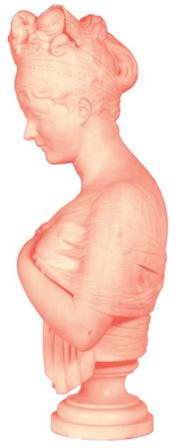


BARBER



HOME

BENNY SEMP

Still Life - Family Art Activity

Our collection, your place

BENNY SEMP

Become a still life artist! Join artist Benny Semp to learn about still life paintings and follow our step-by-step guide on how to make your own still life drawings and collage masterpieces.

This activity pack is inspired by still life paintings from the 17th century which are part of the Barber Institute's art collection.

Suitable for Key Stage 2 + (Ages 7 and above)

Suggested Materials:

- This step-by-step guide
- Paper
- Pencil
- Rubber
- Cardboard box
- A ball, egg or piece of fruit (or any circular shaped object)
- Kitchen pans



What is Still Life?

Still life describes a work of art which shows things that do not move. They can include all kinds of man-made or natural objects. The objects can range from flowers, fruit, vegetables, fish, books, musical instruments or vases. They can be **realistic** – the objects look like real things. They can also be **abstract** – the objects look like unreal things.

In the past some types of Western art were believed to be better than others! In the 17th century still life was ranked at the bottom.

But in actual fact, still life paintings are full of interesting features and beauty. Just like the beauty you can find in your own possessions.

1. History Painting

subjects drawn from classical history, mythology and religion.

2. Portraiture

a representation of a particular person.

3. Genre Painting

paintings which show scenes of everyday life.

4. Landscape

a traditional depiction of natural scenery in art.

5. Still Life

Still Life at the Barber

Evaristo Baschenis,
A Still Life with Musical Instruments,
1660,
oil on canvas.

© The Henry Barber Trust,
The Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
University of Birmingham.



What objects can you see in this painting?

Can you describe the scene?

What part of the painting captures your attention the most?

How has Baschenis painted light and dark in this painting?

Evaristo Baschenis, *A Still Life with Musical Instruments*, 1660, oil on canvas.
© The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham.

This painting is found in our [Red Gallery](#).

Painting Description:



This painting shows a dramatically lit group of instruments and objects. The books are unread, the violin has a broken string and the other instruments are silent; their last melodies played a long time ago. The scene is tranquil, calm and silent as the instruments – covered by a layer of dust – lie scattered on the table. There is a lute in the bottom right hand corner of the painting. It looks as though someone has stroked their fingers through the dust. A curtain hangs above the table of instruments in many layers of fabric of red and gold. The curtain is tied back to show a dark space behind.

What can we find out?

This painting is called *A Still Life with Musical Instruments, 1660*.

The way the artist, Evaristo Baschenis, has painted light and reflections showcases his great mastery of painting. Look at the way he paints the folded drapery of the curtains.

The painting is an example of a *vanitas* - a type of still life that flourished in the 17th century Europe.

Vanitas paintings include symbolic objects designed to remind the viewer of how everything in life changes, nothing stays the same forever.

Here the presence of musical instruments makes the painting a vanitas. The objects are gathering dust, the human presence has gone.



Evaristo Baschenis, was a musician himself, and collected a large number of instruments. He lived in a town called Bergamo northern Italy, famous for making violins. In his painting, he carefully arranges them to show off their patterns and shapes.

Can you play any musical instruments?

What kind of music do you like to listen to?



What objects can you see in this painting?

What materials can you name? We wonder what they would feel like to touch.

This painting is part of the Barber's Collection, [find more about this painting here.](#)

Jan Davidsz De Heem, *A Still Life with Nautilus Cup*, 1632, oil on wood.
© The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham.



Painting Description:

In this still life there is a table with a dark cloth, covered in silver objects. A plate, jug, serving bowl and a drinking cup are arranged there at different angles. Amongst the silver objects is food. A whole lemon is placed beside a silver plate on which there are two slices of lemon, a long strip of lemon peel is to the right. A bunch of green grapes spill out of serving bowl with its vine still attached, reaching up to the top of the painting. Walnuts scatter across the left edge of the table. The shiny surfaces of these silver objects are in contrast with the different textures of the food.

Jan Davidsz de Heem, *A Still Life with Nautilus Cup*, 1632,
oil on wood.
© The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
University of Birmingham.



What can we find out?

Reflections

In this still life by Jan Davidsz de Heem, the objects are arranged to demonstrate the talents of the artist.

Whilst the table may look messy and disordered, the silver objects, like the vase and plate, set up a series of complex reflections.

The effects of light on the different materials show off his talent for painting.



