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Predocctoral Research Resident at La Capraia, Fall 2022

Sensing Naples

Upon arriving at Terracina, just before entering the Kingdom of Naples, Germaine de Staël's eponymous heroine, Corinne, declared: "The whole of the mountain above Terracina is covered with orange and lemon trees, that delicately embalm the air. Nothing in our own climes resembles the effect of this perfume: it is like that of some exquisite melody, exciting and inebriating talent into poetry."¹ This preamble for the Neapolitan chapter of de Staël's pioneering book *Corinne ou l'Italie*, which gave impetus to hordes of European travellers, sets the tone for the "superabundance of sensation" felt in the city by travellers.

From fiery volcanic eruptions to its unparalleled musical and theatrical life, Naples was viewed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Grand Tourists as a continuous feast. My doctoral research explores the city as a place of "leisure, pleasure and a frisson of danger."² I focus on the impoverished population of Naples, the picturesque *lazzaroni*, and I assess the visitors' role in the creation and consumption of stereotypical views on Neapolitan society. The Research Residency at La Capraia, generously hosted by the Center for the Art and Architectural History of Port Cities, will feed into my doctoral research; however, during the Residency I will primarily be acting as an ambassador for Compton Verney, an internationally recognised independent public art gallery in the UK, which holds a unique collection of Neapolitan art. The collection at Compton Verney provides unrivalled insights into the city of Naples and its environs from 1600–1800 and includes view paintings, still lifes, religious works, portraits, furniture and decorative objects.

The *Sensing Naples* research project will allow us to gather material relevant to the redisplay of this collection, which will take place in 2023. The residency period will be used to undertake scholarly research into the works in the collection and the context in which they were created and understood, and in particular to draw out narratives relating to the senses. This research will feed into interpretation strategies that will help to bring these works to life for Compton Verney's visitors, making the collection more accessible, multi-faceted and engaging. I will be working to connect this collection to other collections and archives in Naples, including the holdings of the Museo di Capodimonte, and to the wider themes of the senses, visitor perceptions and experiences from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. My research will give greater interpretive depth and contribute to wider display changes, including new wall labels and shaping sensory "stations" designed to encourage visitors to experience the textures, sights, sounds, tastes and smells of the works on display. As well as enriching my own doctoral project, this research residency will significantly enhance Compton Verney's status as a centre of excellence for Neapolitan art through research, outreach and international partnerships.

¹ Germaine de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, 1807, Book XI, chapter I.

² Rosemary Sweet, in *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c. 1690–1820*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 164–198.