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Without guidance from an Italian family I had to create my own approach towards the city of Florence. To become integrated into culture means to understand the past-where did these people come from? My bike, the pages in my sketchbook and perhaps a slight sense of direction was all I had, and truly all I needed, to explore, discover and enjoy this new Italian city.

I couldn't have discovered a more enjoyable adventure than the day I acquired my bike. Instantly unleashing the daring Italian within. Weaving through cars and people, passing by monuments, and even giving my best friend rides on the back seat. For my taste, the bike was the fastest mechanism I could've used to feel like both the ignorant explorer and the integrated individual. The bike allowed me to have a grasp on the entire city because everything felt in such close proximity. Piazza after monument, hidden cafes and libraries, I felt, were waiting to be unveiled.

It was important to me to use these individual monuments as a kind of lens onto not just culture and history but the controversies between the two. Single objects can open up culture and history through their life stories consequently revealing the disputes as well. That brings up the question of what am I really looking for when I go out to visit history? What do I want from the past? I've come to discover that the most exciting part when I am out visiting monuments- such as the Duomo, San Lorenzo, the Bargello, or the Uffizi, etc.- is in walking the same streets as my predecessors, of course a bit differently.

My sketches are meant to tap into the culture that these Florentines have come to be so proud of. Bricks, concrete and marble always mean more than that of which they appear. How easy it is to live and pass by monuments with indifference because they become part of your daily routine. Florence holds great buildings not because they are at a large scale but because great buildings hold stories, arguments, cultural complexities and re-use, which is what kept me from the indifference. Sketching allowed these objects to be observed as an architectural monument but also as a cultural figure that is reinterpreted by the modern day Florentine.

I like to think that there is an unmediated access between the past and myself. When I enter The Uffizi, I believe it is the Medici and I or it is the eighteenth century and I; although I am really seeing it as a reconstruction to cater to masses of tourists, I still see it as a special moment. As a student of architecture, I become taken aback that these fantastically lavish volumes only exist because someone decided to draw them up. Living in a city where the past is so prevalent in the present I can understand the pride with being a Florentine. The exploration only continues while I ride through the narrow, rocky streets of Florence. As they say, "when in Rome do as the Florentines do."