



Q & A – June 2021
by Laurie J. McNeil
WildfowlCarvingStudio.com

Randy Nokes asks:

Thank you, do you have best practice methods in painting, what are your favorite brushes?

First, I will address your question on my favorite brushes. I have a video on my YouTube Channel talking about brushes and their uses, a talk I gave at the Minnesota Decoy & Wildfowl Carving Club.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qre1wR4zh6I&list=PLqqdXxbNcNq5tTht4DvqA4g6xWLCyRki&index=10>

Isabey 6168 Filberts Sizes 2-4-6-8-10-12 (Acrylics and Oils) (DickBlick.com)

These are great when they are brand new, for feather layouts. They create a feathered back edge in many sizes with one stroke. After they lose the filbert shape, they can be repurposed for other painting jobs like applying iridescence, tinting, and base coats. A little further along in their lifetime they become great blending and stippling brushes.



<https://www.dickblick.com/products/isabey-pure-kolinsky-sable-brushes/>



Raphael – 8403 Sizes 0-1-2-3 (Acrylics and Oils) These are great detail brushes used for vermiculation and splits when they are brand new. They have a springy feel to them and they hold a lot of paint, saving trips back to the palette to load the brush. The natural bristles hold on to the paint and deliver it to the surface differently than any other brushes, letting go of just the right amount of paint when painting. This makes them a favorite among the masters. After their fine tips are worn down, they can be repurposed for other jobs like painting spots and other detail.



<https://www.dickblick.com/products/raphael-kolinsky-red-sable-brushes/>

Royal Majestic Monogram (Round) Sizes 00 & 000 (Acrylics)

The Summer Oldsquaw was painted using one of these to paint in the individual barbs of each feather. They are very affordable and keep their point even when painting on a textured decoy surface.

https://artistpaintbrush.com/NEW-Royal-Mini-Majestic-Brushes_c_377.html

Royal Majestic Filberts Sizes 2-4-6-8-10-12 (Acrylics)

These are great for laying in very small individual feathers and blending. Also affordable, and stand up to use on a textured surface.

https://artistpaintbrush.com/ROYAL-MAJESTIC-FILBERT-BRUSH--ARTIST-PAINT-BRUSH--R4170-10_p_3198.html

Natural Bristle Filberts (For Sealing and for Base Coats)

These are hog hair or horse hair brushes used for applying sealer and base coats.

<https://www.dickblick.com/products/blick-masterstroke-interlocking-bristle-brushes/>

Various brushes at different stages of their lifetime...



Best Painting Practices:

1. Use good quality brushes appropriate for the task.
2. Use fresh paints and mediums. I have encountered near disaster results using old Grumbacher Turpentine in the can, and I have also had the remainder of Grumbacher Turpentine in the newer clear plastic bottle turn yellow 9 months opening it, so I had to throw it. Rule of thumb for me, a new bottle of Grumbacher Turpentine for each project when painting in oils.

Another disappointment has been when I have lost sight of how old my acrylic paint and mediums are. I started dating the paints and the mediums when I buy them, just so I know how old they are. Time flies faster than we think it does.

3. Have enough product on hand before you begin painting. If you lose sight of how much product you have available for a project, running out can be a real hassle. It is important to check how much paint and medium you have on hand, and how old they are before you start painting. Like when you are carving. Are the paints still viable? Acrylic paint will dry the paint INSIDE the tube and bottle walls and around the tube opening and bottle tops.

It's easier with tube paint to prevent them from drying out. Simply squeezing the excess air out of the tube before capping it, keeps it from drying out inside. With bottles, the paint will settle with the pigment settling to the bottom and the liquid vehicle used, separating to the top of the product. If it shakes and you feel a solid shaking in the bottle, throw it away. It will never mix back up to the consistency it was when it was new.

One way to check your older acrylic paints in the bottle is to take a long stick, like a kebob skewer, remove the bottle cap and poke all the way down to the bottom of the bottle. If you find a layer of solids, pretty good chance you aren't going to have a good experience trying to paint with product that old. Best to buy new. During the times between painting, it is a good idea to shake up all of your bottles, from time to time, to help them remain viable for the next time.

4. Don't contaminate your mediums in their containers, pour the amount needed to paint with or to clean up with, into a separate container. This keeps paint and other contaminants from your painting mediums, turpentine, and lacquer thinner.

