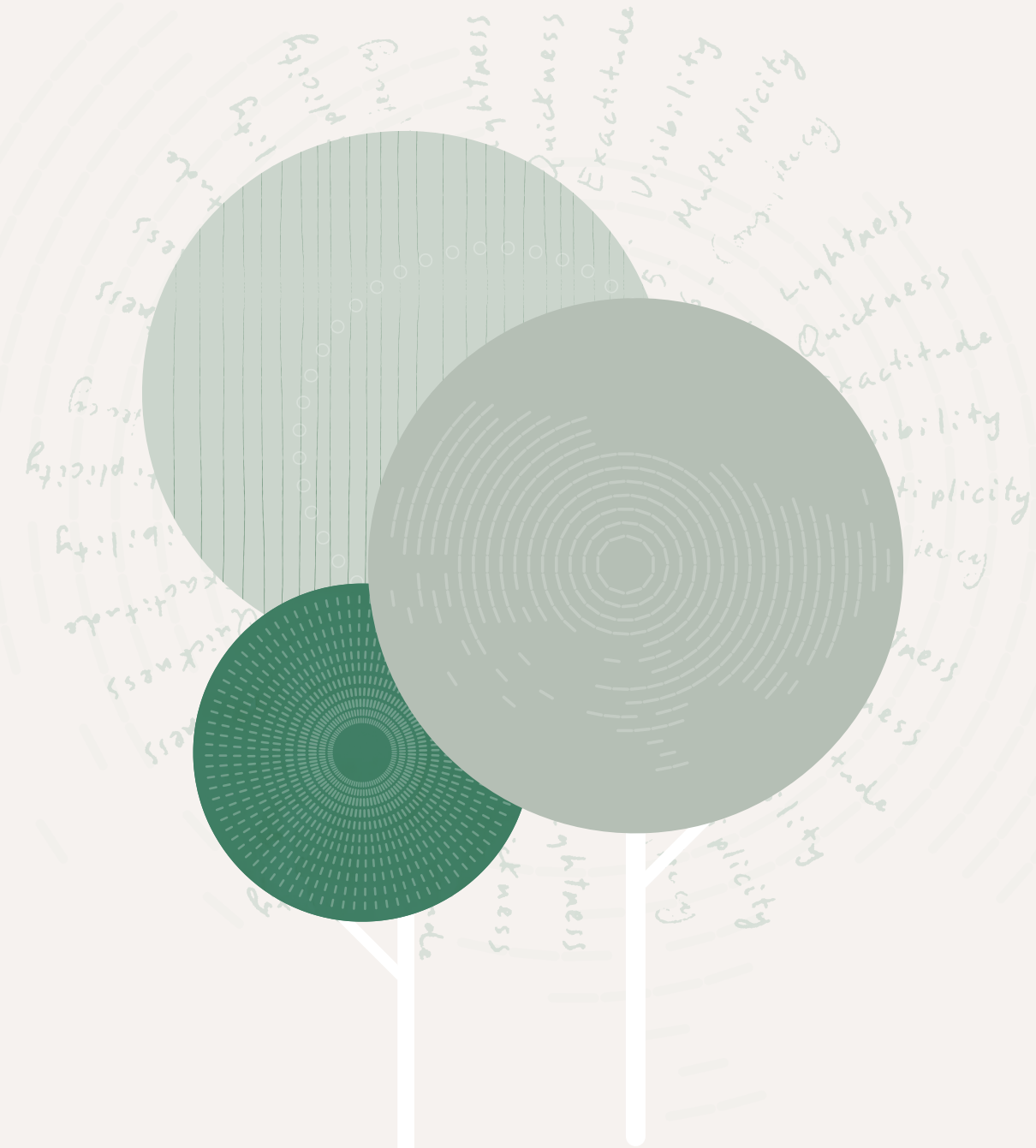


BLENDING MAGAZINE

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GARDENS OF CULTURE

ITALO CALVINO'S MEMOS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

ART | LITERATURE | COMMUNITY | FOOD & WINE | TRAVEL | FASHION | STUDENT VOICE | ALUMNI

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

It has become a terrible cliché to introduce a piece of writing with an explanation of the origin of a particular word, but we're asking to bear with us with just a paragraph. We promise it will be worth it.

The word "culture" has its origins in the Latin term "colere," which originally meant "to till" or "to cultivate" the land. Over time, this word evolved to encompass not only the act of farming but also the nurturing of human practices, customs, and beliefs. It's from this very concept that the theme for the fall 2023 academic conference was born: Cultivating our minds, our passions, and our relationships is at the core of human existence.

And this same theme is shared by the issue of Blending Magazine you're currently reading. Italo Calvino's Memos offer us insights into the nuances of culture and the art of cultivating ideas, stories, and connections. In this issue, we present a diverse selection of student articles that delve into the heart of this theme:

"*I only hear silence*" by Ana Carolina Theodosio de Carvalho Ayres de Camargo, explores, through fiction, scientific concepts about the origin of our solar system.

"*Running: A New Way to Travel*" by Ian MacKay takes us on a journey of self-discovery and cultural exploration through the act of running.

Katherine Dyball's article, "*A Sanctuary of Peace in a Bustling City*," offers a poignant exploration of the green spaces within urban landscapes showcasing a profile of Florence's Giardino dell'Orticultura.

These articles and more in this issue exemplify the diverse perspectives and thought-provoking ideas that our talented students at FUA-AUF and AUF bring to the table. We hope that the pages of Blending Magazine serve as a rich tapestry of insights, inspirations, and cultural reflections.

Happy Reading,
The Blending Staff

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Conference Recap

by Meredith Bach

Florence University of the Arts, The American University of Florence, and Stony Brook University hosted their 12th annual academic conference on Friday, December 1st and Saturday, December 2nd, titled “Gardens of Culture - Italo Calvino’s memos for the new millennium.” Students, staff, and scholars gathered the Palazzo Strozzi’s literary cabinet, where - appropriately surrounded by books-they turned their attention towards Italo Calvino.

The conference celebrated the iconic Italian narrator’s 100th birthday by commemorating the “Garden of Culture” he fostered through his body of work. Panelists explored Calvino’s personal, artistic, and cultural heritage by investigating beyond his well-known stories and publications-delving into topics about his personal psychology and emotions, his participation in politics, history and science, and his connection to other industries and media.

Conference coordinators initiated the two-day conversation with opening remarks, contributed to by representatives from both the Regional Council of Tuscany and the Florence City council, as well as the Executive Vice President and Provost of Stony Brook University. Following this was the keynote speech from scholar Vittorio Coletti, “Calvino’s Precise Italian: Language and Style.”

Panel one discussed the breadth and impact of Calvino’s “literary landscape” over time, providing the audience with a comprehensive and thorough detailing of the author’s accomplishments. It also focused on his “Ecological Prophecy” and how ideas of nature and growth remain evident and consistent in his work.

The conference then moved to Palazzo Bombicci Guicciardini Strozzi, where Panels two and three were hosted in the school’s iconic “Pink Room.” Panel two featured presentations from university students in several courses from the semester: travel writing, creative writing, and wanderlust-the physical and emotional art of walking. Panel three was led by professors who exhibited ideas on the adversities and dark sides of Calvino, and his connection between literature and the visual arts.

Saturday’s share of the conference remained in the Pink Room. In the morning, two different presenters pitched theories on Calvino’s nature as a person and a writer who experimented with innovative writing techniques and creative boundaries.

Panel five investigated Calvino’s role in different areas of

life and industry. While one presentation equated him to a journalist, the other provided a historical background of the author’s involvement within the film and science industries. Another presentation observed how his work interacted with children and early education.

Panel Six was conducted by study abroad students from the Cultural Introductions course and Bibliotherapy course. Firstly, a student detailed the idea of modernization in Calvino’s work, while the other student detected bibliotherapeutic benefits in several of his stories.

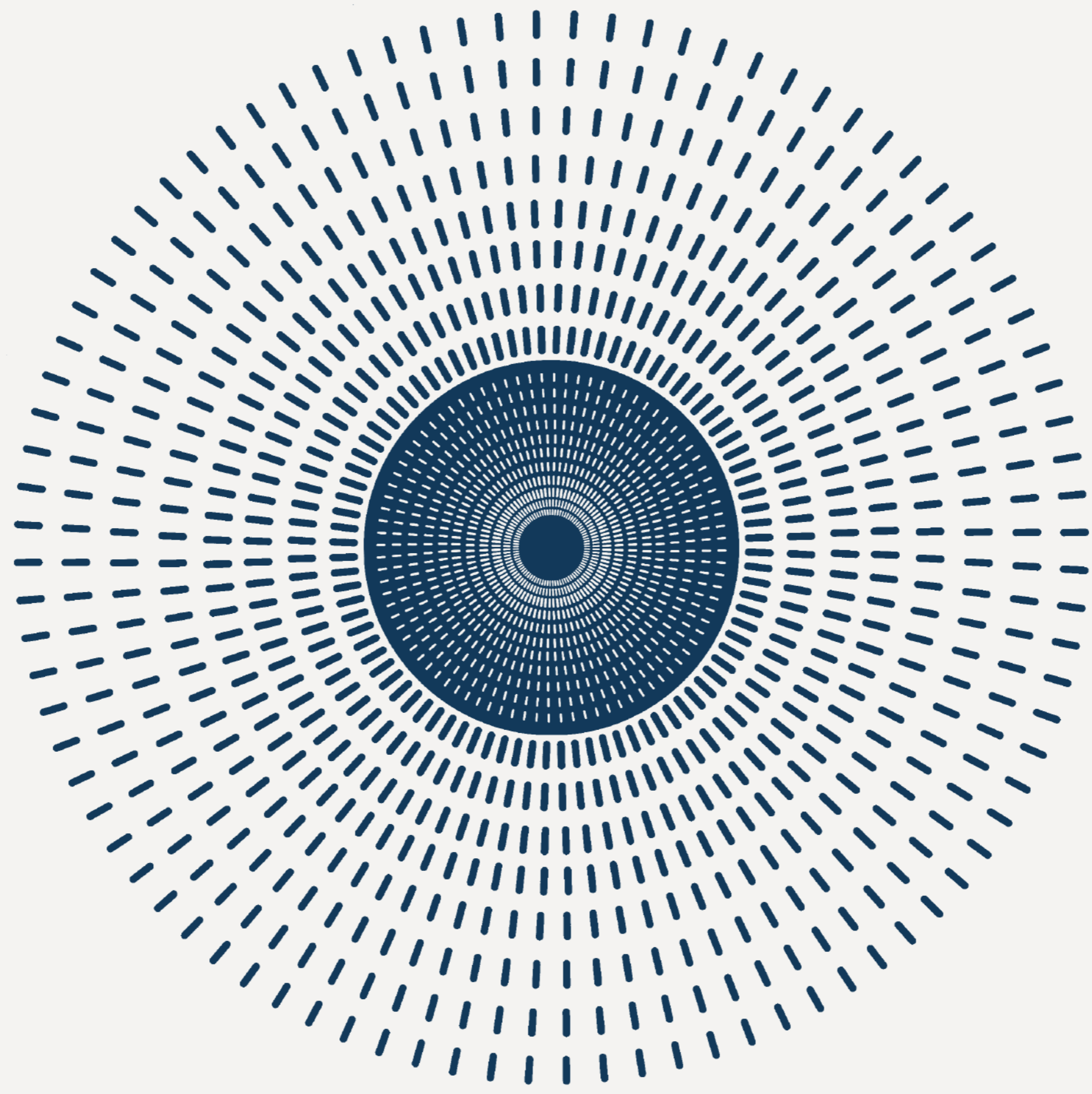
The last panel started with a painter who exhibited original works that connected to Calvino’s six memos and his story “Invisible Cities”. Finally, Sofia Galli of FUA-AUF drew connections between Calvino’s crucial lexicon and the evocative design of a Holocaust memorial.

Each panel was comfortably accompanied by coffee, pastries, and lunch - curated by FUA-AUF’s and AUF’s very own culinary and hospitality programs. Students from the university’s communication and media studies documented every event through journalistic, photographic, and social media coverage. In this way, the students’ significant involvement in the conference exemplifies Institution’s value of student and community engagement and their use of experiential learning models to enhance the academic experience.

