Beyond the Surface:
The Contemporary Experience of the Italian Renaissance

Jo-Anne Duggan

Certificate of Authorship / Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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All images have been photographed by the author/artist unless otherwise stated.

Abstract

It is the intention of this Doctor of Creative Arts to convey the complexity of viewing art in museums. Concentrating on both the physical and cultural contexts of art, I focus specifically on Italian museums that house artworks of the Renaissance. I argue that the viewing experience in these museums is formed at the intersection of cultures, histories, the past and the present, art and the subjectivity of the viewer's own gaze. In this project the personal, physical, cerebral, sensorial and temporal experiences of art are central to my concerns.

The structure of this DCA combines my photographic art practice with this written reflection. I work with both the visual and the textual to most appropriately and effectively express my concerns with the Renaissance and Italian museums. In a peculiar act of doubling, I am making art about the experience of viewing it, and through image-making I am able both to explore and to comment more profoundly on the experience of these museums. While my research and writing at times responds to these images, it also inspires them. Here I integrate the past, history and art, with contemporary theories that are relevant in the study of vision and today's art viewing, and rely on numerous writers across the broad fields of visual arts, art history and theory, museology, historiography and cultural tourism. In surveying these extensive interwoven disciplines I engage with the magnitude of the social, historical and theoretical studies that converge in the museum viewer's field of vision.

Beyond the glorious artworks themselves Italian Renaissance museums exhibit a dense visual and historic culture that provides an enriched viewing environment. They paradoxically intersect 'high' art with a phenomenal popularity that appears ever-expanding through endless reproductions and representations via modern technologies. Through examining these museums with their multiple histories and contexts I hope to argue for a slower, more considered engagement with art, that encourages the viewer to experience the sensual as well as the intellectual aspects that this opulent environment offers.

As you wait for a change in the light, or go about the mechanics of setting up a shot, you have the chance to slow down the act of looking...the camera is a prosthesis that helps you to think through what is.
Guido Guidi[1]

Paintings still have that effect—they are ways of thinking about something other *than what I am.*
James Elkins[2]

[1] Guido Guidi, from the collection of essays, Nicholas Olsberg, (et al.), *Carlo Scarpa Architect Intervening with History*, New York: Monacelli Press and Montréal, Quebec: Canadian Centre For Architecture, 1999, p. 208.
[2] James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*, San Diego: 1st Harvest edition, Harcourt Brace, 1997, p. 23.