

Painting Outdoors: Capture the Colors of Light

The Artist's

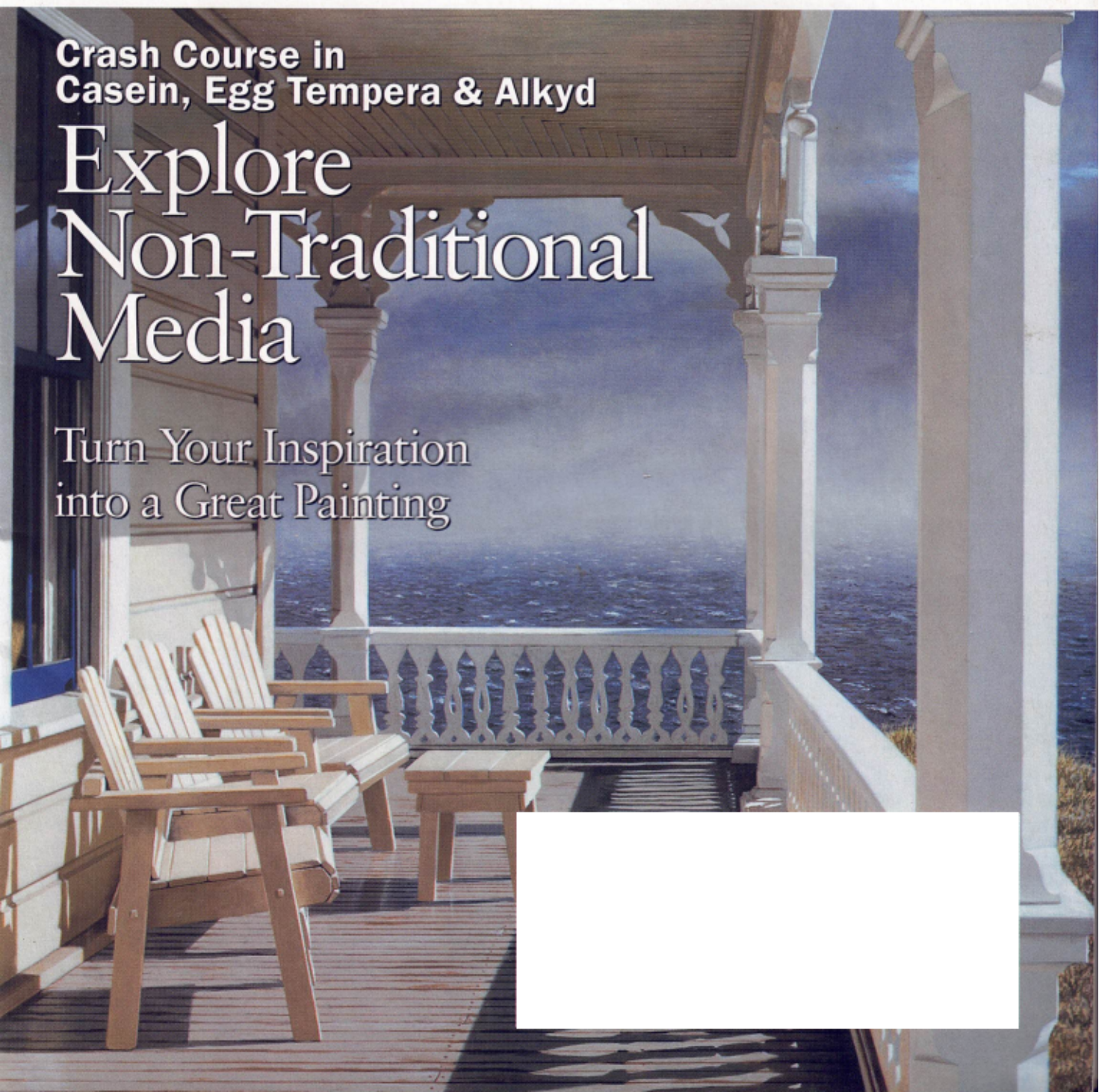
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A Brush With Meaning

Chinese brush painting techniques are steeped in history and symbolism. Discover the tools and strokes you can use to work in this traditional style.

by **Kwan Jung**

From the high art of Chinese calligraphy, the beauty and harmony of Chinese brush painting evolved. It's performed in the same manner as handwriting or calligraphy in that from start to finish a painting often takes only a few minutes. The process is direct and spontaneous, and brushstrokes are applied to the paper without planning or sketching.

