

Sumi-e Black Ink Painting



Although, “Sumi-e” is the Japanese phrase for black ink painting, this type of monochromatic painting has been practiced in every Asian country for centuries. Originally, only the most educated scholars were allowed to paint in this style. It took years to master the brush strokes.

There are 4 “tools” used in Sumi-e, which are referred to as The Four Treasures.

- *The Ink Stick* is made from black soot and glue
- *The Ink Stone* is a small shallow stone plate over which the ink stone is ground to make a fine powder. There is a shallow depression at one end to hold water.
- *The Brush* handle is always made of bamboo. The brush hairs can come from rabbit, horse, cattle or deer. Different brushes are used for different brush strokes.
- *The Paper* is made from rice. It is very absorbent and does not allow for making any corrections once the ink has been applied.

There are 4 different brush strokes used in Sumi-e called The Four Gentlemen.

- Orchid-happy spirit
- Bamboo- strength
- Plum tree- hope
- Chrysanthemum- sturdiness

When the art work is completed, the artist signs his work using an *inkan* (Japanese) or *chop* (Chinese). This is a stone ink stamp that is carved at one end with the artist’s unique “signature” and pressed in red ink.