

Erasmus Florence Academy of Art – Landscape & Still life Painting, 18. – 29.7.2022
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Dear colleagues, dear readers,

My stay in Florence turned out to not just teach me a lot about old painting techniques, but also teach me how to survive in the hottest city in the time of climate change. By the time I arrived in Florence, the heat period had already started a few weeks ago, and people asked me, prior my travels: "Oh, I assume it will be hot in Florence." I answered: "Oh I will be alright. I spend summers in India, Brazil and Lisbon for longer periods of time." I thought, till I arrived, the temperature might already change. I had no idea. When I arrived it just started to get to the peak. 42C ahead of us, each day, you could not imagine it getting any hotter.

I was attending a landscape painting course at the Florence Academy of Art, where we would set up and paint at various sites around town. This means charring all your painting supplies, setting up and working in the heat throughout the hottest hours of the day. I made drawings in the Brazilian rainforest, where mosquitoes would attack me, I sketched the arctic landscape from a sailing boat, doing push-ups in between, to be able to stand the cold. But this turned out to be harder, and it did not make any sense to me, as there are more suitable periods during the year, where you could stroll around the city and make plein air paintings.

The first spot was along the river of Arno. We learned a lot about composition, how to set the values of the painting, first in a purplish grey tone scale. We learned how to set up in a suitable manner, and how to mix all the colors with a palette knife, prior to starting painting. We painted at the same spot for two days, to go over the painting again and have enough time. The second spot was under a bridge with the view to Ponte Vecchio. This was harder for me, as I am not so used to painting architecture. At the end of the week, I asked to switch my course, as it was ridiculous to work in such heat. Even walking for one block seemed impossible, you just try to move in the shady spots, which are rare at some places.

A few important things I learned from Tanvi, my painting instructor: Main object should not be in the center, Inclinations should not be too steep, Mountains in the back in a pale purple without details, leave details behind, sky is whiter than you think, colors of the water repeat the colors above, colors in the water don't really mix, focus on the variety values, not so much on the color.

The second week I spent at school making a still life painting. You would choose your objects carefully and arrange your set up in a Blackbox. You make a charcoal study prior to starting to paint, you copy everything with a cord. I felt like drawing for the first time. Doing everything with lots of care and measurement. 2 former stewardesses from Germany helped me set up on a Saturday, to catch up with the other students, who already worked on the subject for a week. Hannah, my instructor was super nice, and made a great job teaching this difficult painting technique, where you must have lots of patience. I stayed all afternoons; it was like a meditation, and I enjoyed painting and mixing colors. I learned a lot about colors and painting in layers. Spending so much time on one subject was really a gift and I could forget the heat outside.

The afternoons of the first week I spent mostly in my air-conditioned room, making power naps. In a couple afternoons I made it to Museo Bargello, where you can admire the amazing sculptures of Donatello and Michelangelo. We got a great guide from school, she told us all about medieval times and the start of the renaissance, how Bargello was built and turned into a prison for a period. She shared her admiration of how human and soft Donatello's approach was in sculpting, compared to the heroic, genius Michelangelo. I also visited the Uffizi's, where you can walk along some of the greatest paintings in history, such as Giotto, Botticelli's Venus, some unfinished Da Vincis and Raphael's. The brilliant hallway, with it's beautiful windows and stunning roof frescos make it a special experience. In the nighttime I walked around town, almost still too hot to move, visiting all the Piazzas and sights of Florence.

All in all, Florence is an amazing town, showing a great part of human history. In summer though it is too hot to spend time there and there are way too many tourists. Fires popped up around town and it showed me how people in the city are very dependent on the government, running electricity and public transport. How city people and especially tourists are consuming constantly, without questioning and everything just keeps running as they used to, not even the suffering in the heat makes them doubt. It just makes them eat more ice cream, turn on their air conditions higher and get into their cars for the shortest distance.

Thanks for your support to enable my experience at the Florence Academy of Art.



