Telemaco Signorini: spokesman of the Macchiaioli

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TELEMACO SIGNORINI: SPOKESMAN OF THE MACCHIAIOLI

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by
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Abstract

Telemaco Signorini was a member of a nineteenth-century Italian group of artists called the Macchiaioli. He was the son of Giovanni Signorini, a painter. The group came together against the Italian academies and drew inspiration from Decamps and the artists of the Barbizon school in France. Their style emphasizes effect and emotion. The Macchiaioli were a short lived group that only lasted from 1855 to 1862. Signorini and the members of the group participated in 1859 in the Risorgimento, the Italian struggle for independence. Based on this experience Signorini created several canvases depicting the Italian countryside, especially at La Spezia. He was also devoted to literature and in his essays he defended the Macchiaioli on several occasions. After the Macchia had been declared dead by Signorini, he traveled extensively to London and Paris. During these travels, Signorini succumbed to the popular influences of photography and Japanese prints. He began to travel in Italy exclusively beginning in 1884 and continued painting, using a mix of inspirations he had gathered throughout his life, until his death in 1901. This thesis is a comprehensive study of Signorini.
Introduction

When one considers nineteenth-century European art history, most people would think of art in Paris or London. Most scholars would not consider what was happening in the rest of the continent. Even among specialists of nineteenth-century European art, the Macchiaioli, and their unofficial spokesman, Telemaco Signorini, are not household names.

This thesis focuses on Signorini, his life, and his work. His paintings were executed with much skill, and they are comparable to those of his better-known contemporaries, the French Impressionists. He drew inspiration from the same sources as these artists in France. Signorini is quite an interesting character, who was well traveled and very outspoken. He was a member of the most intriguing artistic movement in Italy at this time, the Macchiaioli.

The Macchiaioli was formed in 1855 in the Café Michelangelo in Florence and by 1862 Signorini already declared the movement dead. The group consisted of Telemaco Signorini, Serafino De Tivoli, Raffaello Sernesi, Domenico Morelli, Giuseppe Abbati, Silvestro Lega, and Giovanni Fattori, who is recognized as the main leader of the group. Odoardo Borrani, Vincenzo Cabianca, Nino Costa, Christiano Banti, Vito D’Ancona, Adriano Cecioni, who was the only member who sculpted, Frederico Zandomeneghi, Giovanni Boldini, and Giuseppe De Nittis joined the group late, after it had mostly been formed. “It [the Macchiaioli] had been born,” Signorini explained, “out of these artists’ dissatisfaction with academic studio practice, and had been inspired in particular by their admiration for the sixteenth and seventeenth-century European painterly tradition.”1 It is also known that they all drew inspiration from the Barbizon painters and French Realists. De Tivoli was considered the “Father of the Macchia” because he

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was the initiator of the “violent chiaroscuro,”\textsuperscript{2} after a trip in 1855 that led him to London and the Paris World’s Fair.\textsuperscript{3} Morelli had a more immediate impact on the development of the style of the Macchiaioli due to his enthusiasm for the “violent chiaroscuro.” \textit{The Street Vendor of La Spezia} by Signorini (Fig. 11) is the earliest example of the use of the Macchia in a subject closely associated with Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps.\textsuperscript{4} Decamps was one of the most highly regarded artists in the nineteenth century and was given the privilege of being one of only three artists to be invited for a one-man exhibition in the context of the Paris World’s Fair in 1855. \textit{The Street Vendor of La Spezia} expresses a “romantic conception of the artist’s relationship to nature and his own work.”\textsuperscript{5} Signorini sketched often outdoors in nature, as did many artists in the nineteenth century. As he did not have much training in an Academy, he was taught by his father.

Telemaco Signorini was born on August 18, 1835, in Florence, to Giovanni di Lorenzo Signorini and Giustina di Giuseppe Santoni. His father, Giovanni, was a well-respected painter who worked for the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Leopold II, for several years. Telemaco and his brothers were fortunate to often accompany their father to the Grand Duke’s home and see his collections as well as the collections at the Villa di San Donato di Anatole Demidoff. It was through Giovanni that Telemaco gained several contacts that would prove helpful in his career. The most important of these contacts was Prince Anatole Demidoff. Giovanni and Telemaco worked together closely and even traveled together. Literature intrigued Telemaco the most, but following to the wishes of his father, he became a painter. He spent four years at the Scuola degli Scolopi in Florence. In 1851, the death of Telemaco’s brother sparked his decision to take up

\textsuperscript{2} Violent chiaroscuro is a very harsh, dramatic contrast of light and dark shading.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{4} Broude, \textit{The Macchiaioli}, 61.
\textsuperscript{5} Broude, \textit{The Macchiaioli}, 137.
painting and he began the life of an artist in 1852. While temporarily abandoning his passions for
writing and literature, he was, however, able to use his talents in writing as the spokesman for the
Macchiaioli. He engaged in discourse about their painting style quite frequently. Signorini was
well traveled and journeyed to Paris and London often. Partially due to his involvement in the
military, he explored Italy.

Signorini lived and worked during the time of the Risorgimento, the struggle for Italian
national independence. Italy had been absorbed by this movement throughout the nineteenth
century. Some Italian territories were still under the rule of the Austrians or the Pope. During the
Risorgimento, the territories of Italy were reorganized to form one national entity. Italian national
unity was achieved with much war and political struggles. Signorini served in the war, and as a
result was able to see the Italian countryside, which became the subject of many of his paintings.
He gradually gained recognition and won respect for painting military-themed works.

One of the places where Signorini was stationed during his military service was La
Spezia. It was here that he created the first known work in the style of the Macchiaioli, *The
Street Vendor of La Spezia* (Fig. 11), only one year prior to the outbreak of war, in 1858. This
canvas reveals the influence of Decamps and other Barbizon painters observed in the collections
of Prince Anatole Demidoff and Prince Peter Troubetzkoy. The Princes Demidoff and
Troubetzkoy were Russian aristocrats and art collectors. They owned some of the paintings by
the masters which members of the Macchiaioli admired. However, other members of the
Macchiaioli made it a point to go to Paris, where they saw the work of Decamps and the
Barbizon school firsthand.
Later in his life, Signorini visited Paris and London for himself. At that time, he began to travel abroad quite frequently. The markets in London and Paris were much more receptive to Signorini’s style than the market in Italy. Signorini traveled all over Great Britain and gained inspiration from photography, which he used in many works depicting architectural subjects. Later, after he stopped traveling abroad in 1884, he abandoned British subjects and concentrated exclusively on Italian scenery in his art.

