

# Soap bubbles: the life of an artist and the purpose of the piece



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The still-life painting “ Soap Bubbles” has been hailed as one of Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin’s, a French painter during the 18th century, greatest art pieces. During the 18th century, still-life paintings were regarded as the lowest genre of art in France while history painting as the opposite (Irish Art Encyclopedia website). Even with this fact, he was still able to gain fame, as cultured individuals found his works appealing and amusing; King Louis XV became one of his patrons, as he was appreciated for the masterful detail of his paintings.

“ Soap Bubbles” had a long history of provenance as well; being transferred from one owner to another. The works of Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin may have represented certain aspects of his life; as do all masterpieces entail. In order to look for the intent of the mentioned piece, it is important to read about its artist first. The French Artist, Chardin Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin had a relatively humble background, as do many artists during that era. He was born on the second of November in the year 1699, to a prosperous artisan family in Paris.

He was a son of a cabinetmaker. Well, it might appear that he did not come from a relatively humble origin but it also did not appear that he was born into an elite household. Basically, he was heavily influenced into painting by 17th Century Low country masters like Metsu and de Hooch—both Dutch artists who painted using the still-life genre. He was captured by the simplicity of the still-life genre which mostly concentrated on simple subjects and ordinary themes—much of which can be seen in still-life paintings. He was profoundly self-taught in the art of painting.

Completely devoted to learn and to paint, he did not hesitate to learn from the masters like Pierre Jacques Cazes and Noel-Nicolas Coypel who were both French history painters (Uffizi website), as apprentice. At the course of his apprenticeship with Coypel, Chardin was tasked to paint a musket in one of his portraits. Through this experience, he realized that he was not a conceptual painter—like his two masters. Rather, he was an observational painter. This experience sent him off towards his path of still-life painting. As an artisan, he was not limited to painting masterpieces alone.

One of his first few works was actually a large signboard for a surgeon in order to be placed on his premises. It was here that prompted Chardin's interest for complex urban life, as also displayed in another still-life entitled "Billiard Party". Both of his biographers, Cochin and Pierre-Jean Mariette, described his first painting experience as a still-life game. It was simply described as a calling to become a student of nature—most still-life paintings involve themes that revolve around nature. Through his experiences as a painter, he learned the difficulty of creating an actual imitation of something.

However, he was able to discover that in order to convey reality, the painter needs to create an equivalent of that reality; he carried this knowledge throughout his painting career. In 1730-31, he received his first most important commissions. It was for a set of decorative still-life paintings for the Paris house of Konrad von Rothenburg. When Chardin's Salon paintings became famous, some of the very wealthy became his patrons which include Queen Louise-Ulrica of Sweden and Prince Joseph-Wenceslas-Lorenz of Liechtenstein. A vision problem which may have been caused by oil paint impaired his sight.

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This forced him to work with pastel instead of paint. Then at the sixth of December 1779, he left his only child, Jean-Pierre Chardin who later won the Prix de Rome for painting at the same Academie that he went to. Soap Bubbles: Portraying Concentration and the Fragility of Life He created “ Soap Bubbles” between the years 1730-40 which was first located in Paris; although, there were three versions, rumored to be four, created since the original was lost. The still-life painting displayed a man blowing bubbles— from liquidized soap, most likely—while in deep concentration.

This somewhat displayed a characteristic of Chardin while he paints his genre scenes—many of which regarded as masterpieces later on. It was even mentioned that “ it may have been possible that Chardin did not intend to convey any messages through ‘ Soap Bubbles’, however, soap bubbles usually allude to the transience of life” (Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History 2000). Well, it may have been true that the painting was not intended to convey any messages; although, it was possible for anyone to create their own understanding of the image.

That bubble may have represented the fragility of life if a person would not take good care of it. Hence, the man was in full concentration while blowing the bubble. “ Soap Bubble” had a long history of provenance, as a lot of collectors would pursue his still-life paintings that closely portrayed reality. The following were the known people who commissioned this painting before it made its way into the National Gallery of Art: “ Adolphe Eugene Gabriel Roehn [1780-1867], Paris, by 1845. [1] Laurent Laperlier [1805-1878], Paris and Mustapha, Algeria, by 1860;[2] (his sale, Hotel Drouot, Paris, 11-13 April 1867, 1st day, no. 0); purchased by Biesta. (Gimpel and Wildenstein, New <https://assignbuster.com/soap-bubbles-the-life-of-an-artist-and-the-purpose-of-the-piece/>

York and Paris); sold 1905 to John Woodruff Simpson [1850-1920], New York; [3] by inheritance to his widow, Katherine Seney Simpson [d. 1943], New York; gift 1942 to NGA" (National Gallery of Art website).

This Chardin masterpiece has made its way through different owners. As mentioned, there were three versions of the painting: One is at the NGA in Washington while the other two are located in New York's Metropolitan Museum and Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The Possible Intention of Soap Bubble It may have been just an ordinary still-life painting. However, many would believe that every image contains a hidden message. In Soap Bubble, the fragility of life was compared to the bubble being blown under full concentration. This may have the intended message of Chardin, as life is an integral part of a person's being. Neglecting that fact might lead to the demise of one's reality. Maybe that was a message that he wanted to convey.