

Introduction

Welcome to the LAC still life course. Have you ever looked at still life paintings and wondered how they are done? We aim to give you ideas about how to create your own still life paintings and provide exercises, examples and friendly advice - all of which should inspire you to produce your very own works of art! The course takes a painterly approach, and is rooted in the traditions of Western figurative art. By figurative, we mean 'representational' work, we can recognise. If you find yourself becoming interested in abstract work, stick with the course and pursue your interest after completing these studies. Eventually you will look at things with a fresh eye, relish colour and gain confidence.

In case you are unaware, it is intended you should work systematically through the exercises in the syllabus, from start to finish. So please follow this if you can and you will get the best from your investment in learning with us. The course consists of six study units, which you can do at your own speed.

These study units will cover:-

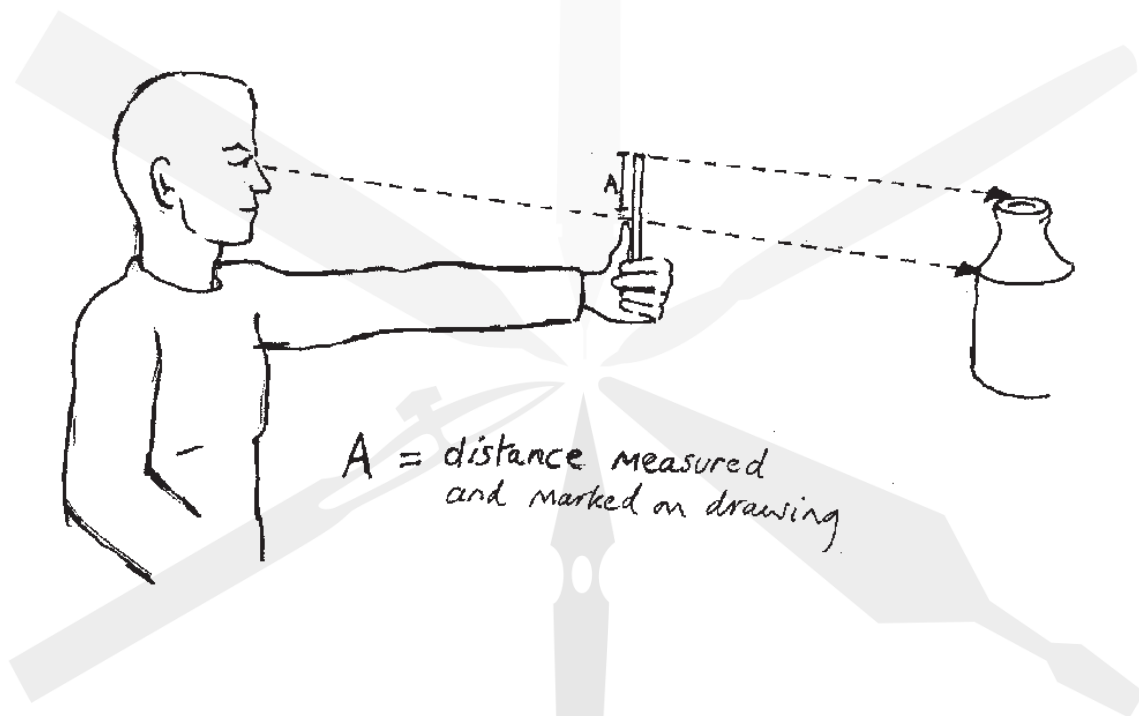
1. Setting up a still life
2. Tone and colour
3. Working with colour
4. Composition
5. Creativity and media
6. Conclusion, final exercises and further development

To make best use of your learning time you will require a few basic materials which are listed as follows:

- * Paint brushes, round and flat, sizes 2 - 8, (for acrylic or oil painting).
- * You may want to use some larger ones, when you buy brushes, avoid very cheap ones. Good quality hog or bristle brushes will be suitable for oils but try to get purpose made ones for your medium of choice, ask at your local art shop and check the price and quality.
- * A selection of cartridge paper and card
- * Soft pencils (3b - 6b) and an eraser
- * Mixing palettes

MEASURING

You can use a pencil or brush handle to make crude measurements with. Hold your brush so it is at right angles to the floor plane. (See diagrams). To get any accuracy with your measurements you must hold the brush this way. Also, lock the elbow joint of the arm holding the brush. This fixes the distance of the brush from your eye. Next look at the subject and find a part of it that can be measured. It may be the height of a jug or bowl. Squint down your arm with one eye and put the tip of the brush handle at the top of the jug. Mark off where the base of the jug appears with your thumb against the brush handle. Using this measurement, look for other similar dimensions in the subject. Make a mark on your piece of paper or card where you want the top of the jug to be and where the base of it will be. Then you will know that the distance between these two points will also be the distance between the other dimension you found and can mark these on your painting surface.



