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2026 / 27

Hugh Belsey



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The Renaissance in Italy:
from Venice to Mantua

twelve illustrated

TALKS



Hugh Belsey, a graduate of the Universities of Manchester and Birmingham, has lectured to groups in Europe, America, Australia and Britain. For twenty-three years he was curator of Gainsborough's House in

Sudbury and in 2004 he was awarded an MBE in recognition of his museum work. He has taught at the Universities of Melbourne and Buckingham and he has also appeared as an expert witness in the BBC series *Fake or Fortune?* and in BBC4's *Britain's Lost Masterpieces*. Yale University Press published his catalogue of portraits by Thomas Gainsborough in 2019 which was awarded the William W B Berger Prize for Art History. Last autumn he curated an exhibition of the work of the Anglo-Italian artist, Thomas Patch at the Lewis Walpole Library in Connecticut and he is currently writing a catalogue of the work of Gainsborough Dupont.

cover and right:
Gentile Bellini

Procession in Piazza San Marco, 1490s
oil on canvas, 367 x 745cm
Galerie del Accademia, Venice

photo Julia Hedgecoe

VENUES & DATES

Lavenham Village Hall at 11am

October Monday 19 (1), Monday 26 (2)

November Monday 2 (3), Monday 16 (4), Monday 23 (5),
Monday 30 (6)

January Monday 18 (7), Monday 25 (8),

February Monday 1 (9), Monday 15 (10), Monday 22 (11)

March Monday 1 (12)

Museum Street Methodist Church, Ipswich at 2.30pm

Entrance in Black Horse Lane (IP1 2EF), limited parking

October Monday 19 (1), Monday 26 (2)

November Monday 2 (3), Monday 16 (4) Monday 23 (5)
Monday 30 (6)

January Monday 18 (7), Monday 25 (8)

February Monday 1 (9), Monday 15 (10), Monday 22 (11)

March Monday 1 (12)

Friends' Meeting House, Great Bardfield at 10.30am

October Tuesday 20 (1), Tuesday 27 (2)

November Tuesday 3 (3), Tuesday 17 (4), Tuesday 24 (5)

December Tuesday 1 (6)

January Tuesday 19 (7), Tuesday 26 (8)

February Tuesday 2 (9), Tuesday 16 (10), Tuesday 23 (11)

March Tuesday 2 (12)

Museum School Room, Saffron Walden at 2.30pm

October Tuesday 20 (1), Tuesday 27 (2)

November Tuesday 3 (3), Tuesday 17 (4), Tuesday 24 (5)

December Tuesday 1 (6)

January Tuesday 19 (7), Tuesday 26 (8)

February Tuesday 2 (9), Tuesday 16 (10), Tuesday 23 (11)

March Tuesday 2 (12)

Complementary refreshments will be served
45 minutes before the start of the Talk.

BOOKING

please tick

Lavenham Village Hall ☐

Museum Street Methodist Church, Ipswich ☐

Friends Meeting House, Great Bardfield ☐

Museum School Room, Saffron Walden ☐

Please book ticket(s) at £135 each
for all twelve Talks

or

Please book the following tickets at £15 each

1 Historical background of Venice ☐

2 Vittore Carpaccio ☐

3 Giovanni Bellini ☐

4 Giorgione and Sebastiano del Piombo ☐

5 Titian ☐

6 Tintoretto ☐

7 Paolo Veronese ☐

8 Mantua and the Gonzaga family ☐

9 Ferrara and the Este family ☐

10 Lorenzo Lotto ☐

11 Piero della Francesca ☐

12 Gainsborough's most famous painting ☐

Pay online at www.hughbelsey.co.uk or use the
booking form overleaf.

The Renaissance in Italy:
from Venice to Mantua

In 1871 Italy was unified. For centuries before, the peninsula comprised a number of city states all of which vied with one another. Last year I lectured about Florence, and this year I will continue the examination. Venice forms a splendid contrast to Florence. By the middle ages trade had made the city extremely rich, and by the 15th century a number of painters were commissioned to fill its churches and civic buildings with oil paintings. Given the damp climate in Venice, fresco painting was unsuitable and canvas was the preferred support for oil paintings. The technique revealed an extra subtlety and variety of handling which would set the tone for artists working in the future. A mushrooming of talent is shown in works by Bellini, Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese. Later, we will study the artistic achievements of central Italy. Architects, such as Alberti and Bramante, and painters including Mantegna, Tura and Piero della Francesca.

The final lecture in this series, a swansong to all the talks I have offered for over twenty-four years, will examine a single masterpiece by Thomas Gainsborough, and serve to celebrate the tricentenary of the artist's birth.



