

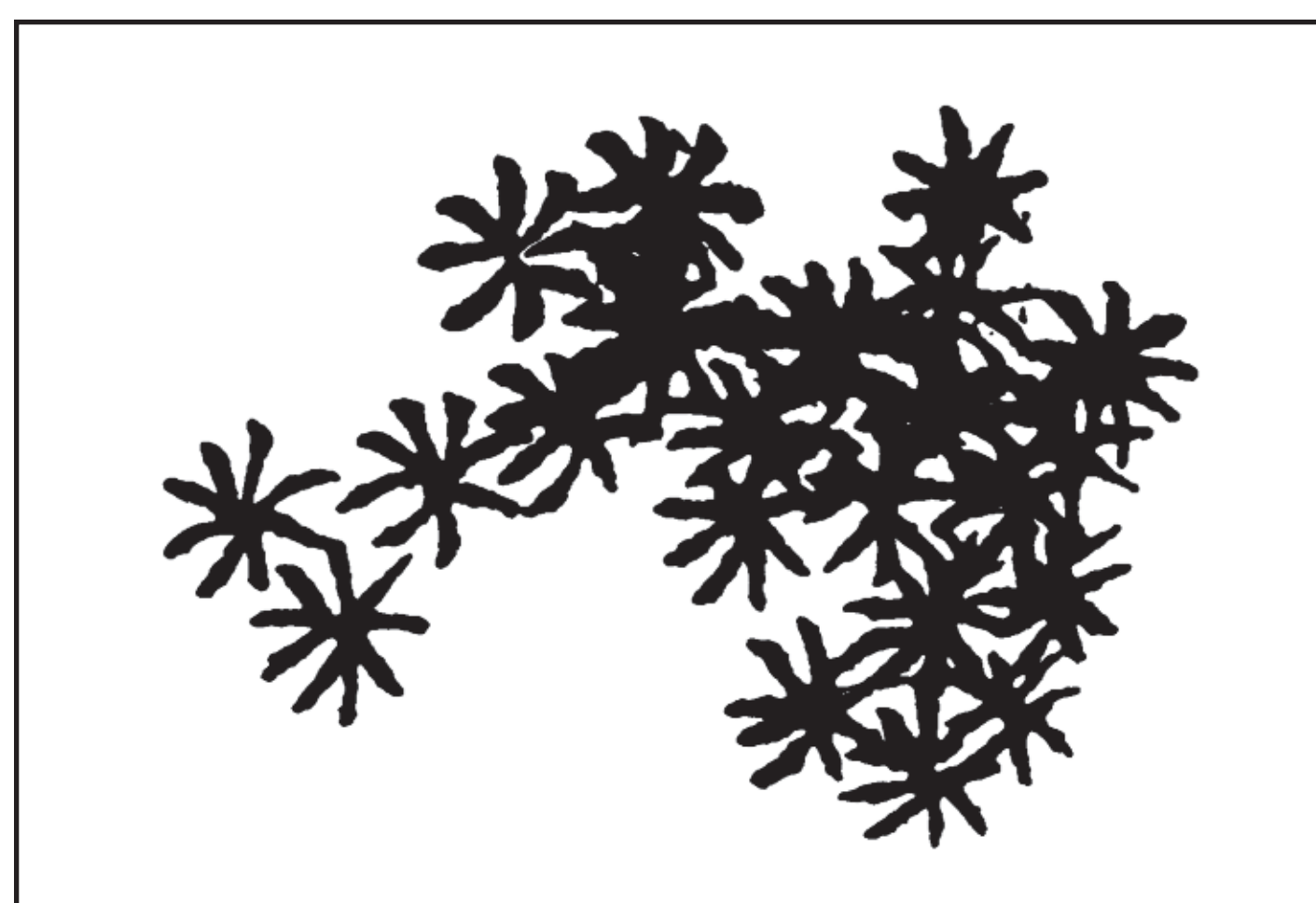
# A vocabulary of dots

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



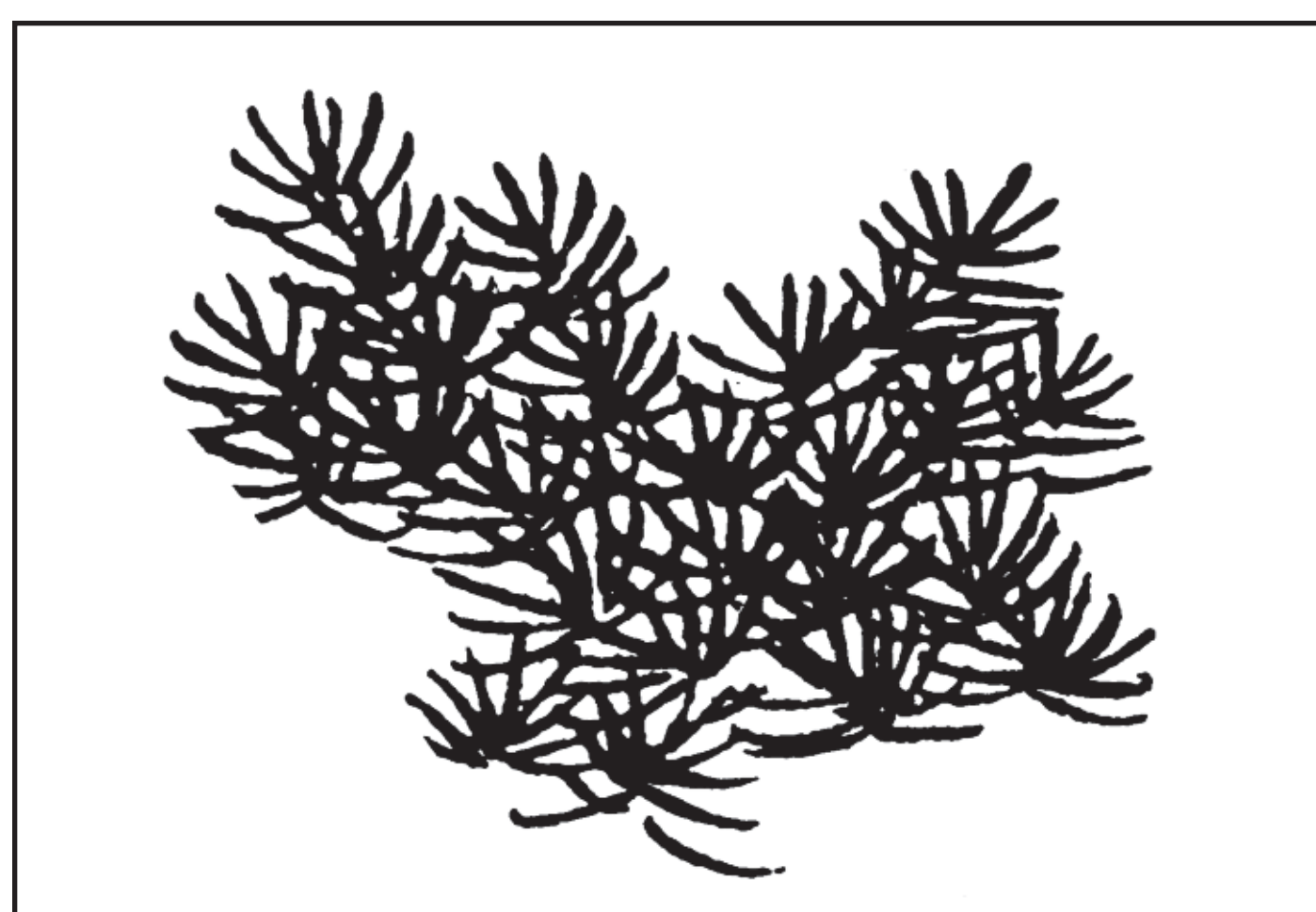
**Confused dots** 小混點

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.



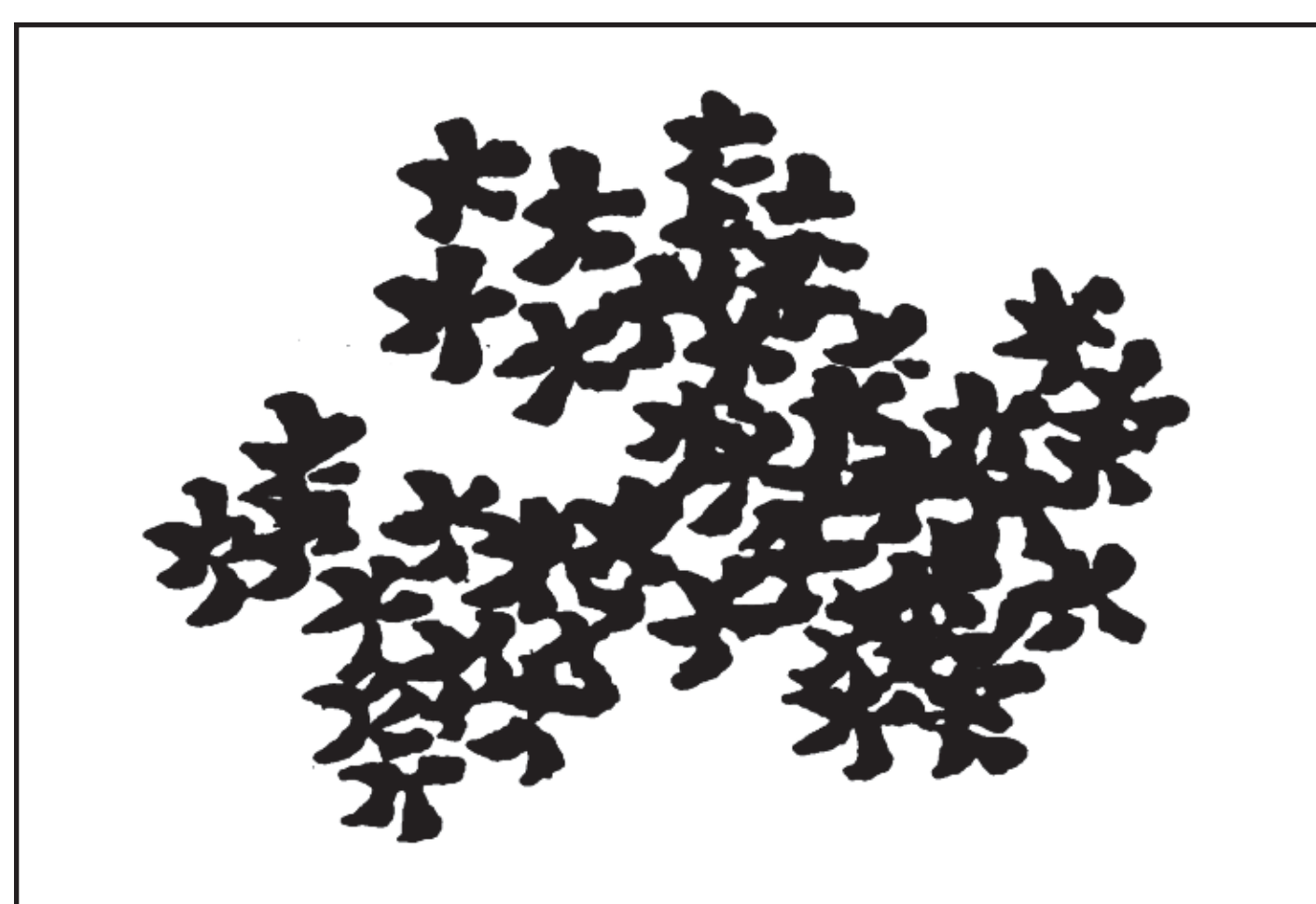
**Pine leaf dots** 松針點

Quick, downward strokes directed toward the center done with the tip of an upright brush.