The Cup

The focus of the painting is a drinking cup, looking delicate and precious. The cup is made from a nautilus shell, a type of animal called a mollusc, found in the Indian and Pacific oceans. Empty shells were collected and seen as mysterious sea treasures, capturing the imaginations of many artists!

Drawing Activity:

Painting always starts with drawing! It's where we can plan, sketch and explore our ideas. Here are some ways to get your still life started.

In Still Life with Musical Instruments, 1660 by Evaristo Baschenis we see some familiar and some more unusual instruments. The painting is over 360 years old so these are the instruments that Baschenis would have seen at the time.



On the right of the picture is the striped bowl shaped back of a lute.



The smaller bowl backed instrument in the middle is called a mandolin.



The box shaped instrument on the left is a spinettino (a portable harpsichord).

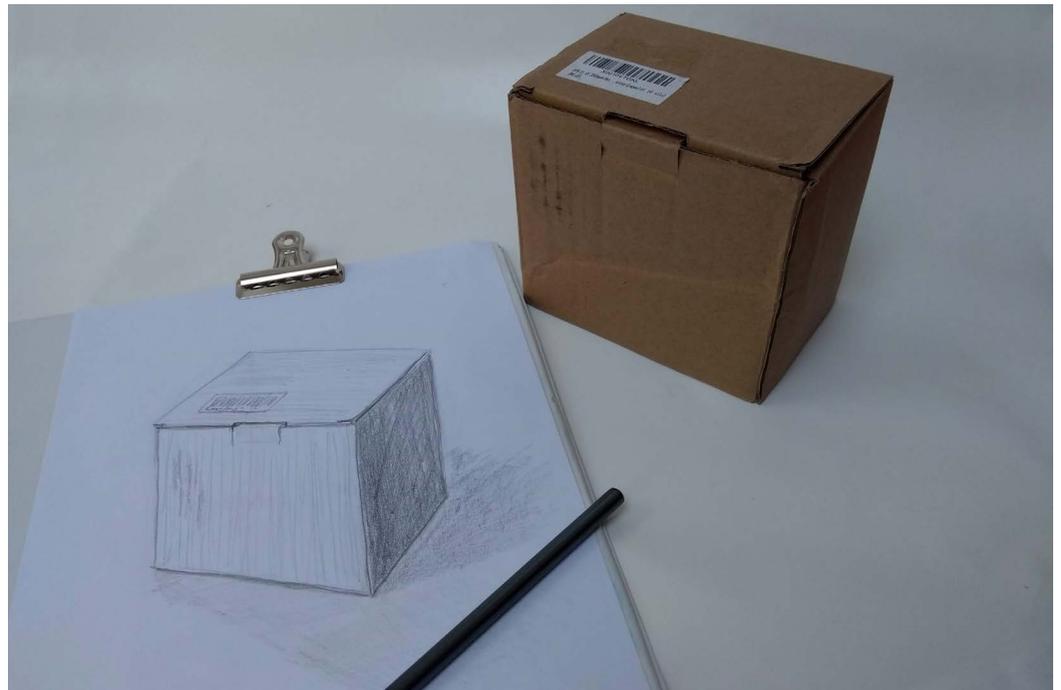
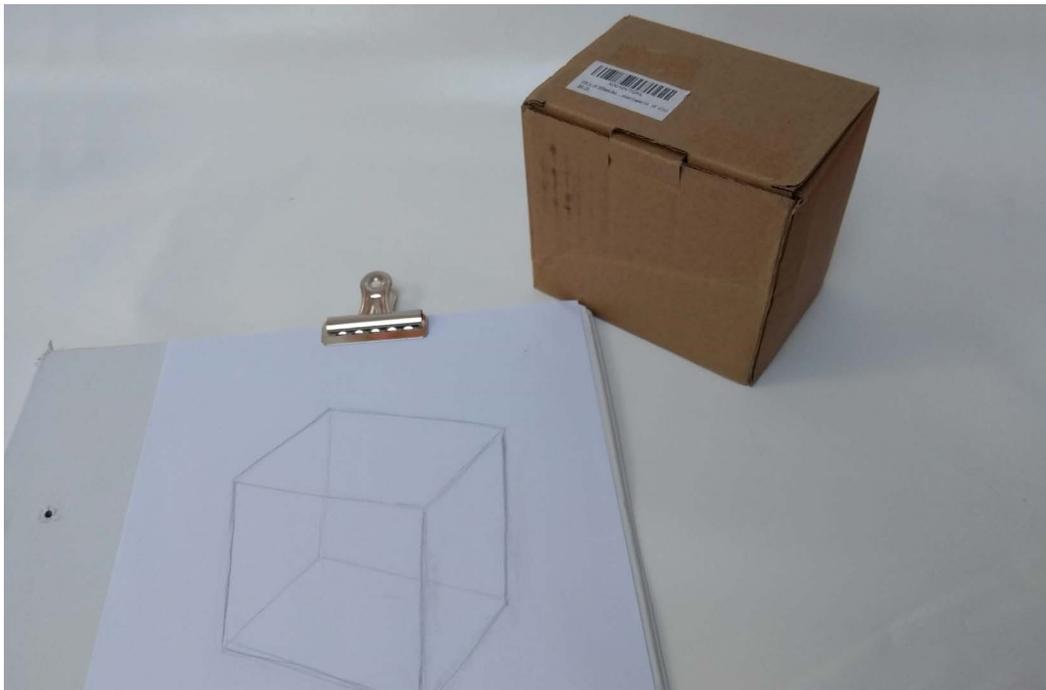
A really good way to draw complex objects is to break them down into simple shapes.

