

*for continuing students*

*the dance*



*of the eye*

*and*



*the hand*

**more fundamentals of Chinese brush painting by Bob Schmitt**

## **fall 2020 lesson 1**

- **variations in loading a brush**
- **applying those skills**

## Assumptions behind the dance of the eye and the hand

As a teacher I begin with several assumptions.  
Any student coming to me has 3 sets of skills to be nurtured.

First, the student has the skills of the eye - when they look at things, what do they see?

Second, the student has the set of skills of the hand - how are they able to connect what they see to the brush, the ink and the paper?

Third, the student has the set of skills of their heart/mind - how are their actions connected to the source of their energy, their spirit, the Qi?

It is from these assumptions that I now offer the dance of the eye and the hand.

These instructional videos with printable models are based on the concept that to learn Chinese brush painting one must train not only one's hand but one's eye as well.

The understanding is that continued learning is a tension between what the eye can see and what the hand can do.

And that the dance of the eye and the hand will always be in play.

That tension is always there.

Mastery is a process.

Not a destination.

Bob Schmitt

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## About brush painter Bob Schmitt



I am a life long student and teacher of the traditions of Chinese brush painting.

I began my study of brush painting in 1962 watching what was then educational tv. I would sit in front of the tv after school with my brush and ink and learn basic forms. I practiced most of my life unschooled.

In the late 90s I was fortunate to begin to study with Lok Tok, Yitong Lok of Toronto and

Hong Zhang in Minneapolis—three incredibly gifted Chinese brush painters and teachers.

Since 1998 I have been a weekly student of Hong Zhang, a native of Shanghai, schooled there and now living in Bloomington, Minnesota.

I have also had a long distance relationship with Chinese master Lok Tok (now deceased) and his son Yitong Lok.

In 2001, all three of these teachers endorsed my beginning to teach Chinese painting to students here in Minneapolis.

Currently I have 40 students who before the COVID 19 pandemic came to my house for weekly instruction in Chinese calligraphy and paintings.

I also have a weekly painting practice.  
To see more of my work, visit:

[www/laughingwatersstudio.com](http://www/laughingwatersstudio.com)

This lesson takes a broad look at how to load a brush, the different ways to load it, the different ways to use it with some models to experiment with extending your use and skill in handling the brush.

To begin with, remember to first fully wet the hairs of your brush. You can then prepare the brush by combing its hairs, organizing the hairs to be parallel to form a solid point.

This is a good practice no matter what you will be doing with the brush as you paint.

When you are getting ready to load a brush, you can choose to load the entire brush, just half of the brush, or just the tip.

You can practice all three options just to increase your awareness of the difference each one of these options makes.

## I. loading the brush:

- **full brush**



- **half brush**



- **tip of brush**



Another consideration is what is the foundation in the brush, to which you will add ink.

A brush can have clear water as its foundation.

It can have a gray wash.

Or the foundation can be pure black ink.

The choice of which to use is driven by the effects you wish to accomplish.

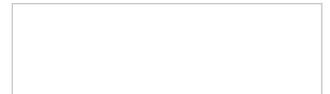
We will explore more of this in the models in this lesson.

Practice all 3 options just to see what difference it makes in how the brush handles and the effects you can achieve.

Play with it!

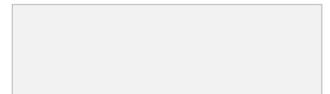
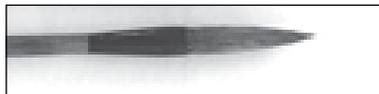
## 2. loading the brush: foundation

• **first water**



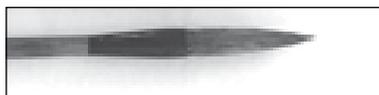
or

• **first gray**



or

• **first black**



## 2. loading the brush: foundation model

- first water

or

- first gray

or

- first black



Regardless of the foundation used in the brush and how much of the brush you have loaded, any brush can be prepared as a dry brush or a wet brush.

To prepare a dry brush, you may wick much of the moisture in the brush off before loading it. Or you may gently remove some of the moisture with a tissue from the loaded brush.

To load a wet brush, you may leave more of the beginning moisture in the brush, or add more to it before loading the brush with ink.

As well you can also add more moisture to the loaded brush. If you add water to the loaded tip, this will dilute the tone of the ink (gray). If you wish simply to add more moisture without changing the tone, add the water to the base of the brush, then remix the contents. This will loosen the ink with less impact on the tone of the ink.