During his later trips throughout Italy, he came under the spell of Japanese prints, which fascinated Western artists, especially many French Painters like Manet. Subsequently, he no longer used the Renaissance single-point perspective, but flattened the planes and used a “spread-x-construction.” Many others in the Macchiaioli used these very same elements in their paintings. However, they were more wary about including Japanese influences than their contemporaries in France (such as Manet or Monet), since the critics and market in Italy were still a bit more conservative and less open to experimentation.

Norma Broude wrote a book, *The Macchiaioli*, and two articles for *The Art Bulletin*, “The Macchiaioli: Effect and Expression in Nineteenth-Century Florentine Painting” and, “The Troubetzkoy Collection and the Influence of Decamps on the Macchiaioli”. Her writings only touch on Signorini. They are an all encompassing view of the Macchiaioli. They were excellent sources for my information, however, my writing is strictly focused on Signorini.

This thesis is a comprehensive study of Signorini. All materials I have found covered only specific aspects of his life or career, were part of a later examination about the Macchiaioli, or were written during his lifetime. I aim to present a thorough view of Signorini’s life and work. His style changed frequently as he matured as an artist and as he traveled abroad more
frequently. Signorini was passionate about the Macchiaioli, his work, and his country, all three of which were key transformative elements in his art. This analysis of Signorini reads as a definition and history of the Macchiaioli and their style. I will then discuss an overview of the life of Signorini. The second chapter is an analysis of Signorini’s work with the Macchia, the Risorgimento, and the works created as a result. Finally, I will discuss a chapter on the influences of photography and Japanese prints on his paintings.
Figure 1. Telemaco Signorini
The Macchiaioli were an Italian group of artists that existed between 1855 and 1862. However, they were not officially recognized as a cohesive group until after the Macchia had been declared “dead” by Signorini in 1862. Members of the association met at the Bohemian Café Michelangelo in Florence on via Larga (now known as via Cavour), where many artists and foreigners used to assemble to discuss ideas about art, politics, or current events.

The Macchiaioli came together because of its members’ dissatisfaction with the Academies, its studio practices, and its conservative academic teaching philosophies. Serafino De Tivoli was recognized as the “father of the Macchia,” because he became the initiator of the “violent chiaroscuro” upon his return from London and his visit to the World’s Fair in Paris in 1855. However, it was not until after the war in 1859 that the artists produced their best work in the Macchiaioli style.

The Macchia was based on the aesthetic principles of French Romanticism. The Macchiaioli also formed a common bond over their appreciation of the Barbizon school of painters and French Realists. They used *plein-air* technique and travelled quite frequently to find the subjects for these paintings. The most important question that moved the Macchia was how to characterize their style. The critic Imbriani put it best when he said:

> It renders the artist’s first, distant impression of an object or a scene: the initial, strongly characterized image that grips him, whether he actually has the object or the scene before him or visualizes it from memory, in his imagination. This dim and distant impression, which the painter records with the color-patch, may be followed by another impression distinct and detailed. But, I repeat, if this first fundamental, harmonic balance is not achieved by the artist, the execution and finish of a picture, however perfect, will never succeed in arousing any emotion in

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6 Broude, *The Macchiaioli*, 47.

the spectator. On the other hand, even a bare patch of color, standing alone, without defining the object in any way, may quite well evoke an emotional response.\textsuperscript{8}

*Macchia* means patch or spot, which describes well the method which the Macchiaioli members used to create their paintings: pure color applied in patches. This approach introduces a sketchy quality to their works and makes the canvases appear unfinished. Venturi states that the Macchia expressed “a vision warmly human and almost primitive in its deep-felt sincerity.”\textsuperscript{9}

Most of the artists in the group had been academically trained. They learned sketching techniques in various academies throughout Italy. They painted mainly landscapes and the working class milieu, from which most Macchiaioli originated themselves. However, they had no formal landscape training. At this time the Italian academies frowned on offering courses in landscape painting. This is why the fundamentals of sketching they learned were so important to the Macchiaioli. They were able to take what they learned about sketching and apply it to landscape and *plein-air* compositions. Members of the Macchiaioli felt academic painting had almost forgotten the importance of tonal clarity and solidity, because of its emphasis technique and “finish.” The Macchiaioli and the academicians both sketched outdoors. However, while the academicians would sketch outdoors and use their sketches of landscape or figures exclusively as models for their finished studio paintings, for the Macchiaioli the sketches would also serve emotional purposes.\textsuperscript{10} They were “records of the artist’s own experiences of nature’s light and of the personal responses these experiences had evoked. And as such, the sketches became not only the formal, but also the expressive foundations for these artists’ finished pictures.”\textsuperscript{11}

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\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{10} Broude, *The Macchiaioli*, 44-45.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 45.
anonymous article Signorini commented that his intent was to “study nature and to find in her those moments which express a character and inspire a particular emotion.”\textsuperscript{12} The sketches and observations from nature would become the Macchiaioli’s primary study material. The impressions they took from these experiences would take precedence for them over the principles that had been established in studios. Martelli describes this phenomenon in terms of “a tonality that nature presents, to translate it with color so that in this translation are reflected all of the effects of nature herself and all of the sensations that the soul of the artist has experienced.”\textsuperscript{13}

The Macchiaioli tried to render nature and their subjects by applying patches of pure color to capture conditions of atmosphere and light at any given moment. It is because of these practices that their paintings have a sketchy quality. However, the patches and preparatory sketches are just the basis of their finished paintings. They would study their subjects carefully and in different conditions at different times in order to gain a clear understanding of how the subject looked and to render it after all of the collected sketches. The basic elements that define the Macchia are “a strong and clear light-dark effect that structures the composition spatially, both in depth and on the surface plane.”\textsuperscript{14} Although their paintings were completed in the studio, when they drew in \textit{plein-air} their sketches emphasized tonal value and had a very limited range of color. Moreover, the sketches were used primarily to capture the effects of light. Although many critics have claimed that their paintings were exhibited unfinished, the difference between a sketch, an unfinished work, and a completed painting is the detail to enhance the effects of light and tonal value that was drawn in the initial sketch.

\textsuperscript{13} Broude, \textit{The Macchiaioli}, 48.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 5.
It is interesting to note that the Macchiaioli would frequently refer back to the same sketch and use it in different paintings. This can be seen in Fattori’s use of a sketch of two oxen. *White Oxen with Cart* (Fig. 2) is a sketch completed around 1867; he used this particular sketch in three different paintings, *Cart and Oxen* (Fig. 3), *Hay Harvest in the Maremma* (Fig. 4), and *Tuscan Maremma* (Fig. 5). These paintings range in date from 1867 to 1890. The original sketch was used not only for the form of the two oxen, but also for the effects of light. In this example can also be seen the sketchy quality of *White Oxen with Cart* and the more finished, detailed quality of the others. On obvious source of inspiration for this iconography was Rosa Bonheur’s work, especially with *Plowing in Nivernais* (Fig. 20).

