

“Nothing more beautiful or wonderful than Florence can be found anywhere in the world.”

- Leonardo Bruni, “Panegyric to the City of Florence” (1403)

“I was in a sort of ecstasy from the idea of being in Florence.”

- Stendahl, *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to Reggio* (1817)

“Historic Florence is an incubus on its present population.”

- Mary McCarthy, *The Stones of Florence* (1956)

“It’s hard for other people to realize just how easily we Florentines live with the past in our hearts and minds because it surrounds us in a very real way. To most people, the Renaissance is a few paintings on a gallery wall; to us it is more than an environment - it’s an entire culture, a way of life.”

- Franco Zeffirelli



Celebrating the City:
the image of Florence as
shaped through the arts

ACM Florence
Fall, 2010

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The citizens of renaissance Florence proclaimed the power, wealth and piety of their city through the arts, and left a rich cultural heritage that still surrounds Florence with a unique and compelling mystique. This course will examine the circumstances that fostered such a flowering of the arts, the works that were particularly created to promote the status and beauty of the city, and the reaction of past and present Florentines to their extraordinary home.

In keeping with the ACM Florence program's goal of helping students to "read a city", we will frequently use site visits as our classroom. These will be combined with lectures, discussion, readings, videos, and interviews to shape a picture of the role of the arts in Florentine civic pride. During the semester students will:

- Gain an understanding of the social and political context of Florence's artistic growth.
- Become familiar with some of the architectural and artistic treasures of Florence and their historical background.
- Become observant of the ways in which the arts can promote political or other agendas.
- View a one-act opera that portrays Florentine family and civic pride and numerous other characteristics of early renaissance Florence.
- Investigate the effect of Florence's historical and cultural heritage upon its current citizens.
- Write about and discuss their own reactions to the art and history of the city.

Your professor and this class:

I am a professional musician and professor who specializes in opera, but who has an interest in many fields of study and an incurable fascination with Florence. It is a joy and privilege to explore this great city with you. This course does not pretend to be comprehensive; rather, it is a sampler of some of the artistic, architectural, and musical works that extol the virtues of Florence. I hope that it will serve as an "antipasto" that will whet your appetite for further study. I have intentionally not planned site visits to some of the most important museums: The Uffizzi, Bargello, Pitti Palace, and Accademia, as I assume that you will have other occasions to visit them.

Policies:

Prompt attendance is expected at all classes. A single unexcused absence may affect the grade of students who are near the border line between grades. More than one absence will result in a lowering of one full letter grade for each missed class. Because some classes will involve site visits, it will be essential for everyone to be on time and to dress appropriately if visiting a church. Written assignments will be expected on time, and the form of the assignment should be as specified. Some assignments may be less strictly “academic” in style than others, but grammar, punctuation, and spelling always count. I believe in having fun while maintaining high standards. If illness or other extenuating circumstance requires you to miss a class or to request an extension for an assignment, please contact me in advance. Requests will not automatically be granted, but they will be seriously considered. If you need additional assistance for any other reason, I will happily help as best I can. Please feel free to e-mail me.

Grading:

Short essays 10%
Longer essay 20%
Photo journal 15%
Interview 15%
Exams 20%
Class participation 20%

Reading

Because of the impracticality of traveling with bulky textbooks, and because no single source is sufficient for our study, most of the readings will be provided in duplicated form. Readings as listed in the syllabus should be completed before class to allow for informed discussion.

One required book: *Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture*
Ross King
ISBN - 0142000159 (Penguin, 2001)

This is an easy to read, but interesting introduction to the construction of the Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral dome and the life of the city during that time. It's a perfect book to take on the plane.

Other required reading (provided) as specified in the syllabus.

Assignments

Ongoing assignment: Keep a photographic journal of the civic, family, and guild crests that can be found throughout the city. Keep a record of:

- location where each was found, including the building or work of art attached to it.
- who or what each crest represents (whenever you are able to discover this information). A directory of a number of common crests will be provided.

This assignment is designed not only to make you familiar with the symbols of Florence, but to give you a reason to look at the details of your surroundings.

DUE: You should submit a disc with your photos and accompanying documentation by Week 8, Class XIII.

Writing assignment: Research and write about one work of art that particularly expresses or promotes an aspect of Florentine pride and civic image. "Work of art" may be considered in the broadest sense to include the visual arts, architecture, music, and literature. Please, however, clear your choice with your professor by the start of the third week to avoid selecting works that will be studied in class. Your paper should be a minimum of four pages, and should include information on the patron, the creator, the physical setting, and the historical circumstances surrounding the work. Discuss the purpose of the work in its historical context, and the ways in which the artist has addressed this purpose. Reference all of your sources, including Internet sources (which should be used with discretion).

DUE: Week 9, Class XV.

Interview assignment: Interview a native Florentine regarding the effect of the city's artistic and historical heritage upon that person's daily life. Does it inspire pride? When one has lived with the great buildings and public art of the renaissance all one's life, do they still create a sense of wonder and awe, or do they pale with familiarity? Is the civic cost of restoring and maintaining a historical city a worthwhile investment? Have tourists destroyed the character of the real Florence? How has the emphasis on medieval and renaissance art affected the contemporary Florentine artist? If your subject lived through the 1966 flood, how did this disaster affect perception of the value of art? Was money spent on restoration justified? These are among questions that might be asked. The specific interview questions will be discussed and formalized in class. Write a report of your interview, including the gender, occupation, and approximate age of your interview subject, with questions, responses, and a summary of any conclusions you might draw from the interview.

DUE: Week 10, Class XVIII.

Short writing assignments on your impressions of Florence as described in the syllabus.

DUE: First class and penultimate class.

Please note: You are more than welcome to turn in assignments early.

Schedule of classes and assignments:

Week 1

I. Introducing Florence

Read:

R.W.B. Lewis

The City of Florence: Historical Vistas and Personal Sightings
Chapter 3 - "The Real City of Arnolfo di Cambio"

Leonardo Bruni

"Panegyric of Florence" (selections)
from *Images of Quattrocento Florence*, Ugo Baldassari, ed.

Write:

In at least two pages (double spaced), provide your first impressions of Florence. This should reflect your own honest reaction to the city, not what you imagine your instructor wants to read. While this is not intended to be a "scholarly" paper, it should, as always, be written with attention to grammar and spelling. **This is to be turned in at the first class.**

View:

"The Power of the Past: Florence" (begin in class; to be completed before the next class)
PBS Home Video

II. Culture and civic image

"Civic humanism" and interest in ancient civilizations

Read:

Gene A. Brucker

Renaissance Florence
Chapter 6 - "Culture"

Mary Hollingsworth

Patronage in Renaissance Italy
Chapter 1 - "Florence: A New Century"

We will share in class (anonymously) some of your first impressions of the city.

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Week 2

III. The heart of spiritual Florence

Read:

Brunelleschi's Dome should be completely read by now.

Hollingsworth, Chapter 2 - "Civic Pride and Guild Prestige"

Class to meet at the Museo del Opera del Duomo

IV. Inside the Dome

Read:

Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574)
Lives of the Artists - "Brunelleschi"

Class to meet at the entrance to the Duomo. We will be looking at selected works inside the cathedral, including "Dante and the Divine Comedy" by Michelino, and then (weather permitting) we will climb to the top of the dome. This is a serious climb! Wear comfortable, non-skid shoes, and bring your cameras. If rain is expected, we will re-schedule this event. Class time may be adjusted to accommodate an un-hurried climb.

Week 3

V. Family pride and piety - family chapels

Read:

Hollingsworth, Chapter 3 - "Merchants and Morality"

Vasari - "Masaccio"

(Meet in classroom.)

We'll start this class by listening to Dufay's motet *Nuper Rosarum Flores*, which was performed at the dedication of Santa Maria Novella in 1436. The structure of this composition may relate to the mathematical dimensions of the cathedral. We'll reflect upon our impressions of the Cathedral climb before considering the patronage of family chapels.

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VI. Brancacci Chapel and Santa Maria Novella

Read:

Michael Levey

Florence: A Portrait

pp. 216-220 (concerning the Ghirlandaio frescos in the Tornabuoni Chapel of Santa Maria Novella with comments comparing them to Lippi's in the Brancacci Chapel)

Class to meet at the Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine

We will view the frescos cycle by the combination of Masolino, Masaccio, and Lippi. We'll then walk to Santa Maria Novella, where among the works we will see are Ghirlandaio's frescos in the Tornabuoni Chapel, Masaccio's *Trinity* (demonstrating the new use of perspective), and Brunelleschi's *Crucifixion*. (For more Ghirlandaio frescos featuring the leading citizens of Florence visit the Sassetti Chapel in Santa Trinita.)

Week 4 - BREAK (Buon viaggio!)

Week 5

VII. Cosimo de' Medici

Read:

Hollingsworth, Chapter 4 - "Cosimo de' Medici"

VIII. Donatello and sculptural propaganda

Read:

Vasari - "Donatello"

Sarah Blake McHam

"Donatello's Bronze *David* and *Judith* as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence"

The Art Bulletin, Vol. 83, no. 1 (March, 2001)

(Copies provided or can be accessed through jstor)

Week 6

IX. The civic heart of Florence - The Piazza della Signoria

Class to meet at Piazza della Signoria, Loggia dei Lanzi, near the statue of Perseus and Medusa by Benvenuto Cellini.

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In this class we will explore the public art and the piazza, then walk to Orsanmichele to look at the sculptures (now replicas) of patron saints commissioned by the various guilds for the outside niches of the building. If time, visit the museum.

Read:

Benvenuto Cellini
Autobiography
Book Second, LXXIII-LXXVIII

X. Lorenzo de' Medici ("Lorenzo the Magnificent") and Grand Duke Cosimo I

Hollingsworth, Chapter 5 - "For God, Their City and Themselves"
Chapter 6 - "Propaganda for the New Republic"

Week 7

XI. The civic heart of Florence - The Palazzo Vecchio

Read:

Marvin Trachtenberg
"Founding the Palazzo Vecchio in 1299: The Corso Donati Paradox"
Renaissance Quarterly, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter, 1999)
(Copies provided or can be accessed through jstor)

Vasari - "Leonardo da Vinci" pp. 267-68

Mercedes Matos Carrara
"Vasari's Praise of Absolute Rule in the Salone dei Cinquecento"
The Florence Newspaper
<http://www.florencenewspaper.it/vediarticolo.asp?id=a8.10.10.20.28>

View:

60 Minutes video "The Lost Leonardo"
<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=4356727n>

Class to meet at Palazzo Vecchio

XII. Wild Card Class - To explore un-anticipated discoveries, catch up and review, or make up a postponed site visit as needed. **Short take-home quiz, due at the next class.**

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Week 8

XIII. Palazzo Medici-Riccardi and the Capella dei Magi

Reading: None! Catch up on assignments.

Due: Your photographic crest journals and documentation.

Class to meet at Palazzo Medici

XIV. Michelangelo's David in Context

(How does the placement of a work of art influence the viewer's perception?)

Read:

"Meeting about where to place Michelangelo's David" pp. 317-323
from *Renaissance Art Reconsidered : An Anthology of Primary Sources*
Carol M. Richardson, Kim W. Woods, and Michael W. Franklin, eds.

Saul Levine

"The Location of Michelangelo's David: The Meeting of January 25, 1504"
The Art Bulletin, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Mar., 1974), pp. 31-49

N. Randolph Parks

The Placement of Michelangelo's David: A Review of the Documents
The Art Bulletin, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Dec., 1975), pp. 560-570

Websites:

<http://www.econ.ohio-state.edu/jhm/arch/david/David.htm>
David: A New Perspective
J. Huston McCulloch

<http://graphics.stanford.edu/projects/mich/>

The Digital Michelangelo Project (Download a 3D scan of David onto your computer, and move him into any position you like.)

Week 9

XV. The 1966 flood

Websites with films on the flood which inundated Florence and destroyed or damaged art and historical documents:

<http://www.lastoriasiamonoi.rai.it/pop/schedaVideo.aspx?id=627>

La Storia Siamo Noi (historical programs from RAI TV)

(Click on “integrale” to see the entire program.)