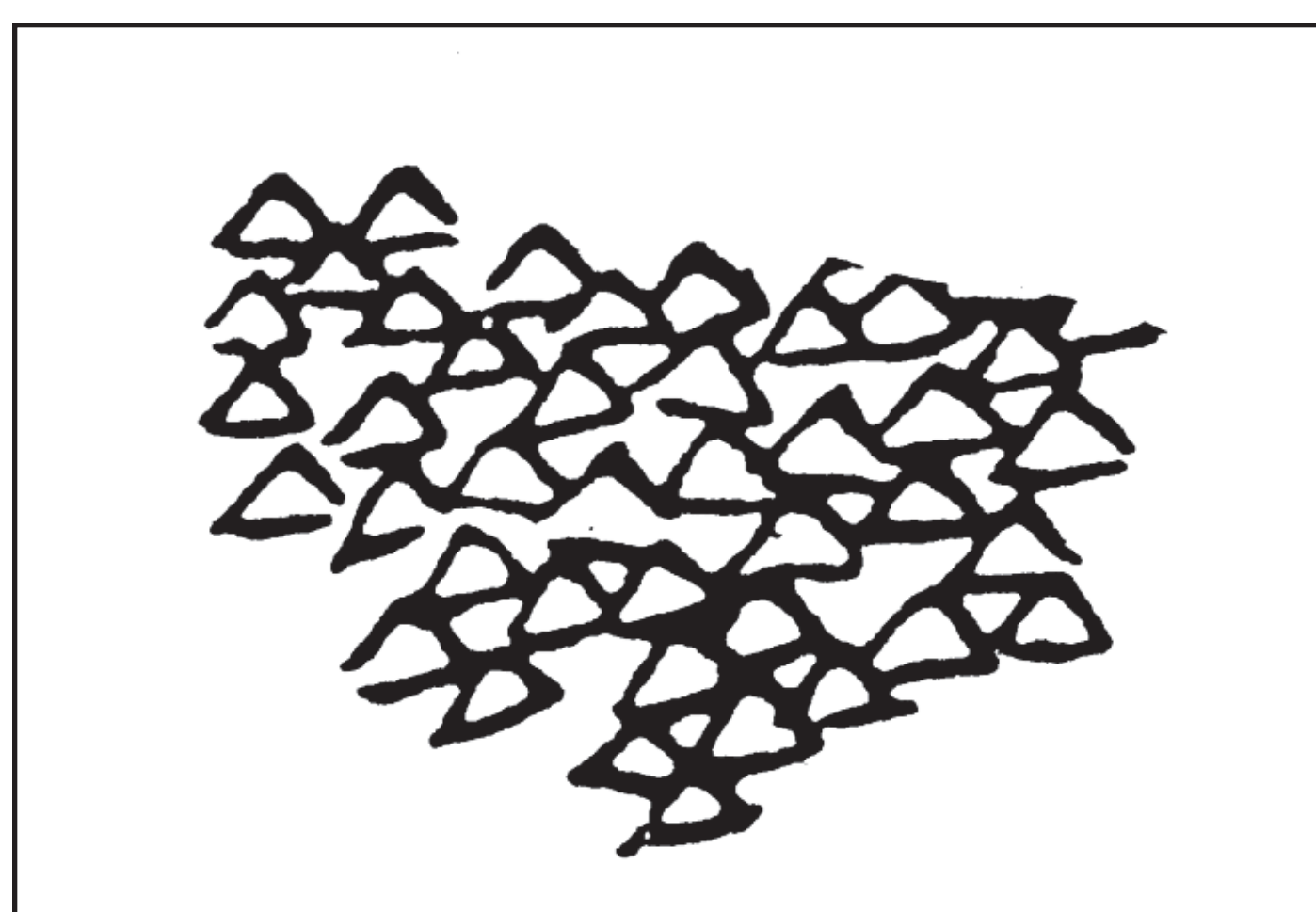
**Wutong leaf dots** 梧桐葉點

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.



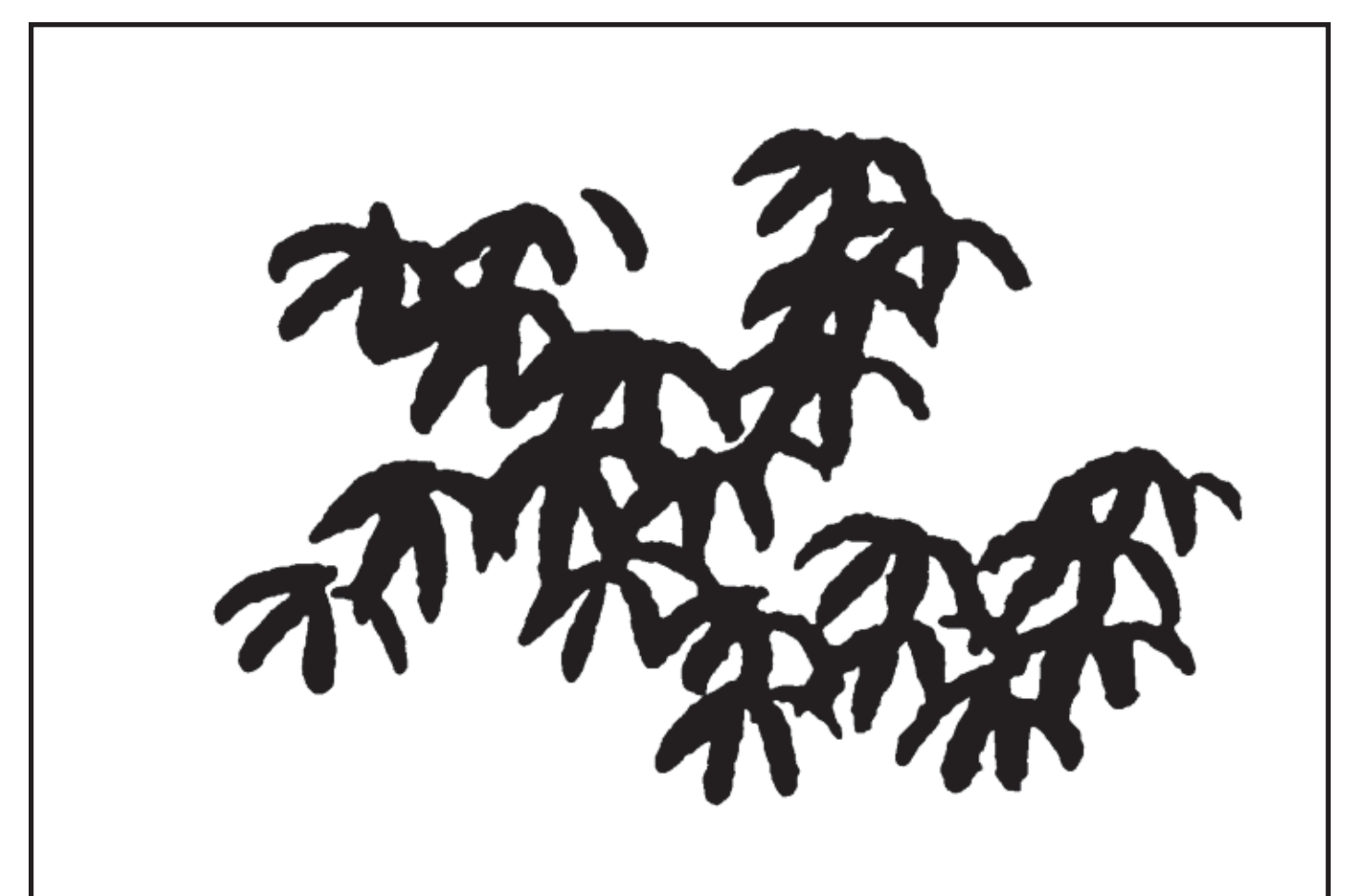
**Prunus blossom dots** 梅花點

Five round dots form a unit.



