

V&A Academy

GIOTTO TO
VAN GOGH:
COLOUR IN ART

Tuesdays

6 October – 3 November 2026





Introduction

Painting and sculpture from the earliest times is very colourful. This course will explore which pigments were used, from the Middle Ages to the end of the 19th century: where they came from, and how artists made them.

Colour is vital to the understanding of a composition - whether painting or sculpture; fresco, tempera, oil, pastel, or watercolour. The placing of distinct colours throughout the composition can direct the eye, and intensify the impact upon the spectator. Colours, such as red and green, or blue and yellow, can be symbolic or can identify figures - Mary Magdalene or St. Peter, for example - clarifying a narrative which the viewer may not have been able to read.

We notice gold tassels, silver embroidery, or delicate facial expressions in the work of Raphael, Velazquez and Rembrandt - all created by the careful placing of subtle and varying colours. How did these artists use their knowledge of colour to create these effects?

By the 18th century, with advancements in chemistry, botany and minerology, new colours began to be discovered, such as Prussian Blue and Mauve. We'll study artists, such as Monet and his contemporaries, who continued to experiment with different techniques and their use of colour in the Impressionist movement. We'll also explore how colour was used to create shock, drama and excitement in the work of Van Gogh and the Fauves (Matisse and his contemporaries) at the end of the 19th century.

Information

Tuesdays, 6 October – 3 November 2026. 14.00-16.30. Online.

Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until 8 December, 2026.

Your course leader

Clare Ford-Wille is an independent lecturer. Previously associate lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London she also lectures regularly for many other institutions including the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Wallace Collection, the National Trust, and the NACF as well as leading groups to places of art historical in Europe.

Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.

Week 1 – 6 October 2026

- 13.50 Welcome, **Clare Ford-Wille**
- 14.00 Introduction to the Course, **Clare Ford-Wille**
- 15.30 Colour in Frescoes, Giotto to Michelangelo, **Clare Ford-Wille**

Week 2 – 13 October 2026

- 14.00 Colours and Gold in Tempera Altarpieces from Duccio to Ghirlandaio, **Clare Ford-Wille**
- 15.30 Colour in the New Technique of Oil from Jan van Eyck to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, **Clare Ford-Wille**

Week 3 – 20 October 2026

- 14.00 Colour to Suggest Light, Shade, Form and Texture in the 17th Century from Velazquez to Rembrandt, **Clare Ford-Wille**
- 15.30 The Use of Colour from Oil Sketch to Tapestry from Rubens **Clare Ford-Wille**

Week 4 – 27 October 2026

- 14.00 Colour in Art and Sculpture in the 17th Century: Caravaggio to Luisa Roldán, **Clare Ford-Wille**
- 15.30 Colour in Art and Sculpture in the 18th Century from Watteau to Liotard, **Clare Ford-Wille**

Week 5 – 3 November

- 14.00 The Use of Colour in Art and Sculpture in the Later 18th and Early 19th Centuries - from Turner to Caspar David Friedrich and Manet **Clare Ford-Wille**
- 15.30 New Directions in the Use of Colour by 19th-Century Artists: from Monet to Van Gogh to the Fauves, **Clare Ford-Wille**