



# STILL LIVES

by Maria Hummel

A REESE'S BOOK CLUB x  
HELLO SUNSHINE Selection

Reading Group Guide



1. *Still Lives* has been praised as a feminist response to the thriller genre, which so often fetishizes violence against women. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Did your perspective on violence against women and on the way the media covers violence against women shift after reading *Still Lives*? If so, how and why?
3. If you are an avid reader of mysteries and thrillers, how does *Still Lives* compare? Does the book offer new elements or a different perspective? If you're new to mysteries and thrillers, did reading *Still Lives* make you want to read more in this genre?
4. How does the book characterize and show the development of female friendships? Talk about Maggie's various relationships with her colleagues at the Roque.
5. Talk about the role of value and worth in the *Still Lives*. Who is valued? What is valued? How is value created in the art world? In relationship? In society and the media?
6. Discuss the ways in which Maggie's past (her relationship with Shaw as well as her involvement with Nikki Bolio's murder) influences her experience of being drawn into this particular crime investigation. Does it impede or propel her investigation?
7. What did you learn about the art world from *Still Lives* that you didn't know beforehand? How does Maria Hummel's depiction of museums and art dealers differ from your understanding of the fine art world?
8. Near the end of the book, Maggie narrates the following about L.A.:

*The dream of a city in a valley of paradise, flanked by the sea. It was the mapmaker's gift to render both the existence of L.A. and its possibility, at the end of our continent, our last and greatest destination.*

*Over a century later, immense, overcrowded, and corrupted, that's still the Los Angeles that people fall in love with, the Los Angeles that drew Greg and me, and Kim and her paintings, and even Evie. It's also the city where monstrous appetites meet private hopes, again and again, and devour them. Where ambition is savaged and changed to devastation, where a brilliant artist can be beaten, stabbed, and locked away to die while her party goes on, cups are raised, and bright beats begin to play.*

Why do you think Hummel chose to set this story in Los Angeles? What role does the city play in shaping her characters?

9. Throughout *Still Lives*, questions of ownership arise in varying capacities. How does the concept of provenance (defined below) interact with other themes in the novel? With feminism? With value? With death?

*Provenance is the chronology of ownership of a work of art. Who owns what. Who bought what from whom. The record of exclusive possession. Ownership is listed on every wall label, and it's written in a history that accompanies every object when it's sold. If a famous collector buys a sculpture, that sculpture will sell for a higher price the next time it goes on the market, sometimes hundreds of thousands more. Dealers know this. They keep long waiting lists of purchasers so they can control who gets what, and which sales are known to the press. . . . The artist-dealer-collector is a symbiotic relationship, soaked in cash. Most of the time, it happens behind closed doors.*

10. What do you think Kim Lord intended to evoke with her show *Still Lives*? How does the work described in the book upend the idea of "still lives" as both an artistic genre and as a pun on society's fascination of murdered women?

11. In the final chapters of *Still Lives* Maggie listens to a recording from Hendricks. In it, he says the following:

*You accuse a famous killer of trying to murder you, and you can never be yourself again. You'll be in the trial, the newspapers, TV, you'll be the one who escaped, but your life won't be yours. It'll be hers.*

Is fame inherently violent? How does this book play with the ideas of fame and ownership?