



# Achieving Crackle Finishes

*The techniques described in this handout are based on the principle of layering different mediums with different rates of drying. Most recipes in this handout require the alternation of both water-based and solvent-based solutions. Opus staff have developed many of these recipes through trial and error and product experimentation. As some processes in this handout are irreversible, we recommend that for whatever use, all crackle recipes should be tested prior to the desired application.*

*Please note that crackling is not an exact science, and as such we strongly recommend that you experiment before applying to your final piece. In addition, external conditions such as humidity, length of drying times, and the thickness of your application can affect the desired outcome of your crackle project.*

## BASIC MATERIALS:

- Sealed or painted object for finishing (ie. painting, flower pot, table, picture frame etc.)
- Soft brushes
- Rags, cloths, paper towels, or cheesecloth
- Solvent (if using any solvent-based products)

## GUM ARABIC ON LINECO PH NEUTRAL ADHESIVE

This recipe is best on flat rigid supports and should be done on a flat, level surface. The Gum Arabic layer is removable when dry because it is water-soluble. Products needed for this process include Lineco Neutral pH Adhesive, Gum Arabic, highlighting products and a sealer.

**Step 1:** Lay the flat object which you want to crackle on a flat, level surface. The surface of the object should be clean of any dirt or grease to ensure proper adhesion of the first and subsequent layers of the crackling process.

**Step 2:** Brush an even layer of Lineco Neutral pH Adhesive over the entire surface and let it dry to the touch. If the glue is too thick, add a minimal amount of water.

For best results, you will want to apply the next layer immediately after the glue is dry to the touch.

**Step 3:** Using a soft brush, brush on a layer of Gum Arabic. The thicker the layer the thicker the crackle pattern. Note: If the Gum Arabic is separating or repelling on the surface, rebrush the Gum Arabic as it thickens. Avoid creating bubbles in the Gum Arabic with your brush.

**Step 4:** Highlight the Crackle with an oil-based paint or a pigment powder and wipe away any excess colour. Important: Gum Arabic is water-soluble. Do not use acrylic, tempera, watercolour or any other water-based paint to highlight the crackle.

**Step 5:** Seal the finished piece with a solvent-based varnish (brush or spray). Suggested varnishes are Liquitex Soluvar, Golden MSA Varnish or most Krylon Spray Finishes.

## GUM ARABIC ON LIQUITEX SOLUVAR VARNISH

This recipe is best on flat rigid supports and should be done on a flat level surface. This recipe is totally removable. Products needed for this process include Liquitex Soluvar Gloss Varnish, Gum Arabic and highlighting products.

**Step 1:** Lay the flat object that you want to crackle on a flat level surface. The surface of the object should be clean of any dirt or grease to ensure proper adhesion of the first and subsequent layers of the process.

**Step 2:** Brush a thin, even layer of Gloss or Matte Liquitex Soluvar over the entire surface and let it dry to the touch. Once dry to the touch, proceed to Step 3 immediately for best results. Note: Gloss is recommended over Matte varnish, as matte varnishes can cause the surface to look milky when this recipe is completed. Soluvar is a solvent-based varnish. Brushes will need to be cleaned with a cleaning solvent. Soluvar Gloss dries to a slick surface that may cause Gum Arabic to repel off the surface. A light sanding with fine sand paper will improve adhesion.

**Step 3:** Using a soft brush, brush on a layer of Gum Arabic. The thicker the layer the thicker the crackle. Note: If the Gum Arabic is separating or repelling on the surface,

rebrush the Gum Arabic as it thickens. Avoid creating bubbles in the Gum Arabic with your brush.

**Step 4:** Highlight the crackle with an oil-based paint or a pigment powder and wipe away any excess colour. Important Note: Gum Arabic is water-soluble. Do not use acrylic, tempera, watercolour or any other water-based paint to highlight the crackle.

**Step 5:** Seal the finished piece with a solvent-based varnish (i.e. Liquitex Soluvar). Other suggested varnishes include GOLDEN MSA Varnish or most KRYLON Spray Finishes.

## GUM ARABIC ON ADHESIVE SIZE

This recipe is best on flat rigid supports and should be prepared on a flat, level surface. The Gum Arabic layer is removable, it is water-soluble. Products needed for this process include Mona Lisa Metal Leaf Adhesive, Gum Arabic, highlighting products and a sealer.

**Step 1:** Lay the flat object that you want to crackle on a flat level surface. The surface of the object should be clean of any dirt or grease to ensure proper adhesion of the first and subsequent layers of the process.

**Step 2:** Brush a thin, even layer of Adhesive over the entire surface and let it dry to the touch. Note: Adhesive remains very sticky when dry.

**Step 3:** Immediately after your layer of Adhesive is dry, use a soft brush to apply a layer of Gum Arabic. The thicker the layer, the thicker the crackle. Note: If the Gum Arabic is separating or repelling on the surface, re-brush the Gum Arabic as it thickens. Avoid creating bubbles in the Gum Arabic with your brush.

**Step 4:** Highlight the Crackle with an oil-based paint or a pigment powder. Wipe away any excess highlighting colour. Important Note: Gum Arabic is water-soluble. Do not use acrylic, tempera, watercolour or any other water-based paint to highlight the crackle.

**Step 5:** Seal the finished piece with a solvent-based varnish (brush or spray). Suggested varnishes include Liquitex Soluvar, Golden MSA Varnish or most Krylon Spray Finishes.

## JO SONJA CRACKLE MEDIUM

This product can be used on top of dried acrylic products to achieve a crackle finish, on both two and three dimensional objects. It is not removable when dry. Products needed for this process include Jo Sonja Crackle Medium and acrylic colours (such as Holbein Acryla Gouache).

**Step 1:** Apply 2 to 3 heavy base coats of the acrylic gouache colour to desired surface. The surface of the object should be clean of any dirt or grease to ensure

proper adhesion of the first and subsequent layers of the process. Allow to dry to the touch.

**Step 2:** Generously apply Jo Sonja Crackle Medium with a large soft brush. Work in a methodical manner and do not over-brush.

**Step 3:** The crackling process will be complete when Crackle Medium is thoroughly dry. Important Note: Do not touch the piece during the drying process.

**Step 4:** Highlight the crackle with either an acrylic or oil-based paint or a pigment powder. Wipe away any excess highlight colour.

**Step 5:** Seal the finished piece with a solvent-based varnish (brush or spray). Suggested varnishes are Liquitex Soluvar, Golden MSA Varnish or most Krylon Spray Finishes.

## APPLICATIONS

Crackling techniques can be used in both fine art and decorative/craft applications. Crackling works best on rigid surfaces such as reinforced wood panels and unfinished frames. You can incorporate these techniques into your acrylic or oil paintings, or combine with other decorative techniques such as stenciling to decorate frames and furniture.

## TIPS

- Crackling is an artform and not a science. Keep notes of all of your test samples to recreate the results on your final piece.
- Outside temperatures and fluctuations in humidity can greatly affect the drying times of products, and the outcome of your piece.
- In most recipes, the base coat should be a little tacky when applying the second coat. If you have let the first coat dry completely, the top layer will not crack. It is the differing drying times and rates of shrinkage that cause the cracking.

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