



Painting the Still Life in Oils

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/237-Painting-the-Still-Life-in-Oils>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to explore the tranquil world of still life painting in oils or acrylics, a practice that is both meditative and enlightening. We'll delve into the art of selecting simple objects and arranging them to create a harmonious composition. The beauty of a still life lies in its simplicity, and by choosing basic shapes and forms, we can focus on the essentials of composition and color without feeling overwhelmed. I've opted for a straightforward setup with a black background and a white cloth, allowing the colors of our chosen objects to truly shine. This lesson will guide you through the process of setting up your still life in a way that enhances its features, using directional lighting to craft captivating shadows and highlights. You'll learn how to maximize vibrant color and create beautifully three-dimensional objects with just five values. With my step-by-step guidance, you'll discover new techniques and tips that will elevate your painting from ordinary to extraordinary, all while enjoying the calming process of creation. Let's embark on this artistic journey together, one brushstroke at a time.



Lemon Tea 12x12" 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
- Ultramarine Blue
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- M. Graham & Co. Walnut Alkyd Medium or Walnut Oil
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Canvas
- Fredrix ultrasmooth canvas.
- 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 Choosing objects and environment



Select Simple Objects

Choose objects for your still life that are simple and easy to work with. Start with basic shapes and forms to focus on composition and color without getting overwhelmed.

Adjust the Environment

Set up your still life in a space that complements the objects. Ensure the background and surrounding area do not distract from the main subjects.

Optimize Lighting

Adjust the lighting to enhance the features of your still life. Use directional light to create interesting shadows and highlights, bringing out the best in your subject.

Light Your Canvas

Ensure your canvas is well-lit to accurately see and mix colors. Avoid glare by positioning your light source at an angle to the canvas.

PRO TIP

Choose simple objects to focus on composition and color without getting overwhelmed.

2 Subject selection



Choose Your Subject

Select a simple subject for your still life, such as a lemon and a teapot. These items provide basic shapes that are easy to work with.

Consider Complexity

Opt for two subjects to keep the composition straightforward. Even if a teapot seems complex, it's essentially similar to a lemon with additional features like a knob and handle.

Select a Background

Use a plain background and base to keep the focus on your subjects. This simplicity helps highlight the main elements of your painting.

Choose Meaningful Objects

Pick objects that hold personal significance. Painting what you love will enhance your enjoyment and connection to the artwork.

PRO TIP

Keep your composition simple with two main subjects to maintain focus and ease of painting.

3 Composition tips



Consider Reflections

Use a blue canvas to create a reflection on the side of your still life setup. Experiment with different colors by placing objects of various colors to see how they reflect and interact with the composition.

Enhance with Details

Add interest by slicing a piece of the lemon and placing it in the foreground. This adds depth and complexity to the composition.

Arrange Objects Thoughtfully

Carefully consider the placement of each object in your still life. This step is crucial for achieving a balanced and visually appealing composition.

PRO TIP

Experiment with different colored objects to see how they reflect and interact with your composition.

4 Avoiding 'kissing' objects



Consider Object Placement

Think about how to place the objects in your composition. With two objects, keep it simple and explore different arrangements.

Avoid 'Kissing' Objects

Ensure the objects do not just touch at their outlines. This 'kissing' effect can make their spatial relationship ambiguous, confusing the viewer about which object is in front.

Use Shadows to Connect

Utilize shadows as a vital shape in your composition. Shadows can help connect objects and guide the viewer's eye across the painting.

PRO TIP

Avoid placing objects so they just touch at their outlines, as this can create ambiguity in their spatial relationship.

5 Creating depth with overlap



Create Depth with Overlapping

Arrange objects in your composition so that they overlap each other. This technique helps to create depth in your painting by showing which objects are in front and which are behind. Overlapping objects is essential for realistic painting as it allows viewers to perceive depth on a two-dimensional plane.

PRO TIP

Use overlapping objects to enhance the sense of depth in your painting.

6 Adjusting viewpoint and angles



Adjust Object Position

Experiment with moving objects forward and backward. Bringing an object forward can create a light space, while pushing it back can connect shadows, simplifying the area. Look for these subtle changes to enhance your still life setup.

Change Your Viewing Angle

Alter your viewpoint by sinking down in your seat or raising the still life platform. A lower angle can make objects appear more grand, while a higher angle allows you to look down, creating more interesting round shapes. Adjust the angle to see how it affects the composition.

Observe Shape Interactions

Consider how shapes interact as you change your viewpoint. Notice how negative shapes change when you move from side to side. Ensure there's enough space between objects to avoid unwanted connections that can confuse the composition.

PRO TIP

Adjust your viewing angle to see how it affects the composition and the shapes within your still life.

7 Environment and reflections



Consider the Environment

Set up your still life with a simple background and base. Use a black background and a white base to create contrast. Be mindful of the surroundings, especially with reflective surfaces, as they reflect everything around them.

Add Reflective Elements

Introduce elements with intentional colors to create interesting reflections. For example, place a blue object to reflect cool light on one side if you have warm light on the other. This contrast adds depth and interest to your composition.

Create a Controlled Setup

Use a dark space or a simple setup like a cardboard box with a cut-out front and movable sides. This allows you to control light and shadow effectively, enhancing the mystery and intrigue of your composition.

Manipulate Light and Shadow

Experiment with removing and replacing elements to observe changes in light and shadow. Notice how a dark shadow behind a light shape can push the background back and bring the subject forward, creating depth in your painting.

PRO TIP

Use a cardboard box setup with removable sides to easily control light and shadow in your still life composition.

8 Lighting the subject and canvas



Set Up Your Lighting

Position an LED studio light with around a thousand LEDs at a 45-degree angle to your subject. This creates a focused and direct light source, essential for achieving a beautiful, rounded appearance in your objects.

Light Your Canvas Separately

Ensure your canvas is well-lit without the light interfering with your subject. Use separate lighting for the canvas to maintain the integrity of the single light source on your subject.

Avoid Additional Light Sources

Block out other lights in the room and minimize natural light from windows. This helps maintain the simplicity and roundness of your subject by using a single light source.

PRO TIP

Position your light source at a 45-degree angle to enhance the roundness and simplicity of your subject.

9 Light intensity and color



Adjust Light Intensity

Experiment with the intensity of your light source. Turn the light up and down to observe how it affects the appearance of your painting. Adjusting the light intensity can dramatically change the mood and perception of your artwork.

Modify Light Color

Consider the color of your light source. Use colored gels or cellophanes to alter the light color, creating a warmer or cooler effect. Ensure any materials used do not pose a fire hazard.

