

Weekend Masterclass: Caravaggio's Chiaroscuro

Dates	Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 January 2026
Times	10.30–16.30 GMT
Location	At the museum (Learning Studio and Exhibition Galleries)
Tutor	Karly Allen and Jo Lewis
Level	Introductory



Caravaggio, *Cupid as Victor*, 1601/02 (detail), Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
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Course Description

Inspired by Caravaggio's use of *chiaroscuro* – the dramatic effects of light and shadow – develop your skills in making tonal drawings from the human figure. You'll learn techniques for observing and creating tone by drawing from paintings and sculptures close up, then spend three hours experimenting with quick-fire and longer poses with a life model, using staged lighting for sensational results.

Suitable as a first experience of life drawing or for those developing their practice, we'll encourage the playful exploration of materials through guided practices and personalised support from our tutors.

Saturday

We'll begin with guided looking exercises in the museum and in our *Caravaggio's Cupid* exhibition, focusing on light and shade. Using pencil and chalk, we'll explore tone on paper through short drawing prompts. In the afternoon, we'll return to the studio to draw from a live model, applying our discoveries. Inspired by Caravaggio's dramatic use of light, our focus will be to capture the qualities of light on the human form.

Sunday

On Sunday we'll create more sustained drawings in preparation for an afternoon working from the live model. Exploring wet material including ink, water, brushes, quill and reed pens, we'll draw inspiration from Rembrandt and Van Dyck. We'll work to different time limits to make large pieces, exploring light and shadow on the figure. By the end of the weekend, you'll have a varied collection of life drawings in wet and dry media, with time to reflect on and share your observations as a group.

Course Tutors

Karly Allen is a drawing tutor and lecturer in art history. A graduate of the Ruskin School of Art (University of Oxford) and SOAS (University of London), she has led workshops and developed learning programmes for national art collections for over 20 years, including the National Gallery, Courtauld Gallery, V&A and National Portrait Gallery. Karly enriches her teaching with her training as a mindfulness teacher and, as co-director of Limina Collective, contributes to the emerging field of mindfulness in museums. She specialises in approaches for looking and drawing in art collections, the history of the sketch aesthetic, and drawing to promote wellbeing and connection.

Jo Lewis is an artist and educator. Jo trained at the University of Edinburgh and the École des Beaux-Arts in Valence. In her work, Jo uses ink and watercolour on paper, frequently working outside in rivers. She has exhibited in the UK and France and has been commissioned and collected by institutions including Hermès, Barclays Bank, More London Collection of Contemporary Art, Raffles Hotels, Ripple USA, Ashstead Hospital and Commonwealth Bank of Australia. Recent exhibitions include solo shows in London and Lyon and group shows in Paris. Jo has taught on many projects for the National Gallery since 2002 and has been a guest lecturer at the London Film School since 2010 and Paris College of Art since 2020.

Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience

None required. This course is designed as an introduction to the subject.

Equipment and Materials

Please wear clothes suitable for using messy materials. All materials and equipment are provided.

Joining Information and Format

For ages 18+. This masterclass will take place in the Learning Studio, Lower Ground Floor as well as galleries throughout the museum. We recommend participants bring a packed lunch. When walking through the museum, food must be packed away in a bag and liquids carried in a sealed bottle, flask or travel mug.
