



# ACRYLIC WORKSHOP

## Painting a Still Life



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You will need...



#### Equipment

[Easel / Support](#)

[12x9" primed canvas board](#)

Jam Jars x 2

1 x 1.5" decorators paintbrush

1 x Large [Flat Bright Size 12 Brush](#)

1 x Medium [Flat Bright Size 6 Brush](#)

1 x Small [Filbert Brush](#)

1 x [1/8 Flat Bright Brush](#)

[Acrylic Paint](#)

Burnt Sienna

Burnt Umber

Titanium White

Ultramarine Blue

Yellow Ochre

Cadmium Red (or substitute)

Kitchen Roll

[Palette Knife/Credit Card/Card](#)

[Stay Wet Palette\\*](#)

**This is a step by step guide to painting a Still Life in Acrylics.**

*Things to note:-*

*Every artist has their own style and your painting will not be exactly like the painting that we are using as reference, or anyone else's. It is important to embrace your originality and not be disappointed if you can't replicate the reference painting exactly.*

*It is the journey that is the important aspect of the exercise, not the destination!*

*It is good to clear your head before embarking in a new painting. You will be surprised how much emotion transfers itself onto canvas. Of course this could be the desired outcome - you decide :)*

*To get good colour matches it is preferable to use natural light to paint by. A north facing studio/area in your home, is the best light to because it is diffused, and will give you the most natural light in order to colour match. If you find it difficult to paint during daylight hours, then you could purchase an artists [Daylight Lamp](#) that can be attached to an easel, or desk.*

*Make sure you protect your clothes and furniture before starting to paint! Acrylic is a devil to remove from textiles!*

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## STEP 1



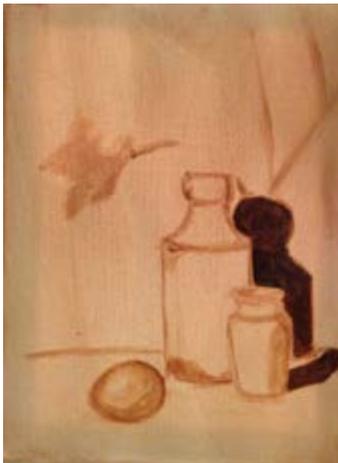
We are going to start by priming the canvas using [Gesso](#). This is to create a surface that will hold the acrylic.

When it is dry we need to create a 'mid' tone to allow us to give our tonal values context. In this case a wash of Burnt Sienna .

Squeeze a small amount (about the size of your thumb nail) of paint onto your Palette and dipping your brush into the water dab it onto the kitchen roll to remove the excess water and mixing with a small amount of your [Burnt Sienna](#) paint, cover your canvas. It doesn't have to be perfect.

When the paint is dry, using a thin mix of Burnt Sienna and the small filbert brush sketch the objects onto the canvas taking care to observe the relationships between them - e.g. distances, height, width etc. Use a grid if it helps.

## STEP 2



Don't worry if you go wrong. Simply add a bit of water to the brush a wash the line off. If it has dried and can't be removed, just use a stronger mix over the top, or paint it out and start again. One of the beauty's of acrylic paint is that it is easy to rectify mistakes!

Now look at the darkest darks in the reference photo. These will include the shadows behind the Vase and Jar and the shadows behind the dried flowers in the vase. Use Burnt Umber to paint these in.

## STEP 3



Time to start adding a thicker layer of paint. Use Burnt Sienna to strengthen to background taking care not to paint over the Burnt Umber Shadows thrown by the pots.

For the tablecloth Mix Titanium White with a touch of Ultramarine and a smidgen of Burnt Umber. Paint it quite thick and let dry.

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## STEP 4



For the ceramic vase mix in order of ratio (largest first):-

Burnt Sienna  
Titanium White  
Ultramarine Blue

Small Pot:-

Titanium White  
Burnt Sienna

Egg:-

Burnt Sienna  
Titanium White

## STEP 5



*When painting these items take care to retain the shape! Observe the curved edges of the pots trying to keep them symmetrical. and the Ellipses in all objects! Its not easy but as long as you remember to keep looking and use your grid to check back.*

### STEP 5

Strengthen the shadows using Ultramarine and Burnt Umber to the background and just under the egg. Use a thinner wash to expand the egg shadow onto the table cloth. Using the same mix add the shadows to the egg. I find it easier to paint this in one movement starting from the outside edge of the egg (Use small filbert) and keeping the paintbrush on the egg imagine that you are tracing the contour round and round until you get to the highlight. This should distribute the paint stronger where the shadows are darkest and weaker where they meet the highlight.

## STEP 6



### STEP 6

Using Ultramarine scumble the shadows of the dried flowers in the background and identify the dark areas on the vase and jar, strengthening if necessary. At this point it is sometimes useful to take a Black and White Photo of your reference and your painting to identify where adjustments need to be made.

## STEP 7



### CREATING THE DRIED FLOWERS

Use a credit card, cardboard, or the edge of a palette knife for the thin stems.

Mix Titanium White and Yellow Ochre and a tiny amount of Cadmium Red ensure that the edge of your 'tool' (not brush!) has enough paint to make a mark when pressed onto the canvas. Observing the reference photo create the stems ensuring that they correspond with the shadows that you painted in STEP 6!

## STEP 8



For the RED Dried stems use Cadmium Red. You can really make them zing if you mix Cadmium Red with Cadmium Orange if you have some!

Next using the tip of the brush handle, dip it into your paint to create the dried seed pods and flowers to the ends of the stems. Don't worry if they smudge or create a blob!

## STEP 9



We are now ready to add an Ultramarine and Burnt Umber Glaze to give depth to the painting. Scumble it in the background and across the table cloth. Next paint over the vase to the back. Make sure that your glaze is not too dark! You can always go over it, and we don't want to lose the texture that you have already achieved!

Using pure Titanium White add the highlights to the ceramics and a few seed pods! Stand back and admire your handiwork!

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## STEP 10



It's good practice to photograph your painting throughout the process in Black and White. It is the easiest way to identify tonal discrepancies!

Now treat your brushes to a good wash with warm water and [Brush Cleaner](#).

This exercise is about observation, tonal values and learning about light and shade. The importance of shadows cannot be underestimated so observe where the light falls and which way the shadows lie.

I used everyday objects that I found around my home and played with the composition until I was happy about where each object sat in relation to the others.

To create intense shadows I made a shadow box using a spare cardboard box that was used for packaging and painted the inside with water soluble paint. I used a brown shade, but you can use any colour - maybe you have a bit of unused emulsion left over from the last time you decorated?

## RESOURCES

Download reference image [HERE](#)

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## MAKING A SHADOW BOX



Take an unused cardboard box large enough to fit your object in comfortably



Cut off the flaps and one side. Cut the bottom of one side so that it can swing open. You could cut both sides so that you could move the light to the left OR right hand side and secure the side that you aren't using with some masking tape or velcro!



Paint the inside of the box to create a backdrop to your painting. I chose to use a water based brown colour but you can use anything you may have left over.



Position the light on the side that is open. In this case the open flap was on the left and I used an angle poise lamp. The lighting in the room was dimmed so the shadows from the lamps' light was not weakened. A diffused light will create soft shadows whereas direct light will create strong directional shadows. Have a play until you are happy with the result.

Place your objects inside the box. I have used a table cloth to the base to replicate a kitchen but you can use anything you would like to enhance the painting! e.g. a wooden board, a slate tile, a patterned cloth etc.

I took photographs and viewed them until I was happy with my composition. As you are painting 3D objects in 2D it is easier to assess the arrangement as a photo.

Have fun!

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