

Painting and Genre (Oxford, 6 Aug 26)

St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford, Aug 06, 2026

Deadline: May 31, 2026

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Painting genres structure artistic practice, shape reception, and inform institutional frameworks. Yet as an analytical category, genre has long occupied a marginal position within art history.

This is not to suggest that the discipline has produced no genre theory. Influential studies, such as Wayne Franits's *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution* (Yale University Press, 2004), have addressed genre explicitly, and scholarship on individual genres, particularly portraiture and landscape, is vast. Questions related to genre, most notably the academic hierarchy of genres, have received sustained scholarly attention, from Jean Locquin to Christian Michel, Mark Ledbury, and Paul Duro. Indeed, one of the discipline's foundational texts – Alois Riegl's *The Group Portraiture of Holland* (1902) – is a genre study.

Art-historical approaches to genre have likewise been varied and innovative. To cite just a small selection of recent examples, Amy Freund has examined the hunting portrait from a sociohistorical perspective, linking it to the changing status of the sword nobility in the early eighteenth century (*Art History*, 2019); Susanna Caviglia has revisited history painting under Louis XV, relating it to contemporary political and cultural discourses on pleasure (*Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment*, 2020); and Stephanie O'Rourke has explored how late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century landscape painting registered practices of resource extraction (*University of Chicago Press*, 2025).

Still, despite this substantial body of scholarship, the study of genre has remained largely overshadowed by iconographic and formalist approaches. In contrast to literary and film studies, where genre theory occupies a central methodological position, art history has yet to develop a comparably sustained theoretical framework for the analysis of genre.

This one-day conference invites contributions that place genre at the centre of the analysis of painting. It seeks to foreground genre not merely as a classificatory device but as a critical category through which artistic production, reception, and historiography can be re-examined.

While certain periods, such as the Dutch Golden Age, readily lend themselves to genre-based analysis, the conference is not limited chronologically or geographically. Case studies of genres from all periods and regions are welcome, as are experimental theoretical contributions and historiographical papers that reflect on the role genre has played within art history, theory, and criticism.

Possible questions include, but are not limited to:

- What formally defines a painting genre?

- What mechanisms govern the formation, stabilisation, and transformation of genres?
- How do hybrid genres emerge and operate?
- How do generic expectations shape viewer perception and interpretation?
- How do genres reflect their historical contexts, including political ideologies, class relations, and gender roles?
- How do genres articulate sociocultural practices?
- What role have genres played within institutions (academies, museums, auction houses) and the art market?
- How has the notion of genre developed within the history, theory, and criticism of art?

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner will be provided at the venue. The organiser intends for the conference to result in a publication.

Please submit a 300-word abstract for a 20-minute presentations and a 100-word biography to Sofya Dmitrieva (sofya.k.dmitrieva@gmail.com) by May 31.

For more information please see:
<https://www.seh.ox.ac.uk/events/painting-and-genre-conference>

Reference:

CFP: Painting and Genre (Oxford, 6 Aug 26). In: ArtHist.net, May 4, 2026 (accessed May 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52365>>.