

Architecture 351: Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance Architecture

Department of Architecture, University of Washington

Winter 2009

Assignment #2 – Beauty and Ornament in Architecture

Book VI, Chapter II of Leon Battista Alberti's, *The Ten Books of Architecture* offers the following definition of beauty and ornament:

Beauty is that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse... Ornament may be defined as a form of auxiliary light and complement to beauty. From this it follows, I believe, that beauty is some inherent property, to be found suffused all through the body of that which may be called beautiful; whereas ornament, rather than being inherent, has the character of something attached or additional.

Write an essay (double-spaced) of not fewer than 750 and not more than 1,000 words that critically examines one key work from lectures 12-24 according to Alberti's theory of beauty and ornament. As with the first assignment, this is not a research paper, in other words it is not merely a restatement of historical information. You are doing a detailed analysis of a key work, with the source of information and/or images being the two course textbooks, the course website and your lecture notes. In order to do the assignment you must also consult the Book VI, Chapter 2 from Alberti's *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, which will be posted on the course website. The intention of this assignment is to focus on the skill of examining works of architecture in relation to a set of theories or principles. In forming your argument you should ask yourself how the concepts of beauty and ornament are expressed in the building. For example, you could examine what establishes the "reasoned harmony" of the building (geometry, proportion, formal rhythm, etc.) and how those elements relate to the qualities that provide an "auxiliary light and complement" to its beauty (materials, details, etc.). In so doing, you must do more than just describe the building or connect beauty and ornament to particular parts of the building. The paper must offer a thesis drawn from the analysis of a building that deals with the connection between beauty and ornament in Alberti's *The Ten Books on Architecture*. Please be aware of the fact that what is "beautiful" and what is "ornamental" is not the same during all time periods or in all locations. In this regard, you are particularly encouraged to use the building to criticize or challenge Alberti's theory—which is based upon Renaissance design principles and tastes.

As with the previous assignment, you must use at least 6 illustrations and include at least two different kinds of images (maps, plans, diagrams, photographs, etc.). Each image must be carefully formatted with the text, it must include a short descriptive caption and the text must make clear reference to each image. Although this is not a research paper, you must clearly cite all sources you have consulted in a properly formatted bibliography at the end of the paper. At the very least the bibliography must list the two course textbooks. If you do not know how to format a bibliography, you should consult the *Chicago Manual of Style* in the library, or check out the following web site: <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/>
Failure to properly cite sources is a serious academic offense.

Grading: Your paper will be graded on the information presented and the quality and organization of the writing (40%), the clarity and support of the thesis of the essay (35%), the suitability of the images and the legibility of the graphic or visual presentation (20%), and the format and content of the bibliography (5%).

Assignment due date – Monday, March 2 – 10:20 a.m.

Please note: List your name and student number on the front page of your paper. Please print your paper on plain white paper (no photo paper) attached with a staple. Do not submit your paper in a binder, folder or plastic sleeve. You cannot submit your assignment electronically, and late assignments will not be accepted except in cases of verifiable hardship.