In the end, after two days of various intercultural dialogue, the conference ended with one last form of conversation: music! Upon returning from a coffee break in the university’s library, attendees found the Pink Room transformed into a concert venue with speakers, instruments, and electronic synths. Along with a spoken word contribution from FUA-AUF professor Sofia Galli, musicians Michele Staino and Renato Cantini presented a concert of experimental house music, mixing speech, melody, and beats all in real time. The atmospheric sound that resulted from their work evoked a feeling of reflection, gratitude and reminiscence after a period of deep introspection and discourse.

It was just the right way to end the conference. Ultimately, the conference unfolded like the pages of Calvino’s stories: with patience, precision, and a lightness of imagination and wonder. Like his gardens of culture, the conference cultivated a conversation about culture too - successfully melding the university with the community once again. Happy Birthday, Italo Calvino!





trA

Art

Nature and Art Throughout History

By Hannah Hill, Julia Stuckart, Margaret Clark, Mariko Pallarito, Kelly Conroy

Nature is a very common theme amongst art as it is almost everywhere we look and often found in the most curious of places. During the Paleolithic era, nature emerged as the predominant subject in the majority of cave etchings. The Altamira cave in Spain is one of the most famous instances of nature found in Paleolithic art, as the inside of the cave is filled with a vast amount of engravings and paintings. Over 20,000 years people have been adding to the artwork inside the cave, but scientists cannot pinpoint the exact centuries these were created (Stewart). The bison on the ceiling is one of the most notable examples of prehistoric cave paintings since it was preserved so well. You can also find many other animals sprawled against the wall deep into the cave, such as deer, horses, and boars. These artworks were made by engraving, then painting on top of with an assortment of natural objects such as animal blood, berries, or colored rocks (Clottes). The way nature is represented and transformed into artwork is a symbolic reflection and testament to the artist's time and place in history. For example, at the time mentioned above, humans were still early in our development of technology, only having recently created stone tools. With a limited understanding of the world, the people of that time were painting in observation of their surroundings, not necessarily trying to make a statement, bolster creativity, or provoke emotion the way art is used today. For example, during the 1500s when the subject of art for many artists was focused around religious and biblical topics, nature was incorporated to provoke emotion. As seen in the painting below by Joachim Patinier in his piece *Charon Crossing the Styx* (1520-1524), nature is incorporated to aid in storytelling and intensify the sense of emotion. A dreamy, gentle blue skies and lush trees on the left depict heaven while the dark, stormy, and smoky skies on the right depict hell, as Charon crosses the water. This example shows that artists' depiction of nature in their work gets interwoven with the cultural and societal trends of their place in humanity's timeline. During the late 1800s, Claude Monet began to focus on a type of painting called impressionism. Monet tied together his love of art and nature to create pieces that represented nature differently. This type of painting introduced a new way to perceive the world and broke away from the stereotypical way of creating art. Impressionism work was done mostly outside to show how the world can be seen differently depending on the way the artist understands the world. Monet's 1872 painting entitled *Impression, Sunrise* was the piece that inspired the Impressionism art movement. This artwork shows the Le Havre harbor with a sunrise in the background. At first, this painting was criticized for its abstract approach. However, it sparked a huge movement throughout the art world to show that art can be diverse and unique. Impressionism had a large impact on the art world and showed people a different perspective to understanding the world we live in. The 19th century

marked a pivotal era in European art where nature emerged and shaped various artistic movements such as realism and impressionism. Realism is a movement characterized by its portrayal of everyday life, with inspiration in nature. This encompassed serene landscapes, people engaging in gardening, or farmers tending to their fields. The essence of realism is in capturing the intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world. One example illustrating this connection is Federico Andreotti's *"An Afternoon Tea"* (1900), a masterpiece set outdoors. Unlike earlier work centered around Greek gods or animals, this artwork places humans as its focal point. Hues of pink, blue, and orange dresses contrast against the rich green backdrop of grasses and leaves, emphasizing the human presence within nature. When discussing nature's relationship with art through the centuries it is important to mention how the representation has evolved in the 21st century. In the contemporary movement, it became popular to explore different mediums and many artists began using nature as a medium itself. One example is the American artist, Andy Goldsworthy. Goldsworthy views his art as a collaboration with nature. He uses found objects in nature such as leaves, rocks, and sticks to create either temporary or permanent installations. An example of one of his temporary installations is, *Sycamore Leaves Edging the Roots of a Sycamore Tree* (Goldsworthy). By using nature as his medium, Goldsworthy's art changes the viewer's perspective of the world. Specifically, when viewing his temporary installations, the perspective of both art, the world, and art's relationship with the world has changed. These installations are temporary just like humans. Many artists wish to create something that lasts beyond themselves but realistically nothing will last but nature. Seasons pass and nature changes, as does the world, but life keeps moving along. When taking art out of a gallery and allowing nature to truly have its effect, this allows anyone or anything to interact and truly allow art and nature to become one. It reminds the viewer and the world that art at its core has always originally been nature. The true connection between nature and art is the Fibonacci Sequence, which is found naturally in seashells, flowers, and leaf patterns. This can be seen in many of the examples previously mentioned such as *Impression, Sunrise*. This sequence is used prominently throughout the history of art. During the Renaissance period, many artists including Leonardo Da Vinci used nature to create harmony in his masterpieces. Leonardo Da Vinci manipulated his representation of nature in many of his paintings, most noticeably the *Mona Lisa*, by changing the perspective. The Renaissance brought about a transformative change in art history, serving as a truly innovative movement that allowed for future changes and experimental work involving art and nature. It was a turning point, and the relationship between art and nature was changed forever by the innovation and knowledge brought about by the Renaissance movement.



Invisible Art

By Zea McGarr

I talo Calvino's descriptive writing in his novel *Invisible Cities* has inspired artists around the world. In the novel, Marco Polo tells Kublai Khan of his expeditions through fifty-five cities. Eventually, the reader discovers that each city is truthfully just one, that city is Venice. Through his descriptive writing, each artist draws inspiration and uses their skill to create unique works, even when illustrating the same city.

Zenobia, one of the mentioned cities in this novel, has inspired numerous artists when it comes to illustrations of Calvino's work. This city is structured high in the air, supported by tall posts. A direct quote from the book describing this says that "the houses are of bamboo and zinc, with many platforms and balconies placed

on stilts at various heights, crossing one another, linked by ladders and hanging sidewalks, surmounted by cone-roofed belvederes, barrels storing water, weather vanes, jutting pulleys, and fish poles, and cranes." This descriptive passage has left lots of room for artists to interpret his work. Renowned Architect, Karina Puente, is one of the many artists inspired by Calvino's novel. Her detailed work depicts the city on dry land below the city, with structures placed throughout the high city. She takes the details from bamboo and interprets that into the pilings holding up the structures. Puente includes the cone-shaped roofs and fish poles hanging from the buildings. She reflects *Zenobia* accurately using the influence of Calvino's writing. David Fleck, another inspired artist,

also illustrates *Zenobia* high in the air. He includes the important features of the city having various levels. The fishing poles, water vanes, and pulleys can be seen in this work when looking at it closely. Fleck illustrates this city more compactly when compared to Puente's illustration, but also follows the description Calvino wrote for *Zenobia*. *Octavia*, a city structured similarly to a spider web, has also influenced artists. This city is located in between two mountains and is suspended over a "void." Calvino writes, "This is the foundation of the city: a net which serves as passage and as support. All the rest, instead of rising up, is hung below: rope ladders, hammocks, houses made like sacks, clothes hangers, terraces like gondolas, skins of water, gas jets, spits, baskets on strings, dumb-

waiters, showers, trapezes and rings for children's games, cable cars, chandeliers, pots with trailing plants." Thomas Schaller, a watercolor artist, used his skill to create his own interpretation of *Octavia*. His work reflects characteristics in Calvino's passage, such as the overall "spider web" feel. However, it does not portray sack-like houses, but instead tall ones that give the impression of a strong sand-colored material. The buildings, however, still hang over water and are held up by strings. Between *Zenobia* and *Octavia*, it can be seen how the mentioned artists have drawn inspiration from Calvino's detailed writing as well as numerous other artists. Due to his ability to create cities using his imagination as well as drawing inspiration from Venice, this had given artists freedom to interpret and illustrate.



Nudity in Art

BETWEEN THE RENAISSANCE
AND THE MODERN AGE

By Ryan Seka

A comparison of the Renaissance and modern art genres is a heavy undertaking. The density of subject matter, the sub-genres, the mediums, the motives, and the definitions of what made an artist an artist are all concrete examples. The further one dives into each, the further one feels unable to explain the magnitude of the most elevated renowned artists in the world. It is only when the value of yourself as the observer is realized, the energy you feel when you see something profound, that one can feel free to explain the ideas. The art was made for you, and from your opinion as a child in a museum to the thoughts even of a tenured art critic, is important. Growing up in the States I was exposed mainly to modern art. From this, I now recognize how my perception of art was influenced by modern artists and modern museums.

Renaissance art is very much alive. Throughout Florence, on every corner and every square is a display of art. Even the Uffizi Gallery, despite being a museum, delivers a unique experience with art being even in the smallest of corners and details. The allure of perfect realism was overwhelming, and a question needed to be asked. How have modern artists connected to these masters of form and composition?

Tiziano Vecelli (Titian) was an Italian painter from the Veneto region. He was born in the latter half of the 15th century and was a highly successful late Renaissance painter, known for possessing multi-talented painting skills, and for influencing later western artists. Many famous Renaissance works were commissioned, technically making the artists closer to what we would call modern-day illustrators. It is unknown if Venus of Urbino was specifically commissioned, but one thing is certain; Titian pushed the lines of sensuality and certainly composed this masterpiece as he saw fit. The painting moves the eyes masterfully from the dark backdrop at the top left of the foreground, guiding you to the woman's face first, a completely unashamed look in her eye that sets the tone for the entire piece. Next to her hair flowing in curls down her arm, to the positioning of the hands, one holding flowers, one covering herself. Then to the end of the bed, across the ripples in the bedsheets, to the dog sleeping peacefully, making the image feel quiet. Again we are pulled up to see two maids at work in the middle-ground of the room. Obscene pinup or high Renaissance masterpiece, this artist's understanding of intimacy, and how to move the eye has left him as one of the most notable high Renaissance painters and standard-setting artists for the female nude. When seen in person at the Uffizi Gallery the scene is larger than life. One quickly understands the reasons why

this piece is held in such regard. It takes almost an entire wall of its own, along with the majority of attention from all who enter the room. It is a prominent and intense presence, the sensuality of the scene heightening your subconscious awareness as you feel the eyes of Venus on you. Over 400 years later, another Italian artist was born in Livorno. Amedeo Clemente Modigliani was a painter and sculptor who created some of the most well-known (and controversial) nudes in Modern Art. His painting "Reclining Nude" was a modern take on the female nude of the Renaissance period.

His representation of the female form is very raw. Her body cuts the composition horizontally, leaving the eyes to only focus on her. He uses warm, soft skin tones against a dark background. The woman herself has a dark outline, further commanding the gaze. The hands and feet are out of frame, her eyes are darkened without detail. The viewer has no choice but to see her as she is without being distracted by finer details. The clean look of the Renaissance women and all of the background details that move the eye around are gone, it's just the viewer and the human body. Perhaps such deviations from tradition were what got the opening day of his first solo exhibition shut down by the police. This collection of nudes was highly controversial for the time, but the exhibition continued, and public interest was fueled further. However this was the intention of the work in a way, and, even a perfect reaction from those accustomed to the norm. Modigliani's nudes were unapologetically hedonistic, intentionally leaving nothing for the human form to hide behind.

It is easy to make the argument that modern artists were nowhere near as technically skilled as the Renaissance legends. It is a knee-jerk reaction to the issue. The question that can be posed, however, is did the artist achieve the intended goal? The composition, the subject matter, the reaction, and the mastery of the genre?

Modern art was never meant to be Renaissance art, it was an intentional dismissal of traditional styles, a move to abstract forms to express meaning. If the characteristic of the genre is not to do what the Renaissance artists did, how can one reasonably compare the two?

