

The Dutch Golden Age

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Course Outline

Dutch painting flourished during the Golden Age of the 17th century, when Dutch trade and science were among the most acclaimed in the world. Having fought off the Spanish monarchical rule of previous centuries, the newly formed Dutch Republic was a flourishing hub for the arts and luxury goods. In this course, we will examine the unique social, political and religious context of the Dutch Republic in the 17th century, and consider how painting and painters fit within that context. Our discussion of Dutch art will be embedded in comparative studies of the other great centres of this time, from Bernini's powerful commissions in Papal Rome, Anthony van Dyck's portraits in Tudor England to Velazquez' Spanish court portraits.

As ever, this course will develop students' visual analysis skills, encouraging a critical awareness and understanding of the visual arts, which can be applied to students' own practices and future studies. Student participation is welcomed and encouraged in this conversational environment through class discussions and debates.

We will examine the various genres and styles of painting that prospered in this period – from the lively portraits of Frans Hals to the seemingly introspective self-portraits of Rembrandt. We will consider how still life and landscape paintings reflected both pride and anxiety in the Dutch Republic's suddenly wealthy lifestyle. The bawdiness and merry chaos of Jan Steen's genre paintings will be compared to the still grace of Johannes Vermeer, perhaps both signalling issues of morality for their Dutch viewers. We will also consider how, with the absence of the Catholic church as an art patron, religious ideas were communicated in art.

No prior experience of art history is necessary, and all are welcome.

Outcomes

At the completion of this course it is expected that students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of major themes and concerns in Dutch Golden Age painting.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the socio-political context that stimulated art in this period.
- Identify key artists and artworks from the Dutch Golden Age.
- Draw from a wide pool of art history for their own influence and interest.
- Understand the significance of this historical art in the contemporary world.
- Apply critical visual analysis skills to art.

Teaching Strategies

I will endeavour to:

- Create an enjoyable, positive and supportive learning environment.
- Clearly explain class content.
- Encourage student participation and feedback.
- Be respectful of each student's individuality.

Expectations of You

As a student in this class you are expected to:

- Arrive promptly for each session.
- Be open, generous and respectful in your professional dealings with fellow students.
- Participate in class discussions.
- Keep your mobile phones switched off or on silent vibrate alert (except in emergencies).

Class Schedule

Week 1: Introduction

This week's class will introduce the course aims, the tutor and fellow students. We will look at the socio-political context of the Dutch Republic, and how artists worked in this context.

Week 2: Portraits and patrons

In this new Dutch Republic, there was a rise in the wealthy middle class, and a rising demand for art. This week we'll look at portraits, and the flourishing trade of portraits that occurred in the Dutch Golden Age.

Week 3: Rembrandt's self-portraits

Rembrandt is known for his extensive output of painted and etched self-portraits. In this class, we will examine a range of these and how they have been interpreted throughout the years, often contributing to the 'myth' of Rembrandt.

Week 4: FILM: *Rembrandt*, 1936

Continuing our conversation about Rembrandt and the almost mythical perception of him, we will watch Alexander Korda's *Rembrandt* (1936), starring Charles Laughton. After the film, we will discuss how this film may reinforce some misconceptions about his character!

Week 5: Genre painting

This week we will look at paintings that ostensibly depict scenes of everyday life: from the chaos of a Jan Steen household, to the restrained calm of Vermeer's women. We will discuss the 'reality effect' of these paintings: how they appear to be true-to-life, but are indeed constructed realities, with layers of meaning. These paintings give us some insight into the morals and virtues that concerned artists and their audiences in the Dutch Republic.

Week 6: Still life and landscape painting

The exacting technique of Dutch painters was well suited to still life and landscape painting, which were popular in household art collections. We will look at how these paintings were not simply decorative items, but spoke to moral anxiety and national pride in the Dutch Republic.

Week 7: Religious art

Religious imagery in the Dutch Republic provides an interesting case study, as the officially Calvinist Republic forbade grand religious iconography. With a very recent Catholic past, we will examine how religious imagery was created and received in the Republic.

Week 8: History painting

Ambitious artists sought to be history painters, as it was the most esteemed genre of painting. This class will examine a range of history paintings, and consider how different artists conveyed narratives through visual means.