

Still Life Photography

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What is a still life?

Still Life Definition

A still life (also known by its French title, *nature morte*) painting is a piece that features an arrangement of inanimate objects as its subject. Usually, these items are set on a table and often include organic objects like fruit and flowers and household items like glassware and textiles.

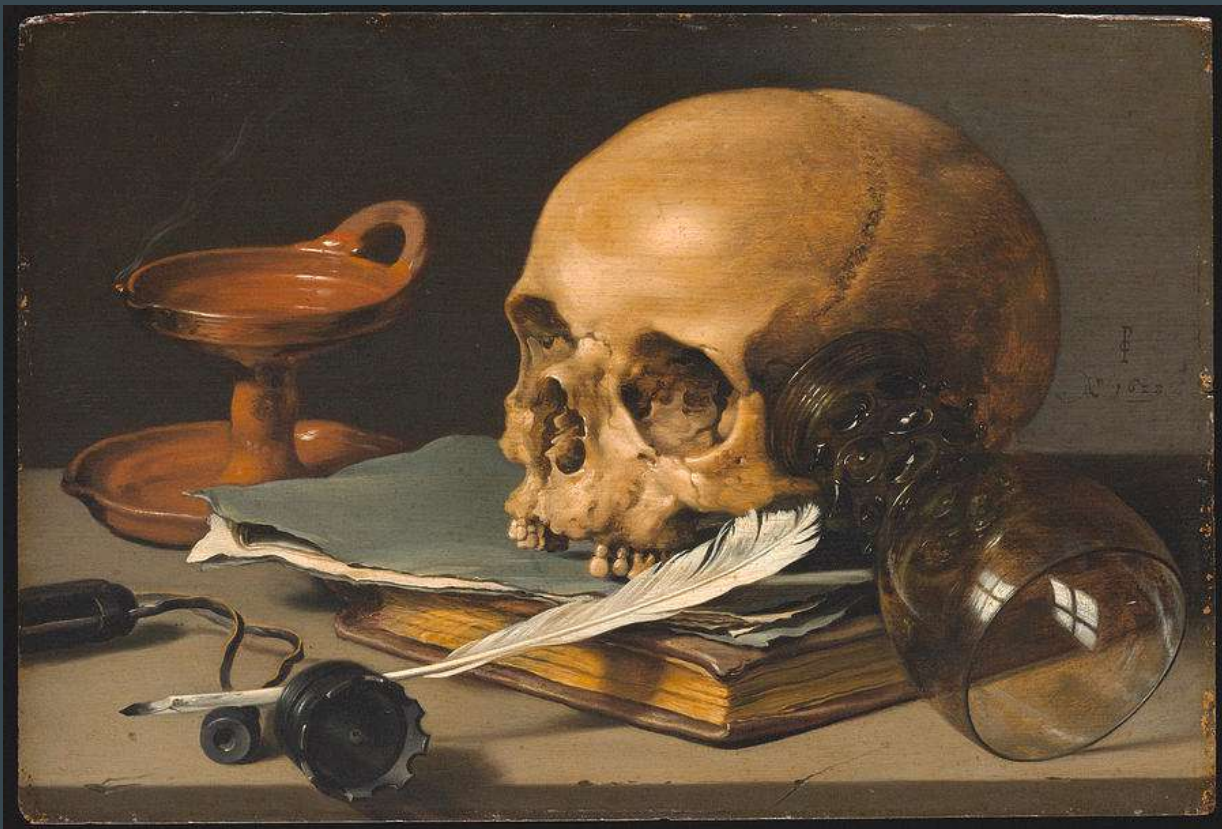
The term “still life” is derived from the Dutch word *stilleven*, which gained prominence during the 16th century. While it was during this time that the still life gained recognition as a genre, its roots date back to ancient times.

From: <https://mymodernmet.com/what-is-still-life-painting-definition/>



Still Life with Glass Bowl of Fruit and Vases,
a 1st-century wall painting from Pompeii.

