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Chapter- I

Still life paintings and drawings

What is Still Life?



Still Life of Poultry, seafood and Vegetables
Roman Mosaic (2nd Century AD)

Still life is the art of drawing or painting inanimate objects such as fruit, flowers and household items which are usually arranged on a table or shelf. Artists create still life paintings for various reasons: to reflect the status of their owner, be it humble or haughty; for their symbolic meaning which reveals a hidden story or idea; to capture the transient beauty of natural objects like a flower or fruit; or as a controlled structure to express the abstract qualities of the visual elements.

Still Life art existed in one form or another since the time of the Ancient Romans and Greeks. Although there are examples of Ancient Roman still life, mostly in the form of mosaics and interior decoration that was preserved when Mount Vesuvius erupted in A.D.79, there are no examples from Ancient Greece. There is, however, a story from around this time in the book 'Historia Naturalis' (the only surviving history of ancient art) by the Roman writer Pliny who lived from AD 23-29. It tells us about a competition that took place about 400BC between two Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Zeuxis created a painting of grapes which were so convincing that the birds flew around and tried to peck at them. In art, this kind of realistic painting is called a 'trompe l'oeil' (a French artistic term which means 'trick of the eye'). Envious of his fellow artist's display of skill, Parrhasius painted a 'trompe l'oeil' image of a curtain which appeared to conceal a painting about the Trojan War beneath it. On seeing his friend's work, Zeuxis asked Parrhasius to pull back the curtain to reveal the rest of the painting. At that moment, Parrhasius claimed victory. Although Zeuxis had fooled the birds, Parrhasius had succeeded in fooling a fellow artist, an altogether more difficult task. Since the earliest times, Still Life has always been a subject that artists have used to show off their technical skills in painting.



Carlo Crivelli (c.1435-1495) Madonna and Child,
tempera on panel (c.1480)

Before the 17th century still life was usually limited to the background detail of religious figurative art usually with some symbolic significance. In Carlo Crivelli's painting above, the apples and fly represent temptation and corruption while the cucumber is seen as the antidote to these as it was a symbol of redemption. Many fruits had meanings that now seem rather strange. For example, the cherry symbolized heaven (it was known as the Fruit of Paradise) and the pomegranate symbolized Christ's Resurrection. This is because in Greek mythology the pomegranate was associated with Persephone who returned to the earth every year from the Underworld, symbolizing the way in which spring brings new life after winter.



Willem Claeszoon Heda (c.1593-1680/82) Breakfast Table with Blackberry
Pie, oil on wood panel (1631)

Before the 17th century still life was usually limited to the background detail of religious figurative art usually with some symbolic significance. In Carlo Crivelli's painting above, the apples and fly represent temptation and corruption while the cucumber is seen as the antidote to these as it was a symbol of redemption. Many fruits had meanings that now seem rather strange. For example, the cherry symbolized heaven (it was known as the Fruit of Paradise) and the pomegranate symbolized

Christ's Resurrection. This is because in Greek mythology the pomegranate was associated with Persephone who returned to the earth every year from the Underworld, symbolizing the way in which spring brings new life after winter.



Juan Gris (1887-1927) Still Life with Bottles and a Knife, oil on canvas (1911-12)

However, during the Reformation, as the Catholic Church's patronage of the arts declined, and the patronage of dealers and collectors grew, a greater demand for still lifes emerged, particularly in Protestant countries like Holland. These early works were usually displays of rich possessions or lavish 'banquet pieces' which reflected the wealth of the patron. Alternatively there were the 'Vanitas' works: objects depicted for their obvious symbolic meaning, warning us of our mortality - the skull, the hour glass, the burning candle, the smoking pipe, the open book, etc. However, as a subject in its own right, still life painting was considered to be a lower form of art. Some painters had achieved great skill in the realistic representation of objects, but it was not elevated to the status of a major art form until the work of Chardin emerged in the 18th century, followed by Cézanne in the 19th century and the abstract style of Cubism in the 20th century.

Subject matter

The subject matter of still life paintings is determined by the objects that are portrayed in the paintings. Discover some of the natural still life objects that appear in famous still life paintings throughout history! Explore the symbolism and meaning of these objects, with still life examples.

Themes in Still Life Art

When looking at a still life painting, or when creating one, the most important thing to ask yourself is, "What does it mean?" Is it a random collection of items, or did the artist have a particular intention when choosing them? It's easy to look at a painting and think, "Hmm, pretty objects", and quickly move on to the next painting. But the artwork usually goes much deeper than just depicting pretty objects. Even if a piece is purportedly meaningless, there is *always* an underlying thought process behind the work. (And if you want to look at art intelligently, it's important to examine the artwork with an investigative eye and an inquisitive mind!)

The themes for a still life painting can be personal, cultural, societal, mythological, religious or philosophical and existential. Or, they can be based on material qualities, such as color or texture. They can even be whimsically based on objects that start with the same letter of the alphabet, or things you might find in a typical junk drawer in someone's kitchen. And of course, all of these themes can overlap to weave a richly layered tapestry of theme and meaning within a single artwork!

The Art of Still Life

This Still Life lessons are the best way to discover and practice the basic techniques of drawing and painting. You can take the drawing and painting skills that you learn from this lesson and apply them to any subject in art.

Each of our still life lessons will teach you about:

- The fundamental techniques of drawing and painting.
- The handling of different media. e.g. pencil, chalk pastels and oil pastels.
- A step by step approach to building up a still life drawing.
- A step by step approach to building up tone and color.
- The qualities of a good composition.

The practice of still life develops and strengthens your natural level of drawing ability. It improves your observation and rendering of shape, tone, color, pattern and texture in a range of different media. You also learn a lot about composition - the interaction of positive shapes (the objects) and negative space (the area around the objects)

Still Life Notes

Over the centuries artists have chosen the subject of still life for a variety of reasons: to reflect the status of their owner, be it humble or haughty; for their symbolic meaning which reveals a hidden story or idea; to capture the natural beauty of transient object like a flower or fruit; to demonstrate the artist's skilled painting technique; or as a controlled structure to express the abstract qualities of the visual elements.

- Traditionally, still life is the drawing and painting of items such as fruit, flowers and household objects, which are usually arranged on a table top.
- Willem Kalf painted still lifes which reflected the opulent lifestyle and status of their owner.
- Harmen Steenwyck illustrated objects that communicated a hidden message to the viewer.
- Chardin showed us that there is great beauty in the humble household objects that surround us.
- Henri Matisse intensified our experience of fruit, flowers and exotic artifacts with his expressive use of colour.
- Juan Gris used still life to experiment with the way we perceive objects in space and time.
- Still life as a subject has provided a platform for artists of different eras to explore their relationship with the world of objects that surround us.
- As our world evolves, new products, artifacts and modern media will continue to suggest new avenues for the stylistic development and reinvention of still life as a subject in art.

Chapter- II

Some Still Life Artists and his/ her works

WILLEM KALF (1622-1693)



WILLEM KALF (1622-1693) 'Still Life with Drinking Horn', 1653 (oil on canvas)

encouraging moderation in the use of alcohol, as lemon juice was added to wine to reduce its potency and for medicinal effect.

Willem Kalf was one of the greatest Dutch masters of a type of still life painting called 'pronkstilleven', a term that could be translated as 'ostentatious still life'. These still lifes displayed an array of luxurious possessions that reflected the lifestyle of the wealthy in seventeenth century Holland. Venetian glass, Chinese porcelain and Turkish carpets bedecked with ornamental gold and silverware were painted as status symbols, to be hung in the homes of the affluent patrons who commissioned them. However the choice of objects was not always for spectacle alone as they sometimes carried a symbolic significance. Although only the rich could afford such rare artefacts, which were usually imported from distant lands, their inclusion in a painting could be interpreted as a patriotic tribute to the prosperity of Dutch trade. The inclusion of citrus fruits alongside wine is often read as

The Classic Dutch Still Life



WILLEM KALF (1622-1693) 'Still Life with a Chinese Porcelain Jar', 1669 (oil on canvas)

'Still Life with a Chinese Porcelain Jar' is a typical example of Kalf's mature work which was painted in Amsterdam, where he finally settled in 1653. His works of this period are remarkably similar in style. They all depict a collection of rare or expensive objects, usually combined with exotic foods and arranged on a tabletop against a very dark background. Kalf was also an art dealer who had easy access to many of the 'objects d'art' that appear in his still life's. Consequently some of these items often reappear in different works. For example, you can see the Turkish rug, silver tray and the ornamental knife from 'Still Life with a Chinese Porcelain Jar' in

many other paintings of his Amsterdam period.

'Still Life with a Chinese Porcelain Jar' is not simply a painting of luxurious objects, it is a luxurious object in itself, even more desirable than the items it depicts. Kalf painted the picture to display his skills as an artist and to demonstrate a level of craftsmanship that surpasses the quality of his subject matter.