### 3. loading the brush: moisture

- **load dry**

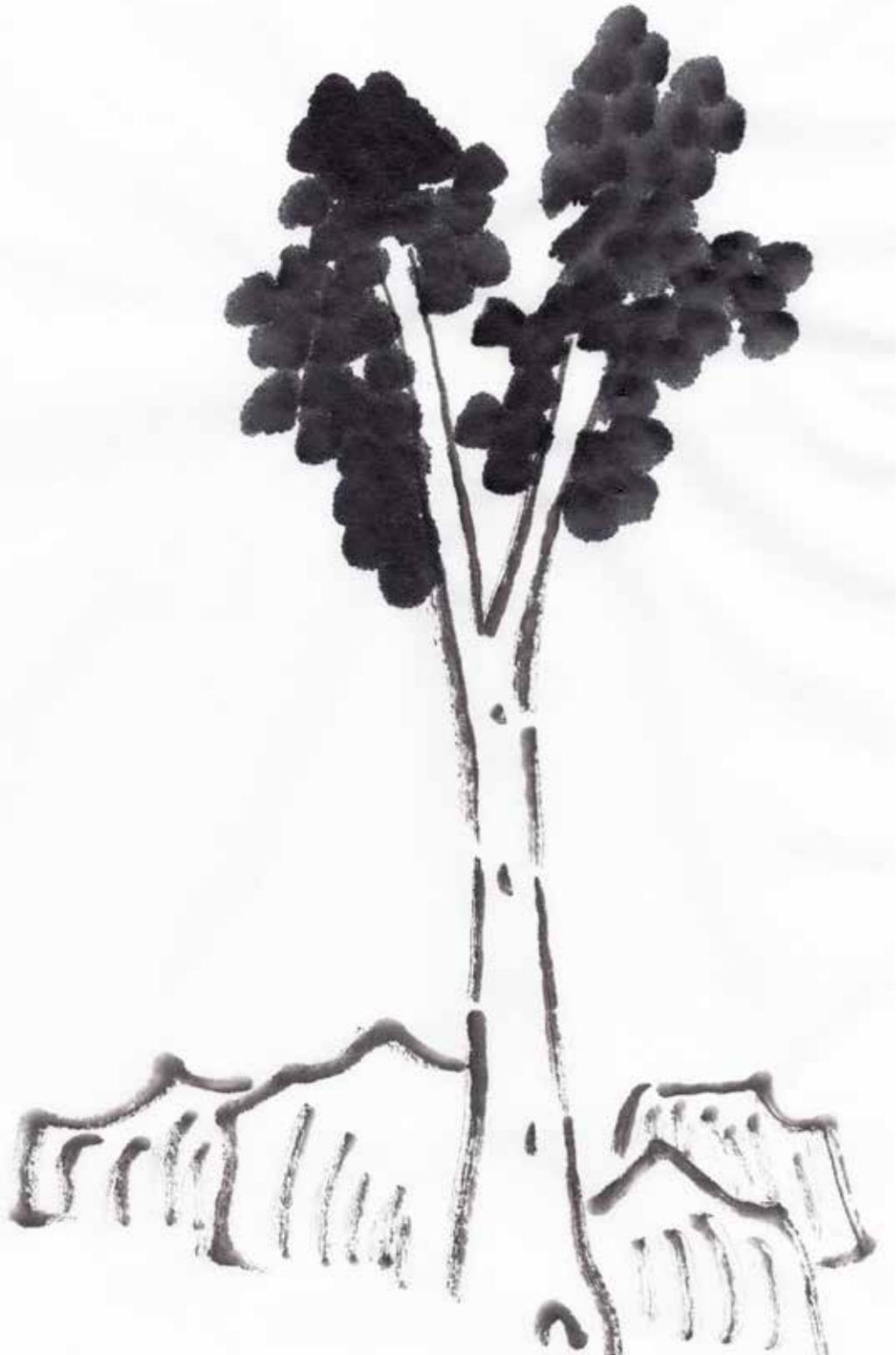


- **load wet**



### 3. loading the brush: moisture model

- load dry
- load wet



A more advanced approach to loading the brush is to apply various tone of ink or color specifically to areas on the brush.

For example, starting with a brush with water as its foundation, then with a second brush, apply full ink or gray wash to a few areas on the brush. (A larger brush will perform this task better than a small one).

