



## Let's Create Still Life Photographs

A digital photography project exploring color and composition inspired by the cubist still lifes of Patrick Henry Bruce

### What is a Still Life?

A still life is an arrangement of objects such as vases, cups, books, fabrics, and natural items like plants, vegetables and fruits, flowers and/or sea shells to make an artwork.



### Activity

Young photographers will use a digital camera or smart device to create color photographs of inanimate objects from around their home. Students will practice using color, light, and shadow to create their images while exploring photography techniques such as composition, framing, and perspective.

### Materials

Digital camera or smart device (such as an android phone or iphone, ipad, or tablet).



## Let's think about composing a digital still life photograph ...

What objects are you going to include? How can arrange those objects to tell a story or create a mood?

What type of lighting will you use? How do you draw attention to certain objects?

How will you group objects by color and size? How will you compose objects in the frame of your image?

### Objects

When choosing objects think about similarities and differences. The image on the right features wood and metal objects while the objects are all made of glass on the image at the top of the previous page. What happens when you put different materials next to one another? What happens when all the materials are the same?

### Color

If the objects you choose for your photographs are in the same color family (this is called "monochromatic") think about using different tones. The lightest tones have the most amount of white and the darkest tones have the most amount of black. The monochromatic image of blue vases shown at right includes items that have light tones, mid tones and dark tones.

If you prefer to use more than one color think about using colors that work well together such as the complimentary colors: blue and orange, red and green, yellow and purple.

### Lighting

If you plan to take your photographs indoors use a window filtered by a sheer curtain or use indirect light such as a lamp. If you are taking photographs outdoors, you will get the best natural light on slightly overcast days when the light is soft and even.

### Background, Placement, and Negative Spaces

When composing your photograph it is important to feature your objects.

Consider using a solid color or a neutral background such as white, gray, black and beige. Spacing is also an important factor when arranging your objects. Does the object in the back stand above the others in the frame or is that one in front? Does the arrangement have a pattern? If you were to connect a line from the top of each object, from one to the next, would it create a triangle or square? What is the interconnectivity between the objects? Can you see empty space around the items you arranged or are they touching?



## Step 1: Brainstorm.

Think about the story you want to tell or the mood you want to create with your photograph.

## Step 2: Select your objects.

What objects will help tell your story?

Perhaps you want to photograph items that have special meaning to you. A favorite toy or an old blanket. A souvenir from a great trip. Or a post card, photo, or drawing.

### Have fun with color

Go on a scavenger hunt to find objects that are all the same color: a red apple, a toy car, and a bottle of ketchup. A blue pencil, a pair of glasses, and a book. Consider making an arrangement with all the colors in the order of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. The choice is yours!

### Play with shapes

You can choose objects that are not the same but have similarities, such as shape. For example, what can you find in your home that is round: An orange. A marble. A plate? Perhaps you can arrange them together in a theme of rounded edges? Now, what happens when you add something hard, like a book or other square object? How does that change the composition of your image?

## Step 3: Create a mood as you compose your photograph.

There is no wrong way to make art.

Keep experimenting until you find the images you like best!

Select the space where you want to arrange your objects. Are you inside or outside? What is the lighting like? Is the background distracting or neutral? Is every object easy to see? Do the objects look balanced or does one item take attention away from the others? Is there sufficient lighting? Are any of the items cast in shadows? What happens if you change your perspective by moving higher, lower, or to the side?

## Step 4: Share your favorite photo with us.

Once you've taken lots of still life photographs, share your favorites with us on social media at [#NEUtoDoKids!](https://twitter.com/NEUtoDoKids)





**Patrick Henry Bruce** (March 25, 1881–November 12, 1936) was an American cubist painter. He was a descendant of Patrick Henry, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States who was famous for saying, “Give me liberty, or give me death!”

Born in Virginia as the second of four children, at 17 years old Bruce was working in a real estate office during the day and taking evening classes at the Art Club of Richmond. In 1902 he moved to New York to continue his art studies; by February 1904 he was in Paris, where he would live for almost 30 years.

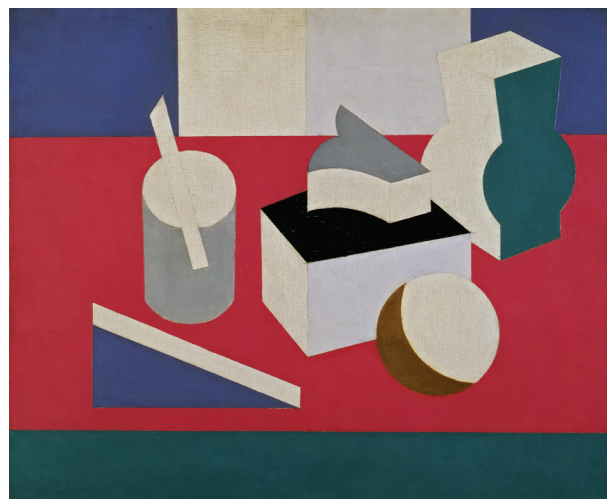
During his career, Bruce’s artwork evolved toward a modernist style that was influenced by various aspects of cubism, an early-20th-century avant-garde art movement that revolutionized European painting and sculpture.

## What is Cubism?

In Cubist artwork, objects are analyzed, broken up, and reassembled in an abstracted form that represents a new view of reality. Instead of depicting objects from a single viewpoint, the artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints. Cubist artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque became well known for their artworks that break objects and figures down into distinct areas or planes, creating depth in their works even though two-dimensional flatness is emphasized.

By 1916, Bruce had developed a form of abstract painting that featured compositions of muscular, flat color areas. One year later, he began painting large-scale, boldly hued abstract still life “compositions” that were cubist-inspired and geometric. He depicted block like forms such as cubes, cylinders and wedges—which he referred to as “the forms”—in a flat palette of blues, greens, lavenders, blacks, whites and reds. By 1918, his work primarily featured hard-edged geometric forms arranged on a tabletop and rendered in flat colors.

Intensely self-critical, Bruce destroyed a great many of his paintings; only about one hundred works remain. His work, *Still Life*, created between 1922 and 1925, is part of the permanent collection at the Neuberger Museum of Art.



Patrick Henry Bruce, *Still Life*, 1922-1925,  
Oil on canvas, 23 5/8 x 28 3/4 inches (canvas),  
Collection Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, SUNY,  
Gift of Roy R. Neuberger, 2001.04.01.  
Photo: © Jim Frank.