

Naples: Visions, Journeys and Perceptions of the City

Semester Teaching Programme for Erasmus Students

Painting Course | Prof. Rino Squillante

First Semester | 150 Hours

Course Overview

This programme offers Erasmus students of the Painting School at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Napoli a path of artistic research, observation and experimentation centred on Naples, understood as a complex, layered organism in constant transformation.

Naples becomes at once an object of study, a place of experience and the subject matter of painting research, through exploration of its historical, cultural, anthropological, landscape and social dimensions.

The course invites students to develop a personal reflection on the relationship between the real city and the perceived city, between the gaze of those who inhabit it every day and that of those who arrive from elsewhere, bringing different cultural references, sensibilities and experiences.

In this context, the Erasmus student's position has particular value: an outsider's gaze, initially unfamiliar with the territory, is progressively transformed through direct experience, engagement with places and encounters with people.

The aim is not to produce a conventional or illustrative representation of Naples, but to construct a personal visual interpretation of the city capable of conveying its contradictions, identities, memories, transformations and imaginary dimensions.

1. Learning Objectives

The programme aims to develop the following skills:

- Analyse the urban and natural landscape of Naples using tools of artistic observation and interpretation.
- Understand the relationships between the human-built environment, the physical characteristics of the territory and patterns of urban settlement.
- Investigate the relationship between cultural identity, collective memory and visual representation.
- Compare perceptions of the city from within, as experienced by residents, and from outside, as experienced by visitors and international students.
- Experiment with contemporary painting languages, including combinations with photography, drawing, collage, archival materials and interdisciplinary practices.
- Develop an independent artistic project grounded in a documented and considered research process.

2. Themes and Areas of Research

A. The City as a Human Organism

The relationship between architecture, inhabitants and everyday life. The street as both public and private space; neighbourhoods as places of belonging; social practices, markets, gestures and collective rituals. The city is observed as a cultural and human construction, as well as an architectural one.

B. The Physical Landscape and the Morphology of the Territory

The sea, Mount Vesuvius, the hills, underground cavities, Mediterranean light and the city's distinctive geography. The investigation considers how nature shapes urban structure, the collective imagination and ways of inhabiting a place.

C. Identity, Culture and Memory

Historical layers, popular traditions, religious and secular symbols, material culture, devotional imagery and contemporary artistic expressions. Particular attention will be paid to the relationship between stereotypes, media representations and lived reality.

D. The City Seen from Within and from Outside

Naples as a place of belonging and as a territory to discover. The differences between the perspectives of residents, travellers and students temporarily immersed in the urban context will be explored through ideas of familiarity, estrangement, orientation and disorientation.

E. Urban Contradictions and Transformations

The relationship between centre and periphery, preservation and transformation, beauty and decay, tourism and everyday life. The landscape is interpreted as a site of social, cultural and ecological tensions, avoiding simplistic or folkloric representations.

3. Teaching Methodology

The course will alternate between studio activities, individual research and direct experiences in the city.

Observation and Exploration

Students will be encouraged to explore the city independently or in groups, collecting impressions, images, drawings, notes and materials with which to build a personal archive.

Research and Documentation

Each student will develop a visual journal of their experience in Naples, comprising sketches, photographs, maps, texts, colour fragments and personal reflections.

Painting Experimentation

The collected material will be reworked through freely chosen painting techniques and approaches, with particular attention to the relationship between observation, memory, interpretation and invention.

Discussion and Review

Throughout the semester, group discussions and individual reviews will be held to assess the coherence between research, expressive language and artistic project.

4. Semester Structure

Proposed organisation over 15 weeks, adaptable to the academic calendar.

Weeks 1-3 | Phase One - Encountering the City

Introduction to the course themes, exploration of the territory, initial observations and creation of the visual journal.

Exercise: My First Image of Naples.

Weeks 4-6 | Phase Two - Observation and Research

In-depth exploration of the relationship between the physical landscape and the human-built environment. Identification of a personal theme and collection of materials.

Exercise: Emotional Mapping of a Place.

