



Utrecht Art Supplies

History: The Impressionist Brushstroke



Image: "Wisteria" by Monet (detail)

Ask the Expert: "The Impressionists are my favorite painters and I have always tried to create this look in my art. I'm fascinated with the way the paint looks in works by Monet, Manet and Renoir. Do you have any advice that would help me get that look for my own paintings?"

A: The Impressionists broke with previous tradition in a number of ways, including how the painted surface was crafted. Unlike earlier artists, the Impressionists deliberately called attention to the surface of the painting through distinct, direct brush marks and a matte finish.

Direct painting was part of the academic tradition from which Impressionism diverged, but with a distinctly different purpose. Unlike the traditional approach to painting in careful, blended sequence, the Impressionist method involved boldly applied, direct strokes without any attempt to disguise the physical surface.

The advent of the metal ferrule (crimped collar) made flat brushes available to the French Impressionists, who used the new tools to create what was called the *tache* brushstroke. *Tache* ("spot", "smudge" or "patch") describes

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separate flecks of color which mix in the viewer's eye to create the impression of light and shade.



Image: "Parc Moneau" by Monet (detail)

The Impressionists also favored a flat, unvarnished appearance for their paintings. In addition to displaying pictures unvarnished, some would also dilute colors with solvent to eliminate shine and create a velvety, matte surface.

To achieve an authentic Impressionist look in your art, try applying short strokes of bright colors without blending on the canvas. Select an assortment of flat, bright and filbert brushes, and use colors straight from the tube or lightly mixed. Instead of mixing complements on the palette to create neutrals, try juxtaposing separate spots of each complement to allow visual mixing in the viewer's eye.

It's best to limit the amount of thinner used alone to dilute colors (too much leads to a weak, powdery film), but a small amount can effectively cut shine. Unvarnished paintings are vulnerable to dust and damage, so rather than avoiding varnish altogether, use Matte Varnish to impart a gloss-free, flat appearance.