

PAOLA'S STUDIOLO: Spring 2026

Presented Live on Saturdays via Zoom

10am Los Angeles / 1pm New York / 6pm London / 7pm Florence

Full Season of 11 live interviews: \$228

Each event is recorded and yours to keep!

To Reserve Your Spot: Paola50122@gmail.com



January

**January 31 – Filippino Lippi and the Ancient Language of Suffering:
A Conversation with Prof. Jonathan Nelson**

February

February 7 – How to be a Renaissance Woman: A Conversation with Jill Burke

**February 21 – Auguste Rodin and The Art of Ancient Egypt: A Conversation with
Carl Walsh**

**February 28 – Bellini's Pieta' at the Morgan Library, and other Restorations of
Venetian Heritage: A Conversation with Toto Bergamo Rossi**

March

March 7 – The Innocents of Florence: A Conversation with Joseph Luzzi

**March 14 – Francis of Assisi: A Man of the 13th Century, A Man for the 21st Century,
A Conversation with Bill Cook**

March 21 – Tigress of Forli ~ Caterina Sforza: A Conversation with Elizabeth Lev

**March 28 – Raphael and the Ladies II: The Prince of Painters and Female Patrons,
Collectors, and Viewers, A Conversation with Sheryl E. Reiss**

April

April 4 – Leon Battista Alberti in Exile: A Conversation with Peter Weller

April 11 – The Genius of Tintoretto: A Conversation with Nick Todhunter

April 18 – The Venetian Bride: A Conversation with Patricia Fortini Brown

Saturday, January 31

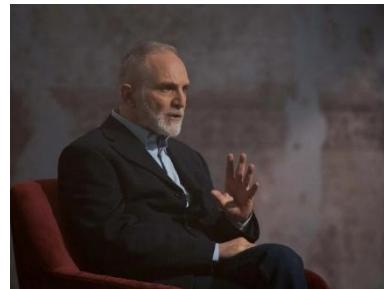
Filippino Lippi, and the Ancient Language of Suffering: A Conversation with Professor Jonathan Nelson



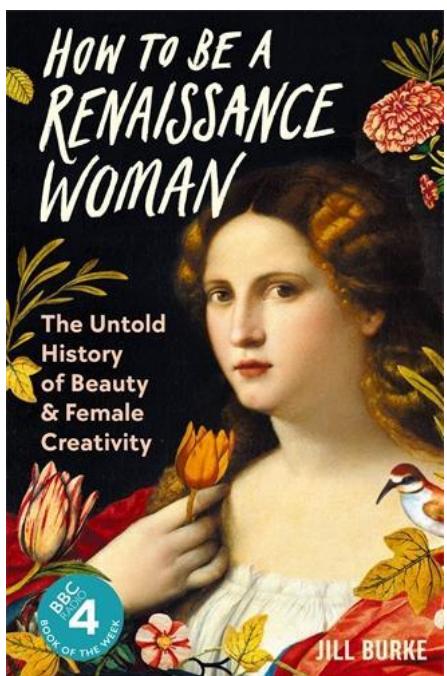
What impact did ancient art have on Italian Renaissance artists? One key lesson, often overlooked, was how to express powerful emotions, especially suffering. We see this in the transformation of Filippino Lippi's (1457–1504) art after he left his native Florence, lived in Rome (1489–93), and enriched his visual vocabulary. When Filippino returned home to Florence, he painted an ancient story, the *Death of Laocoön*, for the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano. This magnificent but little-known preparatory drawing, on view in the [Cleveland Museum of Art's current exhibition "Filippino Lippi and Rome"](#), lets

us look over Filippino's shoulder as he creates a new style—and provides a wonderful introduction to this exhibition.

Jonathan Nelson, professor of art history at Syracuse University Florence, is the leading authority on Filippino Lippi. His numerous books include studies of Lippi, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Plautilla Nelli; and his most recent book (and the subject of his last Studiolo talk) is *Risks in Renaissance Art: Production, Purchase, and Reception*.



