

# VILLAROSSA VOICE

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY IN FLORENCE NEWSLETTER FOR STUDENTS, FACULTY & STAFF

## A Wonderful Walk on the Wilde Side

Oscar Wilde's famous paradox that Life imitates Art recently became a reality, at both the Villa Rossa and Florence's Palazzo Davanzati. On Tuesday, October 6, Dr. Joel Kaplan, Founder Director of the University

Eric Nicholson  
SUF Drama Professor

of Birmingham's Postgraduate Program for the Study of Drama and noted expert on modern theatre, led a lecture/presentation on "Wilde and the Florentine Tragedy" at Syracuse University in Florence. Starting with highly informative background on Oscar Wilde's dramatic experimentations of the early 1890's, Professor Kaplan lucidly explained how the playwright moved from his "Symbolist" and "Continental" *Salome*—written in French and rehearsed but kept off

the public stage by the English authorities in 1892—to his full-length English plays of the ensuing three years: the latter more or less follow but also significantly depart from and even ridicule the conventions of Victorian comedy and melodrama. To appreciate and understand Wilde's theatrical innovations, the nearly sixty audience members in Aula 13 were given a revealing photocopy illustration showing the three types of codified stage gesture used by 19th century British actors, including the rarely raised hand pointing upwards to heaven, even more emphatic than the significant, often accusatory index finger pointed at another character on the stage. In plays like *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*, Wilde coaxes his audiences to expect certain defined "situations" in fine melodramatic style, only to undo these expectations, and thus invite questioning of all-too-familiar roles and relationships. As Professor Kaplan convincingly demonstrated, this pattern also applies to *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where the three-act "farce" structure eventually employed by Wilde manages through comical manipulations to parody not only melodrama but classical Greek tragedy.

The theatrical past and present, the life of the stage and the art of Wilde then blended, fully and irresistibly, when three professional actors read the monologues and scenes in question. Devon Black (of the BBC), Robert Cameron (of Regent's Park Theatre, London), and Elliot Cowan (of the Royal Shakespeare Company) imparted their



Photos: Joel Kaplan

Devon Black (of the BBC), Robert Cameron (of Regent's Park Theatre, London), and Elliot Cowan (of the Royal Shakespeare Company) performed in Oscar Wilde's *The Florentine Tragedy*. The play was presented in the context of a series of events dedicated to the great playwright, organized by SUF in collaboration with New York University, the British Institute, and the Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico ed Etnoantropologico per il Polo Museale della Città di Firenze.

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impressive talents to highly engaging demonstrations of the key insights made by Professor Kaplan. As Matteo Duni, SUF Professor of History and Coordinator of the Humanities and Social Sciences Department observed, “Kaplan was fantastic, a great engaging lecturer who touched all the important points, with the added value of having the actors do the acting..I really enjoyed the evening.” In conclusion, Professor Kaplan provided a generous and stimulating preview of his group’s production of Wilde’s rarely performed one-act play *A Florentine Tragedy*, complete with a speech eloquently delivered by Elliot Cowan.

The production itself, co-sponsored and promoted by SUF, New York University, the British Institute, and the Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico ed Etnoantropologico per il Polo Museale della Città di Firenze, and performed twice on Sunday 11 October at the historic early Renaissance Palazzo Davanzati in central Florence, was a resounding success. Full-house audiences composed of native Florentines as well as English, American, and other visitors enjoyed the first fully professional staging of the play in over seventy years. Under the incisive direction of Robert Cameron, the show made exciting use of the shadowy courtyard, iron-barred windows, and steep staircases of the restored “torre palazzo,” and fully realized the script’s triangular cat-and-mouse intrigue involving the merchant Simone, his wife Bianca, and her

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Scenes from the performance of Oscar Wilde’s *A Florentine Tragedy*, which took place in Palazzo Davanzati. It was the first fully professional staging of the play in over seventy years.

