

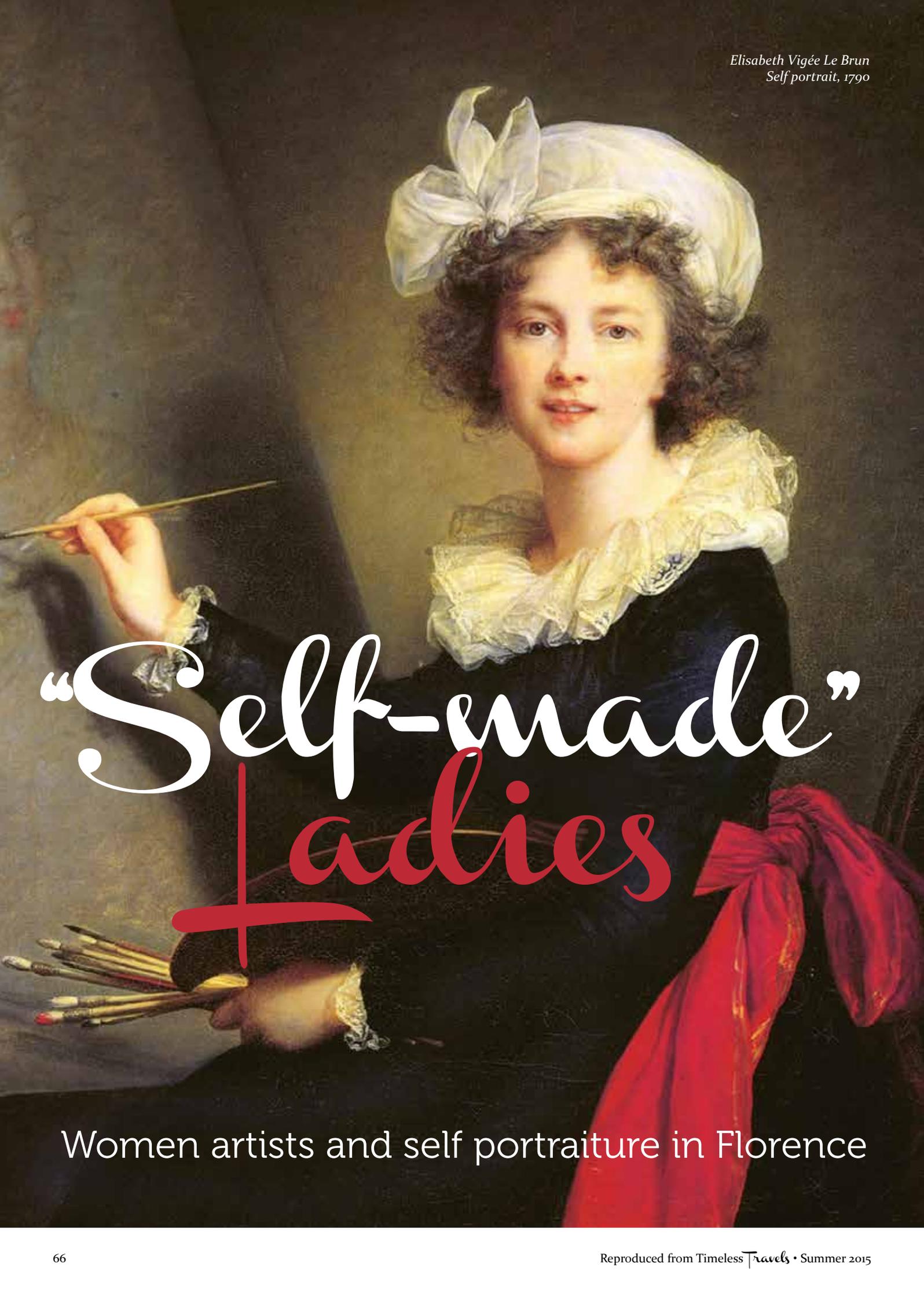
Summer 2015

TIMELESS Travels

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FOR LOVERS OF TRAVEL, ARCHAEOLOGY AND ART