The viewer must judge the artist from the structures in which they worked. The Renaissance produced a myriad of beauty and emotion, a revolution in the portrayal of the human experience that changed everything.

One must ask, if everything has been done, is the only way to make something new achieved by undoing everything? Both of these artists achieved their intended goal, their target audience, and were very successful among their peers, as countrymen born 400 years apart.



Literature

The Six Memos Applied

By Cecilia DiAngi

Italo Calvino was many things, an influential and world-renowned Italian novelist, a journalist, and a memorable storyteller, but above all Calvino was a person who deeply loved literature. Upon becoming an established writer, he created six memos describing important values he wished modern-day writers to abide by: Lightness; Quickness; Exactitude; Visibility; Multiplicity; and Consistency. Although the last value, Consistency, was never completed due to his untimely death in 1985. The question remains—how does following these values reflect once stacked up to our modern aged greats—The New York Times bestsellers? Does following these rules guarantee success, or could they lead to a washed-up failure for these modern writers?

Before comparing Italo Calvino's values to the books, it's important to understand their core meaning. The first value, Lightness, is described as a way to subtract weight from writing, "I have tried to remove weight, sometimes from people, sometimes from heavenly bodies, sometimes from cities; above all I have tried to remove weight from the structure of stories and from language."

Along with eliminating unnecessary wording, Calvino looks to Lightness as a way to write optimistically in order to contrast the stressful and hard times the world faces. The second value is Quickness. Calvino defines this as "to jump from one subject to another, to lose the thread a hundred times and find it again after a hundred more twists and turns." Quickness is a way for writers to know when, how fast, and how long they should make readers wait for the plot to unfold or reveal the next big twist in the story they're reading. The third value, Exactitude, instructs writers to have a clear understanding of what they're writing about before they put pen to paper. Calvino's fourth value, Visibility, may also be called imagery. It can be explained as "the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut, of bringing forth forms and colors from the lines of black letters on a white page." The fifth value is Multiplicity. Calvino describes this as a reason for writers to shoot big and write with all their goals because it may be the only profession that allows such creative freedoms, "literature remains alive only if we set ourselves immeasurable goals, far beyond all



hope of achievement." As previously mentioned, the sixth value, Consistency, was never able to be fully explained.

If you never found yourself browsing the New York Times bestseller list, it works very simply. There are multiple lists divided by genres such as Paperback Trade Fiction, Hardcover Nonfiction, Children's Middle-Grade Hardcover, and many more. To be on a bestseller list, an author has "...to make a minimum of 5000 book sales (higher, depending on the list) in a single week across diverse retailers and from multiple geographic locations." The list may receive a new batch of books each week (depending on if the current books can hold their place), and the more weeks a book spends on the list, the more impressive its place will become. A few bestsellers that seemed interesting to stack up against Calvino's values are *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid, *Holly* by Stephen King, and *Wildfire* by Hannah Grace.

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo by Taylor Jenkins Reid is a novel well deserving of its title, as the main character marries seven times throughout the story. Diving into the first chapter of this book I was pleasantly surprised to find how fast it was to read. There wasn't an influx of unnecessary background information for the characters. All of the details were sprinkled in and left me wanting more as I flipped to the next chapters. Before I realized, I was many pages deep into the story, which is a reflection of Calvino's second value Quickness. Without revealing too much, I recognized during the reading how easy it was for me to picture the story of Evelyn Hugo, the woman that she was, and the reporter who was covering the story. Creating a sense of imagery from writer to reader is so important yet simultaneously difficult, as outlined in Calvino's value of Visibility. Done successfully, it's worthy of respect and I'm not surprised this book is getting it.

The second story I reviewed was *Holly* by Stephen King. This book took a different turn from *The Seven Wives of Evelyn Hugo* because of its more dark and disturbing context. Only a few pages into the book, the main character gets kidnapped and goes through several graphic and disgusting scenes during his imprisonment. As chapters passed, the

imagery and details steadily intensified to become more gruesome. The values from Calvino that stood out in this story were Visibility, Quickness, and Exactitude. There's Visibility in the vivid detail from which King writes and there's Quickness in how he intertwines those details from different character perspectives without fully involving them in the story yet. Quickness and Exactitude go hand in hand in this story because without the value of Quickness, King would have never been able to seamlessly write with Exactitude. There's no mess or haziness in the story despite multiple different character story-lines existing at once. King's writing here is clear and direct; doing a strong job of giving the reader timely information so as not to overwhelm them.

The last story I examined was *Wildfire* by Hannah Grace. This story is different from the other two books because it is written from two perspectives on the premise of a growing love story. While reading it, I enjoyed the author's way of writing from the viewpoint of such young characters. The story felt lighthearted, and easy to relate to, hallmarks of Calvino's value Lightness. The value that this story could work on is Multiplicity. Although I enjoyed the youthful perspectives and the varying emotions present in the storyline, I felt that in turn, it lost a sense of depth and

stability. I would have appreciated more focus on imagery of their surrounding community, and a more intricate plot. If Hannah Grace wrote this story with the hopes of it becoming the next great love story of the decade, a more complex and well-formulated story should have been developed. The lack of Multiplicity makes this story come across as just another cheesy romcom.

Overall, Italo Calvino's six values seem to stack up well when compared to the New York Times Best Sellers. *The Seven Wives of Evelyn Hugo* has spent a considerable 137 weeks on the bestseller list. *Holly* has spent 7 weeks and counting, and *Wildfire* has spent 3. After looking at the length of time they've spent on the list and the prevalence of Calvino's values that are represented in the respective stories, their comparative level of success makes sense. Some, if not all, of his values shine through the writing of these authors and prove to bolster their performance. Calvino's values are fitting long after his death because of their versatility. They're able to morph with the growing writing styles of different decades and continue to be relevant guidelines. Modern authors may find success without following Calvino's values, but they provide structure and pointers for authors to develop their expertise and produce solid pieces of work.



The Transcendentalism of Alchemy and Nature

By Eve Wodarczyk

Magic often eludes scientific explanation, but Italy's alchemical history and the exploration of nature as a transcendental force offers glimpses of the fantastical merging with reality.

In the fourth century BC, philosopher Aristotle proposed the concept of *prima materia*, described as "a preexisting entity without form susceptible of transformation into various forms and different identities." *Prima materia*, or "first matter," is a material essential to the creation of the philosopher's stone, a central artifact in the history of alchemy. This stone was said to have the ability to transform simple metals into extraordinary ones, and even cure ailments or bestow immortality through its elixir of life. As Aristotle explored this matter, he contemplated the phase changes between fire, air, water, and earth. This raised questions about transforming material from one form to the next.

The Alchemical Door in Rome is a physical testament to this age-old concept. The door was built by Massimiliano Palombara, the Marquis of Pietraforte, and is the sole entryway into the builder's villa. Legend has it that the Marquis once met an alchemist who let slip that a certain

herb could transform metals into gold. Of course, the Marquis was interested. However, in the morning, the alchemist was gone, having left traces of gold flakes behind and a cryptic recipe detailing the transformation that evidently took place the night prior. The recipe was written in an indecipherable language but consisted of various planetary symbols, geometric figures, writing in Latin and Hebrew, and King Solomon's seal. Frustrated that he could not translate these instructions, the Marquis carved the recipe onto the door, in hopes that someone possessing the necessary knowledge would come to his aid. Many believe this door still exhibits magic and mystery.

Whether you choose to believe the legend or not, writers like Italo Calvino encapsulate the surreal and transcendent qualities of alchemy, crossing the boundary between mystery and reality. Other authors like Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau have also taken the concept of alchemy one step further, exploring the concept of nature as a transcendental force in human lives, making this complicated idea more applicable to human lives.

Both Thoreau and Whitman capitalized on the idea that humans are deeply connected to the universe; to the

Earth, the air, the water, the stars, and the sky. Thoreau documented his experience living alone in a cabin near Walden Pond, Massachusetts in his book *Walden*. Through this discourse, he encourages readers to immerse themselves in nature as he did, ultimately insinuating that discovery of spirituality and self can be experienced when one forms a deeper connection with the natural world. Similarly, Walt Whitman's poetry collection titled *Leaves of Grass* explores the connections humans have with each other and the universe. He describes humans as one, suggesting that we are all interconnected in some way. He also writes that humans are deeply intertwined with nature, frequently comparing the two entities.

Perhaps not quite as literal, which was typical of his tendency to jump rope between the real and unreal, Calvino described the world as a reflection of ourselves in many of his novels. *Invisible Cities* especially suggests that the urban and natural worlds surrounding us go beyond the physical and tangible, encouraging readers to reconnect with their surroundings through a unique lens. He proposes that our environment is not solely a location, but a mirror of our inner thoughts and ingrained beliefs.

There is a common thread here, that an intimacy with nature brings us closer to our highest selves. Connecting with nature draws us back to our roots by clearing out the distractions and reminding us to unite with the Earth we inhabit.

The science of alchemy goes beyond legend and myth. Alchemy strives to create harmony and balance, as the natural state of the world and humans is one of homeostasis. We like to be at peace and balanced, so if we are disconnected from nature, we will inevitably feel off-kilter. Aside from the abundance of psychological and physical health benefits that come from spending time in nature, our individual relationships with the natural world bring us a feeling of being connected to something greater than ourselves.

Just as these authors' works encourage readers to challenge their thoughts and enter a mentality that challenges their reality, the science of alchemy asks us to explore realms that transcend our own. The transcendental concepts of alchemy and nature encourage us to challenge our mindsets and preconceptions, inviting us to explore a world beyond the ordinary and reconnect with ourselves.

Community



Learning About Parks In Florence

AND THEIR HEALTH BENEFITS

By Madison Audi, Alishbah Siddiqy, Katie Berris



When you think of a city, you normally think of buildings and busy streets, but you don't think about green spaces. Most cities do not have many parks or green spaces, but this article will explore the parks and green spaces in and around Florence, Italy, as well as their health benefits and topics of safety while being in the parks.

Advocating to preserve our community's green spaces can be efficient by utilizing thorough two-way communication methods. Communication on these topics could be most effective because it illuminates the importance of savoring our natural habitats globally within Italy.

In Florence, specifically, it can be hard and time-consuming to carve out a period to completely leave the city due to the fast-paced urbanized society. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to protect and maintain our natural green environments and man-made habitats such as parks. Many natural aspects of Italy can be observed directly from Florence. You can see resident engagement with nature through the vineyards and olive groves surrounding the city in the Tuscan hills. It reflects the balance between urban city life and its respect for agriculture as well as sustainability. In addition, the multitude of categorized trash, recycling, and organic waste bins dispersed throughout the city promote a sustainable lifestyle and work to preserve the environment. However, for these to continue to be effective resources for the community, there must be conversations promoting them.

As technology continues to transpire and advance, outdoor consumption rates have decreased for many, especially within an urbanized setting. Bringing up the prevalence and benefits of nature will allow others to reflect on how they could alter their lifestyles to accommodate the natural beauties around us as well as preserve them for future generations to enjoy.

Amid Florence's bustling urban life, there are several beautiful parks and gardens to seek solace in nature. The renowned Boboli Gardens, the expansive Cascine Park (Parco delle Cascine), and the serene Villa Bardini stand out as rejuvenating retreats. The historic Boboli Gardens, situated behind the Pitti Palace, exemplify exquisite Italian Renaissance garden design. Adorned with sculptures and fountains, it offers captivating views of Florence. Visitors can wander along its pathways, marvel at the sculptures, and bask in the garden's tranquil ambiance.

Cascine Park, one of Florence's largest public parks, extends along the Arno River. It's a great spot for jogging, picnicking, and other outdoor activities, hosting a vibrant weekly market. Families often gather here, enjoying leisurely picnics and taking advantage of the jogging and cycling paths. The park also has a horse riding area, with a stable just nearby. Its proximity to the Arno River creates a serene atmosphere, making it an ideal place to unwind and admire the scenic beauty. Villa Bardini, a historic villa with a picturesque garden overlooking the city, offers a peaceful

escape from Florence's lively streets. Visitors can explore both the villa's gardens and the adjacent Boboli Gardens. Its prime location provides breathtaking panoramic views of Florence, including the iconic landmarks, Duomo, Palazzo Vecchio, and Ponte Vecchio. A visit to Villa Bardini promises a harmonious blend of art, history, and nature, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the beauty of Florence while finding respite from the urban hustle and bustle. Nestled behind the Medici-Riccardi Palace, the Garden of Palazzo Medici-Riccardi is a concealed treasure in the bustling heart of Florence. Adorned with classical statues, graceful fountains, and meticulously groomed greenery, this tranquil sanctuary offers visitors a serene escape from the city's lively atmosphere.

It exemplifies the exquisite design principles of the Renaissance era, showcasing the period's artistic elegance. In this garden, guests can find solace, appreciating the natural beauty amidst the city's hustle and bustle.

Green spaces or parks have many benefits for our physical health and mental health. When you think of green spaces, what comes to mind? Trees, grass, a park, wide open areas? Green spaces are pretty to look out and hang out in but have you thought about what they do for us? Taking care of both physical health and mental health is very important. Just spending time in a green space can easily help our physical well-being. Staying in shape doesn't always come cheap but green spaces are free and easily accessible. They encourage physical activity

and could lead to healthy eating habits. Improving one's physical health helps with cholesterol levels, hypertension, and obesity. Gardening and farming can contribute to our physical health, leading to healthier eating and improving air quality. Our mental health is just as important as our physical health. It has been proven that people who spend more time in nature have enhanced cognitive function and attention and reduced stress, to list a few things that green spaces can do. They are less likely to have an anxiety disorder and depression. Spending more time in nature can lead to higher levels of happiness and well-being. Green spaces also are great for child development, social interaction, and broader communities. These are just few of the many more benefits that come from green spaces and nature. In highly urban city contexts it may take some looking but it's important to seek out green spaces to directly experience the benefits yourself. When exploring parks and their health benefits, it's important to keep safety in mind. Parks are generally safe spaces but like in any public place, take the right precautions such as not walking alone in dark, unlit areas at night. In Florence, taking the time to visit its green areas are an opportunity to recharge and refresh while living in the bustle of city life. The natural settings can provide emotional comfort and stability, and regular exposure to nature can help improve concentration and focus. While the mental health effects of visiting parks can vary between individuals, the overall impact is a positive benefit to one's well-being.



A Sanctuary of Peace in a Bustling City

By Kiki Dyball

In the heart of Florence, nestled amongst the bustling streets and historic architecture, lies a calm place, the Giardino dell'Orticultura. The garden's entrance, framed by wrought iron gates, leads you into a space consumed by tall cypress trees and blooming flowers. A central pathway meanders through the garden, paved with ancient cobblestones smoothed by the feet of generations who have wandered there before. A marble fountain stands as a sentinel, with water gently flowing from the arms of a serene moss-covered statue.

It is a place of wonder, a sanctuary of peace, where the beauty of Florence meets the fleeting moments of life and the legacy of the past.

The Giardino dell'Orticultura is a historic botanical garden and horticultural exhibition space first founded during the period of Italian unification in 1859. At this time, Florence was the capital of the newly established Kingdom of Italy. As the garden's history is closely tied to the period of Italian unification, it has witnessed over a century and a half of cultural, social, and political changes. Giacomo Roster built the garden's tepidarium, an iron and concrete greenhouse, in 1879 for the Tuscan Horticultural Society; this impressive steel and glass pavilion is used to display the flowers and plants grown each year.

The Giardino dell'Orticultura features beautiful architectural elements including greenhouses, pavilions, and a large central pond. The garden has a long history of hosting exhibitions, competitions, and horticultural events such as the Festa dell'Orticultura. These events display the latest horticultural and gardening techniques and attract enthusiasts and experts alike. The Dragon, a statue and fountain in the Orti del Parnaso Garden above

Giardino dell'Orticultura, is located at a beautiful high point in the garden that overlooks the city of Florence. With the Dragon's intricate rock and stone composition and a fountain spraying from its mouth, this spot houses the garden's most scenic view.

The Giardino dell'Orticultura's rich history is a testament to the importance of horticulture in Florence and its ongoing role as a place of cultural and botanical significance. It has evolved from its origins as a place of

education and exhibition to now being a cherished public space in the heart of Florence. In a bustling city, the garden provides a tranquil retreat, offering visitors a connection to nature and a break from the urban environment.

It stands as a symbol of the importance of green spaces in city planning and urban life. Over the years, the ownership and management of the garden shifted between various authorities, including the city of Florence, the province

of Florence, and the Italian Ministry of Agriculture. Maintaining the garden and its infrastructure became a challenge at various points in its history. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, efforts were made to restore and revitalize the garden.

Initiatives included the restoration of historical structures and greenhouses. The garden was once again opened to the public, serving as a venue that hosts cultural and horticultural events, art exhibitions, and educational programs. It has been transformed into a versatile public space that blends history, art, and horticulture. From relaxation and recreation to education and cultural enrichment, its adaptability and its commitment to the local community are what make the garden so unique.

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Soccer Night

WHERE PASSION MEETS PLAY

By Nikhil Jagannath

Each Wednesday night, many students have one thing on their mind: Soccer Night. From D1 to “Don’t make me goalie,” every player loves their time at this extracurricular event led by Fabrizio Polloni, a pro soccer player turned coach.

So, what drives people to the court so religiously? Through interviews with Soccer Night regulars, I found that passion for the sport can often run deep. Fabrizio Polloni and his love of soccer unfailingly bring like-minded students to the field. “I’ve worked in the university’s sports department since 2007,” says Polloni. “Immediately, we decided to have a sports night.” Over the next sixteen years, interest in Soccer Night compounded. Even after low attendance during the pandemic, Soccer Night made a full recovery. As a coach and former player, Polloni aims to foster a love of soccer in exchange students. Through Soccer Night and his class, The Italian Soccer Experience, Polloni shows international students the exhilaration and joy of the game. The 2023 fall semester brought a bigger turnout than ever with a hundred students on some weeks.

For many students, soccer night offers a much-needed time to relax with friends. “Soccer’s been part of my life forever, I’ve grown up with it,” says Colin Guckian. “I find it easier for me to connect with people when I’m playing sports,” he continues. “It’s about enjoying the time you have in this present moment... just having fun and relaxing.” The low-stress environment makes Soccer Night a bonding experience for everyone, no matter their skill level. Additionally, many players get excited to return to the field after being away from home. “The first Soccer Night was the best for me. It was fun to kick the ball again,

and reignite that passion...” Again and again, a passion for the game brings many students back to Soccer Night. After Soccer Night, I spoke with Polloni off the field. We sit at a small table outside the locker room, listening to the buzzing fluorescent lights as the field slowly closes. “Soccer is my life,” says Polloni, explaining how he started professional soccer at just seventeen years old. Polloni played with different teams for the following nineteen years. In 2000, he settled down with the Cerbaia team for the remainder of his playing career. “I scored over three hundred goals in my career... But I was hurt and there was nothing that I could do.”

When injured on the field, Polloni and other professionals received painkillers, a temporary solution to get players back in the game. In 2005, the stress on Polloni’s body caught up to him. “I was a fighter. I was tough. But physically now, my joints are done.” Polloni looks reminiscent. These injuries are difficult for the former player. “I have this passion that I want to give. For me, when I see students coming, it is my life.”

There are thousands of emotions wrapped up in soccer, turning the sport into more than a game. Players like Polloni love soccer for the excitement, beyond the celebrity or the money. The feeling of rushing down the field, locking eyes with a teammate, and that triumphant shot to the net bring students back to Soccer Night week after week. Soccer Night allows students to foster a passion for soccer during their time abroad. Whether you’re a soccer veteran or a first-time player, show your support on the field every Wednesday at nine. Come find out what soccer means to you.



The Faces and Philosophies Behind Fedora Pastry Shop & Bistro

By Meredith Bach



For the lecture of the day, he talked about a singular pineapple for 45 minutes. When his students questioned why, executive pastry chef Simone De Castro simply replied, “for some people it’s crazy, for some people it’s useless. For me, it’s important. Then, you can use that pineapple in every preparation.” With a smile, he added, “except, of course, on pizza.” In De Castro’s kitchens at Fedora, this kind of philosophy is well-practiced. Students are taught to value the depth of their understanding rather than the breadth of their experiences. This is something they are taught from the first day, with a lesson as simple as sandwich-making. A simple staple of lunchtime cuisine, many well-studied pastry students expected to run through the sandwich lesson with ease. But like the pineapple, De Castro tested the extent of their understanding. The lesson challenged his students to question the feeling of the bread, the selection of a specific spread of cream, or the style in which the sandwich was crafted. By the end of the day, the students began to understand what he was getting at. “They were discovering a world in that lesson,” he said. “The details give the difference. When you analyze something and try to take out something from the inside, this is more or less the future of gastronomy.” Ideas like this - philosophies that broad farther than basic instruction and practice - are what fuel the culinary program at AUF. In their studies, cooking and baking quickly become mechanisms to explore ideology on work, success, and ambition. Rather than merely a course in pastries or food, students in the program are gearing up for a lesson on life. The culinary program offers a variety of courses, from basic lectures and practice to intensive kitchen-only classes. Students can also apply for the special project experiential learning class, better known as SPEL, to fulfill a professional placement at the university bistro or restaurant. In any scenario, the interactivity between student and professor is intense. In an industry varied with differing levels of talent, experience, and knowledge, culinary arts requires everyone to blend just as well as their recipes do. De Castro may be the instructor, but he expressed that his students teach him just as much. It’s all a part of the experience in the kitchen. “They teach me to respect them,” he said. “We are faculty. We have big responsibilities. We have the future of the students in our hands. They teach me how it is important to be responsible for what I teach.” De Castro takes this approach seriously, asserting that his actions can directly affect the way the students continue or perceive their careers. As a result, it is a priority to communicate well and often with his students about where they are at in the course. If not everyone is on the same page, De Castro must pivot, adjust, and then move forward. As a result, the students accelerate together, despite their diverse

educational backgrounds. It’s a strategy that builds the program into not only a functional team, but a family. “Sometimes, I say to them that they are like my kids because there are times that I spend just as much time with students in the classroom as with my family,” De Castro shared with a laugh.

One such ‘kid’ is Megan Sullivan, a Fall 2022 pastry student. In the SPEL program that she was in, Megan adhered to the course’s philosophies and procedures well. In fact, by the time her program was nearing an end, the institution had extended an invitation for her to come back. After her abundant experience in the kitchen there, Megan couldn’t resist and found herself walking back through the doors of Fedora no more than a year later.

“It’s so much more than sharing pastries with someone,” she said. “What I create is like a piece of me that I give to somebody else. And then you come together and share it with people you love or strangers and have some quality time.” For a study abroad student like her, food was the social pacifier in a foreign environment with a language

she didn’t speak. When she first got there, the language barrier made it difficult to connect with her new coworkers and peers. But over time, Megan learned that words aren’t the only way to communicate. Through the sharing of meals, she began to get to know those around her. Food offered a sense of humanity that she hadn’t gotten from anything else. “Food? You don’t need language, you don’t need anything like that to have this understanding that I’m giving you food, a part of my history and love.”

Food offered a sense of humanity that she hadn’t gotten from anything else.

Food was how everyone shared their culture, their history, and their personalities. A person’s favorite dish may work to exemplify an intimate family transition, a favorite color, or a preferred style of art and design. Sharing a meal is a conversation, even if the people involved don’t speak the same language. Like everything else in the program, food is an opportunity to learn.

“In my brain, a kitchen is a kitchen,” Megan said. “You’re going to have troubling times, you’re going to have times where you don’t always get along with everybody, but you’re always there to learn.”

At the end of the day, the motivation to learn is what empowers the culinary programs at AUF. There is always the lecture and lab, but there is also the lesson on a plate with two waiting forks. With the philosophy to learn and share knowledge, Fedora is made into a powerhouse for pastries and meals. It’s what made Megan come back less than a year after her departure.

It’s what made De Castro speak about a pineapple for 45 minutes straight. When people connect with the same ideas and motivations, passion becomes vital. They always say that people make the place, but what about the philosophies of those people too?



