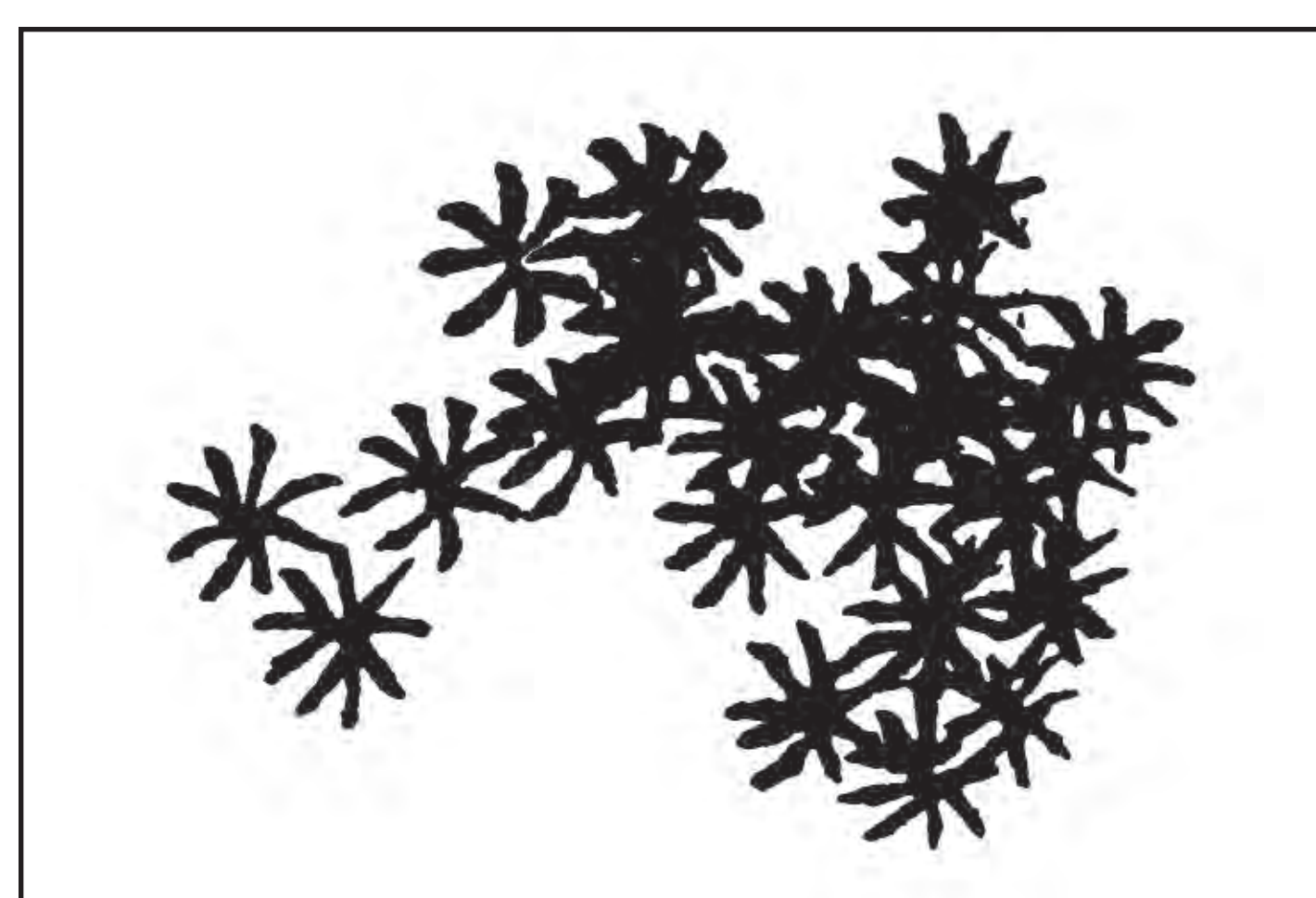


A vocabulary of dots

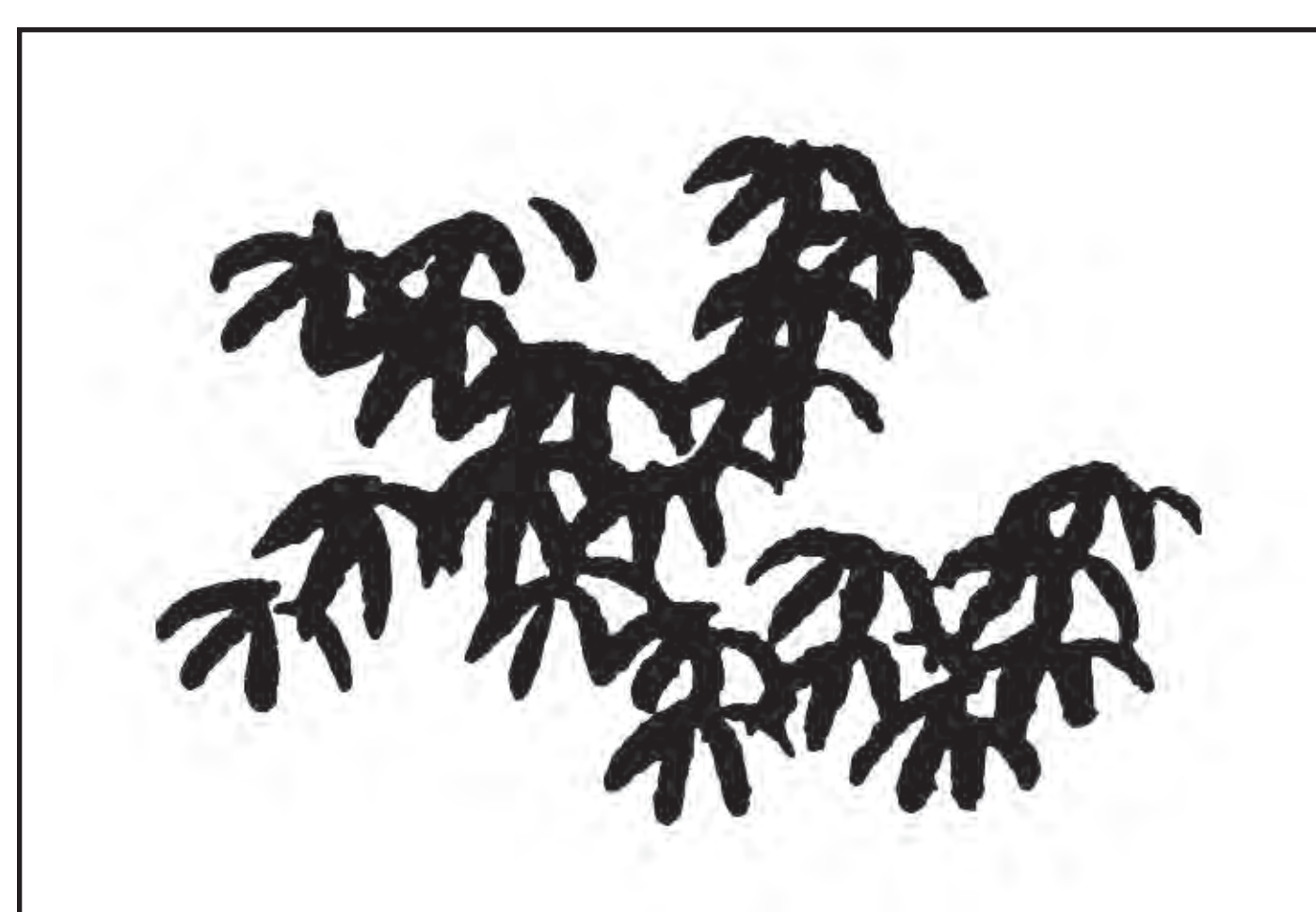
Dots serve various functions in a Chinese painting. They provide accents or highlights for a composition, suggest distant vegetation, or describe the specific forms of certain foliage. The following examples are taken from the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, first published between 1679 and 1701.



Rat's-foot dots 鼠足點
Arranged fanwise in groups of four or five, often with a white space at the center.



Chrysanthemum dots 菊花點
Seven or eight medium-width strokes radiating in a full circle.



