

TOUR OF FLORENCE and VENICE

A QUICK GUIDE (with my personal comments!)

By **JENNIFER KARCH VERZE'**

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Florence and Rome and Venice, the three main cities on an itinerary in Italy and famous mainly for their heritage of the Renaissance. The works of **Leonardo Da Vinci**, **Michelangelo** and Raphael, **Titian** and **Giorgione** in Venice as well as many other important artists and architects will feature prominently in this tour of only Florence and Venice.

What were the great achievements of the Renaissance - Early Renaissance (1420-1500), High Renaissance (1500-1527) and Mannerism (1530-1500)?

Whereas in the previous centuries the most important element in the people's lives was religion (we often call this period the Age of Spirituality), in the Renaissance there is a return of confidence in human reason and individuality. The Humanists (those with a good liberal education discussed the ideas of antiquity) and many of the Italian artists of this period were familiar with works done in Rome and Greece. They moved from the unrealistic and symbolic art of the Middle Ages to the mastery of illusion of reality.

In the field of art, this means the believable depiction of space on a two-dimensional canvas or working after models of sculptures of antiques discovered in this period.

Michelangelo was influenced by the *Apollo Belvedere* and other sculptures that are present in the Vatican. It simply means, artists of the Renaissance tried to represent the real world around them.

A large and wealthy middle class of merchants and professionals provided a market for buildings, sculptures and paintings.

The Humanists saw man as the chief centre and the human body was a thing of beauty, and ceased to be only an instrument to contribute to the glory of God (propaganda of the Church), but was created for the first time for the pleasure of the patrons who influenced Renaissance Art as it remained religious in its subject matter and was commissioned by churches and monasteries but the figures became more individual with a space of depth or perspective.

The development of perspective is one of the most important features of the painting of the Renaissance. Perspective is the creation of the sense of depth and distance on a flat surface - compared to the flatness of figures of the Byzantine art of Ravenna.

Also new themes as history, mythology and portraiture became new and important subject matters. The study of anatomy was important as well

as classical mythology of the *Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli at the Uffizi Gallery and *the Bacchus* in the Bargello, because during the Renaissance, every gentleman and lady had to be educated in the classics.

Naked gods, Mars, Venus, Minerva feature in many frescos, especially in **Raphael's** decoration of the Villa Borghese. For the first time, art becomes a matter of private enjoyment.

The status of the artist also changed drastically as opposed to the craftsmen's status of the previous centuries. Artists became important personalities (**Michelangelo** was a protégé of **Lorenzo the Magnificent**). They were judged by different standards of other human beings.

FLORENCE

Florence became an important city-state ruled by **Lorenzo the Magnificent**, who gathered around him, famous humanists and artists. As the name suggests, Florence - Firenze, has always been associated with flowers. The city's foundations reportedly were like satin with a blossoming meadow surrounded by soft, rolling hills and in the Middle Ages, the city was known as "*Fiorenza*" from fiore or flower in Italian. The iris is the main emblem of the Florentine flag and has for centuries been the symbol of the city, as countless works of art demonstrate.

It is, of course, for the glory of its artistic history - in sculpture, painting and architecture - that Florence is most famous. No trip to Italy cannot be complete without a visit to the city of the Medici, the birthplace and main centre of the Italian Renaissance, the professional home of **Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael and Brunelleschi**.

A good starting point is the Cathedral (Duomo) crowned with **Brunelleschi's** Dome and flanked by **Giotto's** Bell Tower. The famous Cupola of the Duomo was designed by **Brunelleschi**, and beside the Duomo is the Bell Tower designed by **Giotto**, an important and imaginative artist who lived at the beginning of the 14th century and who can be called the Father of Renaissance Painting, as his figures have volume, showing emotion which appear as real people. Please see the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua.

Proceeding from the Cathedral, one encounters Orsanmichele, a medieval granary turned church. Important Florentine statues by the likes of **Ghiberti, Donatello** and **Verocchio** are displayed in the exterior niches of the building. Towards the left is Piazza della Signoria, the Loggia Dei Lanzi and the famous sculptural masterpieces. Towering over the piazza is Palazzo Vecchio, the austere city hall begun in 1299. Certain rooms in the Palazzo may be visited, the studio of Francesco I where the mask of **Dante** was in the book *Inferno* by Dan Brown and also the Salone dei Cinquecento, also cited in the book.

