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# AMERICAN DECORATIVE PAPERMAKERS

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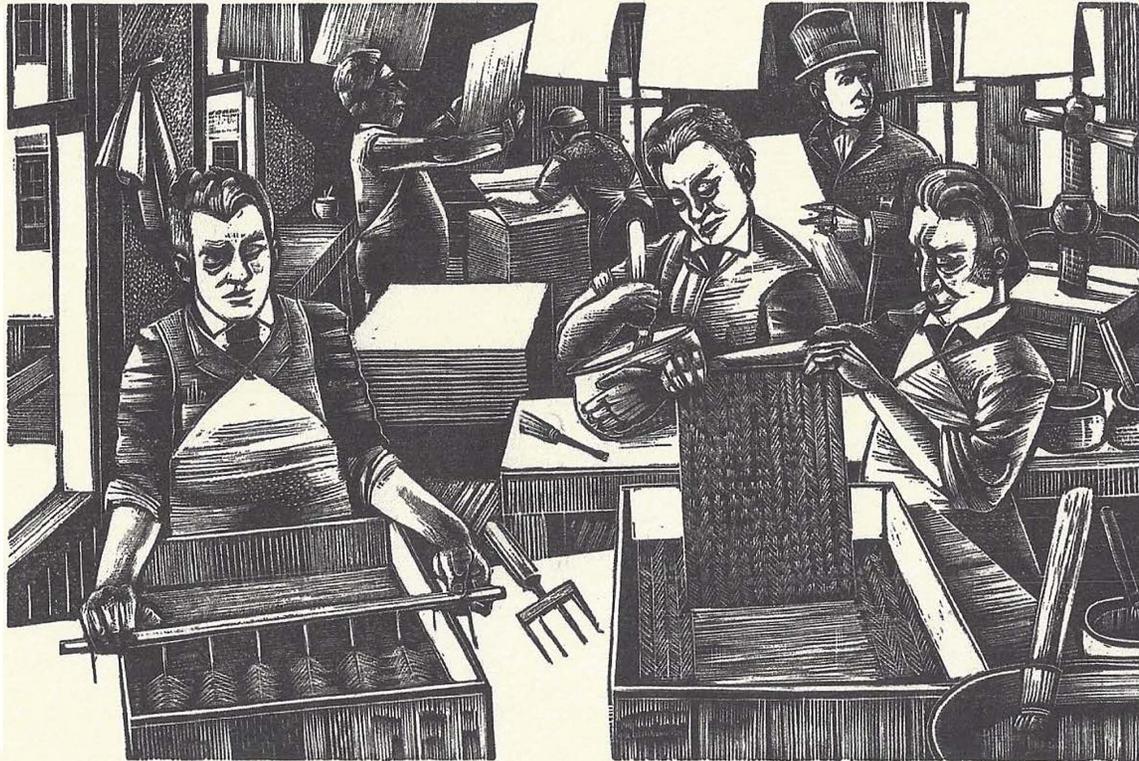
*The Work & Specimens of Twelve Craft Artists*



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*Studies In The Book Arts ★ Busyhaus Publications*

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MARBLING PAPER

*McCurdy*

Wood engraving and letterpress printing by Michael McCurdy for Busyhaus Publications,  
Box 1072, Mattapoisett, MA 02739 First edition five hundred prints © 1983

## PREFACE

*American Decorative Papermakers* introduces the first publication of a planned series, *Studies in the Book Arts*, about the work of contemporary American decorative papermakers, fine printers, typographers, hand bookbinders and papermakers.<sup>1</sup> Future publications will feature essays by book artists and specimens of their work, the purpose being to document the views and methods of those who practice the book arts, making accessible their resources and skills while preserving a historical record of these activities.