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lover Guido, the son and heir to the Duke of Florence. Wilde's provocative exploration of class conflict and sexual prejudices was brought into sharp and compelling focus by the late Victorian costumes and the precise, dynamic performances of the actors—again Devon Black, Robert Cameron, and Elliot Cowan—who wore them (see the photos). With the help of the live cello music expertly played by Pietro Horvath, the cast also managed to render the play's fascinating and surprising range of tones: as various SUF students put it, the performance profoundly changed their understanding of the text, bringing out comedy as well as tragedy, and often when they least expected it. Among many enthusiastic responses, one student remarked, "the actors did a great job in the play and I thoroughly enjoyed it." It is also worth noting that several current SUF students, who are themselves preparing a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* that will be staged at the end of this semester in the Villa Rossa, worked as lighting, stage managing, and technical assistants for the performances of *A Florentine Tragedy*. Abundant thanks must also go to Dottoressa Rosanna Protopisani and her extremely helpful staff at the Museo di Palazzo Davanzati, who generously hosted the show and made it proceed so smoothly. To sum up, then, the production was an especially gratifying collaboration, that made life and art one and the same: we hope that Oscar Wilde himself would have appreciated and applauded the exceptional event.



Joel Kaplan illustrated the key points of his SUF lecture on Oscar Wilde through recitation by actors Devon Black (of the BBC), Robert Cameron (of Regent's Park Theatre, London), and Elliot Cowan (of the Royal Shakespeare Company), the same actors who then starred in the public performance of *A Florentine Tragedy* at Palazzo Davanzati.

# Faculty Watch

## Dorothea Barrett



Apart from her scholarly work, Dorothea Barrett also writes abridgments of classic English novels for students of English as a Foreign Language. Recently the Cambridge University ESOL board, which conducts EFL examinations worldwide, chose her abridgment of *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins as one of the two simplified readers they recommended for the preparation of the First Certificate Examination. *The Woman in White* is one of many abridgments Dorothea has written, under the pseudonym Christopher Hall, for the Reading and Training Series published by Black Cat in Rapallo.

## Molly Bourne



On May 28 Molly Bourne presented a paper entitled “Ville gonzaghesche prima di Giulio Romano” at a four-day conference held in Mantova dedicated to Giulio Romano, the painter, designer and architect who served the Gonzaga court in Mantova from 1526 until his death in 1546. In her paper, Molly described a series of villas created for the Gonzaga court in the years immediately prior to Giulio’s arrival. Destroyed or heavily remodeled in later centuries, these structures and their decorative cycles have been neglected by scholars, even though they provide an important link in the evolution of villa design. Molly Bourne’s reconstruction, based on early maps and archival evidence, was a summary of the central chapters of her recently published book, *Francesco II Gonzaga: the Soldier-prince as Patron* (Rome, 2008).

## Matteo Duni



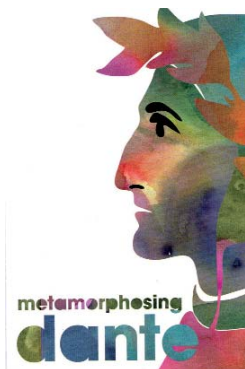
Matteo Duni is the coeditor of the volume *Non lasciar vivere la malefica. Le streghe nei trattati e nei processi (secoli XIV-XVII)*, published in July by Firenze University Press. This book collects the papers that were presented at the international conference “Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Witch to Live. Witches in Treatises and Trials (XIV-XVII centuries),” organized by Matteo Duni and by Prof. Dinora Corsi of the University of Florence in 2006. Contributors to the volume include scholars of international repute including: Giovanni Romeo, the foremost expert on the Roman Inquisition’s prosecution of witches, Stuart Clark, the leading name in the studies on early modern demonology, and José Pedro Paiva, author of a fundamental monograph on witchcraft in Portugal. Thirteen papers provide important new insights on a wide range of issues, from the Italian connections of Heinrich Kramer, the most infamous witch-hunter of all times, to the medieval iconography of the pact with the devil, to famous cases of collective demonic possession in the nunneries. “I’m particularly happy to see the proceedings of this conference published,” says Matteo, “because they bear witness to SUF’s commitment to academic excellence and student involvement. It was fantastic to give the students of my *A History of Witchcraft* course the unique opportunity to directly engage with some of the leading witchcraft scholars, thus enabling them to connect what they had learned in class to the current scholarly debate.”

# Faculty Watch

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## Antonella Francini

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This past summer, Antonella Francini presented her recent volume of poetical translation, *L'angelo custode della piccola utopia*, an anthology of Pulitzer Prize winner Jorie Graham's work, together with Graham, at the Naples Poetry Festival, "Una piazza per la poesia." In September she conducted an interview with the poet at the Pordenonelegge book fair in Northern Italy.

