

Metal Graphic and Method to produce a Metal Graphic

Field of invention

The present invention relates to a metal graphic. Moreover, the invention relates to a metal graphic formed on a surface comprising discrete wire elements.

Description of the related art

Because of their brilliant reflectivity and intrinsic aesthetic value, the desire to use metals to produce visually pleasing raised metallic graphics have been a long sought after characteristic. Unlike ink printing on paper or painting upon canvas for example, metals are difficult materials to work with requiring high temperatures or advanced chemical processing, and therefore not practical to be used as a printing medium for creating graphics.

Common methods to produce graphic designs in combination with metal are typically subtractive, cutting techniques, wherein metal is removed from a larger blank or block piece. However, relatively few additive techniques exist, such as: electroplating, metal evaporation and metal leaf gilding to name a few. It can be appreciated that embossing and engraving can produce a good level of depth and texture as a negative impression, whereas electroplating and metal evaporation produce thin films with no significant depth or

texture. Metal containing inks or paints are another additive application technique. However, as they contain elements other than pure metal and are also applied very thin, their value as a raised metal graphic medium is diminished.

It is further appreciated that most of the above methods are primarily batch processes, in that large sections of the article must be printed or masked, requiring expensive pre-fabricated tooling or stencil fixtures. Batch processing can be advantageous for large volume mass production of a single design; however, it has significant limitations in flexibility, customization, time to design and efficient use of material.

It is therefore an objective of this invention to provide metal graphics that are raised from a surface having depth and texture. It is a further objective of this invention to provide a method for producing metal graphics that are raised from a surface having depth and texture.

Summary of the invention

According to one aspect of the invention, a metal graphic formed on a surface or substrate is provided. The metal graphic comprises discrete wire elements. In a first embodiment of the invention, these discrete wire elements are attached to the surface or substrate. The wire elements can be of any metal, as long as it can be affixed to the surface. The metal comprises precious metals like gold, silver, palladium, platinum, niobium, iridium and rhodium as well as less expensive metals like nickel, copper and aluminium.

The discrete wire elements can be fixed on the surface at one or two ends, depending on the form of the wire. Round loops, square loops or loops with more than two kinks are likely to be welded at two ends. Other forms of the wire elements, like a wire with a melted ball welded at one end of the wire or a melted metal ball, are fixed to the surface only at one end.

Depending on the desired visual effect, the cross-sections of the wire elements can have different shapes. For example, they can be round or rectangular as in ribbon wires.

Also depending on the desired visual effect of the graphic, the metal wires can be of pure metal or act as metal cores that are coated with metallic or non-metallic elements. For example, the wires can be of a low cost metal like nickel which is electroplated with a higher value metal like silver. Further, the wire can be made of aluminium and be coated with a polymer like polyvinylchloride (PVC). As non-metallic coatings, polymers, lacquers and paints are the most common.

In order to form metal graphics as described above, it is essential to use wire elements that can be affixed to a surface. Therefore, a plethora of methods can be applied. Known techniques include laser welding, thermosonic welding, thermo-compression bonding, ultrasonic welding, adhesive bonding, soldering, brazing, wire bonding and microwelding.

The surface or substrate on which the wire elements are attached can be of any shape and of any thickness. As material, only materials that can be affixed to the wire elements are suitable. For example, the surface can be a thin metallic foil or a metal plated organic or inorganic material that may be used to create bendable and wearable shapes. Further, the surface may be coloured to create a contrast between the raised graphics and the background.

Since the wire elements can be very fragile, in a second embodiment of invention the metal graphic is protected from mechanical damage by a transparent cover. The cover can be of any colour and of any transparent material. Typical materials comprise glass, an inorganic polymer like quartz and an organic polymer like Plexiglas.

In another embodiment of invention, the wire elements are not only covered, but are also enclosed in a transparent or semi-transparent medium. For this purpose, different polymers like methacrylates, polycarbonates, cyclic olefin polymers, styrenic polymers, polyesters, polyimides or polyethersulfones are suitable.

In a further embodiment of invention, the surface is used as a temporary medium upon which the graphic is fabricated. After fabrication, the surface is fully or partially removed to create a free-standing metal artwork, such as that used in a highly detailed pendant, for example. The removal of the surface can be accomplished for example by selective chemical etching. Depending on what metal has to be etched, different etchants are available: Sodium hydroxide for aluminium, ferric chloride for stainless

steels, nitric acid for copper or hydrofluoric acid for silica, for example.