At this time, realistic representation in art was valued as a measure of artistic quality, but Kalf pushes his image beyond mere technique. He adjusts the lighting across the painting to extract as much drama as possible from the subject. The overall light for the picture comes from the top left but he has heightened and dampened certain areas to control the effects of texture, pattern, tone and color within the composition. He subdues the tones of the Venetian glassware (probably Dutch copies) whose transparent forms are picked out of the darkness with reflections and refractions of light. To counterbalance their delicate appearance, he intensifies the light on the Ming jar and fruit. This has the effect of heightening both their pattern and texture. The jar, which is emblazoned with a bold blue and white pattern, also subtly reflects the surrounding objects in the gloss of its glaze, while the lemon, whose waxy skin spirals down from its juicy segments, echoes the design on the Chinese jar. Throughout the composition Kalf continues to manipulate light and shade to tune the pitch of pattern and texture across the work. Twisting baroque decoration resonates through each object: the ornamental stems of the glassware, the rippling rim of the silver tray which is repeated in miniature on the lid of the little chronometer or compass, the tendrils of pattern on the porcelain jar, the hand-woven design on the the rug, the marbling on the stone table top and finally, the carefully arranged coil of lemon rind.

This is a classic Dutch still life from the Baroque period which emphasizes the grandeur that appealed to the merchant classes in 17th century Holland.

Willem Kalf (1622-1693)



WILLEM KALF (1622-1693) 'Still Life with Nautilus Cup', 1662 (oil on canvas)

Willem Kalf was born in Rotterdam, worked for a while Paris, before he finally settled in Amsterdam.

- Kalf was one of the great Dutch masters of still life painting.
- The type of still life that Kalf painted was called 'pronkstilleven'. These were lavish displays of exotic food and objects associated with an affluent lifestyle.
- His clients were the prosperous merchants of the day who had made their fortunes on the Dutch trade routes.
- His still lifes depict objects that are rendered in great detail and which luminously glow out of dark backgrounds.

- The same objects often appear in different still lifes. As Kalf was also an art dealer, he probably had easy access to these expensive artefacts.
- Willem Kalf's still lifes have become much more valuable than the precious objects they portray. The poet Goethe stated, 'if I had to choose between the golden vessels or the picture,.....I would choose the picture.'

Chardin (1699-1779)



JEAN BAPTISTE SIMÉON CHARDIN
(1699-1779) 'The Brioche', 1763
(oil on canvas)

Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin was one of the greatest masters of Still Life in the history of art. The painting style of the establishment in his day was Rococo: a pretentious style crammed with allegorical images from classical mythology swirling with ornate decoration. To Chardin this theatrical approach reduced art to some kind of intellectual conversation piece. It was totally alien to the world that he constructed - a simple world of truth, humility and calm played out in a few square inches on the wall.

The items he portrayed from his own home were selected for their shapes, textures and colours, rather than for any symbolic meaning they may have had. They were simply painted to convey the visual pleasure he experienced in

looking at them. As his friend, the critic Diderot put it, "To look at pictures by other artists it seems that I need to borrow a different pair of eyes. To look at those of Chardin, I only have to keep the eyes that nature gave me and make good use of them."

What Chardin strove for was an overall effect: a unity of tone, colour and form. His still lifes reveal themselves slowly, with his objects gradually emerging from their subtly toned background, summoned as the writer Marcel Proust puts it, "out of the everlasting darkness in which they have been interred."

Chardin's Painting Technique



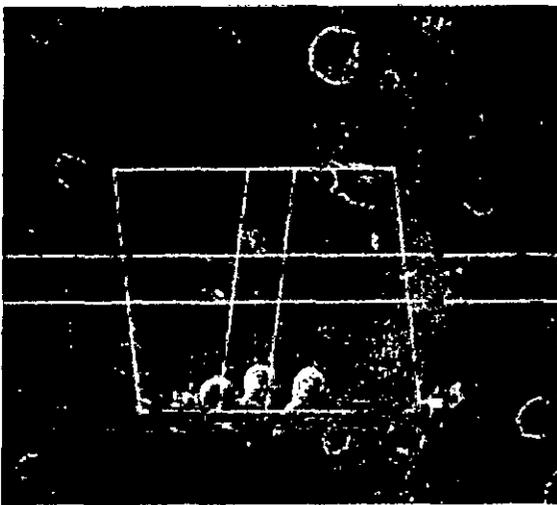
JEAN BAPTISTE SIMÉON CHARDIN
(1699-1779) 'Glass of Water and Coffee
Pot', 1760 (oil on canvas)

Chardin would prime his canvases with a brownish pigment, sometimes tinted with red or green. This would give him a neutral background to paint on. On this he would brush in the darkest tones, then the mid-tones, and finally the highlights. When he arrived at the correct tonal balance, he would add colour, being careful to maintain the overall harmony. He would finally complete the work by going over it again with the colours he had already used in order to create the reflections and highlights that tune and unify the composition. In the example above, the same white that is used for the

cloves of garlic is echoed in the reflections from the glass on one side and in the burnished highlights of the copper coffee pot on the other. The range of browns across the picture are united by a subtle hint of the green of the garlic leaves.

Chardin always looks at the world as if he is seeing it for the first time. The intensity of his vision focuses on the beauty of the everyday objects that surround us - a beauty that we take for granted as we are often too close to see it. From Chardin we learn that there is hidden character on the charred surface of an old coffee pot, or a jewel-like radiance in the crystal clarity of a glass of water. Like all good art his paintings open our eyes and teach us to see afresh.

Balancing the Composition



The hidden geometry in 'Glass of Water and Coffee Pot'

Chardin's 'Glass of Water and Coffee Pot' contains many of the key elements of his deceptively simple still life's. His subject matter is always secondary to his search for the compositional balance of tone and color. The subject comprises three common kitchen items arranged on a concrete shelf: a glass of water, a charred copper coffee pot and a few cloves of garlic. It is the harmonies and contrasts that he builds into the visual elements of these ordinary objects that make this painting extraordinary.

The glass and coffee pot are both truncated cones, but the shape of one is an inversion of the other. The balance of these two opposite forms creates a dialogue between their shapes. This balance of opposites continues through other elements: the glass is light, transparent, cold, smooth and reflective, while the coffee pot is dark, opaque, warm, rough and

charred with soot. Even the details of these objects are carefully balanced as the handle of the coffee pot and the glass from the water level up, both occupy the same horizontal strip on the picture plane.

Chardin balances the tonal values of the glass and the coffee pot by creating a counterchange with the background. He carefully graduates the tone of the background from dark on the right to light on the left. This results in a contrast with both objects: the glass looks brighter against its dark background while the coffee pot looks darker as its background becomes lighter.

There is a basic rule of composition that states you should not have a long unbroken line parallel to the bottom of the picture, as this creates an area of 'dead space'. Chardin introduces the garlic and its foliage to break the long line of the shelf and to enhance the illusion of space at the front of the picture. They also act as a compositional device to lead the viewer's eye into the painting and to link all the objects together. As softer organic forms, they create a welcome contrast to the hard geometric shapes of the glass and coffee pot.

Variations on a Theme



JEAN BAPTISTE SIMÉON CHARDIN
(1699-1779) 'A Basket of Strawberries',
1761 (oil on canvas)

Many of Chardin's favourite still life objects often reappear in other compositions. In 'Basket of Wild Strawberries' he uses the same glass in a very similar arrangement to 'Glass of Water and Coffee Pot'. His purpose in doing this is to develop some variations of the harmonies and contrasts of visual elements that he explored in the earlier painting.

Chardin's Appeal to Modern Art



JEAN BAPTISTE SIMÉON CHARDIN (1699-1779)
'The Silver Cup', 1769 (oil on canvas)

Chardin's paintings appeal greatly to modern eyes accustomed to the simplified forms of Cézanne, and the Cubists. They all share the same ideals: a unified composition reached through the analytical drawing of pure forms, uncluttered by emotion and without any superfluous detail.

Chardin Notes

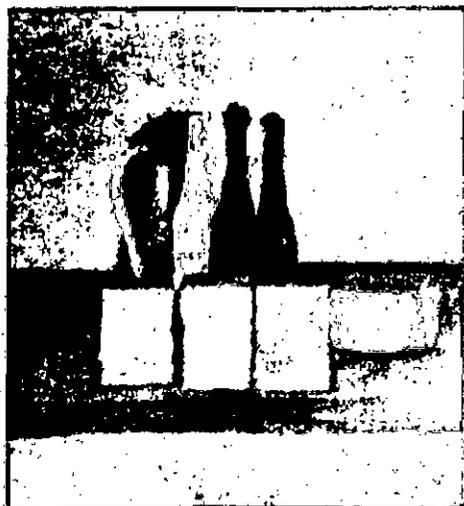


JEAN BAPTISTE SIMÉON
CHARDIN (1699-1779) 'Self
Portrait with an Eyeshade', 1775
(oil on canvas).

- Chardin was one of the greatest still life painters in the history of art
- He found beauty in the everyday domestic objects and utensils that surrounded him.
- He often painted the same objects in different still lifes.
- He chose the objects in his still lifes for their shapes, textures and colours, rather than for any symbolic meaning they may have had.
- He carefully crafted an overall balance of shape, texture, tone and colour throughout a still life.

- In today's fast world you can easily overlook the subtle beauty and balance of a Chardin. You need to slow yourself down to properly appreciate one of his paintings.
- The abstract analysis of shape, colour, tone and texture and the overall unity of composition that we find in Chardin's work appealed greatly to modern artists in the 20th century.

Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964)



GIORGIO MORANDI (1890-1964)
 'Natura Morta (Still Life)', 1956 (oil on canvas)

Giorgio Morandi is one of those painters who, at first glance, seem to defy categorisation. He was nicknamed 'il monaco' (the monk) due to his reclusive lifestyle. Morandi spent most of his life in his native town of Bologna, both living and painting in his flat, and seldom venturing far afield. This gave rise to his initial reputation as a provincial artist, but the obvious quality of his paintings gradually forced a reappraisal of his work and established him as one of the best modern Italian painters and the greatest master of *Natura Morta* (still life) in the 20th century.

Although Morandi does not fit comfortably into the canon of movements in modern art, his paintings are stylistically embedded in the Italian tradition. Initially influenced by the metaphysical painting of his countrymen, Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà, his work was also deeply rooted in the art of the Early Italian Renaissance, particularly Giotto, Uccello and Piero della Francesca.

Morandi's Still Life Objects



Morandi Still Life (1955) and Italian Medieval Town, San Gimignano

Morandi deliberately limited his choice of still life objects to the unremarkable bottles, boxes, jars, jugs and vases that were commonly found in his everyday domestic environment. He would then 'depersonalize' these objects by removing their labels and painting them with a flat matt color to eliminate any lettering or reflections. In this condition they provided him with an anonymous cast of ready-made forms that he could arrange and rearrange to explore their abstract qualities and relationships.

Morandi's compositions and choice of still lifes objects allude to his Italian heritage. When assembled together in a still life group, his dusty bottles and boxes take on an monumental quality that evokes the architecture of medieval Italy - a style with which he seems at ease. Morandi's own city of Bologna has many examples of medieval architecture and is home to the oldest functioning university in the world: the "Alma Mater Studiorum", founded in 1088.

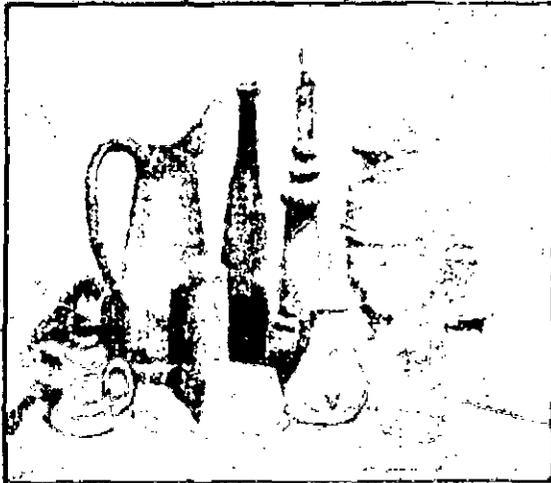
The Theatre of Visual Relationships



FRANCISCO DE ZURBARÁN (1598-1664) 'Still Life with Pottery Jars', 1630's (oil on canvas)

Still life as the theatre of visual relationships had its roots in some of the earliest examples of the genre. Francisco de Zurbarán's 17th century masterpiece, 'Still Life with Pottery Jars' parades four prima donnas, each competing with the other for the attention of their audience. Morandi's characters, however, are the opposite of these: a humble but disciplined chorus singing in perfect harmony.

Morandi's Intensity of Observation



GIORGIO MORANDI (1890-1964) 'Natura Morta (Still Life)', 1929 (oil on canvas)

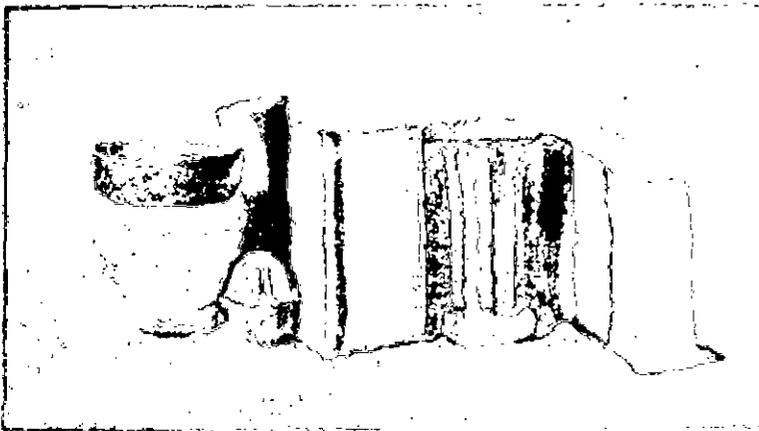
In the hands of a lesser artist, Morandi's restricted choice of subject matter could give rise to a series of boring repetitive images. What elevates his work to a higher plane is the remarkable intensity of his observation.

Today, we were bombarded with images from print and multimedia and are accustomed to absorbing them at breakneck speed. To slow down and focus on one image for a length of time is against our conditioning, but this is precisely what Morandi does in his painting and what he expects from his audience.

Like Chardin, the greatest still life painter of the 18th century, Morandi always looked at his still life objects as if he was seeing them for the first time. He slowly contemplated each object, profoundly searching for its

visual dynamic within the still life group. When satisfied with an arrangement, he would draw around the bases of the objects to finalise their positions. "It takes me weeks to make up my mind which group of bottles will go well with a particular colored tablecloth.....Then it takes me weeks of thinking about the bottles themselves, and yet often I still go wrong with the spaces. Perhaps I work too fast?" It is this intensity of contemplation and observation that gives a freshness and individuality to each of Morandi's paintings, even if the same objects are used repeatedly in different works.

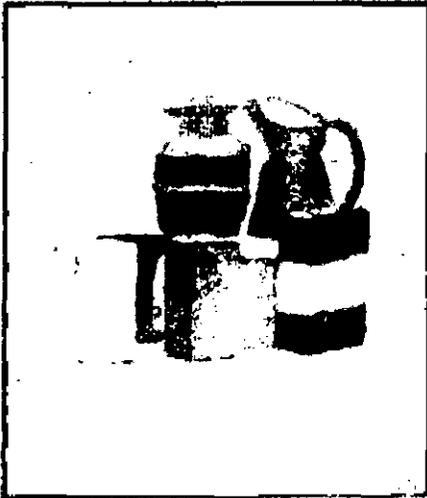
Morandi's Quality of Light



GIORGIO MORANDI (1890-1964) 'Still Life with Cups and Boxes', 1951 (oil on canvas)

I am essentially a painter of the kind of still life composition that communicates a sense of tranquility and privacy, moods which I have always valued above all else. Morandi's carefully balanced colours and tones always convey a peaceful mood. Some paintings are bright and sunlit, whereas others are subdued with a less obvious light source. However, each of his pictures has a certain quality of light that suggests it was painted at a particular time of day or under specific lighting conditions. This distinctive use of light and his continuous exploration of similar images insinuates the

influence of Monet's serial paintings of 'Haystacks' and 'Rouen Cathedral'.



GIORGIO MORANDI (1890-1964)

'Natura Morta (Still Life)', 1960 (oil on canvas)

If, as Marcel Proust puts it, Chardin's still lifes were summoned "out of the everlasting darkness in which they have been interred", then Morandi's still lifes slowly emerge from the light that sculpts their form. Given Morandi's slow contemplation of the elements of his art and the fact that he had to cope with the transient effects of light, it is clear that his pictures were developed over a long period of time. This helps to explain the uncertainty of the outlines of his forms, as he grafts the subtleties of one day's observations on top of the next. These wavering images also recall the work of Paul Cézanne who had a similarly patient approach to painting.

The unique style of Giorgio Morandi's work may be difficult to place within the movements of modern art, but it is so steeped in influences from Giotto in the 13th century to metaphysical art in the 20th, that it acquires an ageless quality - a characteristic that identifies most great art.

Giorgio Morandi Notes



GIORGIO MORANDI (1890-1964)

'Self Portrait', 1925 (oil on canvas)

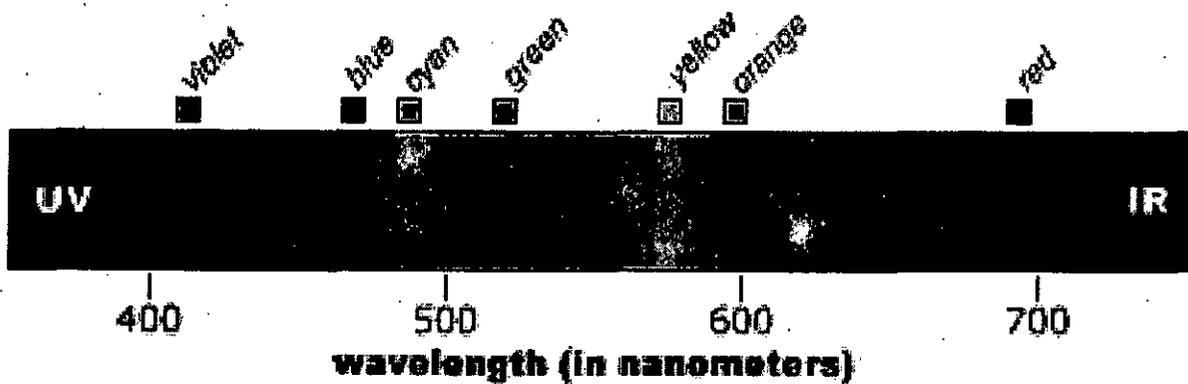
Giorgio Morandi was nicknamed 'il monaco' (the monk) due to his reclusive lifestyle.

