

bernard jacobson gallery

Object / Subject

The Art of Still Life

7th July – 26th August 2022

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is pleased to present a selection of still lifes by Georges Braque, William Tillyer, Bruce McLean, Matthew Smith, and Tom Wesselmann, among others.

Through the still life, links can be drawn between these artists whose careers traverse different centuries. As the selected works move between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, so too do they unfold through a variety of media and techniques. From Braque's historic oil paintings on canvas to Tillyer's recent acrylic paintings on wire mesh, the still life genre is explored and brought to life.

Though once regarded as the least important in the hierarchy of genres, the still life offered modern artists endless opportunities for formal investigations. Unlike the trompe l'œil still lifes of previous centuries, by the twentieth century still lifes prioritised the study of space, shape, and colour over the depiction of reality. In Braque's still lifes – which build on the cubist experiments that he pioneered earlier in his career – significance rests in the relationship between the objects, not in the meaning of the objects themselves. Spatial experiments also take hold in Wesselmann's compositions, where vivid colours and variations in scale structure his paintings. So too does colour play a crucial role in Patrick Caulfield's *Small Green Pot*, where bold shadows compete with the flatness of the pink background.

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Works from the twenty-first century prove that the still life does not belong exclusively to one medium. This is true of McLean's paintings, which present his own ceramic creations in a new dimension. Distinct media also mingle in Tillyer's still lifes: metal mesh and stainless steel wires form layers of grids around acrylic paintings of fruit and tableware. Through this process, Tillyer disrupts the simple backgrounds of traditional still lifes and instead creates a completely alternative space.

The objects portrayed in these still lifes do not serve as simple representations of everyday goods. Instead, the objects themselves become the subjects of the works. Together, the works in this exhibition also position the still life genre as one of constant transformation and regeneration. By examining a wide selection of still lifes, it is possible to identify how changes within the genre have correlated with larger trends in the history of art.

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mail@jacobsongallery.com | +44(0)207 734 3431