Bread and Circuses

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

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March 2012

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2012
Abstract

Studying in another country has become a desired part of academia. Being immersed in another culture while delving deeper into one’s intended major of study provides learning experiences that far surpass the classroom. Honoring the value of study abroad programs within intended college degrees, the Ball State University Art Department hosts a field study throughout Italy every other year. The program focuses on exploring various art media such as watercolor and drawing, while exposing students to some of the most influential works of art throughout history. To capture the essence of how this adventure altered our perceptions as artists, students, and simply humans, I created a booklet of our trip. *Bread and Circuses* documents the work we created during and after the travel program as well as each student’s reflection of this life changing opportunity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank professor Sam Minor for advising me through this project. His guidance throughout the design process of this booklet illustrated his passion for his profession as well as his passion to mentor thriving young students like myself. The artistic growth I achieved during this thesis project was fueled by my advisors enthusiasm, respect, and extensive knowledge of the field of Visual Communication.

I would like to thank professor Scott Anderson and David Hannon for leading this group of passionate students throughout the beautiful country of Italy. I will cherish this experience forever.
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Author’s Statement

Supplements: Bread and Circuses Booklet

Supplements: Digital Version of Bread and Circuses Booklet

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Each year around the beginning of November the Ball State University Art Department reveals a hidden treasure that always thrives to impress. Months of meticulous planning, dedicated work and reflection, and constant guidance by two painting professors leads to a manifestation of a travel experience unlike any other. From the clever name to the phenomenal work, this year’s show left hundreds of viewers pondering the question: “What magnificent adventures did these students experience in the beautiful and awe-inspiring countries of Italy and Spain?”

Being one of these students, I felt a strong desire to articulate the impact of this journey in a realm independent of the typical gallery motif. Utilizing my education in the field of Visual Communication, I developed a project that would transcend our passions, our growth, and our love of art long after our paintings and drawings were removed from the walls of the Atrium gallery.

The 2011 Art in Italy field study, lead by professors Scott Anderson and David Hannon, guided eighteen Ball State undergraduate students from the bustling college town of Muncie, IN, to the picturesque streets of Italy and Spain. Our checklist of cities to discover and digest was extensive. Florence, Venice, Rome, Siena, Ravenna, Orvieto, and Madrid, just to name a few, became our playground and our studios.
The streets, people, and food became our muses, guiding us to an understanding of all that is Italia. We walked where the masters walked. We breathed the same sweet air, felt the same cobblestones beneath our feet, and tasted the same succulent recipes our artistic mentors of the past once encountered. I often found my peers asking, "Is this all real?"

The whirlwind of knowledge and artistic growth left many of us exhausted. But our field study was not complete. The moment we stepped back onto our native soil we faced our greatest challenge. Suddenly all those moments of language barriers, being lost among labyrinths of foreign streets, and trying to convert Euros to dollars seemed like cake, by comparison.

How does one express the sensation of all that we discovered while traveling those thirty-six days? The artwork was the first step. After we had delved into the depths of our cherished Art in Italy memories, it was time to create our show. During our many bus rides to quaint, romantic towns, we discussed proposals of a theme for our show. It was clear that only one encapsulated our Italia: Bread and Circuses.

The basic Roman idea that public approval could develop from two basic elements—bread and entertainment—related to the numerous experiences in which we relished. We became lost in the sport of people watching from places like the steps of the Siena Cathedral and the docks of the Grand Canal in Venice. Everything was exciting and new. We made an adventure out of every excursion and every museum visit. Stopping to consume copious amounts of delicious bread and gelato, we fueled our enthusiasm throughout each day. Even among the most
stressful of situations we found a way to laugh. We had our bread, and we had our circuses, a metaphor for a superficial means of appeasement. Like ancient societies before us, we found pleasure in the immediate.

The appropriate name of our exposition was clear and inspired a drive to do something innovative for the 2011 show. Books documenting the trip had been created in the past. They were used to encourage others to attend future tours and expressed reflections from the students. I took these foundations and ran. For the months leading up to our opening I organized a group of Vis Com students and designed a work not for the show or the department, but for us. My thesis was about honoring an experience that I shared with this particular group of students and professors. It was about honoring the relevance of Italy in our hearts.

I composed a cohesive design, utilizing the expressive sketches of my peers along with watercolor paint splatters as backgrounds. I incorporated body copy of each reflection and works from the gallery. Scans of various ticket stubs and maps created separations throughout the book as visual dividers. After days of editing, the book was ready to be shared. We knew we wanted some physical copies but I also suggested a digital version that would be economical and interactive. The result was a digital swf file on a screen that allowed viewers to click the edge of a page that would then trigger an animated flip of a page.

The night of the gallery opening showcased my thesis. The walls were covered with the varied media of my peers' works, each one as different as the other. Every sketch, painting, drawing, etc., articulated the personal relationships
with Italy that had matured over our month of travel. My medium came to fruition in the corner of the Atrium gallery that night.

I watched with pride as my peers flipped through a digital, 96-page homage to our Italia displayed on a TV screen. They stopped and read their reflections and gazed at the composite of their personal works. The watercolor pages I constructed for backgrounds sparked memories of the splatters that we left on pavements of streets and balconies of hotels—remnants of the passion of young artists.

I hope that my thesis will not only promote this academic experience at Ball State University, but also promote all who encounter it to find value in the bread and circuses of our every day lives. Students often get lost in the seriousness and professionalism of academia, but as the paint splatters remind us, sometimes the passion of life opens one’s eyes to the beauty and value of experiences. With this perspective, every city, every town, and every street can be Italia.
February 27, 2012

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"Everytime you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing."  —Blessed Mother Teresa
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