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HOW TO HEAT SET SAKURA PIGMA PENS ON FABRIC

AUGUST 27, 2010 BY EBONY LOVE



Since I was commissioned to make a wedding quilt, incorporating signatures of the guests, I've been doing a lot of research on the best pens to use to write on fabric. I've heard a lot of great things about the Sakura Pigma Pens (and a couple of horror stories too) and overall it seems to be the best pen for this kind of job.

I also heard that the ink must be heat set. I tried doing a search on just how to do this, but not really finding anything, I thought I'd write my own blog post about it with some tips that I've learned. I only have a couple of pictures that I took of the final results, but I'll just outline what I found in the hopes it can help someone else (or for my own reference later.)

My signature blocks are going into a quilt that I fully expect to be washed. If you're not going to wash the resulting project, maybe some of these tips do not apply.

- DO YOUR OWN TESTS!** Yes, the pens are archival, use pigment inks, are waterproof, fadeproof, lightfast, etc. But all those tests by the manufacturer were done on paper. Fabrics are different, the pigments are different in each pen, and your results can vary. So don't rely on MY tests for YOUR project. Just learn from my example.
- Wash your fabric.** You may not be into prewashing your fabrics in general (I'm not) but you WANT to wash any fabrics you plan on using for writing. The sizing & chemical residue in the fabric left from the manufacturing process will prevent the ink from penetrating the fabric, which means your ink will wash out, bleed, and in general give you terrible results. Observe, my Pigma pens on an unwashed sample, which I then let set for a few hours and then washed with gentle agitation with plain cold water. The blue is completely illegible, and the blacks you can see have bled into the surrounding area. That's no good!



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3. **Test each color, on EACH fabric.** Fabrics behave differently, and you want to be really sure that whatever you do will behave the way you want it to.
4. **Let inked fabrics sit overnight.** This insures the ink is dry and has penetrated the fabric appropriately.
5. **For best results, heat set with an iron and aluminum foil.** Place the foil on your ironing board, shiny side up. Set your iron to its hottest setting, no steam. Lay your fabrics signature side down on top of the foil. Iron over the inked area for about 30 seconds, moving your iron constantly so you don't scorch your fabric. Let cool completely. You should be able to launder normally. To arrive at this conclusion, I conducted 3 tests – no heat, with heat only, and heat with steam. I then washed the samples in cold water, then applied soap, and abraded the fabric by scrubbing it against itself on the printed side. I got the best results with the heat setting and no steam.



You can see here that the non-heat set ink on washed fabric performs better than the non-heat set ink on non-washed fabric, but it still had significant color loss (although there was no bleeding of the ink into the surrounding area.) The heat-set ink with steam was second best; there was still some color loss and no bleeding. The best performer of all though was with heat-set and no steam. It looks really vibrant without any color loss or bleeding.

I still have another set of samples to do with the other fabric, but I'm more confident in that one since it's a very common fabric used for writing & dyeing (Kona Solid, straight from the manufacturer.)

Hopefully that helps someone who is looking to embark on a signature quilt sometime!

Happy quilting!

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Comments



Stephens Askew says

December 16, 2013 at 8:33 am

Years ago I purchased a set of metal tips used for fine fabric paint writing of which I no longer have. I've searched craft stores on line and unable to locate them again. Can anyone direct me to a site to locate them?



Ebony says

December 16, 2013 at 9:23 am

Have you tried Dick Blick?



MsWildflower says

August 27, 2010 at 3:53 pm

Thank you for this information!



SewCalGal says

August 27, 2010 at 5:08 am

Thank you. Great test & tutorial. I've used Pigma pens before, but not these. I do like to do thorough tests and appreciate you doing all this work and sharing insights.

SewCalGal

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CONTACT LOVEBUG
STUDIOS

1862 E. Belvidere Rd. PMB
388
Grayslake, IL 60030
(not a store; mailing address
only)

☎: 877-577-8458

📠: 866-439-6681

✉: cust-service@lovebugstudios.com

Store hours: We don't have
any. This is an online-only
store.