SS118 INTRODUCTION TO ART IN IRELAND
(6 ECTS/ 3 US Semester Credits)

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

Ireland has a rich and vibrant artistic heritage, extending back to c. 3500 BC; this course traces the development of Irish art beginning with decorated megaliths and the exquisite corpus of Irish Bronze Age gold work, before turning its attention to the introduction of Celtic or La Tène art styles into Ireland around the 4th century BC. Following the Roman conquest of western Europe, the Classical roots of La Tène art re-emerge as a dominant element in Irish art of the first few centuries AD and continue, as a core element in the motif-book of early Christian art, in to the 7th and 8th century. Dominated by fantastical animals, Germanic art of Dark Age Europe was also incorporated into Insular art styles. An appreciation of style, symbolism and iconography in Early Christian art is integral to this module and treated in relation to the sublime artistic achievements of the ‘Golden Age’ of Irish art such as illuminated manuscripts, ecclesiastical metalwork such as the Ardagh Chalice and Irish high crosses. In addition to its aesthetic appeal, in revealing cross-cultural influences and the more arcane concerns of its audience, early Irish art provides a unique window on the past that can be explored through iconographical analysis.

This course includes a guided Field Trip to the National Museum and the Book of Kells Exhibit in Dublin. This is an integral part of the course where students will have the opportunity to view the objects they will be studying ‘in the flesh’ as well as a range of comparanda.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

• In-depth knowledge of Irish art from the prehistoric period to the ‘Golden Age’ of the 8th century AD
• Understanding of the broader European context of Irish art during this period
• Understanding of the role of symbolism and iconography in Irish art of the period through case studies

COURSE OUTLINE:

Week 1
Decoding early Irish art; an introduction to iconographical analysis
Passage grave art: The earliest art from Ireland
FIELD SEMINAR: NATIONAL MUSEUM (Guided tour of exhibits relevant to the course) & BOOK OF KELLS EXHIBITION

Week 2
Bronze Age goldwork
La Tène art: The earliest art of the Celts
The art of pagan, Celtic Ireland
The Iron Age to Early Christian transition

Week 3
Understanding Early Christian art
The symbolism of the Ballinderry Brooch – a case study
Early Irish ecclesiastical art: monks, pilgrimage and continental influences
Introduction to Germanic and Byzantine art

Week 4
Case studies from the ‘Golden Age’ of Irish Art – the Tara Brooch and the Ardagh Chalice
‘The Work of Angels’: illuminated manuscripts

Week 5
Irish High Crosses – origins, influences and iconography

COURSE TEXTS:

ESSENTIAL READING:

A course Reading Pack, containing both short articles, book chapters and e-books, will be provided in pdf format on Blackboard.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING:


REQUIREMENTS FOR CREDITS:
1. Attendance and participation at all the scheduled lectures and seminars.
2. One essay of 1,500 words minimum on subject assigned by the course tutor.
3. Slide test and MCQ examination of the material covered in the scheduled lectures and seminars.

COURSE PROFESSOR:

Fiona Gavin Ph.D
Fiona Gavin is a graduate of the National University of Ireland, Galway where she currently lectures in Irish Art from the Early Iron Age to the 8th Century A.D. Her research and publications are focused on the art and iconography of the Insular world of Britain and Ireland during the late Iron Age and Early Christian period.