Food



&



Wine

Food Lore of Florentine Gastronomy!

by Iris Katorri

In the captivating novel, *Under the Jaguar Sun*, author Italo Calvino explores ideas surrounding culinary arts and their connection to historical events and traditions. He describes cooking as an “intricate precise lore,” and shares his beliefs on the passion for cooking that is passed down from generation to generation. It is no secret that Italians share a strong bond when it comes to gastronomy, a practice that is deeply rooted in their long lived history. Specifically within Florence, each dish that has been produced over time radiates a personal and cultural essence. Within this article, we will embark on a journey celebrating traditional Tuscan cuisine that further supports Calvino's emphasis of food being prevalent in Italian history yet appearing timeless. Something that we have all experienced from culinary traditions is reinventing dishes crafted from limited resources. In Italy, these dishes were historically referred to as “peasant food” – a product of having emerged from impoverished families – but are modernly considered comfort foods because they successfully evoke memories of childhood and culture.

One dish that I believe encapsulates this essence perfectly is Pappa al Pomodoro, a traditional Tuscan soup made from tomatoes, bread, and olive oil. Stemming from the Renaissance era, the soup was invented under agreement that it was a sin to throw away bread, so when it became stale, families would combine the bread with tomatoes and oil and cook it into a soup. A quality trait of the dish that speaks to its historical background is its traditionally unsalted bread. This tradition is believed to be a result of the Florentine Pisan war that began in the mid 1300's on account of widespread political disagreement. Advantaged by their geographical position near a natural port, the city of Pisa was in charge of manufacturing and distributing salt across Tuscany; due to the ongoing rivalry, salt was intentionally withheld from Florence, calling for the manufacturing of and adjustment to unsalted bread. Understanding the historical relevance of a dish evokes cultural appreciation and respect, coupled with the experience of delighting in a timeless recipe.

This rustic Tuscan soup has been carried over into modern day as a popular appetizer served in restaurants and homes around the country.

Another dish that has graced Florentine households since the Middle Ages is the classic Tuscan Ribollita. Ribollita translates to “reboiled,” a fitting name, since that is exactly what peasants would do in order to create and recreate this dish. Poor families would take the scraps and leftovers of foods like kale, carrots, thyme, celery, and cabbage and boil it in a large pot. It was boiled in great quantities in order to preserve the ingredients and be able to be reboiled for days in and days out.

Although the ingredients are extremely simple, this dish would gain more and more flavor with each reboil.

In medieval times, Ribollita was typically served on stale bread rather than a bowl or plate to prevent any food waste, similar to the dish of Pappa al Pomodoro and its innovative reinvention and preservation of old bread. Ribollita was not only produced in houses of the poor, but presented at wealthier dinner tables, as well. After the wealthy were done with their meal, they would reboil the leftovers and serve it to their peasants.

It is often served in colder weather, not only because it is a feel good traditional soup but because in medieval times, it was typically made with black kale that only grew in the wintertime. There are now several contemporary versions of this soup containing ingredients like beans, onions, potatoes, carrots, stale Tuscan bread, potatoes, and extra virgin olive oil. The history and restoration of Ribollita brought about one of Tuscany's oldest and tastiest soups that has comforted Florentine families through generations.

A valued tradition within Florence is the remaking of rustic dishes that hold a familial quality to them. These two soups serve as a gateway into past history and a sense of comfort for all. The dishes may have started out as a way to survive hunger and poverty, but are now considered staples and sought out by many. By partaking in these timeless dishes and honoring the intricate lore behind each recipe, we have the privilege of not only preserving Florence's culinary heritage, but also savoring the flavors that have captivated generations before us. As Italo Calvino suggested, food indeed possesses the unique ability to capture a moment in time, making the act of cooking a conduit of cultural preservation.





Making Bread

by Catherine DePalma

Prep the Ingredients.

From a state of stillness, I feel my weight shifting. It is still dark around me, as it always has been, but I know I am moving. Then a thud. I become still, again. The only walls I've ever known crumble around me, the ceiling above uncovers another realm – a place much brighter. My unskilled eyes cannot identify everything, but I can still sense hues and figures. For a moment all movement is paused, until abruptly I tip. My entire body is uprooted from its upright stance and I slide horizontally. I begin to disjoint, pieces of me falling at different paces. These pieces collapse against a hard surface – some parts landing faster, others drifting through the air, nearly disappearing like dust. Something isn't right; I've been unearthed from my home and tossed into dismemberment. I feel violated and scared, as sections of myself lie helplessly detached and sprawled against this lifeless place.

Add the Yeast.

There is no time to become acquainted with this state, for I realize that it is an unending procession of torture. Small particles begin to fly in from above, resting upon me as though I am not there. If I focus enough, I can sense that these particles are alive. And if I listen even closer, I hear them hungrily grit. Visions of these creatures gnawing at my skin flash in my mind – am I their next meal? I cower

in their presence. I long for the comfort of home. I am terrified of what is to come. And just when I think I can't take much more.

Mix in the Water.

It begins to storm. A scentless rain pours upon me, liquifying me as I drown into myself. Droplets and rivers run through the crevices of my disfigured embodiment. This is not all. A stiff, foreign object stirs through me, submerging any last bit of aridity. I melt into a tacky mush. My body coagulates, unnaturally, like a glue-soaked false repair. I am whirled around endlessly, my damp skin occasionally pressing against the walls. The starving particles and I become intertwined. We are undetachable now. Maybe with a little might I could push away, but the magnetism between us would catapult me back into place. I accept this fate as we are dizzied into union. It continues until there is nothing left to be soaked and battered. The rain, the particles, and myself, are now one – my body will never be the same again.

Knead the Dough

During the next period, I sense massive figures clawing at the body newly formed. Our wholeness is captured, lifted, and thrown into an outer realm against a solid surface. These figures prod aggressively. Our pudgy figure

is squished, rubbed, worked out, spread flat, and thrown upon the ground repeatedly. I chafe and I ache, yet the tossing rages on. Each time I am grabbed, I see remnants of my prior self dusted across the surface upon which I am flung. As I meet the ground below me, the dry, powdery fragments of me are jammed into the surface of my new skin, sticking to me synthetically – taunting my memory until the chaos subsides. Finally, I am sparingly patted and shaped, lifted once more, and put back into place.

Cover and Let Rise

Quickly, a blanket of blackness is draped over me and everything is dark. This gently reminds me of home, however, my miserable, inescapable reality harshly stings. It only takes a short time for the buzzing of the starving particles to grow louder. They've feverishly waited to feed, and now, in the dark of night, they begin. This period is painfully long. I am savagely consumed. They chomp, swallow, spit. I am open, raw, and heaving. The meal they're making of me seethes, crackles, pops. Though we are one, the battle between prey and predator rages on in the dark for hours. Unable to die, I surrender.

Remove and Place in Oven

Then it becomes light again. Just as fast as the black night arrived, it is removed, like a sheet. I see the brightness,

somehow I am closer to it now. The feeding upon my flesh, made us fatter. My once dry, light limbs are plump and moist. I am bloated and round, taking up more space. And I notice something: I reek. The scent is sour and tangy – nothing like I've ever known. I feel so lethargic and lazied by torture that when my entire world is upturned – I simply plop. My mass jiggles and smacks the ground upon which I am tipped. I lay here, fat and dejected. As I linger, I am hinted at by the sensation of heat. As the temperature increases, it becomes clear that though the plane is the same, the world around me has changed. I hear some rattling, the ground shakes, a breeze blows as the heat nears. Then all movement stops, and I am completely encompassed by its intense warmth. A slam is heard before me, signaling that all exits are barred. I've never been here before, but I feel the end is near. There are no flames – it's a slow-burn. The heat rages around me as my body is seeped dry of any last life. My skin toughens, singed by incineration; My body expands, bloated with hot air. And oddly enough, the scent of my death is sweet. I am disturbed by the delectability of my own demise. I never imagined that once my life fiercely extinguished, the world would smell more wholesome, more lovely. I torturously cook in this place, losing my senses – everything blurs. As I die, I hear a ringing in the distance.

Time is up!



Travel



Running

A NEW WAY TO TRAVEL

by Ian MacKay

As I stepped across the finish line of my first marathon, I never realized the impact it would have upon beginning my semester abroad. Italo Calvino said in his first memo about lightness: “it’s better not to rush things, better to let them settle in memory, pausing to consider their details, to ponder them without moving beyond the language of their images.” I learned that with the ability to run long distances, I could thoroughly enjoy the places I visit and see things most tourism never touches. I am currently located in Florence, Italy. This is a city over 2100 years old, founded by the Roman civilization, and even older with the Etruscan civilization. That being said, there exists a great number of historical buildings, landmarks, and natural landscapes scattered in and around the city.

According to UNESCO, the world heritage center, in 2019 the City of Florence registered about 15 million visitors with overnight stays. Alexandra Korey said in an article on July 19th, 2023, about 50,000 people will visit the museums of Fiesole in a year. This small ancient Etruscan town with a marvelous view overlooking Florence, Tuscany, and ancient Roman architecture sits about 35 minutes (by bus) from Florence. Better yet, it sits exactly 6.1 km (3.8 mi) away from the center of Florence by way of foot. I began my run by the remarkable Duomo, continuing along Via de Ricasoli. I then cut through streets flaunting historical structures I had yet to see. I eventually ended on Via Faentina—the road that led me to the base of the hill upon which Fiesole rests. This was the challenging part— it marked the start of the 1000 foot (about 300 meters) climb to the top. And yet, it proved by far the best part. The views boasted lush greenery, rustic houses, farms, churches small and large, all adorned with pure silence. I ran up tight streets winding their way around to the top. My journey came to a near end once I breached the main square of Fiesole. Sweating, red, and smiling upon entering the town, I received a few concerned looks from locals. I wound my way to the very top called the San Francesco Panorama and delighted in the most remarkable views— views that justified every step of the difficult trek. The run back was peaceful and easy, but a bit hard on the knees with all of the downhill.

The ability to run long distances while living in Florence has gifted me unforgettable experiences. I have jogged

through multiple small towns with beautiful architecture, circled trails through natural beauty, and met wonderful people on short breaks. My training for a marathon was such a go, go, go experience— running at a bit of a slower pace, lifting my head, and soaking in the entirety of a place has made me appreciate the true heart of Florence.

Now why do I talk about this small town outside of Florence? There is no Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Boboli Gardens, or a world renowned pizzeria. However, it is a less traveled town with beautiful rolling hills, people who live in a community helping one another, and a sense of culture that makes this place something special. Running to a place like this seems surreal. Catherine Carr, a FUA-AUF study abroad student, said she enjoys running to nature because “you get away from the busy streets.”

A simple run to the Parco delle Cascine can allow someone to see greenery, hear silence, and escape to their own thoughts.

A simple run to the Parco delle Cascine can allow someone to see greenery, hear silence, and escape to their own thoughts. It provides the opportunity to escape from the long lines, the bustle of the city, and definitely escapes the begging pigeons.

The benefits of running are clear for your physical and mental health, but while running abroad it can improve your overall experience as well. I asked another student, Sergio Reyes, about what his favorite parts about running in Florence were. His answer was about how he runs in the mornings because “there are not as many tourists and you get a beautiful view of the city.” He gets to see this Medieval city without the obstruction of everyone trying to take a picture of the same thing. No matter where you are, try going on a run. You may have to build up the endurance to run to places like Fiesole, but I encourage anyone and everyone to lace up those running shoes and go explore.

I have come to the realization that running is just as Calvino described, “without hoping to find anything more than we’re able to bring with us.” I have my running shoes and a hope to discover everything in my current location. I think those two things can take someone to some pretty spectacular locations. You’re seeing sites that most people in the world have never seen, and you’re staying healthy at the same time. My question is, the next time you travel, where are you going to run?

