

## ITALY

My first trip to Italy with Enzo Plazzotta in 1974 was a *Coming of Age* adventure for me because I was leaving behind the world of cold bronze, which I had used up to then. All my first children and heroic sculptures were cast by Roy using a mixture of bronze powder and polyester resin. Harrods had asked me to upgrade to casting in real bronze so they could charge more for my sculptures, which made sense, as it would also lighten the work Roy had to do when we had multiple orders.

With great excitement I set off by train with Enzo from London bound for Italy. His car went with us and when we got to Milan we headed south in it down the Autostrada heading for Pietrasanta and Fonderia Mariani. I hadn't been in Italy since I was 14 years old, so it was wonderful to be back.

Enzo's house was just up the coast from Forte dei Marmi, the seaside resort where I had stayed with my parents on the famous holiday when the money was put into the mailbox by accident. Just inland was the ancient 11th century fortified town of Pietrasanta, for a time home to Michelangelo. He was mining marble in the famous Monte Altissimo quarries behind the town of Carrara in the Apennines. The quarries are so high they can only be worked in the summer months, snow closing them throughout the winter.

We arrived at Enzo's home on the side of a hill looking out to sea to be met by his wife Gillie after an exciting journey across the Po Valley, over the Apennines to Genoa and the Mediterranean, then down to La Spezia. My eyes were exhausted from taking in all the magnificent scenery and although I have now driven that road many times I have never ceased to be thrilled by what I see along the way.

Next morning we drove to the foundry in Pietrasanta to deliver the wax sculptures that Enzo had brought out for casting in the car. After he had finished at the foundry he took me to see the studio he kept in the town so he could work in peace when his family were staying and used to live in when he was down on his own. I couldn't believe his generosity when he said that I could use it whenever I liked. It was a magic place full of his old plasters.

The first time I used the studio was about six months after this trip. Fred Kobler had commissioned me to sculpt a life-size figure of Papageno, the comedy hero of the *Magic Flute*, which he wanted to give to Glyndebourne. I had done a maquette in plasticine of Papageno wearing the original feather suit designed by Mozart so I asked Roy if he would drive down with me and help enlarge it in Pietrasanta, take a waste mould and then produce a positive plaster for the Italian foundry to use for a bronze casting. This was a tall order as we would only have a week and meant working at top speed, but I knew with Roy's help we could do it.

It was February, the mountains were covered in snow and it was freezing in the studio as the only heating was a tiny hot-air blower. The warmest spot around was in the next-door café, so when we weren't working, we lived there. The enlargement was straightforward as I had already done the clay head in England, using one of the boys' teachers at school as a model. The Customs man had been very suspicious of the head when we arrived at Calais and insisted on poking it, much to my annoyance.

We soon had *Papageno* finished dressed in a simple suit of feathers. All that was left to do were the hands and feet. Roy had no complaint about my

using his hands as a model, but when it came to having to bare his feet to the cold there had been a considerable amount of grumbling! However, with the hot-air blower directed straight at his toes he was able to survive the ordeal and, with his constant urging from above, I finished the feet in record time!



*Three maquettes of 'Papageno'*



*From clay to plaster in record time*

As it was Roy's first time in Italy I had promised to take him to see Florence before going home. Roy called it the 'Umbrella Tour' as I used mine to point out all the famous sites as we hurried past them. We managed to visit the Uffizi, Cathedral museum, Baptistery, Pazzi Chapel, Ponte Vecchio,

Loggia, statue of *David*, and have lunch, all in record time. We got home in the dark and packed up for an early start in the morning. Up at three o'clock we drove all day, arriving at Calais in time to catch the night ferry!

*Papageno* came up from Italy and was placed in the gardens of Glyndebourne. The sculpture was to be a memorial to Fred Kobler in recognition of his generosity for all the money he had given to finance the Mozart productions at Glyndebourne.

The sculpture was erected that summer and we were invited to a performance of the *Magic Flute*. George Christie kindly lent us his box for the evening and as Margie's brother Michael and his wife Judy were in England at the time, we took them with us. The four of us had a wonderful evening absorbing the magic of Mozart. It was also the hottest and stuffiest night I have ever experienced, but luckily we could take off our coats, ties and shoe as we were in George's private box. The new theatre I am told is air-conditioned!



*'Papageno' at Glyndebourne*



I did an edition of the maquettes for Glyndebourne to sell to Mozart fans and they all sold. The sculpture was fun to do and people said they liked it. However, I am afraid it didn't please everybody and when Fred Kobler died it was sold at an auction house in London, and *Papageno* disappeared taking Roy's feet with him.

Thankfully the story has a happy ending as some of our friends happened to visit the Petto Gardens near Bath and reported that they had seen him in the woods! The owners had bought *Papageno* and had taken him home, so Fred's memorial with the plaque still exists and is well cared for, but I am glad he doesn't know it is no longer at Glyndebourne!

The only other sculpture I sold to Fred was a five-foot long version of the Chinese Flying Horse. When the first Chinese exhibition came to the Royal Academy in London I had fallen in love with the Flying Horse. The models that they were selling as souvenirs did not do the sculpture justice so I decided to make my own. I still have it and it continues to send shivers up my spine.



*'Flying Horse' maquette*

The Chinese used to believe that when they died their souls were carried to Heaven on the back of a horse that could fly. As the horse races past a swallow, one of its hooves grazes a feather, causing it to look round in surprise as it believed that it was the fastest creature in the sky! Having done the maquette I decided that if I did a five-foot long version perhaps someone would buy it, so I made the sculpture and Roy cast it in cold bronze.

I showed it to Fred and thank goodness he liked it and said he would buy one, but only if it was in the middle of his lake! If we put my *Flying Horse* in the lake the swallow would have to be only inches above the water and therein

lay the problem. The first difficulty was to find out how deep the lake was! Fred had a little boat so I was able to row out into the middle and measure down to the concrete bottom. Having found out that the water level was maintained at exactly four feet, Roy welded up a pipe stand that would keep the sculpture upright and the swallow above the surface.

When everything was ready we took the sculpture down to Fred's country house. Can you imagine two men in a tiny boat with a five-foot long horse, struggling to get a one-inch diameter spigot onto a pipe stand? With a great deal of cursing and a lot of laughter, but without anyone falling in, we eventually managed it. We rowed back to the shore after tying a string to the horse's tail so we could turn the sculpture into the best viewing position. When we had finished late in the evening my *Flying Horse* looked very much at home with the swallow skimming over the water.



*The 'Flying Horse' in Fred's lake*

Fred died soon after we had placed the sculpture and I like to think that my *Flying Horse* took his soul straight to Heaven. By supporting Glyndebourne he gave countless thousands of opera fans an opportunity to enjoy the wonderful music of his beloved Mozart. He was a unique man and it was an honour to have known him.

As I am talking about Amadeus Mozart I think it would be right to include another story here about the composer before returning again to Italy. We were on our way home from the foundry and as I had just made a very good sale I decided we would treat ourselves to a night in Monte Carlo as neither of us had been since we were teenagers with our respective parents. Margie had actually won at the tables in the casino with her father, but I had been too young to be allowed in! We arrived as the sun was setting, drove into the main square and parked outside the Hôtel de Paris. We took the cheapest room available and relaxed in a hot bath before going down to dinner. The dining room of the hotel is one of the great extravaganzas in the world, a bit like the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, with masses of marble columns and golden statues. The room was a wonder to behold, although completely empty except for a table of Americans who were obviously celebrating.

We had a superb meal made doubly so by the attendance of two gifted violinists who were both well past retirement age. They played superbly and as we were the only people in the room who seemed to be listening, the two old men gave us their full attention.

If there is one piece of music that Margie and I associate with our life together it is *Fascination*. We asked the men if they knew it? "Yes, of course." They played beautifully and we thanked them with a glass of champagne each, which of course led to several more renderings of the song throughout the meal. We began to feel like Gary Cooper and Audrey Hepburn in *Love in the Afternoon*, the theme music of the film being *Fascination*.

We were within earshot of the Americans' table so couldn't help but hear some of the rowdier parts of their conversation. Suddenly they started to toast each other and the signing of a contract for a new film, *Amadeus*. Actually I didn't like the film much as it made Mozart out to be a coarse person and I just don't believe that someone who could write such divine music could be.

One day when I was on my way to London in the car I happened to tune in to *Desert Island Discs*, a programme where the interviewer asks a famous guest to name his ten favourite records that he would like to have if shipwrecked on a desert island. I can't remember who was being interviewed, but I shall always remember that one of their choices was the adagio movement of Mozart's *Bassoon Concerto*. The interviewer asked him why he had chosen this particular piece and was told by the man that the first time that he heard the music was one sunny day when he was driving along the Corniche towards Monte Carlo. He said he had been so overcome by the melody that he had to stop the car and listen to it as he gazed out over the Mediterranean. On hearing that I of course had to buy the tape. One concerto led to another and eventually Mozart's *Violin Concertos* and my falling in love with the adagio movement of the *Third*, the opening bars of which float in the air like a gossamer thread on a zephyr breeze.

After a day in the studio I always like to relax in a hot bath before having dinner as standing all day on concrete turns my feet into blocks of ice for which there is no better cure than to lie in a hot tub. One evening I was doing just this while listening to the *adagio* from Mozart's *Third Violin Concerto*, when suddenly in my mind's eye I saw the form of the opening bars of the movement as a sculpture. Next day I made what I had envisaged on a copper tube armature coated with plaster. It was my first abstract sculpture and I called it *Adagio*.



*'Adagio', my first Symbolic Sculpture*

I loved what I had done and immediately understood that if I could get inspiration from music I would be able to do the same thing for all the values of life. So began my *Symbolic Sculptures*, which now number over a hundred, all thanks to *Desert Island Discs* and Mozart for starting me along such a rewarding path of creativity.

But to return to our evening in Monte Carlo at the Hôtel de Paris. It had been quite a dinner and as we had both overeaten we decided to go for a walk along the casino's terrace. As we walked I told Margie the story of my maternal grandmother Nell and her engagement to Alex Freeland. Nell, then aged sixteen, and her recently widowed mother, were on holiday in Monte Carlo. My mother told me how when the two of them were waiting for the lift in the casino a 30-year-old gentleman had joined them and, during the trip between floors, he had fallen in love with her mother. Nell, loving the attention,

naturally fell in love with Alex and they were married the following year. They had four children spaced over a period of 18 years, my mother, Nancy, being the last child.

There is one other story about Monte Carlo, not the one in Monaco, but a village of the same name in the hills above Lucca. When Enzo became ill he could not continue to use the studio in Pietrasanta so to keep it occupied he lent it to an American sculptress named Laura. Enzo still allowed us to use the studio bedroom so we got to know Laura, who was married to a conductor on a scholarship to study music at Lucca University. During his research the husband had discovered a previously unknown overture to Rossini's opera, *The Silken Ladder*, and was going to give the first performance of it in the little village of Monte Carlo. Laura asked us if we would like to attend the premiere.

We found the village on the map and drove up on the appointed evening which turned out to be one of the most enchanting we have ever had. The village opera house was on one side of the square and was tiny. The auditorium was horseshoe shaped with five rows of seats, six chairs to a row, while the first and second tiers were divided into tiny boxes with just two seats. The theatre could hold about 50 people at a pinch and every seat was taken. The theatre's acoustics are so famous that La Scala artists begged to sing there. The stage was minuscule and the orchestra consisted of just six musicians. Laura's husband arrived, the opera started and we were spellbound. The performance in the doll's-house theatre was sheer magic.

When the opera ended the encores went on and on and on! Eventually the curtain came down for the last time and we all filed out into the warm evening air. Laura had kindly asked us to join their party for supper with the cast at the local restaurant. Neither of us had ever been to such a noisy party. Margie sat next to an elderly pear-shaped retired opera singer, who immediately fell in love with her red hair, but as he could speak not a word of English he failed miserably with his seduction!

Enzo died much too young. He had exhausted his body by living a very full life. During the war he had been a member of the Italian anti-Fascist guerrilla army and had been captured twice by the Germans. The second time he was arrested was outside the castle in Milan dressed as a nun! He was sentenced to a German labour camp but managed to escape by jumping off the train while it was moving. Unfortunately the bumps and bashes had taken their toll. Enzo was a gifted and generous man. He not only taught me about sculpture, he introduced me to his accountant Allan Russell, without whose help I could never have coped with the business side of my life, and Mario Benbassat in Geneva, who became the principal backer of Edition Limitée.

However, Enzo did *not* approve of my Symbolic Sculptures. One evening he grinned at me and said, "Why are you making all these shitty shapes?" This made me laugh as it reminded me of when we were living at Marwood and Mark as a little boy had been asked by his schoolteacher what his father did for a living. His reply was, "He makes *rudies* in the barn."

Enzo's sculptural aim was to capture the woman of the Sixties and he just did not understand my attraction to symmetrical mathematical forms.

I visited Enzo when he was very ill in a London hospital before he died. It was time to say farewell and he did so with a big smile and a joke, in exactly



the same way as he had greeted me when I first sought his advice. He was a great man and a marvellous friend to whom I owe an enormous debt.



*Sculpture by Enzo Plazzotta*

Around about this time some friends bought a farmhouse called Puccetti in the olive groves above Lucca, about 30 minutes' drive away from Pietrasanta. The farmhouse dated back to the 15th century and not much had been done to the plumbing since that time, so bathrooms had to be added and electric lights installed before they could use it for summer holidays. They needed someone to oversee the alterations and I suggested that they should use my interpreter, Pam Launari. Pam, the sister of the boys' teacher at school who had posed for *Papageno's* head, had married an Italian who would be very useful in dealing with the men working on the house. To cut a long story short they gave Pam the job and a little second-hand car so she could journey between her house in Forte dei Marmi and the farmhouse in the hill village of San Stephano.

When the time came for our next visit to the foundry our friends suggested that we use the farmhouse. To get to the house we had to drive over a steep hill and through beautiful chestnut woods. The views from the sitting room balcony on the second floor were breathtaking, looking out over a valley of olive trees and vines, a view to record on canvas.

As soon as our friends found out that we would be at Puccetti they would just happen to be in the area and come to call! Margie's brother Michael and his family liked the farmhouse so much that they rented it for a month. It really was a special place. Pam and her husband also loved the house and in the winter, when there was no chance of the owners arriving unannounced, they would throw 'bring your own bottle' parties for all their friends. The old house must have enjoyed coming to life again.



*Olive trees above Pietrasanta*

Puccetti owned some vine terraces that were cared for by the local farmer who harvested them on a share basis. The wine was stored in enormous glass bottles that measured a good four feet around the girth. I discovered that instead of a cork the locals sealed the wine by adding an inch of olive oil in the neck of the giant flasks to stop the air turning the wine sour. The mice knew about this custom and would lower their tails down into the oil for a free meal! Beatrix Potter would have loved the idea!

