

V&A Academy

THE MEDICI AND THEIR ARTISTS



Introduction

The Medici family, initially led by Cosimo de' Medici in the early 1400s, wielded immense economic and political power in Florence and beyond. Their patronage extended across architecture, sculpture, painting, and the humanist scholarship that defined Renaissance culture. For the Medici, art was more than personal collections and the projection of cultural superiority; it was also a vital instrument for expressing civic pride - allied with dominance, religious devotion, and the projection of the legitimacy of their rule. Cosimo de' Medici, in particular, cultivated relationships with artists whose works adorned both private spaces and public institutions. The Medici's support was not limited to secular commissions and their own spaces; they played a crucial role in sponsoring religious art and confraternities, which in turn cultivated their reputation as pious Christians and benefactors of Florence and eventually keepers of the Papal purse.

Information

Wednesdays, 21 April – 19 May, 14.00-16.30. Online.

Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until 23 June 2026.

All lectures will be delivered by Leslie Primo unless otherwise stated.

V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.

Your course leader

Art historian Leslie Primo is an author and broadcaster, graduating from Birkbeck, University College London with an MA in Renaissance studies. He lectured at the National Gallery, London for 18 years and at the National Portrait Gallery for 10 years where he still lectures - as well as for the Royal Academy, the Victoria and Albert Museum, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, The Wallace Collection, Martin Randall, John Hall Venice and The Arts Society. He teaches a variety of art history courses at Imperial College, London - South Kensington campus, City Lit and The Course at the University Women's Club, Mayfair.

In his broadcasting capacity, Leslie Primo has appeared on the BBC speaking in 'Renaissance: The Blood and the Beauty' (currently still airing on BBC iPlayer), and on 'The Life of Michelangelo'. He presented 'Turner: Light and Landscape' and also appeared in a new Turner documentary for the BBC, broadcast in October 2025. He was a contributor to the 'Oxford Companion Guide to Black British History', an art history consultant for the Getty publication, 'Balthazar: A Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance Art', was an art history consultant for 'DK Life Stories: Leonardo da Vinci - a children's book for ages 7-11'. He was published by the Royal Academy Magazine for the 'Entangled Pasts' exhibition, 2023-2024. Leslie Primo's new 2025 book 'The Foreign Invention of British Art' is published by Thames & Hudson.'

Week 1 – 21 April

Introduction: World of the High Renaissance

- 13.50 Welcome
- 14.00 Donatello di Betto Bardi (c. 1386–1466) Remembrance and early Medici: Patronage
- 15.30 Fra Angelico (1395 – 1455) and the Medici: Patronage and Piety in Early Renaissance Florence

Week 2 – 28 April

- 14.00 The Life, Work and Medici Patronage of Fra Filippo Lippi (1406 – 1469)
- 15.30 The Medici and the Northern Renaissance: A cultural Exchange

Week 3 – 5 May

- 14.00 The Making of Benozzo Gozzoli (1420 – 1497) and the Power of Medici Patronage
- 15.30 The Life, Work and Medici Patronage of Paolo Uccello (1397 – 1475)

Week 4 – 12 May

- 14.00 By Appointment to the Medici: The Patronage of Sandro Botticelli (1445 – 1510)
- 15.30 The Medici and Domenico Ghirlandaio (1448 – 1494) – Art, Power, and Legacy in Renaissance Florence

Week 5 – 19 May

- 14.00 The Medici & Papal Patronage of Michelangelo (1475 – 1564) & Sebastiano del Piombo (1485 – 1547): Fostering Genius in Renaissance Florence and Rome
- 15.30 Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572) and The Medici Family Portraits
The Artistic Dialogue Between Power and Portraiture in Renaissance Florence

Notes: