

Sites of Contest: Power and Politics in Urban Rome

Architecture Travel Studio, Spring Term 2010, Stephanie Pilat, Ph.D., FAAR, spilat@umich.edu



Mussolini demolishing buildings surrounding the Mausoleum of Augustus, from the Journal Capitolium.

Rome's many rulers—emperors, popes, kings, dictators, presidents and prime ministers—have all attempted to shape and reshape the city as an expression of their power. Sites in the city have been subject to serving political needs on the world stage that is Rome; architecture and urbanism have been used to represent, codify, and solidify power. This course examines the sites that have been the focal point for such expressions from ancient through modern times. Our study will range from imperial sites such as the Imperial Fora, to Papal constructions during the counter-reformation such as Piazza del Popolo, as well as more modern projects such as the EUR, a city district designed to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Fascism. Additionally, we'll explore the periphery of the city and its surroundings including sites such as the Centocelle Airport and the Fascist New Towns outside of Rome.

Students will analyze and deconstruct these sites in order to understand how architecture and urbanism can be used to express political intentions. We'll examine sites where intended meanings have been transformed and changed by the people who use them through resistance, new constructions, and the development of collective memories.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS:

- **Site Study and Proposal.** Students will be assigned a single site to research and analyze through photographic documentation, sketches, diagrams, and writings. They will be asked to envision: what could their site mean next? How could a new collective understanding of their site be formed? Students will be charged with proposing a means through which the site could be transformed, such as an installation, event, or architectural project.
- **Sketchbook.** Students will create a sketchbook documenting their analyses of all of sites visited. Daily site visits will include time for students to gather their reflections and interpretations of these sites through drawing, sketching, diagramming, and writing. Students will be encouraged to experiment with techniques of sketching and diagramming so that by the end of the semester each has developed their own particular style of drawing and analyzing buildings on site. At the end of the term students will compile the best of their analyses into a portfolio.

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TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

May 4 – May 14: Preparations in Ann Arbor:

- Background readings, lectures, and discussion on the city of Rome.
- Assignment of sites in Rome. Student teams will undertake preliminary research on their sites.

Arrive in Rome by Monday May 17th

May 17 – June 11 (Mondays -Thursdays):

- Daily site visits in Rome. Each site visit will include a history of the site, tour and discussion. Students will be given time at each site to work on their sketchbooks.
- Guest lecturers, walks and tours. Budget and schedule permitting, we will have as many as three guest lecturers. Allan Ceen, Director of Studium Urbis in Rome, will be asked to give a lecture and lead a walk on the *Posesso*, the processional route through the city taken by newly elected Popes. Lindsey Schneider, an art historian specializing in Baroque Rome will be asked to lead a tour of key sites of political expression and contest in the Baroque period. Beatrice Bruscoli, an architectural historian, will be asked to lead a bus tour of sites on the periphery of Rome including the EUR and the Fosse Ardeatine.

June 14-17:

- Student presentations at sites in Rome.

June 18:

- Sketchbook reviews.

WEEKEND TRIPS:

- Students will have Fridays free so that they can travel independently throughout Italy on the weekends. If there is interest, group trips to sites such as Florence, Milan, Naples, or Matera may be arranged.

BUDGET & LOGISTICS:

Student Expenses

- Airfare: \$1,000-1,500
- Lodging in Rome: 800-1200 euros per person (\$1200-1800)
- Group dinners and trips: \$200

Program Costs: \$2,400 – 3,500

- Less \$1,000 from Dean's office =

Total Program Costs = \$1,400 - 2,500

- Students should budget additional funds for independent weekend travel, travel to and from the airport, meals, and other expenses. Recommended amount is 15-40 euros per day (\$22-60 per day x 30 days = \$675-1800 total)
- Students will be housed in apartments with kitchens in the city of Rome.

About the Instructor

Stephanie Pilat is a designer and historian who specializes in the politics and architecture of modern Italy. She lived in Rome for two years (2005-07), is fluent in Italian, and most importantly, knows where Rome's best restaurants and gelaterias can be found.