



## ***Mariska Beekenkamp-Wladimiroff***

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### **A selection of possible lectures and Courses**

*Please note all courses can be broken up into individual lectures, and individual lectures can be combined to form a course!*

## **Netherlandish Art**

### **Brueghel & Rubens: A Fruitful Partnership**

In the early seventeenth century, two of the most celebrated painters of the Flemish Baroque—Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel the Elder—formed a remarkable artistic partnership that brought together their distinct but complementary talents. Rather than working in isolation, they collaborated on a number of paintings in which each artist contributed their specialist strengths: Rubens with his dynamic, expressive figures, and Brueghel with his meticulously detailed landscapes, still lifes, and depictions of flora and fauna.

This engaging lecture with Mariska explores how this unusual collaboration functioned in practice and why it proved so successful in the competitive art market of the time. We will examine key examples of their joint works, considering how their combined skills created richly layered compositions that appealed to elite collectors and connoisseurs across Europe.

Alongside their collaboration, we will also look at the wider artistic world of early seventeenth-century Flanders, where innovation, workshop practice, and patronage played a crucial role in shaping artistic production. The lecture offers a fascinating insight into how two very different artistic visions came together to produce some of the most refined and visually captivating paintings of the Baroque period.



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### **Hendrick Avercamp's Winter Wonderlands**

Hendrick Avercamp is one of the most distinctive painters of the Dutch Golden Age, known for his lively and detailed depictions of winter life in seventeenth-century Holland. Working during the period of the “Little Ice Age,” when canals and rivers frequently froze, he transformed the cold season into scenes of energy, humour, and social interaction.

His paintings are filled with skaters, sledders, market stalls, and playful winter activities, bringing together people of all ages and social backgrounds. These works offer a vivid glimpse into everyday life in the Dutch Republic, while also celebrating the shared enjoyment of winter conditions.

In this lecture, Mariska explores Avercamp's winter scenes within the wider development of European landscape painting, the rise of the genre in the Low Countries, and the cultural context of the Dutch Golden Age. We will also consider how to read these works closely, uncovering the stories, details, and traditions embedded in their rich visual worlds.

### **Jan van Eyck: God is in the Detail**

Jan van Eyck is one of the great masters of early Northern Renaissance painting, celebrated for his extraordinary precision, luminous colour, and astonishing attention to detail. Although he was once mistakenly credited with the invention of oil painting, he played a crucial role in refining and exploiting the medium's potential, using its slow-drying qualities to build up intricate layers of texture, light, and form.

Working in fifteenth-century Flanders—part of the cultural heartland of what is now Belgium—van Eyck drew inspiration from Gothic traditions, manuscript illumination, and the emerging naturalism of his time. His paintings are filled with richly observed details, from carefully rendered textiles and reflective surfaces to subtle symbolic motifs that often reward close



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looking. Many of these details would have been difficult to discern in their original settings, suggesting a visual richness intended for prolonged contemplation.

In this lecture, Mariska explores van Eyck's remarkable visual world, using high-resolution imagery to zoom in on details that would otherwise be invisible to the naked eye. We will consider his references to contemporary life in Flanders, his encyclopaedic interest in the natural world, and his strikingly accurate depictions of flora, fauna, and even celestial phenomena such as the lunar surface.

The session will also examine the symbolic and iconographic meanings embedded in his work, as well as his lasting influence on later generations of artists. Through this close study, we will uncover why van Eyck's paintings continue to be admired for their technical brilliance and their layered complexity.

### **Our Lord in the Attic: Tolerance and Dutch Society**

This lecture introduces one of Amsterdam's most unusual and revealing historic sites: the hidden Catholic church known as *Our Lord in the Attic*. From the outside, it appears to be a typical 17th-century canal house, but inside it contains a remarkably well-preserved clandestine place of worship, offering a rare insight into religious life in the Dutch Republic.

After the Protestant Reformation, Catholic worship was officially prohibited in the Dutch Republic, although in practice it was often tolerated in private spaces. As a result, many Catholics continued to practise their faith in concealed "schuilkerken" (hidden churches), carefully integrated into domestic buildings to avoid public attention.

Using *Our Lord in the Attic* as a case study, this lecture explores how religion was experienced in everyday Dutch society during the Golden Age. We will examine what religious tolerance



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actually meant in practice, how Catholic communities navigated legal and social restrictions, and how faith was expressed within private and semi-private spaces.

The session will also connect this hidden church to broader themes in Dutch art and culture, including the relationship between religion and domestic life, the visual culture of the period, and the wider question of how “tolerant” the Dutch Republic truly was. In doing so, we will gain a deeper understanding of how politics, belief, and daily life intersected in one of Europe’s most dynamic historical periods.

### **Mondrian’s Evolution into Abstraction**

Piet Mondrian is best known for his instantly recognisable abstract compositions of black grids and blocks of primary colour, created in the 1920s and beyond. These works have come to symbolise the radical break with traditional representation in modern art. However, what is often overlooked is the long artistic journey that led him there.

