

# **ARST 4270 [Documentary Photography]**

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**University of Georgia (Athens)**

**Study Abroad Program Cortona, Italy**

**SPRING 2017**

KAYSE BRUNELL

SPENCER FROST

ROSE GREEN

ANN MARIE HORMEKU

ELANA RIORDAN

ABIGAL MABRY

MEGAN WATKINS

*Our education becomes complete in proportion  
as our susceptibility to impressions increase in depth and variety.  
And the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish,  
analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which  
a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book,  
produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure,  
to indicate what the source of that impression is,  
and under what conditions it is experienced.<sup>1</sup>*

In DOCUMENTARY PHOTO students set themselves on “assignment.” After looking at a number of short documentary videos, classic in nature, we paused to ask how our immediate experience in Italy compared to the economic, political, and environmental challenges that are typically documented around the globe.

Living in Tuscany—not weathering a storm of violence or injustice—we thought: What was there to fear in documenting the beautiful? What if Cortona’s Study Abroad program went the way of other communities, once beautiful? Isn’t the space to reflect and make art precisely what humans need to evolve a meaningful life?

Taught in studio format, each student located a subject that evolved from “research” around their individual journey. As we met, week to week, the meaning of beauty continued to surface. More and more, beauty was not in the abstract of our day, but absolute in our art history excursions, poetry readings at La Saletta, and dinner conversations at Tonino’s.

And so, I ask, as you read the images and statements of each of the students’ work in this small catalog: How is beauty framed in each of their projects? How was beauty not beyond any of their visions, but in some cases even rescued or made sacred?

*Susannah Hays*  
MFA, MA, PhD

*25 April 2017*  
*Cortona, Italy*

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Tricia Lootens for sharing Walter Pater’s 1867 essay, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* with me.



KAYSE BRUNELL from her book *I Love You So*, 2017 archival pigment print

*I LOVE YOU SO* is a book of nine images that were first shot on gelatin-silver 35mm film, processed, developed and then scanned. The images selected for the book were digitally printed and mounted to text weight paper. The book was then hand sewn with a pamphlet stitch to cover-weight papers. The title arrived from my horoscope, which read: "You will fall in love abroad." This was several days before leaving New York to study abroad in Cortona, Italy. The title also made a connection to Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. I was also inspired by Finn Thrane's *From Dust You Have Come* and Jean-Christophe Bechet's *Accidents*. The last image is meant to symbolize the subject of my love which is open to the viewer's interpretation.



SPENCER FROST *Bedroom*, 2017 JDK Center archival pigment print

BEDROOM is from a series of photos taken over the course of three months during which I studied in the Tuscan hill-town of Cortona; the photos were taken of and from the JDK Center, the UGA dormitory where I lived. This body of work emerged organically from photographs I began taking of the center during my time there; what began as simple documentation of a space became a reprocessing of the space, and an attempt to both find the miraculous in the familiar and make the familiar miraculous. Speaking now, having taken additional photos and organized the pieces of this series (that are both intentional and accidental), I can say that my investment was and is in finding the miraculous and uncomfortable in a space that is both secondhand and new, commonplace and storied. The series is a capturing of a view through a darkened door frame, the unease felt in staring down an unfamiliar passageway.



ELANA RIORDAN still image from *Le Fonti Medievali*, video San Gimignano, Italy 2017

VIDEO TRIPTYCH is a series of short videos completed during a three-month stay in Tuscany. They are a reflection of my observations about how we, as a group of outsiders and as a generation, interact with our new surroundings. They not only relate to our direct interactions with our temporary home, but how we experience high art environments and how our immersion in digitalization affects our perception and presence. The titles of each video correspond to the place they depict: *Pisa*, *San Gimignano*, and *Cortona*.

***Pisa*** focuses on our preoccupation with photographing and documenting our journeys abroad. We are abundant in lenses, phones, and devices which alter our presence in day-to-day life and on our excursions. While photography augments memory of our experiences, it also transfers our presence from the physical world to the world within our screens. This affects not only how we experience places, but also how we experience the passing of time.

