

Easter Egg - The Vasari Corridor!

The path that the lion takes to bring Renato home, is along the Vasari corridor—or rather, the roof of the corridor. This secret passage was built by Giorgio Vasari, and commissioned by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, in 1565. The Grand Duke needed a way to travel quickly and safely between his home at the Pitti Palace, to the Palazzo Vecchio where the government offices were located. Since Florence in the 16th century was politically volatile, this secure passage ensured the Grand Duke would not be easily taken down. Since the passage crossed atop the Ponte Vecchio, the Grand Duke decided that the meat sellers on the bridge had to relocate due to their offending stench. In their place, the jewelry sellers moved in, and remain on the Ponte Vecchio today.

The passage on the Ponte Vecchio did not originally include large windows overlooking the Arno River. Benito Mussolini had them installed for Adolf Hitler's visit to Florence in 1939. Some credit this visit with Hitler's decision to save the Ponte Vecchio when the Nazis blew up all the other bridges during their retreat in 1944.

When I visited Florence for research, I took a tour inside the Vasari passage—something that the public was unable to do until recently. We entered through a door in the Uffizi museum, and ended at a door by the grotto in the Pitti Palace. The corridor over the bridge contains priceless self portraits from artists throughout the ages, including one by Leonardo da'Vinci.

Here is a sketch of the lion on the passage, as well as a color study I did at night in the Piazza della Signoria. I ended up paying the remainder of my lodging bill with this painting. (I thought I could pay by credit card, and they needed cash only—so the difference was made up by this painting—a testament to how Italians still respect artwork.)