Sumi Painting is the art of utmost simplicity, not only in artistic expression but in the equipment it calls for. In comparison with other painting techniques Sumi Painting needs only a few tools which are very simple, but should be the right ones.

In the old days in Japan, artists were proud of possessing and using expensive equipment, because they thought that expensive tools were a great help to their technique. This way of thinking is sometimes correct if the tools match the technique of the artists. It is something like expensive golf clubs for good golfers. The same thing can be said of Sumi Painting. My advice is to have the right tools to suit the user. Just remember that expensive equipment does not necessarily make good painters.

The *sumi* ink stick is usually rectangular in shape and about the size of a finger. There are variations in size, shape and quality. It is made up mainly of carbon and glue. *Sumi* has long been used for writing and painting both in Japan and China. The ink stick usually has some lettering on it showing the trade name it goes by and the name of the manufacturer.

Aged *sumi* is supposed to be good, but old *sumi* sticks crack very easily, especially with present day heating and air conditioning, and in countries with dry climates.

The *sumi* ink stick does not produce ink by itself. It is used together with the *suzuri* ink stone. You need water on the surface of the *suzuri* on which you rub the *sumi* stick to make black ink. Although *sumi* is mostly black, there are a few exceptions such as red *sumi* which is usually used by the master or teacher to correct the mistakes of his pupils.

As for black *sumi* ink, some have brownish tints, some bluish, the latter usually used in Sumi Painting.
Liquid sumi ink is a fairly modern product in Japan and comes in a tube, bottle or can. To use this kind of ink for traditional sumi-e is contrary to the traditional way of thinking. But there is no reason why we should not utilize it to produce traditional art, especially in this day and age, if the situation at hand proves it to be more convenient. This will save you the time and effort to make ink on the suzuri, although you should practice and know how to make ink yourself and get used to using both. You will find it convenient knowing how to use both self-made and ready-made ink. The bokuju comes in both ready-to-use and concentrate consistency, the latter having to be diluted accordingly.

The suzuri is the afore-mentioned ink-rubbing stone. It is black and carved out of a slate-like rock, the usual shape being rectangular. It comes in different sizes, a medium sized one about 3 by 5 inches and about 1/2 inch thick (approx. 7.5 cm. x 12.5 cm. x 1.25 cm.) being sufficient for ordinary use. Surrounded by a shallow rim on three sides is the flat portion on which ink is made by rubbing the sumi ink stick with water. This flat rubbing surface called ‘the land,’ slopes down at the other end to form a deep portion or ink-well called ‘the sea.’ The ‘sea’ end should always be placed away from you. First pour some water into the ink-well and holding your ink vertically with the flat end down, draw up some water to ‘the land.’ Rub your sumi stick with the water to make your ink, rubbing back and forth or in a circular motion. Pick up ink from ‘the land’ with your brush. From time to time water is replenished from the well as needed and the ink stick rubbed accordingly, as the ink on your suzuri should always be kept a dark black. After each use the suzuri should be emptied and rinsed off of excess ink.
Fude (foo day) means brush for both painting and writing, and when I mention a fude brush in this book I, of course, mean a painting brush which is similar in appearance to a writing brush but made differently. Usually a fude brush for painting has a slightly longer bamboo holder than that of a writing brush.

A fude brush is made with the hair of the deer, badger, sheep or other animals.

The head of a new brush is usually protected by a plastic cap. This cap should be thrown away once the brush has been put to use. Do not try to fit it onto the used brush again.

Before using a stiff new brush, rinse it out first in cold water to soften the head, pressing it out a few times. This will dissolve the paste holding the hairs together. Never use hot water with your brush as it will loosen the hairs. Take good care of your brushes being sure to wash them after each use. You may wash your painting brush as many times as you wish, but with some writing brushes the bristles may loosen and drop out of the holder when handled in the same way.

A fude brush should have a sharply pointed tip and the bristles should be flexible. For the beginner, a tsuketate (tsoo kay tah tay) brush is suitable.

The fude is held between thumb and forefinger or thumb and middle finger, and is usually kept perpendicular to the painting surface. The position of the fingers on the brush depends on what is being painted. The following illustrations will help you to paint in the correct way.

1. In most cases hold the brush straight up to draw lines and stokes, except for shaded strokes and wide dry-brush strokes.
2. Hold the upper part of the holder when painting large strokes.
3. Hold the middle part of the holder when painting medium size strokes.
4. Hold the lower part of the holder for detailed work. You may let your little finger steady your hand by keeping it on the paper surface.
**WASHI paper** Sumi painting is usually done on what Westerners call rice paper and what we call washi in Japan. (Actually, there is no such thing as 'rice paper' in Japan.) The name washi means Japanese handmade paper in contrast with Western machine-made paper. There are many different types of handmade paper in Japan, but gasenshi and tōshi are two of the most popular among sumi-e artists.

