

Design Resource

Art Plate Making - Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

Metal handicraft

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Rakshitha
NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/art-plate-making-thanjavur-tamil-nadu>

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



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Introduction

Thanjavur also known as Tanjore is a south Indian city that belongs to the state of Tamil Nadu. It is the headquarters of Thanjavur district. Tanjore acquires an area of 14.03 sq mi. Tanjore is located in the Cauvery Delta, at a distance of 314km towards southwest of Chennai and 56kms towards east of Tiruchirapalli. Due to the tributaries of river Cauvery that flows through the city, it has become an important agricultural centre and also known as “Rice bowl of Tamil Nadu”. According to a legend it is believed that the name Thanjavur is derived from Tanjan, a legendary demon in Hindu mythology. The word Thanjavur is a Tamil name. “Than” means “cold”, “chei” means “farmland” and “ur” means “city”; a city surrounded by cold farmlands. Thus the word “Thancheiur” became “Thanjavur” in later days.

Thanjavur is an important pilgrim centre and major tourist destination of Tamil Nadu. It is a regional cultural centre that upholds the South Indian art, religion and architecture. UNESCO World Heritage Monuments like Brihadeeswara temple that represents the pride of Chola dynasty, is one of the greatest attractions of this city. Such beautiful town with finest monuments and temples are decorated by fully skilled artisans. As further dug into these temples when the curiosity reaps in, one gets to see the beautiful jewelry boxes, Thanjavur art plates and bowls made of brass and copper.

Thanjavur art plate is an artifact that is exclusively made in Thanjavur. These art plates are circular in shape and made as a gift item. It is a handicraft consisting of metals such as silver, copper and bronze. These metals are usually embossed with the figures of gods and goddesses at the centre of the art plate. This unique artwork has been registered for the protection under the Geographical indication of the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement. It is listed at item 63 as “Thanjavur Art Plate” of The Geographical Indications of goods (GI) Act 1999 of the Government of India with the registration confirmed by the Controller General of Patents Designs and Trademarks. Hence the metal compositions and particularization have to remain the same while only the size of the article is permitted to be different according to GI approval.

The production of Thanjavur art plate dates back to early 18th century. It was introduced by Rajah Serfoji-II (1777-1832). He was the Maratha ruler of Thanjavur who encouraged the skilled artisans to create magnificent metal artifacts that would reflect the glory of his kingdom's royalty. These metal artifacts were made of brass, silver and copper, which is worth several thousand for each piece of this stunning art. The blend of silver in high relief on the reddish copper ground makes the metal artifacts strikingly beautiful that would last for several millenniums. The final finishing would depend on the artisan's proficiency and skills.

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These Thanjavur art plates are crafted exclusively by the Vishwakarma community that consists few of goldsmith families of Thanjavur. It is an inherited profession and it's the only way of living for them. These artisans with plenty of experience tend to have the sophistication to prepare durable art plates that would retain its glow and shine for a longer period of time. Hence it is declared as a cottage industry whereas it is made in the craftsmen's houses. Its manufacture is the privilege of the menfolk only.

The Thanjavur art plate made in 20th century was displayed at the Government Museum in Thanjavur during 2011. This art plate made of proposed metals had the relief images of lord Nataraja, the sage Pathanjali and the goddess Sivakami in a standing posture over a lotus flower, encrusted at the plate's central part. And as per the rules and regulations of modern day legislation, those who wish to initiate the art of making 'Thanjavur art plates' should be legally registered and certified producer of this craft. Thus the producer must also possess an authorized user logo that has to be imprinted on all the metal art plates, to ascertain its genuine and authentic description.



Beautifully engraved Thanjavur art plate.



Moulds of lord Ganesh of different poses.

