

Gathering the scales

Scales are harvested off the fish using a spoon, or other flat object that won't damage the skin of the fish. Whitefish was the most common type of fish the Métis would use, as it was a major food source and has nice large scales.

From here, scales are washed with blue Dawn dish soap (as specified by Koohkum Marie Bercier) many times, until scales are clean, and water is clear. The scales are then separated and placed on a towel and dried, making sure to periodically move them around. If scales are not cleaned and dried properly, they can mold and will likely retain their fishy smell.

To dye the quills, you can use anything from natural (berry, bark, or leaf dyes) to clothing dye (such as Rit) or some folks even use bingo dabbers. Using warm water and dye of choice soak your scales until they reach the desired color and then rinse in cold water and dry on a towel, making sure to separate the scales. Move the scales around several times each day, until they are dry.

Once dry, they are ready to be used in your next project.

North Island Métis (NIMA) publishes a monthly newsletter.

Go to NIMA's website (www.nimetis.com/newsletters) to read current and past newsletters.

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North Island Métis



NORTH ISLAND MÉTIS

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**NORTH ISLAND
MÉTIS**

Métis Fish
Scale Art



Variations of fish scale art

This first variation of fish scale art requires tacking down each individual scale, after it has been dyed. At the center, you can finish your flower off with a few beads to cover your threads.



This second variation of fish scale art takes significantly more time. Each scale is glued into place, allowing the glue to dry fully in between steps. After the flower is finished and dried you then paint the flower with nail polish and glue it into place.



Manipulating the scales

As the scales dry, they will take their own unique shape, however, you are able to change the shape of the scales! By soaking the scales in warm water for a couple of minutes you can more easily manipulate the scales to create your desired shape. You can flatten them, curve them slightly or roll them up. This will allow you to create a variety of shapes to be used for all different parts of the flowers that you are creating.

Indigenous Culture

In Indigenous culture all parts of the animal were used. It was important to not let anything go to waste, to honor the animal for giving its life. Fish scale art was a natural progression from this belief. It gave way to being able to use the scales from a major food source to create beautiful three-dimensional art. Fish scale art is a newer Métis artform, having only been around for less than 100 years.

Getting Started (two different variations)

- Thick felt or leather
- Fish scales (dyed)
- Size 10 or 11 beading needle
- Nymo D thread
- Beads
- Scissors
- Bowl with warm water

OR

- Thick felt/leather
- Fish scales (undyed)
- Lepage wood glue
- Aluminum foil
- Parchment Paper
- Pen
- Tape
- Tweezers
- Nail polish

Check out our YouTube page for a step-by-step tutorial @northislandmetis.