

# VISUAL ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

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## Teachers' Notes

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Art History Workshops for Key stage 5  
at the Wallace Collection and Tate Britain



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These notes are designed to accompany KS5 Workshops on Visual Analysis and Interpretation: Introducing Approaches to Art History. This workshop aims to provide an introduction to Art History early in Year 12, or to help students consolidate their learning later in the year or during Year 13.

Encouraging students to engage with a wide variety of paintings and sculptures and through discussion around each work of art, the students will develop their analytical and interpretive skills. The workshop aims to enable students to identify the formal and stylistic elements of paintings and sculpture from different historical periods. It will enable them to explore the materials and processes used in the production of art and to gain an understanding of the varying contexts in which art works are made and seen. By looking and discussing what the students can see, they will develop their knowledge of key art terminology and build a universal descriptive vocabulary which will inform their future engagement with works of art.

## The Workshops

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In both the 2 hours and the 4 hour workshop, the day will begin with a brief introduction to the history of the Wallace Collection, the family and how the collection was acquired. Whilst in the 2 hour workshop we focus on the Wallace Collection, in the 4 hour workshop, we will also consider how or why the contents and nature of the collection might differ from that of Tate Britain.

### 4 hour workshop

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After a morning session at the Wallace Collection, the afternoon is spent at Tate Britain focusing upon the modern part of the collection, making connections and comparisons with works of art seen in the morning. As the day progresses the students are encouraged to work more independently using worksheets. Drawing is another way to explore and extend their learning.

### Jan Steen, *Celebrating the Birth*, 1664, oil on canvas, P111

It was customary in 17th century Holland for a party to be held on the day of a birth, or the following day, for friends and family. But this fascinating painting reveals its true meaning slowly. Using composition, perspective and colour, Steen leads the viewer's eye around the painting. By focusing attention upon the father rather than the mother and with visual clues such as the cracked eggs in the foreground (a euphemism for sexual intercourse) and the cold bed warmer lying on the floor (which recalls the saying 'the only warmth in the marriage bed is the warming pan'), Steen depicts a gathering of people implicit in their acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the child.



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### Nicolas Maes, *The Listening Housewife (The Eavesdropper)*, 1656, oil on canvas, P224

Here, Maes employs an ingenious narrative structure to highlight the contrast between the correct and moral behaviour of the couple seated at a table behind the housewife, with the amorous couple below stairs. Maes creates the convincing illusion of interior space through clever perspectival drawing, and the varying quality of light as we are invited to move through the house. The virtuous woman in her home was a popular subject choice in Dutch narrative genre paintings during this period.



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### Anthony Van Dyck, *Philippe Le Roy*, 1630, oil on canvas, P94 and *Marie de Raet*, 1631, oil on canvas, P79

The leading Flemish painter of the first half of the seventeenth century after Rubens, Van Dyck worked in numerous European courts before becoming Court painter to King Charles I of England in 1629. Knighted by the King and living life of a courtier, Van Dyck worked quickly to produce the large quantity of portraits he needed in order to finance his extravagant life style. His genius lies in his ability to understand and to capture not only the outward appearance but also the aspirations of his sitters. His portrait of Philippe Le Roy, hugely wealthy but burdened with the stigma of illegitimacy, is life size, full length, an embodiment of the courtly ideals of the day. A year later, Van Dyck was commissioned to paint Le Roy's 16 year old bride. Through subtle differences in pose, facial expression and skin tone, dress and props, Van Dyck's portrait pair provide outstanding examples of an ideal manhood and femininity.



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## Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rainbow Landscape*, c. 1636, oil on oak panel, P63

The fourth Marquis paid the enormous price of 4,550 guineas for *The Rainbow Landscape*, but living in Paris, he never made the journey to London to view his purchase. Along with its companion piece, *Het Steen* (National Gallery), *The Rainbow Landscape* celebrates Ruben's deep love for the landscape of Brabant, outside Antwerp. It also reflects the personal happiness of his later years with his second wife, Helene Fourment. Rubens painted 40 landscape paintings, of these, 18 were recorded in his studio at the time of his death, suggesting that they were not commissioned. Oak panel was a more expensive surface than canvas and seems then an odd choice for paintings not intended for sale, but x-ray analysis of *The Rainbow Landscape* reveals a complex structure of 19 off-cuts of panel joined together by a highly skilled panel maker to reduce the cost.



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## Philippe de Champaigne, *The Annunciation*, oil on canvas, P129

Philippe de Champaigne was one of the most successful painters of mid-seventeenth century Paris. This work was originally commissioned for the parish church of Sainte Catherine in the Marais in Paris. Impressive in scale, de Champaigne creates two distinct spheres, the heavenly



above and the earthly below as he tells us the narrative of the Annunciation. A very weighty Gabriel has joined Mary, feet firmly planted on the ground. De Champaigne depicts the moment that the angel tells Mary that she will bear the Son of God. Mary remains calm and serene as she receives the news, her hands elegantly move to her chest. The angel Gabriel's upwardly pointing finger provides a compositional link between the earthly and the heavenly realm, whilst the heavenly light shines down on the figures below to create a unified space.

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## Nottingham School, *The Resurrection*, 15th Century, alabaster, S3

Alabaster is a white stone commonly called gypsum. Softer than marble, it can be easily worked but like marble, it hardens by exposure. During the fifteenth century alabaster could be found in significant quantities in South Derbyshire and Nottingham became home to a large concentration of



alabaster carvers. Nottingham alabaster images were popular throughout Europe, although many of those in English churches were destroyed during the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. This small relief carving would originally have been vividly painted (polychromy) and small fragments of colour and gilding still remain. We see the very moment of the resurrection. Christ appears larger in scale than the soldiers who have fallen asleep whilst guarding his tomb, to emphasize his importance in the story portrayed. Whilst the faces of the figures have been carved with little attention to detail, a sense of the humanity of the figures is clearly conveyed through pose and gesture, and nowhere more clearly than in Christ's hands.

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## Filippo della Valle, *Cupid and Psyche*, marble, S22

This sculpture represents the myth of Cupid, the Greco-Roman god of love and his lover, the beautiful mortal girl Psyche. Unusually, the protagonists are depicted as infants. In the original story, from second century novelist Apuleius, they are adult lovers. Marble has a slight translucency to it that is comparable to that of human skin making for a strong sense of realism and therefore ideal for figurative works. The figures are naked but Cupid is identifiable by the quiver of arrows and a bow that he carries with him. Depicting gods and goddesses rather than mortals provided artists with the opportunity to paint and to carve the naked figure.



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## Pieter Pourbus, *An Allegory of True Love*, oil on oak panel, P531

A group of mythological and allegorical characters is seated around a table in a woodland clearing with an expansive landscape beyond. In the foreground, left and right, cupid and a Jester with a fool's hat warn the viewer of the folly of carnal love. Inscriptions on their clothing help us to identify the other figures in the group. In the centre and the only figure looking straight out at us is Sapiens (Wisdom), who embraces Fidutia (Fidelity). She looks down modestly and offers the wise man spiritual love sanctified by matrimony. The other figures are allegories of less desirable types of love (inconstant love, superficial love, fickleness). Pourbus would have enjoyed the patronage of a well-educated elite in Bruges and the complexity of such an allegory would have found favour with them.



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## Canaletto, *Venice: the Bacino di San Marco from San Giorgio Maggiore*, oil on canvas, P497

The paintings displayed in this room are views of Venice by Canaletto and Guardi, the picture postcards of their day. Between 1725 and 1740 Canaletto specialized almost exclusively in views of his home city. During the 1730s, his work became much sought after by British patrons traveling on the Grand Tour. Indeed, the first Marquis of Hertford, who acquired this painting, went on the Grand Tour in 1738-9. In this painting and its companion piece (displayed on the wall opposite), Canaletto presents us with attractive, clearly identifiable views (although with some slight topographical inaccuracies) full of everyday Venetian life. Compositionally, Canaletto has created a believable sense of space receding into the distance in horizontal bands of colour finishing with an expanse of sky (which in a Canaletto painting is always blue).



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