

The secret of rendering shiny surfaces lies in careful observation and rigorous recording of what you see. It also helps if you have some understanding of what you're looking at.



◀ On reflection, it's jelly by Alastair Lockwood, water-soluble coloured pencil

The shape of reflections and highlights is affected by the shape of the surface that is reflecting them – a long thin bottle will have long thin reflections. You can see these distortions in this study, where the red jelly in the glass dish takes on different shapes in the adjacent surfaces. These shapes change the minute you move your head – so choose a viewpoint and stick to it.

Reflective surfaces

RELECTIVE SURFACES SUCH as metal, glass and glazed ceramics mirror, distort and reflect light, colour, shadows and the objects and surfaces surrounding them. The result can be very confusing – it's difficult to know exactly what you are seeing. When they are skilfully done, drawings and paintings of reflective materials have a dazzling quality that excites admiration.

When you study metal or glass surfaces, you are seeing the local

colour of the object itself – the dark green of a wine bottle or the pink-orange of copper, for example. Next you are seeing adjacent colours and tones reflected in the shiny surface. Materials such as the chrome, silver and glass in Alastair Lockwood's still life (above) have almost no colour and derive all their colour and tone from their surroundings. The shinier the surface the crisper the edges of the reflections will be, the brighter the highlights, and the darker the darks.

In drawings, chrome requires hard edges and sharp contrasts, while less reflective surfaces need gentler gradients of tone and fuzzier edges.

A characteristic feature of reflective surfaces is the highlight. This is the light source shining on the object – the sun outdoors, artificial lights or light from windows or doors inside. The highlight will be the lightest point on the surface and its location is dependent on the position of the light source.