“Self-made”
Ladies

Women artists and self portraiture in Florence

Florence's Vasari Corridor is the Medici passageway that links the Palazzo Vecchio and the Pitti Palace. Today, it is filled with a collection of artists' self portraits, and Jane Fortune, founder of the Advancing Women Artists Foundation, selects her favourites

Florence's Vasari Corridor was built in just five months by painter, architect and historian Giorgio Vasari, on a commission by Cosimo I de' Medici to impress the guests attending the wedding of his son, Francesco I and Johanna of Austria in 1565. One kilometre long, it would allow the Medici to avoid rubbing elbows with Florence's common citizens, by providing a private, elevated passageway connecting the Palazzo Vecchio, the seat of the Florentine government since the 13th century, to their offices (the Uffizi) and the Pitti Palace, which served as the dynasty's family residence for centuries.

As the Arno River ebbs and flows beneath parts of the Corridor, modern-day visitors to this enclosed structure can reflect upon the power of art history's greatest protagonists, while enjoying breathtaking, little-known views from Vasari's rounded windows. Nearly 400 paintings from its 1,750 piece self portrait collection are on display there today and less than 10 percent of these are by women artists. Nonetheless, this unique setting offers the most concentrated collection of art by women in Italy—with over twenty works by female artists available for public view. In fact, when it comes to representing women, the vast majority of larger museums worldwide cannot match this seemingly small sampling of paintings spanning the 16th to the 21st centuries. Visitors are sure to appreciate self portraits by pioneering Italian women artists from the 1500s such as Sofonisba Anguissola, Lavinia Fontana and Marietta Robusti, as well as a significant entourage of Rococo painters like Venetian master Rosalba Carriera and her Florentine rival Giovanna Fratellini. Yet, one of the most surprising features of the collection is the presence of many international women from various eras: Angelica Kauffmann, Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, Louisa Grace Bartolini, Rosa Bonheur, Cecilia Beaux and Elisabeth Chaplin are a few of the notable "self-made" ladies whose success and talents inspire art lovers today.

Angelica Kauffmann (1741–1807)

Swiss-born neoclassical artist Angelica Kauffmann was a child prodigy, whose father, a minor painter, had taught her to paint. By the age of 13, she was already executing portraits of kings and nobles. Later in life, Goethe, her friend and admirer, would write on the artist's career in his famed *Italian Journeys*: "She is tired of commissions, but her old husband thinks it wonderful that so much money should roll in for what is often easy work. She would like to paint to please herself and have more leisure to study and take pains." She was beguiled by Italy and achieved success both there and in England, becoming the darling of intellectual salons throughout Europe. In 1768, during her 25-year stay in England, Kauffmann became one of the founding members of London's Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture with her long-time friend, painter extraordinaire Sir Joshua Reynolds. Six years prior, in 1762, she had been accepted as a member of the Accademia delle Arte del Disegno in Florence. Her idealized, symbolic, self portrait (1787) can be viewed in the Vasari Corridor. It is one of the largest works in the collection. Dressed in white, the artist seems to defy time and

age. She painted this romantic self-rendition as a substitute for an earlier self portrait, [now in storage at the Uffizi] which offered a far more realistic depiction, showing the young artist in her studio next to an open box of paints, palette and brushes in hand. The second painting's technique was of superior quality, Kauffmann argued while insisting upon its replacement, and thus worthier of her larger-than-life persona and the prestige of other self portraits on display.

Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun (1755–1842)

Primarily self-taught through her assiduous work copying the masters, Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun was a beautiful and very popular French artist, who produced 800 works during her life time, 600 of which were portraits. She was supported by Marie Antoinette



