

GRIP

6 ESSENTIAL TOOLS
FOR
GLASS PAINTING
AND HOW YOU HOLD THEM
SO THEY WORK WONDERS
FOR YOU

WILLIAMS & BYRNE
THE GLASS PAINTER'S METHOD

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Foreword

Another time - it will be soon, I promise you - we'll talk together about *techniques* like how to trace or shade or highlight, how to mix a perfect lump of glass paint, or all the different ways there are of using *silver stain* to transform your work as you see her:



Today though, let's start at the beginning and consider how best we hold the 6 essential tools.

Once you grip them right, you'll find these tools will serve you long and well.

So, working backwards from just before you fire your painted glass, we have:

#6 the stick or scrub for highlighting, and then

#5 the tracing brush,

#4 the bridge,

#3 the badger blender, and

#2 the large Ron Ranson hake.

Which bring us to the unsung hero at position number #1.

I mean of course:

Your palette knife

On Facebook and Twitter, you'll find glass painters who post photos of their fancy-looking brushes:



These brushes might seem impressive, but actually it's the palette knife which does the dirty, necessary work.

I don't simply mean the dirty work *before* you paint, but *while* you paint and also *after*.

Before, during *and* after it's your knife with which you mix your paint and organise your palette.

No brush could ever do this work.

And if you ever have to choose between a fine tracing brush and a good strong knife, I hope you'll always choose the knife.

Fact is, unless your paint is well-mixed and your palette organised to start with, your tracing brush can't win.

Unlike the knife, a tracing brush can't change bad paint into good. Your tracing brush is not a magic wand: it uses what you give it.

So feed it *well-mixed* paint, and even a quite ordinary cheap tracing brush will work miracles for you.

That's why, for glass paint mixed with water and gum Arabic, you must begin with a pair of sturdy palette knives like the ones which you see here:



The handle is solid enough for your hand to grip securely; the blade is strong and wide enough for your index finger to push down hard on it when you're grinding and reviving paint.

See here how it's the *flat* side of the blade you use to grind:



And make no mistake: you do push hard. This is how you get your paint smooth so you can trace or shade with it. Indeed you push so hard you often bend the blade:



And when you do this, you'll feel the pressure right through your wrist and forearm. Indeed, if you don't exert yourself now, your paint will dry before you have a chance to work with it. It's got to be tiring.

A bit less tiring is when you use the *edge* of your blade to push and scrape paint from one area of your palette to another.

You'll need time to get used to this particular grip and action because, to be efficient, you want to come down low so that you can push and sweep your paint about with the full length of your knife's edge, which almost scrapes your knuckles:



I've prepared a short video for you where you see both movements: sometimes pushing down with the *flat* of the blade, sometimes sweeping and scraping with the full length of the *edge*.

When you grind paint and organise your palette, you're always swapping from one position to the other like you [see in this video](#).

And now before we talk about how you grip the next essential tool, I'll explain why you need two knives not one.

It's because paint *sticks*.

And sometimes, especially when you're mixing paint or tidying up, it's helpful when you have a second blade which you can use to scrape and clean the first:



Moving on, the next essential tool we'll discuss is:

Your hake brush



You use the hake brush - the [Ron Ranson](#) brand (large size) is wonderful - to lay down a wash of light paint over the whole surface of your glass.



This wash, once dry, is what you mostly paint on, rather than bare glass. (And if you're wondering why we recommend you do this, you'll find some reasons [here](#).)

Here's a photo from the front:



And here's one from the side:



So thumb and index finger in front, the middle finger tucked behind. This grip, particularly when you use just the tip to apply paint to your glass - the tip, not the full length of the hairs: notice how upright I hold the hake: it's nearly vertical - this grip ensures your wash goes down as evenly as possible.

All the same, you'll probably leave brush-marks in the paint. Which brings us to the badger blender and how you hold it.

The badger blender

So the glass painter employs a flat, wide badger blender like one of these:



This blender's chief function is to remove brush-marks from the initial wash so that, when that wash is dry, it's good for you to trace on and do whatever else you wish.

