

Lecture Programme : 2026 - 2027

24 April 2026

Notre Dame de Paris: its iconic status in France's history

Lecturer: Carole Petipher



In December 2024, Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris reopened after a devastating fire had threatened to destroy it five years earlier. A seemingly impossible target had been set by the French President to rebuild: huge sums of donated money and teams of expert restorers ensured the timescale was met. This lecture considers what makes Notre Dame so special and will look at its key location, its most precious artefacts and, through images, consider some of the most significant events to have been staged inside the iconic silhouette. Carole will also introduce the much-loved fictional character Quasimodo, Hunchback of Notre Dame, who was responsible for the cathedral's salvation the first time it faced destruction.

19th May 2026

The Great Age of the Shogun: Art & Culture in Edo period Japan

Lecturer: Professor Marie Conte-Helm



During the Edo period of rule by the Tokugawa Shogunate (1615-1868), the arts of Japan gained in richness and diversity. With the rise of the merchant class and the growth of cities such as Edo (modern-day Tokyo), a new vitality was injected into traditional forms, and an emerging middle-class culture gave rise to exciting developments in the visual and performing arts. This lecture will consider the arts of the period including castle architecture, golden screen painting, ukiyo-e prints, textiles, lacquerware and netsuke, as well as the emergence of the flamboyant kabuki theatre.

16th June 2026

Canaletto in London

Lecturer: Nicholas Salmond



The great Venetian artist Canaletto spent ten years living in London producing wonderful landscapes of the city and its surrounds. In this lecture, we explore his time in the capital and look at how his style changed during his long visit. We look at some of the work he produced and explore how the views he captured have changed over the centuries.

21st July 2026

The Lost City: Colombia's ancient wonder

Lecturer: Eileen Goulding



Lost for centuries until its rediscovery in the 1970's, we will discover one of South America's greatest archaeological treasures and the Tairona people who built it.



Image: Peggy Guggenheim Collection Museum in Venice by Peter Haas, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

15th September 2026

Priceless Peggy: Peggy Guggenheim

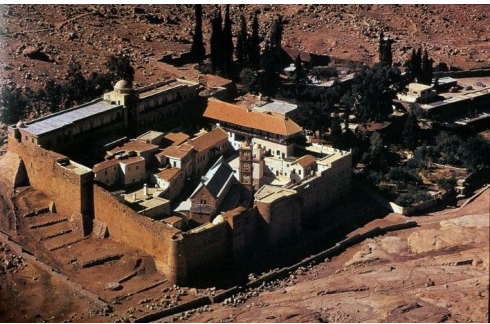
Lecturer: Alexandra Epps

Peggy Guggenheim was the 'poor little rich girl' who changed the face of twentieth century art. Not only was she a woman ahead of her time but also one who helped to define it. She discovered and nurtured a new generation of artists, producing a new kind of art. Through collecting not only art, but often the artists themselves, her life was as radical as her collection

20th October 2026

A Pilgrimage to St. Catherine's Monastery

Lecturer: Dr. Helen Rufus-Ward



St Catherine's Monastery, at the foot of Mount Sinai in Egypt was founded in the sixth century by Byzantine emperor Justinian I – the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments, the location of the legend of the Burning Bush and the resting place of the martyred body of St Catherine. The Greek Orthodox monastery is packed full of precious religious art – a splendid basilica with exquisite little chapels, intricately carved wooden doors and breath-taking mosaics, an amazing collection of the rarest early icons to survive, and a library of rare and beautiful religious manuscripts.



17th November 2026

The Art of Flattery: Reynolds and Gainsborough

Lecturer: Sarah Ciacci

By the latter half of the 1700s, British artists were making their mark and, if they wanted to make money, they focussed on portraiture. The two most successful portrait painters of the day were Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough. Both worked in very different styles which reflected different modes of flattery as well as fashionable aspects of 18th century society and culture. The other key 'portrait' painter we will look at is George Stubbs, who did not paint portraits of people but animals – he was the horse painter par excellence who showed us, with scientific exactitude, that animals could be a worthy subject for art.

8th December 2026

Christmas Dinner followed by Blenheim Palace: Christmas past and present

Lecturer: Antonia Keaney



Christmas at Blenheim Palace has always been a time of celebration. The 7th Duke and Duchess followed the lead of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in making Christmas a family time and an opportunity to give gifts to those who were in their employ. Those traditions are, in many ways, continued to this day. This lecture looks at how Christmas has been celebrated over the years and how, each November, the Palace and its grounds are transformed into a Christmas feast for the eyes.

2027



19th January 2027

The Art of the Great Steal: Nazi looting in World War II

Lecturer: Shauna Isaac

The Nazis Looted over 20% of Western Art during World War II, confiscating art from Jewish families and emptying museums throughout Europe. This lecture will provide an overview of Nazi looting by setting the scene in Nazi Germany, discussing Hitler's obsession with art, and how the Monuments Men recovered art after the war. Several landmark cases will be discussed in detail, including Gustav Klimt's celebrated Portrait of Adele Bloch Bauer and the stash of over 1200 artworks found in the possession of the son of a notorious Nazi dealer.



16th February 2027

Banksy: Fraud or Genius

Lecturer: Pepe Martinez

The lecture will trace the story of Banksy's humble beginnings as a 'tagger' on the streets of Bristol in the 1980s to one of the most recognisable names in the art world. We will examine the reasons behind his incredible rise, looking at some of his famous stunts and discuss what his influence has been on the art market today and what his legacy, if any, might be.

16th March 2027

The Joan Cooper Memorial lecture

**The three great game changers of 19th Century opera:
Verdi, Wagner & Puccini**

Lecturer: Jamie Hayes



The world of opera is full of remarkable contributors, great game changers who leave the stage in a completely different place from the one they found. In the 19th century, three such men revolutionised the art form in three very different ways: Verdi, Wagner and Puccini. From the romantic heartbreak of La Traviata and Rigoletto via the mystery and magic of The Ring Cycle to the breath-taking melodrama of Tosca and La Bohème, enjoy their remarkable journeys and their innovative, dynamic and thrilling theatricality. This illustrated lecture will highlight the great opera productions which have graced the world's opera houses.

