



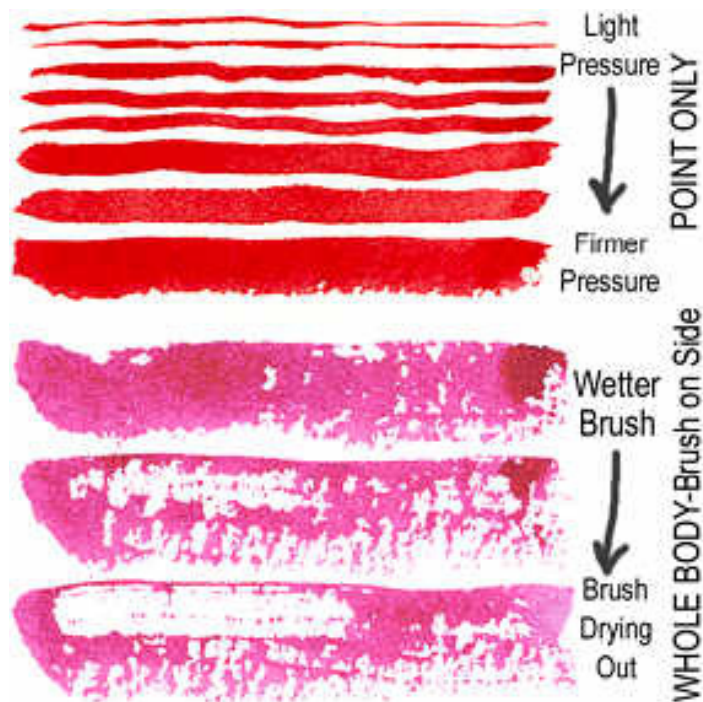
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Practicing Your Brushwork

Most watercolor paintings are comprised of washes, which are large areas of paint put on wet, damp or dry paper usually with a large mop or wide wash brush, and linear or drybrush marks, which are more like drawing or sketching, and are made with the point, edge or body of round or flat watercolor brushes. Some painters do work primarily with washes, and some artists choose to use a more linear approach. There is no “right” or “wrong” approach, but it helps to be comfortable with brushwork because it gives you an opportunity to add form, texture and character to your paintings. Brushwork is almost like writing. Once you have developed a mastery of your brush, your linear marks will be as individual, effortless and unique as your handwriting.

Let’s take a look at some various kinds of brush marks that you can make using a pointed round watercolor brush. I did all these samples with a No.8 brush.

Finally, each layer of color should dry thoroughly before glazing the next layer over it. This gives you the best chance of not lifting the underlying color. You can speed up the drying process with a hand-held hair dryer if you wish.



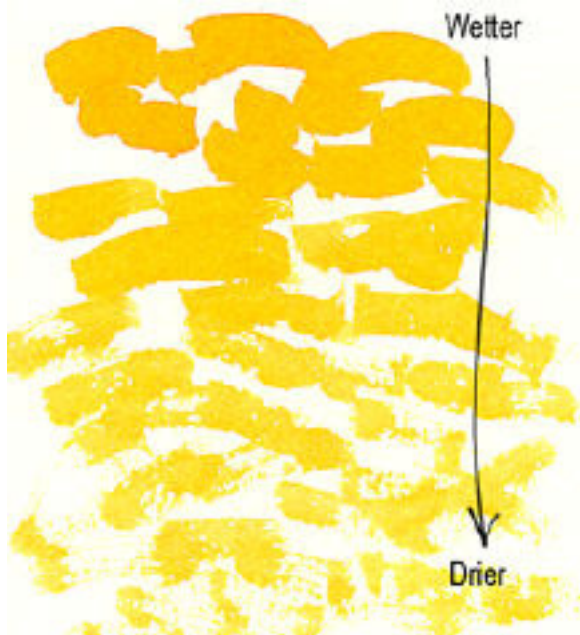
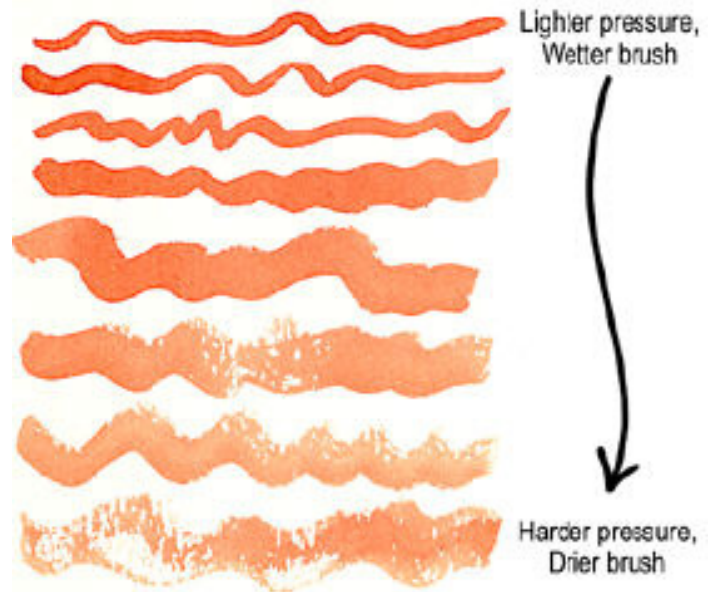
Every mark you make is influenced by (1) how saturated (wet) the brush is with pigment and (2) how much pressure you apply to the brush as you move it across the paper surface. The strokes at the left are dragged strokes, with the wrist kept stationary and the arm moving from left to right.