Antonella has given several other presentations recently as well. This past May she lectured on Cesare Pavese as translator of *Moby Dick* at the Cenobio Fiorentino writing program and in September she gave a paper on Robert Rauschenberg's thirty-four illustrations for Dante's *Inferno* at the conference "Metamorphosing Dante" held in Berlin at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry.

Antonella has just returned from the conference of the Italian Association for Comparative Studies in Literature at the University of Cagliari, where she presented a paper on "Dante's landscape in a Pop Version," focusing on some of Rauschenberg's transfer-drawings.

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## Sara Matthews-Grieco

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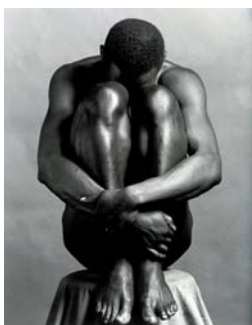
An article by Sara Matthews-Grieco entitled "Media, memory and the Miracoli della SS. Annunziata" came out in *Word & Image* in June 2009. This article treats the phenomenon of the so-called "miracle book" in Counter-Reformation Florence. It examines a series of 16th- and early 17th-century publications that describe tales of miraculous intervention mediated by a late medieval image of the Annunciation, located in the Servite Church of the SS.

Annunziata. While these publications all had different target audiences—from the humanist academies patronized by the Medici to the princely courts of Europe, from common street performers to the members of the Servite order itself—as a whole the publication campaign carried out in relation to the Florentine shrine over some 50 years demonstrates a concerted effort to promote the SS. Annunziata from the status of a local site already celebrated for sacred intervention to a more widely recognized shrine with an international reputation.

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## Jonathan Nelson

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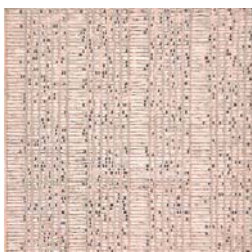


Since the end of spring semester, Jonathan Nelson has been very busy working in field far from his own specialization, Renaissance art history. He co-curated a major exhibition at the Galleria dell'Accademia dedicated to the American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, on the 20th anniversary of his death, and a small show at the Galleria Poggiali, presenting the photographs of the poet-performer Patti Smith. Michelangelo links these events. When Jonathan brought Patti to the Accademia in 2007, she explained that Mapplethorpe had always been fascinated by the Renaissance sculptor. This conversation led to the show in that museum, and then to the show of Patti's own works. The Mapplethorpe show presents a new approach to the artist. Based on published interviews with Mapplethorpe, and new ones conducted with the photographer's friends, assistants, and models, Jonathan asked some new questions. What technical means did Mapplethorpe use to create his photographs, and what impact did this process have on the product? How did Mapplethorpe see himself in relation to artists of the past and present? In short, Jonathan used the tools of art history to study a modern master. He is currently on leave this semester, working on a Botticelli monograph. (NB: The Mapplethorpe show has been extended to January 10; Nelson's exhibition catalogue essay is available at: <http://i1.exhibit-e.com/mapplethorpe/b43d4c5d.pdf>)

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## Kirsten Stromberg

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The exhibition 'No Rising Nor Falling' by the artist Kirsten Stromberg was on exhibit this past summer at the gallery Microspazio in Florence. The show forms part of an ongoing body of work which focuses on questioning the construction of ideological thinking in contemporary society while specifically touching on materialism and the advancing commodification of human experience and expression. The title comes from ancient Buddhist texts discussing the nature of *sunyata*, the great void, which is the foundation and the essential nature of all material phenomena. 'No Rising Nor Falling' is also a play on the current global economic crisis as we watch the ups and downs and perpetually cycling effects of current trends.

## Countdown to SUF 50th Anniversary Celebration

Four, three, two, one...the countdown to the 'Festa,' SU Florence's 50th Anniversary Celebration, has begun.

The entire staff and faculty at SUF are eagerly awaiting our three-day alumni celebration, with an optional fourth-day trip to the Tuscan countryside. Over 100 people have registered for the event. Close to sixty of the participants are flying in from the United States, including trustees of Syracuse University in New York, employees of SUAbroad, and SUF alumni from 1960 to the late 1990s.