Saturday, February 7 How to be a Renaissance Woman: A Conversation with Professor Jill Burke



Dive into the intimate history of cosmetics, and discover how, for centuries, women have turned to makeup as a rich source of creativity, community, and resistance. The Renaissance was an era obsessed with appearances. Beauty culture from the time has left traces that give us a window into an overlooked realm of history – revealing everything from 16th century women's body anxieties to their sophisticated botanical and chemical knowledge. Professor Burke's award-winning book, [How To Be A Renaissance Woman](#), offers a glimpse into the world of the era's female artists, artisans, and businesswomen who were carving out space for themselves, as well as those women who gained power and influence in the cutthroat world of the Renaissance Court. In a vivid exploration of women's lives, Professor Burke invites us to rediscover historical cosmetic recipes and unpack the origins of beauty ideals that are still with us today. "Taking a fresh, women-led perspective, Burke highlights a rich tapestry of female experience that encompasses

everyone from artisans to aristocrats ... The everyday women mixing their own beauty products should rightly be considered chemists and botanists" (The Times of London); "A fun, informative, and occasionally sobering look at the lives of women across social strata ... The real shock of the book is not what's unfamiliar; it is how much of it seems to mirror today's obsessions and controversies." (The New York Times)

Jill Burke is Chair of Renaissance Visual and Material Culture at the University of Edinburgh and an internationally-recognized specialist in the art, objects, and lived experiences of Renaissance Italy. Her work brings this period to life through stories of patronage, beauty, bodies, and identity, drawing on cutting-edge research into art, materials, and everyday practices from painting and sculpture to cosmetics and clothing. An award-winning author, curator, and public historian, she is known for making complex ideas engaging and accessible, offering audiences a compelling way to see the Renaissance anew. She received a BA in History from Oxford University, and her MA and PhD from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, with a postdoctoral fellowship at the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence. She has been teaching at the University of Edinburgh since 2003.



A “sneak peek” from Paola: June 23-29, 2026, I will be leading a 5-day tour in Florence with Professor Jill Burke, based on the theme of her book. We will explore ways to “be a Renaissance Woman” in our own day and age! More details to come...

Saturday, February 21 *Auguste Rodin & The Art of Ancient Egypt: A Conversation with Curator Carl Walsh*

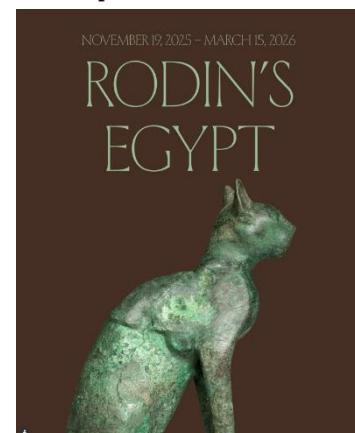


One might have trouble imagining a connection between the works of the master French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) and the art of ancient Egypt. However, Rodin was a great admirer of the art of antiquity and over the course of his life, he amassed a sizable collection of artifacts from Greece, Rome, and Egypt. In his final years, Egypt became a particular source of fascination for Rodin and had a profound impact on the sculptor's practice. Celebrated as one of the founders of modern sculpture, Auguste Rodin crafted expressive bodies that abandoned narrative and embraced the subject and materiality of the medium. At first glance, Rodin's revolutionary approach to the human form seems very much at odds with the highly codified forms of ancient Egyptian sculpture.

But the artist's collection of Egyptian antiquities forms the heart of the exhibition *Rodin's Egypt*, the very first exhibition in the United States dedicated to the masterpieces of Auguste Rodin's Egyptian collection. It is now on view through March 15, 2026, at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University, in collaboration with the Musée Rodin in Paris. In this conversation, I explore how the exhibition came together and reflect on how it reveals new perspectives on both Rodin's sculpture and those from ancient Egypt.

