The rise of the Italian city-state during the Renaissance defines a period of paradoxical contrast. Although scourged by often tyrannical rule and frequent territorial warfare, the great ruling dynasties of the period, among them the Montefeltro, Malatesta, d’Este, Sforza and Gonzaga families, enabled through their patronage a flowering of artistic, intellectual and architectural ambition that gave birth to some of the most splendid examples of art and architecture of the Renaissance period.

This new Art Pursuits Abroad tour, a special offering for members of the London Art History Society, will explore the cultural flourishing of a swathe of Northern Italian court cities — among them handsome Ferrara, which retains its dignified and spacious Renaissance proportions, picturesque Urbino, and romantic Mantua, known by locals as La Bella Addormentata, the sleeping beauty. The tour will bring to life these vibrant cities, and the fierce rivalries between their noble families which served to stimulate the urban expression of Renaissance ideals.
Day 1
Morning flight with BA from London Heathrow to Bologna. Transfer by private coach to Ferrara, our base for the first two nights of the tour and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. An introductory walking tour will familiarise us with the ambitions of the Este dynasty, which transformed the former mediaeval citadel into a Renaissance jewel. It was the vision of Ercole I d’Este (1431-1505) to expand the city, commissioning Baggio Rossetti to draft a new masterplan – the resulting Herculean Addition is today considered one of the finest examples of Renaissance urban planning in existence. Our stroll will take in many of the city’s most splendid buildings, from the Palazzo dei Diamanti, so named because of the 8,500 carved marble ‘diamonds’ that cover the building’s surface, to the imposing, moated Castello Estense. In the evening, we enjoy a group dinner.

Day 2
All-day coach excursion to ducal Mantua whose handsome monuments are the result of the princely patronage of the Gonzaga family. The massive Palazzo Ducale, with Mantegna’s spectacularly frescoed Camera degli Sposi, brings us closer to the Gonzagas, as does their fashionable suburban retreat, the Palazzo Te, the masterpiece of architect Giulio Romano. We will also visit the Christian temple of San Andrea, designed by Renaissance humanist and architect Leon Battista Alberti, a ground-breaking example of Early Renaissance church architecture. Return to Ferrara for an evening free for your own relaxation.

Day 3
By coach to Cesena, where the Biblioteca Malatestiana, created for Domenico Malatesta, stands as one of the great Renaissance libraries. This unique foundation – the first civic library in Europe – has preserved its appearance and codices since its opening in 1454. Onwards to Rimini, where two Roman roads, the Via Flaminia and the Via Emilia, ended. The Roman colony’s significance manifests itself in monuments such as the Triumphal Arch of Augustus. From the 13th century, Rimini was ruled by the Malatesta until annexed by Venice in 1503 and, finally, the Papal States in 1528. Evidence of former Malatesta glory is found in the Church of San Francesco, or ‘Tempio Malatestiano’, designed by Leon Battista Alberti, with interior decorations by Agostino di Duccio and Piero della Francesca, and the Castel Sismondo, supposedly designed by Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini from 1432. Continue to Urbino, our base for the last two nights of this tour. After checking into our four-star hotel, a free evening for independent dinner.

Day 4
A day on foot in Urbino will allow us to discover the delights of the Palazzo Ducale, one of the great buildings of the Italian Quattrocento, the work of Luciano Laurana, collaborator of Leon Battista in Mantua, and the multi-talented Siennese painter, sculptor and architect Francesco di Giorgio. The palace is home to the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, a magnificent collection of works by Paolo Uccello, Piero della Francesca, and Raphael. The Oratorio di San Giovanni, our second visit of the day, is beautifully frescoed in an International Gothic Style and is a further feast for the eyes. In the evening, we enjoy a farewell group dinner.

Day 5
Morning visit to Pesaro on the Adriatic coast, ruled successively by the Malatesta, the Sforza and della Rovere. The focus of our visit will be the city’s handsome Palazzo: the present structure was commissioned during the 15th century by Alessandro Sforza but was much revised and expanded by subsequent ruling families before the passage of the Duchy in 1631 to the Papal States. After lunch, we continue to Bologna airport for an early evening flight back to London Heathrow.

GUEST LECTURER
Dr Geoffrey Nuttall

After a career in academic publishing, Geoffrey Nuttall gained a PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art for research into the artistic patronage of Lucca’s great mercantile families. Now he combines lecturing with writing and tour managing with his wife, Paula.

WHAT IS INCLUDED
• Scheduled return flights (economy class) with BA from London Heathrow to Bologna
• Transfers and excursions in Italy by private coach
• Accommodation and meals as described below.
• One dinner and one lunch
• Guided visits to monuments and museums listed in the programme
• Services of the Lecturer and Tour Manager
• Detailed programme and study notes
• All entrance fees, taxes & gratuities for coach drivers & waiters

TOUR DATES
10 - 14 June 2019
5 days

TOUR PRICES
£1,595 per person
Double room for sole use supplement £180
‘No flights’ price £1,395 per person
Deposit £200 per person

ACCOMMODATION
In Ferrara, two nights B&B in the four-star Hotel Annunziata – centrally located in front of the Castello Estense. Rooms are furnished in a contemporary style and the hotel features a stylish bar.

In Urbino, two nights B&B in the luxurious four-star Hotel San Domenico – a converted 14th-century monastery situated opposite the Ducal Palace in the centre of Urbino. The hotel has a bar and library.