

Just Add Water

Gummy silk cocoons, which look like cream-coloured cotton wool in texture, are the fibres taken from the silk cocoon before it is processed. They still contain natural sericin (the 'glue') and it is possible to use them to make instant 'paper' or 'fabric' without needing to use a medium. The result is amazingly strong and you can make your paper extremely thin, ethereal and delicate or quite thick and you can easily add all sorts of extras.

When you first open a bag of cocoon strippings, they may look rather unattractive, fluffy, messy and unappealing. You need to tease them or card them so that they are easy to work with – you want to turn them into something beautiful.

To Make your Silk Paper Using Cocoon Strippings

Lay a sheet of baking parchment down onto a heat resistant surface (such as an ironing board).



Take your fibres and place them on the parchment by pulling the fibres out in small handfuls. You can lay the fibres evenly or randomly. The cocoon strippings may be carded or teased if you want a smooth result – they can be quite coarse and I tweak them with my fingers by pulling the fibres apart. As you gain experience of pulling and tweaking the fibres, you will have more control of the process. Sometimes using a hand carder or even an old comb can be a good idea. Finally, when they are wet and ironed they can still look rather uninteresting but once they have dried, there are all sorts of possibilities available to you.

Lay the fibres quite thinly. If you use too much fibre your paper will be spongy. With practice, you will be able to adjust the amount of fibre to suit your purpose.



Use a spritzer or mister to spray the fibres with water to the surface. Mist evenly, but without making the surface soggy.

Place a second sheet of parchment paper on top, and using a medium to hot iron (no steam), iron over the surface. This will only take a minute or two.



Turn the 'sandwich' over, gently peel away the paper and spray water onto the reverse side. Replace the parchment paper and iron as before.

Peel off the parchment paper and set your silk paper aside to dry. At this point it will be soft and floppy but soon it will 'cure' and take on a more paper-like feel. Once it is dry,



you will be able to carefully lift it off.

It is better to build up several fine layers, one at a time, rather than attempting to make a thick sheet of paper because this can result in

a spongy interior. Make sure you spray water on each layer as you go.

Variations:

Once you have made this basic paper there are many variations you can try.

Instead of spraying with water, spray the surface with any of the colour sprays (such as Starburst Sprays, Moonshadow Mists, Flat Fabios or any other water-based sprays on the market), or walnut ink or paint with coffee or tea or anything similar – experiment. That's half the fun. Avoid acrylic based paints though because they sit on the surface and change the character of the paper.

Actually – I often colour afterwards. I make the paper – set it aside and then spray with colour. I find that this method of spraying seems to give better colour results for me. I would suggest trying both.

Sprinkle metal flakes onto the sprayed surface before ironing.

Add previously cut silk paper shapes onto the colour sprayed surface before ironing.

Spray colour through stencils either before or after ironing.

Make a lacey paper by building up fibre in some areas whilst leaving empty spaces in others.

Add scrim or other open weave fabric – lay the silk fibres on both sides of the scrim allowing the cloth to show through.

Add in other silk fibres.

Sprinkle in other goodies such as little paper flowers, Angelina fibres, emu feathers, skeleton leaves, petals, threads, bits of paper, lace etc

making sure that they are trapped under some of the silk fibres to ensure that they are bedded in. These silk 'papers' can be treated as paper: cut - glued - folded.

You can strengthen the paper by painting acrylic wax or a textile medium over it. This will both seal and strengthen. I do this at the very end.





