



FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT
WRITERS IN MUSEUMS 1798-1898

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19. To Look (and to See) in the Nineteenth Century: At the Uffizi and Elsewhere

Cristina Acidini

The many museums in Florence each have different histories and characteristics. After the Franceschini reform by the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo in 2014, the state art museums, formerly united as the Polo Museale Fiorentino, were subdivided into distinct functional units: the Archaeological Museum and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, the museums of the 'Opere', at the service of great ecclesiastic compounds, the museums depending on the 'enti locali', starting with those of the Municipality, the University Museums, the autonomous scientific Galileo Museum, the museums of Foundations and of private parties.

Almost all of these museums were established in places that were not purpose-built, for example in private palaces, convents, buildings belonging to the church, villas, and other spaces all created in a pre-industrial age. These buildings originally had lighting systems based exclusively on natural light or on flame ignition.

Almost nothing has been written about light in museums. The main problem lies with the sources: it is difficult to find evidence about lighting at all, let alone the systems that existed before the twentieth century. The museum catalogues of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which one might have expected to be helpful, actually omit any information on this subject, offering only a historical introduction and a description of

the artworks and objects, dwelling on the most interesting exhibits. Not even the Florence guidebooks contain any information on the subject, however detailed, up-to-date and numerous they might have been in the nineteenth century; instead, they concentrate on the changes in government and the status of Florence as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy from 1865 to 1871. This is true of the Galleria degli Uffizi, an exemplar of Italian museums, whose printed descriptions of specific halls — such as the Tribune, the Cabinet of Inscriptions, the hall of the Niobe and other rooms with special collections — give no information on the modes and criteria for lighting.

It seems that the most useful sources of information can be grouped as follows: the internal museum documents including memorials, reports, requests, projects, expense documents, and budgets, which can be found in the archives; old photos and other historical images; and reports by attentive, usually foreign, travellers, which sometimes contain incidental allusions to characteristics of the lighting and its aesthetic effects on rooms and objects.

An excellent example is found in this passage by S. Hippolyte Taine, written while Florence was the capital, on a clear April morning: ‘... le jour est beau; le vitres luisantes jettent un reflet sur quelques blanches statues lointanes, sur un torse rosé de femme qui sort vivant des noirceurs de l’ombre’ [the day is beautiful; the glistening windows cast a reflection onto some distant white statues, onto the pink body of a woman who comes alive from the darkness of the shadow].¹

Taine is like a painter with words, evoking a complex luminescent picture in which the rays of light coming in through the windows — the large windows of the corridors, which even today look onto antique sculpture — caress the surfaces of the statues, revealing their whiteness or flesh-colouring, and making them stand out of the shadows. This is around 1864, when Impressionism was in its embryonic stages (the Salon des Refusés was in 1863): the author’s sensitivity to the ways that rays of colourful light can shape form was soon to become the mood of the day.

We find a contrasting observation, no less precise and intriguing, in Henry James, who, despite his admiration for the Galleria degli Uffizi, found it more satisfying to observe the paintings by Andrea del

1 Hippolyte Taine, *Voyage en Italie* (Paris: Hachette, 1874), 1889 edition, p. 59.

Sarto 'in those dusky drawing-rooms of the Pitti Palace [...] In the rich insufficient light, where, to look at the pictures, you sit in damask chairs and rest your elbows on tables of malachite, the elegant Andrea del Sarto becomes deeply effective'.² On the one hand, through the refined, though snobbish, perspective of Henry James, we catch a glimpse of a museum experience characterized by the privilege afforded only to an international élite. On the other hand, we also perceive the underlying truth that limited lighting or even the penumbra of historical rooms constitute the best lighting conditions in which to view the works of art; the conditions for which they were originally created, and in which they lived for centuries before the advent of electric lighting.

The Italian translations for 'dusky' in the rooms of the Galleria Palatina can vary from 'ombroso' to 'scuro' to 'buio', and similarly 'fosco' and 'tetro', which can be summarised by James's admirable oxymoron 'rich insufficient light'.³ The scarcity of light was counterbalanced by the density of the chromatic tones — suffused with the presumably red reflections of the damasks and the overpowering green reflections of the malachite — which satisfied the observer, stimulating aesthetic emotions where sight could not gather complete information.