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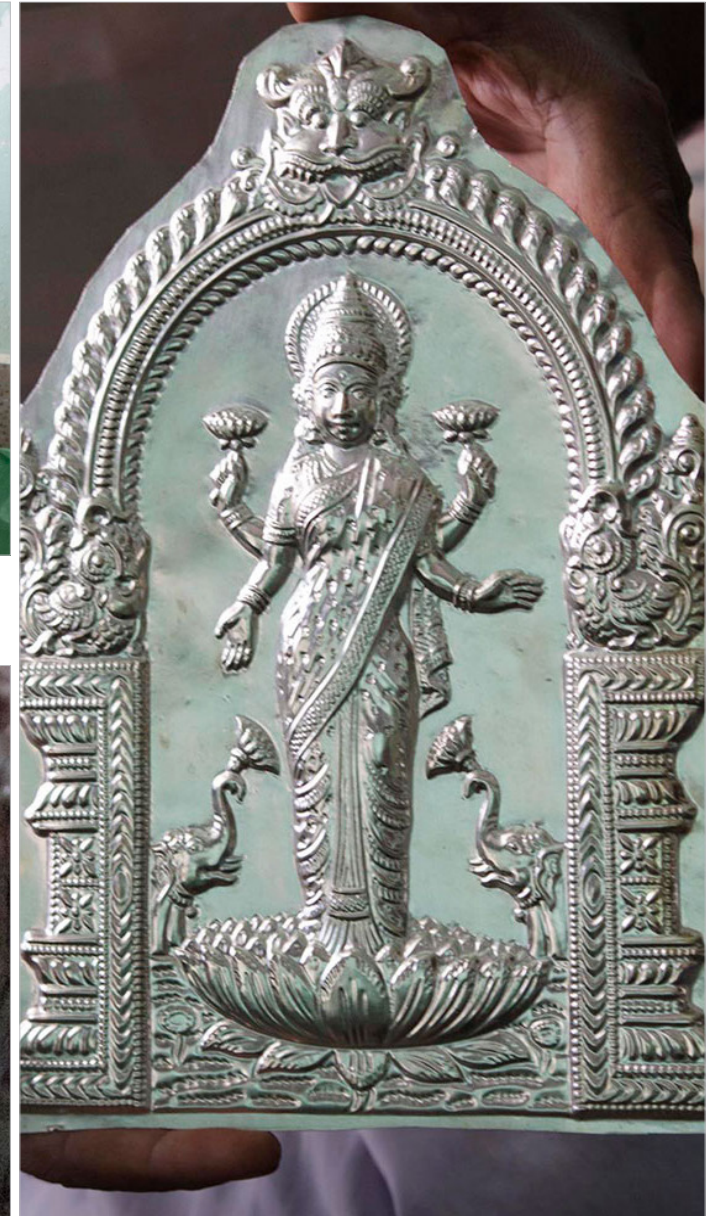
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Senior artisan who is well versed in crafting Thanjavur art plates.



A box, made by the same technique of Thanjavur art plates.



Goddess Lakshmi embossed in silver sheet.

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Tools and Materials

Following are the tools and raw materials required for Art Plate Making:

- Metal: Metal is the chief material that is used for making Thanjavur art plates.
- Hammer: Hammer is used for fixing the metal relief sheets.
- Pincers: Pincers are used while fixing the relief sheets to the base sheet.
- Moulds: Moulds are used for creating impressions on the metal sheets.
- Punches: Punch tool is used for punching the sheets to form an impression.
- Chisels: Chisels are used for engraving metal sheets.
- Grinding Stone: This stone is used for sharpening the tools.
- Forge: This tool is used for heating the metal sheets.