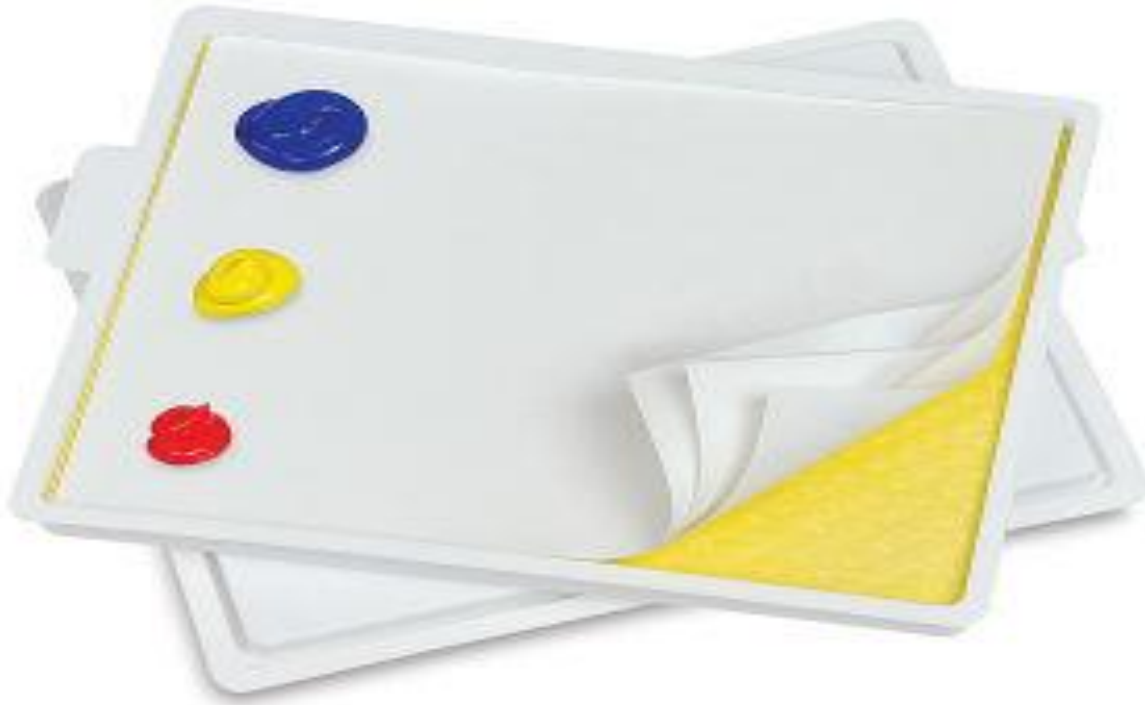
5. Always use a palette knife to mix paint on your palette. Never use your brushes. Brushes are for painting. Many think palette knives are used only for applying loads of paint onto a canvas. Not the case. Palette knives are a great tool.



6. Palettes. Depends upon oils or acrylics.

For acrylics I use the [Masterson Handy Palette](https://amzn.to/3iU6d0f). It's got a small foot print, stores my mixed paint for weeks if necessary, keeping it the same as when you left it the day before, the week before, even the month. Save a ton of paint and time, for not having to constantly remix your acrylic paints.

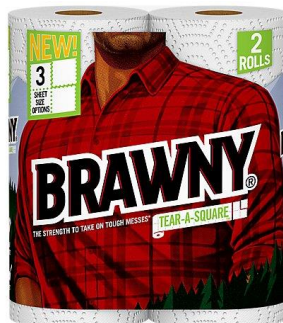
<https://amzn.to/3iU6d0f>



For oils I use a clear glass pie plate for paint, and a second one of the same size to cover the palette when not in use.

7. I find the best consistency for paint, oils or acrylics is that of half and half. By creating a puddle of paint on the palette in the right consistency, I can easily go back to with my brush for reloading of paint over long periods of time.

8. Use a good quality paper towel. I like Brawney brand it has no lint, there are other brands more expensive that are lint-less. My big thing is the "Select-a-Size" so I use only half a paper towel at a time. There are also quartered Brawney towels, "Tear-a-Square", but they are more expensive and more difficult to find.



WildfowlCarvingStudio.com



9. Employ a Lazy-Susan. Rubbermaid makes really good plastic versions; I have many of these in different sizes. These can also be found at secondhand stores like Goodwill. I have a 20" wooden, two 18" and three 12" Rubbermaid. The smaller Rubbermaids are double decker if you choose to use that feature.



10. Work in a well-lit area. Whether you prefer natural light from outside, or artificial light from bulbs (incandescent, compact florescent, florescent) whatever flips your switch, have enough light to see what you are doing. I like swing-arm lamps, one on either side of my work areas, painting or carving, because I can adjust them to get into those hard to see areas that occur in carving and painting.

11. Work cleanly. I keep my work area neat and organized. Paper towels within reach. Trash can within reach. Organize your paint, tubes or bottle, in an order which make sense to you. For me, you will see I line my paints up by color on the color wheel.

