

The Politics of Art in Renaissance Florence

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Syllabus

Major monuments of the Florentine renaissance, notably those of a religious nature, were sponsored by groups or individuals whose aims were to a large degree political. Politics is inseparable from economics, so as this course looks at a variety of material asking where political motivation lies, commercial issues constantly come into play. We start with the layout of the city and then focus on conspicuous buildings including the cathedral, major churches and civic structures, particularly the town hall. Next we move inside to look at the subdivision of large spaces, such as the various areas of a grand religious edifice, and their still smaller units which are family chapels and other types of devotional centers. Finally we scrutinize single objects of decor, such as frescoes, altarpieces and tombs, to discover the implicit political messages embedded in the visible forms. Miracles, relics, procession and spectacle, and the cult of saints (local and non), are topics of focus. The course presents architecture, painting and sculpture with emphasis on the latter two media. It privileges the period from right before 1300 through the next century, when Florence became a world-class city, to then slowly make the way back from devastating plague. It is argued that the well-known evolution of the 15th century city was defined by the patterns established in the earlier period we address.

Program

Class sessions, with few exceptions, are held on site. Areas of study are listed below.

The Political Layout of Florence

The Physical Fabric of the City : Walls and Gates, Bridges, Quarters, Neighborhoods, Piazzas, Key Buildings

The Structure of Florentine Government and Socio -Economic Realities (Magnates, Popolani, Ciompi)

Church Politics, Civic Religion, and Art

Civics and Religion 1: The Old, Newer, and Newest Cathedral of Florence [S.Lorenzo, Sta.Reparata, Sta Maria del Fiore]:

The World of Work on the Campanile and the Piazza Duomo (the Baptistery)

Civics and Religion 2: The Cathedral Façade and Cathedral Paintings, Baptistery Sculpture

The Politics of Mendicant Orders and Art

Franciscans and Santa Croce as a Politicized Arena, I

- a. The Cult of Francis and the Franciscans
- b. Family Politics and Art at Sta Croce

Franciscans and Santa Croce as a Politicized Arena, II
The Politics of Death and Burial

Dominicans and Sta Maria Novella as a Politicized Arena

The Politics of Miracles and Art

Santissima Annunziata:

- a. The Politics of the Annunciation, Competition, and Art
- b. Cult Making: Filippo Benizzi and the Servi di Maria

Sant'Ambrogio

- a. The Politics of the Eucharist, Competition, and Art
- b. Nuns and Politics in the Sant'Ambrogio- Santa Croce Area

The Madonna of Impruneta

- a. Relics, Processions, and Politics
- b. The Madonna of Impruneta

Government, Commerce, and Art

Orsanmichele

- a. Grain, God, the Guilds, and Visual Politics on a Miraculous Civic-Religious Stage
- b. Cult Making: St Anne

The Bigallo

Art for Social Service Organizations, Hospitals, Confraternities, and Art

ROME

The Politics of Power and of Punishment, and Art

The Bargello and Piazza Signoria

The Politics of Building for a Proud Commune and Prisoners and Punishment

Piazza Signoria

Florence as the New Rome

The Devout Life, the Politics of Cult, and Art

The Uffizi

Marian Politics and Art, I :

Sta Maria del Fiore and the Politics of a Name

The Accademia

Marian Politics and Art, II

a. Maria Inconata

b. Other Political Issues in Trecento Pictures

The Classroom

a. More Mary Inconata: The Bishop and the Abbess

b. The Politics of Marriage: Nuns as Brides of Christ

Gender Politics and Art

The Bargello

Devotional Art and Gender Politics, I

Palazzo Davanzati

Devotional Art, Secular Art and Gender Politics, II

Final Examination