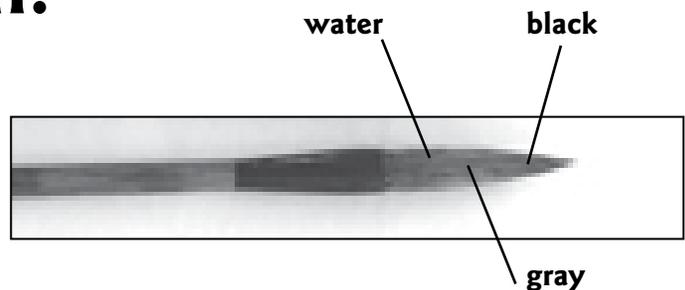
This will give you a more random effect a you paint. But it also allows you to change the tone or intensity of the ink as you paint simply by rotating the brush.

The same approach can be taken when using color as well.

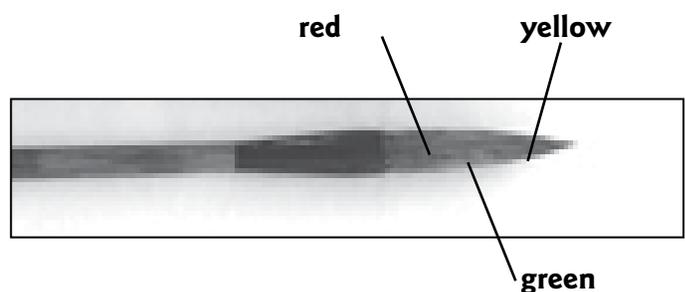
Note: that a brush will tend to continue to mix itself. So any variations of tone or color will blend the longer it is on the brush. For best results, use the brush immediately upon loading it. And wash it out completely before loading again. Unless you are wanting a muddy mess, then just keep on painting. It will do that quite well.

## 4. loading the brush:

- **multiple tones**



- **multiple colors**



## 4. loading the brush: model

- multiple tones



Once you brush is loaded, there are options as to how you have shaped the hairs.

Generally you will comb the brush carefully in the mix dish, stroking the hairs in long horizontal movements so as to create a clear point. Trying to get all the hairs parallel to each other to form the point.

(Caution: do not form a point by twisting just the tip of the brush. This will look good until you press the brush onto the paper. Then you point will splay and be difficult to regain its point as you paint.)

Two other options for forming the shape of the brush are:

a flattened tip: this is achieved by tapping the point on the mixing dish to broaden the tip and shaping it more like a chisel.

or creating a messy hair shape, pulling the hairs carefully with your fingers in all directions.

Again, I encourage you to experiment with these options just to feel how they change the use of brush.

In the models in this lesson you can also practice using these different approaches.

## 5. using the brush: shape of hairs

- **combed hairs**



- **flattened hairs**



- **messy hairs**



## 5. using the brush: shape of hairs model

- **combed hairs**
- **flattened hairs**
- **messy hairs**



No matter how you have loaded the brush, or how you have prepared the hairs, in actually painting with the brush, there are four positions that you can choose to actually use the brush.

You can use just the very tip of the brush.

You can use a little more of it to include the head of the brush.

You can use the majority of the brush.

You can use the middle or side of the brush.

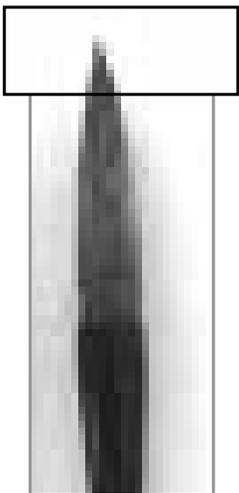
Or you can use the base or butt of the brush.

The tip or head of the brush will generally be in a calligraphy stance: point perpendicular to paper surface.

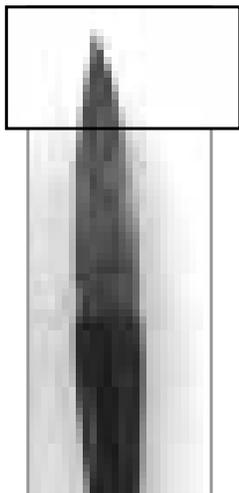
Using the side or butt of brush will be in a more casual handling of the brush, with the brush handle often more horizontal to the surface of the paper.