**Outline method** 夾筆法

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.



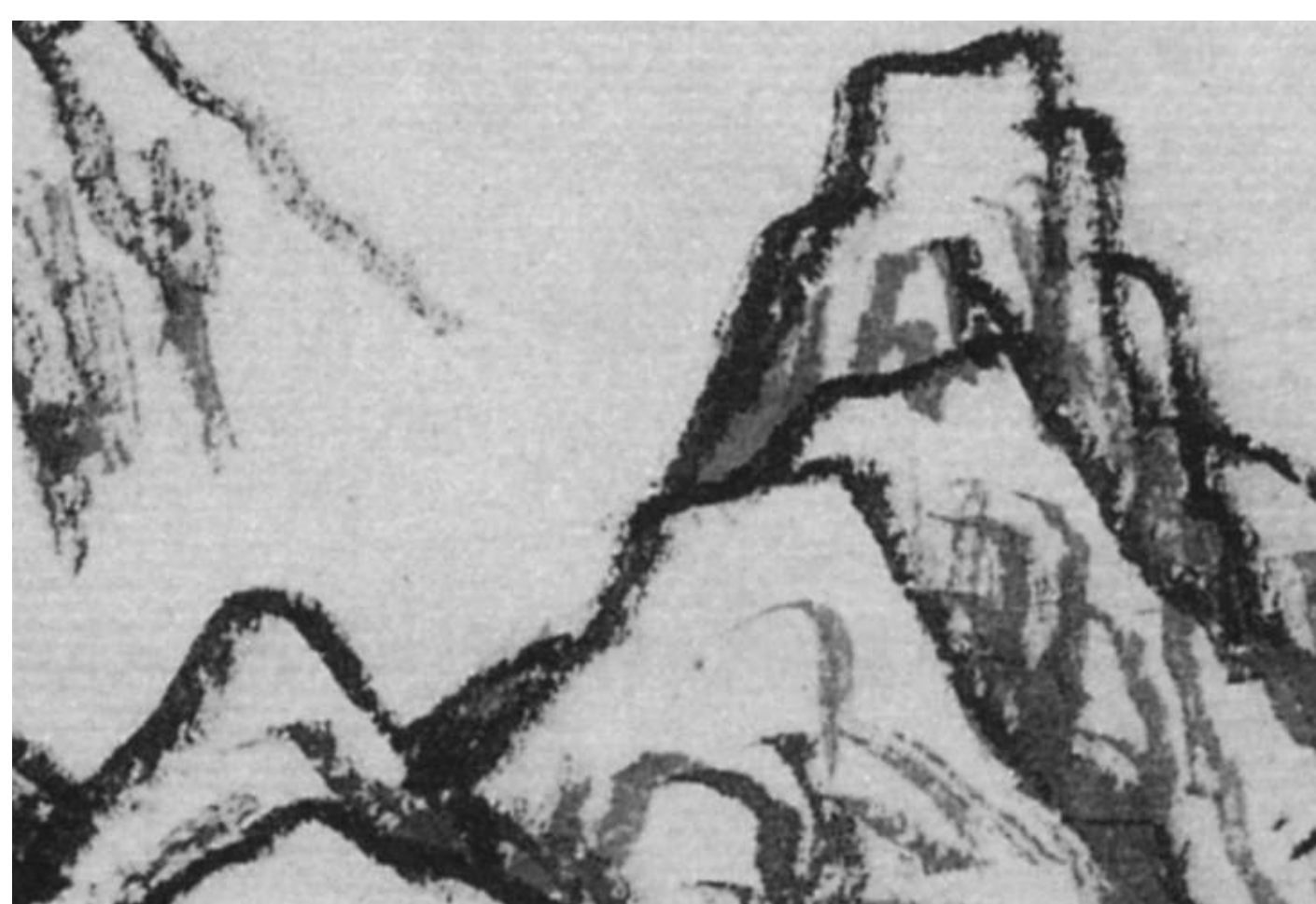
**Long hemp-fiber** 長披麻皴

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.