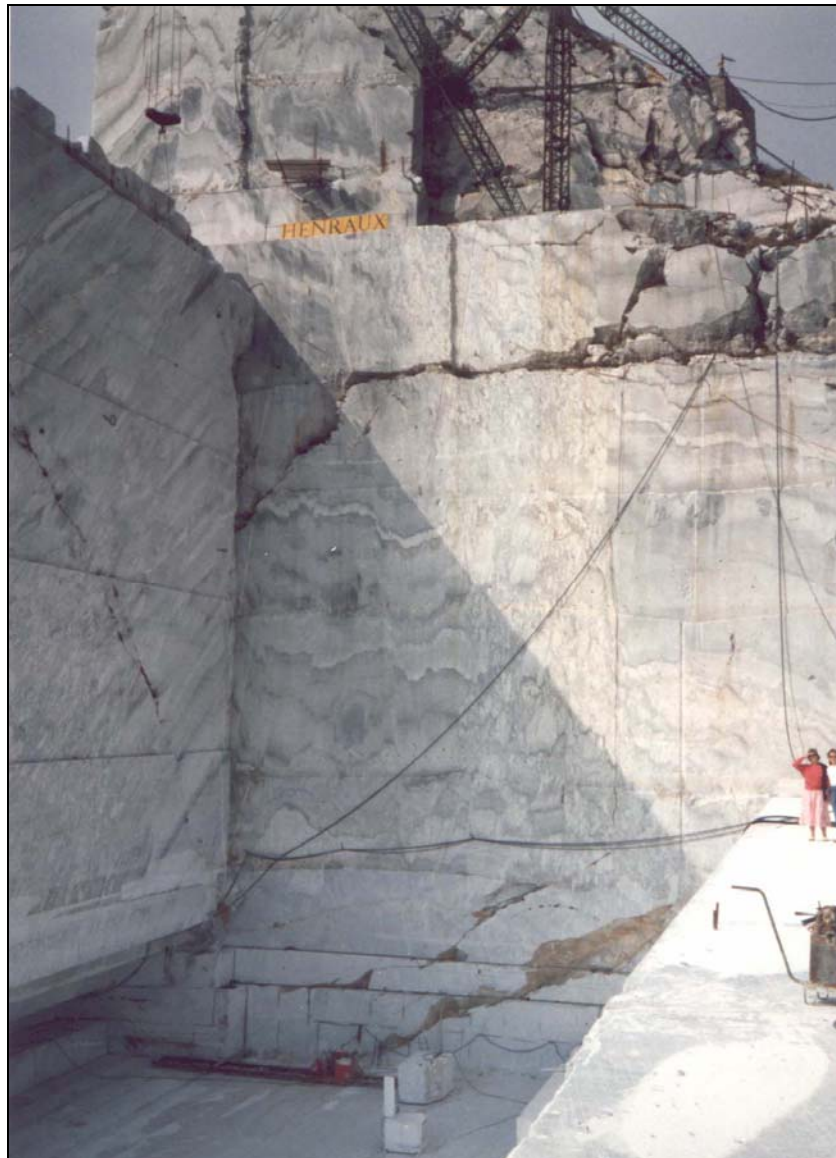
A tiny mountain village store supplied us with basic food for breakfast and dotted around the hills were several restaurants we could use in the evening. I shall always remember one particularly glorious summer evening when we had Margie's niece, Kate, staying with us. On the way home after a very good dinner we saw that the woods were alive with Fire Flies, all signalling with their little flashing lights. We stopped the car and got out to see if we could catch one, and found we could do so with ease. When Kate lay down in the middle of the road they came and buzzed all around her making it a truly magical scene.

Our Puccetti days came to an end and we moved back to Forte dei Marmi and found a marvellous hotel so we could walk up and down one of the best beaches in Europe, much to Margie's joy. It amazes me to think that we had walked the same beach with our parents, me aged 12 and Margie when 20.





*The beach at Forte dei Marmi with Monte Altissimo  
on Margie's left shoulder*



*Michelangelo's Monte Altissimo quarry*

Whenever I think of the Puccetti wine I remember a little story I was once told about an Englishman who bought a house in Tuscany that had two terraces of vines, an upper one and a lower one. He made his own wine from the crop and became rather boring about the quality of the product, bringing it out for his friends to try when they came to stay. A wine expert called one day and was subjected to the homemade vintage. "What do you think of that, eh? This one comes from the lower terrace." The expert sniffed and sipped and replied, "I don't think it travelled very well." Well, I think it's funny!

Over the last few years we have made the journey to Italy our annual holiday. We have found a delightfully easy route that just happens to pass by some of our favourite restaurants at lunchtime and quiet hotels where we could stay a night or two to break the journey!



*Portofino*  
*Our windows are above the big white boat*

Once we left Pietrasanta in the morning and as it was my birthday we decided to stay in Portofino. I rang our favourite hotel and booked a room that overlooked the harbour. As we drove along the narrow road that hugs the coast from Santa Margherita to Portofino it began to rain. For some reason a policeman was stopping cars from entering the port, which meant that the tourists had a half-hour walk into the village. As we were staying in the hotel they allowed us through and on the way passed a young couple getting very wet so stopped and offered them a lift.

They were Americans on their honeymoon and by the time we arrived at the hotel we had discovered that they lived in Fort Worth, Texas. I told them that we knew the town as I had sold some children sculptures to a man called Bill Davis. They couldn't believe this because their house was directly below Bill's home, as he lived on top of the cliff behind them. Of course they had to join us for lunch and at the end of the meal very kindly bought me an ice-cream birthday cake!



Our room looked out on the wide fishermen's quay and down the tiny harbour. The quay had been cleared for a carnival that evening and the main attraction were some acrobats. We watched them rehearse in the afternoon from our balcony and then after dinner performing to a packed crowd. It was a birthday to remember and I shall never be able to work out how Margie was able to organise the carnival especially for me, and keep it a secret!



### *Acrobats practising in Portofino*

One day I found a little Penguin book of Goethe's *Letters from Italy*, and read the following, which I think worth quoting as it sums up the country architectural heritage so well.

*When I indulge in self-reflection, I discover in myself a feeling of great joy. Let me put it like this. In this place, whoever looks seriously about him and has eyes to see is bound to become a stronger character. He acquires a sense of strength hitherto unknown to himself. So let me seize things one by one as they come; they will sort themselves out later. I am not here simply to have a good time, but to devote myself to the noble objects about me, to educate myself before I reach forty.*

Over the last 30 years I have loved visiting the 'noble objects' of Italy. It is an enchanted country and without doubt it is one of the most uplifting places in the world. I suppose the place took off when the Etruscans arrived around 3,000 years ago, so that is probably a good place to begin.

### **ETRUSCANS**

They were the first Italians of note, but amazingly no one is absolutely sure where they came from! The most likely explanation is that they arrived by sea from south-west Turkey. There is an ancient story about a terrible drought that happened in that area and it is said that the king solved the problem of feeding his subjects by putting half of them into ships and packing them off to found a

colony, thus leaving enough food for those who stayed behind. That story rings true to me because its how the world was peopled.

The Etruscans arrived and settled along the coast between Rome and Genoa. Perhaps because they brought useful skills with them the indigenous natives welcomed them and the two peoples seemed to have lived in harmony. The Etruscans certainly appear to have been a peaceful party-loving lot if their tomb paintings are anything to go by! Most of these scenes depict feasts with the diners drinking from raised cups as they toast each other. It is an experience to visit the tombs as the precision of the cut stone walls is masterly.

The Etruscans prospered and spread up through the Apennines and founded cities like Florence and Volterra. I believe they are the ancestors of the present day artisans of Tuscany, because if you look at the eyes in their sculptures and compare them to the eyes of the people of Florence today, you will find that they are very similar. Despite the fact that the Romans tried to obliterate completely the Etruscan culture after defeating them in a bloody war, their genes are still very much alive in Tuscany.

One of the skills the colonisers brought was the casting of bronze. A visit to the Etruscan Museum in Florence is well worthwhile, as there you can find many examples of their exquisite bronzes and terracotta sculptures and tomb paintings that show their way of life.

The Etruscans used to go to the island of Elba to collect iron-ore pebbles from the rivers to ship back to the mainland for smelting. It is a very quick crossing to the island nowadays by catamaran ferry, but it must have been quite a trip 3,000 years ago. This indicates to me that these people were not only good artisans, they were also very good sailors which supports the story of their originally coming from southern Turkey by sea.

One of the finest examples of the skill of the Etruscans can be found in their polished bronze mirrors but to see the best collections of these you have to go to the Metropolitan Museum in New York. One side is highly polished to act as a mirror while the other is engraved with fantastic scenes of the gods and goddesses. The line drawings are beautiful and tell us most of what we know about the people themselves, even though we are still unable to read the text engraved on the mirrors.

In Volterra city there is an original Etruscan arch in the ancient defence wall which is still used by motor traffic. However, it is not the gateway you have to see, but the Museum of Etruscan bronzes, because here lives, in my opinion, one of the most elegant and exciting sculptures ever created. It is called *The Shadow of the Evening* or *Ombra della Sera*. The Etruscans apparently believed that their shadows were their souls. I like this idea because I have always been fascinated by my own shadow. I find looking at one's own shadow on a bare expanse of beach, as the sun is setting, is quite enthralling!