12. With acrylics, DecoArt Traditions, I basically use 12 colors to create all the colors used in my painting. I like to have my paint bottles lined up, left to right, in this order Dioxazine Purple, Ultramarine Blue, Cadmium Red, Hansa Yellow, Titanium White, Warm White, Yellow Oxide, Burnt Sienna, Raw Sienna, Burnt Umber, Raw Umber, Carbon Black. Always keeping the colors I am using, in the same order makes grabbing the color I need, easy and within reach. With these 12 colors, I can create any color I need, with the exception of iridescence.



13. Iridescence. When I paint in acrylics, I use the Chroma Airbrush Paint - Interference colors, in combination with the DecoArt Traditions colors on my palette, they mix well. When I paint in oils, I use Interference Powder, mixing it sparingly, into the color I am painting on my palette. In either acrylics or oils, several light passes are much better than one heavy pass. Too much iridescence can make your bird look like it could glow in the dark. Less is always better when using interference paints in your painting.



14. Save the whitest white like titanium white, for highlights and the darkest black, like carbon black, for shadows in the painting final steps.

Do you paint oil or acrylic paints and why?

When I burn this finely, I paint in oils. The sealer I use Teekay's is watery thin and soaks into the surface of the wood. Because of this, with oils very little detail is lost because the paint is also penetrating the surface of the wood. Achieving base colors is more like staining, because the paint is absorbed into the surface of the wood.

Using acrylics, it is unavoidable, detail **IS** going to be filled in. It's more a matter of planning for that. When you paint with water-based acrylics, it is important to completely seal the surface of the wood so water will not penetrate and ruin the fine wood burning you spent hours on.

It will take several coats of sealer completely seal the surface of your decorative piece. Then so the sealed surface will accept the paint, it is important to prime it with Gesso which also helps to achieve a soft matte look in your painting (decorative or smoothie) applying enough layers to achieve even coverage. Usually, 3-5 thin passes will do it.

With all of the layers spelled out above, (6-10) this doesn't even include the paint. If you have not accounted for this by texturing and burning accordingly, all of the hours of detail will be filled in. This is why I choose to go with oils on a finely burned decorative piece.

Gene Bach asks:

"Can you explain how you make the tiny little feather lines on the heads?"

When I create individual barbs within the feathers, it is important to have a plan, a layout drawn in to follow. I begin at the front, with the smallest feathers. I start the first burn line at the base of the feather. As I reach the end of the feather, I end the barb by twisting the burning tip to the right to bring the barb to a point on one side. The next burn line, also started at the base of the feather, but this time twist the burning tip to the left and close the point at the tip of the last burn line. Now you have one barb. Remember not to burn too deep. Feathers barbs are connected by interweaving with the barb next to it, so keep that in mind when burning.

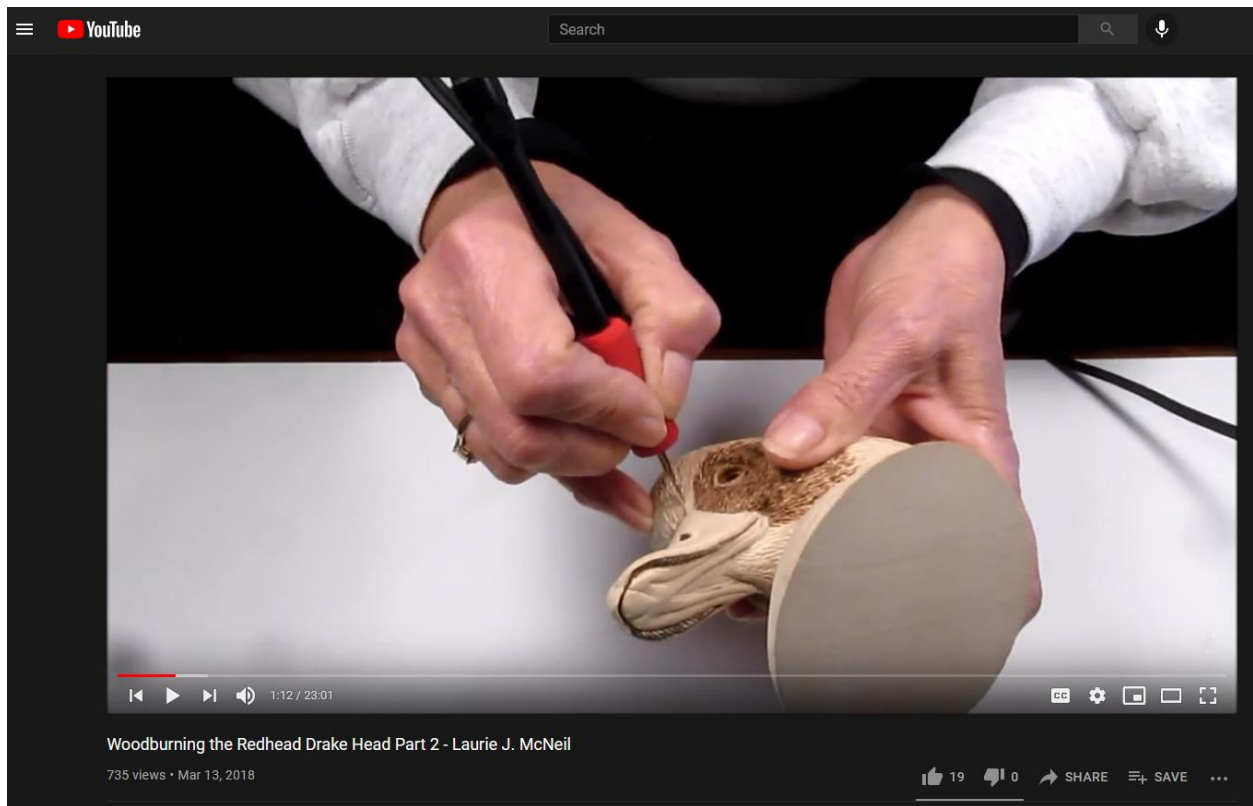
I have a video showing how to end feather barbs on YouTube...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX6ghIqzCGo&list=PLqqdXxbNcNq5tTht4DvqA4g6xWLCyRki&index=84>



