



Glass & Steel

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/109-Glass-Steel>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to tackle the intriguing challenge of painting 'Glass and Steel,' a subject that beautifully combines complexity and elegance. As we delve into this advanced still life painting, you'll find it a bit trickier than previous lessons, but rest assured, it's nothing you can't handle with a bit of practice. If you find yourself needing a refresher, I recommend revisiting our first still life workshop to hone your skills before returning to this one. Here, we will explore the interplay of light and reflection on glass and metal surfaces, a rewarding subject that will enhance your understanding of color, form, and texture. We'll start by setting up a vibrant palette, focusing on oranges and reds to lay down the foundation of our painting. This initial layer will serve as a dynamic undercoat, allowing us to build depth and detail as we progress. By the end of this lesson, you'll have mastered the art of capturing the subtle nuances of glass and steel, bringing your still life paintings to a new level of sophistication.



"Glass & Steel" 10x8" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson



REFERENCE PHOTO

The scene as Richard found it.

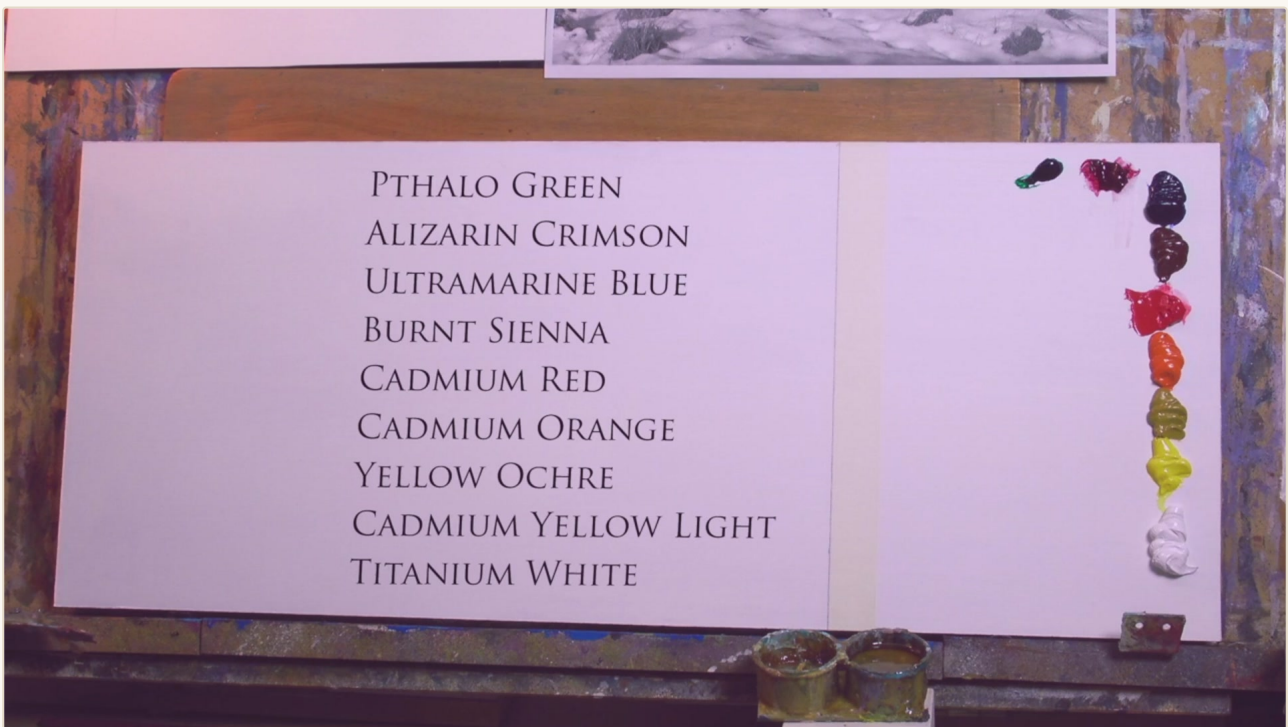
Materials

Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- M. Graham & Co. Oil Paints
- Alizarine Crimson
- Ultramarine Blue
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Red
- Cadmium Orange
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- M. Graham & Co. Walnut Alkyd Medium
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Panel
- I made my own by giving MDF board 3 coats of acrylic primer.
- You could use a canvas panel or anything you prefer.
- Brushes
- Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set
- Palette Knife
- Paper Towels
- Container for solvent
- Container for painting medium

1 Blocking in Colors



Prepare Your Palette

Set up your palette with the colors you plan to use. Consider using oranges and reds for this exercise, as they will form the base of your painting.

