

Please find enclosed two papers for assessment.

In previous subjects that I have studied as part of the Certificate in Art History, my assignments involved individual or comparative analysis of art works. I have no desire to repeat that type of assignment, as I am interested in exploring other areas.

My background is in engineering, which is a discipline that uses quantitative tools and systematic methods. I find it interesting that these techniques are not commonly used in Art History. On the other hand, Art History is a discipline that investigates stylistic developments in a broader context, by using an aesthetic and humanistic perspective that is not often considered in engineering. Both can perhaps benefit from each other.

It is also very interesting to consider the contemporary developments in society, as we tend towards a high point of the information age, which is seen as a culmination of centuries of intellectual activity. It is extremely interesting to study the Florentine renaissance now, as there are many similarities between it and the contemporary renaissance. This similarity is also acknowledged by leading intellectuals.

One driving force in the contemporary renaissance is the codification of knowledge and experience into a fluid and malleable medium, which is increasingly the Internet (it just so happened to be the first technology to 'make it'). The availability of knowledge in this manner will have profound consequences for researchers and knowledge workers across the world, because there is now one single unified repository, rather than the sporadic and disjoint structure currently available. It is worthwhile considering how existing knowledge will be represented in the new medium, and how it will be shaped, formed and strengthened by theoretical tools. It will be a renaissance of intellectual activity!

My knowledge in these areas is superficial, Ted Nelson and the Xanadu project, or contemporary research into hypermedia technologies, and information structures are all investigating how knowledge should be – and hopefully will be – organised. In academia, a new discipline of Information Engineering has grown out of Computer Science and Software Engineering, and Software Engineering has developed its own tools for representing collaborating information. These areas would need to be properly investigated to develop a credible experiment, in applying tools across disciplines, and understanding the complexity of relationships between disciplines.

The assignment that I have presented has two parts. The first part can stand by itself as a legitimate assignment based upon the guidelines presented, whereas the second part is more speculative in nature, and is related to interests above. It's all work in progress!

Firstly, I have made a study of the production of art in Florence during the Renaissance. This draws from one literary source, but the matter is condensed and organised more concisely. From this study, there are many fascinating insights into aspects surrounding the production of art, and this helps in the analysis of works from the period (e.g. knowing how design and execution procedures were separated in the workshop informs my critical analysis processes).

Secondly, based upon the interests mentioned above, I have sketched an experiment. I have not taken on this experiment, for lack of time, so at the moment, it stands mostly as a thought exercise. It would be very interesting, in fact, to carry out this sort of experiment as a research project, albeit with more depth than the superficial overview that I have presented. This could pioneer a new direction for humanities subjects in general, if it has not already occurred.

Matthew