A few decades earlier, the relationship between light and shadow had been quite differently expressed by other visitors to Florence. Mary Shelley wrote that 'during the misty and darker days of this *unsouthern* winter, I have gone [...] to warm my heart and imagination by the golden hues of a sunnier and purer atmosphere'.⁴ While Shelley's warm sunlight was more of a symbolic, psychological condition, the similarly appreciative observations of the American lawyer-writer George Stillman Hillard described the real sunlight that illuminated the rooms of the Galleria Palatina: '[...] there are no gloomy vaults of shade and cold [...] but the sun streams in through spacious windows in rich and enlivening masses'.⁵

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the many nineteenth-century travel narratives that require substantial scholarly attention. For

2 Henry James, *The Non-Fiction of Henry James (Annotated with Biography)* (Golgotha Press, 2011).

3 These Italian terms range in meaning from 'shadowy', to 'gloomy' and 'dark'.

4 Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy 1840, 1842 and 1843* (London: Edward Moxon, 1844), part III, vol. II, p. 156. Shelley's italics.

5 G. S. Hillard, *Six Months in Italy* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1853), vol. I, p. 95.

the time being, however, it is worthwhile to examine the documentary texts available regarding a few Florentine ‘cases’, which deal with ancient and modern museums and their lighting arrangements as they change over the centuries, particularly through the 1800s.

It is appropriate to begin with the abovementioned Galleria degli Uffizi, the first museum opened to the public in Florence thanks to the enlightened Grand Duke Peter Leopold Habsburg-Lorraine; this was part of a long process that followed the French Revolution and the subsequent sharing of privileges formerly enjoyed solely by the sovereigns of the *ancien régime*. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Galleria degli Uffizi underwent a radical re-arrangement. It had been a *Wunderkammer* of famous antique treasures, modern works of art, artificial and natural wonders; nourished, organized and finally mixed up, over the course of the two Medici centuries. This rearrangement had been long overdue, and was carried out by the Grand Duke with the help of directors and antiquarians, as has been recently reconsidered in specialized publications.⁶ Directors Antonio and Raimondo Cocchi, Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni and Luigi Lanzi, each in his own field, brought about innovations and modifications to rationalize the exhibition layout, preparing at the same time the removal of important collections, which would continue in the following century.

From the many published documents there are some — but very few — references to the Galleria lighting arrangements. These were exclusively natural for reasons of safety and practicality, considering the presence of highly inflammable materials, and it was not possible to light the Galleria evenly while attracting regular visitors, who could be suspicious of flame-lit galleries (the only available form of artificial lighting). Flame lighting was known to alter the perception of colours, softening them into a deceptive and indistinct mass that confuses the judgement, conferring on the paintings an elusive grace. ‘Né donna né tela a lume di candela’ [One should not marry a woman nor buy material by the light of a candle] is a proverb that exists in at least fifteen versions in the different Italian dialects; even if ‘tela’ [canvas] does not

6 M. Fileti Mazza, B. Tomasello, Antonio Cocchi, *Primo Antiquario della Galleria Fiorentina: 1738–1758* (Modena: Panini, 1996); M. Fileti Mazza, B. Tomasello, *Galleria degli Uffizi 1758–1775: La Politica Museale di Raimondo Cocchi* (Modena: Panini, 1999); M. Fileti Mazza, B. Tomasello, *Galleria degli Uffizi 1775–1792: Un Laboratorio Culturale per Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni* (Modena: Panini, 2003).

refer to a painting (as art historians tend to take for granted) but only to the material itself, the advice not to conduct aesthetic evaluations under uncertain and flattering light still holds.

In 1773 Raimondo Cocchi tried to make the viewing of medals easier by moving the collection 'nell'ultima stanza sul lungarno dalla parte occidentale, libera e luminosa [...] le altre tutte hanno tropp'eccezioni per quest'uso, specialmente del lume, e son troppo fredde per starvi a sedere a studiare come si fa sulle medaglie [...]' [to the last room on the Lungarno in the west wing, empty and luminous [...] the other rooms all have too many faults for this use, especially the lack of light and its being too cold to sit down to study the medals, as it is usually done],⁷ softening and regulating the light of the big window with a curtain of white cloth with a flounce. In the same year, Francesco Piombanti made a suggestion to the Grand Duke to install the cabinets of the bronze objects taken from Palazzo Pitti in a 'piccola stanza che resta a mezzogiorno dietro l'arsenale vecchio' [small room looking southward behind the old arsenal] having previously 'ingrandire la finestra unica che c'è in tre luci immediatamente prossime una all'altra per avere il lume bisognevole' [enlarged the only existing window into three windows next to one another in order to have the necessary light]. Cocchi underlined in one of his writings that 'i bronzi hanno bisogno di molto e vivo lume'⁸ [bronze objects need a lot of strong light].⁹