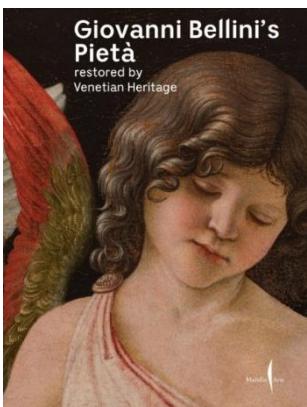


Carl Walsh is an archaeologist and curator specializing in cross-cultural interactions in North Africa, Western Asia, and the Mediterranean during the Bronze Age. He earned his BA in Egyptology from the University of Cambridge and PhD in Mediterranean and Western Asian archaeology from University College London. Prior to becoming Assistant Curator at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World in 2023, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia and the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World at Brown University.



Saturday, February 28

Bellini's Pietà at The Morgan Library, and Other Restorations of Venetian Heritage: A Conversation with Toto Bergamo Rossi



Giovanni Bellini's early Renaissance masterpiece Pietà (also known as *Dead Christ Supported by Angels*, ca. 1470) will be on view in the United States for the first time, on loan from the Museo della Città in Rimini, Italy. The presentation follows a comprehensive conservation treatment made possible by [Venetian Heritage, Inc.](#) The painting will be displayed in J. Pierpont Morgan's Study in [The Morgan Library in New York City](#), alongside highlights of Morgan's own Renaissance collection, including paintings by Hans Memling and Perugino and sculptures by Antonio Rossellino. Bellini's powerful and melancholic Pietà shows youthful angels contemplating the wounds of Christ's dead body as they arrange it for veneration. In contrast to other versions of the subject, the angels in this painting do not wail uncontrollably; instead, the work's poignancy derives from their sad, pensive preparation of Christ's body.



For 27 years, Venetian Heritage has been committed to the long-term preservation of Venice's artistic and cultural heritage—and director Toto Bergamo Rossi has served a key role from the start. Trained in the conservation of stone and sculpture, Venice-native Bergamo Rossi joined the initiative that would grow into Venetian Heritage as a restorer. Already managing his own restoration studio, he was inspired to take a different approach toward restoration. *"In my opinion, it feels reductive to just restore an artwork and put it back on display as it was. You need to do something different, something bigger, and share the artwork's story and context,"* Bergamo Rossi says. Driven by his passion for Venice, art, and sharing knowledge with the public, Bergamo Rossi advocates for an all-encompassing approach toward the projects pursued by Venetian Heritage, where he took on his Director role in 2010.



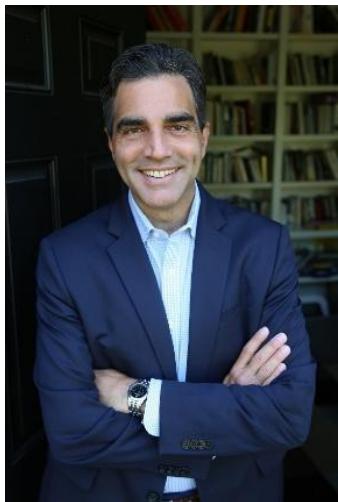
Saturday, March 7

The Innocents of Florence: A Conversation with Professor Joseph Luzzi

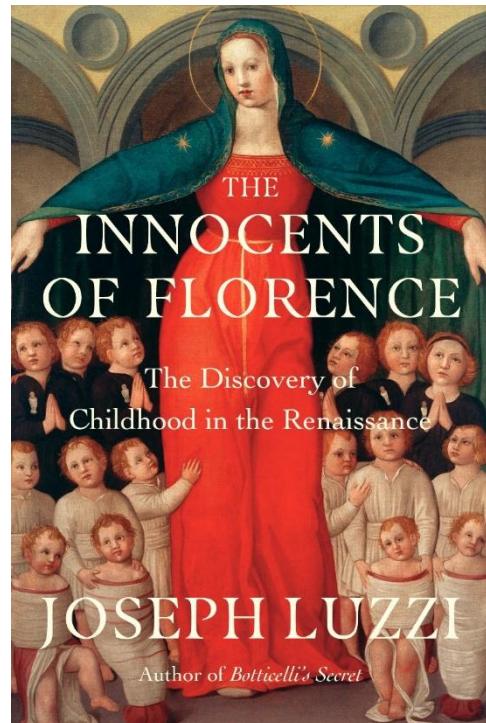
During the Renaissance, a Florentine orphanage opened and began admitting children in 1445, ultimately rescuing thousands of children and revolutionizing childhood foster care and education amid the splendor of exceptional Renaissance art and architecture.

