



**The Exeter College Summer Programme  
at Exeter College in the University of Oxford**

**How to Read Paintings**

**Course Description:** This course will explore the subject of painting and how to develop particular skills in order to develop our interpretation, appreciation and enjoyment of this art. Following the outline of her book of the same title, Ms Rideal will discuss both the paintings reproduced in it and others chosen to complement and broaden the themes. The focus will be specifically on painting but will encompass other related visual Arts such as sculpture, drawing and painting. The adaptation of techniques, ideas and methods and the transference of these from one medium to another will also be covered. The twelve lectures will assess the history of artists and movements and how these relate to both their past and the present-day production of fine art.

**Course Objectives**

The aim of the course is to cultivate and develop students'

- understanding of the relationship between contemporary and historic art.
- understanding of the history of 'ways of seeing'.
- critical skills of object analysis (or ekphrasis) and of painting analysis;
- critical skills of historical cultural analysis and critical writing skills;
- ability to ground analysis, argument and interpretation in critical thinking.

The course is designed to be multidisciplinary and is suitable for students of all disciplines who have a strong interest in art history, painting and museum and gallery collections. There are no prerequisites and no previous knowledge of art history/analysis is required, but would be an advantage.

**Teaching Methods and Assessment**

- 12 x 1.25hr Lectures (15hrs)
- 6 x 1.25hr Seminars (7.5hrs)
- 4 x 1.25hr Tutorials (5hrs)

Lectures as described above. Some museum/gallery collections will need to be visited outside the period of the lectures. Additional (usually short) readings in art theory and history will be required and provided during the course.

Seminars and Tutorials (10 in total) will allow for further discussion of the art, and art theory/history and required reading addressed in the lectures. In addition, each student will be required to give a short presentation in the seminar on one artist and a particular work of theirs, demonstrating the relationship between the art work, the reasons for production and the moment time in which it was produced.

**Final assessment:** An essay of no more than 3,000 words (40%), a final three-hour written examination (40%), oral presentation (10%) and participation in seminar discussion (10%).

### **Detailed Lecture List**

- 1 Introduction – The ‘Grammar’ of Paintings
- 2 Shape, Support, Medium and Materials
- 3 Composition
- 4 Style and Technique
- 5 Signs and Symbols
- 6 The Artist
- 7 The Portrait
- 8 Landscape
- 9 Narrative
- 10 Still Life
- 11 Abstraction
- 12 Conclusions. How and why choose a favourite and is it a masterpiece?

### **Required reading:**

Liz Rideal *How to Read Paintings* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).  
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1972; rpr London: Penguin, 2008).

### **Supplementary reading:**

Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New* (2d ed. London: Thames & Hudson, 1991).  
Norbert Lynton, *The Story of Modern Art* (London: Phaidon, 1994).  
Martin Gayford, *Man with a Blue Scarf: On Sitting for a Portrait by Lucian Freud* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012).