Now your only opportunity to remove these brush-marks is while that initial wash remains wet.

Which isn't long, especially during summer.

And the beginner's mistake is, he is too timid.

Actually, you must be bold.

There's no point at all in gently twitching your blender like you would a feather duster: if you just twitch, the chances are your wash will dry before you make it smooth.

Here, as with all tools, the right grip helps you because it gives you confidence. See next photo.



What often happens is you sweep from the elbow. I'll explain. So first of all I want you imagine you have a feather-duster in your hand:



... and now please twitch your wrist like you want to dust a precious vase: please do this now. So this is “twitching”. This is “feather-dusting”. And sometimes - yes, *sometimes* - this is how you use the blender. I'm sure you feel how much you move your wrist.

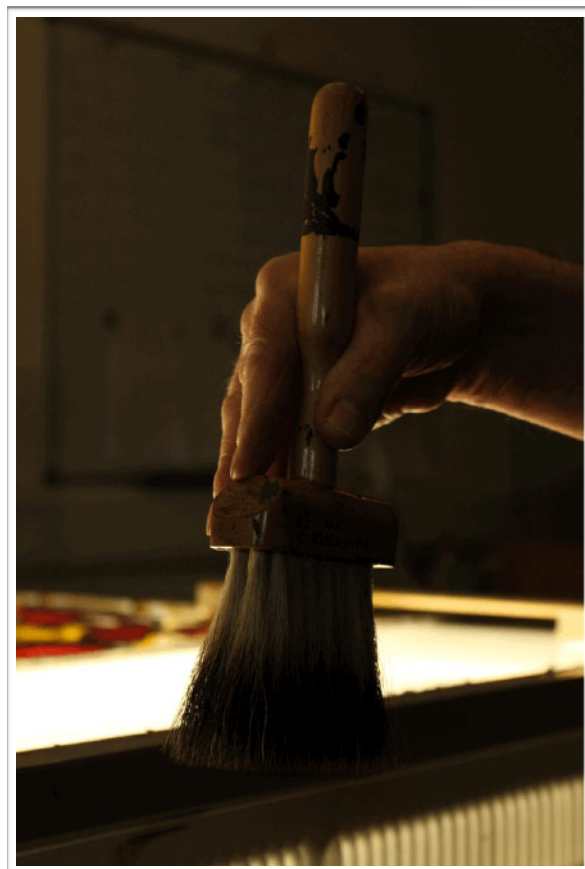
But often, maybe mostly, what you do with a badger blender is very different: you move your forearm to and fro. Please do this now - so put down the imaginary feather-duster, pick up an imaginary table-tennis bat, and, rather than twitching, practise some imaginary back-hand strokes instead:



So keep your elbow steady, a little distance from your side, and move your forearm away from you, then back, then away from you again, and so forth: an even sweeping movement. And this particular grip here will really help you:



... because this grip will encourage you move your forearm (rather than just your wrist).



Furthermore, unlike when you twitch-and-dust, moving your forearm makes sure you have a clear line of vision to the wash you're blending smooth: your hand gets out the way, so you can see where next to blend or whether you should stop now.



I've put a second video over [here](#) - you'll see kind of the sweeping movement I mean. Now please don't get me wrong: certainly, you move your wrist, and you also move your fingers.

The point is, your *forearm* also moves.

Indeed, your whole *body* moves.

You see, your mission is to remove brush-marks from the wash before it dries, and the only way to do this is to sweep the blender this way and that from whatever angle the circumstances (i.e. those brush-marks left by your hake) demand.

You can see this happening - and also how to hold the hake - [right here](#).

So, to remove marks left by your hake, you're unlikely to succeed with timid twitching.

But confident, vigorous sweeping *will* help you win the day, especially when it comes to larger bits of glass like you see here:



And now you let your paint dry.

And now you must beware.

Because until you fire it in a kiln, everything you do is fragile. A careless finger can ruin a morning's work. Goodness! I've seen it ruin a day's work. I've even seen it ruin a week's.