Artists could sometimes choose the location of their painting according to the lighting they desired. In 1778, the Castellamare painter Giuseppe Bonito, who wished to add his own self-portrait to the collection of self-portraits at the Galleria, was told by the director Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni that a favourable location would be found:

7 Cf. Mazza e Tomasello, *Galleria degli Uffizi 1758–1775*. In a letter to the Grand Duke of 18 January 1773, Raimondo Cocchi gave the drawing of the glass panes (p. 69); on 5 July 1773 he stated he had ordered to be placed over the window 'al finestrone una tenda di tela bianca con suo falpalà' [a white cotton curtain with its flounce] (p. 81).

8 Mazza e Tomasello, *Galleria degli Uffizi 1758–1775*. In a document of 7 July 1773, Cocchi observed that 'i bronzi hanno bisogno di molto e vivo lume' [bronze objects need a strong and lively light] (p. 83).

9 Mazza e Tomasello, *Galleria degli Uffizi 1758–1775*. In a letter of 9 July 1773 to the Grand Duke, Francesco Piombanti informed him of the arrangement of the bronze objects in the wardrobes in a special cabinet, and suggested they should 'ingrandire la finestra unica che c'è in tre luci immediatamente prossime una all'altra per avere il lume bisognevole' [enlarge the only window existing into three sources of light one next to the other in order to have the necessary light] (p. 170).

‘[...] il signor Giuseppe Bonito può rispetto al lume, scegliere quello che troverà più favorevole all’idea che concepirà nel colorire il proprio, mentre io nel collocarlo a suo tempo gli destinerò il luogo che gli converrà meglio’ [Mr Giuseppe Bonito can choose, as regards light, that which he finds most favourable to his own colouring of the portrait, while I will position it in the most suitable place in due time].¹⁰

Abbot Luigi Lanzi was pleased that the light of the Tribuna could be regulated by means of curtains in order to suit copyists: the space of the Tribuna was ‘alto, cerchiato intorno da gran numero di finestre, presta col ministero delle tende ad ogni oggetto que’ gradi appunto di luce, che a ben vederlo e a ben disegnarlo son richiesti’ [high, surrounded by a great number of windows, offering to each object, with the help of curtains, those degrees of light which are required in order to see, and make a drawing of it].¹¹

In the past, the only lighting available to the Galleria visitors and scholars was from natural sources. This not only allowed for variations of intensity and tone depending on the time of the day, the seasons, and the weather, but also created a stark contrast between intensely lit rooms and those which were shadowy, sometimes dark. The staff were required to adjust the technical systems (‘impiantistici’) — as we would call them today — in order to balance the light intensity and soften the contrast that was integral to the great building.

The excessive luminosity of several rooms, and especially of the great Corridors (the second of which is lit up, north and south, by a series of large windows constructed of several panes) was juxtaposed with the darker interior rooms, which had medium-to-small windows and modest skylights. In the Corridors, which were originally open loggias, the detailed drawings of Benedetto Felice-Vincenzo De Greyss were made reality in 1749 on the orders of Francis Stephen Lorraine. This involved the installation of distinctive glass panes made ‘a rulli’, that is, formed by disks of blown glass held together by lead:¹² the presence of this type

10 Mazza e Tomasello, *Galleria degli Uffizi 1775–1792*, p. xlv, note 54: report by Giuseppe Bencivenni (formerly Pelli) of 18 May 1778.

