

Timeless Objects: A Modern-Armenian Tribute to Renaissance Still Life

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The motivation to pursue this project was to study the intricate details of Renaissance still-life, which is sometimes perceived as arranging inanimate things on a plain background, for instance, an arrangement of fruit or a flower vase. However, after thoroughly researching Dutch, Spanish, Italian, and other Renaissance still-life schools, I learned that this art form had a lot more to it than its static side. Still-life paintings, strangely enough for what their title is, are full of life, narrative, and significance.

Still-life paintings are dynamic representations of the intellectual, moral, and cultural ideals of the Renaissance, a critical period in the history of art. My capstone project investigates the timeless meaning and reinterpretation of this art form by re-creating Renaissance still-life paintings using contemporary components and real artifacts. This literature review summarizes the available information concerning Renaissance still life paintings and underscores those elements that provide much vitality, morality, symbolism, and technical prowess inherent in the genre. These pieces discussed here should, thus, provide the framework needed to understand the cultural and historical contexts of the origins of still life painting while at the same time providing suggestions for adapting those components to the present setting.

Beyond its aesthetic significance, the food in the Renaissance still-life painting shows cultural, social, and economic narratives as Bendiner (2004) comprehensively reviews. He states that images of abundance and plenty celebrate material pleasures while warning of excess. Food is placed as a moralistic device and a representation of luxury because of its double meaning. Bendiner's emphasis on the juncture of artistic expression and cultural history will inform my study of how Renaissance painters used food imagery to convey subtle social ideals. I plan to juxtapose Renaissance ideals against modern notions of prosperity and consumption by bringing these historical lessons into my recreations. This emphasis will underpin understanding of the

wider ramifications of still-life images both in historical and contemporary contexts as a way of communicating cultural values through the medium of food.

Stupples and Venis (2018) give a better framework for the narrative mechanism of food in Renaissance art, which may cause moral reflection. Analyzing the tension between wealth and poverty, as well as the philosophical implications of "the gaze," they make a helpful basis for thoughts on how the viewer approaches still-life paintings. Their work showcases the narrative sophistication in still-life compositions, and in how visual themes engage a viewer in contemplation over idealistic perspectives within society. It is through this insight that my strategy will be directed toward developing a series of contemporary still-life compositions to encourage the viewer to contemplate present-day issues on excess, consumption, and morality.

The Renaissance aesthetic ideal of "liveliness," which Hazard (1975) discusses, is the ability of art to stir lifelike aspects that engage the viewer's mind and emotions. Her discussion of techniques such as dynamic composition and manipulation of light and shadow emphasizes the technical skill required to achieve this impression. This concept of liveliness will be crucial to my project because through recreation I want to give a feel of vigor that links both the contemporary object-based installations and the conventional painting. Hazard's theoretical framework will also be useful in understanding how Renaissance painters went beyond simple realism to elicit emotional and sensory responses. The concept of liveliness as a combination of technical proficiency and audience involvement adds depth to my research, underlining how these components can create emotionally touching, immersive experiences.

Charting the development of still life painting from its religious beginnings to its Renaissance blossoming, Schneider (2003) further contextualizes Hazard's perspective. The weight he gives to the moral and metaphorical significance of food imagery underscores the

intellectual heft of the genre. My reproduction project will be based on Schneider's insights about the technical techniques utilized to generate realism and symbolic resonance. It will explore how modern materials may be used to create similar thematic and aesthetic results. I will analyze how Renaissance techniques may be used in modern media from his point of view, highlighting how conventional approaches might be rethought for modern artistic expression.

Monteiro, Kong, and Neto (2023) present an interdisciplinary perspective on the temporal and spatial representation of time and space in works of art. Their interpretation of temporal symbolism includes the themes of ripeness and decay, in concurrence with the essence of the Renaissance, which highlighted the fleeting aspect of life. As I experiment with using modern objects to portray time and mortality in a way that appeals to our-day audience, this temporal framework will be essential to my study. Through the lens of temporal symbolism, their method provides a way to integrate historical themes with contemporary challenges like consumerism and environmental sustainability.

Sullivan (1974) offers a more focused inquiry into the vanitas motif in still life painting as it was expressed in the 17th century, through its use of visual elements fruit and skulls, for example symbolically to represent the state of impermanence, or mortality. While his work focuses on the Dutch Golden Age, the detail with which he deconstructs composition and symbolism creates a useful set of guidelines for research into still life from the Renaissance period itself. My goal of integrating vanitas aspects in my recreations is to make links between historical and modern thoughts on death and transient worldly prosperity. Through this use of vanitas elements in my work, I seek to bridge thoughts from contemporary ideas about consumerism and the human relationship with death, including environmental destruction, back to earlier creative traditions.

