

## Renaissance Philosophers on Art and Beauty

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**Start date** 7 July 2019**End date** 8 July 2019**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge**Tutor** Dr Cecilia Muratori**Course code** 1819NTX060**Director of Academic Centres**

Sarah Ormrod

**For further information on this  
course, please contact**Head of Academic Centre Administration, Zara Kuckelhaus  
[zara.kuckelhaus@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:zara.kuckelhaus@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746204**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Cecilia Muratori is a historian of philosophy, and currently Research Fellow at the University of Warwick. She studies the History of European philosophy (15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries), with particular research interests in the role of mysticism in philosophical speculation, and in the human-animal differentiation between ethics and natural philosophy. Her first monograph is dedicated to the mystical philosopher Jacob Böhme and his remarkable afterlives in German Idealism, and especially in the reception of G.W.F. Hegel: *'The First German Philosopher': The Mysticism of Jakob Böhme as Interpreted by Hegel* (2016). She is interested in the mediation of philosophical concepts through the visual arts, and is co-curator of the first philosophical exhibition on Jacob Böhme: *All in All: The Conceptual World of the Mystical Philosopher Jacob Böhme* (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden 2017).

While she was Research Fellow at LMU Munich (2009-2013) and at Harvard-I Tatti (2013-2014) she developed an interest in Renaissance animal ethics: on this subject she has published several articles and edited two essay collections (*The Animal Soul and the Human Mind: Renaissance Debates* (2013), and *Ethical Perspectives on Animals in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period*, co-edited with Burkhard Dohm (2013)). Her second monograph (*The Renaissance of Vegetarianism: The Afterlives of Porphyry's On Abstinence*) will be published with *Legenda* in 2019. Recently, she has also published a co-edited volume on philosophical historiography: *Early Modern Philosophers and the Renaissance Legacy* (2016).

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### Course programme

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## Sunday

Please plan to arrive between 10:00 and 12:00. You can meet other course members in the bar. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

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| 13:00         | Lunch  |
| 14:30 – 16:00 | <b>Session 1: Does Beauty Lead to Truth? Should Art Imitate Nature? The Problem with Art in Platonism.</b> |
| 16:00         | Tea  |
| 16:30 – 18:00 | <b>Session 2: Love and Beauty in Renaissance Platonism (Ficino and Cattani da Diacceto)</b>                |
| 18:30         | Dinner   |
| 20:00 – 21:30 | <b>Session 3: The Artist as a Philosopher and the Philosopher as Artist (Leonardo da Vinci)</b>            |

## Monday

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 07:30         | Breakfast  |
| 09:00 – 10:30 | <b>Session 4: Constructing Beauty: Painting and Architecture (Leon Battista Alberti)</b> |
| 10:30         | Coffee   |
| 11:00 – 12:30 | <b>Session 5: Beauty and Deformity: Renaissance Physiognomics</b>                        |
| 12:45         | Lunch  |
| 14:00 – 15:30 | <b>Session 6: The Afterlives of Renaissance Beauty</b>                                   |

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## Course syllabus

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**Aims:**

Through discussion of the topic of beauty, the course will introduce the students to some of the main thinkers of the Renaissance period. It will enable students to explore the distinctive character of Renaissance thought, one of the most diverse phases in the history of philosophy. It will focus in particular on the connection between the philosophical understanding of beauty and the actual production of art.

**Content:**

For Plato, beholding beauty is a path to philosophical wisdom; but at the same time Plato regards works of art as imitations that can lead away from truth. For Aristotle, on the other hand, beauty consists mainly in symmetry and proportion. Engaging with classical views of art and beauty, Renaissance philosophers debated questions including: what distinguishes beauty from deformity? Should art imitate nature or not? How is beauty embodied in the various arts, such as painting, music, or architecture; and is there a hierarchy of value among these forms? Does the appreciation of beauty make one virtuous? This module will consider the role of beauty within philosophical speculation, and investigate how Renaissance philosophers, who were sometimes also artists themselves, understood the connection between theory and practice in thinking about beauty and in producing art at the same time. Alongside their classical sources, main Renaissance figures to be studied in the course include Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), and Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519).

**Presentation of the course:**

The course will include interactive presentations and guided group work during which we will practice close reading and analysis of selected passages. The course employs the methodology of the history of philosophy, but the students will be encouraged to draw interdisciplinary connections, in particular with art history, and thus to reflect on what counted as 'philosophy' in the Renaissance.

**As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:**

- become familiar with main figures of Renaissance philosophy, and engage with their complex legacy as philosophers, artists, and religious figures;
- reflect critically on the relation between theory and practice, in and beyond the Renaissance period;
- deploy the example of the reception of classical thought in the Renaissance to understand how theories of beauty have persisted and been adapted over time;
- consider how philosophical theories inform artistic production.

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk \*

**Selected material will be provided in a course pack.**

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| Author                           | Title  | Publisher and date           |
|----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Plato                            | <i>Phaedrus and The Republic</i><br>(in <i>The Dialogues of Plato</i> , ed. B. Jowett)   | CUP 2012 (or. ed. 1871)      |
| Leonardo da Vinci                | <i>The Notebooks</i> , ed. Irma A. Richter   | OUP 1980                     |
| Francesco Cattani<br>da Diacceto | 'Panegyric on Love'<br>in <i>Cambridge Translations of Renaissance<br/>Philosophical Texts</i> , vol. 1, ed. Jill Kraye                                  | CUP 1997                     |
| Marsilio Ficino                  | <i>Commentaries on Plato</i> , vol. 1,<br>ed. Michael J.B. Allen   | Harvard U. Press 2008        |
| Leon Battista Alberti            | <i>On Painting</i><br>tr. Rocco Sinigalli  | CUP 2011                     |
| Umberto Eco                      | <i>On Ugliness</i>   | Harvill Secker 2011          |
| Paul Oskar Kristeller            | 'The Modern System of the Arts'<br>in <i>Renaissance Thought and the Arts</i>  | Princeton U. Press 1990      |
| Cecilia Muratori                 | 'From Animal Bodies to Human Souls:<br>(Pseudo)-Aristotelian Animals in<br>Della Porta's Physiognomics',<br><i>Early Science and Medicine</i> 22.1, 1-23 | Brill 2017                   |
| Roger Scruton                    | <i>Beauty: A Very Short Introduction</i><br>(Ch. 1, 'Judging Beauty')  | Oxford University Press 2008 |

## Website addresses

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry 'Beauty': <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauty/>
- Podcast from Philosophy Bites:  
[http://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/2/a/5/2a5dacd50532bff5/MatraversMixSes.MP3?c\\_id=1779312&cs\\_id=1779312&expiration=1535445816&hwt=cd0911300028321a24434b0574c6ba82](http://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/2/a/5/2a5dacd50532bff5/MatraversMixSes.MP3?c_id=1779312&cs_id=1779312&expiration=1535445816&hwt=cd0911300028321a24434b0574c6ba82)

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street,

Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 12 October 2018