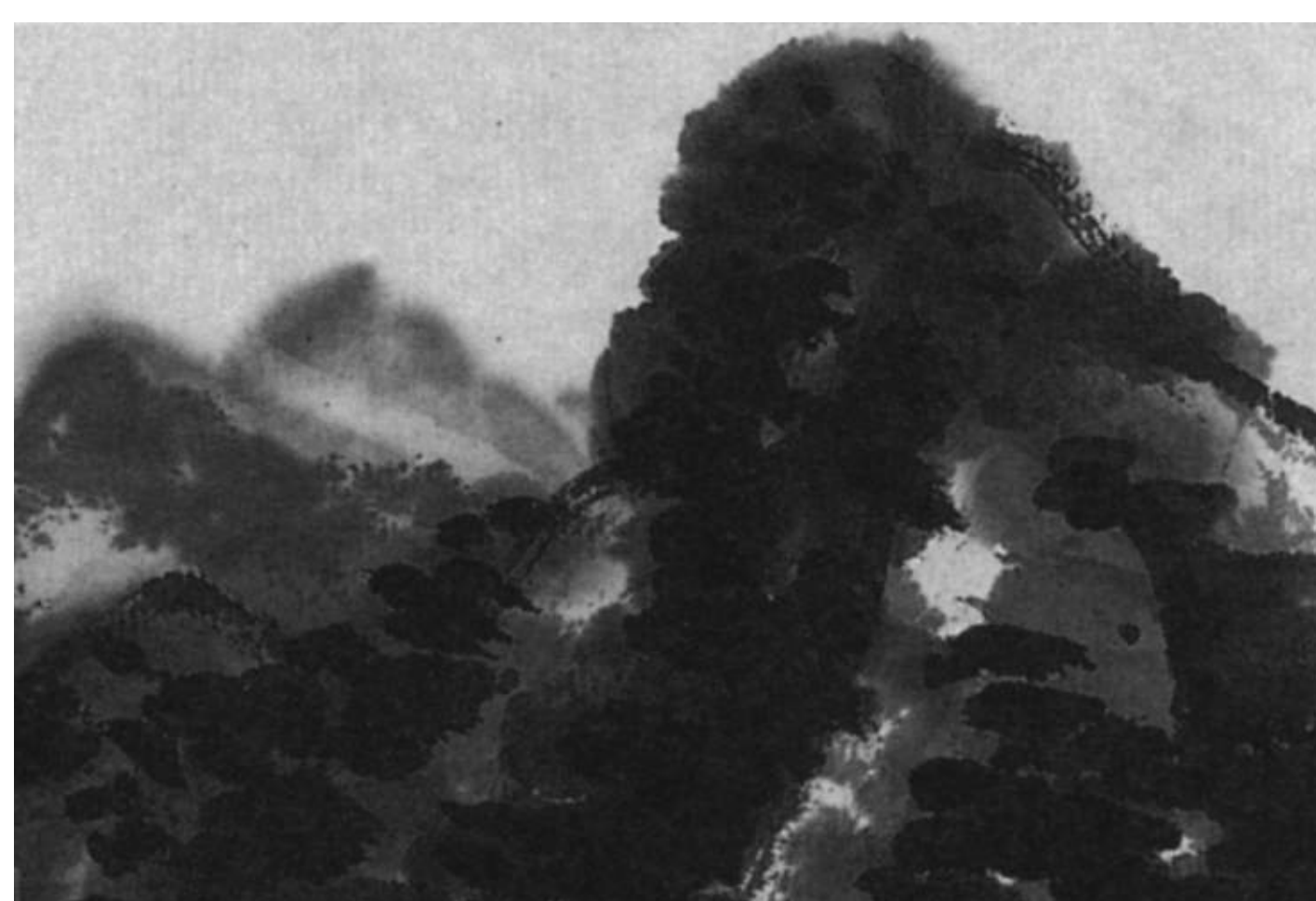
**Raveled-rope** 解索皴

Each stroke retains a twist; done with the slanted brush.



**Cloud-head** 雲頭皴

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.

