

Tip #24

Bravura Brushwork, Round Bruses



There's nothing like the feel of a brand new brush- but by "brand new" I don't necessarily mean fresh from the art supply store. It can just be new to US. Some of my favorite brushes are in fact pressed into service, having been intended for another use, or received as a gift, or a castoff from someone else. Still, they are ALL full of possibilities. Many fresh new paintings may lie hiding in those brush tips.

Once we have that new brush in hand, we need to explore it - take it out for a test drive, see what it will DO.

My introduction to what I sometimes call "bravura brushwork" was in fact many years ago at the Kansas City Art Institute, where I attended evening classes after work. The best class I ever took, bar none, was what was then called "Oriental Watercolor"-sumi-e with color. I learned so much in that class about brush handling, making strokes count, and finding out what a brush could DO. My work doesn't follow the form of Chinese brush painting, any more, but I can still see the vestiges of what I learned there.

If you've worked with watercolor much, you've tried out the major washes-flat, graded, variegated and so forth. But find out what the brush can do as a drawing tool, as well, and the marks of which it is capable.

Art 24-1, Sumi-e strokes

Here, you can see classic sumi-e strokes-the side of the brush, from ferrule to tip, makes the lovely sections of gray bamboo at left, but the pointed tip works well for more delicate effects like the branched twig at upper right. The leaf shapes are each a single stroke starting lightly, with the pointed tip, pushing down to let the belly of the brush create the widest part, then lifting again and pulling away from the paper to create the point on the other end.

The little flower utilizes a single stroke for each petal-it's very much like the leaf stroke but with more of a rolling, rounded motion of the hand. The tip of the brush makes pistils and stamens in the center. The grasshopper at lower right uses a combination of most of these strokes, except for the bold, almost drybrush of the bamboo stroke.



Art 24-1



Art 24-2

Art 24-2, Go wild with brushstrokes.

Now, practice with your round brush to see all the things you can make it do - don't worry about classical strokes, just put it through its paces. Use your whole hand and arm-stand up if you like. Use varying pressure, alternately lift and push down without ever losing contact with the paper. Make lines, dots, leaves, eyes ... have fun! These marks are only the tip of the iceberg - there are literally hundreds more you can make, and then use in your paintings when you need them!

Art 24-3, Try out linear strokes and maximum control!

Try for maximum control, using just the tip of your brush-paint hair, fur, patterns in fabric, tall grasses, whatever strikes your fancy!



Art 24-3



Art 24-4

Art 24-4, Let yourself go - work large! "Maine Coast," 15x22"

Use your whole arm (you may prefer to stand up) and let the tip of the brush dance to create shapes like the evergreens shown here (detail at upper left), or the waves in the foreground, lower right. Large washes in the sky and the bay were done with a 1" flat brush, but all the detail work that gives it its energy was done with the tip of my favorite large round watercolor brush-it has a wonderful, springy point.

This is not sumi-e, but it shows the influence, many years after my initial experience.

For more on these and similar techniques, check my North Light books, including *Creating Textures in Watercolor* -- you can find the new paperback version at <http://www.amazon.com>.

You'll find my original artwork on new products in my Cafepress store, at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson.