

Special Interest Days by Jo Walton

If you would like to explore a subject in a bit more detail, then why not try a Special Interest day. You can find details of a number of popular days here, but if you don't see the topic that interests you listed, then please contact me. Most days are presented digitally, but slides can be used for some subjects.

The Most Serene Republic; Venice, and the Venetians, from Mud-flats to the Modern World.

Venice is a city like no other. Today she is one of Europe's most popular tourist destinations and a World Heritage Site. But she has also been one of the world's most brilliant trading nations, a great maritime power whose sailors and explorers crossed the globe, while her merchants, painters and musicians (not to mention courtesans), set standards of luxury and pleasure unknown elsewhere.

In this study day we look at the architecture and fabric of the city, rising from unpromising mud-flats in a murky lagoon and overcoming remarkable technological challenges, to become one of the most beautiful and powerful nations of Renaissance Europe. We'll also consider how she survived when her power base collapsed, transforming herself into a city of pleasure and becoming a playground for the rich until, with Napoleon's dissolution of the thousand-year old Venetian Republic, the city fell into a long decline.

But that is by no means the end of the story. Over recent decades Venice has once again faced invading armies and insidious dangers – but this time the armies are made up of tourists and the dangers come from the waters of her own lagoon. We'll look at some of the ways in which she has tried to cope and at the ideas put forward by world scientists to halt her gradual descent beneath the waves.

(This day is available as both a digital and 35mm slide presentation).

Donatello and the Sculpture of the Renaissance – A Special Interest Day

Donatello may have been born over 600 years ago, but his sculpture is so powerful that it still speaks directly to us today. Working amidst the vibrant creativity of Florence in the fifteenth century, his works encompass every emotion from unalloyed joy and frivolity, through formal grandeur, to deeply personal religious conviction. A technical master, he broke new ground in the methods he used and the forms he chose to develop, leaving behind a legacy of works that seem startlingly modern.

In this study day we shall begin by looking at the artistic world of Florence around 1400, considering how new ideas shaped the way artists worked and why the city itself encouraged patronage and artistic expression. We'll look at Donatello's career from his apprenticeship to becoming the premier sculptor of the Florentine Republic and consider how developments in his art mirror new and exciting changes in painting and architecture during the period.

(This day is available as both a digital and 35mm slide presentation).

A Family Affair – Florence and the House of Medici

The names 'Florence' and 'Medici' are inextricably linked with each other. From the late 1300s to 1737 the family 'advised', ruled, were exiled, returned and ruled again in Florence in continuing cycles, eventually stamping their authority on the city with authoritarian firmness. At the same time they were responsible for helping to create one of the most vibrant artistic centres of the Renaissance and beyond. This is a story filled with larger-than-life characters and great art alongside stirring historical events, occasional assassinations, and the eventual decline of a remarkable dynasty.

(This day is available as both a digital and 35mm slide presentation).

Raphael and Renaissance Rome

Since his death in 1520, Raphael has been considered as one of the most important painters of the Western World. In this day we'll explore the reasons why his art was so important and ask how it was different from that of his contemporaries. We'll also look at the cities of Urbino, Florence and Rome and meet some of the most dramatic figures of the Renaissance Papacy. Lauded as a celebrity during his life, Raphael achieved further greatness in death – becoming the exemplar by which all artists were judged right up until the early twentieth century. We'll look at his influence on artists from Velasquez, to Picasso and beyond.

(This day is available as both a digital and 35mm slide presentation).

How to be Good. Storytelling and Morality in Victorian Painting

In the 1850s the public were profoundly shocked by the work of a group of young artists, who chose to show the realities of modern life in their canvases. We'll explore the background to such works as Holman Hunt's 'The Awakening Conscience', and see how their determination to show 'modern moral subjects' changed the way the Victorians looked at paintings. Full of cads, bounders and fallen women, this day looks at the social history of the Victorian world through the pictures of the period.

(This day is available as both a digital and 35mm slide presentation).

English Artists and Landscape in the 20th Century

This special interest day is devoted to English (and Welsh) artists and their response to landscape in the twentieth century. Beginning with an over-view of the tradition of English landscape painting during the 18th and 19th centuries, the day continues with works by painters, sculptors and photographers, exploring both the rural and urban landscape across the 20th century. As we move between several strands and traditions of landscape art we shall see some of the same artists from different perspectives, and meet some very different artworks that we may not initially think of as part of the landscape tradition at all. With lots of old favourites and plenty of variety, this is a chance to explore the art of landscape from a different perspective.

(This special interest day is only available as a digital presentation).

Crossing Continents – Northern Lights

In this study day we look at some of the ways in which artistic ideas have moved across, around and between continents. Concentrating on Northern Europe, we'll consider some of the historical

forces that have shaped European culture through war and conquest, but also through trade, exploration and fashion. After a historical introduction, we'll concentrate on developments across the past 150 years – taking as many examples as possible from art that pictures and reflects real lives and domestic interiors. We'll meet painters, interior designers and dress reformers, as well as idealistic architects. But we'll also see how art and politics collide and how the Nazi hatred of the avant-garde forced artists to move to survive - so spreading artistic ideas even more widely than before.

(This special interest day is only available as a digital presentation).

The Artist as Reporter – British Artists and the First World War – A Study Day

This study day looks at the work of a group of young British war artists and considers the ways in which they recorded this new and terrifying form of war in a body of work still remarkable for its ability to move and shock. We'll consider the ways in which their paintings were radically different from anything produced before and see how their own personal experiences transformed their art. We shall also look at some of the popular and propaganda images of the time, see how the urge to commemorate the fallen produced some highly controversial war memorials, and look at what happened to the young artists when Peace was finally declared.

(This special interest day is only available as a digital presentation).

Britain Observed – Artists and the Home Front in the Second World War

In this study day we'll look at some of the ways in which artists worked for the war effort in Britain between 1939 and 1945. Not all war art depicts battles and engagements, and we'll focus particularly on a group of young painters who were influenced by William Blake, Samuel Palmer and the tradition of British landscape painting. Some of their works became an important part of the country's fight for survival and still provide us with our most memorable images of Britain at war.

We'll also look at artists who recorded everyday life in streets and factories, who provided cartoons to instruct and entertain, and made posters for government information campaigns. We'll consider the achievements of Sir Kenneth Clark in protecting the artistic heritage of Britain during the Blitz and find out what did happen to some of our greatest treasures during the War.

(This special interest day is only available as a digital presentation).

Contact Jo Walton through her web site at www.jowalton.com or by phone on 0207 586 2272

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