

Painting France

Dates	Tuesday 22 and Wednesday 23 September 2026
Times	18.00-20.00 BST
Location	Online (Zoom)
Tutor	Clare Ford-Wille
Level	All Levels



Théodore Rousseau, *The Forest of Fontainebleau: Morning*, P283, 1849-51. © The Wallace Collection.

Course Description

Inspired by Winston Churchill's love of painting on the French Riviera, study the many and varied ways in which artists have captured 'la campagne' in this two-session course.

Discover how landscape only began to play a significant role in French painting in the 17th century, when artists looked to Italy and began creating idealised works inspired by Classical Antiquity. Learn how French landscape painting evolved from the nostalgic and pastoral visions of the 18th century to the direct observation of nature in the 19th, when artists captured recognisable landscapes with a new immediacy and realism. From the Barbizon School to the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists and Fauves, explore how French painters embraced their native landscape with remarkable enthusiasm and imagination.

Session One

We will begin by exploring the rare occurrences of the appearance of French landscape in painting before the 19th century, as in the 17th century innovative background vistas by the Le Nain Brothers, before examining the reasons for the emergence of painters' interest in French landscape and the development of paint in tubes which made it possible for painting out of doors to be a realistic possibility in the work of Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes Corot and Eugène Boudin. Painters from the village of Barbizon then began to concentrate on the countryside around the village and the forest of Fontainebleau nearby and the French scene became the subject for the remainder of the century.

Session Two

French landscape in the last third of the 19th century became of principal interest as a subject to not only Impressionists, such as Monet, Pissarro and Renoir, to capture the fleeting effect of light and water. They were succeeded by the following generation who sought to create an enduring sense of place and solidity in landscape, as in Cezanne's views of Mont Sainte Victoire or Seurat's port scenes. Artists from outside France were inspired to paint French views, especially in the south of France, such as Van Gogh and Winston Churchill, but also artists from further afield, such as American artists, for example, John Singer Sargent or Lila Cabot Perry. who came to Giverny to learn from Monet. The Fauves such as Vlaminck or artists as Chagall and Picasso would find new ways to express the French countryside in an endless variety of ways.

Course Tutor

Clare Ford-Wille was an Associate Lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London and lectures regularly for many institutions including the V&A Museum, the National Trust, The Arts Society, the Art Fund as well as leading groups to places of art historical interest in Europe, Armenia and the USA.

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 both 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 both 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.