For the red strokes, the brush is nearly vertical to the paper, with just the very tip touching the surface, so that the line is very fine. As more pressure is applied, the line gets thicker.

For the magenta strokes, the whole brush body is applied to the paper. The brush is held more horizontally for this stroke. Note that as the brush discharges paint and gets dryer, it begins to skip over the paper surface making a scratchier, highly textured, drybrush mark.

The orange strokes are also dragged strokes, but the arm is moved in a wavy motion, with the elbow and wrist stationary. Again notice how lighter pressure, with the brush fully loaded makes a narrow mark, while heavier pressure and a drier brush creates the scratchier, fatter marks at the bottom.

Drybrush marks are more pronounced on rough surface paper than on hot press, because of the hills and valleys in the paper surface.



The curved stroke involves a little wrist movement as you stroke the color onto the paper. These curved strokes can be convex or concave, large or small, and made with either a fully saturated wet brush or a drier one if scratchier marks are the goal.

If you use just the point of the brush, curved strokes are one way to suggest waves in water.

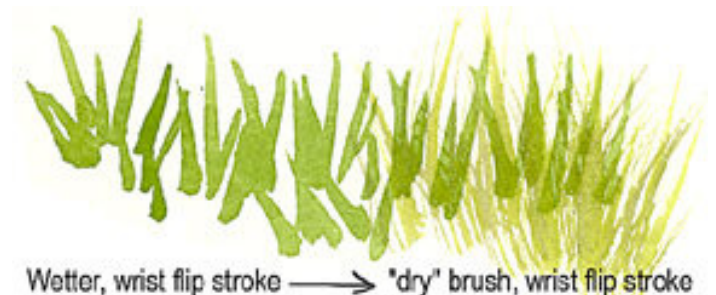


The curved short stroke is very handy for creating rounded rocks or pebbles. These marks can be large or small, and with a second layer of strokes you can begin to suggest three-dimensional form.

The dabbed stroke has many variations, depending on whether it is made with the tip of the round brush or the entire body of the brush. It's very useful for foliage, especially when a second or third value is added over the dry initial dabs of color.

