

# CHOOSING BRUSHES AT OPUS

*This handout will introduce you to different brush types, hairs, shapes and sizes. For maximum performance and durability, certain hair types work best for particular mediums and techniques. We recommend experimenting with different brush shapes as it will enhance your mark-making repertoire.*

## HANDLES AND FERRULES

Short-handled brushes are the choice when working with watercolour, toile and decorative painting techniques. Like drawing tools the handles are short for better control, as paint is generally applied while working on a table or on a slightly slanted table. Long-handled brushes are usually reserved for easel work where distance from the painting surface is required.



The ferrule of a brush is the metal connecting unit between the brush hairs which are glued into one end, and the handle which is crimped and/or glued into the other. It is a metal tube designed specifically for the basic shape and size of each type of brush head.

Metal ferrules are either copper, brass or aluminum. Most of Opus' brush ferrules are "nickelled" aluminum. Brass, an alloy metal, is the strongest of the three.

Any good brush will feature a seamless ferrule, regardless of the metal type. Ferrules with seams tend to pull apart and allow paint, solvents, and water to accumulate, thereby loosening or causing damage to the handle.

In some brushes, a flexible natural or plastic quill is used in place of a metal ferrule. Quills were used in the first brushes ever made and their use today is often only in the interest of tradition.

## SYNTHETIC HAIR

Most often synthetic hair brushes are nylon or polyester fibres, dyed or bleached to resemble the colour of natural hair or bristle. In artist brushes, this synthetic fibre is actually a polyester. "Taklon" is a trade name commonly used. Each filament is tapered, ending in a fine point. Untreated synthetic filament is of unvarying diameter, although with further treatments, it can be given a tapered end or even a split tip.



The primary advantage of synthetic hair is its durability, its resistance to abuse and its ease of cleaning. They are less prone to breakage and durable on many different surfaces. Synthetic hair brushes are best used with acrylics but can be used with watercolours. Synthetic filament brushes are generally less expensive than the best grades of soft hair or bristle brushes.

## NATURAL SOFT HAIR

**Kolinsky** - Finest sable brush. Finely-pointed hair with superb spring, strength, and absorbency. Ideal for watercolour.

**Red Sable** - Any red hair from the weasel family. Many different grades are available. Ideally they hold a fine point with good spring and absorbency. Well suited to smooth strokes and blending in oils and watercolour.

**Ox** - Lacks the fine tip of red sable, but it is a strong, silken hair often used in moderately-priced brushes.

**Goat** - A relatively inexpensive hair. Possesses good absorbency with a soft, wiry feel.

**Squirrel** - Highly absorbent, finely-tipped hairs, but lacks the spring of red sable.

**Camel** - An all-encompassing term for brushes made from a variety of hairs, none of which are camel. They may include ox, goat, squirrel, or pony hair.

# CHOOSING BRUSHES AT OPUS

## BRISTLE

Bristle, as its name implies, is a stiff hair derived from a hog, pig, or boar. It is a coarse, strong hair that ideally has a natural curve and flagged tips. This "flag", or split tip, helps the brush to hold maximum paint and acts as an extra "paintbrush" during application. Bristle is well suited to work with heavier media such as oils, acrylics, and tempera. White bristle comes in many grades. Black bristle is a stiffer, more economically-priced hair.

## SIZES OF BRUSHES

Numbering brushes in "sizes" provides order for differentiating brushes within a series. The size is determined by the measurement of the ferrule opening. Rounds are measured as if the ferrule and hair have been flattened.



In Canada, the imperial or metric system of sizing is commonly used, depending upon the type of brush. Natural bristle brushes are measured using the imperial system, which means a size 12 is equal to one inch. In turn, a size 6 is 1/2 inch, a size 18 is 1-1/2 inches, and so on.

Natural soft hair and synthetic brushes are measured using the metric system. One millimetre is equal to a size 1. This standard is effective, except that it is difficult to measure and assign a value to any measurement less than 1 mm. So, when a brush is sized 10/0, 3/0, etc. it becomes quite hypothetical. Roughly translated, 3/0 means 3 units (undefined) less than a millimetre and 10/0 means 10 units (undefined) less than a millimetre.

Please note that there is no industry standard that manufacturers must follow. Sizing for various types of brushes is often rooted in tradition and the country of origin.

## BRUSH CARE

1. When cleaning a brush made from natural hair, use cool water. Hot water will strip the natural oils from the hair.

2. Always rinse the brush thoroughly in the appropriate solvent (water or paint thinner) to remove as much of the remaining colour as possible.

3. Gently massage the brush in the palm of your hand using a small amount of gentle soap or brush cleaner\*.

4. Repeat steps 1-3 until the brush comes clean.

5. Rinse the brush thoroughly and allow to dry upright or hanging downward.

6. If natural hair brushes are not going to be used for a long period of time in a humid climate, it is wise to store them in an enclosed container with a mothball or two.