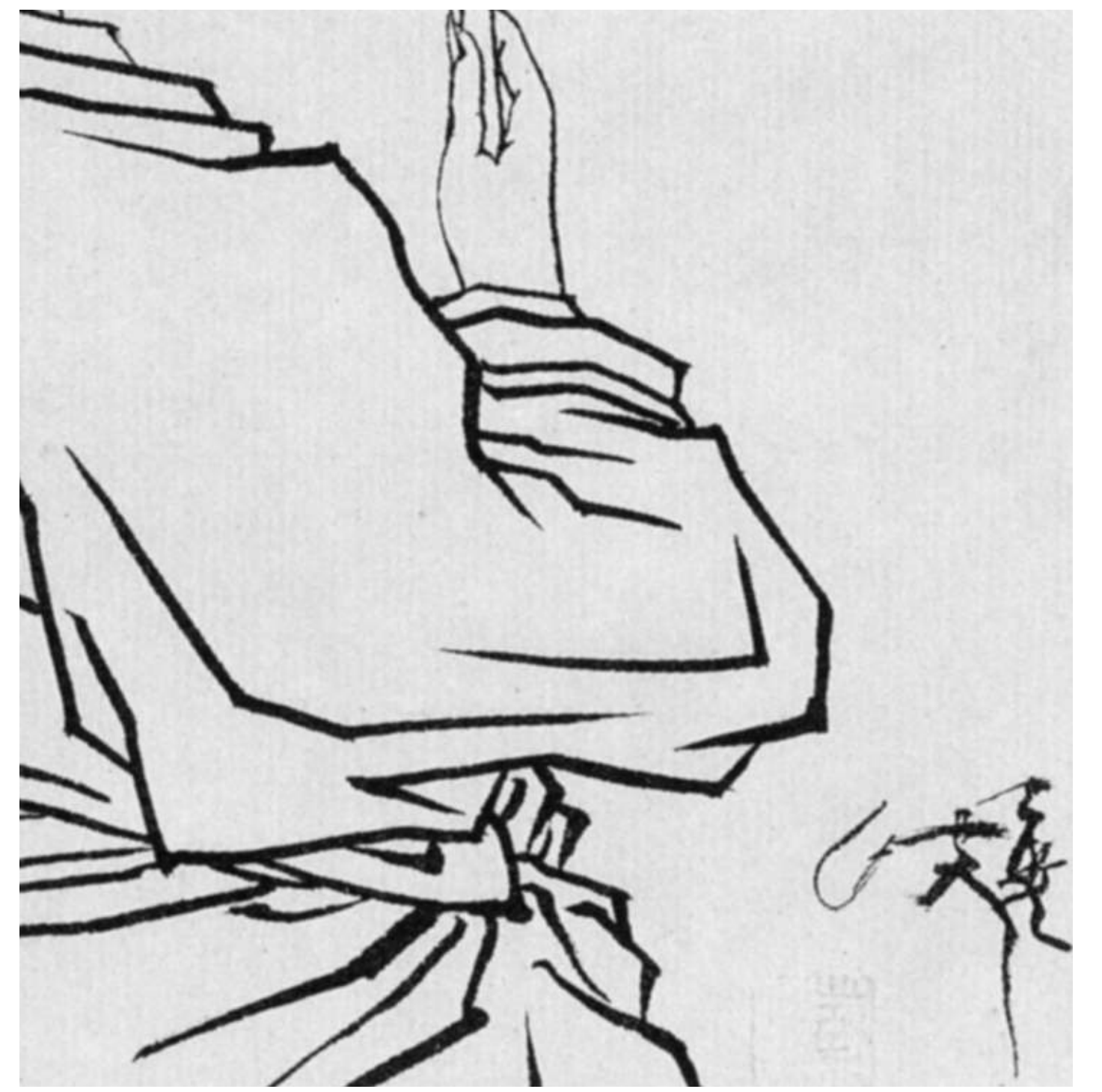


**Nail-head** 釘頭皴

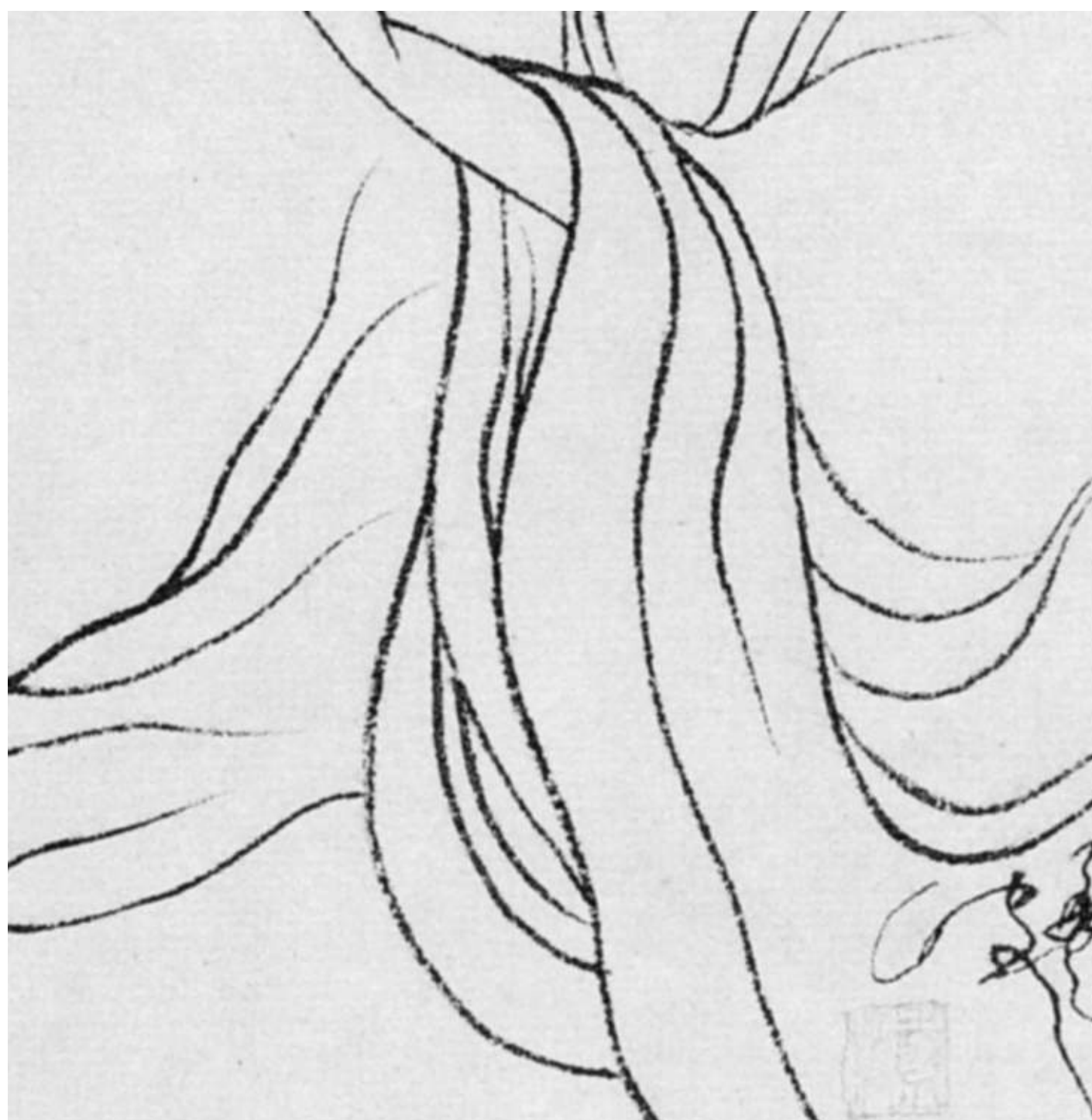
Resembles the profile of a nail with a prominent beginning and ending with a sharp tip. The brush is pressed down at an angle and the stroke is finished with the brush in an upright position.

# Linear techniques for figure painting

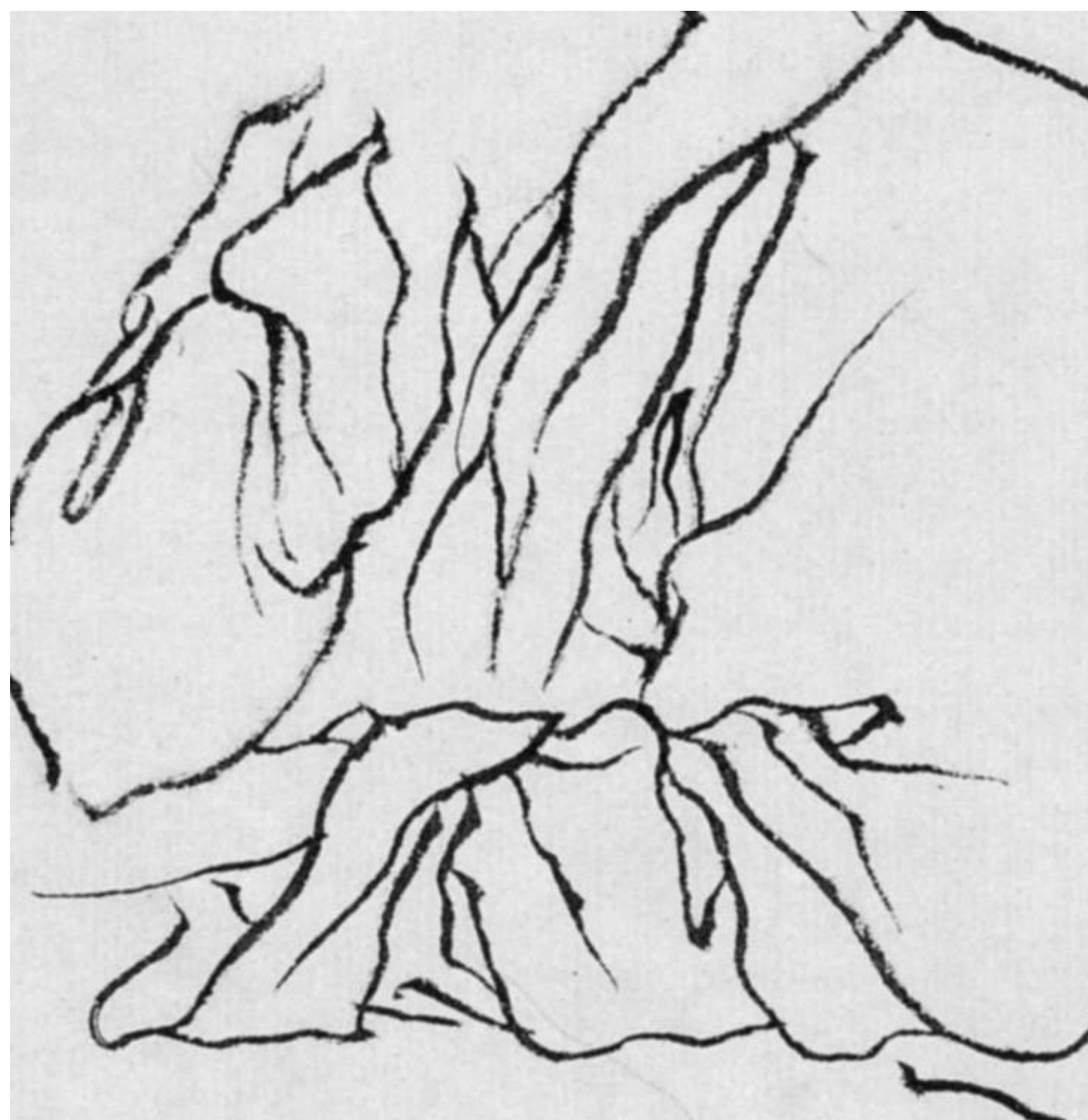
The most fundamental element in ink painting is the line, which defines form and suggests movement. During the Ming dynasty, art critic and historian Wang Keyu (1587–1645) published a list of eighteen outline methods as the basic linear techniques for depicting garments. Seven of these are represented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



