

FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 NATALIE PAROLIN

Transcendent Moments

Exploration By Bike: I do not typically ride bikes and I do not go out by myself at night, let alone ride my bike at night. I have never experienced what I experienced over the last two days: aloneness. In the assignment that was given, the goal was to individually explore Florence. Therefore, I set out on my own to do just that. Never having used a map, or paid attention to the specific routes we took as a group, I felt new fears and emotions that I have never had to deal with at home upon getting lost.

Walking down Via Guelfa, to turn left on Via Santa Reparata, I found myself at a dead end and not at my destination, which was the Piazza d. Mercato Centrale. So I turned right and continued walking aimlessly. The usual thoughts occurred, "I'm lost in a foreign country, I do not know the language, and have no way of contacting anyone for help." To many this may sound like a nightmare, but it was that moment when I realized that I was expanding myself in a new place. I have never had that realization of accomplishing something new. What made it more special was the fact that it was Florence, and with every corner I turned something beautiful was in front of my eyes, whether the site of my destinations roof in the distance, children playing on the street, social interactions between friends, or shop owners standing outside their businesses. From witnessing this, I started to not consider myself as getting lost, but more as stepping into a new world where taking a wrong turn was not only alright, it was encouraged.

This happened a lot throughout the free days in Florence, which helped me to explore new areas and begin to understand how to move through them. Of course in the day it was more difficult with crowds of people everywhere, but living and moving through the city at night was a totally different experience that finalized the whole realization moment for me. Biking to the Uffizi and passing families, nicely dressed couples sitting on random staircases in front of neighborhood churches, dog walkers, and people saying good evening as I rode past them were moments where I fully engaged. Realizing my full potential here was even noticed through other students who were clearly studying abroad as I was. Watching them engage with the same new experiences I was having was a powerful and humbling event to witness. There are many young students in the city. Some are here to learn and some are here to eat at cafes all day long and party in the evenings. However, it is the connecting experience you feel with the ones that are truly studying and feeling the same things you are feeling that is special. You can feel this while passing drawing students that are staring up at streets, or sitting next to architecture students while they observe and draw the Cappella de' Pazzi.

Day or night, lost or found, by stopping just for a split second you can truly realize your place and the others that are in it with you. By taking these moments, it has finally hit me that I am in Italy; a feeling that I was wondering if it would ever occur. By exploring the city on my bike, as I ride down a quiet street at 7am in the morning or to a square along the Arno at night, I am in this place and understand it through the help of this exploration.



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The Realization of Form: On June 27 I sat in line for 2 hours. On June 28 I sat in line for 3 hours. I listened to different stories being told around me. I put up with people trying to sell me things. I sat through mass tourism at its worst. I saw people leave the line up. I saw people spending five minutes looking at a piece and then walk back outside. However, in the end when I turned the corner and bumped right into the David, Birth of Venus, Rape of the Sabine Women or Pieta, it was all worth it.

I have had a fascination with art from a young age, but now realize I have never fully understood what I liked about it. It is an incredible feeling to realize at 21 years of age, what you love about something. It is that moment where everything comes together and is completely understood. For me it was noticing what makes the human body beautiful and now being able to see that everywhere. These pieces have made this trip for me, and will make me never see the world in the same way. I got this sense because I saw the form and realized, "yes, this is what that is supposed to look like." It was the ability to stand with twenty people and filter out the conversations, sounds, movements and unknowingness, to be in silence whilst focusing at a slight curve on the calf of a leg's, or the delicate placing of a hand on a female figure. These pieces even made me feel a presence within them as if they were alive and real: their tension before throwing a stone, their emotion of holding their crucified son, their defenselessness while unable to protect a loved one from a Roman soldier. These feelings were something that I was overcome with a lot during the past few days, dealing with the loss of breath, a tense stomach and faint feeling. How could one single image have such an effect on a person? It is the quality and care that has gone into each stroke and hand movement to make that perfect curve or blend of two colors. It took all my might not to reach out and run my finger along these perfections.

After witnessing these works, it made viewing other pieces so much more valuable. The first understanding moment came in the Santissima Annunziata, when I finally started to see perception, form, color, detail and proportion. After that afternoon at the Renaissance church, everything clicked and I noticed my viewing habits starting to change by accompanying more thought, passion, hesitation, and understanding. This learning point for me made all my experiences more memorable, and something that at that moment I knew would be burned into me forever. Even recalling it now, I feel overcome with the thought of these recollections of how I felt. If I will take away one thing from this trip, it is the ability to carry the feelings and emotions I felt at the moments I viewed these masterpieces. Not only will I take these moments with me forever, but I now know that what it is that I seek in a piece of art is to make a more meaningful connection for myself.



