

Extraordinary in the Ordinary

Creation of a still life composition in Photoshop

VISUAL ART AND TECHNOLOGY

GRADE LEVELS: 6 – 12

BASED ON



Tom Wesselmann (1931-2004), USA
Still Life #35, 1963
Oil and collage on canvas

OBJECTIVES

- Students observe and discuss still life paintings, including *Still Life 35*, and talk about the challenges of creating an eye-catching composition.
- Students identify SEVEN distinctive objects that they plan to merge to create a realistic still life.
- Students utilize their Photoshop skills to select, manipulate, add shadows, lighting and merge these objects together into a realistic composition with foreground, middle ground and background.

CONCEPT

In this unit, students discover a variety of still life artists. The students practice their Photoshop skills in selecting and merging different objects to create a realistic still life.

VOCABULARY

- Still life
- Realistic
- Focal Point/Center of interest
- Merging
- Foreground
- Middle ground
- Background
- Visual Appeal
- Proportionate
- Pop Art
- Composition
- Brand name
- Overlap

MATERIALS

- Images of *Still Life #35*
- Reference images of still life artwork (contemporary, photography, Edouard Manet, Paul Cezanne, William Harnett, Audrey Flack, Janet Fish, Wayne Thiebaud, Ralph Goings...)
- Computers with Internet access & Photoshop software
- LCD or Smartboard for image projection
- Extraordinary in the Ordinary criteria handout (as listed in Procedure 4)
- Color copier

PROCEDURE

1. Students look at various still life paintings and photographs, including *Still Life 35*. Discuss the concept of placing objects that seem natural together vs. objects that don't belong together. Scale, placement, focal point, as well as foreground, middle ground and background are reviewed and discussed.
2. Students brainstorm possible ideas for a still life, including creating a theme vs. collecting totally random items and placing them together.
3. Students look through the internet to gather at least SEVEN items that they believe could be used. What should be in front? What should overlap? Where would the shadows be? Lighting and scale will also need to be reviewed for each of the items. Within the still life, objects can be disproportionate to each other, as long as the composition looks like all the objects 'belong together'.
4. Students use the software program, Photoshop (CS4) to develop a still life composition with at least seven different objects. Specific Photoshop criteria includes:

A. *The still life that you create must include at least SEVEN different objects. Consider the background as well. These seven objects should be from seven different sources. Your job is to arrange, scale, overlap, and shadow the objects so that they 'feel like they are one composition'.*

B. *At least one of the objects should be a **brand name item with type** and this object should be the focal point (for example, a Nike running shoe and shoe box). Keep in mind that your center of interest can be placed anywhere in your composition and does not have to be in the center of the page.*

C. *Items must overlap and include appropriate shadows. The items should look like they belong together. You will be creating a foreground, middle ground and background with your objects and composition.*

D. *Objects can be disproportionate to one another, some larger than life or much smaller. You can include subject matter that would not normally be in a still life composition.*

E. *Your image should have at least 8 layers, even if you merge layers, you still need to maintain at least 8 total layers.*

F. *Set up the document at approximately 8"x10" size and at least a 72 dpi resolution, RGB. Save as PSD and name each layer as to what is on that layer.*

G. *At least 6 selections (and/or selection masks) used within the PS document. Make accurate selections. Remember, no halos around the selections! Clean up the edges of each selection. When the still life is completed, it should look like one image, not a bunch of 'cut out objects'.*

H. *Visual Appeal & Expertise in Photoshop- Show what you know! Be creative! How can you show off what you know about Photoshop, and show off a unique still life? THIS IS A CREATIVE, PERSONAL statement. Challenge yourself to be as creative as possible. At the same time, consider the composition. How does it look?*

CLASS EXPERIENCE

5. Students are reminded to truly utilize their Photoshop skills and not to rely on the same techniques...show what they know. Note that in-process short critiques are held so that all students can view each other's still life on screen as they are developed.
6. Students consider the overall visual appeal and creativity, answering the questions: Does this still life appear realistic and unified? Consider composition, focal point, overlapping, shadows, and overall visual appeal. How creative can you be? Does the blending and merging of the objects appear seamless?
7. Students complete their still life in Photoshop.
8. The students share their still life on the Smartboard and they receive feedback on their success. Students identify 'most creative' still life, 'most realistic' still life and 'best use of Photoshop technology'.

ASSESSMENT

Extraordinary in the Ordinary still life images will be evaluated on the following criteria: *meeting the goals of assignment*: Following the Photoshop criteria as listed in #4 of the procedure, creating a realistic still life that is a seamless overlapping of seven objects, *successful craftsmanship*: Attention to detail in the design and application of the Photoshop program including all the details that create a strong Photoshop image, *overall effort*, and *creativity/visual impact*: Visually appealing still life image that incorporates objects seamlessly.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

Visual Art

Standard 1- Understands and applies media, techniques and processes related to the visual arts.

Standard 3- Knows a range of subject matter, symbols and potential ideas in the visual arts.

Technology

Standard 2- Knows the characteristics and uses of computer software programs.

RESOURCES

www.artcyclopedia.com

www.artlex.com

[After the hunt: William Harnett and other American still life painters, 1870-1900](#), Alfred Franken

[Manet: the still-life paintings](#), George Mauner

[William Harnett](#), Doreen Bolger

[Wayne Thiebaud](#), John Wilmerding

[Still life: the object in American Art, 1915-1995: selections for the Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

[Janet Fish: Paintings](#), Vincent Katz

www.theartwolf.com (10 great still life paintings)



Tom Wesselmann, Still Life 35

Extraordinary in the Ordinary

Your assignment is to create a still life. *A still life is an arrangement of mostly inanimate subject matter, typically commonplace objects which may be either natural (food, flowers, plants, rocks, shells, etc.) or man-made (drinking glasses, books, vases, jewelry, coins, etc.)*

CRITERIA

1. The still life that you create must include at least SEVEN different objects. Consider the background as well. These seven objects should be from seven different sources. Your job is to arrange, scale, overlap, and shadow the objects so that they 'feel like they are one composition'.
2. At least one of the objects should be a **brand name item with type** and this object should be the focal point (for example, a Nike running shoe and shoe box). Keep in mind that your center of interest can be placed anywhere in your composition and does not have to be in the center of the page.
3. Items must overlap and include appropriate shadows. The items should look like they belong together. You will be creating a foreground, middle ground and background with your objects and composition.
4. Objects can be disproportionate to one another, some larger than life or much smaller. You can include subject matter that would not normally be in a still life composition.
5. Your image should have at least 8 layers, even if you merge layers, you still need to maintain at least 8 total layers.
6. Set up the document at approximately 8"x10" size and at least a 72 dpi resolution, RGB. Save as PSD and name each layer as to what is on that layer.

CLASS EXPERIENCE

7. At least 6 selections (and/or selection masks) used within the PS document. Make accurate selections. Remember, no halos around the selections! Clean up the edges of each selection. When the still life is completed, it should look like one image, not a bunch of 'cut out objects'.
8. Visual Appeal & Expertise in Photoshop- Show what you know! Be creative! How can you show off what you know about Photoshop, and show off a unique still life? THIS IS A CREATIVE, PERSONAL statement. Challenge yourself to be as creative as possible. At the same time, consider the composition. How does it look?