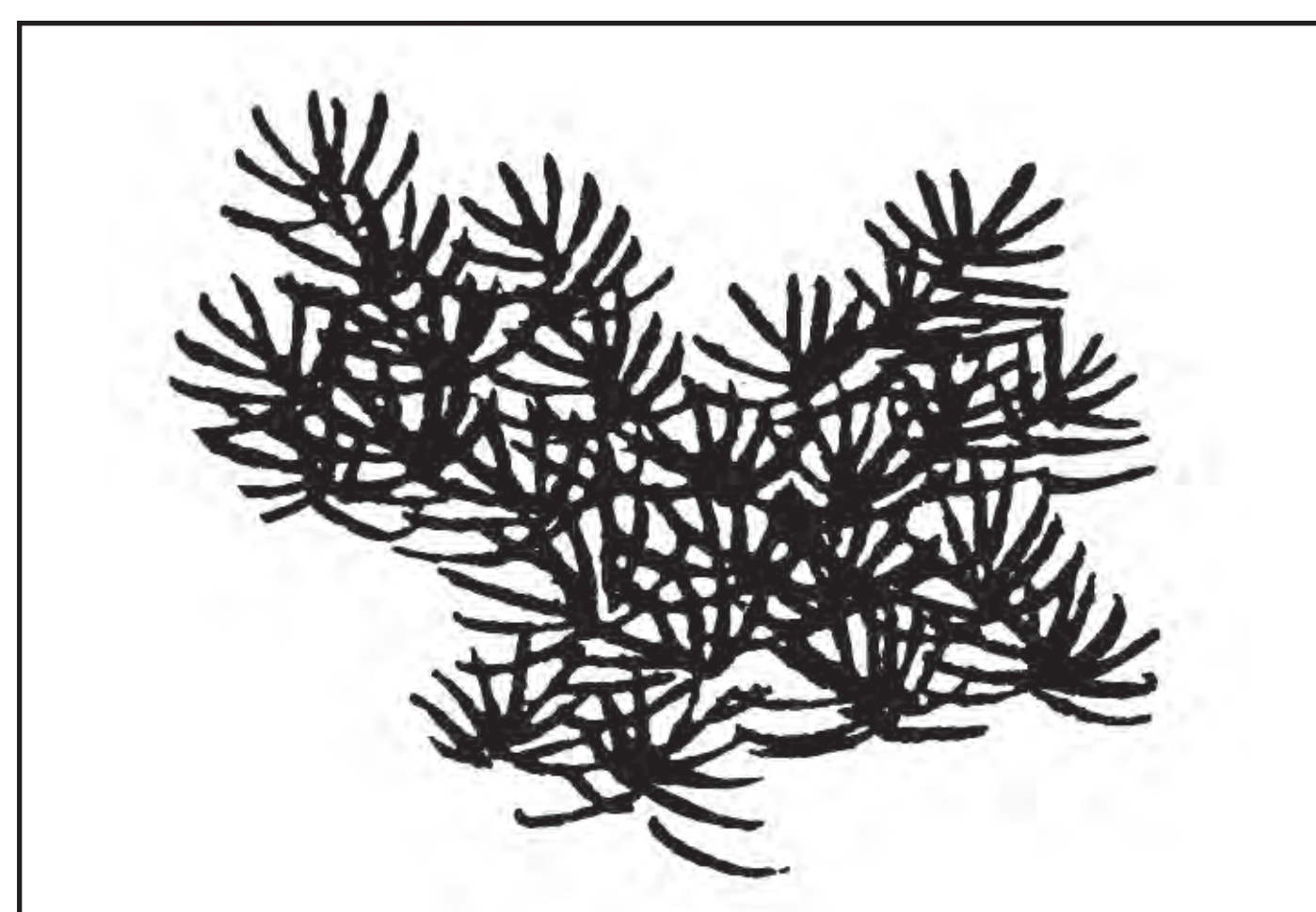
Jie dots 介字點
The individual strokes may be thin, thick, short, long, or overlaps of light dark ink, but they resemble this character: 介



Confused dots 小混點
Wet oval strokes with blurred contours.



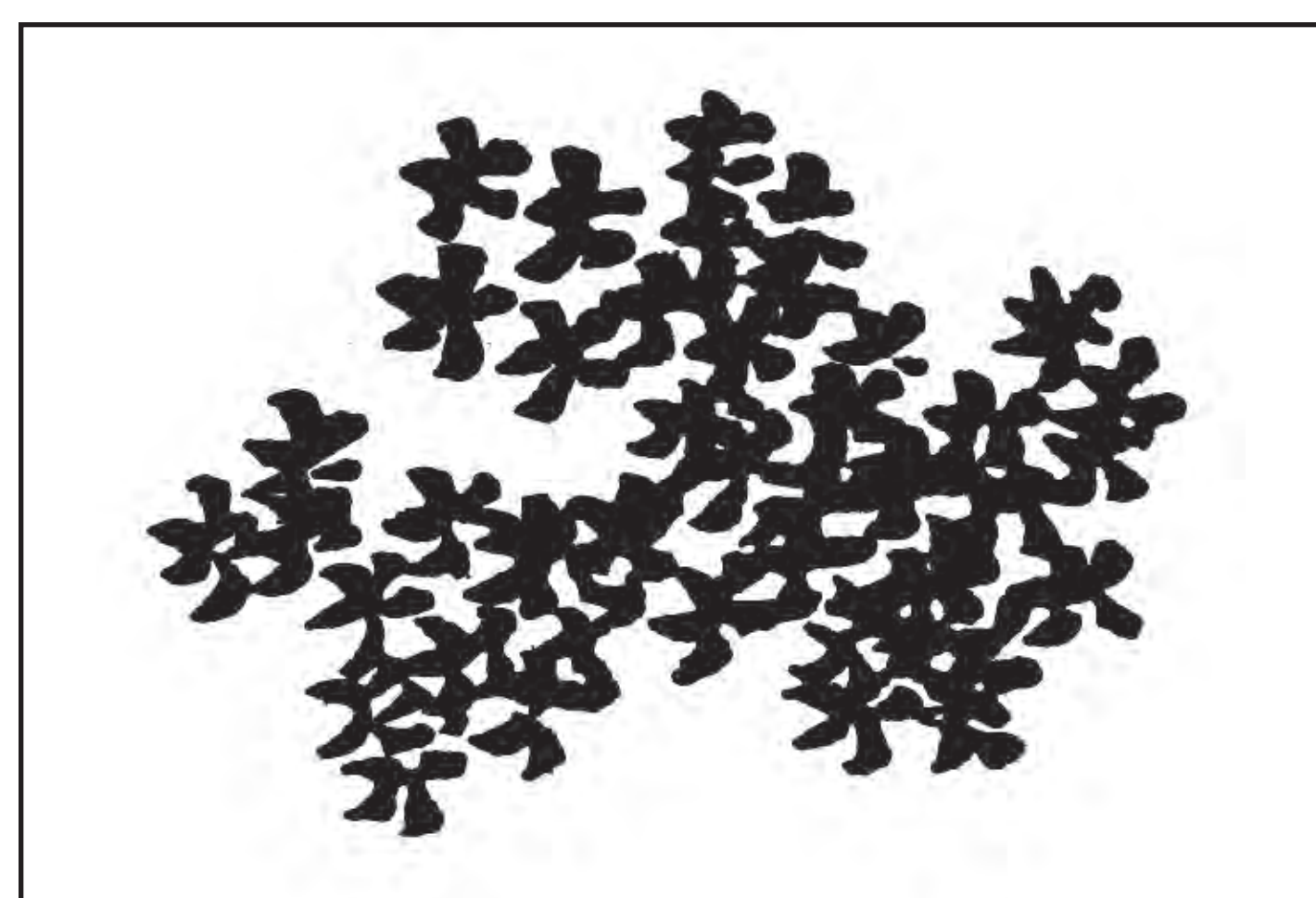
Even-headed dots 平頭點
Fine, horizontal strokes applied lightly with a little more pressure at the end of the stroke than at the beginning. The brush is dragged at an angle. Often used to define mountain contours and suggest distant vegetation.



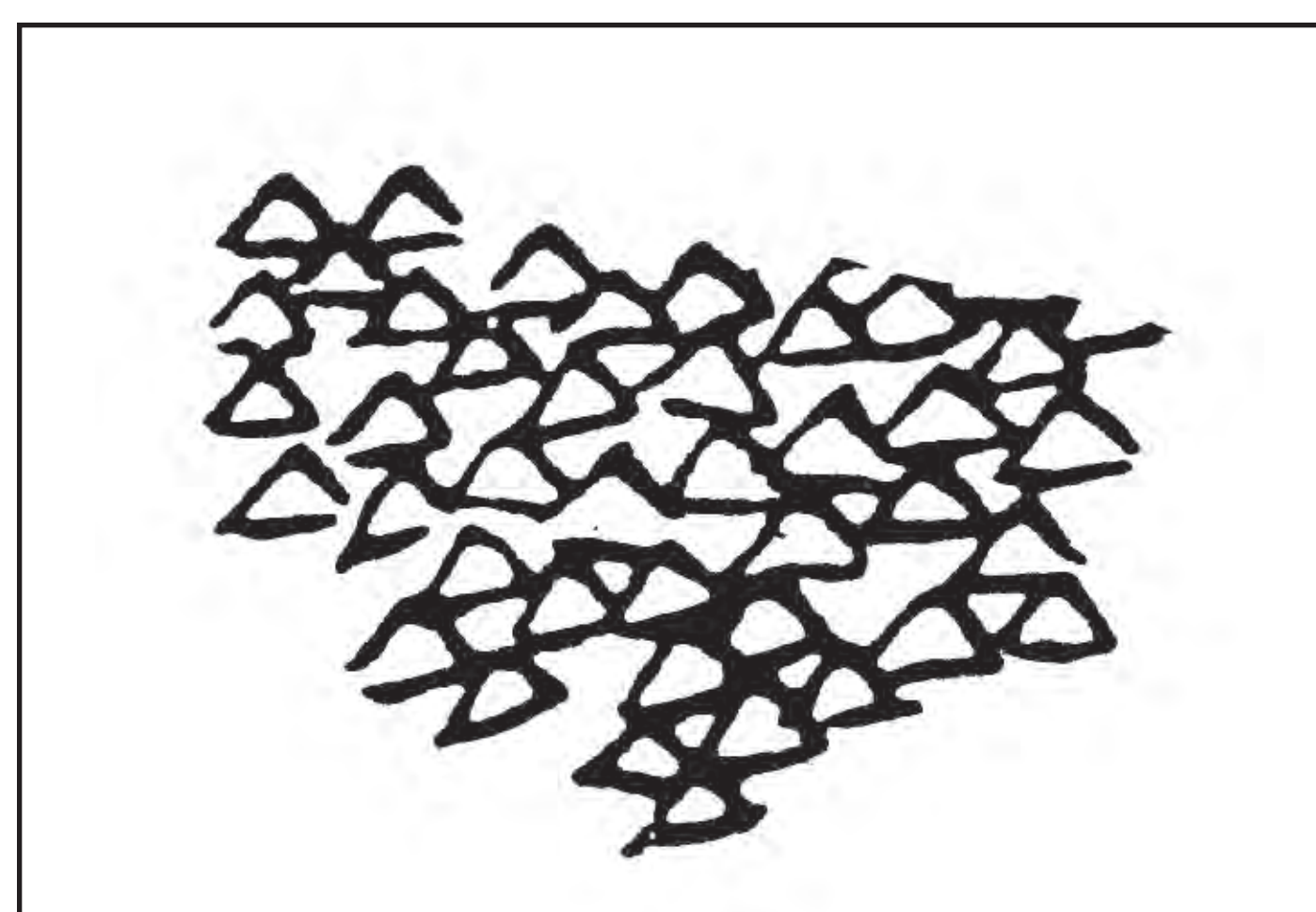
Pine leaf dots 松針點
Quick, downward strokes directed toward the center done with the tip of an upright brush.



