



# Canaletto

& THE ART OF VENICE

Leaving Certificate  
RESOURCE PACK

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Before Your Visit .....	3
First Impressions.....	4
The Hang.....	5
Interpretation .....	7
Two named works .....	8
Canaletto's Background .....	9
Q&A with the Curator .....	14
Glossary .....	16



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GALLERY of  
IRELAND

Cover images used:

Detail of Canaletto, *A Regatta on the Grand Canal*, c.1733-4.  
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# Introduction

This resource pack has been designed to accompany the exhibition *Canaletto & the Art of Venice* (5 December - 24 March 2019) at the National Gallery of Ireland. This exhibition is the result of a collaboration with Royal Collection Trust and the National Gallery of Ireland.

The resource pack contains contextual information about the exhibition and suggested activities for students to complete before, during and after their visit. It is intended to assist students preparing for the gallery question of the Leaving Certificate Art History and Appreciation Exam and does not replace a visit to the exhibition.

## Sample Question from the 2018 Leaving Certificate Art Appreciation Paper

The primary objective in the design of an art gallery, museum or interpretive centre is to create a space for the interaction of people with artworks/artefacts. Discuss this statement with reference to a named art gallery, museum or interpretive centre that you have visited. In your answer describe and discuss two named works and refer to the ways in which the use of the space affected your interaction with these works and briefly outline your visual concepts for the layout of a school-based exhibition of student art work. Give reasons for your design decisions. Illustrate your answer.

## Marking scheme

		<b>Marks</b>	<b>Notes</b>
A	Name of gallery, museum or interpretive centre and discussion of statement.	10	5 for name 5 for discussion
B	Describe and discuss two named works and refer to the ways in which the use of space affected your interaction with these works.	15	5 for named works (3/2) 5 for description and discussion of works (3/2) 5 for space and how it affected the interaction
C	Briefly describe and discuss your own ideas for designing a school based exhibition of student art work. Give reasons for your design decisions.	15	
D	Sketches.	10	
<b>Total.</b>		<b>50</b>	

**History & Appreciation of Art Paper is worth 150 marks i.e. 37.5% of the total marks for Art**

## Before your visit

Visit the National Gallery's website. What information can you find out about the exhibition? Is it easy to find? How is it presented? Does it make you want to visit the exhibition? Is there enough/too much/not enough information?

Do some background research on the artist Giovanni Antonio Canal, or Canaletto as he was later known. What do you anticipate the exhibition will cover? There is more information in the 'Resources' section of this pack.

There have been a number of articles and reviews written about the exhibition. Do you think it is useful to read these before you visit? Do you think reading a review will have an impact on how you view the exhibition?

Consider the exhibition's title, *Canaletto & the Art of Venice*. How do you think the title sets your expectations for the visit?

This exhibition is a collaboration with Royal Collection Trust, all of the works are on loan from their collection. What do you know about Royal Collection Trust?

## During your visit

This resource includes prompts and activities to help you explore *Canaletto & the Art of Venice*. Remember to:

**Observe & record** – use a sketchbook or notebook to record your observations of your visit. Photography is not permitted in the Canaletto exhibition, so it is important that you create an accurate record of your visit. You will be required to include sketches in your LC exam, so make lots of annotated sketches alongside your notes.

**Form your own opinion & give examples** - every visitor to the exhibition will have a different experience. We bring our own backgrounds, histories, opinions and perceptions to viewing works of art. Age, gender, education, nationality and many other factors will impact how we perceive an exhibition. Everyone's opinion is equally valid; there is no right or wrong. When answering the Gallery Question it is important to give your own interpretation of the exhibition, but it is equally important to back up your opinions with examples to support your argument.

# First Impressions

Your experience will be influenced by a number of factors that may consciously or subconsciously affect how you engage with the exhibition. Some of these will have been deliberately created by the Gallery to create a comfortable environment for viewing art (the lighting, the way the paintings are hung), while others will be unique to you (your mood, previous positive or negative experiences at the Gallery). How other visitors are interacting with the space will also have an impact.