Recent features about decorative papers in journals, directories and exhibit catalogues show that Americans are making decorative papers on various craft and esthetic levels.<sup>2</sup> The majority are making marbled and paste papers,<sup>3</sup> followed by stencilled, wood-block, gilded, embossed, silkscreened and lithographed mediums. In America decorative papermaking has been researched and developed by many excellent contributors.<sup>4</sup>

Individuals in this publication became interested in decorative papers in different ways. Christopher Weimann was first introduced to marbled papers when he . . . *took a bookbinding class and through these courses found out about marbled endsheets* . . . Faith Harrison explains her discovery of decorative papers: *In my frequent perusals of the old books, I became intrigued with the fanciful, colorful end papers.*<sup>5</sup>

Most of the twelve participants in this publication have attended workshops by Don Guyot; seven now offer their own studio and traveling workshops. Peggy Skycraft and Don Guyot have conducted more than eighty workshops each. Together, all the participants have given over two hundred and fifty workshops throughout the country.

The impact of publications and workshops has educated a diverse audience of collectors, publishers and artists who now practice and study decorative papermaking. It has contributed to making the book worker and library conservator aware of the historical and craft value of decorative papers in the design and restoration process.

In 1981, when I asked professional decorative papermakers to be represented in this publication, I found that of the twelve accepting, ten were marblers and two paste papermakers.<sup>6</sup> The proportion of marblers among other decorative paper mediums reflects the success of marbling workshop efforts and accounts for the popularity of marbling among bookbinders, as expressed by Jim and Pamela Talin. *Marbling began as an extension of bookbinding and became more important as we were able to complete books with our marbled papers to create a more personal binding.*

Eight of the twelve participants are involved in binding, two in papermaking, two in printing and publishing and one in calligraphy. All make custom decorative papers and two offer supplies and equipment. Together they offer a total of one hundred and sixty-four designs and provide sample swatches. Standard designs are made on fourteen types of paper in twelve sizes with total annual production exceeding eight thousand and seven hundred sheets by all participants. Of the papers used, eleven are machine made and three mouldmade. Ten are made in America, two in France, one in Italy and one in Germany.<sup>7</sup> Most of the decorative papermakers experiment with a variety of papers other than their standard production types, especially when making custom papers. In 1945 the American marbler, Timothy Thrift, commented

*Many cheap papers lend themselves readily to marbling, but in other than experimental work, why take the time and trouble to decorate something that will not endure.?*<sup>8</sup>

A review of papers used by participants indicates that nine papers are archivally made with manufacturers providing rag content and acid-free features. Specific current information about permanence and durability features of these papers can be obtained by writing the manufacturers, suppliers or the decorative papermakers.<sup>9</sup>

The work of the twelve decorative papermakers is represented by the use of ten specimens, as two makers collaborate. Specimens were

## DON GUYOT

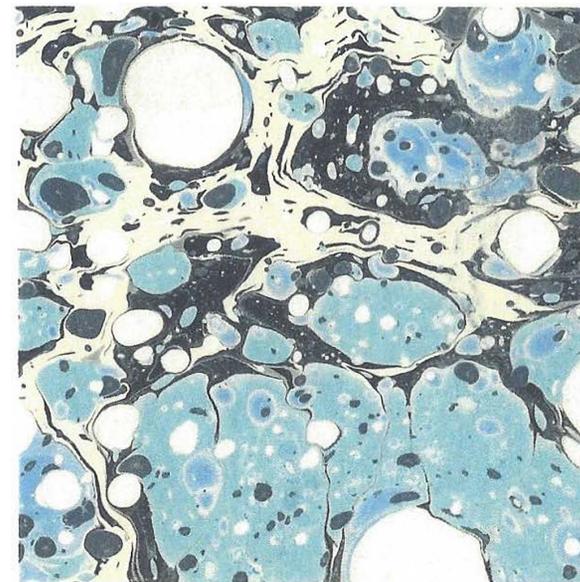
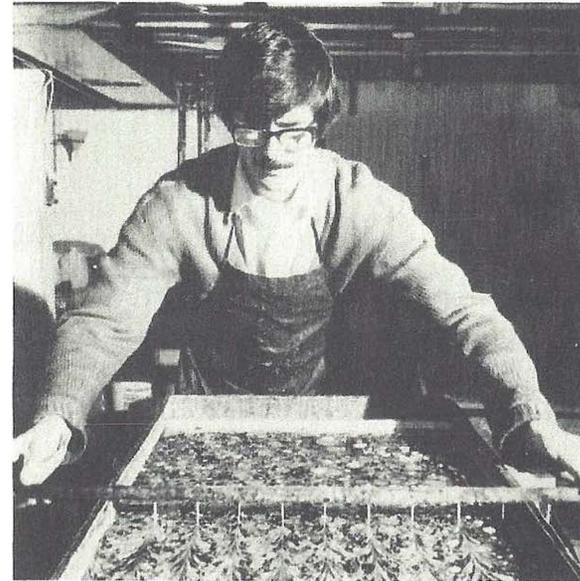
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It is no accident that I chose marbling as a means to explore one of the most interesting aspects of my physical world: its dynamic nature. Nor is it any accident that the people who presumably started the process in the western world (the Turks or Persians) call it "abri" or "ebru"—"cloud art." As far back into my past as I can recall, I have been interested in and amused by the various swirls, twirls, whirls, plumes and vortexes that one can encounter along the way to wherever it is that the human spirit impells him: pine pollen swirling magically into nebular shapes in the backwater of mountain streams; smoke curling from the end of a cigar held in the hand of a favorite uncle; cream meandering atop the surface of a cup of coffee.