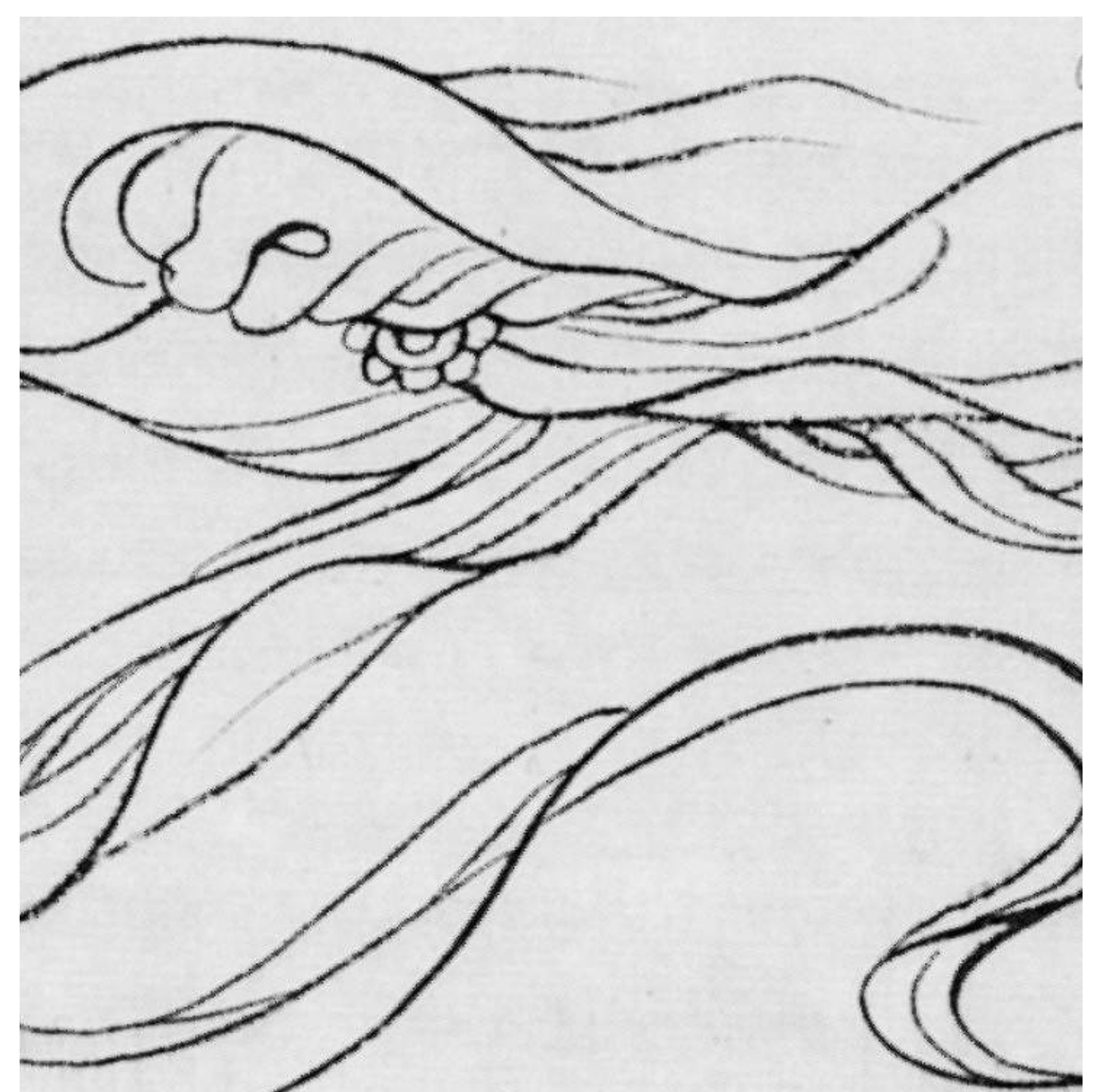
**Iron-wire lines 鐵線描**  
Long, narrow, rigid strokes with sharp angles resembling chisel cuts in stone; done with a vertical brush and even pressure.