## Before you enter the building, note down:

- External factors: time of day; weather
- Internal factors: your mood; energy levels; how your body feels
- Is this your first visit to the National Gallery? Do you have any preconceptions about what your experience will be?
- What does the building look like?
- What is your first impression?

## When you enter the building, note down:

- What can you hear? smell? see?
- What facilities are there? (e.g. information desk, cloakroom, toilets) Is there signage, maps, information about exhibitions? How can you move around the

building? Are there stairs, lifts, escalators? Are there places to sit? What else can you observe?

Make an annotated sketch of the foyer showing these elements

- Who else is in the Gallery? (e.g. staff, other visitors, members of your group) What are they doing? How are they interacting with the building?
- How does the Gallery make you feel?

Think critically about the elements that have been created by the Gallery. Why do you think they are there? How do they affect your experience? Do you feel any differently to before you walked through the door? Do you feel prepared and ready to view art?

## Further activity

There are two entrances to the Gallery. How may your first impressions differ depending on which entrance you use?



Merrion Square Entrance



Clare Street Entrance

You can find out more about the history and architecture of the Gallery here: <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/history>

# The Hang

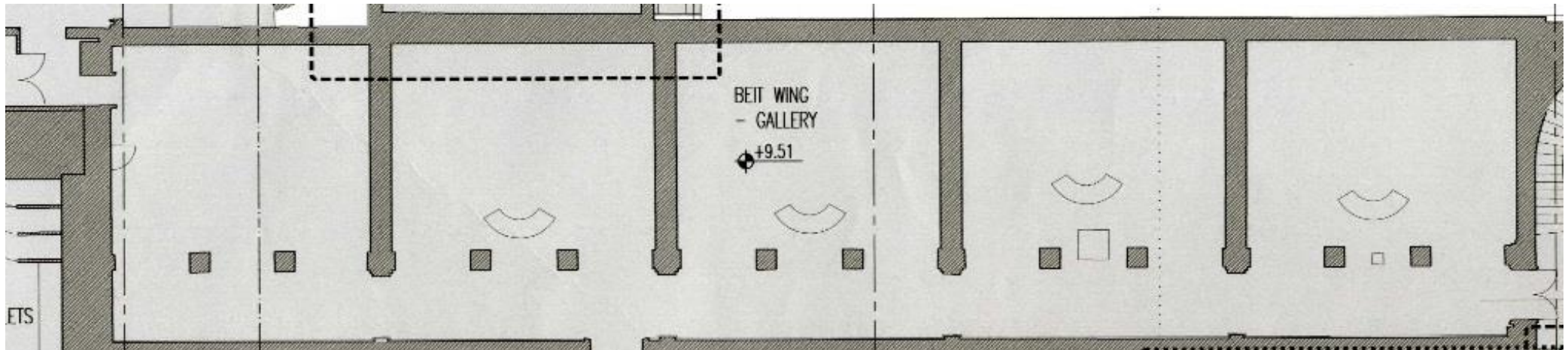
A **hang** is how the paintings in an exhibition are arranged on the walls of the gallery. This refers to both the way they are physically displayed, and the order the curator has decided to put them in. For example, an exhibition may be hung **chronologically**, where the paintings are displayed in order of when they were created, or **thematically** where they are grouped by similar subject matter. Shows may also be hung **aesthetically**, where paintings complement each other. Curators also have to take into account **practical** considerations – some paintings may be too big for certain walls or galleries.

## Observe & record:

**For each element consider how it affects your viewing and interpretation of the paintings.**

- What are your **first impressions** of the exhibition? What is the atmosphere like? What is the temperature of the room? What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you see?
- The **architecture** of the Gallery. What materials, texture and colours are the walls? Ceilings? Floors? Are there doors between the rooms?
- The **hang** of the paintings. What height are they hung at? Are they close together or far apart? Are they grouped? Is your eye drawn to certain paintings? How are the paintings fixed to the walls? What frames are they in? Are they glazed?
- The **interpretation**. Are there text panels? Signage? Labels? Where is the interpretation? What size is it? Colour? Design?
- The **lighting**. Is it natural? Artificial?
- The **fixtures and fittings**. Is there any furniture? Security devices? Light switches, fire extinguishers, etc.? Do they enhance or detract from the paintings?
- How are **visitors** moving through the space? Are they following a set route? How are they interacting with each other?