THE PROCESS

Mix the colours as you like. Use brushes which suit the image size, though try using a larger one for coverage. Place splodges and sweeps of colour and work as broadly as you can. Avoid detail. Stir the paint about on the surface. Experiment with differing amounts of water and paint in mixture to get a good, creamy body of paint on the brush. Don't overload the brush, try to have some control. Avoid making the paint too watery and thin or it will be transparent. Hold the brush away from the base, not like a pen for writing and try to stand back from what you are doing. Experiment with a 'dry brush' technique if you like, using thick, undiluted paint. Remember you can let it dry and work over something easily. Mistakes can be rectified.

To set the image up on the canvas, an outline drawing is done in charcoal, on a piece of paper the same size as the canvas to be painted. This means the composition is made to match the proportions of the canvas; the old chimney pot is used on the extreme left to create depth and interest. The image is transferred to the



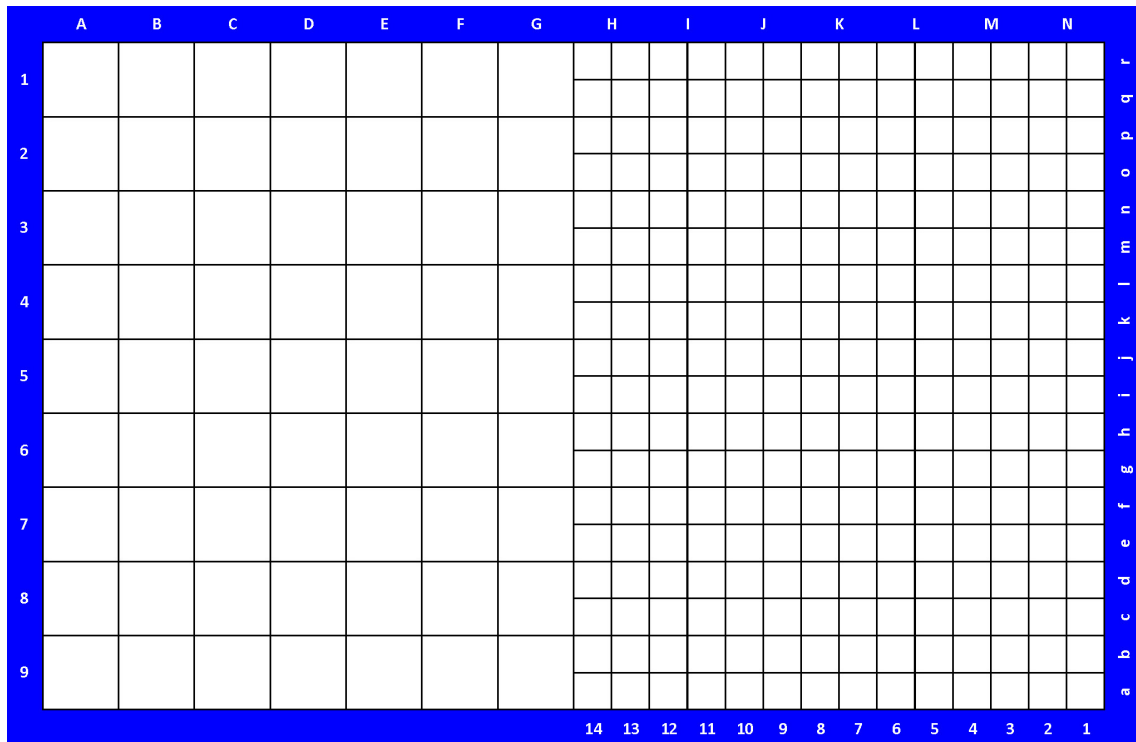
canvas using a dress makers spur to punch holes through the paper along the lines of the design. Then crushed charcoal is pounced through the lines of the design using a brush, the paper is carefully fixed to the canvas beforehand. The resulting image can be secured with fixative, if necessary.



Now the charcoal outline is established by going over it with acrylic burnt umber, then warm reds and browns are used to lay in some of the colour. Acrylics can be used for under painting oils as it is chemically inert when dry. It allows a fast step into the painting as the handling qualities are easier, the colours less subtle and the simplicity of water as a diluent help. An initial

response to the subject is required here in terms of colour analysis and feelings. The aim is to celebrate the mystery in the utilitarian object and to use it as a 'colour stone' - as a transparent form through which the colours of our emotions can be blown until 'the right chord is struck', suiting the form.

