

MARBLING: THE PROCESS

Because our interests and expertise lie primarily with textile design, we will keep the discussion to marbling on fabric rather than run the risk of insulting any of the paper marblers with incorrect information.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

The bath

This is a tray or some other watertight container about 3 to 4 inches deep and the size of the piece to be marbled. For beginners it is best to work with a size about 10 x 15 inches. With practice, larger pieces can be tackled. Some suggestions for containers are roasting pans, dish pans, kitty litter trays, etc. Also, a bath can be made by draping plastic over a wooden frame.

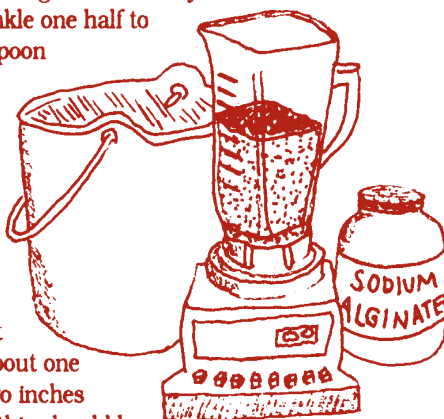
The sizing agent (or size)

There are several different choices of gum to use for the size - sodium alginate, carrageen (both seaweed derivatives), methyl cellulose (derived from trees) and liquid starch to name a few. Our choice of preference in the studio is sodium alginate or carrageen. We use either of these two depending on availability.

To mix, sprinkle one half to one level tablespoon of the powder into a quart size blender. Fill with warm water and agitate. Empty into the marbling bath and repeat until there is about one and a half to two inches of size. Ideally, this should be

allowed to stand overnight. Carrageen breaks down over time once the paint has been added. Hot temperatures or high humidity also change the life of the solution.

The thickness of the size will vary according to the absorbency of the fabric. The more absorbent the fabric the thinner the size should be. As the size is adjusted the paints will also need to be adjusted. The most common fault, when marbling, is to make the size too thick. Running your hand through the size before dropping the paint on will help you learn the correct consistency. If the size is too thick, the colors will not spread, will remain in small spots, and sometimes even sink to the bottom of the bath. If the size is too thin, the colors cannot be controlled into a pattern and also lose their depth of hue.



The size should always be kept covered when not in use because dust on the surface will prevent the colors from spreading. Viscosity also builds up on the surface of the size and for this reason it is good to skim the surface with a piece of newspaper from time to time.



With experience, you can start to tell very quickly whether the bath is too cold, too thick, too thin, or too overlaid with color to be really satisfactory. When this happens, and the size appears to be muddy and lifeless, the colors do not transmit to the fabric clearly, but are dull and disappointing. At this point, throw all the size away and make some fresh.

The paint

The next ingredient for marbling is the color or paint. Again we will discuss those products which we have found to be successful with our work in the studio. We have found four different products that work great on all kinds of fabrics. We use them all and each gives us different effects.

The first is a product called Marbling Dye. It comes in fourteen intermixable colors and works well on both cotton and silk as well as on some fabric blends. They are non-toxic, water-based, and ready to use right out of the container.

The second is Liquitex Acrylic Paint. So far, we have found this brand to be the best of the acrylics for marbling. The paint needs to be thinned with distilled water until it is the consistency of thin cream. Most of the colors work but we recommend testing.

The third product is Setacolor Marbling Paint. This is a new product from the Pebeo Company in France. As with all their products, it is of exceptional quality and works with ease. These paints produce clear, precise, defined patterns on both fabric and paper.

The fourth product we use is also from Pebeo and is the Iridescent line of Setacolor Fabric Paints. Up to now we have not been able to get all the Setacolor Fabric Paints to work but the ten iridescent colors marble beautifully. As with the Liquitex, they need to be thinned with distilled water. They can be used in combination with any of the other paints to give the fabric a wonderful glistening surface.

The alum

Alum is the third essential ingredient (after gum and paints) in successful marbling. Alum is often used as a mordant to fix textile dyes. In marbling, the size has a

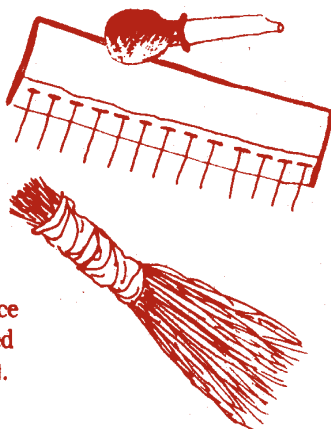


slime which adheres to the fabric when it is removed from the bath. This slime must be washed off with water. If the fabric has not been previously treated with alum, the pattern will just wash off with the slime.

To make up the alum solution, mix four to six table-spoons of alum into a gallon of hot water. Use enough alum water to cover the cloth completely. Stir to dissolve the crystals. Soak the fabric for 20 minutes and then remove and squeeze out excess solution. This solution may be saved and used again. Cotton may be dried in a hot dryer and silk should be lined dried.

Marbling tools

Many different objects can be used to draw the marbling patterns. It is helpful to collect a few before beginning so you will have them near to try. Here are some suggestions: A bristle whisk (shown) can be made by tying together bristles from a corn broom; a paint brush is handy for dropping paint onto the size; an eyedropper (shown); coffee stirrers; and a hair pick. A wide marbling comb (shown) can be made by taping straight pins onto a piece of cardboard (another piece of cardboard can be placed on top to cover the heads).



AND NOW THE FUN BEGINS . . .

With all that technical information under your belt, the real fun can begin. Now that you know what everything does and have all your supplies collected, the process of marbling can be broken down into a few short steps.

ONE

Prewash the fabric to remove any starch or sizing that may be in it. Prepare the alum solution, soak the fabric, and allow to dry.

TWO

Prepare the size. Cover and allow to stand overnight.

THREE

Prepare the colors you want to use. Some will need thinning with distilled water. Some alcohol can be kept nearby - a few drops added to a color will act as a spreading agent.

FOUR

Skim the surface of the size with newspaper to adjust the surface tension. Carefully drop the prepared paint

onto the surface with any of the tools you have collected. Crowd the surface with a paint in order to keep the colors bright and clear.

FIVE

Comb the paint onto a pattern. This can be done by carefully pulling a full width comb through the colors or by using a stylus and swirling the colors into patterns. With practice, you will create literally hundreds of designs and color combinations. Experiment with putting colors on in different orders, dropping, flicking and splat-tering colors on, using combs of different widths, swirling with brushes, chopsticks, anything! Use your imagination. There is no limit to the patterns that can be created. Just remember, the fabric will look exactly like the surface of the size, so work with the design until you are happy with it.



SIX

To print the fabric, lay it onto the patterned size by lowering the middle first, and then gently easing out the ends. Any pause or jerk will disturb the pattern, so make this a smooth motion. Allow a few moments for the pattern to soak into the fabric and then gently pull the fabric off. Wipe off as much excess size as possible. Allow to dry. Skim the size with a piece of newspaper to remove any paint residue and continue with the next design.

SEVEN

Iron the pieces of fabric to set the fabric paint.

EIGHT

Rinse under cool water until all the size is washed out. Hang to dry.