For over thirty years, Mondrian worked as a figurative painter, producing landscapes, trees, windmills, and natural forms rooted in close observation of the visible world. This extended period of experimentation and development laid the foundation for his later abstract language, as he gradually simplified form, reduced colour, and searched for a deeper underlying order in nature.

This lecture traces Mondrian’s artistic evolution from representational painting to complete abstraction, exploring the key stages of his development and the influences that shaped his thinking. We will also consider his involvement with De Stijl, his ideas about harmony and balance, and his belief in art as part of a broader spiritual and intellectual quest for universal order in a rapidly changing world.

By following this progression, we gain a clearer understanding of how Mondrian’s seemingly minimal compositions emerged from decades of artistic exploration and philosophical inquiry.



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### **Amsterdam: built on slavery and colonialism:**

How can a country known for its tolerance and freedom, where slavery was prohibited, become such an active participant in the slave trade? Time to look at what financed Amsterdam's beautiful canals and extra ordinary artistic output!

The past 20 years we have seen a re-definement of what the 'Dutch Golden Age' really entailed for the Netherlands and if we should still call it a 'Golden' age.

In the summer of 2008, a fascinating exhibition about the representation of black people by Dutch and Flemish artists, from late medieval to modern times, was held at the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam. This was followed in 2020 by 'Black in Rembrandt's time', a groundbreaking exhibition at the Rembrandt House, discussing the history of Holland's black community and the way in which stereotypes that later fixed the image of black people were yet to prevail.

In 2021 Amsterdam residents were offered a free book on the city's links with slavery and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam held the widely acclaimed exhibition 'Slavery'.

2023 Saw the Mauritshuis Museum host the exhibition 'Loot - 10 stories' about the struggles museums have with stolen art, and the Dutch King Willem-Alexander finally apologized for for the Netherlands' Role in the Slave Trade.

Time to add to the narrative that Amsterdam and the Netherlands was solely built on its entrepreneurial explorers!

### **Women in the Dutch Republic**

Visitors to the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century were often struck by the remarkable independence of its women. Foreign travellers commented on their confidence, visibility in public life, involvement in business, and freedom of movement—qualities they considered highly unusual compared to the women of other European countries.



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What made Dutch women different, and how did the unique social, economic, and religious circumstances of the Dutch Golden Age shape their lives? In this engaging lecture, Mariska explores the role of women in one of Europe's most prosperous and progressive societies. Through contemporary accounts, paintings, prints, and material culture, we will examine the realities of women's daily lives, from household management and commerce to marriage, motherhood, and social status.

The lecture will also consider how artists represented women in Dutch art, revealing contemporary ideals of virtue, domesticity, wealth, and independence. Featuring works by leading Dutch masters, this session offers a fascinating insight into the lives of the women who helped shape the culture of the Dutch Golden Age and the enduring image of the pragmatic, resilient Dutch woman.

### **Mystery, Miracles, and Magic: The Art of M.C. Escher**

Maurits Cornelis Escher is one of the most recognisable graphic artists of the twentieth century, celebrated for his astonishing explorations of space, pattern, and perception. Although he initially trained in architecture and began his career producing more traditional, observational works, Escher gradually developed a highly original visual language that defies easy categorisation.

His prints are renowned for their extraordinary precision and their ability to challenge the viewer's understanding of reality. Through impossible constructions, infinite staircases, shifting perspectives, and intricate tessellations, Escher creates images in which the logical and the illogical coexist. His work plays with the long artistic tradition of representing three-dimensional space on a flat surface, pushing it to its conceptual limits and transforming it into something entirely new.

Rather than simply illustrating mathematical ideas, Escher's art invites viewers to experience visual paradox firsthand—images that appear both perfectly ordered and subtly impossible at



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the same time. His unique approach has captivated mathematicians, artists, filmmakers, and musicians alike, influencing figures such as Mick Jagger and Stanley Kubrick.

In this lecture, we will trace Escher's artistic development from his early figurative work to his most iconic mind-bending compositions, exploring how he combined art, mathematics, and imagination to create some of the most intriguing images in modern visual culture.

### **The Dutch Golden Age in 6 Paintings**

The seventeenth century in the Netherlands—often referred to as the Dutch Golden Age—was a period of extraordinary cultural, economic, and artistic flourishing. In a relatively small, newly independent republic, artists such as Rembrandt and Vermeer created works of remarkable variety and sophistication, capturing a society experiencing rapid growth, global trade, scientific curiosity, and civic pride.

In this lecture, we will explore this vibrant world through six key paintings that together offer a window into Dutch life and artistic achievement. Despite its size, the Dutch Republic produced an astonishing volume of art, much of it still held in museums around the world today.

Using these selected works as a starting point, we will examine the people, cities, landscapes, and daily life of the period, as well as the beliefs and values that shaped them. We will also explore the rich diversity of Dutch painting genres, including portraiture, landscape, still life, and scenes of everyday domestic life, revealing how artists responded to both the realities and ideals of their society.



