Dear Decorative Painter:

Just as it took practice to learn how to separate eggs or sew a straight seam, side load floating will also take practice to master. Be patient with yourself as you go through this process. You will be rewarded for your efforts!

Most side loading instructions begin the same: “Dip the corner of the brush into paint.” However, after that, most people are left to their own devices with words like “blend” and “stroke”. I’ve watched countless students brush back and forth on their palette paper until the bulk of the paint is ON the palette and NOT in the bristles. The result is a float that is dry, often choppy and certainly lacking enough paint and moisture to go the distance on your surface.

**Step 1:** Designate three flat brushes (#12, #16 and #20) as FLOATING brushes. Do not use them for anything except applying floats to your work. They must be free of all paint residue and have crisp chisel edges. Condition your water by adding one drop of DecoArt Easy Float for every one ounce of clean water in your basin.

**Step 2:** Draw a line on your palette paper as long as your brush is wide.

The illustration shows a ¾” flat brush. I have drawn a vertical reminder line ¾” long on my palette. THIS will be the space in which you blend the paint into and across your bristles! NOT across the entire palette!

**Step 3:** Dip your brush into the CLEAN water and hold the bristles and ferrule flat against the paper towel until you see the shine leave the bristles. Do not dab the brush up and down.

**Step 4:** Dip only the very corner of your brush into the paint

NEXT comes the important part . . . . . . .

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In acrylic painting a “float” is the application of transparent color that graduates in intensity from transparent dark color, to transparent medium color to barely visible color and ends with clear water.
Step 5: Begin the blending process by stroking your brush on the right side of the reminder line on your palette. **Remain in the same spot** and pull down from the top of the line to the end of the line. **This is your blending area.**

If you use the entire palette as your blending area (and many people do) you are leaving the paint on the palette instead of loading it into the bristles.

Be sure that **ALL** the bristles are on the palette as you stroke. Usually after 6 to 8 strokes, the paint will begin to move AWAY from your bristles and cross over the line moving towards the left. Continue to stroke your brush but move it **slightly to the left**, almost like chasing your paint across the guide line. Make sure **all** the bristles touch the palette. It is the water in the brush that helps to pull the paint into and across the bristles.

**PLEASE NOTE:** I LIFTED UP MY BRUSH AT EACH STEP SO YOU CAN SEE THE PAINT ON THE PALETTE!

Step 6: After a few strokes, flip your brush over so the painted corner is to the left of the line. Begin vertical (up and down) **stroking towards the line** and your bristles will pick up the paint and move it across the brush. Now you’re “chasing the paint” as it moves from the **left side of the line towards the right.**

Repeat steps 5 & 6 until you see that the paint has traveled **halfway across** and **almost half way** up the brush hairs. You’ll be shocked to see that almost no paint remains on the palette paper. That means it’s in your brush and ready to be floated on your surface.

Tips:
- It’s called Floating, (not ironing) so use a very light touch as you apply the color loaded brush to your surface.
- Make sure all the bristles are flat on the surface so the paint can FLOAT on the clean water in the brush.
- If the paint has traveled too far across the bristles or you are getting a tinted water line, dip your brush in the water basin. Don’t swish it in the water – just dip and remove. Then lay it on the paper towel until the shine leaves the bristles. Take a few test strokes on your palette. (Stroke along the reminder line) Chances are you have enough paint remaining in the bristles to create your float.
- Your goal is to create a transparent application of color. Transparent floats can be repeated on your surface until you achieve a noticeable transition in color and create an effective value change.
- **REMEMBER!** Your blending area on the palette should be no bigger than the brush is wide. (see step 5)
- Do NOT rush the blending process. You will flip your brush from side to side several times in order to move the paint across the bristles. I have my students hum the Jeopardy final question tune. Everyone chuckles, but it reminds you not to rush the process!
Things to think about:

• You might be surprised to learn that using a slightly bigger brush gives you more room to create a graduated color change and leave room for clean water in the brush.
• When you try to control the color you have loaded by stroking the brush up and down the entire length of the palette (as many of us do) all you’re doing is painting your palette! The bulk of the paint and water have been left on the palette – there is not enough remaining in your brush to create a long, smooth float. The result will be a rough, choppy narrow float.
• Teaching your hand to blend in such a narrow area will take practice! (see Step 5)
• If the bristles of your brush do not create a sharp, chisel edge, there is dried paint in the ferrule. No one can create a good float with a bad brush! ALWAYS clean your brush thoroughly at the conclusion of your practice. I use DS3 DecoArt brush cleaner.
• Remember, it’s called PRACTICE! So, practice!

Need more Encouragement?

• E-mail me at fruitpainter@gmail.com