



ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

CHINESE BRUSH TECHNIQUES BY MAGGIE CROSS, 5TH MARCH 2016

Maggie lived in China for much of her early childhood and it was there she formed a lasting love of Chinese painting. Calligraphy is the basis of Chinese painting; painting and calligraphy are known as “the twin sisters of the brush”. Symbolism, ritual, tradition and legend colours all types of Chinese painting and it is done with the Four Treasures; Brush, Paper, Ink and the Ink Stone. The ink is in the form of hard sticks in dark tones (black, grey and sepia) which are ground onto the wetted ink stone to form a pool of colour and each colour has its own stone to ensure it keeps the clarity required. Brushes are all made of animal hair including goat, sheep, horse, badger and even panda! They are very stiff until soaked in cold water after which they form a large mop head which holds lots of paint together with a beautiful sharp point, enabling them to be used for both broad washes and detailed work. The paper used is highly absorbent, made from plant fibre and will take a lot of paint on its surface. The particular paper Maggie used for the main demonstration had flecks of gold in it, which acted as a resist and added an extra dimension to the image.



There are four basic strokes in Chinese painting: the Stem Stroke is a straight line of the same width all the way down which can be thin or thick; the Dancing Stroke is when the hand holding the brush ‘dances’ across the paper, creating a wiggly line of various strengths (think of a tree branch); the Leaf Stroke is when the line tapers at either one or both ends (in the shape of a leaf, for example); and finally the Dot Stroke, which is what it says on the tin! This is used to form the markings on petals, feathers, fur etc.



Maggie’s first painting was of a Peony, the Chinese symbol of spring. She loaded her brush with three different shades of red; the first was a pale rose pink up to the ferrule end of the mop, near the stem, then the brush was dipped into Peony Red up to the middle of the mop and finally she dipped just the tip of the brush into Rouge, a very dark red. Using one stroke she created the petals of the peony, shading from deep, deep red at the centre out to pale pink at the edge of the flower. She worked quickly around the bowl of the flower, leaving white paper to form highlights and ensure the flower did not get too heavy.



A second peony was added below the first and then Maggie mixed a slightly darker shade and painted an opening bud to the right – she mentioned that you should always try to have space around the main subjects to create balance in the image.



Maggie sometimes uses watercolour paints for the rich colours as she said the Chinese tube paints are more like gouache in consistency and will not give the transparency required. She mixed greens using Gamboge Yellow and Indigo in various strengths with a touch of Burnt Sienna on the tip of the brush and then painted leaves around the flowers with one stroke of the brush. Stems were added using the same colour plus some dark ink and background leaves were added in a very pale green wash. A drop of red was used to indicate the veins on leaves and where they joined the stem. She also used white acrylic paint then gamboge yellow to create the stamens in the centre of the flower.



Chinese painting often has a small animal added for symbolism and Maggie chose to paint a butterfly, which is a symbol of true love and good luck. This was done with just half a dozen strokes of the brush then a few drops of colour to the wings. Finally Maggie added her name in Chinese characters, choosing where to place it carefully as it becomes part of the finished image, then sealed it with her own 'chop' – a formal seal pressed into paint then onto the paper.

Maggie's second painting was of an eagle on a pine branch. Chinese painters always paint the beak and eye of a bird first, done with the tip of the brush. Following that she loaded a big brush with pale grey ink, then indigo in the middle with very dark ink on the tip and leaning into the brush she did long strokes of the brush to create the back and feathers of the eagle. Details of the feathers were added with the dark tip then she loaded the brush with pale ink and Burnt Sienna for the detail, including the legs, claws and the branch and vegetation. Gamboge Yellow was used to colour the claws, beak and eyes then finally she crumpled up the lower third of the paper (yes, really!), smoothed it out a little then dragged the brush across the wrinkles to create the hills and distant views.



We were very spoilt because Maggie had time to do a third painting of a tiger, a traditional subject in Chinese painting. She had already sketched an outline onto the paper and then proceeded to paint the eyes, nose and mouth first, followed by a strong mix of burnt sienna, raw sienna and black to create the body using a hake brush. Black markings were added whilst the paint was wet so they blended into the body markings. Pink was used for the tongue and nose then a rough background was added along with the obligatory signature and voila! Three great paintings in less than two hours!

