

An Italian perspective

JACKSON ARTIST SHARES DIARY & ARTWORK FROM TUSCANY TRIP

By Jerrod Partridge
Photos special to MAGNOLIA

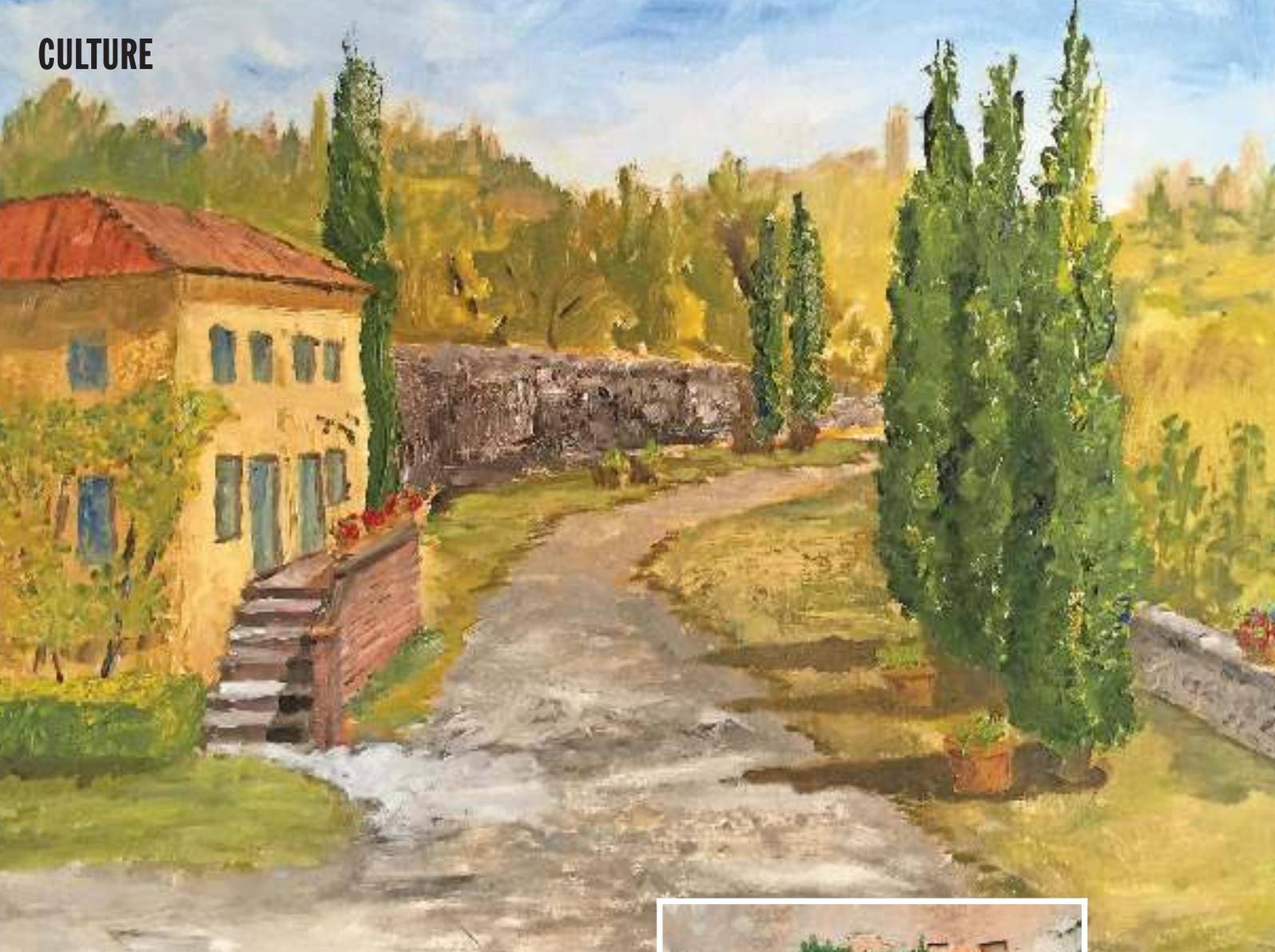
The following is a travel log by Jerrod Partridge from his art trip to Italy from July 13 through 24. This is the third year he and his wife, Jessie, have led a group on “A Visual Exploration of Tuscany through Drawing and Painting,” based at the medieval castle and agricultural estate of Spannocchia, just outside of Siena.

JULY 13, JACKSON:

There is a peculiar feeling when preparing for a big trip out of the country. A sharp contrast of the highs (packing paints and paper and imagining the glories to behold) and the lows (updating your will, just in case). We board the plane ecstatic about seeing our friends at Tenuta di Spannocchia again, and then we’re brought back down to the realities of life after meeting a woman whose face shows the signs of the abusive relationship she and her puppy are leaving behind. A simple Mississippi woman who told us that flying in an airplane has been on her bucket list — just not for this reason.

