

Restoring a Gilt-Lined, Nineteenth-Century Mahogany Frame

By Lauren Sepp

Over the years, we have received many calls from picture framers looking for products to perform light restoration on antique frames that come into their shops. I am pleased to say that there are several solutions available from Liberon Products for just this purpose.

Liberon is an established wood care brand based in the UK. The company has been manufacturing high-quality materials for protecting and restoring wood surfaces since 1912. Their product range has continually evolved to meet the technical, performance, and aesthetic requirements of today's consumers.

In this article, I will walk you through the restoration of a nineteenth-century mahogany frame with a gilt liner using a group of Liberon products. Such frames were popular choices for oil paintings and prints.

I separated the frame body from the liner to make it easier to work on. The first step in the restoration is to check the corners to make sure they are stable. If they are loose, they will have to be glued back together. This frame was stable, but the corners had separated slightly, which is typical for frames of this period. It was decided to leave it as-is. The mahogany body had dulled over time, with a lot of wear showing on the outer edge of the frame. The liner was basically clean with just a light layer of dust. The liner had



● This nineteenth-century mahogany frame, which includes a gilt liner, was recently restored with the help of several Liberon products. The result: a beautiful frame ready to be used again.

slightly open corners, but was stable. There were chips and losses to the gesso on the edge.

Starting with the gilt liner, I lightly wiped the surface with an ultra-soft cloth to remove the dust. The gesso chips and losses were filled with a high-quality spackle that sands easily. I let the filler dry completely, sanded it lightly, and sealed it with a thin coat of shellac. You can also seal a repair with a base color like red; this liner was gilded over sealed gesso, so I left it white.

It was then time to paint the repairs. Liberon offers two products that I used in this stage: gilt varnish and cream.

Gilt varnish is a solvent-based gilt paint that is

applied with a paintbrush. The varnish has a thick consistency that covers well. This material will dry to a hard gloss. All six colors can be intermixed to achieve a variety of tones. Allow to dry for three hours before applying further coats.

Gilt cream is a wax-based gilt finish that is easy to apply with a cotton cloth or a small brush. Gilt cream is a great product for strengthening weak, worn gilding by applying a thin layer. Allow to dry for five hours, then leave the natural matte finish or buff to a shine. It's best to apply several thin coats as opposed to one thick coat.

I started with gilt varnish for this liner. For the best match, I mixed a few colors together. I applied the varnish to the repaired areas using a small artist's brush. After it



● *The original frame before restoration work began*

dried, I mixed the same colors of the gilt cream and applied a light coat to blend it all in. To help hide the repair, I took a razor blade and cut some gesso cracks in the repaired areas to match the cracks on the rest of the liner.

The last step is to fill the miter joints. Liberon offers a wax-based gilt filler stick that is perfect for correcting gaps in miter joints, making small repairs, and filling nail holes in gilt picture frames. All six colors are intermixable and won't shrink or fall out when hardened.

Break off a small piece, work it in between your fingers to warm, then press the wax into the miter joints using a spatula. Smooth down the wax and buff off the excess with a cloth. This product can also be used/sculpted to replace small missing carved elements.

After that, it was time to start on the mahogany frame. The first step was to revive the surface. Liberon makes two products for this: wax and polish remover, a non-aggressive, strong cleaner to remove dirt, grime, dust, smoke, and old layers of wax from antique furniture without damaging the original finish; and burnishing cream, which removes dirt, super-



● *The frame's original gilt liner before repairs*

ficial scratches, haze, and blooms and rejuvenates highly-polished surfaces. It is often considered the "secret" in a restorer's arsenal!

Since the surface was dull and had no signs of wax or polish on it, I went straight to the burnishing cream. Shake the container very well. Soak a cloth with burnishing cream and rub vigorously, going with the grain where possible. Let dry for two to three minutes, then buff the surface to a beautiful luster with a clean cotton cloth.

The next step was to tone the worn raw wood areas of the frame. I used Liberon's palette wood dye, a line of water-based dyes for coloring bare wood, for this task. I chose the appropriate color and applied with a brush to the worn outer edge of the



● *Using a razor blade to cut matching gesso cracks into repaired areas*

frame and other worn areas, then waited a few hours for it to dry completely.

Once it was dry, it was time to apply the finish. One of my favorite products to use for this is Liberon's Easy French Polish, a shellac designed for beginners to polish small items and carved woodwork. Use a good-quality lacquer brush or cloth to apply a thin coat to the surface. Let dry for a few hours before applying additional coats. The other option is to use Liberon's Special Pale French Polish, a light-colored, de-waxed shellac that brings out the wood's natural grain. I am used to padding on shellac, so I chose the Pale French Polish. I loaded my pad with shellac, and starting in one corner of the outer edge of the frame, I worked my way around the frame, applying the shellac with even pressure only to the areas that were dyed. I let the shellac dry for an hour, then applied two additional coats.

To fill the old nail holes on the sides of the frame, I used Liberon's Wax Filler Sticks, a wax fill for repairing small to medium-size holes, cracks, gaps, and deep scratches. Choose from 16 wood colors, including white and ebony. Shave off a piece of wax and knead in your fingers until warm and soft. Apply to the nail hole, smooth out with



● *Burnishing cream can be buffed in to restore a frame's luster*



● Wax Filler Sticks can be buffed in to fill cracks, gaps, holes, and scratches

a spatula, and buff with a rag. You can also use the company's Retouch Crayons. The crayons are made from carnauba wax for filling shallow scratches and small nail holes. Simply rub the crayon into the scratch or rub to fill a hole.

The black ebonized panels on the frame also needed some attention. Liberon's Black Patinating Wax, an extremely deep black wax for adding aged highlights or disguising repairs on old worn surfaces, was used here. This product is perfect for hiding scratches and giving the ebonized panels a nice shine when dry. Apply with a cotton rag or use a brush to work into the surface. Let dry and buff. You can also use a black Retouch Crayon to fill deeper scratches.

Finally, a finish coat of wax was applied to harmonize the surface. Liberon's Black Bison Paste Wax is a blend of fine waxes for nourish-



● Fill shallow scratches and small nail holes with Retouch Crayons

ing and protecting the wood from dryness. The best way to apply the wax is with a soft steel wool such as Liberon's 0000 steel wool. Simply dip the steel wool into the wax and gently apply to the surface of the frame. Let dry for 20 minutes, then buff.


And there you have it; a beautiful frame ready to be enjoyed for many more generations! **PFM**



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Lauren, who is Vice President of Sepp Leaf Products, is the third generation in her family business which specializes in gilding products for the trade. After receiving her B.S. in Merchandising

from the University of Delaware, Lauren joined the company in New York City, where it has served as a local and international resource for gold leaf and related materials for over five decades. She enjoys bringing traditional and innovative products to market, and helping picture framers around the world create beauty with gold leaf.




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