Focusing on the beauty of nature, the earth and our connection to it, popular brush painting subjects include birds, flowers and animals. Practitioners often feel brush painting is a way to escape daily chaos and take notice of the loveliness of all living things.

The Fundamentals

Before you can master Chinese brush painting, you must learn the fundamental concepts, principles and elements. Let's begin with composition. There are three main areas of Chinese

Expression Through Brushwork

Plum blossoms represent the "third gentleman"—one who can create fine things in the midst of adversity. Here, Red Plum Blossom (acrylic and ink, 9x15) is created from many red dots with a variation of values.

brush painting: the subject, the signature of the artist or the calligraphy, and the seals of the artist.

In terms of composition, your main concern is the center of interest and the placement of visual elements across the painting. You need to allow for space between each element and avoid overlapping subjects. This simplicity in design provides a sense of relief to the viewer and what's unseen is then left to the imagination. When the center of interest and other elements have been painted, the signature and the seal are used to create the final balance of the painting.

With brush painting, the most frequently used viewpoint is the bird's-eye view. Whether the subject is a broad landscape or more intimate like birds or flowers, this view offers the most possibilities for design.

As far as perspective is concerned, a sense of distance is implied by varying the value of the ink. An object is darker when it's closer to the viewer. Objects appear to be lighter when they're far away from the viewer.

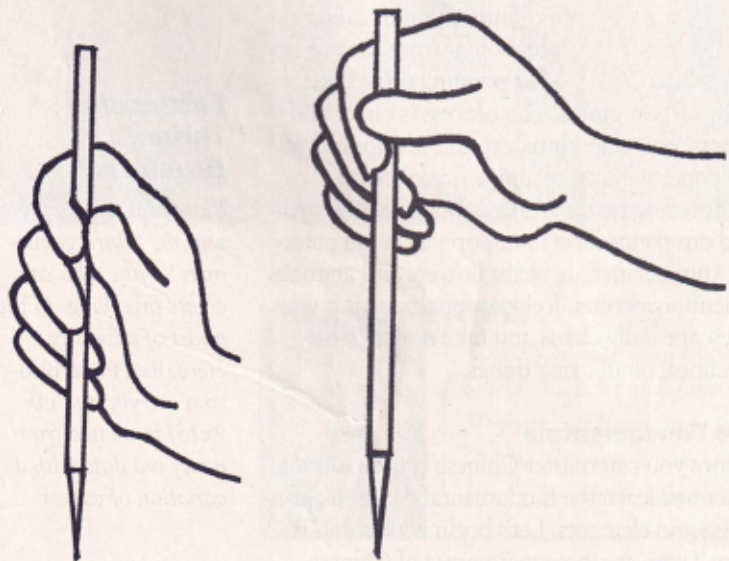
Tools of the Trade

Most of the brushes you'll use contain some type of animal hair including that of wolves, horses and sheep. I prefer to use a pure white sheep-hair round brush, 1½ inches (38mm) long by ½ inch (9mm) wide, which narrows to a fine point. A sheep-hair brush holds more water than other types and enables you to render bolder and more expressive strokes without running dry. The sheep-hair brush holds its shape well, lending itself to fluent twists and turns.

The inks used in brush painting go back 1,000 years to the Shang dynasty in China.

The Hold

I use the vertical lock-in hold (below, left) to draw small, fine strokes. For drawing large and big subjects, I recommend the more common three-fingers hold (below, right).