*Ombra della Sera* really is an exquisite 18-inch high bronze sculpture. The young man's head is of normal proportion but his body, arms and legs are immensely elongated. He is truly beautiful and full of spirit. I bought a bronze copy from the museum shop and it now stands in my study and fills me with awe. The sculpture was ploughed up by a farmer who for years used it as a fire poker! I find it very hard to believe that Giacometti didn't know of the sculpture. I personally have no problem with artists using ideas from the great masters of the past, in fact, I see it as paying a compliment to the original artist's concept and the adaptation as another act of creativity.



*Ombra della Sera*

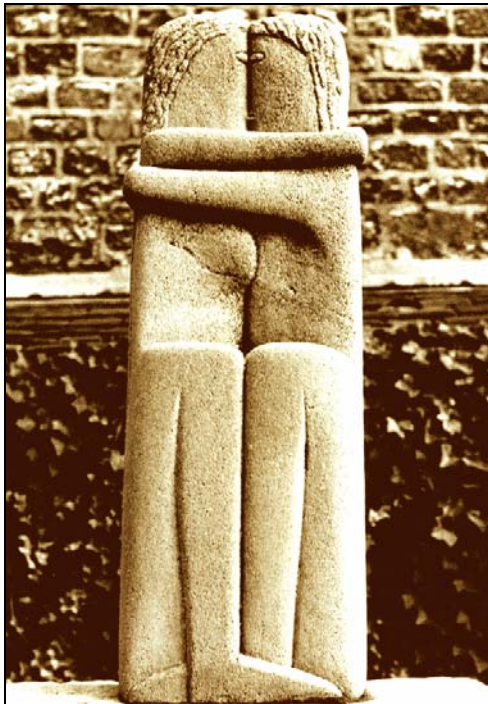


*Detail*



*Giacometti*

The same ideas have been popping into artists' heads from time immemorial. I have recently been introduced to a 10,000-year-old sculpture found in a Judea wadi by a Bedouin that is in the British Museum's superb collection of man's artistic skill. When I saw it I immediately thought of Brancusi's *Kiss*.

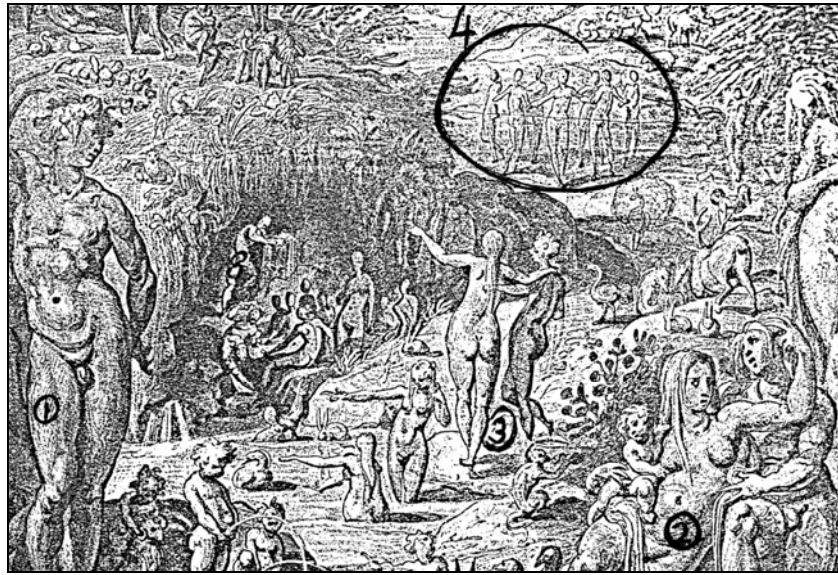


*'Kiss', Brancusi AD 1909*



*'Kiss', Judea 8,000 BC*

Did Matisse see *The Age of Gold* by Zucchi that was on exhibition in Paris when he was painting *Joy of Life*?



*Zucchi : The Age of Gold, 1540–1609*

I can see four scenes in Zucchi's painting used by Matisse. *The Dancers*, marked number 4, is the most obvious. I admire him for being able to gain so much inspiration from the one painting. Don't miss the Brussels sculpture of the little boy peeing in the river by number 1.



*Matisse : Joy of Life*

## GREEKS

The Greeks were the next to arrive in Italy. They came to trade with the Etruscans who taught them how to cast sculptures in bronze using the lost-wax process. They in turn taught the Etruscans how to paint pottery. It must have been a lively trade as Greek settlements soon sprang up along the coast of Tuscany and the finest of these was the port of Paestum south of Rome.





### *Temple of Neptune at Paestum*

The Temples of Paestum are some of the best preserved Greek temples and are a wonder to behold. Three of them, the Basilica, Poseidon and Ceres, stand beside each other on a slight rise of ground. It must have been a very important port to have three such unbelievable architectural gems. It is a magical spot where you can still capture the spirit of the place.

Paestum ended in tragedy, which is why it has been preserved for us today. Malaria was unknown in the area when the port was built, but of course it was inevitable that one day a sailor would arrive on a trading vessel carrying malaria in his blood. Over time the mosquitoes breeding in the marshes around the port became carriers of the deadly disease, which caused the population to abandon the city leaving the temples to stand as a memorial to the Grecian architects and builders for us to admire today.

## **ROMANS**

After defeating the Etruscans in war the Romans enslaved the people, burnt all their books and outlawed the language. So complete was the ethnic cleansing that linguists still can't decipher the majority of the Etruscan script that has been found in their tombs or on the mirror backs. The Romans were not nice people when it came to dealing with their enemies. When Crassus defeated Spartacus he crucified 6,000 slaves along the entire length of the Appian Way between Rome and Brindisi on the heel of Italy, and left the bodies to rot!

However, the Romans were quick to learn and set about constructing the greatest buildings ever created by man. It is hard to fathom how the Romans were able to construct such buildings and it fills one with admiration for the architects. After Goethe visited the Coliseum he wrote:

*...which made me realise for the first time what solid masonry means. These people built for eternity; they omitted nothing from their calculations except the insane fury of the destroyers to whom nothing was sacred. We came to the Coliseum at twilight. Once one has seen it, everything else seems small. It is so huge that the mind*

*cannot retain its image; one remembers it as smaller than it is, so that every time one returns to it, one is again astounded by its size. In a letter on the Pantheon he wrote: ...so great within and without, has overwhelmed me with admiration.*

What an incredible structure it is! Margie and I stayed in the Albergo del Senato beside the Pantheon on our last visit. I chose the hotel because I wanted to be able to see the temple roof from our bedroom. When I had rung up and made the booking, I had asked if we could have such a room. "Si si," was the reply, but I wondered if that was just another Italian answer!

We had taken the train down to Rome from Pietrasanta and arrived on a wet afternoon. The pink walls of the buildings were reflected in the puddles on the empty streets. We registered and with the porter and our cases squeezed into the smallest lift in existence. Up we went to the top floor, down a passage to room 666. We walked out onto an ivy-covered balcony where, right in front of our eyes, was the temple's great domed roof.



### ***Pantheon***

***The fuzzy green growth top left was our balcony***

After exploring the city we would return to our room and sit gazing at the temple, in fact we gazed for so long we got to know by sight each of the cats that live in the walls. I always carry binoculars with me when travelling, so we were able to study closely these feline citizens of Imperial Rome as they climbed up onto the dome. A narrow cornice runs around the building eight foot down from the eaves, a veritable catwalk! The tabbies would appear out of tiny slots in the gigantic walls and jump down onto this narrow ledge and use it to reach the portico roof, jumping over places that had broken away. It was amazing to watch, as we were six floors up! Once on the roof they would walk all over it, right up to the skylight in the dome. It was the greatest entertainment to watch them stalk across the roof.





### *Pantheon*

Entering through the colossal bronze doors of the Pantheon is one of the world's greatest thrills. Nothing prepares you for the shock of what you see before you. The portico of the temple is of a size and structure that is familiar to the eye because it is similar to St Paul's in London or the Madeleine in Paris, but step inside and a whole new world floods your senses.

The interior is one vast circular space that soars up to the sky. An enormous round hole in the centre of the roof lets in the sunlight. There are no windows around the walls, only this great orb of light above one's head. Clouds drift across the space as though there is a painted canopy moving above you. We walked into the centre across the beautiful inlaid wet marble floor that glistened with the morning's rain. The architect was a genius.