Who has not noticed—or is it that I have because there is so much rain in Seattle—the patterns and images that automotive oil makes on the street as it is drawn, floating on water, into roadside drains? Who has not traced the delicate lines of vibrant color in the opalescent glass that Tiffany made? Indeed, who has not wondered about it all when he looked skyward and beheld a cloud changing form rapidly as it blew across the sky?

The cloud rampant, the oil aswirl, smoke pluming: when I come upon these whirlygigs I pause to consider the relationships between the process that produced the thing and the visual image that the thing itself is. Among many observations that I made about these phenomena, one seems particularly relevant here: the process exists for an instant, is short-lived and the resulting image is dynamic, always changing, kaleidoscopic. Fleeting and transient, these images are of the moment, then gone forever. Lamentable!

Ah, can one not photograph these images, thus preserving them at least for the life of the photograph? Yes, of course one can. And I expect that some of the allure that photography possesses stems



supplied by participants from random sheets and are typical of the standard designs offered.<sup>10</sup> Selections of decorative papers and orders should be made from the complete samples provided by the makers.

Starting production dates among the twelve participants extend over eight years (1970-1978) with Peggy Skycraft's work the earliest. After fourteen years of independent study she is aware of her craft origins. *I always wanted to visit England and Europe where marbling is a continuing tradition.*

The general perception among American book workers is that all European book crafts were successfully functioning four centuries earlier and had already instituted traditional practices, when in fact

*It was really in the nineteenth century that the English gained a wide and respected reputation for the making of marbled papers.*<sup>11</sup>

A more accurate rendering of their craft by American book workers shows a development that has been fragile and continually interrupted, due in part to limited apprenticeship practices, and work-related opportunities, and to advances in machine technology which made education and the perpetuation of craft skills and standards inadequate or obsolete.<sup>12</sup> The result has been a dependence on European training, materials and design attitudes and an awkward evolution of a convincing American tradition.

The emergence of an American identity in the book arts and the skills to support it is evident in the journals, exhibits, publications, seminars and organizations now being devoted to them.<sup>13</sup> However, the reliance of American decorative papermakers on past or traditional designs is more the rule than exception. While the making of traditional designs preserves the craft techniques and provides a valuable service to restorers, the making of these and contemporary designs is equally needed for use by modern book designers and the publishing trades.<sup>14</sup> This dichotomy of working within historical models while creating modern ones is a concern of paste papermakers Sage

Reynolds and Colman Rutkin. *We hope that our designs will be perceived as contemporary, but not without history . . .* Kay Radcliffe expresses a similar attitude: *My focus is on innovative uses of marbling.*<sup>15</sup>

Regardless of design preferences among participants, none acquired their decorative papermaking skills by formal training and instead they have relied on workshops, courses and self education in advancing their craft, as Donna Seim states. *Very often the results were severely discouraging, but perseverance won out and through a tedious trial and error method I learned how to achieve the results I wanted.* Iris Nevins also recalls the difficulties of learning marbling: *It is highly affected by temperature, humidity, stray particles of dirt, etc. . . .* These are the same lessons Rosamond Loring learned forty-one years ago.

