

CBPS Tutorial

Loading the Chinese Brush - by Jane Dwight

Brush loading is a fundamental skill, and it requires plenty of messing about with different brushes, ink and colour combinations. Varying the paper types will add to the fun!

The type of hair that the brush is composed of, and the length and thickness of that hair, will influence the ways in which that brush can be loaded.

Loading ink onto a wolf hair brush.

One of the most popular Chinese brushes is the 'Orchid Bamboo' or 'wolf hair' brush. The best ones are sable. Loading this brush with sooty black Chinese ink, made by rubbing an ink stick on an ink stone, will be a familiar process to most Chinese brush painters. The brush is soaked in clean water first and the excess water is wiped out by pulling the brush hairs against the water container a couple of times. This also helps to organise the hairs into a fine point.

Pull the brush through the ink on the ink stone, or through liquid ink on a white tile/plate, in straight lines. This will help the hairs to stay pointed. If the brush is 'swirled around' in the ink then the hairs become 'untidy' and that untidiness will be reflected in the subsequent brushstrokes.

Loading three colours onto a goat hair brush.

Select a large white haired brush to begin with. These soft, goat or sheep haired-brushes are the easiest to learn to load. They are very 'thirsty' and the colours can be seen in the hairs.

Always wet the brush first. Soak it in clean water until the bubbles stop rising. Then wipe the excess water out of the brush by pulling it against the edge of the water container as described for the wolf hair brush.

Before loading any paint onto the brush sort out which colours are wanted. Some colours, such as the tubed colours cinnabar, white and yellow, can be 'sticky'. They need a little water stirred into them. Make up enough paint to be able to carry out the picture or project.

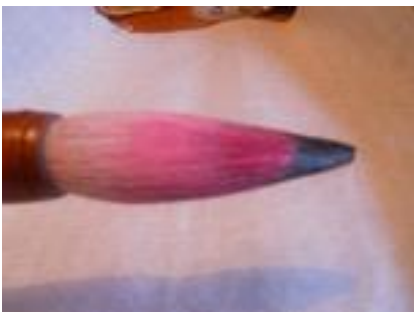


Load the first colour. This is usually the palest colour, say yellow, white or pink. Hold the brush almost horizontal and pull it through the colour. The hairs should stay nicely pointed and the first colour should almost fill the brush. Leave a little space of water before the handle. This serves two purposes. It will allow the paint to 'move' in the brush and it will prevent the paint from settling where the brush is 'glued' into the handle. Accumulated paint, in the neck of the brush, will dislodge the glue after a time.



Load the second colour. This will be a stronger 'hue' and should travel half way up the brush. Again pull the brush through the colour, on the tile or plate, but keep it only half immersed.

Some artists dip the tip of their brush into clean water, after each colour loading. It is thought that the colour is 'sealed' in that position by doing so. Try it.



Load the final colour onto the tip alone. Hold the brush vertically and dip it into the darkest colour chosen.



Using single ply Xuan paper, placed on a blanket or felt as usual, paint the first stroke by holding the brush at a 45 degree angle and placing the tip and heel of the brush on to the paper at the same time. The brush can then be 'danced' across the paper by lifting and pressing it from tip to heel. The three colours will produce an attractive peony petal shape. The colour in the tip of the brush will need replacing more than the others because there is very much less of it.

By the time three or four 'petals' have been painted the brush will probably need to be washed out and reloaded. The 'trick' to using a brush loaded with three colours is to watch what is happening at both the tip and the heel as the strokes are 'danced' across the page.

3 colours, horizontal brush

This peony was painted using the brush held horizontally, dancing the heel sideways, to make the outside of the petal.

Load the wet brush with three colours...or four if liked. Begin with the lightest, cinnabar and white mixed in this case. Fill the brush 3/4 of the way up...this allows for movement of paint at the top of the brush, as the heel is pressed onto the paper.

Now pick up a darker colour, carmine here, and let it fill half the brush. Finally dip the tip of the brush in the darkest colour, rouge hue in this case.

Imagine that you are painting a cup and saucer. Begin with the outside of the cup.

Pictures 1, 2 and 3 show the first three petals... painted with the brush held almost horizontally to the paper and the tip pointing towards the artist. Dance a little on the heel of the brush to make a wider, slightly frilled shape.



Now paint the inside of the cup...pictures 4, 5 and 6 ...making sure that the brush has sufficient dark paint on the tip, and that the brush is held in the same way. Notice that the tip of the brush 'cuts' the shape of the petal below...and, as you press the heel of the brush it should be 'danced' a little to avoid 'printing' as much as possible.

N.B. The brush can be washed out and re-filled at any stage, especially if the paints become muddy...yellow with, say, purple is tricky to keep 'clean' for example.



Pictures 7, 8 and 9 show shallower strokes, to place the saucer if you like, using the tip and heel of the brush together, but pointing left and right.

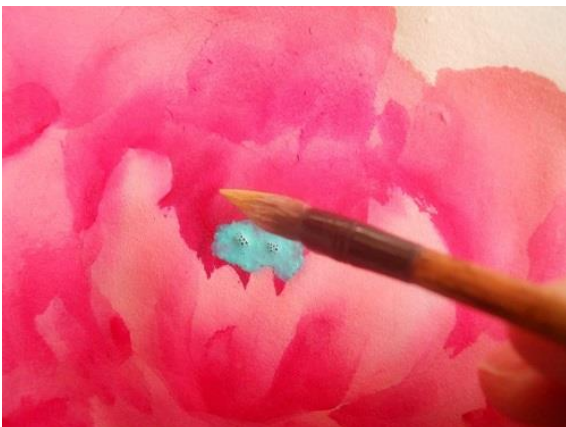
The rest of the pictures show 'dancing strokes' painted on each side to surround that initial 'cup and saucer'...and the difficult decision of 'when-to-stop' is left up to the artist!





Once the peony is nearly dry...place a little mineral green, on a small calligraphy brush, in the centre and surround it with anthers (the top of the stamen).

The anthers are painted with the same small brush held vertically. The paint should be quite thick, double cream consistency, yellow and white mixed.





3 colours, vertical brush

Another variant, to add to the experiments with brush loading, is to use the brush held vertically. Load a sheep hair brush with any three colours, as described above, and begin to paint a flower such as the many-petalled chrysanthemum. If the tip of the brush, with the darkest hue, is used to describe the centre of the flower, then the paint will change colour for the outer petals, as it runs out of the brush tip. There should be no need to re-load.

These chrysanthemums were painted by Angela Reich using her brush held vertically. The brush moves from petal tip to flower centre, keeping centre point by twisting the brush as the petal curves. All these flowers were painted with one single brush loading, with no re-tipping, to show how the colour varies. As the brush dried (between 2nd & 3rd flower), a couple of drops of water were added to the heel right by the handle, to help the colour flow down the brush head.



