Lecture summary:

The conversation piece is one of the most idiosyncratic and peculiarly British painting genres of the eighteenth century. Its relatively short efflorescence, from the 1720s until the 1760s, was crucial to the development of British painting, and helped to reinforce national social and cultural values. This lecture traces the roots of the conversation piece in the imported styles of Dutch and French genre painting, and examines its adaptation to British social concerns. Examining works by Gawen Hamilton, William Hogarth, Arthur Devis and Johan Zoffany, it addresses the construction of ideals of politeness, the signifying role of spaces and objects, and the changing imagery of the family.

Slide list:

1. Marcellus Laroon the Younger, *A Musical Assembly*, c.1720, oil on canvas, Tate
5. Joseph Van Aken, *An English Family at Tea*, c. 1720, oil on canvas, Tate
6. Philip Mercier, *The Schutz Family and their Friends on a Terrace*, 1725, oil on canvas, Tate
8. William Hogarth, *The Strode Family*, c. 1738, oil on canvas, Tate
10. Arthur Devis, *Robert Gwillym of Atherton and His Family*, 1745-47, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art
12. Johan Zoffany, *The Bradshaw Family*, c.1769, oil on canvas, Tate
Reference:


Mario Praz, *Conversation pieces: a survey of the informal group portrait in Europe and America*, Penn State, 1971


Gawen Hamilton, *A Conversation of Virtuosis at the King’s Arms*, 1735, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, London
William Hogarth, *The Strode Family*, c. 1738, oil on canvas, Tate
Arthur Devis, *Robert Gwillym of Atherton and His Family*, 1745-47, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art
Johan Zoffany, *John, Fourteenth Lord Willoughby de Broke and his Family*, c.1766, oil on canvas, J. Paul Getty Museum