

## **Exhibition Overview**

### ***Rebirth of a Craft: Paper Marbling in New Mexico***

The striking patterns and vivid colors found in the end pages of books have pleased and intrigued readers and book lovers for centuries. But the popularity of marbled papers in the Victorian era eventually led to their falling out of fashion, leaving only a few skilled artisans to carry the craft into the 20th century. By the closing decades of the 1900s, however, a new spirit of investigation and experimentation led to a rebirth of this art that traces its origins to the Silk Road, and to times long past.

A handful of these experimenters lived in New Mexico, and their cooperation and enthusiasm led to the first International Marblers gathering in Santa Fe in 1989 - billed (correctly) as "the largest gathering of marblers in the history of the universe." Since then the craft has gone from an obscure "decorative art" to one featured in exhibits and publications worldwide.

This exhibition showcases the work of six New Mexico artists whose paper marbling has made a significant contribution to the revival of the art form: John Coventry, Polly Fox, Katherine Loeffler, Pam Smith, Tom Leech, and Paul Maurer.

Circulation of *Rebirth of a Craft: Paper Marbling in New Mexico* is part of a statewide outreach programming partnership with the New Mexico State Library, Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, the Palace of the Governors and others, in conjunction with the exhibition *Lasting Impressions: The Private Presses of New Mexico*. Funding has been provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a federal grant-making agency dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners by helping libraries and museums serve their communities.

## **Exhibition Text**

### ***Rebirth of a Craft: Paper Marbling in New Mexico***

#### **MARBLING**

Marbling is an art form that has its roots, if not its origin, in the Middle East. While current scholarship places the invention of marbling in 15th Century Persia, there have been suggestions that marbling may have been practiced earlier, along the Silk Road in Central Asia. Another form of marbling - Suminagashi - was in use in Japan in the 11th Century.

Regardless of its place of origin, marbling is an evocative art that has pleased and intrigued all cultures. In Turkey, where it is called “Ebru”, marbling has been handed down in an unbroken tradition since the early 16th Century. It is from the Turks that marbling became known in Europe. From Europe the art arrived in colonial America. It came west in account and ledger books along the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails, and to the west coast in the in the logbooks of sea captains. Some of the ledger books used by Plains Indians to record scenes of warfare and daily life were bound in marbled covers. Some of the earliest books to arrive in New Mexico, by way of Mexico and Spain, contained marbled papers.

Marbling reached a pinnacle of popularity in Victorian England, where it was commonly used for endpapers in books. By 1900 the tastes of fashion had changed, and the many “secret recipes” of marblers were again known only to a few skilled bookbinders.

A revival of the craft began in the United States in the 1970s. A significant event in the history of marbling occurred in Santa Fe in 1989, where The First International Marblers Gathering convened at St. John’s College. (It was also hosted, in part, by the Palace of the Governors and the Governor’s Gallery, and some of the work from that exhibition is now in the permanent collection of the Museum of New Mexico. It may be viewed by appointment at the Press at the Palace of the Governors.) Subsequent international gatherings met in San Francisco, Baltimore and Istanbul. The 5th International Marblers Gathering was at Arrowmont School of Art and Craft in Tennessee, September 2002.

#### **HOW IT’S DONE**

A highly simplified description of how most marbled patterns are achieved is as follows:

1. Water is mixed with a viscous thickening agent (usually carrageenan, gum tragacanth, or methyl cellulose) and poured to a depth of 1 to 2 inches in a shallow tray.
2. Colored inks or paints (watercolor, gouache, acrylic, oil or hand-ground pigments) are applied to the surface of the thickened water by spattering with brushes, eyedroppers or a stylus. Often a spreading agent is required to induce the color to float rather than sink into the water. Ox gall was traditionally used for this purpose.

3. The colors floating on the surface are manipulated with various tools, known as rakes and combs. The order and direction in which the tools are “pushed or pulled” will determine the final pattern.

4. The material being marbled (usually paper, but sometimes fabric, wood or clay) is carefully laid on the surface of the water. A mordant is often used to “fix” the color on the paper. When that is the case the transfer of color from water to paper is immediate and the paper is promptly lifted from the water and air-dried.

These marbled papers were made by Tom Leech, Curator of Printing at the Palace of the Governors. All of the papers used in the exhibition were handmade by the artist. Acrylic paint was used throughout.