Brusati (1990–1991) examines the narrative and introspective possibilities of still life painting, particularly concerning artistic criticism and self-portraiture. Her examination of how things might be metaphors for more general topics of creativity and identity aligns with my aim of reimagining Renaissance compositions with contemporary objects. Brusati's understanding of the visual and intellectual complexity of still-lives will assist my attempts to add layers of meaning to my recreations that invite both individual and group contemplation. I'll consider how still life objects function as an extension of the artist's personality to show how modern materials may be used to express complicated ideas about contemporary social and individual identity.

Pieter Aertsen is a prime example of the subject depth of Renaissance still life paintings, as demonstrated in his inventive use of food and domestic objects as symbolic themes shown by Buchan (1975). My project wants to strike a balance between visual appeal and philosophical depths, and Aertsen's skill at fusing such commonplace images with moral and spiritual connotations acts for an inspiration. My goal is to produce modern still lifes that will appeal to both historical and contemporary audiences, guided by Aertsen's techniques. For ideas on how to use everyday objects to create compositions with significant meanings, I will consult Aertsen's work on the link between the symbolic and the everyday.

Making a modern version of the Renaissance still life paintings requires diving into the traditions, history, and techniques of the genre. These works are marked by intense attention to detail, dramatic light and shadow, and well-thought-through balance of the composition, reflecting not only technical but also intellectual awareness of philosophical and cultural matters. Still-life was a minor genre elevated by Renaissance artists, who often used objects to create themes of abundance and mortality, by embracing realism and symbolism. In addition to guiding the viewer's eye, the thoughtful placement of the objects created perspective and depth.

Recreating these paintings requires technical proficiency and an understanding of the complex history underlying the meaning.

The historical luminism and spatial arrangement techniques used by Renaissance artists to indicate depth and movement have informed my recreation of these paintings through modern objects. For instance, the play of light and dark will be important in making specific elements in my images stand out and appear realistic. Similarly, one of the integral elements of my approach is going to involve strategic placement of objects in terms of guiding the viewer's eye through a story.

Recognizing the genre's capacity for moral and intellectual reflection is also necessary to understand its creative choices. By combining traditional still-life conventions with modern materials, I hope to create works that challenge viewers' understanding of the points where tradition and innovation, materialism, morality, and the past and present converge. This approach not only makes my recreations theoretically sound but also matches the contemplative and philosophical tone of the genre, making them not just copycats.

Researching modern reinterpretations of still-life paintings has also provided valuable insights into how contemporary artists have adapted this genre to relate to modern themes. For instance, artists marry modern technology with old aesthetics by creating still-life compositions using digital media or photography. These examples inspire me to try other mediums and techniques, extending the definition of a still-life painting while preserving its essence.

My capstone project aims to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation by fusing old customs with contemporary items and methods, hence providing a current standpoint on an ageless art form. During the Renaissance, still life went from being a minor genre to a genre of

importance, and it concentrated on symbolism and naturalism, reflecting the changes within society.

I selected 9 still-life paintings from renaissance period and grouped my selections into two categories to emphasize this contrast. The first category consists of those paintings that conform to the historical definition of still life as a consciously chosen group of objects that look artificial in their presentation. The second category is the opposite of the more formal still-lives—it celebrates realistic, often ruffled scenes that document the traces of human presence and activity. Through a delicate and intimate portrayal of ordinary things—a half-peeled fruit, spattered utensils, or a crumpled napkin—the works are imbued with life and movement. The messy and imperfections are not just aesthetic choices; they suggest the energy, habits, and stories of the people who have just departed. The project aims to end myths about still life painting by choosing works most representative of both categories and demonstrating its ability to portray not just the elegance of the material but the cultural stories and lived experiences of the era.

I created a thorough list of needed items for every piece because I am undertaking the recreation of 9 Renaissance still-life paintings. I was then able to see more clearly what I had at home already and what I needed to buy through this list. I found that most of the materials and objects that I needed were already in my house, which made the process surprisingly enjoyable. There were not a lot of things to shop for, and that led me to a surprising epiphany: although the paintings were of Renaissance times (16th–17th century), all those things that were commonly used within homes at the time are being discovered in houses today.

I now value the common things I used to take for granted after this realization, which showed their long-lasting existence throughout generations. Reading the list of products, I was

able to locate some of the items in my house that I never thought of or had forgotten. I was excited at providing a new life and meaning to these lost objects and turning them into significant pieces of my project. This enabled me to recontextualize objects from my own life in Renaissance art as well as combine historical and contemporary themes. Still-life is a form of art that celebrates the beauty of everyday things. It draws attention to the things that would otherwise remain unnoticed in the background of our lives and presents them in a thoughtful, carefully arranged composition. Through this process, these ordinary things were elevated and given meaning, creating a quiet but powerful reflection of reality.

