Foam brushes and rollers

These brushes and rollers can often be picked up as small sets at dollar stores or at your local hardware stores. It is fun to work with them to create lettering and expressive marks - trying out non-traditional ways of working with the common brush.

Flat paint brushes

Depending on the quality you are looking for these large flat paint brushes can be sourced through your local art supply shop, bought at a hardware store or through the online suppliers listed at the end of this resource.

Automatic pens

These pens can be sourced through John Neal Bookseller (link below), in addition to looking for used ones on eBay. I prefer the aesthetic of the old used pens (wood and brass) as opposed to plastic...but they function just as well.
Assorted Calligraphy Felt Pens

This particular brand of calligraphy felt pens is made by Itoya. They are “Doubleheaden” with acid free ink. What I like about these, aside from the 2 sizes of chisel tips at either end, is that they make “on location” practice really easy...no ink to spill, or set up time required.

Old Toothbrushes

I never throw out an old toothbrush! I always sterilize them with vinegar and boiling water and then they make their way into my studio. I use them to scrub calligraphy nibs, for splattering and spraying, texturing paint and many other fun techniques.

Cola Pens

These “home made” calligraphy pens can be made with any old pop/soda/beer can. If you google How to Make A Cola Pen - you will find lots of simple videos explaining the process. Just be careful - cutting the cans creates very sharp edges - wear gloves and work with care!
Bamboo or Reed Pens

I love these simple wood pens that come in a variety of sizes. Again they are usually available from your local art supply shop, craft shops, John Neal Book Sellers, and ebay.

Bamboo Watercolour Brushes

What I like about these brushes is that they hold a lot of water or wet media such as ink or watercolour. You can create all sorts of marks and textures with them, depending on how wet or dry the brush is. You can often buy them in affordable sets of varying sizes.

Pilot Parallel Pens

Pilot Parallel Pens feature a unique nib made up of two parallel metal plates, allowing the ink to distribute very evenly. They are a durable pen that creates crisp lines. You can also create neat blended colours and gradations. They come in 4 sizes and can be purchased online and at most art supply stores.
Ruling Pens

These drawing instruments come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They contain ink in a slot between two flexible metal jaws, which are tempered to a point. You can achieve a variety of effects with these tools from fine, precise lines to expressive, splattered marks.

Coit Pens

These pens are similar to the Automatic Pens, but have a folded brass nib that hides a corrugated reservoir. It is a very strong pen due to its construction and holds a great deal of ink. The upstroke of these pens is not quite as fine as the automatic pens but they have a beautiful quality.

PITT artist pens by Faber-Castell

These brush tip felt pens come in a variety of sizes and colours including black. What I love about them is that they are waterproof, acid-free, have maximum lightfastness, and are made of India ink. This makes them great for working under wax as well as on their own.
Mark Making Tool Inventory

Glass Pen

I put this beauty in here because I love it for drawing and letter writing. It is a glass pen from Venice, Italy. What I like about the glass tip is that it has recessed channels all around the tip that simultaneously load with ink when you dip it. As a result you can write or draw with this pen for a long time before you have to redip. Very handy!

Plastic syringes and pipettes

Other options for creating expressive lettering and marks include dripping or spraying ink, gouache and paint through a syringe or pipette. These tools are often available with fabric dyeing supplies in your art supply store. You can also find them at medical supply companies.

Assorted Calligraphy Pens (Strait and Oblique) with a variety of nibs (Pointed and Broad)

Of course, you can also work with traditional calligraphy tools in both traditional and non-traditional ways. Some of my favourite nibs are by Speedball, Brause and Mitchell which are all available where calligraphy supplies are sold. The nibs come in a variety of sizes.
Straws and Balsa Wood

Like old toothbrushes, straws can be used to create some special effects, sprays and intentional drips. Balsa wood, comes in a variety of shapes and sizes from small square pieces to strips that are 1” - 5” wide. These can be cut to various sizes and used as a writing tool with some amazing effects.

So, this initial list is just to get you considering some of the myriad of options you have with mark making and calligraphy tools. What I didn’t cover here are all the exciting tools you can make by collecting up materials from nature and around the house that you can form into your own personal tools for creating and drawing.

Some online sources where you can purchase supplies include:

The Great Calligraphy Catalogue (worldwide shipping)

John Neal Book Sellers

I recommend that one of the easiest ways to find calligraphy supplies around where you live is to do a Google search “Where to buy calligraphy supplies in _____________)” with your location listed. If you live around me in the Vancouver area some great sources to check out include:

Rath Art Supplies
The Vancouver Pen Shop
Opus Art Supplies
Perks Pens

I’d love to see some of the works you create...have fun with this!

Nancy Crawford