

Faux Marbling with Barbara Raymond-LaPrease

Woodworkers of Central New York Meeting – September 2, 2020



Definition: The art of floating paints on a thickened liquid or water, patterning a design, and making a *contact* print.

Materials:

Methyl Cellulose	<i>Used to thicken water.</i>
Ammonia	Use clear household ammonia that DOES NOT contain ionic surfactants, perfumes, alcohol, detergent, or color. <i>Used to change pH of water.</i>
White Vinegar	<i>Used to neutralize ammonia.</i>
Distilled Water	<i>Used to mix paint and bath.</i>
Newspapers	Tear into strips. <i>Used to clean bath.</i>
Acrylic Paint	Most can be used. Experimentation is critical. Golden Fluid Acrylic or Golden Air Brush Paint are higher quality paints.
Alum	Aluminum sulfate or potassium sulfate. <i>Use as mordant which causes the paint to stick to an object. DO NOT use household or pickling alum.</i>
Eye Droppers	<i>Used to drop paint on bath.</i>
Gloves & Drop Cloth	<i>Used to protect Hands & Work Surface</i>
Small Cups / Toothpicks or Chopsticks	<i>Used to mix paints with water to dilute</i>
Container	Any container should be large enough to handle the size of objects being marbled plus the liquid.

Recipes:

Mordant	<i>This acts as a chemical bonding agent to attach the pigments in paint to the wood fibers.</i> 1½ teaspoon alum to 1 cup warm water. Stir until crystals dissolve. One article suggests 8 cups water (1/2 gallon) to ¼ cup alum
Bath / Size	<i>The bath is where you will float the paint – is it “thick water”.</i> 4 tablespoons methyl cellulose to 1 gallon distilled water. Stir until particles are dissolved. Add 2 teaspoons of ammonia and stir until thick. Wait ½ to 1 hour to allow thickening to continue – then add 2 teaspoons of white vinegar and stir. Let sit a minimum of 3 hours; however, overnight works best.
Wash	Bucket of warm water
Paint	1 part paint to 1 part distilled water as a start. May need to adjust. Different colors of paint float differently.

General Guidelines:

Set Up	<u>There is a fair bit of prep and set up, so starting a day ahead of time is good to do.</u> Plan on a large space where you can lay things out. Depending upon what you are marbling, you may need a rack which can be used to hang pieces from for drying. Many different racks can be made or purchased.
Prepare Wood	All objects <u>must be covered with the mordant solution and allowed to full dry prior to marbling.</u> Paint will not stick to wet or damp objects. The mixture of alum and water can be applied using a foam brush or sponge. Or, for small objects, immerse them in a container of mordant.

Bath / Size	Mix the bath according to the recipe. Allow to stand overnight. If pouring into container, pour slowly as air bubbles will leave a distorted pattern. Always remove bubbles. ALWAYS skim the bath before using. Cover when not in use.
Wash	Floating the piece in warm water is preferable to holding it under a faucet. Be very gentle or the colors can blur. Hang to dry.
Mix Paint	Small medicine cups or plastic shot glasses can be used for mixing paint. Paint needs to be covered when not in use. Make sure paint is well mixed before measuring. Particles tend to settle to the bottom. Mix paint and distilled water in a 1 to 1 ratio to start . Measure paint first and water second; water will wash out paint and you will not waste paint. Mix all colors of paint at one time. Stir well before each use. Test drop of color on bath to make sure they will spread properly.

General Process:

1. **Mix Bath and let stand overnight**
2. **Mix Mordant solution**
3. **Apply mordant solution to wood – must fully dry**
4. **Mix paint**
5. **Float paint on bath**
6. **Dip wood piece in bath**
7. **Wash wood piece & let dry**

Problems:

- ✘ **Paint Sinks** – surface may be dirty; bath may be too thick; the paint was dropped too hard; colors not expanded before adding additional colors
- ✘ **Fuzzy Edges** – temperature of bath and paint not the same; bath too thick; paint too thick; bath not aged long enough
- ✘ **Paint Particles** – paint not completely mixed; dropper may need to be cleaned

WARNING: Never throw sizing into plumbing

Resources:

- ✘ *Marbling Techniques: How to Create Traditional and Contemporary Designs on Paper and Fabric* by Wendy Addison Medeiros
- ✘ *The Weekend Crafter: Marbling: Easy & Elegant Projects for Paper & Fabric* by Laura Sims
- ✘ *Art of Marbling DVD* distributed by Education Video Network
- ✘ *Marbling Turnings: Fluid, Mesmerizing and Spontaneous* by Mary-Celine Thouin from the Winter 2002 American Woodturner available on the internet at <http://www.mceline-artisan.com/article.html>

Purchasing Supplies:

- ✘ Alum and Methyl Cellulose can be purchased via the Earth Guild of our Asheville, NC – <http://www.earthguild.com> under dyes. There is also a set of instructions on their website. Another website is Dharma Trading at <http://www.dharmatrading.com>.
- ✘ Golden Acrylic paint can be purchased locally at an art supply store or via Blick Art Materials - <http://www.dickblick.com>.