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***Serov P.E.**, candidate of pedagogical sciences, associate professor of the department of drawing and painting of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, 191186, Saint-Petersburg, Griboyedov canal embankment, 2, lit. A., e-mail: serov_p@mail.ru*

Transmission of the materiality of objects in a picturesque still life painting for future artists of lacquer miniature painting: challenges and solutions

Abstract. The article focuses on investigating methods for transmitting the materiality of objects in instructional still life produced by aspiring lacquer miniature painters. The aim of the study is to identify the principal challenges faced by students in executing still life and propose effective pedagogical solutions tailored specifically to the peculiarities of miniature painting.

Keywords: lacquer miniature painting, still life, painting, multi-layered painting, higher education, vocational education, chiaroscuro, highlight, glazing.

Creating a still life in oil painting technique represents a pivotal phase in the educational journey of students studying lacquer miniature painting. This genre develops the skill of attentive nature study, enabling analysis of structural, chromatic and chiaroscuro characteristics of objects. Unlike other mediums such as watercolor and gouache, oil painting allows artists to achieve complex color gradations, meticulously refine textural details and attain a profoundly convincing depiction.

The relevance of this study stems not only from artistic-aesthetic considerations but also from didactic necessities in educating future lacquer miniature painters. Contemporary curricula in traditional art crafts emphasize combining classical painting techniques with current pedagogical methodologies that efficiently foster students' capacity to create artistic imagery aligned with the specifics of this unique art form.

Given this context, there is a pressing need for scientific substantiation and description of pedagogical conditions that promote transmission of materiality in still-life painting and equip students with a set of painterly techniques essential for their professional careers as miniaturists.

Pedagogical conditions represent the outcome of intentional selection, identification and application of content elements, methods (techniques) and organizational forms of instruction aimed at achieving didactic goals [1].

Within this study, such conditions refer to pedagogically organized circumstances of instruction: sequential steps, arrangement selection, choice of painting techniques, all of which ensure efficient acquisition by students of methods for conveying materiality in still-life painting.

The significance of this topic is dictated by the specific nature of lacquer miniature painting, where precise reproduction of varied textures and materials in small formats, demanding a high degree of detail and delicate color nuance, assumes

paramount importance. Effective communication of materiality in oil painting can only be achieved if the assignment follows a sequence: "underpainting – modeling – glazing – highlights". Consequently, mastering a stepwise methodology for working on a pictorial still life, grounded in sequential resolution of drawing tasks, color relations, tonal construction and textural variety, contributes to the development of students' skills in accurately representing the material characteristics of objects.

Conveying materiality in oil painting is a goal – oriented artistic process founded on the utilization of color, chiaroscuro and textural means, enabling faithful visualization of physical properties, optical characteristics and textures of depicted objects. This method distinguishes materials according to their external attributes (luster, transparency, density, roughness, reflective capability, etc.) within the framework of the oil painting technique. The process involves conscious spatial and plastic structuring of the object, revealing its volume and internal structure through interaction of color, light, shadow, highlights and reflections, taking into account the material's specific features. As a result, viewers are able to unambiguously interpret the portrayed item as having a concrete material foundation and compelling visual authenticity.

In art pedagogy, still life is viewed not simply as a depiction of fragments of the material world but rather as a complex system integrating tasks related to conveying materiality, volume, color, texture and the author's perspective on reality. Despite the apparent simplicity of the depicted objects – be it utensils, fruits, flowers, or books – the genre of still life demands from students a high degree of observational acuity, analytical skills and artistic prowess. This is because it is precisely through studying these properties that the formation of artistic vision occurs – a necessity for any future lacquer miniature painter.