One foot in front of the other

GETTING LOST IN THE TUSCAN COUNTRYSIDE

by Robert Thompson - *Photo by Robert Thompson*



The idea was begotten - like a lot of the good ones - in Florence. Sean, my chum who resides in the coastal town of Livorno, proposed a considerable journey. Without even thinking, I agreed. We began preparing for our two-day excursion that would start in Livorno and end in the Florentine city center. We packed our sleeping bags, tent, camera equipment, dry meals, and canteens (our only source of water) before making our way. Our backpacks

were heavy and our heads were empty. When you're days away from the destination, you find that the only thing that matters is that the foot behind becomes the foot in front. Starting on the outskirts of Livorno, we were greeted by what seemed to be an endless stretch of tall grass lined along a river. The grass reached to my thighs and to Sean's knees. Wind choreographed the blades to sway in a psychedelic performance that accompanied the beat of our steps. There was no worry other than what was to happen when we traversed more

inland. As our feet shifted in steps, our stage shifted in setting. After eight miles, the overgrown greenery was flattened by asphalt and the wind that once was riding the stream nearby was now beaten by passing cars. The only streaks of nature that remained were the delicate blades of grass that rightfully pierced through the eroded asphalt. Lush fields became crumbling concrete lots and the roosting crows transformed to onlooking locals perched on their balconies. However, circumstances were still the same: keep putting one foot in front of the other. After passing through Fornacette, we entered Pontedera. We followed the Canale nuovo di Usciana, which led us to a lush field beside a woodland preserve. Within the preserve was the sight of our first (and unfortunately only) camp. When the dew filled morning had come, our sites were lush with greenery once again, although unprotected from the noise of highway traffic. Upon finishing our breakfast, Sean and I realized our canteens were just about empty.

As disappointing as it was to see the drastic shift of nature to industry, it was refreshing to have thoughts that meant nothing but keeping one foot in front of the other.

We hadn't passed a single fountain, nor were we able to use the Internet to assist us in finding one. We pressed forward and hoped by some cosmic means that we might be granted refreshment along the way.

On the outskirts of Montecalvoli, an elderly woman had been out watering her garden. She caught sight of Sean. Having noticed her too, Sean courageously asked her if we may get some water from her fountain. She was more than generous, and welcomed us happily. After sharing the details of our journey, she wished us good fortune and we continued on our way. We continued through Montecalvoli and entered Santa Maria a Monte. The six mile stretch from there to Fucecchio gave Sean and me a message for all wanderers in Italy to consider: we couldn't really camp there. Too much of nature had been stripped from our sites. Vast fields, trickling streams, and bird calls were substituted with expansive highways, crumbling parking lots, and train horns signaling their approach to

nearby stations. Without a place to pitch camp within the twenty six miles between Fucecchio and Florence, Sean and I lit a small fire and finished the rest of our dry food as a salute to our joyous attempt. I recall sitting on a log eating my dehydrated chicken goulash thinking, "I cannot wait to do this properly next time." I tend to underestimate challenges. This journey was a series of those moments. I didn't understand the terrain or the sites that Sean and I would see. As disappointing as it was to see the drastic shift of nature to industry, it was refreshing to have thoughts that meant nothing but keeping one foot in front of the other. For a weekend's worth, Sean and I had replaced our superficial responsibilities with simpler ones. Overdue papers were overrun with thoughts of "where the hell are we going to sleep tonight?" Concerns of assigned readings turned to "do I need to eat this protein bar now or can I save it?" We didn't get lost, but I certainly found a small part of myself.





The Many Places You Can Call Home

by Emma Madsen

Studying abroad introduces students to a foreign environment in a foreign country for an extended period of time. This stretch exposes new cultures, new people, and all in all, a new way of life. And after months of living abroad, students are expected to move back home and reintegrate into American customs after having been newly reformed by the overseas experience. You adopt an entirely different way of living and, for many students, you become someone you like more than the person you were when you first left home. It's hard to leave this life-changing experience behind and simply resume your old life. The label of "home" carries a lot of weight. It can easily be argued that the location one studies in for a mere few months is not home, so why does it feel like it to some? Suddenly, the idea of returning to where you came from in the U.S. doesn't have the same feeling it once did.

Molly Daw is a junior from the University of Mary Washington that came to Florence, Italy, to study for the semester. "I think I've definitely grown as a person since being here. I have become more confident and capable," Molly said. "I solve problems on my own and have become more comfortable with asking strangers for help. I have become much more independent since being here, and much more capable of fixing things on my own. I am very thankful for this."

Choosing to study abroad isn't just about changing the setting of your classes. It's choosing to accept a shift change in daily life as well as a sacrifice of comfort and familiarity. Navigating language barriers, homesickness, and generally feeling out of place are mutual difficulties for many that study abroad. Molly also expressed that, she does "not think of Florence as home. I do love living here, but I don't really think I could live here for longer

than one semester. While I love the Italian culture and way of life, it does not feel like home. The majority of my family and friends are not here, so I feel kind of lonely sometimes. I don't think a place that makes you feel lonely can be considered home."

Whether you feel a connection to your study abroad site deeply enough to call it home, or consider it more of a temporary living experience, it cannot be overstated the amount of changes one oversees throughout their time. Pedro Garcia is a freshman from Houston, Texas, studying in Florence for two years, about four times longer than the average study abroad student. "Back at home I was a shy, introverted person, and now living here, I turned into a social butterfly. Living here has exposed me to so many different types of people, personalities and experiences that it makes me want to do and interact more," Pedro said. "Florence gives me an opportunity to be who I am

and not care what other people think." Exposure to new cultures, meeting others from all around the world and traveling through a myriad of different countries leaves quite a mark on a person. And it can be difficult to think about this whirlwind of an experience coming to an end. "I feel really sad about the program ending in December, but I do think when the time comes that I will be ready to go home," Molly said. "I will be sad to not be able to travel all around Europe anymore. I understand that this opportunity is once in a lifetime, and I do not take that for granted so I will definitely be upset when it is time to leave. It will be bittersweet, I will be sad to go but excited to see my friends and family." Whatever your experience is while studying abroad, it is difficult to imagine leaving behind a new life of travel and excitement. The place in which you choose to study may not become your home, but there's no doubt that you bring a piece of it back home with you.

Journey of the Mind and Heart

HOW TRAVEL CULTIVATES PERSONAL GROWTH AND CULTURAL EMPATHY

by Natalie Gallizzo, Rowan Pilarski, Dani Keselman, Lawrence Romito, Amanda Orciuch, Alex McCarron, & Noel Giordano

Travel culture and travel-related culture are interconnected aspects of our global society that profoundly influence our cognitive processes. Traveling is a tool that allows us to think more deeply and discover new things, not merely see new locations. We will learn how traveling broadens our perspectives, deepens our awareness of the world, and promotes personal development, especially when being in Florence. Traveling is a dynamic learning environment that provides ongoing instruction in human interaction, geography, history, and culture. It sharpens our minds, deepens our emotional intelligence, and enriches our worldview, making it a crucial tool for expanding our knowledge and depth of thought.

Unlocking Confidence, Interpersonal Skills, and Independence Through Travel

Traveling is crucial for character development as it offers numerous opportunities to gain confidence and independence. Research by Dr. Julia Zimmermann and Dr. Franz has shown that studying abroad can significantly boost self-esteem and self-assurance through exposure to new cultures and environments. The ability to navigate unfamiliar situations enhances interpersonal skills, heightens extraversion, and lessens tension surrounding social interactions. These developed social skills transfer over to personal and professional settings and relationships. Travel also cultivates receptiveness to new experiences, encouraging individuals to embrace change and novelty. Living abroad can deepen understanding of and appreciation for diversity, promote empathy and compassion, and expose individuals to the biases in their own cultural perspectives. Moreover, managing daily tasks in a foreign country, such as setting up bank accounts and paying bills, nurtures independence and responsibility. Traveling to Florence provides a unique opportunity to unlock confidence by navigating the historic streets and engaging with the locals, as well as growing interpersonal skills through cultural exchanges. It gives you the opportunity to blossom your independence by handling foreign situations on your own, as well as who you are traveling with.



Discovering Growth Mindset: Unleashing Personal Growth through Travel

Traveling also cultivates a growth mindset. When you travel, you often encounter new and unfamiliar situations. From navigating a new city to trying new foods or learning a new language, these challenges work to develop problem solving skills, adaptability, and resilience, which are key components of a growth mindset. Traveling encourages you to ask questions, be curious and seek more knowledge. When traveling and being in any new place such as the Florentine city, it is common to meet people from different backgrounds. It can expand your understanding of the world and condition you to diversity. In doing so, it challenges stereotypes and biases, promoting a more open and inclusive mindset. Traveling is also not always smooth sailing, and almost ensures obstacles and setbacks like culture shock and disappointment. These experiences can teach you that failure is not an end, but rather a means to learn and grow. Overcoming challenges reinforces the idea that setbacks are opportunities for personal growth. Often, traveling demands a step outside of your comfort zone which leads to increased self-confidence. Going to new places is unpredictable, and you often need to adapt to changing circumstances. This can help you develop a greater tolerance for uncertainty and an ability to stay calm under pressure, both of which are qualities associated with a growth mindset. Travel can give you a broader perspective on life and its challenges. It can help you to realize that many of your daily concerns are relatively

minor in the grand scheme of things.

Unpacking the Impact of Travel on Empathy: Exploring the Nuances

In a 2020 article by Ruth Terry for National Geographic, the question arises: can empathy be learned, and can travel help facilitate this learning? Travel possesses a unique capacity to foster empathy, as it welcomes diverse cultures, new perspectives, and differing lifestyles. Traveling to Florence can facilitate empathy with Italians as it provides an immersive experience into their rich, cultural heritage, allowing for a deeper understanding of their history, art, and traditions. Interacting with locals, savoring authentic cuisine, and exploring the city's landmarks can create a connection that fosters empathy.

Experiencing the daily lives of others develops empathy as travelers witness both commonalities and distinctions. Interactions with local communities can evoke a sense of shared humanity through transcending language and cultural barriers. Moreover, facing the challenges of navigating new surroundings supports adaptability and resilience, enhancing empathy by encouraging individuals to relate to the experiences of those they encounter.

However, some experts argue that, while travel is thought to foster empathy, it is not guaranteed. Individuals can remain insulated within their cultural bubbles, wrapped in ethnocentrism, and choose to merely engage in surface-level experiences. Tourism, driven by privilege, might perpetuate stereotypes and exoticize local communities rather than promoting genuine understanding. Additionally, some travelers may view destinations through a lens of entitlement, failing to empathize with the socioeconomic realities faced by the local population. Nathan Thornburgh, the founder of Roads & Kingdoms, stated, "I think in its purest form, empathy is basically impossible. I can weep for you, but I can't weep as you."

Fostering Wisdom, Empathy, and Unity Through Travel

There is an intricate web of influence created by the interaction between travel and its cultural effects. We travel unexplored, discovering new places and ourselves along the way. This promotes self-awareness and cultural immersion. Gaining new insights, dispelling myths, and fostering a profound cultural awareness can all be accomplished through travel. Passport stamps serve as enduring reminders of our dedication to wisdom, and each location becomes a memorial to our personal development. As we immerse ourselves in Florence's wonders and adopt a never-ending quest for knowledge and personal development, we contribute significantly to the development of a community of enlightened travelers. Travel has the transformative power to make us into champions of unity, advocates for cultural appreciation, and people who transcend boundaries.

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page. It features several overlapping circles of various shades of green and grey. The circles contain different patterns: some have vertical lines, some have concentric circles, and some have a grid of small dots. The word "Fashion" is written in a blue, cursive font across the middle of the circles.

Fashion

A photograph of a woman with long, blonde hair walking away from the camera on a cobblestone street. She is wearing a white, sleeveless, backless dress and carrying a colorful, patterned handbag. In the background, there is a black motorcycle parked on the left, a dark grey sports car parked on the right, and a yellow building with arched doorways. The license plate of the car reads "FX-409 JW".