Block in Colors

Apply large blocks of color directly onto the canvas where your objects will be. Use colors like orange and red to represent different elements. Don't worry about precision at this stage; focus on covering the canvas.

Cover the Canvas

Continue adding blocks of color until the entire canvas is covered. This will serve as a multi-colored undercoat for your painting.

Blend with a Rag

Use a rag to smush and blend the colors together. This creates a unified base layer to start your detailed painting on top.

PRO TIP

Use large blocks of color to quickly cover the canvas, setting a vibrant base for your painting.

2 Choosing Initial Colors



Simplify Your Vision

Close one eye and blur your other eye as much as you can to simplify the objects into big blobs of color. This helps you see the overall color without getting distracted by details.

Choose Vibrant Colors

Select colors that are slightly more vibrant than what you want in the final painting. It's easier to tone down the vibrancy later than to increase it.

PRO TIP

Always start with a more vibrant color than you desire in the final result.

3 Smushing Colors Together



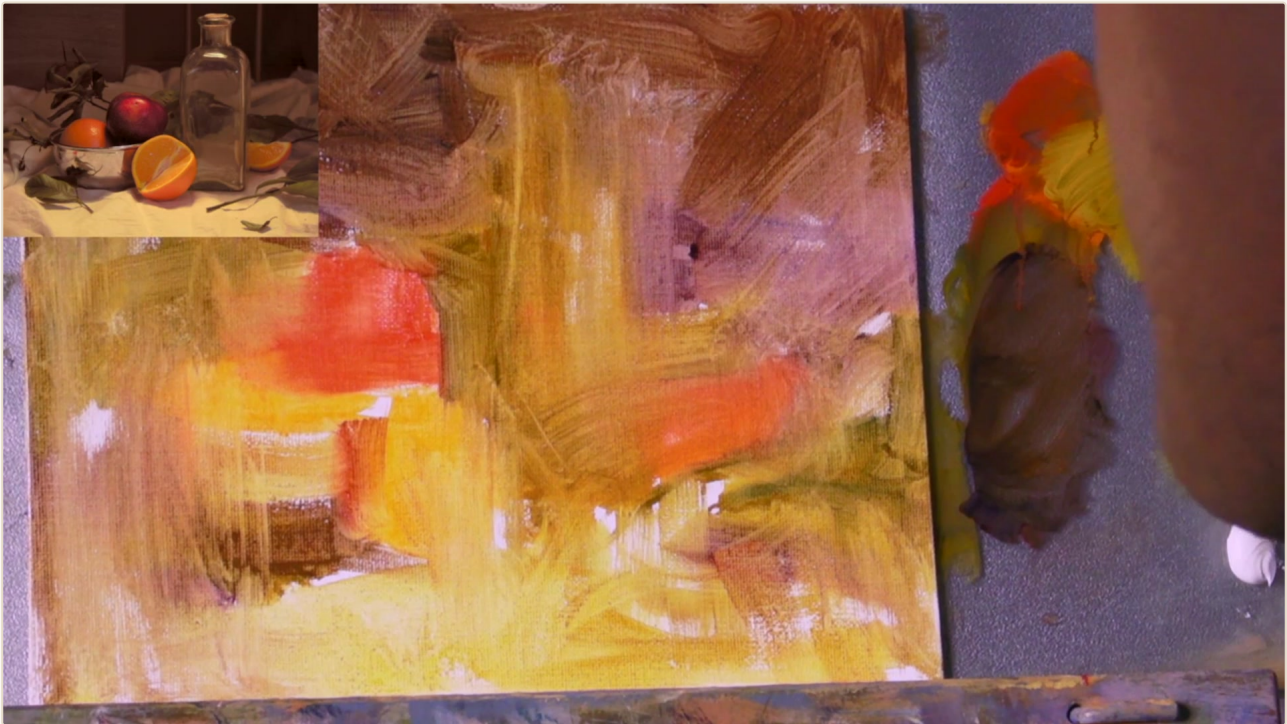
Blend Edges with a Rag

Use a rag to smush the edges of your colors together. This creates a beautifully smooth surface that is ideal for further painting. Ensure the transitions between colors are seamless for a polished look.