Historically, the genre of still life reached its definitive form at the intersection of the 16th and 17th centuries in the artistic cultures of Holland and Flanders, where works by such masters as Pieter Claesz, Willem Heda and Frans Snyders established standards for the depth of materiality representation, subtleties of light and color, and formulated a stable system of composing spatial organization, which continues to guide contemporary artists and educators alike [2, p.45]. However, for educational purposes, the greatest value lies in the academic (educational) still life, serving not only as a tool for forming fundamental drawing skills but also as a basis for developing analytical thinking and visual memory.

Academic still life refers to deliberately structured educational setups where carefully selected objects are grouped according to criteria of form, tone, color and texture, with illumination thoughtfully arranged to reveal essential properties ranging from volumetric construction to color relationships and textural differences. Personal experience working with students demonstrates that such settings enable future lacquer miniature painters to master laws of perspective and chiaroscuro, as well as make informed choices regarding expressive means for communicating specific materials – critical skills when dealing with multifigure or ornamental compositions.

Domestic scholarship has developed a rich exercise system that accommodates variations in educational tasks: arrangements may differ in dominant

color scheme (warm vs. cool tones), character of color combinations (contrasting or analogous), type of lighting (hard, side, diffused), duration of execution (from quick sketch studies to extended compositional work). This flexibility permits tailoring the educational process to match students' levels of preparedness and the artistic challenges they encounter throughout their training.

Properly structured academic still life plays a crucial role in the professional development of students: it not only ensures the formation of technical skills in depicting form, light, color and texture but also promotes the development of compositional thinking, the ability to perceive the whole without neglecting details, and fosters a mindful attitude towards artistic materials. Systematic engagement with academic still life serves as a cornerstone for subsequent individual creative growth, including in the field of lacquer miniature painting, where the ability to discern finely the material and optical properties of objects and skillfully handle lighting nuances becomes decisive for successful completion of independent work.

In the professional training of lacquer miniature painters, the staged approach to working on still life in oil painting remains highly relevant. This is due to the complexity involved in conveying not only color and chiaroscuro relationships but also the material structure of depicted objects [5, p. 5].

At the initial stage, it is advisable to commence work on the academic still life not by immediately transferring the composition to canvas but by completing preparatory sketches. It is recommended to create at least two small drafts: one tonal (black-and-white) and another color-related.

This approach allows for predetermining the main compositional and color decisions, lighting and general chromatic coherence of the future work. At this stage, detailing is not a priority; instead, focus is directed towards identifying the balance between light and dark masses and the overall color scheme of the still life. The tonal sketch is typically done with graphite pencil or ink, rendered in a generalized manner emphasizing distribution of light and shadow. The color sketch might be executed on primed cardboard in a painterly fashion; what matters here is quickly and holistically marking the primary color relationships and identifying the color characteristics of shades present in the scene.

On the second stage, it is essential to concentrate on building a preliminary underpainting sketch on canvas (using the composition determined in earlier sketches), which not only outlines the main compositional and color resolutions but also defines the distribution pattern of light and shadow. Here, it is beneficial to clarify proportions, constructive structure of each object, and their placement in space.

Personal experience indicates that emphasizing ease and conciseness in the underpainting contributes to maintaining freshness and liveliness in subsequent painting layers. Using a brush instead of pencil or charcoal allows immediate volumetric modeling through tonal relationships without compromising ground structure. A transparent underpainting applied thinly with umbra or neutral pigment (grisaille technique) establishes a foundation for further work, permitting refinements in proportions, tonality, spatial positioning and structural form without overloading the surface with dense layers.

Practice shows that at this stage, there is a significant risk of applying overly thick and heavy layers of paint, leading to disruption of color relationships and resulting in irreversible technical problems such as darkening or cracking of the painting layer. Discipline in conserving materials and strict adherence to the principle of gradual transition from broad relationships to details prevent such errors (Table 1).

The third stage of work involves sequentially uncovering the volume and material properties of each object by comparing color and chiaroscuro relationships. Here, the method of impasto writing on illuminated parts of the form, utilizing dense, pastose strokes enriched with white paint, gains prominence. Meanwhile, luster techniques are employed in shaded areas, enabling the achievement of color depth and nuanced shading without excessive thickness. This approach instills in students a sense of plastic expressiveness required for conveying the individual characteristics of materials, whether copper, nickel-plated metal, glass or fabric.

