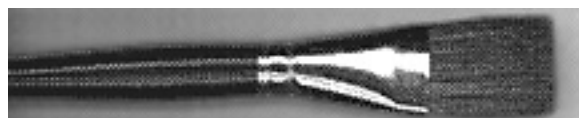


Introduction to Watercolor: BRUSHWORK

Brushwork gives the watercolor artist a chance to express their own personality, and with time and practice, becomes as unique as handwriting. It works in tandem with color choices and subject matter to help define an artist's STYLE.

You can use any tool to apply paint to paper, but the most common tool is a brush, either a ROUND or a FLAT. Round brushes are formed with a fatter collection of hair (the body) towards the metal ferrule, with the hairs tapering toward the tip, so that the brush, when wet, forms a point.

A flat brush has a width that can range anywhere from 1/8" to 3", and you can use the flat side to apply paint, or use the chisel edge of the brush to make thin lines. Turned at an angle, the brush makes thick-thin calligraphic marks quite distinguishable from those made by a round brush.



Turned at an angle, the brush makes thick-thin calligraphic marks quite distinguishable from those made by a round brush.

Right: We can sense the immediacy of the moment in Mary Lizotte's watercolor "Lemon and Lime". Although this painting contains some large background washes, we can see Lizotte's energetic brushwork on top of the softer areas of color she put down first and allowed to dry or nearly dry before painting the more linear "drawn" marks.



Left: In John Singer Sargent's "Brook Among the Rocks", his characteristic brushwork is in full play - dancing over the surface of the water, and creating the stones themselves, as well as color variation in the warm banks of yellow ochre. Although these brushmarks have the easy assurance of a skilled painter, but lack the urgency of Turner's work because Sargent had as much time as he needed to create his painting.

Every artist eventually develops their own combination of washes and brushwork. Some lean more heavily on washes, and others tip the balance toward brushwork. There is no one way to approach watercolor - you have to find the way that works best for what you want to say and how you want your paintings to look. In my own work, my plein air landscapes have a somewhat looser look (as they are done on site in a limited amount of time). I tend to draw more with the brush in plein air work than I do when painting in my studio, where I prefer glazing many layers of thin washes to build up form.

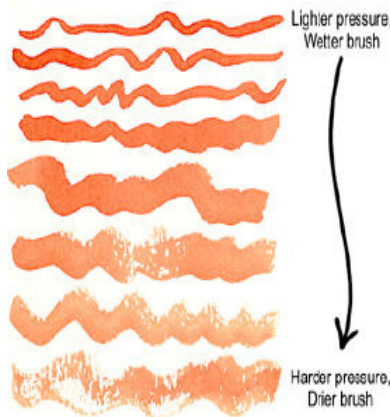
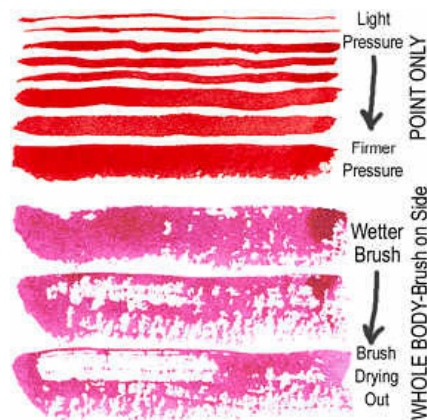
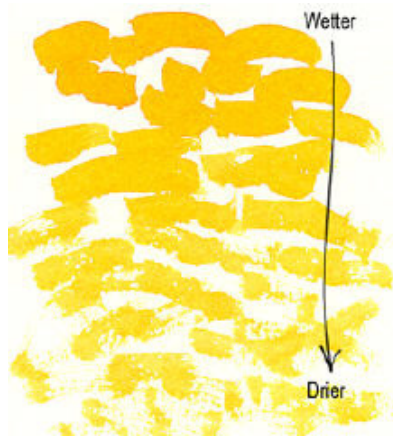
At right is one of my landscape paintings, "Fall Reflections-Winsconsin". It relies on washes for the larger underlying shapes, which are then glazed over with brushwork. I left areas of white unpainted paper in the water and in the tree trunks.



