

# Temple Rubbings -- The Unusual Opportunity

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## Temple Rubbings -- The Unusual Opportunity

This is a business where a person with no art talent can produce art!

Temple or gravestone rubbing is believed to have originated with the ancient (300 BC) Chinese. It was an efficient method of communicating the "written word" and a forerunner to the printing press.

The Emperors had their laws, slogans and messages carved in stone (that's easy for an Emperor to do) then transformed to parchment by rubbing with colored wax or other permanent dye material. Centuries later, pictures (stone and metal reliefs) were carved expressly for this purpose and today several Asian countries feature large temple rubbings commonly called batiks, which is technically a misnomer.

The name batik more properly refers to designed fabric that is coated with a wax, a design scratched or applied with a heated tool, and dipped in dye. Since the dye only affects parts not protected or by wax, the design remains when the wax is washed out. A marbling effect can be achieved when the dye is allowed (or forced) to seep into cracks in the wax caused by crumpling when cooled.

Although carved stone and metals are the most popular subjects for rubbing, virtually any solid relief surface can yield an interesting rubbing product: medals, leaves, architectural reliefs, cultural, historic, or commemorative plaques.

Most commercial rubbings come from church and courtyard reliefs. Their attraction and value are enhanced by unusual materials, novel rubbing techniques, impressive frames and by novel innovations such as certificates of authenticity.

Perhaps the most interesting source for rubbings is old graveyards -- in any country! The markers and design are not only historical, they are often art works of a bygone age.

Temple rubbings and gravestone rubbings are essentially the same. Generally, impressions of oriental designs are called temple rubbings, while gravestone rubbings are usually from markers and tombs. The two terms can be used interchangeably in the business.

A major market for gravestone rubbings is descendants and genealogical projects. Many family records include information from old markers; some have photographs and/or rubbings of those old markers.. Because some of the stone markers are in soft

material like limestone, the photographs may eventually be the only legible record.

Gravestone rubbings from the tomb of an ancient relative might be considered quite a prize -- and not for just for their sentimental value.

The basic tools needed to begin the art of temple or gravestone rubbings are:

A piece of dry sponge, foam plastic or blackboard eraser and a soft brush to prepare the surface that is to be rubbed.

Fabric or paper to place over the design to reproduce it.

A rubbing marker, such as a commercial lumber crayon, or large flat sided school crayon to rub over the design.

Tape and twine to hold the fabric in place --and perhaps a kneeling pad.

For the rubbing fabric, its is best to use white butcher paper at first. It is expensive and will do for learning and can even be saved and mounted.

To make your rubbings look their best, however, it is best to feature an unusual or interesting fabric. One idea is to use marbled paper, another is to buy or make your own special effect fabric; still another is wallpaper -- fabric or paper with a nice texture.

The fabric and frame should be coordinated and both should complement or contrast with the rubbing itself. A variation is to use a light fabric for the actual rubbing, and contrasting dark color and/or texture for a border within the frame.

Another idea for a marker is to make your own applicator. A pad should be relatively flat, porous and about 4" across (although others sizes might be used for special parts of the job).

One suggestion is to start with a cutout circle of 1/8" plywood, about 3" in diameter. Glue a powder puff to one side and a handle to the other, then cover with a piece of 1/4" thick foam rubber (like wet suit material). Tie the foam material together on the handle side to leave a smooth convex surface on the rubbing side. This "tool" can be dipped in burnt umbra or other wet or dry stain and rubbed in a light circular motion to produce a very

smooth, unstreaked reproduction of the relief.

Variations in rubbing pressure, staining material color and consistency, size and shape of the pad, fabric and your rubbing techniques will produce a wide variety of effects. Experiment until you find the ones you want.

Frames can be purchased or custom made. If not covered with glass, the finished rubbing should be sprayed with a protective covering such as Gloss Finish, which is used to spray finished charcoal drawings to prevent smearing (available at any art store).

The higher your asking price, the more important it is to protect and "showcase" your finished rubbing "under glass."

