

Tip #108

A Review of Waterbrushes



These handy tools have taken the sketching world by storm! They carry their water supply right in the handle so you don't need to carry a separate water container when you go out sketching. (If you've never used them, you squeeze the water out through the brush to paint.)

They're terrific for impromptu sketches, while waiting in a café, at an airport, in the doctor's office or out in nature. They're great for travel, or just when you don't want to drag out the whole studio – when you're in the mood for a quick, simple bit of color. They're lightweight, most have a decent brush, and they're fun to play with.

I almost always have at least one with me, so I'm ready to make art any time, any place!

There are a wide range of choices out there—these are just the easily found ones-- and the ones I've personally test driven. From left, a Sakura Koi folding brush (obviously only holds a tiny bit of water, but fits in my travel kit nicely!), two Pentel Aquash brushes with nice soft handles, the Holbein, and a couple of good old Nijis on the far right, including the flat.



Most waterbrushes have white nylon hairs, which will stain with some pigments. That doesn't really affect the color you paint on your paper—it's nothing to worry about.

That said, they DO have their pros and cons. I did part one of a mini-review on my blog, here, <http://katequicksilvr.livejournal.com/?skip=5http://katequicksilvr.livejournal.com/417362.html>, and as noted, I have a short YouTube video on these tools, comparing sizes, here, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oY8d0a8Fgak>.

Though some waterbrushes are marked large, none of them really *are*. Niji's flat is about a half inch wide, which is nice for sketches no larger than, say, 5" x 7" but not really juicy enough for a bigger painting.

Some brushes have a tiny black plug, like Niji – you either remove it to fill, or squeeze the barrel to expel air, let go to draw water up into the brush handle. Aquash and Sakura are both just held under the faucet to fill ... easier, but sometimes leaky.

They will wear out and eventually clog ... you may be able to revive them with a good cleaning, you may not. They're not nearly as expensive as "real" brushes, so it's not a huge loss.

Pentel Aquash brushes tend to have lovely points and do some very nice lettering ... but as noted, they sometimes drool or drip. NOT so good when you want to paint a detailed or delicate linear area. This is a spontaneous gravity drip, by the way, not caused by squeezing the handle, and so it's not actually controllable.

I do have a little trouble cleaning my brush between color changes – with a regular watercolor brush and a container of water, of course, you just swish the brush in the water and go. Some people have no trouble at all, just wiping on a tissue until it's clean; that seems to take a lot of wiping, then some squeezing that clean liquid through the hairs. By then I can have a hard edge or a drying wash ... or mix in mud.

One botanical artist I know says she loves to keep a waterbrush on hand for when she needs instant clean water to adjust a detail – and it works!

After trying all the waterbrushes I could find, I still love Niji best – Holbein would give it a serious run for its money (or mine!) If I could find them easily. Mine was sent to me by Laure Ferlita of Imaginary Trips.com at <http://www.imaginarytrips.com/ImaginaryTrips/Welcome.html> – thank you, Laure, it's fun!

Please drop by my artists blog, <http://katequicksilvr.livejournal.com/>, my fine arts gallery blog, located at <http://cathyjohnsonart.blogspot.com/>, where I often offer mini-demos, my CafePress store, located at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson, where you can find instructional CDs for artists, or drop by for a visit on Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/cathy.johnson1>!

© Copyright 2010 Cathy Johnson, Graphics/Fine Arts, All Rights Reserved