

Advanced English: Oh, to be a painter!

Lillian Davies

Academic year 2026-2027 - Language Department - Fall semester.

This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 level. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Background

In her writing on art and artists, Virginia Woolf once expressed her envy of the medium of painting. Painters have color, shape, texture and brushstroke, but writers only have words. “Oh, to be a painter!”, she exclaims. This workshop will explore the language of contemporary art, with a special focus on the recent resurgence of painting. This is a course for students with an active interest in art.

Course Objectives

The main objectives of this course are:

- Introducing language and resources for navigating and articulating an encounter with contemporary art
- Expanding vocabulary and fluency in writing and speaking about contemporary art and living artists
- Developing specialized listening and reading skills as well as interview techniques
- Building a portfolio of creative nonfiction and culture writing.

Course Description

This is a 12-week course organized around a selection of contemporary artists and art exhibitions on view in Paris. Students will discover podcasts and videos on contemporary art and visit at least one exhibition in a gallery or museum. In class discussions will focus on critical analysis, focusing on the artist's or curator's use of concept, material and space. Reading excerpts of critical texts will provide a conceptual framework for thinking about contemporary art, and writing short reviews of selected exhibitions will strengthen skills in ekphrastic and persuasive writing. During the course of the semester, students will go and see an exhibition.

Organization

Activities will cover the four language skills:

- Listening: podcasts, videos and guest artists in class
- Speaking: weekly class discussion (summaries, analyses, debates) and one individual presentation per student per semester (on an artist or exhibition of choice)
- Reading: a variety of articles and essays on contemporary art
- Writing: one exhibition review during the semester and one interview or research project for the end of the course.