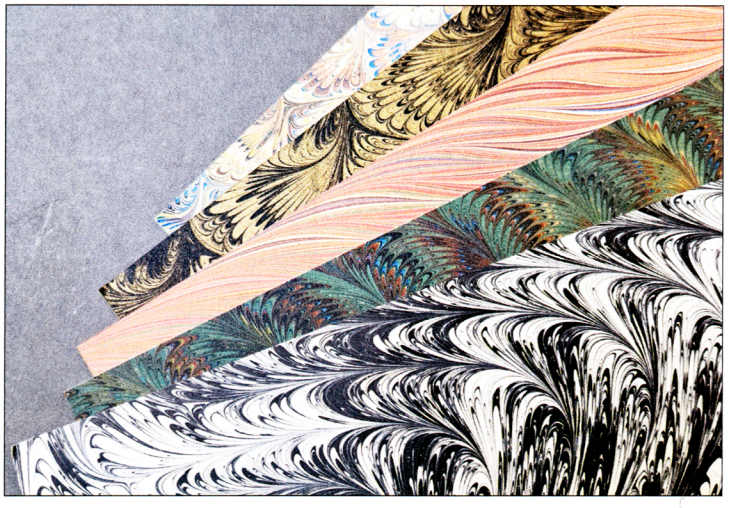
Contemporary Panels: Marble

How to use modern techniques to create stunning marbled decorative panels.



European original one-off marble papers using five different creation patterns.

The practice of decorating mats has been traced back to Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), an Italian painter, architect, writer, and art historian. Vasari mounted his drawings onto large album pages, adding elaborate drawings of ornamented architectural frames surrounding them as well with cartouches bearing the artist's name.

Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694-1774) further developed the practice to design his own elaborate mat designs. His mats often included inscribed artist names and dates along with gold leaf ribbons. Mariette's decorated mounts helped preserve the delicate works of art on paper while also enhancing the viewer's experience.

By the nineteenth century, Pierre Joseph Redouté (1759-1840), a botanist and artist, was the court painter for Josephine Bonaparte, known for his roses and lilies enhancing his mat designs. The English created mats similar to the French with darker and more contrasting colors to better suit their interiors. They were historically used to enhance antique portraits, drawings, botanicals, sporting, and architectural prints.



Giorgio Vasari mounted his collection of drawings onto large album pages, adding richly ornamented architectural frames with cartouches bearing the artist's name and date.

Along with traditional watercolor and ruling pen lines, today's contemporary versions also offer new application techniques of dry and/or wet coloring with pastels and watercolor, original panel painting, gold leaf enhancements, metallic papers, and decorative and hand-marbled papers.

Marbling itself is an artform dating back to the twelfth century. It involves floating paint onto thickened water. The paint is combed and manipulated into patterns and designs, which is then transferred permanently to the surface of paper creating an original monotype. Today there are fabulous handmade marbled papers from Italy, France, Germany, Thailand, and Nepal, which are commercially available



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as framing accents both as original one-offs and digitally printed versions. Suminagashi is a marbling technique on washi paper with monochrome or colored cloud-like markings made by marbling with irregular ripples and rings of Asian ink or colors dripped on the surface of water then transferred to the paper.

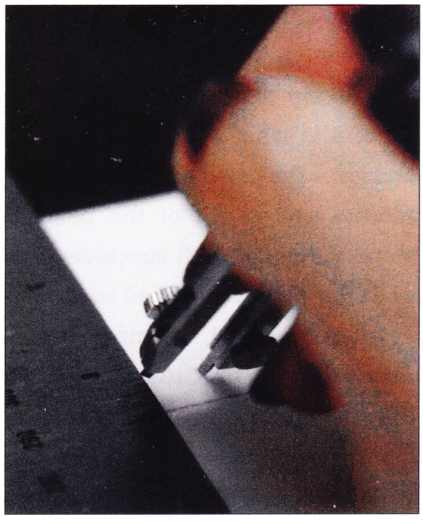


Two pages of poems from "Thirty-Six Immortal Poets" on silver, gold, color, and ink handmade suminagashi paper by Ōshikōchi no Mitsune (859–925), an early poet of the Japanese court. This manuscript contains the oldest examples of marbled paper known today, presented to Emperor Shirakawa in 1112.

