

Crafters' Corner - Articles & Tips

Brushstroke Bonanza Part 2

by Bill Thompson

The first artist's brushes were almost certainly round in shape, as it was a natural movement to gather a group of bristles or other hairs into a bundle and bind them to a stick with some sort of cord. In time the cord was discarded and the bristles or hairs were wrapped in a strip of metal that we know today as a "ferrule." It is then probable that some artist, wanting a really big brush came up with the flat shape. If you were to assemble a huge amount of bristles into a round shape, it would require a mammoth handle to hold them. However, if you made a flat row of the bristles and bound them with a metal ferrule, a small handle could be attached to the center of the ferrule. With time the flat brush became, and remains, the tool of choice for many artists.



As with round brushes, flat ones may be made of a variety of natural and man-made bristles, with the finest and most expensive being made from the soft-tail hairs of an arctic Russian weasel called a "kolinsky." Flat brushes with long bristles are called "flats," while those with short bristles are known as "brights." Ceramists know these types of brushes as "square shaders." If the bristles are assembled in a flat shape but with a rounded end, the brush is called a "filbert." The newest in the line of flat brushes is one that has the bristles arranged to be longer on one side of the brush and tapering down to shorter ones on the other side. This brush goes by the title of "angular."



Flat-type brushes, with the exception of filberts, are not as effective for designs composed of brushstrokes as are round types, being more useful for area coverage and shading. Working with oil paints, watercolors, and china paints as I do, flat brushes are my choice for all except some line work and final details.

The obvious stroke for a flat brush is simply a broad swath of color as shown in the upper left of the brushstroke illustrations. "C-type" and "comma" strokes are often employed to add or "cut in" background around a design.

Strangely enough, flat brushes are excellent for some types of line work. Drawing the brush along on its chisel edge makes it easy to produce lines of even or varying width. Short, joined strokes (upper right of the brushstroke illustrations) simplify the painting of tree branches and twigs.

Loading only the corner of a flat brush allows for easy painting of shaded effects. Corner load a brush, hold it upright and spin it with your fingers and it will produce a nicely shaded round object. Combine 2 side-by-side strokes, keeping the color-bearing corner of the brush to the outside can give the effect of a rounded rod-shaped item.

To successfully corner load a flat brush, place some color on a palette. Dampen the brush with the medium appropriate to the type of color being used, then remove the excess by touching the brush to a cloth or paper towel. Place the brush on the palette next to the color. Using a motion as though writing the letter "C," gradually work the left corner of the damp brush into the mound of color until the color is about halfway across the bristles. Refresh this condition often as you work.

Fully load a flat brush with color, place it on the chisel edge, then pull, apply pressure, and gradually raise back to the chisel edge to produce a shape resembling a narrow leaf. For a wider leaf, paint two such strokes next to one another.

Filbert brushes in brushstroke work are ideal for painting the petals of daisy-type blossoms, some type of leaves, and for clusters of foliage on a tree.

Painting bamboo is an ideal exercise for completing a design with a flat brush. The pictured bamboo design was painted entirely with a #10 sable square shader brush. To paint the trunk of the bamboo, load the brush with a tan color and paint several long, joined strokes with the full width of the brush. Hesitate at the end of each stroke and apply a bit of pressure to indicate the joint nodes natural to these plants. Allow the work to dry, then corner load the brush with brown and go over the same strokes to complete the trunks. Use the chisel edge of the brush and the same color to paint branches growing upward from the joints. Finally paint the clusters of leaves at the branch ends as follows: With the brush loaded with green, begin each leaf with the full width of the brush. As you pull the brush along, gradually turn the handle in your fingers until the chisel edge is toward you and lift up to achieve the leaf point.



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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