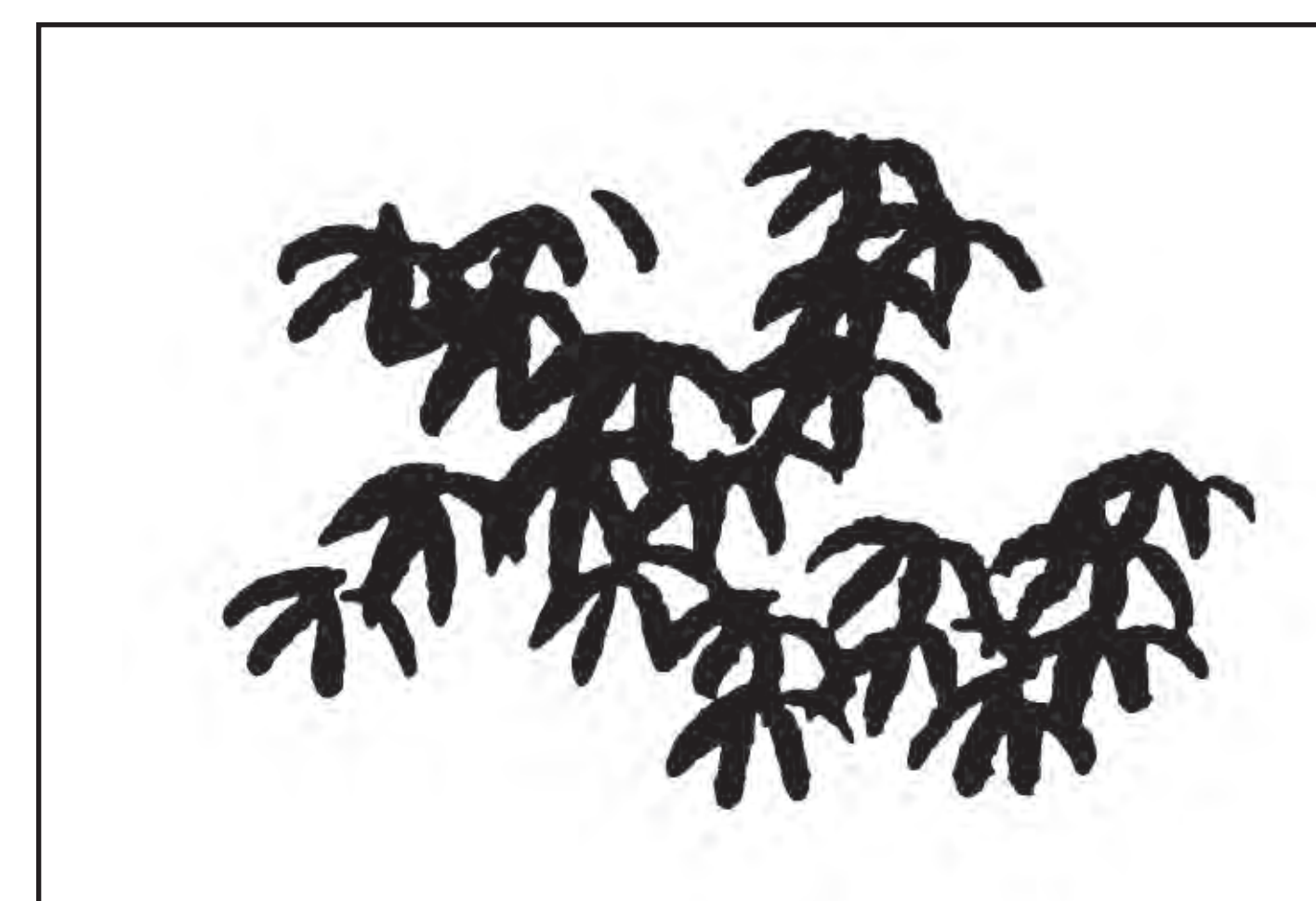
Wutong leaf dots 桐葉點
The upright brush is pressed down in units of four strokes, with the tip forming the top and the upper bristle the bottom of the stroke.



Prunus blossom dots 梅花點
Five round dots form a unit.



Outline method 夾葉法
The leaves are outlined in black and then filled in with color. A few, like the maple (triangles), the wutong, and the ailanthus, are individualized, but most of the varieties are generalized rather than specific.



Pepper dots 胡椒點
Often used for cedar leaves. Done with an upright brush quickly dabbed at the paper with its tip.

Texture strokes in landscapes

Rocks and mountains are the essential components of a landscape painting. The artist first outlines the basic composition with ink, then applies texture strokes, the most distinctive feature in Chinese landscape painting. This method, essentially uses lines to describe the shapes and characteristics of rock and mountain structures.



Small axe-cut 小斧劈皴
Triangular strokes resembling cuts made by an axe; they are associated with Song artist Ma Yuan (active 1190–1225) and Xia Gui (active 1200–1230). Done with a slanted brush.



Large axe-cut 大斧劈皴
Larger and fewer strokes than the previous example.



Long hemp-fiber 長披麻皴
Long, slightly wavy, relaxed strokes. Done with an upright brush held in the center of the handle. The versatile hemp fiber styles represent the most common method for describing rock and mountain forms (see next example).



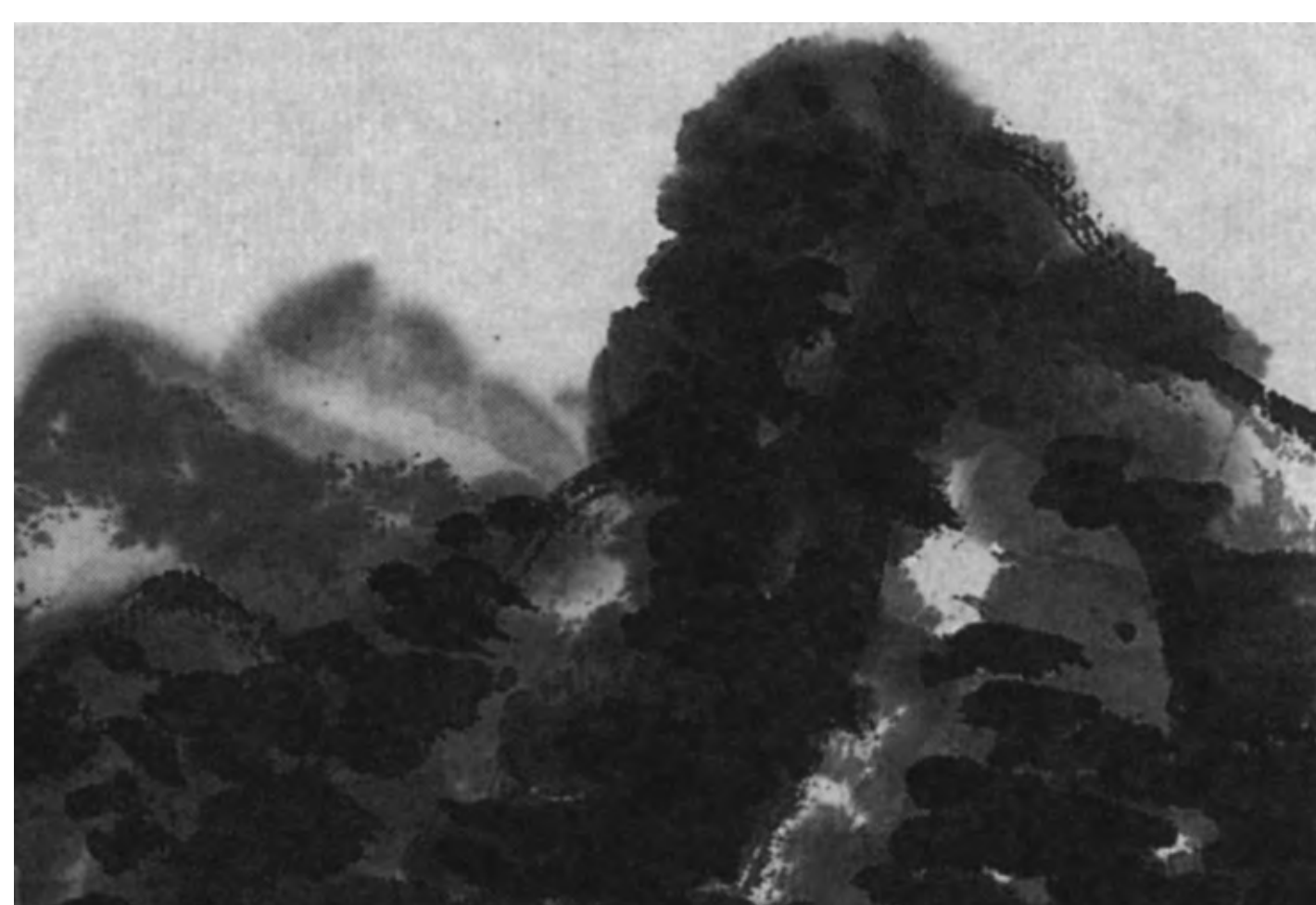
Short hemp-fiber 短披麻皴
Shorter and more ragged than the long hemp-fiber strokes, done with the brush tip.