*Play with Lightness
this Season!*

by Leah Sokol, Leah Jannetti, Milla Tivadar, Ella Karadizian, Jessica Dobek

Concept by Maddie Hinz, Jessica Dobek, Ella Karadizian
Photos by Jessica Dobek, Leah Sokol e Leah Jannetti
Styling by Jessica Dobek, Ella Karadizian, Milla Tivadar
Model: Nicki Christie



It is not unusual for the fashion world to find inspiration in literature. When working on a concept for their collections, designers tend to take inspiration from art, stories, museums, books, movies, etc. For example, this quote from Italo Calvino has inspired the concept for more playful winter fashion: “Take life lightly, lightness is not superficiality (frivolity), it's gliding on things from above, not with a heavy heart.” Although Calvino is not directly tied to the fashion world, his descriptions of lightness can be a catalyst for ideas as well as a visual exercise. Fashion designers, for example, might incorporate storytelling elements from Calvino into their designs. Coming into the new season, we are thinking about how to transition to cooler weather. As the temperature fluctuates, layering clothes and accessories allows us to be prepared for the changing weather throughout the day. By mixing basics with textures and patterns, we can create more original winter looks. In addition to convenience or functionality, layering is a styling choice. This way we can keep our beloved, lightweight fabrics on, maintaining the concept of fluidity and movement. Pairing high-quality dresses and skirts with thermal elements like long socks, tights, sweaters and scarves is the easiest way to stay stylish and have a more monochromatic and functional wardrobe.

In his writing, Calvino plays with his words and caters to an audience of all ages—a concept we can also apply to fashion. His stories tend to have celestial themes behind them, provoking the reader to play with lightness.



Connecting these airy themes into a neutral finished look and adding fun colours and accessories can add excitement to any outfit. Especially during fall, when the cooler tones start taking over and we need a boost of something fresh. Using primary colours, like red, can be a useful tool in accessorising as in adding an accent colour to your bag or shoes. As the weather gets cooler, people tend to reach for dark, rich nail colours and shorter lengths. For example, we gravitate towards cherry reds, navy blues or browns.

As for makeup, people might opt to create rosy cheeks, and shimmery eyelids instead of the golden bronze looks reminiscent of summer. The light, airy feeling of the season is reflected in makeup. Switching from summer sandals to boots like Uggs slippers, leather Docs, and clogs, are a safer bet for the winter season. Leg warmers and knee-length socks can add texture to an outfit while also keeping you warm, emphasising utility. Statement bags such as the bright yellow and red-wine options from Ferragamo can elevate a monochromatic style.

Rather than using colour to accessorise you can throw textures into your look with a classic leather tote. With the changing climates, layering is both a functional and stylish way to ease into colder weather, playing with your existing wardrobe in a new, creative way.

There are many fun options that come with the new season. Take this opportunity to try new trends that you haven't considered and step out of your comfort zone. Spice up your basics with pops of colour and patterns, as well as layers.



Magic meets fashion

ALESSANDRA RICCI'S JOURNEY FROM IMAGINATION TO THE RUNWAY

by Philia Bovee

Italian fashion designer Alessandra Ricci has carved a niche for herself in the world of fashion. Her creations transcend conventional boundaries, fusing imagination with fabric and pushing the limits of design. One might wonder what ignites her creative spark and shapes her unique collections. The answer lies in the imaginative literary worlds of Calvino. Calvino's literary legacy is characterized by his exploration of the extraordinary within the ordinary, seamlessly blending the surreal with the worldly. His unique storytelling captivates readers, taking them on journeys that defy the laws of reality. Ricci found herself drawn to Calvino's narratives early in her career, and his works have since become an enduring source of inspiration.

Calvino's Imaginative Universes as a Source of Inspiration

At the heart of Alessandra Ricci's designs is an appreciation for imagination. Calvino's literary worlds are rich with whimsical details, unexpected encounters, and dreamlike landscapes. Ricci, in turn, found herself drawn to the boundless creative potential within Calvino's stories. She explains, "When I read Calvino, I'm transported to these incredible worlds that defy reality. His imaginative storytelling ignites my creative spirit." Alessandra Ricci's collections often mirror the fantastical worlds created by Calvino. Her garments are more than clothing; they are portals to otherworldly experiences. They challenge conventional fashion norms, as her designs seamlessly blend fabrics, patterns, and concepts, pushing the boundaries of fashion. Her latest collection, named "Dreamscapes," is a testament to her ability to capture the essence of Calvino's boundless imagination.

Whimsy and Imagination in "Dreamscapes"

"Dreamscapes," Alessandra Ricci's homage to Calvino, is a spectacular journey through the surreal and the whimsical. The collection includes garments that defy traditional categorization, creating a dialogue between fashion and literature. Ethereal dresses adorned with

floating silhouettes, whimsical embellishments, and avant-garde concepts all pay tribute to Calvino's imaginative storytelling.

There is one ensemble that stands as a shining example of the profound influence of Calvino's work. This particular piece is a dress that resembles a cascade of stars, and it truly embodies the magic in Calvino's "Cosmicomics." The dress is a work of art, meticulously designed to capture the very essence of the cosmos. It is as if Ricci plucked the stars from the night sky and wove them into a fabric of pure imagination. The dress shimmers with the brilliance of a thousand galaxies, and its celestial beauty immediately transports the observer into the realm of Calvino's storytelling.

In "Cosmicomics," Italo Calvino takes readers on a cosmic journey, where characters interact with celestial bodies, planets, and the universe itself. It is a collection of stories that explore cosmic wonders and the relationships between characters and celestial phenomena. The dress in "Dreamscapes" brings these stories to life, evoking a sense of wonder and magic.

Endless Possibilities and Infinite Creativity

What makes this dress truly exceptional is its ability to encapsulate the idea of endless possibilities, much like Calvino's fictional universe. In "Cosmicomics," Calvino

blurs the lines between science and fantasy, creating a world where the laws of physics and the imagination coexist harmoniously.

The characters in his stories embark on incredible adventures, experiencing the universe in extraordinary ways. The dress reflects this blend of reality and fantasy. The cascade of stars on the dress represents the boundless creativity that can be harnessed when fashion becomes a canvas for imagination. It speaks to the idea that fashion is not limited by conventional norms or expectations; rather, it is a medium through which designers can explore the limitless potential of their creative minds. In "Dreamscapes," Alessandra Ricci showcases her ability to push the boundaries of what fashion can be, mirroring Calvino's penchant for defying literary conventions. As one gazes upon this dress, they are reminded that fashion, like literature, has the power to transport us to otherworldly realms, where the ordinary becomes extraordinary, and the conceivable becomes limitless. It shows how literature and fashion come together to create an enchanting world.

Florence's Creative Intersection of Literature and Fashion

The city of Florence, known for its rich history, serves as an ideal backdrop for Alessandra Ricci's creative endeavors inspired by Calvino. The blending of literature and fashion is clear in Florence, where the city becomes a character in Calvino's stories, giving Alessandra Ricci's work a unique Florentine style.

Luigi Rossi, a fellow Florence-based designer, says, "Florence's rich history blends with Calvino's imagination to make my collections special." Alessandra Ricci echoes this sentiment, drawing inspiration from the city's vibrant urban landscapes to breathe life into her creations.

Conclusion: A Fusion of Literature and Couture

Alessandra Ricci's remarkable journey as a designer showcases the profound influence of Italo Calvino's imaginative worlds on the realm of fashion. Her collections are a testament to the limitless possibilities that can be achieved when literature and couture intertwine. Calvino's influence transcends the page, bringing his magical worlds to life in the form of captivating, whimsical clothing. As the stars of 'Dreamscapes' light up the runway, Florence's unique blend of literature and fashion becomes a testament to the enduring magic of the human spirit.



Student Voice

For this issue, we have brought you a wonderful selection of short stories written by students, inspired by the novels of Italo Calvino. Students in the **Creative Writing** class were inspired by the book *Under the Jaguar Sun*, which focuses on senses, while students in the **Fundamentals of Writing** class were inspired by *Cosmicomics*, using a scientific fact and building an imaginative story around it.



I Only Hear Silence

by Ana Carolina Theodosio de Carvalho Ayres de Camargo

If there's one thing you need to know about space is that it's always quiet. You can't hear a single sound out here, because sound doesn't travel through vacuum. Sound needs matter to travel, and the amount of atoms here is so incredibly low, almost zero, that sound waves don't propagate. I wish I knew that earlier, it would have saved me some time. Not that time is a problem for me, it isn't; when you're a planet orbiting around a star, your only concern is to rotate, revolve, and follow your orbit. You don't even have to think about how fast you're going, gravity does that job for you; your only worry is when another body gets too close to your path, even though you can't do anything about it. For hundreds of years, living my days this way was not a problem for me. But then I started to get bored. Around my star, other planets also orbit. Sometimes we are face to face, sometimes aligned diagonally, and sometimes so far away that it doesn't even seem that we are part of the same system. I wanted to meet them. I wanted to talk to every planet, asteroid, and star; I wanted to ask them their name, composition, and life story. So I did. Every time I saw one of my system colleagues, I would try to reach out.

- Hey! How is your revolving going?
Silence.

- You're so much bigger than me! What are you made of?
Silence.

- Nice satellite you got there! What is it called?
Silence.

I tried for what felt like eternity. I would shout, yell, and scream, the loudest I could, but the answer was always the same: none. I started to get desperate; I couldn't endure silence anymore, I needed noise. I would cry, whimpering and pleading for a response, but the other planets were unchangeable in their decision to stay silent.

With no one to talk to, my life stayed as before – silent, lonely, and now sad. But I didn't give up entirely. One time, while brooding on my unhappy faith, a comet passed by me on its way to somewhere else. I kept looking at it, until it made its way close to the Big Star, leaving a trail of vaporized ice and dust behind. I took that as a sign to try making friends again, so when the next comet passed by, I tried my luck.

- Hello, traveler! Where are you coming from?
I didn't receive an answer, only silence.

Maybe comets are shy, I thought, so I tried with the next meteoroid that appeared.

- Hey! You are made of rock? I'm made of rocks too!
But still, silence was the only thing that could be heard.

With each tentative, my hopes were fading. My dreams of having friends and chatting were being drained. I still had another celestial body to speak to, so I shouted one

last time. Wow, you shine so bright! Are you a Blue Giant? And once more, I got no other answer apart from silence. At this point, all my hopes were gone; I couldn't figure out why no one would speak to me. I got progressively introspective, focusing only on what was inside me and ignoring everything around. I let the silence absorb me, close itself around me like a cage, leaving me trapped in an infinity of nothing. For the longest time, I remained there, immersed in this dark, silent, lonely space. The only thing I did was listen to silence.

One day, though, I got dragged out of my silent cage. I don't know what happened that made me snap out from my desolate state, but I decided to give a final chance to the space around me. For one last time – I told myself – I would look around as I made my way through my orbit.

Now, I love hearing the silence, it has become my favorite sound.

Everything was the same as before. Planets were circling, comets were passing, and stars were shining, contrasting with the dark infinity all over. But then I saw, far away from me, a burst of light spreading through space, making a colorful spectacle to whoever was lucky enough to be looking in that direction. One star had died. I didn't know how long that had happened before I finally saw it, but it didn't matter, I was mesmerized by it. That was not the first nebula I've seen, I

had seen nurseries before, but never a supernova. It was amazing. It was bright and colorful and... silent. I couldn't understand how that was possible. An explosion, silent. How did that star, big enough to become a supernova, to make itself seen millions of kilometers away, didn't make a single sound when exploding? Thoughts filled my following trips around my star.

How is that possible, how did that happen, how, how, how. I couldn't ask anyone, they wouldn't answer; I had to figure it out myself. With each passing rotation, I started to focus more on my surroundings. I observed every single planet and star I had already seen a thousand times, trying to discover something I hadn't realized yet. I put my effort into remembering everything that had ever happened, focusing on a single detail that had never occurred to me before: space is silent. In all my living time, I had never given attention to the fact that I had never heard anything here. Not a single sound, in all my existence. That realization changed me. I started to see things differently; I stopped facing the never ending silence around me as something melancholic, monotonous, and miserable. I don't try to talk with others anymore, I just observe, capturing every detail of the motion and brightness that surrounds me. The silence is no longer frightening, it is comforting; I learned that the lack of sounds is what makes this place special. Now, I love hearing the silence, it has become my favorite sound.

Our Mother's Elegy

By Henry Nelson

We, the entirety of humanity, stared quietly into the night sky. A celestial body is gone. The cosmos was bigger than we had previously imagined. We were just a budding civilization in the 21st century, making a mess of things like a toddler. Many years later, we're now into our early adulthood. Our great technological, political, and societal leaps were not ours to take credit for. It was the Modina who raised us.

