

Modern European History

Unit 2 – The Renaissance

Sister Wendy's Story of Painting: The Renaissance

Born in South Africa in 1930, Wendy Beckett received her dual vocations - God and art - early in life. The eldest of three children, Wendy had her childhood divided between Colinton, Scotland - where the family relocated for several years while her father studied medicine - and her native South Africa. It was there that Wendy's appreciation for art and religious devotion was nurtured by her school-teachers, the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Wendy would join this order herself in 1946, traveling to England to begin her novitiate. The order then sent Wendy to St. Anne's College in Oxford, where she studied English and graduated with highest honors. During this time, Wendy continued to live in the convent instead of the college, maintaining a strict rule of silence.

In 1954 Sister Wendy completed her teaching diploma in Liverpool and returned to South Africa to teach. She was eventually appointed a Reverend Mother, a position she held while also lecturing at the University of Witwatersrand.

After recurrent bouts of illness, Sister Wendy returned to England in 1970 to live a fully contemplative life. Obtaining papal permission for Sister Wendy to become a Consecrated Virgin, Sister Wendy's order arranged for her to live under the protection of the Carmelite nuns at their monastery at Quindenham, Norfolk.

Sister Wendy's contemplative vocation means a life of solitude and prayer, but allows for two hours of work each day. After spending many years translating Medieval Latin manuscripts, Sister Wendy decided in 1980 to pursue the subject that had fascinated her since childhood: art. Making this part of her vocation, she began working from reproductions and postcards, corresponding by letter with art galleries and museums around the world.

In 1991 Sister Wendy made her first appearance on the BBC in a documentary on the National Gallery. This was followed by *Sister Wendy's Odyssey*, six ten-minute films in which she discovered hidden art treasures around Britain. Her next series, *Sister Wendy's Grand Tour*, took her throughout Europe; along the way, Sister Wendy developed a loyal and enthusiastic following among British and European art lovers. That popularity soared to new heights in 1997 when *Sister Wendy's Story of Painting* introduced the engaging art historian to a whole new audience of American art enthusiasts and won praise from both television viewers and critics alike. Sister Wendy's art appreciation is not limited, however, to television. The author of more than fifteen books - including *Contemporary Women Artists* and *Art and the Sacred* - Sister Wendy continues to write for several art magazines.

While not a member of the Carmelite order, Sister Wendy continues to live in seclusion in a trailer on the grounds of the Carmelite monastery at Quindenham. She speaks only to the monastery prioress and the nun who brings her provisions each morning and spends the rest of each day in prayer and complete silence and solitude.

“My real world is a world away from bustle,” Sister Wendy notes. “Coming out into a world of travel and television is the unreal part, where sometimes I get glimpses of what I've left behind.”

Feel free to take notes as you watch.

Florence, 1420

Masaccio, *Adam and Eve*

Medici family, great patrons

Fra Angelico, *San Marco Altarpiece*

Fra Angelico, *The Healing of Justinian by Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian*

Botticelli, *Mars and Venus*

Andrea Mantegna, *Ceiling of Camera degli Sposi*

Masaccio, *Holy Trinity*

Piero della Francesca, *View of an Ideal City*

Leonardo da Vinci

“Renaissance Man”

da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*

Pope Julius II

Raphael

Michelangelo, *Sistine Chapel*

Michelangelo, *Conversion of St. Paul*