PRO TIP

Use a rag to blend colors for a smooth, unified surface.

4 Setting Color Limits



Identify and Paint the Darkest Dark

Determine the darkest area in your composition, which is often a shadow or deep crevice. Mix alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, and a touch of burnt sienna to create a really dark color. Apply this mixture to the identified area to establish the darkest point in your painting.

Identify and Paint the Lightest Light

Find the lightest area in your scene, such as a highlight or a bright spot. Use a very warm yellow color to paint this area. Ensure your brush is thoroughly cleaned or use a new brush to avoid muddying the light color.

Establish the Most Vibrant Color

Select the most vibrant color in your subject, like a bold orange. Apply this color to the appropriate area, slightly modulating it to achieve a natural look. This vibrant color will serve as the upper limit for saturation in your painting.

Set Color Limits for Accurate Relationships

By setting the darkest dark, lightest light, and most vibrant color, you create boundaries for your painting. This approach ensures that no area will exceed these limits, making it easier to maintain correct color relationships throughout your work.

PRO TIP

Clean your brush thoroughly or use a new one when switching from dark to light colors to prevent contamination.

5 Painting Glass and Metal as Jigsaw Puzzles



Paint Glass Like a Jigsaw Puzzle

Begin by applying the first few greens where the glass is located. Approach the painting as if assembling a jigsaw puzzle, piece by piece.

Paint Metal Like a Jigsaw Puzzle

Similarly, construct the metal bowl by painting it piece by piece, generally working from darkest to lightest areas.

Introduce Greys to the Background

Add greys to the background to enhance the vibrant colors of the fruit and make them stand out.

Reflect Orange in Shadows

In the shadow of the orange, ensure that a lot of the orange color is reflected. This will contribute to the final glowing effect of the fruit.

PRO TIP

Paint glass and metal piece by piece, like a jigsaw puzzle, starting from darkest to lightest.

6 Adjusting Drawing and Composition



Paint the Base of the Glass

Use a very dark, dull green to paint the base of the glass. Ensure the edge is crisp across the bottom to define the shape clearly.

Adjust the Drawing

Notice that the drawing may not be exact. It's okay to make adjustments, such as moving the bottle or enlarging the fruit slightly, to improve composition.

PRO TIP

Practice will improve your drawing accuracy over time.

7 Defining Edges and Contrast



Define Edges with Dark Tones

Apply a dark tone to define the edges of the top of the bottle and the background. This contrast helps to clarify the shapes and relationships within the painting. The dark areas make the lighter sections appear even lighter, enhancing the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Use dark tones to create contrast and make lighter areas stand out.

8 Handling Reflections and Distortions



Determine Edge Sharpness

Consider where each brush stroke needs to be sharp and where it should be soft. In areas where a shadow meets another shadow or a light meets another light, you can lose the edge completely to create a seamless transition.

Account for Glass Tint and Distortion

Ensure that whatever happens in the background is painted behind the glass. Remember that it may be tinted by the color of the glass and distorted by its shape.

Add Light Reflections

Paint light reflections on the glass very lightly over the initial color. If a reflection is strong and large, leave space for it before adding it in.

Balance Detail and Simplicity

Decide where to stop adding detail by squinting or blurring your eyes. This helps you focus on the essential elements and avoid overworking the painting.

PRO TIP

Paint light reflections lightly over the initial color to maintain the glass's transparency.

9 Zen of Painting with Fewer Strokes



Embrace Fewer Brush Strokes

Focus intently on your subject to identify blocks of color. Aim to convert each block into a single, deliberate brushstroke. This method enhances the vibrancy of your colors in key areas.

Achieve Precision

Ensure the edges of your brushstrokes are clean and the color is placed accurately. When executed well, this technique brings a sense of satisfaction and vibrancy to your painting.

PRO TIP

Concentrate on using fewer, more deliberate brushstrokes to enhance color vibrancy.

