

The Professional Artist In Renaissance Florence

ACM Florence

Fall, 2010



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This course will examine the professional life of the renaissance Florentine artist, from his apprenticeship in a workshop to the production of works for important patrons. Among the topics to be considered are the relationship between masters, assistants and apprentices, the guild system that fostered and controlled artistic output, agreements and balance of power between patrons and artists, and the socio-economic conditions that contributed to the growing demand for art and the elevation of the artist's status from craftsman to independent creator. These and other matters related to the practical life of the artist will be addressed through a combination of lecture, discussion, site visits, and readings from primary and secondary sources.

During the semester students will:

- Gain an understanding of the role of the artist and his work in the society of renaissance Florence.
- Consider the purposes served by art and the reasons patrons paid for it.
- Gain an understanding of some of the techniques and materials of the renaissance artist and the training regimen of the artist.
- Become observant of the ways in which materials and techniques are used in works by great artists.
- Consider the role of the artist as craftsman and individual creator.
- Observe artists and artisans who are maintaining some of the same techniques used in the renaissance.

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. As someone who supported herself for many years as a free-lance musician, the business of being a renaissance artist seems in many ways remarkably familiar. I look forward to exploring the artist's world and work with you in this extraordinary city.

Policies

Prompt attendance is expected at all classes. A single unexcused absence may effect 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

Writing assignment #1 - 15%

Writing assignment #2 - 20%

Class Participation - 20%

Take-home quiz - 20%

Final exam - 25%

Reading

Required text: *The Renaissance Artist at Work - from Pisano to Titian*

Bruce Cole

Harper & Row, NY, 1983

ISBN 0-06-430129

This is a good and very readable overview of the practical professional life of the renaissance artisan and his social, religious, and political surroundings. **Please purchase this book before you leave the U.S. and bring it with you.** It is a relatively inexpensive paperback that is not too bulky for your luggage.

Supplementary reading assignments are as specified in the syllabus. Copies will be provided.

A couple of particularly useful, though non-required books:

Gene A. Brucker

Renaissance Florence

University of California Press, 1969

ISBN 0-520-04695-1

(The best and most readable overview of background information I have found.)

George Ferguson

Signs and Symbols in Christian Art

Oxford U. Press, 1966

ISBN 978-0195014327

(A portable and detailed, though not scholarly in style, guide to things like what a pelican might symbolize in a painting and which saint is which.)

Writing Assignments

1. Write a “contract” for a work of art. You, as the patron, may commission a work from any renaissance artist (who actually lived) for a specific Florentine location of your choice (disregarding the fact that another work may already occupy that place.) Before writing your contract, identify yourself: Are you a wealthy banker? The prior of a church? One of the Medici? A merchant of modest means? Perhaps you represent a group of people, like a guild or confraternity. In planning your commission, consider the nature of the location and the function of the work. You should research your chosen artist to determine the medium(s) in which he worked, the time during which he lived, the materials he could have used, and his relative fame. (Can you really afford a large panel by Michelangelo?) You may use the actual contracts and the fictional contract read for class as general models for the form of your document. Be sure to include:

- date.
- type of work.
- subject matter and content, possibly specifying a specific the arrangement of figures. If you wish, you may include a sketch.
- size.
- materials, especially as this regards the most expensive ones.
- who is to do the work (master and assistants, or just the master)?
- price and when payment is to be made.
- amount of time allowed for completion
- provisions for non-compliance or sub-standard work.

Price is the portion of our invented contract that is nearly impossible to replicate, given the broad variety of prices, fluctuation in the value of currency, and difficulty in comparing to our modern currency. Materials played a big part in the price of art, followed by size, skill and length of time required of the artist, and the reputation of the artist. Mary Hollingsworth in *Patronage in Renaissance Italy* (pg. 4) suggests a life-size bronze statue might cost 1,000 florins, marble only 200, about the same as a panel painting in an elaborate carved and gilded frame. A large fresco might cost only 25 florins, according to Hollingsworth. For the sake of a rough guess, let’s pretend that 1,000 florins is our top price.