All the originals and my modern Armenian reinterpretations are carefully placed in a thoughtfully curated [portfolio](#)—portfolio is not too strong a term, since it is not merely an assortment, but an experience. What gives the portfolio its understated power is the quiet thread that links each image to the next. Each couple—each Renaissance still-life and its modern complement—is arranged in a thoughtful sequence, where each new image speaks with something in the one before. It can be an everyday object, a recurring hue, a mirrored composition, or an emotion that spills and finds a new form. The connection is at times obvious, at times intimate and hidden in plain view.

This design invites the viewer to move through the portfolio not as a spectator, but as an interpreter. There is no fixed path, no single correct way to "read" the sequence. Instead, each participant is encouraged to discover their webs of meaning—by memory, association, or intuition. In this way, the portfolio is more than a project. It is an open-ended dialogue between past and present, tradition and innovation, and ultimately, between art and the inner world of the viewer.

N1

Juan Sánchez Cotán's "Still Life with Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber" (1602) is known for its almost mystical precision and balance. His use of dramatic lighting, geometric simplicity, and a minimal color palette created a genre-defining piece. Inspired by Cotán's austere composition, I set out to recreate the scene in a way that blends the discipline of classical Spanish realism with my personal and cultural surroundings—a modernized, Armenianized version of the original.

For the setting, I chose our kitchen again as the most versatile and practical space in the house. I placed two black boxes side by side in place under the cupboard in our kitchen to replicate the simple horizontal plane of the original by Cotán. It served as the perfect makeshift platform, giving me a level working area as well as a versatile height that was required in replicating the same composition exactly.

In terms of selection, I studied Cotán's work closely. He used an apple, a head of lettuce, a melon, and a cucumber, some suspended in the air, others placed with great care on a plane. I did the same with my own choice of produce—an apple and a cucumber, straight-up calling out the source, and a pear and a pomelo that I brought in as creative substitutes. Most crucial to me was not only replicating the forms but also duplicating the color harmony of the work. The soft greens, yellows, and earth tones of the original were echoed in my choice of produce, with visual consistency even in the transitions.

Maybe the most fulfilling aspect of the process was suspending the fruit. At first, I worried that it might take hours to figure out how, but brainstorming got me going. I found a thick thread in my mom's sewing box and used it to thread both the pear and the apple. Then, with two small pieces of tape, I carefully taped the threads to the back of the cupboard above,

hanging the fruits at just the right height and angle. This hanging was not merely a technical trick—it was a nod towards Cotán's original intention of defying gravity and transforming the ordinary into something holy and serene.

Once the composition looked balanced, I turned my attention to photography. Natural light coming through the kitchen window offered contrast and texture, and I allowed shadows and reflections to enhance it. The photo was finished in a matter of minutes. The completed photograph, modern in setting and content, is also timeless in appearance—still, peaceful, and quietly rich in symbolism.

What I was most intrigued by in this recreation was how a painting from centuries ago could be meaningfully reinterpreted in terms of contemporary Armenian life. The composition I created does not depend on costly props or studio lighting—it was constructed out of the textures and instruments of everyday life: kitchen fruit, sewing thread, tape, and improvisation. But that is precisely what still life is all about—raising the mundane, framing the humble, and finding beauty in stillness.

N2

Recreating Giuseppe Arcimboldo's "L'ortolano (The Vegetable Gardener)" (1590) was a matter of more than just visual copying—it was a moment of cultural reinterpretation, playfulness with food, and artistic communion across centuries. Arcimboldo's initial painting, a surreal work where vegetables and greens of salad shape a human face, is already full of metaphor and painterly ingenuity. His portrait breaks down the divisions between man and nature, civilization and earth, reminding us of our dependence on the land and the sustenance it

brings us. Standing in my kitchen, surrounded by the sweet aroma of fresh vegetables, I knew I was not merely replicating a painting—I was infusing it with a modern Armenian spirit.

My recreation was that of spontaneity and instinct. I did not need to plan or make drawings—it began from the moment I opened the fridge. What was contained within was not a random assortment of ingredients, but a palette grounded in Armenian culinary traditions: red, ripe tomatoes, crispy lettuce, earthy radishes, fragrant coriander, and of course, the infamous carrot. These are common ingredients in Armenian kitchens, frequently combined in a cool summer salad served around a family table. To use them to build a face—a semblance of a person out of vegetables—was to bring personality to something that already has profound cultural significance to me.

Emotionally, it was a very light and fun process, almost like having food again as a kid, but with more appreciation for art and symbolism. There was even humor in watching my version take shape. My piece was much less spooky and mysterious a gaze on Arcimboldo's behalf as it turned out to be quite funny—and perhaps even lovable in its own right because it was so simplistic. It was comforting, the way a vegetable being might greet you at a farmer's market. And that wasn't by mistake. I think the "Armenianization" of the piece toned down the surreal nature of the original and added warmth to it. That is what home food does—it comforts, deactivates the defenses, welcomes.