10 Color Relationships and Adjustments



Enhance Color Contrast

Push the color in the shadow areas to achieve a glowing effect. Balance warm colors like oranges and reds with cooler tones such as a purpley grey. This contrast will make the colors stand out and complement each other.

Adjust Dark Tones

Identify areas where the dark green meets the shadow and plum colors. If the dark green isn't dark enough in relation to its surroundings, darken it to enhance the overall depth and contrast in the painting.

PRO TIP

Balance warm and cool colors to make each other stand out.

11 Adjusting Shadows and Highlights



Compare Values

Always compare similar values. Compare lights to lights, darks to darks, and mid-values to mid-values. This approach helps maintain consistency in your painting.

Adjust Orange Highlights

Add detail to the orange by comparing the existing light areas. Make it slightly yellower and lighter to enhance the highlights.

Modify Orange Shadows

Darken and cool the orange in the shadow areas. Mix in a touch of the purpley grey used in the shadows of the middle bowl to achieve the desired effect.

PRO TIP

Always compare similar values to maintain consistency in your painting.

12 Creating Believable Highlights



Apply the Highlight

Use a thick glob of warm light to create a highlight. This initial application should be bold and confident to capture the light effectively.

Break the Highlight

Soften the edges of the highlight by gently blending them into the surrounding area. This step helps integrate the highlight into the painting and prevents it from looking too harsh or unnatural.

Restate the Highlight

Reapply the highlight with a fresh layer of paint, focusing on the areas that need more emphasis. This final touch enhances the highlight's realism and ensures it stands out from a distance.

PRO TIP

For believable highlights, apply, soften, and then reapply to maintain a painterly effect.

13 Final Adjustments and Details



Add Dark Leaves

Add a few dark leaves to the painting to enhance depth and contrast. This will help balance the composition and draw attention to the focal points.

Mix and Apply Dull Green-Grey

Mix a very dull greeny-grey to use in the reflections. This color will add subtlety and realism to the reflective surfaces.

Incorporate Orange Reflections

Add a little bit of orange to reflect the existing orange hues. This will create harmony and a cohesive look in the painting.

Enhance Background with Orange

Introduce orange into the background, losing some edges to make the outer oranges glow. This effect will enhance the vibrancy and warmth of the scene.

Add Glow to Cork

Apply a subtle glow to the top of the cork to emphasize its presence and add a touch of realism.

Reflect Orange in Glass

Paint the reflection of the orange on the side of the glass to enhance the illusion of transparency and depth.

Introduce Purple Variation

Lace a bit of purple through the background for color variation. This will add interest and complexity to the scene.

Restate Highlights and Edges

Restate the highlights in the foreground with thick paint for emphasis. Sharpen the edges to bring elements forward in the composition.

Distort Glass Stem

Exaggerate the distortion of the stem in the glass to convey the glass's curvature. This will enhance the viewer's understanding of the material.

Add Purple-Grey for Depth

Introduce a purpley-grey to the warm areas to shift them out of the spotlight. This subtle color change will guide the viewer's eye across the painting.

PRO TIP

Exaggerate distortions in glass to emphasize its reflective and refractive qualities.

14 Finishing Touches and Signing



Make Final Adjustments

Observe your painting for any subtle differences that need tweaking. Focus on areas that may require a bit more emphasis or adjustment. This is your chance to enhance the painting's overall balance and impact.

Enhance Highlights

Add a little more power to specific highlights to bring certain elements forward. This will help create depth and draw attention to focal points in your painting.

Sign Your Painting

Once satisfied with the adjustments, sign your painting. This marks the completion of your work and adds a personal touch.

Review and Reflect

Step back and review your painting. Even after signing, you might notice areas that need further refinement. Make any final changes if necessary, but remember to eventually put down the brush.

PRO TIP

Enhance highlights to bring elements forward and create depth.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by establishing a vibrant base with large blocks of color. Use a rag to blend these colors, creating a unified surface that sets the stage for your detailed work. As you progress, focus on setting clear color limits by identifying the darkest darks, lightest lights, and most vibrant hues. This will help maintain balance and harmony throughout your painting.

Approach painting glass and metal as a puzzle, piecing together each section with care. Pay attention to reflections and distortions, ensuring they enhance the realism of your work. Use deliberate brushstrokes to capture the essence of your subject, balancing warm and cool colors to make each element stand out.