Brushstrokes fall into two general categories - **pushed strokes** or **pulled strokes**. Some involve using just the tip (point) or the edge of the brush, and others involve using the body or side of the brush.

Variations in pressure, direction, arm, wrist and finger movement and paint load (wet to dry brush) and whether or not the paper is dry, damp or wet all determine how the stroke appears on the paper.

Notice how in the sample of trees below, having a fully loaded brush vs. one that is beginning to dry out makes a difference in the appearance of the tree as the brush is stroked on the paper. The body of the brush was used for the tree foliage, and the point for the trunks and main branches, along with the small figure, fence and birds in the final illustration on the right.

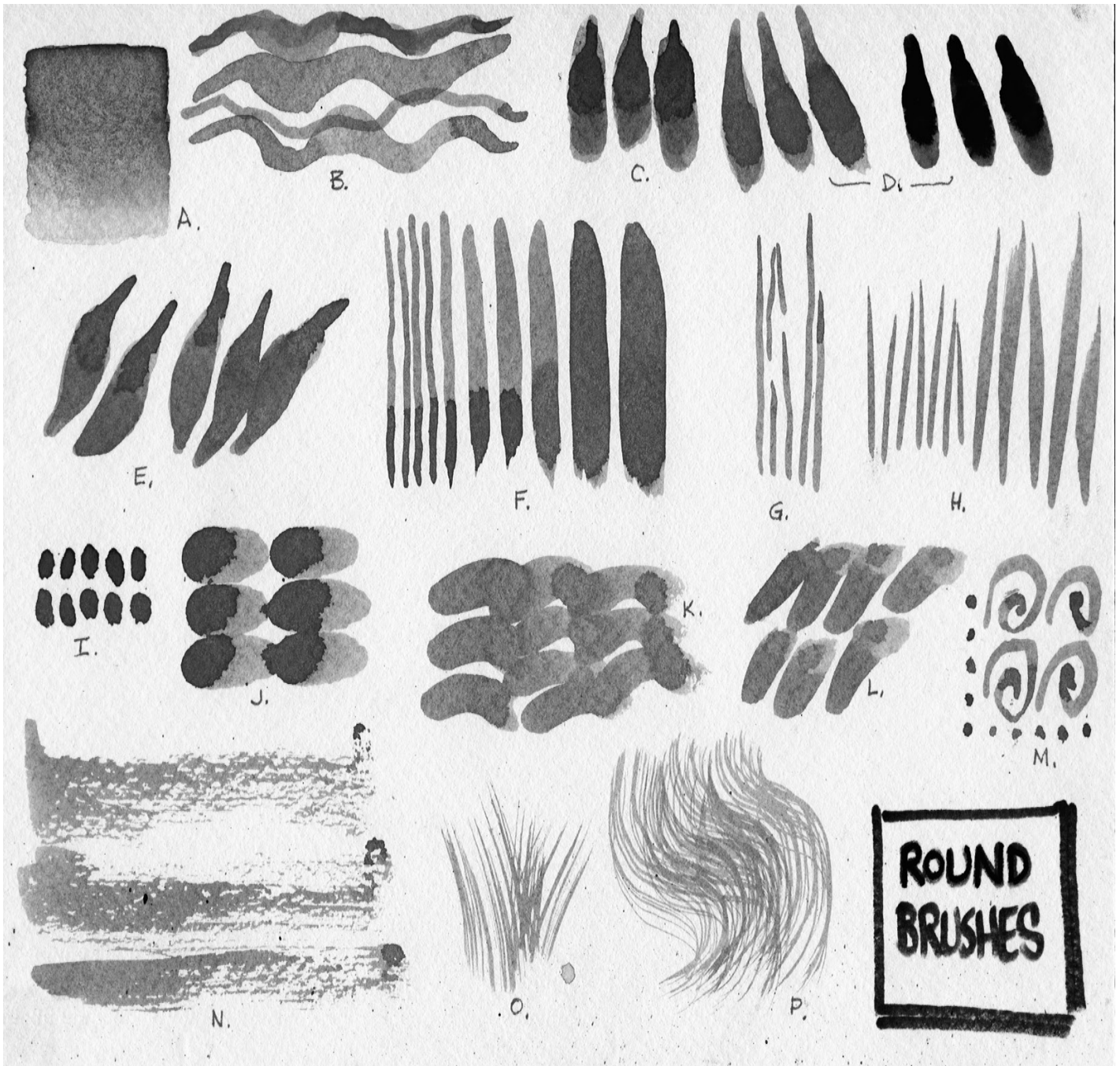


John Singer Sargent, Palms, 1917, watercolor

Practice, practice, practice!