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### **Giants of the Dutch Golden Age**

*(A six-part series)*

The seventeenth century in the Netherlands produced some of the most extraordinary artists in European art history. Figures such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer, Frans Hals, Jan Steen, Rachel Ruysch, and Jacob van Ruisdael shaped a vibrant and diverse visual culture that continues to captivate audiences today.

In this six-part series, Dutch art historian Mariska guides you through the lives, works, and lasting legacies of these leading artists of the Dutch Golden Age. Each session focuses on a key figure, offering insight into their artistic achievements as well as the cultural, social, and economic world in which they worked.

From Rembrandt's profound exploration of light and human emotion, to Vermeer's quiet, intimate domestic scenes; from Hals's energetic portraiture and Steen's lively genre paintings, to Ruysch's exquisite floral still lifes and Ruisdael's dramatic landscapes—this course reveals the remarkable range and innovation of Dutch art in its golden century.

Designed for curious learners and art enthusiasts alike, the series will deepen your appreciation of these masterpieces and equip you with the tools to look more closely, understand more fully, and enjoy more richly the art of the Dutch Republic.

### **The Golden Age of Dutch Art and its most creative genres:**

**Landscape Art, Portrait Painting, Genre Painting, Still Lives, Symbolism in Art.**

A full immersion into different aspects of the arts during the start of the Dutch Republic. It's main genres, how and why they developed, and how they were reviewed in the time.



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- **The Low Countries and the start of Landscape Painting:** This unique genre was first fully explored as an individual subject in the Low Countries. We will discuss its beginnings, its development, and its influences on later artists in other countries.
- **Portrait Painting in 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland:** The large mercantile class in the Dutch Republic were keen patrons of the arts. Far more than their equivalents in other countries they were ready to commission portraits, and they had a ready supply of very able artists to choose from. Their portraits still speak to us today with their raw and real likenesses and relatable behaviours. This lecture will show what sets them apart.
- **Still Live Painting of the Golden Age:** A genre which had existed for ages, still lives weren't just mere copies of inanimate objects to the Dutch. Still lives were highly prized and took on a whole new meaning, often giving us clues in the symbolism they include and the objects they portray. There is more than meets the eye in these often almost photographic likenesses, and this one hour talk will try to explain this very Dutch genre a bit more.
- **The recognizable and the everyday: Dutch Genre Painting:** A phenomenon which really took off in Protestant Holland, populated by middle class burghers who were mostly living in towns, were the genre paintings of ordinary people going about their ordinary business. Often funny, sometimes moralistic, but always relatable these paintings still speak to us today even though we often miss the true stories they try to tell.

### **A house full of (still life) flowers**

This course will cover the unique genre of Dutch Flower Still Life Painting, which bloomed (!) into a remarkable and highly lucrative type of painting in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries.

After becoming an independent republic in 1581, the Dutch developed into one of the most successful seafaring nations, with a network of worldwide trade that brought them extra ordinary riches. New technologies, ideas, plants, flowers and animals were introduced into



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Europe, with much of it coming through Dutch ports. It brought about a frenzy of trade and collecting, with people eager to own and display the latest novelties.

Our course will start with the Age of Exploration, and the interest in trying to order, define and classify new objects, artefacts and species in Collector's Cabinets. We will focus on the taxonomy of flowers and the rise of a widespread interest in gardening and the cultivation of exotic flowers. The development of flower still life painting as an independent genre plays a key role within this interest of collecting, and we will discuss its importance as a visual representation of the knowledge about flowers. We will highlight that beyond the obvious beauty of flower still life paintings, these paintings were full of different layers of interpretation. Reading the possible story within a painting was a popular pastime among owners of artworks, and the vogue for visual intellectualism was supported by the production of a great many emblem books containing the meaning of certain symbols. We will analyse the iconography used in flower still life paintings and the enjoyment of finding elements to complement your search for meaning.

This course will end with the worthy contribution to this genre by Dutch artist in general, but female artists from the Netherlands in particular. Rising to incredible international fame, with patrons at all the main European courts of the time, these women artists pushed this genre to new and unprecedented creative heights. Earning more for their paintings than Rembrandt ever did (even at the peak of his career), these stars of a genre usually seen as the least impressive when it comes to the fine arts, are still often overlooked. Time to address!

### **Van Gogh: From Lost Soul to Visionary Artist**

*(A three-part course)*

Few artists have captured the imagination like Vincent van Gogh, whose emotionally charged paintings and turbulent life story have become inseparable. Yet behind the familiar image of the "troubled genius" lies a complex artistic journey shaped by experimentation, struggle, extraordinary creative ambition and unwavering family support.



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This three-part course traces Van Gogh's development from his early, uncertain years in Holland, England, and Belgium—where he searched for purpose and attempted various paths in life—to his transformative time in Paris, where he encountered Impressionism and Post-Impressionism and began to develop his distinctive visual language. The course concludes with his intensely productive and profoundly expressive final period in the south of France, where colour, emotion, and symbolism reached new heights in his work.

