

RSA/Kress Grant Winner, 2013
Senior Scholar, Art History

Evaluation by Grant Committee: *This proposal is effective at explaining the principal goals and methodology of the project in the opening paragraph. The proposal demonstrates the author's detailed knowledge of the topic, and the author's familiarity with specialized vocabulary and current scholarship. The integration of digital technology tools with traditional archival investigation offers a novel way to examine sources. The proposal includes reference to prior work completed by the author but focuses largely upon the work to be completed, and is quite specific about the next steps. One weakness is that the proposal does not mention any specific convents to be examined; there is a passing reference to Franciscan convents, but we are not told which convents will be the foci of the study. However, the explicit goal of the project is to consider Venetian convents as a whole, and to look for common themes, rather than individual variations.*

The Urban and Architectural Practices of Venetian Convents during the Early Modern Period

Two significant histories of Venetian convents have been published since 2000, but no comprehensive study of Venetian convent architecture exists. This is explained in part by the adaptation or demolition of convent complexes, the lack of associations with identified architects, and numerous lacunae in the archival record. Despite these challenges, the history of Venetian convent architecture deserves attention for its contribution to our understanding of building and spatial practices apart from the city's canonical monuments. Equally significant are convent architecture's engagement with and response to gendered social, religious and cultural roles, and the frame of reference it provides for new investigations of patronage networks. Recent studies of individual houses by Gary Radke, Tracy Cooper, and Benjamin Paul highlight how building process, patronage, status, and religious reform affected convent architecture, but from these discrete studies it is difficult to discern whether and how Venetian convents responded to their contexts in ways that reflected local architectural and institutional conventions. Surviving built fabric, prints, drawings, photographs, and written sources can

inform analysis of convent architecture and the ways in which it accommodated form to function.

The point of departure must be an understanding of the architecture itself, and this is the focus of my summer 2013 project. Building on already undertaken archival research, I seek \$3000 to support one month of research in Venice to complete four important parts of the larger project: a) a study of maps, drawings, and prints at the Biblioteca del Museo Correr, and of photographs of no longer extant buildings and drawings at the Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici; b) consult the Cini Foundation's *microfilmoteca* pertaining to Venetian relations with the Vatican; c) the completion of photography of pastoral visitation records at the patriarchate's archive; and d) participate in a ten-day digital mapping workshop facilitated by Duke University and the University of Venice (IUAV), which will provide instruction in photogrammetry, Sketchup animation, and ARCGis for the study and re-presentation of my visual evidence. My intention is not simply to represent changes to the city's physical form over time, but to analyze and document spatial strategies deployed in convent complexes on the neighborhood and urban level. Exploiting digital tools for study and illustration allows for the interpretation and dynamic diagramming of different scales of architectural and spatial relationships, demonstrating how they informed and were informed by various internal and external forces.

The resulting publication will not be a catalog raisonné; rather, it will comprise a series of chapters that emphasize three themes that are central and particular to Venetian convent architecture during the early modern period. These focus on convent foundation and

development, architectural conventions, and the influence exerted by external institutions, namely monastic orders and ecclesiastical and civic offices.

Development strategies are of particular interest, not just for how they responded to building regulations and other contextual pressures, but also for what they reveal about convents' relationships with other institutions and individuals, and with one another.

Competition for space sometimes inspired rival convents to attempt to prevent the establishment of new houses; their strategies ranged from spurious appeals to monastic rules governing site conditions to legal maneuvers. The conflicts sometimes lasted decades, playing out before secular and religious authorities. With regard to patronage networks, I examine patricians' responsibilities as custodians of the city's religious infrastructure; among the names of founders of Venice's earliest convents is a concentration of families that funded convent construction, but also shaped the institution as a religious and political entity. I also study the ways in which women patrons in particular employed a variety of approaches to gain financial and institutional support for convent foundation and development.

Examination of local and institutional norms of form and function focuses on the idiosyncrasies of building in the lagoon, including practicalities of entry and egress on land and water, the typology and control of the *caneva*, and the necessity of regulating views inside and out of extraordinarily restricted sites. Standard convent *topoi*, like relationships between public and private spaces and emphasis of points of contact, are also considered in the Venetian context.

External influences have been widely studied with regard to convent administration, but their impact on convent architecture has hardly been examined by historians. While no

consistent convent typologies are associated with particular monastic orders, the orders' identities and practices distinguished them from one another and, consequently, they asserted themselves differently in the public realm, sometimes in response to supervisory monastic institutions. To explore this phenomenon, I undertake a case study of the spate of Franciscan convent foundations at a time of crisis for Venice that coincided with the Franciscan reform movement and the contentious pontificate of Franciscan Pope Sixtus IV. Sixteenth-century reforms and pastoral visitation records that document attempts to realize them reveal how spaces and architecture functioned. Historians have mined these sources to describe the political and social imperatives that motivated reform, and have recounted nuns' attempts to resist reform, but in these studies, convent buildings are treated as stage sets. No scholar has examined the sources systematically with a focus on understanding the architecture itself. Nuns interacted with architecture as a medium to express self-determination and identity; formal analysis considering material, organization, details, and convents' urban impact will add relief to our understanding of these efforts.

A Gladys Kriebel Delmas grant supported archival study of the Franciscan houses mentioned above. That grant's life was extended with the photography of several dozen pastoral visitation records, and over 50 folios from account books, suppression records, copies of testaments, and notarial documents from the Archivio di Stato, sources that have expanded the scope of my research and advanced it significantly. My research of convent architecture throughout Italy provides important points of comparison with the Venetian context. This background allows me to approach the study of visual resources in relationship to the textual evidence with a broad and deep understanding of the historical issues they document.