

FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 DOMINIC WONG

Transcendent Moments

There is an indescribable moment of transcendence that is spoken of throughout the Italian Field Study. This moment is filled with overwhelming awe and speechlessness while the rest of the world continues on with its business.

Experiencing this moment of transcendence involved feeling aesthetic pleasure that derives from the effortful achievement over an uncertain boundary. And throughout this city I was in search of a transcendent moment. Though it was through riding around and immersing myself in the observation of how people move and interact in Florence that the process of finding a transcendent moment became the transcendent moment itself

In terms of the city and its buildings, the aesthetic message I received was through the lines, edges, and negative spacing. Every once in a while inside a Piazza, a courtyard, or an enclosed space, I would look up and the beauty of the clouds-in-motion are a breathtaking sight. The height of the facades would frame the sky, cropping out a section of it so that we're able to take a closer view at what's happening and watch the clouds move.

My first reaction was that I've never seen this happen in Vancouver. But then I understood that the buildings and the sky created an intricate relationship with one another - the light from the sky lighting the facades of the buildings, and the buildings in return the favor and frame the changing sky.



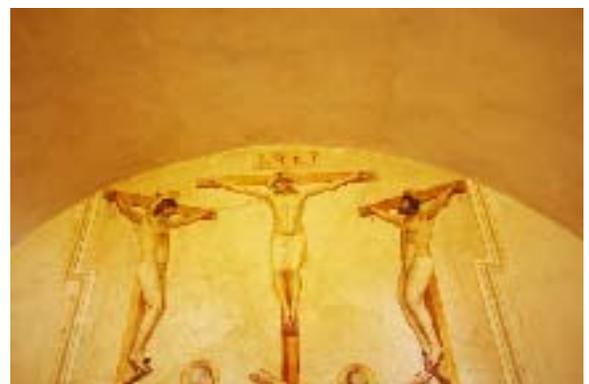
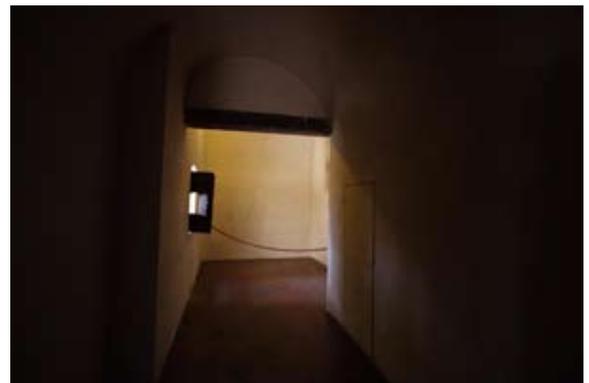
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When we were brought to the Museum of San Marco, it was the restrictions placed on taking photos that again hinted at my interest of the area. The thrill of the challenge was there to get the best photos possible of the space, but also to experience it for myself - rather than doing a group thing. As a group we had walked through the courtyard and split up on our own. I decided to go through the rooms, sneaking as much photo shots as I can. Though the experience was still of any other museum, it was the upstairs of San Marco which surprised my the most.

Passing the painting of the Madonna after the stairs, I started to peek into the many rooms which were along the upstairs hall. And after realizing each room held a painting of a significant moment in Jesus Christ's life, my walk along the hallway not only looked out for the story in each painting, but the patterns that setup the entire experience. The entire upstairs presented itself like an old stable inn with small single rooms resembling the historical account of when Mary and Joseph went around to find a room for the birth of their son. There were three specific rooms had an open window that allowed the sunlight from the roof to shine in. And in every room, the painting of the crucifixion was hung at an angle in which the viewer is humbly, but also condemingly looking upwards, as if they are placed on the level as those who put Him up there.

One room I entered at one end of the hallway had a large dark room first, unlike the other rooms. Light was cast onto a painting a couple feet away, but I was unable to see it while standing in the dark room. As I turned the corner to my right the painting was revealed, depicting the moment where the crucified thief on Christ's right-hand side was saved at the last moment. The thief on his left has an agonizing expression whilst all of the others in the painting, including Christ, and the thief on the right, wear a peaceful look. Seeing this moment in the story of Christ that is often overlooked by many and finding this moment captured by this painting was an amazing and surprising experience. Nonetheless, the dark room preceding the painting emphasized the mood, content, and setting so much more than any of the other rooms.



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Another transcendent moment occurred at the church of Santa Croce. Upon entering the church, my mind was set on finding where natural light was coming from and what things, at this time of day, it was shining down upon. We arrived at the church very early in the morning and the church was nearly empty. Inside it was nearly silent.

The only audible sounds were the footsteps of the few people who were inside until an organ started playing on the left hand side of the nave - a roped off portion of the church dedicated to prayer. It was brightly lit by the sunlight and a bird was trying to fly out through the stained glass window.

Quietly being inside the church by myself set up the mood and atmosphere of being in a sacred space. That is until we walked outside to the Pazzi Chapel, and in a second, I experienced the transition from the church interior and into the enclosed field with sparrows soaring around it. It was a completely new experience after I set foot outside of the side doors from Santa Croce. And from the Pazzi Chapel we entered into Brunelleschi's Cortile - once again the entire environment shifted from the sounds of birds chirping to the sound of water. Even the birds flying in there weren't making any noises. The space was serene and yet again, I was taken from the previous space and moved into another one spontaneously, but yet very well designed as the space opened up more and more from the church, to the field, to the Cortile.



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Another moment came from one of the solo adventures I took around the city. It was a cloudy day and I was biking out to explore the city of Florence. After taking a long route around the city to sit and enjoy the various piazzas and markets, I decided to go up to Piazzale Michelangelo.

Once I arrived at the point where people lock their bikes, I saw two flat roads that lead straight up. Instead of walking up steps towards the piazza, I decided I was confident that I could ride straight up the hill on my single-speed bike. Half way up the hill I spotted the San Miniato al Monte church further up from the Piazzale Michelangelo.

With Peter F Smith's Dynamics of Delight in mind, I recalled the point he made about "overcoming uncertainties to expand the boundaries of our knowledge" (Smith). Biking up to the church was a difficult uphill ride. Nevertheless my mind was set on getting up on that hill to the church. It was then again that Smith's term of "Sublime" popped up in my head. Riding up that hill and going through uncertain paths put me in the presence of danger, all at the same time with my legs feeling like they are about to give up. The view that surpasses the Piazzale Michelangelo was my motivation.

After 25 minutes of the repetitive routine of biking and resting, I made it up to San Miniato a Monte. At that moment, the view of Florence was captured by photo that still cannot describe the view that was in front me. It was then again that aesthetic pleasure was achieved and won through effort - physical effort. I soaked in the experience of being up at San Miniato, visited the inside, and sat by the ledge to have an evening watching the sun start to set over the city.

