ABOUT PAINT BRUSHES.

ART SCHOOL 99

Paint brushes are made from stiff or soft hairs, which be either natural hairs or synthetic fibers. Soft brushes are ideal for thin paint,which spreads easily, and for detailed work as they form a sharp point which allows for precision painting. Robust, hard brushes are ideal for pushing around thick paint and for creating brush marks in the paint.

**Is natural hair better than synthetic?**  
Modern synthetic brushes are excellent and have the advantage of being cheaper than natural hair. Purists will tell you that no synthetic fiber can beat a [Kolinsky sable](http://painting.about.com/od/artglossaryk/g/definition-Kolinsky-sable.htm), considered the ultimate of soft hairs because of its flexibility and strength, which give an artist great control. They are good for watercolors ONLY. If you're at all squeamish about or ideologically opposed to the sources of natural hair, then synthetic brushes are the way to go.

**What natural hairs are used in paint brushes?**

* **Sable:** The ultimate soft brush is made from the hairs on the tail of a sable marten; these taper naturally, so when they're put into a brush they form a point. Sable brushes are expensive, but are renowned for their softness, flexibility, and fine point. Kolinsky sable from Siberia has traditionally been considered the best hair for watercolor brushes.
* **Squirrel:** Cheaper than sable, squirrel is a soft hair with little spring. Larger squirrel brushes work better than smaller ones because the mass of hairs together gives them support.
* **Hog/bristle:** The ultimate hard brush is made from the hairs on the back of a pig (hog), which are strong yet springy. The bristles have natural split-ends, which increases the amount of paint they hold. Used for oils and acrylics.
*  **Camel:** Brushes labeled 'camel' hair are really made from other types of soft hair. Camel hair is unsuitable for brushes because it's too woolly.
*  **Ox:** Long, strong and springy hair.
*  **Pony:** Coarse hair that doesn't form a good point. Often used in cheaper brushes
*  **Goat:** Lacks spring, but forms a good point. Used in calligraphy and Chinese Brush painting.