TALKS

1 Venice and the Vivarini family

From about 1200 Venice became the pre-eminent trading city in the Mediterranean. It looked towards the east, trading in spices, silk and grain. To secure its status it used a mercenary army to suppress piracy along the Dalmatian coast. The city began to decline in the 15th century when Antonio, Bartolomeo and Alvise Vivarini provided religious paintings for many of the churches.



*Bartolomeo
Vivarini
polyptych, 1490
tempera and gold
leaf on panel
The J Paul Getty
Museum
Los Angeles*

2 Vittore Carpaccio

Influenced by Gentile Bellini, Carpaccio's work is characterised by a strength of composition and clarity of detail, both humorous and varied. He painted several series of canvases for confraternities in Venice.



*Giovanni Bellini
St Francis in Ecstasy
c.1480, oil on panel
124.2 x 141cm
The Frick Collection
New York*

3 Giovanni Bellini

Bellini's earliest works are in tempera but, influenced by Antonello da Messina and Albrecht Dürer, he began to use oil paint. The change enabled him to paint with more subtlety, producing delicate shading and brilliant colour.

4 Giorgione and Sebastiano del Piombo

Giorgione was born in Castelfranco and settled in Venice early in his career. His work is rare and enigmatic. Sebastiano del Piombo started in Venice as a lutenist before he entered Bellini's studio. His work shows the influence of both Bellini and the Florentine painter Fra Bartolomeo.

5 Titian

Born at Pieve di Cadore, he came to Venice in his teens. His subject matter is more varied and his delight in the application of oil paint develops over his long career. His reputation was based on his portraits and religious subjects and, as his fame spread, he was receiving commissions from the Habsburgs and the Papacy.

'Illuminating ...



Paolo Veronese
Lucretia, 1580s
 oil on canvas
 109 x 91cm
 Kunsthistorisches
 Museum, Vienna

6 Tintoretto

Tintoretto painted huge canvases at speed. He used an almost abstract technique, using complex perspectives and extraordinary lighting effects. The churches of Venice and famously the Scuola di San Marco are filled with his paintings. His largest painting is the enormous *Il Paradiso* in the Doge's Palace which he began in 1588.

7 Paolo Veronese

Born in Verona, Veronese moved to Venice in about 1550 where his talent for producing large compositions was quickly recognised for its vibrant colour and the grandeur of its compositions. He is perhaps best known for painting crowded canvases set in imaginary classical architectural settings. He also painted a number of penetrating portraits.

perceptive and engaging . . .

8 Mantua and the Gonzaga family

Ludovico III Gonzaga built the church of S. Andrea to the classical designs of Leon Battista Alberti and commissioned Andrea Mantegna to decorate a suite of rooms in the Palazzo Ducale. The mannerist Palazzo del Te, designed and decorated by Giulio Romano, was used for relaxation.

9 Ferrara and the Este family

Artists such as Ercole de' Roberti, Cosmé Tura and Dosso Dossi, used eccentric colouring and dramatic compositions to great effect. An important series of frescos in the Palazzo Schifanoia are now attributed to de Roberti and Francesco del Costa.



Lorenzo Lotto, *Young Man with a Lamp*, c.1506
 oil on panel, 42.3 x 35.3cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

rich in wit and wisdom . . .

10 Lorenzo Lotto

Often described as a Venetian artist, Lotto's commissions were centred around Ancona and Bergamo. His work is unusual, even eccentric, with distinctive compositions and unusual interpretations of subject matter, vivid colours and lively characterisations. His altarpieces and portraits are amongst the finest likenesses of the Italian Renaissance.

11 Piero della Francesca

Piero was a mathematician and geometrician as well as a painter. His distinctive compositions give his frescoes and panel paintings a disarming strength and beauty. His enigmatic subject matter has been the subject of much debate.



*Piero della Francesca
The Baptism of Christ
c.1450, tempera on panel
167 x 116cm
National Gallery, London*



*Thomas Gainsborough, The Blue Boy, 1770, oil on canvas
179.4 x 123.8cm, The Huntington Library, Art Collections
and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California*

12 Gainsborough's most famous painting

In 1770 Gainsborough exhibited a portrait of a youth that eventually became known as *The Blue Boy*. It remained in aristocratic collections until it was sold to Henry Edwards Huntington in 1921 for a world record price. Since then it has only been lent once to the National Gallery in London and that was to mark the centenary of its acquisition by the Huntington Art Collections and Botanical Gardens.

meticulously researched . . .

a lasting legacy.'