Innovation once came at a snail's pace. Small increments, change came at great cost and time. And in one boring afternoon, a breakthrough in deep-space electro-magnified radio-waves forever changed our trajectory. Just as the gravity from planets and stars can be used to slingshot a spacecraft nowadays, back then it was theorized that the same could be done with these radio-waves. And so a unique transmitter was assembled.

The Modina were the first and only to respond to our wails in the night. Their communications had a sense of benevolence in them; a poet might call it affection. While we first were guarded and uncertain, humanity quickly found the Modina as an advisor, or guardian. They helped soothe our political turmoil, medicated our incurable ailments, bestowed upon us great wisdom, all from the other side of the telephone. They too had once been a young civilization and saw something in humanity that

reminded them of themselves.

We fought hard but short to reach them in person. The problems facing intergalactic space travel seemed to be impossible to overcome with our physics. The Modina too had never breached far from their home system. While some still researched solutions to this seemingly insurmountable problem, humanity generally accepted that some seas were not ready to be crossed. The Modina would stay our penpals.

In another corner of the galaxy, three black holes once orbited one another. Chaotic motion, they call it, no stable configuration, the three-body problem. Then, unannounced, unwelcomed, one of these blackholes was launched from the triad and into space. Directly into the path of the Modina.

When the Modina noticed their constellations warping, they hastily responded. Quick assessments were done, trajectories calculated, satellites, probes, anything they could do to find out the true extent to this black death approaching. And the Modina paled at the diagnosis. It is the size of a thousand suns, they told us. It's approach much too fast for any large-scale exodus to be feasible.

All that could be done was a matter-propelled redirection. It was a toxic trick, one which killed the black hole just

as much as the Modina. They razed their mountains, froze their oceans, emptied their mines. The planet's goals and aspirations grinded to a halt. They became a war machine against death. Anything they could, they ejected at the blackhole, and in mind bending quantities. Jettisoned material might hold enough inertia to change the trajectory of the black hole. Humanity watched from afar, unable to help in a meaningful way. Instead, we cooed encouraging words, begging them not to fall to this hurdle. The Modina put on a brave face and assured us they would not be leaving anytime soon.

The Modina would be leaving soon. Their quality of life was at an all-time low. Further calculations indicated that the black hole hadn't changed trajectory in any meaningful way. Yet the planet had soon given all it could. The planet's surface was devoid of its once flourishing flora. It's once prismatic seas now gone. Like a sickly patient, the Modina had nothing left to give. They were terminal. And so they stopped sending time and energy to fight off the black hole, but instead focused on rebuilding some sense of their now self-pillaged utopia. They ended their treatment plan, and hoped to spend their remaining time in comfort.

Humanity pleaded for them to continue to fight. Like a grief stricken child, we fought and thrashed for our mother civilization to live. We looked for other solutions, less logical medications. We created schematics for faster spacecraft, fast enough for them to escape. Some attempted to build memory databases to download their brains, to help them escape to a new plane of existence. Anything to save them, even just a single one. Frantically, our ideas became more and more far-fetched. Technological breakthroughs occurred at unprecedented rates. A prototype for a faster than light spacecraft was

assembled. And we rejoiced, for we knew the Modina stood a chance. We conquered physics for them! But problems remained, and our sciences were unfinished.

The Modina spoke to us gingerly. With a sympathetic tone, they apologized to us. They would stand together and face the black hole united. They were finished fighting this fruitless battle. In shock, we faltered. Then we wept. We shouted to them, begged, cried, screamed. Some of us argued they were idiots, others prayed for them to change their mind. The stumbling child humanity once again became, turmoiled with grief.

The Modina responded with a lullaby. A sickly mother assuring her child all will be ok when she is gone. Soft verses of shared companionship in the otherwise lonesome galaxy. That even though their planet will soon be gone, violet nebulas might flower where they once stood. That the stars will twinkle on. That in a place as large as this, they were lucky to find us. And when their transmissions abruptly ended, we sang on.

We sang quiet hymns of love and affection. We sang of the impact they had on us, of the people we are because of them. Of the things we've achieved because of them. Of the life we've lived because of them. A child never forgets their mother. And so the lullaby never ended.

Broadcasts into the empty universe sing of the stories of the Modina, lived on through humanity.

An elegy of love for a civilization gone, but never forgotten. We learned to not only grow our forests, but to walk them too. To gaze at our mountains and realize they aren't as timeless as we once believed. To swim in the sea, and feel the water lap at our cheeks. The things we love and nurture will not be with us forever. We too will neither be. But while we are, we will look to the heavens and remember our mother, our Modina.





Dwarfish Strife

by Samuel Beacher

I stepped over yellow caution tape and practically fell into Captain Gibbons' arms. "Looking for these Cadet Rockinson?" the captain flashed me slacks I left at the station last night. "Yes sir, thank you sir," I awkwardly grabbed them and pulled them up over my plaid shorts instantly. I could feel his piercing gaze all over,

oozing disappointment. I took in his shimmering captain's bars as all four feet of me, paradoxically, towered me above my superior. "Due to your tardiness, I shall have to explain the assignment in brief," he flashed me a cold look. "I'll make it up to you, sir?" I sucked in my belly and gave him a salute soft as overcooked pasta.

"A group of Bluesies are sitting in a circle, blocking Highway One, hands clasped," he motioned to the symphonic yelling of angry dwarves late to work. He continued, "We are not permitted to use force—yet. We're tasked to get them off the road within the hour, says orders from up high," Captain Gibbons handed me a baseball cap more gray than blue.

Only the Dwarfish Kings had access to real blue items. Then Bluesies came along, endangering the whole caste system of underground life. They claimed that every dwarf should have a fundamental right to all colors, even blue.

"What's this for?" I said, praying for an end to parking duty.

"I need you to blend in. Get the Bluesies to disperse and be disruptive somewhere outside my district," he nodded at my blank look: "Figure it out, cadet. Prove yourself. And stay rock hard," he gave me a quick harumph in approval. Then, leaving as one's superior should, he squatted down to a truly dwarfish height and pirouetted on one foot into a graceful handspring.

"Stay rock hard," I replied in common courtesy, before returning to him a bow of epically Lillipution proportions.

I turned around and got a picturesque view of Graniteville Highway One. The road was made up of ancient asphalt and beginnings of stalagmites. I stepped over decades of underground life's refuse, walking towards the protestors. There were the remains of rock chip bags and posters washed out in gray ash exclaiming the revolution of blue for all. The Bluesies' leader remains shrouded in mystery. Urban legend claims he discovered some whimsical treasure trove of blue. Most importantly, he uncovered a lost tome, claiming any old dwarf once was able to look up and see a blue canvas ceiling with only gray splatterings.

"Lost in thought?" said someone below me, as I bumped into the group. Sitting down, they were almost friendly, until I took in their garb. Never before had I been so close to so many hues of cradled cyan and tingling teal. I gaped at the nonchalant show of excess.

"We shall not move for you," he said, in an even tone. I presumed him to be their leader, as the rest sat still as statues.

"I, uh, I've come to—" I thought of Gibbons, "--to join you!" I resisted an impulse to run away.

"Daaad, I never get to hang out with someone my own age!" a dwarf of teenage years stood up, stumbling with the grips of two dwarves next to him. He wore a navy blue scarf over traditional gray overalls, yet surrounded by all the color, he seemed additionally flaked in royal blue.

"Isay we take him," he crossed his arms in smug confidence.

"Louie! Sit down and respect your elders," giving me a skeptical look, he moved faster than a young dwarf to the dinner cauldron, snatching off my baseball cap. Inside he revealed a recording device.

"Sir, I swear on my mother's stew recipe, I don't know who put that in there," I took in a steadying breath, "I'm simply interested in joining up—and, don't you need all the help you can get?" I said, hoping my appeal worked.

"Did the Blue Revolution quell your dreams of becoming a famed dwarfish scientist?"

their boss jumped in with a stone cold demeanor, "did an increased military budget doom your close friend to death in an underfunded healthcare system? Only two types of dwarves become police during extreme unrest. Those who dream of being Sherlock Gnomes and those without

another option," satisfied, he pursed his lips and returned to a meditative state.

"Rrcknson...cme in...rrck" my former baseball cap interjected with the Captain's voice.

"Rrckinson...tn-fur...rrck—" it cut out as the boss crunched the receiver under his foot.

"Change is life's only constant. And unrest only seems destructive when compared to stability. You are the missing piece of the puzzle. You will tilt Justice's scale into

our favor. And you may call me Elder Blue. Welcome to the cause, Roy Rody Rockinson," the ancient power of reciting my name chilled me like a phantom breeze.

The words missing piece bounced around my head like driftwood logs. Gibbons never treated me as anything more than an item with promise. At best, I was a sculpture he could meld into his perfect page, at worst a forgotten toy. Within five minutes, Elder Blue uncovered suffering I didn't even know I carried. I am the missing piece. What was I to do with this power.

What couldn't I do? I was suddenly overcome with the urge to bend a knee, and words spouted out of my mouth like an uncorked, upturned, wine bottle:

"I hereby pledge my service to the cause:
To cobalt cruises on sapphire seas,
Bluesies live, chimney flues
Full of ash but something new
Bluesies die and see the light
Above all in grayish blue
A Bluesie, I'd live and die for you"

and the trance shattered like a window pane. I stood, horrified in my disloyal behavior, yet simultaneously satisfied in the rebellion. Elder Blue offered me his hand with warmth unlike anything I'd felt before. I clasped his in tandem, and jumped into an abyss of insurrection.

Alumni Profile

TAYLOR SAMUELS

by FUA-AUF Alumni Association



Introduce yourself

My name is Taylor Samuels, and I am from Massachusetts in the United States.

When did you study at AUF? What program were you engaged in?

I graduated from the digital publishing & communications program at AUF in May of 2022. My concentration was in photography.

Why did you choose to study at AUF?

I was looking for an opportunity to live abroad, to feel like a part of a community, and to have a unique learning experience in the field I was interested in, and AUF checked all those boxes. I was really excited when I found out about this program and felt like it was perfect for me.

Why Florence? Why Italy?

I love Florence because it is a small city where you get to know many local people, while also being a part of a large international community. Not only is it a beautiful historic city with incredible food, but it is walkable, there is always something to do, and the lifestyle feels a lot healthier than the way of life I was used to in the US.

What did you do at AUF that helped you in your career and/or in your personal growth?

I am grateful for the opportunity I had to study alongside my professors who are extremely experienced in their fields. The staff and students form a tight knit community in which I was able to gain insight very personally through small class sizes and personable teachers. Thanks to them, I was able to improve my skills, mentality, and courage to succeed in photography and other forms of media. I was given assistance in creating a professional portfolio which is a huge part of starting my career. I studied and became more confident in my Italian language skills which boosted me in feeling

more confident overall. I was also exposed to many other talented artists to collaborate with and learn from!

What are your favorite AUF memories?

My favorite memories from my time at AUF are the art exhibitions held in Corridoio Fiorentino at the end of each session! These events allow students and staff to get together after the pressure of final projects and exams, enjoy the art and drink some wine and hang out. These evenings often ended with my friends and I getting dinner at our favorite restaurant, and was easily one of my favorite days of the month.

Are you still friend/in contact with someone you have met at AUF?

Yes! I am still very close with all of my friends from AUF and Florence in general! I am using the airline points that I earned throughout all my time abroad to come visit everyone this April, and I am very excited.

What would you say to any future students looking into AUF?

AUF is a unique learning experience that gives you a lot of room to grow as an artist and as a person! You learn a lot not only through your classes, but in everyday life living in a different country, meeting new people, and having new experiences that you never would have had if you chose to stay in your comfort zone.

If you had 60 seconds to convince a friend that they should study abroad at AUF, what would you say?

If you want to live in a beautiful city full of art, food, and culture while studying with some really talented professors, lots of opportunities and a lot of fun, you should go to FUA-AUF!

Describe your AUF experience with a word.

One word to describe my experience would be growth.

