


VOI SIETE QUI (You are here) A Grand Tour Redux Project

By Stephanie Sepulveda

Roma

The Miami-Florida European Union Center of Excellence would like to share with you the wonderful essay-reflection FIU Honors student Stephanie Sepulveda wrote after making her study abroad trip to Italy in June with Professor John Bailly as part of the course, "The Grand Tour Redux".

Introduction: The Grand Tour Redux

The aim of this project is to reexamine the concept of the Grand Tour in a contemporary and personal way. I am a 22-year-old Latin American woman who in no way fits the traditional description of a Grand Tour participant, this gives me the opportunity to explore traditional concepts and ideas through a unique lens. In a way, this project allows us to use tradition and history as a stepping stone for our own personal reflection and development.

The title of this project is Voi Siete Qui, or You Are Here. I chose this title because this phrase, which kept popping up every time I looked at a map, serves as a reminder to take a second and appreciate where I am and what I am doing. Knowing where we are mentally and physically allows us to see ourselves in a bigger context, and, in a way, that is what I am attempting to do with this project. As I explored Italy I not only wanted to understand the places and their history, but I also wanted to immerse myself in them and to see where I would fit in within their context—just like that dot on the

map that tells you where you are when you are lost.

A Brief Explanation:

In order to give structure to the project, I decided to look at each location we visited through a different lens. I chose each of these themes as I explored each city and used them a guidelines for my reflections and research.

These are all topics in which I'm interested in, and although they may not have been traditionally studied in the Grand Tour, I feel that they were essential to my individual experience as I traveled and learned in Italy.

Each section of this website will focus on a different city and will serve as a space for reflection, some are in the form of poetry and others in short reflections on the subject.

ROMA: History and Permanence
Ancient Stone

My body isn't what it used to be,
My weathered skin with creases and
cracks betrays me.

The scorching sun hits my back,
as I carry my brothers and sisters.
I've seen the others fall,
I've seen what the elements can do.
I know failure and I know permanence.

I've been robbed, and hurt.
I've been used, abandoned, and found again.
I watch you pass like I watched those before you.

You have changed, but you haven't.
Time has passed, but it hasn't.

I can't speak out loud,
But I let my appearance tell my story.
I see you today and I'll see the others after you.

Reflection:

It is impossible to visit Rome without being awestruck by the incredible combination of the old and the new. I think it is difficult to find a city more apt to study the passage of time and the permanence of certain cultures in our present lives.

The fact that these ruins continue to stand tall within a modern city is testament not only to the physical endurance of Roman architecture, but also to the permanence of the Roman innovation that has had such an important influence on us.

Personally, every time I visited a new site in Rome I was awestruck by the immensity of the structures. The Baths of Caracalla, for example, left a deep impression on me. Although the place is left in ruins, the sheer size of the structure is enough to let us imagine the greatness of the place in its heyday. The thickness and strength of the walls, dramatically contrast with the intricate and delicate work of the mosaics that remain. Just spending a few hours in this place was enough to take me back in time for a second—to appreciate the greatness of the Romans and the advances that they made.

The examples are endless in Rome—from the Colosseum, to the Forum, to the Circus Maximus, Rome is a city where the past becomes present, where you can live and breathe history. Seeing that first hand, and learning about it in the actual location, is incredibly hum-



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The Vaticano

bling. Our culture has borrowed so much from the Ancient Romans, from architecture and art, to military structure, that actually seeing where all these ideas took place, and walking the roads where these people walked is incredible. Yes, history is always a part of who we are, but in Rome we can actually experience it.

VATICANO: Religion

A Wednesday at the Vatican:

The early morning sun was scorching and the sky was perfectly blue. We were there two hours early to secure a good seat. The plastic chairs that had been neatly assembled were still mostly empty. You could feel the tension in the air as people started to fill St. Peter's Square. Men, women, and children walked slowly, with sleep still fresh in their faces. People from every nationality trickled in and took their seats in front of the imposing facade of St. Peter's Basilica. In what seemed like a second, the entire square was full of people. Some craning their necks to see if they could catch a glimpse of anything, others taking selfies and waving their flags in the air.

