

TAS Cambridge Study Day Synopses 2025- 2026

Study Day - The Second Sex: A Journey Into the lives of Italian Renaissance

By Women Sarah Dunant

Thursday 20 November 2025

When you think of the Italian renaissance, how many female names come to mind? They may have been half of the population, but very few women have made it into history. Did any of them hold a paintbrush?. Compose music? Collect art and antiquities? Rule states? Speak directly to God? What was it like to be born female in what, on the surface looks, like a man's world? In these sumptuously illustrated lectures, Sarah Dunant, author of a trilogy of best-selling novels about women's lives in the renaissance, shares her own journey through art and scholarship, to bring to life many of women who lived during this extraordinary period of history. And along the way she celebrates some figures who deserve a much bigger place in our imaginations and our history books.



Ghirlandaio 1485

Biography of Sarah Dunant: Novelist, broadcaster and critic. Sarah read history at Cambridge, then worked for many years as a cultural journalist in radio and television on such programmes as Kaleidoscope (BBC Radio 4), The Late Show (BBC 2), and Night Waves/Free thinking (BBC Radio 3). She has published thirteen novels, taught renaissance studies at Washington University, St Louis and lectured around the world at festivals and conferences. Her last five novels have been set within the Italian Renaissance. In the Name of the Family completes the story of the Borgia family and the remarkable period of Italian history in which they lived. She is a regular contributor to BBC Radio 4's A POINT OF VIEW and these talks, alongside her series on history for Radio 4, When Greeks Flew Kites are available on podcast or BBC sounds.

Study Day - From Levina to Artemisia: Women Artists and Patrons across Renaissance Europe

By Dr Paula Nuttall

Thursday 26 March 2026

Unsung figures in the history of art, marginalised and poorly documented, women artists of the renaissance have largely been ignored. We explore the careers and personal lives of the best known, including the Flemish miniaturist Levina Teerlinck at the Tudor court, the Florentine nun Plautilla Nelli, the wildly successful portraitists Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana, and finally the racy life of Artemisia Gentileschi, who truly rivalled her male peers in Florence, Naples and Rome. We also look at female patrons of art, from abbesses and wealthy widows to rulers such as Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Ferrara and her great (if today less famous) contemporary, Margaret of Austria, regent of the Habsburg Netherlands and the most powerful woman in early sixteenth-century Europe.



Sofonisba Anguissola 1555

About our speaker:

Dr Paula Nuttall is a specialist in Renaissance art, both Italian and northern European, on which she has published widely, notably *From Flanders to Florence: the Impact of Netherlandish Painting 1400-1500* (Yale, 2004). Has collaborated on major exhibitions including *Jan van Eyck: an Optical Revolution* (Ghent, 2020). Former Director of the V&A Medieval and Renaissance Year course, and lecturer at – among others – the Courtauld Institute and the British Institute of Florence.