In the final stages, refine your painting by adjusting shadows, highlights, and details. Introduce subtle color variations to add depth and interest. Remember to enhance key highlights to bring forward focal points, and don't forget to sign your masterpiece as a mark of completion. Step back and admire your work, making any last-minute tweaks to achieve the perfect balance.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use large blocks of color to quickly cover the canvas.
- Start with more vibrant colors than desired for the final result.
- Blend colors with a rag for a smooth, unified surface.
- Clean your brush thoroughly when switching from dark to light colors.
- Paint glass and metal piece by piece, like a jigsaw puzzle.
- Use dark tones to create contrast and make lighter areas stand out.
- Concentrate on using fewer, more deliberate brushstrokes.
- Balance warm and cool colors to make each other stand out.



"Glass & Steel" 10x8" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson

Student Critiques

Club members painted their own versions of this scene and I critiqued each one. Their paintings — and my feedback — are a wonderful way to see this lesson's ideas in action.

"Steel and Glass" by Annie Hemsley



"Steel and Glass" 40 x 30cm Waterbased Oils by Annie Hemsley

Design

No, not the best design in the world, but not the worst either. :-) The more time you spend on setting up, the better it's going to get. The flat white base doesn't help - not much interest or character there. The lighting is the main problem though. You have two or more light sources which effectively removes shadows and detracts from the dark and light shapes of the objects, flattening them. Basically it removes variation, which is the prime key to interesting paintings. It also makes it more difficult to paint as there is less obvious dark/light information to work with. My advice is to knuckle down and sort this all out before you start painting because the most important thing about painting is that you are excited to be painting the subject. One dominant light source - start with that.

Colour

The blue/orange complementary design is one of my favorites. Do remember that when you're using a colour design like that, that both colours needn't be of equal vibrancy. You could gray that blue right down and it will still work well, and in fact that would make the fruit appear even more vibrant contrasted with a more subdued background. At the moment the vibrant blue draws a lot of attention, so what did you want to be the star player here - the fruit or the background? Okay, so you can subdue colours at your discretion to meet the aims of your painting.

When you're trying to paint vibrant coloured fruit, laying on more and more strong colour will not help because you can only go as vibrant as what comes out of the tube, so the idea is to darken and dull the

shadow sides in order to make the light sides look bright by comparison. Again, working with a single light source makes this easier.

Brushwork

Waterbased oils do seem to have a tendency to not cover the canvas as well as traditional oils, which means either laying down an acrylic coat of broad colour notes first or laying on lots of thick waterbased oil paint. That's my experience with them anyway. They also tend to muddy in mixture faster than normal oils, making it harder to keep vibrant colour. All that means is that you're battling with an inferior medium and that tends to destroy any fresh brushwork because you'll spend a lot of time just trying to cover the canvas properly. (I may get stoned by some die-hard waterbased oil painters out there for saying this, but it's just my experience after working with them for over a year about 10 years ago and then a few brief forays since then). Besides that, when you start thinking more in terms of light and shade families and start building objects systematically with value plains you will find that your brushwork will improve along with your understanding and confidence. All a matter of brush miles.

Realism

Well I've dragged you over the coals a bit here Annie, but hopefully some of it helps. Actually your milk bottle, which is arguably the trickiest part of this painting challenge is looking decidedly glassy and solid, so well done on that - especially the exaggerated refraction of the orange which shouts out "hey I'm all glassy over here!" What impressed me more than anything was that you did one painting in watercolour and also this one in oils, which reveals to me the curious spirit of and true artist, and that is beautiful beyond all measure. You go girl!

"DR-Clementines" by Dorothy Ruckdeschel



"DR-Clementines" 11 x 14" Oil on Canvas by Dorothy Ruckdeschel

Design

Wow - not your first painting then!? Love the freedom of this Dorothy - great to see. It's well designed with the dancing leaves balancing the formality of the other objects. Lightening the background as you have has added to the sense of fun and freedom in the painting but at the same time you've lost some of that overall dark to light structure which was holding the whole thing together so now I get a feeling that the top half is a little lost in translation, particularly because in changing the lighting behind the jar you've had to invent a lot of that glass which has detracted from its realism.