Florence's Ospedale degli Innocenti/Hospital of the Innocents was Europe's first orphanage for abandoned children. In an era when children were often trafficked or left to die or roam the streets, an orphanage devoted to their care and protection was a striking innovation of profound humanism. The building in Florence, designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, was a symbol of Florence's cultural and architectural brilliance. Over 500 years, it ultimately became a haven for more than 400,000 abandoned children.

With deep knowledge of the literary and artistic environment in which this new understanding of childhood flowered, in [The Innocents of Florence](#) Luzzi explores how Florence's Innocenti taught and cared for young children but also discusses the flaws – especially as the organization struggled with rampant disease and political upheaval. Luzzi's is the first comprehensive "biography" of a groundbreaking humanitarian institute that shaped education and childcare for generations to come, even up to the present day.



Joseph Luzzi received his PhD from Yale University. He is the Asher B. Edelman Professor of Literature at Bard College, where he also teaches courses on film and Italian Studies. He is the author of eight books, including his recent *Botticelli's Secret: The Lost Drawings and the Rediscovery of the Renaissance* (Norton, 2022), and an essayist in newspapers, magazines, and journals, as well as a widely sought-after speaker who has presented worldwide on literature, art, film, and the power of the humanities. Among his honors are a Dante Society of America prize, Yale teaching prize, a National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholars Award, and fellowships from the National Humanities Center and Yale's Whitney Humanities Center. The first American-born child in his Italian immigrant family, Luzzi was named Cittadino Onorario, an Honorary Citizen of Acri, Calabria, in 2017. He is the founder of the [Virtual Book Club](#), an international online community devoted to exploring some of the best books ever written.



Saturday, March 14

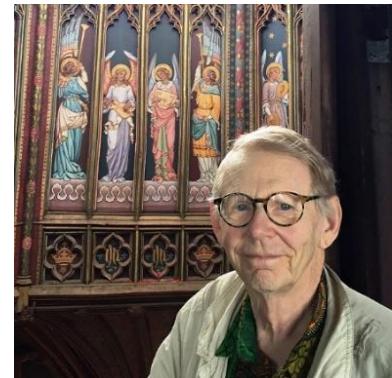
Francis of Assisi, A Man of the 13th Century, A Man for the 21st Century: A Conversation with Dr. Bill Cook



Pope Leo XIV proclaimed 2026 a “Special Year of Saint Francis,” and to reflect on this honor, we have the pleasure to hear from Professor Bill Cook, the ultimate expert on the life of this beloved saint. He said, “*If history is to be useful and not just entertaining for our time, we must first get the facts and contexts right for the subject, and then we need to think creatively about how to apply Francis’s lessons to our very different age. So, I will present a life of the saint, largely in images, and then discuss how lessons learned can make our lives more meaningful 800 years after his death.*”

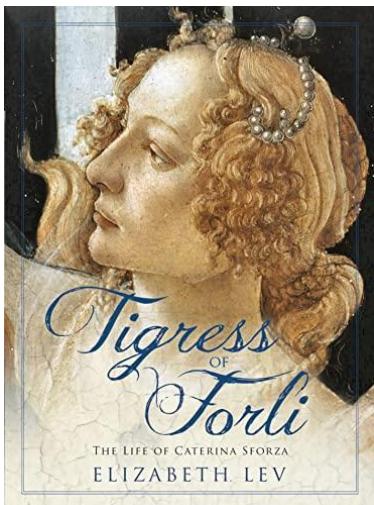
Dr. Cook received his B.A. from Wabash College, then was awarded the Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Lehman fellowships to study Medieval History at Cornell University, where he completed his M.A. and PhD. He is a lecturer for *The Great Courses* and was Distinguished Teaching Professor of History at the