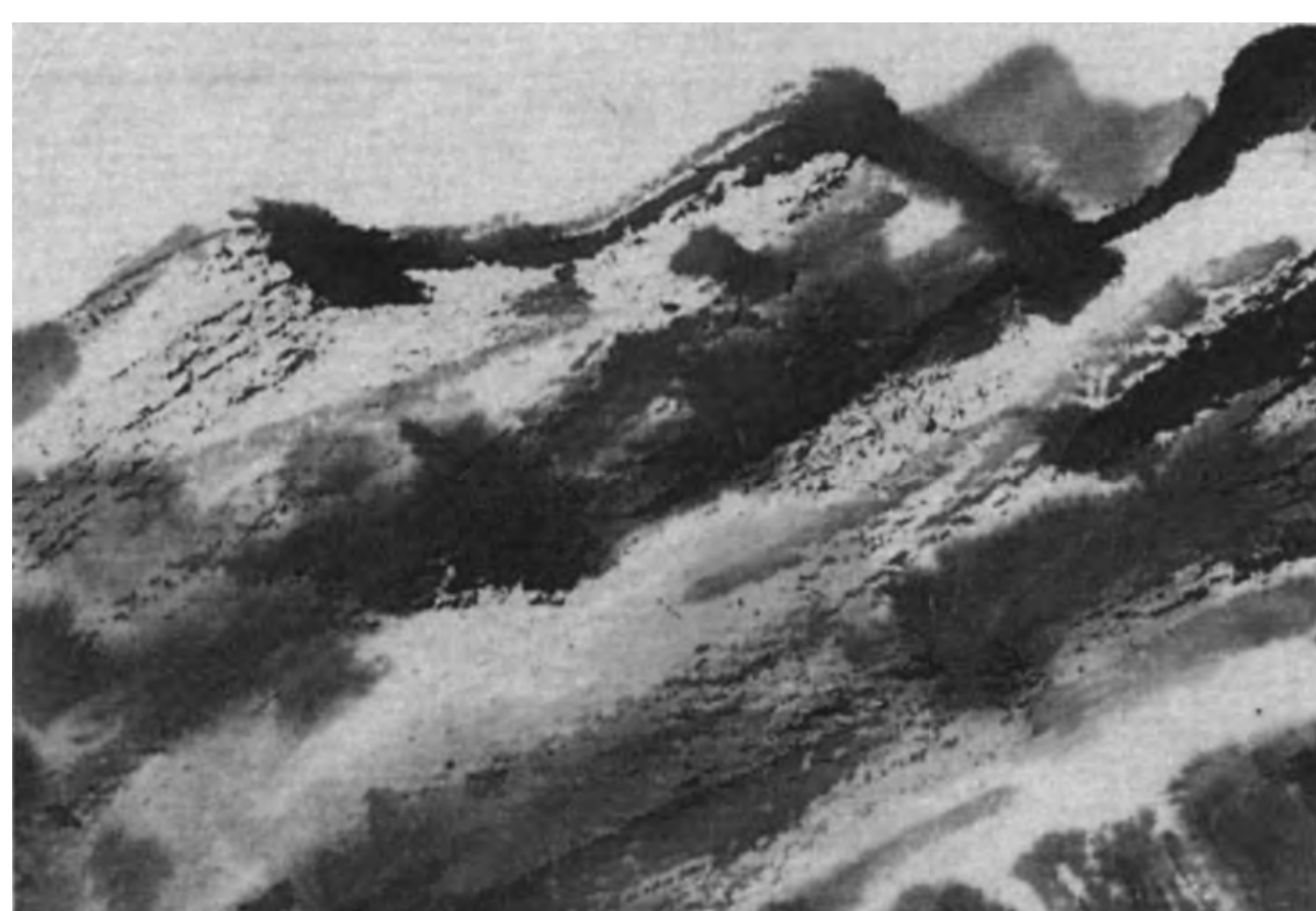
Raveled-rope 解索皴
Each stroke retains a twist; done with the slanted brush.



Cloud-head 卷頭皴
Curving strokes built up in the shapes like cumulus clouds associated with Guo Xi (active 1068–1078).



Mi dot 米點
Extremely wet, diffuse dots creating a blurry, atmospheric effect, associated with Mi Fu (1051–1107), made by laying the brush sideways and parallel to the picture horizon.



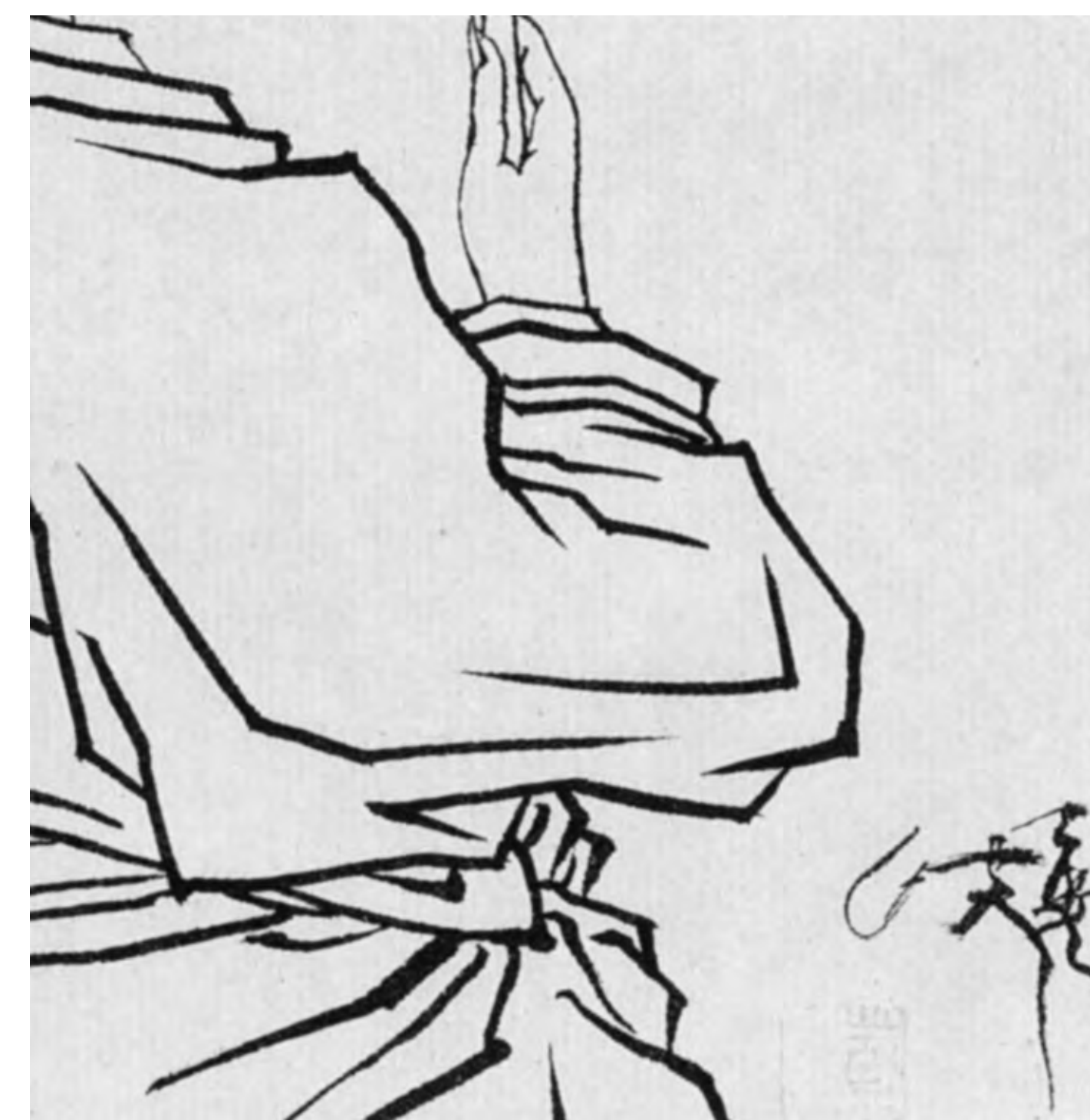
Bands dragged in mud 拖泥帶水皴
Free and spontaneous, the general shape is applied in wash. Before it dries, strokes are added to produce a less clearly defined effect.