Colour

The play of colour against gray is nicely done. If you really want to push through into the impressionist colour I'd like to see some more hue variations being woven into the background and major masses as well, tying the whole thing together, although that would be easier on a larger canvas. Some areas got a little muddled like the plum on the left and some of the interior of the glass and I would have liked to see a little stronger colour and value in the orange on the left to give it more form, but overall it's very good.

Brushwork

You've achieved a real symphony of varied brushwork there on a small canvas - a real treat and something many of us aspire to. It seems a shame you lost the drawing in the top of the glass because up until then you had balanced keen drawing with loose brushwork, which is difficult to achieve. Personally I'd redo that bit because you're onto a winner. I'm really impressed with how far you're pushing your lost and found

edges and most of the time you're right on with what needs to be sharp and what can be obscured - just keep thinking about those as you do them.

Realism

With a little more focus applied here and there in building form and careful drawing you will have fully bridged that gap between well observed realism and joyously applied paintwork. Great work!

"Workshop8" by Li Ningning



"Workshop8" 40 x 30cm Oil on Canvas by Li Ningning

Design

A very effective and pleasing design Li - it shows that you spent a good long time setting this up and arranging the lighting. Nicely done. Plenty of variation and subtlety. I especially like the S curve of the fruit leading back into the picture and onto the pitcher. Even the little berries are expertly placed! That's very Ninja.

Colour

It looks on my screen like the colour in your photograph of your painting has been pushed a little too vibrant, but even so, I can see all the relationships are good and the dark background does make the fruit look extra punchy and adds a degree of mystery to it all.

Brushwork

Your work is very slick and you do hide your brushwork a lot with overpainting and glazing but you have laid it on thick where it counts and that's beautiful to see. You could go even further in that regard pushing the relationship between thin and thick paint, but that's up to you, as always. I love those lost edges on the background leaves and the super-sharp edges in the foreground. Great stuff.

Realism

It doesn't get a lot more realistic than this in the alla prima style at this size. Your apple especially is very biteable and you've shown a commendable restraint with all the highlights which are so easy to overdo.

The brevity of this critique basically means I can't think of anything much to improve on this painting, so all I can do is join in the applause for this one Li! Great work.

"Glass and Steel" by Dania Bree



"Glass and Steel" 11x14" Oil on Linen by Dania Bree

Design

I love this design Dania - there is so much well orchestrated variety here it's a joy to take in. The purple background was a bold choice but you've quite wisely subdued that so it doesn't overpower the subject. Your objects are well placed with solid overlaps so none are 'kissing' edges and the colour placements keeps the eye moving around the painting from reds to reds, oranges to oranges, greens to greens. It's a rich concerto full of life and movement.

Colour

There's a subtle grey quality to your colour which makes me wonder if you are using black in your grays. To me it's neither good nor bad to use black in your grays - it's all a means to an end and if the final colours are good and harmonious then who is to question the means. I particularly like the colour you have in the capsicum and the metal bowl - both have been subtly seen. It's good to see you noting the subtler differences in the shadows of the tablecloth too which introduces the background colour into the foreground.

Brushwork

Your brushwork is one of the main elements that drew me to look at this painting. From a distance it looks quite carefree and lyrical but on closer inspection I can see that it is in fact quite tightly drawn and the brushwork is well considered. It seems, like me, that you are trying to loosen up your brush strokes and it is working well. If you want to go further the next step is to use bigger, juicy globs of paint, and don't mix

the paint completely on the palette - allow some of that to happen on the canvas. Then of course there's always the palette knife. Depends where you want to go next of course. Where you are is great, but where to next? Some of your edges could do with softening off like the far left edge of the table cloth - it's sharp and high contrast - not a good combo for the edge of the canvas, but you have certainly done well elsewhere. It's up to the artist to decide what to accent and what to obscure. Yes this helps with giving depth to an object and a scene, but we might also consider 'what is this painting about?' Am I more interested in the jungle or the tiger?

Realism

Realism most often relies on drawing and value and on both scales you have done very well. Your drawing did lapse a little in the bottle and the bowl, although that's probably just more readily evident because these are precise man-made objects which we know to be more straight and regular than organic material. I find it a real battle to balance expressive brushwork with careful drawing, but hey if it wasn't a challenge who would do it right? Congratulations on a beautiful painting Dania.