**SHIKISHI paper board** The shikishi is made with handmade paper such as gasenshi, torinoko, gold or silver paper mounted on cardboard. Of these, I recommend gasenshi for sumi painting. The shikishi is rectangular in shape and comes in several standard sizes, the usual one used for sumi-e measuring 9½ by 10¾ inches (24.3 cm × 27.3 cm).

**Illustration board** When I was living in San Francisco, I found illustration board suitable for painting sumi-e when Japanese paper was not always available. Illustration board is white paper mounted on thick cardboard.

**Newsprint** Newsprint (unprinted newspaper) is inexpensive paper that can be found in any country and is good for practicing sumi painting. You can also practice on old newspapers.

**EGINU silk** Sumi-e is also painted on eginu (ay gee noo) silk which means silk for painting. It is usually sized to make painting on it easy. When using eginu for painting, you must stretch it first on a frame similar to stretching canvas for oil painting.

![Edges pasted onto frame](image)

**FUDGE-ARAI** (water well)

The fude-arai is the water well that holds water for washing out the brush, also for thinning sumi ink on the brush. Those sold commercially are circular or rectangular in shape with compartments, come in various sizes, and are usually made of white china. However, you may use any deep bowl or cup for this purpose.
The *sara* is a small white dish which is used as a palette for testing the color of ink or for thinning the ink for different tones. Although sold commercially in plain and fancy shapes and various sizes, any dish, preferably white, is fine. You will find a saucer good for this purpose.

The *fu-de-fuki* or brush wiper is absorbent cotton material used to soak up excess water on the brush or to wipe the brush on. Old towels are fine. Large pieces should be cut to convenient size and folded into “a pad.” When you do not have appropriate material on hand, you may use facial tissues for a substitute.

When you paint on paper, place the *bunchin* weight near the top edge so that the paper will not move while painting. Anything heavy will do. Even a fairly large stone wrapped in paper is sufficient, the latter to cover any rough surfaces or sharp edges. Commercially made *bunchin* come in various shapes and sizes, some quite artistic. Narrow rectangular shapes are very common.

A sheet of felt or flannel should be placed under the painting paper so that any excess moisture will be absorbed.

As mentioned previously, basically *sumi* painting is done in black *sumi* ink only but watercolors are often used together with *sumi* brush strokes, at which time it is called *tansai sumi* painting. For instance, flower petals can be painted in color and all other parts with black *sumi* ink. This kind of painting is the *tansai sumi-e*.

Although there are typical Japanese watercolors for Japanese-style paintings, you may use any watercolor which is used for Western-style watercolor painting. Either colors in tubes or in cake-form are fine. Japanese watercolors do have some shades which differ slightly in tone and which you may be tempted to call something like ‘persimmon red’ or ‘oriental blue.’
Position of Equipment

1. Sara
2. Sara
3. Fude-arai
4. Sumi
5. Suzuri
6. Fude
7. Bunchin
8. Paper
9. Fude-fuki
10. Mōsen

Left-handers may reverse the positions.
Lesson 2 - Basic Techniques
Lesson 1

In Lesson 1, you learned that with just one touch of your brush, you could draw a simple outline. Now, let's start with your main lines. Let us study shading a bit further.

Use a clean brush with clean water, lightly tapping off the excess water on your faucet. Your brush, of course, contains only water at this point. Next, add light color ink to some of your brush, then pick up that color ink.

Only water

Basic Painting Techniques
Lesson 1 — *Unpitsu*

○ How to control your brush

(1) Dark color

(2) Light color

(3) *KASURE*

(4) *NIJIMI*

(5) *BOKASHI*

All of the preceding lines were painted by holding the brush straight up, painting from left to right. If left-handed, you may of course reverse the order and paint from right to left. (The following numbers coincide with those above.)

(1) Use dark color ink.

(2) Pick up dark color ink on the tip of your brush and transfer it onto a dish. Add some water to it with your brush to make light color ink.

(3) Make medium color ink by adding a little bit of water to dark ink on your dish. Pick up the medium color ink with the tip of your brush, wiping off the excess ink on your * fluoride-fuki* cloth. Use this dry brush to draw the *KASURE* (kah soo ray) line.

