

online intensive

the dance



of the eye

and



the hand

more fundamentals of Chinese brush painting by Bob Schmitt

introduction to color

lesson I (of 4)

- defining the Chinese palette
- determining which colors to use

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

bob@laughingwatersstudio.com

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/laughingwatertsstudio.com

What about color in Chinese painting?

(excerpt from *Chinese Painting Style: Media, Methods and Principles of Form* by Jerome Silbergeld)

Very little has been written about the use of color in Chinese painting. The Chinese traditionally discussed it much less than calligraphic line.

Over the centuries, many artists held an active prejudice against the use of any significant degree of color in painting. This stemmed from two sources. First was the attitude that shaped Chinese intellectual life throughout the traditional period, prizing detachment from worldly things and the stilling of emotions. Color was seen as superficial, attractive and base in its appeal. Confucius deplored the court robes of his time as decedent for they had abandoned the pure colors, red and blue, in favor of mixed colors, purples and off-reds. The Taoist classic, the *Tao-tching*, saw most men as crazed by their love of beauty and pleasure and warned that “the five colors will blind the eye” to true perception. Beginning in the eighth century, color was sometimes eliminated from painting as a means of bringing out the inner essence or spirit of the objects depicted. Even the Chinese language reinforced this negative attitude toward color, as the written word for it, *se*, also meant “beauty,” “passion,” “lewdness” and “anger.” Chinese also has far fewer words than English to identify specific colors.

A second source for this negative attitude toward color, not entirely separate from the first, was the relationship of painting to calligraphy sought by those scholar-painters who preferred “writing out” sketches in ink and indulging in “ink play” to painting in color. After this scholarly mode came to dominate Chinese painting in the fourteenth century, the painting of ink bamboo became so common that the story was told of an eccentric artist who enjoyed painting bamboo in red, much to the surprise of his audience. When one disbelieving onlooker was asked what color bamboo should be, his answer was, “Black, of course.”

Nevertheless, as much as half of all Chinese painting used some degree of color in addition to black.

Before the Sung, the use of bright colors in painting was common. An early term for painting was *tan-ch-ing*, “the reds and blues,” and during the Tang period a mineral-based “blue-and-green” color scheme was so popular in landscape painting that any use of it in later times invariably recalled that earlier period. More commonly the use of color was slight, a single delicate shade or two scattered about the work or limited to minor details. But even with their sometimes negative attitude toward and limited use of color, Chinese artists often treated it sensitively, and a few, in pursuit of naturalism, demonstrated more than the obvious know-how in the use of colors.

In place of a color theory based on natural observation, the traditional Chinese painter inherited a pedigreed system of color symbolism,

in which five colors were designated as representing the cardinal points of the compass and the primal forces of nature. The south was symbolized by a red phoenix, readily associated with the tropical summer sun, while the north, the direction of the dark arctic winter, was associated with two black reptiles, snake and tortoise. A blue-green dragon stood for the east, direction of the ocean, while the western regions were symbolized by the white tiger that occupied their distant, upland slopes. The Chinese kingdom itself, the stable center of these cardinal points, was symbolized by a yellow dragon, while Heaven, like the north, was indicated by the color black. This categorical approach says much about the typical Chinese use of color in painting, which was to particularize it, isolate it against a neutral background identify each object with its characteristic color, and severely limit the number of colors in use.

Although these five symbolic colors were chosen for other than naturalistic reasons, they correspond directly to the five colors held basic in Western color theory, in which all colored pigments may be generated through combinations of three primary hues, red, blue yellow, plus black and white. Chinese artists accepted the hues that natural vegetables and minerals provided. They did not attempt to adjust them to spectrally “true” reds and blues. They did not mix hues to achieve closely related series of intermediate hues, as European oil painters so often did. Typically if the Chinese artist did mix hues, it was to obtain the one brown intended to go with the one blue of the painting.

There are two other aspects of color, in addition to hue, which are prominent in color theory: tone (or value) and saturation (or intensity). Tone refers to the relative lightness or darkness of a color. White itself represents the highest possible tonality and black the lowest. The addition of white to other hues raises their tonality and is referred to as tinting; the addition of black lowers tonal value and is called shading.

