

# STILL \* LIFE \* PAINTING

**Topics:** composition, light, shapes, textures, attention to details

**Supplies:**

- interesting objects from around your house (small toys, plants, dishes, seashells, rocks, anything from your recycling bin)
- a cardboard box
- a desk lamp
- paints
- brushes
- bowl of warm water

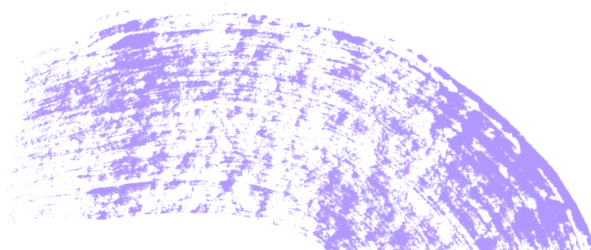
Do you have a collection of favorite objects around your house? **Mary Fedden** and **Jonas Wood** are two painters who use a very traditional type of painting to explore the relationships between everyday personal objects.



**Mary Fedden**



**Jonas Wood**



# MARY FEDDEN

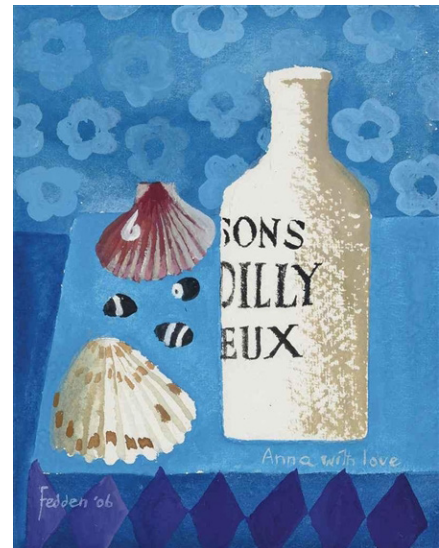
**Mary Fedden** was an art teacher and a painter who loved setting up still lifes in front of landscapes, two very important subjects in the history of painting. She lived in England and painted for over 80 years, making smaller paintings as well as large public commissions in collaboration with her husband. Mary also loved to paint cats! Though she painted from a still life set up she once admitted “each of my paintings is a mixture of things that I’m looking at, and my thoughts and imagination”.



*Tuscany Watercolor, 1999*



*Ben's Box, 1994*



*Still Life with Bottle and Shells, 2006*



*Still Life with Fig and Pineapple, 1991*

# JONAS WOOD

**Jonas Wood** is a painter living with his family in Los Angeles. He makes paintings of things that are around him in his day-to-day life. He paints places from memory, images, or photographs. His shapes and colors are very bold and just realistic enough to give the viewer an idea of the subject. He hopes this style of painting will evoke the idea of a memory or the past. Unlike a photograph, the quality of the painting allows you to bring your own meaning to his objects and environments.



*Aloe With Topps Box, 2016*



*Doodle Privacy Curtains, 2019*



*Shelf Still Life, 2018*



*Studio Still Life, 2012*

# STILL LIFE PAINTING

A “**still life**” refers to any image of various objects chosen and arranged by an artist. It can be a drawing, a painting, or even a photograph. These objects are often different kinds of fruits, vegetables, other food items, or flowers. There can also be inanimate but familiar objects!



*Offerings in Hall of Barques at Abydos,  
13th Century BC, Egypt*

People have been making still life paintings since ancient times.

**Ancient Egyptians** painted images of favorite foods inside the tombs of kings and queens. In **Ancient Rome**, people commissioned still life paintings for the walls of their homes as a way of showing their prosperity.

The golden age of still life painting occurred during the 1600's, when oil paints became the material of choice for artists. With oil paints you can build up thin layers of color, so painters started making more and more realistic images. **Dutch still life paintings** are considered some of the best ever painted.



*Vincent Van Gogh, Vase with Twelve Sunflowers,  
1888-89*

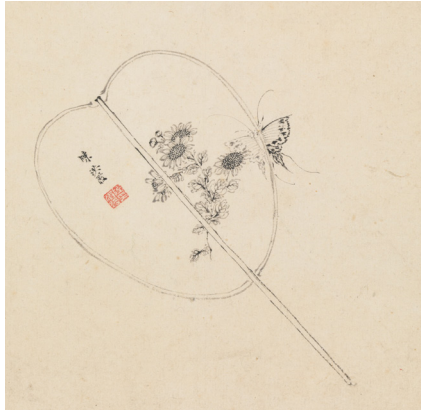


*Top: Nicolaes van Veerendaal, Bouquet of  
Flowers in a Crystal Vase, 1662*

As artists developed new styles of painting, like post impressionist painters **Vincent Van Gogh** and **Paul Cezanne**, they often turned to the familiar subject of still life painting to introduce their new ways of seeing to audiences.