The Great Palaces in Florence are typical of the new Renaissance style in architecture. The two most important names linked to architecture are

Brunelleschi and **Leon Battista Alberti**. They derived their forms from classical buildings, as they spent time in Rome measuring and observing the Roman ruins).

The main buildings are Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Palazzo Strozzi and Palazzo Pitti. Palazzo Pitti was designed by **Brunelleschi** for a rich merchant who wanted to compete with the Medici, and he did not succeed and the palace passed into the hands of the Medici Family.

Leon Battista Alberti, who was younger than **Brunelleschi**, is also one of the most important figures in Renaissance Architecture. He wrote treaties about art, sculpture and architecture and summarised all the new knowledge. He did the Pazzi Chapel in Florence, which was an innovative new approach to building. You can notice in many of the Renaissance paintings, you can see Roman and Greek Temples or ruins in the background, which show how ancient times influenced the artists of the Renaissance.

The rulers of Florence at that time were the Medici's and Florence is full of mementos of their rule such as the Medici Riccardi building, the first Medici palace, the home of Cosimo the Elder and Lorenzo the Magnificent and the workplace of artists of the calibre of **Donatello**, **Michelangelo**, **Paolo Uccello**, **Benozzo Gozzoli** and **Botticelli**. The Renaissance house... where it all began.

Should you go to visit the chapel, you will see the Medici family represented in the so-called those times - Lorenzo the Magnificent and his brother in their youth, beautifully dressed, their grandfather Cosimo the founder of the dynasty. If you look closer you will see a bearded figure, this is probably a Jewish scholar as the Hebrew language and Jewish philosophy was of great interest to the humanists.

Inside the Gothic Franciscan church of Santa Croce, are **Giotto's** frescos, **Vasari's** *Tomb of Michelangelo*, and **Donatello's** *Annunciation*. Nearby the church is the Pazzi Chapel, designed by **Brunelleschi** and the Museum of S. Croce.

The rulers of Florence, the Medici family, were originally bankers who had their branches all over Europe. The Portinari family - a large painting in the Uffizi called the *Portinari Altarpiece* was brought all the way from Bruges.

To do justice to the many museums and galleries in Florence, one would have to spend a lifetime there. The two most important galleries in Florence are the **Galleria degli Uffizi**, one of Europe's greatest museums, which was originally administrative offices, built in a U shape by Vasari.

The paintings are on the third floor. In the first rooms are mostly religious paintings and unless you are interested in the development of Renaissance paintings from the Byzantine era (with gold backgrounds) to Giotto, I would strongly advise you to skip all these rooms and start with the **Botticelli**, **Filippo Lippi** and **Leonardo** Rooms.

When you see the paintings of Leonardo, **Botticelli**, **Michelangelo**, **Fra Filippo Lippi**, **Bronzino** and other great artists, keep in mind that the

domination of the church was over and although you will still see many religious paintings, Madonna's with Christ, Mary as Mother of God, you really look at elegant Florentine ladies.

Notice the balance and harmony in the paintings, how the figures relate to each other, the perspective, the modelling by light and shade, the pyramidal or triangular construction, foreshortening and naturalism and the use of beautiful colours.

Remember also that the greatness of these artists lies in their originality. Although they went to Rome and Greece for ideas, they created their own original art that will influence Western Artists for many centuries to come.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE UFFIZI

1. *Adoration of the Magi*, **Leonardo**. An unfinished painting on panel only blocked out in brown tones, see background caves, the dramatic moment depicted, see the characterisation of faces.
2. Painting by **Andrea Verrocchio**, Leonardo's teacher. Angel was painting by youthful Leonardo, possibly also Christ. Verrocchio was primarily a sculptor (Colleoni Equestrian Statue in Venice) and the face of John the Baptist reflects sculptural elements.
3. **Botticelli's** room with the *Birth of Venus* and the *Primavera*. (Botticelli means little barrel).