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Pieta and Duomo Connection: As a person of Catholic faith, I try to go to church every Sunday. I was not aware that being in Florence would have such an effect on my understanding and feelings towards my faith. When the chance to attend Sunday mass at the Duomo came up, I knew it was an experience I would not have wanted to miss. The mass itself was like any other I have been to. I did not feel anything special at the beginning to be honest, but it was not until I looked up at the ceiling that my eyes were opened and I realized where I was. The elevation and characters of the ceiling hooked me. While being in that place and listening to the mass, looking at this story above made me more aware of my faith. It was this painting and the elevation that made me focus on the mass and what I was feeling, raising to the sky. All I could really think about was how inspired and understanding the frequent churchgoers must feel by seeing this every Sunday. There are some times that we forget our faith and what we believe, but it is these images that help us to understand and remember. It was also a great feeling to sit under this structure with three other students who were going through the same moments as myself, and even other travelers and locals.

A moment that made this all come into perspective and brought me closer to the origins of my faith was viewing the Pieta. At first I did not fully understand importance of the piece. I have grown up with this image and statue in my house, however I have never looked at it closely enough to understand what it stands for. It is amazing how a piece of art, of someone's interpretation, can make a person realize the actual happenings of an event. It was this piece that put the death of Christ into perspective for me. No other interpretation was able to captivate me in the way that the Pieta did. The emotion in Mary's face and the relief in Jesus put into perspective the feeling of these people and what they went through. The limpness of Jesus' body was something I have never witnessed before in any other rendering, I have noticed usually all of them seem stiff. His form was accurate and gave a real sense of his state at that moment, a snapshot of time. The way his arms limped onto Mary's body and the form of his underarm heavily placed on her was amazingly detailed and made the overall image that much more powerful as rendered realistically.

Seeing this image and feeling this pain of what these people went through, helped me to connect to how I must feel about this event and my faith. This image stayed with me, and helped me while in mass to understand why I was there and why I was feeling the way I was. It is a very powerful thing to have these revelations and feelings just from viewing a piece someone has created. But it is respected that these artists and architectures put the care and quality into their work, so viewers could have these special moments that connect us with our faith and ourselves.



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Experiencing Old Inhabitants - Brunelleschi's Cortile in Santa Croce and Convento di San Marco: I was already in a state of awe from viewing Santa Croce when we entered the cortile designed by Brunelleschi. As soon as I entered it and viewed the entire space, I felt like I had never seen a more perfect place. As soon as I walked in I heard water running, birds chirping and fluttering above, and the quietness of calm air that surrounded us. I enjoyed the two contrasts provided from feeling outside whilst being inside. We took seats in one of the corners and sat in silence, as it was apparent everyone was taking in the space. It was not until it was inspirationally said that this space was used by students like ourselves when it was first made, that I fully began to realize the beauty and importance it had over me. I pictured students using the space, walking freely around it and discussing different topics. It was not hard to imagine this space inhabited in that way. I also had a similar reaction in the Convento di San Marco. It was amazing to walk through and see their living spaces. To walk on their floors and touch their door handles, to feel enclosed in their rooms and peaceful while walking down the hallways. Listening to the sound of my shoes gently hitting the floors and the echo they made put me in that place. By simply doing this I was overcome with a sense of habitation from the ones who once lived there. It is these feelings of connections to the people, spaces and environments that have helped me to understand and feel my own presence in other places, which is a humbling experience.

These moments in these spaces lasted for a long time, as I was able to constantly hold on and return to it. As I felt I was coming out of the moment, one glance or listen in the direction of some birds brought me right back. It was difficult to leave the space as this kept happening, as I kept falling back into a state of tranquility. After our lecture was complete and everyone had left the cortile, I stayed longer and ate my lunch in total quietness. It came to me that spaces like this are the form of good inspiration, and working in them are healthy for the mind. This moment in these spaces helped me throughout the trip, as I was able to constantly go back in my mind to that place and be inspired and at peace all over again. These moments and spaces that are now etched into my mind have helped me see their importance for me as a student, so I can constantly find and create similar spaces and feelings. It is amazing how something so quiet and hidden can have an effect on a person, in which you know will be with them forever in their studies, life, and passions.