Tom Leech demonstrated marbling at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in the summer of 2002. He was a presenter at the 5th International Marblers Gathering, and had a one-person show entitled “Marbling Reconsidered: A New Look at an Old Craft” at the American Museum of Papermaking in Atlanta, from September 12 - November 29, 2002. Tom can be reached at (505) 476-5096 for more information.

## **Interview**

### ***Rebirth of a Craft: Paper Marbling in New Mexico***

*The following interview with Tom Leech was conducted by telephone by Beth Maloney, Education Coordinator for TREX, August 5, 2005. The following is not a transcript of the interview but rather notes intended as a resource for docents, teachers and staff at venues hosting the exhibition Rebirth of a Craft.*

#### ***What is your background? How did you come to curate Rebirth of a Craft?***

Though I am a sculptor and painter by training, I have been a papermaker and a printer for 30 years. After about a year and a half working at the Palace Press, and after I put together an informal exhibit of my own papers, I had the opportunity to develop a more formal show, this one specifically about marbling and New Mexico. Because there were paper marblers living and working in New Mexico, because there had already been an international gathering of paper marblers here, and because book arts are such a key part of the mission of the Palace Press, this seemed to me a natural venue for such an exhibition.

#### ***How long have you been working with paper marbling? How did you get into it?***

I first took a workshop in 1986 as part of an intensive book and papermaking session. When I started paper marbling I immediately fell in love with the craft.

#### ***What is the most interesting part of the process of paper marbling for you? What do you enjoy in terms of the craft itself?***

With a minimum of tools and investment, you can have an infinitely variable response. The outcome of the art is always changing. Even though you work diligently to make, learn and repeat patterns, there are subtle original differences that cannot be controlled. You can never make exactly the same paper twice. Each page is a monoprint, and somewhat unpredictable. Just as marbled paper can be subtle, it can also be in your face. And while the act of marbling paper is something I find meditative in and of itself, it also requires a level of concentration to really get into it. If I'm doing it right, that degree of concentration takes me to another place. I find that beginning with traditional patterns is a little like practicing the scales on a piano. From there I can then move on and break away into my own, possibly more wild, patterns.

#### ***What is the most interesting aspect of the history of paper marbling to you?***

One of the most compelling parts of the craft is the mystery of its origins. These are lost in time. It's a tradition that moved from the Middle East through Europe, changing and taking on new names and approaches as it grew, with techniques taught to apprentices by experts, under a veil of secrecy. This all changed with the current renaissance of the craft. Now people are sharing ideas and patterns and approaches. The ethic of the craft has really changed. We paper marblers really feel like we're part of a larger, somewhat unknown tradition.

***Were you at the International Marblers Gathering in Santa Fe? What was that like? How did that come about?***

The International gathering was the brainchild of one of the artists featured in the exhibition, John "Cove" Coventry. It was the largest gathering of paper marblers that there had ever been in history. Two hundred to three hundred people came to Santa Fe to share ideas, patterns and meet each other. The atmosphere was almost giddy as people quickly found kindred spirits and connected with each other across cultural lines. There were some technical talks, but mostly it was amazing to connect with people, even though we spoke different languages. Just like marbled paper, there were variations on themes, but the general feeling was about connection.

***Would you say there was a “rebirth” or revival of this art form? Why did this happen?***

The revival was something that came out of the 1960s, at the same time as the hippie movement, psychedelics and a rise in interest in the handcrafts. People began to look at old books and wonder how the papers were made. They shared what they found, and a sense of energy and community began to develop. People also turned to artists living and working in Europe and Turkey, some of whom shared what they knew about the craft. In Turkey, we discovered an incredible continuous unbroken tradition of 500 years. The marbling patterns that came out of this early time in Turkey are different from the marbling patterns that were established in the Victorian era.

***What was your favorite part of working on the show Rebirth of a Craft?***

I enjoyed getting to know these artists, hearing their stories and seeing the diversity of the work. It's incredible that the work of only six marblers can be so diverse. It's not cookie-cutter stuff. Marbling became associated with the decorative arts, but, in truth, these artists are practicing a more evocative, modern art.

***How did you choose the artists featured in the show?***

These artists were known to me and were part of the first gathering in Santa Fe. Since the show has gone up, I have heard of others, but the people featured in the show were artists I felt represented the craft here in New Mexico.

***What would you like people to walk away with after they have seen the exhibition?***

I'd like people to really look closely at the pieces and see the great diversity of work shown. Like modern art, some of the marbled papers can best be appreciated by looking closely and really opening your eyes to the use of patterns, colors and composition.