We expect to arrive in a foreign land in about 13 hours. However, I take notice that as soon as we leave the ground, our home city becomes an





Oil painting of Spannocchia, by Margaret McLarty of Jackson.

exotic, unknown place: Bodies of water reflecting the blue-gray of the thick, humid summer sky. Rivers and trails snaking around in beautiful abstract patterns. There is so much to explore right here at home when I get back.

JULY 14, SOMEWHERE OVER THE ATLANTIC OCEAN:

“The traveler recognizes the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and will never have.”
— Italo Calvino, *“Invisible Cities”*

A friend suggested Italo Calvino’s “Invisible Cities” as my travel book. It seems very appropriate, seeing that we are flying into Calvino’s hometown of Venice. The main character of the book: Marco Polo. The

airport we are flying into: Venice Marco Polo Airport. It is a beautiful, poetic (and fictional) story of Marco Polo describing different cities to Kublai Khan. At one point the Khan points out that all of Polo’s descriptions seem to be of the same place, and questions Polo on the fact that he never describes his hometown of Venice. Polo replies, “Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice.” This reminds me that we can only see another place through the filter of where we are from. How different Venice must look to someone not from Mississippi.

JULY 15, VENICE:

Venice is like walking



The traveling group (left to right): Thomas Wilson, Jessie and Jerrod Partridge, Martha Ross Thomas, Katey Carter, Margaret McLarty, Hoot and Anne Wilder, Marita Pace Walton, Ben Walton, Elke Briuer.

through an M.C. Escher drawing: A beautiful maze of impossibilities.

The food, oh, the food. Venice’s cuisine is far different from the food of Tuscany. Pasta with prawns and zucchini, anglerfish with arugula salad and chopped pistachios, spaghetti with cuttle-

fish ink. This last dish was on the island of Burano, known for its local craft of lace making. My mouth remained stained like a kid’s after eating candy, and with a similar grin. It was that good.

JULY 16:

I was thrilled with the idea of

visiting the famed Venice Biennale international art exhibition. Less thrilled with the realities of it. It is a strange mix of bizarre offerings. Jessie said that I only wanted to come to be annoyed. Possibly. I can be like that. But I was able to find a few gems amongst the video-heavy work. A particular highlight was Chiharu Shiota in Japan's pavilion. The Japanese never seem to forget that there is still a place for beauty in art.

JULY 17, TENUTA DI SPANNOCCHIA:

Jessie and I took the train to Florence to meet our group — nine wonderful people who joined us to visually explore Tuscany. The weary travelers were still able to enjoy the picturesque scenery on our drive to Spannocchia through their half-open eyes. An historical tour of the 12th-century castle, while very interesting, just about did them in. Showers, wine on the terrace, a splendid meal — everyone was quickly refreshed.

JULY 18:

We began the drawing and painting classes. I reminded everyone that we were not there to make “art.” There can be so much intimidation surrounding that word. Drawing is a celebration. We were there to celebrate God's creation and man's creation. We were there to observe and to dream. To put down with pencil or paint a response to a place, without embarrassment due to lack of experience. We were there to see it, because you haven't really seen something until you have tried to draw or paint it.

Siena in the afternoon. Probably my favorite of the Tuscan towns. It never ceases to amaze me.

JULY 20:

Tuscan cuisine tends to be simple and more vegetable-heavy. The meals are directed by what is gathered fresh from the garden. Fried squash blossoms, ravioli with spinach, pasta with basil and tomato, and a little wild boar thrown in. Everything is rich with the most fla-

vorful olive oil.

JULY 21:

This seems to be a slower and more thoughtful part of the world. Even the young people seem to have wisdom as ancient as the country itself, as if they have lived a thousand years without aging a bit.

JULY 22, OUR LAST FULL DAY AT SPANNOCCHIA:

I'm enjoying experimenting with a medium I haven't really used before — watercolor. It's unforgiving to my inexperience. Trying something new gives you a deeper appreciation for those who do it well.

I was proud, to say the least, of the work our participants did during the week. There were hurdles to overcome — lost luggage and unusually high temperatures. But the beautiful spirits of people willing to visually explore this world made for a great week. On several mornings people were up sketching, writing, and communing over a cup of coffee before I even got

out of bed. Today, I got into the studio around 6:40 a.m. to find nearly everyone working. Though the landscapes are beautiful, with the far-off patchwork of farmland and the towering, iconic cypress trees, as a teacher, this was one of the most motivating and inspiring scenes I came across.

JULY 23, FLORENCE:

Michelangelo's town. High Renaissance at its finest. It was my fourth time to Florence and I have yet to make it to all of the major churches. Finally San Lorenzo with its Medici tombs and Donatello's tomb can be checked off the list.