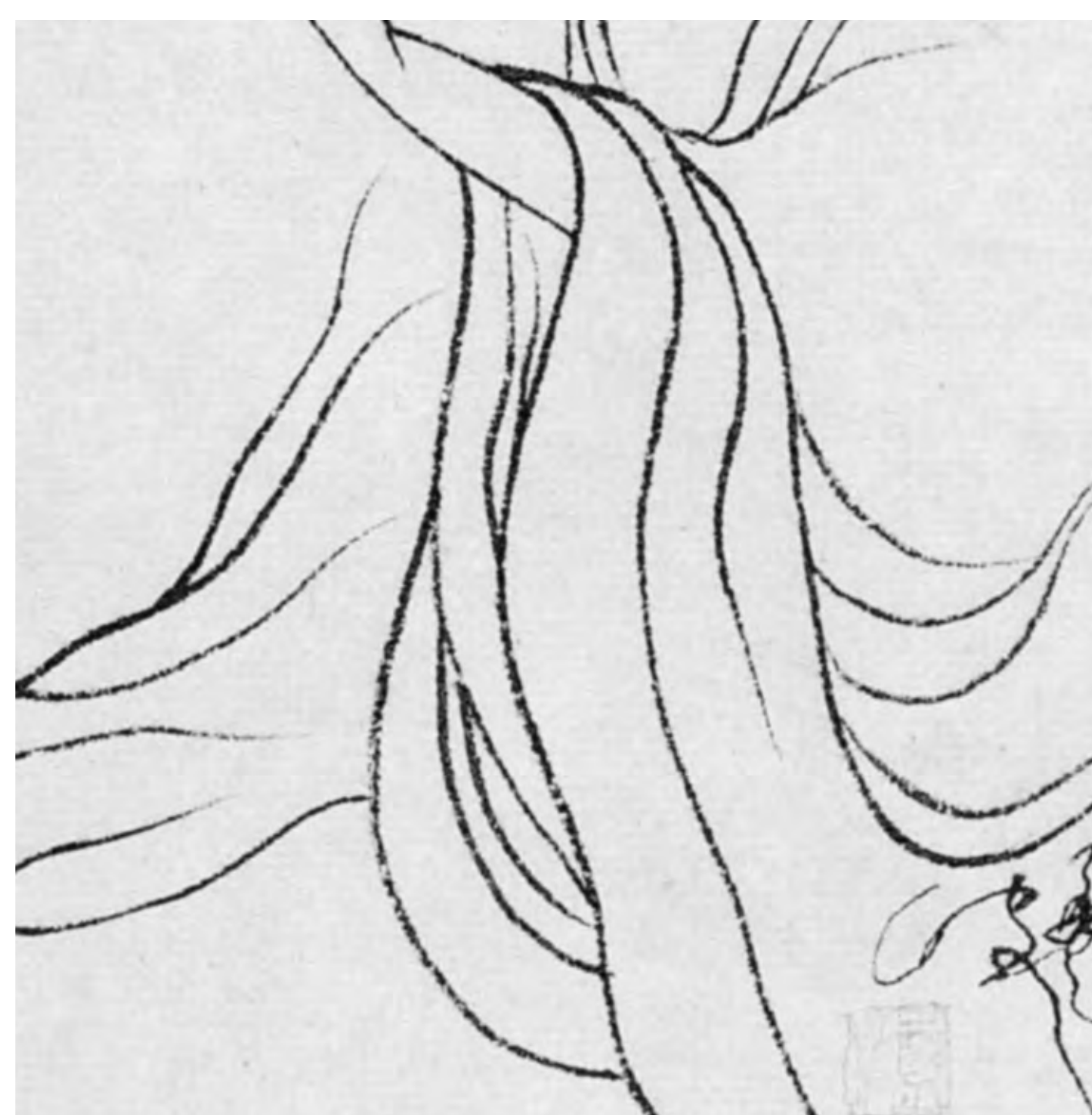
Nail-head 釘頭皴
Resembles the profile of a nail with a prominent beginning and ending with a sharp tip. The brush is pressed down at an angle and the stroke is finished with the brush in an upright position.

Linear techniques for figure painting

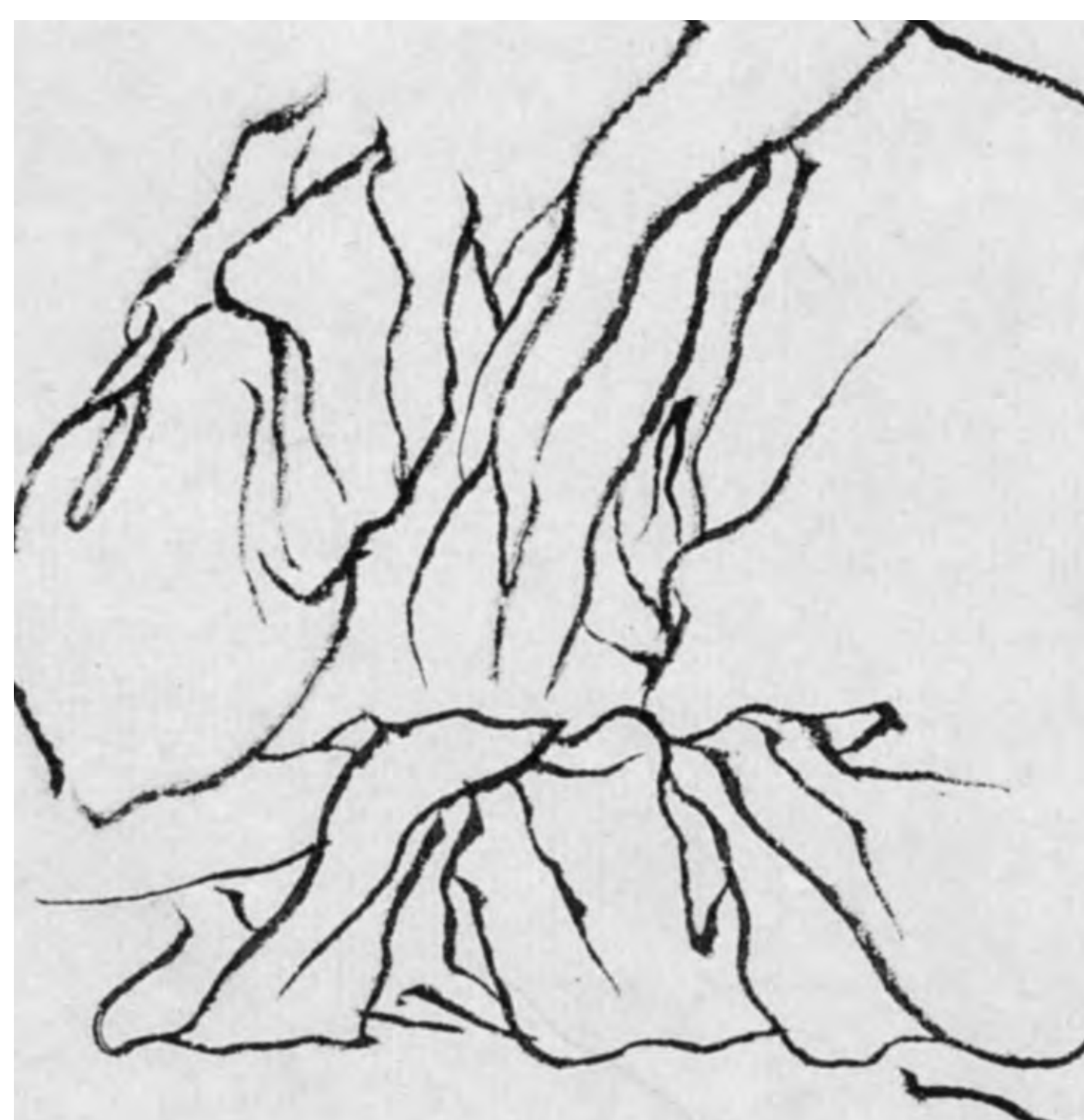
The most fundamental element in ink painting is the line, which defines form and suggests movement. During the Ming dynasty, art critic and historian Wang Keyu (1587–1645) published a list of eighteen outline methods as the basic linear techniques for depicting garments. Seven of these are represented here.