Symbolically, I see this recreation as a nod to tradition. Arcimboldo used food as metaphor—talking about identity, nature, even vanity. In my version, those same connotations apply, but are also filtered through the prism of contemporary, local sensibility. The shiny metal bowl that I used as the hat, something common in any kitchen, is now a mythical crown on top of this vegetable face. It is the daily ritual of meal preparation, the unglamorous yet intimate

activity of chopping, stirring, and breaking bread. In doing so, the "vegetable gardener" is not only a Renaissance figure, but a modern Armenian one—as one who inhabits our kitchens, gardens, and dinner tables.

Best of all what I enjoyed in this experience was how relaxed and spontaneous it was. Differently from other kinds of recreation in which I have been engaged, that might include intricate setting-up or intense expressiveness, this one felt very natural. It was like seeing art as a cheerful, made-up thing, emerging from the materials we already know and adore—like a simple Armenian salad on a warm summer afternoon.

N3

I recreated an old Dutch "Still life painting with Berries" by Osias Beert (1608) in the middle of my home—our kitchen—integrating into it both modern and Armenian cultural elements. The original painting is a rich, detailed work with rich glassware, gold-plated metal dishes, and a profusion of cherries and berries, all carefully arranged on a dark wood table under melancholic lighting. It is a photographic ode to excess, luxury, and the fleeting nature of earthly pleasures. I did not want to recreate it but reinterpret it in terms of what I had to work with, reworking the composition into something more personal and relevant, but faithful to the essence of the original.

The kitchen counter was the ideal location for this recreation, not only for convenience but because of the natural light pouring in through the window beside it. The diffused, bright daylight emphasized the textures and colors of each object, replicating the dramatic light and dark contrast of the original painting. I picked three different glasses from our kitchen cabinet—each with a distinct vintage-like cut, recalling the baroque goblets of the original. I set one with

water and the others with apple juice, a practical and modern substitute for what would have been wine or ale centuries ago, but one that still closely mimics the color and depth of the liquids in the painting.

The fruits were key to getting that feeling of abundance. I found fresh strawberries in the fridge and split them between a golden-colored bowl and a silver platter—repeating the mixed plates in the original. Without cherries, the strawberries still got that burst of red, juicy opulence. I even set a few loose strawberries and olives on the counter to mirror the choreographed "messiness" of the painting, which is used to add life and vitality to a static piece. The olives in the back, kept in a small plastic dish, are perhaps a modern touch, but their positioning and function are true to the use of a similar dish in the original.

One of my favorite improvisations was to replace the fancy knife used in the original with this huge, fancy spoon that we had at home. Its handle, which was shaped like a butterfly-shaped flower, had that very ornamental look that suited so beautifully into the overall look of the painting. Lastly, to give it a recognizably Armenian feel, I replaced the European-style bread roll with a piece of lavash—to me, the most special traditional flatbread in every Armenian household. However, this would not only make the image local but also, symbolically would insert my identity and heritage into a very traditional Western language.

This recreation is intended to be a nostalgic, yet thoughtful, emotional space where the elegance of the past meets the warmth of personal memory. The original still life painting has an air of formality and luxury and perhaps a little reminder of mortality, typical of Dutch Baroque art. My version, on the other hand, softens that tone by bringing it into a familiar, everyday space: my kitchen. By juxtaposing the sublime with the everyday, I hope the viewer will feel both wonder at the classical loveliness and a cozy sense of familiarity with the here and now.

And then there's that element of cultural pride I wish to invoke—especially through the Armenian elements, such as the lavash. It is a subtle yet potent reminder that art and history do not need to be limited to Western narratives alone; they may be localized, reinterpreted, and made our own. I want viewers to appreciate that even quotidian environments and mundane objects can hold beauty and meaning if perceived through an artist's eyes. In brief, I would like the audience to feel both grounded and uplifted—to realize the beauty of where we originate from and what we possess, and how that can be equally significant as a painting in a museum.

This recreation was a conversation between epochs, styles, and cultures. Since I used objects from my own home, I could link a centuries-old artistic convention with the cadences of my own daily life, introducing Armenian elements that rendered the still life not only a reproduction but an interpretation full of personal and cultural significance.

N4

Inspired by the Dutch still life painting "Glasses, Smoking Implements, and Cards" by Jan Jansz van de Velde (1653), I embarked on recreating this timeless work in a contemporary, localized, and Armenian context. What followed was not merely a reproduction, but an interpretation—one that combined historical process with personal and cultural narrative. The most important and probable first step to recreating it was to locate the right site. The diffused, subdued lighting of the original painting was needed in the same manner if the reproduction were to succeed. A walk through various rooms and areas of the house followed in search of just the right setting. Finally, the kitchen counter was discovered, with its empty surface and placement near a soft light source from which it might be possible to achieve the diffusion of light.