11 L. Lanzi, *La Real Galleria di Firenze accresciuta e riordinata* (Firenze: Franc. Moücke, 1782), p. 170, http://www.memofonte.it/home/files/pdf/lanzi_realgalleria.pdf

12 ‘Dell’inventario figurato furono realizzati quattro volumi in due stesure, una a matita ed una toccata in penna. Le parti completate raffiguravano i tre corridoi, la sala delle iscrizioni, cinque pareti della tribuna e la stanza degli autoritratti. Questi disegni sono conservati al Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi (stampe

of glass pane is confirmed by the illustrations of *Viaggio pittorico della Toscana* by Francesco Fontani (1801–03). The same technique was used for the Tribuna windows, during the restoration that was completed in 2012, in order to evoke the ‘invetriate di spere venetiane’ [window panes made of Venetian glass disks] of 1590. In archival documents there is little evidence of the decision to substitute the ‘a rulli’ panes with big modern windows, made of wood and glass panes, shielded by curtains.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Galleria — like other Florentine and Italian collections — underwent the traumas of the French and Napoleonic occupation, which involved the seizure and subsequent return of antiques and art works; the Restoration; the unification of Italy in 1861; the period when Florence was the capital (1865–71); the departure of the government for the new capital, Rome, in 1871; and finally, it metamorphosed from princely gallery to public state museum. Political events inhibited or delayed architectural and technical renovations. When the Senate left the Uffizi, the Galleria reclaimed its place in the old Medici theatre, which became the Botticelli hall in the twentieth century.

A closer examination of nineteenth-century lighting choices, pending more targeted research in the archives of the Galleria degli Uffizi, can be undertaken using Enrico Ridolfi’s account of his time as director of the Gallerie Fiorentine, and therefore also of the Uffizi, from 1890 to 1903.¹³ This has not received much attention from scholars, and perhaps not even from those who work there (excepting the excellent use made of it by Luciano Berti in his general catalogue of the Uffizi), but it certainly merits examination.

Another text one might expect to reward attention is Aurelio Gotti’s ponderous work devoted to the Florentine Galleries in the form of a

in volume, nn. 4492–4588), eccetto quelli relativi alla sala degli autoritratti che, sia nella prima versione sia in quella definitiva, si trovano nella Biblioteca nazionale di Vienna’ [Four volumes in two versions of the illustrated inventory were made, one in pencil and one in ink. The completed parts presented the three corridors, the room of the inscriptions, five walls of the tribune and the room of the self-portraits. These drawings are preserved at the Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi (stampe in volume, nn. 4492–4588), except for those referring to the room of the self-portraits, which, both in their earlier version and in their final version are now at the Vienna National Library]. (*De Greyss, Benedetto Felice*, in ‘Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani’ Volume 36, 1988.

13 E. Ridolfi, *Il mio directorato delle regie Gallerie fiorentine. Appunti* (Firenze: Tipografia Domenicana, 1905).

report to the Ministry of Public Education; it covers the crucial period when Florence was the capital but there is no consideration of lighting, even though the report deals with the formation of new museums, the reorganisation of existing ones, and the study, arrangement and enlarging of the collections. It is therefore to Ridolfi's book I shall turn.

In his descriptions of the projects he had overseen, Ridolfi underlined the critical situations he had had to put right and the improvements he had introduced or tried to introduce. He also wrote an essential foreword, with which anybody would still agree: 'Non bisogna dimenticare che il locale degli Uffizi non era sorto a uso di Galleria: a tal uso fu poi destinato, ed aumentato quindi a poco a poco, e formato nella maggior parte di piccole sale illuminate da finestre' [One should not forget that the premises of the Uffizi were not originally used as a Gallery: they were geared to this use later, slowly increasing the space, formed mainly by small rooms lit up by windows].¹⁴

It must be remembered that until the arrival of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century painted masterpieces, the Galleria was best known and appreciated for its statues, archaeological marble and bronze works, the collection of self-portraits and the cabinets of special collections, such as bronze objects, antique ceramics, vases, gems, etc. In the corridors, a *promenade* of antique sculptures and reliefs, which had been the pride of the Medicis — including the series of famous historical characters known as 'la Gioviana', and that of the Medicis and their relatives known as 'l'Aulica' — imposed themselves on the visitor. A polychromatic counterpoint was offered by the vaults (whose bays were frescoed with *grottesche* and other sixteenth-to-eighteenth-century decorations) and by the paintings hung high up on the interior and external walls. In order to present the statues in the second corridor at their best and eliminate the reflection caused by the large windows to the north and south, one side of the corridor had been shielded with canvas curtains. Intending to improve this effect, Ridolfi arranged a test, covering the curtains with a series of tapestries portraying histories of Cleopatra: 'per nascondere con quella ricca tappezzeria le grossolane tele che vi si vedevano destinate a coprire le invetriate da un dei suoi lati, onde la luce non venisse da più parti togliendo effetto alle gentili statue dispostevi' [in order to hide with those rich tapestries the coarse

14 Ibid., p. 8.

curtains, which were used to cover the windows on one side, so that the light would no longer come from several directions, diminishing the effect of the lovely statues exhibited].¹⁵ But apparently the test was not convincing.