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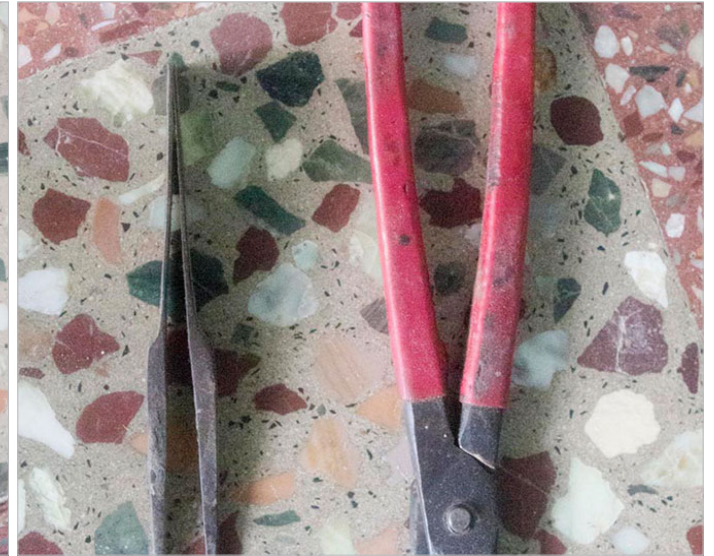
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Chisels used for engraving the metal sheets.



Holder and cutter that are used while cutting the metal sheets.



Brass sheet.



Thin silver sheet.

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Hammer used for fixing the relief sheets.



Mould is used for creating impressions on the metal sheets.

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Copper sheet is one of the metal sheets that is used in Thanjavur art plate.

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Making Process

Thanjavur art plates require to be made in strategic manner. The making of art plate consists of three components.

- The base plate,
- A circular plate of metals with primary relief and
- The secondary relief.

This processes in three levels done by a metal worker (who works on preparing base plate), jeweler (who makes reliefs on circular metal plate) and a stone – setter (who makes the secondary relief). But a single craftsman could also carry out all these three levels of work.

Initially in the first stage, the base of the art plate is made which involves the desired metal cutting as per the required size and shape. This base is usually made of brass. The front side of the brass is carefully polished. It is then firmly fixed on a wooden base with an asphalt bed. The entire frame is heated with a blowpipe and leveled until the base design is prepared. Further the silver and copper sheets are placed on the base to cross check the required size and then they are cut accordingly. They are then heated slightly with the dye to form an impression. Hence the impression is made by refining and etching using punches and chisels.

In the next stage, metal sheets are super imposed and encrusted on the base. This is done by filling a mixture of wax made of brick powder, gingili oil and frankincense. These ingredients are used to fill hollow depressions at the back of the metal relief sheets. Thus the relief sheets are then placed on the base plate and encrusted by punching along the grooves. Relief sheet is then polished and prepared for the final designs.

As the last process the secondary relief is made. The designs on the central circular metallic disc are usually made are the figures of deities like lord Nataraja, goddess Saraswati, goddess Ashta Lakshmi and lord Ganesh. Apart from the figures of the Hindu deities, some of the floral designs are also etched around the central motif and sometimes they also replace the figures of the deities on metallic disc.

Besides Thanjavur art plates, other products like key chains, paper-weights, bowls and boxes are also made using the same technique. Even the logo and emblems of corporate firms and organizations have also been embossed using the same technique.

