Painting and Genre (Oxford, 6 Aug 26)

Old Dining Hall, St Edmund Hall, Queen's Lane, Oxford, OX1 4AR, Aug 06, 2026

Sofya Dmitrieva

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 brings together 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.

Attendance is free of charge, and no registration is required. A light lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Conference Programme

13.45 – Welcome and introduction by Sofya Dmitrieva

14.00-15.00 – Panel 1: Definitions

- Emma Barker (The Open University), Defining genre painting
- Miles Fletcher (University of Cambridge), Een Algemeen Schilder: Landscape, Technology, and the History of Depiction in England and the Low Countries, 1649–1702

15.00-16.00 – Panel 2: Institutions

- Anastasia Skoybedo (University of Cambridge), Landscape Painting within the Soviet Hierarchy of Genres. The case of the Leningrad Landscape School
- Alyse Muller (Columbia University), The Genealogy of the Marine Genre in France

16.00-17.00 – Coffee break

17.00-18.00 – Panel 3: Taste

- Daniel Sobrino Ralston (National Gallery), The Rise and Fall of a Genre in Second Empire Paris
- Vittoria Cervini (Royal Collection Trust), From Carlton House to Buckingham Palace. Seventeenth-century genre paintings in George IV's collection

18.00-19.00 – Panel 4: Reimaginings

- Tom Zille (Mucha Foundation), Queering the Conversation Piece
- Sarah Hegenbart (Heidelberg University), Towards Transcultural Pictorial Genres

Reference:
CONF: Painting and Genre (Oxford, 6 Aug 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 7, 2026 (accessed Nov 13, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/52898>.