- Morandi is the greatest Italian still life painter in the 20th century.
- Still life painting is called 'Natura Morta' in Italy.
- Morandi's still lifes have many influences spanning seven centuries from the early Renaissance to the 20th century.
- Morandi's still life arrangements have a monumental quality.
- Morandi contemplates his still lifes for a long time before he paints them.
- Morandi tries to communicate a sense of tranquility in his art.
- You have to slow down to look at and appreciate the beauty of one of Morandi's paintings.

Chapter- III

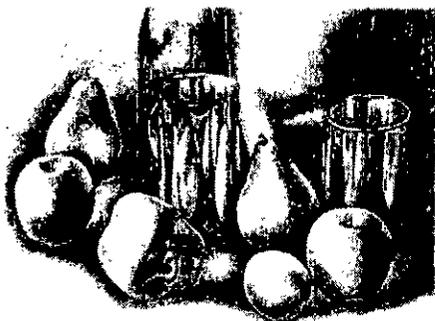
Some words about colors

- Our visual system is more responsive to Green and Yellow light than Red, Blue to Violet (see the diagram below—the colors in centre are most visible in daylight whereas colors towards the ends less so). Therefore, if your painting is placed in low light, the green and yellows will hold up, whereas the blues, violets and reds will lose their intensity.
- Colors also change value based on light. In low light, reds become darker and blues become lighter. If for example you were to paint cherries in a blue bowl of the same value (or even a blue darker than the cherries), in low light, the red cherries will look darker.



Of course, in the end, these differences in visual perception are interesting, but ultimately not crucial. Our intentions as artists, as communicated through design, brush stroke and of course subject matter is much more important.

Still Life in Pencil



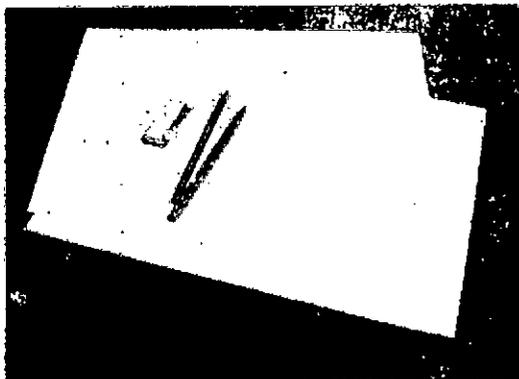
Still Life is the best subject in art for learning and teaching the skills of drawing and painting. It teaches you how to look at objects and see them like an artist - with a perceptive awareness of their outline, shape, proportions, tone, color, texture, form and composition.

Our step by step still life lesson will teach you the drawing techniques used to create the still life above which was done with a 2B pencil on cartridge paper.

Steps 1 to 4: These steps demonstrate how to draw the shapes and proportions of the still life objects using line.

- Steps 5 to 8: These steps illustrate how to render the three dimensional form of the still life using tone.

Art Materials for our Still Life Pencil Drawing



For this still life lesson you will need:

- a 2B pencil
- an eraser
- an A3 sheet of stiff cartridge paper, or a paper of similar quality around 180+gms.

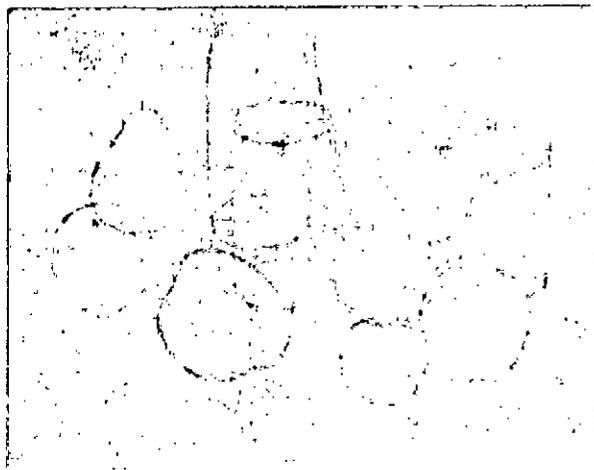
Step 1: Starting the Still Life Drawing



TECHNIQUE: In any still life, you should start to draw the objects as if they are transparent wire frame forms with visible lines of construction. This technique helps you to be fully aware of the shape of each individual form and its position in relation to the other forms. It is important to sketch the objects lightly as this makes it easier to change any mistakes and erase any lines of construction.

NOTE: This see-through drawing technique uses vertical and horizontal lines of construction to help you to draw convincing ellipses and to balance the symmetry of cylindrical forms.

Step 2: Creating an interesting composition



TECHNIQUE: When composing a still life, try to introduce the qualities that make an interesting arrangement. You need to be aware of the abstract structure of your arrangement: its rhythms and contrasts of line, shape, tone, color, pattern, texture and form.

NOTE: A transparent wire frame approach to sketching the still life helps you to organize the composition of the group. It makes it easier to see the shape, position and proportions of each object in relation to its neighbors.

Step 3: Erasing the lines of construction



TECHNIQUE: Once you are happy with the shape, proportion and composition of the still life, you can erase the lines of transparent construction. This will leave you with an accurate visible outline of each form and the confidence that all the objects are positioned correctly. You are now ready to work on the details of each object.

Step 4: Adding the details in line



TECHNIQUE: Now lightly sketch in the shapes of any shadows or reflections onto each object.

NOTE: The more care you take over the accuracy of these marks, the easier you will find the next stage of the drawing - the Application of Tone.

Step 5: Shading Technique - 1



TECHNIQUE: The tone of our still life is built up in four stages outlined in steps 5 - 8. In this step, some basic tones are lightly applied to each object to help build up its three dimensional form.

Step 6: Shading Technique - 2

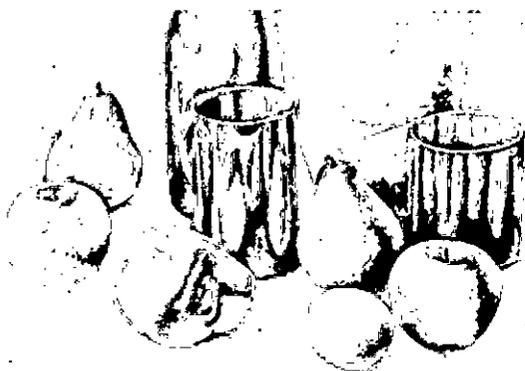


TECHNIQUE: The second stage in building up the tone focuses on the spaces between and around the objects.

NOTE: The drawing of the light and shade between the objects must be treated with as much importance as the drawing of the objects themselves. The shadows cast beneath and around the objects add as much to the definition of their shapes as does the shading on their surfaces. Notice how the counter-change of tones

between the objects and the spaces takes over from the use of line to define the forms of the still life.

Step 7: Shading Technique - 3



TECHNIQUE: In the third stage of building up the tone, you focus back on the objects. This time you deepen their tone, increasing the contrast between the areas of dark and light. This will enhance the form of the objects and increase the impact of the image.

NOTE: The biggest problem at this stage is maintaining a balance of tones across the whole still life so that no object appears too dark or too light. You are searching for a unity of tone and form.

Step 8: Shading Technique - 4



TECHNIQUE: Finally, you focus again on the spaces between the objects, deepening their tones and increasing their contrast.

NOTE: You need to be careful in balancing the tonal values of the objects and the spaces between them to ensure that you create a unified image.

THE FINISHED STILL LIFE: The completed still life should work on two levels: as a realistic representation of the group of objects and as a dynamic composition of visual elements, harmonizing and contrasting the use of line, shape and tone.

Still Life with Oil Pastels



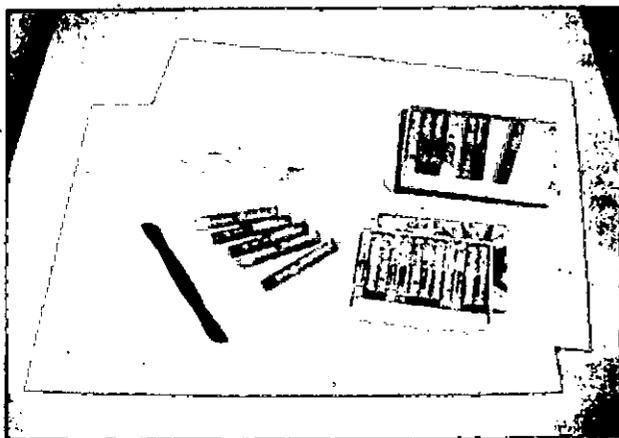
Still Life is the best subject in art for learning and teaching the skills of drawing and painting. It teaches you how to look at objects and see them like an artist - with a conscious awareness of their outline, shape, proportions, tone, color, texture, form and composition.

This step by step still life lesson will demonstrate the techniques used to create the still life above which was done with oil pastels on cartridge paper.

Steps 1 to 6: These steps demonstrate how you should establish the basic shapes, tones and colors of the still life.

Steps 7 to 10: These steps illustrate how to adjust the colors and tones to increase the dramatic impact of the still life.

