

14.05.20

Art techniques and Materials

Noel Basualdo

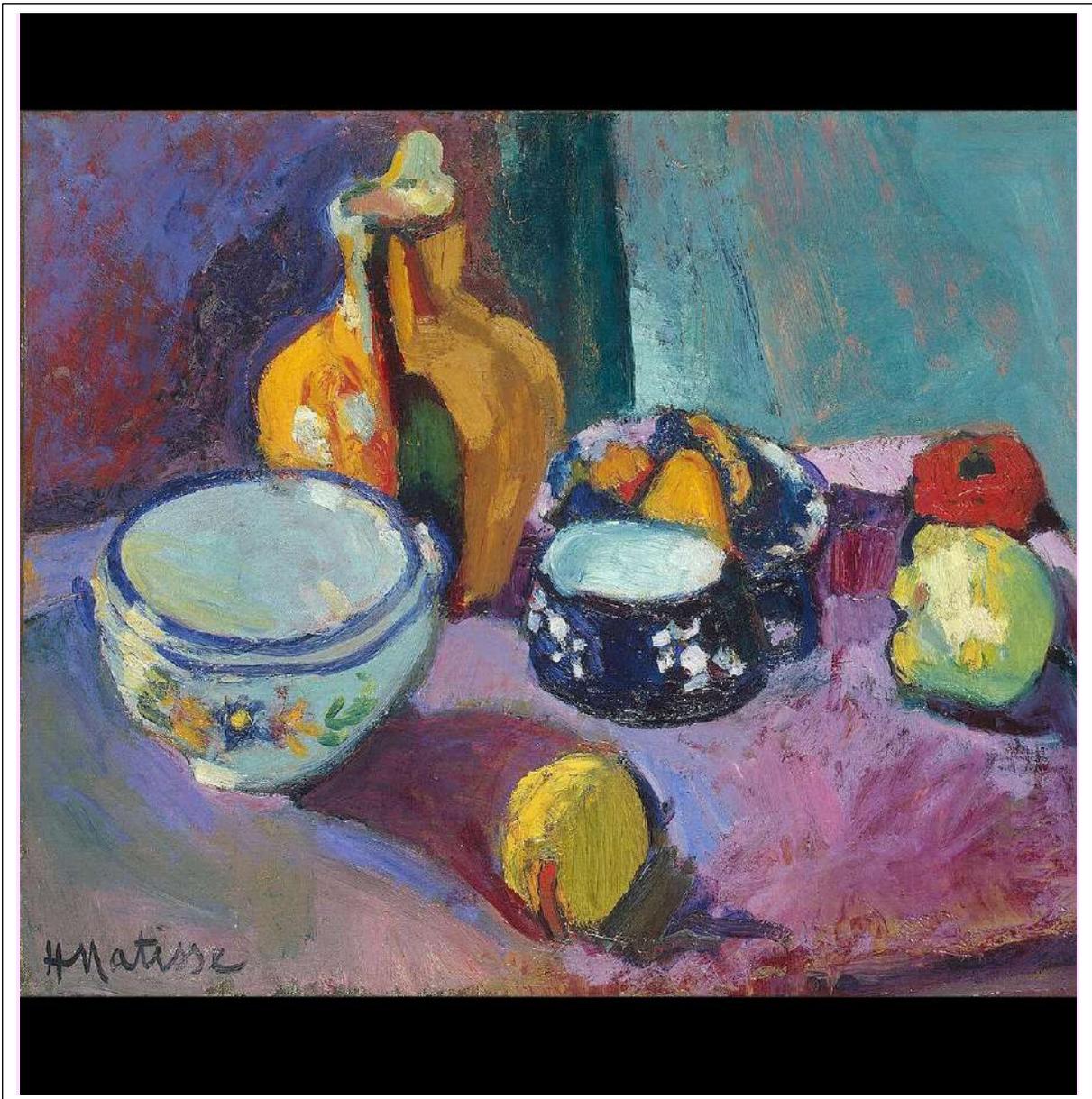
Dear Core members,

Hello everyone at home! Hope you are all safe and sound and continuing with your artistic practice from home ☺ Today we will be further exploring the subject of still lives, which is easy to set up at home. Please use any art materials you have at home.

I look forward to seeing your results!

Have fun creating,

Noel



(Henri Matisse - 'Dishes and Fruit')

Still life painting is a broad genre, as it can encompass any static objects we find, and can bleed over into interior painting as we start to include some of the surroundings. This overlap with daily life makes it accessible, and a convenient way to practise our painting.



(Abraham van Beyeren – 'Banquet Still Life' Still life can be highly elaborate in set up, like this example, or far more simplistic)

We can control the arrangement of our set ups, and lighting. Much of the work of a still life is done before we even pick up a paintbrush, so don't rush this stage!



(Samuel John Peploe - 'Roses')

The convenience of still life also affords us the chance to experiment with different styles, subjects and technique. There is no time limit, no cost for models, and no audience. Small studies, of perhaps only one or two simple objects, are a good way to get more practise. Not every painting has to be a big project.



(Antoine Vollon -'Mound of Butter'. Even seemingly simple subjects can become interesting paintings.)

Setting Up a Still Life Painting

Painting gives us an extra challenge of handling different materials, and of course, introducing colour. When setting up a light source, the colour of the light is going to tint your subject and change its local colours. It is generally best to opt for something fairly neutral, unless you feel like experimenting. Most household lights have a warm tint, so you may want to locate a neutral light, or use natural light to avoid this.