DUE: Class III

2. Compare two works you have seen in Florence that deal with the same subject (two “Adoration of the Magi”, “Saint Sebastian”, etc.), but that use different mediums (a fresco and a tempera altar panel for example, or a marble statue and an oil painting.) First provide background material on the artists, patrons (if known), historical circumstances surrounding the works, their date of production, and their original context (if different from where they are now displayed). Then comment on the purpose of each work and the ways in which the artists have used their style and materials. The background material should be researched, and sources should be properly cited. Your own observations on the similarities and differences between the two works and the manner in which they communicate should include your own ideas from

careful observation. What purposes were these works intended to fill - to decorate, moralize, tell a story, inspire piety, impress people with opulence, etc.? To what extent do you feel each is successful within the context of its own time and place? Your paper should be at least five pages (double spaced), plus references.

DUE: Class XVI

Schedule of classes and assignments

Week 1

I. Background information

The purposes of art
The purchasers of art
The social and political status of the artisan

Read

Cole, pp. 1-30

Michael Baxandall
Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy
pp. 40-45 "The function of images"

Richardson, Woods, & Franklin, eds.
Renaissance Art Reconsidered: An Anthology of Primary Sources
1.5.5 "Contract for Sassetti's 'Madonna della Neve' alterpiece"
1.5.6 "Valuation of 'Madonna della Neve'"
1.5.7 "A fee is fixed"
1.5.8 "Final valuation"

Martin Kemp
Behind the Picture: Art and Evidence in the Italian Renaissance
pp. 32-42 "The framework for agreements and disagreements" (a fictionalized contract)

II. Religious art for church, state, and family

Read

Cole, pp. 35-56

Creighton E. Gilbert
Italian Art 1400-1500
pp. 145-159 "The Clergy Speaking"

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New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia (online)
"Indulgences"
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07783a.htm>

World Civilizations Website
glossary: "Indulgences"
Richard Hooker, Washington State University
<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/GLOSSARY/INDULGE.HTM>

Week 2

III. The training of artists - the workshop and guild systems

Read

Cole, pp. 30-35

Gilbert, 30-31 "Neri di Bicci Contracts with an Apprentice"
33-34 "A Training Course for a Young Painter"

Cennino Cennini (translated by Daniel V. Thompson, Jr.)
The Craftsman's Handbook
pp. 1-3, 14-16

Martin Wackernagel
The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist
"The Artist Class", "Studios and their Working Procedures" pp. 300-313

DUE: Your artist commissions (see above for complete instructions).

Week 3

IV. Materials and types of art - fresco

Read

Cole, pp. 57-95

Website of Museo Benozzo Gozzoli in Castelfiorentino
<http://www.museobenozzogozzoli.it/index.html>
Read everything in the green section headed "Techniques", and watch the videos on "Fresco" and "Strappo"

Optional reading: Cennini on fresco (for a very detailed description of the process)

Class meet at Ognissanti Church - The church contains frescos by Botticelli and Ghirlandaio, and the cenacolo contains Ghirlandaio's "Last Supper" displayed with its sinopia (underdrawing) from which the fresco was detached for restoration. (The church also contains the tombs of Botticelli and Amerigo Vespucci.)

Other possible field trips:

Museo Benozzo Gozzoli in Castelfiorentino. (I only know of this from its web site, but it looks potentially interesting.)

Pisa: A young artist named Luca Battini is painting a large fresco in the church of San Vito utilizing traditional renaissance techniques and featuring prominent citizens of Pisa in historical costumes. This huge project, which is projected to take three years, should still be going on during the fall of 2010. I have found the artist's e-mail address, and can write to him to request that students be allowed to observe his work. This would be a fantastic opportunity to see renaissance-style fresco painting in action. There is also a sinopia museum housed in a building designed in 1257 by Giovanni di Simone, who also designed the Leaning Tower.

V. Drawing and Sculpture

Read

Cole, pp. 95-136

Week 4 - BREAK (Buon viaggio!)

Week 5

VI. Trip to Carrara? (Carlo Nicoli studio?)

VII. Panel painting and altar pieces

Read

Cole, pp. 137-157

(Make egg tempera in class?)