Weeks 7-9 | Phase Three - Project Development

Definition of the artistic concept, selection of techniques and experimentation with compositions, formats and materials.

Presentation and discussion of a preliminary project.

Weeks 10-13 | Phase Four - Artistic Production

Creation of the artwork or series of paintings, with periodic reviews and individual guidance.

Attention to the quality of research and the coherence of expressive choices.

Weeks 14-15 | Phase Five - Presentation and Examination

Finalisation of the work, organisation of documentation and presentation of the project.

Critical discussion of the artworks and the research experience.

5. Final Examination Project

GENERAL THEME — Naples: Real Landscape, Lived Landscape, Imagined Landscape

The examination requires an individual artistic project, developed throughout the semester, that presents a personal interpretation of Naples and the relationship between its physical, human and cultural dimensions.

The final project may take the form of a painting, a series of paintings, a painting installation or a project combining painting with other visual languages.

The work must include three essential components:

- Artistic production: one work or a coherent series of works, with dimensions, technique and supports agreed during reviews.

- Research journal: a considered collection of sketches, photographs, studies, visual materials and evidence of the process developed over the semester.
- Critical essay: a short text of approximately 1,000–1,500 words, in Italian or English, explaining the chosen theme, motivations, methodology and expressive choices.

Questions to Explore in the Final Project

Each student will be encouraged to engage with questions such as:

- What image of Naples did I have before arriving, and how has it changed through experience?
- Which aspects of the city are immediately visible, and which emerge only through everyday familiarity?
- How does the physical structure of the territory influence the lives and identities of its inhabitants?
- How can painting represent a city without merely describing it?
- What relationship has developed between my cultural identity and that of the place I temporarily inhabit?

6. Assessment Criteria

Assessment will take into account the entire research process, not only the final outcome.

Criterion	Weight
Quality and originality of artistic research	25%
Ability to interpret the urban and cultural context critically	25%
Technical experimentation and expressive quality	25%
Project coherence and documentation of the process	15%
Presentation and discussion of the final project	10%

The percentage weightings are proposed as teaching guidelines and may be adapted to the Academy's official assessment procedures.

7. Artistic and Cultural References

The programme may be supported by the study of artists who have explored landscape, the city, identity and the relationship between art and place.

Possible references include:

- William Turner and Giacinto Gigante: light, landscape and the tradition of representing the Bay of Naples.
- Mario Sironi: the city as structure and pictorial construction.
- Alberto Burri: matter, surface and transformation.
- Mimmo Jodice: Naples, memory, absence and the identity of places.

- William Kentridge: historical memory, drawing and the layering of images.
- Francis Alÿs: urban exploration, walking and artistic practices in public space.
- Julie Mehretu: cartography, urban space and pictorial layering.

These references are not stylistic models to imitate, but tools for expanding the possibilities of interpretation and research.

8. Expected Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students should have developed a greater awareness of the relationship between personal experience, territorial context and artistic production.

The final work should demonstrate the ability to transform observation of the city into an independent painting language in which analysis of reality, memory, imagination and individual sensibility coexist.

The Erasmus experience is thus understood not only as an opportunity for technical and cultural education, but also as a chance to engage with different ways of seeing, inhabiting and representing the world.

9. Concluding Remarks

Naples offers a particularly meaningful context in which to question the relationship between landscape, history, identity and contemporary life. Its complexity provides students with a field of research that goes beyond aesthetic observation and encourages reflection on the very meaning of inhabiting and representing a place.

The project aims to transform the city into an open laboratory in which the Erasmus student's external perspective can enter into dialogue with the experiences, memories and perceptions of those who inhabit the territory every day.

In this process, painting becomes a tool for knowledge, connection and critical interpretation, capable of conveying not a definitive image of Naples, but a plurality of personal and cultural visions.

This proposal is structured as a semester teaching programme that may serve as the basis for a course syllabus or an Erasmus learning project at the Academy.

To further strengthen its academic character, I would suggest retaining as its conceptual core the relationship between the physical, human and perceptual landscapes: three dimensions that connect painting research to the international student's specific experience without reducing Naples to a tourist-oriented or purely iconographic representation.