

**People, Places, Myths and Symbols:
Selected Themes in Viewing Art at the National Gallery”**

Lecturer: Maria Martin

This small-group series led by LLeaP lecturer Maria Martin will help you to develop your knowledge, appreciation and comfort level when viewing and discussing art. Each week you will gather together at the National Gallery of Canada to view artworks from the collection, with a light-hearted approach. There will be a different theme every week, including landscape art, portraiture, representations of history and historical figures, still-lives and symbolism, abstract and contemporary art. Lectures and discussions will take place in front of selected works in the Gallery’s collection.

Week 1: The Architecture of the National Gallery, and the Changing Nature of Landscape Art

We will talk about the architectural design of the National Gallery of Canada, and how it is set within its surroundings. We will then go into the galleries to look at how artists have depicted landscapes over the centuries, including how artists have faced the unique challenges of depicting the Canadian landscape.

Week 2: *Who am I?* A Closer Look at the Art of Portraiture

The way we present ourselves, or choose to be portrayed, is very revealing. In this week we will visit the European and Canadian galleries to view how artists have captured their subjects in sculpture, painting and photography, and what is revealed about the artists and the times in which they lived.

Week 3: ‘Saints and Sinners’

This week we will look at examples of Italian and Northern Renaissance art, and subsequent periods such as the Baroque, to see a range of subject matter from the sacred to the profane. We will look at stylistic changes, and learn about painting materials and techniques, and how artworks have been conserved and framed.

Week 4: Whose History is it Anyway?

Before the invention of photography and cinema, the depictions of historical events could only be understood through oral and visual representations, which were open to the interpretation of storytellers and artists. With a focus on Benjamin West’s 18th century history painting, *The Death of Wolfe*, we will look at how a seminal moment in Canadian/European history was depicted and shaped through the artist’s choices. We will also look at some portraits of

significant figures in history from the Gallery's collection, who were witnesses to, and makers of our history.

Week 5: "My kid could do that!" The Perils of Abstraction

When the *Voice of Fire* was exhibited in the National Gallery of Canada after the building opened in 1988, a storm of controversy ensued. What is it about Abstract art that infuriates the public? How do we approach works of art that seem so simple, and not wonder whether the artist is 'having us on'? We will look at a number of interesting and sometimes provocative abstract paintings and sculptures in the Gallery's collection, from the early 20th century to the present day, to consider the artist's message and its meaning for us.

Week 6: Contemporary Art at the National Gallery

We will visit the Contemporary Art wing at the Gallery to view 20th and 21st century artworks, including larger 'installation' pieces, conceived for gallery spaces. In contemporary art we find that artists are often creating works with a larger public in mind, and with a consciousness of the societal impact of their art.

Lecturer biography: Maria Martin has studied and worked in the Arts for many years. She holds a Master's Degree in the History of Art from Queen's University, and a Bachelor's Degree in Art History from Carleton University. Maria has recently retired as a Manager with the federal government, and previously worked at the Canada Council for the Arts as an Art Consultant at the Council's Art Bank, and as an Education Officer and Guide at the National Gallery of Canada. [Read what participants have said about Maria Martin's lecture series.](#)

