



Still Life painting is the depiction of one or more objects arranged on a surface. As an artform it has served a variety of functions in different eras. Dutch seventeenth century still lifes were loaded with symbolism. Bread could have religious connotations and the inclusion of a pomegranate stood in for immortality or fertility. Today we don't read symbolism in a way that the seventeenth century viewer would and after the breakdown of form in the twentieth century by Picasso and the Cubists, anything is possible with still life. There's much enjoyment to be had from painting objects in relation to each other, and a great deal to be learnt about painting technique along the way.

MATERIALS NEEDED: any water based paints such as watercolours or acrylics, paper, brushes, a water container and some kitchen towels to blot brushes on.

SUBJECT: select any objects you have to hand, even the most mundane items can make interesting still life subject matter. You could choose some fruit or vegetables, crockery, an old ornament, flowers or even a pile of folded washing. Italian artist Giorgio Morandi spent most of his career painting different arrangements of household vessels to startling effect.

LIGHT SOURCE: If you turn out the electric lights and work with natural light you will see a wider range of tone and colour and the light will only come from one direction, simplifying shadows.

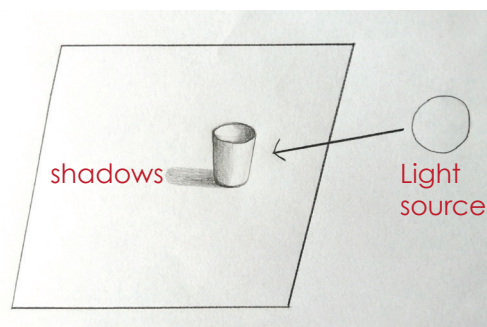
While setting up your still life think of the objects in relation to each other, where they touch, how far apart each item is from the others, how does each colour relate to the next? Think of which background to use; it could be a simple wooden table or a piece of patterned fabric; think of colours that will chime with your objects.

Start by roughly painting in the background and marking in where each object will go, always thinking about the painting as a whole image so there is a unity to it. The background is as important as the objects for the overall appearance of the painting.

As you paint the objects, try to show their weight and make them really sit on the surface. If you pick out some of the shadows at the points where the objects meet the surface, it should help to achieve this and to make them appear to be three dimensional. Think of the objects as a series of planes which will work with each other and try to get them to work together as a group. Think about where your light source is coming from and make sure all the highlights and shadows are on the correct sides of each object (see diagram below right).



Untitled, Andrew Kerr, 2008



The side of the object which the light hits first will be paler while the side farthest from the light source will be in shadow. Work fast to catch the shadows and forms before the light changes!