Balance Light on Canvas

Use a combination of cool and warm light bulbs to achieve a balanced light on your canvas. This helps avoid making your painting appear too warm or too cool, placing it in the 'Goldilocks zone' where the light is just right.

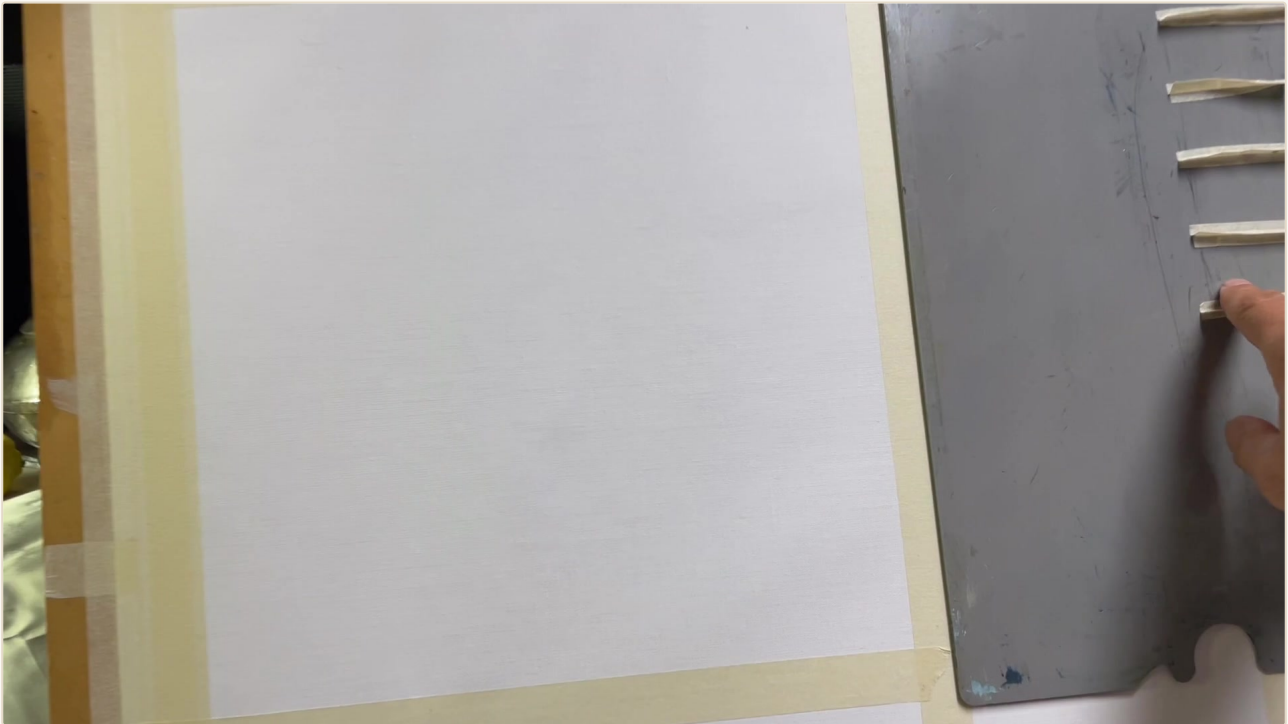
Match Palette and Canvas Lighting

Ensure your palette is in the same light as your canvas. This consistency prevents color discrepancies when transferring paint from the palette to the canvas, ensuring accurate color representation.

PRO TIP

Use a combination of daylight and normal bulbs to achieve balanced lighting on your canvas.

10 Canvas and materials



Prepare Your Canvas

Choose a fine smooth linen canvas for your painting. This type of canvas is excellent for showing brush strokes, enhancing the texture of your work.

Consider Alternative Surfaces

For an even smoother finish, use a wood panel gessoed with several layers and lightly sanded. This surface allows for a sleek and refined painting experience.

Stretch Your Linen

Purchase linen in large rolls to save money and stretch it onto a board using tape. This method is cost-effective and practical for shipping paintings.

PRO TIP

Use masking tape to create small rests for your paint, ensuring color consistency from palette to canvas.

11 Photographing the subject



Photograph from a Distance

Position yourself a bit further away from your setup to avoid distortion. Zoom in to capture the image instead of getting too close, which can create a fish-eye effect.

Adjust Exposure

Tap the middle of your smartphone screen to access the exposure settings. Lower the exposure by dragging the sun icon down to create a more mysterious and interesting image with better contrast.