Marble Panels

The marble demonstrated in this article is based on the look of polished marble stone, with any similarity to traditional French mat panels being in the application more than the actual look. All panels are created as originals, thus picking up texture, color, and mood while retaining a creative personality of its own. The dry pigments used should be stick pastels, since the edges of the stick may be used to enhance the highlight and shadow of the veining in the marble over powdered pigment. Though any dry pigment will work as well as non-waxy artists' pastel Conté crayons, but not oil pastels, it will require a blending stump or tortillon.

Matboard selection is important when preparing to do any surface decoration. Many boards are somewhat textured; therefore, the pattern may compete with the panel design, and some boards receive dry pigments better. Although softer boards may receive pigment well, the tape or Friskit (removable stencil paper) may damage the surface when removed. Museum ragboards are always a good choice not only because of the smooth surface, but also because of the acid-free elements and the solid color core, allowing the panel more dominance.



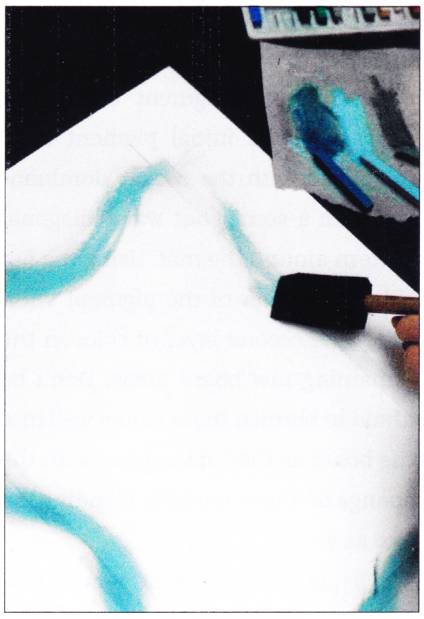
A parallel cutter, similar to a divider, has two blades for accurate dual cutting.

Preparation

Size and cut your mat, leaving wide enough borders to accommodate the desired panel. In order to be effective, it is easier to work with even borders until the mat is completed, then trim off the top and two sides to weight the bottom just prior to framing. When using this formula, don't forget to add the additional 1/4" to 1/2" on the three sides to be trimmed later. Refit the fallout back into place, taping with 3M 811 removable tape to support the sheet of stencil paper and to keep the bevels clean, and burnish the tape to activate the adhesive.

Use Friskit low-tack, soft-peel, self-adhesive masking film to cover the entire mat border. Cut the stencil slightly larger than the actual mat and trim off excess at the edges after applying to certify the entire surface has been covered. Using a mat marking tool or manual mat cutter for accuracy, set it to the desired inner distance from the outer edge of the mat and lightly draw the pencil guidelines around the four sides of the mat. An X-acto parallel cutter (or Excel 30608 Dual Cutter Knife and #59 blades) is a fabulous tool for creative designing, similar to a divider or compass, yet it has two blades for accurate dual cutting.

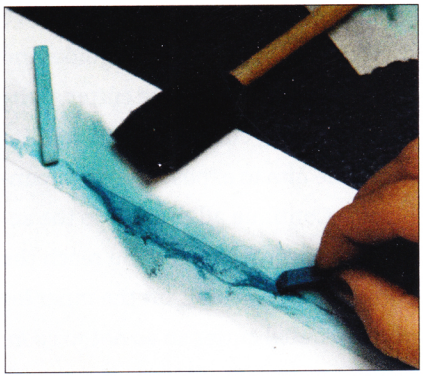
Use a cork-backed straight edge or your mat cutter as the guide and the parallel cutter. Set the cutter at the desired width, cut the stencil, and remove the film to expose the clean panel area. Continue all the way to the actual panel corner, but as you reach the corner of the opening, lift the inner leg of the parallel cutter so as not to score into the actual panel being decorated. Peel away the film to expose the raw board when fully scored.



The initial pigment layer is applied with the darker dominant shade in a somewhat wavy diagonal pattern around the mat.