Eg. The spinettino is a five-sided box with an open top and strings inside.

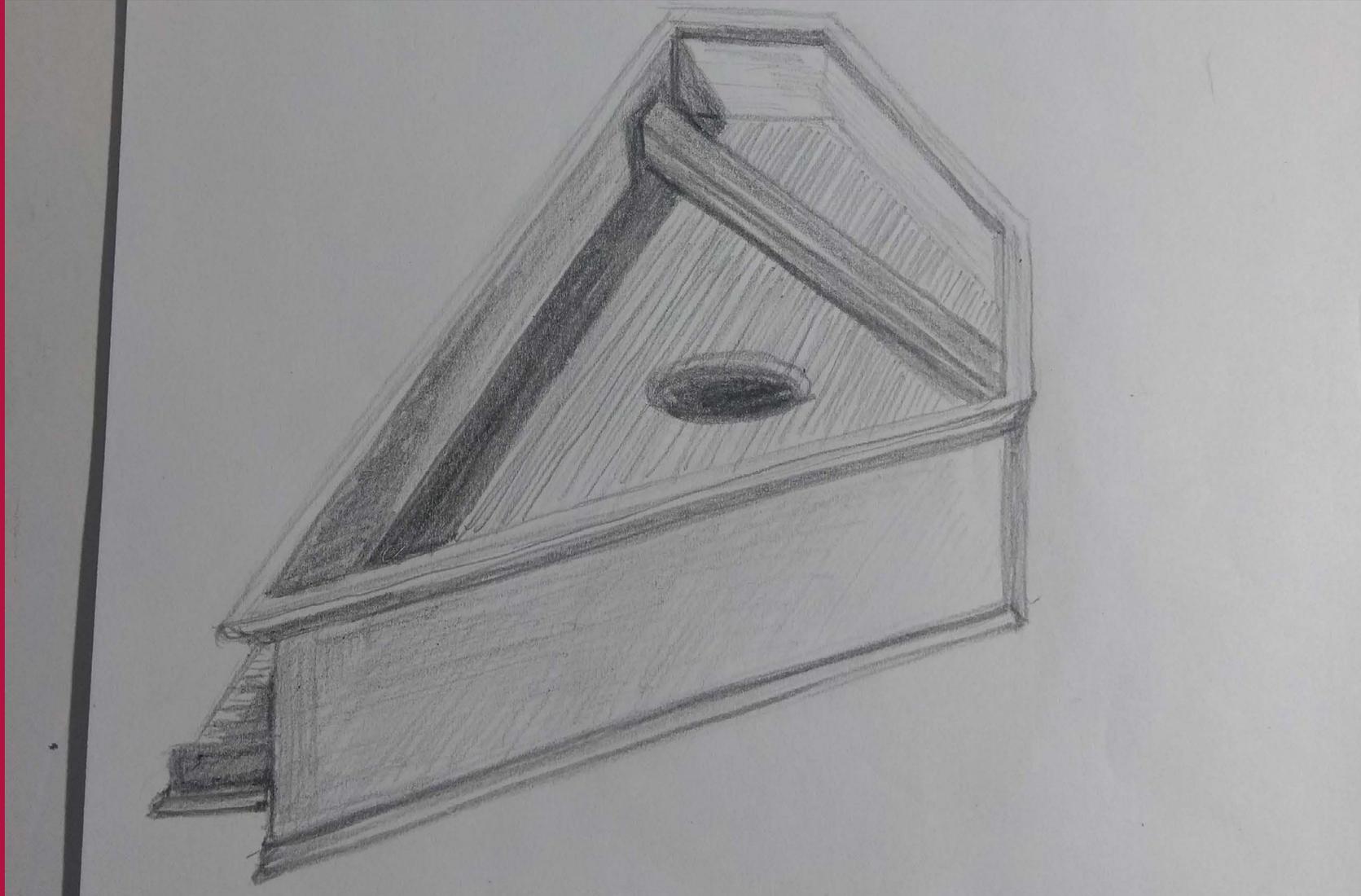
Let's practise drawing...