Art Materials for our Oil Pastel Still Life

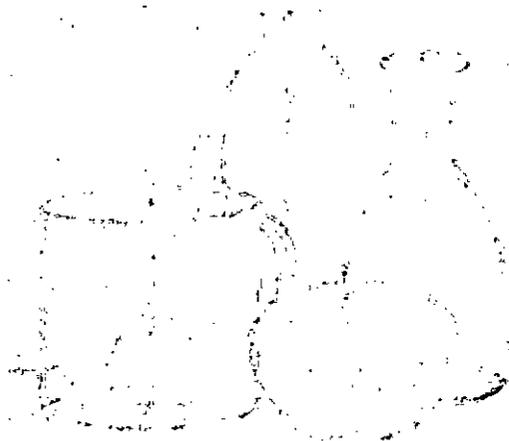


case a plastic clay modeling tool) for scraping off excessive layers of oil crayon and for experimenting with different textural effects.

For this still life lesson you will need:

- a box of oil pastels.
- two A3 sheets of stiff cartridge paper or a paper of similar quality around 180+gms. (one sheet can be used as a palette for testing color mixtures).
- some tissues or kitchen paper for blending colors and tones.
- a palette knife or similar tool (in this

Description of the pilars



TECHNIQUE: In any still life, you should start drawing the objects as if they are transparent wire frame forms. This approach helps you to be fully aware of the shape of each individual form and its position in relation to the other forms. This see-through drawing technique also uses vertical and horizontal lines of construction to help you to draw convincing ellipses and to balance the symmetry of cylindrical forms.

NOTE: When you are working with oil pastels it is not usually good practice to start your drawing using a black crayon as it will contaminate the purity and freshness of any colors applied over it. In this case the initial sketch was done in violet. After some tests it was found that most of the other colors in the box blended comfortably on top of the violet crayon.

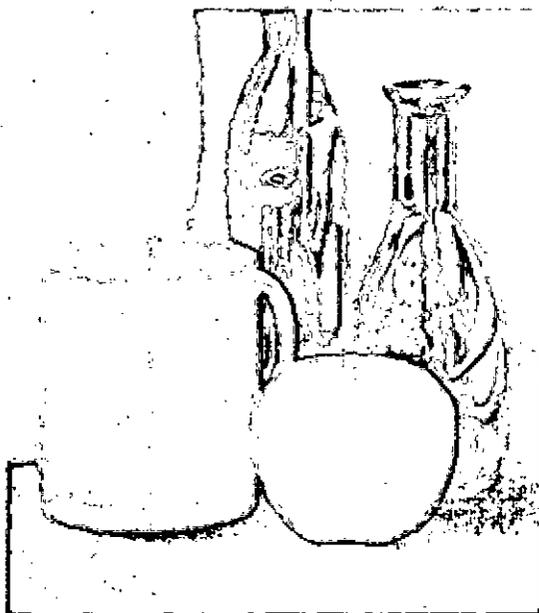
Step 2: Applying Tone and Color



TECHNIQUE: At this stage of the work, the foreground and background were loosely blocked in using a dark and light green respectively. A tissue was then used to soften the texture of the pastels and blend the color more smoothly. Next some blue was lightly applied to create the areas of shade. Finally, the tissue was used again to blend the various colors together and to refine the merging tones of the shadows.

NOTE: When drawing a still life, you normally start with the nearest object and work towards the background of the group. However, when applying color in paint or pastels you reverse this process, starting with the background and working towards the front. You will find that this method helps to improve the sharpness and accuracy of your work as you are always drawing the edge of an object over its background. This way there are no awkward gaps left between any object and its background.

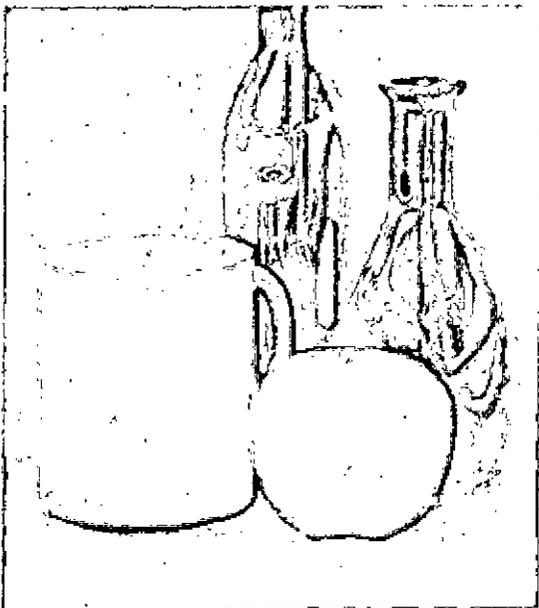
Step 3: Color the Still Life from Back to Front



TECHNIQUE: After applying color to the background and foreground you move on to the objects at the rear of the still life group. A basic brown crayon was used to draw in the dark tones of the bottles. The lighter tones and reflections were left as the white of the paper. Again a tissue was used to smooth out the rough texture of the crayon and blend the tones more gradually into one another.

NOTE: Although it is not obvious in our illustration, it is helpful to lightly sketch the shapes of any shadows or reflections onto each object before you start applying the color.

Step 4: Coloring the Vase



TECHNIQUE: The form of the large vase on the left hand side of the still life was built up with broad layers of yellow, red and blue. These colors were subsequently blended together with a white crayon. A tissue was then used to smooth and unify the overall tone to create the mottled effect of this color.

NOTE: When you are building up layers of color on top of one another, do so lightly as an excessive thickness of the oil crayon will start to resist the application of more color. If this happens, use a palette knife to scrape off the excess crayon so that you may then apply fresh color.

Step 5: Adding the Reflections to the Silver Cup



TECHNIQUE: Next the distorted shapes of the reflections on the silver cup were carefully drawn from close observation, however, they were loosely colored exercising care not to overdo the darker tones. These reflected colors and tones were mixed by various combinations of red, blue and dark green. The lightest tones, which were created without any white crayon, were achieved by allowing the white of the paper to shine through.

NOTE: In an attempt to keep the color as fresh as possible, no black was used in the creation of the darker tones.

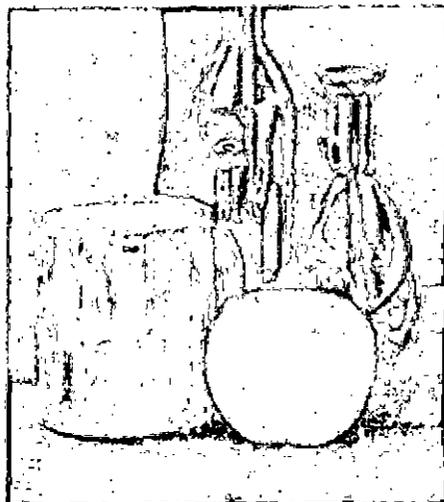
Step 6: Completing the Basic Colors and Tones



TECHNIQUE: The final step in completing the basic colors and tones of our still life was to shade in the green apple. It was initially colored using a bright yellow which would establish a luminous foundation for the darker layers of green to be applied at a later stage. The areas of darker tone on the apple were suggested by smudging a light green into the yellow.

NOTE: This step completes the application of the basic shapes, tones and colors of the still life. It is only once you cover all the major areas of white that you should to start to adjust and balance the colors and tones of the work to create a unified composition.

Step 7: Adjusting the Color and Tone for Dramatic Effect



TECHNIQUE: Once the basic colors and tones of a still life are established, they need to be adjusted to balance their harmony and contrast across the composition in order to increase the expressive impact of the image. We start this process by increasing the tonal contrast of the background and foreground. In the background, a dark blue was blended into the green base color to deepen the darkest tones behind and below the objects. A layer of white was also applied to subdue the luminosity of the green. In the foreground the subtle variations of tone and reflected color were suggested with blended layers of white, blue and yellow.

NOTE: The level of contrast that you establish at this stage sets the tonal key for the rest of the still life. All the objects must now be adjusted to that same level of contrast.

Step 8: Building up the Form of the Vase



TECHNIQUE: Next, the form of the vase on the left is built up using a thin layer of white to strengthen its lighter tones and a blended mixture of red, yellow and blue to deepen its darker tones.

NOTE: A small line of reflected light is highlighted down the right hand side of the vase to increase its contrast with the background.

Step 9: Intensifying the Color and Tone of the Bottles



TECHNIQUE: Continuing the process of working from back to front, the colors and tones of the two bottles are now intensified. Blues and reds are blended into the brown of the bottles to deepen the density of their dark tones while a full spectrum of light colors including pinks, yellows, oranges, greens, blues and violets is used for their reflections.

NOTE: Earlier we said that still life 'teaches you how to look at an object and see it like an artist - with a perceptive awareness of its outline, shape, proportions, tone, color, texture and form'. Once you begin to develop this 'perceptive awareness' you can begin to exaggerate some of these visual elements for expressive effect. For example, when our artist first looked at the two bottles he observed some very subtle hints of color reflected on their surface. He then exaggerated

these subtle reflections by increasing the intensity of their color in order to enhance the visual impact of the bottles. The different ways that artists edit what they see through this 'perceptive awareness' is what gives their work its individual style.