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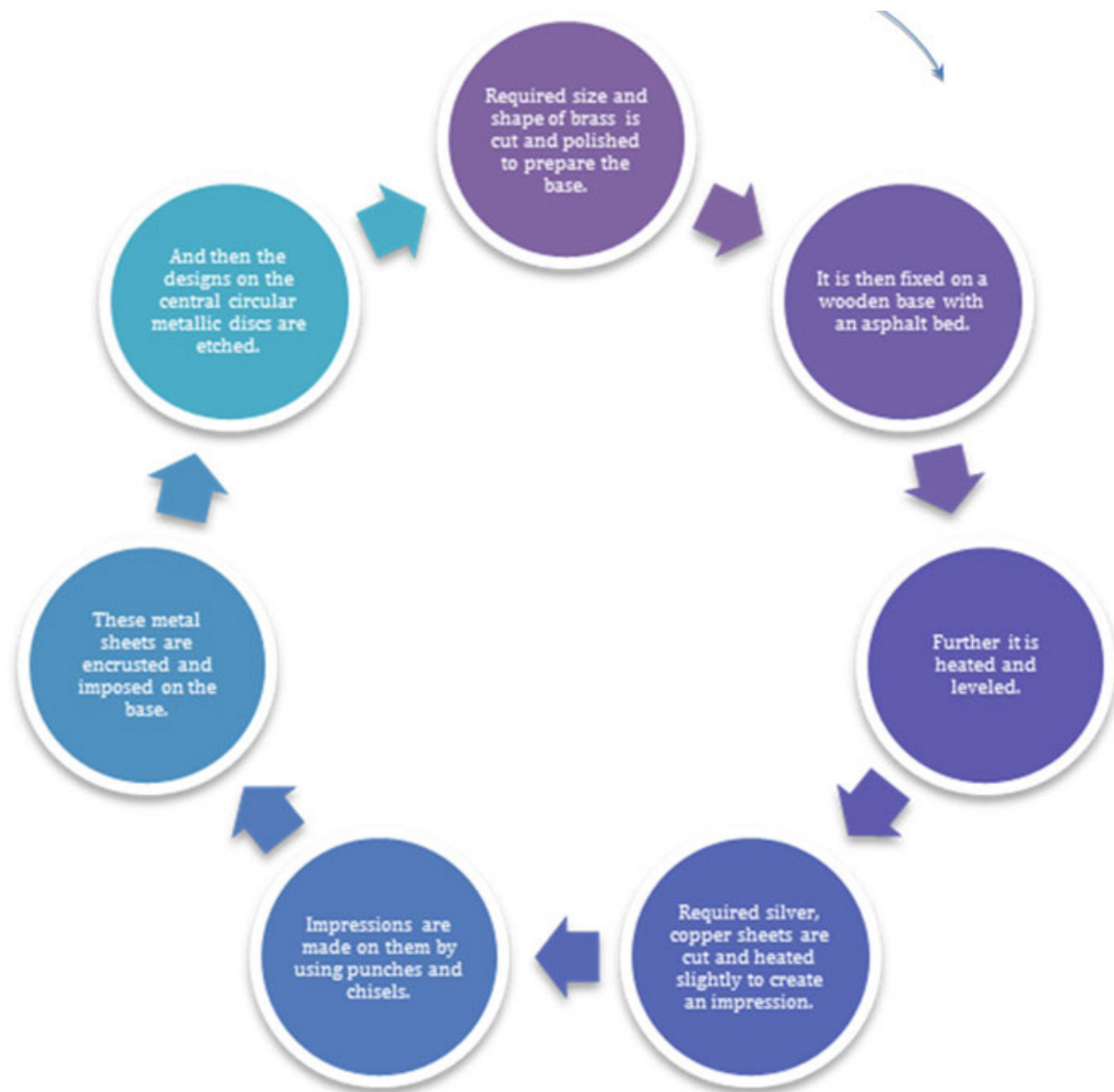
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Flow Chart



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Required brass metal is cut and polished..



It is fixed on the wooden base and marked.



Markings made on brass.



Desired metal mould is chosen.

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Copper sheet is placed on the mould.



Keeping cloth as the support, impression is gained by tapping on the copper sheet-using hammer.



It is again tapped by hand to gain the precise impression.



The copper sheet is removed from the mould.

