

Marbleizing & Monoprinting Techniques

with Cheng-Khee Chee, ASW DF, NWS
The final volume (vol. 6) of a six-part VHS & DVD series

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Go beyond technique and get into the *soul* of creating art. The beauty of marbleizing and monoprinting as taught by Chee is you can experience these processes on many different levels. For him, this highly intuitive way of painting began as a spiritual quest and became the “visual realization of my inner being.” He says he “contemplates on the infinity of time and space” and ponders on supernatural experiences that go beyond the physical.

As he meditates with a particular piece, he and the work become one. The painting speaks to him at various stages of development and he allows himself to be receptive to what it suggests to him. Meditation, in this case, means to quiet your mind and be fully in the present, effortlessly focusing on the work, and opening yourself up to whatever thoughts or pictures come to you. Only then does he develop the images that will complete his painting or, to describe it even better, “journey.” As Chee puts it, the “end result is a collaboration of the artist and the medium itself.”

Marbleizing was practiced in ancient China but never developed into an art form. Recently, Liu Guo Sung, an innovative Chinese artist, developed it into a fine art and influenced Chee. Early on, the Buddhists brought it back to Japan, using it as a spiritual process. The result of dipping paper into monochromatic ink and water suggests highly spiritual natural landscape-like images of water, rocks, and clouds.

Because this is so intuitive, the “how to” techniques can be described but developing your artwork is highly individual. Even though he works improvisationally, Chee gives you all the technique information you need in exquisite detail. The majority of the DVD is about marbleizing and the last part is on monoprinting. While both processes use different ways to get paint or ink on paper, the contemplative communication with the piece and letting it resonate with you as you develop it are the same.

Using un-sized paper that absorbs pigment for both processes (he’ll tell you exactly what kind to get), he shows you ways to maneuver the paper so you end up with more or less of what you want. If you’re into high control, abandon those thoughts before you watch this DVD. Because the outcome of these processes is so unpredictable, you’ll get many surprises and unexpected results. That’s a given. But there are certain things you can do to somewhat fit your design intentions.

With marbleizing, you can manipulate your design depending on where and how you dip the paper into the liquid ink (you’ll see how the ink floats on the water). He shows you ways to let the water work for you, what to do to resist the ink and prevent marbleizing in places, and how to get those nice soft edges. And, while this happens, he reminds us to pay attention to design – values, shape organization, space division, etc. When you’re done, the piece should look good in any direction.

The DVD will help you grasp the key ideas as they are printed on the screen and stay long enough for you to take notes. An example is, “You can increase the appearance of spatial relationships by dipping areas at different times.”

Because you use monochromatic ink to begin and you apply color or adjust value later, Chee calls it “marbleizing plus painting.” Here’s where you develop your work. After dipping many pieces of paper, the first step is to select the most promising ones to finish. They will be abstract so look for exciting composition, shape organization, value contrast, and value relationships.

If you love abstraction or want to impose realistic subject matter on the abstract, this is a way to expand your horizons. Meditate with the piece, let it speak to you, and the abstract images will be revealed to you. Here's where you can reflect your design, making it more personal and more exciting. The process allows you to capture the spirit of the images whether they are rocks or clouds or abstract shapes.

During his demonstration, he shows how he tones down the stark white near the edge of the paper so the viewer does not go out of the painting. He delicately adds washes, intermingles warm and cool, and adjusts values with opaque white to allow space so people can breathe. Using a light touch, he says he wants to "preserve the original swirling texture" and keep in harmony with the medium. Gentle, soft music fits beautifully with the mood of the painting and makes watching this part of the DVD relaxing and enjoyable.

When he is done, he demonstrates how to mount the piece so the paper doesn't buckle. And, to give you a little extra to think about, he briefly discusses collage options.

Shots depicting before editing, after editing, and after adding color help you pull it all together.

Then Chee moves to an unusual and exciting form of monoprinting plus painting where he applies water and color to a flat surface and does some minor manipulation before using absorbent paper to pick up the paint. He suggests we do several. Then put them up, meditate on them, let them speak to you, and contemplate on what to do next. Meditating helps him experience the pieces more fully. When he sees what the shapes and colors suggest, he continues to develop the images.

This is something you don't complete in a few hours. It is a process. Sometimes these papers will sit in his studio for years until he decides how to finish them.

Influenced by Fauvism and Emil Nolde as well as the beautiful multicolored Longevity Stone from the Chinese mountains, he uses a variety of different colors in his demo.

There are so many possibilities. A monoprint can be an underpainting or develop it into a landscape. You can turn one into a realistic or abstract painting or combine abstraction with some realism.

In the "Closing" section, he says that while this works for him, it is not for everybody. It's a journey of discovery. At the highest level of learning, philosophy, not technique, is most interesting. He encourages you to use his processes for your own ideas, to transcend technique and reach up to this higher and deeper level so your work originates from your heart. Here's where you reveal your innermost you. Paul Klee said years ago that he made the invisible visible. Chee tells us to become one with the subject and then, he says, "your painting will paint itself."

For painting tips, free downloads, workshop schedules, and more, visit <http://www.ccpvideos.com>, click on Cheng-Khee Chee, then click on downloads.

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