

Faculty of Art Florence Program, 2019 – Research Theme
Expanding Perspectives and Consciousness in Art and Design
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Considered the birthplace of the Renaissance, Florence stands as an important location in western history. Around 1425, looking at the portal of the Duomo Baptistery, engineer/architect Filippo Brunelleschi discovered one-point perspective. This western pictorial convention helped to usher in a mathematical, secular, and individualist approach to seeing and viewing the world, and contributed to Enlightenment/Modern values still with us today. From our contemporary context, it is important to learn how dominant pictorial structures have shaped thought and excluded other cultural perspectives. The Renaissance was an early global phenomenon, and in our current version of globalization, it is important to learn of different forms of depiction that have told different types of narratives - from then to now. Looking deeply and examining alternative cultural depictions against the dominant narrative that emerges from European history, and its artifacts, is an important exercise in understanding. Western culture can't be challenged without knowing its underlying structures first.

The embellished surfaces and objects found in the art and design of Florentine churches, museums, palaces, and artistic representations that propagate throughout the city are instructive of an Italian legacy fully intertwined with other cultures and civilizations. Decorative elements and coveted objects tell stories of exploration, war, colonization, and trading relationships. The current Italian luxury goods industry carry these stories as subtexts. Origins are found in Florentine museums and revealed in lush shop windows and markets that proliferate the city. Attracted as we are to these visions, it is important to ask: how did these decorative elements evolve; from where were some of these motifs and objects appropriated; where do we find these forms today; and finally, where is this product really made today?

Through its abundance, Florence provides a rich site from which to reflect upon the foundations of western history and work toward a repositioning of this history. Our Canadian frame of reference, and its cultural aspirations, can be examined and reinforced while abroad. Our active emphasis upon decolonization and the recognition of Canada's ancestral people, it is interesting by contrast to go to Italy – a country of inescapable history. Ancestry is deeply rooted in daily regional life - most specifically through the rituals of food, and traditions protected generation to generation. There is great value in being submerged this experience for an extended period of time. Addressed with an informed eye, Florence becomes a fruitful platform from which to make and reconsider one's cultural frame of reference.