# STILL LIFE PAINTING

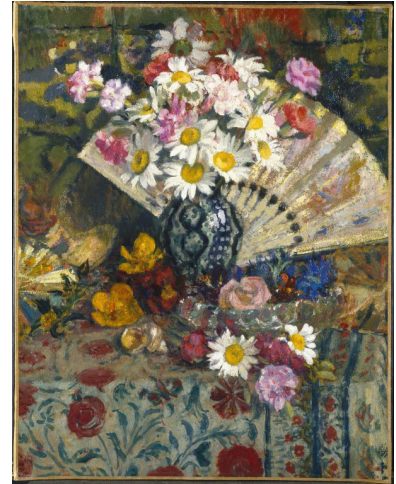
Because of its universal appeal and accessibility, still life painting lends itself to lots of different styles. Below are some other artists who have made still life paintings. Notice how different each image is despite their similar subject matter. Each one is still a still life!



Chen Hongshou, *Miscellaneous Studies*, around 1619 China



Anna Ruysch, *A still life of flowers in a glass vase on a stone table ledge*, c.1690s, the Netherlands



Georges Lemmen, *Still Life with Fan*, 1907-08



Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Flowers and Lemons*, 1941



Roy Lichtenstein, *Still Life With Lobster*, 1974



Daniel Gordon, *Still Life with Pears*, 2016

Sometimes the objects in a still life help convey a message or a story. Other times, artists choose objects they think will be fun or challenging to paint.

**What objects will you choose for your still life painting?**

# STILL LIFE PAINTING

Take a look at Jonas Wood's painting made in 2018 and Mary Fedden's painting made in 1997. Can you identify some of the different objects they put in their still life paintings? How might the objects inspire what you will put in your still life set up? How are their paintings similar? How are they different?



**Blackwelder Speaker Still Life**

Jonas Wood, 2018

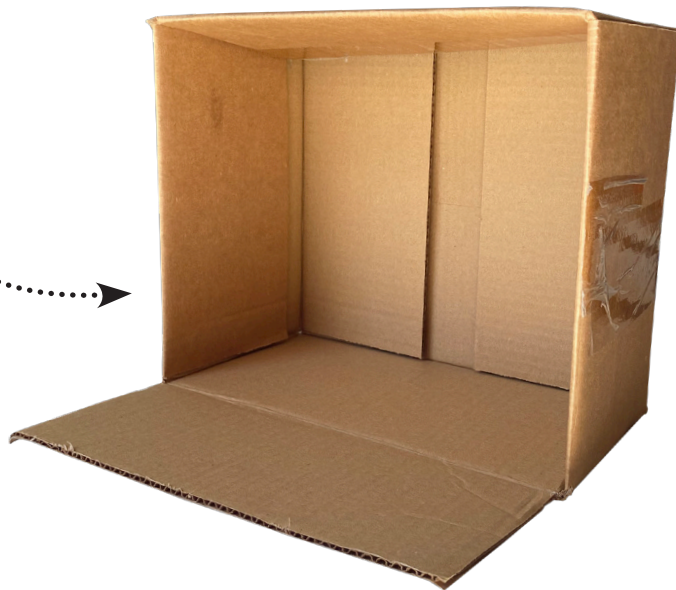


**Rain on Skye**

Mary Fedden, 1997

# Let's set up a still life!

- 1 Start by creating a stage for your still life. Fold in or cut away the top flaps of a medium-sized box so that one side is completely open. Lay the box on its side.



- 2 Pick five items from around your home to use for your painting. They could be favorite small toys, mugs or glasses, fruit, or a small plant. Don't forget to check your recycling bin! Think about why you've chosen each object. Is it because of the way an object looks? Does the object hold a special meaning?

- 3 Drape a piece of fabric, such as a pillow case or towel, inside your stage. Consider adding a plate as a base for your still life. Bring together your box, five objects, fabric, and base. It's time to arrange your still life!



# Let's set up a still life!

Here are some ideas for how to arrange a classical still life:



Put larger objects in the back and smaller objects in the front.

A triangle composition is often seen in traditional still life paintings.

Keep similar colors separate from one another. This will help distribute the colors of your painting.

Step back and take a look at your composition. If you like the way it looks, it's time to make some art!



- 4** Grab your paints and get to work rendering your still life! Look closely at your composition. What shapes make up each object? What colors do you see in each object? What colors are the shadows?

# REFLECTION

Jonas Wood said:

**“You could call [my work] a visual diary or even a personal history. I’m not going to paint something that doesn’t have anything to do with me. Of all of the possible things I could paint, the thing that interests me is something that I can get close enough to in order to paint it honestly.”**

What do you think he meant by that?



Show your still life to another person and ask them some questions about what they see. How does your painting make them feel? Hang your still life and admire your hard work and contribution to the history of still life painting!

# RESOURCES & SOURCES

## Resources

Other still life artists to look at are contemporary photographer Daniel Gordon, impressionist painter Paul Cezanne, and modern painters Cyril Mann and Frances Hodgkins.

## Sources

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/still-life>

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