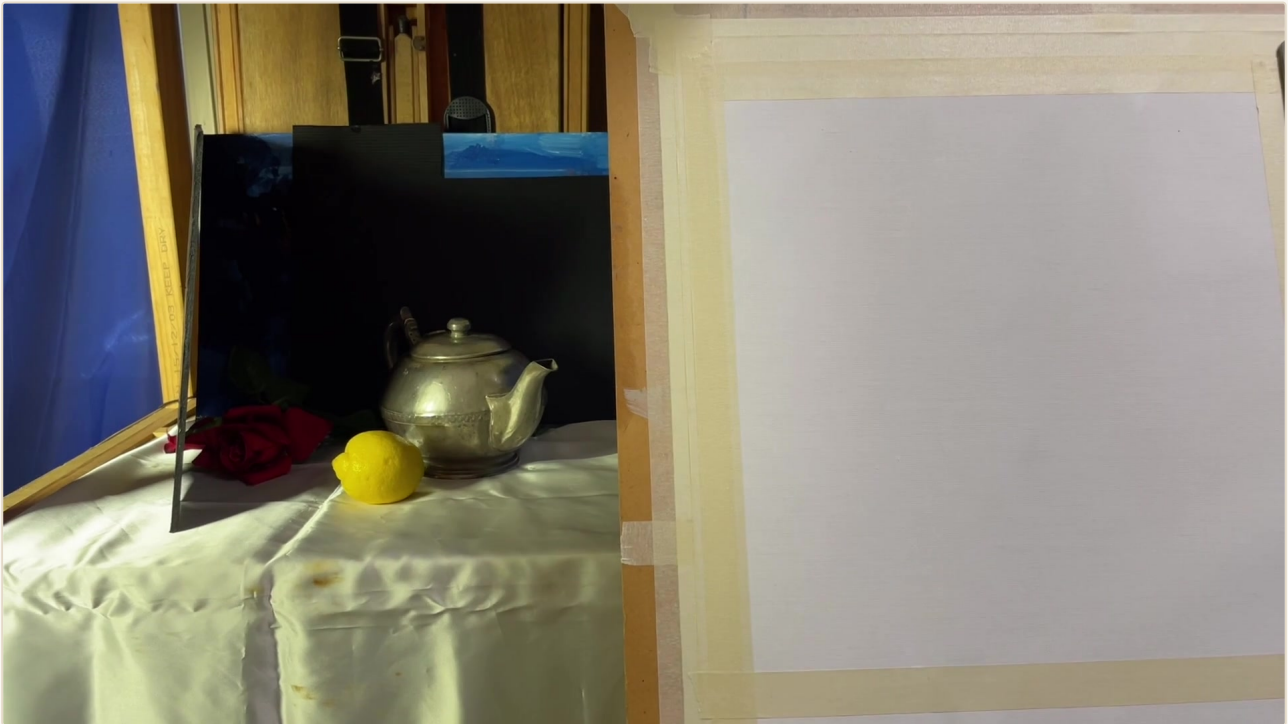
Use Black and White Filter

Switch to a black and white filter to view your subject in terms of values. This helps you understand the tonal range and can be a valuable reference for painting.

PRO TIP

Photograph from a distance and zoom in to avoid distortion and capture a more natural-looking image.

12 Setting up the canvas



Position Your Canvas

Set up your canvas directly in front of your subject. The closer you can get to your subject, the easier it will be to paint because you can make direct comparisons.

Align Your View

Arrange your setup so that you can see both the subject and the canvas in one view without having to look away. This allows for quick visual comparisons.

Match Subject and Canvas Size

Try to set up your canvas so that the subject appears the same size from your viewing position as it will on the canvas. This is known as the sight size method and simplifies the painting process.

PRO TIP

Position your canvas and subject so they are the same size from your viewing position for easier comparison.

13 Brushes and palette



Select Your Brushes

Choose long-bristled brushes for their ability to hold more paint, allowing you to cover more area with each stroke. Use natural bristle brushes for a softer touch and synthetic bristles for more precision. Incorporate dagger brushes for fine lines, eliminating the need for a rigger if used skillfully.

Prepare Your Palette

Set up a reduced palette with ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, cad yellow light, and titanium white. Mix ultramarine blue and burnt sienna to create a neutral dark grey, which suits the predominantly grey composition of the painting, except for the yellow lemon.

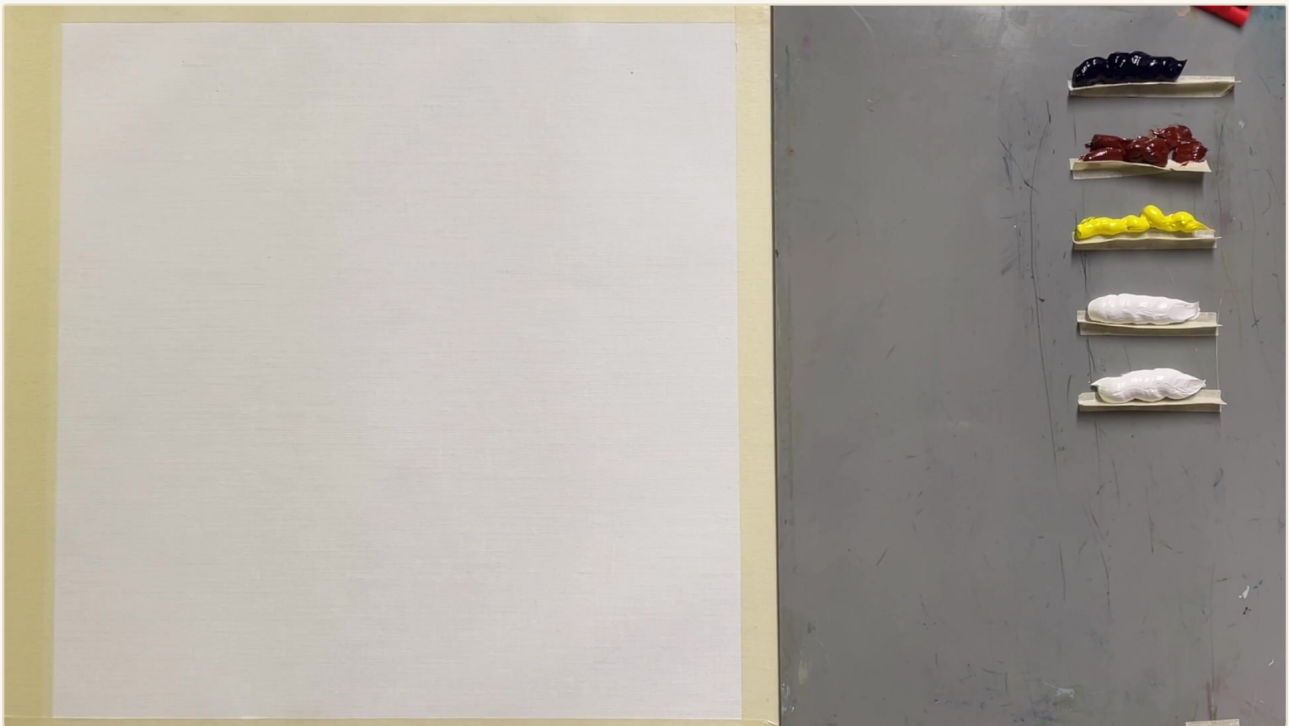
Choose Your Medium

Use walnut oil as your painting medium for a natural option that avoids the smell and potential allergies associated with alkyd mediums. If faster drying is needed, liquin or an alkyd medium can be used, but be mindful of their stronger odors.

PRO TIP

Using a reduced palette simplifies color mixing decisions and enhances color harmony in your painting.

14 Toning the canvas



Prepare Your Materials

Ensure you have a jar with a bit of old dirty turps for use during the drawing stages. Have a mahl stick ready for painting fine details or keeping your hand steady.

Mix a Grey Base

Use a big brush to dip into the tips of your paint, creating a very thin grey wash. Aim for a neutral grey, avoiding brown or blue tones, to cover the white canvas.

Apply the Grey Wash

Lay the grey wash onto the canvas to eliminate the stark white and help the paint flow better. Allow it to dry slightly until it's just damp, creating a soft surface to paint into, often called painting into a couch.

PRO TIP

Use a mahl stick to keep your hand steady when painting fine details.

15 Acrylics vs oils



Tone the Canvas

Tone the canvas to reduce the glare of the white surface. Allow it to dry before proceeding. Using a bright color for toning can add interest but may require thicker paint layers to cover.

