The Italian Renaissance: A New Reading

Introduction
The period or movement commonly referred to as the Renaissance remains one of the great iconic moments of Western history: a time of remarkable innovation within artistic and intellectual culture, and a period still widely regarded as the crucible of modernity. Italy was the original heartland of the Renaissance, and home to some of
its most powerful and enduring figures, such as Leonardo and Michelangelo in art, Petrarch and Ariosto in literature, Machiavelli in political thought.

The Italian Renaissance: A New Reading provides an overview of Italian culture from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, examining not only literary, artistic, and intellectual history, but also material culture, cartography, science, technology, and history of food and fashion. It reflects recent trends in scholarship in investigating the extent to which “Renaissance” ideas and cultural trends became diffused beyond the social elites to a wider public, and the extent to which women participated in literary and artistic culture alongside men.

Learning objectives
Students will gain from this course:

- a detailed knowledge of one of the most remarkable periods in Western cultural history;
- a sense of how the art, literature, and material culture produced by a given society relate to social and political conditions;
- a sense of how knowledge evolves within a given field through the critical examination of past theories and paradigms;
- acquaintance with two key New York cultural institutions (the Metropolitan Museum and the Frick Collection);
- a basic grasp of research methods in the humanities, including the identification, evaluation, and analysis of appropriate sources;
- a basic training in the core academic skills of critical reading and writing;
- practice in the oral presentation of ideas, both in informal class discussion and formal presentations

Assessment
The course grade will be broken down as follows:

Attendance and participation in class discussion 5%
In-class presentations 5%
Response papers (4 x 2 pp) 20%
Midterm exam 25%
Independent Research Project (6 pp) 20%
Final exam or final paper (8 pp) 25%

Attendance of all classes is a requisite for the course. Unavoidable absences (e.g. on account of illness) must be notified in advance to the instructor. Absences from class
without prior notification or persistent lateness will impact on the grade for course participation.

The class will be conducted in the style of a seminar, with an introductory presentation by the professor followed by structured discussion. All students are expected to participate actively in the activities of the class, and to give an introductory presentation at least once in the semester. All discussions and readings are in English, although supplementary readings will be available for anyone with a knowledge of Italian.

Students may choose whether to take a final exam or to write a final paper. The final paper will be an essay of around 8 pages on a topic of the student’s own choice. A title and abstract must be submitted and agreed with the instructor by Week 9. Guidance on formulating a topic will be given in class.

In addition to the final paper or final exam, all students will be asked to research a text or art work of the Italian Renaissance not included in the syllabus, to write a paper of c. 6 pages, describing the work and its context, and to present the work briefly in class. This task is assessed as “Independent Research Project.” The response papers will provide structured guidance for the project.

**Readings and materials**

The only required purchase books for this course are Virginia Cox, *A Short History of the Italian Renaissance* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), and Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch (Norton Classics, 2002). Other readings and materials will be made available through NYU Classes, except in the case of books and journal articles available electronically through the Bobst Library site.

**Schedule of readings**

N.B. The readings listed are those to be read and discussed in class in successive weeks. Further reading will be suggested by the professor in connection with students’ research projects and final papers. See also the “Further Reading” section of the textbook (Cox, *Short History.*) Full citations for all works are given in the bibliography at the end of this syllabus.

**Office hours**

My physical office hours are Wed. 1-3, in my office at the Casa Italiana (24 West 12th St, Room 302). I’m happy to arrange alternative times if needed, and I can always be contacted on virginia.cox@nyu.edu.
Disability Disclosure Statement
Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosecsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating
Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).


[Date]
Introduction (no reading required)

[Date]
Cox, Short History, 15-33
Burckhardt, Civilization, selections

TOPIC 2 (WEEKS 2-3): THE RENAISSANCE AND THE ANCIENT

[Date]. Humanism and its contexts
Cox, Short History, 34-42
Petrarch, Letters, selections
Bruni, Dialogues, selections

[Date]. Art and the ancient 1
Cox, Short History, 42-60
Botticelli, Primavera
Dempsey, Portrayal of Love, 20-49
[Date]. Art and the ancient 2
Alberti, *On Painting*, Prologue; 63-77; 89-98
Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne; Diana and Actaeon*

[Date]. Humanism and Christianity
Cox, *Short History*, 60-73
Castiglione, *Courtier*, 242-260 (Bk IV, chs 50-73)
Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, selections