Angelica Kauffmann, 1735
Self portrait, Uffizi,
storage

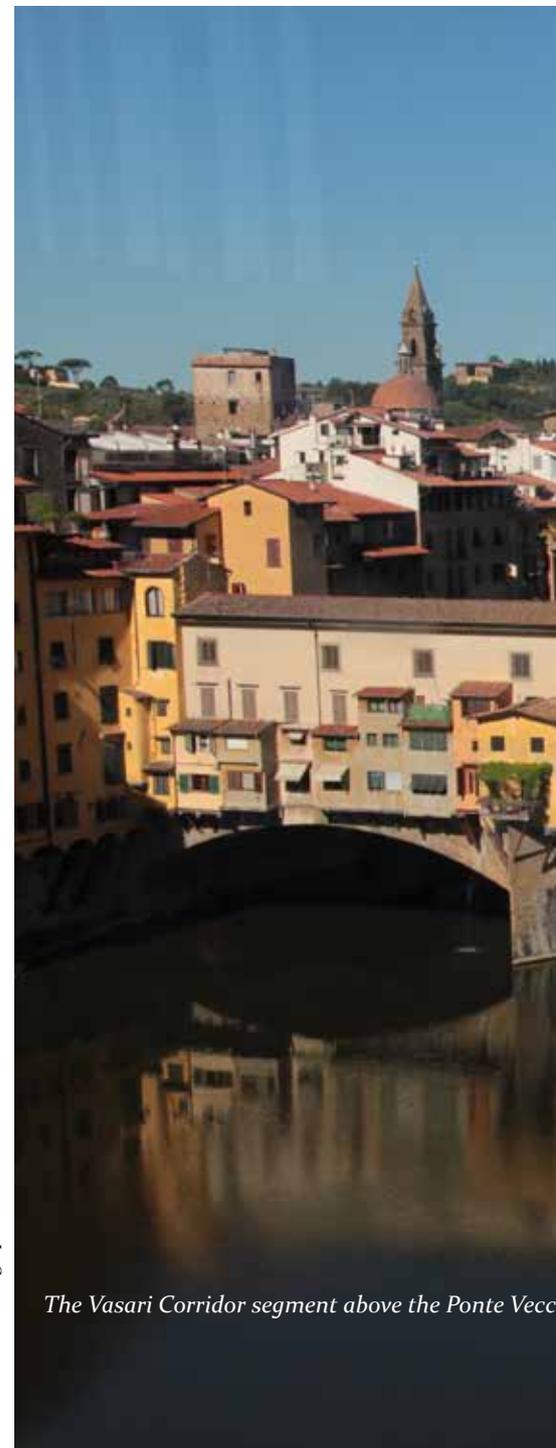


Louisa Grace Bartolini
Self portrait,
1860-65

Louisa Grace Bartolini (1818–1865)

Born in Bristol, England, Louisa Grace Bartolini spent most of her life in Pistoia, Italy. Her Vasari self portrait intricately shows the details of her elegant cape and laced blouse. She holds a book in her hand and an easel nearby shows a partial portrait of an unknown person. A dog, symbol of fidelity, gazes adoringly up at her. Bartolini's earlier works showed she studied Andrea del Sarto and Fra' Bartolommeo, but in her later years, she used techniques of light and colour, typical of Titian and the Venetian school. She was a well-published poet and

and produced dozens of royal portraits, including one of the French queen with her children that is considered the greatest political painting of the 18th century. King Louis XVI was so impressed by Vigée Le Brun's work that he told the artist: "I know nothing about painting but you have made me love it." Her Vasari self portrait at an easel (1790) shows her youthful gaze, elegance of pose and a whimsical quality of her clothes and hat, which make the work a pure delight to view. Three years prior to its production, Vigée Le Brun had caused scandal by painting a self portrait with her mouth open and her teeth visible. Though criticized, she continued this trend in the Uffizi work, of which she was immensely satisfied. "My painting in Florence enjoys great success," she wrote in a personal letter. "All artists have come, come again; the princesses of all countries, the men even. They call me 'Madame Van Dyck and Madame Rubens.'"



Photograph © Francesco Cacchiani

The Vasari Corridor segment above the Ponte Vecchio

her first work was published in Italian at the age of fifteen. More of her art—68 drawings and 57 paintings in five albums—are hosted at the Marucelliana Library in Florence and two additional self portraits can be seen there. In both she is shown as she works as a painter.

Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899)

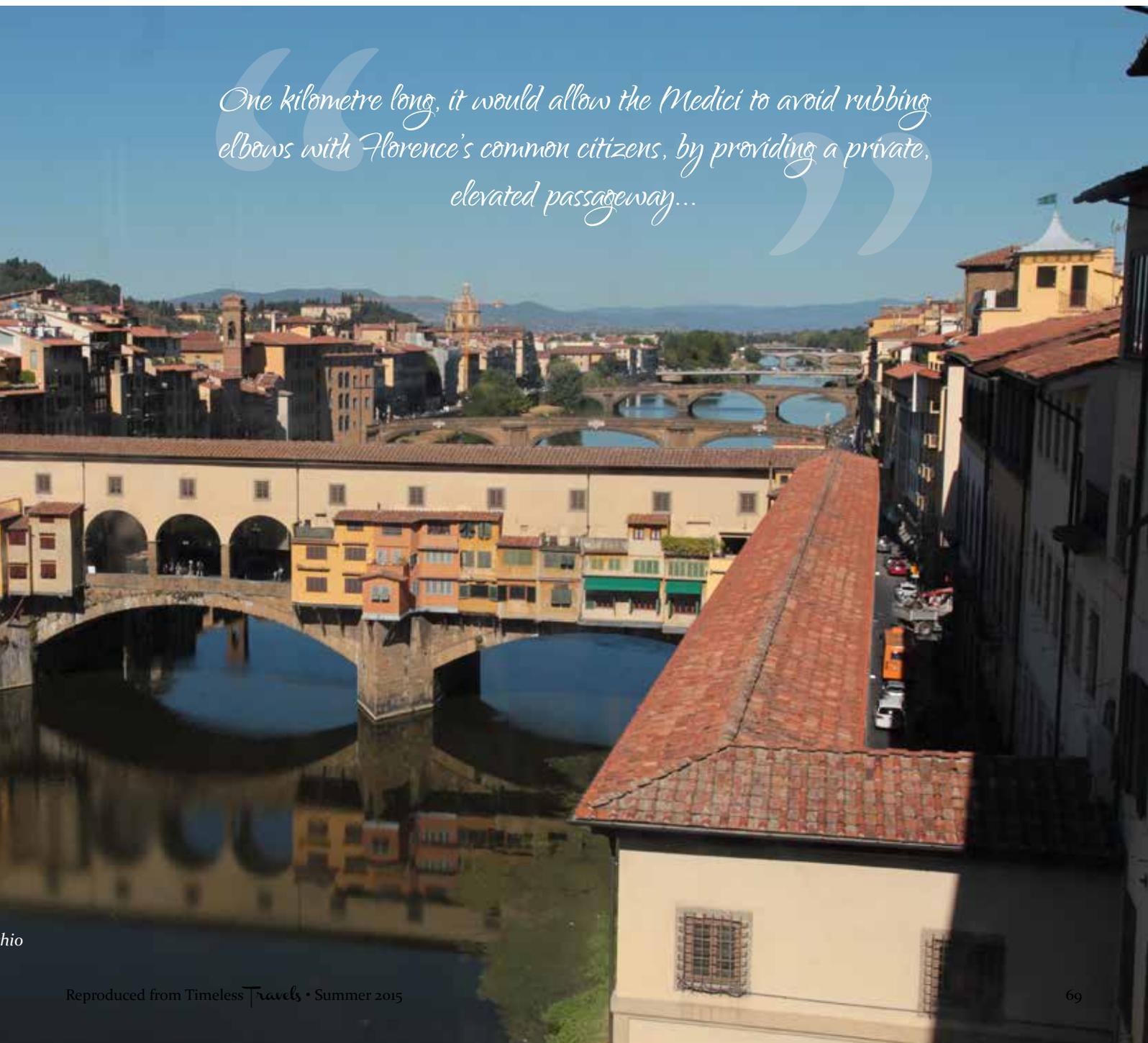
A unconventional woman who preferred trousers to skirts, the controversial French artist Rosa Bonheur believed in the equality of sexes and defied innumerable social restraints, but her art work was very traditional. Best known for her realistic portrayal of animals, Bonheur sketched them from the age of ten, overcoming difficulties in learning to read by drawing animal figures to memorize the alphabet. The Vasari self portrait is her only work in Florence. Painted between 1860 and 1865, it became part of the collection in

1922. It was created just before Bonheur became the first woman to be awarded the Cross of Legion of Honor, France's highest honor, for noteworthy success in her field. Her contemporary, the Victorian novelist George Eliot once looked at her paintings and exclaimed, "What power! That is the way women should assert their rights!"

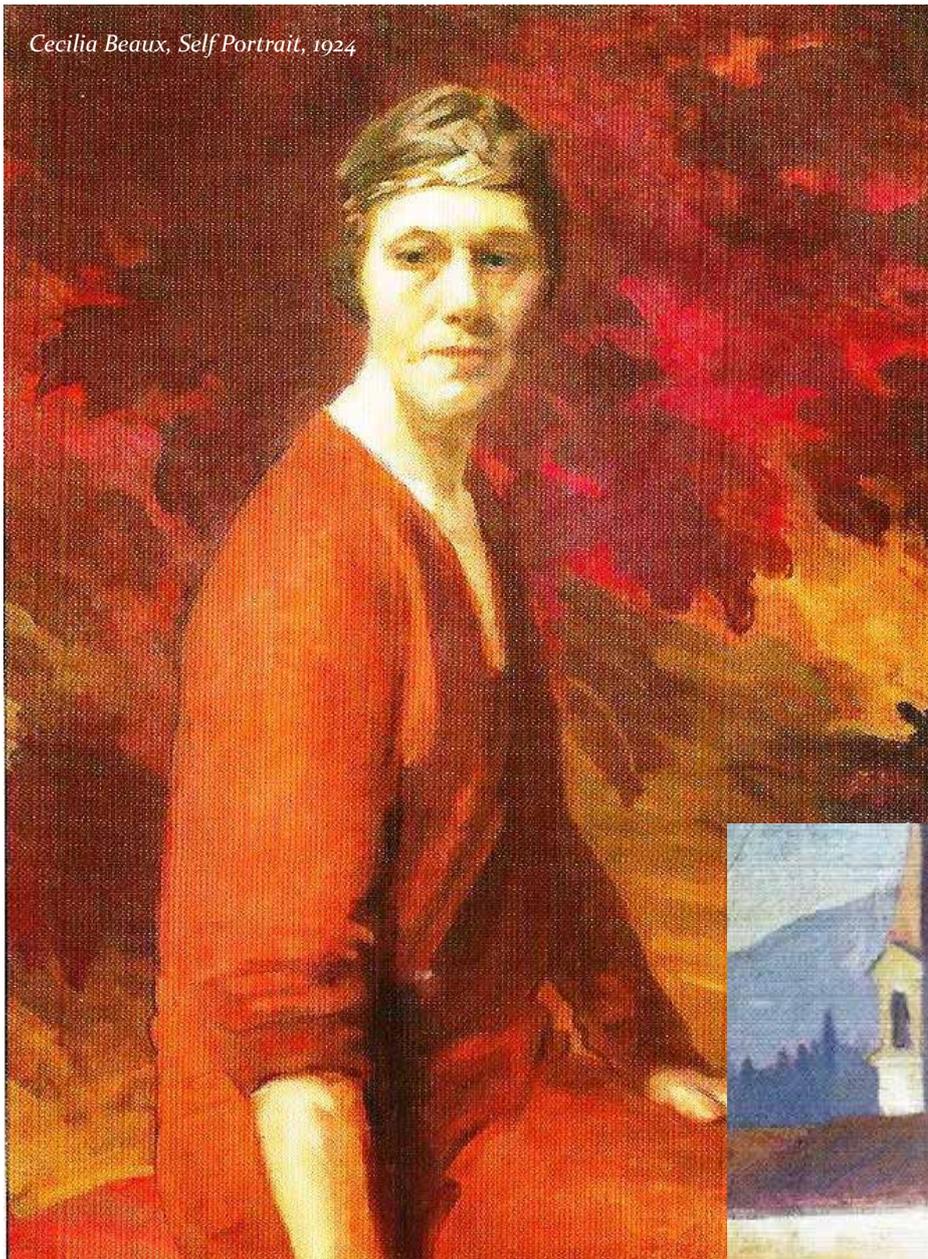
Cecilia Beaux (1855–1942)

