

Sumi-e Tempera Resist



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Experience expressive East Asian-style brush painting through a simple pattern design and masking process.

The beautiful, distinctive style of ink painting first developed in ancient China, at the same time as calligraphic writing. It was the use of the flexible hair brush during the Han dynasty (second century A.D.) that evolved the written and visual language of the culture. Zen Buddhist monks brought the painting style to Japan in the 14th century, where it became known as Sumi-e (translating as “ink pictures”).

Chinese artists refer to this style as “writing a painting” and “painting a poem,” placing great importance on simplicity and the beauty of each individual ink stroke. A painting is considered successful if it contains brush strokes that capture the spirit and energy (Ch'i) of a subject.

The practice of Sumi-e is meditative, mindful, and an expression of the present moment. This simplicity reflects the Zen concept of “ma”, which translates as “space” or “pause”. There is a flow and rhythm to brush painting. Each movement — from holding the brush, loading the ink, and the speed and pressure applied to each stroke — demands focus and control.

As the painting style developed in many East Asian cultures, fabric designers also developed processes for applying these brush techniques to cloth to make art wearable. In the Japanese process of Tsutsugaki, watersoluble rice paste is used to brush patterns on cloth, which is then dyed and rinsed. Similar to the well-known technique of batik, simple masking and dyeing cycles produce complex designs, without heat or the signature cracking formed by cooling wax.

For this lesson, the medium that will serve as a resist is washable tempera paint. Colored and India inks will replace the dyes used in traditional batik and tsutsugaki. Painters are encouraged to practice and focus on a simple design, emphasizing repetition and pattern while familiarizing themselves with the capabilities of the sumi brush.

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Practice using sumi brush on drawing paper. Use water at first, then ink.



Materials (required)

Blick Black Cat Waterproof India Ink, 3 oz (21101-2004); share one bottle across class

Blick Sumi Brush, size 2 (04321-1002); need one per student

Canson XL Bulk Watercolor Paper, 9" x 12", 140 lb, 250 sheet pkg (10173-1013); need one sheet per student

Blick White Sulphite Drawing Paper, 9" x 12", 60 lb (10209-1003); need one per student

Blick Essentials Washable Tempera Paint, 16 oz pints, choice of colors (00135-); share one across class

Daler-Rowney FW Acrylic Water-Resistant Artists' Inks, choice of colors, 1 oz bottles (21107-); share a minimum of one color, two bottles across class

Richeson 7-Well Flower Palette, 6" dia (02067-1007); need one per student

Optional Materials:

Royal & Langnickel Bamboo Brush and Palette Class Pack, set of 72 assorted sizes (06462-1072)

Sumi Ink Stick, Artist (20828-1001)

Yasutomo Suzuri Grinding Stone, 5" x 2-1/2" (22879-1001)

Ready to order materials?

Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/sumi-e-tempera-resist to access a product bundle for your convenience.

Practice:

Holding the brush:

The traditional way to hold a brush for East Asian style painting is to hold it straight up and down (perpendicular to page). Hold it between three fingers, with your thumb on one side and the first two fingers on the other. Hold it loosely, just above the center of the brush.

Moving the brush:

Holding the brush in the traditional sumi-e fashion will likely feel strange to someone accustomed to painting in the western style. This grip allows an artist to move the brush using their entire arm - not just the wrist and hands. The goal is to make each stroke expressive and meaningful.

Practice making strokes with water only, using relaxed movements that flow from the shoulder, through the arm, to the brush.

Loading the brush with ink:

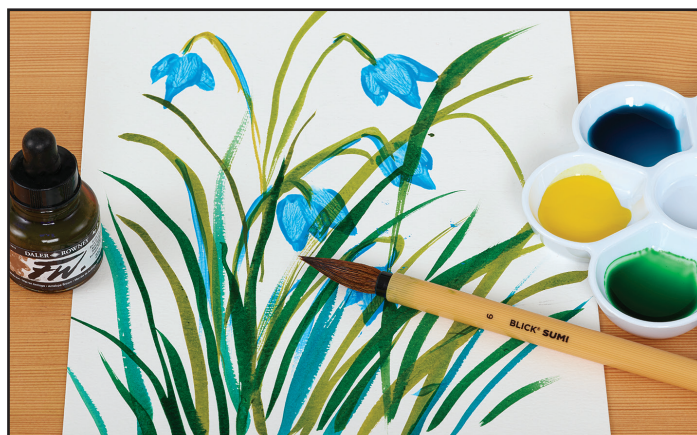
Knowing the exact amount of ink and water to execute a particular stroke takes much practice and experience. Experiment with loading the brush with various amounts of ink.

First, with a clean, dry brush, dip just the tip into the ink cup and make a few small strokes. Next, dip the brush in the ink so that all the hair is covered with ink. Pull it across the edge of the ink cup so that the brush forms a point and excess ink is removed. Make some longer strokes.

Clean the brush off with water. While it is still wet, dip just the tip in the ink. Try creating a variety of grey tones. Shading is a very important component of East Asian painting and the subtle shift of tones can be beautifully expressive.



Step 1: Mask the areas to remain white by brushing with Blick Essentials Washable Tempera.



Step 2: Add strokes of color using acrylic ink and mask them with washable tempera paint.



Step 3: Cover entire image with a coat of Blick Black Cat India Ink.



Step 4: Remove tempera resist by rinsing it under running water over a sink.

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Process:

1. After practicing with the sumi brush, select a stroke or design. In the following steps, that stroke will be repeated multiple times to make a pattern and build up layers of resist and ink. Plan a design by making preliminary sketches or drawing an idea directly on the watercolor paper.
2. In the first step, areas of the painting that will remain white will be masked. In the process of batik, the masking would be made with hot wax. The Tsutsugaki method masks designs using rice paste. For this lesson, the masking medium will be washable tempera paint.

Using the sumi brush, make the selected strokes or design on the watercolor paper. If needed, make a few strokes on practice paper first.

Any color of tempera can be used. Most of the color will be rinsed away, but small amounts will remain as part of the painting. Allow a few minutes for the tempera to dry.

3. Next, apply areas of color using acrylic ink, repeating the strokes with the sumi brush. Use a single color or multiple colors. Allow these areas to dry.
4. Color areas will need to be masked as well. Paint washable tempera over the acrylic ink and allow to dry.
5. As a last step in the ink application, brush black india ink over the entire page. After it dries, rinse the sheet under running water in a sink. The washable watercolor resist will rinse away, revealing the areas it was masking, while the india ink will cover the rest of the page.

The strokes formed by the sumi brush will be highlighted by the surrounding black background. The imperfections will also stand out - a missed spot, or a misshapen stroke. These unexpected outcomes are a beautiful contribution to the overall distressed appearance of the image.

Options

— For a more traditional approach to ink painting, substitute india ink with a Suzuri grinding stone and sumi ink stick. Grind stick with water onto the stone to make fresh ink.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

