

18. PAINT A MUNDANE

still life

A LACK OF ATTRACTION TO YOUR SUBJECT ALLOWS A FOCUS ON PAINT HANDLING, SAYS **ANN WITHERIDGE**

THE BENEFITS

For this exercise, it shouldn't be the subject matter that attracts you, but rather the fall of light and the colour patterns. If we are less emotionally invested in the subject matter, we are often better able to experiment with the handling of the paint.

THE PROCESS

People often ask me what my favourite subject is to paint; my answer is always what is in front of me at the time. I love colour and the feel of the paint itself, so the subject is of less importance.

Landscapes give you energy in a rush to capture them, while portraits have a wonderful human element, but I also love objects. I find it really hard not to buy pieces of ceramic and nothing broken gets thrown away in my house as it is all a potential still-life subject.

I always get my students to set up their own still life and bring in their own objects as I love seeing how creative they are with their set-ups. A beautiful bottle or jug seems a very natural subject to paint, but for a great test, why not try to paint something you would not usually see as an object of painterly interest? A shampoo bottle, some sweets, something that has no obvious attraction. The attraction will instead have to be achieved by the quality of the paint and your handling of it.

Here are four things to consider during this particular challenge:

1. SUBJECT MATTER

Choose a subject that isn't obviously appealing. For this painting, I chose a



paracetamol packet and a tube of Savlon, set on a blue background.

2. VALUES AND EDGES

Decide how strong you want to make the value contrasts and make sure some edges are into both the background and into the subjects.

3. COLOUR

Choose a background colour that compliments or harmonises with the

subject so you can borrow its colour into the subject. I had fun pushing the values and subtle temperature shifts within the same general hue.

4. PAINT HANDLING

Experiment with the paint, both varying the thickness and the looseness of the edges. Try to find internal value shifts – changes in colour and tone within a single plane.

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