

An Introduction to the Artist Brush

A brush is an extension of the Artists' hand and usually the last point of contact between the Artist and their work, making it therefore a very important tool.

Selecting the right brush for the job can be of paramount importance in avoiding unnecessary frustration in achieving the effects required.

A brush consists of three main parts: the tuft, the ferrule and the handle.

1. The **tuft** is a bundle of animal hairs or synthetic fibers tied tightly together at the base;
2. The **ferrule** is a metal sleeve that surrounds the tuft, gives the tuft its cross sectional shape, provides mechanical support under pressure, and protects from water wearing down the glue joint between the, base of the tuft and the handle;
3. The lacquered wood **handle**, which is typically shorter in a watercolor brush than in an oil painting brush, has a distinct shape—widest just behind the ferrule and tapering to the tip.

HAIR

Bristles may be natural — either soft hair or hog bristle — or synthetic.

Soft hair brushes:

Natural animal hair has several desirable qualities depending on the type of animal it is from and the quality of the source. Natural animal hair, like human hair, is covered in fine scales that typically hold a large quantity of liquid and release it evenly.

- **Sable:** The ultimate soft brush is made from the hairs on the tail of a sable marten; these have a belly which acts like a reservoir and taper naturally, so when they're put into a brush they form a point. Sable brushes are expensive, but are renowned for their softness, flexibility, excellent liquid retention and fine point. Kolinsky sable from Siberia has traditionally been considered the best hair for watercolor brushes due to the harsh conditions in the animals natural habitat the hair grows to its optimum.
- **Squirrel:** Cheaper than sable, squirrel is a soft hair with little spring but huge colour carrying capacity. Larger squirrel brushes work better than smaller ones because the mass of hairs together gives them support.
- **Camel:** Brushes labeled 'camel' hair are really made from other types of soft hair.

Camel hair is unsuitable for brushes because it's too woolly.

- **Ox:** Long, strong and springy hair from the ear of the animal which holds a lot of liquid.

Comes in two kinds - light and dark with the light being the better quality.

- **Pony:** Coarse hair that doesn't form a good point. Often used in cheaper brushes
- **Goat:** Lacks spring, but forms a good point. Used in calligraphy and Chinese Brush painting. Good liquid retention, often used in mop brushes.

Hog bristle (often called China bristle or Chungking bristle)

The ultimate hard brush is made from the hairs on the back of a pig (hog), which are strong yet springy. The bristles have natural split-ends, which increases the amount of paint they hold and a natural curve which can be used to retain shape. For oils and acrylics. It may be bleached or unbleached.

Synthetic fibre brushes are often a by-product of the fibre optic industry and made of special polyester or multi-diameter extruded nylon filament and often have names like Taklon that change depending on the manufacturer. Often chemically tapered or cratered to carry more colour and disperse it evenly similar to the natural hairs.

With the development of better performing fibres and mixtures of, synthetic brushes are becoming ever more popular with painters in all mediums.

Just as they were in the past, artists' brushes are still crafted by hand. Brush makers hand "cup" the hair to shape, so that each strand falls into place, giving the brush a fine tapered point or a clean, straight edge. A good brush is *never* cut to shape.

HANDLES

Artists' brush handles are commonly wooden but can also be made of molded plastic. Many mass-produced handles are made of unfinished raw wood; better quality handles are of seasoned hardwood. The wood is sealed and lacquered to give the handle a high-gloss, waterproof finish that reduces soiling and swelling.

Generally the long handle, about 9" in length, is for easel work/traditional oil and acrylic painting. A short handle, 5" to 6" in



length, is for watercolor and other painting done at a table.

What's more important than length is that the brush feels balanced in your hand. Better brushes have a different sized handle for each different size brush head. You're going to be using it a lot, so it needs to be comfortable to hold.



Shapes

Natural and synthetic brushes are sold with the tuft shaped for different tasks. Among the most popular are:

Rounds. The tuft has a round cross section but a tapering profile, widest near the ferrule (the "belly") and tapered at the tip (the "point"). These are general purpose brushes that can address almost any task.



Flats. The tuft is compressed laterally by the ferrule into a flat wedge; the tuft appears square when viewed from the side and has a perfectly straight edge, for spreading paint quickly and evenly over a surface.



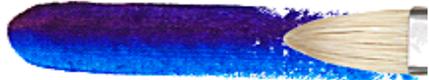
Bright: shorter than flats, providing better control, produces short, crisp paint strokes. Good for driving paint into the weave of a canvas in thinner paint applications, as well as thicker painting styles like impasto work.



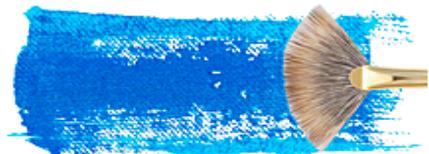
Flat Shader - For blending and large, even strokes. Holds a lot of color. Clean crisp edges



Filbert: flat brushes with domed ends. They allow good coverage and the ability to perform some detail work. Gives a rounded look to a flat stroke



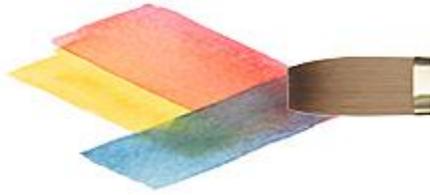
Fan. A small flat in which the tuft is splayed into a fan shape; used for For blending and softening the edges of other strokes; dry brushing to create hair, trees, shrubbery and grass.



Angle Shader: like the filbert, these are a versatile brush used to paint both sharply defined edges and contrasting softly shaded areas like foliage.



One Stroke - Used for lettering, blending and glazing. Long hair length, holds a lot of color, hairs are longer than a shader.



Wash/Glaze - For broad strokes and blending. Apply washes of color or finishes.



Oval Wash:



Rigger (hair only). An extremely long, thin tuft, originally used to paint the rigging in nautical portraits. They are useful for fine lines and are versatile for both oils and watercolors.



Mops (natural hair only). A round brush, usually of squirrel hair and, decoratively, with a feather quill ferrule that is wrapped with copper wire; these have very high capacity for their size, especially good for wet in wet or wash painting; when moist they can wick up large quantities of paint.



Stippler and deer-foot stippler: short, stubby rounds



Liner: elongated rounds



Dagger : natural hair shaped to provide a long, rounded chisel edge, much as the shape of a metal dagger, to provide a long uniform stroke in one continuous motion.



Rake: (or comb)



Scripts: highly elongated rounds



Egbert : long filbert



Grainer - For creating multiple lines- grass, hair and fur



Sumi: Similar in style to certain watercolor brushes, also with a generally thick wooden or bamboo handle and a broad soft hair brush that when wetted should form a fine tip. Also spelled Sumi-e.

Hake: An Asian style of brush with a large broad wooden handle and an extremely fine soft hair used in counterpoint to traditional Sumi brushes for covering large areas. Often made of goat hair.

Spotter: Round brushes with just a few short bristles. These brushes are commonly used in spotting photographic prints.



Stencil: A round brush with a flat top used on stencils to ensure the bristles don't get underneath. Also used to create texture.



BRUSHES FOR ACRYLIC

Synthetic hair brushes provide a smoother stroke than natural bristle, retain their stiffness, and when used with acrylics and other water based media, clean easily with soap and water. Most synthetic hair brushes are also more durable. When used with acrylics, natural bristle brushes tend to lose their stiffness, though natural hair brushes often carry more colour. It is a matter of preference: synthetic or natural hair.

BRUSHES FOR OIL

Natural bristle brushes are not all alike. Yes, all hairs come from hogs or boars, but many factors affect the performance of the brush. The most desired bristles come from Chungking and Shanghai in China. The best bristle has long, soft split ends called "flags," which increase the brush's color-carrying capacity. Generally speaking, the more flags a brush has, the more colour the brush holds. Control is further enhanced when the hairs curve inward and become interlocked. A good interlocked brush will maintain its original shape, help you to control the placement of colour, and add textural qualities. Some artists who use acrylics prefer natural bristle, while some oil painters choose synthetic brushes. Again, it is your choice. Sable is also used for blending and for fine detail in oil color. Unlike bristle, sable does not show brush strokes. Although natural bristle brushes can be used with acrylics, sable is not recommended.

BRUSHES FOR WATERCOLOR

Selecting the right watercolor brush can be both challenging and confusing. Natural hair, synthetics and combinations of the two offer seemingly endless choices. For example, sable hair is often recommended for watercolor painting. However, there are many different grades of sable. Even within the finest grade of sable, Kolinsky, there are variations in hair quality. In synthetics, two brushes can have the same hair color, but that may be where the similarities end. Inexpensive synthetic brushes often use a single diameter filament while better quality brushes are a blend of filament sizes. Multi-diameter filaments hold more color and are designed to simulate natural hair. Synthetics are often more durable and usually less expensive. The best synthetics and synthetic sable blends are indistinguishable in performance from many natural hair brushes.