A booming voice on the speaker system welcomed the different groups in their respective languages. People clapped and cheered. Pope Francis zoomed into the square. Gone was the bullet proof glass used by previous popes, it was just him in contact with the

people. The mass of people moved like a wave, pointing and waving, some even stood on their chairs to get a better look. The Pope's image was shown on giant screen on either side of the Square, he stopped to kiss babies and bless children. I cheered along with the others and tried frantically to get a photo, and as soon as the service started, the crowd went silent.

Pope Francis spoke evenly and easily. I could somehow make out what he was saying in my very precarious Italian. He spoke of love and commitment, simply and openly. I cried. I wasn't just because of the words, or because of the service, it was because of the atmosphere of the place. I was among thousands of people who had made it all the way to the Vatican to be there at that very moment. It was the fact that I got to see and be a part of a ritual that so many Catholics dream to be a part of. It was a moment of reflection, a way to see how religion and faith moves and affects people.

Reflection:

I wouldn't call myself a religious person. I believe in certain things, but I have never been attached to a particular creed or religion. Because of this, when I said I wanted to see the Pope in the Vatican, people immediately questioned me. "But, you aren't even religious," someone asked me as we rode the bus to the

Vatican to pick up tickets for the Wednesday Papal Audience. After this question, I took a moment to think about why I wanted to go so badly. Was it to say I saw the Pope so that I could cross it off an imaginary list of experiences that I needed to have? Maybe. Was it for my mother who would have loved to attend? Also a possibility. But then I realized that it was so much more than this; it had more to do with the idea of community and of the power that faith has to move people in different ways. I wanted to be part of that energy, to be in the presence of this ritual that has united people for so many years.

Funny enough, that Wednesday at the Vatican was one of the highlights of the trip. I've always been interested in the power of religion, and I was able to experience it that day. It was an amazing sight to see the community that is formed around the ideas of Christianity. The love and excitement that people felt was undeniable and contagious.

We stood there after Pope Francis said his goodbyes and people started making their way out of the square. We stood there in silence for a while, and I think that in that moment we were all thinking the same thing—we had experienced something that many people yearn to experience and we would remember it always.


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Firenze



Cinque Terre

FIRENZE: Feminism**She**

You put her in a box.
 You glued her to a stand.
 You showed her to others.
 You taught her to spin.
 You forced her to follow the music.

She's not what you thought.
 She won't let you stop her.
 She'll dream bigger.
 She'll work harder.

She does it for her, for them, and for you.

Reflection

I came into the trip thinking that my project was going to be an exploration of the representation of women in Italian art. But it wasn't until Florence that I actually got excited about this idea. As we explored the Uffizi Gallery, we saw the traditional representation of women in art—Virgin Marys or portraits of rich women. Strong women, which were constant subject in classical Rome, were no longer subjects for works of art. It was only until we saw Botticelli's Birth of Venus, that women representations of women started to change.

And if women were underrepresented as the subjects of the artwork, they were even more absent in the form of artists themselves. In all of the museums and churches we saw in Italy, we had not seen a

single piece done by a woman—a testament to the historical exclusion of women that continues to exist to this day. But, finally this changed. In the Uffizi we saw works by Artemisia Gentileschi. It was refreshing to see work by a woman. Beautiful and powerful work that not only showed her talent, but also her ability to persevere and succeed in a world where she was constantly discriminated against for her gender.

This, of course, made me reflect on feminism and the treatment and discrimination of women that continues to exist today. Is the discrimination that women experience as blunt and violent as the one that Artemisia experienced? Not necessarily, at least not in the Western world. But it is still very much a problem. Women continue to be underpaid, to be sexually harassed, to be refused jobs, and denied equal rights. As a woman, I see Artemisia as an inspiration. Her story and her talent show the ability that women have to overcome the obstacles that they face. She is the only woman artist in that museum and her work is good enough to be hung next to a Caravaggio. And now, hundreds of years later, her story is an inspiration to all women who are still victims of unequal rights. I just wish that more people could know her story and see her work.

