



Cézanne and the Modern: Masterpieces of European Art from the Pearlman Collection

Lesson Plan: Communal Still Life in Watercolor

Background: Grades 9 - 12

3 day lesson

Essential Questions:

- What is a still life?
- Why do artists paint them?
- What techniques did Paul Cézanne use in his watercolor still life paintings?
- What objects symbolize your life?

Objective:

Through studying the techniques in Paul Cézanne's *Still Life with Carafe, Bottle, and Fruit*, students will learn how watercolorists leave sections of unpainted white paper as highlights and areas of emphasis in their works. Students will then choose an object that symbolizes them, combine it into a communal still life, and from it render a watercolor painting.

Terms:

- Still life
- Highlights
- Emphasis
- Symbolism
- Self-portrait

Materials:

- Watercolor paper – one sheet per student
- Watercolor paints – one palette per student
- Watercolor brushes – one per student
- Collection of objects – found around classroom/brought by students
- Drawing paper – one per student
- Pencil – one per student
- Viewfinder – one per student (same as paper dimensions)
- Movable spot lights/recessed lighting – available for still life setup
- Cloth covering – used for the base of the still life

Lesson:

Day 1:

1. Tell students the history of still lifes, what objects are usually shown in them, and why artists have continued to create them for centuries.
2. Show Paul Cézanne's *Still Life with Carafe, Bottle, and Fruit* and explain his watercolor technique of "saving the white of the paper" to show highlights and lighter colors.
 - a. Video: "Paul Cézanne's Approach to Watercolor" Getty Museum
3. Explain how to compose a successful composition in a still life
 - a. Overlapping edges
 - b. Dramatic lighting
 - c. Cloth base uniting the objects
 - d. Simple, clearly defined objects
4. Give students 5-10 minutes to find one object from around the classroom or in their own possession that represents them in some way.
5. Collect the objects and arrange them on the still life stand, with cloth underneath.

Use boxes/different structures under the stand to build different layers.
6. Have students walk around the still life and use their viewfinder to find possible compositions.
7. Draw out thumbnail sketches of different compositions in the format of the watercolor paper. Encourage them to explore different angles and points of view.
 - a. Remind students to map out the highlights of the objects, making sure they are balanced throughout the piece.
 - b. Talk about the role of negative space, and how to emphasize their specific object.
8. Review every student's chosen composition and have them fix any visual issues.

Day 2:

1. Have students sketch out their composition *lightly* on their watercolor paper, making special attention to map out the highlights and light areas of their composition.
2. Once sketched in, have students work in light watercolor layers to fill in the piece.
3. Emphasize keeping the highlights blank, having the white of the paper act as the lightest value in the work.
4. Encourage students to fill in the background and foreground as well.
 - a. Bring attention to the folds of the cloth.

Day 3-4:

5. Students continue working until finished
 - a. Remind students of the importance of knowing when to stop is crucial in watercolor pieces.
6. Students sign and title their work
7. Class critique
 - a. Students explain why they chose their specific object
 - b. Assess the successes of each still life

Assessment:

Students will be assessed based on:

- Their ability to compose a still life of symbolic objects
- If they successfully incorporate Paul Cézanne's watercolor techniques of "saving the blank paper"

Modifications/Extensions:

- Students could choose a specific color palette or color family to paint their still life in
- Students could compose their own individual still life as a self-portrait

Standards:

VAHSVAMC.1 Engages in the creative process, imagines new ideas by using mental and visual imagery, conceptualizes these ideas by using artistic language and contextual understandings in assessing learning, and develops a personal artistic voice that gives unique form to these concepts.

VAHSVAMC.2 Finds and solves problems through open-ended inquiry, the consideration of multiple options, weighing consequences, and assessing results.

VAHSVAMC.3 Cultivates critical thinking and logical argumentation in aesthetics.

VAHSVACU.1 Articulates ideas and universal themes from diverse cultures of the past and present.

VAHSVACU.2 Demonstrates an understanding of how art history impacts the creative process of art making.

VAHSVAPR.3 Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes in color / painting.