Learning Tuscany: Course Descriptions, Summer 2016

Learning Tuscany, ART 319T / ART 320K / ART 379T / ART 320
Ornamentation in Northern Italian Art
Michael Mogavero, Associate Professor in Studio Art (mogavero@austin.utexas.edu)

Throughout the history of Italian art, ornamentation has played a critical role in its development. Beginning with Etruscan decorative arts so heavily influenced by Classical Greek works to Renaissance artists and architects who nurtured a unique and original vocabulary of ornamentation in their paintings, sculptures and architecture between the 14th – 17th centuries.

Ornamentation in the Italian Renaissance was not relegated to a strictly decorative practice. Instead, at its best it played a fundamental role in visually representing religious and philosophical beliefs of the time and was often created as tangible symbols that would solidify man’s orderly relationship with his faith and place in the world.

Whether it is the mathematical complexities of the floor mosaics in Siena’s Duomo or the magnificent architectural façade of the Italian Gothic style cathedral in Orvieto or Gentile da Fabriano’s important painting “Adoration of the Magi” from the Uffizi Gallery in Florence ornamentation has enhanced the perpetual power and the sustained longevity of so much of Italian art.

These courses will study the history of Italian ornamentation through field trips, lectures and studio work. Examples of the development of an Italian ornamental style will be viewed and discussed by visits to museum and architectural sites in cities such as Florence, Rome, Orvieto, Cortona, and Siena.

Learning Tuscany, ARH 331J (VAPA, GC)
Gothic and Renaissance Art and Architecture in Central Italy
Dr. Ann Johns, Program Director, Senior Lecturer in Art History (acjohns@austin.utexas.edu)

We will focus on the rich tradition of both Gothic and Renaissance art and architecture in central Italy. In introductory courses, we learn that the Gothic style is the last and most elaborate of medieval modes, whereas the art of the Italian Renaissance is a return to Antiquity. What we find when we are in Italy and have the opportunity to look at the real works of art is something much richer and more interesting. We see “Gothic” painters who employ the rudiments of scientific perspective, while we encounter “Renaissance” sculptors and architects who also incorporate Gothic decoration and architectural features into their work. Painters like Fra Angelico and Gentile da Fabriano create stunningly convincing and naturalistic landscapes and fully modeled figures, while still using lavish quantities of gilding and decorative patterning. Brunelleschi’s famous dome of Florence cathedral—the signature monument of the early Renaissance—is encased by graceful Gothic ribs. All of the cities that we will visit—Florence, Rome, Siena, Orvieto, Arezzo, Cortona, and even our own Castiglion Fiorentino—possess countless works of art and architecture that demonstrate the difficulty of separating the Gothic style from the Renaissance once we’re in Italy.

Unlike classes here in Austin, few of our meetings will take place in a classroom. Much of our examination of Gothic and Renaissance works will take place in cities like Florence, Siena, Orvieto, and Rome, under the gaze of actual works of art such as Duccio’s Maestà and Brunelleschi’s Florence dome. A Gothic monument like the Cathedral of Siena holds, in fact, artistic treasures by some of the greatest sculptors of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, including Nicola Pisano, Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini.