

## Thomas Gainsborough: Painting Identity

---

<b>Dates</b>	Tuesdays 8, 15 and 22 March 2022
<b>Times</b>	18.00-20.00 GMT
<b>Location</b>	Zoom Webinar
<b>Tutors</b>	Karly Allen, Alik Braine and Jo Rhymer
<b>Level</b>	All Levels

---



Thomas Gainsborough, *Mrs Mary Robinson (Perdita)*, 1781 (detail)

---

### Course Description

Moving from his family home in Suffolk at the age of 13, Thomas Gainsborough arrived in London in 1740 to begin an artistic career which was to establish him as one of the leading portrait painters of his day. He became the favourite painter of King George III and Queen Charlotte; he was also a founding member of the Royal Academy and was influential in establishing landscape painting as a significant genre for painting.

The Wallace Collection boasts two large-scale portraits by Gainsborough and this course takes inspiration from these important paintings. Focusing on these works, we'll discuss Gainsborough's innovation and inspiration, exploring his formidable ability to give vivacity and palpability to his sitters and the landscape setting.

Gainsborough's early childhood was spent surrounded by the beauty of the Suffolk countryside and we'll discuss how his landscape paintings often convey a sense of place. We'll also consider the inspiration he drew from artists he admired, as well as his influence on future painters.

---

---

### **Session One: Gainsborough and Portraiture (Karly Allen)**

We'll begin our course by focusing on portraiture, looking in depth at the Collection's two portraits, *Miss Haverfield* and *Mrs Mary Robinson (Perdita)*, which were painted at the height of Gainsborough's career in London, in the early 1780s. Through careful study and observation, we'll ask questions about Gainsborough's development and innovations as a portrait artist: why was Gainsborough so sought after as a portraitist by 18th-century fashionable society? What did he admire and learn from significant artists of the past? And what was the role of drawing in his painting process?

We'll also turn to the world of music and the stage, through Gainsborough's connections with the theatre in Bath and London. We'll consider how Gainsborough's painted lyricism, performative brushwork and fondness for the drama of genre painting adds to our understanding of his influential portraits. Taking examples from the Wallace Collection including paintings by Watteau and Greuze, as well as British contemporaries Reynolds, Lawrence and Romney, we'll set Gainsborough's portraits within the context of his time.

---

### **Session Two: Gainsborough and Landscape (Alik Braine)**

Despite his pragmatic choice to focus on portraiture – the most lucrative form of painting at the time – Gainsborough also pushed against the artistic conventions of the mid-18th century in his practice of landscape painting. Landscape was considered a 'lowly' subject, not worthy of a serious artist's attention. Significantly, Gainsborough's great rival, Reynolds, advocated history painting above all subjects. Yet despite the opposition of the high-minded Reynolds, Gainsborough was instrumental in establishing landscape as an independent subject. This move was particularly key at a time when English painting was establishing a new reputation and style, independent of the art of mainland Europe.

Looking at paintings in the Collection and beyond, we'll explore how landscape plays a role in Gainsborough's portraiture and the works of his youth. We'll also consider landscape's function as another kind of 'portrait', and as a topographically accurate rendering of specific places.

---

### **Session Three: Gainsborough and Barbizon (Jo Rhymer)**

Our final session will draw on a small selection of Wallace Collection paintings to consider how Gainsborough's work connects with painting across the Channel. As well as discussing links to the development of modern painting in 19th-century France, we'll look at a work in the Collection by 17th-century Dutch painter, Jacob van Ruisdael – an artist whom Gainsborough respected. We'll also consider the landscape painter, John Constable – a key figure in the English and French painting nexus. What connections can be made between these two painters?

Like Gainsborough and Constable, Barbizon painters were keen to represent the lived experience of being in nature, rather than depicting idealised landscapes constrained by artistic conventions. The loose association of artists who found inspiration in the Forest of Fontainebleau are represented in the Collection by Corot, Rousseau and Dupré, whose works were made between the 1830s and 1850s. What is significant about their paintings in the history of art, and what links might we make between them and the work of Gainsborough?

---

---

## Course Tutors

**Karly Allen** has over 20 years' experience as a lecturer in art history and has taught widely for British collections and cultural organisations including the National Gallery, Courtauld Gallery, V&A Museum, National Portrait Gallery, the Art Fund and Christie's Education. Karly complements her teaching with the practice of drawing as a tool for looking, and with her training in mindfulness for close observation. Having graduated from the Ruskin School of Art (University of Oxford), Karly gained a Master's degree from SOAS (University of London). Her extensive experience as producer of museum learning programmes includes her former role of Education Manager for the Royal Collection at Buckingham Palace.

Born in Paris, **Aliki Braine** studied at the Ruskin School of Art, the Slade School of Fine Art (University of London) and the Courtauld Institute, where she was awarded a distinction for her Masters degree in 17th-century painting. After working at the National Gallery for 20 years, she now teaches at Christie's Education and at the Wallace Collection, and is an Associate Lecturer for Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts, London. Aliki is also a practising artist who exhibits her photographic work internationally.

**Jo Rhymer** is a history of art lecturer. She has broad experience of working in museum and gallery learning departments and was previously Head of Adult Learning Programmes at the National Gallery. She leads tours in the UK and abroad, is an accredited lecturer for the Arts Society and lectures for various organisations including the V&A Museum; she is also a Panel Tutor for the Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge. Her particular interests include 19th-century and early 20th-century French art. She is particularly interested in the visual skills and benefits involved in sustained looking at paintings.

---

## Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience

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

---

## Joining Information and Format

This course will be taught through Zoom Webinar. For more information, including instructions on how to download and use the system, please visit [www.zoom.us/support](http://www.zoom.us/support).

Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a five-minute break and time for Q&A with the tutor.

Tickets are for all three 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 one week only.

---