SUF has planned a remarkable series of events for the occasion, beginning with a Reunion Party at the Villa Rossa on Sunday, October 25th. On Monday and Tuesday, alumni can choose from a variety of site visits in the city center and classes at the Villa Rossa. Eminent art historians on the SUF faculty will lead site visits to the most celebrated Florentine museums and monuments, such as the Duomo and the Uffizi Gallery. "Alumni University," a series of classes taught by SUF professors, includes a panel discussion on contemporary Italy, a lecture on the Mafia, and an Italian language class. Two extraordinary events are planned for Tuesday afternoon and evening: the Closing Ceremony at Orsanmichele, a magnificent Renaissance building in the heart of the city, followed the Farewell Dinner at the US Consulate, a splendid palazzo overlooking the Arno. The dinner will be hosted by the US Consul General in Florence Mary Ellen Countryman, "SUF is the embodiment of what a study abroad program should be," says Countryman. "It has been an important part of Florentine-American relations for fifty years. I am honored to host the SUF alumni at our consulate."



## SUF Publishes Fifth Book in *The Villa Rossa Series*



**Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne**  
New Research

Edited by Rab Hatfield  
Syracuse University in Florence

*The Villa Rossa Series*  
Intercultural Perspectives on Italy and Europe

SU Florence is pleased to announce the publication of the fifth volume in *The Villa Rossa Series* entitled

*Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research*, edited by Rab Hatfield. The volume contains six essays based on papers given at a conference in Florence in October 2008 to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Herbert Horne's ground-breaking monograph on Botticelli. The volume opens with essays by Rab Hatfield and Barbara Deimling, both of whom address the fundamental question of the identities of figures in major Botticelli works. In the third essay, Louis Waldman presents a contract he discovered recently, which is the only known contract for a work by Botticelli. Jonathan Nelson's essay explores various Botticelli works in search of answers to a crucial question about attribution: are we justified in attributing a work to the maestro if it was wholly or partly executed by assistants in his workshop? Caroline Elam then shifts the focus from the artist to the critic; her essay explores the remarkable life and personality of Herbert Horne. In the final essay, Antonella Francini presents and analyzes a fascinating poem about Botticelli by Horne, which she discovered recently. Says Barbara Deimling, SUF Director and *Series* editor, "The volume sheds new light on a great artist and one of his most sensitive and innovative interpreters."

*Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research*  
Edited by Rab Hatfield  
Paperback: 286 pages  
Florence, 2009  
Distributor: Syracuse University Press  
ISBN 88-95250-04-4

## Patronage Patterns: a Cost-Benefit Analysis

Review of lecture  
"Lorenzo de' Medici as  
Art Patron: A Cost-  
Benefit Analysis"  
Shannon Gilmore and  
Laura Genatiempo  
SUF Fine Arts Graduate  
Students

Wondering what the rich spend their money on? People who attended the September 22 lecture entitled "Lorenzo de' Medici as Art Patron: A Cost-Benefit Analysis," delivered by SUF professor Jonathan Nelson, gained

insight into the purchasing habits of one of the Renaissance's most famous art patrons. Nelson revealed the multifaceted nature of Lorenzo de' Medici's art patronage. In the analysis of his patronage patterns, Nelson demonstrated how Lorenzo displayed two different facades in his artistic commissions. Through a cost-benefit analysis, Nelson argued that Lorenzo's patronage activities in the city did not largely consist of commissioning works of art from contemporary artists, as generally assumed. Instead, Lorenzo de' Medici invested much of his money in the purchase of antiquities. Within the more public sphere of the city, he did not engage in ostentatious displays of power through artwork and architecture. Nelson suggested that a possible reason for Lorenzo's avoidance was due to his desire to maintain his image as an ordinary citizen. Nelson further illustrated how Lorenzo determined that the social cost of flaunting his wealth in the city outweighed the benefits, and thus Lorenzo conducted his spending habits in a very conscientious manner.

In his analysis of Lorenzo de' Medici's patronage patterns, Nelson demonstrate how Lorenzo de' Medici displayed two different facades in his artistic commissions.