Consider Acrylics for Underpainting

Use acrylics for the underpainting if you want a faster drying time. Ensure the acrylic layer is completely dry before painting over it with oils.

Painting Entirely in Acrylics

Use more paint with acrylics for a painterly effect, about four times the amount compared to oils. Keep the paint wet by spraying the palette and canvas with water. Consider using a stay-wet palette to maintain paint moisture.

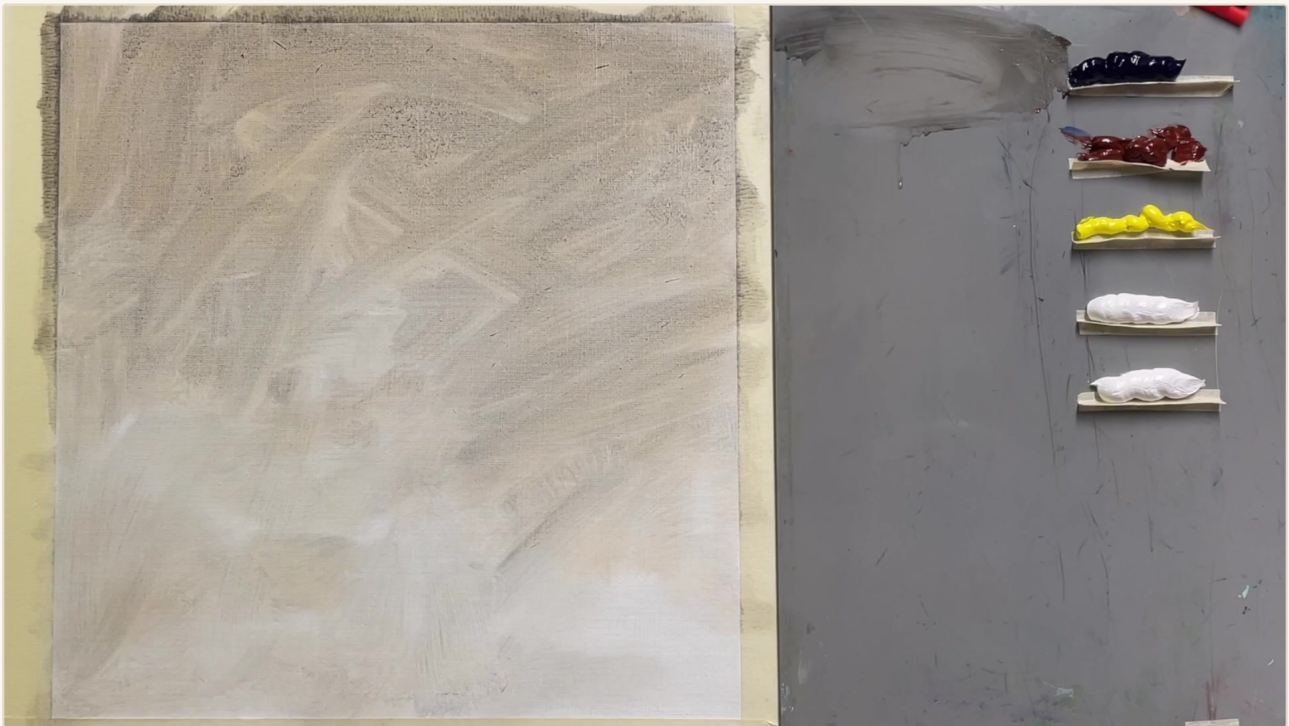
Plan Blends in Acrylics

Plan ahead for smooth blends from darks to lights with acrylics. Work quickly to achieve a smooth finish before the paint dries.

PRO TIP

Use a spray bottle to keep acrylic paint wet on the palette and canvas.

16 Drawing methods



Project and Sketch

Take a photo of your subject and project it onto the canvas. Sketch the outlines directly from the projection to ensure accuracy.

Pencil Transfer Method

Print your photo to the desired size. Rub pencil on the back of the paper, place it on the canvas, and press hard around the outlines to transfer them.

Grid Transfer Method

Overlay grids on your photo and canvas, maintaining the same proportions. Draw each section individually to create an accurate representation of your subject.

Brush Drawing

Use a brush to draw directly onto the canvas. This method allows for fluidity and expression in your initial outlines.

Rag Wiping Technique

Apply wet paint to the canvas and use a rag to wipe away sections, creating outlines by removing paint.

Pencil Drawing

Simply use a pencil to sketch your subject directly onto the canvas for a straightforward approach.

PRO TIP

Use the grid transfer method for precise and proportionate drawings.

17 Envelope method for drawing



Establish Object Boundaries

Use the envelope method to determine the boundaries of your objects. Identify the top and bottom points and note that the center is slightly off-center. Measure the width and ensure it's a bit wider than it is tall.

Draw Symmetrical Shapes

Sketch the general shapes within the established boundaries. Since the object is a flattened sphere, make it symmetrical by drawing one side and mirroring it on the other side of the center line.

