

## 12th September 2022 - Maggie Cross – Chinese Brush

As an introduction Maggie explained that Chinese painting began with calligraphy 2000 BC and their art was demonstrated through silks, pottery and bronzes, Chinese has been the only continuous civilisation unlike the Greeks and Romans. Maggie was brought up in post war Hong Kong, learned Cantonese not Mandarin, and at school learned calligraphy before painting.

She explained there are four ingredients, brushes, Ink sticks, an ink stone and paper. Brushes made from animal hair, wolf, rabbit, badger, horse-hair and deer (sable). New brushes are starched and firm, which need to be soaked in warm water to dissolve the protection. Black ink sticks made from ground soot of pine trees, moulded and painted by hand. Ink stones made from scrubbed slate are decorated with carving. The idea is to drop water onto the slate then grind your stick to get a water colour consistency. Their paper is made from the bark of bamboo or grass reeds, is generally absorbent and not sized. For their colours they grind mineral powder in a pestle and mortar. Upon completion of the painting the artist will sign with their symbolic signature and stamp with their own seal in red.



She demonstrated how to hold brushes, between the thumb and first two fingers then deliver, dry brushwork (called flying white) for stem strokes. Leaf strokes taper the line from thin to thick and thin again, side strokes all showed the importance of the absorbent paper. The bearded iris illustration was painted on a silver impregnated paper. The brush needs to 'dance' or 'dab' over the paper to create different densities to illustrate where the petals start and finish, much of art is symbolic, minimalistic rather than realistically following a ridged line.



Much of her loading of fuller headed brushes were by immersing into a pale colour first then putting the tip into a darker colour, up to three colours, thereby delivering fluid colour mix. Some colour minerals generate opaque colours. Her 'cheat' was to use white acrylic ink, powerful and strong (wash brushes quickly), then apply golden yellow over the White.





She managed to complete two paintings and embark on a third during the evening. The second was a Minor bird, (pets owners take into the park in their cages which they hang in the trees to identify with the open air) Scruffy birds they look like they have had a bad hair day, but can talk. She began with the eye and beak, leave bits to the imagination. Black birds with colour in their beaks. Paint birds first on a Lychee tree (a lucky fruit). Opaque red for the fruit and a scarlet tip, using a side brush with strong colour straight from the pot, with veins in indigo to join up the branches.





The final one was of a Tiger, in golden yellow and burnt sienna, using a hake brush on a golden flaked mulberry paper. The black was applied wet on wet to allow the stripes to bleed and run a bit to create fur. Plus, a hint of bamboo plant, a symbol of strength."



Brooke Snell

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