

FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 NATHAN WADDINGTON

The Basilica of San Lorenzo

While in the Basilica of San Lorenzo, I found myself sitting down, looking around the basilica, at the dome and the apse, thinking, "I thought Brunelleschi did some work here, but this dome doesn't look like his." I looked a bit more and saw the entrance to the Old Sacristy. I walked over to it and as I passed through into the space I realized this is Brunelleschi's work! I hadn't thought that I knew enough about an architect to recognize his's work without knowing for sure who did it, with the exception of perhaps Zaha Hadid. But when I walked through the door into the space, I realized for certain that the dome was Brunelleschi's. This was the first time I had that realization, for I only knew that he had done work for the basilica without being sure which part or where it was.

When I got into the space I looked for minutes on end, wondering about the construction of the dome and if it informed of the great dome on the Duomo. I stood up on a raiser where there was a cabinet and started to draw what I saw, and immediately a security guard came wagging his finger - come off, come off. I stepped down and kneeled on the ground to try to get a better position for drawing. Then I saw several security guards coming out from a door in the cabinet and the carpet had been dirtied by people walking on it. I thought, "good, a place to sit where I won't damage anything" - same security guard, same wagging finger. This time I stood to continue my drawing.

Not five minutes went by and I saw the security guard coming back, but this time he was carrying something - his chair. He sat it down next to where I had sat on the carpet, looked at it, and said, "5 minutes for you, 5 minutes for me."

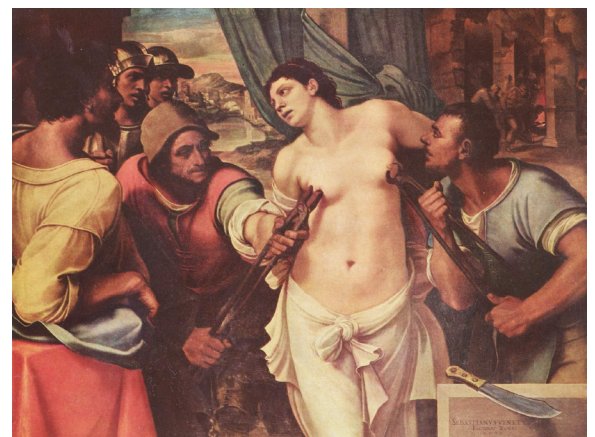
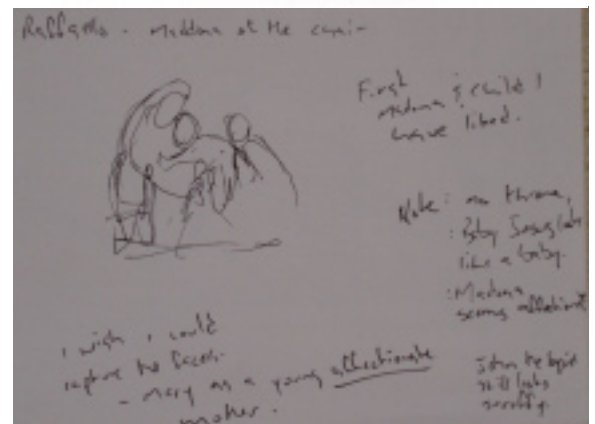


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Galleria Palatina at Palazzo Pitti

For years I have been seeing the Madonna and Child motif, and I have always considered it somewhat stale and uninspiring - a woman on a throne and a baby on her lap with (in some cases) the features of a man. Going through the cities in Italy I have seen the same motif repeated again and again in the churches, in the museums, and even on the walls of private residences as little chapels to the Madonna and Child. It took me until going into the Galleria Palatina at Palazzo Pitti to find a rendition that actually moved me, a Madonna and Child I appreciated - Raphael's Madonna of the Chair, which depicts Mary as a young, affectionate mother, holding her child (who is a child) in an embrace with (a still scruffy) John the Baptist as a toddler nearby. I sketched out the painting (no photos are allowed in the museum) and found myself transfixed by the serenity of the scene, wishing I could capture the faces, the look on Mary's face. I closed my eyes and could still see her image. The composition brought Madonna and Child back to a human scale, no throne, just a chair, and halos which were very subdued and subtle (without which, one might have made the mistake that this was a painting of a young mother and her children).



On the other side of the room was a painting that took me out of my serene state of mind - the martyrdom of St. Agatha by Sebastiano del Piombo, an unsettling image of a woman being tortured and killed, I later looked up the story of St. Agatha and was not comforted by it. It simply reminded me of the cruelty that people treat each other with. I did however come away from these two paintings with a new appreciation of how artists can affect emotion and thought. I won't soon forget either painting or the feelings I experienced seeing them.