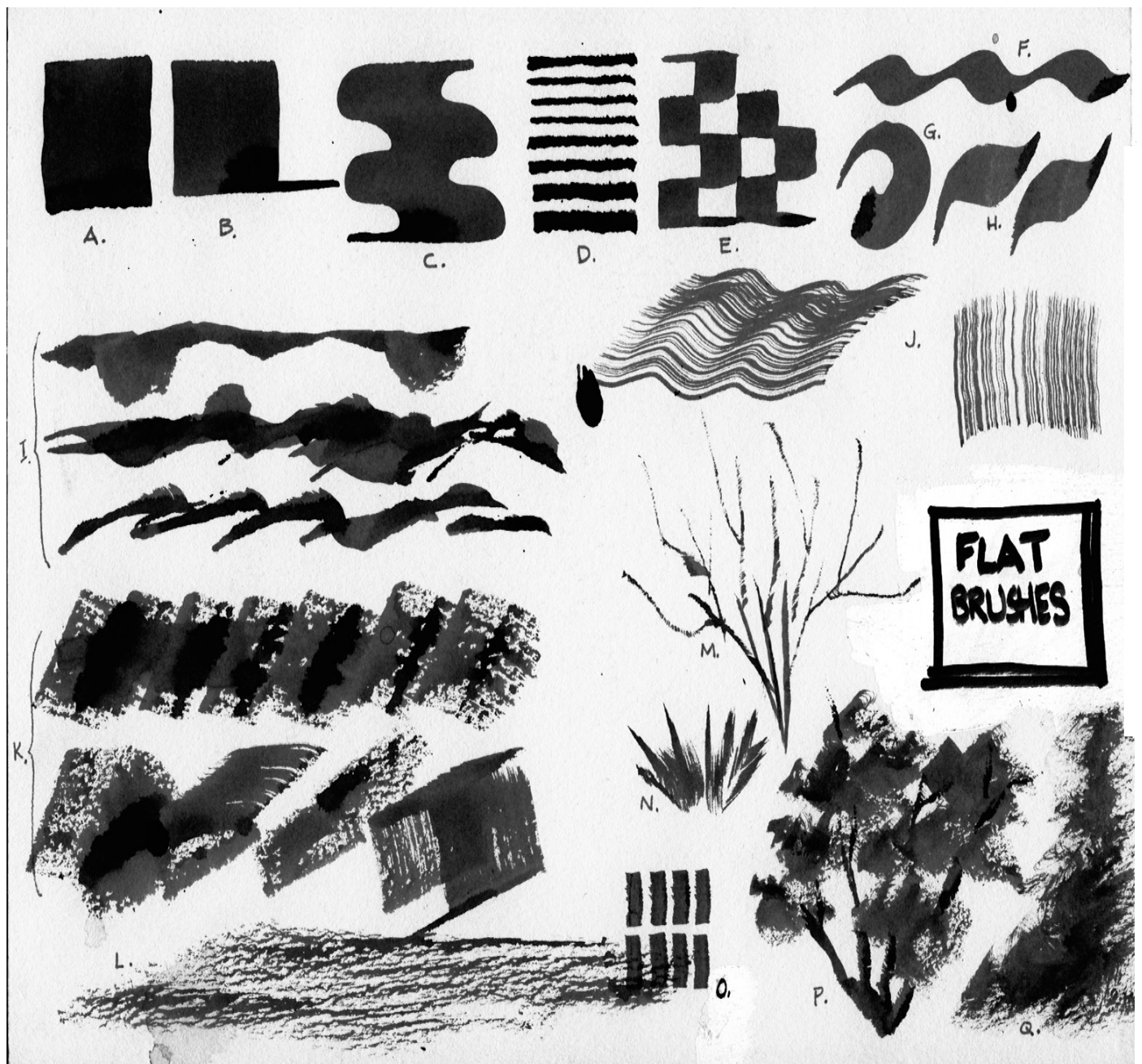
Ideally, you want your brushwork to seem effortless, assured, deliberate and recognizably yours. That only comes with putting brush to paper as regularly and fearlessly as you can. Practice with a single color on old newspapers. Stand up to paint so that you can use your whole arm and wrist in addition to just your fingers to manipulate your brush.

