

Suminagashi Demonstration



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Floating ink

From the Japanese sumi (ink) nagashi (water). Thought to be the earliest form of marbling. Most ancient reference appears in the poetry of Shigeharu (825-880 CE).

Spurious claims about the origins. According to legend, inventor was Jizemon Hiroba, divinely inspired, who wandered the country searching for the best water. Settled in Echizen, Fujui Prefecture, and his family carried on his tradition for 55 generations.

Key Concepts

- The artist avoids striving to manipulate the ink into a premeditated design; rather, allows the ink to express itself through the fluidity of the water and movement of air.
- Design is created through the interdependence of artist, materials, fluid surface and environment.
- The process is a collaboration between the artist and the natural world, evoking trust, chance and surprise.
- **Suminagashi paintings are like fingerprints. No two are ever the same.**

In today's demonstration, you will enjoy observing the process, rather than working to keep up with the instructor. The demonstration reveals process and perhaps self-discovery. You will experience a way of working that you may take to your own studio.

Materials

- Ink
- Surfactant (dispersant)
- Ink cups: one for each color, one for surfactant
- Japanese sumi brushes: one for each color, one for surfactant
- Tray for water bath
- Water
- Newspaper in strips
- Absorbent paper
- Drying rack
- Weighted press

Procedure

1. Set up a workstation, ideally on a sink counter close to a faucet and sink drain.
2. Add just a few drops of each ink to individual ink cups. Add a few drops of surfactant to its own cup.
3. Wet brushes and use fingers to roll/retain pointed ends. Assign one brush to each color and one to surfactant.
4. Slowly pour water into tray to a depth of 1.5 to 2". You can skim the surface with newspaper strips.
5. **Now settle:** Take your gaze inward to find your place of calm, quiet and spaciousness. Let your breath deepen. At the same time, allow the water to settle. When you meet the water, both you and the water will be of calm mind.
6. In one hand hold brush loaded with ink, in another hand a brush loaded with surfactant.
7. Bring the brush of ink to the middle of the tray just hovering above the surface. Touch the surface (or allow the water to be soaked up into the brush). The ink forms a circle of color (very light at first).
8. With the brush of surfactant, dip the point into the middle of the circle of color and allow it to disperse outward into a ring.
9. Repeat steps 7 and 8 until the surface is covered in rings of ink.
10. Allow the ambient air to move the design of the rings, or gently encourage the movement as suggested below.*
11. When you are content with the design, hold a sheet of paper by opposite corners and slowly lay it down on the surface.
12. When entire paper has absorbed the ink, pick up the paper, rolling it off the surface. (Some papers cause the ink to run a bit; if so, just rinse gently under a faucet.)
13. Place print flat on rack or surface to dry.
14. When completely dry, press under weight.

*Optional Techniques for Encouraging Movement of Ink

- Swish the water before or after you apply the ink. Allow the motion of the water to slowly move the ink.
- Use a needle or a single hair plucked from your head to draw through the design.
- Use a hand fan to move the ink through a slow gust of air.
- Use a straw to blow a gust onto an area.

Mixing Surfactant from Soapberries

- Combine 3 soapberries with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of water in a small clean jar.
- Let steep for 12-24 hours, until water becomes a pale amber color. Give the jar a gentle shake a few times during steeping.
- After 12-24 hours, remove the soapberries and store them in their own lidded container (refrigerate). Can be used again (and again).
- When ready to use, pour the extract into its own cup, rather dipping your brush into the jar and possibly contaminating it.
- Soapberry extract will keep for about a week (longer if refrigerated).

Working on Fabric (A mordant is needed)

Alum Mordant (different solution than what is needed for paper)

- 2.5 teaspoons alum to 1.5 litres boiling water
- Stir in the alum to dissolve. Allow it to cool. (Can be used again and again with fresh pieces of fabric; just give it a good stir each time.)
- Iron fabric before soaking it in the alum solution.
- Soak the fabric in the solution for 25 minutes.
- Air dry (not heat dry) the fabric.
- Iron the fabric again. Now it is ready for the floating ink design.

Resources

- **Ink** Aitoh Boku-Undo Suiminagashi (not sumi ink)
Individual colors in 200 ml bottles or set of 6 assorted colors (in .4 oz bottles)
Dickblick.com
- **Soapberries** (soap nuts)
naturoli.com
- **Hahnemuhle Sumi** paper for Japanese ink painting.
Dickblick.com
- **Yasutomo** Sketch Paper
Dickblick.com
- **Strathmore 25% cotton wove, 24 lb. writing paper**: natural white or ivory
Amazon.