Still Life Painting Examples



Pieter Claesz's Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill of 1628



Still Life with Cheeses,
Artichoke and Cherries by
Clara Peeters, 1625

Often the objects in a still life represented ideas. If you are curious about this, check out this link:

https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/in_depth/a-symbolism-guide-to-the-spooky-world-of-dutch-still-lives-56298



The Basket of Apples
Still life by Paul Cézanne, 1895



Giorgio Morandi, Still Life, 1946

Still Life Photographic Examples

Early in the history of photography, the technology at the time meant there had to be long shutter speeds. So still lifes were a great thing to photograph because they did not move.

Roger Fenton, 1860





Fredrick G Tutton, 1923



Irving Penn, After Dinner Games, 1947



Sharon Core, 2007-2010



Paulette Tavormina, 2014



Mat Collishaw Last Meal on Death Row, Texas (Gary Miller) (2011)

Ros Atkinson



Viola Virtamo





Stella Andronikou



Stella Andronikou



Laura Letinsky, 2002

Letinsky crafts tabletop vignettes that suggest larger narratives, as she explains: “It’s this idea that the narrative has already occurred; the meal has been eaten, the cornucopia has been consumed...and this is what’s left in the early morning light.”

But how do you make a still life yourself?

Active choices making a photographic still life

- Backgrounds - light vs dark
- Backgrounds - plain vs draped
- Choosing the right objects
- Using space - height and rhythm
- Using space - foreground, midground, background
- Lighting - artificial vs natural
- Shallow depth of field vs Greater depth of field
- Editing



Decide if you want a light or a dark background...or maybe something colorful?



Plain boards can be used as a background, or tape a piece of paper or poster board halfway on the wall with half of it on a table or on the ground



Draped Fabric can be used in the background or on the table for a classical look



Subject - nature, plants, shells, food, glass, ceramics, metal objects, things that are important to you, really anything that looks interesting. Google “still lifes” for inspiration.



More object examples - mix up types of objects



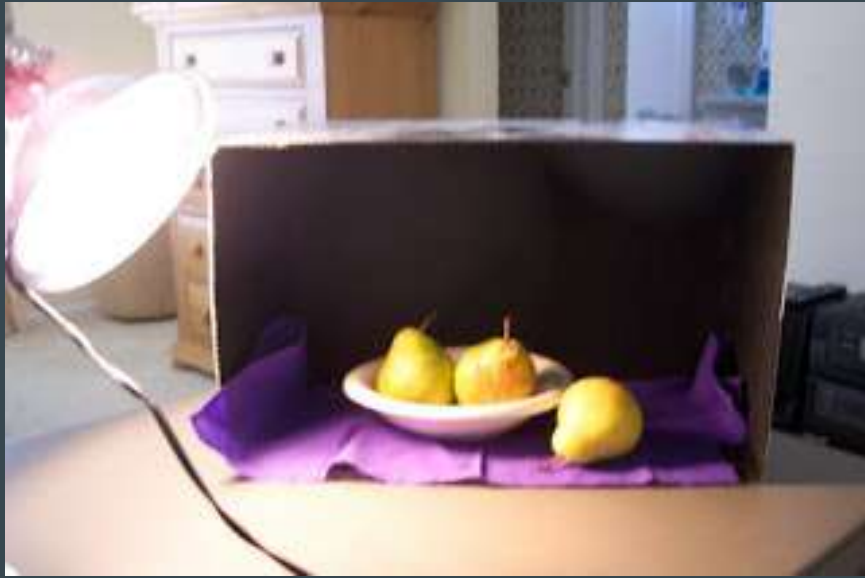
More object examples - maybe have a theme, such as a hobby



Space - have things at different heights and levels. And choose placement that creates a nice visual rhythm up and down. Think about the rule of thirds and asymmetrical balance. Break “rules” if it works better. Move things around until they look “right”. Trust your gut.



Space - have objects different distances away...foreground, midground, background



Lighting - Use directional artificial light....



Lighting - use window light on one side



Depth of Field - Shallow vs Greater



Editing - you may want to darken the background (or lighten if on white), and add contrast & saturation.

Student Examples



Amelia DV



Eden M



Ella A



Alice M



Cali P



Logan De Souza



Dexter Woodman



Andrew Cahill



Isabel L