## **Artists' Statements**

### ***Rebirth of a Craft: Paper Marbling in New Mexico***

#### **Paul Maurer**

*"Enjoy the orchestration of fantastic details. Provoke the medium and allow it to respond. Capture it in transition."*

Paul Maurer first became aware of marbling in 1961. In addition to marbling he has worked in bookbinding, calligraphy, photography, painting and graphic design. His practice of marbling has taken many turns. In addition to his current work as an artist, he is a chuck wagon cook at the Bell Ranch and lives in Serafina, New Mexico.

#### **Polly Fox**

*"As a young child the rich colors and intricate patterns of endpapers in old books took up residence in my being. Now, more than half a century later, I can still see the wonders hidden between those covers."*

Polly Fox began marbling while studying bookbinding in California. Her dedication to marbling shaped the future of her life, and the life of the craft. She was the editor of Ink & Gall magazine, an internationally acclaimed journal of marbling from 1987 until the magazine's demise in the Lama Mountain fire of 1995. Along with the archives of the magazine, most of Fox's life work was lost. She still lives on Lama Mountain, between Taos and Questa, and creates flower essence remedies for animals, people and plants. She occasionally teaches marbling.

#### **Pamela Smith**

*"The process of paper marbling holds all of the mystery of medieval sorcery."*

When Pam Smith started to teach herself marbling in the early 1970's, instructional booklets from England had her collecting rainwater, boiling seaweed, and mixing hand-ground pigments with beeswax and alcohol. While she now works with more readily available artist materials, for her, the mystery remains. As Director of the Press of the Palace at the Governors from 1972 to 2001, Smith brought the craft before the public during annual book art festivals that she initiated. Two of the marblers in this exhibition can trace their early interest in the craft to seeing her work. She creates Marblesmith papers in Abiquiu, New Mexico.

### **Katherine Loeffler**

*“I learned from a Turkish gentleman that Turkish marblers felt their hands were being guided by God, or a spirit greater than themselves.”*

Katherine Loeffler first witnessed the “magic” of marbling in the courtyard of the Palace of the Governors more than twenty years ago. Since then she has experienced immense satisfaction (as well as endured many frustrations) in learning to master marbling’s infinite combinations of pattern and color. Her interest in marbling led to a study of bookbinding and a business restoring and repairing books. She is the proprietress of Peregrine Arts Bookbindery in Santa Fe.

### **John “Cove” Coventry**

*“When I’m marbling I’m into the flow of the paints, the physics of the bath, the metaphysics of the moment.”*

Cove “accidentally discovered” the art of marbling in California during the “psychedelic sixties,” where his large marbled fabrics were used as stage backgrounds at rock concerts. He moved to Santa Fe in the late 1970’s. His marbling remains experimental: he has devised a way of working that involves mixing and pouring colors that he describes as “chaotic and divine.” He finds inspiration in the prints of Gustave Baumann and pays homage to what he sees as the “painful beauty” of New Mexico.

### **Tom Leech**

*“I’ve seen marbling, centuries old, that looked as dynamic and abstract as work done yesterday. I realized I am still connected across time and space to those old artists.”*

Tom Leech came to marbling with a background in papermaking, and most of his work is on his own handmade paper. His familiarity with handmade paper has encouraged him to explore what can be done to paper in the marbling process. He is particularly interested in developing a “vocabulary” of over-marbled patterns. Leech is the Director of the Press at the Palace of the Governors. He first saw marbled papers made at the Palace in 1983.

## **Suggestions for Docent Training**

### ***Rebirth of a Craft: Paper Marbling in New Mexico***

#### **Exhibition themes**

**We hope that visitors to the exhibition will come away with an understanding and appreciation of:**

1. The creative skills that go into making decorative paper
2. The inspiration to try making their own decorative paper

#### **Introduction to the exhibition**

The striking patterns and vivid colors found in the end pages of books have pleased and intrigued readers and book lovers for centuries. The popularity of marbled papers in the Victorian era eventually led to their falling out of fashion, leaving only a few skilled artisans to carry the craft into the 20th century. By the closing decades of the 1900s, however, a new spirit of investigation and experimentation led to a rebirth of this art that traces its origins to the Silk Road, and to times long past.

A handful of these experimenters lived in New Mexico, and their cooperation and enthusiasm led to the first International Marblers gathering in Santa Fe in 1989 - billed (correctly) as "the largest gathering of marblers in the history of the universe." Since then the craft has gone from an obscure "decorative art" to one featured in exhibits and publications worldwide.