Conversely, Nelson argued that, when outside the city limits, Lorenzo's patronage pattern changed. Lorenzo's villas were the main sites of his patronage in the countryside, which included architecture, painting, and sculpture. In the countryside, Lorenzo was further from the public eye, and was thus able to more visibly display his wealth. One of the benefits that Lorenzo de' Medici probably received from these countryside commissions was the pleasure that resulted from the ownership of beautiful buildings and objects. Nelson determined that the Medici received additional benefits from their patronage activity in the countryside, including the bestowal of honor and the favorable impression presented to heads of state. In fact, he suggested that Lorenzo de'



*Portrait of Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Giorgio Vasari (1533)

Medici himself performed a cost-benefit analysis of his family's expenditures; the patron wrote that the money spent by the Medici over the years was worth the benefit of the honor that their state received. Despite the amount of wealth at his disposal, like any other buyer of objects, there were constraints that affected Lorenzo de' Medici's purchases. Nelson identified some of these constraints as availability of materials, of manpower, and of space. Thus, contrary to popular belief, it is not the commissioning of numerous works of art for which Lorenzo de' Medici was renowned. Rather, Nelson argues that he is to be remembered for the "[creation] of an atmosphere where the arts could flourish." Jonathan Nelson derived his lecture from the book that he published in 2008, in collaboration with economist Richard J. Zeckhauser, called *The Patron's Payoff: Conspicuous Commissions in Italian Renaissance Art*.

## The Art of Study Abroad: Getting Acclimated

Brenda Cooke  
Staff

Through “The City as a Work of Art,” the orientation lecture presented by SUF Professor Alick McLean, and the ‘zone dinners’ created for students to get to know each other, the first week of the semester offered students the opportunity to realize that there is indeed an ‘art’ to study abroad.



Photo: Caroline Elo



McLeans lecture began, not surprisingly, with some history...but with a twist. He presented the intriguing idea that the concept of what is art can be applied to the form daily life takes, both in past and present Italy. From the Etruscans to present day Italy, McLean presented some unusual topics for our consideration as art: defense of the city, public ritual, and ordinary day-to-day living. Says McLean “In Italy there are cultural habits formed over hundreds of generations living in the same cities. The development of the Italian city can be so much more than just as a matrix of infrastructure, buildings, residents, and services—it is also a composition of consummate art.”

Alick McLean urged the SUF students to become a part of the performance art of daily life in their host city by active participation in the art of daily ritual. For example, if one chooses to frequent a small, independently owned food shop rather than the supermarket, it’s only a matter of time before cultural barriers are breached and the shop owner becomes an acquaintance. Give it a little more time, and the shop owner is a friend, asking about your mother and giving out recipes for how to prepare the food you just purchased. McLean added that this is one of the best ways to really increase your proficiency in Italian, and to better come into contact with and understand Italian culture.

The lecture segued quite naturally into a ‘zone dinner,’ SUF’s solution to the art of helping students meet other students living in their neighborhood. Dinner was offered in the campus garden, followed by an ice-breaker exercise: students were given a page of questions, each of which they had to ask to a different student whom they had not yet met, and write down that student’s answer. The pace was fast and fun as students circulated, asked questions, and recorded answers. The first two students to finish the survey won coupons for Elia’s Caffè, the campus bar. Said Monica Davis of Santa Clara University, winner of a coupon, “The zone dinner was such a fun way to meet all of the people who live in my neighborhood. I had no idea that some of my new friends were also my next-door neighbors.”

## The Art of Study Abroad: Making a Difference

Brenda Cooke  
Staff

The SUF Volunteer Program has kicked off what promises to be an action-packed fall 2009 semester. Professor Vittoria Tettamanti, Coordinator of the program, declares, "I'm very pleased with the students' enthusiasm. Between Storytelling, Reading for the Blind, and the Soup

Kitchen, our students have their work cut out for them-and I am confident they are up to the task."

Tettamanti says the Storytelling program is by now well known among Florentine elementary school teachers and is more popular than ever. Thirty-five schools have adhered to the initiative this fall, for a total of 140 classes. This semester SUF students will be reading Dr. Seuss's *I Wish that I had Duck Feet* and between the storyboards, flashcards, props and activity books, the children are bound to have a great time as they learn English.

As usual, Tettamanti has organized several workshops so that SUF volunteers can learn how to conduct the storytelling. This semester however she has given the responsibility of running these sessions to several volunteer students and is very pleased with the results. Says Tettamanti, "So far more than 80 students have signed up to participate in the Volunteer Program."

All of the Volunteer projects have already started, including the storytelling visits, which began the first week of October."