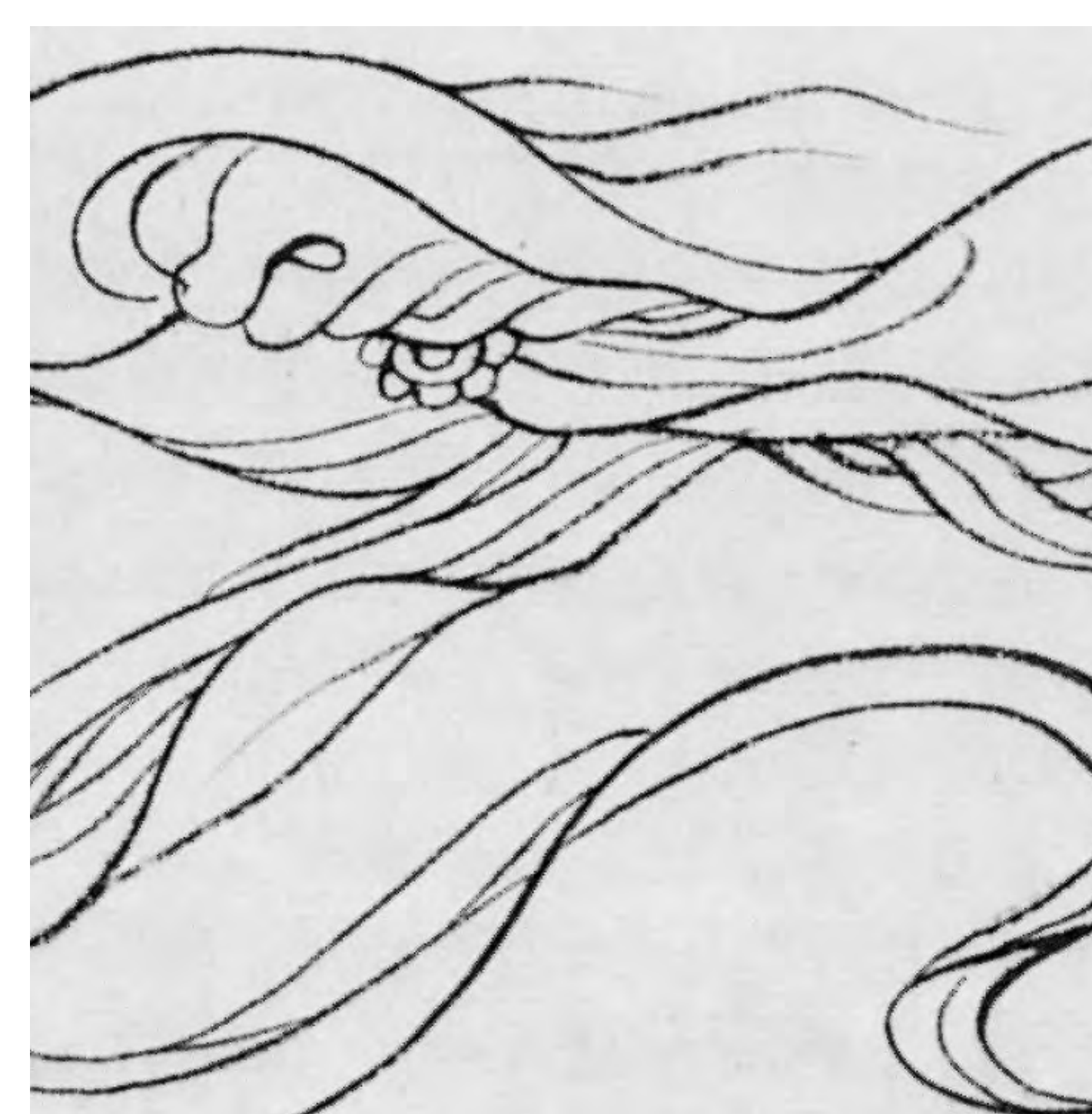
Iron-wire lines 鐵線描
Long, narrow, rigid strokes with sharp angles resembling chisel cuts in stone; done with a vertical brush and even pressure.



Floating silk-threaded lines 高古游絲描
Extremely fine but strong lines that seem to float without breaking and resemble the kind of thread spun by the silkworm; rendered with the tip of a fine brush held vertically.



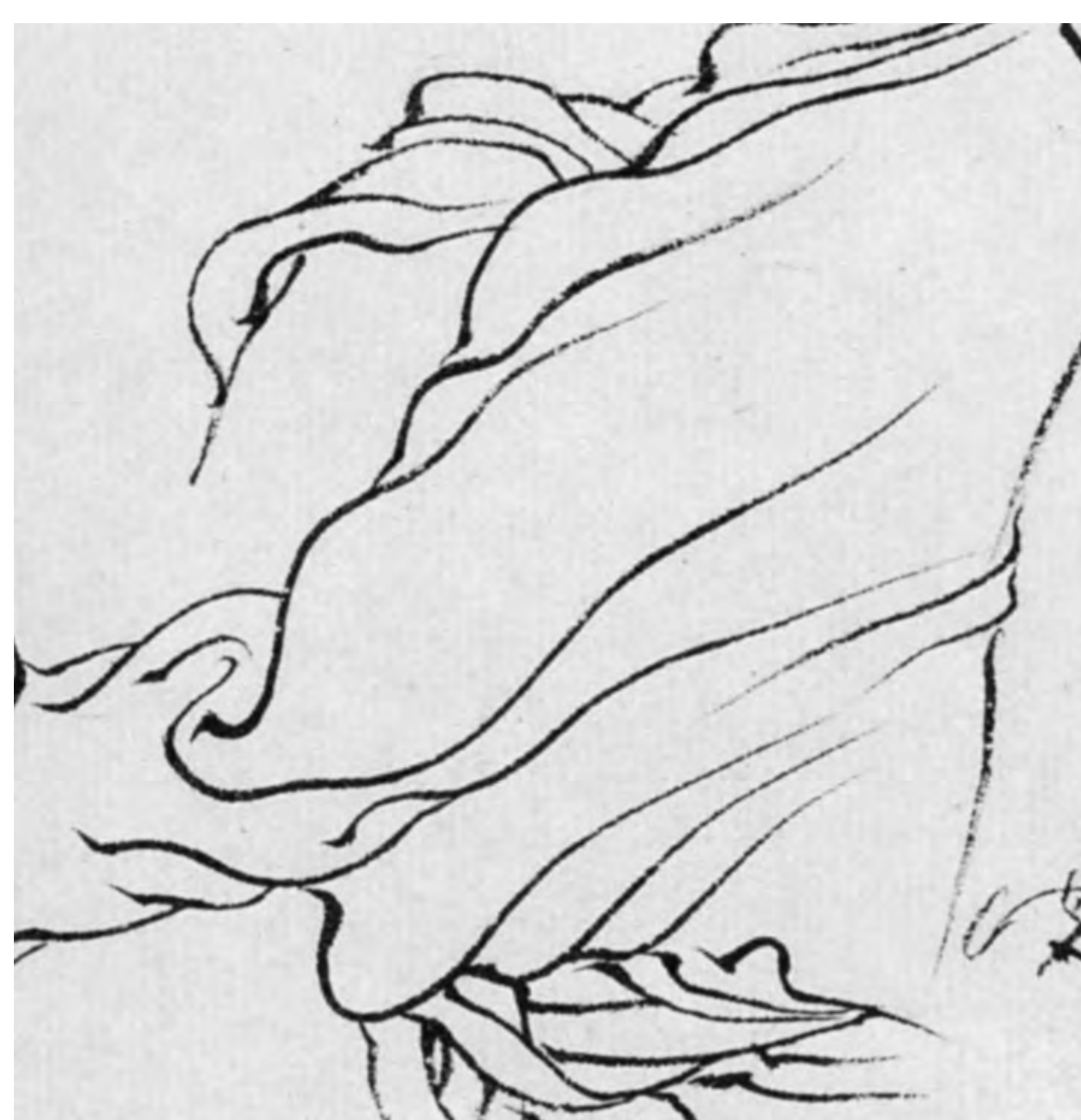
Rippled-water lines 戰筆水紋描
Distinguished by varying pressure throughout the line; done with a quivering brush held at an angle.



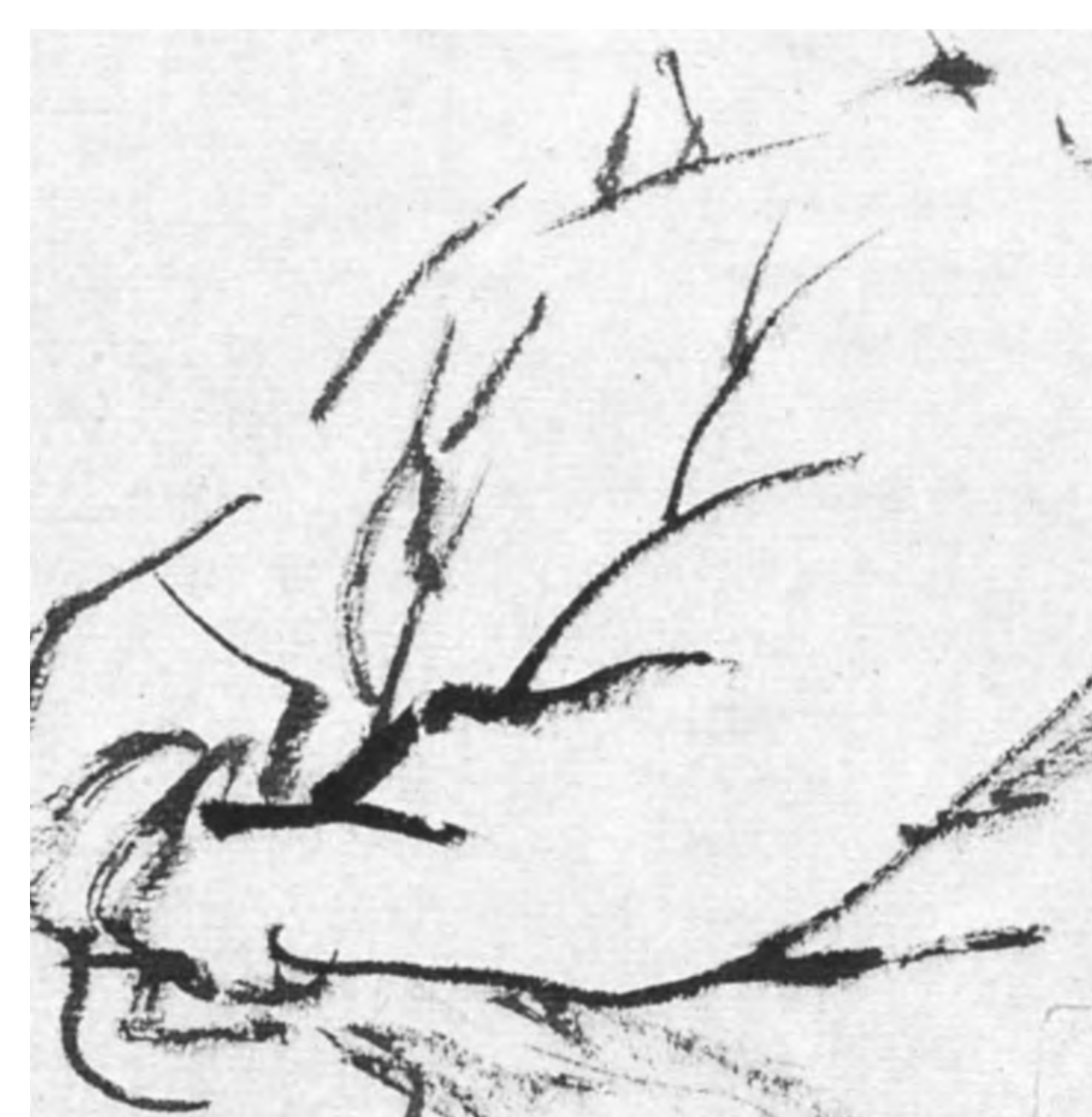
Floating-cloud lines (or running water) 行雲流水描
Even, carefully controlled lines seeming to describe the figure in a single, free-flowing line, very popular for depicting fluttering draperies.



