

Family Art from Home

Let's Make Tempera Paint at Home!

by Ophelia Cornet

Tempera is traditionally created by hand-grinding dry powdered pigments into a binding agent or *medium*, such as egg yolks or casein (the protein found in milk). Tempera paintings have been found on early Egyptian sarcophagi and the painted panels from the European Medieval and Early Renaissance period. In this project, we will use ground-up chalk pastel and egg yolks to make the paint. Then we will use our homemade paint to make a still life. This is an egg-cellent activity for the whole family!

Supplies Needed

- Objects for a simple still life (a bowl, fruit, tablecloth...)
- Eggs
- Pencil and eraser
- Paper—scrap paper a
- Brushes
- Bowls
- Chalk pastel or food coloring
- Stone to crush the pastels
- Gold paint (optional)

How to do it

1. Make paint!

If you are using chalk pastel, use a medium sized stone and crush each chosen color one at a time into a fine powder. Use a piece of paper under the pastel to collect the powder. Wash the stone after each color and change the paper on which you are grinding the pastels so the colors don't mix. Pour pigments into separate bowls.

Separate your egg yolks from the whites and add a yolk into each bowl. Mix well!

Add some pigment to a yolk until you have a rich color. (See Image). If using food coloring, only add a small amount so that you can keep the tempera as thick as possible. You have succeeded in making your own paint!

2. Set up a beautiful scene!

Now you are going to set up your still life. Choose objects like bowls, fruit, or a vase of flowers and arrange them on a table. Think about overlapping objects and maybe add a table cloth for added pattern. Keep it simple overall!



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3. Sketching

Using a pencil, lightly sketch what you see starting with the objects closest to you. Keep shapes fairly large on your paper and remember that items can go off the page. Have fun with this!

Think of it as a focusing exercise. Ask questions along the way: In this scene, does the avocado seem smaller than the orange? Which fruit is the furthest to the left, etc.? This will help you notice things and draw a more successful rendering of your still life. Also take deep breaths, go slow and keep that eraser close by!! (See Image).

4. Paint!

Choose the brush size that best suits the space you're going to paint. Fill a bowl with some water. Remember to squeeze out all the water from your brushes between color changes. I personally prefer to use one brush per color so there is no water, rinsing, and squeezing involved!

Begin to fill in your shapes with your homemade tempera paint. You can add little amounts of white or light yellow tempera wherever you see the light hitting the objects to give them a more three-dimensional feel. For the same reason, you might choose to add a very small amount of black chalk pigment to your colors at the very end to produce a darker version of the initial color and add some shadows to objects.

To finish your piece, choose a dark colored tempera or a store-bought gold paint to fill in the background and create a contrast to the still life painting.