State University of New York at Geneseo from 1970 until he retired in 2012 with the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor. His publications include *Images of St. Francis of Assisi* and *Francis of Assisi: The Way of Poverty and Humility*. He currently edits and contributes to volumes of essays, *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*. Dr. Cook has lectured widely in the USA and Europe and has taken countless students to Europe to study Medieval and Renaissance history and art. In retirement, he founded [the Bill Cook Foundation](#), a nonprofit organization supporting schools and school programs in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America.



Saturday, March 21

Tigress of Forlì ~ The Life of Caterina Sforza: A Conversation with Elizabeth Lev



Professor Elizabeth Lev will discuss the astonishing life of Caterina Riario Sforza (1463 –1509), one of the most prominent women of Renaissance Italy, who was a wife, mother, leader, and warrior, fierce enough to make Machiavelli himself wince. In her biography, Elizabeth Lev examines Caterina's extraordinary life and accomplishments. Raised in the court of Milan and wed at the age of ten to Pope Sixtus IV's corrupt nephew, Caterina was ensnared in Italy's political intrigues early in life. After turbulent years in Rome's Papal court, she moved to Forlì Italy's northern Emilia-Romagna region. Following her husband's assassination, Caterina ruled Italy's crossroads with an iron will, martial strength, political savvy, and an icon's fashion sense. In finally losing her lands to the Borgia family, she put up a resistance that inspired all of

Europe and set the stage for her progeny—including Cosimo de Medici—to follow her example to greatness. Lev's book *The Tigress of Forlì* is a rich evocation of the Renaissance, telling the complex and extraordinary story of Caterina Sforza – a brilliant and fearless ruler who was a tragic but unbowed figure.

Elizabeth Lev, who lives in Rome, is an American art historian with degrees from the University of Chicago and University of Bologna. She has been working as a guide in Rome for over 20 years and teaches at Duquesne University's Italian campus as well as the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas. She has served as a commissioner of the Tourism Board of Rome and is a didactic consultant for the Vatican Museums. Liz is also the author of four books and has taught and lectured in numerous venues in Europe, the U.S., Singapore, and Australia, including an address she gave at the United Nations in New York.



Saturday, March 28

Raphael and the Ladies II, The Prince of Painters and Female Patrons, Collectors, and Viewers: A Conversation with Dr. Sheryl Reiss



During his all-too-brief career, Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, better known as Raphael (1483–1520), frequently benefited from the patronage of women and painted works intended for female viewers ranging from nuns to noblewomen. Raphael's women patrons and viewers came from different social classes and were often linked via bonds of kinship, marriage, and friendship. This conversation with Sheryl Reiss continues a Studiolo presentation in November 2022, when Dr. Reiss discussed the networks of female patrons who helped to shape the artist's career; how Raphael catered to women's tastes in different locales; and how he varied his style to suit different female patrons.

This follow-on talk will look at other case studies both during and after Raphael's lifetime, including an unusual example of a female observer in Cinquecento Florence and a pious woman collector of erotic art in

late 16th century Rome; female viewers in the writings of 16th century authors Paolo Giovio and Baldassare Castiglione; the gendered reception of Raphael in the works of three Victorian women writers (Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, Anna Jameson, and Julia Cartwright Ady); and the insatiable art collector Isabella Stewart Gardner in Boston's Gilded Age. Dr. Reiss's presentation will coincide with opening of the exhibition "[Raphael: Sublime Poetry](#)" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (March 29–June 28, 2026) and is dedicated to the memory of Patricia Rucidlo who was a devoted member of Paola's Studiolo.

