

Design Resource

Meenakari Art - Varanasi

The Art of Ornamenting Metal

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baraland Ranjitha M. C.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



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Introduction

Silver is considered as one of the precious metals that has been used for many years to make jewelry, coins, utensils and various pieces of art. Now a day's silver is also used in dentistry, electronics, photography, mirrors and for industrial applications. Silver is a soft and shiny metal which is malleable and ductile and can be shaped easily by hammering. Silver is found in native form, either pure or an alloy in nature. Silver is commonly extracted from ore by smelting or chemical leaching.

Meenakari, a unique art also known as enameling, the art of ornamenting metal surface with attractive colours and kundhan stones. In olden days the meenakari art was done on gold, but later on it is done on another metals like silver, copper, etc., The word 'meena' means the specific enamel or colour used in this work where as in other words mina is the feminine form of minoo in Persian which means heaven and meena refers to the blue (azur) colour of heaven. Mughals introduced this unique art to India during 17th century. The one who does meenakari art known as meenakars. These meenakars belongs to the particular caste of kshatriyas and classify themselves with the name of meenakar or verma. Meenakari is not just limited to traditional jewelry but expands into more modern products including bowls, ashtrays, key chains, figures of deities and decorative showpieces. Meenakari is famous in various places in India and Varanasi is one among them. The meenakari in Varanasi is characterized by pink strokes on white enamel hence it is known as Banaras Gulabi Meenakari. The art was learnt from Persian craftsmen who visited to Lucknow in 17th century. Artisan prefers silver for meenakari art because of the price and lustrous surface. Involving in meenakari is bit typical hence it is very important that the artisans have technical hand to get aware with its process.

Mr.Ramesh Vishwakarma form Varanasi is well known artisan with more than 33 years of experience in meenakari art. He got this talent from his father Mr.Late Ramadhar Vishwakarma and he trained his family members for the same. This art is famous in the name of Banaras Gulabi Meenakari because of its unique style and colour combination.

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

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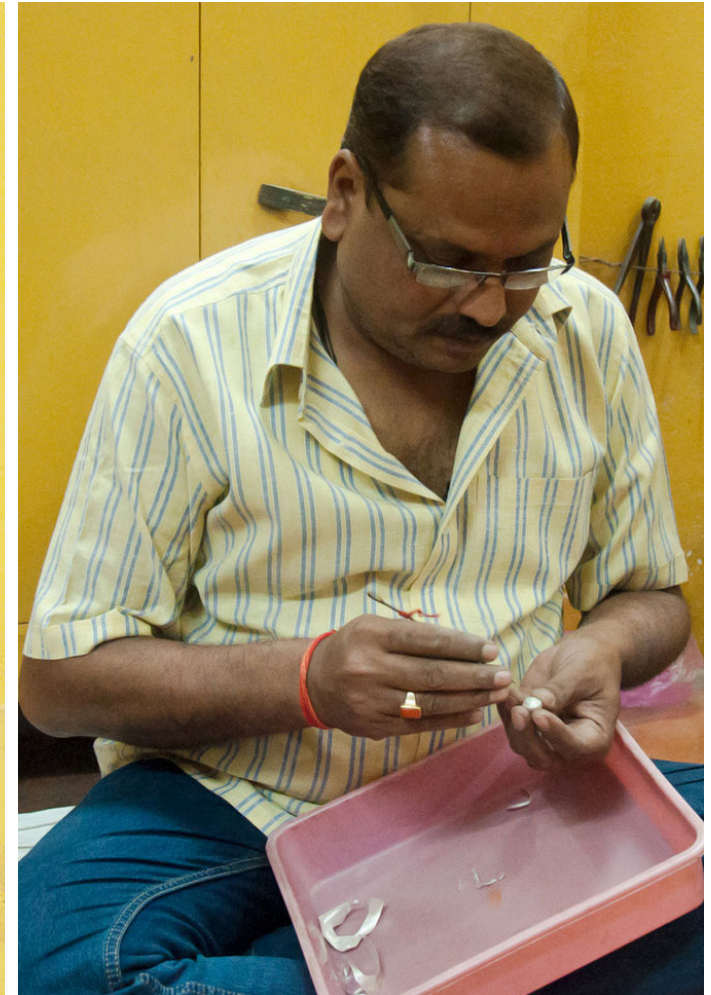
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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/introduction>

1. **Introduction**
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Decorative royal elephant depicted in Meenakari.



Artisan focusing on artwork.

