



True to Life? Let's Talk About It!



Osher at JHU, Columbia, Spring 2023



Wednesdays, 10:00 AM to noon
Roger Brunyate, instructor

True to Life? Let's Talk About It!

LISTENING TO A LECTURER or reading up in books are not the only or even the best ways of engaging with the arts. Most of us form perfectly valid responses to something we see, hear, or read for the first time, if only we learn to trust them. But it can be easier to focus on the differences between two related works than to talk about one out of context. Comparisons like these are precisely what this course aims to provide—six classes in pursuit of one enquiry: how useful is it to say that something is "true to life"?

In the first hour of each class, I will show paintings in pairs, with minimal factual information, and leave the rest to you; I will give the facts after you have had your say, and post full details after each class. The second hour will be devoted to similar questions in some other medium, such as film, theatre, and music. *rb.*



1. Art and the Photograph (April 5). Photographs are generally held to epitomize realism, but is this always so? In the first hour, we consider the interrelationship between photography and art. In the second, we extend this enquiry to **film**.



2. **In the Blink of an Eye** (April 12). Was French Impressionism a realist medium, a painterly one, or a bit of both? What constitutes truth-to-life in this context? In the second hour, we shall consider **music** and/or **poetry** of a similar period.



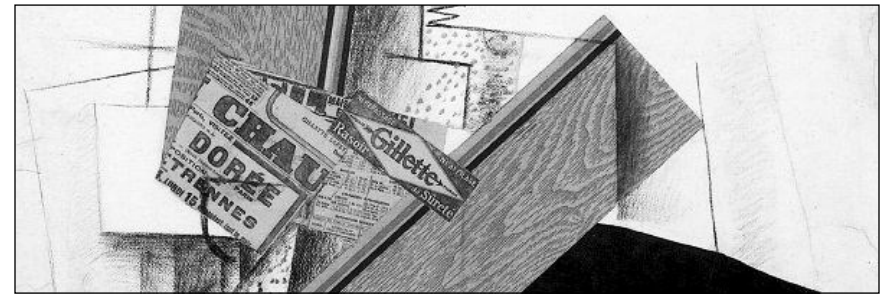
3. **Victorian Realism** (April 19). There was a strong strain of social realism running through the art of the Victorian era, especially that intended for popular consumption. We'll enquire into the purposes of this in the first hour, and look at the realist **novel** in the second.



4. **Catching a Likeness** (April 26). Portraiture is surely the one field in which truth-to-life is *sine-qua-non*. And yet all portraits involve compromise between objective realism and flattery. The second hour will ask how an **actor** can make even a fictional role seem real.



5. **The Way We Live** (May 3). We look at the 17th-century Dutch obsession with the detailed representation of everyday life and the hidden meanings such works can contain. In the second hour we consider period **television** dramas like *Masterpiece Theatre*.



6. **Imported Reality** (May 10). Rather than painting them, many modern artists have included real objects in their works. How does this affect the criterion of truth-to-life? The second hour of the class will be devoted to updated productions of classic **operas**.

An interactive, full-color version of this syllabus can be found at:

www.brunyate.com/true2life/

Roger can be contacted at:

rogerbrunyate@gmail.com