

FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 BEN NG

Santa Maria Novella Station – Seeing an Old Friend

The passenger terminal at Santa Maria Novella Station had always been a site of interest for me. This was largely due to the fact that Heather and I had researched it back in the Spring during our preparation course lat 391. Whilst heading over to see it after we reached Florence, I had doubts on whether this was a good day to see the station. It was in the mid-afternoon and I was sure that the site would be a packed, crowded area.

Upon parking my bike and catching a glimpse at the ticket booth area, my suspicions were confirmed. However, once I entered the ticket booth area and turned around to look at the light entering through the ceiling, all my worries and suspicions eased away. I knew then that I would be able to get the experience that I came for, even if it meant having to deal with mass numbers of people and the noise that comes out of that.

Once I stepped into the passenger terminal, one distinct statement came into my mind. As Russell has said to us many times, once you study a topic and become familiar with it, “it’s like seeing an old friend”. For me, that is exactly what this moment felt like. If I were to imagine the emotions I would feel after not seeing a good friend of mine for an extended period of time, the range of emotions would probably end up along the same lines: anxiousness, followed by joy, relief and peace.

I was able to find a small crevice along the wall where I stayed for a few moments, just enjoying the light and the vast open space for what it was intended for.



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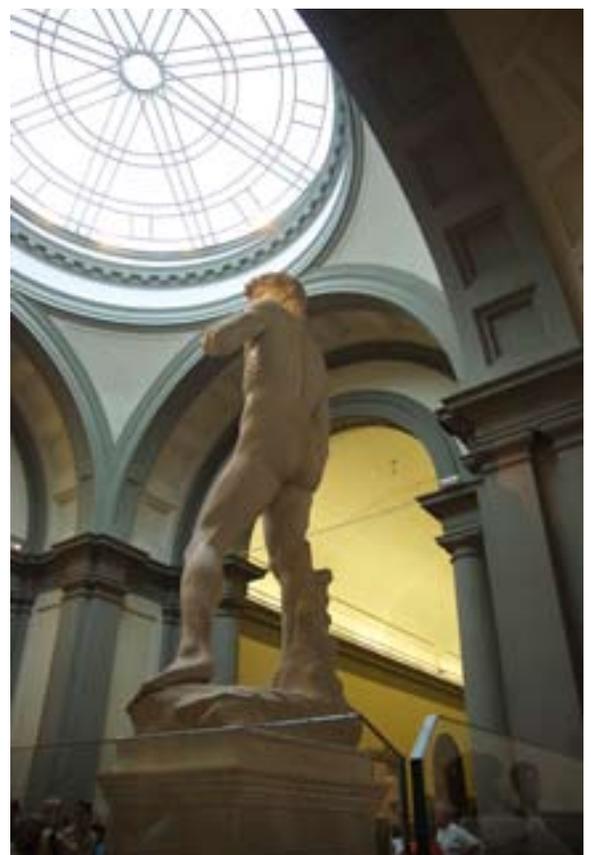
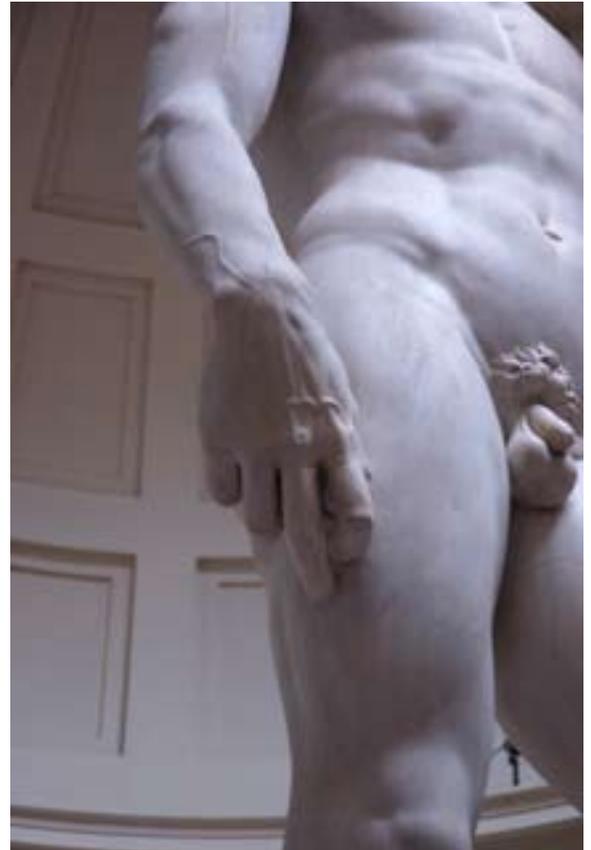
David @ The Galleria dell'Accademia

This day could have turned out rather poorly. Instead I experienced one of the most pleasing moments of the trip thus far. Prior to my experience at the Accademia, I had tried to visit Santa Spirito and San Lorenzo for Michelangelo's Staircase and Laurentian Library only to find out that both were closed. By this point, late in the day, I was dejected and tired, but also driven to get something out of the day. I went over to Santa Maria Novella, and then over to the Accademia. To my luck, Nat was already at the front of the line, which allowed me to bypass several hours in line. I told myself that I would not subject myself to mass tourism, but because Nat was already at the front of the line, I felt it was an opportunity that I should not pass up.

We entered and turned the corner to where David was placed. Turning the corner to see the David was an incredible feeling. It made my heart skip as well as making me physically stop to take in what I was seeing.