**Sketch:** Using the floorplan provided, sketch the layout of the exhibition. Is it hung chronologically or thematically?



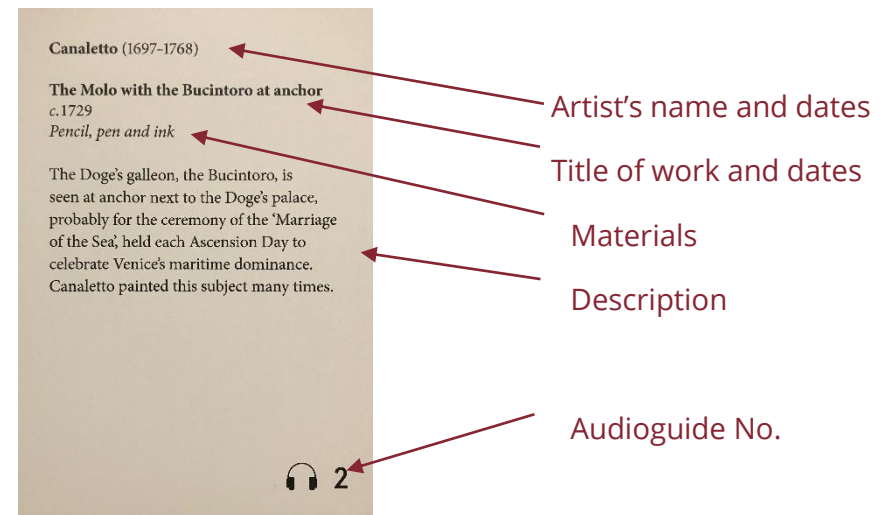
National Gallery of Ireland, Beit Wing, Rooms 6-10, architectural plan

# Interpretation

Exhibition text is skilfully written to convey complex information in a clear and accessible way, within strict word counts. A curator will often do a great deal of contextual research about a work or artist that they then have to condense into a short amount of space. When someone visits an exhibition, they don't want to read a book on a wall! The curator will have to decide what they have to leave out, as much as what they will write. This process can be very difficult, but curators have lots of practice in writing in this particular style. The text will also be proofread by a number of different people who will check for accuracy, clarity and style. The final text that you see in the exhibition will have gone through lots of drafts and edits before it is printed.

There are different layers to exhibition text. In the Canaletto exhibition there is:

- An introduction panel for the whole exhibition
- Introduction panels for each room
- Panels for different themes expressed within the rooms
- Labels for each artwork
- Audioguide commentary
- Leaflet
- Large format text of the labels for the artwork



Is there anything more you would like to know about the painting? Is there any information you don't think should be included? What information do you think is the most important?

### Further activity

Choose one of the paintings from the exhibition and write your own label. Think about:

- What is the most important piece of information you want to share with the visitor? Put this first.
- Use active rather than passive language.
- Don't just describe what's in the painting – include something that the viewer can't see for themselves.
- Use language a 10 year old would understand – keep it clear, accessible and interesting.
- Prompt the visitor to look deeper at the painting – you might want to ask a question.
- Remember to stick to the word count – maximum of 80 words for the description.



# Two named works

In the LC exam you will be asked to discuss two named works in detail and use sketches to illustrate your answer. While you are in the exhibition space, use this time to make detailed notes and sketches of two works. Some of the works in the show are under copyright restrictions and you may not be able to find images of the works online after your visit, so it is important that you take down as much detail as possible.

## Note

- Title of work
- Date
- Materials
- Information included in the label

## Sketch & annotate

- How the painting is hung (is it high, low, close/far away from other works, make a note of other works nearby)
- Lighting
- Wall colour
- Frame
- Interpretation (where is it positioned, what does it say, how does it affect your viewing of the work)
- The formal elements of the painting (shapes, colours, textures, etc.)

