

Art and Society in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance

BCSP – Spring 2026

Prof. Giancarlo Benevolo

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Hours:

From February 23rd to May 6th

Monday 3 pm – 5 pm

Wednesday 3 pm – 5 pm

BCSP Classroom

Description: This course aims to illustrate a period of Italian civilization through the analysis of art and society of the Middle ages and the Renaissance. The iconography, the styles, the social and political aspects, will be presented and discussed with the purpose of allowing students to fully comprehend not only the artistic (architecture, paintings and sculpture) evolution between these two ages but also the differences and cultural continuities between the two periods.

Instructor: Giancarlo Benevolo is in charge of the Bologna Historical Archives and the Department of Education of Bologna Civic Museums of Ancient Art, which is part of the Medieval Civic Museum. His interests focus primarily on the history of society and culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and particularly on the social and political context of art patronage in Bologna. He has supervised the exhibition and catalogue of *I corali di San Giacomo Maggiore: miniatori e committenti a Bologna nel Trecento* (Edisai, Ferrara, 2003) and has written various essays about Giotto's activity in Bologna. He has also written a book on the fortress built by the Pope in Bologna (Marsilio, Venezia, 2006) and has recently carried out studies on the patronage for the *Libro d'ore Ghisilieri* (Panini, Modena, 2007), property of the British Library in London.

Method of presentation: classroom lectures and excursions.

Language of instruction: Italian

Required work and form of assessment: Attendance and active participation to class (20%); written mid-term (30%); final written exam (50%).

Attendance: course attendance is mandatory. Only one absence will be tolerated. More absences will be justified only for serious health reasons and must be accompanied by a doctor's note.

½ point will be reduced from the final grade for every other absence. No justification will be accepted for absences due to personal reasons, family visits, etc.

If you cannot attend class, you will be expected to get information from your classmates about readings and assignments and to be prepared for the next class. Unjustified lateness will negatively affect your grade in class participation.

Contents:

In the first component of the course, the instructor will introduce the methodological aspects of historical and art-historical research; the periodization of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; literary and iconographical documented sources; the language of art (the art techniques, the stylistic analysis); the role the patron and the evolution of the artist laboratory.

The second component will illustrate the passage from the "Tardo antico" to the Middle Ages (IV-XII centuries), through Byzantine and Early Christian Art, High-Medieval Art (in its Barbaric,

Lombard and Ottonian periods) and the Romanic with specific details on Rome, Ravenna and the Po valley (Lombardy and Emilia).

The third component will define the evolution and the characters of the artistic expression of the Romanic and Gothic style in the XIII century, the relationship with antiquity and the definition of the Italian artistic civilization in the XIV century. A closer look on Cimabue, Giotto, Nicola Pisano, Arnolfo di Cambio and Simone Martini will be offered in the context of the cities of Assisi, Padua, Bologna, Siena and Florence.

The fourth component is dedicated to the beginnings and the early developments of the Renaissance in the XV century. The main protagonists of this period will be presented (Brunelleschi, Donatello, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Mantegna, Jacopo della Quercia, Leon Battista Alberti, Bramante) together with other cases of patrons and artists in the contexts of the family courts in Florence, Mantua, Urbino, Ferrara, Milan, Bologna.

Required readings:

G. Benevolo, *Arte e società in Italia tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Packet of photocopies, Academic Year 2025/26.

Suggested readings:

F. Negri Arnoldi, *Storia dell'Arte*, vol. 1 e 2, Milano, Fabbri editori, 1990.

L. Castelfranchi Vegas, *L'arte medioevale in Italia e nell'Occidente europeo*, Milano, Jaka Book, 1993

L. Castelfranchi Vegas, *L'arte del Quattrocento in Italia e in Europa*, Milano, Jaka Book, 1996

| CALENDARIO | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1 | Lunedì 23 Febbraio |
| 2 | Mercoledì 25 Febbraio |
| 3 | Lunedì 2 Marzo |
| 4 | Mercoledì 4 Marzo |
| 5 | Lunedì 9 Marzo |
| 6 | Mercoledì 11 Marzo |
| 7 | Lunedì 16 Marzo |
| 8 | Mercoledì 18 Marzo |
| 9 | Venerdì, 20 Marzo - Escursione a Padova (Affreschi di Giotto – Cappella Scrovegni) |
| 10 | Lunedì 23 Marzo – Esame mid-term |
| 11 | Mercoledì 25 Marzo |
| 12 | Lunedì 30 Marzo |
| 13 | Mercoledì 1 Aprile |
| Vacanze di Pasqua | |
| 14 | Lunedì 13 Aprile |
| 15 | Mercoledì 15 Aprile |
| 16 | Lunedì 20 Aprile |
| 17 | Mercoledì 22 Aprile |
| 18 | Lunedì 27 Aprile |
| 19 | Mercoledì 29 Aprile |
| 20 | Lunedì 4 Maggio |
| = | Mercoledì 6 Maggio – Esame scritto finale |