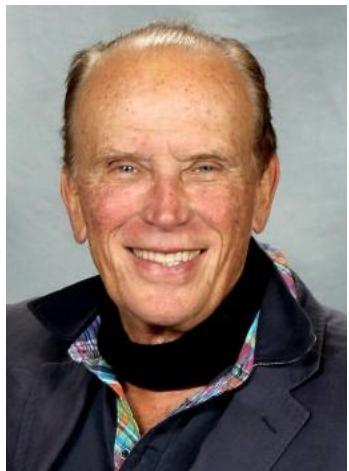
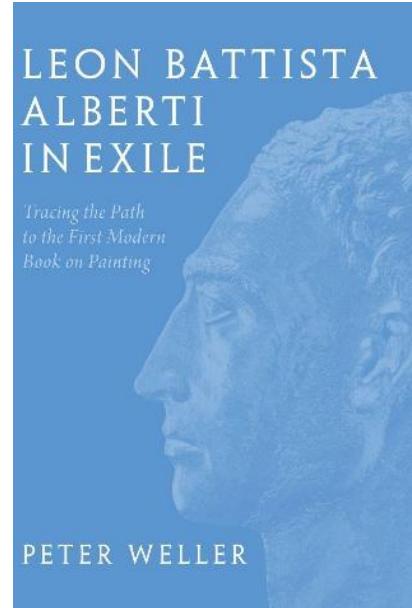
Sheryl Reiss received her PhD from Princeton University in 1992; she is a Scholar-in-Residence at the Newberry Library and teaches at the Graham School of the University of Chicago. She is a specialist in Italian Renaissance art and architecture with particular interest in the history of patronage. She is also interested in women and gender; archaism in early modern art; exchanges between Italy and Northern Europe; and funerary art. She is the recipient of numerous grants and fellowships and has published widely on Italian art and art patronage of the early 16th century, focusing on the patronage of members of the Medici family on Raphael and Michelangelo. She has co-edited two books, *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* (2001, with David Wilkins) and *The Pontificate of Clement VII: History, Politics, Culture* (2005, with Kenneth Gouwens). She is currently completing *The Making of a Medici Maecenas: Giulio de' Medici (Pope Clement VII) as Patron of Art* and, has coedited a collection of essays, *Reconsidering Raphael* with Yvonne Elet and Linda Wolk-Simon, to be published in 2026.



Saturday, April 4

Leon Battista Alberti in Exile: A Conversation with Dr. Peter Weller

Leon Battista Alberti, the prodigy poet, playwright, architect, painter, and humanist savant, was the author of *De pictura* (“On Painting”), a treatise composed first in Latin in 1435, then published in 1450. It is one of his three treatises on art; the other two are *De statua* and *De re aedificatoria* – the three would form the Renaissance concept for the fine arts: painting, sculpture, and architecture. In 2025, Peter Weller published [Leon Battista Alberti: Tracing the Path to the First Modern Book on Painting](#), in which he challenges the popular notion that *De pictura*'s compendium on lines, points, mathematics, composition, narrative, and portraiture is primarily the result of Alberti's return to Florence and his short exposure to its visual art. Weller argues that Rome, Padua, Bologna, and Northern Europe – environs where Alberti studied, worked, and lived during exile – empowered his paramount intellectual-artistic gifts. Alberti, who many call the original “Renaissance man,” merged the two most conspicuous cultural developments of early modern Italy – visual art and humanism — to create *De pictura*, our first modern book on painting.



Peter Weller is not just a scholar and writer, but an American actor and director and jazz trumpeter in the quintet FLY NAKED. In 2004, Weller completed an MA in Roman and Renaissance Art at the unique Syracuse University program in Florence, Italy. In 2014 he received his PhD from UCLA. His dissertation was *Alberti Before Florence: Early Sources Informing Leon Battista Alberti's De pictura*. He has appeared in more than 70 films and TV series, including *RoboCop* (1987) in which he played the title character; and *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), including such films as Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995), and David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* (1991). He recently launched his YouTube channel, [Weller World](#) and is soon to appear with Brad Pitt in Quentin Tarantino's sequel to *ONCE UPON A TIME IN HOLLYWOOD*, directed by David Fincher.