The circular wall is divided by great pillars that support the massive roof. Between these pillars are alcoves, occupied by Roman Catholic altars, as the Pantheon is now a functioning church. You can imagine yourself back in the glorious times of the Roman Empire. Senators in their white togas attended by priestesses wearing diaphanous tunics! Nothing brings back the feeling of ancient Rome more than a visit to the Pantheon. We looked up at the hole in the roof to see if a cat was looking down at us, but couldn't see a little head peaking over the edge, although would not be surprised if one could see us.

Pompeii has to be visited, but it is a place that I personally find very depressing. The art from Pompeii is mainly housed in the museum of Naples and it is worth going to that lawless city to see the wonderful mosaic of Alexander the Great defeating Darius. Alexander looks like a wild-eyed gangster, so the horror on the face of Darius is not surprising to see. I felt the same horror myself when we got a puncture driving through a very poor area of Naples. I have never changed a tyre faster in my life!

## RENAISSANCE

Leaving the Romans behind, a visit to St Peter's Basilica takes you into the Renaissance. The façade with its colonnades on either side is as impressive as any building could be, but for me it is all just too much. We stood under the dome and wondered at Michelangelo's ingenuity of being able to span such a width, but there is nothing here to compare to the power of the Pantheon.

Michelangelo's Pietà is of course a *tour de force* and is rightly known around the world as such, but it is not my favourite sculpture although it is without doubt one of the great masterpieces of the Age.

My main fascination was to see the spot where Charlemagne had knelt to be crowned in the year AD 800 as the Holy Roman Emperor. We once made a pilgrimage to Aachen in Germany to see the chapel that Charlemagne built a year before the Pope crowned him.



*Emperor Charlemagne's throne in Aachen*



Aachen is a gem that should be visited by anyone interested in architecture. Napoleon stole the Roman marble pillars from the church, but after Waterloo they were restored thank goodness.

The story of our visit to see Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel rounds off my memories of Rome. To get to the Sistine we had to walk through the Vatican Museum where we saw the *Apollo Belvedere*. I wondered if it was so named because Apollo was the God of Imagination and Creativity?

The Vatican Museum is also the home of Raphael's *School of Athens*. Although this is an astonishing painting I am afraid it just doesn't grab me. For me the interesting thing about the seated figure, which is thought to be of Michelangelo, was I believe used by Rodin as the model for his *Thinker*.



The Sistine Chapel on the other hand is quite out of this world! I sculpted the *Hands* in clay and had two casts done, one in blue glass and one in white. I altered the angle to add strength. How cheeky can one be!



Walking into Michelangelo's Chapel is best summed up by Goethe:

*The self-assurance, the virility, the grandeur of conception of this master defies expression. If only there was some means of fixing such images in one's memory!*

How right he is! All one can do is lie on the floor and gaze up in wonder. It is in places like this that the value of binoculars really becomes apparent, as the ceiling is so far above you that it is impossible to see any detail with the naked eye. I have been lucky enough to visit the Chapel before and after the cleaning that has been done over the last decade. The colours now glow with their original life and personally I like that. We were very lucky on our second visit as there were no more than 20 visitors in our group. Each group is only allowed to stay in the chapel for only 15 minutes, so every moment is precious and how time flies in such places!

We lingered until everyone had been herded out by the guards except ourselves and a young mother with her baby. She was sitting on a side bench and had started to breastfeed her child, and in a typical Italian way, the guards signalled her to continue. I am sure the young girl was performing what was for her a sacred right in the most holy place that she knew. She was not there to look at Michelangelo's masterpieces, but as some kind of religious act for the benefit of the child. It was a bonus for us as we stayed on as well and because the baby seemed to be in no hurry to finish suckling, we managed to have another five minutes to enjoy the magic of the paintings!

I confess to stealing three ideas during my lifetime from the Sistine Chapel. Just before we had moved to Agecroft our local church in the village of North Cadbury had been attacked by vandals. They had pulled the four stone saints from their niches above the altar and smashed them on the floor.

The vicar decided that as a sculptor had moved into one of the villages that make up the Camelot Group of Parishes he should ask him if he would consider replacing the saints for them! The Reverend Tony rang me and asked if he could come and see me, explained the problem and invited me to visit the church with him and talk about a possible replacement.

The unfortunate thing about the North Cadbury church in my opinion is that the Victorians ruined the original centuries old reredos. I looked at the altar and the brown granite cross and, with the arrogance of a sculptor of three years' standing, suggested that instead of replacing the saints, a job that didn't excite me in the least, I should do something different. "Why don't I do something and you can either accept or reject it?" The thing that did excite my imagination was the possibility of filling the tall medieval niches on either side of the reredos by stealing some ideas from the Sistine Chapel.

Michelangelo painted the wall above the Sistine altar with the Righteous rising to Heaven on the left, and the Damned being cast into Hell on the right. Amongst the Damned there is a young woman falling towards Hell peeking through her fingers as she goes, not being able to resist having a look at what lay below her!

I did the sculptures flat on a table in the same way as I had done *Peace* at Marwood, but when the clay figures were completed and it was time for the vicar and his committee to inspect them, I propped them up so the group could get an idea of how they would look on the wall. Although I had enjoyed doing the figures, I was very nervous about what everyone's reaction would be.

The committee arrived and hummed and hawed over the figures while I chatted on about the Sistine Chapel and Michelangelo's genius! There was no outright condemnation, just a stunned silence. After a while they announced that they would go away and discuss the sculptures, as they were not quite what they had expected. *Fair enough*, I thought at the time, but looking back some 30 years I am surprised at my cheek of even suggesting such a radical concept when all they really wanted were four little saints!

When Margie asked how the meeting had gone I told her that I didn't expect the committee to be returning, but I certainly hadn't regretted doing the figures. I believe that artists should always be allowed complete Freedom of Expression as that is how Imagination is released and Creativity born, but I was probably pushing the boundaries in this case. The vicar rang me a few days later and much to my surprise said that they had decided to accept the figures. I could hardly believe it. As they were to be cast in cold bronze, I decided to have a second copy done for myself. Roy came down and collected the figures to take back to London as he would have to take a gelatine impression off the clay to be able to do a second edition.

When Roy brought the figures back we went down to the church and with the vicar's help hung them up. By now I think there were a few cold feet in the committee, so it was decided to hang the figures temporarily on wires in the appropriate places, and allow the congregation to hold a *Keep or Reject* vote in a couple of months' time. I thought that this was a good idea, because by then I was getting cold feet myself!



*North Cadbury church reredos with figures*

The Parish committee eventually did make a decision and asked if I would be offended if they moved the figures out onto a beautiful old stone wall that is beside the path that leads up to the church through the graveyard. This was done and I must admit they certainly looked much better outside.





### *The 'Heaven and Hell' figures in the churchyard*

While the Parish jury had been deliberating the Headmaster of a large boys' school near Bristol asked me if it was possible to have another set cast for his chapel. This was a blessing as by then Roy had delivered the second set of figures and I didn't have enough money to pay him. I quickly agreed to a sale saying I would deliver them straightaway, just in case he changed his mind.

A few years later I received a call from the new Headmaster of the school, saying he was appalled by the nude women above the altar in a chapel used by young men! To add insult to injury he asked me take them away and give him back the money! I replied that if he returned them to me I would try and sell the figures and if successful would of course return the money. He agreed to this and sent the figures back and I hung them up in my studio.

They only stayed there for a year because the vandals attacked the churchyard yet again, this time stealing both *Heaven* and *Hell* although leaving *Christ*. A very distressed vicar rang me and asked if it was possible to have the figures repeated as they were sorely missed and they had the insurance money to pay for them to be replaced!

I assured him that would be no problem and next day pulled the figures down from the studio wall and delivered them to the church before they also changed their minds and decided to keep the insurance money to fix the church roof. I sent the Headmaster the sale price I had agreed to and kept what was left over as I thought by then I had earned it!

*Heaven* and *Hell* are now firmly fixed to the wall with gigantic bolts so to steal them you would also have to take the barn! Walking past them one Christmas Day Margie turned to me and said, "I think that would be a nice place for our ashes," pointing to a spot under the figures. I agreed, as I think Margie is a saint for putting up with me and is definitely going to *Heaven*, and no doubt I shall go to *Hell* for all the sins I have committed!