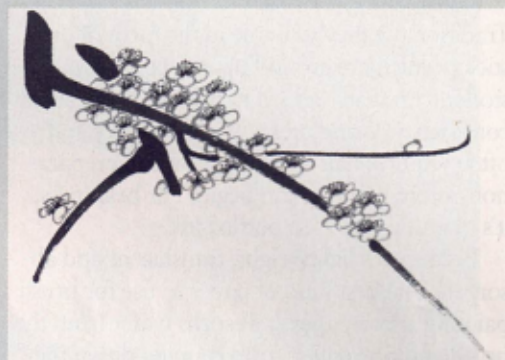
1 Soak the brush with diluted ink, then make bold and forceful strokes to form the tree trunk base for the branches. Next, soak the brush with dark ink and paint swift long lines from the trunk to form tree branches. The lines should be strong and round, using vertical brushstrokes that begin and finish with blunt, hard edges. Break some of the lines in the branches for the flowers to occupy later. Plum tree branches aren't short and straight but rather long and slightly curved.



4 Underneath each flower, add a teardrop-shaped stroke to the left by pressing the tip of the brush down and then tilting it up. On the other side under the flower, make a comma-shaped mark to the right by pressing and tilting the brush.



2 Plum blossoms are made of round-shaped petals. To create them, wet the tip of the brush with light ink and make circular strokes for the petals.



3 Wet the tip of the brush with dark ink and working from the center of each flower, draw curved, fine lines, one by one, tilting upward to form the shape of a fan. Add small dots to the tips of the filaments using the same brush.

Simple Strokes

1

The Tree Trunk and Branches

2

The Petal Circles

3

The Flower Filaments

4

The Flower Calyx

5

The Stems



5 Load the brush with more dark ink and starting from the branch, draw a few lines to connect the branches with the flowers. Place the tip of the brush parallel to the branch and press the brush down to touch the tree branch. Then make a 90-degree turn of the brush and

pull it to form a straight line. When it reaches the bottom of the flower, stop. This line will look like a sharp nail with its head parallel to the tree branch. The sharp end of the branch touches the flower.

Dedication to Nature

Camellia No. 1
(acrylic, 13x14) uses strokes similar to those in Red Plum Blossom. I darkened the petal center with ink before adding the yellow filaments. And the flower petals are a variation of red dots with different values.

Traditionally they've come in the form of dry sticks, which are ground up in a pestle (ink stone) with water added to achieve the desired consistency. Grinding ink sticks is tricky and often requires half an hour of careful preparation before painting can begin. For beginners, it's often easier to use bottled ink.

Because it's lightweight, translucent and absorbent, the best kind of paper to use for brush painting is rice paper. It absorbs water from the brush and prevents it from running down the surface of the paper. And it's also thin, which precludes overabsorption and permits a sensitive, quick response to every brushstroke.

You'll need a few other miscellaneous supplies for brush painting: some paper towels, a container of water, dishes to store and mix colors and about two yards of thick wool cloth placed under the paper to protect the table from spills and water stains.

How to Hold the Brush

There are two basic ways to hold the brush. The vertical lock-in hold is where you use four fingers to hold the brush—the thumb, index finger, the middle finger and the ring finger. As in the illustration on page 34, the thumb presses the brush against the inside of the index and middle fingers with the back of the ring finger pressed against the brush at the bottom. To paint, place the wrist of this hand firmly on top of the table. This grip is used to draw small, fine, even strokes.

The second brush position is the three-fingers hold. Place the brush between your index and the middle finger and then apply pressure to the brush from the thumb by pressing hard against both the index finger and the middle finger. This grip is used when painting large, less detailed images.

Basics of Brushwork

Most often, the forms and patterns of the subject dictate the brushwork used to render it. Frequently, however, the strokes made must be an interpretation rather than a rendition. Only experimentation and experience can teach you how much ink and water to pick up with the brush to describe each form. And only practice in rendering the form of each subject will give you the skill to interpret them with quick, articulate strokes. ♦



About the Artist



KWAN JUNG lives in San Diego and is an award-winning member of the National Academy of Design and the American and National Watercolor Societies. His work can be found in many collections and various exhibits throughout the United States. He's the author of *Chinese Brush Painting* (North Light Books), from which this article was excerpted with permission.