Experiment with holding the brush in a variety of ways – with thumb opposing all four fingers (as you might hold a stick of charcoal); at the end of the handle like a conductor's baton. Draw and mark using every part of the brush, including the handle (to draw/scratch/scrape into wet/damp washes).



- A. A big (#14-20) round (or 1-3" flat) brush can be used for painting large areas quickly, or for graduated (graded) washes.
- B. varied pressure on the point creates thick/thin lines.
- C. Pulled strokes. Touch point to paper, then press body to paper.
- D. Touch point, and then gradually increase pressure as you pull down.
- E. Pushed strokes. Start with point at bottom (towards you), increase pressure in the middle of the stroke, then decrease at end of stroke.
- F. Pulled lines. Vary thickness by changing pressure and/or brush size. Stroke begins at the top and is pulled down towards you.
- G. Pushed lines. Same as F, only stroke begins nearest you and brush is pushed away from you.
- H. Same as G, but a quick flip of your wrist at the end of the stroke will create a sword-like fine point to the stroke.

- I. Dots - fully charged brush tip is touched to paper
- J. Body of brush is laid on paper, then lifted, without moving it further.
- K. Curved pulled strokes; use wrist rotation for these.
- L. Pushed upward strokes; use the body of the brush, not just the point.
- M. Calligraphic lines made by drawing with just the point of the brush.
- N. Dry brush effects - use semi-dry brush and drag the body of the brush sideways across the paper. Rough paper enhances effect.
- O. Brush bristles separated by twirling a just damp brush in your palette with a little pressure. Stroke is upward (pushed) with just the tips of the separated bristles touching the paper.
- P. Brush bristles separated as in O, but stroke is pulled downward, using your whole arm to direct the movement/direction of the stroke.



- A. Fully charged downward stroke; brush held with wide part flat on the paper.
- B. Same as A, but brush pulled to right at end of stroke without changing the brush position, resulting in a thin line at the end.
- C. Wide part of brush held flat to paper. Stroke is downward, using your arm, moving from side to side with brush in same position.
- D. Brush used to "stamp" fine lines by using just the tips of the bristles. Variation achieved by changing amount of pressure on the brush.
- E. Checkerboard pattern created by holding wide part of brush to paper and alternately pulling brush down>right, down>left. Brush should not be lifted, Repeat for each row of checkerboard.
- F-H Various pulled strokes that achieve thick/thin variety by changing the amount of pressure and tilt on the brush.
- I. Same as F, but brush is "rolled" and tilted more during the stroke.
- J. Bristles of damp brush are separated by pressing in palette, then just the tips of the separated brush pulled across the paper.
- K-L Dry brush effects. Use a semi-dry brush and drag the body across your paper. A rough surface paper intensifies this effect.
- M. Use just the tip (chisel edge) of your brush. This pushed stroke starts closest to you and you use your wrist to slightly roll the brush up and away from you.
- N. Pushed upward stroke using just the chisel edge of the brush, with a definite flip of your wrist at the end of the stroke.
- O. Pulled strokes. Good for windows, bricks, etc.
- P-Q Scumbling. Use a semi dry brush and scrub paint on in patchy or circular motion. P shows this effect for foliage, using M and/or O strokes for trunks/branches.

Assignment: Brushwork



Above: "Cholla Bouquet" painted en plein air on the east side of my house one spring, illustrates how I start with light washes, and then using additional glazes of washes and brushwork, gradually build up to the depth of color and value that I want. This piece has more brushwork than I usually do - I favor washes.