Step 10: Polishing up the Final Image



TECHNIQUE: To complete the still life, the tonal contrasts of colors in the silver cup and the apple are exaggerated by dramatically darkening the reflections and shadows on both objects. Various mixtures of blue, red, dark green and brown were blended to create the darkest areas of tone in these objects, while a little white was applied as highlights and to sharpen contrasting edges.

NB: Finally, and for the first time in this still life, some small amounts of black were used to deepen the very darkest tones. It is always advisable to carefully limit the use of black to the final stages of a work as it easily overpowers the

freshness and vitality of other colors.

NOTE: When students first start to practice still life, their most common error is to understate the contrast of tones in a work. This is down to the technique of blending one color into another. They may start with the correct light and dark tones, but once they start blending their colors together, the light tones become darker as they mix with darker colors and the dark tones become lighter as they mix with lighter

colors. Consequently the range of tones from the lightest light to the darkest dark is reduced and the impact you get from their tonal contrast is lost. What you need to do to remedy this is to exaggerate the differences between the light and dark tones before you start blending to compensate for the loss of contrast after blending. Remember that in order to achieve a unified image, the level of tonal contrast that you are searching for must be balanced throughout the whole still life with each object adjusted to a similar tonal scale.

Still Life in Chalk Pastels



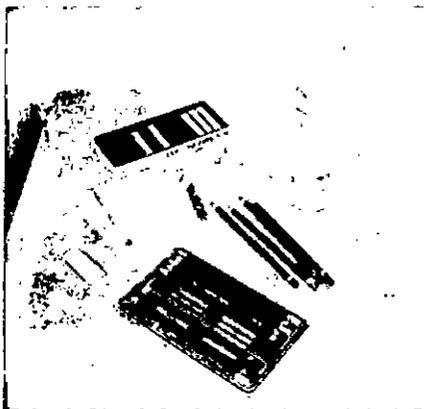
Still Life is the best subject in art for learning and teaching the skills of drawing and painting. It teaches you how to look at objects and see them like an artist - with a conscious awareness of their outline, shape, proportions, tone, color, texture, form and composition.

Our step by step lesson will teach you the drawing techniques used to create the still life above which was done with chalk pastels on brown sugar paper

Steps 1 to 4: These steps demonstrate how to establish the lines, shapes and tones of the still life.

Steps 5 to 9: These steps illustrate how to build up the colors of the still life.

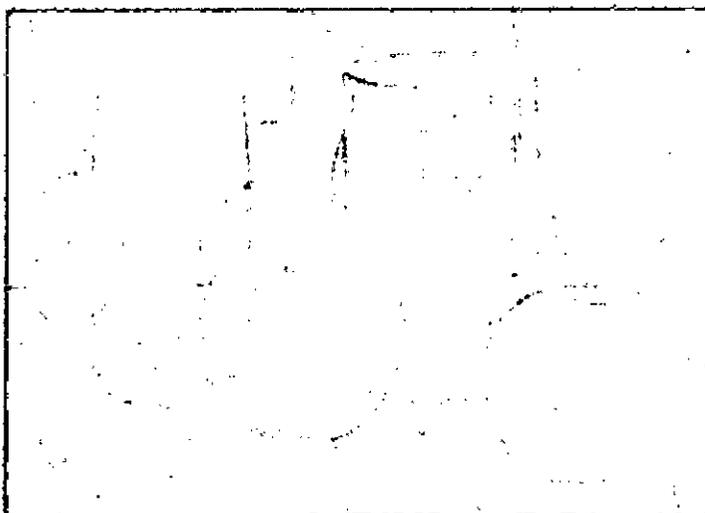
Art Materials for our Chalk Pastel Still Life



For this still life lesson you will need:

- A box of chalk pastels.
- A set of pastel pencils for finer details.
- A couple of sticks of white blackboard chalk.
- A soft eraser.
- Two A3 sheets of sugar paper or a paper of similar quality around 150+gms. (the second sheet can be used as a palette for testing color mixtures).
- A blending stump (tortillon) or alternatively a tissue for blending colors and tones.
- A can of fixative or hair spray (the cheapest of these are the best for this purpose) to protect your image and prevent it from smudging.

Step 1: A Preliminary Line Drawing



TECHNIQUE: Our still life lesson using chalk pastels begins with a line drawing to establish the basic shapes of the group and some of the reflected details on the objects. Fixative was applied at this stage to prevent the drawing from smudging.

NOTE: When you are working with chalk pastels it is not good practice to start your drawing using a black pastel or charcoal pencil as it will contaminate the purity and freshness of any colors applied over it. In this case the initial sketch was done with a violet pastel pencil. After some tests it was found that most of the other colors in the box blended comfortably on top of this color.

Step 2: Establishing the Dark Tones



TECHNIQUE: The next step in creating our still life in pastels was to focus purely on the dark tones, with a view to rendering the form of the objects, before applying color in the later stages of the work. A violet crayon was used to establish the areas of dark tone which were then smudged and blended using both a tortillon and tissues. A similarly colored pastel pencil was used for the finer details.

NOTE: Be careful not to overwork the dark tones as it is easier to darken pastels than it is to lighten them. Make sure you leave an adequate amount of unshaded paper to accommodate the lighter tones and colors. If you apply the dark tones too heavily at the start of a work you will have difficulty in keeping the lighter colors bright as the darker tones will persist when you blend them together.

Step 3: Intensifying the Dark Tones



TECHNIQUE: A burnt umber (very dark brown) pastel crayon and pencil were used to intensify the darkest sections of tone. Adding this deeper level of tone will enhance the form of the objects and increase the impact of the still life.

NOTE: Once you establish the general areas of dark tone, it is necessary to look more closely at the objects to find the darkest sections that lie within their areas of shading.

Step 4: Establishing the Light Tone



TECHNIQUE: Next you establish the lightest areas of tone to heighten the three dimensional qualities of the still life. The aim here is to create a balance between the light, dark and medium tones: the light tones rendered by the white chalk, the dark tones created by a blend of violet and burnt umber and the medium tones established by the neutral color of the paper. It is very important that you do not overwork the light and dark tones and leave enough of the paper exposed to accept the layers of colors that are yet to be applied.

NOTE: A stick of white blackboard chalk was used to render the light tones. Blackboard chalk is harder than pastels and can be sharpened to a fine point to highlight the crisp edges and fine details of the objects.

Step 5: Introducing Color



TECHNIQUE: You now begin to introduce color to the still life in a series of layers, applying the brightest layer first, the next brightest second; and so on towards the darkest. At this stage a layer of yellow was applied to the exposed areas of paper on those objects whose colors ranged between yellow and green.

NOTE: Once you apply an area of color, gently soften its edges to subtly blend it into the light and dark tones.

Step 6: Building up the Color Stage 1



TECHNIQUE: A layer of green was carefully blended into those objects which had a greenish hue. Applying the green on top of the yellow gives the color a luminosity and complexity that you do not get from using a single color.

NOTE: As you blend the various layers of colors into the light and dark tones of the objects, you will notice that those tones begin to take on the correct light and dark tones for that

color. The success of this technique largely depends on those colors that you choose for the dark tones at the start of the still life. Always test your colors before you start the still life to see what range of tones they can produce.

Step 7: Building up the Color



TECHNIQUE: Next, a layer of light and mid blue were softly blended into the background and foreground respectively.

NOTE: When the mid blue is blended over the underlying dark tones of the foreground, it does not achieve the same depth of tone as the dark green shadows did on the apples. This is because the blue is more opaque than the green. Such variations have to be adjusted and balanced out once all the colors have been applied.

Step 8: Building up the Color



TECHNIQUE: Finally, the bright reflected colors on the silver cup and the neutral grey of the large vase on the right were carefully blended to complete the basic colors of the still life.

NOTE: As the color of the still life has been built up one object at a time you often get an inconsistency in the overall unity of the work. This is generally seen in variations of tonal contrast across the work, usually due to the opacity of different colors or lapses in your

concentration and technique. Either way, this problem has to be addressed in the final stage of the work.

Step 9: Balancing the Tones and Colors



TECHNIQUE: To complete the still life we adjusted and balanced the tones and colors throughout the work to achieve an overall unity in the composition. This was done by adding subtle changes to the color of certain objects and cautiously using black to balance the contrast of tones across the work.

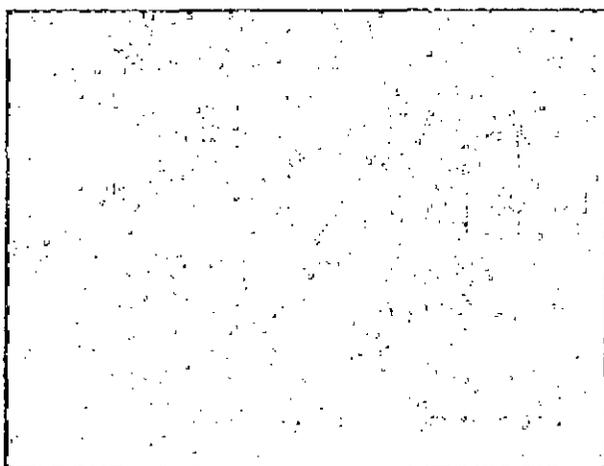
NOTE: The color black is used for the first time in this still life. The dangers of overusing black cannot be emphasized

strongly enough. It must be used discreetly and with great care as it all too easily overpowers the other colors.