Willow-leaf lines 柳葉描
Tapered at each end and wider in the middle, the lines have a gentle, supple feeling. The brush varies from upright to oblique as the line modulates from thin to thick.



Nail-head rat-tail lines 釘頭鼠尾
Long, tapering lines beginning with a strong dot and tapering to a fine point.



Lines of few strokes 減筆描
A bold vigorous, abstract line; often the entire garment is rendered in a few zigzag strokes.

Basic vocabulary of strokes

The artist can achieve a multitude of effects by varying such factors as the speed and pressure applied to a brush, the size and type of brush, the amount of moisture, the manner in which different shades of ink or colors are loaded onto the brush, the angle at which the brush is held, and the type of paper or silk used for painting. These examples, drawn from the museum's permanent collection, represent some of the more common techniques.



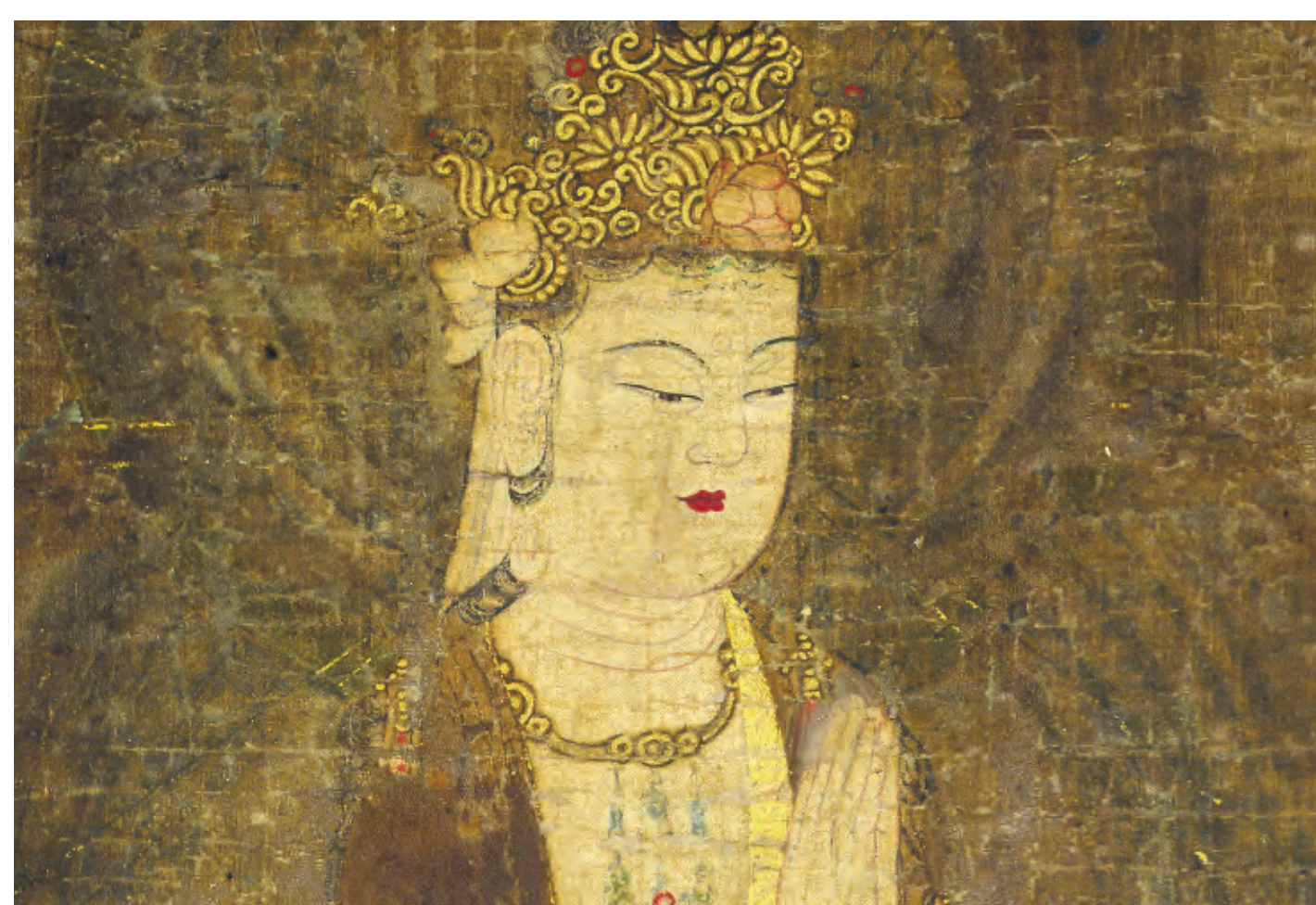
Xieyi 寫意
Free and spontaneous, primarily in ink, sometimes with light color tints, favored by scholar painters. (B74 D1)



Flying white (*feibai*) 飛白
A method of applying pressure to the brush, which causes the hair to separate, leaving streaks of white spaces. The effect is of speed and vigor. (B68 D6)



Dry brush 乾筆
Ink is used sparingly with little moisture in the brush. (B69 D41)



Gongbi 工筆
A careful, precise style with meticulous attention to details, forms, and standards, usually associated with works in color. (B66 D2)



Gongbi 工筆
Another example of this technique. (B65 D49k)



Boneless 沒骨
Painting without outline in colors or ink. Sometimes different colors or shades of ink are loaded on to the same brush, enabling the artist to achieve various effects with just one stroke. (B69 D15)



Outline drawing (*baimiao*) 白描
Outline drawing in ink without color, shading, or wash. (B70 D46)



Splashed ink 潑墨
A very wet, free application of ink resulting in ink blobs, broad strokes, or saturated areas of wash. (B87 D1)



Broken ink 破墨
A method of "breaking" the wash with deeper or lighter ink tones while the first layer of ink or color is still wet. (B87 D1)

Discover the Art of the Chinese Brush

When executed with masterful technique, a single ink brushstroke is capable of conveying vitality, delicacy, and contemplation—the essence of Chinese philosophy and spirit. It is this “life force” or *qi* (pronounced chee) that the artist aspires to capture and express through brushpainting. Unlike European-trained artists, the Chinese artist does not try to create a realistic rendering of the external appearance of a subject, seeking instead to capture its inner spirit. Only after intently observing the subject matter in its natural state does the painter return to the studio to paint. The essence of the subject is retained in the artist’s imagination, and it is this image that is painted in a moment of spontaneous inspiration.