PRACTISE DRAWING A BOX

1. When we draw a cube shaped box it's easiest to start with a flat shape. We can see the top of the box clearly, so we'll start by drawing that. Draw everything lightly at first, then once you're happy with the shape you can go over the lines harder.
2. Next we'll put the vertical lines in. Have a good look at the shape to check which sides you can see and which you can't, then draw straight vertical lines at each corner.
3. If you're struggling to get the shape right try drawing the object as if it were a wire frame that you can look straight through. Draw all the lines in, then rub out the ones on the back of the box that you can't see.
4. Once you've got a shape, look where the light and shade are and where it casts a shadow. Then add texture and surface detail.



If you can draw a box, you could try drawing the five sided box of a spinettino. Look carefully at the shape, then use the same technique you've just learned.





The upturned mandolin and lute are both roughly oval shapes. They also have stripes, which will help to show their shape. You can practice a curved shape by drawing a ball, an egg or piece of fruit.

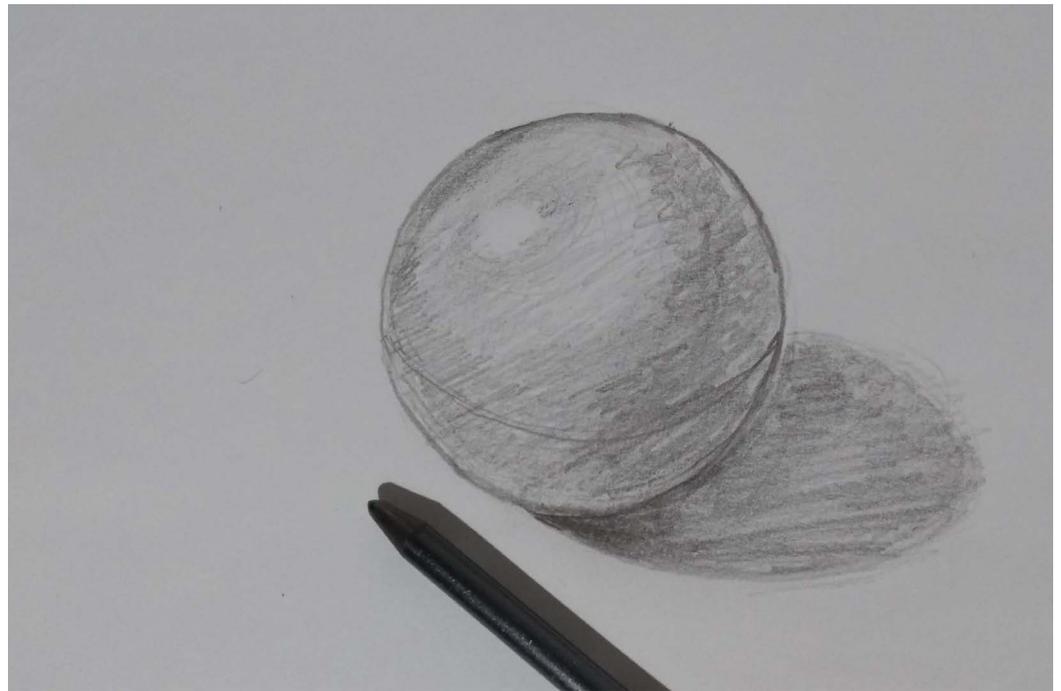
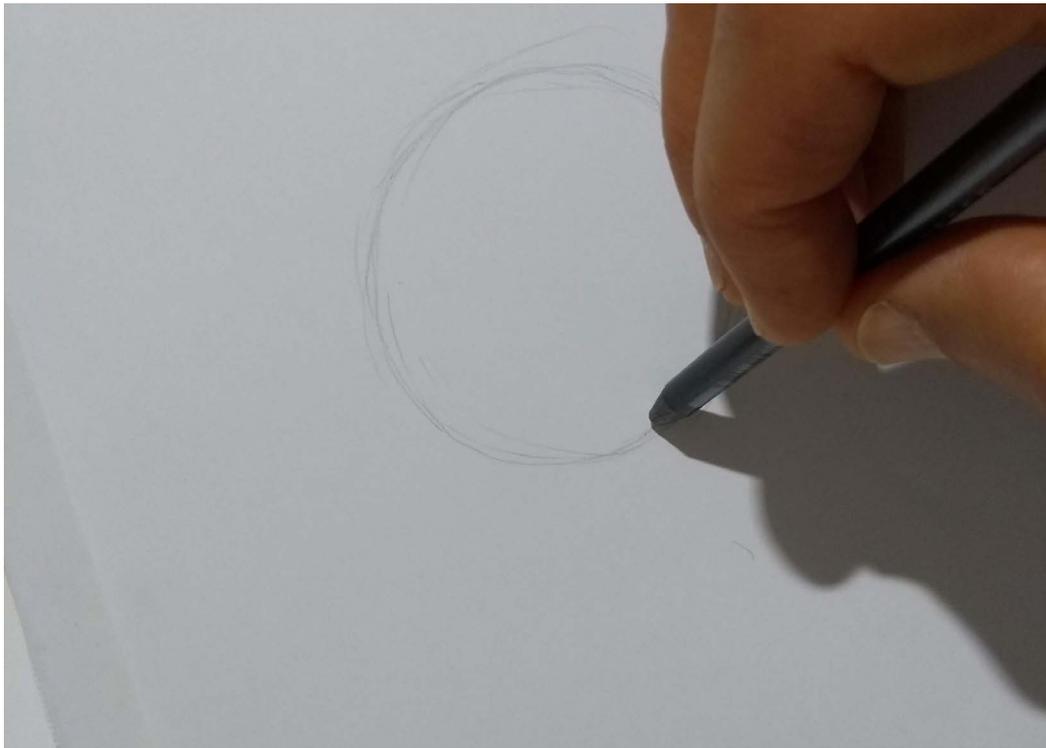
PRACTISE DRAWING A BALL