It is critically important that attention to texture development does not overshadow the task of preserving color integrity and volume, otherwise objects lose their persuasiveness and dissolve into the compositional background. The efficacy of the phased method is particularly evident when working with transparent materials, where the difficulty of conveying materiality and three-dimensional form intensifies due to the necessity of accounting for color reflections, translucent layers and mutual influence of surrounding objects.

The fourth stage, being the culminating point, aims to integrate all previously discovered solutions to create a unified and expressive painting study, where spatial organization is achieved through judicious distribution of color strokes and highlighting of planes. Here, the colored stroke acquires intrinsic value and separate brushwork along contours accentuates the viewer's focus on key compositional elements while simultaneously underscoring the characteristics of texture, illumination and spatial positioning of objects.

Professional experience confirms that rigorously adhering to these stages not only builds technical proficiency but also fosters the kind of vision necessary for mastering oil painting techniques and effectively conveying the materiality of objects in still life.

We can conclude that systematically carrying out all stages of work contributes not only to commanding oil painting techniques but also to achieving materiality in represented objects, which is particularly important in the context of lacquer miniature painting.

Table 1

Main errors and recommendations at stages of work on an academic still life

Stage	Common mistakes	Recommendations
Stage 1. Sketches	Excessive detailing	Focus on composition and primary tonal and chromatic relationships
Stage 2. Underpainting, construction	Excessively thick paint layer, damage to ground texture	Utilizing transparent paints, adhering to glazing technique, conserving materials

Stage 3. Refinement of form and color	Mixing color relationships, loss of volume	Separating work between lit and shaded areas, employing impasto and glazing techniques
	"Dirty" colors and murky shadows: improper palette mixing on canvas	Following multilayer technique, allow each layer to dry
	Errors in layer sequence (in multilayer technique)	Strictly follow the stages of still life execution
Stage 4. Completion of the study, summarization	Loss of compositional coherence, absence of perspective plans	Structuring space through separate brush strokes and color-tone relationships
	Violation of compositional wholeness due to overemphasis on details	Embrace the principle of moving from general to specific

During the analysis of theoretical and practical aspects of materiality representation in still life, particular attention is paid to the nature of chiaroscuro modeling, which determines not only the spatial location of objects but also the specific properties of the depicted material. Table 2 presents comparative characteristics of the chiaroscuro structure of four materials: plaster, clay, glass and metal.

Table 2

Comparative characteristics of chiaroscuro structure in various materials

Material	**Nature of transitions from light to shadow**	**Blur of boundary**	**Intensity of highlights**	**Nature of reflections**	**Specifics of visual perception**
Plaster	Smooth, gradual	High	Very low	Nearly absent	Matt, homogeneous, soft surface
Clay Fabric	Smooth, gradual	High	Low	Insignificant	Matt, pliable, warm
Porcelain	Smooth, gradual	High	High	Insignificant	Matt, homogeneous, soft surface
Glas	Sharp	Low	High	Clearly expressed	Transparent, reflections are present
Metal	Contrasting, often sharp	Very low	Very high	Clearly outlined	Glossy, reflective, bright highlights

Using plaster and clay as examples, we observe a high degree of smoothness in transitions from light to shadow – boundaries between illuminated and shaded areas are blurred, creating soft, barely perceptible contrasts. Intensity of highlights in these materials is extremely low or absent altogether, as their matte surfaces uniformly scatter light. Conversely, glass and metal exhibit sharply demarcated boundaries between light and shadow. Bright local highlights stand out prominently,

reflecting light sources and environmental objects: in glass, these highlights tend to be linear and replicate the shapes of surroundings; in metals, they are punctiform, saturated and starkly contrasting.