The style of the Macchiaioli is also defined by the use of violent and exaggerated chiaroscuro. This predilection comes from Morelli, Altamura, and De Tivoli’s description of paintings that they had seen at the World’s Fair in Paris in 1855, especially works by Bonheur, Decamps, and Troyon. The other members quickly began to adopt these techniques. De Tivoli was among the first in the group to go to London and was the first to use the violent chiaroscuro.

The Macchiaioli have frequently been referred to as “Italian Impressionists.” Although they share many similar characteristics with the Macchiaioli and are frequently compared to them, the French Impressionists were based in Paris and their group was formed nearly a decade after that of the Macchiaioli. The French Impressionists obtained their designation in the same way that the Macchiaioli were named, after a critic’s derogatory review. In spite of the fact that their paintings are quite similar in style and technique, the earlier paintings of the Macchiaioli are frequently discussed in a hindsighted manner and compared side by side with the later paintings by the French Impressionists.
Figure 2. Giovanni Fattori, *White Oxen with Cart*, ca. 1867, oil on cardboard, location unknown.
Figure 3. Giovanni Fattori, *Cart and Oxen*, ca. 1867-70, oil on canvas Gallery of Modern Art in Palazzo Pitti, Florence.
Figure 4. Giovanni Fattori, *Hay Harvest in the Maremma*, 1870-71, oil on canvas, Piero Dini Collection, Montecatini, Italy.
Figure 5. Giovanni Fattori, *Tuscan Maremma*, ca. 1890, oil on canvas, Gallery of Modern Art in Palazzo Pitti, Florence.
Something that does distinguish them from the Impressionists is that, “by using pure colors arranged in a kind of patchwork, [they] clearly indicated the different planes and delineated forms in space without dissolving them into an all-enveloping luminosity.”

Another major difference between the French and the Italian artists is that the French would work “en plein-air.” The Italians did follow this approach, but only for sketching and studying, and would complete all of their works in a studio. Both groups wanted to express what they saw initially in nature and capture the effects of light on their subjects.

Much like a decade later in France, the use of the Macchiaioli’s characteristics, patches of color and violent chiaroscuro, sparked many discussions focused on the observation that the Macchia paintings, compared to academic art seemed “unfinished.” The term Macchiaioli was first introduced in the *Gazzetta del Popolo* on November 3, 1862 by the critic who signed his name as “Luigi.” This article was written in response to Signorini’s “X’s” article in *La Nuova Europa* about the works by the Macchiaioli exhibited in the Società Promotrice delle Belle Arti. On November 19, 1862, “X” responded to “Luigi” to explain the Macchiaioli and their style. This essay would make the first time he appeared as a “powerful critical spokesman” for the group. The term *Macchia* can mean spot, stain, or patch, and “Luigi” criticized the group for their use of Macchia and described their work as unfinished. The Macchiaioli were more concerned with the effect of the paintings than their unfinished appearance. It would have been common knowledge for the Macchiaioli to understand effect as “that element of the whole that contributes order and harmony to the composition, and it was thought to be most readily perceived from a distance.”

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15 Venturi, 116.
17 Ibid., 97.
of this time. “Luigi” makes it clear, though, that although effect is acceptable, the Macchiaioli used it to an extreme:

They are young artists, some of whom are undeniably gifted, who have taken it into their heads to reform art, starting from the principle that effect is everything. Have you ever met someone who shows you his snuff-box and insists that in the grain and various stainings [macchie] of the wood he can recognize a small head, a little man, or a tiny horse? And these things are all there in the stainings of the wood! All you need to do is imagine them! So it is with the details in the paintings of the Macchiaioli. […] If things continue at this rate, the Macchiaioli will end by painting with a brush on the end of a pole and will scribble upon their canvases from a respectable distance of five or six meters. In this way, they will be certain of obtaining nothing but effect. 18

In his November 19, 1862 response, “X” replied that the style of the Macchia “was only an excessively sharp mode of chiaroscuro.” 19 This is also the occasion when he declared their use of Macchia dead. Signorini no longer painted in an exaggerated style or used “violent chiaroscuro.” It is noteworthy that until this point there was no distinct Macchiaioli group or Macchia style; the artists labeled this way had never been previously grouped as a coherent movement with a particular style. 20 Signorini claimed that “Luigi’s” arguments were exaggerated. The Macchiaioli did strive for finish and detail in their paintings. They did studies in plein-air and brought back rough sketches to their studios to create larger, more finished and detailed paintings. They did not want draftsmanship, finish, and detail to suffer for effect. 21 They did not send their sketches to exhibitions, but showed only their fully executed, finished works. The Macchiaioli learned traditional methods, and although they rejected the style of the Academy, they still sketched from nature and brought their studies back to their studios to create finished works.

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18 Ibid., 96.
19 Ibid., 97.
20 Ibid., 96.
Moreover, at the beginning of his career, before the formation of the Macchiaioli, Signorini only took one class at the Accademia in Florence, life drawing, in 1852; the rest of his training was under his father, Giovanni. Giovanni was “distrustful” of the Academy.\textsuperscript{22} He did not want his son to be part of the academic routine; he wanted him to have some freedom of thought and open-mindedness, and to produce art without bias. Giovanni also taught another aspiring artist in the group of the Macchiaioli, Cabianca. Because of Telemaco’s early education and connections through his father, he was able to move “with ease in the upper-class circles of Florence.”\textsuperscript{23} It was because of Giovanni that he became familiar with Anglo-Saxon society in Florence and expatriates from Great Britain, some of whom would regularly visit Giovanni’s studio in Telemaco’s childhood. Giovanni made Telemaco copy Dutch and Flemish masters from the seventeenth century, such as Rubens, Jacob Van Ruisdael, and possibly Vermeer. This may be the reason why one finds traces of northern European influences in some of his works such as \textit{Waiting} (Fig. 6) and \textit{Unable to Wait} (Fig. 7), which invite comparison with Vermeer’s \textit{Woman in Blue Reading a Letter} (Fig. 8), the parallels with these Dutch masters can be clearly seen. All three artists depict women in interior settings, reading or writing letters; and even the light source comes from the left in each composition.

In 1854, Telemaco Signorini began to paint studies in the \textit{plein-air} style in the countryside near Certaldo and San Gimignano. This period was also the first year he exhibited his works publicly in the Società Promotrice delle Belle Arti.


Figure 6. Telemaco Signorini, *Waiting*, 1866-1867, oil on canvas, E. Angiolini Bottega d’Arte, Livorno Italy.
Figure 7. Telemaco Signorini, *Unable to Wait*, 1867, oil on canvas, Cariplo Foundation, Milan.
Figure 8. Johannes Vermeer, *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, 1662-4, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Netherlands.
He chose to show a painting whose subject was derived from Sir Walter Scott’s writings, the Puritans at the Castle of Tillituddlem. He tended to favor literary subjects and would submit The Puritans, another painting inspired by Scott, and Duke Valentino, inspired by Machiavelli, to the Promotrice one year later, in 1855. Following the conventions of literary-inspired history painting, Signorini’s iconographic preferences suggest that he had access to a painting by Delaroche in the Demidoff collection. This opens the possibility that Delaroche was an influence for these types of paintings by Signorini, executed before he turned to the style of the Macchiaioli.