Seven students have signed up for Reading for the Blind. Tettamanti notes this is an ideal volunteer activity for those who have less free time but still want to help out: vol-

unteers read books, in English, with their computer and the recordings are given to the "Stefano Bruni Tape Library," a non-profit national center that distributes audio books all over Italy to people with sight disabilities. On Sunday, September 27, twenty-three students volunteered at the refreshment stand on Piazza della Signoria, passing out water, juice, and fresh fruit to over 10,000 participants in the annual *Corri La Vita*, Florence's walk/run marathon in support of victims of breast cancer, while twenty-nine SUF students ran the marathon.

Caroline Thielenhaus, Syracuse University, says, "Volunteering at *Corri La Vita* was quite an experience and we were all glad to lend a hand in the fight against breast cancer. Although the event at times seemed somewhat unorganized and confusing, it was all perfectly ordinary for the participants, who remained enthusiastic and appreciative throughout the event. Overall, the event was a great way to dive into the midst of Italian culture."

Tettamanti notes that SUF was recently invited by the organizers of the Florence Marathon to volunteer for the famous forty-two kilometer event on Sunday, November 29, "a sign," she concludes with pride, "that SUF students are indeed making a difference."

**The power of orange**  
SUF student volunteers in the classroom with *I Wish that I had Duck Feet*, and near Palazzo Vecchio, in support of the fight against breast cancer through participation in the annual Florentine marathon *Corri La Vita*.



Photo: Vittoria Tettamanti

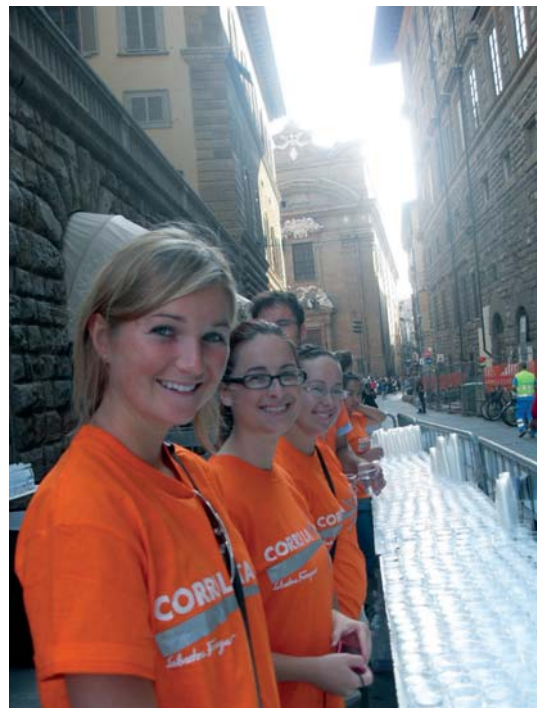


Photo: Paulina Kernacova

## A close encounter with the origins of the Italian language: Option II students visit the Accademia della Crusca

Brenda Cooke, Staff  
and Antonella Francini,  
SUF Professor

Ever since their arrival at SU Florence, Option II students have been fervidly preparing for their upcoming studies at the Centro di Cultura per Stranieri in the University of Florence through intense advanced Italian classes, and site visits. They recently wrapped up their preparation with a

visit to the Accademia della Crusca, the institution that compiled the first dictionary of the Italian language four centuries ago.

Says Antonella Francini, Coordinator of the Option II program and professor of the advanced pre-Centro course, “A visit to the

Crusca provides students with a historical perspective on the language they have studied at home, and which they have come to perfect in Florence. It’s a crucial complement to their knowledge of Italian and its legacy today.”

The Accademia della Crusca (literally, the Academy of Bran) is a leading research institution on the Italian language. Its origins can be traced back to the late 1500s. Currently located in the magnificent Medici Villa di Castello, for which Botticelli supposedly painted his *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus*, this place and its historic garden is the perfect haven for students of the Italian language. Notes Katie Gosewehr, Pomona College, “When I visit a place with a long history, I can feel its past and its experiences. I breathe the same air the building breathes—the same air the people who have lived there breathed. This was my experience at the Accademia della Crusca, which gave form to the Italian language we study today.”