One of the most striking features of Chinese painting is its integration of large tracts of unpainted silk or paper into the overall composition.

Less obvious is the intrusion of the color of the ground into the applied colors and ink. Both of these factors contribute to the tonality and, in turn, to the general mood of the work. A white paper ground heightens the tonality of transparent colors, often giving them a charming pastel-like effect. Deep golden silk lowers tonality, contributing to the profound quiet of many richly atmospheric landscapes.

Chinese artists were generally greatly concerned with tonality as they were unconcerned with hues. Artists and connoisseurs regularly asserted that “if you have ink, you have all the five colors.” and they largely validated this assertion with their successful exploration of black ink alone.

What are Chinese watercolors?

Chinese watercolors are natural pigments bound with glue.

Traditional Chinese watercolors are mineral and vegetable pigments, premixed with some kind of binder, mostly animal glue.

They are used in the same way as the Western watercolors by adding some water and after painting they fix perfectly on the rice paper.

The main feature of genuine Chinese watercolor painting is its luminosity and transparency and that's what vegetable and mineral pigments are all about. The purer the pigments, the more subtle their tones and brilliance will be. The quality of the pigment is also affected by the glue used, its origin and color.

For this intensive we will be using a basic set of 12 tubes of Marie's Chinese Painting Color.



This set includes both semi-transparent colors and 3 opaque colors. The opaque colors are the white, stone green and stone blue.

In the past those of you who have studied with me, we would set up a container of 8 of these colors, which was the basic palette I learned from Mr. Lok Tok. In this case we would squeeze the contents of each tube into the container and let it dry. Use of the color required using a wet brush to lift the pigment from the container and mix it in a mixing bowl before use.

white		opaque
gamboge yellow		semi-transparent
vermilion		semi-transparent
cinnebar		semi-transparent
rouge		semi-transparent
carmine		semi-transparent
scarlet		semi-transparent
burnt sienna		semi-transparent
stone green		opaque
stone blue		opaque
phthalocyanin		semi-transparent
indigo		semi-transparent



In this intensive I will be demonstrating an alternative method based on my experience in learning color from Mr. Hong Zhang. This is a good example of the breadth of the tradition in Chinese painting and the variation in method and form dependent on from whom you have received your instruction. Both methods work.



In the four lessons of this intensive we will explore setting up a palette to create this rendering based on a painting by Shen Zhou.

As a practice to prepare for that work, first create several test pieces: rocks, trees and pine tree. These are shown on the following pages. Step by step description of these can be found in the beginning series>

We will use these to begin to explore both preparing color and applying color.