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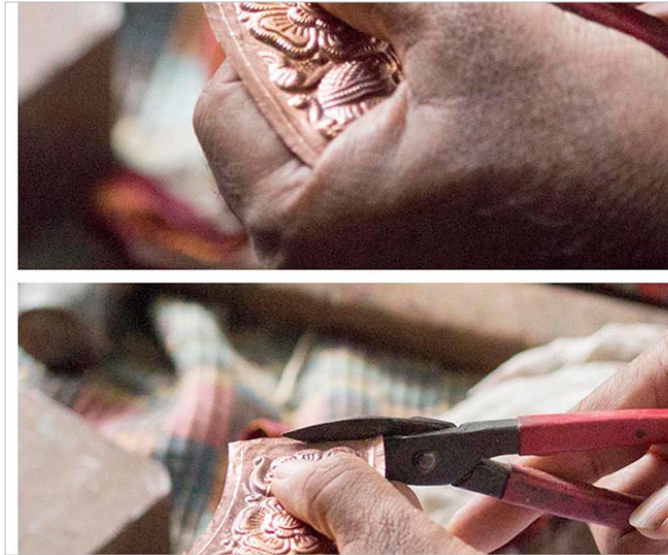
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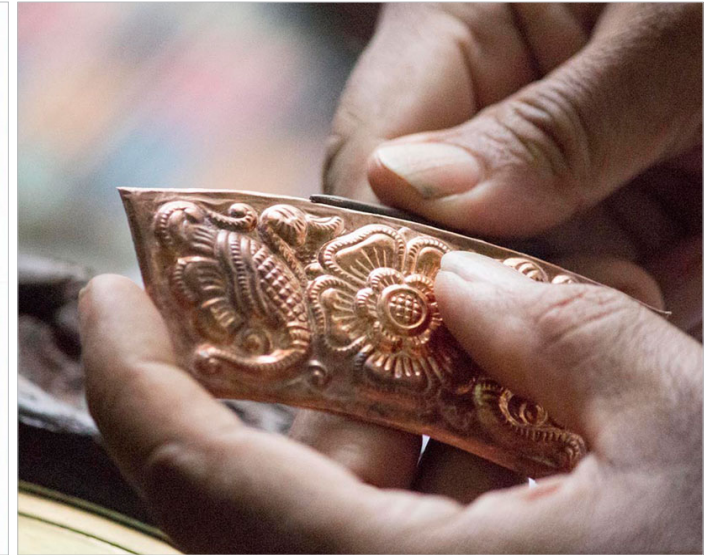
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The excess of sheet is cut.



Borderline is checked for neat finishing.



Mixture of brick powder, gingili oil and frankincense is filled in hollow depressions at the back of metal reliefs.



These metals reliefs are placed on the base metal sheet of brass.

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The corners are neatly placed and fixed.



Initially the outer most circle is filled with the metal reliefs as per the design.



Initially the outer most circle is filled with the metal reliefs as per the design.



Finally the centre area is filled with the main design's relief and the Thanjavur art plate is made ready.

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Products

Thanjavur art plates are embossed cautiously with fine art. These are made with the combination of silver and other mastery metal materials that are used as wall hangings etc as the final product. These art plates are the real time representations of the Maratha's royal splendor. It is the art of engraving and embossing small figures in the metal plates which is one of the finest and most difficult form of metal crafts. These Thanjavur art plates are designed with gods of Hindu mythology. These Thanjavur art plates are used as the corporate gifts as it is a uniquely traditional art that not only satisfy the artistic taste of the receiver but also helps in keeping the traditional art alive!



Goddess Ashta Lakshmi engraved on the metals brass, silver and copper to decorate Thanjavur art plate.



Thanjavur art box that is beautifully ornamented.

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Intricately engraved and embossed art plate of Thanjavur.

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This documentation was done by Professor Bibhudutta Baral and Rakshitha at **NID, Bengaluru**.

You can get in touch with him at [bibhudutta\[at\]nid.edu](mailto:bibhudutta[at]nid.edu)

You could write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

Key Contacts:
Shri.Mari Muthu, Senior Craftsman
Thanjavur
Tamilnadu
Cellphone: 9444803123

Helpdesk Details:
Co-ordinator
Project e-kalpa
R & D Campus
National Institute of Design
#12 HMT Link Road, Off Tumkur Road
Bengaluru 560 022
India

Phone: +91 80 2357 9054
Fax: +91 80 23373086
Email: [dsource.in\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:dsource.in[at]gmail.com)

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