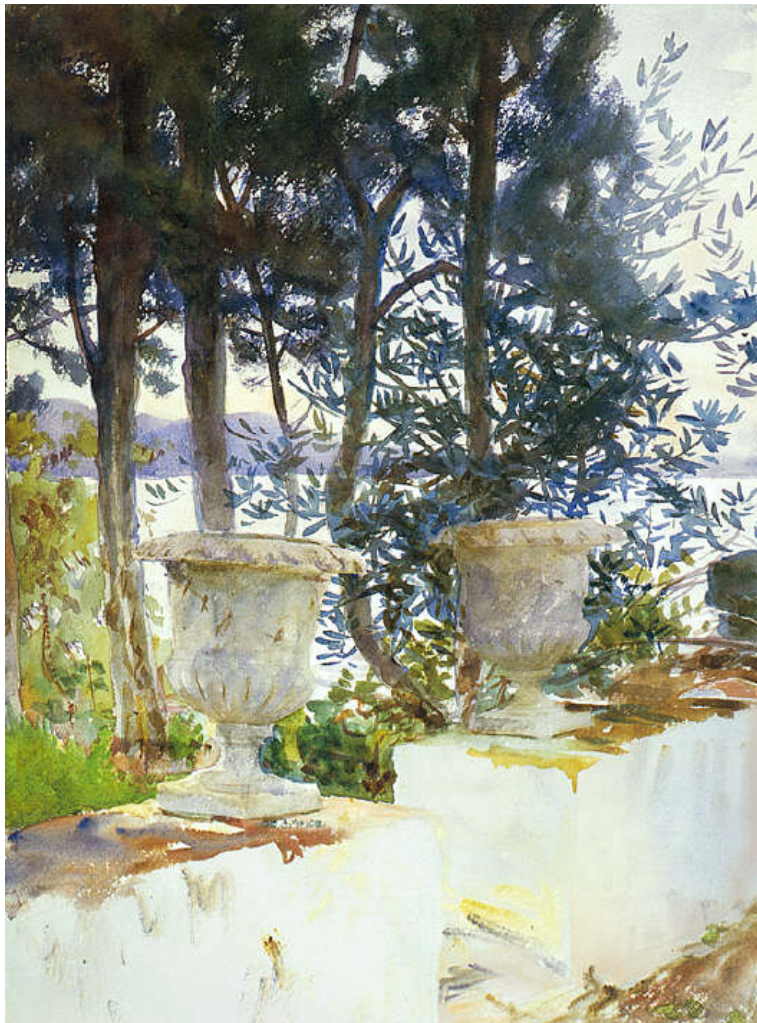
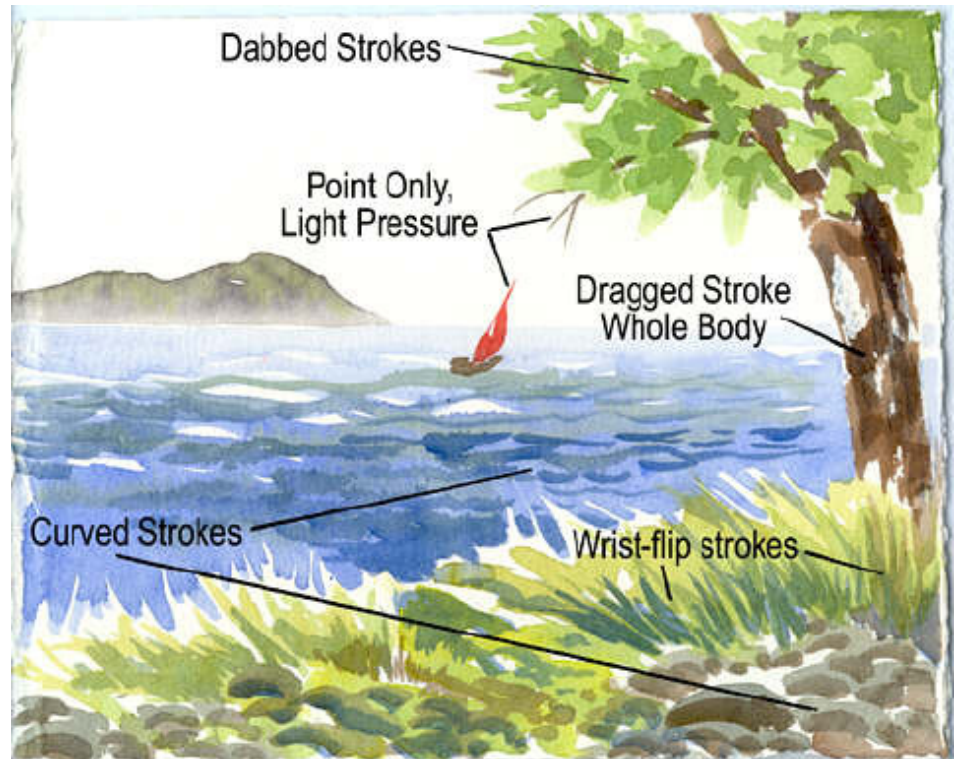


This last sample is made with a stroke that uses the point of the brush and involves a flick of the wrist. When the point of the brush contacts the paper, the wrist is flipped upward, causing the point to lift off the paper and create a mark that is wider at the bottom and very small and pointed at the top. Great for suggesting grass, or with a brush so dry that the hairs begin to separate, it can be used to suggest fur or hair, or very fine grass.



Remember to let washes and brush strokes dry if you want to layer more brush strokes over them and maintain sharp edges. If your previous dabs are wet, and you make more dabs over them, the strokes will merge together instead of making a new layer of color.

Notice that the dabbed strokes I added to the wet mountain shape in the distance are indistinct and soft, while the dabbed strokes in the tree leaves were put on in three layers, letting each layer dry before dabbing on the next.



Now take a look at a master of the brush stroke ...John Singer Sargent.

Sargent was born in Florence, Italy in 1856. His American parents were there for his mother's health. He was encouraged early to develop his artistic abilities, and became a master "plein air painter" taking his watercolors everywhere he traveled.

This painting is comprised mostly of brush strokes. Sargent really liked to "draw" with his brush. There are some wash areas (the mountains in the distance, the soft corner of sky, the whitewashed walls, some of the greenery). But look at the linear marks! In the ground in front of the wall, on the pottery, the leaves in the trees and bushes. Especially notice the scratchy dry brush area in the dark tops of the pine trees.

"Corfu: The Terrace" by John Singer Sargent
1909, Watercolor on Paper, 20³/₄" x 15³/₄"
Charles Henry Hayden Fund,
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston