



Overview: What is a Still Life?

A still life is a work of art that depicts inanimate, everyday objects, such as fruit, flowers, or household items, as its primary subject.

The term comes from the Dutch word “still even” or “quiet life” and was used as a way to enjoy the world around us, acknowledging the beauty of the world.

Figure 1 (William Kalf, “Still-life With A Lobster Drinking-Horn and Glass”)

Why Should We Do Still-Life?

Still-lives give artists the space needed to experiment with composition, techniques, and develop the skills needed to grow.

While still-lives usually rank low on the totem pole in relation to art, it is a fundamental practice needed to grow. Allowing us to have a better understanding of the relationship between objects and to improve our eye.

Still Life and Its Meaning

Hidden symbolism and iconography are often embedded in still lifes to give them a new sense of meaning. This hidden concept gives your art an elusive air of mystery that more overt art doesn't have.

An example of this is found in Van Eyck's "Arnolfini Portrait"

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"Arnolfini Portrait" Mystery

As You Look at this picture, what do you see?

Did you see the Mirror in the background revealing us, the viewer?

Do you see the beautiful, rich green of the dress, symbolizing wealth and influence?

Or lastly, did you see the one candle that's discreetly lit in the background, possibly hinting at the death of one of the lovers

In conclusion, the symbolism and imagery found in this portrait are endless as Van Eyck masterfully composes objects within it.

This is a perfect example of the value of still-lives as they use and manipulate symbolism to create hidden mystery, transforming common day objects into small puzzle pieces that the viewer can use to understand the story.







Activity: Please create a Still Life of your own using the materials in this room.

Things To Consider:

- Find objects that are visually interesting to draw.
- Think of any meaning that you object might have.
- Have Fun!