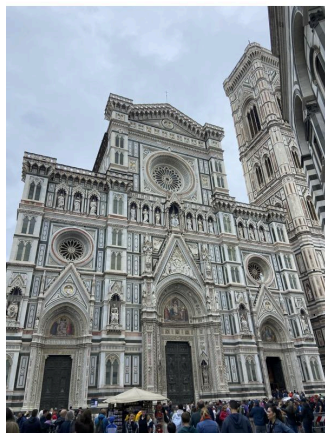


Over the Summer vac, I travelled to Florence in order to be able to see some first hand sources at the cradle of the Italian Renaissance. I focused my trip on visiting the Uffizi Gallery, as well as the churches and convents in the surrounding locality, in order to immerse myself into the cultural and geographic context of the sources I would be studying this year.

I am specialising in the period 1450-1530, which saw the rise and fall of multiple political regimes in Florence, as well as the patronage and production of the most renowned pieces of artwork today. Florentine architecture was a key focus of my trip, as throughout this period there was a culture of highly public investments in art and architecture. Whether for reasons of personal self aggrandisement, or to contribute to the standing of the city-state on the world stage, the architectural achievements of the city were fascinating to see.



This was the facade of the infamous Duomo, otherwise known as the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. It is located in the centre of the city as religious centres and cathedrals tended to be built at the heart of communities, to symbolise wealth and prestige, as well as the devotional life of the city. I went down into the crypts of the Cathedral, which was built upon multiple layers of previous religious sites, going back to pre-Christian times. The Cathedral of 'the Lady of the Flowers' is supposed to

represent Florence, a flowering and flourishing city. The facade serves as a visual representation of the city's glory, and is important to us today when we consider patronage studies. Florence had a well developed culture of corporate and private patronage, and the construction of the cupola speaks to this, as it was funded by a communal city fund. The dome of the Cathedral, colloquially known as the Duomo, was designed by multiple architects, most notably Filippo Brunelleschi, between the years 1420-36. The inside of the dome, a fresco piece, was designed and painted by Vasari from 1572-79, and depicts 'The Last Judgement'.

Some other significant buildings were of a more secular nature, such as the Palazzo Vecchio, which was the heart of civic power in Florence, as it functioned essentially as a government building. This



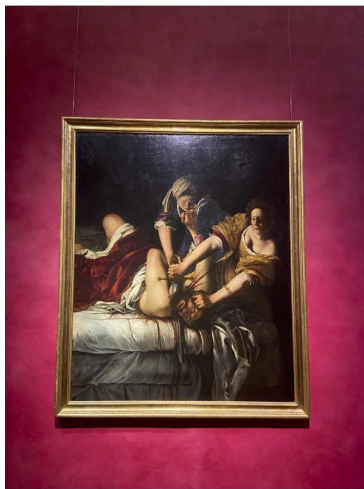
stands in one of the many city squares, or piazzas, which were spaces of official and unofficial participation. I also spent a day exploring the wonderful Uffizi Gallery, which houses some of the most renowned pieces of Renaissance and Roman art. Looking at Greco-Roman sculptures was so important to gain an understanding of the antiquity that shaped Renaissance artistic production as we know it today. Attached below are some that stood out to me, particularly in the depiction of bodies, wherein we see a strong influence of sculpture upon the proportions.



Botticelli's 'The Birth of Venus' (1486)



Botticelli's 'Primavera' (approx 1470-80)



Botticelli is so interesting to me as an artist, as a result of his association with the Medici family for years (both of these paintings were privately owned in their collections and survived the downfall of their regime as a result of this). He produced both secular and incredibly Christian art and in the years of the Savonarolan regime, (according to Vasari) he was so convinced by the preacher's evangelical vision of Christianity that he is said to have thrown his own work onto the flames of the Bonfire of the Vanities in 1497. He is an artist whose work spans classical and Christian themes, and is deeply touching to me because of his nuanced relationship with his own artistic production.

This painting was my personal favourite; it is by Artemisia Gentileschi, influenced heavily by Caravaggio's iteration of the Judith and Holofernes story. It is an oil on canvas that captures a feminine rage, in all its passion and violence.

Having immersed myself in the artistic culture of Florence, I also tried some local Tuscanese delicacies. Here is beef tongue with miso gnocchi, which wasn't my favourite, but exciting to try!