Therefore you must now find a way to lift your hand away from the unfired paint.

Exactly: whether working with a tracing brush or a highlighting stick, from now on you'll need that tool we glass painters call a bridge or arm-rest.

Your bridge



You use the bridge to support and guide your working hand:



How you hold it - indeed, whether you hold your bridge at all - depends on whether you're *applying* or *removing* paint.

You *apply* paint with one of those fancy-looking tracing brushes we saw earlier (but only when your knife has done its work):



You *remove* paint - i.e. make highlights - with a scrub or stick:



This brings us to an important difference:

- You rarely push a *brush* so hard it moves the glass you're working on, and anyway its hairs are soft;
- It's very different when you highlight - a *stick* or *scrub* is hard, and then you also push hard, because you want to cut through paint.

So when you trace, you hold the bridge:



And when you highlight, you find a way to hold the glass:

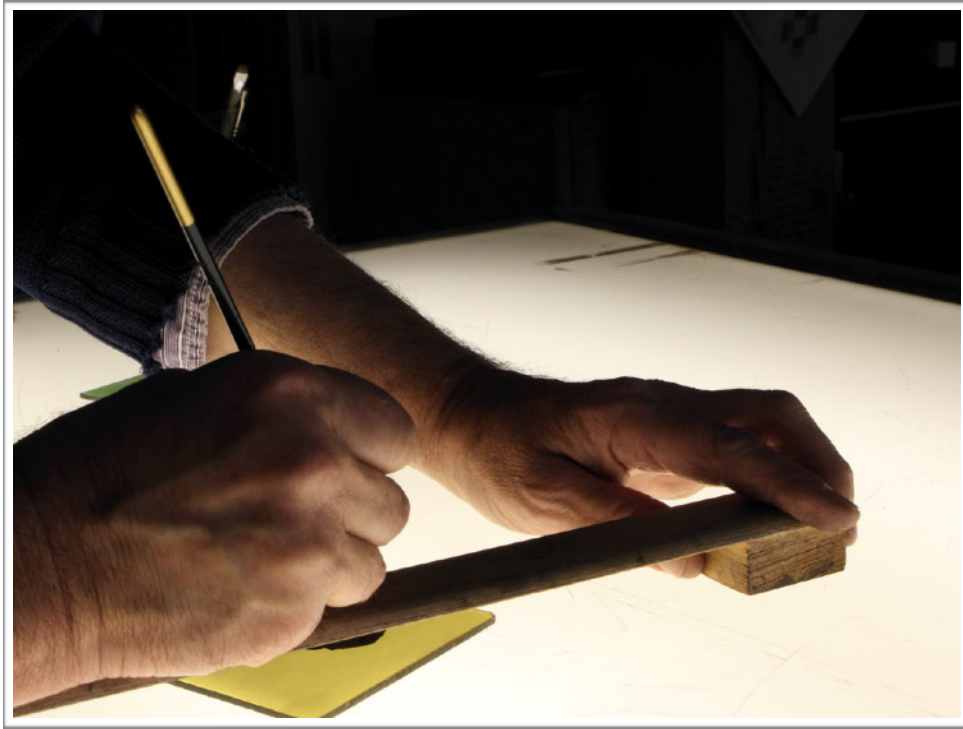


The bridge-when-tracing and how you hold a tracing brush while painting

There's no right or wrong answer here. You just have two objectives:

1. You want to guide your hand and prevent it from trembling;
2. You want to stop the bridge from toppling over (much like a ladder will topple over if you reach too far).

So you can hold your bridge at the far end:



Or you can hold it at the bottom:



If you hold it at the bottom, you can wrap your fingers underneath it like you see in the next photo:



This means you can quickly move it where you want and so continue tracing at a steady pace.

Incidentally, you may find it helps to fasten sticky pads like these:



... to your bridge's two feet: this way it's quieter when you move the bridge around.