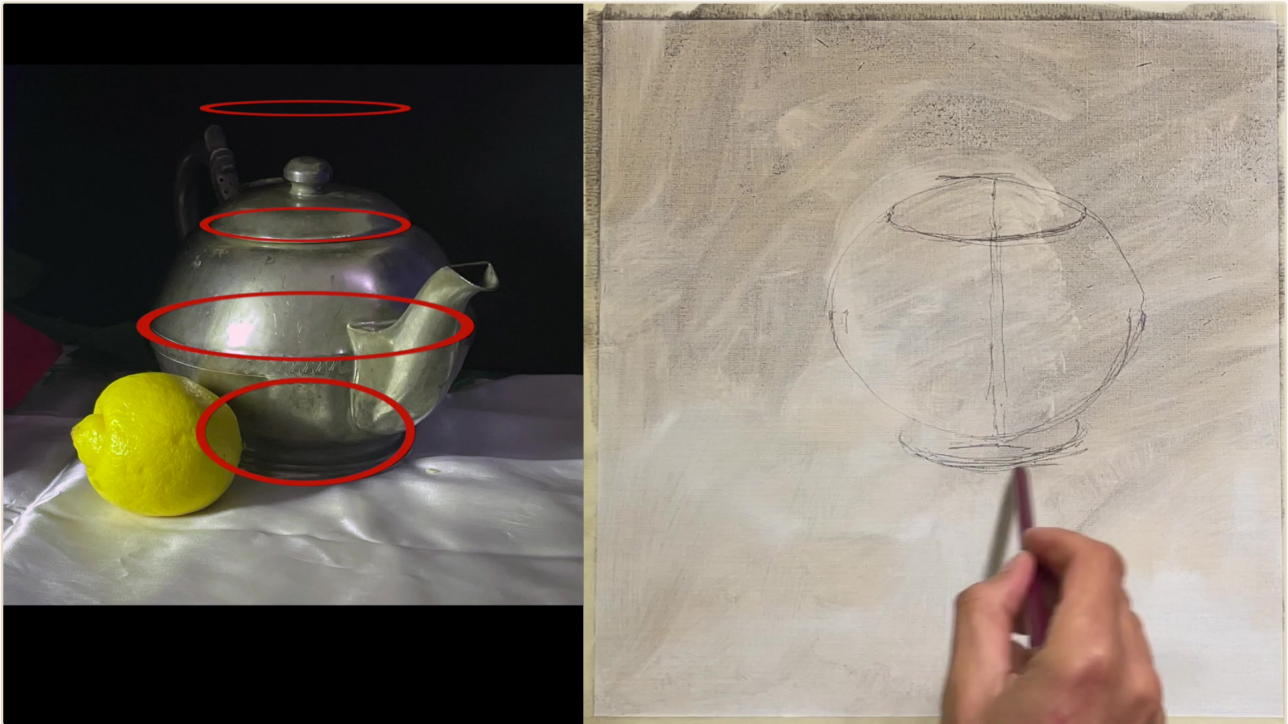
Understand Ellipse Flattening

Observe how ellipses change as they approach eye level. They become flatter near the horizon line (eye level) and rounder as they move away from it.

PRO TIP

Use a center line to help mirror shapes and maintain symmetry in your drawing.

18 Drawing ellipses and symmetry



Understand Ellipse Shapes

Observe that ellipses at the bottom are rounder compared to those at the top. Notice how the top ellipse is different due to the shape of the teapot's lid.

Focus on Drawing Accuracy

Take your time with the drawing process, adjusting your level of accuracy as needed. Remember, the goal is to enjoy the process, not to match someone else's precision.

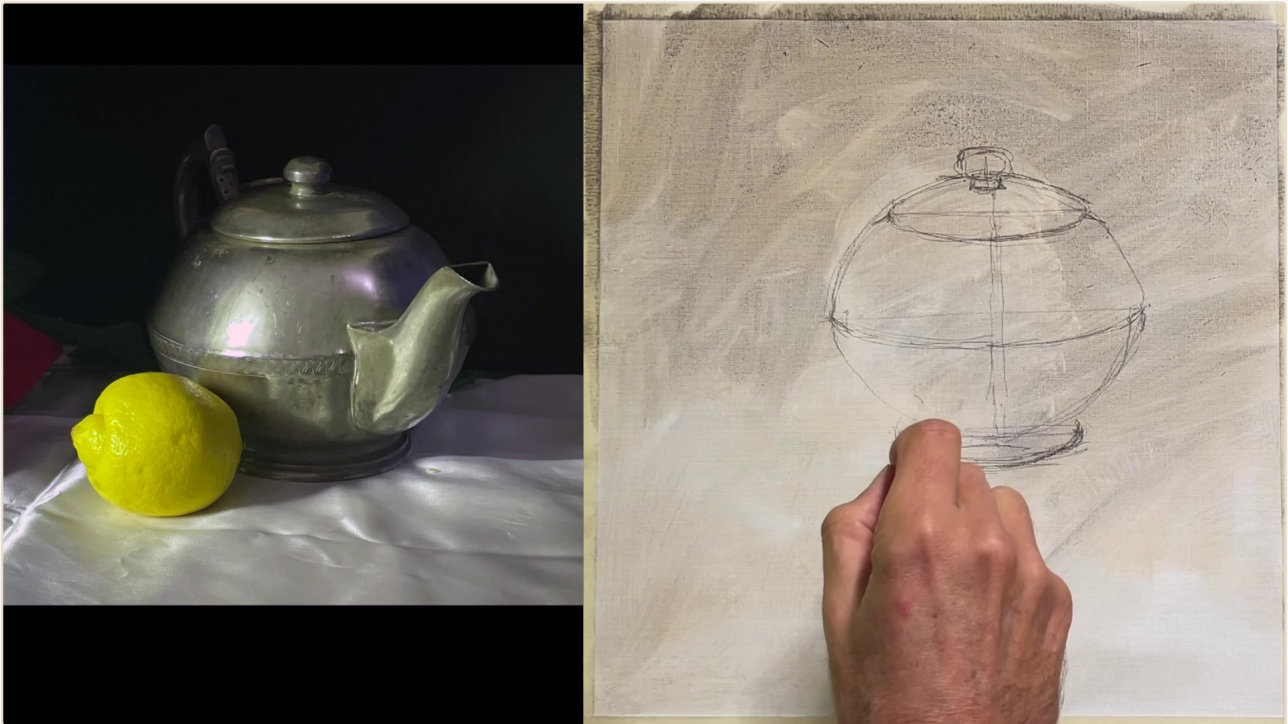
Align Ellipses Horizontally

Ensure that the outermost points of the ellipses align on a horizontal line if the teapot is vertical. Adjust these lines if the teapot is tilted to maintain symmetry.

PRO TIP

Align the outermost points of ellipses on a horizontal line for accurate symmetry.

19 Angle transfer and drawing accuracy



Determine Lemon's Position

Use a pencil to align with your photograph and observe where the lemon's right side intersects with the teapot. Identify the invisible lines that connect different parts of the objects to ensure accurate placement.

Apply Angle Transfer

Measure the angle from the outermost point of the teapot to the outermost point of the lemon. Rotate your body to maintain this angle and apply it to your canvas. Mark the topmost and bottommost points, considering the ratio of length to height.

Capture Lemon's Unique Shape

Avoid drawing a generic sphere or ellipse. Pay attention to the lemon's subtle shifts in angle and shape to capture its character accurately.

Utilize Negative Spaces

Identify and draw the negative spaces around your objects. This helps with the overall drawing accuracy. Use angle transfer again by placing your pencil over the subject and rotating your body to transfer the angle.