Among the first Americans asked to contribute a self portrait to the Vasari Corridor was Philadelphia-born artist Cecilia Beaux, who made her contribution in 1924. One of the most successful society portrait painters of her time, Beaux's talent was compared to that of her contemporaries, John Singer Sargent and Mary Cassatt. Despite her time in Paris, from ages 32 to 44, Beaux's work was not influenced by the Impressionist movement, and she remained true

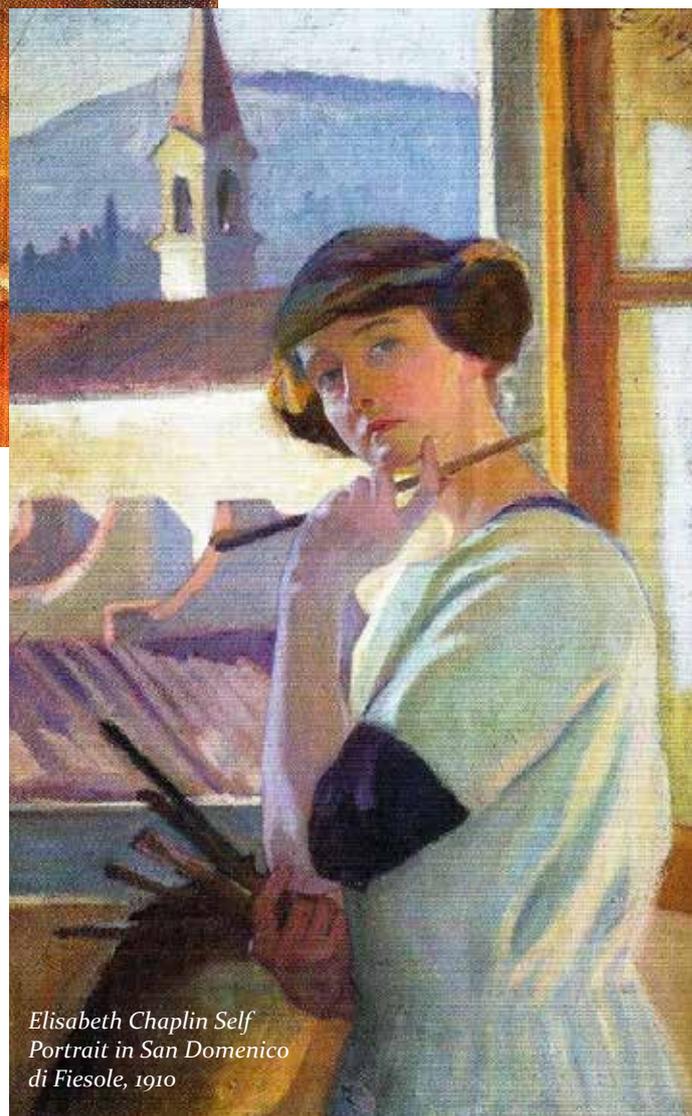
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Cecilia Beaux, Self Portrait, 1924



2014. In this 1910 rendition, the artist depicts herself in front of an open window, holding paintbrushes. During those first years in Tuscany, she copied the Old Masters' works in the Uffizi Gallery, particularly paintings by Pontormo and Bronzino. To some degree, Chaplin's artistic skills might be considered inherited: her mother Marguerite Bavier-Chauffour was a sculptor and poet, and Charles Chaplin, her great uncle, worked as a favourite court painter for Napoleon III. Sixteen of the twenty-three paintings by women exhibited in the Pitti's Modern Art Gallery are by Chaplin and mainly depict family scenes and colourful portraits. A prolific artist, Elisabeth left 621 of her works (including oils, water colours and pencil drawings) to the Pitti. The majority of these works are currently in storage awaiting a 'space of their own'.



Elisabeth Chaplin Self Portrait in San Domenico di Fiesole, 1910

to Realism, as she strongly admired the classic artists. She returned from Paris to Philadelphia in 1889 and six years later became the first woman to hold a teaching position at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, her alma mater, for twenty years. Beaux is said to have avoided marriage so she could devote all her time to painting. "I can say I have a passionate determination to overcome every obstacle," the artist once wrote. "Work is a struggle to conquer something. And I do my own work with a refusal to accept defeat that might almost be called pitiful." Declared "the American woman who made the greatest contribution to the culture of the world", by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1933, Beaux's work is largely forgotten today, but it is interesting that neither Cassatt nor Sargent have self portraits displayed in the Vasari Corridor!

Elisabeth Chaplin (1892–1982)

Self Portrait with a Green Umbrella (1908) was painted by French-born Elisabeth Chaplin at the age of 16, after her family moved from Paris to San Domenico di Fiesole, a serene hillside town overlooking Florence. The town's church and bell tower can be seen in Elisabeth's second self portrait, first displayed in the Corridor in

A continuing tradition

Created by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici in the mid-17th century, the Vasari Corridor continues to receive donations of artists' self portraits even today. An invitation to paint one's self image for this esteemed Medici collection is still one of the art world's highest honours! In 2011, several international paintings were added, including contemporary works by Vanessa Beecroft, Niki de Saint Phalle, Jenny Holzer, Yayoi Kusama, Patti Smith, Allison West and Francesca Woodman.

Whether self portraiture is perceived as a means of individual expression or a form of personal publicity, it is one of art's most explored genres, in which the artist contemplates her most available sense of inspiration: the self. As Frida Kahlo once wrote, "I paint self portraits, because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best."

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Getting there

Flying

A number of airlines fly to Florence, including British Airways, United, Lufthansa, Air France, American Airlines and Alitalia.

Visas

If you are an EU citizen, you do not need a visa. If you are a non-EU citizen you will need a valid passport and depending on your country of origin, you might need a visa; you could obtain a visa through the Italian Consulate nearest to your residence.

Weather

Given its long boot-like shape and varied geography, the weather in Italy varies considerably from north to south.

In central Italy, beyond the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, the climate is milder and wetter with a less pronounced difference between summer and winter.

Holidays

(In 2015): January 1 (New Year's Day), January 6 (Epiphany), April 6 (Easter Monday), April 25 (Liberation Day), May 1 (Labour Day), June 2 (Republic Day), August 15 (Assumption), November 1 (All Saints' Day), December 8 (Immaculate Conception), December 25 (Christmas Day), December 26 (St Stephen's Day).

Getting around

Italy has an excellent public transport system of buses and trains, both within the cities and between cities. Italy has many regional airports and the main domestic carrier is Alitalia. Car hire is readily available and there is an extensive network of motorways.

For more information please visit
www.italiantouristboard.co.uk

Essentials

Time difference: GMT + 1

Language: Italian is the official language, with English widely spoken in the cities and main tourist areas. Dialects are spoken in different regions.

Electrical current/ plugs: Plug sockets have either two or three round pins with a current of 230V AC, 50Hz.

Culture: Italians are warm and welcoming, whilst quite traditional.

Water: Tap water is safe to drink in Italy, although bottled water is readily available.

Politics: Italy is a Republic with a head of state.

Money

Currency: The currency in Italy is the Euro (EUR; symbol €) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents.

ATMs are widely available throughout Italy. Look for the 'Bancomat' sign for machines with multilingual interfaces. Pick pocketing and petty thievery can be problematic in tourist areas, so take care to keep belongings secure and be vigilant when making cash withdrawals.

Credit cards: MasterCard, American Express, Cirrus, Maestro and Visa are widely accepted.

Traveller's cheques are widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Euro, Pounds Sterling or US Dollars.

Evening view of the Vasari Corridor and the Ponte Vecchio



Photograph © Marco Badami

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