

Art History: Art & Life in the Italian Renaissance - Course Schedule

Week 1. Antiquity

We will explore the art and architecture of Ancient Greece and Rome, which was 'rebirthed' during the Renaissance. Contemporary examples of art and architecture will be included to illustrate the far-reaching legacy of Antiquity.

Week 2. Byzantine

Moving into the medieval period, we will look at how art transformed to serve Christianity. This period of art has historically been dismissed as the 'Dark Ages', and we will re-contextualise the work as experiential aids for worship and ambition.

Week 3. Art in the making

This class will focus on the various art-making techniques commonly used in the Renaissance, such as: tempera, oil and fresco painting, and marble and bronze sculpture. We will also examine art-making within a wider socio-economic landscape and explore how artists trained and subsequently operated workshop practices.

Week 4. Carving a civic identity: Florence

We will explore how public sculpture can be used to declare and define a civic identity. Florence was a fiercely proud Republic, and public art commissions were wielded as statements of civic pride and values.

Week 5. The Northern Renaissance

This class will introduce the Northern Renaissance and the overarching themes in this period of art. We will move between the north and south, comparing altarpieces as a way of differentiating styles and approaches.

Week 6. The Last Suppers

Artists often represented the same narratives in paintings, in response to patron demands and artistic trends. We will address a wide range of Last Supper paintings from both Italy and the North, exploring the flexibility of visual storytelling.

Week 7. Power and patronal ambition

Where there is money, there is art. With money often comes a desire for status and commemoration. We will explore all of these things in relation to the rise of portraiture in the Renaissance, and grand family chapels.

Week 8. Poesia and private pleasures

In Venice, a particular type of painting proliferated: poesia. Often understood as visual poems, they are enigmatic and resist straight-forward interpretations. Intended for private homes, they continue to be sources of contention and contemplation. Staying inside the home, we will also look at art that was associated with love, marriage and weddings.

Week 9. Papal Rome

We will end our course in Rome, the heart of the Church. Our focus will be the Sistine Chapel ceiling, and other artworks in St Peter's. Bombastic commissions celebrated the grandeur of the Church and the ambitions of popes. We will consider how art functioned in the Vatican, intended for this powerful and pious audience.