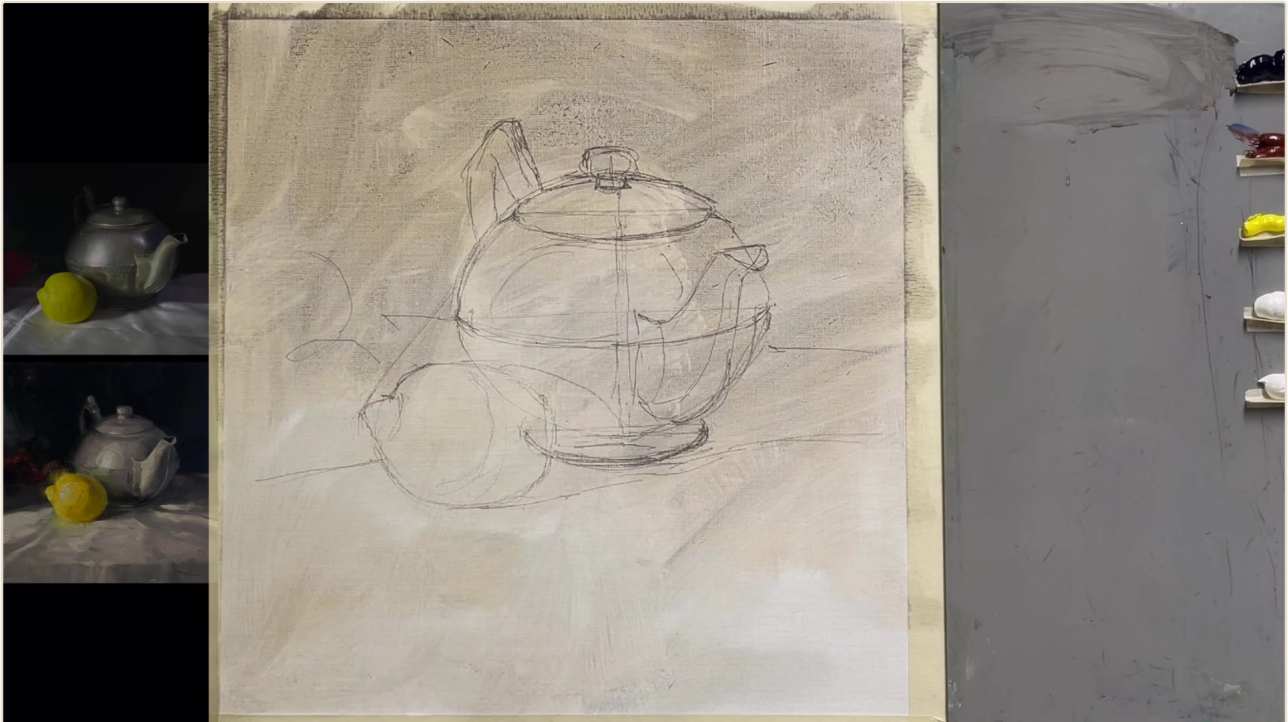
Sketch Lightly

Sketch lightly to prevent the graphite from becoming too thick and muddying the paint. This also allows for easy adjustments. Mark in the shadows and check your drawing with a mirror or flipped photo to spot any mistakes.

PRO TIP

Sketch lightly to allow for easy changes and prevent graphite from muddying the paint.

20 Blocking in the background



Prepare the Brush and Paint

Use a big, soft brush and dip it into walnut oil. Mix blue and burnt sienna to create a neutral color, aiming for an equal balance of both.

Apply the Background

Brush the neutral mix onto the background, being careful not to obscure your initial drawing. Keep the paint thin to start with, as this will help with layering later on.

Create a Loose Texture

Use large brush strokes to apply the paint, allowing for a brushy texture on the outer areas. This will contribute to a looser feel on the edges, which will contrast with more detailed work in the center of interest.

PRO TIP

Keep your initial paint layer thin to facilitate easier layering and adjustments later.

21 Squinting to simplify shapes



Intimate the Rose

Use a warmer color to suggest the presence of the rose. It doesn't have to be red, just a warmer tone to create contrast with the background.

Add White to Increase Opacity

Mix a little white into your background color to increase the opacity. This helps cover the canvas more effectively and reduces the appearance of brushiness.

Use Color Consistently

Apply the mixed color to other areas where you see it, such as the teapot. This saves time by avoiding the need to remix the color later.

Extend Paint for Blending

Paint slightly beyond the area you need, allowing the next layer to blend smoothly with the current one.

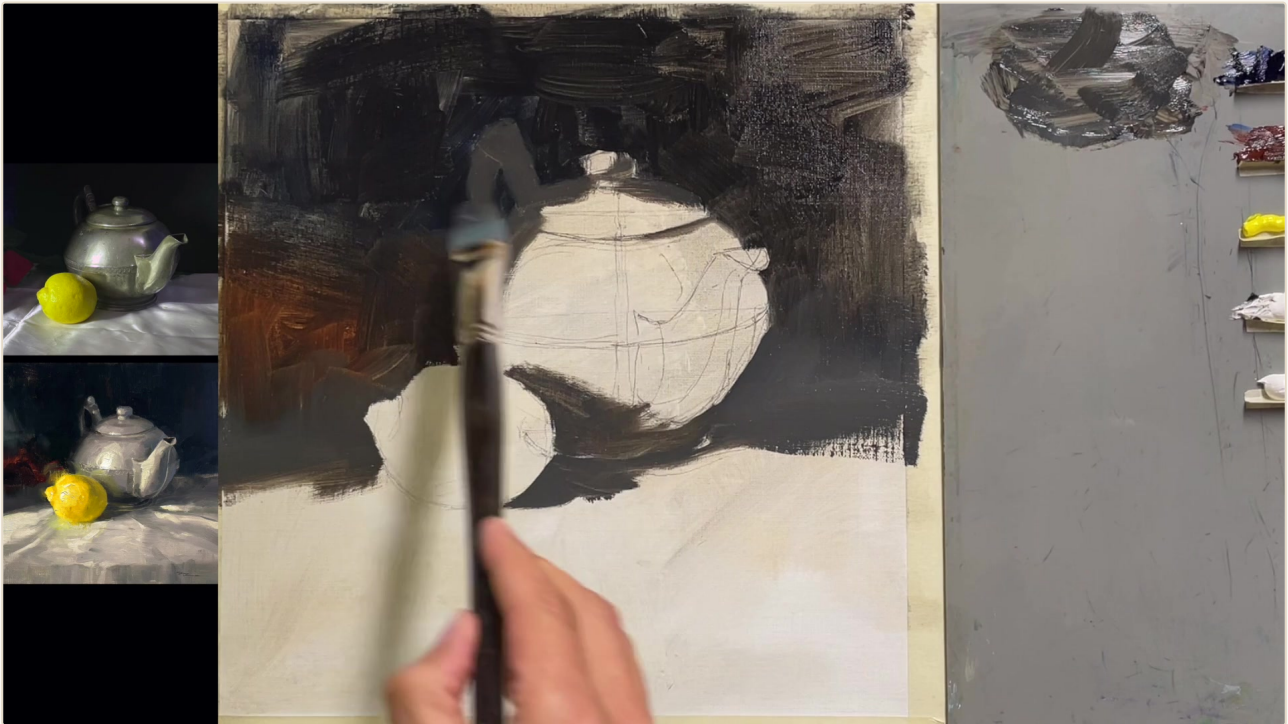
Squint to Simplify Shapes

Squint or blur your eyes to simplify the subject into larger shapes. This technique helps eliminate confusing details and focuses on the big shapes, essential in the early stages of painting.