Across the series, we will explore key themes in Van Gogh's art, including his fascination with self-portraiture, his desire to depict working people with dignity and empathy, and his evolving ambitions as both a portrait and landscape painter. We will also consider how his technique, use of colour, and brushwork developed in response to his changing environments and emotional states.

By following his artistic and personal journey, this course offers a deeper understanding of how Van Gogh transformed lived experience into some of the most powerful and enduring images in modern art.

### **Laughter in Art: Humour in Dutch Golden Age Painting**

The Netherlands in the 17th century produced an extraordinary number of humorous paintings. In Dutch Baroque genre scenes, people—and animals—are frequently shown misbehaving, playing tricks, falling in love, making fools of themselves, or simply laughing out loud. Everyday life becomes a stage for comedy, from drunken revelry and inattentive workers to children causing chaos and unexpected moments of cheeky irreverence.

These paintings were not only meant to entertain. Some illustrated well-known proverbs or stock characters from popular theatre, while others carried moral lessons about folly and excess. At the same time, laughter was increasingly seen as beneficial to health, and printed collections of jokes and humorous verse became widely popular.



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Visitors to the Dutch Republic often remarked on the Dutch as unusually humorous—sometimes even “clownish”—noting a culture that seemed to embrace wit and playfulness in daily life.

In this lecture, we will look at these works as they were likely intended: genuinely funny. Expect mischievous tricks, sleepy servants, lovers struck by misfortune, lively taverns, and animals behaving badly—even in sacred spaces. A light-hearted exploration of the wit and comedy of Dutch Golden Age painting.

### **A Tribute to Antwerp:**

Often overshadowed in broader surveys of art history, Antwerp was one of the most dynamic and inventive artistic centres in Europe during the late Renaissance and early Baroque period. In this session, we turn our attention to the extraordinary circumstances that allowed the city to flourish as a hub of creativity, trade, and artistic experimentation.

Working in and around Antwerp were some of the most influential artists of the period, including Pieter Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens. Yet alongside these celebrated figures, many other artists played a crucial role in developing entirely new pictorial genres and visual languages that would shape painting across Europe—in Italy, England, and most profoundly in the Netherlands.

It was here that landscape painting emerged as an independent genre, that portraiture began to incorporate objects reflecting the sitter’s identity and status, and that ordinary people increasingly became the central subject of artistic representation. These innovations helped establish the foundations of genre painting as we understand it today.

This lecture will explore Antwerp not simply as a backdrop, but as a driving force in artistic transformation—a city where commerce, ideas, and image-making converged to redefine the possibilities of painting.



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### **Hieronymus Bosch: Universal Disorder**

The often bizarre and captivating paintings of Hieronymus Bosch open up a world of temptation, sin, and moral consequence, where the familiar and the fantastical collide. His scenes are densely populated with strange creatures, fragmented narratives, and unsettling imagery that continue to intrigue viewers today.

Rooted in the spiritual climate of the *Devotio Moderna*, Bosch's work reflects a belief in personal responsibility for one's actions and the wellbeing of others. His paintings can be read as moral landscapes, warning against folly while inviting close, almost forensic looking—each detail offering a clue to human behaviour and its consequences.

At the same time, Bosch creates an atmosphere of constant observation: figures are both watchers and the watched, under the gaze of divine judgement. These layered scenes reward careful attention, revealing meanings that are never fully fixed, but always compelling.

Join us for a closer look at Bosch's extraordinary worlds—where disorder is never random, and nothing is quite what it seems.

### **The Difficulty with Rembrandt**

For all his talent, this rather unpleasant, over ambitious, over confident man actually lived through some tough times personally. But he also lived through some of the most interesting times during the Golden Age of the Republic of the Netherlands. Amsterdam was beaming with wealth, different cultures, new and exotic objects, foods and materials and an optimism and self belief unequaled anywhere else in Europe. Some of this is captured by Rembrandt, but his art is also one of his own personal evolution into disillusionment. This lecture will showcase the beauty and suffering, the nice and the ugly, the exciting and the disappointing.



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## **Women & Art**

### **Heroines & Villains: Women in the Bible**

Biblical women have inspired artists for centuries, appearing in some of the most powerful and memorable images in Western art. They are portrayed in many different ways: as virtuous heroines and devoted mothers, cunning seductresses and dangerous temptresses, courageous leaders and tragic victims. Their stories have been interpreted, celebrated, and reimagined by artists from the Renaissance to the modern era.

In this fascinating lecture, Mariska explores the lives and legacies of some of the Bible's most enduring female figures, including Eve, Judith, Salome, Esther, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary. Through paintings, sculptures, and other works of art, we will examine how these women have been represented across the centuries and consider the symbolism, cultural values, and religious ideas embedded in their depictions.

By looking closely at these iconic images, we will discover not only the stories behind the artworks but also what they reveal about changing attitudes towards women, power, virtue, and morality throughout history.

### **Women in the Dutch Republic**



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### **Let's Talk About Mary: The Many Marys in Art and the Bible**

There are around eight Marys in the New Testament, including five in the Gospels and even one Miriam in the Old Testament. But who is who—and how do we recognise them in art?

