



Trecento Frescoes

The age and legacy of Giotto

9–16 September 2025 (ML 772)

£3,510 • 8 days

Speaker: Professor Donal Cooper

Encompasses almost all the major surviving fresco schemes in central Italy.

Based in Padua, Florence and Assisi, with visits to San Gimignano, Pisa and Siena.

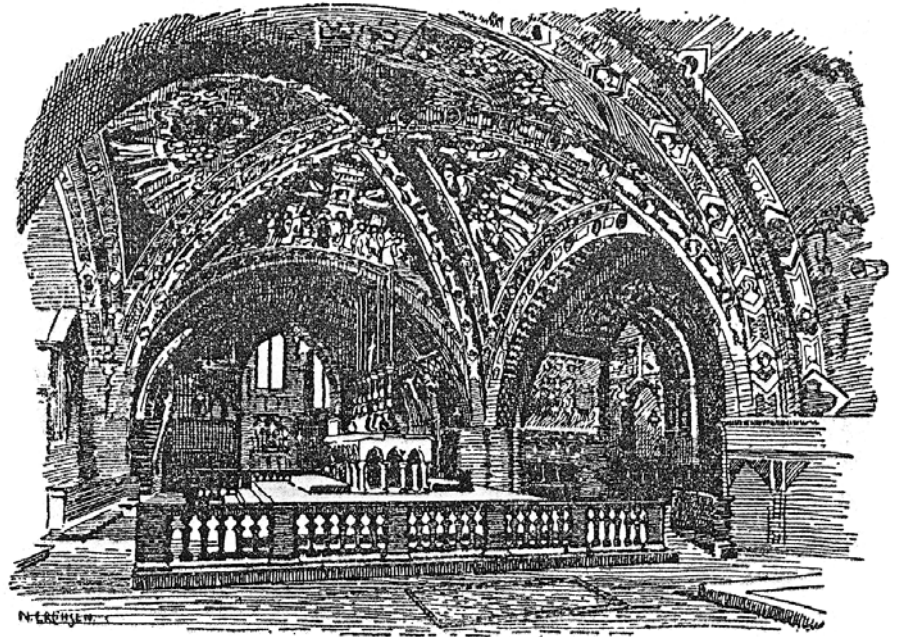
Shines a light on Giotto's great masterpieces and those of his numerous followers, showcasing some of the most potent images in Western art.

This tour celebrates the heroic age of fresco painting from the late 13th century to the mid 14th. The era of innovation that revolutionised the visual arts in Italy began in the decades around 1300 and is above all associated with the medium of fresco, especially the narrative cycles painted in the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi and the Arena Chapel in Padua. Fresco cycles are site-specific, conceived to be experienced by the viewer within a particular purpose-built architectural setting. Perhaps more than any other medium, to fully feel the force of their meaning, impact and beauty they need to be appreciated first-hand, within the spaces for which they were designed.

The magnificent principal cycles to survive from this period across northern and central Italy include the narratives of the life of Saint Francis in the Upper Church at Assisi; the cycles by Giotto, Simone Martini and Pietro Lorenzetti in the Lower; Giotto's masterpiece, the Arena Chapel, Padua; the Passion cycle attributed to Barna or Lippo Memmi in San Gimignano; and Bonamico Buffalmacco's recently restored *Triumph of Death* in the Campo Santo at Pisa.

Alongside the sacred narratives to be explored are also civic schemes for town halls at San Gimignano and Siena, where Ambrogio Lorenzetti created a pictorial political treatise of unprecedented sophistication in the so-called 'Sala della Pace'. A generation of painters followed Giotto and the Black Death through schemes such as Andrea da Bonaiuto's chapter-house frescoes at Santa Maria Novella, Florence, or Altichiero's audacious experiments in perspectival space in Padua.

Throughout their schemes, Giotto and his contemporaries combined narrative and allegory in their frescoes to stake new intellectual claims for painting as a universal art. Painters exploited alignments, symmetries



Assisi, vaults of San Francesco, from 'Medieval Towns: Assisi', publ. 1903.

and vistas to generate additional registers of meaning for their viewers. A visit to Assisi compels investigation into one of the greatest of all art-historical controversies; whether or not Giotto did in fact paint the 28 scenes of the life of Saint Francis.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 2.15pm (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Venice Marco Polo and drive (c. 1 hour) to Padua, where the first two nights are spent.

