

Strewn Apples, 1923 Max Weber (American, 1881-1961)

Max Weber manipulated the placement of objects in space as he searched for ways to depict traditional still life objects in a modern way.



Oil on canvas; 36 x 26 inches. Collection of Vaughn O. Vernerberg. ©Estate of Max Weber, Courtesy of Gerald Peters Gallery, NY

As a young artist, Weber spent four years in Paris absorbing the groundbreaking theories that were transforming the way artists looked at the real world. He was especially affected by Paul Cézanne's work and enjoyed visiting galleries where he could study paintings by Cézanne while holding them on his lap. Before returning to New York, Weber collected books and reproductions of paintings in the modern style, including those by Fauve and Cubist artists whose work was largely unknown back in the United States. He found reproductions of Cézanne's paintings especially inspiring, and displayed them on the walls of his apartment to encourage him as he worked.

What is similar about Weber's *Strewn Apples* still life and a conventional still life arrangement?

- The items are arranged on a table.
- The still life includes everyday containers (sugar bowl, bottle, goblet, and flower pot).
- The still life includes pieces of fruit, some grouped together.
- A folded drapery encloses several of the objects on the table.

In what ways is Weber's *Strewn Apples* unconventional?

- The tabletop is tilted at a precipitous angle. (The apples would surely roll off.)
- It appears that the open top of the long-necked bottle and its underside can be seen simultaneously.
- The space is ambiguous.
 - The shape of the room is unclear. Is there a corner?
 - The relation of table to wall is unclear. Is the table placed well away from the wall? Or do the edges of the table touch the wall?
 - The position of the chair is unclear. Are both sides of the chair pushed up against the edge of the table? Or is the chair set at an angle to the table?

Imagine that your eye level is at the table's edge. How would the composition change?

- The objects would overlap each other.
- The nearest apples would appear larger than the apples placed near the far edge of the table.
- The oval shaped openings of the bowls and goblets would not be visible.

What does Weber gain by tilting the table forward?