Upon arrival, linguist Lucia De Anna introduced the Option II group to the history of the Accademia and the *pala* room, an enormous room whose walls are lined with wooden shovels, created to represent each member of the Crusca with a symbolic image, a nickname, and his chosen motto. Students saw an edition of the first *Vocabolario*, a dictionary of the Italian language printed in Venice in 1612 to preserve the beauty of the Florentine language as it had been used by illustrious authors such as Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Lorenzo il Magnifico, and Machiavelli. Said Tessa Lawler, USC, “Inside the walls of the villa are the most important testimonials to the critical influences of Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio on the Italian language. The visit was fantastic!”

Says Amanda Levin, Rutgers University, “I had learned about the Crusca in another course, and I was looking forward to the visit. I loved everything there, especially the shovel room and the history behind each *pala*. The garden, the statues, the grotta—everything felt like a *paradiso*.”



Photos: Brenda Cooke

## “My” Annunciation

Michael McDonnell  
University of Texas at  
Austin

Where and why students go abroad varies for many reasons. When I chose Florence for my semester of study it was to fulfill my language requirement, eat pasta and drink wine, and see works of art in person, such as Michelangelo’s *David*.

Whether or not you know its actual dimensions, no one can truly comprehend its grandeur until they see the goliath of a David in person. I came to Florence because art is meant to be seen in the flesh; slides and Power Point presentations cannot do them justice. My most memorable experience in Florence was similar to but more profound than the first time I saw the *David* and it came with a work I was unfamiliar with until Professor Nelson’s class on Botticelli.



It’s the first week of class and Nelson has already assigned a five-minute presentation on any of Botticelli’s works. I choose his fresco *Annunciation* from San Martino alla Scala here in Florence. Using key art historical terms, we compared our works to one by a different artist on a similar subject. There is no shortage of available annunciations for comparison, yet every one I see makes me appreciate Botticelli’s even more. It appealed to me so much that in class I would simply refer to it as *my* annunciation.

The work is “in” the Uffizi, but it’s not in the Botticelli room, or any other room that I had been in for that matter. So after a site visit there I asked Professor Nelson, “Where is *my* annunciation?” “Hmm, I don’t know, let’s ask,” he replies. So we ask, and we do not get very good results. Two guards do not know, and finally one says that it is no longer on public display. *Che peccato!* Oh no, no, no. Nelson tells me to wait there. Two minutes later he returns with Dr. Giovanna Giusti, a curator for the Uffizi. We exchange “*Piacere!*” and she leads us into a small cramped elevator. We go down two floors and

she stops in front of two large wooden doors. She lets us in and turns on the lights and it takes a moment for my eyes to register what she just presented before us.

There, thirty yards in front of me is *my* Annunciation. This beautiful and immense fresco, over fifteen feet long and eight feet high, leaves me simply dumbfounded. It takes me some time to regain my composure and formulate a cohesive thought but I’m fairly certain it was nothing more than “wow,” as my mouth remains open in utter disbelief. Gabriel is swooping down to bring the Virgin the lily and the gift of the Christ child. He is still in the act of flying and his toe is just extending towards the ground but his hair and robes wrap around him, engulfing him in drapery, creating an intense sense of movement. The most incredible aspect, lost in most reproductions, is the subtle, yet powerful, rays of light that extend from the mouth of Gabriel. They penetrate the whole scene and a single ray reaches the heart of the gracious and accepting Virgin.

This city has experienced mankind’s greatest achievements in art and has taken great pride in their museums and collections. My goal of studying abroad was to see works in person, but I never thought that would mean the private viewing of such an amazing fresco. Nowhere in the United States can you find teachers that are so invested in their passions, with a close relationship to the museums, that they can offer such an unforgettable opportunity to their students. It is one of the majestic qualities of this country and a testament to the SU Florence faculty, and although this whole semester is one that I will never forget, that moment in that room, with that work, will forever be ingrained in my mind as one of the most spectacular events in my art history career.

*Editor’s note: Michael was a student at Syracuse University in Florence in spring 2009. He wrote this piece in response to his experience in Jonathan Nelson’s Botticelli course.*

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SUF Option II Program & the Department of Humanities  
and Social Sciences present

## Gabriella Kuruvilla

Italian-Indian travel writer and painter

*A bilingual presentation of the works of the author*  
November 18, 6:15 - Villa Rossa, Room 13

Open to all students



The VILLA ROSSA VOICE is the newsletter for the Syracuse University in Florence community. We welcome your questions, comments, articles and/or artwork.

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## SUF Adopt-a-Book Program

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