

# **WATERCOLOR STILL LIFE**

## **Purpose**

To help students become aware of composition, color and pattern in creating a still life painting 'Matisse-style'.

## **Teacher Provides**

Pencils

## **Docent Provides**

Still life set-up: Vegetables or Fruits (variety in size, shape and texture)

Box of watercolors with brush for each student

Water container for each student

Material to drape over table and for back-drop

Permanent black felt markers for each student

Strips of watercolor paper for practice

Watercolor paper for project 12" x 18"

Completed sample of still life painting

Matisse prints: Interior with Eggplants and Portrait of Woman

Paper towels

## **Set Up**

Select a table centrally located in the classroom so all can see the display. Students' desks may need to be arranged around the table.

Add books or boxes to attain more height if necessary.

Drape fabric over table, boxes or books then set up still life.

Pass out to each student one 12" x 18" watercolor paper.

Display Matisse print

## **Introduction - Matisse prints**

Henri Matisse (1860-1954) was a French artist and a master of design and color. Although his subjects were traditional his revolutionary use of brilliant color and exaggerated form to express emotion made him one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. His parents ran a shop selling house paints which influenced Henri's color sense. At age 20 when he was sick with appendicitis his mother brought him art supplies and that was how he discovered his love of art. Matisse's mother was the first to advise her son not to adhere to the "rules" of art, but rather listen to his own emotions. Matisse later said: "My mother loved everything I did." He disregarded perspective and abolished shadows. Matisse spearheaded the "Fauve movement" in France, characterized by spontaneity and roughness of execution as well as use of raw color straight from the palette to the canvas. Fauvism is described as a way less of seeing the world than of feeling it with one's eyes.

What do you notice first about these two paintings?

Color... brilliant; colors repeated. Repetition of color helps to hold it all together.

Pattern... How many different patterns do you see in each? Count them.

## **Studying the still life**

What object is **closest** to you? Ask a few students from different locations.

Which object is **farthest** away?

Compare the sizes of the fruits/vegetables. How large is the onion compared with the eggplant? Half? One fourth?

Fruit is overlapped. Artists achieve depth by overlapping.

## **Show steps to finished product**

Using sample art in portfolio, explain each step of the project. Children like to know what they will be doing and why (pencil contour outline, go over in black marker, add details with the marker, add paint).

Impress on students that they will be successful in this lesson and each one will look different from the others!

## **Sketching the still life**

Docent to demonstrate first. Start with the object closest to you. Sketch very lightly with pencil and no details yet. Basic shapes only.

Draw first object up at least 2" from bottom of paper – leave white space to allow for still life to sit on a surface. THINK BIG!

Now draw the object which adjoins the first object; then on to the next adjoining object (may need to explain this word!) and on and on until your composition is complete.

Leave out some items if you wish; add others if you wish. You are the artist so make this your very own composition. Exaggeration of size and color OK.

Add some details to fruits/vegetables (leaves, stems, vines, patterns).

Divide the surrounding space into three sections. A foreground area to show where your still life is sitting and a background vertically into two other sections to create the illusion of a corner. When dividing the space, notice that lines off center are more interesting to the eye than divided right down the middle. Show examples of lines, angles, and direction.

Sketch in a pattern in at least two of these three areas (checks, stripes, polka dots, squiggly lines, stars etc.) One area can be a solid color or left white.

## **Check students' composition**

As instructed above, check to see if their layout is pleasing to them. If not make some suggestions. Enlarge, add more elements. Have a variety of sizes.

Assistant docent can pass out black markers at this point. Lead docent should tell students not to use them until instructed to.

Look again at patterns used by Matisse.

## **Outlining**

Show students the two different width lines you can get with the black markers.

The tip will make a finer line and the side will make a wider line. Suggest using the wider lines for the basic perimeter shape of the objects and the fine line for the interior details.

Don't forget we will be painting as well.

You don't need to trace over every pencil line on your paper, it could get too heavy with black marker. You can use the paint for some of those details.

Encourage smooth, flowing contour lines not jagged, sketchy lines. You get a smoother line by pulling the marker towards you. Set drawing aside when finished.

## **Watercolor Experimentation**

Prime your paints (review with them-couple of drops of water squeezed into each color).  
“Hug” brushes clean before dipping them in your in water.

Look at the colors of the still life items. Let’s experiment with two colors on your brush.  
Using strip of watercolor scratch paper.

Yellow + tip in red... for oranges, pumpkins etc.

Red + tip in blue... for grapes, apples, etc.

Blue + tip in red... for eggplants

Yellow + tip in blue... for green leaves, avocados, etc.

Orange + tip in blue... for brown tones.

Leave some white specks of paper showing for highlights.  
Create 'roundness' by shading from a darker color to a lighter one.

## **Painting your still life**

Think through your color scheme.

Test colors on your scrap of paper before using. Find a brand new color! Exaggerate a color.

Repeat some of the fruit/vegetable colors in your background or foreground... this gives unity to a painting.

Skip around your painting and let areas dry a little first so colors don't bleed together.

Make a contrast between your still life and the background/foreground.

## **Additional tips**

Watercolors dry lighter than they are when wet. Use plenty of pigment.

Pre-wetting areas gives a variety of tones with the paint. It also goes on faster! Be sure your paints are wet and not dry. Too dry of a brush will damage the brush when painting as well as take much longer to paint with.

To add more than one color to an object, go back on top of painted areas again with more color once the first color has dried somewhat.

Paintings look striking when mounted against black paper.

Praise their Matisse style paintings.