Having found the place, I began to collect the objects. I selected two glasses from the kitchen—a martini glass and a tall beer glass—to represent the glassware in the original painting. To prepare the golden liquid in both vessels, I took apple juice, which is easily found at home, and added a bit of water to achieve the precise color. However, replicating the foam of the beer was an issue. Taking a cue from the techniques of advertising photography, I coated the surface of the beer glass with a film of dish soap foam. The trick provided the foamy appearance of the original artwork without disrupting the illusion of reality.

Among the more inventive liberties I took was replacing the antiquated clay pipe with a modern vape device. The replacement was not random. The pipe in the original painting denoted leisure and, very likely, indulgence—a motif that remains relevant today. By substituting the pipe with a vape, I not only updated the symbolism to reflect current trends among youth but also created a cultural bridge between the 17th century and modern-day Armenia. The vape is a visual metaphor for how societal behaviors evolve while underlying themes of the human condition remain constant.

Another fundamental reinterpretation was the addition of sunflower seeds. The artist of the original had included nuts and shells strewn about the table—icons again of excess and transience. In my reinterpretation, I replaced them with sunflower seeds, the ultimate Armenian social culture snack food. Sunflower seeds are inextricably linked with casual social gatherings, conversations, and laid-back hours in Armenian culture. Their existence not only placed the work but also offered an autobiographical quality to the piece. The fragments of sunflower seeds remind us of hangouts, mirroring the atmosphere of friendship and laid-back recreation. More precisely, this detail aids in the rendering of a notably masculine atmosphere—a scene akin to social spaces commonly associated with clusters of young Armenian men comfortably passing

time, trading stories, drinks, and laughs. It captures a space in which masculinity is defined not by acts of heroism, but by relaxed, shared habits of daily life.

The metal tray, originally containing a mix of seeds or spices, was substituted with a modern ornate dish, ornamented with golden butterflies on the handle. The inclusion, though not directly in the original piece, contributed a soft note of elegance and transformation—perhaps implying the dynamic nature of tradition.

Finally, the playing cards in the original and my recreation are virtually identical in meaning. They signify chance, hazard, and the fleeting nature of enjoyment—the universal themes that transcend centuries. Their inclusion highlights the modern elements in the recreation of the philosophical roots of the still-life tradition.

This recreation preserves the compositional balance and symbolic richness of the original but incorporates contemporary Armenian elements that are synonymous with contemporary living. It is now a dialogue between past and present, East and West, and ultimately, between artist and audience.

N5

The original painting that inspired my second recreation is Willem Claesz. Heda's "Still Life with Oysters, a Rummer, a Lemon and a Silver Bowl" (1634), a quintessential 17th-century Dutch banquet scene. With a detailed focus on texture, reflection, and symbolic abundance, Claesz captured the extravagance and subtle moral undercurrents of the Dutch Golden Age. My own recreation aims to not only pay homage to his artistic mastery, but to reinterpret his work through a modern Armenian lens—infusing contemporary culture, daily life, and localized elements into a timeless visual tradition.

As compared to the first recreation, in which location scouting was an exploratory process, in this case, I already knew the specific location where I could recreate the light and composition of the original. The cabinet in the living room was a perfect set. At 8 a.m., the sun strikes the surface at the exact angle to produce the soft but dramatic lighting that recalls Claesz's dramatic highlights. Natural lighting was essential—it was used to produce the depth and contrast required to breathe into each object a sense of realism, such as in the original. In the original, lighting is a light of morning, signaling a setting that has occurred in the aftermath of a party or gathering, where signs of celebration persist. That tacit narrative suggested by the light was something I strove consciously to replicate in my reimagining, using the pre-dawn light to accomplish that same still afterward and sense of presence that lingers in absence.

I began assembling the scene with two decorative plates taken from my grandmother's antique collection. Their ornate gold trim was not just visually pleasing but reminiscent of the silverware and tableware opulence seen in Claesz's still life. Instead of using the original's herring and lemon—items of luxury and delicacy in 17th-century Holland—I decided to reinterpret them with a partially peeled apple, chosen for both its practical availability and symbolic potential. The apple, drizzled with syrup to evoke a glossy, painterly effect, mirrors the spiral of the peeled lemon in Claesz's painting, offering a visual echo while recontextualizing the object within my cultural and domestic reality.

In trying to modernize the choice of food in a manner that the focus on the extravagance of the original is preserved, I replaced the walnuts and shells with Armenian chocolates—refined, colorful, and meaningful. They are more symbolic of modern-day treats, similar to nuts at the time Claesz worked. The addition of chocolates as symbols of luxury also adds a host-like and warm tone to Armenians.