*If the size is too thin, it cannot be controlled. Furthermore, it is difficult to draw the pattern . . . The color also spreads out too much over the surface of the size which is too thin and loses the desired shade. If, on the other hand, the size is too thick, the color remains in small spots and does not spread out enough, or else sinks to the bottom of the trough.*<sup>16</sup>

While the learning experiences, materials, techniques and designs favored by participants vary, few discuss the creative reasons behind their design choices. Pam Smith describes her choice of marbling colors, which . . . *although varied, distinctly speak of the Southwest.* This view of the Southwest is shared by painter Georgia O'Keeffe.

*The hills sometimes appeared an angry purplish blood-red when a cloud passed over them, and other times they were a warm, pale fleshy pink.*<sup>17</sup>

Don Guyot marbles . . . *because the process teaches one much about the relationships between and among color, motion, line,*

## FAITH HARRISON

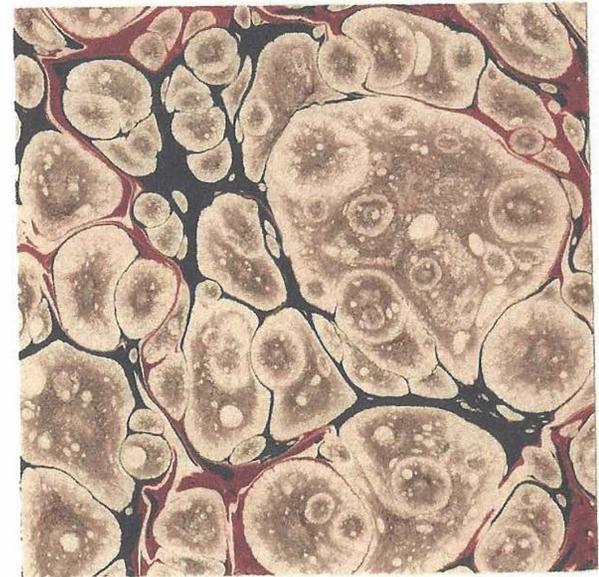
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I became interested in paper marbling in 1978 when I was working for a rare book dealer. In my frequent perusals of the old books, I became intrigued with the fanciful, colorful end papers. I was referred to a bookbinder who in turn referred me to Terry Harlow of Bookworks (Bookworks operated from 1976-1981) from whom I learned paper marbling. Following this start, it has been primarily self-study to answer the myriad of problems and questions. The Watkinson Library (Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut) has been invaluable to me for research. They have the rare and sometimes obscure nineteenth century manuals on the techniques of marbling.

I use and prefer colored vellum paper, marbled on carrageenan size and use water-based inks that I make. Many of my color schemes have come from taking notes at institutional and private libraries, old town hall ledgers and, of course, experimentation. I prefer nature's muted colors. Guided by bookbinders, I tend toward reproduction of historical patterns.

During the past year marbling has become my means of employment. I finally have worked out enough of the exasperating problems associated with marbling to consistently achieve papers to my satisfaction. I now sell to bookbinders. In January 1981 I bought Terry Harlow's marbling and supply business. I sell marbling ingredients and equipment, and make the latter. From this business, I have developed a wonderful correspondence with fellow marblers, swapping ideas and techniques. I also have a busy schedule of teaching marbling workshops and giving demonstrations.

