

Cities of Art: Florence, Rome, Urbino

Dates	Tuesdays 9, 16 and 23 September 2025
Times	18.00–20.00 BST
Location	Online (Zoom)
Tutor	Dr Sarah Pearson
Level	All Levels



Gaspard Dughet, *The Falls at Tivoli*, around 1661-63 (detail)

Course Description

Journey through the visual culture and society of a selection of Italian cities by focussing on a range of artworks seen in the Wallace Collection and beyond. Looking at Florence, Rome and Urbino, our investigation will reveal the impact of each city's unique artistic and architectural development, centred around the 15th to 17th centuries.

In republican Florence, we'll learn how art offered a way for clients, led by the Medici family, to express cultural superiority. In Rome we'll see how successive Popes used commissions to promote themselves and their family name – and in the city-state of Urbino, we'll discover how art and architecture were powerful propaganda tools.

Session One: Florence

Our first session takes us to Florence, which was ostensibly a Republic where leading families, including the Medici, fought an ongoing political game for superiority. We'll consider how this powerful dynasty utilised art and architecture to shape their public image, and how portraiture was key to this aim. Alongside a wide range of artworks and architecture, we'll examine a portrait medal of Cosimo de' Medici and a painting of Elenora di Toledo, both in the Wallace Collection, to assess the impact of imagery of all shapes and sizes.

Session Two: Rome

Our second session takes us to the city of the Pope, which was dominated by leading families who created grandiose commissions to demonstrate their status. We'll see how those elected to Papacy used their rule as an opportunity to ensure their legacy through art and architecture. Looking at works in the Wallace Collection by artists including Claude, Poussin and Salvatore Rosa, we'll explore how this great city attracted artists from across Europe to create imagery of the classical world and the beauty of the Roman Campagna.

Session Three: Urbino

In our final session, we move to the Renaissance city of Urbino. You'll learn how the ruler, Duke Federico da Montefeltro, followed by his daughter-in-law, Elisabetta Gonzaga, transformed this tiny city into a vibrant centre of culture and learning. You'll also discover how the architect, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, created the magnificent Ducal Palace and how the Duke commissioned works from leading artists. Urbino was also famed for its maiolica production and we will look closely at some of the many fine examples which can be found in the Wallace Collection.

Course Tutor

Dr Sarah Pearson is a Teaching Associate at the Institute of Continuing Education at the University of Cambridge. She teaches on art and architectural history from the Renaissance period to the present day, with specialist interests in the European Renaissance and in the Grand Tour era. Sarah has enjoyed teaching and lecturing at universities and adult education institutions on a variety of art and architectural subjects since 2001.

Joining Information and Format

This course will be taught through [Zoom Webinar](#). Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a five-minute break and time for Q&A with the tutor.

Tickets are for all dates. Ticket holders will be emailed the Zoom link, Webinar ID and Passcode 24 hours in advance of the first course session, which should be retained for accessing all sessions of the course.

Course Recording

This course will be recorded. Within 48 hours of each course session, ticket holders will be emailed a link to view the recording, which will be available for two weeks.