You would think that this story ends with a lonely Christ hanging on my studio wall, but it doesn't. The last twist in this convoluted tale is that within



weeks I received yet another telephone call, this time from a Brotherhood of Christian monks who ran a retreat in Dorset. They had visited North Cadbury church, which by the way is one of the loveliest churches I have ever been in, and had fallen in love with the Christ figure. Would it be possible to buy a copy for their chapel? “No,” I said, “you can have one for free.” So ends the story of the first idea I stole from the Sistine.

The second idea I stole was a subconscious one. Lying on the floor of the chapel looking up through binoculars at God reaching out to Adam is without doubt one of the great moments of my life. It is an amazing image and leaves one gasping with admiration.

My subconscious robbery happened in this way. As I continued trying to capture the values of life with the Symbolic Sculptures, I arrived at the point of wanting to express the magic of being alive and made the *Spark of Life*. One day I was taking a group of young students around Damon’s garden explaining how I gave the sculptures names to act as doorways for the viewer to go through so they could then interpret them as they wished. When I came to the *Spark of Life* a young girl turned to me and said, “I see that as Michelangelo’s painting of Adam and God on the ceiling of the Sistine.” I am sure you can imagine how pleased I was!



*'Spark of Life'*

There are so many wonderful things to see in Rome that the list is endless. While walking around the forum ruins, being stalked by the innumerable cats, one absorbs the atmosphere of the grandeur of this ancient city: Trojan’s column, triumphal arches and ruined palaces and the spooky castle. Rome has to be absorbed.

I talked earlier about A D Hope's poem *Letter from Rome* as being one of the things that got me thinking of selling the farm and coming back to Europe to try my hand at sculpting. Back then I could only feel the magic of the city in my mind. Being there allowed me to feel the magic with my Being.

On our first visit to Rome we had visited the Villa Borghese Museum to see the Canova sculptures. In those days, because I envied these masterpieces, I would gaze at sculptures like *Daphne and Apollo* and groan with agony recognising my own lack of talent. Canova was probably the most gifted marble-carver who has ever lived, but to me they now appear almost dead.

### MICHELANGELO

When you go to Florence and visit the Accademia to see the original *David*, you are overawed by the scale. The marble sculpture is in the setting to reflect the light on the polished surface, unlike the copy outside the castle that is so badly weathered and unreflective. The Medici Chapel figures of *Night and Day* are also utterly overpowering. All these sculptures are 'highly finished' like the famous St Peter's *Pietà*, but for me they are too perfect, like Canova's work.



*Awakening Slave*

It is the 'roughly finished' carvings that appeals to me, as the technique captures movement making the sculptures come to life. When I look at the *Awakening Slave* I can feel the slave straining to free himself from the marble block, symbolising Man's struggling to obtain Freedom.

Many people have asked me, "How did Michelangelo see the figure in the block of marble?" Here is an explanation of how I think he worked.

If you are working from a positive plaster it is easy to copy the original in marble with a pointing machine that uses three fixed points on the plaster, which are repeated on the marble. The machine has a moveable fourth arm so you can measure one point on the original plaster and copy the same point on the marble. This is a long process, but makes it relatively simple for a skilled carver to copy a plaster sculpture. Michelangelo was a master carver so he was able to bypass this whole process that took time.

So how did Michelangelo enlarge the little wax models that he must have made before carving the heroic statues like *David*? First of all he measured the height of the block of marble and divided it into units. In this example we shall use units of 'one foot'. Now think of the statue of *David* and then think of the marble block that he carved it from. It must have looked like a giant loaf of bread standing on its end. Suppose the block was *ten foot tall* and he divided it by *ten*, he would have *ten units* each measuring *one foot high*.

I think he made a ten-inch high vase out of beeswax with the inside of the vessel the exact shape of the block of marble he had quarried. Next he placed his *ten-inch high* wax model of *David* in the vase.

So how did he transfer the measurements from the maquette to the marble? Actually it is surprisingly simple. First of all you drill nine holes down all sides of the ten-inch high vase all precisely one inch apart, starting with the first holes one inch from the bottom. The last hole is one inch from the top. Next put the model into the vase, plug the holes with matchsticks and fill it with olive oil to the top.

The first thing Michelangelo would have wanted to do was find out exactly where the top of *David's* head would be at the top of the block of marble. The top of the model would be level with the surface of the oil so he could measure in from the lip, multiply the distance by ten and transfer the measurement to the marble. Next he would want to know exactly where the left hand and shoulder were. To do this he removed the top match from the vase and let the oil run out, thus exposing that part of the model. He could measure from the four sides of the vase through the holes, and then chisel away the marble around the area.

Suppose he then wanted to find out where the left elbow came. By removing the match near the left elbow of the maquette and letting the oil run out, then taking that measurement and multiplying by ten, he could work out where the left elbow would be in the marble. And so on until he had roughed out the whole figure. I don't believe this takes anything from the wonder of his carving, but increases it, because it adds to the man's genius.

When you have seen all of Michelangelo's sculptures in Florence, it is time to go to Milan to see his *Pietà Rondanini*. The experts say this is his greatest carving as it shows more of the sculptor's genius than any other of his works. He was still working on the *Pietà Rondanini* six days before he died, aged 89!





*Pietà Rondanini*

The sculpture has a room all to itself and is set slightly back to one corner to catch the best light from the windows. The opposite corner is filled with rows of seats that curve around the two walls like a theatre, so you can view the sculpture from every angle at different heights.

The wonderment of the sculpture is that Christ, who is being lifted by Mary, has two positions. It seems that Michelangelo nearly completed Christ and then changed his mind and started to carve a second Christ. The first right arm of Christ is finished to a polished stage, while the second right arm is roughly hewn and unfinished. The effect is that Christ seems to be disappearing back into the unfinished body of Mary, thereby giving the impression that he is passing from flesh to spirit.

Goethe wrote: *The self-assurance, the virility, the grandeur of conception of this master defies expression.*

I like to think back to the vessel and model stage of the carving of the *Pietà Rondanini*. Were his ideas fixed when he began the sculpture and then at some stage, when nearing completion, did he have another vision? Or was the image already in his mind when he began?

Florence is a truly magical place. The Ponte Vecchio is so special that even the Germans desisted from blowing it up as the Allies approached at the end of WWII. Later the General was so ashamed of his action that he claimed he didn't blow it up because he thought it was too weak to carry tanks! Years ago I bought Margie a wonderful necklace of amazonite on the bridge and every time she wears it I take a little trip to the Ponte Vecchio. Whenever we are in Florence we cross the bridge because on the far bank a little upstream is a café with the best view of the bridge. It also serves excellent food! What more could anyone ask for after a morning in the museum.

The museums of Florence have the greatest collection of Renaissance art in the world. I find it impossible to spend more than an hour or so in the Uffizi because my senses just can't take in any more and I have to escape to open space. We bless the Uffizi Museum authorities because they never move paintings around. Year after year they have remained in the same place enabling us to go directly to each of our old friends without distraction.

After climbing the grand staircase that seems to go on forever, the first person we visit is the Duke of Urbino. What an ugly profile, but what a face! The Botticelli paintings are the next stop, but only if you are there before the tourists arrive. The crowd around the *Four Seasons* and the *Birth of Venus* can be 20 deep! Next stop has to be out on to the Loggia to pause and gaze at the Arno. One of our favourite little rooms in the world is to the left as you step out into the Loggia. It was decorated by a Medici for his wife, the daughter of the King of France. The ceiling is painted as though it is a domed lattice arbour covered with flowering vines. Hundreds of birds are depicted amongst the leaves and we feel that the French bride must have been very happy here, far away from her native country. I had a plan to paint this scene on the ceiling of the entrance hall of a penthouse in Houston, but never got around to it, probably fortunately as it would have been a mammoth job. I did lie on the floor of the Uffizi and take the photographs of the ceiling, much to the other visitors' amazement!

