

I was granted the opportunity to study abroad in Florence, Italy for the winter of 2016. It consisted of a three week study of intermediate drawing in a studio environment. I was able to use my free time to study the historical works of art contained within this wonderful city as well as working on my own sketches. I also travelled to Sorrento to visit the sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum and took a one day trip to the city of Lucca.

This was my second time studying in Italy and I returned to explore more of a culture with which I one day hope to be more intimate. With this in mind, I tried to follow more of not only the day to day life but also the current news and ideas that were shaping the city and the country. And what I noticed is that they are more engaged in actively protesting that which they feel is a wrong. Their transportation workers frequently go on strike and while I was there, two different protests occurred against war and other government issues. These protests were staged in various cities. It has been a long time since I have read about any major protests of such a magnitude and I give them credit for using their right to voice an opinion.

Of course some of the differences arise from the proximity of our country as compared to theirs to world conflict. They see the armed guards patrolling the steps of the cathedrals and major museums because they will face the direct repercussions of the war in the middle east while Americans know there is an ocean between. Yet these are decisions made partly by the American government for which Italians feel the effect.

There was very little which disorientated me about returning to Florence. It was as if I had never left. One thing I have learned, though, is never be afraid to ask. Ask directions, ask if this is the right train platform, ask where to get a bus ticket. It not only saves a lot of anxiety, but sometimes you meet people that way. For example, I had a very good time trying to find the right platform for the return train from Lucca to Florence because I met a couple from Great Britain who were also trying to figure it out and we navigated our mistake together, laughing and talking. It was great fun instead of being anxious.

Study in Italy has made a great change in my life. When I arrived back in Florence, I knew I was in a foreign country, but the people were not alien to me. They were people facing the same problems and issues, enjoying the same pleasures and amusements. And for a moment I was a part of their community just as I am part of my community back in the United States. And I hope, in the future, to be a longer term part of their community. I would like to find a career where I can travel back and forth between Italy and the United States because, while there is art and history in Europe that a new country like ours can not match, I realize now how much parkland and open space there is here that I am equally in love with. Study abroad has created a bit of an issue for me which I playfully like to describe as being, as the song goes, "...torn between two lovers." So there are moments when I think about how much easier it would be if I had never gone. But I met so many people, made some good friends, both casual encounters and long term relationships, and not just with Italians. I would sit and sketch on the loggia in Piazza della Signoria every night and in this way I met people from China and Japan, Australia and Turkey, and of course Italian. So in a few hours, I not only studied the statues that were there and did some of my own drawing, but I learned about the people of the present day. And they learned a bit about me. Curiosity is a great translator. It will find a way to communicate.

Talking to friends of mine in the art world of Florence, I learned about their concerns for the preservation of their history and it made me wonder why the world community does not do more. The Renaissance and the Baroque are two eras in art history that have far ranging repercussions for every artist who has come after so I think we all share in the responsibility to help conserve it. Maybe one day I will play a role in this endeavor.

So there has been a great change in my life since returning from Italy and I look forward to seeing the fruits of that change continue to ripen in the years to come.