## 6. using the brush: what position

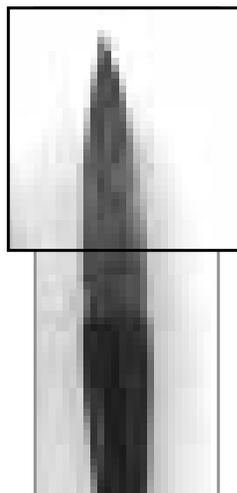
• **tip**



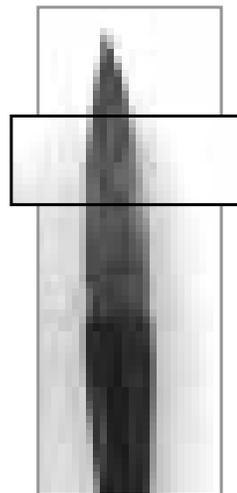
• **head**



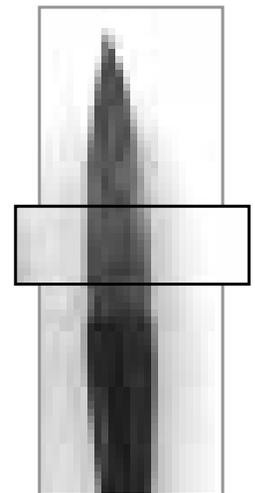
• **full**



• **side**



• **butt**



## 6. using the brush: what position model

- tip
- head
- full
- side
- butt



The last elements we will explore in this lesson are the directions we move the brush once it is loaded.

Remembering that as a default we hold the brush in a calligraphy stance. That is the handle perpendicular to the surface of the paper, with you thumb towards you, next two fingers on the opposite side of the brush handle, and you last two fingers on the same side as the thumb.

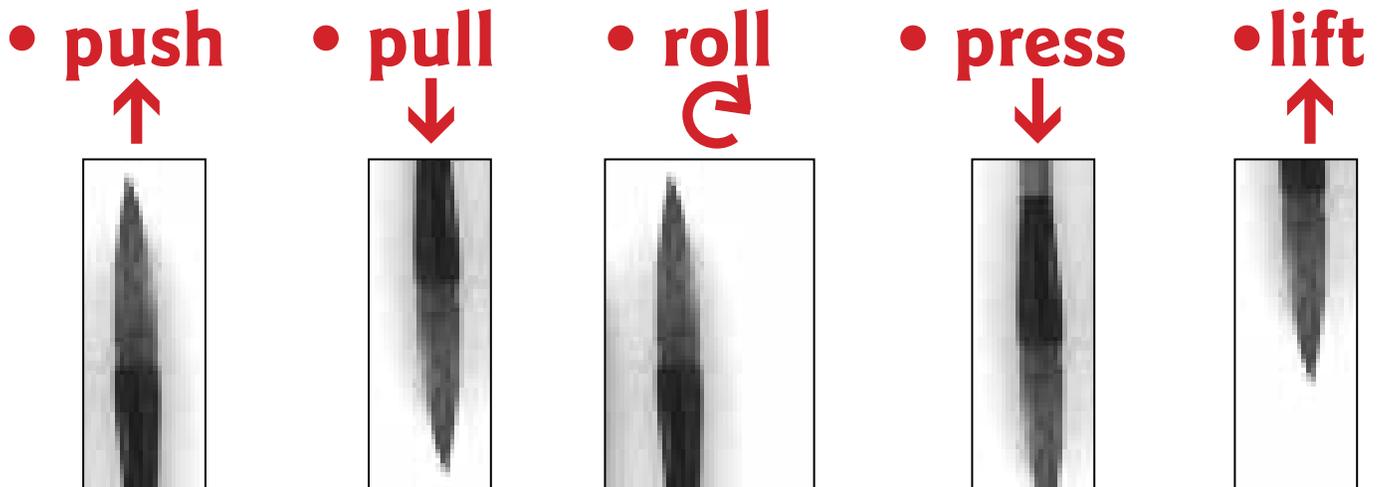
This should always be your starting position. Then in moving beyond calligraphy, you may apply more flexibility in the use of the brush.



Experiment with these movements:

- Pushing the brush away from your body.
- Pulling it towards yourself.
- In either of these motions, try pressing the brush deeper into the paper as you move.
- Or try lifting the brush slightly as you move the brush.
- Lastly, try rolling the brush in your fingers as you paint. This can be done with brush handle upright or parallel to the surface of the paper.

## 7. using the brush: direction



## 7. using the brush: direction model

- push
- pull
- roll
- press
- lift





This interpretation by Bob of 17th century Chinese painter Tao-chi's "lakeside geese" includes a couplet from 8th century Chinese poet, Tu Fu:

*Wild geese from the lake fly in pairs—  
When the veterans return from the old northern campaign*

In this somber scene, the geese are returning from the northern country, which the southern Chinese remember historically as a land of bitter hardship and border warfare. The forbidding atmosphere supports the well-known antiwar sentiment of Tu Fu. The figure on the bridge is thought to be Tao-chi.

From the 8th century to the 17th to the 21st, the prospect for war continues to be as inevitable as the return of the geese. The need for witness to peace remains as critical as well.

# lesson 1: model for extended practice

