

Marbling Demonstration

By Steve Rohr

Things you will need:

1. Carrageenan
2. Alum
3. Marbling paint
4. Large tub
5. Stirs
6. Homemade broom straw brushes
7. Newspaper strips
8. Paper towels
9. Combs and Rakes (optional)
10. Drying racks (custom to your piece)
11. Some way to hold your work when you marble
12. DROP CLOTHS!

Process:

1. Make whatever turning you want but do not seal it. Raw wood works best. Yes we will raise the grain but we'll take care of that later.
2. Mix the carrageenan the day before and store in gallon jugs in the fridge. It will keep for about a week but not much longer. It is pretty expensive to do this for one piece so you will want to have plenty of items ready. Also, the carrageenan needs at least 12-24 hours to set before it can be used so figure that into your planning.
3. Mix the alum the day before and apply to your work. It dries fast but best to do it the day before. Like the carrageenan, there is a shelf life. I generally mix a new batch each time.
4. Set up your workspace next to either a water supply or have a tub of water available.
5. Fill your marbling tub with carrageenan. You will need a depth of at least 1-2" more than the thickness of your work. More is better.
6. Skim the surface of the carrageenan with either paper towels or newspaper strips to remove air bubbles and to break the surface tension.
7. With your home made brushes, tap droplets of paint on the surface of the carrageenan. The paint should be the right consistency to allow the droplets to disperse on the surface but not disperse too much. A large quantity of small droplets is much better than a few large droplets. This is just something you learn with experience.
8. Repeat step 7 as many times as you want with different colors of paint. It is generally best to use at least 3-4 colors.

9. With a back and forth motion, stir the paint on the surface. This will give you a pattern that looks like flames. This pattern can be used by itself or you can use various methods of combing and raking to create whatever design you wish. With practice, you can get detailed arches, paisley patterns, peacock pattern, etc.
10. Hold the piece to be marbled and slowly dip the piece into the paint/gel mixture. Try to avoid trapped air and make as smooth a motion as possible. I generally submerge the piece entirely but it is not necessary. Just use your imagination.
11. Remove the piece from the paint/gel and GENTLY wash off the excess gel with cold water. The paint is still very soft so be very careful with this or you will wash off the paint too.
12. Set aside to dry. Generally I wait at least 24 hours but you can live on the edge if you want.
13. Now, skim the paint off the surface of the gel and repeat the process. I can generally get about 12-15 large pieces out of one batch of carrageenan before the mixture does not work well. When you skim the paint you are removing the paint from the top as well as the excess Alum that transferred from the wood into the gel. There will be paint under the surface but will not generally be a problem for subsequent dippings. But, the excess Alum does become an issue and there is a maximum of pieces that can be done before things start to break down. You will know it when you get there.
14. Seal the paint with some sort of clear coat. I generally put at least 3-4 coats on and sand after the second coat.

Material Sources:

MarbleArt.us

They have just about everything you need. That's all they do so they know marbling well but their experience is with paper and fabric and not with wood. There aren't many people doing marbling on wood so you are somewhat on your own. That said, Marble Art is a great source for marbling supplies.

Prochemicalanddye.com

Good supply for marbling paint. I've tried their alternatives to carrageenan and don't think they work as well. They are, however, less expensive.

Amazon.com

This can be a good supply for the carrageenan and if you want to mix/make your own marbling paint.

Homemade broom straw brushes

To make the brushes, simply buy a cheap broom (plastic bristles) at the discount store and cut the bristles off. Group about 40-50 bristles together and hold with a rubber band. Make plenty. You want one for each color you use. Use plastic, they clean up great and can be easily reused.