

Tutorials: Art History

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The Art of Ancient Egypt

This tutorial covers three millennia of art history, from the pre-dynastic period around 3000 BC until the establishment of Roman rule over Egypt in the first century BC; it is remarkable how much continuity is to be found across this period, in addition, of course, to impressive developments and achievements in a wider range of artistic media. Students will be able to investigate architecture, sculpture, and painting in a wider variety of examples, and an emphasis will be placed on gaining a profound familiarity with primary sources and the ability to analyse them in a scholarly and sensitive way. Numerous themes are expressed in Egyptian art, and students will be able to examine the projection of royal power, family relations, religious expression, attitudes to death, and gender roles, among others. The Ashmolean Museum has a remarkable collection of Egyptian material culture, with unusual riches relating to the earliest period, as well as exceptional objects from the time of Akhenaten, Hellenistic Egypt, and an entire temple building from the reign of Taharqa, in the Twenty-Fifth (Nubian) Dynasty; in addition to working in the library, students will be able to enrich their studies by examining these public collections.

Art and Archaeology in Britain in the Early Middle Ages

Between c.600 and 1066, Britain was transformed in social and political terms, as the idea of England formed from a diversity of peoples and polities. This transformation is vividly reflected in the art and material culture that survives to this day. Students will consider the ways in which political power, social relations, and religious beliefs are encoded in physical objects such as weapons, personal adornments, manuscripts, and buildings, and will attempt to interpret them in the light of the wider historical context. This tutorial will give students the chance to examine engaging primary sources such as the finds from the Sutton Hoo burial, the Franks Casket, and the Alfred Jewel, objects whose context is often as mysterious as they are visually captivating, as well as manuscripts such as the Lindisfarne Gospels. In addition, students will study the archaeology of the period, grappling with the methodological problems inherent in the discipline and learning the ways in which excavated sites can illuminate social practices and networks as well as providing vital context for individual objects. Themes will include the expression of religious belief and religious change in material culture, as well as the interaction of diverse cultural impulses with Celtic, Germanic, and Roman backgrounds. By the end of the tutorial, the student will have brought to light a period which has been traditionally and unfairly characterized as dark and will have learnt both to appreciate and to interpret a glorious wealth of visual culture.

Art History in Theory and Practice

Art history is not the mere chronicle of the production of visual art. As a discipline it is selective, and arbitrates between what art is to be considered valuable and what

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art is to be ignored; and it interacts with wildly divergent theoretical approaches to art in its attempt to create some sort of coherent narrative of the creation of art over time. This tutorial examines the discipline of art history, caught between the practice of art on the one hand the theory of art on the other. Students will study significant primary sources which have shaped the writing of art history, with an emphasis on authors operating from the nineteenth century up to the present day, but with the possibility of examining significant figures of the past, too, such as Pliny, Vasari, and Winckelmann. Students will consider how important theoretical approaches to art (such as Formalism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism) shape the way art history is crafted and consequently how art is valued. Oxford is rich in museum collections as well as art *in situ*, including a remarkable and unique array of architecture, and students will have the chance to examine this public art as part of their studies. In particular, they will consider the ways in which the public presentation of visual art reflects specific art-historical approaches, and, in turn, creates its own historical narratives. By the time they complete this tutorial students will have a good grasp of the historiography of art history in general and will have developed deep insights into their own practice as historians of art.