**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.



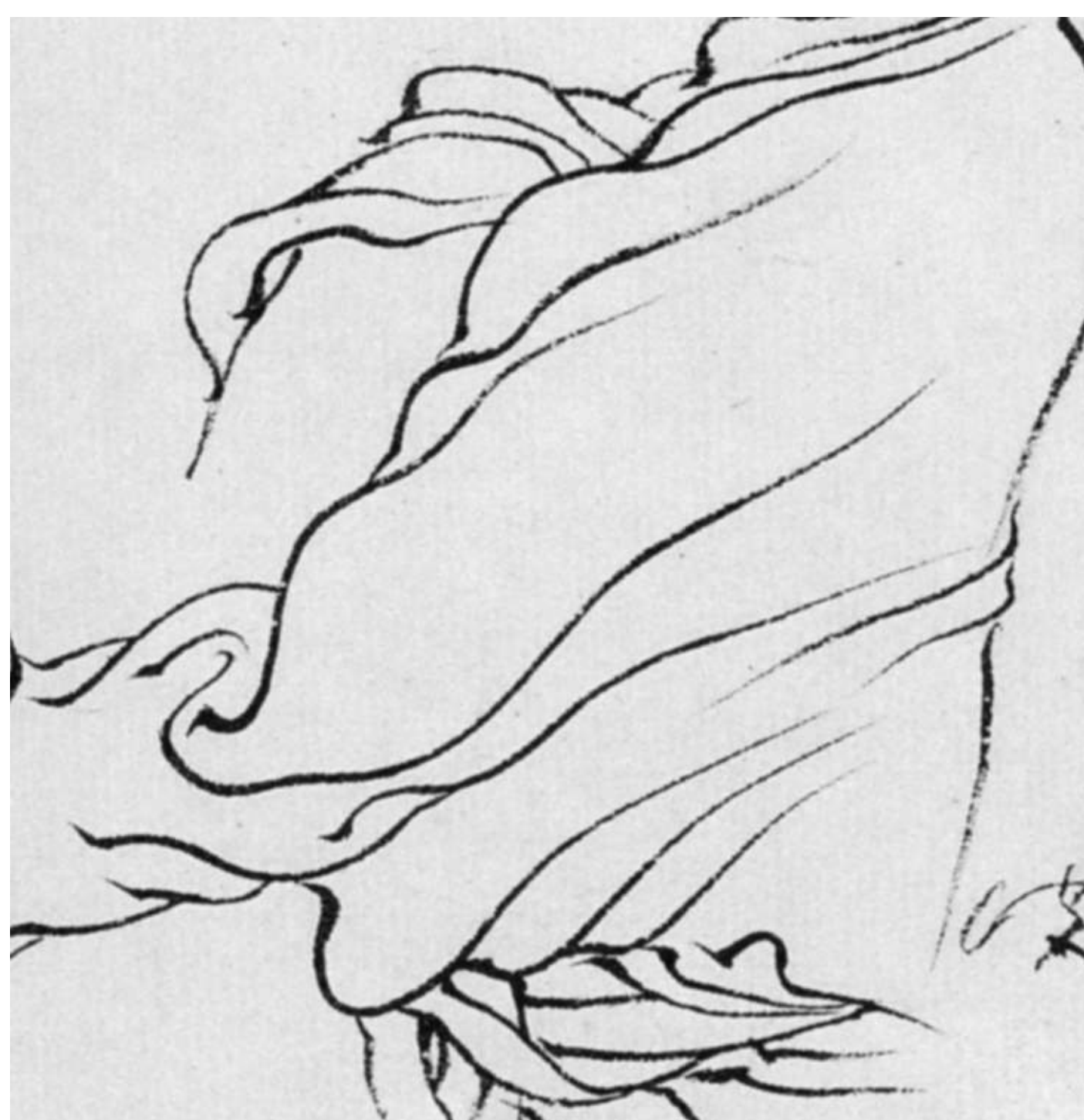
**Rippled-water lines 戰筆水紋描**  
Distinguished by varying pressure throughout the line; done with a quivering brush held at an angle.



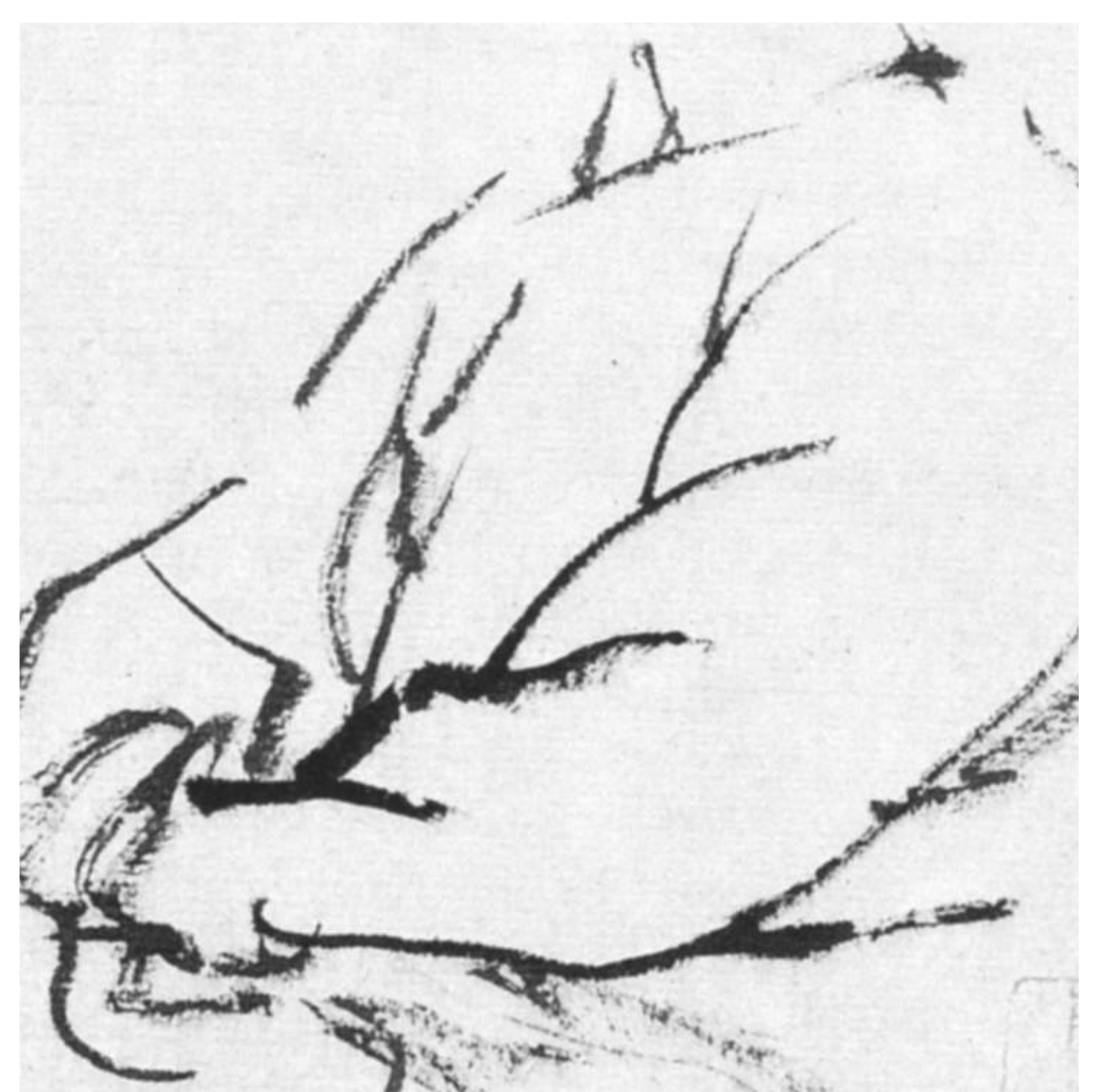
**Floating-cloud lines 行雲流水描 (or running water)**  
Even, carefully controlled lines seeming to describe the figure in a single, free-flowing line, very popular for depicting fluttering draperies.



**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 釘頭鉤**  
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)