Thus, the table clearly illustrates that the key discriminatory parameters for artists are the degree of blur in chiaroscuro transitions and the intensity of highlights (Fig. 1[31]).

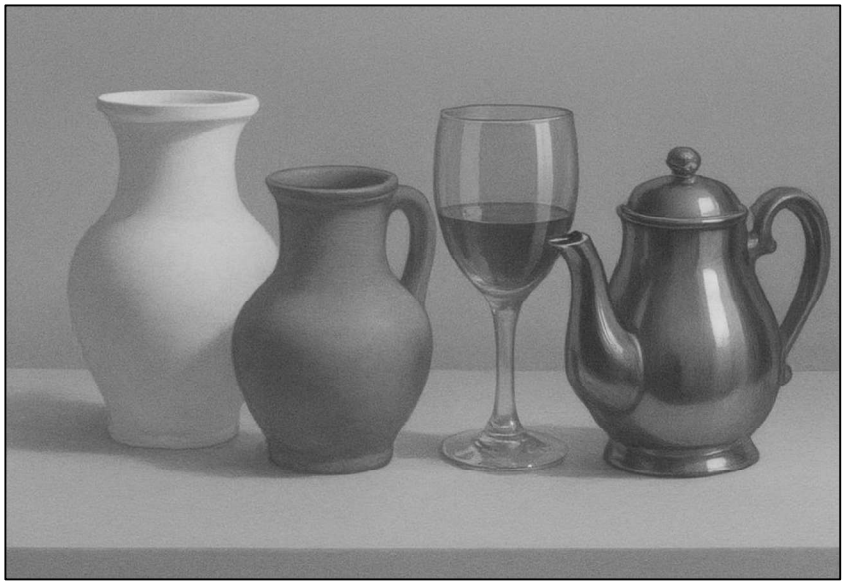

Fig. 1. Nature of chiaroscuro modeling in plaster, clay, glass and metal

It can be stated that such differentiation of visual characteristics of materials has not only practical but also methodological significance for the formation of students' artistic vision and the development of their technical skills in conveying materiality in still life painting.

The personal experience suggests that emphasizing these nuances in teaching lacquer miniature painting allows students not only to mimic the outward appearance of objects but also to achieve credible depiction of mass, weight and surface texture sensations. Therefore, the materiality of depicted items ceases to be an abstract artistic task and becomes a foundation for sound composition and a means of enhancing the expressiveness of the artistic image. Thus, a comprehensive approach to analyzing the nature of chiaroscuro, the specifics of highlights and reflections, based on comparing theoretical and practical parameters, forms an understanding among trainees of the regularities governing the transmission of the material essence of objects in still life, which is particularly significant for the professional training of lacquer miniature painters. [6, p. 149].

In contemporary theories and practices of painting instruction, a prominent place is occupied by the problem of differentiated representation of various surface types depending on their light reflection characteristics, which is especially important in the training of future lacquer miniature painters. Summarizing data from artistic methodologies and my own observations, it is possible to identify three

[31] Fig. 1, 2. Generated by ChatGPT neural network.

key groups of surfaces: matt, glossy and strongly shiny, each presenting its own technical and compositional requirements to the artist.

Matte materials – ceramics, fabrics, untreated wood – are characterized by pronounced light scattering, which causes soft shadows and almost complete absence of bright highlights; shadows on such objects have a velvety structure and merge into the illuminated areas imperceptibly, without noticeable borders (Table 3).

Table 3

Characteristics of light and shadow structure of surfaces according to reflection types

Surface type	Nature of light reflection	Transitions from light to shadow	Nature of highlights	Degree of prominence of reflections	Examples of objects
Matt	Diffuse, scattered	Smooth, blurred	Absent or very weak	Insignificant	Lemon, ceramics, fabric
Glossy	Moderately reflective	Fairly smooth	Moderately bright	Prominent, but not harsh	Lacquered wood, fruit
Strongly shiny	Moderately reflective	Sharp, contrasting	Bright, localized	Maximally pronounced	Metal, glass, mirror

In the case of glossy surfaces, for example, lacquered wood or some types of fruits, the appearance of moderately pronounced highlights is observed, and tonal transitions remain relatively smooth, albeit less blurred than in matte objects.