This exercise will give you practice in:

- Using the round and flat brushes to make a variety of marks
- Controlling appearance of brushwork depending on dampness of the paper

Evaluation:

- Does your painting emphasize brushwork rather than washes?
- Did you try a variety of marks with both the flat and round brushes?

Work from the photo reference (next page), OR a subject of your choice that lends itself to brushwork. Rough paper is particularly suited for drybrush work, but you may experiment with any paper surface (cold press, hot press, or rough).

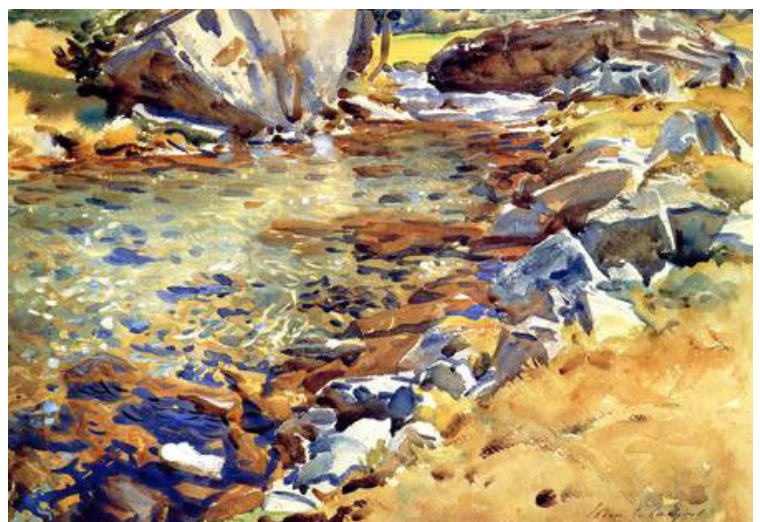
Pigments to use: any of your six basic colors, intermixed as needed.

I suggest that you do a value study in your sketchbook, or at least one or two ideas of how to treat your subject matter. Once you've decided on a composition, LIGHTLY sketch it on your watercolor paper.

Begin the painting with some light to mid-value washes of color, which could be graded washes, flat washes or wet in wet. While wet, these could be "worked" with splats of clean water, additional paint, scraped or scratched to add the illusion of texture.

As these washes begin to dry, or when they are completely dry (depending on whether you want hard or soft edges), begin adding brushstrokes to the painting to develop your subject.

Any time you paint over or into an area that is damp to wet, your strokes will soften and spread, AND the colors will mix the more you work them with your brush. Use a light touch when glazing or layering color and don't overmix. The dryer the paper is, the harder (more distinct) your edges will be.



Above: "Brook Among the Rocks", John Singer Sargent
Sargent was a master of brushwork, using drybrush combined with washes and layering of color, along with the occasional use of Chinese White (opaque) for highlights. This painting is completely painted in transparent watercolor, leaving whites unpainted.

Try a wet-in wet wash for the sky

The mountain could be a flat wash



Above: Put down a wash from where the sky meets the ground to the bottom of your paper. This should be basically light in tone, with some areas of midtone for the farthest clumps of creosote bushes, and the shadow shapes. Let this wash dry then add some brushwork for the foreground bushes and grasses.

There are lots of opportunities for brushwork in these photos, but also places where washes are appropriate.

Generally speaking, in watercolor we work from light to dark, beginning with the palest, most unsaturated washes of color and ending with the darkest, most saturated passages of paint, and from general (simple) to specific (detailed). Take time to analyze your subject before beginning to paint, and select a limited group of colors to use (a palette of colors) and perhaps even pre-mix particular puddles of color to use so they will be ready when needed.

Exercise:

Choose one of these photos to work from, and paint it, editing where necessary, and making “artistic choices” about the color rather than trying to match the photo. This is particularly important in the areas that appear gray or black in the photo.



In this photo, I let my camera help me edit what I was going to focus on (the flowers) by blurring the objects in the background. These areas can be treated more simply (grouped together as larger shapes, or painted wet into wet with softer edges)