My memory on the contents of David was blurry and unclear. What I did remember was the perfection of bodily proportions in this statue. Luckily for me, Nat remembered much more than I did. She was able to share her knowledge with me while standing right in front of the David. She reminded me that this version of David captures him at the moment he turns to throw the stone at Goliath. It was then that I connected the dots with the details of the statue and the concept behind it. It was this that put me in a state of transcendence. I started noticing the veins in his arms, the twisting of his core and the flexion in his abs and legs. The pinnacle of this experience for me was walking around the statue of David and finding the angle that captured moment and adrenaline that rushed through his body. It showed the weight in his back leg ready to be transferred with his eyes peering over his left shoulder. This angle helped me understand the emotion that was to be conveyed with the statue.

Reflecting back on it now, it seems strange to me that I almost missed this opportunity and the experience of transcendence that I had there. A potentially disappointing day turned out to be a good one.



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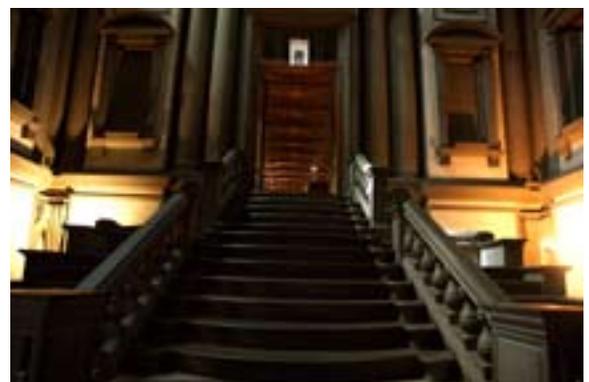
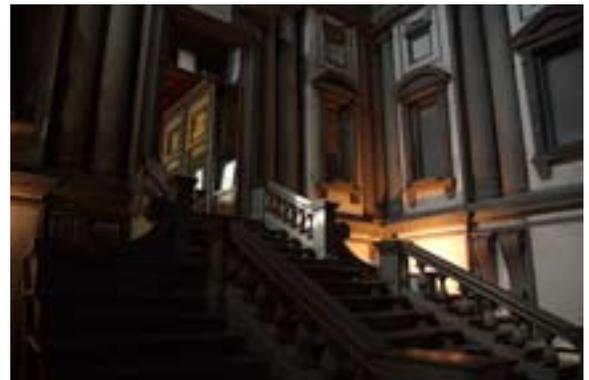
The “No-Photo” Lady @ San Lorenzo

I arrived at San Lorenzo hoping to see the Laurentian Library and Michelangelo’s staircase. This was the third time I had tried to see it as the first two times were closed. I entered the room containing Michelangelo’s staircase, and after taking it all in, I tried to pull out my camera discreetly to take a photo. However, before I could do so, the lady who was there quickly came up to me stating “No Photo, No Photo”!

After she had stopped me from taking photos, I looked at alternatives on how to capture what I was seeing. I turned to sketching, but realized quickly that I have little to no skill in this realm. After spending some time in the library I returned to the staircase to give sketching another chance. Again, it did not turn out well.

I decided to try another approach. This time I engaged the lady who was there and ask her permission. At this moment what hit me was something that my Italian language instructor said to the class last spring. He told us that if we tried to speak their language, they would appreciate it more than the average tourist. I did my best to communicate to her in Italian that I was a Canadian student studying here and would appreciate it if I could take some photos of the staircase.

I watched her contemplate, but she eventually gave in and left the room. She did not radio anybody, or watch me like a hawk. She simply left the room and turned a blind eye. I left making sure that she was appreciated for her generosity, to which she replied “grazie ti”. It was the only time I had seen her crack any kind of smile. I walked to the adjacent side of the cortile to reflect on what had just happened. She had no reason to grant me permission to take any photos, but she allowed me to. I tried putting myself in her position. Constantly acting like a big brother and disallowing people from taking photos, putting their feet up on the ledge or entering unauthorized or cordoned-off spaces would eventually take its toll on me as well. For someone to show a little bit of courtesy towards me would go a long way as well.



Lunchtime @ Santa Croce

There I was, sitting on a bench on the outskirts of Piazza Santa Croce observing and studying the space for my application of Dynamics of Delight, when an old, little Italian lady came and sat down beside me. She pulled out her aluminum-wrapped sandwich and started eating it. I turned to her to say “buongiorno”, to which she replied a long sentence in Italian, which I did not understand. I sat there for a while studying the space, while she occasionally blurted out what seemed like a statement or two directed towards me in Italian. I could do nothing but nod and smile. I wished I could understand her.

A little while later, pigeons and small birds slowly accumulated at our feet. They were probably smelling and sensing the food that the lady was eating. I look off to my left to see a little boy who could have been no older than five, sprinting towards us, trying to kick every bird in his way. The lady got up in anger to protect the birds from harm. Again, she turned to me to mumble something in Italian that I could not understand. She started feeding the birds, and in no time at all, we had about fifteen birds at our feet.

I told her I was a Canadian student in Italian, to which she replied, “tourist”? I told her no, and that I was a “studente”. She continued to feed the birds, while becoming friendlier towards me at the same time. I still did not know what she was saying, but from her hand gestures and her smile, I could tell she was trying to show me how the smaller birds were faster than the bigger pigeons. What I saw through that, was that this lady was sharing with me something that she enjoyed doing. She finally finished her lunch and got up to leave. She came towards me, still speaking Italian that I did not understand, and brushed the side of my face with her hand while giving a warm smile. This scared and shocked me, but I could not help but feel content towards her. It felt like I had connected with this old lady and shared a moment with her. Perhaps this happens to her a lot, but for me, in a foreign country where I have been trying to fit in for the most part during my stay in Italy, it was the first time where I felt like I really had been accepted into this environment.