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# Study Unit 2

## Studio Equipment & Calligraphy

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Brush, ink-stick, paper and inkstone are the four treasures (note that colours are not classed as one of the four treasures).

### **BRUSHES**

There are a large variety of brushes made from different hairs these including such hairs as wolf, sheep, rabbit, horse, goat, mountain cat, badger and mixes of hairs there are in fact up to 200 kinds of brushes! However, it should be noted that some professional artists use one brush for all purposes and some a variety.

The essential difference about Chinese brushes is that they are packed so they can be moved both backward and forwards without splitting. However we will simplify the range of materials required into two kinds of brushes, one being softer than the other.

#### (1) White soft brushes.

These are made from sheep or goat hair and are used for things like painting (either in ink or colour) large branches, big leaves, flower petals and for washes over large areas.

#### (2) Hard brown brushes

These are made from wolf hair or a mixture of weasel and wolf hair, they come in a variety of lengths and can be used for outlining dots and details, as well as drawing

Chao Lang, a painter of the Ching dynasty, says “Use hard hair brushes for line drawing, soft-hair brushes for tinting, new brushes for elaborate works, old brushes for impressionistic works, hard-hair brushes for mechanical lines, soft-hair brushes for washes, hard-hair brushes with sharp points for leaf-veins, old hard-hair brushes with blunt points for dots, big soft hair brushes for diluted ink washes, and old soft-hair brushes for thinly coloured shades”

I certainly can't improve on that advice and from it you can see the importance of keeping old brushes!

However to start with all your brushes are going to be new and they are going to be coated with a gel like glue, it is advisable to soak the brushes until this coating dissolves and then carefully dry them. The handles will be made from bamboo and there will be string or ribbon loops at the end, reshape your brushes and hang them from this loop or store them in such a way that the air circulates freely around them so the part where they are joined to the handle does not rot.

The size of the brush will dictate the finished size of the image, the larger the brushes the bigger the painting. For simplicity sake and to get you started

I suggest you get two or three sheep hair brushes in various sizes for washes and tints, and in the wolf hair range get an orchid and bamboo brush, and a plum blossom brush for drawing and a calligraphy brush for detail dots and veins.

In examples and exercises I will refer to them by numbers where 1 is the smallest size and 5 the largest

- 1 wolf hair medium or long a calligraphy brush for detail and veins
- 2 wolf hair a plum blossom brush for drawing
- 3 wolf hair an orchid and bamboo for drawing
- 4 sheep hair for leaves and petals
- 5 sheep hair for large branches and washes

However again I stress the number and size of your brushes will dictate the finished size of your painting and by exercising control over your brush and holding it in different positions you will be able to achieve a variety of strokes and effects with each brush.

### **INK STICK**

There are in fact three kinds of ink sticks. One is made of tung-oil soot, the second of resin soot, while the third is made of lacquer soot. Those made of tung-oil soot are the most appropriate. Black and rich in lustre, they can be graded into different shades in use. Obviously, unless you have access to highly specialised suppliers you will have to make do with the one most readily available to you. A word of caution the soot is held together with glue and if you leave the stick with a dampened end in contact with your inkstone it will stick hard!!!

### **PAPER**

Chinese painting may be done on either paper or silk, in this course we will not be experimenting with silk as generally a different range of brushes and slightly different techniques will be used. The

## Chinese Brush Painting Course

best advice is to know the character of the paper first before doing a painting. Ordinarily those sorts of paper called 'rice paper' may be used for Chinese painting; the most commonly used is "Hsuan" paper, the best of which is made from sandalwood bark. I suggest you try a variety of papers and see their effects; a paper is good if it is firm, solid, unblemished and hospitable to ink.

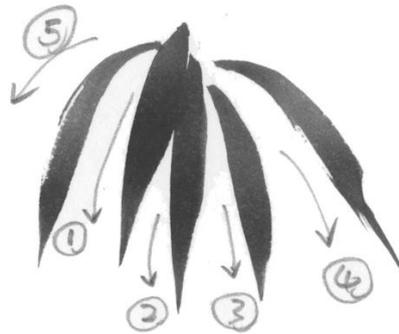
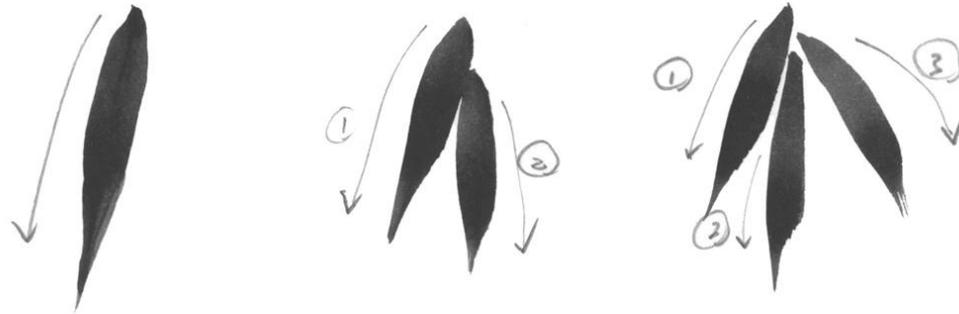
Chinese painting paper is absorbent, on which the ink diffuses as the brushstroke is laid, because of this it is necessary to place a layer of felt or some absorbent material under the paper and because the paper is flimsy it is also necessary to weight the paper down. The problem with painting on this kind of paper is the speed at which the ink spreads and the difficulty of gaining control over the strokes. I would suggest for this course while you can experiment with the rice paper and see the different effects achieved on it, that for practising and to be able to send me examples of your work you start learning the strokes by using a cheap absorbent paper such as wall paper lining paper!!! This has the advantage of being very cheap so you can do lots and lots of practising – and don't forget you are aiming for a spontaneous travelling of ink and brush over the paper so for the twenty rapid experiments you do only one will achieve that form and energy you require. When the paper is alum sized it becomes non-absorbent and if you are doing the outlining more detailed method of painting this is far more suitable. There is also a huge range of different handmade papers of different colours and absorbencies you may wish to experiment with also these papers will be easier to mount or frame the absorbent flimsy paper requires professional stretching and mounting.

If you are going to use the xuan – moon paper (the flimsy rice paper sold in rolls) I suggest you have a wad of newspapers a layer of felt or other absorbent material and then you will need to weight the paper down, you should paint on the smoother side of the paper. You will find that if you apply the ink slowly the image will fur and to achieve sharp edges you will need to apply the ink swiftly.

However Chinese painting can be done on stone, porcelain, bronze etc. once one has mastered the strokes.

**FROM STUDY UNIT 5**

**PAINING BAMBOO IN THE NON-OUTLINING METHOD**



*Fish Tail Leaf type*



*Dragonfly leaf type*

**FROM STUDY UNIT 10**

And here is an example of a loose painting of how to paint a peony head.

Peonies have a large number of petals arranged in two or more rings with those in the outer ring larger than the others.

**DIAGRAM OF PEONY**



Peonies - white, yellow, orange, purple, red and pink.  
A large number of petals arranged in two or more rings  
with those in the outer ring larger than the others

**FROM STUDY UNIT 11**



See the next page for a step by step of this painting.