<http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-18bf27f2-7a41-4c8b-a09c-0dcb91b64185.html?p=0>

Per Firenze

Franco Zeffirelli, director

Richard Burton, narrator

Watch at least one of these two programs (though you may wish to watch both). Both are in Italian, but by now you may be able to understand most of what is being said. The first is a 40 year anniversary retrospective from 2006 including archival film and interviews with people who were present. The film by Zeffirelli, the famous movie and opera director, was shot during the flood, helped raise money for flood relief, and is rather more theatrical in style. Richard Burton’s Italian is heavily accented, but his comments are simple and easy to understand.

The flood raised awareness of the importance of art conservation, and the degree to which the artistic patrimony of Florence is viewed as belonging to the entire world.

Writing due: Your paper on a specific work of art, as described above in the syllabus.

XVI. Operatic Florence

Puccini’s one-act opera *Gianni Schicchi* is a comic portrait of Florentine civic and family pride. Some of the topics addressed in the opera include: Dante, the Donati family, Ghibellines and Guelfs, the “gente nuova”, notaries, wills, forgery, forced exile, church patronage, and various Florentine locations and personalities.

Read:

Gianni Schicchi libretto by Giovacchino Forzano, translation by William Weaver

(This is a dual language edition with a literal translation, so you can practice your Italian language skills as well as learn the story of the opera.)

Gene Brucker, ed.

The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study

“The Testament of Michele di Vanni Castellani” c. 1306

“The Testament of Andrea di Feo, Stonemason” 1380

Fabrizio Ricciardelli

“Exile as evidence of civic identity in Florence in the time of Dante: some examples”

Reti Medievali Rivista, V - 2004/1 (gennaio-giugno)

http://www.dssg.unifi.it/_RM/rivista/saggi/Ricciardelli.htm

Optional viewing:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb_P1icHmVU

The librettist of *Gianni Schicchi* talks (in Italian) about the origin of the opera and his work with Puccini. There are also a number of links to home movies of Puccini.

Week 10

XVII. Operatic Florence (continued)

View (in class) *Gianni Schicchi* by Giacomo Puccini and Giovacchino Forzano

(Glyndbourne Festival production)

followed by discussion.

XVIII. Meet with a representative of one of the government agencies, such as the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, charged with maintaining and promoting the art and history of Florence.

Writing due: Written report of your interview with a Florentine citizen.

Week 11

XIX. Presentation and discussion of your interviews with Florentine citizens

Writing Due: In at least two pages (double spaced), provide your personal impressions of Florence as you prepare to depart. (See class #1 above.)

XX. Exam and concluding discussion

Nota bene: This is a preliminary draft of this syllabus, submitted more than a year in advance of the fall, 2010 semester. It is anticipated that the details of this course will change during the coming year, though its general outline probably will not. In any case, this course should be flexible enough to respond on the spur of the moment to opportunities, discoveries, and impediments that present themselves while we are in Florence.

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A few particularly useful web sites:

<http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/links.html> Art history links page from University of New York, Oneonta Art History Department, Professor Allen Farber. Professor Farber's course materials on line also offer a wealth of information and images.

<http://www.learner.org/resources/series1.html> Annenberg videos on "Art of the Western World" can be viewed free on line.

http://www.operaduomo.firenze.it/cupola/home_eng.html The digital records of the Opera del Duomo with search capability. It contains an amazingly detailed archive of every order and expense regarding the building of the cathedral. You can, for example, read the expense of July 10, 1433 regarding, "Payment for wine given to a blacksmith for the welding of the chains." Not really useful unless you are doing extensive research on the Duomo, but fun to browse.

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<http://www.paradoxplace.com/> Interesting, entertaining, and highly personal commentary on travel, history and art by Adrian Fletcher. Lots of images, chronologies, and neatly linked information.

<http://www.polomuseale.firenze.it/> The museums of Florence official site.

<http://smarthistory.org/> Art history resources and instructional videos.