

The Glory of Venice

Dates	Wednesday 24 – Friday 26 February 2027
Times	16.00-18.00 BST
Location	Online (Zoom)
Tutor	Siân Walters
Level	All Levels



Canaletto, *Venice: the Bacino di San Marco from San Giorgio*, P497, about 1735 – 1744. © The Wallace Collection.

Course Description

In this three-day course we explore the history and enduring appeal of La Serenissima or "the Most Serene" Venetian Republic through a study of paintings in the Wallace Collection, from Titian's great mythologies and Canaletto's vedute to portraits by Rosalba Carriera and images of the city produced by foreign visitors such as Richard Parkes Bonington.

Session One

We explore the Golden Age of Venetian painting, the late quattrocento and cinquecento, when artists such as Giovanni Bellini, Cima and Titian developed a new and radical approach to style and technique, introducing a softer and more tonal use of light and colour which would revolutionise painting not only in Venice but also as far away as Flanders and Germany. Most of the works commissioned during the period were designed for worship and yet very few of them remain in their original location, calling into question how we can interpret and view these works within a museum context. We discuss the question of why so many paintings during the period were dismembered and why so many fragments are located in British galleries such as the Wallace Collection, with reference with examples by Crivelli and Cima.

Titian's Perseus and Andromeda was one of a series of six mythologies created for one of the most important and prestigious collections in Europe, that of Philip II of Spain. These ambitious 'poesie' as Titian named them were intended to be the visual equivalents of poetry, drawing upon classical subjects which underlined his erudition, yet also appealing to the King's predilection for sensual subject matter.

Session Two

The production of vedute or views of Venice became a major industry in the 1700s and the artist most commonly associated with this particular genre was of course Canaletto. His works provide us with evocative and meticulously painted topographical records of the city, but there were many other artists who also specialised in the genre such as Francesco Guardi. We explore how their work demonstrates quite different approaches to similar subjects and yet also reveals the strong influence which they had upon one another. With reference to works such as Venice: the Giovedì Grasso Festival in the Piazzetta, we also explore more intimate insights into everyday life of the 18th century, examining the wide variety of entertainments enjoyed by the Venetians at carnival.

Session Three

Whilst we associate the 18th century with the grandeur of Canaletto's canvases the reality was that Venice was in decline both politically and financially, although she continued to project an image of splendour and magnificence. One of the many illustrious artists of the period was Rosalba Carriera, a largely self-taught Venetian portraitist who gained international renown for her exquisite pastels as exemplified in the Wallace's miniature of an Unknown Lady. Her portraits were commissioned by collectors across Europe, particularly Grand Tourists, although the Napoleonic Wars at the end of the century led to a dramatic fall in visitors to Venice. However, the end of conflict in 1815 saw a new generation of artists flocking to the city. Turner of course found great inspiration here but Richard Parkes Bonington, Clarkson Frederick Stanfield and Felix Ziem also fell in love with the city's luminous atmosphere which is reflected in their evocative canvases.

We conclude the course by examining artists in the galleries who were inspired by Venetian painters, from Rubens and Van Dyck to Velázquez and Murillo.

Course Tutor

Siân Walters is a highly experienced art historian, presenter and events organiser, and the

director of Art History in Focus. She has been a lecturer at the National Gallery for over 20 years and is founding Honorary Chair of the International Art Council for Artemisia Gold, a charity dedicated to identifying, restoring, and exhibiting artwork by women.

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 both 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 both 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.
