President’s Message from Sarah Wilkins

October 15, 2021

Dear Members of the Italian Art Society,

I’d like to begin by wishing everyone a healthy, safe, and productive academic year. While many of us have returned to teaching in person, and some fortunate few were able to resume traveling abroad for research over the summer, it is clear that we are still far from getting entirely back to “normal.” Please take care of yourselves, both mentally and physically in this continuingly difficult time.

There are, however, some glimmers of hope on the horizon! It was recently announced that vaccinated travelers from abroad will finally again be allowed entry into the US. And while we were once again unable to hold our annual IAS/Kress Lecture in Italy this year — usually the highlight of our summer programing — we are extremely pleased to announce that we are planning to resume the series in summer 2022 with a lecture held in Cortona on June 30. Rest assured that all safety measures will be in place as conditions and regulations demand. The Call for Speaker (found on p. 3 in this Newsletter, as well as on the website) is currently open, with a deadline of January 21, 2022. If you work on a relevant topic, please consider submitting a proposal via the website portal. And for those of you thinking longingly of travel to Italy next summer, put the event date on your calendar now! In addition to the lecture, followed by an aperitivo, we’re also planning to offer optional visits to several important sites in Cortona, to make this the truly celebratory event we all need after these last many months. I’d like to thank Katie T. Brown, our Membership Chair, for her invaluable work thus far in planning this event, and our Executive Vice President, Tenley Bick, for designing the event flyer.

While we are always grateful to the Kress Foundation for their ongoing support of our joint lecture series (and their understanding during the last two years when we were unable to hold events), we have an additional reason to be
appreciative of their support at this current moment. As you know, each year they fund the IAS/Kress Foundation International Travel Grants which are available for transoceanic travel to conferences at which the IAS sponsors sessions. Normally we are able to offer four such grants per year, but with the resumption of largely in-person conferences (with the exception of ICMS at Kalamazoo), the Kress’s generosity has made it possible for us to instead offer eight such awards for travel in 2022. This is a real boon in a year when several conferences will be held in Europe, at a time when many departments have slashed travel funding due to the pandemic, and when some of our members have found themselves without employment due to departments being shuttered in ill-conceived “cost-saving” measures. We thank the Kress Foundation for their continued support! We will soon advertise for the 2022 conference travel awards, as well as for the IAS Dissertation Research Grant and IAS Research and Publication Grant. If you have any questions — about these or our other awards — please contact Max Grossman, Awards Chair.

I’m also thrilled to announce that the Membership, Outreach & Development Committee, under the leadership of Katie T. Brown and Nicola Camerlenghi, has created a new way for you — our members — to support the IAS and to further our goal of greater inclusivity within our organization. Outlined in further detail on p.3 in the Newsletter, the new Sospeso Membership enables members to gift a free one-year membership to international (non-US-based) scholars, contingent faculty, emerging scholars (as defined for the ESC), independent scholars, and/or scholars from underrepresented demographics (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, First Gen, etc.). These will be available on a first-come first-served basis to those whose papers have been accepted in IAS-sponsored conference sessions by contacting Katie T. Brown; any additional Sospesi can be claimed by other scholars. You will find the option to add a Sospeso Membership to your own on the website when you go to join or renew your membership for 2022. Please consider taking advantage of this exciting new opportunity to support members of our community if you have the means to do so!

In other news, the nominations cycle for 2022 IAS positions has now closed. We’re pleased to say it was a huge success. We had a record number of self-nominations, speaking to the great enthusiasm of our membership. We thank the Nominating Committee for their excellent work on this thus far. They will announce the completed slate shortly. If you wanted to serve and were unable to commit to doing so this year, or we were unable to include you in the final slate due to the number of submissions, please do consider contributing in other ways, like writing for the IASblog or proposing a special feature for the Newsletter, and please keep your eyes open for more opportunities to serve next year!

In closing, I’d like to thank you all for your continued enthusiastic support during this unprecedented moment. I’d like to also thank all our officers, committee members, and our communications team, who make the IAS’s work possible. Particular thanks are due to our treasurer, Antje Gamble, whose hard work behind the scenes underlies all that we are able to accomplish for our membership. The IAS Board wishes you all a happy, healthy, and safe fall semester, and we look forward with great anticipation to seeing you at events in person in the new year!

