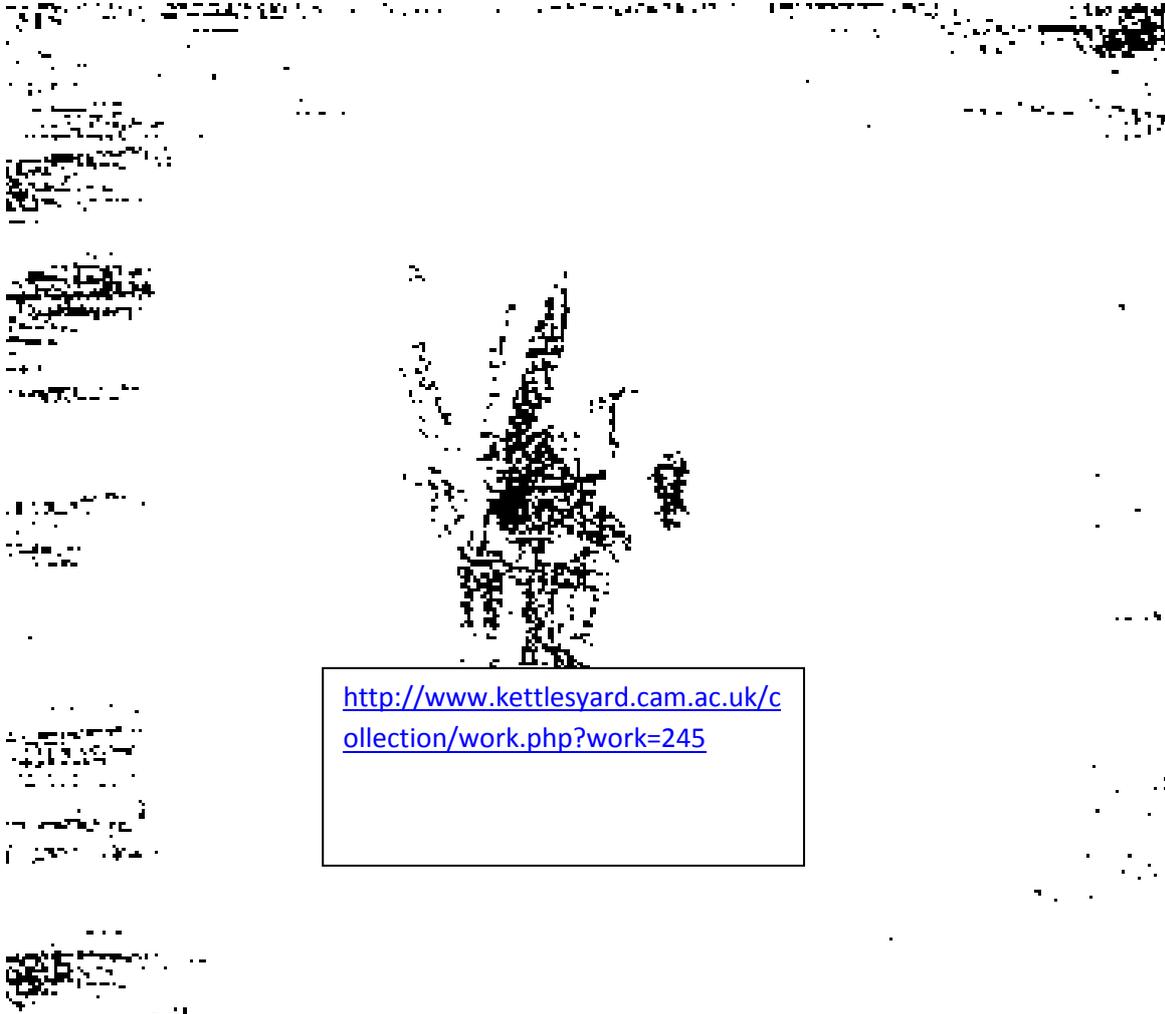


## Flowers, 1930 by Christopher Wood



<http://www.kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk/collecion/work.php?work=245>

*Oil on board, 330 x 400 mm, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge*

I visited Kettle's Yard when in Cambridge just over a month ago. The exhibition at the time was of work by Christopher Wood, an artist I had not heard of at the time. Details of the exhibition are at <http://www.kettlesyard.co.uk/exhibitions/2013/wood/> and I was really pleased that I had gone. I liked the work of Christopher Wood and found out more about him and his work in the time after returning home.