Drinkware in my understanding includes a wine glass and a common glass, each filled with water. This is a literal echo of Claesz's rich introspection within the crystal-clear fluid of the goblet and beaker. While I did not seek to replicate the intricate optical illusion of his crystal clear fluids as much, utilizing water nonetheless emphasizes transparency and purity, in line with the reflective tranquility that still-lives typically evoke.

One of the most symbolic substitutions in this redo is the 20,000-dram bill for the crumpled dollar of Claesz's painting. Capital in his piece symbolized trade, wealth, and the growing capitalist economy of 17th-century Europe. My decision to add Armenian money—neatly folded and placed partially under the plate—was a conscious way of injecting national identity into the universal theme of wealth and value. It also bridges the past concept of economic status with modern-day Armenian life, where money still quietly but evidently lingers within domestic spaces.

Aesthetically, I paid attention to the composition and balance of textures. The leaned metal tray against the second plate re-establishes the dynamic diagonals in the original, while the haphazard arrangement gives the impression of spontaneity with careful beauty—desirable traits of an excellent still life.

This reimagining not only mirrors the visual composition of Claesz's painting but transports its meaning to a 21st-century Armenian context. Both paintings include objects as symbols of luxury, fleetingness, and earthly delights. My substitution of modern equivalents—chocolate for nuts, apple for lemon, and dram for dollars—makes those symbols local without losing their significance. The timeless message persists: material excess is fleeting, and real beauty is in relishing the here and now.

N6

In my modernized-Armenianized recreation of “Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill” by Pieter Claesz (1628), I sought to merge the symbolic gravity of 17th-century Vanitas art with the familiar warmth and realism of a contemporary Armenian household—more specifically, my father’s study room. The original painting, a quintessential Vanitas still life, evokes themes of mortality, transience, and the ephemerality of worldly knowledge. Claesz places a human skull next to a toppled glass, an extinguished lamp, a feather quill, and aged books—objects traditionally associated with intellect, creativity, and life’s fleeting pleasures. This composition communicates a quiet but poignant message: all things pass, no matter how noble or brilliant.

To recreate this painting, I intentionally chose my father’s study room because it already carries the essence of a modern thinker’s workspace. It is a personal, lived-in space filled with subtle markers of daily mental labor: notebooks, files, pens, and a laptop mouse—tools that, like the quill and inkwell in the original painting, symbolize communication, thought, and work. I did not need to bring these items in; they were already scattered on the desk, just as Claesz might have imagined them centuries ago, adding authenticity and an emotional layer of intimacy to the scene.

In reinterpreting the toppled goblet and clay lamp, I borrowed objects from our kitchen—a delicately carved wine glass and an ornate candy dish—to reflect modern domestic life while still maintaining the aesthetic drama of the original. These objects preserve the sense of refinement and indulgence, albeit in a new cultural context. The crowning element—the skull—was a deliberate addition I ordered from an online store. Placing it beside my father’s belongings served as a jarring yet contemplative reminder of mortality, echoing the exact emotional weight

that Vanita paintings carried: a reflection on the inevitability of death, even in the most intellectual or comfortable environments.

In Claesz's painting, the skull is the central *memento mori*—a reminder of the inevitability of death and the fragility of human life. It is a generalized symbol, placed in a neutral, timeless study meant to speak to anyone, regardless of background. In your recreation, the skull takes on a more intimate resonance. Though still symbolizing mortality, its placement among my father's real-life belongings—his book, files, and tools—makes it feel personal. It's no longer a philosophical abstraction but a tangible meditation on the fleeting nature of *his* lineage, legacy, and familial memory.

Claesz uses a feather quill, parchment, and a heavy manuscript to suggest classical learning and scholarship. These are the tools of a Renaissance humanist or scholar—symbols of intellectual pursuit that were deeply tied to the written word and traditional education. My recreation replaces these with a pen and a computer mouse—symbols of contemporary thought, writing, and communication. This shift suggests a broader cultural evolution, from slow, deliberate scholarship to the fast-paced, digital knowledge economy of today. The symbolic contrast highlights how intellectual labor has changed, but the existential weight it carries remains constant.

Claesz's background is stark and anonymous, meant to universalize the message. My recreation, by contrast, is deeply rooted in my own life. The choice of my father's study makes the composition culturally and emotionally specific. It reflects Armenian identity not only through setting but also through reverence for generational wisdom and personal narrative. This cultural personalization introduces a layer of symbolism not present in the original: life and death are not only philosophical concerns—they are embedded in relationships, memory, and heritage.

What makes this recreation uniquely Armenian is not just the location, but the spirit of familiarity and familial reverence woven into the composition. The room itself holds emotional weight; it is a space shaped by daily routine, fatherly wisdom, and personal memory. By placing historically symbolic items among these deeply familiar elements, I hoped to create a dialogue between past and present, between grand philosophical themes and everyday life. The skull is no longer just a general memento mori; it is a reflective anchor in a setting where legacy, labor, and love converge.