Still Life in Watercolor

These still life projects have been exercises in a number of watercolor techniques: color mixing, wet-in-wet, dry brush, wet-on-dry, loosing edges, liquid masking, color lifting, brush dexterity, and the general feel of how color acts on the paper under a range of circumstances.

Step 1



I always have them prepare a careful drawing on 300 lb paper as "homework" to save class time and ensure we all start at the same level.

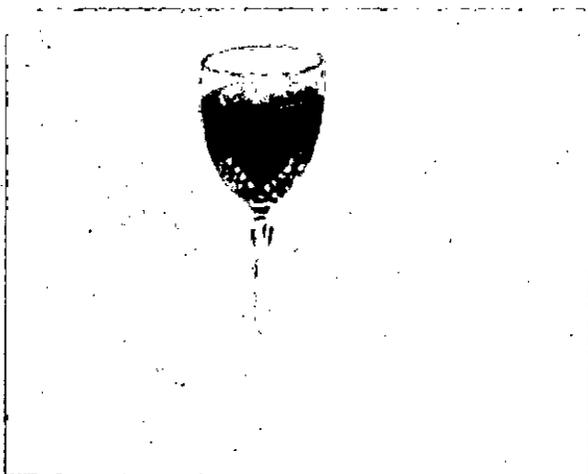
Step 2



Here I've mapped in the basic glass "color" made from a light wash of Antwerp Blue and Brown Madder, with the darker rim made from a much stronger mixture of these two colors.

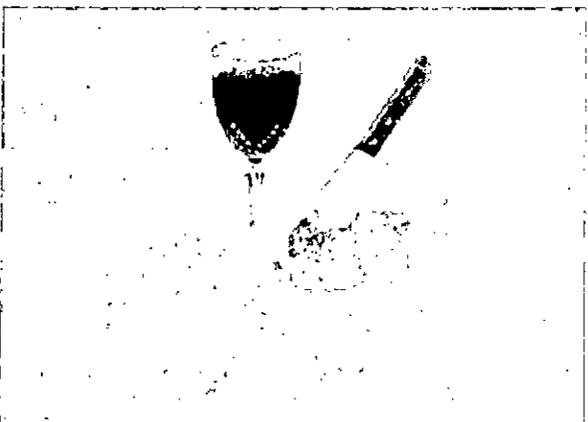
We work from a limited palette and I avoid giving lectures on color theory to beginners as it means little until they have actually handled colors in a real-world situation. By using a small amount of liquid masking before painting in the glass they begin to learn the magic of white paper. Later, they can often dispense with this with negative painting techniques.

Step 3



The wine was painted in using a mixture of Alizarin Crimson and a shadow or darker mix of Antwerp Blue and Brown Madder, working from light to dark. The use of a small scrub brush, water and facial tissue, lifts out the some reflected lights. Then the masking is removed and further blending to complete this stage.

Step 4



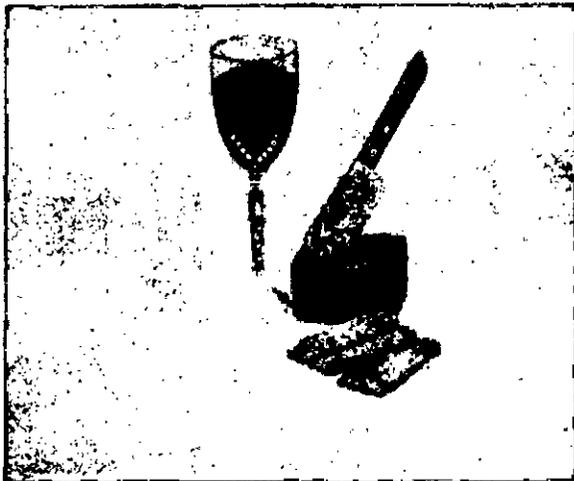
The knife and cheese block were painted in next, with the knife handle a mixture of Raw Sienna and Burnt Umber, plus our standard shadow mix of Antwerp Blue and Brown Madder. The cheese block was Cadmium Yellow Deep, Cadmium Red and a touch of Brown Madder. The blade was a mixture of Ultramarine Blue and a touch of our shadow color.

Step 5



Here I've mapped in the Melba Toast slices using a mixture of our cheese color plus Raw Sienna and Brown Madder. Part of this was a dry brush technique. The final shadows will be left until the cutting board is in.

Step 6



A little more tinkering on the Toast slices using a dry brush technique to reproduce the textured surfaces.

Step 7



I've jumped ahead here a bit, but the grapes were mostly Aureolin Yellow and a touch of Sap Green, with our shadow color where needed. The shine is achieved by the dab and lift technique shown here.

Step 8



Now the cutting board is roughed in with a wash mixture of Raw Sienna, Brown Madder and a touch of our shadow color.

Step 9



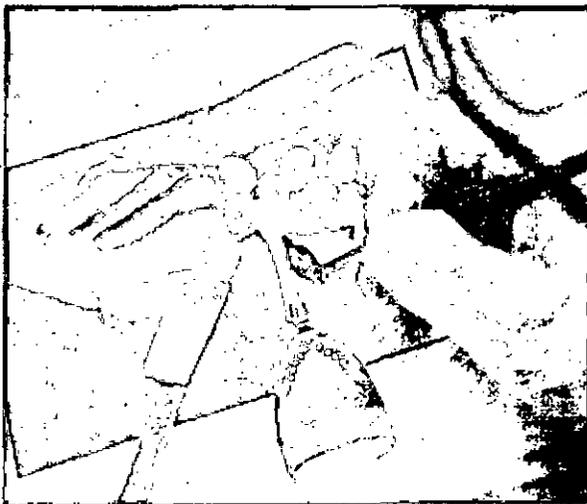
With the edges protected by liquid masking the various grain texture and shadows, it enables us to paint straight across and not "paint up" the other elements. The shadows are still to come of course. All these effects are a mixture of the colors already in our palette, some used as a dry brush technique. Then the final shadows are out in with our basic shadow color.

Step 10



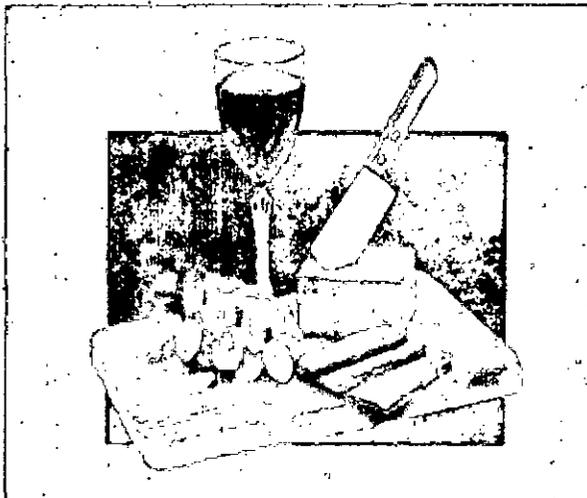
For the more daring of my beginners I suggested a "paint outside the box" finish to this piece. In order to fill in the background with a strong shadow color I used a ruling pen to give us a straight edge all around. This requires several strong glazes of Antwerp Blue and Brown Madder, so the ruling pen must be loaded with pure color.

Step 11



This gets tricky and is a good exercise in brush dexterity. Turning the board all ways to make the brush work for you is also good experience for beginners.

Step 12



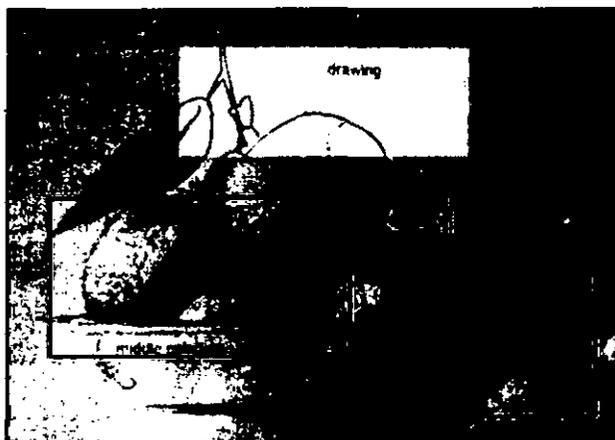
The first wash can be imperfect as subsequent washes will cover this up.

Final Step

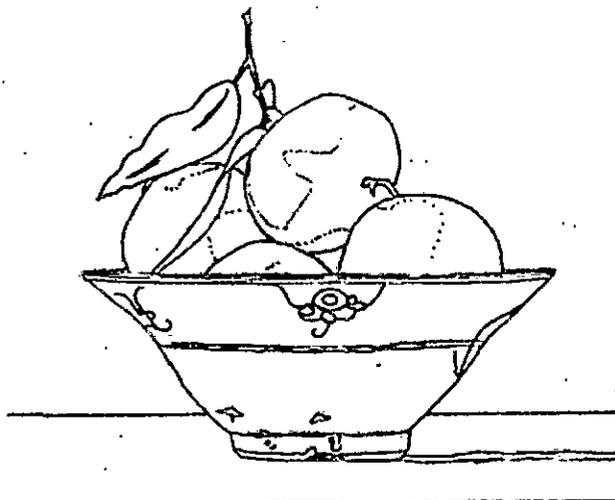


The third wash completes this project, and when matted and framed, makes a nice painting to hang in the wall.