***San Gimignano*** is a marriage of ancient and modern in a short video of *Le Fonti Medievali*, the medieval Roman fountains preserved in San Gimignano. With a train window view of passing mountains imposed on top of it, the passing mountains appear to be a reflection in the water, with the sounds of both places layered on top of one another. After the train view disappears, the fountain shots are isolated, one by one, and then they decompose into multiplied grids that resemble an iPhone's camera roll.

***Cortona*** is a reflection of living here but not being fully present in this place. While everyone brings their own memories and different ways of looking, we gaze out into the Tuscan hills with various thoughts and associations that cannot be quieted. *Cortona* is also about missing loved ones and imagining that they could be here with you.



ROSE GREEN *Father and Son* Camucia, Italy 2017 archival pigment print

FATHER AND SON is from the series *Emotions Behind Footsteps*, a document about travelers. Why do we travel? How do we leave our loved ones at the airport, bus or train station? What is it about traveling alone that enhances relationships? How do people navigate unfamiliar environments, rattling maps and speaking a foreign language? Why do some people travel the world with a backpack while others carry a truckload?

These questions become all the more interesting to observe when traveling oneself. My focal point was to capture a traveler's emotional state, from wherever they were coming or going. While some people appear always in a hurry to get somewhere, others linger as they say goodbye. Observing emotions, emanating from their journey, it was important to imagine their possible narrative. As I was also in the process of passing through these same bus and trains stations, I practiced separating my own emotions—in order to learn from my observations—as part of my destination.



ANN MARIE HORMEKU, still from *Fifty Years of Cultural Exchange*, video 2017

Ideally, FIFTY YEARS OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE in Cortona, Italy will be completed as a full-length feature film in time for University of Georgia's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, summer of 2019. For the Mostra, I accomplished editing a portion of stills and clips for a short, ten-minute "trailer." By showing just two central interviews, it's possible to learn the scope of the project, as it covers the history and impact of the program.

To discover these impacts, I conducted over 25 interviews with program participants, staff, faculty, alumni, and the local population of Cortona. I also made a series of still images that will be included in the documentary, so the viewer can observe the depth of beauty participants are immersed in, while they are in the process of gaining their experiences.



ABIGAIL MABRY *Leviticus 20:13* Cortona, Italy 2017 archival pigment print

WORDS OF ILLUSTRATION is a body of work that observes the complexities associated with fitting a man or a woman's identity into a heteronormative society. All high contrast, black and white, these studio portraits pay direct attention to the fierce nature of an individual who is bold enough to resist conformity that would otherwise confine their identity. While some images translate stigmas about the LGBTQ+ community, others contend with religious or literary sources that reveal the paradox of bisexual women who remain beholden to their faith. In one image, a bible verse that would condemn her is placed in contrast to her sexual identity. In another, the text of Victorian poem *Aurora Leigh*, exemplifies what a woman traditionally "ought to be." Female hands, tattooed with the words "fearless," are posed in a masculine fist, questioning our perceptions of the socially idealized woman.





MEGAN WATKINS *Stained Glass Window* Museo dell'Opera Sienna, Italy 2017 archival pigment print

A TOURIST'S JOURNEY focuses on the interactions between tourists and sites they are visiting. These sites can vary from a museum to a park. The inspiration came from the work of my grandfather, Jim Ferri. After a tour of duty in the Army, in 1970, my grandfather became a freelance magazine photographer, then also a writer, and shortly after the managing editor of a large travel magazine. Eventually, he began his own travel blog, one that I worked on last summer. The experience inspired me to create my own travel images, in resemblance to his. He has always taken portraits of people from all over the world, in these places, as opposed to photographs simply of the location. Each destination we visited, during my Spring semester in Tuscany, I incorporated people from all over the world, who have come together appreciating Italy's beautiful sites.



*Outside Severini Studio: first row: Elana, Ann Marie, Spencer; Rose, Kayse, Abi, and Megan*