



Tip #124

Exploring Your Artistic Roots with Dip Pens

Once upon a time, ALL pens were dip pens ... the fountain pen may have been invented around 1709. Dip pens were used from ancient times, if you count the Egyptian stylus used to write on papyrus. Reeds and the quills of various birds (the early form of the croquill or "crow-quill" pen!) were commonly used, and cut either by the user or a skilled pen maker. Then came nibs of silver and gold; the less expensive steel nibs were first made around 1780 in Birmingham, England, but were not commonly available until the early 19th C.*

Now that you've had your mini-history lesson, you may like to try these venerable drawing tools -- or revisit them if they're old friends. Granted they ARE more prone to disaster since you're using an open bottle of ink, but they're dependable, affordable, and versatile.

Nibs are relatively inexpensive – you can buy a nib holder for less than \$1.50 and a nib for about the same. Or try out Speedball's starter set, with two holders and both artists' and lettering nibs for just over \$10! (If you like the effect, you can always try out Gillot or one of the other pricier brands...)

I'm not wild about croquill pens, they're a bit too fine and scratchy for me, but take a peek at mapping nibs, hawk quills, or even some of the finer lettering nibs for bolder lines. You may be able to find pens, pen holders, or nibs in secondhand stores, as well -- I've bought whole boxes of nibs for a dollar or so!

124-1 Watkins Woods



I really enjoyed doing this sketch, but OH what a mess. The darkest darks here are covering up ink spills! It helps to push a wad of cotton, soft absorbent fabric, or a small sponge down in your ink bottle to help prevent a spill.

124-2 Dip Pens

Try out your nibs, varying pressure, direction, and even how you hold the pen, as you did with the fountain pens last time—you'll be surprised how much difference that can make!



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Posture of Hand

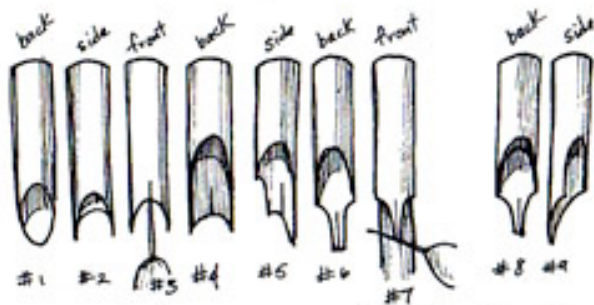
and the Knife

(Diderot's version)



A to L

Plus lettering styles of all types - like Henry Ford's Model T that you could have in any color as long as it was black. Diderot shows "all types" of lettering - all fancy.



Diderot on how to cut a quill - the angled cut at #7 produces a tip more suitable for calligraphic writing than for sketching

124-3 Quill

Try making your OWN pen, as our ancestors did. All you need is a feather, a reed, or a length of bamboo, and a sharp knife. This illustration is from the same book mentioned above, and is after Denis Diderot's drawing from the late 18th century.

124-4 Handmade

You can buy commercially prepared feathers or find your own - here, you see both the pen made from a white feather I bought, and a variety of ones cut from feathers I found in the wild. Look for sound ones, and notice, you don't leave the feather's vanes whole -- it would get in your way! Just pull them off to expose the quill.

You can use any ink you like with a dip pen - even metallic! Unlike a fountain pen, they're easy to clean and generally tough. They're also inexpensive enough to replace without trauma. India Ink, Sepia, one of the acrylic inks that would ruin a fountain pen all work fine with a dip pen. Choose black, brown, or go wild with color -- they're available in a whole rainbow of hues.

Watch for an upcoming downloadable tutorial on cutting your own drawing implements, coming soon.

* This information and accompanying art is from my little book, *Living History; Drawing on the Past*, available here <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/bookpages/history.html>, for which I researched art and writing tools and much more...



You may also like my Watercolor Pencil Mini-class ... for more information, read here: <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/watercolorpencil.html>

Check out all my YouTube videos for lots more art tutorials, youtube.com/user/KateJosTube.

I'd love to have you visit my artist's blog at katequicksilvr.livejournal.com/, my brand new Etsy store where I'll be offering some of the demos from my classes at etsy.com/shop/CathyJohnsonArt, my catalog where you can find instructional CDs for artists, or drop by for a visit on Facebook, [facebook.com/cathy.johnson1!](http://facebook.com/cathy.johnson1)