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Final Project: A Sense of Place

To Whom It May Concern:

I am Jinghong(David) He, Assistant to the Development Director at Save Venice Inc. Although I am currently working in New York, I actually grew up in China. I know it sounds corny, but you do realize you should cherish what you had when you lose it. That's how I thought of the ruins of the Garden of Perfect Brightness when I first visited there. Widely conceived as the peak of Chinese imperial garden and palace design, the Garden of Perfect Brightness was an architectural wonder, known for its extensive collection of gardens, its building architecture and various art and historical treasures.¹ I so pitied that previous generations could not protect it from being destroyed by the invaders from the first time I saw the 3-D modeling of the garden. Now, it is entirely up to you, on whether or not you would save Venice, a unique wonderland, from being destroyed, not from any particular people, but our mother nature.

Fleeing from the barbarian invasions in the 7th century, some Roman citizens from nearby cities took refuge in the small islands within the lagoon and then set permanent settlements there.² Perhaps they never thought of Venice could become ambitious and powerful one day, so they first picked St Theodore as their patron saint.³ Dependent both politically and economically to the mainland, first Ostrogoth then Byzantine, the Venetians struggled with their boggy terrain

¹ Grove Art Online. "Qing dynasty." Accessed Dec 5, 2018.
<http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy.bc.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000070285?rskey=pOnUED&result=2>

² Crouzet-Pavan, Elisabeth. *Venice Triumphant: The Horizon of a Myth*. Translated by L.G. Cochrane. Baltimore and London, 2002, 3-6.

³ Brown, Patricia F. *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997, 3.

for many centuries.⁴ As Venice was becoming wealthier and more powerful, one of the most critical events in Venetian history happened. Two merchants stole the relics of Saint Mark, one of the essential apostles in Christianity, and brought it back to Venice. Although it remains unclear to us about the motives of the two merchants, but we do know Venetians welcomed the body of Saint Mark and constructed a church for it. A great example to exemplify this early story of Venice is the two columns of Saint Mark and Saint Theodore, located in the Square of San Marco, which is the heart of Venice, since the 12th century.⁵ At the top of the column of the west part of the square is a marble statue that represents Saint Theodore stamping on a felled dragon, while at the top of the other column you can see the bronze statue of a winged lion. In the times when Venice could only be reached by sea, these two columns of granite, authentic treasures brought from the Orient, were erected as an entrance gateway to the city. Merchants, missionaries, ambassadors, and now tourists, an uncountable amount of people from different places have passed these two columns for various reasons, but these two columns were continuously witnessing things happened in front of them. If nothing occurred, it would consistently be there for the coming centuries, telling the story and history of its own. Unfortunately, it has already been regularly in the water during *Acqua Alta*.

During the *Acqua Alta*, the Basilica of San Marco is also often flooded. Among all of the famous sites in Venice, you must be once amazed by its complicated and luxurious facades. This is another story of the uniqueness of Venice. Both the exterior and interior decorations are great examples in showing the process of Venetian history and its relationships with other nations. The main portal in the south wing contained Roman columns, Gothic arches, Horses of Saint Mark,

⁴ Crouzet-Pavan. 2002, 5.

⁵ Venetian Art Website. "Lion Of Saint Mark." Accessed Dec 5, 2018.
<https://library.bc.edu/venetianart/items/show/1455>

and Renaissance frescos. Each of them added to the facade from different time and places. While as people thinking about the interior of the Basilica, the first images that many people thought of are the mosaics with their golden backgrounds. The mosaic decorations were developed for eight centuries. Although the majority of the original medieval mosaics have been restored and renovated during the past centuries, some part of the mosaics is still in a reasonably pure Byzantine style, but after the Byzantine influence was reduced, and finally disappeared, the style was Italian in essentials.⁶ The golden mosaics represented stories from the Bible and depicted the figure of Christ, the Virgin Mary, Saint Mark, and other saints. Reflecting from the Mosaics, we could see Venice's history, its ambitions, faith, languages, and trends characterizing the evolution of its form art. The skills to represent and interpret other culture outside is fundamental regard the history of Venice. As we all know that the original Basilica of San Marco was burned down during the 10th century, and what we have seen now is rebuilt on its ruins, there is always a sense of pity there. Perhaps we have a better one now, yet we will never know what is it like for the old one. This sense of sympathy and compassion was also in the Basilica of Saint Mark today.