Ultimately, I wanted viewers to feel both grounded and unsettled—to recognize how close we live to these eternal questions even in our most mundane spaces. This recreation isn't just about mimicking an old painting; it's about finding relevance, emotion, and symbolism in what we often overlook. It is about taking something distant and canonical and giving it breath, memory, and meaning in the here and now.

N7

Recreating this “A Still Life with Flowers in a Vase, Books and a Candlestick” from Spanish or Neapolitan School (1650) was a deeply personal and surprisingly emotional experience. From the moment I decided to work with this particular painting, I felt an instant connection—not just with the visual elements, but with the mood and atmosphere it conveyed. The painting’s quiet, introspective tone, its soft lighting, and the position of books, writing tools, and fading flowers all suggested something timeless: a reverence for knowledge, memory, and the fleeting nature of life. It immediately reminded me of my father’s study room—a space I have always associated with calm, wisdom, and a quiet kind of presence. Without even thinking

too much, I knew that this was the perfect location for my recreation. It already carried the same spirit.

The process of gathering objects for the composition felt almost like a ritual. I did not want to merely mimic the painting, I wanted to reinterpret it through a contemporary, Armenian lens—something that felt true to my life and my culture. I pulled books from the shelves, arranging them in a similar structure to those in the painting, but each book I chose held personal or cultural value. One of them, placed near the candles, is *Narek* by Grigor Narekatsi—a book that holds profound spiritual and literary significance for the Armenian people. It is not just a book, but a symbol of resilience, prayer, and poetic identity. Having it in the composition transformed the still life from a generic homage to a statement rooted in my heritage.

Many of the objects I included came directly from our home, which made the recreation feel more intimate. I used my father's reading glasses, a detail that quietly added his presence to the scene. He was not physically in the room when I arranged the composition, but in a way, he was everywhere—in the books, in the atmosphere of his study, in the habits and values I've absorbed from him over the years. The golden ashtray on his desk became my version of the ornate inkwell from the painting. I found another similar-looking tray in the kitchen and used that as well, emphasizing a sense of domestic continuity—how everyday objects in a modern Armenian home can still echo the elegance and symbolism of classical art.

The flowers, although fake, were chosen for their emotional symbolism. They came from our living room, and I arranged them in a simple glass to mirror the bouquet in the original painting. I liked the idea of artificial flowers standing in for real ones—it felt like a quiet nod to the way beauty is preserved in memory, or how we often try to hold onto something ephemeral.

It also represented the blend of the past and the present: a traditional aesthetic captured using modern materials.

One of the most meaningful additions for me was the candles. These are not just decorative items—they are thin, red church candles from our Armenian church. Their presence in the composition elevated the spiritual dimension of the recreation. To me, they represent faith, tradition, and a sense of community. When placed next to *Narek*, they formed a sacred little corner within the image. This was where Armenian spirituality met artistic interpretation—a point where visual culture, literature, and religion quietly conversed.

In the end, this work became much more than an exercise in visual recreation. It was a way for me to explore my roots, reflect on what home means, and reinterpret a centuries-old artistic tradition through the lens of my own life. What began as a still life became a living portrait of identity—modern, symbolic, personal, and unmistakably Armenian.

N8

This recreation was different from the others that I have done, and in many respects, it turned into a muted act of memory and reflection. The original still life painting by Pieter Gerritsz. Van Roestraeten - "Still-Life with Chinese Teabowls" (1670-1680) is a depiction of an intimate, fleeting moment—a table amid use, cups resting with coffee or tea in them, crystals of sugar alongside, and a sense that the people who were drinking from them have just stood up. It is a beautiful snapshot of daily life, a celebration of communal ritual, warmth, and presence. However, in my adaptation, I deliberately sought to turn that narrative on its head. I did not want to capture a snapshot of life in movement. I wanted, instead, to render stillness—stillness of memory, tradition, and reverence.

For this, I turned to something highly personal: my grandmother's porcelain tea set. These objects sit in our living room, in the glass doors of the "presentable" cupboard—a staple in almost every traditional Armenian home. They are typically filled with items passed down through the years, never utilized, rarely touched, but deeply cherished. They are physical manifestations of memory and continuity. The tea set I utilized was among her most beautiful possessions, and now that she has passed, it has even greater meaning. I took it out, piece by piece, and placed it with quiet attentiveness on the table right next to the cupboard where it had been kept, as though bringing something sacred back to life.

In contrast to the original painting, I have deliberately left the cups empty. This decision was at the center of the emotional and symbolic message that I wanted to convey. These cups have not been used in years—they're no longer part of a daily ritual. Now, they're artifacts of a time long past, reminders of a woman who brought love and grace to everything she did. Leaving the cups empty symbolized the void that is now a part of our existence, but also how her presence fills the room in other, more ethereal, planes. The pristine, untouched state of the porcelain was a way of honoring her—preserving her beauty, her attention to detail, and the aesthetic values she held dear.