In 1855, Signorini and his friends Borrani and Cabianca frequented the Café Michelangiolo, the birthplace of the Macchiaioli. In the same year, he met D’Ancona, whom he jokingly described as his mentor. This was also the year when Morelli, Altamura, and De Tivoli visited Paris and attended the World’s Fair. These three described the “violent chiaroscuro” which they perceived in the works of Decamps, Troyon, and Bonheur to the other members of the group. The Macchiaioli were able to recognize this “violent chiaroscuro” in examples by Decamps in the collections of Prince Peter Troubetzkoy, a member of the Russian consulate and Prince Anatole Demidoff, a Russian nobleman. They would have frequented the same social circles and possibly have the same interests. Demidoff is said to have possessed the best collection of contemporary European art in Italy. Signorini himself stressed the importance of

24 Broude, The Macchiaioli, 49.
26 Broude, The Macchiaioli, 52.
27 Balloni, “Signorini, tra arte e letteratura,” 32.
this collection to the Macchiaioli during their “formative years.” I will address the importance of Demidoff, Troubetzkoy, and their collections in greater detail below.

Later in 1855, Signorini travelled to Venice. Like many other artists who journeyed to this artistic city, he was able to study in the museums and the palaces. He also became interested in the canals of Venice as a subject matter. He met Frederic Leighton, Francesco Gamba, and Giuseppe Abbati. Signorini returned to Florence in 1856, when he discovered that his paintings completed in Venice had been rejected by the Promotrice for his use of “violent chiaroscuro.”

Signorini then went on to his first visit with Cabianca to La Spezia, Lombardy-Venetia, and Liguria, including two visits to Venice in 1858 with his father. During this sojourn, he began his first paintings in the Macchia style. Signorini’s paintings show “over-neatness of the radical and violent conflict” and chiaroscuro designed not only to “define the space but [also] the installation of the figures marked by a heightened stereometry,” as can be seen in the faces of some of the preparatory drawings. In 1860, Signorini returned to La Spezia with Cabianca and Banti. During his stay he created some of his most important and best-known works.

On May 5, 1859, Signorini volunteered for service in the artillery corps. He fought in the Lombardian campaign against the Austrians during the Risorgimento. Many other artists, including Borrani, Cecioni, and Martelli, also took part in the Italian war of Independence and fought in the same campaign. While his military service interrupted the production of his works, it allowed Signorini to create sketches of a different subject matter: the war-torn countryside and battlefields in Calcinato and Solferino. He created two works that he submitted to the Promotrice of 1860 from these sketches. Signorini would also go back to Calcinato and

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29 Monti, 16.
Solferino after he was discharged on October 19, 1859. I will expand upon Signorini’s two La Spezia periods as well as the Risorgimento and works created as a result in the following chapter.

In 1861 Signorini made his first trip to Paris with fellow Macchiaioli Cabianca and Banti. However, on the way there, they stopped in Turin, where, accompanied by much controversy, he exhibited *The Ghetto of Venice* (Fig. 13). Signorini called it “the most subversive of my paintings, in excess of chiaroscuro.” While in Paris, he was able to study many examples of what his friends had seen on their trip to the 1855 World’s Fair. He was even able to meet several leading French landscape painters, including Troyon, Corot, and Rousseau. On their way back to Florence the group stayed in La Spezia for a short time.

Signorini made it a point to travel to Paris to see the official Salons of 1868, 1873-74, 1878 (Universal Exposition), 1880, 1881, and 1883-84. In 1870 he won an award at the Promotrice for his painting *November* (Fig. 9). *November* is a landscape with two figures walking on a well-traveled road on a dreary day. Because of Signorini’s winning of the award and his travels to Paris, his name became well known in the European art world, evidence of which is provided by Degas’ visit to Signorini’s studio in 1875, when the Impressionist painter was touring Italy. Degas reacted very positively to one of his paintings, *The Ward of the Madwomen at S. Bonifazio in Florence* (Fig. 10). In fact, this composition is reminiscent of Degas’s paintings in that the perspective is exaggerated and groups of people provide the focus of the viewer’s attention.32

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31 Ibid., 69.
32 Ibid., 139.
Figure 9. Telemaco Signorini, *November*, 1870, oil on canvas, International Gallery of Modern Art in Ca'Pesaro, Venice.
Figure 10. Telemaco Signorini, *The Ward of the Madwomen at S. Bonifazio in Florence*, 1865, oil on canvas, International Gallery of Modern Art in Ca'Pesaro, Venice.
In 1873-1874 Signorini made his first trip to London. He established extensive contacts in the British capital with many collectors and dealers in the art world there. Subsequently, Signorini returned to London in 1881, 1883, and 1884. On his 1881 trip he also explored Bath, Bristol, Edinburgh, Leith, and Glasgow. Inspired by the impressions of his travels he began to paint many street scenes.

In 1888, Signorini became professor at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Naples and at the Accademia di Belle Arti e Liceo Artistico in Bologna. In 1892, he received a diploma with the Accademia and taught drawing at the Royal Institute of Higher Learning in Florence. He continued painting and writing until his death in 1901.

Now that a view of the Macchiaioli and the life of Signorini has been presented, I will discuss the work of Signorini in the following two chapters as it pertains to the Macchia style, as well it relates to the Risorgimento, and as it evolves and incorporates new influences in his later years.
Chapter 2: Signorini’s Work in the Style of the Macchia

Signorini made his first visit to La Spezia in 1858 as part of a journey across northern Italy. This trip included stops in Venice, Turin, Lombardy-Venetia, and Liguria. Due to the interruption of the Risorgimento, it was not until summer of 1860 that he was able to go back for an extended visit to La Spezia, and produce more sketches and paintings. Moreover, during his first visit in 1858, his paintings began exhibiting the qualities of the Macchiaioli. These qualities are especially noticeable in *The Street Vendor of La Spezia* (Fig. 11) from 1859. This canvas depicts several figures either lounging or shopping from a trunk on a mule’s back outside of buildings. The brushwork is very patchy, and the exaggerated chiaroscuro can be seen in the figures faces. This painting was particularly well received by his friends and colleagues.\(^{33}\) Not only did the qualities of the Macchiaioli appear, but the influence of Decamps could also be detected. Because Signorini had not been to Paris to see many of Decamps works in the original, his access to these paintings was provided by Prince Anatole Demidoff and Prince Peter Troubetzkoy.

