



## DR VALERIE SHRIMPLIN

Dr Valerie Shrimplin has lectured extensively on Byzantine, Medieval and Renaissance Art and Architecture – and on sixteenth-century history as well. She has a particular interest in the influence of astronomy and cosmology on art (including her PhD on a link between Michelangelo and Copernicus). Contact: [vshrimplin@gmail.com](mailto:vshrimplin@gmail.com) and see: [www.valerieshrimplin.com](http://www.valerieshrimplin.com)

## ART HISTORY

### The Italian Renaissance I: Giotto and the Early Italian Renaissance

Drawing comparisons between different styles and approaches, the ancient heritage of Rome and the revival of the classical tradition by artists like Cimabue, Duccio, Simone Martini and Giotto will be considered - alongside the historical and philosophical context that contributed to the 'rebirth' of the arts in fourteenth-century Italy.



### The Italian Renaissance II: The Quattrocento - Masaccio to Botticelli

The flowering of the Italian Renaissance in the fifteenth century will be examined, including paintings by Masaccio, Donatello, Bellini and Mantegna. Works by Uccello and Piero della Francesca show the development of linear perspective, whilst Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi and Botticelli followed the more 'lyrical' trend in Quattrocento painting.



### The Italian Renaissance III: The High Renaissance - Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo

The High Renaissance reached its peak in the works of Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo. Leonardo's prowess as a scientist is clearly reflected in his earliest works, whilst Raphael's expertise was reflected in his religious paintings and frescoes in the Vatican *Stanze*. Michelangelo's work as a sculptor will be examined, as well as his frescoes in the Sistine Chapel.



### Shadows in Western Painting: 'Standing between Darkness and Light'

Defined by Leonardo as '*standing between darkness and light*,' shadows are everywhere, but they are not always depicted in art. The origins and history of shadows in art will be examined, from the use of shading for 3D effects to the depiction of actual cast shadows – often with psychological resonance: mysterious, ethereal or divine.



### Circles, Spheres and Globes: Models of the Universe as Depicted in Art

Ideas about the shape of the known world led to the invention of the globe itself in the fifteenth century. The depiction of globes in famous paintings (in Holbein's *Ambassadors* or *Portraits of Elizabeth I*) demonstrates their significance in the promotion of the 'new learning' and world view – whether cosmological, geographical, political or educational.



### Affairs of the Heart: the Symbolism of the Heart in Art

The heart is used worldwide as a symbol of love, yet how did the curious, oddly-shaped and bloody heart become transformed into the image that is so familiar today? An amazing muscle with the anatomical role of a pump came to be represented as a beautiful, pristine and symmetrical form – a symbol of emotions varying from love and devotion, to courage and strength. (A talk for Valentine's Day!).



## ART AND ASTRONOMY

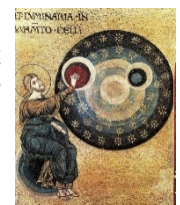
### Michelangelo, Copernicus and the Sistine Chapel: The *Last Judgment* Decoded

Set against a background of Judaeo-Christian Cosmology and its traditional depiction in art, it is argued that Michelangelo's monumental fresco of the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel (1536-41) reflects Copernicus's theory of the sun-centred universe (heliocentricity).



### The Beginning and the End: Images of the Universe

The beginning and the end: Creation and Last Judgment, or big bang and gravitational collapse/eternal nothingness? Images of 'The Beginning' of the universe vary from the great mosaic cycles in St Mark's Venice to works by Blake and Brancusi. Similarly, images of 'The End' range from traditional *Last Judgment* scenes to apocalyptic images and modern space-scapes being used to explain complex concepts.



## Astronomy and Cosmology in Byzantine Art

From *Genesis* to *Revelation*, the great mysteries of the universe have been explained in terms of cosmological concepts. These are in turn reflected in art and especially in Byzantine architecture and decoration where not only individual icons, but entire cycles of church decoration were devised so as to reflect the ordering of the Universe.



## Domed Architecture as a Reflection of the Universe

The cosmic symbolism of the dome as imitative of natural eye observation of the flat earth surmounted by the 'dome of heaven' is of very ancient origin, with spiritual and symbolic significance. More than a functional type of vaulting, domed architecture was important in ancient civilisations in Greece and Rome, as well as for Judaeo-Christian architecture, revived during the Renaissance.

## The Influence of Astronomy and Cosmology on Medieval Art

Building on writings by Aristotle and Ptolemy, astronomical ideas expanded during the Middle Ages, and their influence on medieval art is immense. Looking at examples of Judaeo-Christian art c 500-1500 AD, this overview considers artworks varying from medieval manuscripts to Renaissance images of the cosmos, sun, moon, comets and Milky Way.



## The Architect Borromini and Kepler's New Astronomy

After Copernicus challenged the accepted order in his heliocentric system, Kepler, in turn, demonstrated that the universe was in fact based on elliptical rather than perfect circular motion. The work of the Baroque architect Borromini appears to have been influenced by these enormous changes in world view, cosmology and astronomy of the age - such as his use of elliptical domes.

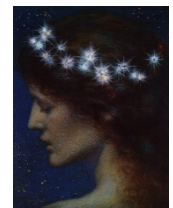
## Sir Christopher Wren: Architect-Astronomer

Sir Christopher Wren is better known as an architect rather than astronomer but much of his architectural work still echoes his earlier career as a Professor of Astronomy. Examination of the astronomical and architectural elements aspects of Wren's career will focus in particular on St Paul's Cathedral.



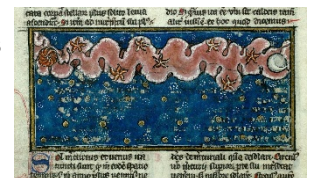
## Astronomical Imagery in the Work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brother(and Sister)hood

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (founded 1848) sought to return to art in its purer simpler form, emphasising the natural world in an almost religious-like devotion to truth. Astronomy was one of many sources of inspiration for members of the PRB, since many of them were fascinated by the night sky and used astronomical symbolism to express their ideas.



## Dark Skies and Light Pollution: An Art-Historical Approach

The spectacle of vast numbers of stars is becoming increasingly obscured by light pollution in the 'civilised' world. From ancient times, the sight and contemplation of stars and planets have inspired religions, philosophies and myths. Consideration of historical images of stars and galaxies demonstrates the need to protect the Dark Sky.



## HISTORY

### Anne Boleyn - Harlot or Heroine?

Anne Boleyn - a scheming, ambitious strumpet, or the tragic and innocent victim of events? A highly-educated and forward-thinking queen, with a passion for the new learning and reform, or just wishing to have a good time and enjoy court life? Discussion of Anne's early background and romance with King Henry VIII - to her (*spoiler alert!*) execution in 1536.



### The Story of St Albans, as a Reflection of the History of the Country

Ancient tribes, Roman soldiers, medieval monks, kings and warriors, high society and academics have all lived in or passed through the historic town of St Albans. Its story is a microcosm of the history of the country, with a key role in major events from the Roman invasion and Magna Carta to the Wars of the Roses, Dissolution of the Monasteries and modern times.

### Sir Thomas Gresham and his Vision for Gresham College

Merchant, financier and adventurer, Sir Thomas Gresham (1519-79) had an amazing career as one of the most powerful, influential and wealthy men of his age. A merchant dealing in the cloth trade, he acted as financial agent and adviser to four Tudor monarchs, and saved England from financial ruin - at the same time as creating the Royal Exchange and founding Gresham College.