In the past three years, my study of paper marbling has been one of continuous and developing appreciation. There has been no end to discoveries and new intriguing results.



form. This relationship which decorative papermakers find between the survival of traditional designs and creation of new ones is a means for preserving and expressing our ideas and feelings through the use of decorative symbols, for the same reasons one paints, etches or draws with a pencil.<sup>18</sup>

The decorative artists in *American Decorative Papermakers* frequently learned their skills while practicing a variety of related craft disciplines. If one is a bookbinder or papermaker, certain design and technical qualities will become evident in one's decorative papermaking effort. While American practitioners rarely apprentice with a "master," they have studied with a variety of regional or traveling craftspeople and these experiences have contributed to their attitudes about decorative papermaking and its methods. Within these kinds of learning experiences the American book arts tradition has developed, from which these twelve decorative papermakers evolved, and on which the publishing program Studies in the Book Arts will focus.

Robert Hauser

Busyhaus Publications

#### PREFACE FOOTNOTES

- 1 The wood engraving *Marbling Paper* by Michael McCurdy illustrated in this publication is available separately, printed from the block and signed by the artist. Busyhaus will also publish *Gatherings*, a collection of three broadsides printed letterpress of seventeenth and eighteenth century book arts poems, with wood engravings by Michael McCurdy. For ordering information, please refer to section on Busyhaus publications.
- 2 Recent examples include Dorothy Bevis and Eugenie Candau, *Hand Bookbinding Today, an International Art* (San Francisco: Hand Bookbinders of California and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1978); Gary Richman, *RE: PAGES, An Exhibition of Contemporary American Bookworks* (Boston: Hera Foundation and New England Foundation for the Arts, 1981); Renee Roff, *Directory of American Book Workers* (Bronxville, NY: Nicholas T. Smith, 1981).
- 3 The most concise definitions of these terms are expressed below. *Marbled Paper*: "Genuine marbled papers are made by sprinkling various oil colors on the surface of water to which certain grease-repelling agents have been added. These colors, skillfully stirred by the craftsman, spread, intermingle, and form patterns on the surface of the water and are transferred from there onto the paper to which they become permanently affixed." Hannah French, J. Rogers, and H. Lehmann-Haupt, *Bookbinding in America* (NY: R.R. Bowker Co., 1967), p. 211. *Paste Paper*: "The simplest technique used is that of covering the surface of a sheet of paper with colored paste and drawing a design on it through the paste with a blunt tool, with a comb or some other object, or simply with the finger or thumb. In this way striped patterns may be made, or plaids, diamonds, and various forms may be impressed through the colored paste, which show a paler tone than that of the surface color." Edith Diehl, *Bookbinding: Its Background and Technique* Vol. 1 (NY: Kennikat Press, 1946; reprinted 1965), p. 186.
- 4 See, for example, Sue Allen, "Floral-Patterned Endpapers in Nineteenth Century American Books," *Winterthur Portfolio* 12, (Winterthur, DE: 1978); James Nicholson, *A Manual of the Art of Bookbinding* (Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird & Co., 1887); Richard Wolfe, *The Role of the Mann Family of Dedham, Massachusetts, in the Marbling of Paper in Nineteenth Century America* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Perspectives in Printing and Publishing, 1981).
- 5 Quotations from decorative papermakers appear in their essays in this volume. Douglas Cockerell, renowned British binder and marbler, had this to say about the use of marbled papers for bookbinding: "There are considerable disadvantages in using marbled papers, as if they are of thick enough paper to help the strength of the binding, the 'made' sheet is very stiff, and in a small book is troublesome. On no account should any marbled paper be used, unless it is tough and durable. The quality of the paper of which most marbled papers are made is so poor, that it is unsuitable for use as end papers." Douglas Cockerell, *Bookbinding and the Care of Books* (London: John Hogg, 1901), p. 83.
- 6 The decorative papermakers selected were those who offered standard papers, stocked a choice of papers, and would be representative of the work in America. The twelve decorative papermakers come from eight states: California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Washington.
- 7 Refer to section on technical notes and resources for names of papers and addresses of manufacturers or representatives.
- 8 Timothy Thrift, *Modern Methods in Marbling Papers* (Winchester, MA: Lucky Dog Press, 1945). Rosamond Loring Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, number 52L-87.