PRO TIP

Squinting helps you focus on the big shapes by eliminating unnecessary details.

22 Using values in painting



Understand Values

Recognize that values refer to the lightness or darkness of a color. You can simplify a painting by using five key values: dark accents, darks, mid values, lights, and highlights.

Start with Three Values

Begin by painting with three values: darks, mid values, and lights. This helps establish the basic structure of your painting.

Add Dark Accents and Highlights

Once the three main values are in place, add your dark accents in the areas where light doesn't reach. Then, apply highlights to the spots where the light is most intense.

Simplify and Blend

Simplify your painting by sticking to these five values. Paint blocks of different values and blend them to create smooth transitions and in-between values.

PRO TIP

Simplify your painting by using five key values to make it easier to manage and blend.

23 Large brush for painterly effect



Choose a Large Brush

Select a large brush to achieve a painterly effect. This approach encourages bold, expressive strokes and helps avoid over-detailing early on.

Mix Neutral Gray

Combine ultramarine blue and burnt sienna to create a neutral gray. This neutral tone is useful for balancing colors and establishing a mid-value base.

Lighten the Mixture

Adjust the gray mixture by lightening it slightly. Use a neutral palette to see how close you are to achieving the desired neutrality.

Add Walnut Oil

Once the mixture is right, incorporate a tiny bit of walnut oil. This will help the paint flow smoothly and allow for easier application.

Paint Boldly

Apply the paint in a blocky manner, squinting at your subject to simplify shapes. Aim to create a 'big fuzzy jigsaw' effect, focusing on the overall composition rather than details.

Place Brush Strokes Deliberately

Be intentional with your brush strokes, observing your subject multiple times before painting. This careful approach ensures accuracy and confidence in your work.

PRO TIP

Use a large brush to maintain a painterly effect and avoid over-detailing early in the painting process.

24 Analyzing highlights and shadows



Capture the Big Idea

Focus on capturing the overall impression of the scene with as few brush strokes as possible. Don't worry about subtle differences at this stage; you can add details later. Aim to get the big idea down first.

Enhance Reflective Surfaces

Reflective surfaces won't appear shiny until you add the final highlight. Until then, they may look dull, like pottery. Extend any necessary colors with a small brush without remixing.

Clean Brushes Efficiently

Use a paper towel or rag to squeeze out excess paint and clean your brushes between mixtures. This keeps your colors pure and your brushwork clean.

Adjust Highlight Colors

Since the light is warm, add a bit of yellow to your lighter areas. Squint at your subject to see the subtle variations in highlight color and lightness.

Analyze and Compare

Pay close attention to the differences in lightness and color of highlights and shadows. The more you analyze and compare these elements, the more realistic your painting will appear.

PRO TIP

Squint at your subject to better see subtle variations in highlight and shadow colors.

25 Reflections and color adjustments



Enhance Reflections

Add more yellow to your palette and apply it to the areas where the lemon reflects onto the kettle. This will create a shinier and crisper appearance.

Avoid Over-Detailing

Resist the urge to focus too much on details at this stage. Ensure the entire painting is blocked in before refining specific areas.

PRO TIP

Use a yellowy gray mix to subtly enhance reflective surfaces without overworking the details.

26 Painting fabric and highlights



Identify Big Shapes

Squint your eyes to simplify the scene and identify the big shapes in the fabric. Focus on capturing these shapes to create a strong composition.

Mix Greyer Tones

Mix a slightly greyer tone using your limited palette. This will help create the half tones between the shadow and the light areas of the fabric.

Adjust Angles and Shadows

Adjust the angle of certain shapes to better direct the viewer's eye. Add shadows to frame the light and enhance the composition.

Lighten and Add Yellow

Gradually lighten the tone and add a touch of yellow. This will help to capture the energy and feeling of the fabric without directly copying it.

Highlight Cool Tones

Observe the highlights on the fabric, which may appear cooler than expected. Capture these crisp highlights to convey the texture of silk or satin.

PRO TIP

Squint to simplify the scene and focus on big shapes for a strong composition.

27 Starting the lemon



Prepare for the Lemon

Select a clean brush to ensure the lemon's color remains vibrant and unaffected by previous colors.

PRO TIP

Be mindful of the light source direction to accurately depict highlights and shadows.

28 Blocking in vibrant colors



Block in Vibrant Color

Start by blocking in a chunk of very vibrant color. Squint and compare it to the color in the scene to ensure it's as powerful as possible. If it's too bright or light, tone it down with burnt sienna, which acts as a dark, slightly grayed orange. This approach helps maintain the saturation and vibrancy of the color.

Adjust and Refine

After blocking in the vibrant color, make necessary adjustments to ensure it matches the scene. Begin working outwards and then back into the vibrant area to keep the color pure. This method prevents the destruction of saturation when transitioning from shadows to light.

Add Shadows

Once the vibrant color is in place, add shadows to create depth. Use a mix that complements the vibrant color to maintain harmony in the painting.

PRO TIP

Start with the punchy color first to maintain its saturation and vibrancy.

29 Shadow and light on the lemon



Establish Basic Values

Squint at your subject to identify the main shapes and values. Use a big brush to quickly cover the canvas, creating a two-value statement with light and dark areas on the lemon.

Create a Three-Value Statement

Blend the existing values to introduce a mid-value between the light and dark. Aim to mix this color rather than just blending, for a more painterly effect.

Paint with Chunky Strokes

Apply paint in chunky strokes without worrying about softening edges yet. This approach helps you assess if the colors are correct.

Soften Edges

Soften the edges by zig-zagging your brush and swiping through the paint. Focus on the transition between light and shadow.

Adjust Light Color

Clean your brush and return to the original light color, adding a bit of burnt sienna for warmth. Use this to refine and soften the transition in the light areas.

Use Thick Paint in Light Areas

Apply thick paint in the light areas to make them pop. Keep the dark areas flat to maintain a sense of mystery.