One painting that I liked very much was Flowers, which Wood painted in 1930. I was attracted by the idea of the frame within a frame and as I thought that this was a very good still life study. I have always enjoyed photographing flowers so I thought that this would be an ideal subject for me to try to copy for this part of my third assignment.

In considering this painting I think that it is useful to consider what was on the display notes by the painting. "The use of flowers as a still life is a popular motif and one shared between Winifred Nicholson and Christopher Wood. Winifred would frequently send flowers to Wood in Paris for him to paint. Wood had used sand in his paint as early as 1924, to add texture and later used a technique of layering and scraping down or incising white gesso to stress surface and texture, revealing the working process".

I was somewhat daunted at the start of this exercise as I had not done any painting of any kind since leaving school over 40 years ago. I didn't think that I could just go out, buy some oil paints, mix in a bit of sand and follow the other techniques described above.

I decided to use my strengths and made two different copies of the painting. For the first copy I used my graphics tablet and ArtRage painting package for computers. I learned a lot from this as I will describe below. I also decided to try to make a photographic version of the painting and I am pleased that I did because this taught me a little more.

These are the notes I took at the time of my visit to Kettle's Yard and my observations based on a print of the painting that I bought at the time of the visit.



- Dark grey background forms frame to the painting. Intensity of shade reduced by lines formed by scraping technique
- White background to flowers but again with darker shades and tones from technique used
- Yellow daffodils flank the composition to left and right. RH daffodil pointing downwards
- Colours grouped in the centre, reds and light purples
- Not painted in highly representational style, more impressionistic
- Tall white flower on left and sloping daffodil on right give a sense of diagonal movement top left to bottom right

Following my study of the painting this is the copy that I made using ArtRage, I downloaded an electronic version of the painting on the Kettle's Yard website and used the graphics tablet to copy it.



This is what I learned from undertaking the copy

- Blending of colours. Although the flowers initially look one colour, they are made up of many shades of colour in each bloom. For example the daffodil on the left has many shades of yellow in the petals which blend into a greenish shade as the flower turns into the stalk. It was only when I looked very closely to make the copy that I realised how each of the flowers was made up of many shades.
- Brushstrokes. I learned how different effects can be obtained from the length and direction of your brushstrokes, from flowing curves to give the edge of a petal to the stippled effect caused by dabbing the brush onto the surface as used to represent the black centres of the flowers.
- Intricate detail in colours. I found copying the shapes of the flowers fairly easy, what was difficult was matching the many different shades of colour used in the original painting. This was hard enough when using a computer programme where trial and error can easily be used, I can't imagine how difficult it is to mix oil paints to give exactly the same shade as used by the original artist.
- Composition. This can be seen by carefully studying a painting, but it is not quite the same as experiencing it through copying that painting.
- Time. I certainly found out how much time it takes to produce a painting such as this – my copy took several hours, the original painting is made up of so many different elements.

- Effects. I discovered the different effects that can be achieved from different brushstrokes, size of brush, and amount of paint loaded onto the brush.
- How the image is built up. You may have a simple image in your mind (or in a vase in front of you) but the end product is built up from many, many small images.

As well as this copy of the painting I thought that it would be interesting to try to produce my own photographic version. I was very pleased that I tried this as I learnt things that didn't come out of simply copying the painting. This is my photograph:



These are the extra points that I learned from producing this image:

- Lighting. In order to recreate the painting in a photograph you have to work out how the original subject had been lit and then try to recreate that set up. In this instance it seemed to me that the lighting was coming from the left and slightly above (the right hand sides of the flowers seem to be in shadow). I recreated this with a flash to the left of the flowers, to prevent the right hand flowers being too dark I used a reflector on the right hand side.
- Seasons. It seems obvious to say, but you can't recreate a still life with daffodils in the autumn! I tried to recreate the composition by keeping to the general colour scheme and using flowers that were available at the time of year.

- Availability. Getting flowers of a similar shade to the original painting was difficult , this also was true for the vase, table, background etc.
- Composition. I learned just how difficult this was to copy. For example, without daffodils it was difficult to create the downward pointing yellow flower on the right hand side and without this the composition suffers. Also when you are arranging the flowers yourself it is difficult to keep the flower heads in the right position above the vase as well as keeping all the stalks together on the left hand side below the water line.

I don't think that my attempt to produce a photographic version of the painting has been very successful, but I have learnt a lot from it. I might even have another go in the spring when the daffodils are out! I think I could learn a lot for my flower photography by studying still life paintings.

### **Link to image**

<http://www.kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk/collection/work.php?work=245>