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Scholarship Recipient 2017



To the County of Santa Clara/Province of Florence, Italy Sister County Commission:

Upon returning home from my 9 months of study abroad in Florence, I first want to share how grateful I am for the financial support of the Commission which allowed me to live comfortably in Florence and played part in fostering my experiences abroad - culturally, artistically, and academically. I chose to study in Florence because I wanted to go somewhere known for its wealth of influential artists and art from the western world. In my time abroad I experienced personal growth, improved confidence (and Italian), empathy for others and personal skills that enabled me to mentally and physically navigate my way through the culture and environment of Florence, which was what I hoped for but much more than expected!

My first accomplishment living in Florence: finding an apartment. I immediately bonded with my roommate who also attends San Jose State University (though we met in Florence). Our first choices (and then more desperate choices) for apartments were taken again and again, but finally we found our new home and met our Florentine landlords who themselves used to live in the space before starting their family. We lived near *Mercato di Sant’Ambrogio*, which was a perfect location for me as it was conveniently close to both schools I attended and a short distance to *centro*, but quieter. I took art history, Italian

conversation and grammar courses at the California State University International Programs: Florence Study Center and my studio art courses at the *Accademia di Belle Arti di Firenze*, a huge opportunity that I was not certain I would be able to attain.

Throughout the year, I took part in many activities which enriched my cultural experience in Florence, broadened my appreciation for other cultures and gave me an understanding for the significance of an international community which was made possible with the generous assistance of the Commission. I attended a cooking class at a local Italian family home, hosted by a charming elderly couple. I visited most of the main attractions and sites in Florence several times, climbed the *Duomo di Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore* twice, wandered with awe through the classical Renaissance masterpieces in the *Uffizi* and *Palazzo Pitti*. I saw contemporary art shows in the *Palazzo Strozzi*. I participated in multilingual *aperitivo* events and attended a *Fiorentina* football game. I chose to spend the holidays in Florence, celebrating the new year (*Capodanno*) with thousands of others at *Piazzale Michelangelo* to watch the *fuochi d'artificio* light up and boom all over the valley, reflecting off the surface of the *Fiume Arno*, and was delighted to enjoy a concert afterward where a live pop band played music and sang in Italian for several hours. I was humbled by the churches and their artworks, heard my first Gregorian chants inside the *Basilica di San Miniato al Monte* and learned about the local history and artists, food and wine in various tours. I went to as many museums in Florence as I could, including the *Galileo Galilei*, the *Bargello* and *Cappelle Medicee* and the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale and the Laboratorio Di Restauro*, where I learned about the 1966 flood in Florence and its influence on modern day book restoration and conservation. I enjoyed the lush gardens throughout Florence, including the *Boboli*, the Iris and Rose gardens and the views of Florence from afar, as from *Fiesole*. With my program I got to visit many cities - *Roma, Torino, Venezia, Padova, Napoli* and *Ravenna* to name a few. I made sure to travel around Tuscany and Italy in my free time as well, so the Commission helped me visit *Cinque Terre, San Gimignano, Montepulciano, Siena, Viareggio, Rimini* and more. After my adventures, even the few times where I left Italy, I always felt glad to return home to *Via Dell'Angolo 31, Firenze*.

Since my time in Florence was for study and artmaking, I was engulfed by the challenge of attending the *Accademia*, where I was for the first time a foreigner in a school with different ideas and practices from home. I was blessed to have assistance in navigating

Accademia from a renewal student from the previous year and my art advisor. Trying to speak with my teachers and peers in a completely Italian environment and completing my projects for *la revisione* (critique) was the highlight and shadow of my education abroad. I practiced my Italian and learned techniques for *incisione* (etching), sculpting with wax and creating plaster molds for *fonderia* (foundry). I felt challenged with the language and culture barriers, but also liberated when I could accomplish small tasks. Through my interactions there I learned that Florentines return whatever warmth you extend to them and they take social time, work time and meals equally seriously! I watched the young, stylish art students at Accademia sing to music together, roll their tobacco and *prendi un caffè* together, prep huge canvases in tiny hallways or chisel away at pristine *Carrara* marble. They would converse deeply about their art together, eat homemade lunches with their professors or eat a *panino* on the steps of *Piazza Santissima Annunziata*, as I often did. Students were kind to me when I reached out, even if they did not know me, and this made such a difference that I want to support international students who study abroad in California in the future.

I adored being surrounded by such amazing art and architecture that I had dreamed of experiencing in person, but nothing prepared me for the influence it would have on me. I fell in love with listening to the Tuscan Italian spoken all around me while walking down the narrow streets. I admired the potted plants and hanging laundry and the smell of tobacco and leather. I took in all the art I saw in Florence and throughout Italy, cherishing the idea that I was there to follow an ancient tradition of art study and practice in a place where so many great artists trained before me. I am honored that the Sister Counties Commission provided me not only with funds to round out my experiences of Florence outside of my program, but more importantly, provided me with confidence that my experience abroad matters and has value to others. I thank the Commission again and express my gratitude for your part in my wonderful opportunity.