
Suminagashi Ink Marbling with Jody Alexander

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

- I'm going to show you suminagashi. It's a traditional Japanese form of paper marbling. Suminagashi means floating ink or spilled ink. What we're going to be doing is dropped ink on top of water and making an impression of it. You could use them to make book covers, even cards and other papercraft projects.

Chapter 2 - Materials

Materials

- I'm gonna go over the tools and materials that you need for suminagashi. First of all, you'll need a shallow pan that's gonna be filled with about an inch of water that we're gonna drop our ink into. This is a glass lasagna pan that I've used. Once it enters your artist studio though, it should stay there; it shouldn't go back into the kitchen. I have designated tools and supplies for my studio. You'll need just about an inch of water in here, that's all. The water can just be from your tap, but if you find that you've started this project and your ink is sinking, that means that your water is too hard or maybe has some metal in it, so in that case you can get some distilled water or some bottled water and that should work fine. You're also gonna want to put a light surface underneath your pan if it is glass, that way you can see the pattern that you're making. You're gonna want a bigger tub, filled with a few inches of water, and that's for rinsing our pieces after we've taken our impression off of the water here where we have the ink. You're gonna need two brushes. These are Japanese sumi brushes, but you can use any brushes with a round tip. I'll show you a couple examples of just regular brushes that you might already have around. These will work perfectly fine. You want to though, have two brushes that are approximately the same size in the round bristles, because they'll hold a different amount of liquid if they're different sizes. So these two could work together but I would want to get them a little closer in size. You're also gonna need some ink, which is what we'll use to be making our pattern on top of the water. You can use sumi ink that's pretty readily available at art supply stores and craft supply stores. I think you'll find that it's not difficult to find. That's what I'm gonna use today. You can also use just a regular india ink and there are a number of varieties of those available as well. I'm gonna be using black ink today but you can use different colors if you want to. You can experiment with different colors of india ink if you'd like. You're gonna need something to store the ink in. I just have this little ceramic pot but a small palette might work well for that. You're gonna need something that will resist this ink, and that's what creates this pattern, is a dot of ink and then a dot of something that resists it and pushes it out, and then we're gonna alternate and alternate and it's gonna keep pushing, pushing, pushing, resisting each other, and that's what forms this pattern. What most artists use for the resist is PhotoFlo, which is a photography solution, and it's readily available as well, and what you're gonna do with this is take a quarter teaspoon and mix that in a half a cup of water. And so for that you'll just need some kind of measuring tool for your quarter teaspoon, and some kind of container where you can have that mixture readily available to dip your brush into. Make sure you have a drying area to put your paper down after it comes out of the water rinsing bin and some paper towels to blot your papers with.

Chapter 3 - Suminagashi

Suminigashi

- I'm just gonna top off my water here to about an inch in this clear pan. That's all you need. It doesn't need to be very deep at all. Okay, so I have my ink on this side, Photo-Flo on this side, a brush for both sides and I'm ready to start dipping. I'm gonna dip first in the ink. I'm gonna charge my brush with Photo-Flo so I'm ready to go. I'm first gonna dip the ink right into the water, and it's very light, and then I'm gonna dip in my Photo-Flo. It's really hard to see at first, but once we get going, you can see how the Photo-Flo has pushed out the ink and you can see how, oh, got a little more ink that time, they're resisting each other and pushing each other out and you can see the longer I leave my brush in there, I'm getting a little more ink. You wanna be placing the brush tip down there really straight. See how I'm not doing any angle at all. I'm recharging my brushes here, ready for some more ink, some more Photo-Flo. You want the brushes straight down. Had a lot of Photo-Flo on that. So it really depends on how much you have on your brush. You can see I have a little more liquid on my Photo-Flo brush that's really resisting it. You'll find that you have not a lot of control over what it's doing here in the pan, and that's part of the beauty of it, that you're just kind of letting the water take the ink where you want it. We're getting some darker patterns here. I like to just let it do what it wants to do. You can do a few things to make certain kinds of patterns. Let me just get a few more rings in here and I'll show you a few things that you can do. You can see my ink is sinking just a little bit there. I think that's where I had a little more ink on my brush, so that goes a little heavy and so it's sinking a little bit there, but that's okay. So let's pause here just for a second to show you how I can manipulate this pattern now. I can just brush my hand over the surface of the water and you can see how that's moving it just a little bit. I can even move my pan around a little bit, and if you want kind of a jagged line, you can even blow on it and you can see how I got a jagged line there by blowing on it, and now I'm gonna start, I like what I have going on here, so I'm gonna start a new area here and do the same thing. Got a little more dispersing on there. You can do this really quickly, back and forth with your brushes. Remember to go straight down. You can see how now this circle is pushing away the other one. Now we've got a pattern going here on the surface and you can keep going if you want and really fill it up, but I wanna go ahead and show you how we're now gonna lay the paper on the top of this to pick up this impression and rinse it and it'll be ready to dry. I've got my piece of paper here. This is a piece of printing paper that I've found works pretty well, but really experiment with different kinds. It's hard to predict what's really gonna work. Holding firmly both ends of the paper, I'm dipping down this side and I'm pushing it down, just on the top, rolling it. Gonna rinse it real quick in my pan, real quick, and then we're gonna dry it and I'm gonna take some paper towels and dab it down. This is gonna pull a little ink off the top too, so all you have left is the ink that was in my pattern on the top of my paper that printed onto this paper, so that one came out pretty well. I'm pretty happy with it. I could've filled in more areas there. Really, you can do whatever you want, and again, you have just so much control. I wanna show you too how now what's in my pan really looks like a big mess, but I find that if you do another print, it's called a ghost print, that's your second print, that it looks absolutely gorgeous. It looks a little bit different, less defined rings, so let's go ahead and take a ghost print. I'm not sure how it's gonna come out, but that's part of the fun of this. Okay, oh, that one's real subtle. Okay, gotta give that one a little bit of a dab and a drying. Okay, this is really beautiful, a lot more subtle, a lot lighter. This could be really nice to use on an end sheet of a book or in some other collage materials or even for the cover of the book if you like it. This resembles western marbling a little bit more, I think, so be sure to take a ghost print after your original print and then you can leave this ink in the pan as is and start another set of dippings and it'll just push this ghost print to the edges.

Using Colored Paper

- Okay, let's pull another print. I want to show you an example of using a colored paper, and what I'm gonna do is just leave the ink in my pan from my previous two prints and what's gonna happen is the ink that I put in now is just gonna push it off to the sides and sometimes that gives you a nice side effect. So I'm gonna go ahead and charge my brushes with some ink and with some dispersant. I like to always start in the center, and then just see where it goes, and it seems to do really whatever it wants. Sometimes it'll flow to the right, to the left, might just depend on the air in the room, maybe how I'm leaning on the pans here is kind of encouraging it to go in one direction or another, and I try not to really figure that out, I let it just do what it wants to do, that's part of the art of suminagashi, the unpredictable nature of it. Wow, I'm really getting a different pattern this time. Depends on how much ink you have in your brush, how much dispersant you have in your brush. Getting some great rings here, I really like this, so I'm just gonna kinda go with it. You can use colors of ink; I prefer the black, but you can use colors, and you can use more than one color at a time. I really prefer the black; I like the dramatic effect I get with it, and then if I want to bring color into my project, I'll use a colored paper. Okay, so we've got, wow, we've got something pretty great going on there now. I'm gonna move it around a little bit. That's nice, alright I'm just gonna start one more sequence of dots and rings in one corner here and start, ooh, a new sequence, (gasps) Ooh, and I can't tell you why it did that, that first dip of my ink, it must've hit something, maybe some other ink, but I like that effect, so you see it's very unpredictable, and that's what so fun about it, I really like that, I don't know how I could do that again. Okay. Alright, so I think I have an interesting pattern there. I'm gonna maybe just move it around just a little bit, and then I'm ready to take my piece of colored paper and pull another print. Alright so, this is a piece of colored art paper. And experiment with different ones; I've tried some that don't work at all, the ink totally blurs on it, and some that work beautifully, I think it might depend on the sizing in the paper. This one works well, but it does blur just a little, so we'll see what kind of effect we get. So remember, hold on firmly to both sides. I'm gonna dip the one side in. I'm gonna kinda push down the paper just a little bit, pull it, gonna rinse it real quickly, ooh we got some nice patterns there. Rinse it, put it on my drawing area, and take some paper towels and dry it. Oh gosh, I can't wait to see this one. Oh wow, this one came out really nice. I got some great squiggles there where I moved the pan. This area here is the ghost print from my previous section, so I have some ghost images there, and then this was that new circle I got. This is that squiggly area where I dipped my ink in and it didn't really form a circle, it formed kinda these jagged edges, I'm not even sure why. So I just made three good examples of suminagashi. This is black ink on a colored paper, black ink on a white paper, a print-making paper, and this is a ghost image; after I pulled this, I pulled another sheet to see what I could get. So that's suminagashi. These papers can be used for covers of books, they can be used in collage projects, and be sure to upload examples of what you've done to the student gallery.