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#### **What is paper marbling?**

Marblizing or marbling paper is a method of decorating paper by using "floating colors." Colors and patterns are not applied directly to paper with a brush but rather to a liquid that the paper is then laid on. The patterns formed by the floating colors are transferred to the paper, absorbed by it when it is laid on top.

Artists create patterns in the paint with tool – combs, sticks, their fingers. However, these patterns cannot be controlled to great detail (like paint applied with a paint brush). Also, changes in the water, temperature and patterns effect the way the colors blend and relater to each other. Every time a page is dipped in the water and comes out with a pattern, it is unique. No two marbled pages are identical.

Colors used can come from all sorts of mediums. Though traditionally artists use oil paints and ink, but one can also use acrylic and tempera paint, watercolors, chalk shavings, dyes, wood stain, and even Easter egg coloring materials. Sometimes glue is added to the paint to aid in the fixing of the color onto the paper.



## **A brief history of paper marbling**

Some people trace the tradition of paper marbling back to China more than 1,000 years ago. Other experts claim that the tradition comes from the eight-century Japanese art of *suminagashi*, or “ink floating.” *Suminagashi* was writing paper decorated with hues of ink in a marbled pattern. From East Asia, the art traveled to Persia where it was known as *ebru*, or “cloud art.”

The art continued to travel west via the Silk Road and other trade routes during the fifteenth century, when travelers to Istanbul would regularly bring sheets of “Turkish marble paper” back to Europe bound into books. These Turkish marbled papers are some of the earliest papers still in existence. They were used mainly for decorative purposes in books but also as a background for official documents and signatures—because they were so unique, they could be used as a safeguard against forgery.

By the 1600s, the marbling tradition was an integral part of the art of bookmaking in Western Europe, in particular France and the Netherlands. Marbled papers were used as decorative endpapers and also for a more practical use—to hide the mechanical aspects of book making (glue, folds and strings). Book making guilds were separate from marbling guilds, who worked separately to keep their techniques secret. This air of secrecy was in part to maintain the tradition so that not just anyone could learn to produce these papers (and do so more cheaply). Marbling techniques were passed on from masters to apprentices, often times within the same family under oaths of secrecy.

But as more people began to read, and books were printed in larger numbers (and the process became cheaper), these labor-intensive processes were prohibitively expensive and became less and less common. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the art of marbling was out of fashion and rarely practiced. It was not until quite recently that paper marbling experienced a revival.

## **Revival of the art in New Mexico? Why? Who?**

I tried to get more information out of Tom (anecdotal, etc.) but was not that successful. He is going to send along a handout he prepared for the show though. But in terms of this “revival” it’s hard to find anything on the web, etc. Any suggestions?

## **What can this marbled paper be used for?**

Besides being used in book binding as endpapers or covers, marbled and decorative papers for that matter can be used in lots of other ways – to frame a picture, as notecards, in collages, as origami and for covering anything from gift boxes to cans. Marbling can even be done on cloth.

## **One note that could confuse:**

This type of marbling (paper marbling) is not the same thing as *faux marbre*, or faux finishes (false marble). These faux techniques are used for painting a marble-like surface directly onto a wall, column, or piece of furniture, using sponges, feathers, and paintbrushes. This technique has nothing to do with paper and fabric marbling. Few traditional paper-marbling patterns look anything like marble—so the name “marbling” could be somewhat misleading.

## **Marbled Paper Materials**

### ***Rebirth of a Craft: Paper Marbling in New Mexico***

#### ***Materials***

- ❑ High quality paper (any paper that is not too thin will work)
- ❑ Tools for making patterns in the water once the color has been added (examples include: plastic forks, straws, combs, toothpicks)
- ❑ Several colors of tempera paint (you can experiment with different types of inks and paints if you like, for example oil paint, chalk shavings, ink, dyes and Easter egg coloring.)
- ❑ Tubs or containers larger than the size of the paper. These don't have to be deep. (just an inch or two like a cake pan)
- ❑ Dishwashing liquid
- ❑ Water
- ❑ Plastic sheets or spread out bags for drying
- ❑ Thin strips of newspaper

#### ***Teacher Preparation (30 – 45 minutes)***

1. Cover work areas to protect from water and paint.
2. Fill tubs at each work area with water and a drop of dishwashing liquid (so that the color floats on the top of the water as opposed to mixing with it)
3. Prepare paints to be added to the water in tubs - paints should be very liquid, so thin if needed.
4. Set up drying area (the floor will work) to accommodate all students

## **Directions for Making Marbled Paper**

*Post or write these directions on the board or in a place where all students can see them.*

1. Gently drip colors onto the surface of the water so they float (just a couple of drops will do!)
2. Make your design in the water—swirl colors with a tool.
3. Hold a piece of paper horizontally with both hands and bring ends together so that the paper is curved into a "U" shape.
4. Lay the paper on top of the painted water surface - placing the center of the paper (bottom of the U shape) on top of the water first and then lower both sides onto the top of the water.
5. Immediately remove the sheet from the water. Work quickly!
6. Lay the paper (painted side up) on a flat surface to dry.