CINQUE TERRE: Nature**Cinque Terre**

It's still and clear,
 you can't see where it ends or begins.
 It's silent and cool,
 you walk with you heartbeat and breaths.
 It's uneven and treacherous,
 you look down and measure your steps.
 It's hot and arduous,
 you stop to wipe you face and catch a breath.
 It's long and painful,
 you keep trekking, step by step.
 It's vast and infinite,
 you stand on the edge and take it in.

Reflection

Our days in Cinque Terre served as a time out for our minds. They were a moment for us to silently reflect on all we had experienced in the first three weeks of our trip. The sanctuary was a place where we could be apart from the sounds, people, and places of the city. From up there, the horizon was a blur, the blue of the sky melted into the blue of the ocean. It was silent. It was different from anything I'm used to, particularly in Miami where city life makes it so difficult to spend time with nature in silence.

The hike was long and tough. It was the hardest thing I've ever done but it was also the most rewarding. We spent nine hours with ourselves and with nature. For long stretches there was nothing but

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Cinque Terre



Venezia

silence as each one of us used all our physical and mental strength to get through the trail. We swam in the Mediterranean and we explored small towns that have maintained their traditions while embracing tourism. We experienced something different from anything we had seen before.

After weeks of studying history and art, we were allowed to take a breather. This is where I did a lot of my thinking. Both about the trip and the project, but also about the future. This is where I decided on the title of this project—"You Are Here." Particularly when you come in such close contact with the vastness of nature, like we did with the ocean and the trails, you can see where you are. You can attempt to reassess your life, and put it into a correct context. In nature you can take a second to realize that you (really) are here.

VENEZIA: Art

Reflection:

It was difficult to choose art as a lens through which to look at just one city in Italy since art has had such a pervasive influence in the history of this country. Italy is truly a country of art, and this allows us to experience different moments and styles of art as you travel through it. But, it was in Venice, the last leg of the trip, that I was finally

able to look back at the entire experience and reflect. We didn't visit any major museums here like we did in Rome or in Florence, but what we did see was the connection between the history of art in Italy and in Venice, and art in the present day.

In the Biennale, Venice becomes a city of art. The exhibitions, presented by countries around the world, give us an opportunity to experience contemporary art along with the art that has historically been present in this city. Here is where I was finally able to see the result of all the years and years of art history that we studied. Of course, we missed some chapters in this history that we did not get to cover, but overall, to see contemporary art installations set up in a church that is 1,000 years old is art in it of itself.

It is this juxtaposition between old and new, classic and modern, that not only characterizes Venice and makes it beautiful, but that can also be applied on many different levels to the parts of Italy that we have been fortunate to explore. Art is not just something beautiful, or personal to the artist, but it is a window into cultures and moments in time. By studying art we are able to draw conclusions about moments in history and to trace the development of ideas and traditions. We went from classical Roman art, with

open representations of the human body, to a polar opposite in Christian art that dealt with predominantly religious subjects and the heavenly world. And we finished in Venice, where we saw an eclectic mix of artists that dealt with a variety of different subjects from around the world, all within the beautiful architecture of the famous Venice Palazzos.

History has progressed, globalization has become a growing phenomenon, and the multiculturalism that has been historically characteristic of place like the Roman Empire, or Venice, or our own Miami, is now permeating cities everywhere. And it was in Venice, where this became most evident. And what was most interesting to me, was that it was not the people or the place that made me reflect on this, but it was the art.

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For more information on Italy, Grand Tour Redux program, visit the following page:

<https://ugrad.fiu.edu/studyabroad/Pages/HonorsItaly.aspx>