

## Retreat from Reality

On the occasion of the exhibition, *American Dreamers. Reality and Imagination in American Contemporary Art*, the CCC Strozziina developed a special program, **Retreat from Reality**, dedicated to American students who experience a period of artistic and cultural growth in the city of Florence.

The project involves art instructors leading different paths of study of six foreign universities in the city of Florence to initiate a shared reflection on the issues faced by artists of the exhibition, *American Dreamers*. While maintaining their own teaching style, each instructor appropriated teaching materials provided by the CCC Strozziina to explore the theme of *Retreat from Reality*, and had the option to have guided tours to the exhibition. At the end of the project the involved teachers selected the students who were best able to interpret and develop the theme.

### CAPA International Education

**Oliviero Draghi**, Professor of Sculpture

We presented and discussed the theme of the show. Although we spoke about the "American Dream", the preferred theme proved to be "Escaping Reality", perhaps because the latter was more accessible to these students and easier for them to connect to their personal experiences. Each student was asked to focus on a concept, an event, a personal idea, and from there we stimulated them to find their possible individual modalities of expression. The final choice, in any case, was always left up to the student. The project proved to be a valuable test of the student's ability to pass from a conceptual idea to its visual representation.

All students from the CAPA art department plus two students from the Accademia Italiana's Mixed Media course participated in this project. Many of these students are beginners.

**Jamie Miller Morris**, Professor of Painting

Freshly arrived in Florence and immersed in the exploration of this new reality, I discovered my beginning student's ability to expand upon the concept regarding the American Dream was a little obscured.

Interest naturally gravitated towards the subject *Retreat From Reality* generating enthusiasm, vivid ideas, and was for various reasons considered a significant topic. We began with a concept, choosing a direction and committing to a clearly defined outcome that the artist found meaningful enough to study and develop in depth through preliminary sketches leading to the final project.

I focused on the development of the visual symbols along with building the technical skills in order to enable each student to express him/herself to the best of their ability.

### FUA - Florence University of the Arts

**Lukáš Machalický**, Professor of Mixed Media / Installation Art

In order to adhere to the theme *Retreat From Reality*, proposed by the Center for Contemporary Culture Strozziina, I gave my FUA students from the classes of Mixed Media and Installation Art, a theoretical background, and made them discuss how American culture and society may be perceived. We highlighted some main characteristics and issues of America today, and compared those with what happens in different non-western countries.

We then decided to revolve around those topics by adopting a visionary procedure, as suggested by the exhibition *American Dreamers*, that we visited with the classes, rather than a pure mimetic portrayal. This is how we have eventually selected the work by Kevin Ivester for the project *Retreat from Reality*.

### New York University

**Patrice Lombardi**, Professor of Painting + **Alessandra Capodacqua**, Professor of Photography

Students from three classes at NYU have been involved with creating work in conjunction with the show at the Strozziina. Many of these students are working at the introductory level but their efforts show a marked dedication. They have been greatly inspired by their short time in Florence and their chance to explore and develop their vision - their reality - into compelling visual statements. Their involvement with the show - *American Dreamers* has fuelled their imagination! A selection of paintings, collage, photography and drawings from the twenty six participating students have been chosen that illustrate their progress.

## **SACI - Studio Art Center**

**Lorenzo Pezzatini**, Professor of Advance Painting

The project **Retreat from Reality** has been an interesting experiment for SACI students to examine the American society through a sort of reversed binoculars: from a distance but in great detail. The idea of working and drawing inspiration from the exhibition **American Dreamers** has been received with great interest and has pushed students to look beyond our great artistic tradition to search for more contemporary possibilities.

In this way the project has allowed the students to engage in their paintings in a highly introspective and personal way showing them a city that strives to actively participate in the contemporary artworld and free itself from its illustrious past.

## **Syracuse University**

**Stefania Talini**, Professor of Photographic Art + **Lawrence C. Davies**, Professor of Architecture

Students from both the architecture and the photographic art programs produce work that is informed by each other's efforts, each attempting to interpret the exhibition theme. The photographers explore the topic in a personal way, only indirectly influenced by the idea that being in a foreign country, and in particular the city of Florence, is an escape from something more familiar yet often only understood in a vague, even mysterious, way. For the architecture students some aspect of the work of a fellow student photographer and the idea of making art outside one's home country are the starting points for the design of a museum that contains only art about Florence made by those who are only temporarily living in Florence. Combined with the project's placement in the less-touristic neighborhood of Piazza Tasso, students are asked to create a built experience that doubles back on itself in cultural purpose, form and space.

**Kirsten Stromberg**, Professor of Painting

The Special Topics in Painting class at SUF addressed the project *Retreat From Reality* through an investigation that reflected on the student's particular experience and artistic research in Florence while discussing the experience of 'Retreat from Reality' as an opportunity to question cultural assumptions and explore ideas of belonging and becoming. Sub-themes touched on home, lineage, perception, and transitional/liminal states. After researching from various museums in Florence, each student chose an object/focus that held specific significance, reflecting on it's meaning visually and conceptually. From this they developed their thematic work through exploring object/ground relationships, quality of light, brushwork, perspective and compositional structure while linking their ideas to the overarching question of 'Retreat From Reality'.

## **WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY in St. LOUIS**

**Regan Wheat**, Senior Lecturer of Fine Arts + **Lindsey Stouffer**, Senior Lecturer of Architecture and Art  
"there is only one way left to escape the alienation of present day society: to retreat ahead of it." Roland Barthes

Reality & Imagination: Retreat from Reality

In this course, students examine the act (v.) and space (n.) of retreat to raise questions about the character of society and the forms of artistic and cultural investigation that create new modes of becoming and belonging. Students address the following themes within the concept of *Retreat from Reality*. Alternative worlds: parallel, dreamlike, fantasy. Condensed reality as miniaturized systems / Expand outwards into space /Alternative ways of organizing life /Outmoded manufacturing methods /Response to serial production and/or excessive speed / Home, family.



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