



STILL
NESS

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What is a still life? In definition, a still life is the *depiction* of common objects, natural or man-made, arranged in a deliberate composition. This is the driest of definitions. For artist, still life is much more than a depiction. It is a way to reflect something about ourselves. It is a vessel for memory and intimacy—of stories told and pleasures felt. The artist can make time stand still in hopes of drawing us into that moment as a witness, a participant, even a co-conspirator. Still life is a paradox—life made still—unmoving and never changing, but created with the hope that in this stilled moment, we may reflect on the passing of time, our memory, our day to day encounters, and the small, ordinary gestures of grace, beauty, and abundance within our own lives.

Think about how we surround ourselves with still lifes of our own making. We cook a meal; ingredients set aside for cutting, bowl and pans pile up in the sink waiting to be cleaned. We set the table for a feast: dishes, silverware, something to drink, some flowers on the table perhaps? We empty our pockets at the end of the day and toss the contents on a nightstand or dresser: wallet, keys, change, receipts. All of these, if you were to stop and look at them, are examples of still life.

This exhibition brings together painting, drawing, print, and photography created over the last 100 years from the Museum's permanent collection. The selected artists have rendered their moments, real or imagined, in a variety of artistic approaches; from precise realism to degrees of expressive, gestural exuberance; all to singular effect. These artists have used their unique approach to the still-life genre to involve all the senses, capturing some idea of the emotional, subjective, metaphysical presence of what they are depicting. This tension between representation and abstraction—between holding on and letting go—is key, shuttling us between the unmoving, quiet moment and the energetic, often urgent measure of that experience.

Doug Stapleton
Associate Curator of Art

(FLOWERS)

I am working at it every morning from sunrise on, for the flowers fade so soon, and the thing is to do the whole in one rush

-Vincent Van Gogh

Flowers are the staple of still-life painting. A floral still life is a man-made arrangement that freely invents composition and atmosphere beyond illustration. Flowers in art have a long complex history as storytellers.

Still life painting had its heyday in the Netherlands in the 16th & 17th centuries as a reflection of the rise of interest in botany and the influx of rare, imported goods into the markets and gardens of Europe. The Dutch perfected the still life as a genre, both celebrating the bounty and pleasures of their world, as well as cautioning the viewer that nothing lasts forever. These are often referred to as "vanitas" paintings, sometimes including a withered bloom, skulls, and hourglasses to drive the message of impermanence home.

The 19th century Victorians had a complex coded language for flowers: roses for love, violets for modesty, poppies for eternal sleep—an emotional drama played out in a vase of blooms!

The artists represented in the group to the right have a more modern approach to the floral still life. Each has given us a domestic moment, flowers and plants in vases and planters, arranged on a table—something perhaps to brighten the room. Carolyn Plochmann's quiet intimate moment is rooted in more direct depiction, while Manierre Dawson and Flora Schofield spiral out into energetic, expressive images, freed from the meaning or message of their historic predecessors.

Carolyn Plochmann

(b. 1926, Toledo OH)

Persimmon and Marzipan

1998

acrylic and oil on canvas

2007.100.4, Gift of the artist

Manierre Dawson

(1887 – 1969, b. Chicago IL, d. Sarasota FL)

Two Nuts and Three Leaves

1910

oil on panel

1980.115.8, Gift of Dr. Lewis Obi, Frank

McKeown, Leferts Mabie

Mary Agnes Yerkes

(1886 – 1989, b. Oak Park IL, d. San Mateo CA)

Untitled

n.d.

oil on canvas

2010.104.6, Gift of Christopher G. Yerkes and Craig H. Yerkes

Flora Schofield

(1879 – 1960, b. Lanark IL, d. Chicago IL)

Untitled

1940

white line block print on paper

1983.138, Gift of Frances Badger given in the name of Shreve Badger Schofield

(SADORUS)

Frank Sadorus

(1880 – 1934, b. Sadorus IL, d. Kankakee IL)

Untitled Still Life (flowering branches in a glass jar)

Yuletide Delicacies

c.1910, printed 1980s

contemporary gelatin silver prints from the original glass plate negatives

1987.001.172, 1987.001.200, Gift of Raymond Bial

Frank Sadorus was a farmer who lived with on his family's farm in Sadorus IL. During the off-season from November to April, he photographed the people and landscape he knew intimately. He considered himself an artist and studied photography via mail order books, catalogs and contemporary photography journals such as *Photo Era* and *The Camera: The Photographic Journal of America*. Sadorus photographed life on the family farm, including these remarkable still life photographs of his own making. He was very sensitive to light and shot at many different times of day to capture a range of dramatic effects.

(REALISM)

Realism is an attempt to make art resemble life through accurate depiction. The invention of photography in the 19th century offered a new, accurate tool that supplanted the role that drawing painting and printmaking played in documenting the world around us. In response, artists continue to explore realistic depiction as an artistic strategy, pushing their observation towards ramped-up optics, hyper-real focus on detail, lighting, and scale.

Steven Carrelli and Albert Wong keep a quieter tone in their trompe l'oeil, or 'fool the eye,' depictions of common subjects. Eric Wert turns a tiny store-bought cactus into a menacing, film-noir monster through a shift in scale and lighting. Jeanette Pasin Sloan juxtaposes bold patterns against polished objects, creating an eye-dazzling interplay of form against reflection. Nancy Hild's painted still-life composition of inflatable holiday toy is precise and bright, rendered in a graphic flatness with dead-pan humor.

Steven Carrelli

(b. 1967, Canton OH)

Hardware Store Abstraction

2005

egg tempera and oil on wood

2012.34, Gift of the artist

Albert Wong

(b. 1947, Nanking, China)

Illusory Space I (Pears)

1979

oil and canvas

1980.73.9, Museum Purchase

Jeanette Pasin Sloan

(b. 1946, Chicago IL)

Red Shift

1983

lithograph on paper

1983.85, Museum Purchase

Eric Wert

(b. 1976, Portland OR)

Tall

2002

graphite on paper

2010.43, Gift of David & Michal Wert

Nancy Hild

(1948 – 2017, b. Cincinnati OH, d. Oaxaca City, Mexico)

Happy Holidays

1984

acrylic on canvas

2018., Gift of Linda James & Mary McAuly

Daily Bread, Plain Abundance

Macena Barton and Alejandro Romero give us two interpretations of humble loaves of bread. Both artists interpret the bread as an allegory of plenty through very different styles. Romero's feast centers on a basket of bread surrounded by corn, vegetables, fruits and a host of wild creatures, connecting food as a lively force of nature. Barton's loaves, piled high on a simple painted table, majestically rise above the horizon—a symbol of the bounty of the verdant land. Barton's image is a monument, rooted in the solid rendering of Midwestern regional painters like Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood. Romero, influenced by Mexican and European Expressionism, offers us a feast, brimming with life.

Macena Barton

(1901 – 1989, b. Union City MI,
d. Chicago IL)

Loaves

1938

oil on canvas

1943.16/910.2, WPA/FAP

Allocation

Alejandro Romero

(b. 1948, Villahermosa, Tabasco, Mexico)

still Life

1990

lithograph on paper

1992.57, Gift of the artist