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1. **Introduction**
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Group of artisans who work on Meenakari.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Following are the tools and raw materials required for Meenakari Art:

- **Silver Sheet:** The basic raw material for meenakari art.
- **Forceps and Holder:** To hold the metal sheet.
- **Metal Sheet Cutter:** Used to cut the silver sheet according to the size and shape.
- **Glass:** Raw material to prepare enamel for meenakari.
- **Mortar and Pestle:** To grind the glass into a fine paste or powder.
- **Liquid:** Made of pomegranate seeds and water.
- **Molds:** Its used for metal casting.
- **Impression Tools:** To emboss the metal sheet.
- **Hammer:** Its used for stamping metal sheet by hammering.
- **Furnace:** Electric furnace is used to heat the enameled metal.
- **Water Soluble Flux:** To solder the two silver pieces.
- **Hand Gas Burner:** To heat the metal sheet.
- **Brush:** To paint the craft.
- **Furnace:** To heat the enameled craft.

1. Introduction

2. **Tools and Raw Materials**

3. Making Process

4. Products

5. Video

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

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1. Introduction

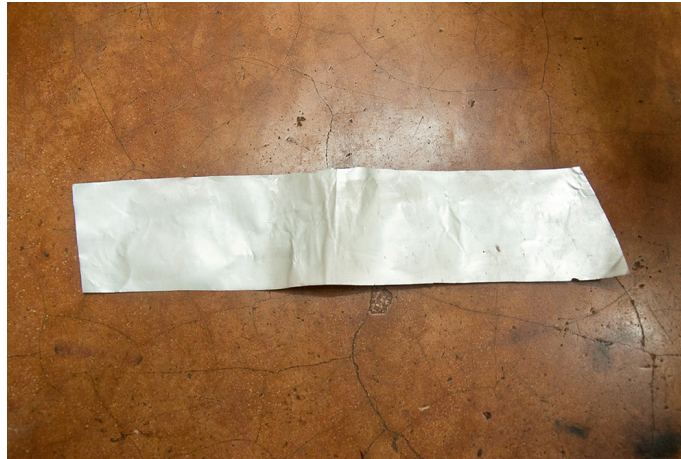
2. **Tools and Raw Materials**

3. Making Process

4. Products

5. Video

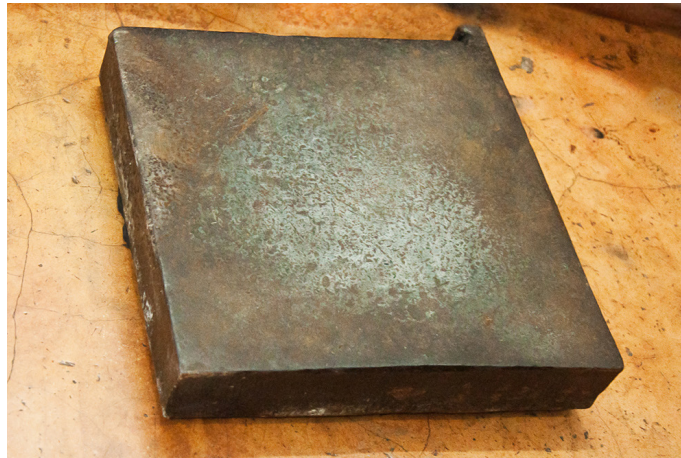
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Silver sheet is the basic raw material for Meenakari.



Molds and impression tools for peacock design.



Metal slab is used to work with Meenakari.



Crucible is used to melt silver waste.

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/tools-and-raw-materials>

1. Introduction
2. **Tools and Raw Materials**
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Hand gas burner is used to heat the silver sheet.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/tools-and-raw-materials>

1. Introduction

2. **Tools and Raw Materials**

3. Making Process

4. Products

5. Video

6. Contact Details



Metal holder for holding the crucible.



Plucker for holding hot metal sheet.



Metal heater to heat the craftwork.

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/tools-and-raw-materials>

1. Introduction

2. **Tools and Raw Materials**

3. Making Process

4. Products

5. Video

6. Contact Details



Painting brushes are used to paint the craft.



Different colours for colouring the craftwork.



A Glass piece, which is available in local market, is used to prepare colours.

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/tools-and-raw-materials>

1. Introduction
2. **Tools and Raw Materials**
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Customized tools for particular task.