This talk explores the shifting identities of the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and the lesser-known Marys of the Passion narratives, such as Mary of Clopas, Mary of Bethany, and Mary, mother of James. We will look at how artists distinguished—or deliberately merged—them in different periods.

The Virgin Mary's image changes from early Christian liturgical figure to medieval Queen of Heaven and later to a more restrained presence in Early Modern art. Mary Magdalene's role



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shifts dramatically too: from devoted disciple and teacher in early traditions to repentant sinner in later centuries.

Join Mariska for a clear guide to identifying the Marys in art, and what their changing depictions reveal about how women and sanctity were understood over time.

### **Marina Abramović, grandmother of Performance Art:**

At 78 years of age Abramović can truly be seen as the grandmother of Performance Art. The most prominent figure in performance and body art since the 1970s, she never gave up her quest to confront fear and vulnerability in the pursuit of artistic expression. Best known for her work where she tested the limits of her own physical and mental endurance, she manages to transform her audiences who feel they become part of the art itself. The first female artist ever to exhibit solo in the imposing Main Galleries of the Royal Academy in London, she has been honoured in a now career changing show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York: the Artist is Present, and returned to show at the city where some of her most iconic works started: Amsterdam. Time to dive into the who and more importantly: why?!

### **Women, Collectors & the Making of Modern Art in New York (1929–1939)**

In the early 20th century, women began to play a transformative—and often under-acknowledged—role in shaping the modern art world, not only as patrons but as active collectors using art to construct independent identities and cultural authority.

This session explores how, in the decades around 1929–1939, New York's museum landscape was fundamentally reshaped through the vision and determination of women collectors and cultural organisers. We follow the origins of four of the city's most iconic institutions—the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Frick Collection, and the



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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum—each now internationally renowned, yet all deeply shaped by female agency at critical moments in their formation.

Far from being passive consumers, these women used collecting as a form of intellectual and social authorship, defining what modern art could be, how it should be displayed, and which artists would enter the canon. Their activities unfolded against the backdrop of a rapidly changing New York, where modernism, philanthropy, and social ambition intersected in new and powerful ways.

Together we will examine how these figures navigated taste, power, and visibility, and how their contributions helped establish the institutions that continue to define modern art history today.

## **Art Historical Periods**

### **Mind Your Mannerism:**

A little known art movement, happening right at the end of the European Renaissance, and before the Baroque, Mannerism has divided opinion since the moment it developed.

As a movement catering for ultra-sophisticated courtiers and collectors, this was definitely never meant as a mainstream trend. With its elongated, twisted bodies and idealised faces the figures seem far removed for the naturalism that was sweeping through Europe. The subject and meaning of the artworks are often unclear, and the depictions complex and impossible.

Time to dive into the ins and outs of this short lived style!



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Join Mariska as we introduce the 'manniera' of some extremely skilled artists, who were pushing the boundaries of art and what it depicts. This virtual journey through the Mannerist art movement will include:

- Its existence within the context of Art Historical discourse
- Historical, religious and socio-economic background of 16th century Europe
- Explanation of the iconography and symbolism used
- Some of its main players like Michelangelo, Bronzino, Parmigianino, El Greco and others
- Courts and countries where this style flourished

## **Themes**

### **Symbolism in Art:**

As centuries passed, a language of symbols developed so that artists could tell stories with deeper and more intricate emphasis, instantly understandable for an audience which did not always share the same spoken language and which was often illiterate. Even though many of these symbols are still in use today, modern audiences have lost the ability to recognize and read them. This series of lectures dives into the deeper meaning hidden in works of art. Learn how to read the secrets of different objects, forms, shapes and colours and the iconography associated with it. We will cover a wide range of (mainly Western) art of diverse kinds and origins, and examine the fascinating and complex range of different symbols making it easier for you to interpret works of art.



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- **Christian Iconography in Art:** Do you know that in most classical museums 1/3 of their collection has Christian subject matters? Through 9 centuries almost all European art was inspired and financed by the Christian church. In fact Papal overspending on art was an important cause of the Reformation. To be able to enjoy classical European art, it is therefore helpful to understand the imagery associated with biblical stories and Christian ideas. This lecture will focus on some of the motifs that keep re-appearing and which explain much of what you are looking at without ever having to read the museum label!
- **Deciphering the Meaning of a Painting by its Colours:** The colour of a cloak or dress will instantly give away to the audience if we are dealing with a sinful person, someone who has great humility, or a majestic person for instance. But many of us are no longer aware of the symbolic meaning colours held for people in the past. In this lecture we will look at different works of art and how different artists, across different artistic styles and countries, have used the same colours to give meaning to their art.
- **Identifying Symbolic Meaning of Geometric shapes in Artworks :** In this talk we'll see how within European art history geometric shapes play an important part in the interpretation of the piece. Sometimes these shapes are clearly visible at other times it is hidden in the way things are lined up, but in all the works we will be discussing the artists put these references in their on purpose to add a layer of interpretation, possible because of the symbolic meaning of these shapes.
- **Objects and their symbolic meaning in works of art :** In this talk we'll identify objects within works of art and their symbolic meaning to the work. Objects are often used within the arts as an attribute of gods and goddesses, saints and sinners and personifications of concepts. We will trace the reason behind the use of certain objects and how you sometimes need to look at the combination of different objects to get the full picture of the story being told.
- **Explaining Allegories in Art (*the figurative representation of an abstract idea*):** In this talk we'll be looking at ways in which complex, abstract ideas such as love, life, death, virtue and justice can be represented in art using symbols. Although Allegories use symbols, they are slightly different from symbolism in so much that allegories are complete narratives. In Latin Allegoria means 'veiled language' and that is exactly what these artworks represent.