Even the setting mattered. I did not want to place the objects in some random setting; I wanted to shoot them where they are stored—in the same living room, on the table closest to the cupboard. Something was appealing about doing the recreation on site, so the objects could remain in their place. It emphasized the idea of legacy, the things that persist with us long after people are gone. I guess, in a way, I wasn't just re-creating a still life—be that as it may, I was creating an altar of memory, an obituary for a woman whose life continues to resonate within the delicate china that she once placed with such dignity.

Visually, the two pieces differ quietly but deeply. The painting is worn—sugar spilled, liquid in the cups, careless elegance. My recreation, on the other hand, is frozen in time: clean, unviolated, complete. And that is the emotional significance of my recreation. While the original holds the beat of life, mine holds its echo. It is about how we remember, how we retain, and how we stay in touch with those we love. It's modern in its outlook, Armenian in its cultural reference, and strongly personal in its motivation. This was not simply a visual exercise—a meditation on memory, tradition, and love.

N9

Recreating Johannes van der Beeck's "Emblematic Still Life with Flagon, Glass, Jug and Bridle" (1614) was an unusual and personal experience—one that was likely the most intimate of all of my recreations. Unlike others, which necessitated a trip to the kitchen or a rearranging of household items, this one happened entirely within my room, within the realm where my personality, memories, and contemporary identity come together. The result was not just a still life—but an image poem about who I am as a young Armenian woman, living in the present, yet with pieces of the past around me.

When I first encountered Van der Beeck's still life, I was immediately drawn in by its haunting darkness and the subdued atmosphere produced by the partially hidden glass of wine, and especially the scroll of music along the bottom. What drew me in most was the musical note nestled so deliberately into the design. That was my point of entry. Because I am a piano player myself, I was able to think instantly of my old piano sheet music in my desk drawer—yellowed and torn, once my aunt's as a child. That paper is not merely paper with notes upon it—it's

emotion, heritage, and memory passed down to me over two generations of women who knew rhythm to the keys.

I placed the sheet music in the middle of my desk but then went to work decorating it. Flagons and jugs of 17th-century England gave way to the objects already in my room—feminine vases with soft, delicate curves, streamlined in design, representative of how modern woman blends tradition and simplicity. These vases, which I sketched from opposite corners of my room, replaced the lavish, baroque vessels in use during Van der Beeck's day—chosen items that are representative of self-expression and an aesthetic sense of modernity.

I then, smiling, added a symbol of modern luxury and personal identity—my Chanel lipstick. Placing it carefully next to the sheet music, I wasn't just placing a modern addition—I was placing layers of symbolism. Where the original had a bridle—a symbol of control or restraint—I placed a lipstick, a tool of self-shaping, power, and femininity. In my era, beauty is no longer just ornament—it is empowerment. The lipstick represents choice, identity, and sometimes the front that we put on.

The final item was the wine glass—literally snatched from the kitchen, filled with water. Clear, reflective, delicate—it brought balance and mirrored the original's glass, but without pretense. Water, to me, symbolized clarity, being here, and the everydayness of life. It brought the work back to its roots in the real, the unassuming, the authentic.

I adore this recreation so much is how much me it feels. It does not seek to reproduce the original precisely—it speaks in my voice, through objects invested with my recollections and modern-day environments. It catches the calm, curated beauty of a young Armenian woman's bedroom, where shards of the past mingle with symbols of today, and where there is silence

punctuated by subtle signs. It is a testament not only to the art history, but to our history, to womanhood, and to how we create our homes reflections of our inner selves.

This entire process—of months of research, creative experimentation, and introspection—has been profoundly inspiring, gratifying, and life-altering. Through the process, not only did I apply a wide range of abilities that I already had, but I also discovered new facets of my creativity and perspective. I came to understand and value that Renaissance still-life paintings are more than the careful arrangement of odd objects on a canvas; they are philosophies in visual form, filled with symbolism, emotion, and cultural importance. Most significantly, I learned that personal interpretation is what is at the heart of connecting with art. The meanings I found in each work of art—tinted with my Armenian background, memories, and today's sensibilities—are unique to me, for others will see something entirely different through their lens. This body of work reminded me that art is a continuing dialogue between past and present, tradition and innovation, and between artist and spectator.

In the end, this project was not just about recreating still-life paintings—it was about breathing new life into them through my own story, and in doing so, discovering the timeless beauty of art as a reflection of who we are.

Still life—still here.

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*Link to the Portfolio - https://drive.google.com/file/d/11-pcdyk81GByO0gvKAJChRx44v2_QWcW/view?usp=drive_link