

Free masterclass at the RKD

Discover the hidden stories behind works of art and explore the wealth of resources at the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History. Our masterclasses give students and teachers direct access to unique collections, expert researchers and practical research methods. We offer several masterclasses every year. During the 2025/2026 academic year, these will be the masterclasses listed below.

Practical information

Location: RKD in The Hague

Duration: 1 to 3 hours (depending on the programme)

Time: weekdays between 10:00 and 17:00

Cost: free for educational institutions

Language: Dutch or English

Number of students: 20 students per masterclass (unless otherwise indicated)

Book a masterclass

Please contact us at events@rkd.nl to discuss the options for your class or group. You need to book masterclasses at least six weeks ahead of time.

1. Introduction to the RKD

This masterclass offers an introduction to the RKD and is a must for first-year Art History students. Students gain insight into the history of the RKD, the development of its extensive collection, and how to effectively search and utilize it for academic study and research via RKD Research.

Period	Language	Title	Duration	Level
Early Modern	English / Dutch	Introduction to research at the RKD (digital and analogue)	30 – 45 minutes	From bachelors degree year 1
Modern / Contemporary	English / Dutch	Introduction to research at the RKD (focus on Mondrian, or contemporary media)	30 – 45 minutes	From bachelors degree year 1

2. Archival research

The RKD manages an extensive collection of archives from artists, art historians, collectors, art dealers, and galleries. In these masterclasses, students learn how to read an archival inventory and are introduced to various types of art historical sources, such as correspondence, artist files, registers, and sales records. What kind of information can be found in these archives, and how can it be used in art historical research?

Currently, the RKD offers three masterclasses on archival research: On the archival notes with biographical information about seventeenth-century Dutch painters, compiled by Abraham Bredius (1855–1946), on the photo albums of the 19th-century painting collection of Fop Smit (1815–1892), on the archive of the influential Amsterdam-based gallery Art & Project (1968–2001).

Period	Language	Title	Duration	Level
Early Monder	Dutch	Archival notes Abraham Bredius	2 hours	For students from BA year 3 onwards, with emphasis on the 17th century
Contemporary	English / Dutch	Gallery Art & Project	1.5 – 2 hours	Master students

3. Recognising the hand

Attributing artworks has traditionally been a key part of art history. The distinction between the hand of a master, a pupil, or a follower is often subtle – and deliberate forgeries can be deceptive. Recognising the correct hand and determining a work's authenticity begins with close observation.

The RKD offers five masterclasses under this theme, focusing on: Early Netherlandish painting and the connoisseurship of Max J. Friedländer, Seventeenth-century painting, Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drawings; on recognizing printing techniques; on Han van Meegeren's forgeries in the style of Johannes Vermeer; and on attributions and connoisseurship surrounding Mondrian. In each of these masterclasses, students learn to articulate their observations through thorough visual analysis of artworks and make a well-considered assessment of the attribution or authenticity of a work of art.

Period	Language	Title	Duration	Level
Early Netherlandish Painting	English/Dutch	Max J. Friedländer and connoisseurship	1.5 hours	From bachelors year 2
Early Modern	English/Dutch	Drawing	1.5 – 2 hours	Master students
Early Modern	English/Dutch	Drawing	2 hours	3rd year bachelor or masters students

Early Modern	English/Dutch	Recognising the print	2 hours	All study years
Early Modern / Modern	English/Dutch	Forgery: Vermeer & Van Meegeren	1.5 – 2 hours	2nd and 3rd year bachelors students

4. Technical documentation

What can technical research reveal about the origin, creation, and meaning of a work of art? In this masterclass, students are introduced to the RKD's extensive collection of technical documentation, including X-ray imaging, infrared reflectography, paint sample analysis, and dendrochronological research. These techniques are presented alongside their art historical applications. Participants gain hands-on experience interpreting technical documentation through practical assignments and learn to use the RKDtechnical database. The focus is on integrating technical data into broader art historical research.

Period	Language	Title	Duration	Level
Early Modern / 17th-Century Painting	English/Dutch	Technical documentation	1.5 - 3 hours (upon consultation)	Upon consultation

5. Provenance research

Provenance research focuses on the ownership history of a work of art. This history begins with the artist and continues up to the current owner. In this masterclass, students learn to investigate like detectives: what questions to ask and how to gather relevant information. They make use of the RKD's collections throughout the process.

There are two masterclasses within this theme:

- One on the paintings from the d'Oultremont collection, which were auctioned in Paris in 1889;
- And another on paintings from the collection of the Rotterdam collector Fop Smit (1815–1892).

Period	Language	Title	Duration	Level
19th Century	Dutch	Provenance research on the paintings from the collection of Fop Smit (1815–1892)	2 – 2.5 hours	Upon arrangement. Maximum of 10 students
Early Modern	Dutch	Where have the paintings from the d'Oultremont auction (1889) gone?	3 hours	Upon arrangement. Maximum of 10 students

6. Iconographic Research

To fully understand a work of art, it is essential to know what is depicted. Many artworks created before 1900 portray themes from the Bible, classical mythology, literature, and ancient history. Over time, established visual traditions have developed in which artists use recurring motifs and symbols. For contemporary viewers, the meaning of these symbols is not always immediately clear. Iconographic research allows us to decipher the themes and symbolism in artworks. During this masterclass, participants are introduced to the key sources for this type of research and apply them directly to their own case studies.

Period	Language	Title	Duration	Level
Early Modern	English/Dutch	Iconographic research at the RKD	1.5 hours	1st and 2nd year bachelor students