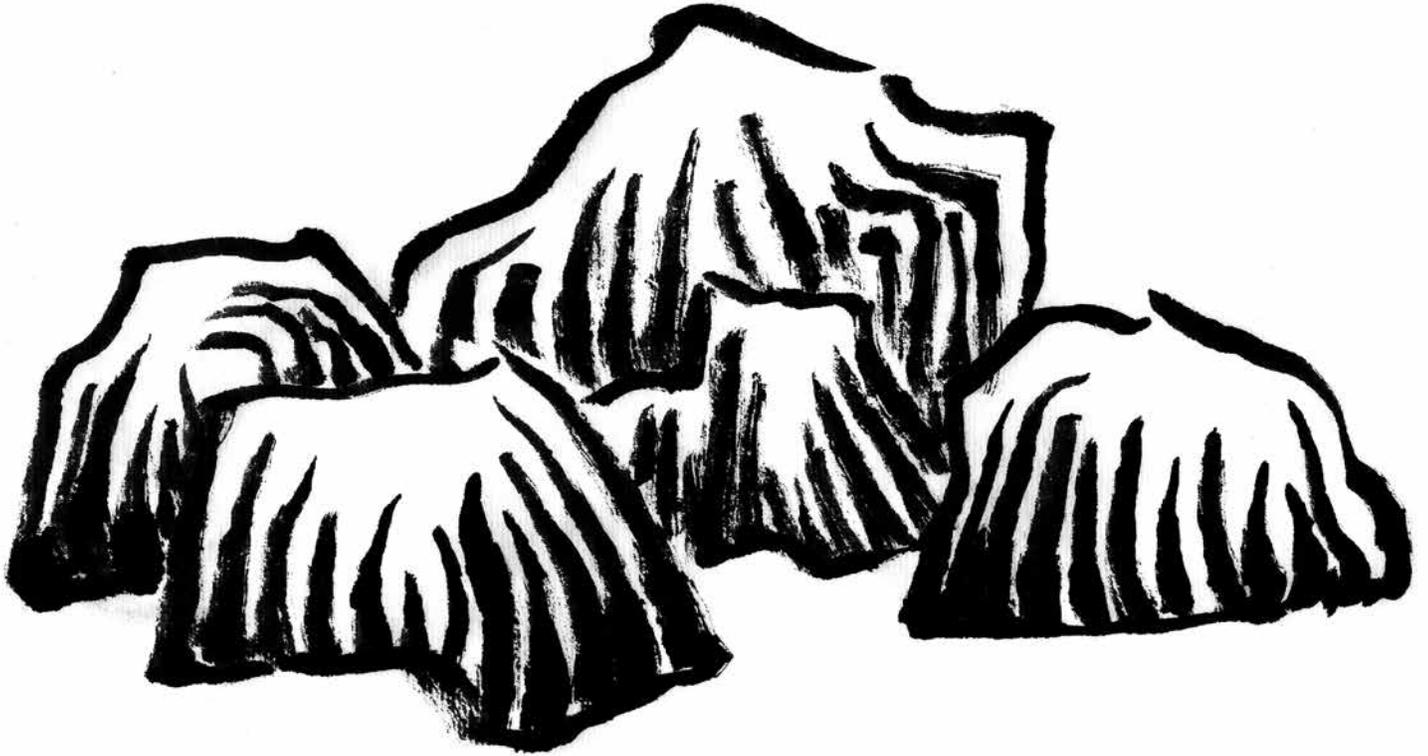
As we have learned from studying the Six Methods, any painting begins with creating the bone structure. Color comes later in the process.

So to begin now, please create one or more versions of the model for rocks, trees and pine tree.

Once you have the structure in place for each of these models, we can begin to apply the color.

