

A detailed still life painting. In the center, a large plucked duck hangs from a metal hook against a textured, light-colored wall. To its right, a smaller duck hangs from another hook. On a table in the foreground, a duck lies on a white cloth. To the left, a woven basket contains several white eggs. In the center of the table, there are several golden apples and a plate of sliced carrots. To the right, a large green cabbage sits on the table. A copper pan hangs on the wall to the right. The lighting is soft, creating subtle shadows and highlights on the various objects.

Still-Life

Designed by:
Baseline Co. Ltd
61A-63A Vo Van Tan Street
4th Floor
District 3, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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“Cézanne made a living out of a teacup, or rather in a teacup he realised the existence of something alive. He raised still life to such a point that it ceased to be inanimate. He painted these things as human beings, because he was endowed with the gift of divining the inner life in everything. His colour and line are alike suitable to the spiritual harmony. A man, a tree, an apple - all were used by Cézanne in the creation of something that is called a 'picture', and which is a piece of true inward and artistic harmony.”

- Wassily Kandinsky

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Still Life with Large Earthenware Jar

Félix Vallotton, 1923
Oil on canvas, 81 x 65.3 cm
Galerie Vallotton, Lausanne

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One should treat with doubt the extremely widespread conviction that the still life has been in art since time immemorial. We know of a large number of “still lifes” from the art of antiquity, but it cannot serve as the sole criterion for today’s definition of still life in art history.



Two Skulls on the Embrasure of a Window

Hans Holbein the Younger
tempera varnished on wood,
33 x 25 cm

Public collection, Art Museum, Basel





We should therefore avoid a confusion of the genre's history with its pre-history. It seems that the researchers link the history of the still life with easel painting, "where its laws manifest themselves most distinctly and have direct parallels with the emergence of other genres within painting."



Game and Fruits

Peter Boel

Oil on canvas, 61.5 x 81 cm
Museum of Western and Oriental
Art, Odessa





The Dutch term “stilleven” (“the quiet life”), first recorded in the year 1650, came into general use only towards the end of the seventeenth century. Later still, it was taken up by the English and German languages,



Flowers and Fruit

Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer
Oil on canvas, 74.5 x 122 cm
The Hermitage, Saint Petersburg





and only then was its meaning inherited by the French term “nature morte,” which shows however some degree of narrowing down, if compared with the original connotation. The fate of the still life proved completely different from that of the majority of genres in painting.



Fruits

Jean-Baptiste Oudry, 1721
Oil on canvas, 74 x 92 cm
Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts,
Moscow





Alexandre-François Desportes, the noted still-life artist, “painter of the royal hunts”, was still entirely in the thrall of the Flemish school, as can be seen from *Still Life with a Hare* and *Fruit and Still Life with Game and Vegetables* (both in the Hermitage).



Still Life with a Hare and Fruits

François Desportes, 1711
Oil on canvas, 115 x 199 cm
The Hermitage, Saint Petersburg





He displays the same refined naturalism in the juxtaposition of different textures to create his effect - foliage, fruit, stone, wood, feathers, wool, fur, and so on.



Still Life with Fruits

Jean-Baptiste Oudry, 1721
Oil on canvas, 74 x 92 cm
The Hermitage, Saint Petersburg





His still lifes might also include works of art such as, say, the relief by Duquesnoy included in *Still Life with Dead Game and Vegetables* - one of the highly fashionable "quotations" found in French painting from that time (and one more proof of close Franco-Flemish links in art).



Still-Life with Game and Vegetables

François Desportes, c. 1700
Oil on canvas, 121 x 135 cm
The Hermitage, Saint Petersburg

