

## MA IN FINE AND DECORATIVE ART

### COURSE STRUCTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

The aim of the Postgraduate Diploma and its associated MA in Fine and Decorative Art is to develop students' ability to research and analyse works of art by means of first-hand study of art objects. In particular, students will be encouraged to address questions of attribution or connoisseurship by means of the critical visual methods they acquire during the course. The approach taken is empirical and object-based, rather than primarily text-based. Therefore students are asked to look closely at objects, rather than simply reading about them, and to return to fundamental principles of knowledge about art objects.

Comparative method is stressed as an approach. This may involve looking at a large amount of material in order to research a particular object. It is thus essential that students attend the entire programme of lectures throughout the year in order to have the necessary breadth of background with which to tackle potentially new or under-explored areas, such as the historical revivals of the nineteenth century. Techniques of production, materials, stylistic analysis, ornamental vocabularies, provenance, and historical background are examined throughout the year, while the economic, social and political context of the production of art objects will be stressed where appropriate.

These aims are realised through the objectives of the three units of the course, which develop progressively the student's skills in describing, analysing, and synthesising. In **Semester I** students are asked to put aside the methods of interpretation of art they have learned in previous academic courses, and instead to approach individual objects at first hand by means of acute visual observation and the acquisition of precise terminology which is used in descriptive and cataloguing exercises, culminating in an Object Report at the end of the first semester.

In **Semester II**, students use visual observation, in conjunction with historical research, to analyse the stylistic and technical features of objects in order to arrive at a dating and attribution. These skills are then tested in the coursework exam half way through Semester II. Those writing the dissertation for the MAFDA will begin work in their chosen area of specialisation.

By the end of Semester II, students are called upon to synthesise text-based information with object-based information in order to set objects within a broader context of social, political, and economic concerns. That is, observation of objects and knowledge of techniques and materials is supplemented with text-based research. Through stressing visual observation, students at Sotheby's Institute are encouraged to research less well-known objects, patrons or collections. It is hoped that exploration of new areas of enquiry in the fine and decorative arts will be encouraged by means of these teaching methods. At the end of Semester II, students will participate in the month-long House Sale exercise, in which they assume the roles of auction house experts in preparing the catalogue of a major sale. MAFDA students will research and write dissertations in their chosen fields during the summer and autumn months (the third semester).

## **MARKED WORK**

### **Semester I:**

4 Seminars

1 Object Report

### **Semester II**

4 Seminars

Coursework Exams

House Sale Report

### **Semester III (MAs only)**

Dissertation

Also Cataloguing Exercises, Handling Sessions etc. (assessed but not marked)

By the end of the programme, all students will be experienced in individual and team work, as well as turning work around quickly in order to meet coursework deadlines, and should have acquired the following:

#### **Intellectual and Professional Skills:**

- the ability to analyse and synthesise information, including primary source material and empirical data;
- finely honed research skills with which to solve problems of highly specific or technical nature;
- skills of spoken and written presentation to a professional standard, which are developed by the wide variety of coursework assignments;
- skills of cataloguing to a professional standard, including the acquisition of techniques of visual analysis, description and technical vocabulary;
- MA: the ability to write a longer work of research to a professional standard based upon a strong line of reasoning and argument.

#### **Knowledge and Understanding of:**

- key factual information in the four course disciplines (e.g. furniture, ceramics, Old Master paintings, and modern art) plus optional areas of specialisation;
- the transmission of art historical style and ideas through both two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects;
- the process of connoisseurship and attribution of works of art, particularly those which lack documentation, leading to wide-ranging judgements of quality;
- the fundamentals of the history of the art market, taste and collecting;
- MA: an in-depth knowledge of one particular field of specialisation through researching and writing the dissertation.