



## 2019 Workshops: Classic Marbling Rejuvenated

Quite possibly first used artistically in ancient India, marbling came to the Middle East at least two centuries before its adoption in 17th-century Europe by the burgeoning commercial bookbinding trade. From then until the mid-19th century, driven in large part by competition, this labor-intensive craft achieved an unparalleled level of perfection, particularly in France and Germany, enhancing high-end leather-bound books. So astonishing were the effects achieved and so economically advantageous the mystery around how they were created, in fact, that from the beginning, many of the techniques developed fell under a cloak of extreme, virtually impenetrable, secrecy as proprietary trade secrets. That is how things stood when, suddenly, with the rush to mechanize almost everything in the last quarter of the 19th century, including book production, marbling fell from favor, and with it all the technical finesse of its trade secrets. Almost overnight, marbling became and still remains in Europe a critically endangered craft.

For some years, a revival in the United States that began in the mid-20th century appeared to give marbling a new life, largely because many artists here shared it openly, confident that teaching was the way to keep the art vital as a source of creativity and invention, and that sharing technical knowledge of the process was the way to ensure its survival. Yet this effort, too, ran headlong into trouble—different, to be sure, but serious trouble, nonetheless. The switch to buffered (acid-neutral) paper production in the U.S. in the mid-1980s, while much needed for preservation, exposed serious flaws in the marbling chemistry used here. Pigments tended to rub off buffered papers, making it necessary to spray them with acrylic fixatives before they could be used for bookbinding, box building, etc., a practice that tends to dull colors significantly.

And that might have proved an end to watercolor marbling's story had it not been for two 19th-century master trade marblers courageous enough to record their processes in detail, coupled with the tenacity of 20th-century scholar/marblers who mined European library archives in search of just such documents and then spent years translating and interpreting them. The discovery of these treatises by active craftsmen about trade practices in Germany and France and the work of contemporary scholar/marblers, including Garrett Dixon, Richard Wolfe, and Daniel St. John, have thus largely dispelled a century's darkness. What a gift! And there's more: we now also have a century's worth of research in color science that has given us artist colors that are safer and far more varied than the most dangerous ones used in earlier centuries.

Marbling with watercolors can now be said to be both very old and, once again, very new. And while you should still want to understand what keeps the watercolors from dissolving in the water bath, why they don't blend or run off the paper, how papers are buffed to a polish, and how stone effects and swirling color patterns are created, knowing all this will never dispel the thrill of pulling a marbled sheet from the bath. It may not be magic, but it will *always* be magical!

**WHEN?** April 13-14 and May 4-5

SATURDAY, 9:00-5:00

SUNDAY, 9:00-5:00

**WHERE?** 3304 Grasmere Avenue  
Columbus, Ohio 43224

**COST?** \$220. \$60 supply fee. Class limit, 8  
\$120 deposit by April 3 holds a spot  
Print/complete form  
and send w/check to  
Ann Woods at the address above.  
Full refund until 4/1, or if spot is filled.

**WHAT TO BRING?** Wear Sensible Shoes!  
Work-clothes, Apron, Hair Covering (optional),  
Cardboard--1 piece ca. 15" x 20"  
Book or Pad for keeping notes,  
and Lunch.

Coffee, herbal teas, filtered water available.

**QUESTIONS?** [aimiaart@gmail.com](mailto:aimiaart@gmail.com), or text  
614-815-7218,