Art and Religion in the Classical World

From Archaic Greece to the height of the Roman Empire, art was employed to express the religious narratives and ideas of the Greeks and the Romans. While Jews and Christians had public sacred texts, Greeks and Romans did not, and their art was a powerful way of developing and communicating notions of the divine and of religious and spiritual experience. This tutorial will examine the varied religious experience of the Greeks and the Romans and ask how their art gives us insight into that experience, whether through representations of the gods, expressions of piety, depictions of religious narratives, the representation of worship, or, in some cases, tantalizing presentations of mystery cults in action. The rich archaeology of well-known sites such as Athens, Delphi, Rome, and Pompeii will provide fascinating case studies of the way art was used in both grand public settings and in hidden domestic contexts, and in Oxford itself the Ashmolean Museum contains a rich collection of Greek and Roman art relating to religion, which the student will be able to study at first hand. This tutorial will also consider the rise of Christianity to dominance in the fourth century AD, and the way Christian art transforms the public language of religion but at the same time draws on the very Greek and Roman traditions whose religious ideas it seeks to supplant.

Art and the Sacred

In this tutorial we consider how art — including but not confined to painting, sculpture, and drawing — has been used to represent the divine, and events, people, and places with religious significance. We also look at religious buildings to examine whether the spaces are in some sense sacred in themselves or whether they are simply containers for religious activities. We consider representations of particular

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events, such as the Annunciation, Nativity, adoration of shepherds and magi, or Crucifixion, and look at the biblical and other texts which inspired them. Accepting that we rarely know for certain the intention of patrons or artists, we try to tease out the works' purposes. Were they intended to teach the illiterate, as was often said but which hardly explains their presence in luxury devotional texts or expensive tapestries? Were they intended primarily to provoke an emotional response in a viewer already familiar with the event depicted? Did patrons seek to glorify God or gratify their own vanity or both? What happens to the meaning of a religious work of art when it is translated from a religious setting to a museum? We look at works of art from Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions and from late antiquity to the present day, with a particular emphasis on getting into Oxford's art museums and exploring churches and chapels. For those with little or no art-historical experience we learn the techniques of visual analysis, and for all students we focus on taking the time to look and explore in detail.

Greek Art of the Classical Period

The city of Athens, between the establishment of democracy in the late sixth century BC and the loss of Greek autonomy to the Macedonian military might of kings Philip and Alexander in the second half of the fourth century, produced a body of art that has amazed subsequent viewers, inspired passionate emulation, and earned the period the label of 'Classical' in that it has seemed to many to represent a standard of excellence that no subsequent generation can afford to ignore. The student taking this tutorial will examine the revolutionary changes in artistic technique, style, and representation that characterized this period, from the austere patriotism of the early Classical style to the freedom and delight that reigned before the coming of the Macedonians.

Part of the challenge and charm of studying this period lies in the very partial survival of the art. The achievements of vase painters are well represented in the surviving archive, and while more and more sculpture has been recovered over the last two centuries, the famous works of the renowned sculptors of their age are known through texts and later copies. Painting has virtually vanished, though texts give us clues, but architecture is still well represented, if ruinous, and the accompanying architectural sculpture amazes to this day. Thus during this tutorial the student will indulge in an exercise in scholarly reconstruction, employing detective skills to exploit the evidence. They will also learn to appreciate this art from an aesthetic point of view, discerning its distinctive features and trying to understand its impact on its contemporary audiences as well. Lastly, the student will put the art in its social and historical context, grasping the way in which visual culture was the product of contingent circumstances and may express implicit social assumptions, political messages, and philosophical ideologies, all of which remain to be discerned by the careful scholar.

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Hellenistic Art

The three centuries between the death of Alexander the Great and the defeat of Cleopatra saw remarkable changes within Greek art. In addition to technical and thematic development, Greek art spread geographically and interacted with numerous local cultural traditions, and mutual influence led to radical transformation. Many aspects of art had their birth or first development during the period, such as naturalistic portraiture and mosaics. This tutorial will give students the chance to examine radical artistic developments against the backdrop of the new imperial Hellenistic kingdoms, which saw the mixing of people groups in new urban centres (such as Alexandria and Antioch) and novel expressions of centralized royal power. The student will be able to study sculpture, painting, mosaics, architecture, and numismatics, among other forms of art. Themes may include the visual expression of royal power, the role of women in art, religious art, the Greeks in Egypt, Jewish responses to Hellenistic culture (for example, the Temple in Jerusalem), and the influence and enduring legacy of Hellenistic art in Roman visual culture.