And the Texturing and Burning a Redhead Drake Head video series also shows first hand, how I burn those fine feathers in on a head. Here's the link to the playlist of 46 videos demonstrating from start to finish.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqqqdXxbNcNr4zsrS6KPnTVEayxwnHPdh>



Randy Nokes asks:

“What bits do you use for power carving or texturing?”

Carving both tupelo and butternut here.

-Roughout 1/2" x 1 3/4" Karbide Kutzall (sleeve on foam) 1/4" shank. I have both medium coarse and Fine grits.

For harder tupelo the Extreme (Very Coarse) Kutzalls are awesome and clear the wood quickly, in both tapered and ball nose work well for my needs.



WildfowlCarvingStudio.com



Then to clean up bandsaw marks, before rough out, and the scarring roughout leaves on the surface, I like to use bud shaped carbide cross-cutters, some refer to them as stump cutters. These are available from GregDorrance.com and other woodcarving suppliers. These work excellent and remove the scarring left behind from the bandsaw and rough out bits. They leaving a nice clean surface without having to sand. Good enough to draw some good detail on with a pencil. These are also great for quick overall wood removal.

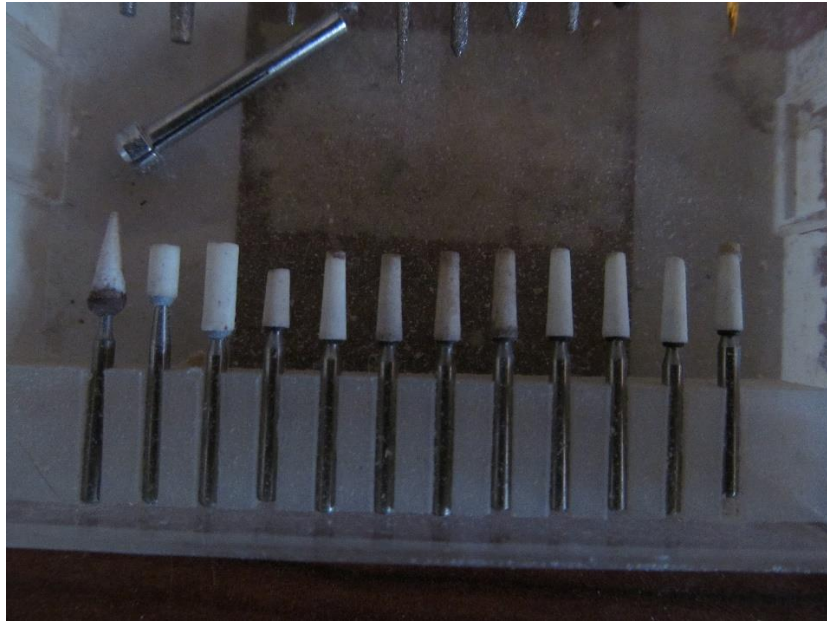
When it comes to carving in the fine detail, I like a long-tapered diamond flame 3/32", also available at GregDorrance.com. I use diamond spheres of various sizes to custom fit glass eyes.



Also have a set of 1/16" diamonds for carving small things like hummingbirds and other very fine details.



For texturing I use a white aluminum oxide tapered cone in both 3/32" and 1/16" shafts to create feather texture.



Do you also use hand tools and if so which ones?

For carving, I am strictly power. No hand tools.

NOTES: