

KHI Summer School: Welcome to Florence (Florence, 5-10 Oct 26)

Florence, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Oct 5–10, 2026
Deadline: May 30, 2026

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KHI Studienkurs/Summer School, in collaboration with the European University Institute (EUI).

“Welcome to Florence”. Workers, Foreigners, and Other Communities in the Renaissance and in the Present.

Florence today is at the center of a paradox. The city struggles with millions of visitors who arrive to enjoy the treasures of the Renaissance, while international scholarship seeks to challenge the enduring monolithic Florentine paradigm of Renaissance art and culture.

This year’s Summer School will consider the Renaissance in different terms through a focus on workers, foreigners and other communities between the past and the present.

Seeking to depart from traditional narratives of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florentine art, the Studienkurs will move the focus away from the major names of painters, sculptors and architects to the contexts in which works were created; moreover, it will consider the agency of groups – rather than individuals – of different natures and with diverse provenances, as patrons of works of art and architecture, artefacts and objects, and as protagonists of daily urban life. It will also bring attention to the multicultural aspects of city life, considering Florence as a site of importation and contamination, and highlight specific features connecting its stratified society, from the elite to enslaved people, from religious orders to minorities. While focusing on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the study course will systematically shift the attention to the present, with the aim of addressing contemporary Florence beyond the city’s own stereotype and self-fashioning as a museum of Renaissance culture, and uncovering the multidimensional challenges faced by different communities living in the city today, from residents, migrants, scholars, and tourists.

The Studienkurs will include thematic on-site visits both to famous fifteenth- and sixteenth-century monuments reconsidered within the framework of the questions set out by the course, and to sites and works which are generally excluded from the traditional vision of Florence. Some fundamental questions that will be taken into account include: what happens if we consider the Cupola from the point of view of the masons who worked for or rebelled against Brunelleschi, or Orsanmichele through the eyes of the corporations who commissioned one of the most renowned public collections of sculptures, which included works by Donatello and Verrocchio? Can we recount the agency of different communities by rethinking the topography of churches, searching for the loggias of the elite or visiting the sites where those condemned to death were assisted?

What were the spaces of female labor? Can we walk through museums such as the Uffizi, the Accademia and Palazzo Pitti looking for tangible evidence of the foreign presence in Florence? Moreover, who were the foreigners of the past and who are the foreigners of today? These are just a few examples of the themes with which the Summer School wishes to approach Florence in the Renaissance and today.

We are looking for proposals from scholars at the early stages of their career (master students, doctoral students, postdocs who have recently obtained their doctoral degrees) that deal with sites, monuments, works of art, artefacts, objects both of the Renaissance and from our own time to enable a stimulating discussion on art reframed in relation to workers, foreigners and communities in the Renaissance and today.

Topics may include:

- local and foreign patrons of works, e.g. artists, architects, artisans, doctors, lawyers, humanists;
- formal and informal spaces of work (shops, workshops, open-air laboratories);
- female labor, invisible labor, foreign workers;
- chapels, palaces and neighborhoods of foreigners;
- communities of friars and nuns of religious orders or religious minorities;
- spaces and works for the confraternities;
- space and works for the hospitals;
- spaces of the elites and of marginalized peoples.

Participants are expected to prepare a presentation in English or Italian and to be actively involved in the discussions. We encourage proposals connected to on-site visits (sights, monuments, works of art, artefacts). Good passive knowledge of Italian is required. The Institute will bear the cost of accommodation and will reimburse half of incurred travel costs; in addition, participants will be given a daily allowance.

The application should include your CV, university transcripts and, if applicable, a brief summary of your master's thesis or dissertation project. Candidates can suggest topics or indicate primary areas of interest for presentations, which will be taken into account where possible. Applicants will be notified by June 30 about the selection and assignment of presentation topics.

Please send your documents by May 30, 2026 in a PDF file (2 MB max.) with the subject line "Studienkurs 2026" to Prof. Dr. Bianca de Divitiis: dirdedivitiis@khi.fi.it

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