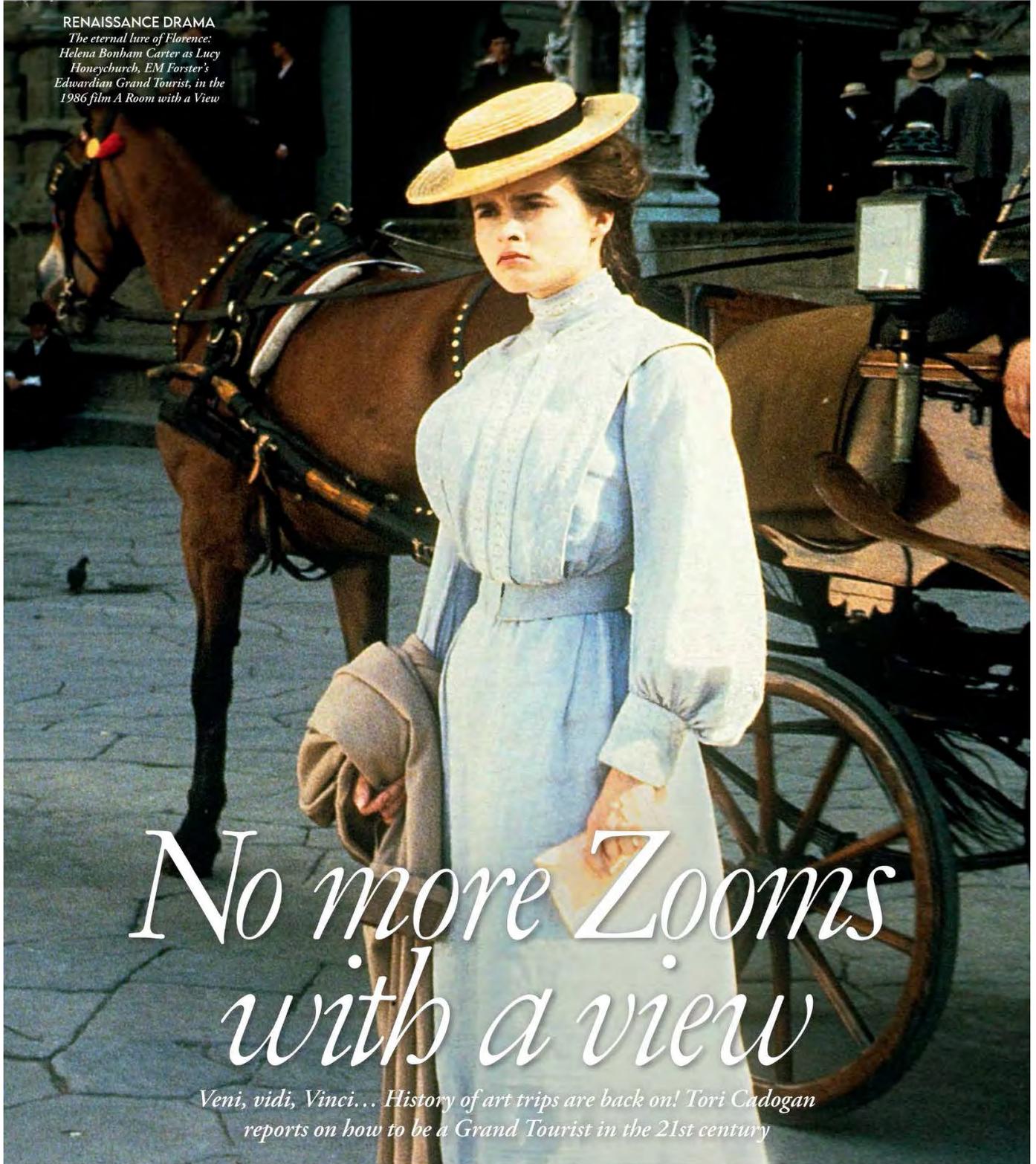


HISTORY OF ART

RENAISSANCE DRAMA
*The eternal lure of Florence:
Helena Bonham Carter as Lucy
Honeychurch, EM Forster's
Edwardian Grand Tourist, in the
1986 film A Room with a View*



No more Zooms with a view

*Veni, vidi, Vinci... History of art trips are back on! Tori Cadogan
reports on how to be a Grand Tourist in the 21st century*

AFTER YEARS OF ONLINE learning, cultural travel is back on the agenda. Celebrate by taking a family holiday to Italy to introduce children to its treasures, or plan a gap year following in the footsteps of 18th-century Grand Tourists. As well as developing an appreciation of art and architecture, and fine-tuning analytical skills, history of art students can be sure of inspiring visits to richly endowed cities.