Week 6

VIII. Art for domestic use

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Read

Cole, pp. 157-167

IX. Site Visit: Antico Setificio - A silk factory manufacturing fine fabric using old methods.

Read

Sergio Tognetti

“The development of the Florentine silk industry: a positive response to the crisis of the fourteenth century”

Reti Medievali Rivista V-2004/2 (luglio-dicembre)

http://www.storia.unifi.it/_RM/rivista/dwnl/Tognetti.pdf

Week 7

X. Keeping up with commissions - collaboration and production techniques

Read

Michelle O'Malley

“Quality, Demand and the Pressures of Reputation: Rethinking Perugino”

Art Bulletin, Dec. 01, 2007

Frances Ames-Lewis

“Drapery ‘Pattern’ Drawings in Ghirlandaio’s Workshop and Ghirlandaio’s Early Apprenticeship”

The Art Bulletin, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Mar. 1981)

pp. 49-62

XII. Site Visit: Opificio delle Pietre Dure and restoration laboratory - Location containing both a museum of inlaid stone work and the center for restoration of artworks (which became of increased importance after the flood of 1966).

Read the remainder of Cole.

Short take-home quiz. **DUE** at the next class.

Week 8

XIII. The changing status of the artist

Writing about art and artists

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Read

Giorgio Vasari
Lives of the Artists - Alberti
Preface to Part Three

Leon Battista Alberti
On Painting
Prologue and Book Three

Benvenuto Cellini
Autobiography
Book Second XLI-XLVI

Rudolf Wittkower
"Individualism in Art and Artists: A Renaissance Problem"
Journal of the History of Ideas
Vo. 22, No. 3 (Jul.-Sept., 1961) pp. 291-302

XIV. Site visit: goldsmith and/or woodworking shop

(No reading; catch up on assignments.)

Week 9

XV. The Medici and some of their favorite artists

Assignment: You will be provided with a Medici family tree. Personally visit at least two commissions from each of three different Medici. Submit your list of commission visits with work, artist, and location (signed to certify that you saw these in person, not just in a book or the Internet) by class XIX.

Hints: Here are some of the artists associated with three of the most important Medici:

Cosimo "il Vecchio": Brunelleschi, Michelozzo, Donatello, Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico

Lorenzo "the Magnificent": Botticelli, Verrocchio, Michelangelo, Ghirlandaio, Da Vinci

Grand Duke Cosimo I: Vasari, Cellini

(This assignment counts as part of your "class participation" grade.)

XVI. Theatrical art

Scenery, stage machinery, and art for celebrations

Read:

Götz Pochat

"Brunelleschi and the "Ascension of 1422"

The Art Bulletin, Vol. 60, No. 2 (June, 1978)

pp. 232-234

James Laver

"Stage Designs for the Florentine Intermezzi of 1589"

The Burlington Magazine, Vo. 60, No. 351 (June, 1932)

pp. 294-300

Stella Mary Newton

"Stage Design for Renaissance Theater

Early Music, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jan. 1977)

pp. 12-18

Orville K. Larson

"Vasari's Descriptions of Stage Machinery"

Educational Theatre Journal, Vol 9, No. 4 (Dec. 1957)

Website:

<http://www1.appstate.edu/orgs/spectacle/Pages/Bibliography.html>

A web site devoted to the development of scenic spectacle, with computer simulations.

Listen (in class) to portions of:

La Pellegrina - Intemezzo composed for the wedding of Ferdinando De Medici and Christine de Lorraine, Princess of France, Florence 1589

DUE: Your paper comparing two works (see above for complete instructions).

Week 10

XVII. Wild Card Class - To explore un-anticipated discoveries, catch up and review, or make up a postponed site visit as needed.

XVIII. Site Visit: "SAM" Spazio Arti e Mestiei (Recently opened center for traditional arts and crafts.)

<http://www.spaziosam.it/>

Week 11

XIX. Guest lecture - Matthew Bates, a successful American painter who has been living and working in Florence for more than a dozen years, has tentatively agreed to speak with the class about his work, his life as an artist in Florence, the procedures and techniques he uses in planning and executing a work of art, and the business side of being an artist. His style is what he describes as "magical realism", and the materials on his website draw interesting parallels with the ways in which renaissance artists created their works.

Mr. Bates' website: <http://www.mattbates.net/>
Read his blog entries on his biography, techniques, and methods.

DUE: Your Medici commission list.

XX. Final exam and musical finale

Read

Timothy J. McGee

"In the Service of the Commune: The Changing Role of the Florentine Civic Musicians 1450-1532"

The Sixteenth Century Journal Vol 30, No 3 (Autumn 1993) pp. 727-743

(Suitable celebratory renaissance music will be played, T.B.A.)

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.

Limited Bibliography

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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.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.