

Still Life

What is a still life?

A still life is an artwork showing an arrangement of everyday objects. Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh are famous still life artists.



The Basket of Apples by Paul Cézanne, 1893–1895



Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers by Vincent van Gogh, 1888

Subject matter

Still life artwork shows a selection of objects. They can be natural or human-made. Food, flowers, shells and skulls are popular natural objects. Vases, bottles, books and candles are common human-made objects.



Luis Meléndez used a selection of natural and human-made objects in this painting.

Techniques

Artists use many techniques when planning and creating still life artworks.

Composition

Artists arrange objects in their artworks carefully. They decide which objects will go in the foreground or background of the work. They also think about the size of the objects they have chosen.



Paul Cézanne painted the apples in the foreground and the jug in the background in this painting.



Jan Brueghel the Elder painted large flowers at the top of the vase and small ones at the bottom.

Colour

Artists choose colours carefully. They decide whether to use warm or cool colours and think about how those colours make people feel.



Paul Cézanne painted these apples in bold, warm colours.

Texture

Artists select different materials to create a range of textures. They might try to create a smooth or rough texture.



Vincent van Gogh used thick oil paint to create a rough texture.

Glossary

background The part of an artwork that seems furthest from the person looking at it.

composition The way objects have been arranged in an artwork.

cool colour A colour that reminds people of cool things, such as water and shade.

foreground The part of an artwork that seems closest to the person looking at it.

human-made Something created by humans.

natural Something found in nature that has not been created by humans.

subject matter The objects shown in an artwork.

texture The roughness or smoothness of an artwork.

warm colour A colour that reminds people of warm things, such as fire and heat.