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- **Animals and their symbolic meaning:** In this talk we'll be looking at how the animal kingdom has brought us many comparisons with us humans! Throughout art history many artists have made use of the symbolical value of certain animals and their behaviour to describe the people depicted in the work of art or even take their place. To know the symbolism associated with these animals assists in the interpretation of the works of art and greatly helps in the enjoyment of your museum visit.
- **The Symbolism of Music in Dutch Genre Painting:** In this talk, art historian Mariska Beekenkamp-Wladimiroff will look at the fascinating hidden meaning of music and musical instruments in Dutch genre paintings from the 17th century. Discover how this unique symbolism brought together the two disciplines of art and music, opening up this genre of painting to an audience that did not always share the same spoken or written language.
- **A short introduction to Symbolism in art:** this one hour whirlwind talk will introduce a series of symbols used throughout this ages and in many countries. Knowing what these symbols mean is fun and a great help in understanding what you are looking at.

### **Master Pieces:**

these one hour talks will take the time to properly look at some of the most well-known and admired pieces of art by talking not just about what our eyes can see, but highlighting the artist, the story being told and people portrait, the time in which it was made, the art historical period, the techniques used, the size and material, the patron and places it has hung!

- **The Ghent Altarpiece: The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, Jan van Eyck, 1420-1432, Oil and Tempera on wood, c.3.4 m × 4.6 m, St Bavo Cathedral, Ghent**
- **Allegory of Sight, Jan Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1617. Oil on wood, 64x108cm Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain**
- **A Poulterer's Shop, Gerrit Dou, c. 1670, oil on canvas, 58 x 46 cm, National Gallery, London**



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- **Marriage Portrait of Isaac Massa en Beatrix van der Laen, Frans Hals, c. 1622, Oil on canvas, 140 x 166,5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam**
- **Composition C (No.III) with Red, Yellow and Blue, by Piet Mondriaan, 1935, oil on canvas, 56x55.2cm, Tate Modern**
- **The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp, Rembrandt, 1632, Oil on canvas, 216.5 x 169.5 cm, Mauritshuis, The Hague**

### **An Introduction to European Art History**

This broad-ranging course provides an accessible introduction to the major periods of European art, from the artistic achievements of Ancient Greece to the diverse movements of contemporary art. Along the way, we will explore how styles evolved over time, identify the key characteristics that distinguish each period, and discover the artists, regions, and ideas that shaped the history of European art.

Whether you are new to art history or looking to refresh your knowledge, this course will equip you with the tools to recognise and place artworks within their historical context, while gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural developments that influenced their creation.

*This course can be adapted to run as a short survey of six sessions or a more comprehensive programme of up to twelve sessions.*

### **Back to Basics: The Renaissance**

*(A series of four lectures)*



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The Renaissance gave rise to some of the most celebrated artists in history, including Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael. But what conditions allowed this remarkable artistic revolution to flourish? Why did Florence become its centre, and how did politics, patronage, religion, and innovation shape the art of the period?

This four-part course explores the cultural and historical foundations of the Renaissance, providing a deeper understanding of the ideas, people, and institutions behind its masterpieces. By examining the wider context in which these works were created, you will gain a richer appreciation of the paintings, sculptures, and architecture that continue to define the period.

Topics will include:

- Florence and the rebirth of the arts
- Power, patronage, and ideology
- Artists, materials, and artistic processes
- Religious culture and the visual arts

### **Art Nouveau in Europe and America**

*(A series of two lectures)*

Emerging at the turn of the twentieth century, Art Nouveau brought a fresh and distinctive aesthetic to architecture, interiors, and the decorative arts. Characterised by flowing lines, organic forms, and motifs inspired by nature, the movement bridged the gap between the Arts and Crafts movement and the rise of Modernism.

Across two lectures, we will explore the work of some of Art Nouveau's most innovative and influential figures, including Victor Horta, Antoni Gaudí, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and many others, discovering how their designs transformed the visual culture of Europe and America.



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### **Metamorphoses: Myth, Transformation, and the Inspiration of Art**

Discover the captivating world of *Metamorphoses*, the celebrated epic poem by the Roman poet Ovid. Spanning from the creation of the world to the deification of Julius Caesar, this remarkable work is woven together by tales of transformation, where gods, mortals, and mythical creatures are changed in extraordinary ways.