Conversely, the gloominess of many of the rooms, especially those lacking windows, was to be illuminated by means of different devices. For instance, a large glazed interior window reflected the light pouring in from the Sala dell'Ermafrodito into the adjacent and otherwise dark Ricetto delle Iscrizioni, enhancing the strong *chiaroscuro* contrasts between the statues in relative shadow and the luminous background.

The need to adjust the presentation of the collections according to their location resulted in a display that aimed to use the different rooms to best effect. Thus, Ridolfi explained, paintings were exhibited

soltanto nelle sale interne per esser quei locali di maggior decoro e illuminati da luce più favorevole perché scendente per quanto fosse possibile dall'alto, o venendo almeno da un sol lato; mentre la luce che illumina la parete dei grandi corridoi venendole dai vetratoni che si aprono rimpetto a quelle, riesce poco favorevole ai dipinti e molto invece agli arazzi, alla cui esposizione pertanto e a quella dei marmi e dei disegni sarebbero stati i grandi corridoi riservati. ([...] only in the interior rooms, as those were the most decorous rooms, lit by a more favourable light coming as much as possible from high up, or at least from one side only; while the light illuminating the wall of the great corridors, and coming from the big glazed windows opening in front of them, is not very favourable to paintings although it is favourable to tapestries, which were therefore exhibited, together with marble works and drawings, in the corridors.)¹⁶

The interior rooms were generally equipped with skylights, which Ridolfi enlarged in order to convey the best light: a cold and almost unchanging light and therefore ideal, as in artists' studios and homes, to view works of art and especially paintings.

According to Ridolfi, 'i lavori di mutamento e di rifinimento delle nuove sale [...] e il restauro di molte delle antiche' [the work done to change and finish the new rooms [...] and the restoration of many of the antique rooms] was especially carried out in order to 'illuminare dall'alto tutte quelle che potevasi col mezzo di lanterne, o per ampliare

15 Ibid., p. 34.

16 Ibid., p. 36.

quelle lanterne che già vi esistevano, ma insufficienti a dar luce bastevole nelle giornate non splendide' [illuminate from high up all those that could be lit by means of lanterns, or in order to enlarge the already existing lanterns; this was insufficient, however, to shed enough light on the duller days].¹⁷ He decided to install 'altra lanterna nella volta' [another lantern in the vault] in the Ermafrodito-Vestibolo area; the decision to 'rialzare i soffitti e aumentare la luce' [to make the ceilings higher and to increase the light]¹⁸ was taken for other rooms. Ridolfi used 'lantern' according to its architectonic meaning, referring not so much to its morphology (generally shaped like a small temple on top of a dome) as to its function, as a technical device that sends natural light downwards. The desire to enlarge one of the existing large windows in one of the four rooms that housed the self-portraits clashed with the risk of altering the stability of the structure.¹⁹

In 1899 the arrival of an important set of works of art from the Arcispedale di Santa Maria Nuova, regularly purchased, required new adaptations. Thus the *Tryptich* by Hugo van der Goes was installed in a room that was 'convenientemente illuminata dall'alto' [conveniently lit up from the top],²⁰ requiring the 'modern' — more recent — self-portraits to be moved, even though they had been there for several years. If the light had to be softened, this was done with the usual shielding by curtains, which were altered to fit the style of the time in addition to their functionality. In the Gabinetto delle Gemme, rearranged during Ridolfi's tenure, 'la finestra della sala fu munita di tenda d'antica stoffa' [the window of the room was provided with a curtain made of ancient material]²¹ and in the Sala della Niobe 'le sconvenienti tende di tela bianca che stavano appese alle finestre ornatissime, si cambiarono in seriche tende di stoffa giallognola' [the unseemly curtains of white

17 Ibid., p. 11.

18 Ibid., p. 35.

19 '...vedendo come la maggiore di esse [quattro stanze], designata a contenere i ritratti più moderni, riusciva debolmente illuminata nella parte estrema opposta al finestrone, né potendo ormai ampliar questo maggiormente senza nuocere [...] alla robustezza dell'edificio, [l'architetto] raccorciò di una terza parte la sala...' [... since most of the rooms [four rooms], designed to hold the more modern portraits were weakly lit up far from the big window, and it not being possible to enlarge this without endangering [...] the solidity of the building [the architect] shortened the third part of the room...]. Ibid., p. 25.

