

Still Life Assignment

- Your goal is to apply KNOWLEDGE OF ART HISTORY, SYMBOLISM, LIGHTING, experimentation, and creativity to make an engaging photo that creates a MOOD and expresses and MEANING.
- As always, photograph from multiple angles and think about composition, depth of field and focal point.
- Use NATURAL LIGHT FROM A WINDOW OR DOORWAY (it could be direct light or indirect light) as the main light source for at least half of your photos. Use something white (paper, cardboard, fabric, etc.) to reflect light back into shadows if desired, or something black to darken the background or shadows.
- Get rid of everything in the background you do not want. Move things, move to a location with a suitable background, cover things up. You can tape or pin up paper or fabric to create a plain background behind your objects, etc., but it works best if there is several feet of separation between the subject and background, and usually dark or rich/patterned fabric looks better than a thin white bedsheet.
- Use a low ISO and a tripod or some other way to brace your camera when photographing. The technical quality of the image should be as high as possible.
- Compose at least four different still lifes and shoot a minimum of 24 exposures each week to earn an average score. More will give you more of a chance to develop your skills and increase your chance of getting good photos.
- Compose objects in different layers – some in front, some in the middle, some in back – build up depth.
- At least a couple of your still lifes each week should be vanitas (see below) and make use of symbolism.

Types of traditional still lifes

- Flower arrangements, banquet arrangements, breakfast arrangements (Ontbijtjes)
- **Xenia** – edible items representing offerings from the host to guests (a motif from Roman mosaics)
- **Natura mortem** (dead nature) - game animals taken in a hunt, also a way to study/show animals and anatomy
- Arrangements tied and tacked up on a wall board
- **Pronkstilleven** (Dutch for 'ostentatious still life') – depict an abundance of objects, fruits, flowers, dead game, often together with living people and animals
- **Vanitas** (warnings against vanity) – arrangements of riches/goods that also included symbolic elements reminding of the brevity of life and earthly pleasures – skulls and bones; burning or snuffed out candles, matches, cigarettes in ashtrays; hour glasses and other time pieces; fruits or flowers that have faded or partially spoiled; flies, hornets, butterflies and caterpillars, dragonflies, spiders; etc.

Things:

- Unprepared foods and pantry items, preserves, wine & drink bottles, eggs and eggshells, breads and baked goods
- Kitchen utensils, pots and pans, tableware, serving ware – things related to food preparation, serving and dining
- Musical instruments and sheet music, books, globes, letters, writing implements, chess boards and game pieces
- Shells, mineral specimens, other natural specimens, mementos, collections
- Fabrics and furs – lace, velvet, satin, sheets and blankets, towels, linens
- Scientific instruments
- Tools, garden tools and pots, weapons
- Boots and shoes, gloves, hats, luggage, ribbons and ties, masks, canes
- Antique items including furniture, things with history/that show age

Settings, backdrops, things to set items on:

- Kitchens, dining room tables, sideboards, countertops, desks, fireplace mantels, workbenches & workshops, hothouses & garden sheds, labs, art studios, bedrooms, blank walls, corkboards, chalkboards, pegboards, window sills
- Cutting boards, bowls and baskets tilted over/on their sides, pails and colanders
- Wooden boards and planks, floor tiles, pieces of stone, pieces of glass and mirrors
- Cover or wrap things to partially disguise or abstract them, or create a mood or meaning.