Drawing on the rich traditions of classical mythology, Ovid's stories have inspired artists for centuries and remain one of the most influential sources in European art. In this lecture, we will explore some of the poem's most memorable characters and episodes, uncovering the myths behind many of the artworks you may have encountered in museums, galleries, and popular culture.

### **Series: 6 weeks, 6 of Europe's Greatest Museums and 6 of their most renowned master pieces!**

Join Mariska on a journey through six of Europe's most celebrated art museums. Over six weeks, each session focuses on a single world-renowned collection, tracing its origins, historical development, and the extraordinary artworks that define it today.

From royal and papal collections to national museums formed in the modern era, this series explores how some of the most important art institutions in the Western world came into being. Alongside well-known masterpieces, we will also highlight lesser-known treasures that deserve closer attention.

Each lecture will centre on six key artworks from the featured museum, selected for their artistic, historical, and cultural significance. By looking closely at these works, we will explore what makes them masterpieces and why they continue to be essential viewing for anyone interested in art history.



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Across the series, we will encounter works spanning the full breadth of the Western art tradition—from the Ancient Greeks to the modern period—developing a deeper understanding of how art collections are built, interpreted, and experienced.

Museums included:

- The Louvre, Paris (1793)
- The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (1800)
- The Prado, Madrid (1819)
- The Uffizi Gallery, Florence (1743)
- The National Gallery, London (1824)
- The Vatican Museums, Rome (1506)

### **Series: Facing the Self – Six European Artists in Their Own Image**

Join Mariska on a journey through the work of six European artists who, across different centuries and artistic movements, repeatedly turned to themselves as both subject and source of inspiration.

While a portrait is often understood simply as a likeness—a visual record of a face—self-portraiture is far more complex. Across art history, artists have used their own image not only to explore appearance, but also to construct identity, communicate status, experiment with style, and reflect on their place in the world. These works can function as personal statements, professional tools, psychological studies, and even as carefully crafted artistic “documents” shaped by audience and intention.

Rather than asking what these self-portraits look like, this series asks a more revealing question: what were they for? Each session explores how artists used their own image to think



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through ideas of selfhood, creativity, and representation, revealing how self-portraiture operates as diary, performance, advertisement, and artistic laboratory all at once.

Artists featured in the series:

Artemisia Gentileschi, Rembrandt van Rijn, Edvard Munch, Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, and Tracey Emin.

### **Series (2): Art Before and After the French Revolution**

Join Mariska for this two-part series exploring how French art shaped—and was reshaped by—the dramatic political and cultural upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

From the elegance and refinement of royal patronage at Versailles, including the influential role of women at court, to the radical visual language of the Revolution and the emergence of Napoleon as a dominant figure in European culture, these lectures trace a period of profound artistic transformation. We will examine how shifting power structures influenced artists, patrons, and subject matter, and how these changes were reflected in style, symbolism, and artistic purpose.

Each lecture will showcase key masterpieces from this pivotal era in Western art history, offering guidance on how to recognise stylistic developments and understand what makes these works so significant. By the end of the series, you will have a clearer sense of how art both reflected and shaped one of the most turbulent periods in European history.

### **Different Perspectives**

The Renaissance is often described as a turning point in Western art history, when the development of linear perspective revolutionised the way artists represented space and



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created the illusion of depth. It is frequently presented as the moment when art finally “got it right”—as if a single system of viewing the world was established as the standard for all that followed. But what happens if linear perspective is not the only way—or even the most interesting way—of understanding pictorial space?

In this thought-provoking lecture, Mariska explores the wide variety of spatial systems and visual strategies used by artists across different periods and cultures. While we will begin with the innovations of the Renaissance and the emergence of one-point perspective, we will also examine multiple viewpoints, shifting or continuous perspective, reverse or inverted perspective, and approaches that challenge conventional ideas of depth and space, including more conceptual ideas of the fourth dimension.

Through a range of artworks drawn primarily from Western European art, with occasional references to other global traditions, we will consider how artists construct and manipulate space to guide meaning, emotion, and narrative. We will also reflect on the role of the viewer in completing the image, and how our expectations shape what we think we are seeing.

Along the way, we will explore key questions: why has the idea of the artwork as a “window onto the world” been so influential? What happens when artists deliberately disrupt that illusion? And how might we train ourselves to see artworks from multiple, shifting perspectives rather than a single fixed viewpoint?

This engaging lecture encourages you to rethink how you look at art—and to discover how many different ways there are to see the same image.

### **Fashion & Makeup in Art History**

Self-expression has always been a central part of human identity. From the earliest periods of human history to the present day, people have used clothing, adornment, and cosmetics to



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shape how they see themselves—and how they wish to be seen by others. Fashion and makeup are therefore not only personal choices, but also powerful cultural statements, reflecting ideals of beauty, status, gender, power, and belonging.

In this lecture, Mariska explores how fashion and makeup appear in European art history, and how artists have documented, idealised, and sometimes challenged the visual codes of self-presentation. Through paintings and visual culture from different periods, we will examine how appearance is constructed both by individual expression and by social expectation.

