

The Dutch still life painters made heavy use of composition and as a result, the techniques they used are a great way to practice composition. The methods used here will help you to focus on developing your sense of composition.

- **Dark backdrop** – for this assignment, use black. This focuses the viewer's eye on the composition of the piece.
- **Light!** Experiment with types:
 - Use natural - sunlight through a window coming to the side of the display or a bit to the front.
 - Spotlight – you will want to use a diffuser which can be as simple as thin white paper held up in front of the light source.

Using the Tv setting on the camera, bracket exposures, start high and work down. You may have some dark images but with manipulation in Photoshop, you may find the detail/shadow in the darker ones is more dramatic and visually appealing. You also should have a reflector (or large white board or sheet) that you can use to redirect light on the side opposite the light source. That way, all of your shadows are not just dark voids but they will have some detail.

- **Color:** Use of muted, often analogous/adjacent color helps to unify the composition. So if your food still life uses red pears, yellow pears, multi-colored potatoes, crusty bread...they are all adjacent on the color wheel. If you throw in a bottle of red fluid or a beautiful eggplant, you can really give a boost.
- **Space:** if you notice on the examples, there is deep space. Often dishes or fabric come out into the viewer's space (by hanging off the table at the 'edge' of the composition – a common painting technique) and other items are laid so they go back into space. Not straight back (because the foreshortening would help lessen that spatial element) but at an angle. Put your pieces on different planes of the image, not all lined up in one. You can also use beautiful scarves or tapestry as a way to create space. Look at the examples.
- **Compositional Triangle:** Many images from this era (and others, like the Renaissance) rely to some degree on a compositional triangle. It may not always be obvious but it will be there.
- **Kissing Objects:** Don't place still life items next to each other in a line so they're kissing. One of the most distracting things you can do in a composition is to kiss, or have items just touching each other rather than having a definite space between them or a definite overlap. The viewer's eye doesn't know whether to move from one object to the other, and gets distracted deciding whether or not there is indeed a sliver of a gap between them or not.
- **Reflections:** Use shiny objects such as glass, silver, or brass to really show the light and add visual interest. Find interesting shapes and cuts to the glass to draw in your viewer. It can also show your ability as you want to be careful not to overexpose or underexpose your image which can be tricky with light reflections. Use of the reflecting board/paper helps here, as well as the diffuser set up to avoid too much light reflecting off your still life.
- Don't forget things like Rule of Thirds, Using lines to lead the eye, unity and variety, and texture.
- Look through the attached Powerpoint, it contains images - some from modern artists and some from the 17th century. See what else you can notice about the composition and try it out on your own. Also, read through the text to get more ideas.