Still Life in Oil color



Painting in layers with discrete stages (as seen above) is a powerful means to create realistic and expressive artwork. In this post I describe an example of the process with still life, although the methods are appropriate for any subject matter.



The black ink in the drawing above has a high contrast against the ground. Is this a good way to start what I hope will be a subtle still life? In fact it is, because I am going to use a layered technique. The high contrast of this image introduces an important theme in layered painting: make something strong contrast, then paint over it to make more subtle contrast. [On the panel, the bowl is five and a half inches wide (i.e., 14 cm).]

Stage 1) A simple under drawing, black ink on a white gessoed panel.



Stage 2) Under painting in oil over the drawing.

extra linseed oil to the colors so that they were a bit more fluid than straight tube colors. I generally paint without turpentine.

Look at how I apply the paint in the background in the under painting stage above. It looks very streaky, doesn't it? This is another example of making something high [or medium] contrast so that, after being covered by another layer or two, it will take on more subtle contrast. This streaky background pattern will later add a bit of texture to the painting, but it won't jump out as it does now. Paintings that have smooth, perfectly blended surfaces tend to lack breath, they become suffocating and hard.



Stage 3) over painting, where I make the contrast stronger again, with attention to strong lights and darks.

The under painting above is thin, direct and colorful, working out the basic forms without worrying too much about details in one painting session. Though the painting is thin, the drawing is now barely visible. If I had not used dark ink in the drawing, it would have been hidden by even a thin layer of paint; by using dark ink, I could still see the drawn details as I painted over the drawing. Before painting, the first thing I did was to mix the colors on my palette, where I could find a good color harmony.

In under painting, I generally aim for warmer colors than I want in the finished work. I also added a little

Obviously, the under painting (Stage 2) was dry before I painted over it. For the Stage 3, I use a bit of thickened linseed oil to make the paint more rich and rounded. I painted over the entire painting in one session, but quite thinly. The only thick parts are the highlights.

I'm accomplishing different things in Stage 3. On the one hand, I'm toning down some of the contrasts from Stage 2. But I also create some contrasts that are much stronger than I ultimately want to have (for example, the highlights on the fruit). The bowl and background are mostly finished at this stage.



Stage 4) Finishing touches.

In Stage 4 I finished the painting with a final over painting. I painted sparingly, but the results were dramatic. On the lights of the mandarins, I put on a *very* thin layer of orange to mute the overly bright highlights from Stage 3 and unify the forms. I played with the leaves a bit, and I worked on the front side of the table. I made subtle changes elsewhere as well, for example toning down the light on the left side of the bowl. Finishing a painting takes time, but most of the time is spent just looking and thinking. The actually brushwork in Stage 4 was probably no more than five minutes.

People interested in art generally think that traditional oil painting involves many layers of transparent colored glazes. This isn't quite accurate. Yes, layering is involved, but rarely did artists of the past need to make many more layers than I use here. Also, much of layered painting involves painting translucently rather than transparently. I use transparent colors for the dark colorful shadows. But in many places, I use opaque colors (e.g., mixtures containing white) that are nonetheless translucent because I paint thinly. A bit of opaque color will prevent a transparent glaze from having too hard and glassy effect. Painting with only transparent colors in oil gives an unpleasant effect, I think.

People interested in art generally think that traditional oil painting involves many layers of transparent colored glazes. This isn't quite accurate. Yes, layering is involved, but rarely did artists of the past need to make many more layers than I use

Still Life in Acrylic color

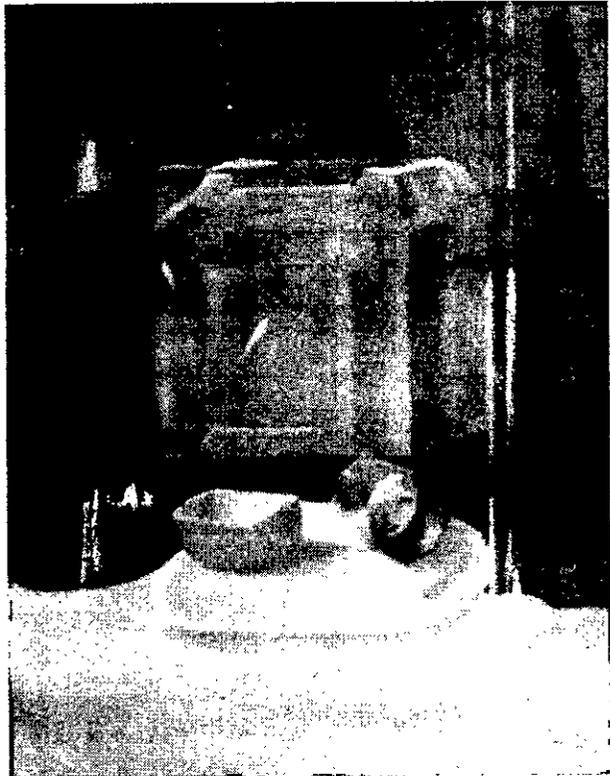
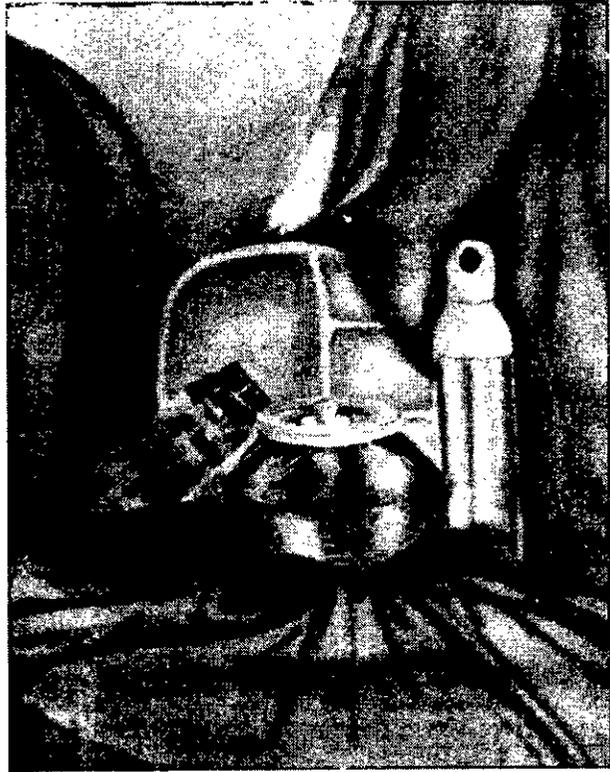


A step-by-step illustration showing you how to paint with acrylic using a flicking brush technique: building up layers to create a simple still life painting

Some Still Life Painting



Some Still life Painting



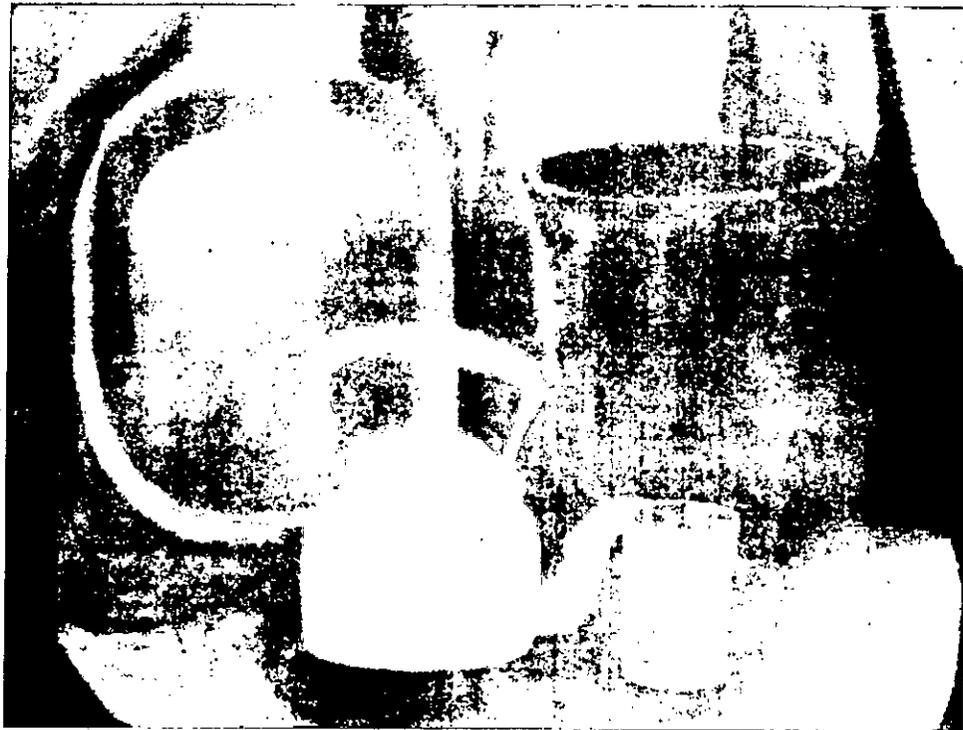
Some Still life Painting



Some Still life Painting



Some Still life Painting



Some Still life Painting



Some Still-life Painting