1. We'll start by very lightly sketching the outline of the shape. A good way to draw a circle is to hold the pencil slightly above the paper and move it round, imagining what line it would draw if it were touching the paper. Move your whole arm from the shoulder, not just your hand. When you're happy with the motion of your pencil, touch it lightly on the paper and keep moving in the same motion.

2. Go round a few times to get a rough shape, then go over the marks that are closest to the circle you want.

3. Rub out any stray marks at the end.

4. Light is very important to creating round shapes. The area closest to the light source will be much brighter than the rest. To show this, leave a patch of white paper where the brightest part of the circle is, then go around gradually darkening until you get to the underside where it is darkest (it helps if the object is lit strongly from one direction).

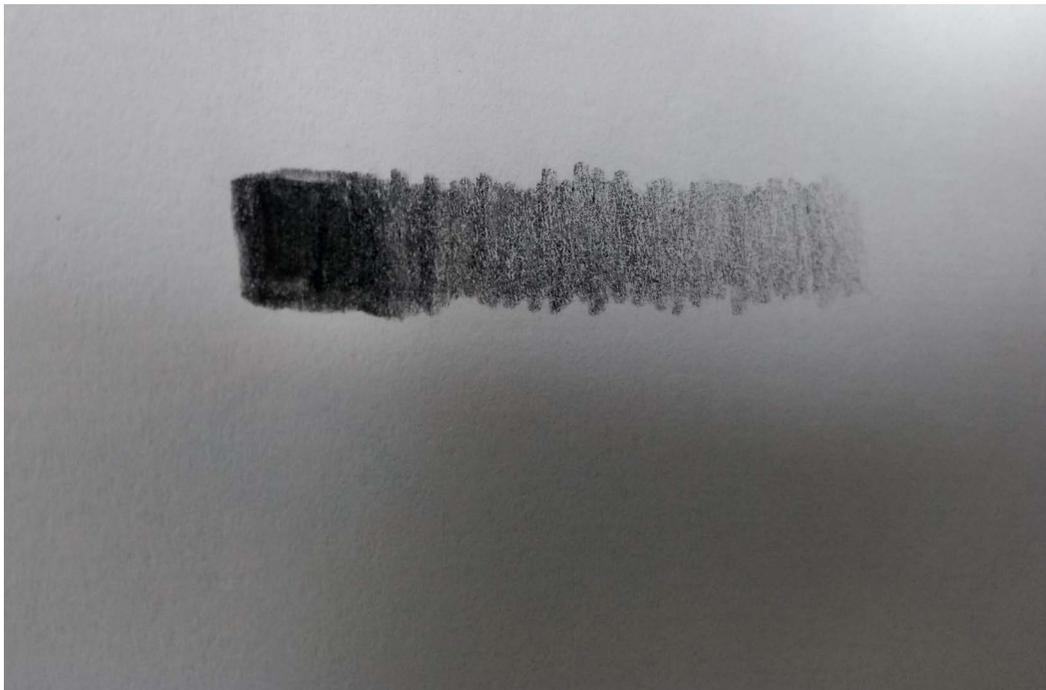
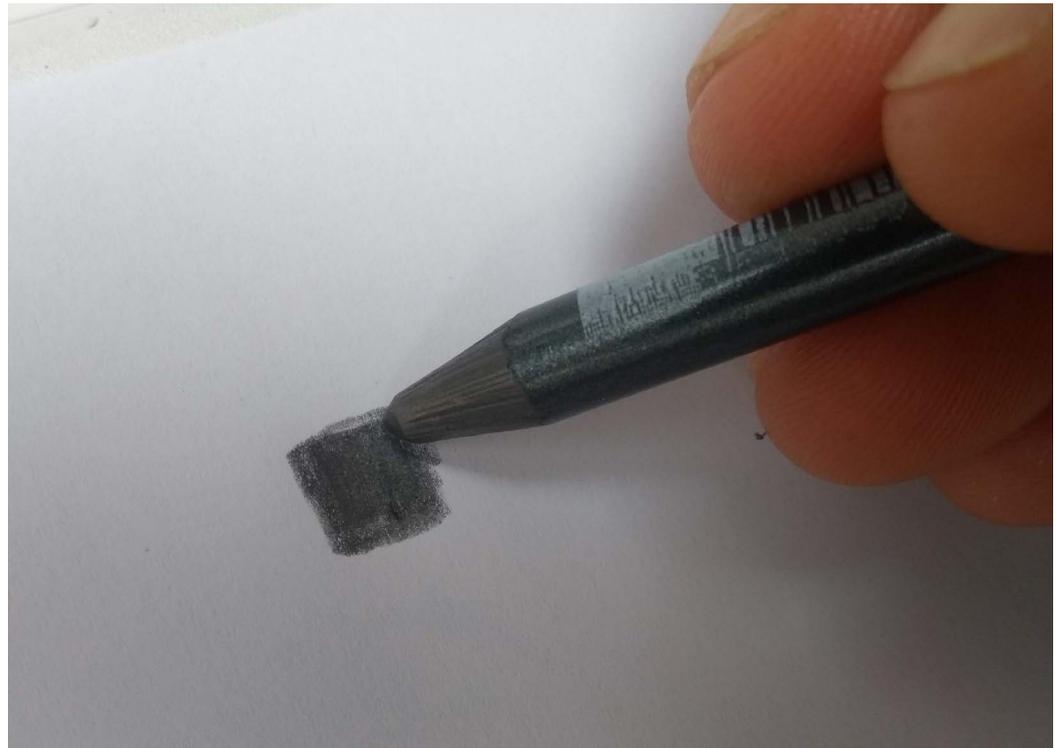