After a long lingering look at the river and the Ponte Vecchio you pass on to Michelangelo's painting of the *Holy Family*, followed by Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and the *Bacchus* by Caravaggio. Next to the end of the gallery to admire the carving of the *Laocoon* and don't forget to use the excellent Rest Rooms before staggering back out into the street, your mind reeling!



*Painted ceiling*

The Baptristy and the Cathedral are superb buildings and Brunelleschi's Dome is one of the greatest examples of architecture ever achieved. Ghiberti's bronze doors are incredible works of art and will never be surpassed as examples of perspective or of casting.

A quick visit to the Bargello for a lingering look at Donatello's *David* and then to the Michelangelo room to gaze on the round white marble Pitti Tondo. Next a short walk to the Loggia to admire Cellini's *Rape of the Sabines*. Whether you like the sculpture or not, every artist should read Cellini's autobiography in which he explains how he cast this colossal bronze in one piece, at the same time setting fire to his house! It is an amazing story.

The next and last stop has to be the Duomo Museum behind the east end of the Cathedral where, in my humble opinion, is a collection of some of the most breathtaking sculptures in the world. You climb the stairs to the



galleries, passing on your way Michelangelo's *Nicodemus Pietà*, which is said to be a self-portrait of the master. The museum has recently been refurbished and Donatello's *Mary Magdalene*, one of the most moving woodcarvings I have ever seen, has rightly been given its own room. Moved and saddened by this elegant sculpture you arrive in a gallery full of happy dancing children.

One panel is by Luca della Robbia and the other by Donatello. Moving from one to the other and then back again is one of the great joys of life. Although it is hard to choose between the panels, before leaving I always seem to end up looking at Luca's *Dancing Children*. It is quite superb. I love it so much I made a small tile copy in clay and had it cast in crystal glass in Prague.



*'Dancing Children' in marble by Luca della Robbia*

Before leaving Florence I have to mention Brunelleschi's Pazzi Chapel, because the Renaissance was as much about Architecture as Painting and Sculpture. The Chapel is without doubt a perfection of design, every inch of it being in harmony with the rest, beautifully simple and sophisticated.





*'Dancing Children' in crystal glass*



*Sketch of the Arno at night from our hotel balcony*

The cathedral in Ravenna is full of gold and white figures and is one of the finest examples of the art of mosaic anywhere in the world, but behind one of the churches you will find a tiny cell-like chapel of cerulean blue dotted with gold stars. It has the gem quality of smallness and is a joy to see.

In contrast to the tiny chapel is the Barbarian Emperor Theodoric's mausoleum. He conquered Italy by taking Ravenna in 493 and gave the country peace for 33 years! He is remembered for three things: lowering taxes, being tolerant of all religions and, because he was terrified of being struck by lightning. The capping stone of his mausoleum is claimed to be the largest stone ever quarried in Italy. How it was ever moved from the quarry to the mausoleum is hard to imagine. But it was, and the dead Emperor has been well protected from lightning ever since!

I have mentioned the portrait of the Duke of Urbino in the Uffizi, so I must tell you about our visit to his castle. The Duke was a mercenary soldier who commanded the best army in Italy, which he hired out for exorbitant fees making him an extremely rich man. He was also a patron of the arts and an example of how the 16th-century art critic, Sperone Speroni, defined Civilisation: *The creation of wealth and the patronage of art.*

When you arrive at the gates of Urbino the enormous walls of the Duke's palace overshadow you. The massive façade of pink brick that towers above is set with white marble window frames.

The palace within the castle may be very impressive but it must have also been bitterly cold in the winter, that is, for everyone except the Duke, who worked in a tiny study, one of the treasures of Italy. The study is lined with the finest example of inlaid wooden panels that exist. Some panels depict cupboards of books, other are full of musical instruments. The pictures are so three-dimensional that they make the room feel twice as large as it really is. What a snug study to keep warm in while everyone else froze to death while waiting to see you!

The people of Urbino are very proud of their cuisine. The hotel dining room was closed but the concierge recommended a restaurant, which he said had the finest food in town. As it was a cold wet evening we wrapped up well in our raincoats and set off to find this gourmet's paradise. On arrival we discovered the place was empty, that no one spoke a word of English and the menu was in Italian. We overcame this problem by ordering the *Specialità della Casa*, feeling pleased with ourselves for having solved the problem so simply.

Bread and red wine appeared and we started to nibble and sip while we waited with bated breath, our hunger mounting. The meal arrived in an earthenware dish, but when the lid was lifted a nauseating smell invaded our nostrils and the sight was equally as horrifying. With a big smile the host announced with triumph the name of the dish and left us to help ourselves.

After looking at each other while trying to control our laughter there was nothing else to do but try it. Perhaps it tasted better than it looked or smelt. Bravely we helped ourselves and took a taste. No, the meat component didn't taste better than it looked and the white mush was disgusting. Was it horsemeat? Luckily we had a big basket of bread and a bottle of wine, so we didn't starve, but this still left the problem of what to do with the food so as not to offend our host!

Very luckily we had been given a large number of thick paper napkins. Stealthily we began to wrap up some of the meat in the paper napkins and secrete the little packages into the poacher's pocket of my raincoat, which was the type that detectives wear in the movies. I had inherited it from Margie's father and had never really liked it, but tonight I blessed him as the poacher's pockets were enormous.



We called for the bill. As the restaurant was empty and the host was longing to close, we were soon out on the street and fit to bust our sides. The problem now was to find somewhere to dump the parcels as they were already beginning to feel soggy, so we began to walk around the old town looking for a rubbish bin. We walked for at least half an hour before we found a bin and, would you believe it, yes, it was right outside our restaurant, which luckily was in complete darkness and locked up for the night. I emptied my pockets and we hurried away.

Finally I must write about Venice. What a wonderful place! Goethe wrote:

*It was written on my page in the Book of Fate that five in the afternoon of the 28th day of September in the year 1786, I should see Venice for the first time. I entered the lagoons from the Brenta, and set foot in this beautiful island-city, this beaver-republic.*

In some cases the streets are only wide enough for two people to pass and this intensifies the bustle of the citizens going about their normal business. It is a bit like watching a trail of Leaf Cutter ants. Only on entering the Piazza San Marco do you find any internal space, all else being canals.

Goethe arrived at the very end of September. Italians call the first week of June and the first week of October the Golden Weeks, when the weather is exceptionally good, so I guess he had good weather!

Venice is to be avoided during the crowded tourist season, July and August. The first time I visited Venice was in 1948 when just 13 years old. I can only really remember it because of riding in a gondola with my mother and brother Pat. The city was still recovering from WWII and completely deserted, which was lucky as we were there in August! The place was bright with sunshine and the palaces along the Grand Canal glowed in the warmth.



*The Grand Canal, Venice*

The reason for our first trip to Venice together was to meet the Reverend Frederick McDonald of Seattle. He had booked Margie and me into a hotel opposite S Giorgio Maggiore. Our room was brilliant because it looked out across the water to the church. One of the amazing features of the mixture of the Venetian sunlight and sea mist is that the view seems to change with the varying light. Sometimes we would look out of our window and swear that we

could touch the church, while at other times it seemed to be floating on the horizon in a mist. The view was like a Turner's watercolour!



***'Venice and Salute', Turner 1775–1851***

The Reverend Frederick had asked us to meet him at Harry's Bar for a Dry Martini before lunch! I had first met Frederick when I had gone for my exhibition in Seattle of the figurative bronze maquettes that included a head of Margie, which I called *Joan of Arc*. Frederick turned out to be a collector of anything related to the heroine and bought the sculpture.

We arrived at Harry's Bar and as he was well known in the establishment, we had a very jolly lunch. He then asked us if we would like to cross the canal and see the English church before having tea with his friends.

We climbed on the waterbus with a crowd of other Venetians going about their daily business. It was just like hopping on to a London bus, but it floated. The skill with which the crew handled their craft is amazing to watch as they zigzagged back and forth across the Grand Canal, each stop taking no more than three or four minutes to dock, speedily disgorge passengers, gobble up others, and then off again, all the time avoiding the gondolas and barges that were plying up and down the canal. The whole thing reminded me of old prints that show the chaotic muddle of traffic around Piccadilly Circus in the days of horse-drawn carriages.