In many of the Renaissance paintings, the painters included their personal likeness in the religious painting. So if you want to see how Botticelli actually looked like as a young man, there is a small painting on the wall also called *Adoration of the Magi* (you know the story of the Kings coming to Bethlehem to witness the birth of Jesus). On the right in a yellow mantle, this is Botticelli. He worked for the Medici family and once again in the same painting you can see Lorenzo the Magnificent and his brother Giulio who was killed during an uprising in Florence.

The masterpiece of this room is called *the Primavera*, or *the Allegory of Spring*. This fabulous painting was commissioned for the Medici's Summer Palace. Just enjoy this painting without paying any attention to content (elaborate allegorical, mythological painting that you read from left to right). Observe the highly personal style, the lines, Mercury, the three graces, Venus, Flora, Cloris the nymph and Zephyr, god of the spring wind. In fact, this painting is a synthesis of Christian ideas and Greek legends, but foremost it conveys an atmosphere of love.

Another beautiful painting by Botticelli is *The Birth of Venus*, although Botticelli does not always adhere to anatomy and here he differs from the other Renaissance painters, his figures are delicate and elegant. Venus is standing on an enormous shell blown by the wind.

4. The other very important room in the Uffizi is the so-called Tribuna room, this is a small domed room, where the treasures of the collection were kept the Medici were great collectors of antique sculptures of special value like the Venus Medici, a famous sculpture found at Tivoli, the Villa of Adrian and Hellenistic sculpture are in the centre. See the portraits of the Medici in the 16th century by *Bronzino*, the court painting, see the luxurious dress of Eleonora. This room has remained the way it was in the original state.

5. Another famous painting in the Gallery is the *Doni Tondo, Holy Family* by **Michelangelo**. It was painted as a wedding present for an important Florentine family called Doni. It is one of the very few paintings (except for the Sistine Chapel) by the artist who was basically a sculptor.

See the muscular bodies sitting on the ledge, the muscular arm of the Madonna, her twisted by. This Madonna could be any mother reaching for her baby. This painting served as an example to many Renaissance painters and Raphael, who belongs to the great painters of the Renaissance was certainly influenced by Michelangelo as well as by Leonardo.

There are a great number of masterpieces in the Uffizi, but I could not possibly fit them into this little write-up. I love the Netherlandish paintings and other works in the Collection of **Roger Van Der Weiden**. I probably would have to go back many times to say I have seen most of the work well, along with the Vasari Corridor, which I would like to see again, as it has all portraits by many artists and it goes over the Arno bridge to arrive at the Pitti Palace. However, I would still like to draw your attention to a few artists that follow the High Renaissance and are called Mannerist.

They are often included among the Renaissance artists but they are certainly different. Their style is elegant, refined but at the same time great technique that is the trademark of all good Renaissance paintings. You can recognise their paintings by the elongated bodies, often very tall figures, strongly anti-naturalistic.

Try to see the “*Madonna with long neck*” by **Francesco Parmigianino**. This elegant, refined lady does not look like a saint. She is charming, her slightly bent neck, beautiful hands fingers are very different from paintings of the Renaissance. Can we see how?

Mannerism actually started with **Raphael** and **Michelangelo**, elongation of bodies, twisting bodies. There are mannerist sculptures in front of the Palazzo Vecchio by Ammanati (the Fountain), there is a typical mannerist sculpture in the Loggia Dei Lanzi on the side of the Palazzo Vecchio by *Gianbologna e Benvenuto Cellini*.

The other art gallery that is world-famous is the Palatina at the Pitti Palace. The great masterworks there are the Titian's (*Venus of Urbino*), **Raphael**, **Reubens**, and other great masters. I want to draw your attention to the Madonnas of Raphael in this gallery.

They are mostly Madonnas with the Christ child. **Raphael** was a superb painter, he came from a small town but he was an instant success. Whereas **Leonardo** and **Michelangelo** were difficult to get along with, **Raphael** was handsome, clever and loved by all. He had a large following and many high born ladies wanted to marry off their daughters to the handsome painter. But he loved a young woman, the baker's daughter and the beautiful Madonnas you see, are actually in her likeness. There is also one portrait of her, "*The Veiled Lady*", a study in great and gold.

Pope Julius II called him later to Rome when he elected his most important work called *The School of Athens* in the Vatican and other important works. He died at 37, a very young age and his paintings were finished by his students.

