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Choosing your watercolor paintbrushes

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Script liner, flat brush, round brush or filbert brush? Given the range of instruments available to you, it pays to be methodical! Start off with a small number of paintbrushes in different sizes and focus on quality. You can always add to your collection as you acquire more experience.

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1. Paintbrushes in all their guises

Are you just getting starting? Here are the essential models:

- **The round paintbrush:** an all-purpose brush for applying washes and drawing narrow lines. The indispensable round brushes will handle everything you need to do.
- **The square flat brush:** its flexibility allows you to draw precise lines and apply washes.
- **The wash brush:** it is both wide and flexible and can hold large amounts of water. It is ideal for spreading color quickly over vast areas.

Are you already experienced? Consider exploring new approaches:

- **The filbert brush** is flat and tapered to a point, producing a characteristic stroke well suited to precision techniques and glazing.
- **Fan-shaped brush:** recommended for shading and blending techniques, and for dry brush work.

- **The dagger brush:** Its bristles are tapered to one; its main use is for drawing straight lines.
- **The script liner brush:** It holds significant amounts of paint and allows you to draw fine lines.

2. Natural or synthetic bristles?

Natural bristles

- Kolinsky red sable bristles: very fine quality, particularly flexible, long-lasting and capable of holding large amounts of diluted paint ? this the watercolorist's paintbrush par excellence.
- Brushes made from badger, ox ear or goat, as well as gray squirrel, are less expensive and have their own role to play

All of them can absorb significant amounts of water, more so than synthetic bristles.

Synthetic fibers

They are as fine and long-lasting as animal bristles, are generally firmer, and absorb less water: they are very useful for adding unadulterated color and avoiding diluting it.

What you need to know: a matter of size

Paintbrushes are classified by size number, from thinnest to thickest: from N°0 to N°24. The brushes are classified differently, depending on their width. Each manufacturer has its own numbering, so thicknesses and lengths with the same number tend to vary.

3. Memo: Quick anatomy of the paintbrush

Aquarelle - anatomie du pinceau

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A paintbrush has the following features:

A. Bristles: whether they have synthetic fibers or natural bristles, they need to keep their shape when wet.

B. Bristles: they absorb paint and release it gradually.

C. Heel: this is the part where the fibers are inserted in the ferrule.

D. Ferrule: an actual metal collar that holds the handle and bristles together.

E. Handle: protected by varnish, it generally carries the name of the manufacturer, the range, size and selected fiber.

See also

Watercolor: Choosing your colors

Choisir ses couleurs aquarelle

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Initiation epitomizes restraint. When getting started, limit yourself to a dozen colors. You can enrich your palette later: as you make progress, particularly in terms of the themes you'd like to work on.

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Selecting your accessories for watercolor painting

Choisir ses accessoires pour peindre une aquarelle

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Besides paper, colors and paintbrushes, the three essentials, watercolor painting requires a few accessories. Don't worry, they're easy to find!

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