Technique

The look of marble can be best recreated when there is an understanding of the makeup and nature of the actual stone. The veins running through the stone don't always exist on the same plane, meaning that by layering pigment colors as well as the inked veining, fade in and out creating a visual depth, and more depth means a more natural look. Select three shades of stick pigment: one light and one dark, both from the same color family, and one complementary or accent color. Using a small sheet of sandpaper, powderize some of the stick for application into the board.

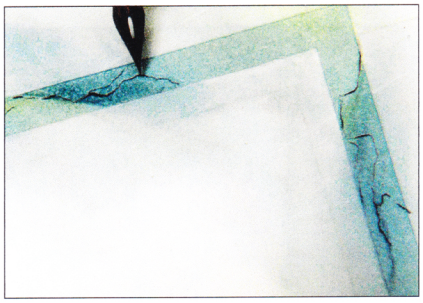


Using the flat side and corner of the pigment stick, apply the second layer of color in the remaining raw board areas.

Dry Pigment Application

Use a 1" sponge brush to apply the base dominant pigment color onto the board. The initial pigment layer is applied with the darker dominant shade in a somewhat wavy, diagonal pattern around the mat. Using the flat side and corner of the pigment stick, apply the second layer of color in the remaining raw board areas. Don't be afraid to burnish these colors well into the board as they are applied with the sponge or finger, partially blending the two as you go.

Begin to reinforce the veining pattern with the stick by following the base diagonal pattern. Contrast the dark patches of color with the integration of the complementary color as a highlight extreme and blend/burnish with a tortillon, stump, or Q-tip. An established dark edging should always be offset with a corresponding highlight or accent edge. Dust off any excess dry pigment and verify that the pigment is well burnished into the board by going over it one last time with the sponge brush or cotton ball and blowing away any loose pigment.



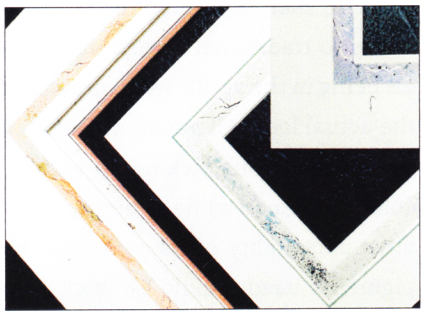
Veining is hand-drawn by a crow quill dip pen nib, using permanent, lightfast black and/or metallic inks.

Ink Veining

The veining is hand-drawn by a crow quill dip pen nib using black and/or metallic inks. Since the pattern of the veins have already been established by the dry pigment, the ink squiggles are only reinforcing what already exists. Think back to the piece of natural marble, its multiple planes and the directions in which the veins move. The veins would never be contained within the bounds of the panel width, so they must cross into and out of the panel randomly. Also, note that the smaller veins must branch off larger ones. Generally they should originate from the infinity beyond the panel border; remember, this is representative of only a slice of the marble slab.

If both black and metallic inks are to be used, always begin with the metallic to establish the basic veining pattern prior to applying the black. The metallics used should follow the basic warm/cool format of color relations; gold is primarily a red/yellow-based metallic and should be used with warm colors of reds/oranges/yellows, while silver is primarily a blue-based metallic and should be used with cool colors of blues/greens. This is, however, a gross generality, since yellow-based silver is a very warm color.

After all the veining has been completed, metallic and/or black ink speckles may be added. This is easily achieved by splattering by flicking the bristles of an old toothbrush dipped in ink. Make certain you do this in a protected area; you can end up with ink everywhere.



Assorted corner samples of various colored marble include an orange marble with gold and black accent veining (top). It illustrates a wavy pattern of dominant orange color. The corner also shows a spacer with a double tiered mat beneath. A pale blue-green marble with dominant gold splatter and black veining is shown in the center, and a lavender marble (bottom R) has gold and black veining and splatters.

As the marbling process evolves, additional layers of the lightest dominant color may be burnished over dry veined lines, while new veins are layered on top. This progressive layering process is what enriches the colors and gives the panel the natural translucence and depth of the polished stone. Although each successive layer of dry pigment applied over veins deepens the panel, the entire process may quickly be executed by the basic dry pigment/veining/spackle format.

Do not overdo the use of black veining. Subtler dry pigment shadows and highlights, as well as layering, are far superior. PFM