Large wires including ribbons may be used for large size graphics.

In a further embodiment of invention, the metal graphic is created as a negative image, i.e. the subject of the image is surrounded by the discrete wire elements instead of being directly composed of wire elements, which create an outline of the graphic for a different visual effect.

It should be appreciated that the enclosed invention describes a technique for placing a graphic image on a surface, and thus it is evident that such a technique can have broad applicability and uses. The technique can be applied in similar instances where one would find engraved, embossed, stamped, etched, cast, gilded, painted, printed, metallic inkjet, plated, stencilled and evaporated metal graphics, designs or images. The type of graphics that can be created are basically anything that can be printed and broken down into discrete elements such as lines or dots. Some examples of the type of graphics which could be rendered using the techniques described, include, but are not limited to:

Types of Graphics

Symbols

- o Logos (e.g. organizations, associations, groups, etc.)
- o Crests (e.g. university, family coat of arms, military, etc.)
- o Emblems (e.g. sports teams, musical bands, etc.)

- o Religious images and symbols (e.g. Cross, Buddha, Star of David, etc.)
- o Popular (e.g. peace sign, stop sign, etc.)
- o Lucky symbols (e.g. horseshoe, astrological, etc.)

People

- o Famous people (historical, popular, celebrities, etc.).
- o Friends & family
- o Fictitious people (e.g. Cartoon, animated, characters, etc.)

Places

- o Landmarks
- o Maps
- o Nature scenes

Things

- o Animals
- o Objects
- o Paintings

Words, Letters & Script

- o Alphabet and scripts used in any written language
- o Inscriptions
- o Mathematical & scientific symbols
- o Musical symbols

It can be appreciated that the graphics formed of metallic elements will have high value in comparison to typical ink printed graphics on paper. These graphics can be combined into various forms to create end uses which also have high value. A few examples of these types of valuable

applications are listed below, but are not all inclusive or limited to:

Types of Combinations

- o Jewelry (pendants, rings, necklaces)
- o Watch faces
- o Framed objects
- o Medallions
- o Paintings
- o Awards & plaques
- o Souvenirs
- o Memorabilia

Further features and embodiments of the invention will become apparent from the description and the accompanying drawings.

It will be understood that the features mentioned above and those described hereinafter can be used not only in the combination specified but also in other combinations or on their own, without departing from the scope of the present invention.

The invention is diagrammatically illustrated in the drawings by means of an embodiment by way of example and is hereinafter explained in detail with reference to the drawings. It is understood that the description is in no way limiting on the scope of the present invention and is merely an illustration of a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Brief description of the drawings

Figure 1 shows a graphic created by metal wire loops according to the invention.

Figure 2 shows a top view of a graphic created by metal wire loops according to the invention.

Figure 2a shows a graphic formed on top of an oval shaped metallic surface according to the invention.

Figure 2b shows a side view of the oval surface with wires mounted on the surface including a transparent cover.

Figure 3 shows round wires which are affixed to a surface.

Figure 4 shows ribbon wires with rectangular cross-section which are affixed to a surface.

Figure 5 shows a spool of wire which may be used to continuously feed materials to be attached to the surface.

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate wires which may be sparked into round balls, and affixed as single point bumps.

Figures 8, 9 and 10 show wires bent into various loop shapes.

Figures 11 and 12 show wires which may be over-layed, cross-hatched or affixed in repeating patterns.

Figure 13 shows a surface which is initially used as a temporary medium upon which to fabricate the graphic according to a second embodiment of invention.

Figure 14 shows a graphic which is created in negative.

Detailed description of the drawings

Figure 1 shows a graphic created by metal wire elements (1) formed into parallel lines on a surface (2) to create the letter "C". Here, the wire elements (1) are formed into squared loops (13).

Figure 2 shows a top view of metal wire loops formed into parallel lines to create a graphic of a maple leaf (3).

Figure 2a shows the maple leaf graphic (3) formed on top of an oval shaped metallic surface (4) and made into a necklace pendant (5).

Figure 2b shows a side view of the oval surface with wires (1) mounted on the surface (2). The wires are protected from damage by a see-through, optically clear glass or plastic cover (6), which allows the design to be viewed but not directly touched.

