

**Newark Community Art Club with Elaine Winter**  
**Autumn Term 2020 Session 8:**

## **Why light is important**

**Materials needed:**

Pencil, rubber, sharpener

White paper to draw on (any size you like to work on and whatever you have at hand)

**Introduction:** This week's activity focuses on the importance of light. Different types of light affect how objects look and therefore we need to respond and change the way our drawings and paintings depict light. So, for instance, a still life arrangement can vary a lot in terms of how it looks to us, depending on whether it is lit with natural light, electric light, or combinations of the two. The direction of the light sources and the time of day and season can all play a part too.

**Activity 1:** Before you draw anything at all take some time to play around with lighting a very simple still life object. It can be something as simple as a single white or pale coloured cup or jug. Try to set it up somewhere near a window during daylight hours and see how it looks at different times of day. Morning and evening light look different to the light you get in the middle of the day. If you are doing this in the winter the light is different to the light you get in the summer as the angle of the sun is lower. Try taking photographs of the object at different times of day and see how they compare.

**Activity 2:** Using the same object, now use electric light to light it. Try lighting it with just an overhead light (like a light you would get in a living room that hangs from the ceiling, and see how it looks as you move it around the room – it may look different depending on how far away you move it from the light cast from the overhead light source. Again take photographs of how it looks in different locations. Next, try lighting the object with a table-top lamp. If you have an angle-poise lamp, use that as it will give you a bigger range of angles you can use to light your object. If you don't have an angle-poise lamp, try something like a bedside light as it will still give you a different effect to an overhead light source. Again take photos. Finally, if you have one, try using a torch and moving it to alter the effect the direction of light has on your object. Again take photographs as you go.

**Activity 3:** Now look through your photographs and compare. You will probably notice that natural light can give you a wider tonal range and more interesting shadows. By this, I mean you will see a range of tones between the very lightest and the darkest. You will also probably notice that overhead electric light is quite a 'flat' light. By this I mean you don't get such a wide tonal range and so the form tends to look flatter than it really is. Meanwhile a directional electric light like a lamp or a torch can give you a more dramatic lighting effect and shadows, which will enhance the form of your subject.

**Activity 4:** Now do a drawing of your object. You can either work from a photograph or set it up again and if the latter is easy to do I would recommend you do that. Choose the lighting you feel was most interesting to you and your object.

- Your drawing exercise is all about the importance of light but then because of light there will also be dark so let's start with tones.
- A good place to begin is to do an overall mid tone for the colour of your object. Even if it is a 'white' mug or jug it will have a tone, which is not the colour/tone of white paper so work on that first and blend it well.
- Once you have the mid tone down look for the shadows. Shadows come in two kinds. There are shadows on the object itself, these tell us about the shape and surface of the object. There are also cast shadows, which tell us about the strength, direction and placement of the light source – the stronger the light, the darker and more dramatic the shadow.
- Next look for the highlights which will also describe the light source and the surface of the object, so if you are looking at a cup or jug with a shiny glazed surface your surface will reflect more than e.g. a soft surface like wood or unglazed ceramic. There may be multiple highlights so look out for those. Use a rubber to get your highlights back in from your mid tone.

**Extension Activity:** if you have enjoyed this session you can do it with additional objects and add in some brightly coloured ones to your arrangement and check out what happens to say a white shiny surface when the colour of a bright object is reflected in it. Also, look how different colours look in natural light and electric light – it can be quite different.