REFLECTIONS AND TONE

1. Let's try to draw some reflective objects like in *A Still Life with Nautilus Cup, 1632 by Jan Davidsz de Heem*. If you don't have a shiny tropical shell mounted on a silver stand (who does?!), you can use metal or ceramic kitchenware, food tins or even shiny fruit. It will help if they are strongly lit from one side.

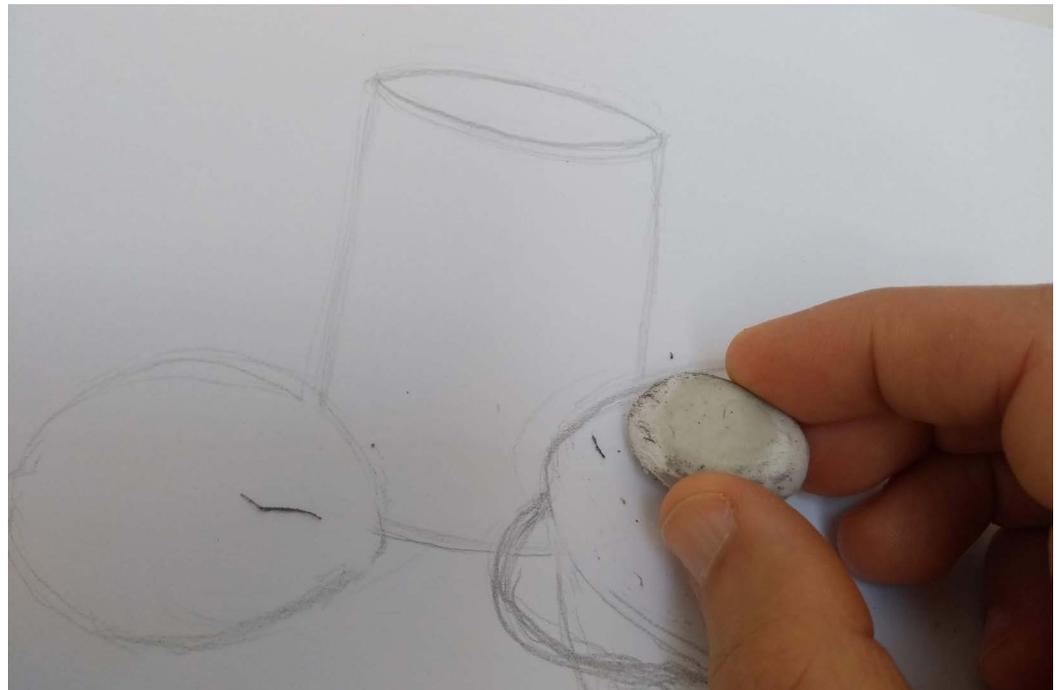
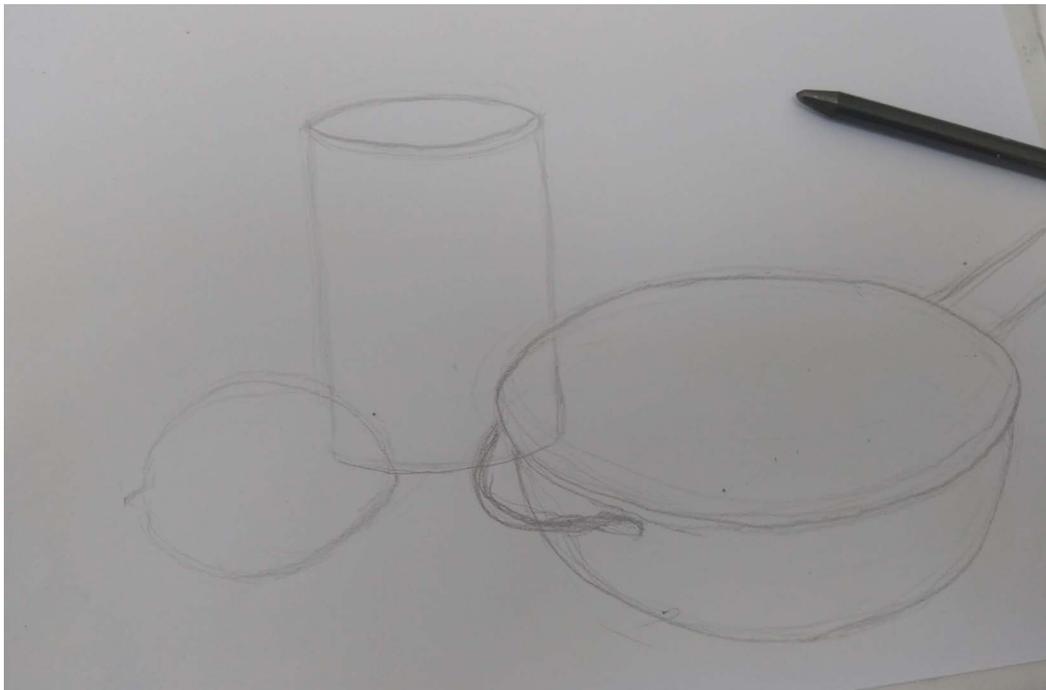
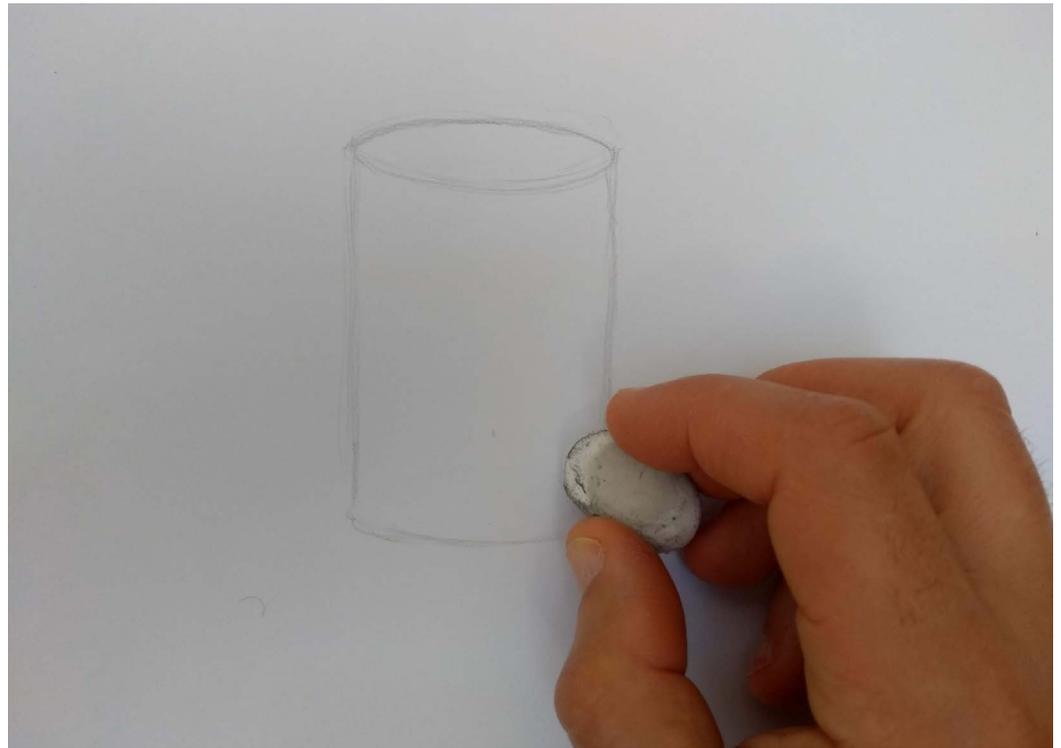
2. To practise shading different tones, draw a 1cm square and shade it in as dark a tone as possible. Press the pencil down hard, use up and down strokes and keep them close