**TOPIC 3 (WEEKS 4-6): THE RENAISSANCE AND THE MODERN**

[Date]. A changing world
Cox, *Short History*, 74-82
Castiglione, *Courtier*, pp. 65-69, 147-48 (prefaces to Bks 2 & 3); 88-90 (Bk 2, chs. 26-28)
*Stradanus*, 148-59, 300-306 (on *Nova reperta*)

[Date]. “Discovery of the world and of Man”: geography and cartography
Cox, *Short History*, 84-92
Fra Mauro, *Map*
Fiorani, “Mapping”

[Fiorani, *Marvel of Maps*, extracts]

[Date]. “Discovery of the world and of man”: dissection and anatomy
Cox, *Short History*, 92-99
Leonardo, *Anatomical Drawings*

[Date]. The progress of art
Cox, *Short History*, 99-102
Bruni, *Life of Petrarch*
Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, prefaces to Bks 1-3 (pp. 25-47, 83-91, 249-54)
Barolsky, “The Theology of Vasari”

**MIDTERM**

[Date]. Midterm exam
TOPIC 4 (WEEKS 7-8): IDENTITY AND THE SELF

[Date]. Renaissance individualism revisited
Cox, Short History, 110-20
Burckhardt selection from Week 1 (review)
Castiglione, Courtier, 69-88; 92-102 (Bk 2, chs 5-25; 31-41)

[Date]. Performing identity: the portrait
Cox, Short History, 120-32
Raphael, Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione (Louvre); Portrait of Pope Julius II (National Gallery, London)
Titian, Portrait of Pietro Aretino (Frick Collection, NYC); Portrait of Pope Paul III (Naples, Museo di Capodimonte)

[Date] VISIT TO METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

[Date]. Performing identity: the lyric
Cox, ed. Lyric Poetry, pp. 92-93; 268-72; 275-76 (nos. 13-14; 130-33; 136-37)

[Date]. Case study: Isabella d’Este
Shemek, Isabella d’Este, introduction and selected letters
Welch, Shopping, 245-73

TOPIC 5 (WEEKS 8-10): RENAISSANCE MAN

[Topic for Individual Research Project due]

[Date]. Renaissance men: the merchant
Cox, Short History, 132-38
Morelli, Memoirs, 98-100; 136-40; 146-63

[Date]. Renaissance men: the courtier
Cox, Short History, 138-43
Castiglione, Courtier, 19-35; 48-63 [Bk I, chs. 12-28; 40-56]

[Date]. Renaissance men: the artist
Cox, Short History, 144-50
Vasari, Lives of the Artists: Piero di Cosimo; Raphael (first paragraph only)
Michelangelo, Poems 151, 153, 285
[Date] VISIT TO THE FRICK COLLECTION

[Date]. Renaissance men: artists of the table
Cox, *Short History*, 150-56

**TOPIC 6 (WEEKS 11-13): RENAISSANCE WOMAN**

[Date]. Gender and society
Cox, *Short History*, 167-77
Alberti, *Family*, Book 3, selection

[Date]. Rethinking woman
Cox, *Short History*, 177-85
Castiglione, *Courtier*, Bk. 2, 138-39 [chs. 90-91]; Bk. 3, 149-77 [chs. 3-38]

[Individual Project Due]

[Date]. Representing the new woman
Cox, *Short History*, 185-88
Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, Canto 32 (from “Bradamante meanwhile …” (p. 384))
Colonna, “My August Lord, I Write This”

[Date]. Beyond the courts
Cox, *Short History*, 188-96
Tullia d’Aragona, *Selected sonnets*
Veronica Franco, *Capitolo*

[Date]. Renaissance women and the arts
Cox, *Short History*, 196-205
Isabella Andreini, *Selected Poems*
Moderata Fonte, *The Merits of Women*, selections

[Date]. Presentation of independent research projects

[Date]. Final exam / final paper submission

**Readings**


Colonna, Vittoria. “My August Lord, I Write This” in Cox, *Lyric Poetry*.


Franco, Veronica. Selected poems, in Cox, Lyric Poetry.


Petrarch. See Petrarca.


Stampa, Gaspara. Selected poems, in Cox, Lyric Poetry.


Art works

Botticelli, Sandro [Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi]. Primavera [Spring], c. 1477. Uffizi, Florence.