

Art in Context : Florentine Decorative Complexes 1300-1450
ACM Fall 2011
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This course examines multi-part artistic environments and is based on the premise that they can be fully understood only when approached as integrated wholes. On-site study ideally equips us to investigate how various components interact as parts of an ensemble. We ask how function governed what the artist(s) produced in a variety of decorative complexes, and then how the contemporary audience decoded the visual result. Ensembles for scrutiny include works in sculpture, painting, and architecture within family chapels, convents and monasteries, miraculous sites, the town hall, the civic piazza, the guild hall, and the cathedral complex.

The premier decorative ensemble in Florence is the cathedral square with its church, baptistery, campanile, and surrounding piazza. A number of sessions dedicated to the cathedral complex open the course. In the Palazzo dei Signori or town hall (the *Palazzo Vecchio*) campaigns of decoration from our period were lost in the sixteenth century refashioning of the interior, but the historical record serves to reconstruct what once was presented. We will study the evolution of the piazza surrounding the governors' hall--a remarkable construction that reflects the planners' ingenuity and their vision of an urban ideal that they understood Florence to reflect. The Ponte Vecchio is considered as a manifestation of the same enlightened urban planning.

Comparatively contained ensembles are family chapels in the great churches of Sta Croce, Sta Maria Novella, San Lorenzo and Sta Maria del Carmine. Students will take charge of a chapel during the term, presenting it to the class in on-site sessions. Other ensembles of décor for scrutiny served the religious life, such as those in the nuns' realms at Sta Felicita, Sant' Ambrogio, and Sant' Apollonia, and those for Franciscan and Dominican friars in the conventual houses, but also at San Marco (observant). Presentation of miraculous objects produced some spectacular ensembles, prime among them the tabernacle at Orsanmichele. Time permitting, we will also treat typical components of utility and decoration for private homes.

The purview of the course includes Siena, where parallels for the Florentine experience are abundant. Among many artists treated, the major figures are the painters Giotto, Taddeo Gaddi, Orcagna, Andrea Bonaiuti, Masaccio, Fra Angelico, Andrea del Castagno, and the sculptors Andrea Pisano, Orcagna (again), Ghiberti, Nanni di Banco, and Donatello.

Some background in art history, ideally of Italy, is highly desirable.

Regular meetings fall on Mondays from 9:00 to 10:30 and on Wednesday from 3:00 to 4:30. Alterations in that pattern are starred on the syllabus. In most cases we will convene on site rather than in the classroom, so please plan your route and estimate travel time carefully to ensure prompt arrival. Dress for conditions and be forewarned that 1) many times you will have little or no

opportunity to sit 2) churches are not heated 3) museums are minimally heated and 4) we cannot reschedule because of unfavourable conditions.

Office hours are immediately after class, and in the ACM office at a time to be announced, or by appointment.

Requirements and Grading

More than two **absences** seriously compromise your ability to pass the course. Mandatory **readings**, illustrations, and monument sheets will be provided. You will be assessed a fee since there is no cost for books per se. Some specialized readings will be lent to you, and any item not in pdf form must be checked back in to the instructor in person, *unmarked and in otherwise good condition*, at the end of the term. Books from the ACM library, some placed on a course reserve shelf, must not leave ACM spaces at Linguaviva, 4th floor. For background, refer to ACM copies of F. Hartt, *Italian Renaissance Art*.

On occasion, in preparation for a given class assignment you will be required to make a **site visit** on your own.

Grading for the course is based on a scale of 100 points. See percentages below. In fairness to your peers, **late work** is not allowed. When the deadline has passed, expect considerable reduction in your grade. To ensure parity, all written assignments must be presented in hard copy on or before deadline.

Lively participation in **discussion** is encouraged and counts in an unquantified way in determining your grade. Most welcome are comments that reflect your own thinking and that integrate the course readings. You might be called on at random to give a summary of, or comment on an article assigned for a given class session. Be prepared to respond effectively. Sometimes the class will be divided into groups assigned differentiated readings. On those occasions, it is of particular benefit to all that you convey what you have read. For some sessions you will be required (and alerted in advance) that you are to lead the discussion or make a brief presentation.

All of the following assignments must be successfully completed in full to pass the course.

Assignments

- Midterm Exam [20%]
- Analytical Essay on the Cathedral Square [15%]
- Term Paper on family chapels [20%]
- Oral Report(s) [10%]
- Short Assignments [10%]
- Final Exam [25%]

Participation [swing factor]

Program

**This is an ideal, preliminary program subject to change.

I Introduction to Decorative Complexes

**September 13, Tuesday 2:00-3:30 *Aula 3*

****September 20, Tuesday 2:00-3:30** *Baptistery*

II The Religious Heart of the City: Cathedral Square

****September 26, Monday 9:30-11:00** *Piazza Duomo, Elements and Design*

September 28, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 *Piazza Duomo, Elements and Design, II*

October 3, Monday 9:00-10:30 *Opera del Duomo Museum*

III The Civic Heart of the City

October 5, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 *Piazza dei Priori and Ponte Vecchio*

October 10, Monday 9:00-10:30 *Palazzo dei Priori*

IV Miraculous Sites

October 12, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 *Orsanmichele (and Bigallo)*

BREAK

October 24, Monday 9:00-10:30 *Santissima Annunziata*

V Family Chapels and their Churches

October 26, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 *Sta Croce (Introduction, Burial, Family Chapels, Alberti Chapel Scaffold)*

****October 31, Monday 9:30-11:00** *Sta Croce (Reports: Bardi, Peruzzi, Baroncelli chapels)*

November 2, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 *Sta Croce (Reports: Bardi di Vernio, Rinuccini, Castellani chapels)*

****November 7, Monday 9:30-11:00** *Sta Maria Novella: Introduction and Strozzi, Ricci, Lenzi chapels*

November 9, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 *Sta Maria del Carmine: Brancacci Chapel*

****November 14, Monday 9:30-11:00** *San Lorenzo: The Old Sacristy*

VI Ensembles for Monks and Nuns

**November 16, Wednesday 9:00-10:30 *Sta Maria Novella Cloister and Chapter House*

**November 21, Monday 9:30-11:00 *Sta Croce Cloister and Refectory*

November 23, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 *Paintings for Friars, Monks, and Nuns (Accademia)*

November 28, Monday 9:00-10:30 *San Marco and Sant' Apollonia*

**November 30, Wednesday time to be decided *More Paintings for Friars, Monks, and Nuns (Uffizi)*

VII Domestic Interiors

**December 5, Monday 10:00-11:30 *Palazzo Davanzati*

VIII Final Exam

December 7, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 *Aula 3*