The History of Photography

This tutorial offers the rare chance to study the history of an art form in its entirety, from the 1830s, when photographic techniques first came to public notice, until the present. Students will examine the ways photography has participated in wider art-historical narratives, studying the manner in which pictorialism, modernism, abstraction, and conceptual art, for example, have been expressed through photography. The tutorial will also look beyond the confines of a narrow art-historical approach, looking at the ways photographs have transformed society and the way we see ourselves, at commercial photography, at the proliferation of digital photography, and at documentary photography, and photojournalism. Students will be exposed to photography outside the traditional European and North American contexts, looking at world photography and its contexts, for example its use in anti-colonial movements. There have been relatively few dominating narratives of the history of photography, and the student will be asked to question such narratives and develop their own skills as a discerning and critical historian, excavating themes that have been obscured until recently, such as the role of women in photography. The city of Oxford is an excellent context in which to pursue these studies, since it has a significant role to play in the history of photography. The city appears several times in the first camera photobook, *The Pencil of Nature*, and has inspired many photographers since the 1840s. In addition, it has become increasingly important as a centre for the display, collection, and study of photographic archives in recent years. For students who are so inclined, it will be possible for part of this tutorial to be practice-based, with 25 per cent of the course credit assigned to practice should this option be taken.

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Patronage and Power: Court Life and Art in Early Modern Europe

In the early sixteenth century, when High Renaissance and Mannerist styles dominated taste, Charles V, Francis I, and Henry VIII sought to out rival each other in magnificence across Spain, France, England, and the Low Countries; by the late seventeenth century, a Baroque Europe rotated around the gravitational cultural centre built at Versailles by Louis XIV. This tutorial seeks to examine the role of courtly culture in the production of art during a time of unprecedented upheaval and violence but also wealth and splendour. Students will examine a wide variety of primary sources, from painting and sculpture to architecture, theatrical spectacle, and even etiquette, gardening, and food. While royal sway was most obviously projected by visual art, many other circles of influence strove to express their power through creative visual means, and art also played a significant role in diplomacy. New political, social, and religious ideologies were eloquently expressed in visual media, and students will be asked to reconstruct the historical contexts of their primary sources and strive to interpret them as experienced by contemporaries. Students will investigate the mechanisms by which art was created, excavating the networks of elite patronage, as well as patterns of collecting, and the new scholarly enterprises that embraced and provoked the creation and collection of artworks. Students will encounter famous names in art creation, the figures whose prestige and wealth were burnished by their association with courtly contexts; but they will also encounter humbler contexts of artistic production, in which courtly images were projected and propagated through the world at large, through printing, costume, gardening, etc. Courtly centres in Madrid, Paris, Vienna, Brussels, Rome, and London will become familiar to students, who will gain both a historical and an art-historical expertise about the period in question.

The Rise of Modernism

This tutorial finds its roots in the revolutionary artistic movements of the later nineteenth century, and traces the development of visual art through numerous discrete groups to Modernist responses to the First World War. In Manet, the Impressionists, Cézanne, and the Aesthetic movement, the student will trace the themes and ideas that influenced artists in subsequent decades, through both emulation and revolt. The student will be able to examine the development of Cubism, of abstract art, of Futurism, and of Surrealism. Primary works of art will be examined and analysed, so that the student will gain a deep understanding of the art in question, but the social and political background to artistic developments will also be investigated in full. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were periods of great self-awareness among artists, and students will critically investigate the way artists located themselves in an ongoing history of art, and will be encouraged to critique accepted narratives of the history of this period. Overlooked narratives, such as the role of women and the importance of spirituality, will be addressed. The problematic relationship between the visual arts and the wider world, in an age of confident colonialism, is another salient theme: the craze for Japanese visual culture and the vogue for 'Primitivism' are key areas of study. In

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addition, the student will have the opportunity to get to know important urban centres, such as Paris, London, and Vienna, where artists flocked and new visual styles (Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Bauhaus, etc.) flourished and influenced the world more broadly.