As art-rich as Italy is, I was amazed to see only one other person outside of our group drawing. One person sitting next to the canal in Venice. No one in Siena, no one in Florence. Why do people not draw anymore? Images are gathered so quickly by phones, but there is no connection to the place. Selfie sticks allow people to prove “I was there,” but they



Graphite drawing of farmhouses and Etruscan museum at Spannocchia, by Jerrod Partridge.

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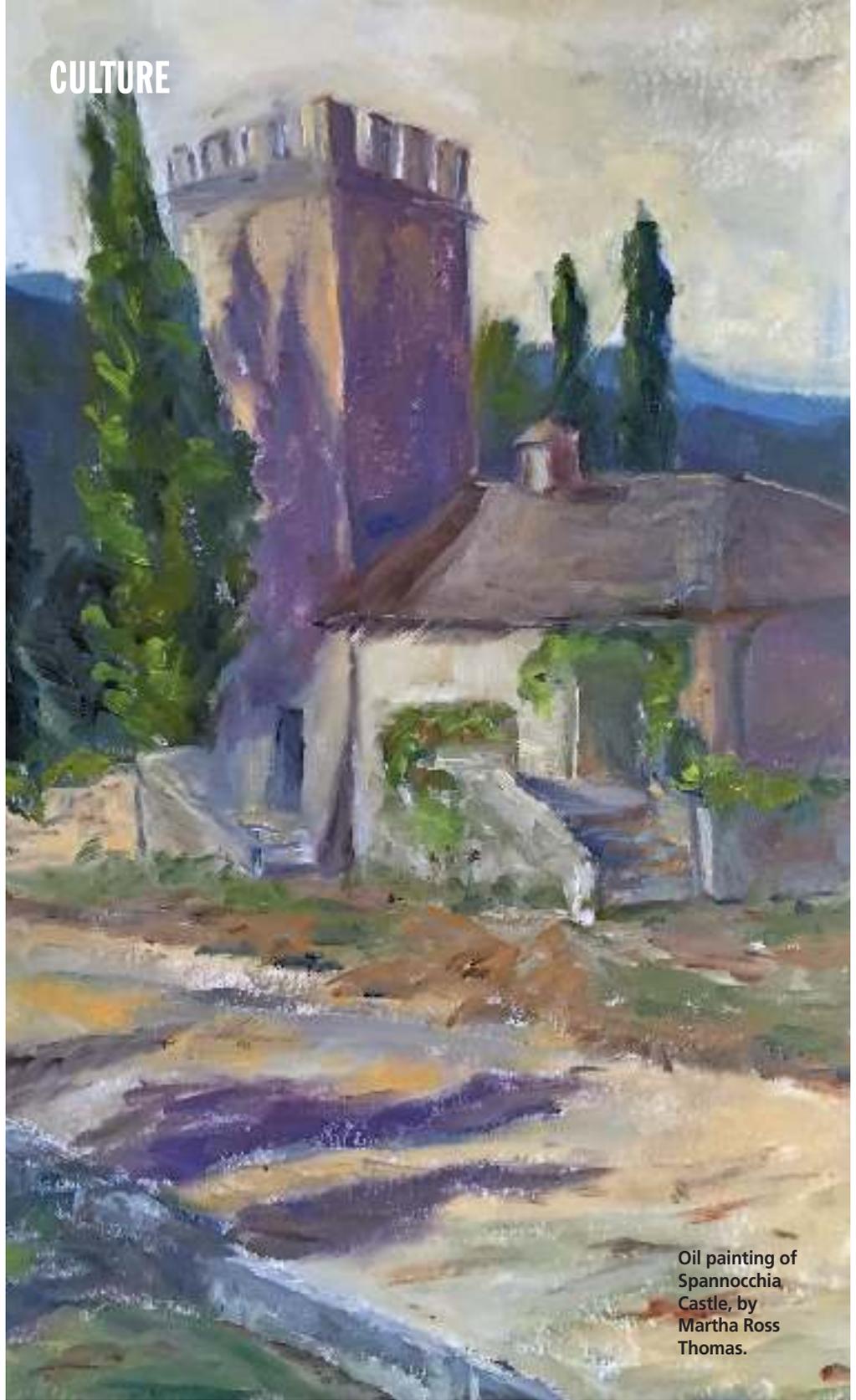


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Oil painting of
Spannocchia
Castle, by
Martha Ross
Thomas.

forget to look at what is behind them. Jessie and I were amused that selfie sticks were banned within the Venice Biennale. With that simple gesture everyone was reminded to “pay attention and be present.”

JULY 24, COMING HOME:

Early morning flight back home. When traveling, I don’t generally find myself with an envious desire to live in that place. I am

filled with the desire to be more aware of where I call home. I want to really see it. I want to draw and paint it.

Jerrod Partridge is a full-time visual artist and instructor living and working in the Fondren neighborhood of Jackson. He and his wife have three young children, who often provide inspiration for his work. More of his work is available to view at www.jerrodpartridge.com. H