20 Ibid., p. 33.

21 Ibid., p. 20.

canvas hanging on the most ornate windows were changed for yellowish silk ones].²²

Two types of objects collected by the Gallerie were permanently damaged over the course of time by their being exposed to strong and constant light, which was originally believed to be favourable: drawings and tapestries. The distribution of many drawings (which were earlier kept in closed drawers) throughout various rooms on the second floor started in 1854, when the director Luca Bourbon del Monte — to use Aurelio Gotti's words:

provvide con savio pensiero a disporre con pubblica mostra nella Galleria delle statue [degli Uffizi] alcuni dei migliori disegni che potessero soddisfare alla giusta curiosità del pubblico, e dare agli artisti un saggio della importanza di tutta la collezione, della quale per l'avanti nulla mostravasi se non a qualche dotto straniero, o a qualche principe, o a chi si fosse procacciato autorevoli commendatizie. Riuscì, tutta insieme, una bella e ricca mostra, nelle tre sale che erano state inalzate al dorso della gran terrazza ('wisely provided a public exhibition in the Galleria delle statue [degli Uffizi] of some of the best drawings that could satisfy the well-placed curiosity of the visitors, and offer to the artists an example of the importance of the whole collection, no piece of which was previously shown except to some foreign scholar or some prince or to those who managed to obtain authoritative recommendations. The result was on the whole a beautiful and rich exhibition in the three rooms that had been erected on the big terrace').²³

In 1866, when Florence was the capital and the king lived in the Pitti, il Corridoio Vasariano was altered with the purpose of 'distendendovi una buona parte dei disegni, delle stampe e degli arazzi che rimanevano sempre chiusi in cartelle, o disposti nei magazzini demaniali' [exhibiting there a good number of the drawings, prints and tapestries that were always kept in folders in the *demanio* (state-owned) storage spaces].²⁴ By 1867 this exhibition had already finished; it had included the large and exquisite still-life drawings by Jacopo Ligozzi. Further along the Corridoio, down the big staircase annexed to the third corridor and along the section that runs parallel to the Lungarno Archibusieri

22 Ibid., p. 21.

23 A. Gotti, *Le Gallerie di Firenze. Relazione al Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione in Italia* (Firenze: Cellini, 1872), p. 223.

24 Ibid., pp. 254–55. There is no reference to the lighting of these art objects that had just been exhibited, taking them out of protected storage.

were hung prints that had never been previously exhibited; later, the drawings collected in the three rooms near the Terrace were moved to the section of the corridor above the Ponte Vecchio — which was the most illuminated section, since the western windows had been enlarged on the occasion of a pre-unification visit by Vittorio Emanuele di Savoia, at the time king of Piedmont and Sardinia (not for the visit of Hitler and Mussolini as the legend has it). Thus the 1716 drawings could be exhibited. These ‘exhibited’ drawings, which were grouped in one of the categories where the GDSU²⁵ (E) drawings were listed, suffered serious damage,²⁶ even though the damage was caused by accident; it was noted and communicated to the press by the connoisseur and aesthete Ugo Ojetti. In describing the future layout of the Uffizi in 1904, Ojetti foresaw some solutions for the location of the statues in the corridors, but above all he recognized the damage already done to the exhibited drawings:

le statue e i gruppi classici di marmo che adesso ricevendo luce solo di faccia sembrano appiattiti contro il muro saranno posti nel mezzo dei corridoi [...]. Molti dei disegni adesso sono esposti lungo le vetriate dei corridoi [...] è impossibile lasciarli, come le stampe, eternamente lì, dove il bistro s’illanguidisce, la biacca s’ossida, la punta d’argento sbiadisce, e la carta s’ingiallisce e fiorisce [the statues and the marble classic groups that now receive the light only from the front, and therefore look flat, will be placed in the middle of the corridors [...]. It is impossible to leave many of the drawings and prints where they are [...] along the windows of the corridors, where the *bistro* pales off, the *biacca* gets oxidized, and the paper becomes yellowish and spotted].²⁷

