

Essential Brushstrokes

There is a wide misconception that an artist's paint brush is used like a paint brush. To the latter, I'm referring to a paint brush used for painting walls. This is where most novice artists get off on the wrong foot. When using a brush they tend to make flat lines and use only one side of the brush.

From the artistic aspect brushes are to be used very differently. To begin with strokes should not resemble each other. Instead of one color used in ordinary household painting, the artist's brush should be loaded with several colors at the same time to get variegation. In common painting the brush strokes go back and forth in straight lines, in art they don't. They should be irregular. So let's forget that we have a brush in our hands and let's imagine it is a tool of expression. Your brush should be turned and twisted and above all danced on the paper like a ballet dancer.

Here are some samples brushstrokes that will be useful for you to know.



Above is an example of a correct brush stroke. It is irregular and the rainbow of different colors is very noticeable. To do this, load your brush with several colors by dragging each side through a different pool of paint. There are 5 sides to a brush! Make sure you only slightly mix the colors on the palette, just enough to neutralize the chroma (intensity of paint out of the tube). The flat sides of the brush should contain the most predominant colors. A great deal of color mixing should be done on the paper rather than the palette. Why waste time painting your palette? You will wipe it off eventually, unless you want to sell framed palettes.



This brushstroke was created by varying the pressure. This irregular shape is extremely important and will appear on many landscape subjects. Make a habit of this by consciously applying this as you work.

Where these brush strokes would appear:

Shadows on a snow bank
Side of a stone wall
Warped wood on a barn
Grain in wood

grooves in a tree trunk
tree branches
dark cracks between wooden boards
wavelets on water



wood grain



choppy brush stroke to indicate the grooves in tree trunks.



barn wood



Left. How the side of a stone wall should look.

Right. The side of a tree trunk or a barn, etc will be less straight this way.



Tapping motion.- Another way of applying paint is by tapping on the edge of the brush. This is really a good technique to depict the foliage of pine trees.



This resembles the foliage on a pine tree.

Splaying the bristles.- This will give you interesting brush strokes. The way to do this is by pressing down on the brush, while turning it clockwise and counter clockwise until the bristles separate. Eventually if this is done many times, it will damage your brush. It is a good idea to keep one separately for this purpose. This comes in handy to depict clumps of grass, pine needles, many small twigs grouped together such as the edge on winter trees or small leafless bushes, to indicate the grain on barn wood, rusty tin roofs, etc.



Example of clumps of pine needles.



Left. Example of grass strands grouped together.
Right. The edge of a winter tree.



Example of rust on a tin roof.



Example of wood grain.

Flat brush.- Laying your brush flat to the canvas loaded with wet paint will give you a solid form yet some what dry brushed on the edges. This works so well for stones on walls.



Example of a stone. The broken paint will indicate the mortar overlapping it.

Chisel edge.- It is quite difficult to control rigger brushes to get very thin lines. When it comes to very thin lines, such as distant tree trunks, hairline cracks on wood or stones, thin twigs, and individual strands of grass, an easy way to paint these is by shaping a flat brush to a chisel edge. This is done by dragging it through the pool of paint on both sides. Keep rotating it until the bristles form a sharp edge at the tip. Gently tap the brush on your paper adding one portion of the line to the next until you're satisfied. This will give you irregular widths of thins lines.



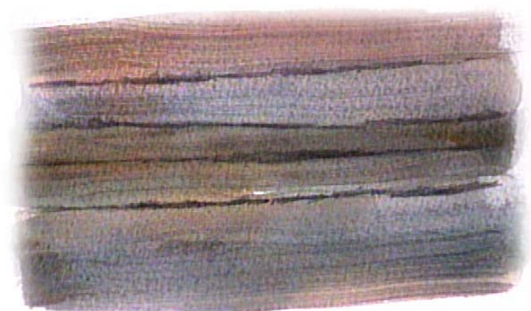
A brush formed to a chisel edge.



A branch done with a ¾ inch brush.



A distant tree



The cracks between the boards were done with a flat brush.