I would like to finish off with work of **Michelangelo**, as he looms like a Giant in Renaissance art and when you will see his work you will understand his greatness. His models were Greco-Roman sculptures, in his later years he just discovered Hellenistic sculpture of the *Laocoon* in the Vatican and *Torso of a Man* that he owned himself, but he adds new elements to his work that are non-classical-expressive and a sense of the tragic. His early works in the Academia (museum of Sculpture in Florence where the *David* is housed) are more modelled after classical examples.

In the Vatican church, the Pietà (he was 24 - 26 years old when he did this work) is the apogee of virtuosity. He was all versed in anatomy and his representation of the human body is thus believable. You can also admire the ceiling in the *Sistine Chapel* in Rome this is unique in the history of art. Notice his sculptural forms even in his paintings. As time progressed and Michelangelo lived nearly to become 90, his work deals with the men in torment and the heroic struggle of man.

The only church I would recommend you should go to in Florence is the S. Lorenzo Church and the Medici Chapel. The church was built by **Brunelleschi** (facade not finished). This church was the official church of the Medici family. When Lorenzo the Great's son Giovanni became Pope Leo X, he commissioned **Michelangelo** to execute a family tomb that was never finished.

There are two fabulous figures here: one representing the active life and the other representation of the meditative life (Duke of Urbino and Never...) and the Tomb of figures of *Night, Day, Dawn and Dusk*. Although female figures, they look like men and were modelled after men.

Adjacent is the Laurentian Library - **Michelangelo** (was also a superb and imaginative architect) that is most of the time closed, however, it is an example of beauty and symmetry.

Galleria dell'Accademia has works by Michelangelo, the original **David** and foremost the four unfinished statues of prisoners whichever meant for the tomb of Pope Julius II. He was the pope that practically forced Miche-

langelo to do the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel- there are other works by him also.

The Palatine Gallery located in Palazzo Pitti Museum is recognised for its fine pictorial collection. Among the highly acclaimed paintings in the Palatine are: Raphael's *Donna Velata*, Andrea del Sarto's *Assumption* and Titian's *Portrait of a Gentleman*.

Venice Whenever you go to Venice you ask yourself what time it was in history that inspired the Venetian government as well as its aristocracy to build this superb surrounds for their citizens as well as their private palaces along the Grand Canal and encouraged the artists to create the great works of art. There are few cities in the world the can match the splendour of Venice although today it is fading and even neglected.

Venice grew from a small fishing village in the 6-7th century to a great maritime city. Venice traded in luxury goods with the Middle East, Persia, Africa, Byzantium and are rich and powerful in the process. Their ships transported the Crusaders to the Holy Land and in the 14th century it was the strongest power of the Christian world and the centre of an Empire.

When you will look at paintings in the Galleria dell'Accademia pay attention to the variety of people represented: Orientals with turbans, blacks, Turks thus reflecting the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city.

But most important keep in mind the close ties of Venice with the Byzantine Empire before it was conquered by the Turks. The Basilica of San Marco is a typical example of the strong Byzantine influence. The wealth of gold, icons, mosaics is certainly reminiscent of Constantinople. The four horses in front of the Basilica going back to probably to Greece were brought from Constantinople.

In general, the architecture of Venice is a mixed bag (in contrast to Florence) with Byzantine, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque.

Facing the Doges Palace is the beautiful Renaissance building of Sansovino, a Florentine architect brought to Venice to renovate the Basilica and the Doges Palace. He also built government offices opposite the Palace - (the Archeological Museum is housed there and it is recommended with the best Greek, Hellenistic and Roman sculpture in all of Europe. Remember that Michelangelo also received his inspiration from some of the Hellenistic sculptures).

The Venetian artists are known for their colour and light. The warm colours remind us of the setting of the sun in Venice. Golds, greens, orange colours are unique to Venetian painters. The Venetians are also among the first artists that introduced landscape into their paintings. They loved the *campagna*, they built their summer homes in the countryside facing the sea - think of **Giorgione** and **Tintoretto**.

Notice also the luxurious gowns - silk, damask, velvet - in the paintings of **Paolo Veronese** and **Titian**. The Venetian were great lovers of music and in many of their paintings, we see them playing different instruments.

The earliest Venetian Renaissance paintings are by the members of the **Bellini** family. They are mostly narrative, depicting the ceremonial life of their city.