A presto,

Sarah

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ELEVENTH ANNUAL IAS/KRESS LECTURE IN ITALY

We are seeking a speaker for our IAS/KRESS Lecture in Italy, which we are delighted to resume after a forced hiatus of two years due to the pandemic. Jointly sponsored by the IAS and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the IAS/KRESS Lecture seeks to promote intellectual exchange between North American art historians and scholars in Italy.

Our next lecture will take place in Cortona on June 30, 2022.

Eligibility:

- Senior or established scholars based in North America (esteemed publication record and PhD required)
- Proposed lectures may address any period in Italian art from antiquity to the early nineteenth century (1800-1830), but must be related to the host city of Cortona, or its environs
- Lecture may be given in English or Italian
- Length: 45-50 minutes
- Lecture must not have been previously published or presented
- Applicants must be members of the IAS at time of application and presentation of lecture
- Speaker must be available to present their lecture on the event date
- Current IAS officers are not eligible to apply
- Speaker must be vaccinated against COVID-19 to ensure ability to travel to Italy

The presenter will receive an honorarium of $800 and a $1250 supplementary lecture allowance that may be used for travel, lodging, or translation expenses.

Application deadline: January 21, 2022
Submit here

Applicants should include a cover letter, a 250-500-word abstract of the proposed lecture and a current CV. Questions should be directed to IAS President Sarah Wilkins. If you submit a proposal and do not receive confirmation of receipt, please contact Dr. Wilkins.

NEW SOSPESO MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY PRESENTS GIFT OPPORTUNITY

A tradition with Neapolitan origins, a caffè sospeso, or “suspended coffee,” is an espresso paid for anonymously in advance. A person of means may purchase two cups of coffee at a bar when only consuming one so that a person in need who inquires later if there is a sospeso available may have a complimentary cup. The sospeso allows members of a community to support each other with anonymous acts of kindness. The Membership, Outreach, and Development (MOD) Committee is extending this tradition to IAS Memberships. When you join or renew for 2022, please consider purchasing an additional Sospeso Membership at any of the three most economical levels: Socio ($35), Studente ($20), or Pensionato ($20). Your gift membership will be held in a separate “pending” account for prospective members who apply to receive one.

Once funds for the endeavor have been raised, eligible applicants will be able to request a one-year Sospeso Membership by contacting Katie T. Brown, Membership Chair. The Sospeso membership is intended for international (non-US-based) scholars, contingent faculty, emerging scholars (as defined for the ESC), independent scholars, and/or scholars from underrepresented demographics (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, First Gen, etc.), whose papers have been accepted in IAS-sponsored conference sessions. They will be distributed, as available, on a first-come, first-served basis. Once speakers in IAS-sponsored sessions have been offered the opportunity of the Sospeso Membership, any additional available Spesesi can be claimed by other scholars from the aforementioned demographics, again by contacting Katie T. Brown.

Your generosity during the upcoming IAS Membership renewal season will expand our membership base for 2022 to be more inclusive, broaden participation, and ultimately increase the impact within our field. For questions, please contact us at membership@italiansociety.org. Grazie mille!

CALL FOR IAS-ORGANIZED SESSION PROPOSAL – AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ITALIAN STUDIES (AAIS) 2022

We are seeking proposals for IAS-organized sessions at the annual meeting of the American Association of Italian Studies (AAIS), which will take place between May 13 and 15, 2022 (online) and May 29 to June 1, 2022 (in Bologna).

In keeping with the mission of the AAIS, sessions that approach Italian Studies through interdisciplinary lenses and
represent a range of interests and time periods are particularly welcome. Topics that are broadly conceived to also include architecture, cinema, mass media, etc. are of special interest. In recognition of the format, we welcome sessions that bridge the online and in person modalities. In addition, linking to the Association’s efforts to adopt a greater pro-active position regarding racial injustice, we particularly welcome interventions that address questions of antiracism and decoloniality. Note that 2022 marks the birth centennial of Pier Paolo Pasolini and we are especially interested in proposals engaging with his work and legacy in light of recent disciplinary trends and methodologies.

IAS members interested in putting together a session should submit the following items:

- session title
- abstract (100 words max.), to be forwarded to the AAIS in the event of selection
- short list of potential or confirmed speakers
- longer text (up to one page) contextualizing the proposal. This should include an explanation of the relevance of the session and the related expertise of the organizer(s) and speakers
- brief CV (1–3 pp)

**IAS deadline: November 22, 2021**

Submit [here](#)

Questions should be directed to Cristelle Baskins. Additional conference-specific guidelines, including AAIS membership requirements, are available [here](#).