**Observe & record:** Make annotated sketches of how Canaletto uses characters to fill and narrate his views of the Grand Canal.

# Canaletto

Giovanni Antonio da Canal (Canaletto) was born in Venice on 28 October 1697. His mother Artemisia Barbieri and father Bernardo da Canal were both from Venice, which made Canaletto an *Origine Civis Venetus* (original citizen of Venice). He lived until 19 April 1768. Bernardo da Canal (1673-1744) was a theatrical stage painter. Canaletto followed in his father's footsteps and began his artistic career designing and creating stage sets for famous theatres of Venice. Canaletto and his father created sets for operas by famous Italian composers such as Vivaldi (1678-1741) and Scarlatti (1660-1725). On a visit to Rome in 1719-1720 Canaletto was inspired by the ruins of antiquity there and began to develop a style of landscape drawing and painting. From then on he focused on drawing the city of Venice, from every angle, and created many cityscapes and imaginative views, or *vedute ideate*, for which he is well known.

## Patronage and an Irish Connection

An Irishman, Owen McSwiney (1676-1754) born in Enniscorthy Co. Wexford but living in London, is connected to Canaletto through their shared involvement in theatre. McSwiney is

recorded to have employed Canaletto, among other Italian artists, to create sets for his Queen's Theatre in Haymarket, London. He moved to Venice and became acquainted with English patron, collector, and merchant Joseph Smith (c.1674-1770). Canaletto painted many views of Venice for McSwiney and Smith in a myriad of mediums including engraving, painting, and pen and ink with wash. These were very popular for the '**Grand Tourists**' visiting Venice from abroad. Smith was responsible for commissioning the twelve views of the Grand Canal in this exhibition which took Canaletto seven years to complete (fig. 1).

All of the works in this exhibition are originally from Smith's personal collection which he sold to King George III in 1762 for the large sum of £20,000 (approximately €3.6m in today's money). Other artists in the exhibition, such as Marco and Sebastian Ricci (1676-1730 and 1659-1734), are present to show how Canaletto fits into the cultural setting of the time and the contemporary landscape tradition of Italy.



Fig 1. Canaletto, *The Rialto Bridge from the North*, c.1726-7.  
Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.

### **Canaletto's Technique and Process**

Canaletto's background in theatrical set production gave him an in-depth understanding of perspective and draughtsmanship. How this training informed his paintings can be seen in the construction of the views and the attention to detail given to every surface and figure. His works in pencil, pen and ink contain just as much preparation and meticulous setting up of the view or perspective, with hundreds of vertical lines underneath the finished work (fig. 2). After carefully setting out his views Canaletto was able to add little flourishes which gave his drawings and paintings great activity and vibrancy.



Fig. 2. Canaletto, *The central stretch of the Grand Canal*, c.1734.  
Royal Collection Trust /© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.

Canaletto continuously sketched the city of Venice and used these studies to create vast paintings in his studio. His nephews Bernardo Bellotto (1721-80) and Pietro Bellotti (1625-1700) worked with him in his studio and Bernardo Bellotto had a successful career in Northern Europe creating views in the style of Canaletto.

Canaletto often drew from a boat on the canal or combined two perspectives of the city into one work, enlarging, widening or shifting buildings and forms to create his idealised view of the city. This is what gives his views of Venice a hyper-realistic effect.

Canaletto's masterful use of dramatic light and shade add to this aura and his colour palette lightened as his style matured. There was less and less solid black in his paintings during the 1730s. He started using pastels more frequently and the architecture was outlined in the softest of black lines or sometimes described only by incising the paint with a sharp point. Two fine examples of this period of painting are *The Bacino di San Marco on Ascension Day* (fig. 3) and *A Regatta on the Grand Canal* (fig. 4). Later on, during busy periods of production, Canaletto utilised stronger contrasting colours again.



Fig. 3. Canaletto, *The Bacino di San Marco on Ascension Day*, c.1733-4. Royal Collection Trust /© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.