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Making Process

Silver sheet is the basic raw material for meenakari art. Initially the silver sheet is cut according to the required size. The molding and casting is done by melting silver waste to make an impression tool for the peacock's body and pedestal. Then the sheet is placed between the metal mold and impression tool to get a desired shape by hammering and then the embossed sheet is exposed to the heat to make it soft. Again the reheated sheet is hammered to get a better shape. Using metal sheet cutter the unwanted area is removed and the two parts of the peacock's body are fused together by binding a preheated thin silver wire. The small pieces of silver sheet are dipped in water-soluble flux and then placed on the craft to join the two parts by firing through hand gas burner. Filing the top edges of the craft for the neat finish. Then the clawed feet of the peacock are attached by making a small hole on the body. The feathers of the peacock are embossed by hammering the impression tool on silver sheet and joined to the peacock's body. Whereas the silver pedestal for the craft is embossed and joined in the similar method.

The enamel for the craft is done by powdering the glass (which is available in the local market of Varanasi) using mortar and pestle. Mixing the powdered glass with liquid made of pomegranate seeds and water to give a shining surface. Then the meenakar (one who does colouring) starts decorating the craft by applying attractive colours. The head, neck and chest parts of the peacock are painted with royal blue colour and the feathers are enameled with the combination of blue and green. Different colour glasses are used for different colours. The enameled craft is heated in the furnace where the colors fuse and harden to become one with the surface for long lasting glossy surface. The heat of the furnace is set between 750 to 850 °C. The kundhan stones are added to embellish the artwork. It is important to confirm that the hardest colour is used first and fired. Then the metal is cooled to start with the detailing. The preheated craft is painted with the unique colour combination of pink on white, which is again heated in the furnace. Finally the enameled body, clawed feet and the feathers are joined together.

1. Introduction**2. Tools and Raw Materials****3. Making Process****4. Products****5. Video****6. Contact Details**

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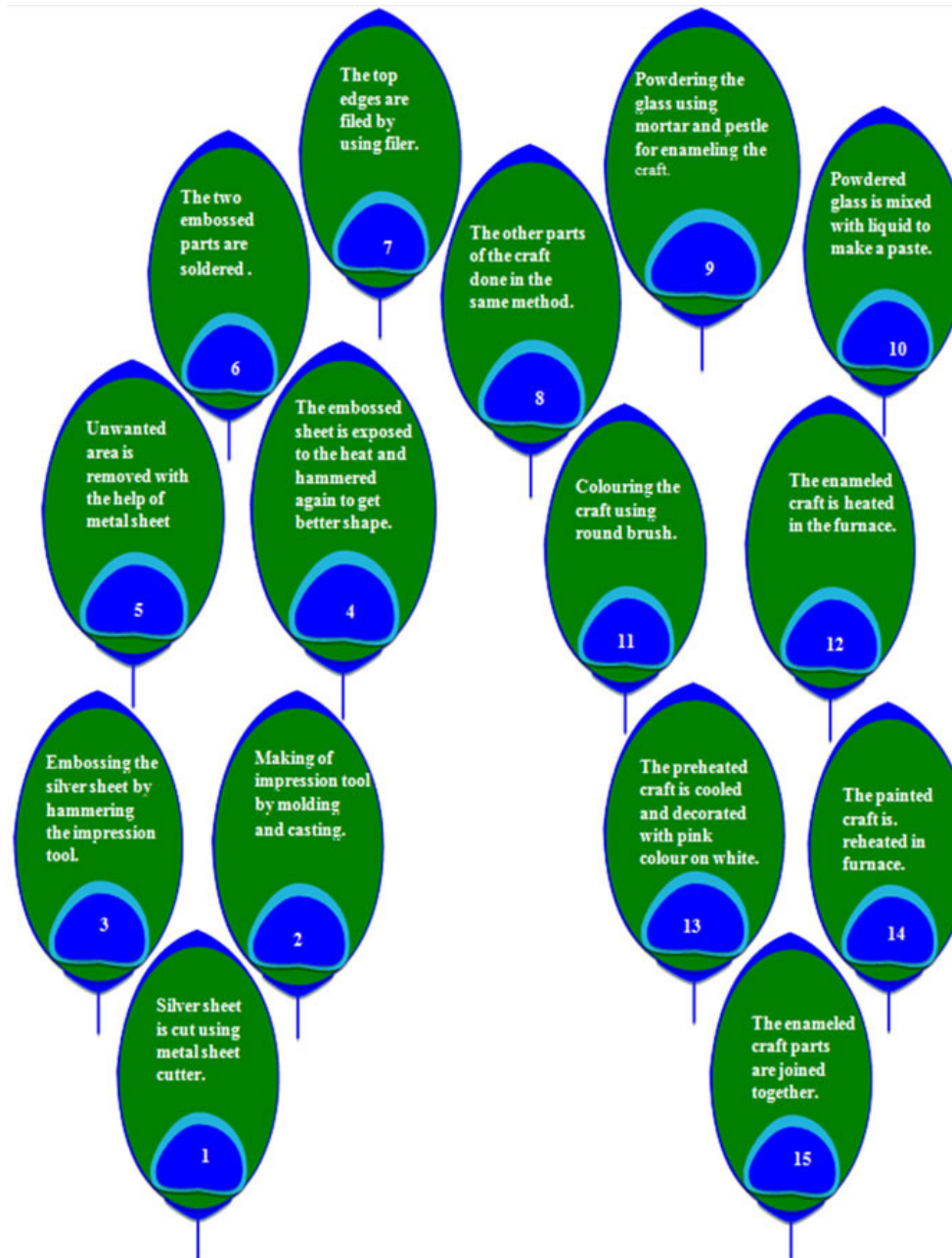
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Flow Chart:



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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Metal casting by melting silver waste in crucible.



Metal sheet cutter is used to cut the silver sheet.



Silver sheet is placed on the mold.



Hammering the sheet by placing the impression tool to get a required shape.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Heating the embossed metal sheet to make it soft and easy to bend.



Preheated embossed sheet is hammered.



Removing unwanted metal with the help of metal sheet cutter.



Hand gas burner is used to heat the embossed craft piece.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



The two embossed parts are attached by binding wire.



The embossed part is reheated.



Small pieces of silver is arranged which is dipped in chemical.



Joining the two parts of the peacock by heating.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Artisan piercing the metal sheet to make a hole.



Using silver wire and silver sheet does the leg part of the peacock.



Embossing the metal sheet by hammering.



The embossed metal sheet, which illustrates the peacock feather.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



The unwanted metal is removed by using metal sheet cutter.



Bending the embossed silver sheet.



Arranging the feather to the peacock body.



The stand for the peacock is embossed in the similar method.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Grinding the colour glass with water to make fine powder.



Colouring the peacock feather.



The stand for the peacock is painted.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



The craft is heated to retain the colour for long time.



A beautifully crafted peacock in meenakari art form.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/products>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details

Products

Silver is one of the adorable metal because of its soft white lustrous surface. Mr.Ramesh Vishwakarma is one of the skilled craftsmen for meenakari art. The group of artisans including his family members also makes lord Ganesh, horse, mirror, conch, tortoise, frog, elephant etc., in meenakari art form. Silver meenakari dancing peacock and silver meenakari elephant and riders are the most famous meenakari idols. The price of the meenakari craft starts from INR 150 to 35,000 and weighs up to 500grams, which depend on the design. The meenakari artworks are promoted through Government added Central cottage industries emporium, Delhi.



The decorative show piece, which depicts the royal procession.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/meenakari-art-varanasi/products>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



The display of beautiful peacock in meenakari form.



Lord Ganesha with Hamsa (swan) and mooshak (rat).



Beautiful mirror with fish hand.

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1. Introduction

2. Tools and Raw Materials

3. Making Process

4. **Products**

5. Video

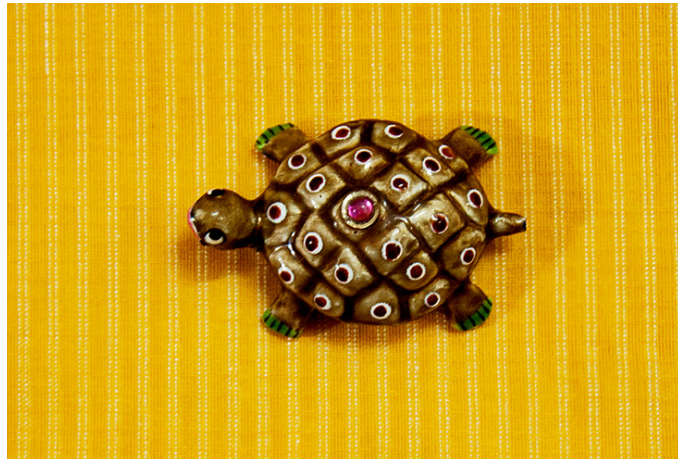
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Colourful meenakari Conch.



Elegant elephant pendants with attractive colour pattern.



Tortoise embellished with unique design.



Beautifully painted meenakari metal frog.

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Video



Meenakari Art - Varanasi

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. **Video**
6. Contact Details

Design Resource

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1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. **Contact Details**