Gentile Bellini depicted the Sultan of Morocco, the daughter of Jacopo Bellini married **Andrea Mantegna**, the first artist that introduced illusionism into painting, creating an impression of space by foreshortening and perspective (Camera degli Sposi in Mantova). His most famous painting is in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milano called "*Dead Christ*", an admirable realistic painting using foreshortening. **Mantegna** had a great influence on the Venetian artists. His love of antiquity (Roman buildings in the background) were emulated by **Paolo Veronese**.

GALLERIA DELL'ACADEMIA

Gentile Bellini - Giovanni Bellini - Madonna and child

Carpaccio - the weaving of St. Ursula

Giorgione - Limited number of paintings as he died very young. Titian was his student later rival. Was the first artist to use landscape, secular spirit, frees art from the restriction of the church. Beginning of "Art for Art's Sake".

The Tempest - Famous painting, man in nature, great step forward in art. Poetic landscape, approaching storm, light (see overpainted part at left)

Titian (Tiziano) - The most famous Venetian painter lived a long and productive life. His paintings have to be seen in order to appreciate his genius. Many of his paintings ended up in the Habsburg collections, many in Vienna, many are in the Prado. The most famous is his "*Venus of Urbino*" and many other works in the Uffizi in Florence. There are many in the Academia and the altarpiece in Santa Maria Dei Frari Church in Venice. His portraits, especially from the later period, are outstanding.

Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti) A student of Titian, a very talented artist, at the age of 20 had his proper workshop. The saying goes that he wrote on his studio walls "Colour of Titian", "Drawing of Michelangelo". Thus he based his style on Titian as well as Michelangelo. Large canvasses, at first warm Venetian colours, later becomes Mannerist and he reduces the colours.

Tintoretto's painting treated as a theatrical stage, every detail is well thought out, no matter wherever we stand we are always in the middle of action. Great spatial relationships, master of composition, see how **Tintoretto** uses the diagonal line, instead of the traditional horizontal line parallel to the picture plane. He is one of the first Venetian artists to interrupt the harmony

Tour of Florence Venice by Jennifer Karch Verzè

and balance in his paintings. New change in mood and perception. He introduces mystery and tension into his later paintings.

There are 56 paintings by **Tintoretto** in the Scuola di San Rocco, Venice. His portraits are also outstanding.

Paolo Veronese - Born in Verona, contemporary of **Tintoretto** but very different. Whereas **Tintoretto** often used spiritual quality, especially in his later painting, **Veronese** is very worldly, His religious paintings rather reflect the luxurious atmosphere of Venice in his time.

The Academia - House of Levi, the composition is symmetrical, well balanced, reference to antiquity, with a balcony, elegantly dressed people. This painting got him into trouble as originally he was commissioned to paint "The Last Supper". He was summoned to the Tribunal of the Inquisition and had to change the name of the painting to the "*Supper at the House of Levi*."

Remember large paintings in the Louvre, where Veronese included many prominent citizens of Venice as well as artists playing musical instruments.

Canaletto (1697-1768)

In the 18th century, Venice attracted crowds of foreigners who admired the beautiful city, its paintings and architecture. Venice also offered many other pleasures as concerts, great parties and beautiful courtesans. As most of the visitors were sons of the wealthy aristocracy (England) they took with them their home paintings of views of Venice. These paintings were called "capricci" or "vedute" and a whole school of landscape painters emerged.

Among them was **Canaletto**, who painted the city with great accuracy and details. Notice the beautiful colours, his blues and greens are exquisite.

Many of his paintings ended up in England and are today in the Queen's collection.

Tiepolo (1659-1734)

There are a great number of frescos in Venice by Tiepolo. By the time he arrives on the scene, great changes have occurred in the art of painting. The Baroque with its emphasis on the dramatic has become in the 17th century the style artists use.

Tiepolo certainly is influenced by theatre, he is an artist with great imagination. You can notice many turbaned Turks in his paintings, his atmosphere is festive. Notice his colours, turquoise blues, yellows, pinks are prominent.

Sometimes you can get tired of his huge frescos as he is too pompous, not my favourite artist.

I HOPE YOU ENJOYED THIS TOUR OF MY TWO FAVORITE CITIES!