



KUNST
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O.D. Ottesen, *Blomsterbillede*, 1885 (detail). Belongs to Ribe Kunstmuseum

Press Release

Still on the Table!

Beauty never goes out of fashion – and neither does our preoccupation with the fleeting nature of life and the decay of all living things. Now, Kunstmuseum Brandts presents a wealth of examples of a much-loved genre in art: the still life. Expect plenty of arrangements of fruit, candles, half-empty decanters and platters piled high.

Still on the Table! opens at Kunstmuseum Brandts on 10 October 2026.

Things are never just things. We surround ourselves with objects that hold particular significance for us, and we share photographs of everyday possessions online. Still lifes – carefully arranged compositions of objects – have fascinated artists for centuries. It is a much-loved genre that can accommodate both powerful emotions and quiet moments, extravagant living and poignant decay.

Kunstmuseum Brandts now presents the genre through more than ninety works spanning over 400 years of art history, from the symbol-laden paintings of the seventeenth century to playful present-day interpretations.



These images of dead fish, pomegranates and grapes, skulls, bread and wine may appear simple at first. However, seen together across the centuries, they take on a poetic poignancy and unexpected depth. Here, the familiar and the ordinary sit alongside the extraordinary.

For some artists, the objects depicted are laden with symbolism, evoking new life and approaching death, eroticism and vanity. For others, the interest lies in aspects of technique and experiments with form and colour.

Four centuries of art history

The exhibition traces the development of still life, exploring how it reflects a succession of changing artistic and social ideas and movements.

In the seventeenth century, still lifes were usually commissioned by patrons, and only the very wealthy could afford them. These paintings were expected to display an extravagant way of life, rendered in meticulous detail and achieving the greatest possible perfection. The exhibition includes several major international works from this period, among them *Still Life with Ham* by the Dutch painter Pieter Claesz and *Still Life with Flowers and Insects* by the Flemish painter Catharina Ykens, one of the first well-known women painters in art history.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, still lifes were no longer exclusively commissioned, giving artists greater freedom to shape the genre as they wished. Many turned to their own lives for inspiration, often making their compositions simpler and more everyday in feel. The exhibition includes works by two well-known nineteenth-century Danish still-life painters, J. L. Jensen and O. D. Ottesen.

In the nineteenth century, middle-class women also began to paint, often in order to learn skills they could pursue after marriage. With their many domestic responsibilities, women found it easier to fit a still life of flowers and household objects around their duties than a large landscape or portrait. Yet landscapes and portraits carried greater prestige and were more readily regarded as 'real' art.

Modernist form and colour

In the twentieth century, the hardships of the interwar years found their way into art, and still-life subjects became sparser and simpler. The modernists Ebba Carstensen and Christine Swane painted birdcages, which could also serve as symbols of their own lives. Other modernists, among them Vilhelm Lundstrøm, Edvard Weie and Olaf Rude, were less concerned with the symbolic significance of objects, focusing instead on simplifying form and colour.

Odilon Redon's important *Nature morte* (1900–02) and Diego Rivera's *Nature morte* (1918) exemplify the international currents that inspired several Danish painters in the early twentieth century. Among them was Georg Jacobsen, who is also represented in the exhibition.

This period saw artists challenge several of art history's long-established hierarchies. More museums had opened to the public, and art was no longer seen as the preserve of an elite.

Fast-forward to the present and we find artists such as Kåre Frang, Anna Munk and Benedikte Bjerre extending the still-life genre into the realms of sculpture and installation. Their materials range from oil paint and embroidered fabric to silicone and wood.



In Kåre Frang's *People understand butter* (2026), butter is recreated in silicone, symbolically representing food while also inviting reflection on our consumption, rising supermarket prices and price competition. Anna Kristine Hvid Petersen, meanwhile, uses traditional oil paint and painstaking techniques, but, unlike in classical still lifes, her compositions are more abstract and juxtapose objects that do not necessarily belong together.

'We are delighted that our collaboration with the Nivaagaard Collection brings two major Danish collections into conversation – from Nivaagaard's early masterpieces to the outstanding modernist works in Kunstmuseum Brandts' collection. Together with a number of wonderful loans, they offer visitors a fresh perspective on a much-loved genre and show how it has reflected social norms and developments in art over 400 years. Still life remains relevant today, when many of us also stage and capture moments for social media, creating images of who we are and how we want to be seen,' says Stine Høholt, Director of Kunstmuseum Brandts.

AT A GLANCE:

Among the many still lifes on display, visitors will find Vilhelm Lundstrøm's rigorously structured compositions, birdcages by Ebba Carstensen and Christine Swane, and Pieter Claesz's *Still Life with Ham*, alongside works by Edvard Weie, Olaf Rude, Astrid Holm, Johanne Fosie and Ursula Munch-Petersen. Contemporary art is represented by artists such as Kåre Frang, Anna Munk, Anna Kristine Hvid Petersen and Benedikte Bjerre.

Still on the Table! comprises more than ninety works presented across 750 square metres.

The exhibition has been created in collaboration with the Nivaagaard Collection, offering a unique opportunity to bring two major Danish museum collections into dialogue.

The Nivaagaard Collection contributes seventeenth-century masterpieces, while Kunstmuseum Brandts' collection is particularly strong in major works of Danish modernism.

Catalogue:

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published in collaboration with the Nivaagaard Collection.

The catalogue essays approach the exhibition's themes from a range of angles, including art-historical survey, contemporary cultural analysis, technical and historical analysis of individual works, and interdisciplinary and theoretical perspectives.

Simone Lind Rasmussen, curator at Kunstmuseum Brandts, traces the genre from the sixteenth century to the present. Focusing particularly on interpretations of still life in Danish modernism, her survey identifies everyday life as a key dimension of the Danish modernist still life.

In a peer-reviewed research essay, American art historian Catherine Powell-Warren examines the genre's early development, with particular attention to the contributions of women artists.

Writer and cultural critic Martin Kongstad reflects on the creative class's use of food as a marker of identity and status, as well as the interplay between meals and images at some of the best-known restaurants.

Drawing on literary examples penned by Inger Christensen, Vincenzo Latronico and Patricia Lockwood, a peer-reviewed research essay by Lise Villemoes Grønvold, curator at the Nivaagaard Collection, explores other ways of encountering still lifes and arrangements more broadly, particularly in today's digital image culture.



Three shorter pieces interspersed among the longer essays offer insights from contemporary artists Anna Munk, Kåre Frang and Anna Kristine Hvid Petersen. They show how the artists are taking the still-life genre in new directions: increasing its scale, extending it into three-dimensional space and engaging the senses, or turning towards living things.

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