3. Once you have a solid square start to move your pencil along the page gradually easing the pressure as you go. Keep your strip the same height and don't let the pencil strokes get further apart. You should start to have a strip of tone that gets gradually and smoothly lighter. Stretch this out to about 10cm and by the end your shading should be so light you can hardly see it. Can you do pencil drawing that uses every tone from darkest black to lightest grey?



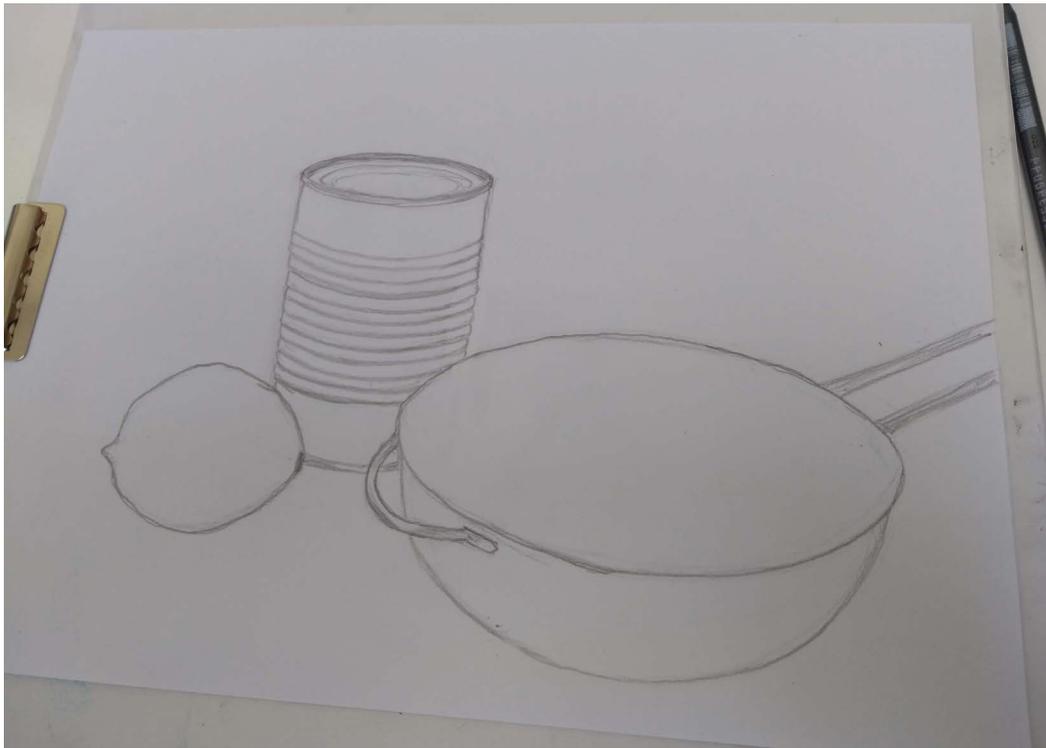
DRAWING A CYLINDER, LEMON AND PAN

1. A cylinder can be drawn by drawing an oval for the top, another for the bottom and then adding two vertical lines.
2. You can then erase half of the lower oval to make the shape solid.
3. The lemon is drawn in the same way as the sphere. The difference is the irregular outline. The pan is the same as the lute, but the other way up.
4. Where objects overlap, it's easier to draw them both together and then rub out the parts you can't see.



ADDING TONE AND DETAIL

1. Start to add more detail into your objects.
2. Look carefully at your shiny objects. Where are the brightest reflections and where are the darkest shadows? Outline on your drawing where the brightest and darkest areas are, as well as mid-tones.
3. Start filling in more tones. Remember to look at the object often to check if your drawing is looking similar. Half of drawing is about looking!





Thank you for taking part in this Barber Home Family Activity!

Share your responses at [#BarberHome2020](#) or look on our website for more Family Activities you can do from home, inspired by our collection.