Introduction to color

base model for group of rocks



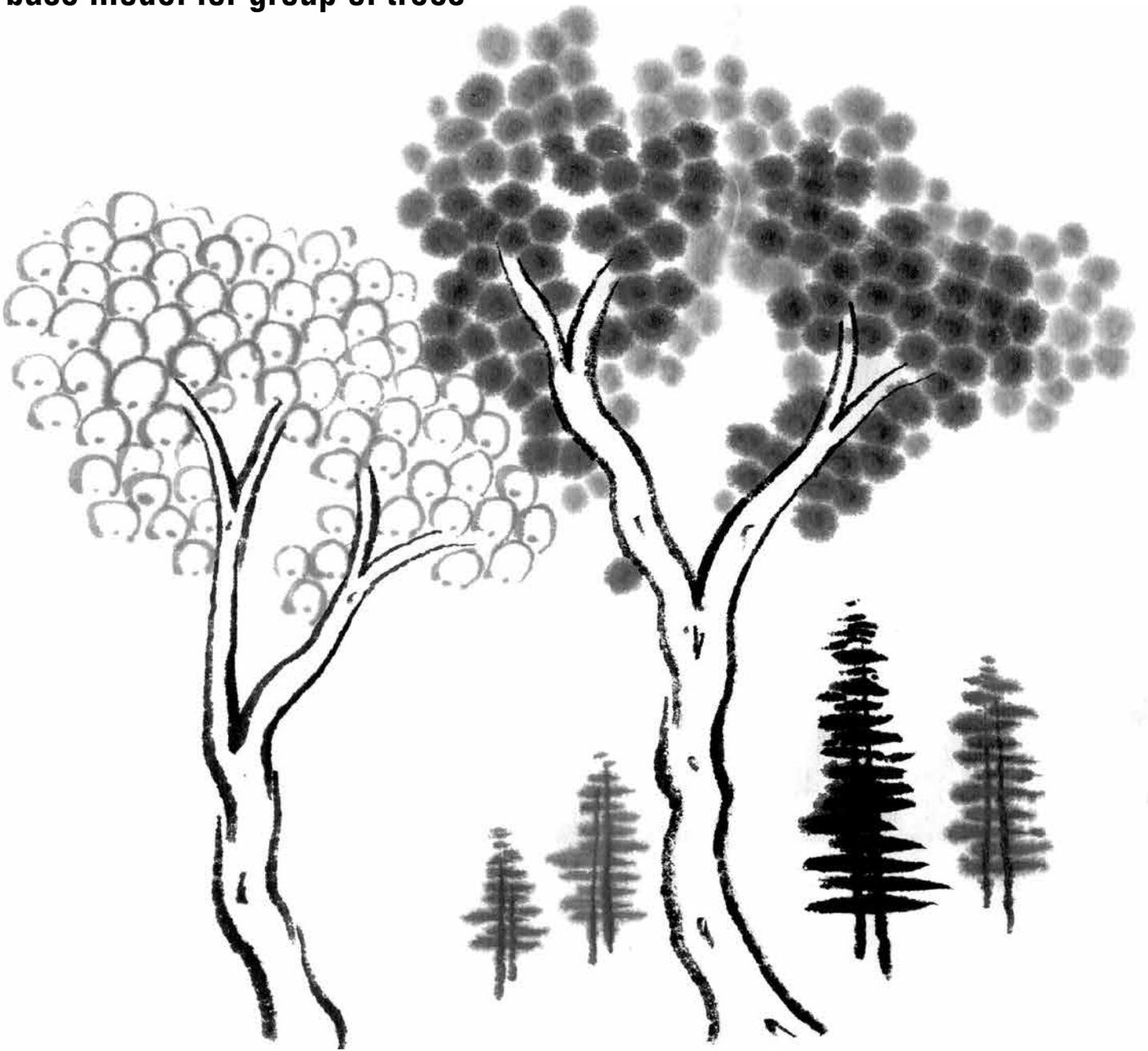
Begin with outline. Paint rocks from nearest to front to farthest away.

Then add shading lines.

To increase level of difficulty do shading lines in a mid gray.

Introduction to color

base model for group of trees



Begin with outline of host tree (larger one) then add dot leaves. To increase level of difficulty vary tone of dot leaves.

Then create outline of second tree. And add circle leaves.

To increase level of difficulty vary tone of circle leaves.

Finally paint distant pines. First parallel verticals, then horizontal branches.

Introduction to color

base model for pine



Begin with the trunk, then build all the branches.

Add knot holes and scales (bark).

Finally add groups of needles.

Introduction to color

adding color to group of rocks



Begin with a medium gray to add more shading lines to base of each rock.

Then add more shading lines using the burnt sienna color.

Let dry.

Then mix a little indigo with yellow to create a blue green and add more shading lines.

Finish with black dots.

Introduction to color

adding color to group of trees



Begin by painting entire trunk and branches of each tree with a light burnt sienna.

Let dry.

Then for dot leaf tree, mix yellow with indigo and add this to dot leaves, either individually or in groups.

For circle leaf tree, mix carmine with yellow and color leaves individually or in groups.

Add second layer of wash in yellow to tint the orange leaves and to bring the leaves together.

Finally, add layer to distant pines mixing yellow with indigo.

Introduction to color

adding color to pine



Begin by painting entire trunk and branches of tree with a burnt sienna. Leave a patch of white around each knot-hole. Focus wash on inside side of trunk outline, leaving a little white down the center.

Let dry.

Then with a mix of yellow and indigo, place loose dots of wash behind each group of needles. Press some more than

others to allow wash to bleed, creating a tonal gradient when it dries.

Add 2 successive layers to trunk and branches of the burnt sienna, and a final edging of trunk in medium gray.

Finally add black dots to trunk and branches and a few groups of dots to create ground line.