Fig. 4. Canaletto, *A Regatta on the Grand Canal*, c.1733-4. Royal Collection Trust /© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.

### ***The Vedute Ideate and Capricci***

As well as his hyper-realistic views of the Venetian cityscape, Canaletto was also well known for his 'imagined' or 'fantasy' works which drew from the real fabric of the city, Roman ruins, and more, to create the *Vedute Ideate*, idealised views, and *Capricci*, imagined views (fig. 5). Many of these scenes show familiar ruins or monuments in new contexts and were popular during the eighteenth century amongst the Grand Tourists and beyond. Canaletto's unique balance of reality and fantasy make his views in paint and pen stand out (fig. 6).



Fig. 5. Canaletto, *The Colleoni Monument in a Capriccio Setting*, 1744.  
Royal Collection Trust /© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.



Fig. 6. Canaletto, *Capriccio with a Monumental staircase*, c.1755-60.  
Royal Collection Trust /© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.

# Resources

## Q&A with Anne Hodge, Curator of Prints and Drawings

### **Tell us a bit about yourself and your job**

My name is Anne Hodge and I am Curator of Prints and Drawings in the National Gallery of Ireland. I studied printed textile design and art and design history in NCAD and then did a Master's degree in Library and Information Studies at UCD. I'm very lucky that my job involves looking after art and putting on exhibitions – art is one of my main interests in life, along with hiking, reading and cooking.

### **How did you get your job?**

I applied for the post while I was working in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. My NCAD thesis tutor spotted the job in the paper and contacted my parents. I would not have been aware of it otherwise. I was called for interview and had to identify a selection of drawings from different schools and periods. Happily, I was successful and a number of weeks after the initial interview, aged 29, I started work in the National Gallery of Ireland as one of a small team of curators.

As you start off on your career, be prepared to do jobs that are not exactly right, but which have a connection with art, museums etc. Be prepared to volunteer to gain experience and always keep in touch with mentors and with people who have been helpful to you in the past – they usually will continue to be helpful into the future!

### **What was your role in the development of the exhibition?**

My role was that of liaison curator. The exhibition was created by two Royal Collection Trust (RCT) curators: Rosie Razzall (drawings and prints) and Lucy Whitaker (paintings). They spent some three years working on the exhibition, selecting the works and researching and writing the catalogue and exhibition texts. The Gallery agreed to be the third venue of the show; it also was shown in London and Edinburgh. I had to decide how to hang the works in our exhibition space to ensure a really good experience for our visitors. I had to choose the paint colour. I chose two different greys to allow the colour within the paintings and the gilded frames to shine. I decided neutral colours would work best and would not overpower the drawings. With our lighting expert and conservators I had to make sure the lighting was right for every object on show including books, prints and drawings. I also worked with Education Department colleagues to develop the education and events programme.

### **What was the idea behind the exhibition?**

To tell the story of this great Venetian artist, Canaletto, through the rich collection of his works in the Royal Collection, which were acquired by King George III from Joseph Smith in 1762. In particular, to show how Canaletto fitted into the world of art and culture in Venice in the first half of the eighteenth century.

### **Who are the target audiences for the exhibition?**

A wide mix of people including regular visitors to the Gallery who always want to see something new; people interested in Venice as a unique city; people who want to get away from the hustle and bustle of life and have some quiet time with calm, sun-filled peaceful paintings.

### **What were the learning objectives for the exhibition? (What are the key things that you'd like visitors to learn from the exhibition?)**

To show that Canaletto was a ground-breaking artist who developed a way of painting the city that provided eighteenth-century tourists with gorgeous 'souvenirs' of their stay in Venice.

To show how patronage was, and is, so important in the life of an artist.

To show how little Venice has changed since the eighteenth century, but conversely how fragile the city is and how human developments over the last three centuries - global warming, colossal cruise ships and the huge numbers of tourists - threaten its very existence.

