

Dutch Still Life Painting

This lesson will introduce the concept of still life paintings popularized in the Dutch region of Europe during the 17th century. After discussing what Dutch still life painters liked to depict in their works and the methods they used to make them, you will learn how to make your own Dutch-inspired still lifes at home.



Willem Claesz Heda, *Breakfast Table with Blackberry Pie*, 1631.

What do we mean when we say Dutch still life painting?

Dutch: The word Dutch is used to refer to a big area in Europe that includes the Netherlands and parts of Germany.



Still Life: Still life paintings, as seen here, are paintings featuring objects from everyday life, and the things that people had in their houses. In art schools at the time, still life paintings were seen as the least important of all of the different types of painting. Still lifes have been a popular subject in art history for hundreds of years. Still lifes have been a popular subject in art history for hundreds of years.

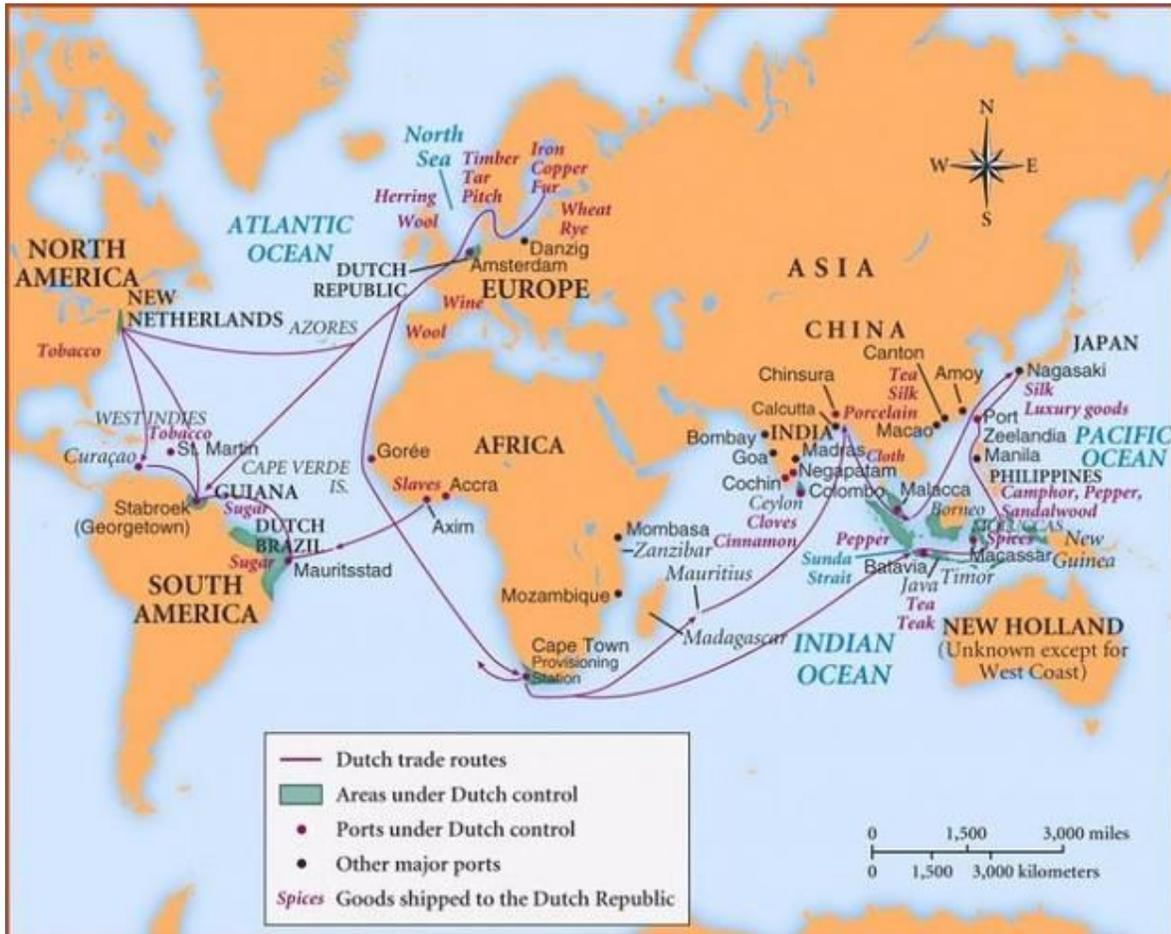
For the Dutch in specific, these take on a special meaning because of trade. These newly founded trade routes brought all kinds of new and exotic items, foods, and animals to the Dutch artists to paint. As cities became more industrial and nature became less accessible, still life paintings of flowers, fruits, and animals allowed artists to bring nature back inside their homes in these bustling cities. New, exotic objects also showed the wealth of their owners.

Can you identify any of the objects you see in this painting?



Willem Claesz Heda, *Breakfast Table with Blackberry Pie*, 1631.

Trade: When you go to the store and buy some paint, you are *trading* your money for their paint. When painting still lifes became popular over 400 years ago, different countries who were learning to travel farther distances began trading things they made or grew at home with other countries who had items that they did not have. One would have to travel, such as by foot or by boat, to go to another place to get new types of things, and bring them back home!



Here is a map that shows some of the places that the Dutch people traveled to for trade.

This still life is at the AD&A Museum!

What kind of fruits do you see? What kind of insects? Take a moment and try to find as many as you can!