To make your first temple rubbing, select your subject, and a nice dry day. Clean the surface thoroughly with your sponge or brush. Use a little vinegar to for stubborn moss spots (let it dry before attempting to rub). Do not use anything harder or you risk scoring the surface which can damage the subject and lower the quality of your rubbing. Remove as much moss as possible for the best representation.

Next, place the fabric over the design and tape (or tie) it in place. Always use larger sheets fabric so there is plenty of margin to tie or tape without touching any of the surface that is to appear in your finished rubbing.

Peel off the paper from your crayon marker ( or dip your sponge pad) and use the flat side of the marker to gently rub over the raised portions of the design from the center outward all around until you have a light representation of the design.

Reverse directions and work from the outside in, gradually applying more and more pressure until you have just the amount of color, contrast and design that you want.. Study your rubbing from all angles and distances while it is still held firmly in place. Darken desired areas and correct any errors BEFORE removing the tape or ties. Once you move the fabric,, you are finished with that impression!

It should be mentioned here that some "experts" deliberately move their rubbing fabrics slightly during their process. They complete the rubbing in the basic color then move the fabric slightly. The next step is to go over the highlights with a contrasting color -- for a sort of highlight or 3-D effect.

Especially in a foreign country, always check with the proper authorities before attempting any type of rubbing activity, regardless of whether the object is on private, public or religious property.

It is not only good manners, but it can save embarrassment and possibly hard feelings. There could be religious, political, family or cultural considerations as well as property rights.

It is impossible to predict what your temple and/or gravestone rubbing might sell for (somewhere in the \$10 to \$1,000 range?). The price you realize will depend on the quality of your work, the subjects and their artistic appeal, as well as their frames and the manner in which they are marketed. The highest prices can be realized with glass covered creations in a attractive, contrasting fabric bordered frames and presented in art gallery fashion.

Tip: If your subjects are oriental, you might hire an oriental person to sell market them.

Persons visiting or serving in overseas assignments have a unique opportunity to find interesting and historical rubbing subjects,. But, there are also plenty of "stateside" opportunities as well.

Consider just one specialty: epitaphs. There are some pretty curious examples in some of the old graveyards across the country, including funny sayings, terse explanation of occupant's downfall and not a few with major errors.

In the past, most markers were not carved by professionals or scholars -- many were made by people who hardly could read and knew very little about stone carving. Some have words or letters missing or crammed in at the end of lines. Some even have corrections -- IN STONE! There are some very interesting (and valuable) collections out there -- patiently waiting for an enterprising entrepreneur.

## BUSINESS SOURCES

THE KELSEY CO.,Box 941, Meriden, CT 06450, 203/235-1695. Printing and related materials and equipment; type, paper, presses, wood and linoleum blocks, etc.,Old, reliable company.

DICK BLICK CENTRAL, Box 1267, Galesburg, IL 61407-1267, 800/477-8192. Wholesale art, sign, ceramic, sculpture supplies. Old, reliable company.

EL DO PLASTICS, INC.,Box 451, El Dorado, AR 71730, 800/643-1556. Magnetic sign & engraver supplies; has sponge rubber pads (called Davis Daubers). reliable company.

MEYERS PUBLISHING CO.,2135 Summer St.,Stamford, CT 06945, 203/356-1745. Publishes ART BUSINESS NEWS, trade magazine for art and picture frame dealers.

FABRIC FINDERS, 125 Wold Rd., Albany, NY 12205.  
Wholesale fabrics (first quality and seconds).

JAPS, 126 7th Ave., Hopkins, NM 55343. Picture framing  
supplies; offers framing guide for \$3; free catalog.

PICTURE ART INDUSTRIES, 2566 Stirling Rd., Hollywood,  
FL 33020, 305/921-6664. Wholesale framed pictures featuring  
lithograph prints under glass; over 1,000 pieces.

COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS, INC., 5266 Barfield Rd., Atlanta,  
GA 30328, 404/256-9800. Publishes ART MATERIAL TRADE NEWS,  
"The Journal of all art, craft, engineering and drafting  
supplies"

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC., 31 East 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11051.  
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QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelter Rd., Lincolnshire, IL  
60917-4700, 312/634-4800. Office supplies.

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