We will consider how artists use clothing, jewellery, hairstyles, and cosmetics to communicate identity, and how these elements help us interpret the lives of people depicted in art. Fashion and makeup also move between art and life: artists record contemporary styles, while at the same time influencing how beauty and elegance are imagined.

Along the way, we will encounter some of the most striking, daring, and expressive examples of appearance in art history—ranging from opulent court fashion to bold acts of personal styling and transformation. This lecture reveals how appearance functions as both visual language and historical evidence, offering a vivid window into the worlds of the past.

### **Master Pieces of the Baroque (series of 5)**

Join Mariska for a five part series where we bring together five of the most well known artworks from the European Baroque period.

As the Catholic church lost ground to the Protestant Reformation, it declared that art had to serve the church in instructing the faithful in the Catholic faith. Art became relatable, human, personal and exciting. Drawing in, not just 17<sup>th</sup> century audiences, but art lovers to this day.



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This series will focus on 5 master artists, choosing one of their master pieces each, to explain the context of the period, the regional differences, the period's love for theatre, trickery and the exotic, and the reason why these works changed the course of European art history forever

The following works will be discussed:

1. David with the Head of Goliath (Self Portrait), by Carravaggio, 1609-10, Galleria Borghese, Rome
2. Raising of the Cross, by Pieter Paul Rubens, 1610, Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp
3. Judith Beheading Holofernes, by Artemisia Gentileschi, 1620, Uffizi, Florence
4. Portrait of Pope Innocent X, by Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velázquez, c. 1650, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome
5. Ecstasy of St. Theresa, by Bernini, 1647-52, Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome

### **Series (3): Master Pieces of the Rococo**

Join Mariska for a three part series where we bring together three of the most well known artworks from the European Rococo period.

Life at Versailles in France completely changed after the death of Louis XIV. Things relaxed and all became less centralised. The new king, Louis XV, and his mistress Madame de Pompadour, preferred a life more private, lighthearted and playful. A time of unparalleled luxury and abject poverty followed.

This series will focus on three master artists and their patrons who helped shaped the look of this art historical period, making it a style that would spread beyond the borders of France, and one that would ultimately lead to people questioning the might of its rulers and institutions.

The following works will be discussed:



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1. Portrait of Madame de Pompadour at her Tambour Frame, François-Hubert Drouais, 1763-1764, oil on canvas, 217 × 156.8 cm, National Gallery, London
2. Pierrot (also known as Gilles), Jean-Antoine Watteau, c. 1718-19, Oil on canvas, 184 x 149 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris
3. The Swing, Fragonard, 1767, oil on canvas, 81 x 64.2 cm, Wallace Collection, London

### **The Start of Museums: From Ancient Collections to Modern Institutions**

The word “museum” comes from the Greek *Mouseion*, originally a place of contemplation and learning rather than display. So when did museums, as we understand them today, begin to emerge?

In this talk, Mariska traces the history of collecting from some of its earliest known examples, including the ancient Mesopotamian “museum” of Ennigaldi-Nanna (c. 530 BCE), through to the development of Renaissance *studioli*, Cabinets of Curiosities, and Enlightenment ideas of classification and knowledge.

We will also explore how nineteenth-century museums became public institutions linked to education and civic identity, and consider what defines a museum today.

### **Challenges and Tensions: The Inter-War Years, 1917–1939**

Join Mariska for this five-part series exploring the complex artistic landscape of the inter-war period, a time shaped by the aftermath of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, the cultural dynamism of the Roaring Twenties, and the profound economic and political crises of



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the Great Depression. The era also witnessed the Spanish Flu pandemic, the rise of fascism across Europe, and the growing tensions that ultimately led to the Second World War.

Against this backdrop of upheaval and uncertainty, artists responded in diverse and often contradictory ways. Some embraced radical innovation and abstraction, while others turned to figuration, social commentary, or political engagement. This series examines how different artistic movements and individual artists navigated these turbulent decades, asking to what extent historical events shaped—or failed to shape—their creative output.

Focusing primarily on European art, the series will introduce key movements and figures, including the post-war “-isms,” Wassily Kandinsky *Hardships & Conquests*, Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian, and Käthe Kollwitz, among others. Through their work, we will explore how art reflected, resisted, or reimagined a world in crisis.

### **Art and the Perception of Time**

How do artists tell stories that unfold across time within a single image? Since the Renaissance, narrative painting has explored this challenge, compressing and shaping time on a static canvas in increasingly inventive ways.

In this webinar, Mariska examines how artists in Western European art history represent and manipulate time—freezing moments, extending sequences, and guiding the viewer through complex narratives. We will explore key approaches such as monoscenic, continuous, and synoptic narrative, alongside visual devices including calendars, seasonal cycles, solar imagery, and symbols like the Ouroboros and Father Time.

The lecture also considers how artists depict movement and reflect on the idea that art itself can outlast human life—echoing the enduring notion that *ars longa, vita brevis*. Through a range of examples, we will see how artists push the boundaries of painting to make time visible.



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