



Flemish Painting

From van Eyck to Rubens: Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels

1–6 July 2025 (ML 732)

6 days • £2,880

Lecturer: Dr Sue Jones

Immersion in the highlights of Flemish painting in the beautiful, unspoilt cities in which they were created.

The main centres of Flemish art: Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels.

First-class train travel from London.

One might argue that Western art began in the southern Netherlands. In the context of 40,000 years of human artistic endeavour, painting which gives primacy to the naturalistic depiction of the visible world was an eccentric digression. Yet the illusionistic triad of solidity, space and texture first came together early in the fifteenth century in what is now Belgium, and dominated European art for the next five hundred years.

The Flemish cities of Bruges and Ghent were among the most prosperous and progressive in medieval Europe. Brussels and Antwerp peaked later, the latter becoming Europe's largest port in the sixteenth century. All retain tracts of unspoilt streetscape which place them among the most attractive destinations in northern Europe.

Jan van Eyck and his brother Hubert stand at the head of the artistic revolution in the fifteenth century. Their consummate skill with the hitherto unexploited technique of oil painting resulted in pictures which have rarely been equalled for their jewel-like brilliance and breathtaking naturalism. The tradition of exquisite workmanship was continued with the same tranquillity of spirit by such masters as Hans Memling in Bruges and with greater emotionalism by Rogier van der Weyden in Brussels and Hugo van der Goes in Ghent. Meanwhile Hieronymus Bosch was an individualist who specialised in the depiction of human sin and hellish retribution.

The sixteenth century saw a greater focus on landscape and a shift towards mannerist displays of virtuoso skill and spiritual tension, although the outstanding painter of the century was another individualist, Pieter Bruegel.

A magnificent culmination was reached in the seventeenth century with Peter Paul Rubens, the greatest painter of the Baroque age. His works are of an unsurpassed vigour and vitality, and are painted with a breadth and bravura which took the potential of oil painting



Bruges, watercolour by W.L. Bruckman, published 1900.

to new heights. This tour presents one of the most glorious episodes in the history of art.

Itinerary

Day 1: Bruges. Depart at c. 11.00am from London St Pancras by Eurostar for Lille, and from there drive to Bruges. With its canals, melancholic hues and highly picturesque streetscape, Bruges is one of the loveliest cities in northern Europe. A major manufacturing and trading city in the Middle Ages, decline had already set in before the end of the 15th century. Three nights here.

Day 2: Bruges. Introductory walk. See the market place with its soaring belfry, Gothic town hall and Basilica of the Holy Blood. St Salvator's Cathedral contains a triptych by Dirk Bouts.

Day 3: Bruges. The Groeninge Museum has an excellent collection by Flemish masters including Jan van Eyck and the Church of Our Lady is home to Michelangelo's marvellous marble *Madonna and Child*. Free afternoon.

Day 4: Ghent, Antwerp. Drive to Ghent to visit the Museum of Fine Arts, principally to see a work by a follower of Hieronymus Bosch. Visit the cathedral and the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* polyptych by Hubert and Jan

van Eyck, one of the greatest masterpieces of Netherlandish painting. Continue to Antwerp. Two nights here.

Day 5: Antwerp. The great port on the Scheldt has an abundance of historic buildings and museums and churches of the highest interest. Four of Rubens's most powerful paintings are in the vast Gothic cathedral, joined for the first time since dispersal by the French in 1799. The Royal Museum of Fine Arts, or KMSKA, houses an impressive collection with works by Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden and Hans Memling, and the Mayer van der Bergh Museum has a small but outstanding collection including works by Bruegel.

Day 6: Leuven, Brussels. The attractive university city of Leuven has a splendid Gothic town hall and the *Triptych of the Holy* by Dieric Bouts, still in the chapel for which it was painted. Thriving in the 19th and 20th centuries, Brussels nevertheless retains splendid historic townhouses and guildhouses around the Grand Place. The Fine Arts Museum is one of the best in Europe, and presents a comprehensive collection of Netherlandish painting as well as international works. Take the Eurostar from Brussels to London St Pancras, arriving in the early evening.

Flemish Painting
continued

Lecturer

Dr Sue Jones. Specialist in Netherlandish art between the 14th and 16th centuries. She was Assistant Curator at the National Gallery in London, a Fellow at the Art Institute of Chicago, and she has taught widely in both the US and the UK. In recent years, she was a member of the 'Verona' project at the KIK-IRPA in Brussels, which published a new technical imaging of Jan van Eyck's paintings. She has also published extensively on Van Eyck and is a co-author of *Northern European and Spanish Paintings before 1600 in the Art Institute of Chicago: A Catalogue of the Collection*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,880 or £2,640 without Eurostar. **Single occupancy:** £3,340 or £3,100 without Eurostar.

Included: rail travel (Standard Premier) on Eurostar; private coach travel for transfers and excursions; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts and four dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions; all tips; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Dukes Palace (hoteldukespalace.com): 5-star hotel in the historic centre. **Rubens Hotel** (hotelrubensantwerp.be): an elegant 4-star hotel near the market square. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of standing in museums and walking on this tour, often on cobbled or roughly paved streets. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. You will need to be able to carry (wheel) your own luggage on and off the train and within stations. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 28 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 20 participants.