The tapestries hanging in the Corridoi of the Uffizi, also exhibited during the previous century, were suffering damage that was more difficult to spot. They were removed from the Corridoi degli Uffizi only in 1987, since such prestigious and decorative objects were usually kept where they were unless their relocation was deemed to be essential. It was extremely fortunate that there was insufficient money or space to carry out Ridolfi’s intentions:

congiungere alle mostre di antiche stoffe e ricami che trovansi alla Crocetta [il palazzo ex Mediceo della Crocetta presso la SS. Annunziata,

25 Gabinetto delle stampe degli Uffizi.

26 Gotti, *Le Gallerie di Firenze*, p. 255. See also Anna Maria Petrioli Tofani, *Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi. Inventario. Disegni esposti*, 2 vols. (Firenze: Olschki, 1986).

27 Ugo Ojetti in the ‘Corriere della Sera’, 14 December 1904.

oggi sede del Museo Archeologico], le molte e belle stoffe del legato Carrand non mai potute esporre nel Museo Nazionale per mancanza di spazio, o esposte in luoghi ove è difetto di luce [to add to the ancient materials and embroideries exhibited in the Crocetta [the former Medici palace of the Crocetta near SS. Annunziata, now the seat of the Museo Archeologico] the many and beautiful materials belonging to the Carrand bequest, which were never exhibited in the Museo Nazionale due to lack of space or exhibited in places where there was little light].²⁸

The Carrand textiles collections were left protected in dark rooms, or, to their greater benefit, in the drawers of the Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

Two more short observations on two Florentine cases.

If one exits the Galleria degli Uffizi and the Complesso Vasariano, one comes across a complex and fascinating case (although on a lesser scale) in the Cappella dei Magi by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Medici Riccardi palace. The chapel, part of Michelozzo di Bartolomeo's plan for the palace, was finished by 1459. It was made of wood and grey sandstone, with polichrome marble decorations, and Benozzo Gozzoli painted scenes on its walls including the *Journey of the Magi*, *The Annunciation to the Shepherds* and *The Adoration of the Angels*. Today, these scenes converge towards the altar and the *Adoration of the Child*, a painting ascribed to Pier Francesco Fiorentino, which took the place of the original painting by Filippo Lippi that had hung there and was sold and exported in the nineteenth century. Gozzoli finished them in 1464, when he left Florence. From its very origin the chapel must have been in perpetual shadow due to the lack of natural light, which was admitted only through a western oculo (overlooking a narrow courtyard), an eastern oculo (overlooking an entrance, now a small corridor), and from two small western windows in the small lateral vestry. These circumstances, linked to the position of the chapel at the heart, as it were, of the monumental pile, had an impact on the artist's decisions when it came to the chromatic, tonal and luminous rendering of the frescoes. During the illumination tests of 1992, when artificial light was reduced to an absolute minimum, one could see (and enjoy) the clear and well-defined shapes of the equestrian statues stand out of the shadows; the thick applications of ultramarine blue and red lacquer, gold, and silver shone more strongly, creating an effect of diffused luminosity, while the

28 Ridolfi, *Il mio directorato delle regie Gallerie fiorentine*, p. 27.

impressions of distance were heightened by the semi-darkness, which deepened the observer's view until it lost itself in an indistinct darkness.

The tapestry effect caused a flattening, with a vertical ascent of the composition, criticized by some famous art critics such as Bernard Berenson; this is softened and disappears while the light balance evokes the situation during the pre-industrial past.

There were various attempts to compensate for the lack of light in the chapel. Before 1650, on the orders of the Medicis, two rectangular windows with round glass panes were opened on both sides of the original entrance, but they admitted only a pale and indirect light since they looked onto another interior room. One of the two windows was destroyed during the structural modifications during the ownership of the Riccardi family from 1269, when architect Giovan Battista Foggini built a staircase that obtruded onto the left-hand-side of the chapel and caused it to be remodelled. The original functions of the chapel, as both the religious heart of the palace and evidence of the supreme wealth of the Medicis, were less important to the new owners who did not hesitate to carry out heavy alterations. In 1837 — after the Riccardis had sold Filippo Lippi's *Adoration of the Child* in 1814 — the new owners, the Lorraines, installed a wide arched window on the altar wall, which allowed a wave of light to wash over the altar and, from there, to irradiate the room. Two of the four symbols of the Evangelists painted by Gozzoli, St. Mark's Winged Lion and St. Luke's Winged Bull, were lost. Finally, during the 1929 restoration of the chapel, the window was bricked up, the wall was rebuilt and painted blue, and another *Adoration* was placed on the altar, a painting attributed to Pier Francesco Fiorentino, almost certainly taken from one of the convents that had been suppressed in the city: darkness returned to the chapel.²⁹ However, artificial light solved the problem at its root. The troubled (and in its own way disastrous) history of the chapel is certainly an interesting case study, which offers a unique perspective on our changing perception, over the centuries, of (and in) artistic spaces.

