



The Still Life Course

Module 2: Composition: The Basics

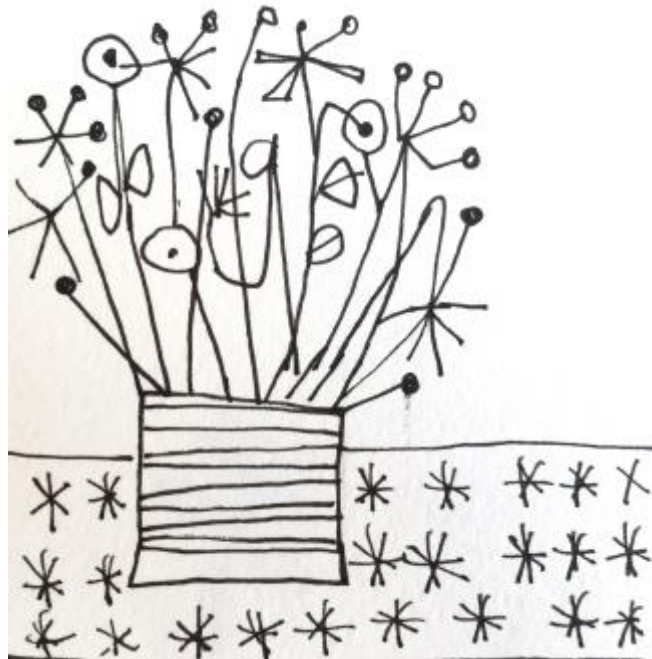
Guidelines for simple still life paintings

A still life painting can be simple or complex. As a colourist, I regularly paint stylized still life paintings. I will be discussing the aspects of still life composition that I find to be most important. In order to create a square, simple still life painting, the following aspects are taken into account:



Harmony

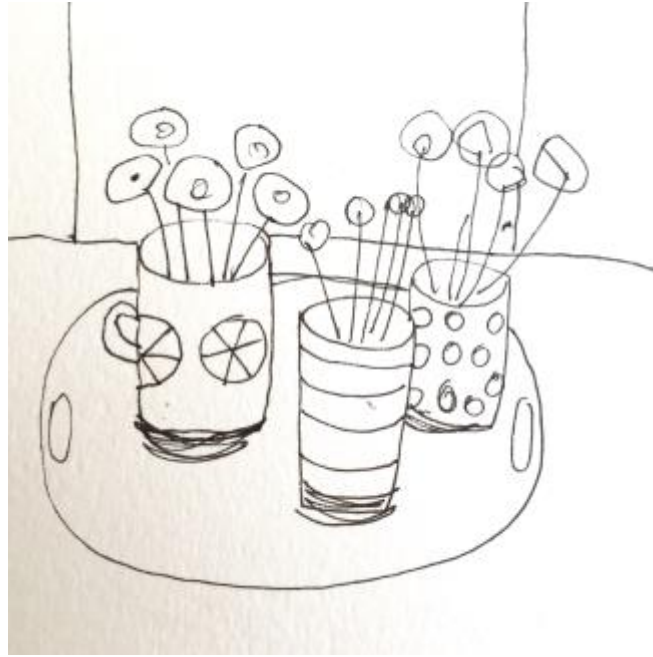
Harmony and balance between the components to be used in the arrangement, the space around them, as well as the foreground and background.



Balance

The different objects, as well as the surface upon which they rest, and what happens in the background need to be in balance with one another.

By putting everything in perfect balance, it will look unnatural or too stylized, so it is more important to have a balance of the different volumes and grouping together of the different components, in order to make sense of the composition.



Space

The space to the foreground of the painting, between the bottom edge and on a 40x40cm around 5cm should be kept free of objects such as containers or fruit. If objects are placed too closely to the bottom, with no space around them, it interferes with the overall balance of the painting. Space around plant or **flowers: do not squeeze the plant into the painting's edges** it is not a box. If your arrangement is bigger, then allow some plant stems to go beyond the edges of the painting; this will help it to appear more natural.

The 'horizon line' where the table, or foreground surface ends, is important, how this interacts with the container and objects is also very important. The top of a vase or container should not be in line with this horizontal line (the end of the table).

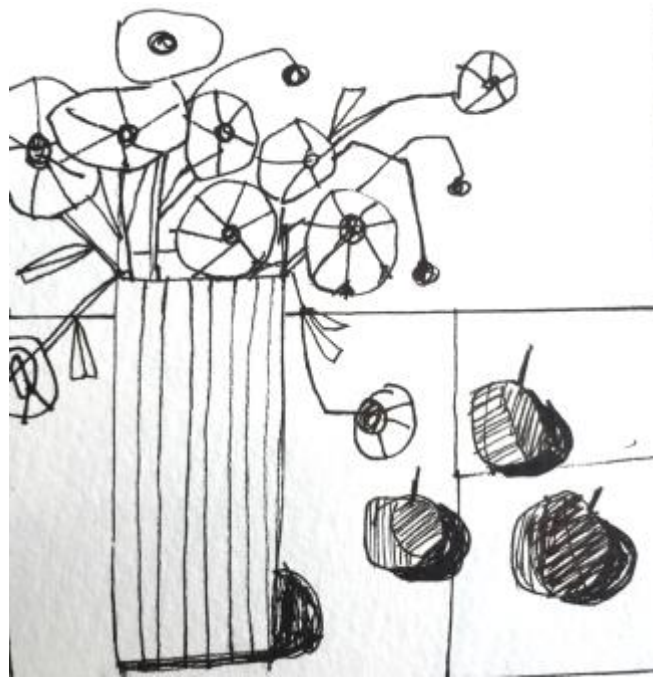
Proportion

Take care to keep the proportions of the different components depicted, in proportion. Fruit should be in proportion to each other, and with the size of flowers or leaves on a plant, if these are used in the painting.



Direction of flow

Lines in the painting, the vase, plant, table and background, take the eye into different directions. The eye should be lead around the painting. The flower arrangement or plant should be balance in the vase, not leaning to one side, or bunched in, or constrained.



Repetition

Create a sense of flow between the different objects, a rhythm and repetition of the variety of shapes in a painting is important. If you use flowers, repeat the same shape at least twice, if you have large flowers in a vase, make them relate to one another.

There should be a dialogue between the different components in a painting. A painting can look too busy, either from too many different components depicted, or the colours used in the artwork. It is important to keep this in mind to get the painting to be interesting to look at without being overwhelming.

Rhythm

Consider all objects in the composition, and allow lines and shapes to **resonate with one another. The vase or container's shape can be repeated in** the angle of a flower stem. The size and shape of a flower petal can correspond with the fruit in the foreground. These lines could be subtle or more pronounced to suit the mood of the painting.

Colour

Colour is vital in the creation of paintings, but the basic design elements need to be in place in order to make it all work together.

