

Paintbrushes

In the first few paintings I produced in this style, I experimented with many different brushes. Finding the right ones had a significant impact on the quality of what I could produce. I wanted control over the marks I was making as well as a brush that could carry a decent quantity of paint. Getting the right brushes is essential to being able to produce the kind of quality work you want.

Quality

I used to dismiss synthetic brushes for not holding enough paint – but after a student suggested I try them again, I am glad I did. Their quality has improved enormously, so they now hold the perfect amount of paint for my method. Their crisp point and firm texture means they are ideal for my techniques, as well as being great value. They are also a non-animal product (which sits well with me as a vegetarian!)

Shape

For this style of painting I use miniature or spotter brushes. They are shaped like a tear drop which means that they are able to hold plenty of paint at their base and yet also have a sharp point, meaning that you can create really crisp lines. They also lend themselves perfectly to the stippling technique I use so much (see page 51 for more information on stippling).

Their bristles are shorter than most watercolour brushes and this gives you a greater feeling of control over the marks you are making. I often think that they feel like using a felt tip pen – something I loved as a child!

The brand I favour is series 323 from Rosemary & Co. They are a UK-based manufacturer who produces an excellent 'Anna Mason' set of the five sizes I recommend. Winsor & Newton's Series 7 Miniatures are a good alternative that share many of the same qualities.

Sizes

I always work with fairly small brushes. Brushes are given numbers to indicate their size, but these can vary quite a bit between brands. The following are based on Rosemary & Co or Winsor & Newton Series 7 miniatures and the picture in the box to the right gives you an idea of their sizes, should you need to compare them to those you already own.

Although I own a size 8 I would only ever use that on the first, most watery wash of a very large painting. The largest size I regularly use is a 5, and I most often use sizes 3, 1, 0 and 000 (sometimes shown on the brushes as 3/0). I do not usually bother with an 00 (or 2/0) brush as it is so close to a 000 in size. It is possible to create most marks with the five brushes listed above, so I would recommend getting those when you begin.

Why small brushes?

Sticking to small brushes means there is less likelihood of getting too much paint on the brush at one time. This helps to maintain quick drying times, and better control of the paint. I use the larger size 5 brush only on larger paintings or initial washes of large blocks of colour.

My brushes. From top to bottom: sizes 5, 3, 1, 0 and 000.

