

SHOWCASING ART HISTORY, SEASON XII, 2017-2018

Spring term 2018: Colour: Theory, Practice, and Meaning in Byzantine and Western Art

What colour is and what it brings to art has been thought about since antiquity. From the Renaissance, the skilful employment of colour, light and shade in the service of a 'life-like' art was a key requirement of the master painter, and was seen to be brought to perfection by the Venetian and Flemish 'schools', epitomised by Titian and Rubens respectively. Colour's status in relation to 'design' was hotly debated, with colour assigned an inferior position in



the context of Academic discourse for its perceived appeal to the senses rather than the higher faculties of the mind. This notion of a binary opposition – colour versus line – and their hierarchical relationship was challenged from the late 1700s onwards; a century later, French avant-

garde artists described Eugène Delacroix as the father of the 'modern school' for his emancipation of colour from line, and its employment as the principal means of composition. The use of pure, loosely applied colour was the hallmark of many modern artists, from the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists to the *Fauves* and Expressionists.

In this series of lectures, ranging from Byzantine mosaics to colour field painting, we will discuss the ways artists, critics and theorists thought about colour, what value they assigned to it and how it was believed to act upon the viewer. As John Gage pointed out, artists engaged with the full range of scientific and philosophical theories on colour available to them and we will likewise look at some of the most influential of these ideas. We will also consider more practical matters concerning the manufacture, sale and accessibility of pigments, and about the impact on artistic skill when the preparation of paints – once an important aspect of the artist's training in the workshop – began to be taken over by commercial 'colourmen' early in the 18th century. Colour in art is a vast subject and this ten-week term will focus on Byzantine mosaics and Western painting only; colour in other cultural contexts, polychromy in sculpture and the significance of colour in architecture and the decorative arts will be the subject of future explorations.

Image: Paul Signac, *Saint Tropez*, circa 1893, Oil and graphite on panel © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery London

Provisional timetable:

9 January	Professor Liz James	Colour in Byzantium, title tbc
16 January	Professor Paul Hills	<i>Venetian Colour</i>
23 January	Dr Sheila McTighe	Poussin and Rubens, title tbc
30 January	Dr Lelia Packer	Painting in black and white, title tbc
6 February	Clare Richardson	Making Colour, title tbc
13 February	Dr Anne Puetz	<i>Secrets and Lies: Venetian Colour and the 'British School'</i>
20 February	Professor Paul Smith	Nineteenth-century colour theory and art, title tbc
27 February	Dr Caroline Levitt	<i>'Harmony, dissonance and "agreeable effects": The work of colour in Cézanne, Van Gogh and the Fauves'</i>
6 March	Dr Natalia Murray	Early 20 th century Russian theory and practice, including Kandinsky's ideas on colour, title tbc
13 March	Dr Kate Aspinall	Colour and mid twentieth-century abstraction, title tbc