(4) Dip your brush into the water, take off some of the excess water on your * fluoride-fuki* cloth and pick up dark color ink. Use this wet brush to draw the *NIJIMI* (nee jee mee) line.

(5) Wash your brush with water. Wipe off excess water on your * fluoride-fuki* and pick up dark color ink only at the tip of your brush. Remember, black ink is **only at the tip**. Draw the *BOKASHI* shaded line from left to right.

After practicing these lines horizontally, continue practicing them vertically from top to bottom. Remember that between the dark and light tones, the grades of color are actually infinite.
In Lesson 1 you learned that with just one touch of your brush, you could draw a shaded line showing both dark and light tones. Let us study shading a bit further.

First, wash your brush with clean water, lightly patting off the excess water on your *fude-fuki*. Your brush, of course, contains only water at this point. Next, add light color ink to half of your brush, then pick up dark color ink on the tip.

Hold the brush slanted or almost flat against the paper, and draw straight or curved strokes.
First—light color ink

Next—pick up dark color

(1) Apply light color ink to the entire brush.
(2) Pick up dark color ink at the tip.
(3) Use the brush slanted or almost flat against the paper painting from bottom to top for the bamboo trunk. (Bamboo will be explained in detail on pages 26-35.)
Lesson 3 - Men-gaki

- How to fill in flat areas such as the sky

Using your brush flat or slanted, draw a wide stroke with the same speed from the beginning to the end. Repeat this stroke immediately alongside the previous one. Do not wait long in between, otherwise the moisture from both strokes will not spread out and join, making two separate strokes instead.

Try not to overlap the second stroke too much as it will make a very dark portion.

Keep adding as many strokes as necessary depending on the size of the area you wish to fill in.
Lesson 4 - *Nō-tan*

- Darkness and lightness: contrast in tone

*Nō* means dark, and *tan* light. A *sumi* painting consists of a variety of *nō* and *tan*. For example, even a single tree leaf looks artistic when it shows both *nō* and *tan*.

In just one stroke you can show *nō-tan* using the shaded stroke.

You can also produce *nō-tan* by adding dark color ink over light or medium color ink strokes. In this case, add dark color ink immediately after the light or medium color stroke is drawn while it is still wet. Otherwise, the dark color will stand out by itself, not blending in with the lighter tone.

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**Light color**

**Dark ink added**
Nō-tan is also shown in the kasure or nijimi strokes.

Remember the differences:

*KASURE* is made with a dry brush or with speedy movement and has a lacy effect.

*NIJIMI* is made with much moisture on your brush and has a blurred effect.
Lesson 5 - *Ten*

- Dots

Bird's eye (just press)

Beak

Grain

Pine cone

Narrow leaves

You can also produce *d-* *ten* by adding dark color ink or light or medium color ink strokes. In this case, add dark color ink immediately after the light or medium color stroke is made. The dark color will superimpose the lighter tone.
Examples for Practice
Bamboo (A)

Hold your brush straight up. Paint the branch first with light color ink, then each leaf from its base to its tip.
Bamboo (B) on a Fine Day

Trunk—First take up light color ink on your brush, then pick up dark color only at the tip.

1. Press brush, pull downwards and lift off.
2. Press, push upwards and press again.
3. Press, push upwards and lift off.
Nodes—Use dark color ink. Holding your brush straight up, draw the nodes at the base of each section.

Branches—Use light color ink. Hold your brush straight up.

Small nodes—Use dark color ink.

Leaves—The order to draw is from the top leaf down to the bottom one. Each leaf is painted from the base at the branch to the tip. Use dark color ink which will gradually get lighter as you work down. If you must replenish your ink, use medium or light tone accordingly.
Bamboo (C) in the Rain

The shape of the leaves is enough to suggest rain without actually painting it. The order of drawing is the same, from the dark colored leaves to the light ones.
Bamboo (D) in the Rain

(1) Again, branches are painted first, holding your brush straight up. Draw from the bottom, working up to the top, just as the bamboo grows.
(2) Leaves are painted from the dark colored ones to the lighter.

The bamboo is one of the trio of auspicious trees symbolizing happiness. The other two are the pine and the plum.
Bamboo (E) in the Wind

The contrast in color shows the difference in distance, the lighter colored leaves being blown farther away. Paint the leaves with the speed of the wind.
Bamboo (F) in the Rain (advanced)

Imagine yourself in the rain as you paint, drawing the leaves with the speed of falling rain.
Impression of Bamboo in the Rain (very advanced)

This is the deformation of bamboo leaves for advanced study. After your primary studies, you may paint your impression of any subject in deformative style.