Prince Demidoff owned a villa, Villa di San Donato, just outside of Florence. Demidoff inherited his home from his father, a Russian Ambassador to the Court of Tuscany. He collected some of the most popular work of the time, by such artists as Boucher, Greuze, Delaroche, Delacroix, Meissonier, Isabey, Vernet, Ingres, Bonington, and Calame.\(^{34}\) There were no less than 16 works by Decamps available for study in the Demidoff Collection, as well as other works by Constant Troyon, another major influence on the Macchiaioli.\(^{35}\) Signorini visited the Villa di San

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\(^{34}\) Broude, *The Macchiaioli*, 71-72.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 71-72.
Donato di Anatole Demidoff as a young boy with his father; however, evidence of the influence of Decamps on Signorini’s work from this collection is not visible until 1858-1860.\textsuperscript{36} Not until 1855 did he and some other members of the Macchiaioli gained knowledge of this collection. It is most likely that, after hearing of Decamps and the Barbizon School from Morelli, Altamura, and De Tivoli’s visit to the Paris World’s Fair in 1855, other members of the Macchiaioli visited the collection to study examples of Decamp’s art.\textsuperscript{37} One such example was a watercolor recorded under two different titles, \textit{Le Pouilleux} and \textit{Les Petits Mendients}, the whereabouts of which are currently unknown. This composition is described in Adolphe Moreau’s 1869 catalogue raisonné of Decamp’s work as “featuring a grouping of figures along the steps of a large stairway, a compositional device that is perhaps echoed in the ascending arrangement of the figures in Signorini’s \textit{The Street Vendor of La Spezia}” (Fig. 11).\textsuperscript{38} Since the Decamps work in question is missing, we can only infer what it looks like from Signorini’s painting.

The other collection that Signorini could have seen contained works by Decamps, Bonheur, Daugbigny, Rousseau, and Troyon. It was owned by a “Prince T*****” whose possessions were auctioned off in 1862.\textsuperscript{39} In the same catalogue raisonné of 1869 by Moreau, “Prince T*****” is identified as Prince Peter Troubetzkoy. He was a member of the Russian consulate and in that capacity possibly would have frequented the same social circles as Prince Demidoff; alternatively, as the Czar’s representative, he may have stayed for an extended period of time at San Donato.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Broude, “The Troubetzkoy Collection,” 403.
\textsuperscript{39} Broude, \textit{The Macchiaioli}, 72-74.
\end{flushright}
Figure 11. Telemaco Signorini, *The Street Vendor of La Spezia*, 1859, oil on canvas, location unknown.
If Troubetzkoy, in fact, was Prince Demidoff’s guest, he would have housed his collection in private galleries at San Donato, to which the Macchiaioli would have had access.\textsuperscript{40} Prince Troubetzkoy was a page in the Russian Czar’s court, then part of the embassy in Constantinople, after which he was appointed to the embassy in Italy. After his “ill-advised” marriage to an American music student, Ada Winans, and resignation from his diplomatic post, he possibly found himself in financial trouble. The sale of his collection in 1862 may have been related to this period of his life.\textsuperscript{41}

In the Troubetzkoy collection was \textit{Une Rue de Smyrne} by Decamps (Fig. 12), among several other paintings by this artist. This canvas is similar to Signorini’s \textit{Il Ghetto di Venezia} (Fig. 13) in that they contrast brightly sunlit areas and dark shadows, demarcated by archways; beyond the archways there are stairs and bridges surrounded by crowded buildings, and in both paintings figures are costumed and are either brightly lit, or engulfed in deep shadows, or simply appear as darkened silhouettes. Strong chiaroscuro is one of the most notable characteristics of the Macchiaioli, which certainly holds true for both of these paintings.

In 1859, war with the Austrians broke out, this interrupted the lives of the Macchiaioli. At the end of the eighteenth century Italy was almost entirely under foreign rule. Austria had control over Lombardy, the Veneto, and Tuscany along with the grand dukes from the House of Habsburg-Lorraine.\textsuperscript{42} The Spanish Bourbons reigned over Naples and Sicily. The pope was regarded as a foreign power governing over the Papal States in Umbria and the Marches.

\textsuperscript{40} Broude, “The Troubetzkoy Collection,” 406.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 403.
Figure 12. Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, *Une Rue de Smyrne*, ca. 1835-45, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
Figure 13. Telemaco Signorini, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 1860, oil on canvas, private collection, Milan.
The only area to retain its Italian identity was the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont, ruled by the House of Savoy.

With the country in such a state of disarray, Napoleon Bonaparte intervened. He formed the Kingdom of Italy in 1805 with himself as king and his stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, as viceroy. Some liberal Italians welcomed this regime. The French were able to defeat their traditional enemy, Austria. Napoleon also abolished any remnants of the feudal system, and Jews were given full citizens’ rights. Napoleon united the Italian judicial system by establishing the Napoleonic Code. Because Napoleon had been able to unite separate regions, social systems, and laws, the Italian people began thinking of themselves as a unified group, identifying themselves with the country and no longer with their region. Some Italians began to organize against the French when they began to levy higher taxes and spent in excess. Napoleon at this time came to be viewed as an invader himself and was no longer regarded as a liberator.

The Italians soon realized the positive aspects of the Napoleonic rule when the Congress of Vienna broke Italy apart. The group responsible for deposing Napoleon in Italy, the Carbonari, now focused on establishing the new government. Liberals in Italy, especially writers, voiced their opinions on how Italy should be unified. Some thought that the pope should be president, others that the country should be governed by a monarch. These liberals struggled under several different leaders to unify Italy.

Giuseppe Mazzini was one of the most active and radical figures of the Risorgimento. He was a member of the Carbonari and formed his own political group called “Young Italy.”

Young Italy’s goal was to recruit young people to create a united Italy with a republican government.

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43 Ibid., 22.
government and capital in Rome. Mazzini sparked uprisings and delivered subversive newspapers across the borders of Italy. In 1849, after the pope fled, Mazzini became a member of the triumvirate of the new Roman Republic. Rome was then attacked by the French, which eventually conquered the city.

Another prominent figure of the Risorgimento was Giuseppe Garibaldi. He was well-known, internationally celebrated military hero who received many honors. American president Abraham Lincoln offered Garibaldi the rank of major-general in the Union army during the Civil War. The USSR much later praised him for his support of the Paris Commune and Marx’s First International. He sparked great enthusiasm on a visit to London and was acclaimed as “one of the most remarkable men in Europe.”

