

Brush With Success

All you need to know about the filbert, rigger and spotter brushes.

Painting with watercolor is a tricky business—challenging, satisfying, infuriating and exciting all at the same time. Why not minimize those frustrations, and maximize your success and painting pleasure? The solution can be as simple as finding the right brush for the job.

Most of us have experienced the frustration of picking up a brush to make a lovely, long line only to have it run out of paint midline. Picking up the line in the same place with just the same thickness and rhythm is next to impossible. Or maybe you meant to make a tiny, sparkling accent, but had too much paint in your brush and ended up with a big blob instead. Perhaps you need something softer than a flat brush, but bolder than a round. Well, hurry off to your supplier and take a look at the marvelous brushes waiting for you. And, here, I'll show

you how a filbert, rigger or spotter brush may offer exactly the effect you want, plus more control and less frustration.

The filbert

The filbert brush is named after the nut of the same name because of its shape—set into a flattened ferrule, but curved at the tip in more or less a soft U-shape. Filberts come in many types and sizes from large to very small and with long bristles or hairs to relatively short ones. Soft-bristled squirrel-hair filberts will hold a lot of pigment and are marvelous for skies, clouds, broad landscapes or other areas you prefer to keep a bit softer. Try experimenting with using the flat of the brush, the side and the edge.

Notice the illustrations below. In **A** the manganese hue and the ultramarine blue were done with a large, soft

filbert. The yellow ochre lines and squiggles in **B** were painted with a springier No. 9 with man-made hairs. This brush would be good for both oil or acrylic paints. The red foliage of **C** was done with that same springy brush and then the smaller leaves were painted with a No. 2. I used a miniature filbert for the tiny green lines and leafy shapes of **D**.

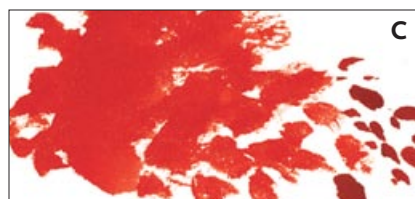
The rigger, the liner and the script

Some artists consider riggers, liners and scripts different brushes, but I tend to think of them as different names for essentially the same tool. They all have disproportionately long hairs for the width of the brush—about two times as long as a round brush of the same size. For instance, my favorite No. 4 script brush has kolinsky sable hairs that are $\frac{7}{8}$ inch long, whereas the hairs of a No. 4 round are $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in length.

These brushes come in all sizes. I have a tiny 2/0 brush, a No. 6 with $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch hairs and even some monster liners that are well over an inch long. They're made with kolinsky sable, sable, man-made mixed or entirely man-made hairs, as well as goat and squirrel hair. Each handles a bit differently, but all hold much more pigment than a normal brush, allowing your lines to go on and on. These brushes were traditionally used to paint the rigging of ships, hence the name, but they're marvelous for tree branches, grasses and the textures of wood and hair. Basically, you name the subject and these brushes won't let you down.

The versatile filbert

All the illustrations at left were done with a filbert brush.





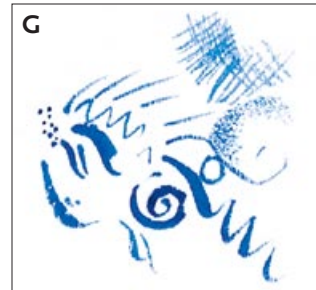
Rigger, liner or script

Each of the brushes above has a long, fine tip ideal for depicting details or doing fine line work.

In the drawings above, you can see the various lines and shapes you can make with riggers, liners and scripts. In **E** the loops of raw sienna were done with a No. 6 squirrel brush, while in **F** the tree was painted with a No. 4 kolinksy, as was the blue border, the dots, the spiral and the broad drybrush mark.

The spotter

A spotter is the brush you want to use for maximum control when painting the highlight in an eye, a few delicate hairs, or the details of a delicate flower or textile, for instance. You won't get that big accidental blob of paint with a spotter. Spotters are very small—from



The right touch

With its tiny, pointed tip, the spotter brush is used for the finest of details.

tiny to tinier to the tiniest still! A No. 1 would be quite large for a spotter. They range from a size 0 on down to an amazing 18/0 with only a few hairs. Like their larger cousins, they come in various types of hair, but at that size it's not as critical as in larger brushes. Obviously a spotter doesn't hold much paint, but it's surprisingly versatile.

At left in **G** you see lines, squiggles and the pointillist technique at which spotters excel. Painters of miniatures find these brushes indispensable.

Experiment with a variety of brushes; see what they do for you. Remember that different brushes do different things, and different subjects require different brushes. Finding the right brush for you and your artwork can be the key to success. ♦

Watercolorist **CATHY JOHNSON**'s work is exhibited in galleries and private and corporate collections across the country. Learn more at <http://cathyjohnson.info/>.



Brush in the details

A small filbert brush and a variety of spotter brushes allowed me to add fine details to the botanical flowers in *June Roadside* (above; watercolor, 15x22). For the eye study (below), I used several filberts and riggers, as well as a spotter for details.