Saturday, April 11 The Genius of Tintoretto: A Conversation with Nicholas Todhunter



Painter and portraitist Nicholas Todhunter returns to Paola's Studiolo to discuss the work of Jacopo Tintoretto (1518–1594), described as Venice's most dramatic painter—a whirlwind of speed, shadow, and swagger. Nicknamed *Il Furioso* for his wild energy, he painted saints like stage actors, miracles like lightning strikes, and ceilings as if gravity were optional. Tintoretto worked fast, thought big, and aimed to outdo everyone, turning Venetian art into a full-blown spectacle of movement and emotion. Tintoretto's bold artistic motto and lifelong

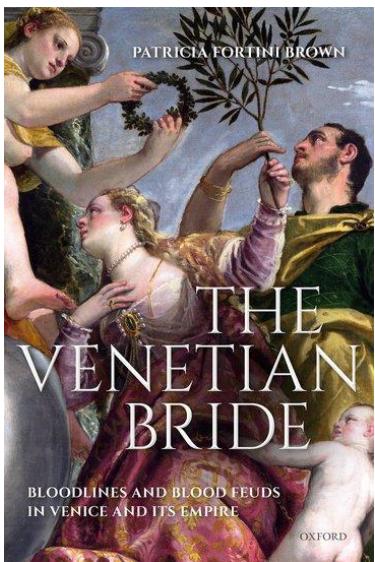
ambition for his painting was: "*The drawing of Michelangelo and the coloring of Titian.*"

Nick Todhunter, born in Paris in 1981, has lived and worked across Europe, the United States, and Asia. He studied at the Chelsea School of Art in London before moving to Florence to study at the Charles Cecil Studios, the only atelier in Europe where traditional realism is taught. He spent three years there, learning drawing and painting and being introduced to the visual language and Old Master techniques of painters from earlier centuries. After his studies in Florence, Nick moved to Venice. For him, Venice is the heart of portraiture and is the source of limitless inspiration. He has exhibited throughout Europe and his works are in private collections around the world. Nick divides his time between Somerset, England, and Venice, Italy, and is the curator of the highly popular [The Lives of the Artists podcast.](#)



Saturday, April 18

The Venetian Bride: A Conversation with Professor Patricia Fortini Brown



Professor Brown tells a true story of vendetta and intrigue, triumph and tragedy, exile, and repatriation in her 2021 book, *The Venetian Bride: Bloodlines and Blood Feuds in Venice and its Empire*. It chronicles the 16th century marriage of Giulia Bembo and Girolamo Della Torre and reveals the complexities of the Venetian Empire, family life, and power struggles. In her Studiolo talk, Professor Brown will discuss the interconnected lives of the Bembo and Della Torre families, illustrating the vastness and fragmentation of the 16th century Venetian state through their experiences in Venice, Crete, and the mainland. She explores vendettas, feudal culture shifting to individualism, the central role of women in binding society, and the challenges of imperial life in this detailed historical reconstruction, offering rich insights into daily life, politics, and family dynamics.

Patricia Fortini Brown was born and raised in Oakland, California. After attending Brigham Young University, she graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with an A.B. in Political Science. Brown was active as a studio artist for 17 years and raised two sons before beginning graduate work. Returning to Berkeley, she earned an M.A. and PhD in the History of Art. Brown taught at Princeton for 27 years in the Department of Art & Archaeology and served as department chair for six years. Dr. Brown served as president of the Renaissance Society of America, and has received many honors and awards including Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships; the Rome Prize at the American Academy in Rome; the British Academy Serena Medal in Italian Studies; and the Paul Oskar Kristeller Lifetime Achievement Award from the Renaissance Society of America. A trustee of Save Venice, Inc., Brown has published extensively on Venetian art and culture. Her award-winning books include *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (1998); *Venice & Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (1996); *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (1997); and *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family* (2004).