In turn, strongly shining surfaces – glass, metal, mirror – act as optical reflectors, providing bright, saturated highlights and sharp contrasts between illuminated and shaded areas, which fundamentally change the compositional solution of the still life. Figure 1 clearly demonstrates the specificity of light-shadow structure for each type of material: the matte surface of the lemon is executed with emphasis on halftone transitions and textural porosity, whereas the metal teapot is depicted with intentionally left white areas on the canvas, simulating maximally intense highlights and creating an impression of shine (Figs. 1, 2). As noted in specialized methodological manuals [4, p. 25] a student working on a still life must, at the preliminary analysis stage, determine the optical properties of the object's surface and select adequate techniques for conveying its materiality. Based on years of personal teaching experience in painting, we stress that the crucial moment is the students' ability to consciously differentiate techniques for rendering chiaroscuro: for matte surfaces, avoid hard highlights; for glossy surfaces, especially metal and glass, utilize compositional techniques based on contrasts and localized light spots. This approach enables achieving not only technically accurate but also artistically expressive representations, as confirmed by practical results of classroom exercises (Table 5; Fig. 3). Overall, mastering the rules of chiaroscuro modeling for different types of surfaces not only builds technical proficiency but also deepens students' understanding of the nature of representational materials, which is critically important for the professional development of lacquer miniature painters.

Fig. 2. Examples of varying light-shadow structure of surfaces according to reflection types

In the academic practice of developing professional skills for future lacquer miniature painters, the mastery of the principles of form construction and perspective is of fundamental importance. Research findings [2; 4; 5] and personal pedagogical experience confirm that without a thorough grasp of drawing fundamentals, including the ability to accurately convey the volume of an object, any attempts at detailed rendering of texture or chiaroscuro nuances prove ineffective and, often, entirely futile in terms of achieving a believable representation.

This issue is most acute in simple household objects commonly featured in still life, such as pitchers, vases and fruits. Even slight distortions in the construction of ellipses or hesitant determination of proportions result in the breakdown of form integrity. Consequently, even the most painstaking simulation of surface appears unconvincing, and the object visually loses its volume. Only precise adherence to the principles of constructing simple geometric bodies – sphere, cube, cylinder – empowers the student to successfully analyze and reproduce more complex forms in elaborate compositions (Table 4).

Teaching experience validates that systematic work on construction, with emphasis on spatial organization, enables beginning artists not only to avoid errors in volume representation but also to establish a firm foundation for introducing subsequent painting details, such as highlights, reflections, cracks and other signs of materiality. Within this context, the academic drawing course, built on a gradual progression from simple forms to complex ones, proves most productive in terms of developing skills in artistic analysis and visual synthesis. If a student understands that the ellipse of a vase neck must be constructed according to perspectival foreshortening, then all elements of chiaroscuro and local color accents automatically assume their rightful positions, enhancing the sensation of plasticity

and credibility of the object. Hence, an important methodological conclusion arises: the sequence, wherein volume is first constructed and then facture processing is applied, not only helps overcome typical errors but also fosters the student's ability to see the composition as a whole, which is particularly valued in the specificity of lacquer miniature painting, demanding high precision and exquisite form treatment [7, p. 4].

