

## Masterpiece: *Seashells*, 1630-1650 by Balthasar Van Der Ast

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Keywords: Color, Line, Texture,  
Shape, Contrast, Still  
Life

Work: oil on panel

Grade: 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

Month: April

Activity: Still Life Watercolor



### Meet the Artist:

- Balthasar Van Der Ast was born around 1593 in Middelburg, Netherlands.
- An orphan at a young age, he lived with his sister and her husband Ambrosius Bosschaert, a famous still life painter. Under Bosschaert's guidance, he became one of the most distinguished still life painters in the Netherlands.
- His unique subject matter, such as seashells and fruit made him notable among his peers.
- He is considered to be one of the founders of still life painting in the Netherlands.
- Baroque era painter.
- He died at the age of 63 in 1656.

### About the Art:

*Seashells* embodies the Dutch fascination with unusual plants, flowers, and other wildlife specimens. Exotic shells were highly prized in the Netherlands during this time, and Van Der Ast chose to include shells from every continent in this painting. Van Der Ast uses and underdrawing, or single sketch, to outline the work before beginning to paint. A variety of patterns and colors on the shells as well as pearlescent reflections create a rich and textured painting. Sharp outlines and intricate patterns are used to portray each shell with zoological accuracy. The colors are muted with browns and beiges, creating a somber or introspective mood. Insects are found in many places in the painting, and bring with them a sense of movement. Van Der Ast is able to create a sense of three-dimensionality without having to use thick paint or heavy textures.

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The painting also contains a moral subtext regarding life and death that is demonstrated by the juxtaposition of the live insects and the long-dead sea creatures found in the shells. The painting illustrates the Greek concept of "vanitas," or the shortness of life, by including peaches that are ripe on this day, but may be rotten the next. (see handout from Phoenix Art Museum, attached)

### Possible Questions:

- What do you see in this painting?
- What patterns do you see in each shell? Does one of the shells make you feel a certain way? Why?
- Do you think the still life looks real? What does the artist do to make you see that?
- If you were to create your own still life, what items would you include? Why?
- Where is the contrast? (the background has dark colors, not bright/light like the foreground).

**Materials Needed:** water color paper 9x12, pencils, stencils, watercolors, brushes, erasers, shells/vase to be used for still life, black permanent markers, black construction paper 12x18.

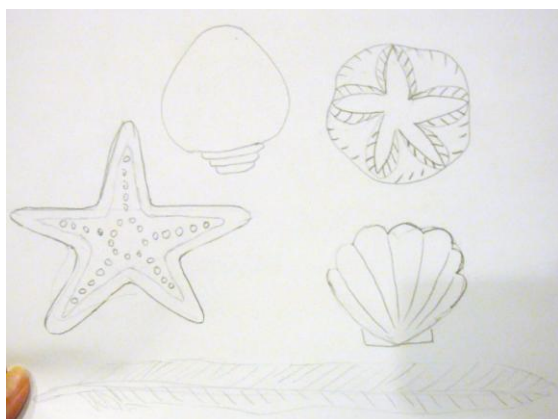
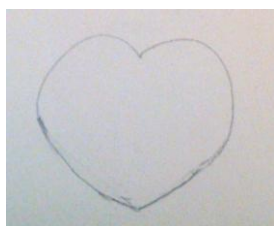
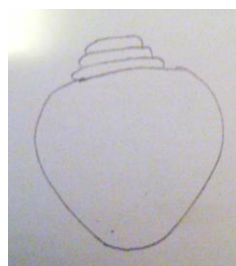
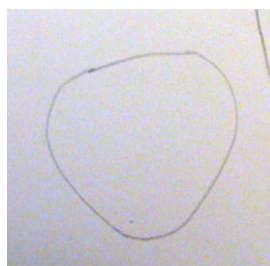
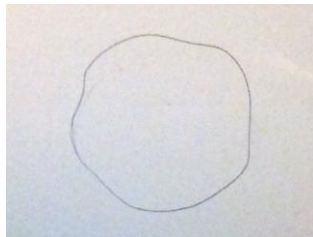
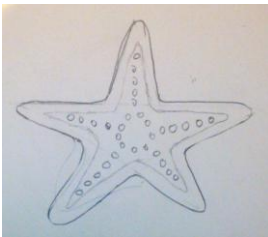
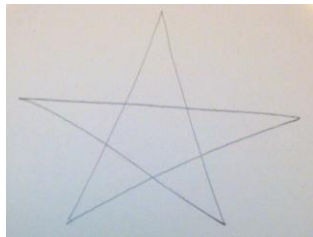
**Activity:** Still Life Watercolor

### Process:

1. Have students arrange objects into still life presentation.
2. Have them write their name and room number on the back of the paper.
3. Using pencils, sketch the scene (see attached - how to draw shells).
4. If the students need help with drawing, they can trace the shell stencils.
5. Outline shapes with black permanent marker.
6. Watercolor their still life.
7. Mount on black construction paper, label back with their name and room number.

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## ELEMENTS OF ART

*The unique way in which an artist composes the elements of art for an expressive purpose is called style. Identify the elements of art in paintings to gain an understanding of an artist's style.*



BALTHASAR VAN DER AST

Dutch, 1590-1656

*Sea Shells,*

c. 1630 - 1650

Oil on oak panel

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Donald D. Harrington 64.250

### Light

The suggestion of a light source within the image; often used to create shadow and thereby suggest three-dimensionality or for dramatic purposes.



### Texture

A simulation of the textures of a three-dimensional object.



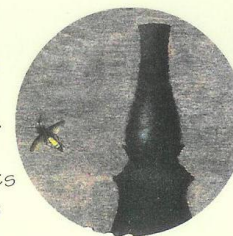
### Balance

How the artist places elements to create or deny equilibrium in the overall image.



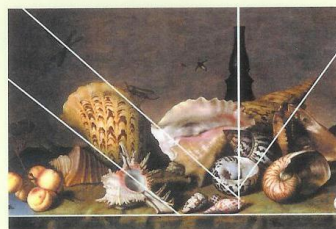
### Shape

The geometric or organic forms selected by the artist to create an image. Geometric forms often suggest man-made objects or environments; organic forms may suggest life, motion and change.



### Line

The visible or invisible lines created by elements of the image. The artist uses these lines to suggest stasis, motion, depth and to move the viewer's eye around the image.



### Color

Used for identification or expressive purposes. Colors may be placed to draw attention to specific aspects of a work.