Still Life with Fruit and Insects (1649)

Cornelis Mahu

Oil paint on Canvas

How are still life paintings made?

The Dutch used oil paints that produced vivid colors and took a long time to dry, meaning artists continuously blended and changed their paint placement to create a more realistic effect. The artists would set their objects up on a table, and then painted what they saw.

People also made paintings of just flowers, which were also objects important to everyday life.



Jan Brueghel the Younger

A Basket of Flowers

1620s.

Sometimes, still life paintings also had larger meanings. On one hand, it showed the wealth of their owners, since they had to travel, or had someone travel for them, to get these objects. On the other hand, these paintings also told viewers that the objects in them would not last forever. Eventually, the candle flame would die out, and people would eat the food, or it would go bad.

What objects can you identify in this picture? Do you think they will last forever?



Clara Peeters
Still life with Venetian glass, Römer wine glass and a candle
1607.

What about still lifes today?

Still lifes are still painted today often as practice to help artists sharpen their painting skills, but also, close looking. Still lifes allow artists to practice finding the simple shapes, shadows and highlights that make objects look the way that they do.

Take a look at Mahu's painting again.

What shapes do you see within the objects? Where is the light hitting the fruits? What shape is the shadow of the objects?



Still Life with Fruit and Insects (1649)

Cornelis Mahu

Oil paint on Canvas

Now, make your own still life at home!

Making your own still lifes at home is so easy and a great way to practice your artistic abilities! All you need is a few things from around your house. You might gather flowers, leaves from trees, fruit, cans of food, bowls, plates, glasses, any objects important to everyday life!

Look around and find:

- Canvas or paper
- 7-10 objects
- A pencil
- Optional: Color in your shapes and objects to make them more realistic using colored pencils, paints or pastels

Hint:

As you begin working, choose objects that are fairly simple shapes and do not have a lot of patterns so you can stay focused on the overall shapes, shadows and highlights. As you begin to sharpen your skills, add in more complex objects, or let your imagination fill in some spots!

Step 1: Set up your table

Start off by organizing your objects on a table. There is no proper way to do this, so just follow your heart and have fun! Here's an example:

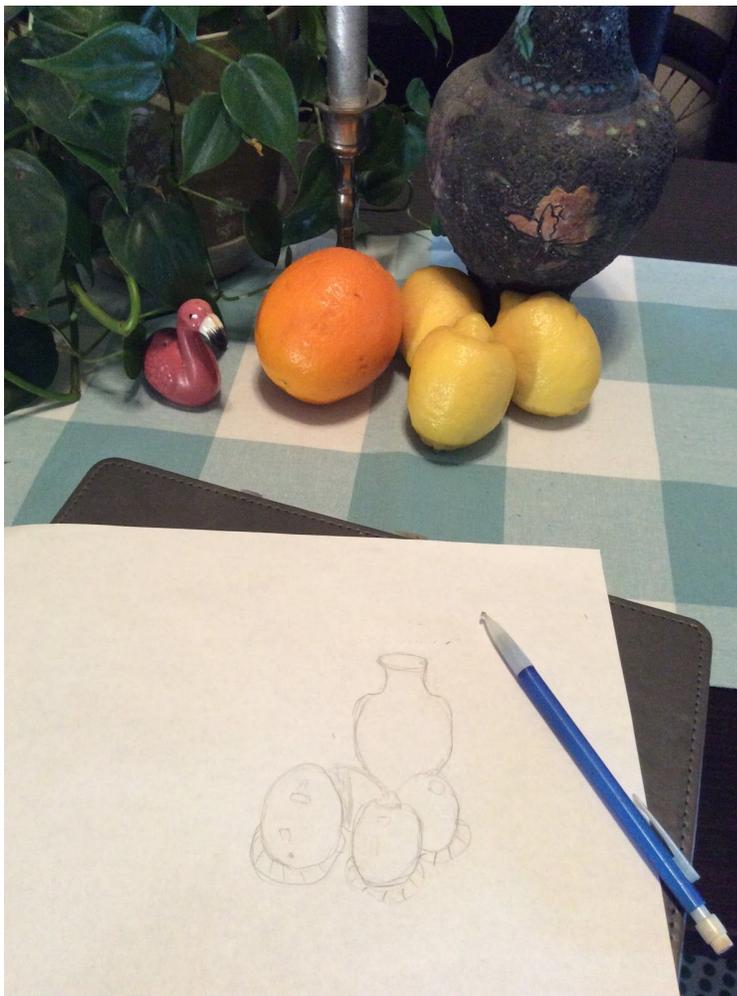


Step 2: Sketch your composition

Look carefully at the objects on your table. They are now pieces in your composition. Start sketching your pieces from the outside in. Lightly sketch the shape of your objects. Start simple. An orange is a circle. Then look closer. Is it a perfect circle? No! Oranges almost always have little imperfections that make them unique.

Hint:

- ❖ Choose one spot to look at and draw your still-life from; if you move, you will be looking at a different viewpoint, and your shapes will change! If you feel like switching it up, start on a new page and come back to it later.



Step 3: Color

The Dutch artists used Oil paints to create their masterpieces, but you can use whatever you like the best to add color to your still lifes.

Get creative!



Hint:

- ❖ Don't stress! You learn from your mistakes. This is meant to be practice to help you learn and grow as an artist. Have fun and make mistakes!