

When is looking not enough?

We welcome essays that begin from close attention to a particular work, object, exhibition, collection, building, interior, image, act of display, or visual encounter. The strongest pieces will allow that encounter to shape the argument, rather than merely using it as an illustration of an idea formed elsewhere. Essays will be judged according to quality of attention, art-historical seriousness, originality of thought, clarity of argument, and strength of prose.

Who can enter?

Currently matriculated undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University of Oxford, in any discipline. All current Edgar Wind Society committee members, the Prize Director and those involved in administering, shortlisting or judging the Prize are ineligible. College representatives and former committee members may enter if they have no such role and are not current committee members. One essay per entrant. Please declare any close connection to a judge or organiser on the submission form; this will not automatically disqualify you.

What to Write

Submit an original English-language essay of 1,800–2,200 words (approximately 2,000 words). Main text, quotations, footnotes and endnotes count; title, image captions and bibliography do not. Work adapted from tutorial or academic work is welcome if it is substantially reshaped for this Prize, responsive to its question and accessible to a broader readership. Previously published work or work accepted for publication is not eligible.

The judges value precise attention, independent thought, judgement, responsible research and compelling prose. Specialist knowledge and extensive scholarly apparatus are not requirements. Images may be included where useful, with captions and sources, but are not required. Submit a readable essay PDF—not a poster, slide deck, Canva document or image-only file; visual design will not be assessed.

Prize and Publication

The winner will receive a £500 prize. The winning essay and selected shortlisted entries will be published in a printed EWS Art Writing Prize pamphlet. We are also developing an external editorial opportunity for the winning essay, subject to quality and fit.

JUDGES

Martin Kemp FBA is Emeritus Research Professor in the History of Art at the University of Oxford. His work has ranged across Renaissance art, Leonardo da Vinci, visual knowledge, and the relationship between art and science. He was Professor of the History of Art at Oxford from 1995 to 2007.

Jennifer Higgie is a writer, critic, editor and curator whose work moves between art history, criticism, fiction and biography. Formerly editor of *frieze* magazine, she is the author of the novel *Bedlam* and the non-fiction books *The Mirror and the Palette: 500 Years of Women's Self-portraits* and *The Other Side: A Story of Women, Art and the Spirit World*.

Tim Smith-Laing is a writer, critic and academic. A book critic at *The Telegraph* and a regular contributor on art to *The Financial Times* and *Apollo*, he writes across art, literature, criticism, myth, philosophy and cultural history. He holds a DPhil from Merton College, Oxford, and is a senior lecturer at the University of Maastricht.

Deadline: 23:59 GMT, Sunday 15 November 2026

Shortlist announced: 5 December 2026

Winner announced: Prize-giving ceremony, Hilary Term 2027

Full terms and the submissions form at edgarwindsociety.co.uk/prize

Any questions may be sent to prize@edgarwindsociety.org

*Can you make a reader see and think differently about art
in just 2,000 words?*