These trips are crucial; they allow students to contextualise the art, to fully appreciate the works they are studying and to analyse the finer details of, say, the artist's brush strokes and mediums. As the head master of Stowe, Dr Anthony Wallersteiner, who gained his Doctorate in Art History and Theory at the University of Kent, explains, 'There's no substitute for being up close and personal with a painting, a sculpture, a work of art or a building.'

Florence

De rigueur for sons of the aristocracy on their Grand Tours, Florence is still the perfect starting point for any art history exploration. Traces of the infamous Medici family and their exorbitant wealth and power are evident throughout the city, from the Basilica di San Lorenzo, their burial place, to Palazzo Medici Riccardi, their first palace, where Michelangelo contributed to the design. Other protégés included Leonardo da Vinci and Botticelli, whose works are well represented.

WHERE TO STUDY

Tom Richards, who runs the Florence Academy of Art, feels that the city's art is 'absorbed as part of everyday life', not just something you visit when the museums are open. 'Students go from drawing the nude in class to sharing a drink in a piazza in front of the statues that inspired the pose,' he says.

The Academy offers six-week painting and fine art courses throughout the year, with options for beginners through to more experienced painters. They're so popular that students frequently



DOMES SWEET DOMES
A 21st-century Grand
Tourist still wants a room
with a view

stay on, enthralled by Florentine life. florenceacademyofart.com

Founded 105 years ago, the British Institute of Florence – or 'il British' as the Florentines fondly refer to it – offers bespoke courses in history of art, life and cost drawing, and the Italian language. Many students combine them all. Lectures and gatherings are hosted in the stunning 16th-century Palazzo Lanfredini, which houses one of the largest English-language libraries in Europe.

As director Simon Gammell explains, by the end of the 20th-century 'il British' had garnered a bohemian crown for its 'artists, intellectuals [and] renegades', but now it's for 'the discerning visitor – if you like, the new Grand Tourist, who's coming with a purpose'. The duration of courses varies and students stay in accommodation of their own choosing. britishinstitute.it

For an alternative exposure to the muses, book an Inkspirence with creative wordsmith and calligrapher Betty Soldi in her design studio opposite the Boboli Gardens. Classes are ostensibly to learn calligraphy, but this is simply a by-product of learning how to thrive, create and free up one's artistic

energy. Betty extols the joy of writing – the connection of head, heart and hand – and with patience and vivacity gently pries away students' reservations. Soon they are expressing themselves in giant flourishes. And as Betty says, 'If you don't flourish, you die.' bettysoldi.com

WHAT TO SEE

The Uffizi Gallery, former offices of the Medici family and now home to one of the world's finest collections of Renaissance art, is incredible in variety and scope. Works include Caravaggio's *Medusa*, Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and the breathtaking Octagonal Room with its shell-covered, domed ceiling. The Palazzo Strozzi, under the direction of Arturo Galansino, has fabulous exhibitions ranging from the Renaissance sculptor Donatello to contemporary artist Olafur Eliasson. At the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, the newly restored *Pietà Bandini* sculpture by Michelangelo is not to be missed.

WHERE TO STAY

The Hotel Lungarno, with its world-class private art collection (including Picassos) and sumptuous suites, offers views over the Arno river. lungarnocollection.com

Venice

The name evokes culture, gastronomy, pleasure and, of course, the famous waterways. A republic for 1,100 years, Venice has a fascinating history. The first doge is believed to have been elected in 697AD, and the bewilderingly complicated voting system kept the republic strong until the last doge handed over to Napoleon in 1797. Venice's canal-based topography is of crucial importance to art historians. With the exposure to salt water in the summer heat causing irrevocable damage to precious frescoes, it's here that artists first started painting oils on canvas.