Garibaldi was a part of Mazzini’s Young Italy. He was a merchant-captain and sailed trading ships in the Mediterranean. After participating in an uprising in the Piedmontese navy in 1834, he went into exile in South America. There was a wave of immigrants from Italy going to the Americas at the time. Garibaldi took up the cause for a republic in Brazil and revolted against dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas of Argentina’s conquest of Uruguay. In Montevideo, he formed a legion of Italian forces that would be the model for his forces in Italy. The legion in Montevideo wore red shirts that would later become the uniform for the Garibaldini in Italy. Finally, in 1848, he found the opportunity to fight on his native soil with his Legion when Piedmont was at war with Austria, although he never fought in that war, as Piedmont was defeated before he could mobilize his forces in Milan. Garibaldi then went to Rome in 1849, after it had been declared a republic, and defended it against the French, who tried to restore the young republic. The French forces overwhelmed him and he escaped to the

44 Ibid., 24.
United States via San Marino in 1850. He returned to Europe in 1854, and the Piedmont government allowed him to return to Italy.

Mazzini and Garibaldi were two of the more radical figures active in the Italian unification movement. Count Camillo Benso di Cavour was part of a noble Piedmontese family and a proponent of a more moderate view. He became the Prime Minister under the King of Sardinia, Vittorio Emanuele. Cavour was “a gentleman-farmer who believed in economic and scientific progress, and representative government with limited suffrage.”\(^45\) He bought out the political newspaper *Il Risorgimento* which promoted ideals such as independence of Italian states and reduction of their numbers, a league of Italian rulers, and an orderly political reform program.

Cavour forged an alliance with Napoleon III against the Austrians in 1858 and began searching for a pretext for war with Austria. On April 29, 1859, Austria invaded Piedmont.\(^46\) In June the Piedmontese defeated Austria at Lombardy and at Magenta. The Battle of Solferino was indecisive and caused many casualties. The Austrian forces retreated into their fortresses in Lombardy. Napoleon III agreed to a truce with Austria, fearing that Prussia might come to Austria’s aid, further losses, a long siege, and a deepening disapproval at home. Meanwhile, King Vittorio Emanuele had approved of the armistice against the wishes of Cavour. Napoleon III met with the emperor of Austria at Villafranca and negotiated the terms of the treaty to include the ceding of Lombardy to Piedmont, while the Veneto would remain Austrian. These terms could not be carried out due to revolutions in the wake of the Piedmontese troops’ conquests in northern and central Italy, where patriots gathered in Modena, Parma, and Tuscany.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{46}\) Telemaco Signorini enlisted on May 5, 1859.
after the local rulers fled and Piedmontese laws and currency were adopted. These revolts also occurred in part of the Papal States. The kingdom of Piedmont soon extended down from the Alps to Rimini, on the Adriatic Sea.

In May of 1860, Garibaldi sailed for Sicily and almost completely controlled the island by August. He successfully entered Naples and defeated local troops in September and October. Cavour then sent Piedmont’s troops to Umbria and the Marches, which were then under papal control. Cavour’s troops marched to Rome and arrived before Garibaldi and his men, so that Cavour would be feted as the “savior of the Risorgimento.” Garibaldi then withdrew to his retreat on Caprera, and finally, in 1861 the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed, ruled by Vittorio Emanuele.

All of the members of the Macchiaioli were born between 1825 and 1838. They all grew up in this war-torn political climate. Some of the older members of the group participated in the conflicts of 1848-1849, and they would all be involved in military campaigns in 1859. They participated in a demonstration on April 27, 1859, which resulted in the removal of the Austrian Grand Duke of Florence, Leopold II. Leopold II was a very benevolent ruler and granted many political refugees sanctuary in his region. Several of these refugees joined the Macchiaioli.

Two days after the Grand Duke of Florence was deposed, Austria invaded Piedmont. Six days after that Signorini joined the artillery forces. For him and many other of the Macchiaioli their military activity “provided them with a new physical and psychological mobility, expanding their range of experience and freeing them from the timidity and hesitancy that had often marked their earlier experimental efforts.” Demand for military and patriotically-themed paintings grew

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47 Boime, 39.
48 Broude, The Macchiaioli, 3.
49 Ibid., 62.
exponentially. Several government competitions were launched during the late 1850s and early 1860s that dealt with such themes.

Signorini and others of the Macchiaioli saw first-hand the war-torn battle sites where they fought and the picturesque countrysides through which they. He was discharged on October 19, 1859, and spent the winter of 1859 and the first half of 1860 responding to the growing demand for military-themed paintings. Signorini submitted two of these paintings to the Promotrice in 1860, *Halt of the Tuscan Grenadiers at Calcinato* (Fig. 14) and *The Tuscan Artillerymen at Montechiaro Greeted by the French Wounded at Solferino* (Fig. 15).

The *Halt of the Tuscan Grenadiers at Calcinato* was based on a drawing he completed at Calcinato during his military service. It illustrates soldiers and horses at rest and possibly visiting local peoples or perhaps even purchasing wares. There are no known drawings for *The Tuscan Artillerymen at Montechiaro Greeted by the French Wounded at Solferino*, but oil sketches do exist. This painting depicts soldiers paraded through the streets meeting with much praise from the French wounded soldiers. Bells are ringing and French flags can be seen flying on the sides of buildings. In this instance he adhered to the academic sketching style; however, with *Halt of the Tuscan Grenadiers at Calcinato*, the innovations of his sketching style from his summer in La Spezia in 1858 can be observed, in that the preliminary sketches were executed on the spot. The simplification of the sketching style and the bold contrasts he developed while in the military can be detected when compared to *Street Vendor of La Spezia* (Fig. 11), completed a year prior in 1858.

Signorini then went back to the battlefields to sketch again. He toured the countryside to see the landscape on which he had fought and sketched more battle scenes. In June of 1860,
while traveling on foot at Solferino, he was arrested by the Italian police as an Austrian spy. The reasons for his arrest were that he did not wear any uniform, had a beard and blond hair, wore an “English style” of dress, and had distinct features. After this ordeal, he went back to La Spezia which he had visited for several months prior to the outbreak of war in 1858. During this second La Spezia period, he spent approximately the month of July in the company of Cabianca and Banti. The three artists tried to capture their immediate impressions, and they sacrificed detail and local color for simplified tonal patterns and vibrancy of tonal transitions in their sketches. Cecioni later wrote that they “devoted themselves to dealing with the effects of sunlight… and as a result of their bold and daring studies, labors and experiments, real progress was made during the time they spent at La Spezia.” After his travels throughout northern Italy, he returned to Florence for a few months before going to Paris for the first time in 1861. This marks the beginning of many years of continuous travel to France and Great Britain.