I am afraid I don't remember anything about the little church except that it was very cold and dark inside and smelt of incense. It must have been a private chapel before being converted to Church of England for the fashionable colony that had sprung up in Venice at the end of the last century.

It was time for tea so we followed Frederick and entered what was once the home of a Prince bordering the Grand Canal, but had long since been converted into apartments. We climbed a palatial staircase and arrived at the door of a majestic apartment.



*Margie as 'Joan of Arc'*

Frederick knocked and a servant let us in and showed us into the most incredible and immensely long blue-carpeted room. Perhaps it wasn't as large as the impression it gave but at the time it seemed to go on forever. The reason for this was because there was only one enormous window that filled the far end of the room that looked out on the Grand Canal. The rest of the room was dark, so it was a bit like looking down a tunnel.

Tea came and went while Frederick talked with our hosts. I don't remember anything that happened because I was so overcome with the eerie feeling of the place and wondering how anybody could want to live there. Perhaps in the morning the sun poured in and it was more cheerful. I certainly hoped so for their sakes as it gave me the shudders.

Being in Venice is very different to being in Florence. In Venice one tends to wander around soaking up the atmosphere of the city rather than visiting museums. Apart from the splendid bronze horses that the Venetians stole from Constantinople and which now grace the portico of the Basilica, Venice for me is not so much a place of Art but of Architecture, where all the buildings live in harmony with each other; Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*.





### *Canal San Guiseppe*

Many years before this I had seen a painting of the *Canal San Guiseppe* in a London art gallery. I thought it was a really beautiful scene and I would have liked to have taken the painting home, but fortunately it was far too expensive. Instead for years I carried a photograph of it around in my briefcase. I showed the photograph to the driver of a water taxi and asked if he knew where the canal was and, if so, could he take us there. He said he did know the spot but was afraid I would find that things had changed since the painting was done.

Still it was a beautiful day and we decided to have a look. I am afraid the boatman was right, it had changed beyond recognition, but I still like to look at the photograph of the painting and think that it showed Venice as Goethe would have seen it in 1786, with girls washing clothes in the canal!

We climbed the clock tower to watch the bronze giants strike their great bell with their bent hammer handles, which is something that has always worried me, even when I was 13 years old. It has never ceased to amaze me that the Melbourne *Hammer Thrower* has had its hammer replaced at the wrong angle and no one has noticed. The hammer droops down at an angle of about ten degrees and looks very odd. One year the Lord Mayor of the city used the *Hammer Thrower* on his Christmas card! If he had asked my permission I would have pointed out the fault and he could have corrected it!

I must admit that the Melbourne sculpture has had a rough time. The hammer originally was a bronze ball on a twisted shaft to resemble the wire cable as used in the Olympic Games. The sculpture had only been unveiled for one day before vandals stole the hammer causing an urgent request for a replacement to be cast in England and flown out to Melbourne. Meanwhile the authorities replaced it with a broom handle and the float from a lavatory cistern! Before the replacement arrived in Melbourne the broomstick and float had disappeared three more times.

There was obviously no point in putting back the new bronze hammer so each time it is stolen the custodians of the park have replaced it with another broomstick and float. I am told the last count is approaching an unbelievable 100 times!

In January 2002, Margie and I made a trip to Melbourne on Bradshaw Foundation business. While we were there one of the things we wanted to do was visit the Botanical Gardens because it was where we had spent many happy hours when we were courting 46 years ago! After breakfast we drove over the river and out along St Kilda Road towards the Gardens. The road passes the *Hammer Thrower* and I could see he was empty handed! "Let's go and have a look," Margie suggested. I replied, "No, the hammer's missing and I don't want to see it like that." Well, of course, like all well-trained husbands, I gave in and we parked nearby so we could walk over to the sculpture.

The *Hammer Thrower* is set on a tiny island in a small pond. He really looked very sad without his hammer and a bit lost as to why he was there leaning back with no centrifugal force to hold him up. We walked around the pond with me muttering about 'the way people behaved nowadays' so by the time we headed back towards the car I was not in a good mood. As we arrived at the roadside a car pulled up and a Park Warden got out, walked round to the trunk of his car and opened it just as we passed by. "He's got the hammer!" Margie exclaimed, and sure enough, he did.

Of course Margie asked him what he was doing and had to tell him that I was the sculptor! The Warden then explained that every evening he came to remove the hammer and returned in the morning to replace it every single day of the year. We couldn't believe it! This is when I learnt that they had lost 100 hammers. The only way that they could solve the problem was by removing it over night, so he had been doing it for the last ten years. All quite incredible!

We walked back to the sculpture with him and helped replace the hammer. He had a Polaroid camera with him so Margie took a photo of us both replacing the broomstick with the copper float on the end so he could show his mates. We walked away marvelling at the coincidental timing of the whole event. It was worth going all that way to Australia to have such an extraordinary experience.

The *Hammer Thrower* suffered another indignity in Melbourne. One day I received a letter from a friend reporting that it had appeared on a billboard in the heart of the city. The sculpture is of a nine-foot high nude man, but on the billboard he was shown as twice that size, *but wearing underpants!*

I wrote to my cousin Michael of Arthur Robinson and Co, (a company started by WS's elder brother and now the leading firm of solicitors in Melbourne) hoping that we possibly could squeeze the manufacturer for a charity, as they had not asked my permission to use the image. Michael wrote to the firm, who blamed the advertising firm, who eventually handed over a cheque for a miserable amount for our chosen charity.

The last trip we made to Venice was by accident as we were meant to be in the Dolomites visiting some of the famous Palladio houses. We were on our way to the foundry, but instead of taking our usual route over the Grand Saint Bernard Pass we had decided to take the Brenner Pass instead. We reached Cortina in the evening and booked into a hotel.

All the way through the Alps we had been driving in golden autumnal sunshine, but that night it snowed and we woke to a very different-looking world. We even had trouble getting out of the car park, but as the main road seemed to have been gritted we decided to head up towards the next pass, as there were no signs out to say that it was closed.

After driving for about 15 minutes it started to snow and soon there were no wheel tracks on the road. That was enough for me so we found a place to turn and retreated back down the mountain in first gear for by now the slightest touch on the brakes turned the car into a toboggan! We reached the Autostrada and headed south thinking about what to do with our spare day. It was Margie's birthday, so we decided to go to Venice.

When we had been there with our parents as children we had both used the same hotel, the famous Luna. We wondered if we just turned up whether they would have a vacant room. They did have a room, of course it was one of their grandest, but what can you do on your wife's birthday? What a room, but even more so, what a bathroom! And the towels! We settled in with ease and prepared to go out to dinner.

While Margie was taking a bath I arranged with the concierge for a surprise to be waiting for her when we came downstairs. The *Michelin Guide* recommended a restaurant by the Opera House so I asked him to book a table.

We arrived at the front desk and talked to the concierge who told us that he had been working in the hotel for 40 years, starting as a bellboy. That meant he had been there when we had both stayed, which for me was 38 years ago. This led to much laughter and a photograph of the three of us at the front door of the hotel the following morning before we left.

By now our transport had arrived and the old man handed Margie into a gondola. The surprise on Margie's face was a delight to see. Off we set into the night gliding up the Grand Canal towards the Rialto Bridge. The night was black and still with only intermittent lights glowing in the odd palace window. The canal was completely empty of traffic, it being late October. It was a moment of pure magic.

Much too quickly we arrived at the side canal that led to the Opera House. The only sound was the creak of the oar and plop of the water drips as they fell back into the canal. When we glided under the tiny arched bridges the sound was magnified almost to music by the pitch-black surroundings.

On approaching a corner on the canal our gondolier would call out just in case another craft was coming, his cries echoing between the walls of the dark canyon. Suddenly we burst out into the Opera House Plaza ablaze with lights. What a journey! Out we hopped and into the warmth of the restaurant for our dinner, which luckily turned out to be nothing like the one in Urbino, as the meal being delicious. Two weeks later the Opera was burnt down!

We walked back to the hotel after dinner, crossing over the same little bridges we had floated under, zigzagging our way back to San Marco for one last look, and then to the Luna to sleep, two very contented people. What a city and what an evening, all totally unplanned and unexpected, brought on by snow in the mountains.