Table 4

Correlation of still life household items with geometric prototypes and chiaroscuro characteristics

Household object	Geometric prototype	Chiaroscuro characteristics	Key indicator of volume
Apple	Sphere	Central highlight, uniform halftone, shadow around circumference	Well-defined volume
Bottle, glass	Cylinder	Vertical axis of chiaroscuro, smooth transition on sides	Elongation, stable axis
Pitcher, vase	Combination of ellipses and cylinder	Complex combination of elliptical highlights and shadows	Elongation, stable axis
Box, Book	Cube	Sharp boundaries between light and shadow, three visible planes	Straightness, planes

Transmitting the materiality of objects in a still life painting poses a complex challenge for future lacquer miniature painters, combining theoretical and practical facets of academic training.

The primary challenges facing students studying lacquer miniature painting stem from the necessity of mastering technical techniques and painting technology to convincingly and accurately depict the textures of various materials on a miniature surface.

Let us now analyze the practical implementation of all conditions identified in the study (sequentiality, chiaroscuro, materials) using the example of a still life entitled “Study of complex thematic still life 'Art'”, which can serve as a demonstrative aid for students of lacquer miniature painting learning methods of materiality transfer (Fig. 3[32]).

On the canvas, a complex academic setting has been composed – a classic "thematic still life" – where against the backdrop of a gypsum relief depicting Madonna and Child, objects of various textures are positioned, including:

- three-pronged metal candlestick;
- single candle (matte wax);

[32] Fig. 3. Photo from the archive of the department of drawing and painting of the Russian university of traditional art crafts.

- small ceramic milk jug – grayish gloss;

- faience pitcher-vase with rose bouquet: white, pink, yellow buds with foliage;

- old book;

- four draperies: bright blue on the tabletop plane, dark blue in the background, red velvet drape on the right and a black drape in the foreground uniting the composition.

Fig. 3. Perevozchikova S.G., specialist's degree student, year 5.
Academic study “Study of complex thematic still life 'Art'”

Light comes from above-left, setting a unified tonal key and enabling the artist to orchestrate the contrast between "cool foreground – warm background".

The work exhibits the following sequence of stages:

- semitransparent underpainting (visible faint brownish glow around the book edges and on the plaster) sets the construction and overall tone;

- form modeling: volumes of objects are clarified, connection between light

and shadow is logically established (see ellipses of vases and candleholder);

- glazes: depth of blue and black fabric, smoky shadows beneath the pitcher demonstrate layered application of paint;

- final highlights: metallic "sparks" on the candlestick, sharp highlights on the glazed neck, and pinpoint lightening on petals.

This four-stage logic fully corresponds to the proposed methodology of "underpainting – modeling – glazing – highlight", which is critically important for conveying materiality in an academic still life.

Ultimately, the execution of the still life develops the following skills in students:

- differentiation of surfaces: the viewer instantly distinguishes between metal, matte plaster, glossy ceramics, organic matter, and soft fabric;
- control of highlight as a material indicator: changes in highlight intensity and form alter the perceived texture;
- color "Cross reflection": blue reflections in metal, red in plaster create environmental unity;
- work from large masses to details: illustrating the principle of "general to specific", reducing form errors and enhancing material conviction (typical errors and recommendations are discussed in Table 1).

Therefore, the still life exemplifies the practical implementation of five methodological conditions identified in the study: sequential execution of the assignment, differentiation of painting techniques, specificity of chiaroscuro modeling, constructive basis of imaging, and targeted arrangement of the still life. It can serve as a visual guide for students of lacquer miniature painting studying methods of conveying materiality of objects (Table 5).

Table 5

Transmission of the materiality of objects in the academic still life
“Study of complex thematic still life 'Art'”

Object	Techniques for depicting materiality observed in the painting	Methodological recommendations
Gypsum relief (matte surface)	Smooth transitions from halftone to shadow without active highlights; soft warm reflection from the red drape	Surface type: "Matte" – scattered reflection, blurred boundaries between light and shadow
Metallic candlestick (highly shiny surface)	Sharp localized highlights with impasto technique; shadows reduced to deep contrasts; reflections of the blue drape are visible in halftone areas	Surface type: "Highly shiny" – bright highlights, sharp contrasts; Technique: pastose impasto painting in light areas, transparent glazes in shadows
Pitcher-vase (glazed ceramic gloss)	Moderate highlights without "mirror-like" effect; light boundaries are softer than in metal; color depth achieved through fine semi-transparent layers	Surface type: "Glossy" – combination of smooth transitions and moderately bright highlights; differentiation of painting techniques (solid/dense painting/glazing)