PRO TIP

Use thick paint in the light areas to enhance their brightness and make them stand out.

30 Reflected light and shadow blending



Add Reflected Light

Switch to a smaller brush to add a lighter tone where light is bouncing off the cloth onto the underside of the lemon. This reflected light adds interest and realism to your painting.

Paint the Core Shadow

Mix yellow, burnt sienna, and a little blue to create the core shadow color. Squint to see the shape of the shadow and adjust the mixture to make it slightly darker if needed.

Highlight with Impasto

Clean your brush and use a palette knife to apply white paint thickly for highlights. Note the position of these highlights as they indicate the light source.

Create the Occlusion Shadow

Add a crisp occlusion shadow right under the lemon using a slightly orange tone. This enhances the glowing effect of the light and adds depth to your painting.

Blend Shadow Edges

Soften the edges where shadows meet to create a mysterious and varied effect. This blending adds depth and interest to the shadow areas.

PRO TIP

Use a slightly orange tone for occlusion shadows to enhance the glowing effect of surrounding light.

31 Finishing touches on the teapot



Refine Dark Areas

Focus on the dark areas of the teapot. Examine the transitions between mid values and darks, adjusting where necessary. Ensure edges are soft where the teapot should recede and crisp where it should come forward.

Enhance Highlights

Add highlights to the teapot to bring out its form. Use crisp edges on the spout to make it stand out and softer edges on areas meant to recede.

Focus on Small Shapes

Look at the small shapes within the larger form of the teapot. Adjust edges to create a balance between soft and crisp, enhancing the overall depth and interest of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use crisp edges to bring elements forward and soft edges to make them recede.

32 Background brushwork



Use Large Brushstrokes

Switch to a larger brush to apply bigger brushstrokes in the background. Focus on creating large shapes with minimal strokes to maintain a painterly effect.

Vary Your Brushwork

Avoid repeating the same brushstroke or color throughout the background. Experiment with different shapes and colors to prevent a patterned look.

Soften Edges

Add a touch of blue to soften the edges in the background. This creates lost edges, enhancing the painterly quality of your work.

PRO TIP

Use larger brushstrokes in the background to save smaller, detailed strokes for focal areas.

33 Final adjustments and highlights



Use a Soft Brush

Select a very soft brush to create interesting brushwork. Experiment with the brush to see how it affects the texture and feel of the painting.

Switch to a Smaller Brush

Switch to a smaller brush and add lighter colors with a touch of yellow. Be precise with the placement of these lighter areas to enhance the details.

Utilize a Mall Stick

Use a mall stick to steady your hand for precise work on small sections, such as reflections or edges. This will help maintain control and accuracy.

Create Crisp Edges

Use a palette knife to achieve crisp edges where needed. This technique is particularly useful for defining sharp lines and adding contrast.

Loosen the Painting

Extend certain areas to create a looser feel. Break up rigid lines and then refine them to add interest and dynamism to the composition.

Enhance Three Dimensionality

Darken the core shadow on the lemon to improve its three-dimensional appearance. This adds depth and realism to the object.

Adjust Reflections

Evaluate small reflections and reduce them if they do not contribute positively to the painting. This helps maintain the overall balance and focus.

PRO TIP

Use a palette knife for crisp edges to add contrast and definition.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your still life painting journey by carefully selecting simple objects that resonate with you. Set them up in an environment that enhances their features, using lighting to create captivating shadows and highlights. Begin with a straightforward composition, focusing on basic shapes to avoid feeling overwhelmed. As you arrange your subjects, consider their placement and how they interact with each other and their surroundings to create a balanced and engaging composition.

As you progress, use techniques like overlapping and adjusting your viewpoint to create depth and interest. Pay attention to lighting, ensuring your subject and canvas are well-lit without interference. Experiment with light intensity and color to find the perfect mood for your painting. Choose your materials wisely, from the canvas to the brushes and palette, to support your artistic vision.

Finally, prepare your canvas with a toned surface to ease the painting process. Consider different methods for drawing your subject, whether through projection, grid transfer, or freehand sketching. These foundational steps will guide you in capturing the essence of your still life, allowing you to express your creativity and refine your skills with each brushstroke.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Choose simple objects to focus on composition and color.
- Keep your composition simple with two main subjects.
- Avoid placing objects so they just touch at their outlines.
- Use overlapping objects to enhance the sense of depth.
- Adjust your viewing angle to see how it affects the composition.
- Position your light source at a 45-degree angle to enhance roundness.
- Use a combination of daylight and normal bulbs for balanced lighting.
- Use the grid transfer method for precise and proportionate drawings.



Lemon Tea 12x12" 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.

“**"Lemon Tea",in acrylics, by Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada.**” by **Eric Hillmer**



"Lemon Tea",in acrylics, by Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Great to see this done in acrylics Eric. Always harder to get that wet-in-wet look but it has it's own benefits too. The colour and drawing are good overall. The base ellipse of the lid is a little too round. Interesting to see it with a brown background. Composition is interesting too - feels like they're staying in the light on the right to avoid whatever is lurking over there in the shadows. The lemon is suspicious. :) The lemon's cast shadow on the teapot is particularly well done and holds the whole painting together. Some of the highlights within the shadows and halftones of the teapot are not helping to enhance the form - they are actively confusing it. You can keep those for interest, but with less contrast would help. Good job!

- Richard

"Lemon tea , 13x 12"" by Mark Price



Lemon tea , 13x 12"

Hey Mark, great to see you taking the time to really knuckle down and assess what you're seeing in the forms here. It's a brain workout for sure. Some really nice modelling there in the teapot and cloth.

Your lemon could do with darker shadow plains to make it rounder. The button handle on the lid could grow to the right a bit to make it more central and you could try darkening some of the background further to remove the fluffy texture which to me seems to compete a little for attention. Keep up the good work!

- Richard

“lemon and the pot” by Magdalena Lipinska



lemon and the pot

Hi Magdalena, it sure is difficult to photograph dark paintings without reflection on them, right!? I had the same problem and ended up photoshopping it to get it right.

So, I'm loving the gestural paintwork here, the looseness of the whole thing. I especially love how the lemon came out.

Personally I'd like to see a little more care taken with some key parts of the teapot like the end of the spout and the area around the main highlight. That's just a matter of switching gears a little, slowing down and perhaps using a finer brush - not necessarily smaller, but with a crisp end on it. Aside from that, beautiful painterly work!

- Richard

“Original Bench Top Still Life Photo” by Geoffrey Geeson



Original Bench Top Still Life Photo

Nice subject!

- Richard