

Brushes



Brushes used for oil painting are made of various fibers. Each has a different purpose. All brushes are made of a handle, a metal ferrule, and hair. The quality and the cost of the brush is most dependent on the type and quality of the hair used. The handles of oil brushes are long, allowing the painter more variation in grips and the ability to view the painting from a greater distance while painting.

Hog Hair -- These brushes, sometimes called bristle brushes, are the most common for oil use. They are made of stiff white bristles. The best, and most expensive are Chinese hog hair. That does not mean they come from China, but they are from a breed of pig called a Chinese White. There are even preferences within the Chinese hog family. Chunking, Junkies and Hankow are the most favored. The reason hog bristles are favored for oils is that (1) they are strong and stiff, for the usually stiffer oil paint, and (2) the ends do not taper to a thin point; instead the hairs split and fork into several tips, called flags. These help in holding paint.

Sable -- A fine hair that comes to a very good point. For oil painting, most hair comes from the Asiatic mink, and is not the expensive Russian Kolinsky used in the finest watercolor brushes. Sables are used in oils when working with thin, fluid paint called long paint.

Badger -- Used for blenders, also called sweeteners, recognized by the hair which is white on the end with a black band in the middle. These are round, but fanned like a shaving brush and used to blend and soften the brushstrokes of other brushes. They also come in a fan brush style. Both are best used when dry and clean.

Mongoose -- Used for blending and painting. It has a hair somewhat stiffer than sable, but not as stiff as bristle. Good for thin paint and applying glazes and very useful in a filberts shape.

Synthetic -- There are many good synthetic fiber brushes on the market. They are usually much cheaper and combine (to some degree) the best properties of more than one of the natural fiber brushes. The best thing to do is experiment by buying one or two small versions of these and finding what works best for your style.

Brush styles



Round

Flat

Bright

Filbert

Fan

Blenders

Rounds -- As the name implies. This is a brush with the hair shaped in a round ferrule and coming to a point. Good for general painting and details.

Flats -- The hair of these brushes is shaped to a flat edge. The fiber is long as opposed to a bright. Used for all general painting.

Brights -- Short hair, flat, bristle brushes. Used for stiff paint, called short paint.

Filberts -- Sometimes called "cat's tongue" brushes. (Similar to a flat, but with a slightly rounded tip.) Originally developed for portraiture where a hard edge was to be avoided.

Fans -- As the name implies. It is a flat fan-shaped brush used for blending and special effects.

Blenders -- Soft brushes, usually of badger hair, in a bushy shape, used to soften or to remove the appearance of brushstrokes.

Care of brushes

Oil brushes should be rinsed in turpentine or mineral spirits and then washed carefully in soap and water. Plain household soap or dish detergent can be used, or better yet one of the many brush soaps on the market.