It is a good idea to have a backdrop. This helps simplify the background, and the amount of coloured reflections. The best way to eliminate unwanted reflections is to create a shadow box. This is basically a box that is lined with black to reduce light coming from secondary sources, like overhead lights.



(There are lots of shadow box set ups you can try, but I like to keep it simple. Here I have just taken a big cardboard box and lined the inside with some black fabric.)

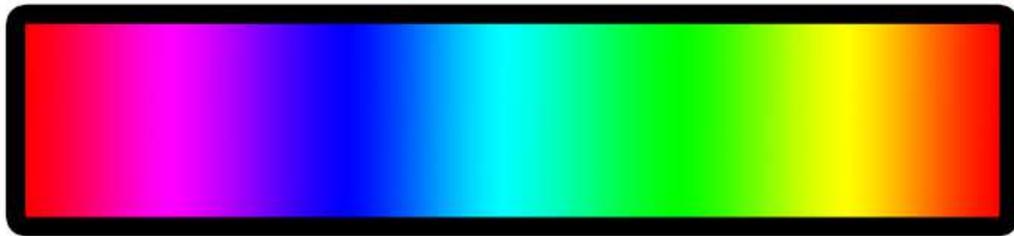
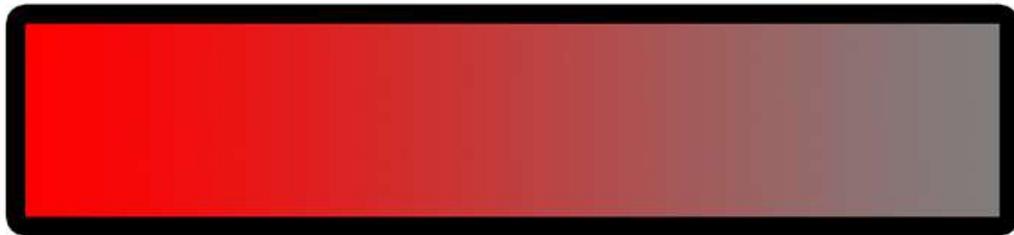
Value, Saturation and Hue

If you were to cut a swatch of colour out of reality, it would be comprised of three ingredients: tone, saturation, and hue.

Tonal value (first scale) of a coloured describes how light or dark it is, from total black, to pure white. The range of values we can perceive is much greater than what our media can produce; a black corner in an oil painting will still reflect a little light.

Saturation (second scale) is how 'bright' a colour is, from being a pure colour, to grey. It is actually quite unusual to see a saturated colour in nature, outside of fruit and flowers. Most of the colours we see are actually greys with colour tints.

Hue (third scale) is the 'pure' colour – I like to think of hue as being the place on a rainbow that a colour occupies.



By changing each of these properties, we generate individual colours. For instance, a light value, high saturation colour with an orange hue would look like what we would call orange, whereas a colour with dark value, low saturation and orange hue would be recognised as brown. In the same way that we use tonal contrast, we can create colour contrasts to help compose our paintings and unify our colour schemes. When you pick items for your still life, think about how the colours work together.



(Vincent van Gogh – 'Still Life with Quinces' This painting has great colour harmony, with blues, greens and yellows forming an analogous scheme, accented with a little red. Note how little tonal contrast there is)

There are no hard and fast rules for composing with colour, sometimes things will or won't work, but colour theory can help us narrow our aim. Here are some starting suggestions:
Avoid contrasting all three aspects – value, saturation and hue - at the same time. Pick one or two.

Try pairing complementary colours. These are colours that sit on opposite sides of the colour wheel. Highly saturated colours will clash and look too intense, so test objects with different saturations in your composition.

Analogous colour schemes use colours that neighbour each other on the colour wheel, minimising hue contrast, instead relying on saturation and value.

Over to You: Painting a Still Life in Watercolour and Gouache

Still life is a great subject to practise your painting. Objects can offer an array of surfaces, colours, forms and textures, so this week's challenge is to try painting a still life. I will be using a combination of gouache and watercolour paints in this demonstration, where gouache is used to add opacity to the watercolours. This is handy if you need something compact, or if the fumes and mess of oils make them an unsuitable option for your home. Often, I will use a wet palette with gouache as well, which is great for laying in opaque colour. Gouache is very tolerant of different papers, as long as they are fairly thick.

1. Initial Sketch

I start by sketching the painting in coloured pencil. Because gouache is opaque it can cover graphite or coloured pencil. I like water-soluble pencils, as they melt into the paint. Keep this simple and concentrate on getting the big shapes down.



2. Colour Wash Layer

When working in gouache, I generally go from transparent layers to opaque ones. Here I have indicated the colours. This helps give an underlying harmony. If you are working on white paper, it also prevents 'gaps' in your colours later.



3. Lay in Darks

Starting to add more opaque paint now, I go through the painting as a whole and block in the shadows and darker areas.



4. Add Opaque Light Layers

The light areas painted here use white gouache to build opacity. The white surface the objects are standing on has also been blocked in – it never received a wash as it doesn't have a strong colour. For large, very light areas, it can be difficult to work on top of paint without it mixing in.



5. Build Detail

In this final stage I add the tighter details of patterns and highlights. To get the pattern on the pot, I started by painting the shadow shapes, then the mid tone bronze colours, before adding the lightest highlights at the very end.

