

The Art of Family Life

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| Dates | Tuesdays 12, 19 and 26 May 2026 |
| Times | 18.00–20.00 BST |
| Location | Online (Zoom) |
| Tutor | Jacqui Ansell |
| Level | All Levels |



Jan Steen *Celebrating the Birth*, 1664

Course Description

Join art historian Jacqui Ansell to discover the importance of fatherhood and family life for 17th-century painters Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Jan Steen, and learn how domestic life inspired their art.

We will explore how the idea of 'home' acquired heightened meaning during a period of uncertainty, when the Netherlands was frequently engaged in internal and international conflict. Situating a key work in the Wallace Collection by each artist within a broader context, we will uncover fascinating attitudes towards family life and the socio-economic forces that shaped each of the artists' careers.

Session One - House and Home: Peter Paul Rubens' *The Rainbow Landscape*, 1636

We will begin with the gifted painter Rubens - a consummate courtier and diplomat whose missions took him to Italy, Spain, France, and England. With financial success came a magnificent Antwerp town house and country estate 'Het Steen' - home for his growing family. We will focus particularly on the ways in which Rubens' wives and children featured in his work, inspiring deeply personal images as well as poetic landscapes such as *The Rainbow Landscape* now in the Wallace Collection.

Session Two - A Fond Father: Rembrandt van Rijn's portrait of *Titus, the Artist's Son*, 1657

As we turn to Rembrandt, we will find a family life marked by hardship and loss. The Wallace Collection's masterly portrait of his son Titus - the only child from his marriage to Saskia to reach adulthood - stands as a poignant reminder of the fragility of life in the 17th century. Through an exploration of Rembrandt's graphic work and searching self-portraits, we will gain insights into the financial anxieties and domestic difficulties that shadowed his career and dominated his posthumous reputation.

Session Three - Hectic Households: Jan Steen's *Celebrating the Birth*, 1664

In our final session, we move to Jan Steen and one of the most popular themes in 17th-century Netherlandish art - the home and family. Steen is so celebrated for his distinctive depictions of domestic chaos that even today the Dutch describe a messy house as 'a Jan Steen household.' We will compare Steen's image of the cuckolded husband in the Wallace Collection's christening scene with other outstanding works to consider how Steen skilfully weaves humour into his lessons about home and society.

Course Tutor

Jacqui Ansell is an experienced and entertaining art historian and educator, accredited by The Arts Society. For her M.A. at the Courtauld Institute she focused on the art and social history of the 17th-century Netherlands. Formerly a Senior Lecturer with Christie's Education, she now offers tailor-made tours of London galleries and works freelance as an expert in decoding and dating paintings (through her specialism of dress history). You will find several articles by Jacqui on the Wallace Collection website. Her forthcoming book focusing on fashion in art will be published by Yale and the National Gallery.

Joining Information and Format

This course will be taught through [Zoom Webinar](#). Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a five-minute break and time for Q&A with the tutor.

Tickets are for all dates. Ticket holders will be emailed the Zoom link, Webinar ID and Passcode 24 hours in advance of the first course session, which should be retained for accessing all sessions of the course.

Course Recording

This course will be recorded. Within 48 hours of each course session, ticket holders will be emailed a link to view the recording, which will be available for two weeks.