**Key deadlines:**

- **22 November 2021**: Submit session proposals to IAS
- **15 December 2021**: Submit approved session proposals to AAIS
- **15 February 2022**: Complete sessions due to AAIS

**NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS**

Carson Barnes’ print of Gilberta Leporati Lodi and her son, based on the marble statue for the boy’s tomb by Barbieri in the Certosa di Bologna, is on exhibit until 23 October at the Alexandria Museum of Art in Alexandria, Louisiana. Images of five more prints from Carson’s photographs of marble portraits by Italian funerary sculpture artists (works from Rome, Milan, Genoa, and Florence) were projected at the Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester, Massachusetts, on September 12. Carson’s work will also feature as part of the Griffin’s *Once Upon a Time* exhibition (November 18, 2021 – February 22, 2022)

Nicola Camerlenghi contributed to the republication of the Nolli Map Website, a joint effort between the University of Oregon, Stanford University and Dartmouth College. The website, which aims to be a go-to-source for students, scholars and fans of early modern Rome alike, features 3D maps, updated and enriched data, and an expanding number of curated essays. If you would like to offer a contribution, please get in touch with Nicola.

Francesca Fiorani’s book *The Shadow Drawing. How Science Taught Leonardo How to Paint* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2020) is a finalist for the 6th edition of the Bridge/Il Ponte literary award, in the American non-fiction section. The Bridge Award aims to strengthen mutual understanding of the Italian and American cultures through literature. To encourage the reading of some of the best and most recent publications of both fiction and non-fiction of the two countries, the Bridge Award contributes to the costs of translating the winning books from Italian to English and vice versa.

Anne Leader and her project team at the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, University of Virginia, were awarded a 2021 Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grant from the Division of Preservation and Access of the National Endowment for the Humanities. This two-year grant of $299,000 will support research on the relationships between the living and the dead in premodern Florence and will further develop the Digital Sepoltuario, an internet resource based on archival registries kept by church officials to keep track of patronage rights and burials on their
grounds. NEH funding will enable an extensive expansion of the dataset, the construction of more robust search mechanisms, and the development of mapping features. These enhancements will allow students, scholars, genealogists, and visitors to Florence, whether in person or virtually, to explore and interpret the tombscape of this treasured UNESCO heritage site.

Adelina Modesti has been awarded a $AU 5,000 research grant (2021) from the Australian Institute of Art History and the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand for her book project on Elisabetta Sirani, currently under contract with Lund Humphries, London, for their new series *Illuminating Women Artists*, edited by Marilyn Dunn and Andrea Pearson. The volumes in this series will also be published in the United States by Getty Publications, Los Angeles.

On Friday, November 5, 2021, Babette Bohn will present the 25th annual *Sydney J. Freedberg Lecture on Italian Art* at the National Gallery of Art in Washington: “‘More Perfect and Excellent than Men’: The Women Artists of Bologna.” Registration is required for the premiere of the recorded lecture, with live Q and A, on November 5. The recorded lecture will remain available thereafter, on the NGA’s website and YouTube channel.

Christopher Platt has recently been appointed Assistant Professor of Art History in the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning at the University of Cincinnati.

Aja Martin has contributed to the organization of a series of events at the Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA) in New York, including the upcoming study days on Mario Schifano (October 20-23). Aja will also present her research on October 23: “(Non)Figures within Mario Schifano and Frank O’Hara’s *Words and Drawings*.”

Congratulations and best wishes to them all from the IAS community!

**EXHIBITION REVIEW**

*How to Frame Female Old Masters. “Le Signore dell’Arte. Storie di donne tra ‘500 e ‘600.” Palazzo Reale, Milan*

By Sheila Barker*

“*Le Signore dell’Arte. Storie di donne tra ‘500 e ‘600.*” which was on view at the Palazzo Reale in Milan from March 2 to August 22, 2021, was curated by Annamaria Bava, Gioia Mori, and Alain Tapié. It offered an extraordinary opportunity to see a range of Italian women artists of the early modern period, thirty of them, in fact. The best represented were Orsola Maddalena Caccia with ten works, Elisabetta Sirani with thirteen works, and Lavinia Fontana with fifteen works (including a few questionable attributions). Also notable was the inclusion of women artists who have either rarely or never been seen before in an exhibition, such as Properzia de’ Rossi, Lucrezia Quistelli, Claudia del Bufalo, and Antonia Pellegrini. Another important achievement of this exhibition was the uniting of works from members of the same family: there were works here by three Anguissola sisters and by three members of the Volò dynasty, as well as father and daughter works by the Gentileschis, the Novellis, and the Robustis.

