

BONNIE McDONALD

MARBLING BASICS

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Marbling (or marbleizing) is an intricate art form with numerous variables and techniques, especially when it comes to manipulating the paint on the Size. This instruction sheet is just a starting point, with information about the materials and set-up. For a deeper understanding, consult books and other sources. And most of all, spend some time playing with it.

Paint and Additives

Acrylics come in a large assortment of colors. They need to be thinned to work properly for marbling. PhotoFlo-It slightly changes how the colors move on the size.

TO PREPARE ONE GALLON OF SIZE (Carrageenan)

Mix 1 tablespoon of Carrageenan to about 4-5 cups of water in a blender for about 60 seconds. Pour into a large bucket. Repeat with the second tablespoon of Carrageenan. Pour into the same bucket and add additional water to make a full gallon. Let "rest" for 12 hours to dissipate any air bubbles.

YOU WILL ALSO NEED:

Paper, cloth or *wood* on which to marble. Things like bowls and vessels are possible, but not the best things with which to start.

A shallow, flat tray or pan that is at least 1"-3" deep (you will need larger containers both in width and length and depth depending on what you are marbling). Choose a tray (container) big enough for the sheet of paper or wooden object, with at least 1" clearance all around. NOTE: If dipping a bowl you will need a container that will be deep enough to handle the bowl.

Stylus, toothpicks, sticks, nails, combs or other objects that can be used to manipulate the floating paints. These can also be taped or glued (evenly spaced) to long, rectangular pieces of cardboard to make a comb or rake to develop intricate patterns.

Aluminum Sulfate commonly called "alum"

Color applicators/dispenser, whisks made of broom straw, squeeze bottles, eye droppers, pipettes. Water needed for mixing, washing and cleaning. Be sure water is relatively neutral, perhaps using distilled water for color mixing and size mixtures.

Newspapers and/or paper towels, for cleaning up, during and after.

BEFORE MARBLING PRE-TREAT PAPER, FABRIC, OR WOOD WITH ALUM

This allows the paint to make a more permanent bond. Using a mixture of 1 ¼ cup alum to a gallon of water (or 1 ½ teaspoon per cup of warm water), mix well until all alum has dissolved. Soak cloth well in alum-water. For paper and wood, it may be better to pour the alum mixture into a spray bottle and spritz it on evenly. You can use a sponge to remove excess. Pat dry. NOTE: make sure you wear latex type gloves. Alum is hard on your skin.

MIXING THE PAINT

Dilute about half-and-half with water. Start with a little less water, so you can adjust without wasting paint.

TEST SIZE & PAINT

Pour size into tray at least an inch deep. Give bubbles time to go off, or pop them carefully. Drag a piece of newspaper across the surface of the Size. This helps to set up the surface tension and remove bubbles. Pick up a drop of paint on the tip of a small stick (or bamboo skewer, tiny dowel, broom straw, pipette). Put the paint on the size and watch how it spreads. If it just sits, or gets smaller, or sinks down, or spreads without bound-conditions are not right. The size is too thick or too thin, or the paint is, or the humidity is too high or too low. If you can spot and repair the problem, do it. Ideally, the paint should spread easily out to a 3-4 inch diameter circle. Test all the colors you intend to use, because different pigments will travel differently. Note which are the fastest and which are the slowest.

Clean up your test by placing a piece of newspaper on the size; leave it for a few seconds to absorb the paint. Pick up two adjacent corners and drag the paper across the edge of the pan, scraping as much size as possible back into the pan. This is a good time to think about where you will put your marbled paper, or fabric (hanging or flat), or wood object to dry.

BEGIN MARBLING

There are really no rules from here out, either for applying or manipulating the colors. It is up to you to find methods that give pleasing results. But there are some common practices that will get you started. Using the slowest moving of your colors, apply a pattern of dots around the size, anywhere from four to twelve dots-each spreads out into a circle, then squares up as it bumps into it's mates. Then, into the center of each squarish circle, apply a drop of a second color. And again with third and fourth colors, building bulls-eyes.

If you like the effect you have now got, you can take a print. The colors, by the way, will print darker than they appear on the size.

Or you can manipulate the colors. Use a pointed stick or a fork or a wide-toothed comb and push the colors around on the surface of the Size. Don't go deep, drag just deeply enough to move the paint. Use slow long sweeps, or slow sharp zig-zags, swirl through complete circles, or back up, or go side-wards. It is your design. When you have got it where you want it, take a print. Don't be too long making the pattern-the color separation eventually breaks down and you begin to lose fine detail.

PRINTING

Lay the paper, cloth or wood object as smoothly as possible onto the size. Begin at one end and let it roll down. Or for paper and cloth, begin in the center and roll out. Hesitations will show as lines across the design. Avoid air bubbles between the sheet or object and the size, they'll leave gaps in the print and paint will be left on the size. Pick up two adjacent corners and lift the sheet up off the Size. Either lift straight up and allow the excess size to drip back into the pan; or pull across the edge and scrape the size back in. Scraping saves more size, but can smear the colors. The less size you waste, the longer you can go on marbling, so keep as much in the pan as possible.

RINSING & DRYING

For paper, it's better to let it start to dry before rinsing. I put my paper on an acrylic board that is standing upright and then rinse off the Size. Once the Size is rinsed off, lay paper flat or hang like cloth. Your wooden piece can be rinsed off and set aside on a paper towel or cloth towel.

CONTINUE

You will need to clean the surface of the size with newspaper before starting your next design, every time. Eventually you'll run out of size, but you can get dozens to hundreds of prints from a gallon. Try working with a whole rainbow of colors, or with just one, or with a couple. Try lots of manipulating for very detailed fussy designs. Try minimal manipulating for simpler patterns. Try whatever you can think of.

FINISH

You will need to finish your wood piece with some type finish. It can be varnish, shellack, or any other finish you use that will seal the surface paint. Several coats of finish sprayed on the surface will seal it. Between coats of spray finish you can use 0000 steel wool to get a smooth surface finish. Make sure you have several coats of finish on your piece before you start to use the steel wool. You will lose some of the paint if you don't seal it first.

RESOURCES:

DHARMA TRADING COMPANY-1-800-542-5227 OR www.dharmatrading.com

Thanks to Carole Floate for information provided.