WHERE TO STUDY

The Peggy Guggenheim Collection, exhibiting works by Picasso, Barbara Hepworth and Dalí, is one of the world's most important caches of 20th-century European and American art – and students and graduates can apply to join its International Internship Program. Established 40 years ago, this scheme will give them invaluable experience working at a museum with such significant stewardship. guggenheim-venice.it

Meanwhile, the John Hall Venice Programme has been a ▷



FOLLOW YOUR ART
Clockwise from left, the Renaissance church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, Venice; a mural depicting a migrant child created by Banksy during the 2019 Biennale; a drawing class on the John Hall course in Venice in 2016



◁ gap-year favourite for generations of the aesthetically minded. Now run by the dynamic Charlie Hall, an incredible fount of knowledge, the course comprises one week in London and six in Venice – with extensions in Florence and Rome as optional extras – and aims to give students an appreciation and understanding of Italian art, music, cookery, culture and civilisation. Its secret is access. Imagine a private visit to St Mark’s Basilica at night, when they switch off the lights and illuminate 8,000 square metres of gold mosaics. Or a tour of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection with a welcome from director Karole Vail (who happens to be Peggy’s granddaughter). Participants stay at the Hotel Pausania, a short walk from Campo Santa Margherita, a buzzing student quarter with a vibrant nightlife.

If John Hall-ers want to stay on in Venice, Charlie is happy to help,

and can recommend suitable candidates for precious British Council internships at the Art Biennale. Founded in 1895, it’s now the world’s biggest contemporary art show and runs every two years from April to November. Each country has a pavilion, with the British hosting such artists as Damien Hirst, the Chapman Brothers and the 2022 Golden Lion winner Sonia Boyce. johnhallvenice.com

WHAT TO SEE

Beyond the set-pieces of the Doge’s Palace, the Rialto Bridge, the gondolas and St Mark’s Square, the

true magic of Venice is frequently found in the back streets. Set off on foot and explore, keeping your eyes peeled for a discreet Banksy and one of the oldest gondola repair boatyards in Venice, the Squero di San Trovaso.

Other sights? The Chiesa di San Pantalon houses one of the biggest paintings on canvas in the world. Created in sections by Giovanni Antonio Fumiani (1645-1710), it took more than 20 years to finish and occupies the entire ceiling. The story goes that, on completion, Fumiani stood back on the scaffolding to admire his work, stepped

too far and fell to his death. The Scuola Grande di San Rocco, with more than 60 works by Tintoretto and his assistants, is also breathtaking. The artist beat off the competition for the job by putting his submission on the ceiling and as the scuola wasn’t allowed to reject a gift, it guaranteed his place. It’s believed that Tintoretto included in a painting the face of the insider at the scuola who helped him, by way of thanks.

WHERE TO STAY

The Ca’ di Dio hotel, a former 13th-century pilgrim hostel, is located on the Riva degli Schiavoni (Venice’s main waterfront). It provides a charming respite from the crowds and welcomes guests with a cooling, minimalist elegance, lifted by handmade Murano glass pieces designed for the hotel. cadidio.com

Further afield

Dr Wallersteiner cautions against our European conditioning and suggests that a modern Grand Tourist should consider exploring cultures further afield.

‘If you want to see global civilisation, go to Japan,’ he urges. ‘The royal family is 1,000 years old and its history of Hinduism and Buddhism is every bit as interesting as Western religion.’ Naoshima Island – home to the iconic pumpkin sculptures of Yayoi Kusama, aka the ‘princess of polka dots’ – is known for its museums, galleries and installations; and Art Week Tokyo, held each November in collaboration with Art Basel, is set to be fantastic. For those especially interested in traditional Japanese art, the Nezu Museum in Tokyo is home to more than 7,400 diverse pre-modern works.

But as the 18th-century writer Samuel Johnson put it, ‘Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion and the last.’ Even the most reluctant culture vulture will struggle to resist being swept up in the delight and *la dolce vita* of Italy; or indeed, the energy of kaleidoscopic Japan. Our advice? Get planning! □

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