Although its rationale was not perfectly coherent, in general the arrangement of the works privileged the question of artistic formation. After the early forerunner Properzia de’ Rossi, noblewomen who paid for instruction in the arts were grouped together according to whether they were mentioned by Vasari (or not). Next in the sequence were the women who learned their craft while in the convent (including Caccia and Fetti, although both apprenticed under their fathers),...
followed by professional women who were trained by family members (except for Cantofoli who apprenticed outside the home). The show’s itinerary then addressed women who were honored in their own times with membership in academies.

At its culmination, the exhibition featured five works by Artemisia Gentileschi, including the newest addition to her oeuvre, namely the graceful *Mary Magdalen* discovered by Gregory Buchakjian in Sursock Palace, still bearing the scars of the Beirut explosion. The resulting trajectory encouraged a focus on these women’s diverse life stories, rather than on the artworks themselves. Indeed, the shuffling of styles and genres was a bit disorienting for those who are well versed in the art of the period. Yet, the same arrangement provided a felicitous organizing principle for the catalogue, which takes the form of a series of amply illustrated biographies (individual entries for the artworks are presented as a long appendix).

This essentialization of women’s style and its automatic application to all female artists of the Baroque is repeated in Tapié’s essay for the Milan show. In his essay, the concept of women’s style is invoked uncritically as the “mano donnesca” (“womanly hand”) although with no apparent awareness of Torquato Tasso’s *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesco* and with no acknowledgment of socially constructed gender. The implication is that Baroque women artists inhabited what the author calls the “femminino universale” (“universal femininity”), meaning that women’s art is self-reflective and disengaged from a male world of social and political action. This private realm of womanly art — Tapié terms it an “eterno autoritratto in cui la donna fa della pittura la propria allegoria” (“an eternal self-portrait in which women turn painting into their own allegory”) — sounds like solipsistic navel gazing. By contrast, Tapié suggests that male painters like Rembrandt could transcend their own bodily experience in order to express “l’umanità universale” (“universal humanity”) and to even paint like women if they should so choose.

Even Artemisia Gentileschi, a history painter who depicted political liberators, rebels, and tribal warriors like Judith, Lucretia, Hercules, Esther and David, and who enjoyed patronage from the powerful male aristocrats of her time, is said by Tapié to be disinterested in politics, and only capable of producing symbols of an existential and ahistorical female struggle “contro il potere degli uomini” (“against the power of men”). Such claims, beyond impoverishing the rich signification of Artemisia’s art, distort the history of feminist thought in Baroque Italy, failing to account for why so many men wrote pro-woman treatises and why opposition to the political authority of queens and female regents occurred along the fault lines of dynastic and confessional conflicts, not sex. Other aspects of the essay raise concern: Cassiano dal Pozzo is defined as a poet; Jacopo Ligozzi (1547–1627, here mistakenly called ‘Ligossi’) is improbably portrayed as the follower of the much younger artists Otto Marseus van Schrieck (1613–1678) and Willem van Aelst (1627–1683); and the chronology of Giovanna Garzoni’s artistic trajectory is scrambled in order to put undue emphasis on botanical illustrations (whose formal idealization is an anomaly in her oeuvre, not a leitmotif).

This exhibition shared some common ground with the similarly named Ghent exhibition of 2018–2019, “De dames van de barok. Vrouwelijke schilders in het Italië van de 16de en 17de eeuw.” This is no coincidence given that the aforementioned co-curator of the Milan show, Alain Tapié, also co-curated the Ghent exhibition. Both exhibitions covered wide temporal, geographic, societal, and stylistic territories. The first was predicated more or less explicitly on the assumption that such a thing as “vrouwelijke schilderkunst” (feminine painting) existed in a concrete, almost biological sense.