Roses and leaves (organic texture)	Delicate glaze layering gives petals a translucent appearance; central highlights are softened; petal edges are worked with a dry brush	Writing with glazes to convey fragile materials; principle of "from general to specific"
Book	Matte cover: absence of active highlights, warm diffused reflex; texture emphasized by contrast of paper edge	Approach to matte surfaces – avoid hard highlights, work with halftones
Blue and black draperies	The drape is modeled with large tonal relationships; folds are enhanced by deep glazes; outer folds are highlighted corporeally	Contrast of textures. Absence of bright highlights and smoothness of tonal gradations resonate with the description of "diffuse scattered reflection" for matte materials
Scarlet velvet drapery	Thick application of paint in illuminated areas, velvety texture thanks to warm halftones; deep shadows are brought closer to the cold background, forming a color reflection on the plaster	Plan separation through color tone; use of "warm/cold" color scheme as a compositional device

Based on the analysis of the presented material, the following pedagogical conditions can be identified. These conditions are specially organized educational circumstances and teaching techniques that form the basis for students' mastery of methods for conveying materiality in still life. Among the conditions determining the effectiveness of students' work on still life are:

- *sequential assignment implementation.* The effective conveyance of materiality in objects is achievable only by adhering to a sequential process: underpainting, modeling, glazing, and highlight. Each stage addresses specific artistic challenges, and their execution contributes to the development of professional competencies in lacquer miniature painting.
- *differentiation of painting techniques.* The use of dense, pastose brushstrokes on illuminated areas (impasto technique) and glazes in shadowed areas facilitates accurate depiction of textures of various materials such as metal, glass, fabric and wood.
- *specifics of chiaroscuro modeling.* Clear understanding of differences in light-reflecting properties of materials (matte, glossy, highly reflective) enables artists to consciously choose artistic means, ensuring the plausibility of the image and the integrity of the composition.
- *constructive basis of imaging*. Precise adherence to the laws of perspective and principles of geometric construction of objects in academic still life is a critically important factor, as any violations lead to a loss of credibility in material characteristics.
- *purposeful setup of still life.* Selection and grouping of objects based on form, color, texture, coupled with considered lighting, foster the development of

students' analytical skills, enabling them to convey the material properties of objects.

The study reveals that successful representation of materiality in academic still life for students studying lacquer miniature painting hinges on a clear methodology, sequential oil painting techniques and systematic examination of texture, color and chiaroscuro characteristics of different materials. Empirical evidence corroborates that adherence to these factors not only enhances technical proficiency but also fosters professional artistic thinking, essential for success in lacquer miniature technique.

This work discusses the process of creating an academic still life as an effective teaching method for future lacquer miniature painters, which contributes to the development of:

- *technological discipline* (sequential stages, layered application of paint and utilization of its texture);
- *ability to perform opto-material analysis of surfaces* (highlights, reflections, texture characteristics);
- *constructional drawing and composition* as the foundation for any textural refinement.

The sequential execution of stages in working on an academic still life – from underpainting to final highlights – enables students to master techniques essential for accurate depiction of materiality. Their acquisition assists future lacquer miniature painters in developing keen powers of observation, a sense of form and color and confidence in handling diverse textures. Practice demonstrates that it is through academic still life that enduring skills are formed, without which further professional development in lacquer miniature painting is impossible. The incorporation of described techniques in the educational process facilitates the accomplishment of primary tasks in conveying materiality, cultivates professional vision and develops competencies ensuring the quality and expressiveness of students' educational and creative works.

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