I will conclude my chapter with one of the rare cases of a Florentine museum space built from scratch (*ex novo*), that is, the Tribune dedicated to Michelangelo's *David*, located in what was initially (in 1873) the

29 Cf. C. Acidini Luchinat (ed.), *I restauri nel Palazzo Medici Riccardi. Rinascimento e Barocco* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan: Silvana, 1992).

Galleria d'Arte Antica e Moderna, and which is nowadays the Galleria dell'Accademia, formerly the Ospedale di San Matteo.

A hall in the form of a temple, the Tribuna was built according to plans by Emilio de Fabris in 1873 (and in preparation for the four-hundredth anniversary of Michaelangelo's birth in 1875), after a special committee had decreed the removal of the marble colossus from the Piazza della Signoria and its exhibition in a museum. It was constructed at the heart of the big block which still had green spaces and cloisters, even if it was already the seat of the Conservatorio Musicale 'Luigi Cherubini' and of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, the heir of the 'Galleria dei Lavori' removed from the Uffizi by the Lorraines of the Restoration. The *David* was not placed in the centre but it was partially set under the apsidal arch of the new structure, covered by a vast glazed dome. The Galleria was originally a teaching place for the nearby Accademia di Belle Arti with its 'ancient and modern' paintings (later moved partly to the Gallerie degli Uffizi and to the Arte Moderna at Palazzo Pitti). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the director Ridolfi fitted out three rooms in order 'collocare in miglior luce' [to place in a better light]³⁰ Botticelli's *Primavera* and other of his masterpieces, as well as paintings of the increasingly beloved 'quattrocentisti'. Ridolfi took great care of the rooms adjoining the *David*. In the *crociera* of the Tribuna 'si rifecero i finestroni in modo e forma convenienti' [the big windows were rebuilt in the proper manner and shape] and 'furono poi meglio illuminate e decorate le altre sale cui da qui si accede' [then the other adjoining rooms were better lit and decorated].³¹

The idea to allow natural light to fall on Michelangelo's marble statue from high up (filtered by glass panes) had at least one important precedent: the exhibition of the *Barberini Faun* for Ludwig of Bavaria in the Munich Glyptothek, placed in a specially built hemicycle structure in 1820. However, the most important and authoritative model of light falling through a ceiling into a space lacking windows was, then as it is now, the Pantheon, which has lost nothing of its inspiring power.

It has been observed of this mode of lighting that:

il sole, nel suo quotidiano itinerario privato del rapporto con l'orizzonte, assume un carattere trascendente, metafisico. Si partecipa del sorgere e

30 Ridolfi, *Il mio directorato delle regie Gallerie fiorentine*, p. 12.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 12 and 14.

del tramontare: solo l'intensità luminosa e la profondità delle ombre ci riporta ad una dimensione reale. Uno spazio privo di finestre e dotato di aperture sommitali si trova in una condizione estraniata, disorientata: lo spazio galleggia, inconsapevole, tra sotto e sopra, ipogeo e epigeo [the sun, in its daily journey deprived of its relationship with the horizon, takes on a transcendent and metaphysical character: One is part of sunrise and sunset: only the light's intensity and the shadow's depth takes one back to a dimension of reality. A space with no windows and equipped with summit openings is in a disoriented, alienated condition: space floats, unconsciously, between above and below, between hypogeum and epigeum].³²

In this as in other instances, one should never underestimate the power of light to create particular psychological conditions for the visitors of museums and other exhibition spaces: strong emotions, in front of overpowering masterpieces, can indeed cause disorientation, wonder, and finally alienation. It is not a coincidence if the psychological phenomenon known in literature as 'Stendhal syndrome' has been identified and studied in relation to the *David*, a naked giant, glaring white in a light of perfect abstraction.

32 www.luigifranciosini.com/download/lab01/la%20casa%20studio.pdf