Note: before marbling another piece of paper, use thin newspaper strips to skim the water's surface and remove all the old color.

## ***Making Marblized Paper***

### **Estimated Time**

1.5 hours (not including teacher prep time)

### **Materials**

See attached sheet for teacher preparation and detailed list of materials.

### **Vocabulary**

End papers  
Decorative

### **Standards Met**

National Standards for Arts Education, Visual Arts Content Standards, 1 – 5  
New Mexico State Art Content Standards 4 & 5

### **Extensions**

Students create books and use their paper as decorative covers or end pages.

Students take directions home and do craft with their families.

### **Special Notes**

Marbled paper, can be used for many purposes such as stationary, or wrapping paper.

Marblizing paper can be messy so paint clothes are recommended!

### **Goal**

To explore the process of creating marbled paper, following basic steps that artists have been doing for approximately 1,000 years.

### **Student Learning**

Students will create their own unique marbled paper by selecting color and design.

### **Procedure**

1. **Discuss** the *Rebirth of a Craft* exhibition and marbled paper.  
**Show examples of books** with beautiful endpapers and books that feature photographs of paper arts. Students may also look at the endpapers of their own books in class or at the library.
2. **Explain** that students will be making their own marbled papers.  
**Post or write directions** (see attached) in a place where students can see them and introduce the materials that students will use to make their paper.
3. **Model** how to make marbled paper, following the posted directions. **Discuss** the different methods students can use to create patterns and designs. Remind them that there is an ambiguity to the process – you never know what exact pattern you'll end up with. If these marbled papers are going to be associated with a book the students are writing or creating, ask them to consider what sorts of designs/colors might communicate the messages or themes of their book?
4. Students **create their own marbled paper** using colors and techniques of their own choosing. You may want to assign one group of students to a particular color pallet.
5. After clean-up, **look at all students' papers** together. Students **share their process**, describing the choices they made, techniques they used or what they were trying to communicate (if anything).
6. Once the marbled paper has dried, students **iron** the backside of the paper and **trim** the edges. Use as book covers, end pages or mount in classroom as art.

### **Suggested Forms of Assessment**

- Observe students' work
- Artwork produced

## *Bibliography*

### ***Rebirth of a Craft: Paper Marbling in New Mexico***

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Mauer – Mathison, Diane. The Ultimate Marbling Handbook: A Guide to Basic and Advanced Techniques for Marbling Paper and Fabric. Watson-Guptill Publications, 1999.

Medeiros, Wendy Addison. Marbling Techniques: How to Create Traditional and Contemporary Designs on Paper and Fabric. Watson-Guptill Publications, 1994.

Miura, Einen, The Art of Marbled Paper: Marbled Patterns and How to Make Them. Kodansha International (JPN); 1st U.S. ed. edition, 1991.

Shannon, Faith. Paper Pleasures: The Creative Guide to Papercraft. Grove Weidenfeld. 1987.

Sims, Laura. The Weekend Crafter. Lark, 2002.

## **Websites**

[www.marbling.org](http://www.marbling.org)

A developing website of the “society of marbling,” dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the art of marbling internationally through the sponsorship of events and the development of educational resources and scholarship.

[http://members.aol.com/\\_ht\\_a/marbling/](http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/marbling/)

Personal website of Galen Barry, professional marbler, includes samples of marbled paper, some historical context of marbling and a list of classes and materials for sale.

<http://www.suminagashi.com>

Personal website that explored the history of this Japanese art form and recommends resources, classes, websites and related material.

[www.dianemaurer.com](http://www.dianemaurer.com)

Website of author and artist Diane Mauer featuring images of her work, advertises her books and original art.

<http://www.philobiblon.com/site.htm>

Website for the Book Arts Web, featuring links, educational and professional opportunities, reference materials, images and the Books Arts list serve (of almost 1,500 people) which has an archive that can be searched.

## **Exhibition Contacts**

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