Next to the Basilica of San Marco, it was the Ducal Palace, which would also be a striking and excellent example of gothic architecture being flooded during Acqua Alta. Famous for its south and west wings of exquisite facades, the Ducal Palace also served an essential role in Venetian history. Both wings were decorated in the combination of pointed arches, which were Gothic style, Quatrefoils, Ogee arches, and lozenge tilings, which were originally from the east.⁷ This kind of openness in adapting different cultures in reflection to its own architecture design made Venice even more unique because it was at the very center of the cultural exchange

⁶ Howard, Deborah. *The Architectural History of Venice*. New Haven, 2002, 13–28.

⁷ Howard, Deborah. *Venice & the East*. New Haven, 2000, 171–179.

between the western and eastern world. But how can we preserve this building of history and its meaning if we can't even stop the water from eroding to the bottom of the facade?

The Venetian school paintings were also very significant in the Renaissance. For those workshops and places where masters once lived and worked, we could revisit them in order to get a better sense of what they are, how they valued color more than designs in person.⁸ We could closely observe those altarpieces, for instance, Titian's *Assumption of Virgin*, in the Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, in its original locations. As the largest altarpiece in the city, with the figures well over life-size, with a considerable distance between the altar and the congregation, Titian developed the painting in three zones, divided by spaces filled only with light. This will helps us understand more about how the artist thought of the layout of painting as a part of the whole church. There is always a sense of harmony and balance between the altarpiece and the architecture that accommodate it. Although those altarpieces and other public missions might be able to be transported and exhibited in other museums around the globe, however, it could only be in its original location, in Venice, that helps us understand the meaning more deeply, because there is always a sense of connection between this masterpiece with this sinking city.

As you were riding the gondola on the grand canal, you must notice there are buildings with different styles. Ca' d'Oro, Palazzo Corner della Ca' Grande, and Ca' Rezzonico shows the historical evolution of the house building technics. Basilica of Saint Mark, S. Michele in Isola, S. Giorgio Maggiore, and Santa Maria della Salute revealed the different styles and types of churches. You may also have time to think about how Giovanni Bellini, Gentile Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese learned from each other and created their own

⁸ Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. "Venetian Color and Florentine Design." Accessed Dec 5, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vefl/hd_vefl.htm

masterpieces⁹. All these similarities and differences were connected and organized by the grand canal, which reflects the wisdom and values of different ages. This canal seems like a river of the history of Venice. While Venice was evolving and changing throughout the ages, this body of water is silently witnessing everything that is happening.

It is always important to realize that as we preserve ancient artworks and architectures, we are not only protecting themselves but also maintaining a sense of connection and bonding. Imagine, Napoléon was once also standing in front of the Bronze Horses of Saint Mark, while you once stood in front of it too. Each artifact has its own story behind it, and it is only because our preservation, these stories and connections could be passed to future generations.

Venice compresses a significant number of artworks and history into a remarkably small space. This kind of uniqueness is unprecedented, and may probably not be able to duplicate in the future. It has fallen to us, our generation, to take the responsibility of preserving history for our future generations, like what our past generations did. Whether or not Venice would become a real-life Atlantis for future generations is entirely depending on you, as well as others who also valued this unmatched pearl on the northwestern end of the Adriatic Sea.

Sincerely,

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⁹ Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. "Sixteenth-Century Painting in Venice and the Veneto." Accessed Dec 5, 2018.

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/veve/hd_veve.htm