### **How did you choose the works in the exhibition?**

The works were selected by RCT curators. I decided where each work should hang to best advantage in our exhibition space. I decided to make more of the unique Grand Canal series of paintings, an important group of 12 pictures commissioned by Joseph Smith to hang in his palazzo (palace) on the Grand Canal. Unlike the exhibitions in Edinburgh and London I chose to hang the Grand Canal paintings singly so that the viewer sees each one at eye level and can imagine that they are travelling along the Grand Canal by gondola and slowly enjoying each new section of the city as it comes into view. It allows time for all the fascinating details of each painting to be taken in ... dogs playing, flames leaping from a tar barrel used to waterproof gondolas, the shadows cast by the bright sun on the decorative buildings.

### **How did you choose the themes in the exhibition?**

The themes were chosen by RCT curators. I wrote an extra text panel explaining the Irish connection in the Canaletto story – the fact that an

Irishman, theatre impresario Owen McSwiney from Enniscorthy, introduced the artist to his most important patron, the English merchant Joseph Smith.

### **Do you have a favourite work in the exhibition?**

I have two! One is the amazing image of the seventeenth-century church of Santa Maria della Salute, located on a narrow finger of land between the Grand and Giudecca canals at the Bacino di San Marco. Although it is a very imposing baroque building Canaletto makes it appear even larger and more impressive by cutting off the top of the dome making it seem that the canvas cannot contain this huge church. The use of light and shade gives great drama and energy to the scene too. My second favourite is a drawing, also located in the last room of the exhibition. It depicts the famous tower or campanile in St Mark's Square. It is a superb work in pen and ink, showing how important drawing was to Canaletto. It is a bit of reportage, something that shows us that Canaletto was actually there on the spot sitting with his sketchbook looking up at the tower which had been damaged by lightning. We can see the crumbling edge of the brickwork and the precarious-looking scaffolding. Canaletto wrote in the top corner that he drew it on St George's Day, 1745.

### **What was the biggest challenge?**

Ensuring that all 97 works fitted into the space well, and that everything was well lit. It was the largest exhibition I have worked on in my career to date. I was concerned that the RCT curators would not be happy with my decisions on layout so it was with bated breath that I waited for their opinions when they came over. Luckily they were very complimentary!

### **Is there anything else you'd like to share?**

Despite creating hundreds of drawings and paintings that were hugely popular in his lifetime and fetched high prices, Canaletto was not a

wealthy man when he died. An inventory of his possessions at the time of his death shows that he owned very little: 28 unfinished canvases; an old single bed and a sad collection of clothing including a few patched cloaks. It seems art was his life and he cared little for anything else.

A curator is only one small cog in the exhibition wheel. A major show like Canaletto and the Art of Venice involves collaboration between many different people both within and outside the Gallery: art handlers, conservators, designers, education, exhibition, maintenance and visitor services colleagues, and the Director (a brilliant curator who is always generous with his advice). Without everyone working hard together it would be impossible to put on exciting shows.



# Glossary

## **Antiquity**

The word antiquity is used in both history and art history contexts, and describes anything relating to classical Roman art, or any art and architecture created before the decline of the Roman empire.

## **Patronage**

A patron was someone who financially supported artists and art institutions, usually to support a specific artist and their work. A relationship of support could last decades.

## **Grand Tour**

The term 'Grand Tour' was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe a trip to Italy, Greece and sometimes Egypt and Turkey. The tour began as a rite of passage for wealthy young scholars, to see the ruins of the Roman empire, classical temples, old-master paintings and more, in order to 'complete their education'. It developed into a fashionable and social trip rather than an educative one.

## **Vedute Ideate**

Translated from Italian as 'Ideal Views' these were scenes that were based on reality but were tweaked or skewed to create a better or perfect scene.

## **Capriccio**

An Italian term for 'Imagined View' or a fantasy view, often of familiar objects rearranged in a new way.

# Education Programme

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive Education & Public Programme. Pick up a paper leaflet outside the exhibition, or find out more on our website:

[www.nationalgallery.ie/what-we-do/education-department/](http://www.nationalgallery.ie/what-we-do/education-department/)

The programme has been designed by the Gallery's Education Department to support the exhibition and enable a range of target audiences to engage with it at their own level.