Day 2: Padua. Among the most illustrious of Italian cities, and a leading centre of painting in the 14th century. The great fresco cycle by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel is a major landmark in the history of art. Colourful and lively works by Altichiero and Giusto de' Menabuoi are in the vast multi-domed Basilica di S. Antonio and the Oratorio di S. Giorgio.

Day 3: Padua, Florence. Start the day with a second visit to the Arena Chapel before boarding a fast train for Florence. The abundant frescoes in the Basilica di Santa Maria Novella include those by Filippino Lippi and Domenico Ghirlandaio. They were financed by the most important Florentine

families to ensure themselves funerary chapels. The next three nights are spent in Florence.

Day 4: Pisa, Florence. Pisa's Campo Santo contains an expanse of frescoes exceeding that of the Sistine Chapel. Nearly destroyed during World War II, vast restoration efforts – concluding in 2018 with the reinstallation of Buffalmacco's *Triumph of Death* – have returned it to almost its original glory. The museum of under-drawings, the Museo delle Sinopie, is an essential destination in any fresco tour. Back in Florence, visit San Miniato al Monte to see frescoes by Taddeo Gaddi on the vault and by Spinello Aretino in the sacristy.

Day 5: San Gimignano, Florence. Morning drive to San Gimignano, the enchanting little city of towers. In the Collegiata there are Old and New Testament fresco cycles, respectively by Barna da Siena and Lippo Memmi. Memmi painted a *Maestà* in the town hall. Santa Croce in Florence is a vast Franciscan church and favoured burial place for leading citizens. Giotto's great works in the Bardi and Peruzzi Chapels find echoes in the several other frescoes by other 14th-century masters.

Day 6: Siena, Assisi. Leave Florence and drive to Siena. The Palazzo Pubblico is home to a large collection of secular frescoes,

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continued

commissioned, unusually, not by the church but by the governing body of the city. The most notable cycle, *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, adorns the walls of the Sala della Pace. Simone Martini also created two works of exquisite beauty. Continue to Assisi for the final two nights.

Day 7: Assisi. Spend most of the day at S. Francesco, mother church of the Franciscan Order. Here is one of the greatest assemblages of medieval fresco painting, including the cycle of the *Life of St Francis* which may or may not be by Giotto. There is an upper and a lower church – much more than a crypt – and many of Giotto's contemporaries worked here, including Cimabue, Simone Martini and Pietro Lorenzetti.

Day 8. Drive from Assisi to Rome and fly from Fiumicino Airport, arriving at London Heathrow c. 5.15pm.

Lecturer

Professor Donal Cooper. Professor of Italian and Mediterranean Art at the University of Cambridge; over more than 25 years he has published widely on art and architecture in medieval Italy with a particular focus on Giotto and the patronage of the Franciscan Order. His co-authored book with Janet Robson on the fresco decoration of the Upper Church, *The Making of Assisi* (Yale University Press), won the Art Book Prize in 2014. He is currently contributing to major exhibitions on Sienese Art (National Gallery, London) and Cimabue (Musée du Louvre). During his career he has lived and worked extensively in Italy, Florence, Perugia, Rome and Venice.

Practicalities

Price. Two sharing: £3,510 or £3,250 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,090 or £3,830 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 319); travel by private coach, and some travel by first-class train; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 1 lunch and 5 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Europa, Padua (hoteleuropad.it): a comfortable and functional, if uninspiring, 4-star hotel, well located in the city centre. **Hotel Santa Maria Novella, Florence** (hotelsantamarianovella.it): a delightful 4-star hotel in a very central location. **Fontebella Palace Hotel, Assisi** (fontebella.com): a beautiful 4-star hotel with wonderful views and elegant interiors. Superior rooms with valley view are available on request and for a supplement. *Single occupancy rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking in town centres where the ground is sometimes uneven, the pavements narrow and the incline steep. There is also a significant amount of standing in churches and other sites. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Fitness is essential. There are several long coach journeys and one journey by train, you will need to be able to carry (wheel) your own luggage on and off the train and within stations. Average distance by coach per day: 93km.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.