Roman Art

The art of Rome represents, at the same time, the visual self-presentation of a single city, whose political power, religious system, and social network of ancient aristocratic families find vivid representation in self-aggrandizing monuments across many centuries, and the hugely diverse visual culture representing numerous people groups that came into the Roman orbit and responded to Roman power with accommodation and resistance. This tutorial will capture the complexities and paradoxes of the art of an empire that stretched from Mesopotamia to Portugal and from Britain to the Nile. Students will examine the competitive display of wealthy rivals during the late Republic, and the refashioning of the Roman state in political and visual terms during the time of Augustus and his successors. While Roman art was sometimes seen both at the time and more recently as unoriginal and derivative of Greek models, this tutorial will examine the vibrant and imaginative strategies employed by those living in the Roman Empire as they expressed a rapidly changing political and social landscape in strikingly novel visual forms. Students will learn to interpret a wide range of primary sources, from sculpture, jewellery, ceramics, painting, and mosaics to architecture and city planning and coins. They will put this visual culture in its historical context, making use of the surviving literary evidence to elucidate material remains. They will consider the artistic productions of those at the centre, familiarizing themselves with the astonishing remains of the city of Rome itself, as well as the extensive visual patronage of the emperor; but they will also examine the art of the periphery: both the underprivileged of Roman society, whose visual vestiges can be pieced together from sensitive archaeology, and those groups whose identities made them eccentric in the Roman universe, such as Jews, Christians, and others.

Understanding Museums and Collections

This tutorial provides an introduction to the study of museums and collections, with particular reference to approaches drawn from archaeology, anthropology, history of art, history of science, and science and technology studies (STS). Students will be introduced to four main areas in the study of museums and collections: the history of museums; museums and time; museums, culture, and nature; and collections as practices. These areas will be explored through examples drawn from the earliest archaeological evidence for collecting (including hoarding and deposition), through the first museums in the ancient world, to medieval, Early Modern, modern, and contemporary collections and museums. The development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas of preservation and heritage will also be introduced.

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The tutorial will provide students with the opportunity to explore aspects of particular museums and collections through a series of themes, including the history of ideas of assemblage and collection; art and aesthetics; science and the natural world; objectivity and knowledge production; curiosity, performance, and colonialism; identity, politics, and cultural repatriation; material, digital, and virtual museums; and preservation and heritage.

Victorian Visual Culture

Victorian Britain was home to extremes: from violent imperialism to philanthropic ventures that strove to transform society for the better; from rapid and vigorous processes of industrialization to obsessions with a mythical English, or Scottish, or Welsh, or Irish past; from the remarkable growth of new urban centres to a burgeoning idealization of the countryside; from unprecedented wealth to new excesses of poverty. All of this was reflected in the visual culture of the age, which might embody the conservation or rediscovery of ancient modes of seeing and also some of the most radical innovations in art and manufacturing of their time.

This tutorial will examine Victorian visual culture in its broadest sense, from paintings, sculpture, and architecture to ironwork, book design, and photography, setting it in its social and historical context and examining its effect on contemporary viewers as much as on the audience of today. The rich and verbose literary productions of the time will be studied to understand the ideologies lying behind visual representation, with figures such as John Ruskin and William Morris taking centre stage both in creating visual art and explaining and promoting it. Themes that may be addressed include political activism, the role of women, patronage and art, the relationship between text and image, representations of empire, and the growth of photography. Oxford, a city physically and socially transformed in this period, is the perfect place to indulge in such studies, with its buildings including some of the most remarkable instances of Victorian visual culture and its museums containing rich relevant collections that can be studied at first hand.