



Title: Still Life, but Passing: Time in Still Life Paintings

Abstract

Painting is a spatial medium, and therefore the representation of time is a challenge for it. We can only conceptualize time through change, and the representation of change is not an easy task in the still, unmoving genre of painting. This text narrows the visual representation of time to the time of living beings: the visual representation of the passing of life. From the Renaissance onwards, special types of painting were dedicated to this theme: the *memento mori*, the *vanitas*, and the still life, which is (also) about the passing of time. In contemporary art, still lifes have lost the symbolism that refers to ideas of passing, of finitude. If still life does carry such a message (such as Andy Warhol's *Flowers* series), the reflection on the passage of time is expressed more abstractly in the language of the mathematical sublime as Immanuel Kant theorized it in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. This paper argues that, alongside *memento mori* and *vanitas* paintings, the still life also essentially directs our attention to the passage of time and expresses this message either through symbolic means, in the language of the beautiful, or through quantitative means, in the language of the sublime.

Keywords: still life, *memento mori*, *vanitas*, representation of time, mathematical sublime