Spray colour through stencils either before or after ironing



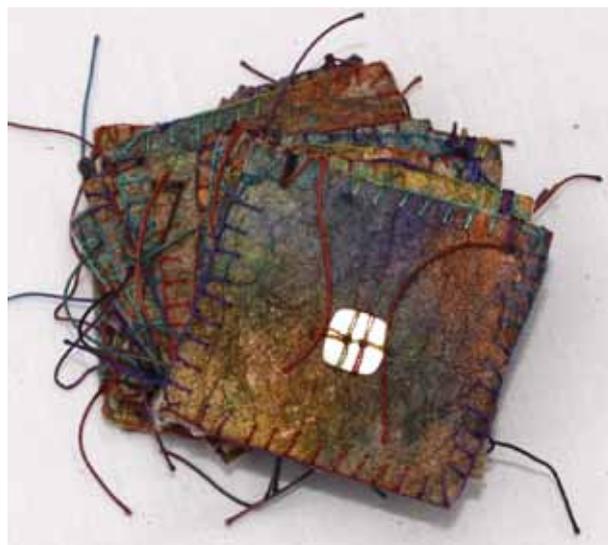
Sprayed through a stencil and stitched



Use as backgrounds for mixed media work

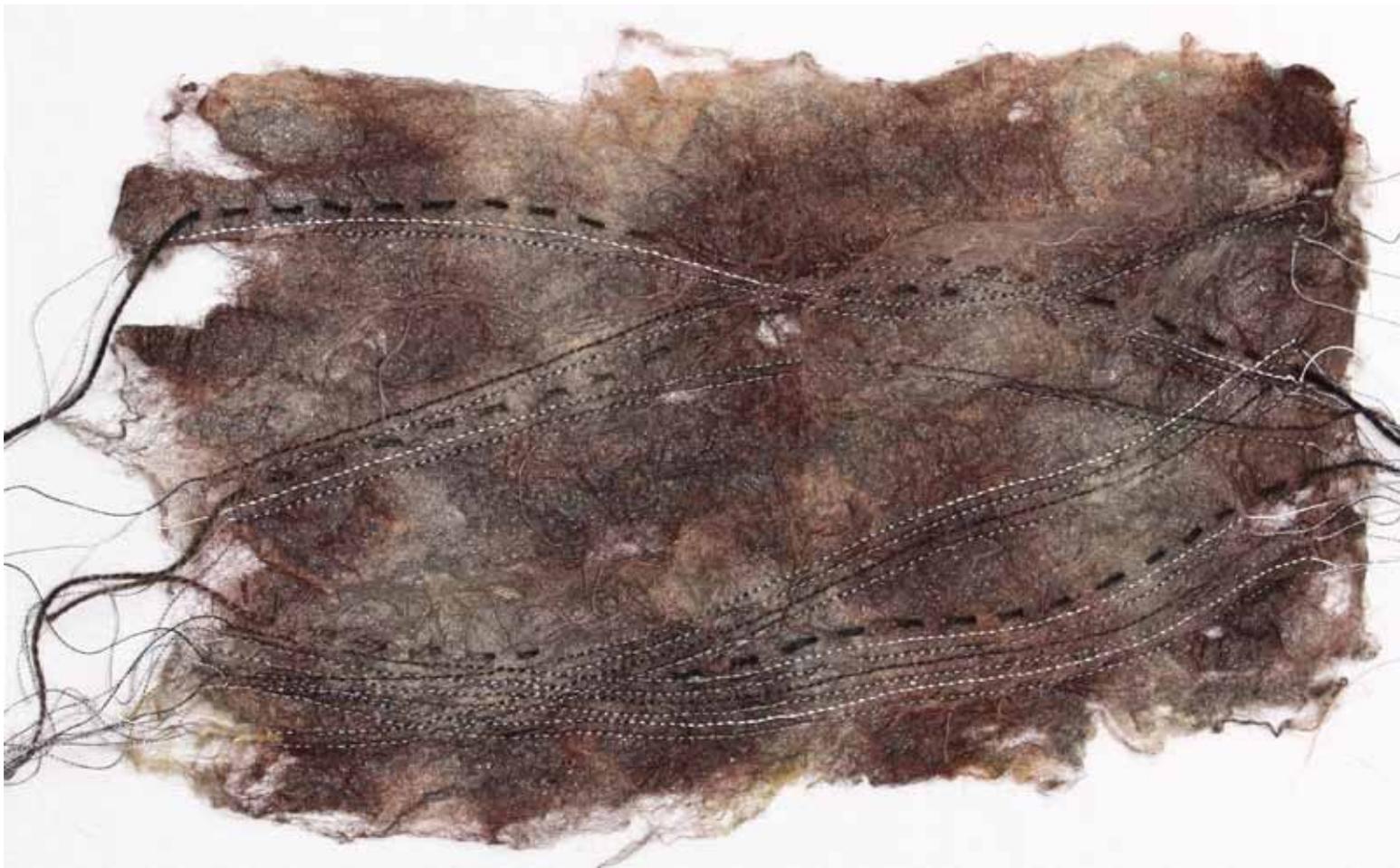


Fold up book





Fold up book with added scrim and silver metallic flakes





Advanced Technique

Moulding in the microwave

Something to experiment with using gummy cocoon strippings. I selected a small glass, wrapped it with baking parchment and sprayed it with plenty of water. Over this I have added a layer of cocoon strippings and sprayed with plenty of water again.

To seal – wrap it carefully with cling film and tie it securely at the top.

Next – place it in the microwave for 3 -5 minutes. (watch carefully because all micro-waves are different). Leave it in the microwave to rest for another 5 minutes, then remove it carefully.