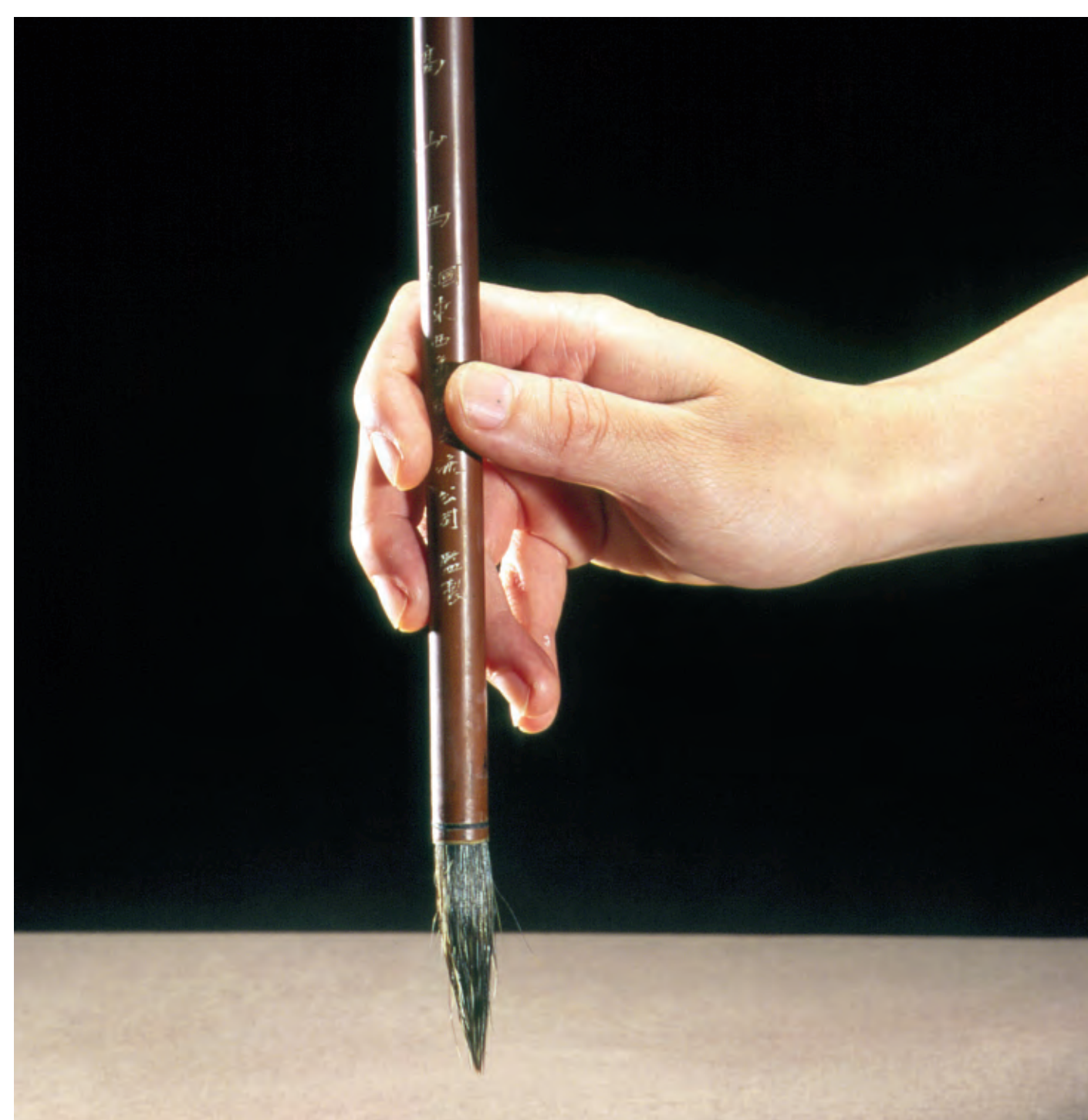
How do Chinese brushpainting masters create such an array of vibrant brushstrokes and ink washes? They begin by intently studying the techniques, elements, and principles of traditional brush and ink painting (*bi mo hua*).

Experience for yourself the art of brush-and-ink painting. Begin by learning how to hold the brush. Once you feel comfortable, experiment by applying varying degrees of pressure, speed, and moisture. Finally, create your own brushpainting masterpiece!



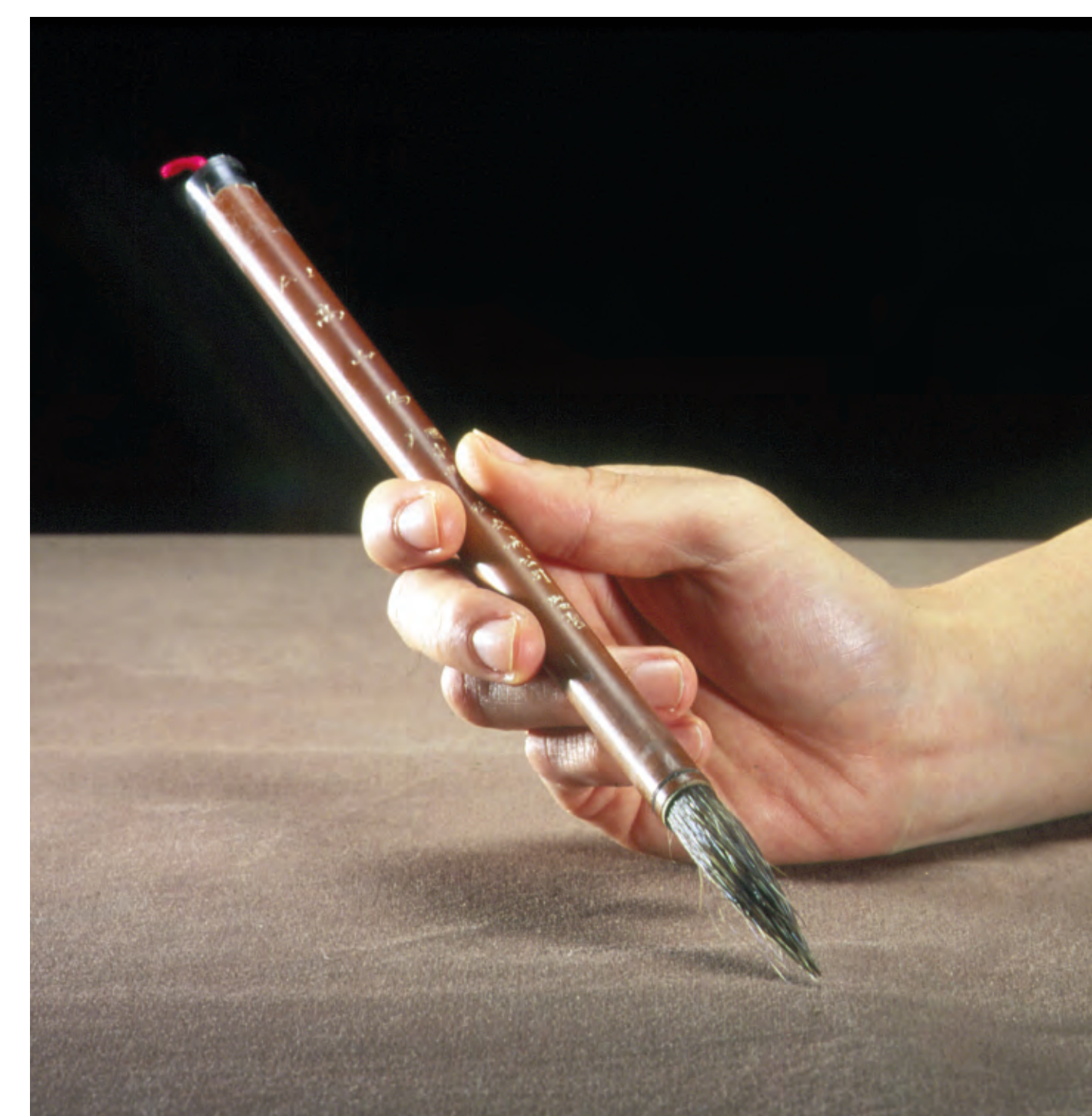
How to Hold a Brush

- Hold the brush midway up the handle. Place the handle on the inside of the index finger, supporting it on the opposite side with the tip of your thumb. The tips of the index and middle fingers rest on the top of the handle: the ring and pinkie fingers are placed behind. Leave an open space in the palm of the hand, allowing for a full range of movement. None of the fingers should touch the inside palm.
- To achieve a full range of brushstrokes, hold the brush in a gentle and relaxed manner. Your touch should be gentle enough that a tomato could be held in the cup of the hand without bruising its skin.



The Upright Brush

- Hold the brush upright and perpendicular to the paper. Apply varied speed and pressure to create a range from thin, delicate lines to wide, powerful strokes. For long, sweeping strokes, hold the brush higher up the handle. For detail work and shorter strokes, hold the brush closer to the brush hairs.



The Oblique Brush

- Hold the brush at an angle in relation to the paper. In this method, the broadest strokes can be made with the greatest number of bristles touching the paper.

Inking Techniques

Traditional Chinese artists use a special black ink (*mo*) that is said to contain “infinite gradations of color.” This ink is made from a mixture of burnt pine soot and glue that is molded into an inkstick.

- A small amount of water is placed in the inkstone reservoir (the inkstone is commonly made of water-resistant rock such as slate). The inkstick is gently ground with the water in a circular motion to create a deep black liquid.
- The tip of a moist brush is dipped into the ink. As the ink is absorbed into the brush, the moisture that is already in the brush dilutes the ink and creates lighter gradations of ink further away from the tip.
- To use a side-ink technique, a brush is loaded with a light wash of ink. The brush is held in an oblique position and the sides of the brush are dipped with ink. This technique is used to paint subjects such as the lotus flower.



Brushstroke Examples

The following examples were painted with an upright brush.

- a) fast speed, light pressure
- b) medium speed, medium pressure
- c) slow speed, heavy pressure
- d) combination of light and heavy pressure
- e) “flying white” (*fei bai*): fast speed, little moisture

Notice how, by using different ink techniques, gradations of ink can be created within a single brushstroke.

- f) Load the tip of the brush with ink and create a brushstroke by holding the brush in an oblique position.
- g) Load the brush with a light wash of ink and dip opposite sides of the brush with dark ink. This is an example of a side-ink technique.

