

Life Stories: Caravaggio

Dates	Thursdays 15, 22 and 29 January 2026
Times	18.00–20.00 GMT
Location	Online (Zoom)
Tutor	Clare Ford-Wille
Level	All Levels



Caravaggio, *Bacchus*, 1596 (detail) Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Course Description

With his radical use of light and intense realism, Caravaggio was a revolutionary painter who transformed the development of European art. Much has been written about the man, the artist, and his notoriety. Yet despite numerous books, exhibitions, and films he remains somewhat elusive.

As his painting *Victorious Cupid* is exhibited at the Wallace Collection, we'll explore Caravaggio's turbulent life along with the extraordinary work he created for churches and palazzi in Rome, Naples, and Sicily. We'll consider how his new style was so powerful that it profoundly influenced not only artists in Rome, but also those in Naples, Spain, France, and the Netherlands.

Session One

Caravaggio came from Lombardy, and in this first session we will investigate several innovative and vibrant 16th-century northern Italian painters whose works influenced the young Caravaggio. We will also look at his early life in Rome as came to the notice of important patrons such as the Cardinal del Monte. We will see how his early work introduced the new and influential subjects of genre and still life to the city.

Session Two

Our second session turns attention to Caravaggio's career as an independent artist in Rome with his first two major religious commissions for San Luigi dei Francesi and Santa Maria del Popolo. We'll learn about the influential patrons who favoured him, including the Marchese Giustiniani for whom he painted *Victorious Cupid*. We will see how their picture galleries were in fact forerunners of museums such as the Wallace Collection.

Session Three

What do we really know about Caravaggio's years in Rome? We will examine the events of 1606 that forced him into exile and reshaped the course of his career. Our focus will then turn to his successful commissions in Naples, his work for the Knights of Malta, and his subsequent flight to Sicily. Finally, we will follow his return to Naples to consider the turbulent final months of his life, during which he produced remarkable altarpieces in every place he worked.

Course Tutor

Clare Ford-Wille was an Associate Lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London and now lectures regularly for many institutions including the V&A Museum, the National Trust, The Arts Society, the Art Fund as well as leading groups to places of art historical interest in Europe, Armenia and the USA.

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.