7. Synthetic brushes that have become misshapen can sometimes be brought back to 'life' and into a useable profile by placing them under hot (not boiling) water. This will soften the synthetic hair.

8. If natural hair brushes become misshapen, using a bit of soap on your fingers to bring the wet hairs to a point will enable the brush to hold a point when stored.

9. Keeping the brush clean will dramatically extend the life of the brush.

\* Opus carries "The Masters" Brush Cleaner and Preserver which can be used for cleaning oils, acrylics and watercolours from your brushes. For hard to clean paints such as oil "The Masters" Brush Cleaner can be left on brushes for a short period of time until the brushes set. This process can be repeated until the brushes come clean.

## BRUSH STORAGE

There are a number of solutions for storing or carrying your brushes when not in use. The simplest and most economical is to store them upright in a tin can or jar.

There are also bamboo brush wraps, canvas brush carriers, wooden brush boxes, and plastic brush tubes available. When choosing a brush carrier, ensure that air and moisture are able to pass freely through the material or through holes provided. It is important that moisture is not trapped in your brush carrier to prolong the life of your brush hairs and to prevent corrosion of the ferrules.

# CHOOSING BRUSHES AT OPUS

## BRUSH SHAPES & USES

The names for same or similar shapes, in various hairs or handle lengths, appear in parentheses.

**Round** - Use on point, or apply pressure to make thick-to-thin strokes.

**Liner** - Continuous curved or straight lines. Thickness varies with pressure changes.

**Ultra Round** - Use as a liner on point. Full belly provides a reservoir for paint and water.

**Script-Liner (Long Liner)** - Scroll work, flowing thick-to-thin lines. Length of hair holds more paint than a regular liner.

**Flat (Shader)** - Blocking in colour, shading, blending, highlighting, and stroke work.

**Bright (Chisel Blender)** - Short, flat strokes and blending, especially useful with heavy mediums.

**Angular Shader (Angle Flat)** - Tight shading, curved strokes. Popular rose petal brush.

**Wash (or Glaze)** - Washes, bases and applying finishes.

**One Stroke (Stroke)** - Long, flat lettering brush.

**Filbert (Oval)** - Strokes with soft edges. Blending. A natural flower petal shape.

**Deerfoot Stippler** - Texturing brush. Use for dry brush techniques or with a light, pouncing movement for fur, shrubbery, and soft backgrounds.

**Fan** - Use dry or with tips loaded to create texture or smooth other brush strokes.

**Rake** - Flat, texturing brush with a naturally-fingered shape. Use for hair, grass, wood grain, feathers, and fur.

**Dagger Striper** - Long chisel edge for easy, fine lines. Vary pressure for thick-to-thin ribbon effect.

**Miracle Wedge** - Can be easily loaded with 3 different colours for a variety of stroke effects.

**Stencil** - Use with dry brush techniques with very little paint and with a circular or stippling motion.

**Mop** - Blending and softening. Washes.

**Varnish Brushes (not pictured here)**- A wide flat bristle brush for covering large areas. For applying varnish to oil paintings a badger hair brush is ideal. For applying varnish to an acrylic painting any wide soft synthetic brush will work.



Round



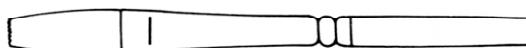
Liner



Ultra Round



Script Liner (Long Liner)



Flat Shader



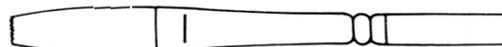
Bright (Chisel Blender)



Angular Shader



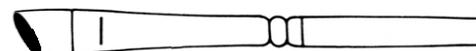
Wash



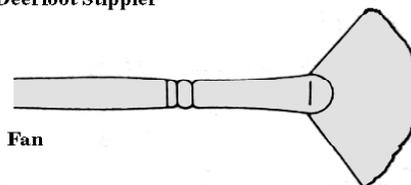
One Stroke



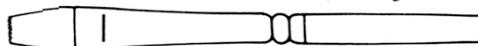
Filbert (Oval)



Deerfoot Stippler



Fan



Rake



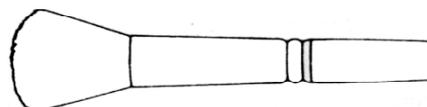
Dagger Striper



Miracle Wedge



Stencil



Mop

# CHOOSING BRUSHES AT OPUS

NOTES:



**OPUS**  
Framing &  
Art Supplies

OPUS Vancouver  
1360 Johnston St  
604-736-7028

OPUS Langley  
5501 204 St  
604-533-0601

OPUS Victoria  
512 Herald St  
250-386-8133

OPUS Kelowna  
1357 Ellis St  
250-763-3616

OPUS North Vancouver  
120 Lonsdale Ave  
604-904-0447

OPUS National  
Mail Order Service  
1-800-663-6953

*'where artists prefer to shop'*

[www.opusframing.com](http://www.opusframing.com)