51 Broude, The Macchiaioli, 65.
Figure 14. Telemaco Signorini, *Halt of the Tuscan Grenadiers at Calcinato*, 1859, oil on canvas, private collection, Biella, Italy.
Figure 15. Telemaco Signorini, *The Tuscan Artillerymen at Montechiaro Greeted by the French Wounded at Solferino*, 1859, oil on canvas, private collection.
Beginning in 1861 Signorini made his first trip to Paris, and from 1873-74 he undertook his first of many trips to London. Signorini had a predilection for British culture since his youth and had the opportunity to meet those involved with the British art world at his father’s studio. His frequent travels to Paris and Great Britain were motivated by a desire to find more responsive, wider markets for his work. Unlike fellow members of the Macchiaioli, like Boldini, De Nittis, and Zandomeneghi, Signorini maintained his residence in Florence and a cultural identification with his Italian heritage.

In 1868 his style changed and softened: he had a wider range of color, and his line was more indicative and incisive. With the exception of canvases Signorini could have brought with him on his first trip to Paris, all of his works would have been from his later period after the Macchia had been declared “dead.” He no longer used “violent” or “exaggerated” chiaroscuro. Signorini would go to Italy to paint, and to Paris or London to sell his works. In Paris, during his stay from 1873-74, he worked with dealers Goupil and Reitlinger. Over the course of some of Signorini’s later trips to London, he exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Grosvenor Gallery, and with gallery directors Colnaghi, Wallis, Lemon, and Lucas.

Signorini’s style also changed due to the influence of photography, which can be seen in The Ward of the Madwomen at S. Bonifazio in Florence (Fig. 10). This is an image that Degas had admired in Signorini’s studio ten years after it was painted, as noted above. The Ward of the Madwomen has an exaggeratedly low viewpoint, much like that found in various nineteenth century photographs and paintings, including some by Degas, who is known for the photographic

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52 Venturi, 123.
influences on his work. This is most poignantly revealed in Degas’s use of perspective and
cropping. It is also an established fact that photographers would set up their cameras in hospitals
and asylums to observe patients, and it is possible that Signorini saw some of these
photographs.\textsuperscript{54} He also spent time in an asylum to study the phases of patients’ lives.\textsuperscript{55} We do
know that Signorini had an interest in photography, because he collected the photographs taken
by a friend of his, Giulio De Gori. One of these images has been identified as the compositional
source for Signorini’s painting \textit{Man in the Woods} (Fig. 16).

Photography was also an influence on Signorini’s street scenes. The most famous of these
subjects is \textit{Leith} (Fig. 17). Central to the composition is the large Rob Roy whiskey
advertisement.\textsuperscript{56} The advertisement contributes color to the otherwise almost monochromatic
scene. Signorini created this composition as an all-inclusive representation; he painted
everything he saw and did not edit out what some other artists would have eliminated.

\textit{Leith} is reminiscent of another work, entitled \textit{Via delle Torricelle} (Fig. 18). The viewpoint
of \textit{Via delle Torricelle} is presented from an odd angle. The viewer is positioned at about street
level on the far righthand side, looking down the street and simultaneously at the sides of a row
of walls and buildings. The perspective is exaggerated and distorted, while the right edge is
cropped; this arrangement, in combination with the low viewpoint, suggest the influence of
photography.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 139.
\textsuperscript{55} Helen Zimmern, “Telemaco Signorini,” \textit{Art Journal} (1895): 167.
\textsuperscript{56} It is also probable that he was drawn to this advertisement because Rob Roy was the hero of a romantic novel by
Sir Walter Scott, whose influence can also be seen in Signorini’s earlier paintings.
Figure 16. Telemaco Signorini, *Man in the Woods*, date unknown, oil on canvas, private collection, Rome.
Figure 17. Telemaco Signorini, *Leith*, 1881, oil on canvas, Gallery of Modern Art in Palazzo Pitti, Florence.
Figure 18. Telemaco Signorini, *Via delle Torricelle*, 1874, oil on canvas, Caprotti Collection, Milan.
One can encounter similar cropping techniques and the same viewpoint from the lower righthand side in one of Signorini’s best-known compositions, *The Towpath* (Fig. 19). In this painting there are five men towing a boat, which is hidden from view, along a river. In addition, Signorini depicted a man with a top hat looking away from the workers, accompanied by a young girl acknowledging a small black dog barking at the men towing. It has been suggested that this work was intended as a social commentary. The man and child look away from the laborers, away from poverty.57 We do not see the boat being towed either, only the effort that is required to tow it. This painting not only implies photographic elements as described above but also shows some of the same influences found in Signorini’s earlier works. The Barbizon painters’ inspiration is easily detected when the composition is compared to one of Rosa Bonheur’s most famous paintings, *Plowing in Nivernais* (Fig. 20). The diagonal composition is identical (in reverse), as is the detail of strained muscles found in either the animals or the men. The viewpoint is lower in *The Towpath*, but the perspective is the same.

From 1882 to 1886, Signorini returned to scenes of Florentine markets and ghettos. As with the other paintings discussed, these works display the affinity with photography regarding choice of view point and cropping. Signorini’s series of markets and ghettos met with great acclaim and much success in both Paris and Great Britain, where his art was particularly well received in Scotland.58 He continued to travel abroad, sketching and selling several of his paintings to receptive collectors until 1884. The years from 1884 until his death in 1901 were spent traveling throughout Italy; these trips coincided with his coming under the spell of a much different style, that of Japanese art.

58 Zimmern, 168.
Figure 19. Telemaco Signorini, *The Towpath*, 1864, oil on canvas, private collection.
Figure 20. Rosa Bonheur, *Plowing in Nivernais* 1850, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
In 1873, Signorini radically transformed his approach to art because Japanese woodblock prints began to fascinate him. Japanese aesthetics exercised a great influence on late nineteenth-century European artists, most famously the Impressionists, and Signorini was no exception to this. The infatuation with Japanese painters and printmakers had been evident in Western art ever since the International Exposition of 1867. Ugo Ojetti, an Italian art critic concerned with the Macchiaioli, wrote in 1877 the following lines about the Japanese influence on Signorini:

For ten years, exactly, since the International Exposition of 1867, Paris had raised to fashion the illustrious and capricious Japanese painters, and [Mario] Fortuny had been enchanted, but only the group around Manet and Degas had taken from that initiative any positive and lasting advantages: the clarity of coloring, the liveliness in capturing fleeting expressions and movements, the freedom in composition balancing the painting only on color harmony and no longer on symmetry of lines and counterweight of masses.59 As had happened to Fontanesi and his followers and to the Florentine ‘Macchiaioli,’ who had studied the English landscape of Bonington and Constable only through the great French landscapists of 1830, once again the Italians did not see, or at least did not understand, the Japanese except through Fortuny, and worse, through his butterflying followers. It was a delirium: illustrations for books, wall posters, newspaper mastheads, covers of novels, women’s fashions, decorations of whole rooms, everything seemed to come out of the fans and screens and from the forged lacquers of the Japanese bazaars of Naples or Rome. And painters of fans, often like Dalbono, exquisite with liveliness, sprang up in every corner of Italy, slaves of Japan in the name of freedom. And everyone who wished to call himself original and modern soon showed a disdain for the mummy-colors and for the so-called juicy colors of the past, the distrust of yellow and the love of white lead, the study of frontal lighting so as to avoid as much as possible any shadows, the passion for local and whole tones, the deliberate disdain for aerial perspective, the lack of depth, all the figures equally clear and all on the picture plane.60

Other Macchiaioli were also interested in Japanese art, such as Fattori, D’Ancona, and De Nittis.