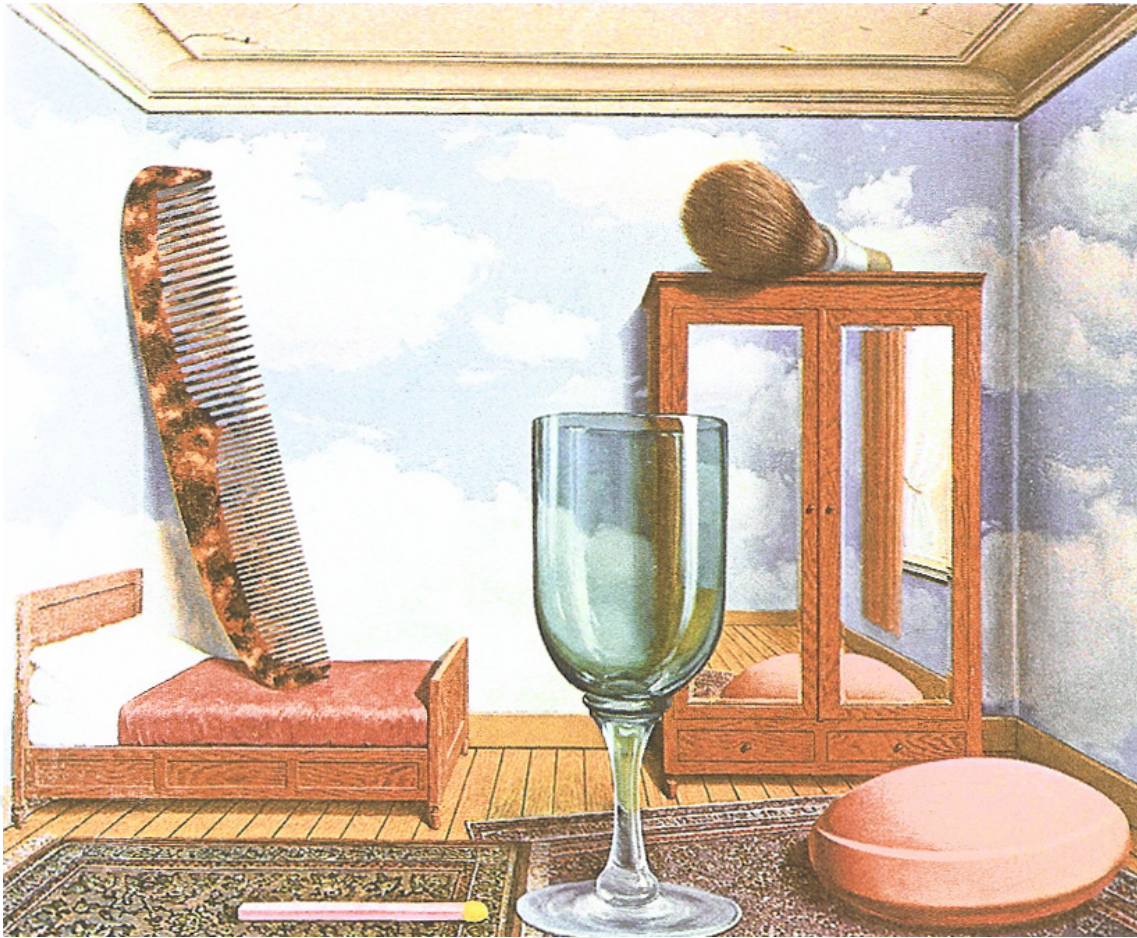
An example of a grid:



Having done this, next make a sketch which is a view from directly above the subject. Stand and look over your subject if you can, what you are being asked to do is to form a drawing 'in plan'. Why? Because it will make you think about your subject 'in the round' and it is from a good understanding of the three dimensional, 'real' qualities of something that strong two dimensional work arises. Are you clear about what two and three dimensional work is? Two dimensions involve the left and right, up and down of a flat surface such as a painting or wall. Three dimensions include the aforementioned plus the third dimension of forwards and backwards.

Sculpture is three dimensional. Painting and drawing are two dimensional. What you have done so far is aid your understanding of how the objects are placed in relation to each other. Spend a few minutes comparing your sketches and the subject matter. Look particularly at where objects overlap and how this changes as you move your viewpoint. It should influence the appearance of your painting layout. If it is unsatisfactory, move the objects again.

Now we will consider what can be the cause of some problems in composition and suggest ways of improving a painting's layout. You will find we constantly recommend just a few things to work with rather than many. Too many objects result in confusion, complexity and a great deal of work. It takes skill and discipline to limit yourself – without becoming impoverished. Just as too many objects can be a problem, so can too few. We have suggested three or five or seven – not just because of religious significance but for practicality. There are no rules however and it is up to you what you choose. Objects which are unconnected or bitty, can mess up your performance – so try to keep a theme, if not in terms of meaning then colour or texture. But, having said this, it is often the chance meeting of strange, disconnected items or unlikely bedfellows which can be the greatest source of creativity.



Personal Values, Magritte, 1951/52

Oil on canvas

How you place the objects within the painting 'frame' will have an instant effect on its appeal and success. A picture must be 'well held at the top'. What do we mean by this?