Meanwhile, your bridge and mine will be different heights, as will my work-bench and yours, my light-box and yours: as indeed will you and I ourselves (I am 5 feet 11 and 3/8 inches tall).

And our fingers will be different lengths.



So it's best I simply show you how I hold *my* tracing brush: it's largely common sense, because it's similar to how I hold a pen or pencil *with one exception* which I'll come to straight away:



The exception is (though I generalise again), when working from a bridge, you extend and retract the fingers which hold your brush *more often* than you do when working with a pen

or pencil. This is because, when you're on a bridge, you're higher up - there's a larger area you can work within than when your hand is resting on paper.

Also, a pen or pencil tip is hard, a brush's hairs are soft. So, when you use a brush to trace, you extend (push down) to form a thick line, you retract to paint with just the tip and make a fine line:



So take a pen or pencil. And, in the air, practise how you use thumb, index finger and middle finger to extend and retract.

Extend:



And then retract:



That's what you'll do a lot of when working with the bridge and tracing brush. Just be sure you don't extend too far and cause the bridge to topple over.

One last point about how to grip the tracing brush:

How you hold a tracing brush when loading it with paint

When tracing, you tend to hold your brush close to the ferrule:



When loading it with paint however, it's often easier if your hand climbs higher up the shaft:



The reason is, held higher up like this, you'll find it easier to swirl and twirl your brush, which loads it.

Then, once loaded, your hand moves down the shaft again and holds it near the ferrule, which gives you more control:



It's obvious when you think about it: your position depends on what you want the tool to do - paint a line, or load your brush. Watch this 30-second video [here](#). You'll see the difference.

The bridge-when-highlighting and how you hold a stick or scrub or needle

Because you use a hard object to push down hard and highlight - i.e. cut through dry, unfired paint - you have to find a way to stop your unfired painted glass from moving, because this could ruin the mark you want to make: a wobbly, scratchy highlight is horrible to see.

You either hold the glass with your other hand like you see here:



Or you secure the glass with black Plasticine - children's modelling dough. (See next photo.)



(Melted beeswax is traditional. It smells wonderful, is well-suited to the cooler English weather, but takes longer to apply and remove. Speed! Even [we](#) use Plasticine these days.)

And you grip the stick or scrub in a way that lets you extend and retract it as you wish:



And that's all for now - except for this.

One final observation

Your grip is how you make a tool *part of yourself* so that you can achieve victories with it which you could not achieve alone. All I've wished to do in these pages is show you the various grips which work for *me*. And I perfectly understand that you and I are very different people. So my suggestion is:

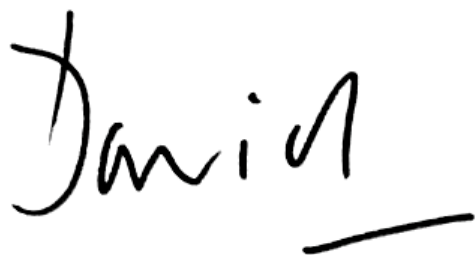
Start by copying what I do here, then experiment and discover what works for you.

And if you'd like to learn the complete framework - not just the grip, but all about the paint and the different ways you have of using it - you might be interested in this *online* foundation course:

- It's called **Illuminate**
- Step-by-step, you'll get super-confident about the key techniques.
- It lasts 6 weeks and we run it a few times each year.

You can join right [here](#).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel". The letters are cursive and fluid. A single horizontal line is drawn underneath the name.A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large, sweeping flourish at the bottom.



David Williams & Stephen Byrne

Illuminate

"Tremendous course of study and practice. I am learning so much and this inspires me to set high standards right from the very beginning" (Paul M.)

"I so enjoy this format of learning, I can stop & start as much & as often as I need to. Also to have the choice of when I want to study is a very big plus for me since it gives me the possibility to study when my concentration is at its best" (Joanne L.)

For the **Illuminate** foundation course, see [here](#).

How to **shade** is [here](#).

How to work with **silver stain** is [here](#) (hint: don't mix yours with *water*)