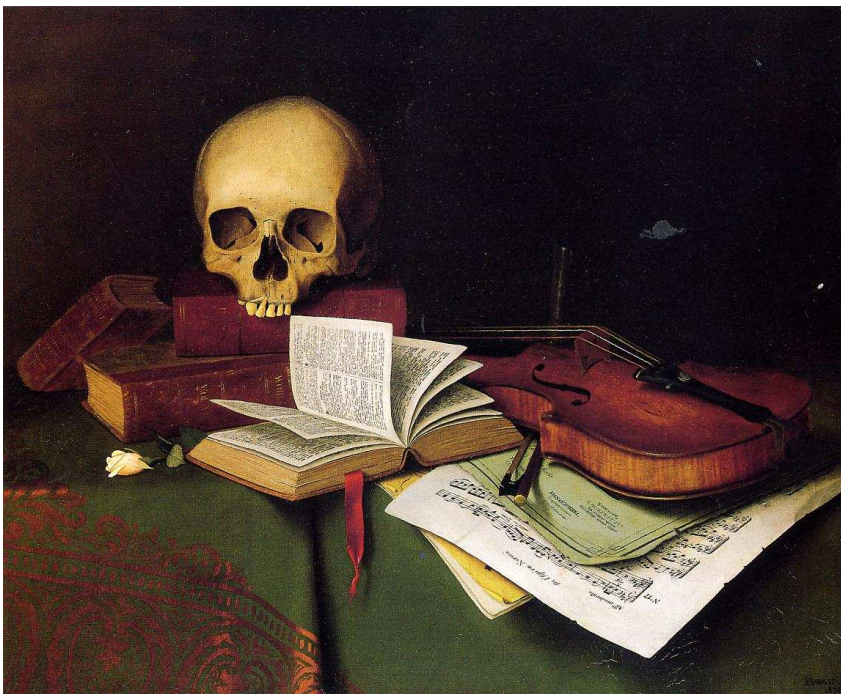


The paintings I will be comparing are *still life with a skull* (1671) by *Phillipe de campagne* and *Mortality and Immortality* (1876) by William Harnett.



Still life with a skull
1671
Oil on canvas
Phillipe de Campaigne



Mortality and Immortality
1876
oil on canvas
William harnett

First impressions:

When I first look at Champaigne's piece of work, I see the skull dominating the centre of the image, looking at me. The image makes me think about death, as the skull seems to be watching the viewer – awaiting their death. What is strange however is the flower beside the skull.

Harnett's painting however is somewhat different; at first sight, I see more to the image than just a skull.

Basic elements:

The colours used in both paintings however are quite similar in that darker hues are used to create a dark 'deathly' atmosphere. The colours used in Harnett's painting are slightly warmer than Champaigne's painting; both however used contrasting hues to create visually striking depictions. The light has been effectively exploited to aid in this.

The texture of Champaigne's painting seems quite rough whilst Harnett's seems smoother, this is because the way the paints have been used in Harnett's work create a smoother feel.

Content:

In Champaigne's painting, there is a skull dominating the image, with a flower to its left and sand timer to its right. It's as if Champaigne wanted to encapsulate life and death within the very same image by having a flower symbolising life whilst having the skull to symbolising death. The timer could possibly be suggesting *time is running out and you will die next*.

Harnett's image however gives us a clue as to what it is about, because of its title; *Mortality and immortality*. The books and the violin maybe suggest immortality and human pleasures whilst the skull reminds us of death and mortality, so there's a real sense of contrast in both paintings which is interesting. I believe both works were done from observation with imagination to supplement their observations.

Mood and atmosphere:

Both works give me an eerie feeling of death and how *Time is running out*. Everything seems peaceful and relatively normal until the viewer notices the skull, which momentarily creates a sense of panic that the viewer is unable to comprehend. The skull immediately suffuses the paintings with a deathly atmosphere.

Materials and techniques:

Both paintings have been done using oil on canvas. The paint has been used precisely to achieve a realistic still life image.

Composition:

I think both paintings have been carefully planned; I believe this because of the effective use of overlapping created which surely cannot be by chance as it serves a real purpose.

Although Champaigne's painting is somewhat simpler compositionally as there's less in the painting, the skull has purposefully been placed in the middle and the flower symbolising life to its left and the timer to its right. This is no accident as I believe Champaigne did this purposefully to challenge life and death.

Harnett's painting makes much more use of overlapping, with books towards the front overlapping other books behind them on which the notorious skull stands. The pages are flickering as if to suggest life within this deathly painting. The violin is pointing towards the skull; it brings us into the painting from the foreground and leads us to the midground where the skull stands and disappears into the darkness of the background.

Context:

Champaigne produced a very large number of paintings, mainly religious works and portraits. Influenced by Rubens at the beginning of his career, his style later became more austere.

Other paintings Champaigne has made include *christ on the cross* (1650) and *last supper* (1648).

Harnett was inspired by previous artists such as Pieter Claesz. Who had specialized in tabletop still life. What sets Harnett's work apart, besides his enormous skill, is his interest in depicting objects not usually made the subject of a painting such as musical instruments, hanging game, and tankards, but also painted the unconventional *Golden Horseshoe* (1886), a single rusted horseshoe shown nailed to a board

He painted a casual jumble of second-hand books set on top of a crate, *Job Lot, Cheap* (1878), as well as firearms and even paper currency. Harnett's best-known paintings are the four versions of *After The Hunt*.

Links:

I chose these artist's works as they involve themes of life and death; Shown through everyday objects such as books and instruments and even flowers symbolising life and everyday paraphernalia that is linked to it. The skull on the other hand reminds us of death. So there are two major contradictory themes fighting against each other. The timer also emphasizes the struggle for life and the approaching death in Champaigne's painting.

In my work, I am also using everyday objects to show my identity – objects that are normal to me. However I have also contemplated incorporating a skull to evoke a feeling of death.

The book in Harnett's painting is also an object which I might implement into my 'identity' work; Interestingly the book I am planning to implement within my composition has an illustration of a skull with cross bones – its title is '*double or die*' and its these contributing aspects of the book which fit into one of my themes; death. I have also thought of incorporating the 'time' theme through a clock. I also have an illustration of a skull on a book of mine which I am thinking of implementing somewhere within my final composition.

Evaluation:

I personally found these works very striking and interesting as they portrayed life and death very well. I would add more objects to Champaigne's painting as there's a lack of overlapping to create a sense of real depth.

If I could ask both artists a question, I would ask them both what is the significance of the skulls in both paintings.

