

Crafters' Corner - Articles & Tips

Brushstroke Bonanza Part 1

by Bill Thompson

Becoming familiar with brushes and the various strokes they are able to produce can be a never-ending source of pleasure and provide a sense of accomplishment. Gaining facility with the various types of brushes is no more difficult than learning to write-it simply takes a positive attitude and a bit of practice and perseverance. Forget the words "I can't" and banish the notion that brushwork is some esoteric function experienced only by a chosen few. ANYONE, having the desire to do so, can learn to paint the basic brushstrokes and to combine them in numberless ways to create unique designs.



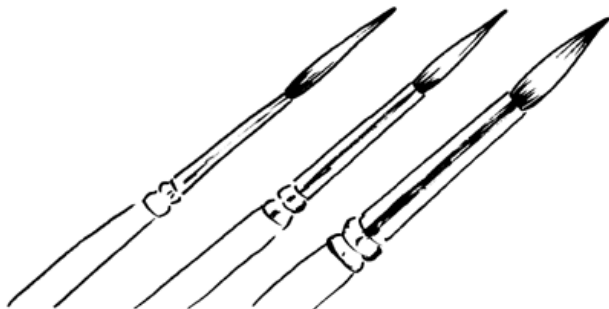
As there are different styles of brushstrokes, there also are a variety of brush types, with some types available in a number of different shapes. Each style and shape is suited to a certain application and capable of producing definite kinds of brushstrokes. In this and subsequent articles we will be concerned only with those brushes generally employed in brushstroke work.

Although it may not seem to be so, caring for brushes is an important part of brushwork. Be sure to wash brushes after each use in the appropriate solution: water for water-base mediums and turpentine or mineral spirits for oil-base colors followed by a wash of soap and water. Take care that all paint is removed from the brush bristles where they enter the ferrule, since color allowed to remain and dry in this area is sure to eventually ruin the brush shape. When cleaning a brush, swish it back and forth in the cleaning solution and blot it on paper towel. Repeat until you can no longer see any trace of color on the towel.

After cleaning, reshape each brush. Flip wet round brushes with a snap of your wrist to bring them back to a point. Lightly pull the bristles of flat brushes through your fingers to return them to a chisel shape. Allow the brushes to dry, and once dry, store the bristles up in a suitable jar or other container.

ROUND BRUSHES

Round brushes are considered by many to be the workhorses of the brush world and are capable of a great diversity of stroke shapes. Those called simply "round" are the sort that often come to mind when one refers to watercolor brushes. Longer, slimmer round brushes bear the appellation "liner", while an extra long and slim brush may be called a "script" or a "rigger". (See the drawing below.) Although some are earmarked for specific applications or effects, all round brushes can produce variations of the same brushstrokes.



The floral design in the color illustration is composed entirely of the type of brushstrokes shown in the brushstroke diagram: pull-press-and-pull, press-and-pull, pull-and-press, dots, and lines. Each petal of the yellow and purple iris was painted with overlapping press-and-pull strokes. The blue flower is simply a cluster of the same strokes in a side-by-side fashion. All of the leaves are pull-press-and-pull strokes with lines and dots adding details.



Referring to the brushstroke diagram, practice each type of stroke. All of the strokes can be painted by pulling the brush toward or away from you.

Hold the brush well back from the ferrule, since to grip it close to the bristles will inhibit movement and make it difficult to produce graceful brushstrokes. If your hand is a bit shaky, use your little finger as a prop. You also can use an "artist's bridge" to steady your hand. Bridges are available at most art supply shops, but a ruler across a couple of books will work just as well.



As you paint imagine that the brush is a clock pendulum and your fingers are what cause it to swing back and forth above the painting surface. When the brush reaches the apex of the forward or backward movement, bring it down onto the painting surface and execute the desired brushstroke.

To paint a pull-press-and-pull stroke allow the tip of the brush to touch the painting surface, begin to apply pressure and as you move the brush toward or away from yourself until the desired width is achieved, then gradually release the pressure and bring the brush back up on its point.

Paint press-and-pull strokes in the same way, only immediately apply pressure at the apex of the stroke and gradually release pressure as you pull the brush along. The opposite of this motion will produce a pull- and-press stroke.

Lines of any width can be painted with a round brush, the pressure determining the width; more pressure, a wider line and vice versa.

Paint dots by holding a fully loaded brush upright and allowing only the tip to touch the painting surface. Dots of diminishing size will automatically occur as the brush runs out of color.

The final row of the brushstroke diagram and the small color photo of rose and bud, illustrate a few of the ways round brushes can combine to duplicate almost any real or imagined design.

Remember the old joke about the musician who asked a passerby how he could get to Carnegie Hall. The answer was: "Practice, practice, practice". The same holds true for gaining brushstroke facility. [Click here](#) for a pattern you can copy and practice your brushstrokes with.



Editor's Note: If you have painting questions that have been plaguing you or have some painting technique that has been giving you trouble, drop us a line.

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