

Materials and step by step instruction for painting a spring silk cushion cover / breezy diaphanous window drape:

Materials you'll need:

1. **Silk cloth** – any dimension required with a margin of approximately 2.5 cm on each edge to allow for the overlap once stretched onto the wooden frame.
2. **Jelutong wooden frame** of the same dimension as the silk. Each of the frame pieces need to lock snugly into each other, so the least fussy way of doing this is to have each edge fashioned into a cross halving joint. It is advisable to use Jelutong albeit it is a bit pricey because this particular wood is rigid and holds its form well, but it is still soft enough for one to drive thumb tacks into it – and remove them without too much cussing and nail breaking.
3. **Thumb tacks** - I prefer the vertical plastic knobbed ones since they are much easier to lever in and out of wood than the flat-headed brass ones.
4. **2B Pencil** –this is one softer than the usual HB pencil which allows you to trace or draw your design onto your silk without having to apply too much pressure while you draw, thus preventing any snagging of the delicate fabric.
5. **Your own design** to fit the dimension of the cloth. Keep it fairly simple to accommodate the nature of melted-wax-and-paintbrush technique: too much detail might be lost depending on your paint brush size and your level of dexterity.
6. **Size 5 or 6 round-tipped paint brush** – this does not need to be an expensive one especially since you'll be dipping it into melted wax, but it must have hair bristles as the heat of the wax will melt synthetic bristles into an unusable blob on the end of a stick!
7. **Silk dyes** – bought from The Silk Shop in Fourways. I prefer these since they are a wonderfully colour-saturated range and their transparent character allow for beautiful overlaps of colour and flexibility in intensity, and a little goes a long way!
8. **White ice tray** – the dimensions of the dimples in an ice tray are usually of a rectangular dimension and are deep enough to allow for enough colour to saturate your sponge applicator when it comes to spreading it across your silk. The multiple dimples also give the option of mixing differing intensities of a certain colour to use in creating colour-overlaps. Also, using a white ice tray will give one a more accurate reflection of the colour one is mixing whereas a coloured tray might confuse the eye for those who are not yet familiar with their medium.
9. **Sponge applicators** – these most commonly come in 2.5 and 5 cm width and are very useful for carrying enough colour for the even application of colour over larger surface areas.
10. **Ordinary white candles** – these are an inexpensive and uncomplicated source of wax that works well for this particular technique – its brittle character is also ideal for achieving the crackle effect over the masked areas if so desired.
11. **Electrical Beautician's Wax Pot** – this might be a bit expensive for this technique if you're trying it out for the first time but the advantage of its heat settings will regulate the temperature of the wax to prevent it from over heating and burning that can quite easily happen when one is using an ordinary pot on a stove as most of us might when venturing into this initially.
12. **Packaging tape** – this is sticky enough to stick and hold your piece of silk in place over your drawn design if you happen to be tracing it onto your cloth.
13. **Heavy duty aluminium kitchen foil** – this is to make your capsule top and bottom for steaming.

METHOD:

1. Stick your paper design onto a wide window pane. Use clear packaging tape to position your silk cloth over your paper design onto the glass window pane and use this together with the outside sunshine as a lightbox for tracing your design using your 2B pencil.
2. Remove your silk from the window and pin it to your assembled wooden frame, starting with the selvage of the cloth (you'll notice the slightly stiffer weave on one edge which appears least stretchy compared with the remaining cut edges) and, starting from the centre, pin it down working towards the corners.
3. Snap three or four candles roughly in half and throw them into the electrical wax pot and turn it onto a fairly hot setting but not at its maximum – you want your wax to melt down to a virtually clear liquid with a consistency similar to what ordinary ink or paint might be without burning. Don't worry about the little wicks lying at the bottom of the hot, melted wax; this will not affect the process in any way.
4. While this is happening, pin the opposite edge onto the frame starting at the centre again as before, placing thumb tacks in corresponding positions to their respective opposites so that an even tension is created across the cloth.
5. Do the same for the two remaining edges, making sure that the cloth is taught enough to withstand too much sagging when the dye is painted onto the silk later on. Even though you are piercing holes through the silk this will not be visible as part of the design as it will disappear into your seam when it is sewn into a cushion or when you edge off the window draping. And don't worry too much about tearing the cloth while stretching it across the board as the silk is more robust than you might think, so pull as tightly as required.
6. Now the fun part begins: take your round-tipped hair-bristled paint brush and dip it lightly into the melted wax (be careful not to have too much on your brush as this might drip in unwanted places onto your cloth and it's easier to maintain control over your strokes with less wax) and start to paint over the areas you wish to have masked (these are the areas which will resist the dye once it is painted over the cloth and wax). Try to use light and free strokes as this will really show off the hand-made quality of your artwork in keeping with the very natural theme you have chosen. Don't be afraid that you have not stuck to the exact outlines you've drawn as your freehand brush strokes will simply lend more charm to the piece.
7. Try to work from the opposite side to your hand, for instance, if you're right handed, work from the left hand corner and rotate the frame as you go along until you have completed the design in wax. The wax will cool and dry rapidly as you go along, so you don't have to worry about any smudging.
8. Now to choose your colours: mix about three colours that will create some dimension to your flat piece of silk: for example, use a soft turquoise or yellowy green to symbolize water or earth and move to the next colour as a contrast, like cooler lavender, then finally a darker navy to symbolize sky. Mix these in shades in the ice tray.
9. Next is the application of the dye to form the background to your wax design. Start with your darker colour at the top of the frame, applying broad horizontal strokes using your sponge applicator. Work quickly and boldly so that the colours, while still wet, will blend easily when applied next to each other. You'll discover new colours that will form on the fabric as you blend your overlapped areas of colour. This is part of the adventurous happening.
10. You may paint more concentrated colour in the open areas of texture to create a bit of volume and contrast to the wax forms and images.
11. Once all the dye is dry, remove your painted silk from the frame and place a double layer of blank newsprint on either side of the cloth and fold it up small enough or it to fit into its foil capsule to go inside a pressure cooker. Take care to ensure that the cloth does not touch itself as you fold it up in the paper.
12. Place the silk and paper parcel inside the loosely sealed foil capsule and balance it atop an inverted ceramic bowl inside a pressure cooker into which enough water has been poured to reach about 3 centimetres below the top of the inverted bowl. The water should never make contact with the capsule as this will make watermarks on the cloth should water droplets form inside the capsule. What we're after is pure steam.

13. Steam the artwork inside a pressure cooker for about 40 minutes. Once the pressure cooker has cooled and the steam has released, remove the paper parcel from the pressure cooker.
14. As the paper parcel is unfolded, you'll notice the waxy spots and blobs all over the paper surface. This means that the wax has been successfully absorbed into the paper and removed from the silk and the dye has been fixed.
15. Wash out the silk cloth with cold water and iron it out on a low heat while still a bit damp. In doing this the lovely soft silky lustre of the cloth will have been reconstituted.
16. Sew up your cloth into a cushion cover or simply finish off the cloth edges to drape it over your window.