on the rough side and allow to dry thoroughly before using again).
- Occasionally a screen will start to break down in an interesting way and will take on an extra lease of life as a fractured or distressed image!
- Once the image is beyond further use, the mesh can be cut out and the frame reused. You can order replacement imaged mesh from Thermofax Screens ready for you to tape into your old frame(s). Instructions for taping are supplied).

## Getting the most out of your screen

Try some of the following ideas to get started and then tweak them to develop your own style. Continually ask yourself "what if ....?".

- Print single images as focal points.
- Print repeat images to form patterns.
- Rotate the screen to print the image randomly all over the cloth.
- Print and overprint in layers, with one or more colours.
- Combine two or more screens in the same piece – this could be small and large versions of the same image for variety of scale, a 'texture' screen as a background with a feature image overprinted or two or more screens with related imagery like spiders and webs.
- If images are printed close together or overlapping, you may find that you have picked up medium from an earlier (still wet) print on the back of the screen. This will cause a 'ghost' image to be laid down on the subsequent print. Sometimes ghost images can be a unexpected bonus, adding texture and an extra dimension to your printing, but if you need perfectly clean images, you can lightly cover the wet print to avoid picking media up on the back of the screen. The easiest way to do this is to take a double layer of kitchen paper and lay it gently over the wet print without pressing it into the ink (the kitchen paper can be trimmed if the image is small or the space is tight). You can then print close to the first print and if there is any wet media it will be picked up by the kitchen paper rather than the screen.
- If you want to print a small part of the image, you can mask off the unwanted area with a double layer of kitchen paper. Tape the kitchen paper to the back of the screen with a couple of pieces of masking tape (attach the masking tape to the frame not the mesh). N.B. the mask may need to be replaced at intervals if you have a lot of printing to do.
- A partial image can also be achieved by applying a temporary mask to an area of the cloth with something like sticky backed plastic, freezer paper or masking tape. If the mask is a positive shape eg a leaf, then the printing will be on the negative space. If the mask covers the negative space eg a largish piece of sticky-back plastic/freezer paper with a leaf shape cut out of it, the printing will be in the positive shape.

## Suppliers

**Thermofax Screens** - [www.thermofaxscreens.co.uk](http://www.thermofaxscreens.co.uk) - [info@thermofaxscreens.co.uk](mailto:info@thermofaxscreens.co.uk) - Foxley Farm, Foxley, Towcester, Northamptonshire NN12 8HP UK - for ready-made screens, custom screens made from your own designs, textile screen inks, lightweight squeegees, books etc.

**Kemtex Educational Supplies Ltd.** - [www.kemtex.co.uk](http://www.kemtex.co.uk) - Chorley Business & Technology Centre, Euxton Lane, Chorley, Lancashire PR7 6TE - 01257 230220 - for Procion MX dyes, Manutex, Soda Ash, Ludigol, Urea, Synthrapol / Metapex 38 etc)

**Fibrecrafts** - [www.fibrecrafts.com](http://www.fibrecrafts.com) - Old Portsmouth Road, Peasmarsh, Guildford, Surrey GU3 1LZ - 01483 565800 - for Procion MX dyes etc, Speedball inks, Pebeo Setacolor and other paints, Jacquard Discharge Paste, Fibre-Etch etc)

**Art Van Go** - [www.artvango.co.uk](http://www.artvango.co.uk) - The Studios, 1 Stevenage Road, Knebworth, Hertfordshire SG3 6AN - 01438 814946 - for some of the above plus Jacquard Professional Quality Screen Printing Inks and also for metal leaf, glues etc.