De Nittis designed a fan for Princess Mathilde Bonaparte in the Japanese style in 1883. Because

59 Fortuny is Mario Fortuny, or Mariano José María Bernardo Fortuny y Marsal, a popular Spanish artist. He painted in the Romantic and Orientalist style. He is not to be confused with his son, Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo, a painter and fashion designer active in Paris and Venice.

Signorini was the most widely traveled in the group, he had more opportunities to see examples of the Japanese style.

Another critic, Francesco Netti, wrote about Italian painters influenced by the Japanese style. He described one of Signorini’s paintings, *Borgo di Porta Adriana a Ravenna* (Fig. 21), which displays affinities with the Japanese style, as “an excellent study.”61 This is a busy street scene with a stretched horizon. Troyer notes that one would be hard pressed to convince the viewer of its Japanese derivation when *Borgo di Porta Adriana a Ravenna* is compared to other, French paintings that are commonly accepted as examples of the fashion for giapponismo.62 In this painting there is no single vanishing point, which results in a spread-X-construction (Fig. 22). The horizon is very broad and takes up almost the entire width of the painting. The Japanese were not as partial to the Renaissance perspective as those who trained in the West and varied their style more often. The town and clothing may be Western, but the spatial construction of this painting was completed in the Japanese style.

Signorini used Japanese elements in many of his paintings until the end of his life. He never thought to abandon the use of Renaissance perspective entirely. The critics and public of Italy were far less open to the use of Japanese elements than the art world of London and Paris. One subject he revisited frequently was his busy marketplace scenes, epitomized by *The Mercato Vecchio in Florence* (Fig. 23). Signorini made at least eleven etchings of this scene, as well as several paintings, depicting it during different weather conditions and seasons, and varying the number of figures. Signorini flattened the planes, simplified the background, and left open space in the foreground; all of these stylistic elements are reminiscent of Japanese prints.

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62 Troyer, 138.
Figure 21. Telemaco Signorini, *Borgo di Porta Adriana a Ravenna*, 1875, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Modern art in Rome.
Figure 22. Katsushika Hokusai, *Manga III*, 1815, etching, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Kansas.
Figure 23. Telemaco Signorini, *The Mercato Vecchio in Florence*, 1886, oil on canvas, Museo di Firenze com’era.
Scholars believe that Signorini got some of his inspiration from a series of prints by Utagawa Hiroshige.\textsuperscript{63} When their works are compared, one finds some identical elements, such as perspective and construction. According to Farinella, Signorini had seen prints by the Japanese master as early as 1861, on his trip to Paris.\textsuperscript{64}

No matter what year Signorini began his experiments with elements of Japanese painting, their echo is evident in his work. Although, he remained loyal to Italian subject matter, he varied his technique frequently. One of his last paintings, *Morning Toilette* (Fig. 24), painted toward the end of his life in 1898, demonstrates how he employed all of the aesthetic lessons he had absorbed over the course of his career. The perspective is similar to that of *The Ward of the Madwomen at S. Bonifazio* (Fig. 10), but it depicts social commentary couched in a brothel scene, whose spatial devices are reminiscent of those of photography. He continued to experiment with effects of light, such as those he encountered during Italian journeys undertaken until his death in 1901.

\textsuperscript{63} Vincenzo Farinella “Signorini e Hiroshige: un’ipotesi sulle fonti visive dell’Alzaia (e un’apertura sul giapponismo dei macchiaioli),” in *Telemaco Signorini e la pittura in Europa*, ed. Ettore Spalletti (Venezia: Marsilio, 2009), 46. 
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 48.
Figure 24. Telemaco Signorini, *Morning Toilette*, 1898, oil on canvas, private collection, Milan.
Conclusion

Telemaco Signorini is often overlooked in discussions of nineteenth-century European art. For that matter, the Macchiaioli and Italy as a whole are overlooked as well. They all deserve to be better recognized among scholars and anyone else interested in nineteenth-century European art.

I have presented an overview of the Macchiaioli, how they formed, the elements of their style, and influences. The group brought to bear an emotional component in their works which their Italian contemporaries did not. Their canvases appeared to most as “unfinished,” but to the Macchiaioli conveyed an atmospheric effect, characterized by a “violent chiaroscuro” which they celebrated. Telemaco Signorini was born into an artistic family and therefore was privileged to gain access to prominent Russian collectors in Florence, whose collections provided inspiration to him and other members of the group. His claim to fame is that he created the first painting in the Macchiaioli style. Signorini traveled throughout Italy after he enlisted in the military. The group used him as a spokesman and he wrote and debated about its style with critics.

The Risorgimento was a catalyst for many paintings in nineteenth-century Italy. Artists used the struggle for unification as subject matter. The Macchiaioli were no exception. All members of the group enlisted in the military. Their tours of duty allowed them to travel the countryside, which served as a source of inspiration for their canvases.

Later in his life, Signorini began to travel abroad. He visited Paris and London frequently. Stylistic elements of photography and Japanese print aesthetics began to inspire works of Signorini, other members of the Macchiaioli, and their contemporaries, such as the Impressionists. After 1884 Signorini began to travel even more extensively throughout his
homeland. Every influence mentioned remains evident in Signorini’s paintings until his death in 1901.

In conclusion, Telemaco Signorini was an artist dedicated to his craft. He defended his stylistic choices vehemently. He continued to grow as an artist and experiment regularly. Currently, he and the Macchiaioli are under-appreciated. Signorini is truly an outstanding artist who deserves better recognition.
Bibliography


Christine Elizabeth Morgan was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1986. She spent most of her childhood growing up in Manassas, Virginia, and Slidell, Louisiana. She graduated cum laude from Southeastern Louisiana University in May, 2008, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in cultural resource management. Growing up only an hour away from Washington D.C. allowed her parents to bring her throughout her childhood and adolescence to several art museums, including the National Gallery of Art. This sparked a love of art that guided her decision to obtain her degree in cultural resource management and further her education with a Master of Arts in art history. Christine obtained an assistantship through the Louisiana State University Student Union Art Gallery, where she aided the gallery director, Judith Stahl, in curating several art exhibits. After obtaining her degree, she would like to work in a museum in a position relating to collections management, registration, or curation.