Figure 3 illustrates round wires (7) which are affixed to a surface.

Figure 4 illustrates ribbon wires (8) with rectangular cross-section which are affixed to a surface (2).

Figure 5 shows a spool (9) of wire or ribbon which may be used to continuously feed materials to be attached to the surface.

Figure 6 illustrates a wire bearing at one end a melted ball and affixed to a surface at the other end (10).

Figure 7 shows a wire which may be melted into a round ball and affixed as single point bump (11).

Figures 8, 9 and 10 show wires bent into various loop shapes, a round loop (12), a square loop (13) and a loop with three kinks (14), respectively. The choice of a loop shape depends on the desired reflections and surface textures.

Figures 11 and 12 illustrate wires which may be over-layed, cross-hatched or affixed in repeating patterns creating different textures and reflections. Such wire patterns can be grids (15), bows (16), frames (17), waves (18) or bushes (19). As repeating patterns, parallel lines (20), parallel lines made of dots (21), cross-hatching (22), an ordered surface pattern (23), random dots (24) and ordered crosses (25) are possible.

Figure 13 shows a different embodiment in which a surface is initially used as a temporary medium upon which to fabricate the graphic. After fabrication, the surface may be fully or partially removed to create a free-standing metal artwork, such as that used for jewelry, a highly detailed pendant, for example. In this example, a free-standing letter "C" is made by attaching wires vertically to the surface in order to fill the outline of the letter "C" (Figure 13a). Next, wires are attached horizontally, and attached directly to the previously vertically attached wires (by micro welding, for example), creating a solid structure of connected wires (Figure 13b). Finally, the wire structure is removed from the surface, for example, by

chemical etching which only attacks the surface, in the case of gold wires and aluminum surface (Figure 13c).

Figure 14 shows a graphic which is created as a "negative" image, i.e. the subject of the image, which in this case is the letter "C", is surrounded by the discrete wire elements (1) instead of being directly composed of wire elements, which create an outline of the graphic for a different visual effect.

The invention has been described here in an illustrative manner, and it is to be understood that the terminology used is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than limitation. Many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is, therefore, to be understood that within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced other than specifically enumerated within the description.

Claims

1. A metal graphic formed on a surface (2), wherein said graphic comprises discrete wire elements (1) that are attached to said surface.

2. The metal graphic of claim 1, wherein said discrete wire elements comprise metallic wires.

3. The metal graphic of claim 2, wherein said metallic wires comprise any weldable metal.

4. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 3, wherein said discrete wire elements (1) are bumps, loops, free standing wires or ribbons.

5. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 4, wherein said discrete wire elements (1) are metallic cores coated with metallic or non-metallic elements.

6. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 5, wherein said surface (2) is weldable.

7. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 6, wherein said discrete wire elements (1) are affixed to said surface by different known methods like laser welding, thermosonic welding, thermo-compression bonding, ultrasonic welding, adhesive bonding, soldering, brazing, wire bonding, micro-welding.

8. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 7, wherein said discrete wire elements (1) are protected by a transparent cover (6).

9. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 7, wherein said discrete wire elements (1) are enclosed in a transparent or semi-transparent medium.

10. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 9, wherein the metal graphic is removed from the surface after formation.

11. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 10, wherein the metal graphic is created as a negative image, i.e. the subject of the image is surrounded by the discrete wire elements (1).

12. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 11, wherein the surface (2) is made of metal.

13. The metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 11, wherein the surface (2) is made of a metal plated organic or inorganic material.

14. A method for forming the metal graphic of any of claims 1 to 13, comprising the steps of

- providing a surface or substrate (2);
- attaching discrete wire elements (1) to the surface (2) in order to create a desired graphic appearance.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the step of attaching discrete wire elements (1) to the surface is done by any of the methods in the group consisting of laser welding, thermosonic welding, thermo-compression bonding, ultrasonic welding, adhesive bonding, soldering, brazing, wire bonding, micro-welding.

16. The method of claim 14 or 15, further comprising the step of removing the graphic from the substrate.

17. The method of any one of claims 14 to 16, further comprising the step of covering or enclosing the graphic formed by the discrete wire elements (1) with a protective and/or transparent cover or enclosure material.