

Understanding the Italian Renaissance: History, Society and the Rise of the Artist

Date/Time	Thursdays 12 Feb – 19 March 2026 (omitting 12 March) 11am -1pm	Price	£110
Venue	Online Zoom Event, link details will be emailed to attendees on the morning of the event	Lecturer	Dr Dorigen Caldwell

This course is an online Zoom event. The recording will be made available to ALL attendees and will be available for 4 weeks.

This course offers an in-depth exploration of some of the defining themes and contexts of Italian Renaissance art. We will begin by examining the very idea of the 'Renaissance': what is meant by the term, when it was first used, and how the concept of rebirth had its roots in humanist learning. We will go on to consider the central place of classical revival in the Renaissance, from antiquarianism and collecting, to drawing after the antique and the re-emergence of mythological subject matter. But we will also look at the continuing relevance of religion and systems of belief that are more commonly associated with the Middle Ages, from pilgrimage and relics to miraculous images. From there, we will reflect on the role of patrons in shaping the art of the day, from the mercantile classes of cities such as Florence, to the ducal courts of Mantua and Ferrara. And we will conclude with a consideration of the changing status of the artist, and how writings on art helped to shape the modern concept of individual creative genius.

Week 1 The Idea of the 'Renaissance' – From the narrative of rebirth to modern historiography

Week 2 The Lure of Antiquity – humanism, collecting and classical revival

Week 3 Piety, Purgatory and Pilgrimage – art and Christianity in the Renaissance

Week 4 Merchants and Princes – the politics of patronage

Week 5 From the Workshop to the Academy - the changing status of the artist

Lecturer

Dr Dorigen Caldwell is Senior Lecturer in Italian Renaissance Art at Birkbeck, University of London, having gained her doctorate at the Warburg institute. She previously taught at UCL and the American University in Rome, and continues to contribute to the V&A Academy short courses. Dorigen has published in numerous academic journals, including the *Burlington Magazine*, *Renaissance Studies*, *Art History* and the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. She specialises in Italian art of the later sixteenth century, and is currently writing a book entitled *Piety, Patronage and Politics in Early Modern Rome*.