The catalogue offers a counterweight to Tapié’s portrayal of women artists in the form of Gioia Mori’s scintillating introductory essay. Mori’s contribution vividly problematizes the notion of a shared feminine sensibility by illustrating the cultural divides among artists who were noblewomen and amateurs, those who took religious vows, and those who

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*Lucretia Quistelli, St Catherine’s Mystical Marriage, 1576, oil on canvas. Parish church of Santa Maria e San Pietro, Silvano Pietra, Pavia.*
were raised in artisanal families. Mori’s sensitivity to the contrasting values and opportunities that resulted in part from a woman’s social class or spiritual path is perhaps a sign of intersectional feminism, but it is surely also a result of her extensive and thoughtful engagement with the most recent historiography on women artists.

A useful contribution to the specific knowledge of women artists is represented by Annamaria Bava’s informative essay, “Giovanna Garzoni alla corte sabauda,” focused on the period of the artist’s career in which she consolidated her mastery of the miniature technique and widened her practice across several additional genres, including mythology and still life. The final essay, by Marco Gargano, Matteo Interlenghi, Tiziana Cavaleri, Christian Salvatore and Isabella Castiglioni, presents the results of technical examinations of Garzoni’s portrait miniatures of the Savoy dukes. One surprising finding was that her pigments included real gold. I would have liked to learn more about the challenge of painting with gold, and whether other artists at the Savoy court used this supremely precious pigment.

“Le Signore dell’Arte. Storie di donne tra ‘500 e ‘600” undertook the challenge of placing a widely divergent group of artists, from the masterful and famous Artemisia Gentileschi to the mediocre and obscure Maddalena Natali, into the same exhibition space. We were encouraged to appreciate their lives, although sometimes this got in the way of appreciating their artworks. Yet, without such broad parameters, it might not otherwise have been possible to convince lenders to contribute some of the important but rarely seen gems that made it into this show. The chance to see works by Quistelli, De’ Rossi, Pellegrini, and Del Bufalo was not the least of the wonderful payoffs for the major effort behind this impressive and landmark show.

The frequency of exhibitions of female Old Masters is clearly on the rise. For instance, another anthological exhibition (“By Her Hand: Artemisia Gentileschi and Women Artists in Italy, 1500–1800”) opened on September 30 at the Wadsworth Atheneum (see p. 11 in this issue) before traveling to the Detroit Institute of Arts (February 6 – May 9, 2022), while the Baltimore Art Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario will soon mount another such show. How should we build upon this foundation once the propaedeutics are behind us? These all-women shows, conceived in terms of what Lara Dodds and Michelle M. Dowd have called an 'adversarial framework,' have some clear advantages: they can not only open up the canon, but they can also break away from narrow, academic definitions of art. While this approach allows more women through the door, it would be problematic to display Gentileschi’s paintings next to, say, a reproductive engraving or a papier-mâché reliquary, if nothing more than the makers’ gender binds them together.

Yet, such juxtapositions can be enlightening in thematically focused shows in which more nuanced questions are addressed. A great example of the latter was Fausta Navarro’s 2017 exhibition, “Plautilla Nelli: Art and Devotion in Savonarola’s Footsteps,” which, through an almost anthropological lens, showed up the strangeness of pious
Judging by the text, the article is discussing the work of Italian women artists, particularly those associated with the Futurist movement. It highlights the importance of their work and the challenges they faced, particularly during times of political upheaval. The article references various exhibitions and books that have brought attention to these artists, such as Claudia Salaris’ book on the Futurist women artists and Marisa Mori’s work on the social realist artist Lea Vergine. The article also mentions the importance of feminine theory and the role of women in shaping cultural globalism.

The text is rich with quotes from various sources, including letters from Marisa Mori to Tullio d’Albisola and an essay by Claudia Salaris on the Futurist women artists. The article is well-researched and provides a deep analysis of the subject matter.

I have also included a reflection piece by Jennifer S. Griffiths, who writes about the importance of preparing for and presenting art exhibitions. The piece provides insights into the author’s life story and the challenges she faced in preparing for the exhibition.

Overall, the article is a comprehensive exploration of the role of women in Italian art, particularly during the Futurist movement. It provides a valuable contribution to the study of Italian women artists and their place in the cultural landscape of the early 20th century.
Rather lamentably, 2020 was slated to be a year for celebrating women in the arts across Italy. As part of a 2020-2021 series of events, exhibitions, and acquisitions, called Women Up, the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna in Rome acquired the Carla Lonzi Archive. With Io dico io (April 26, 2021 – June 6, 2021), curators Paola Ugolini, Lara Conte and Cecilia Canziani aimed to look across generations at forty-nine women artists of the later twentieth century, including Marisa Merz and Carol Rama, putting them in conversation with Lonzi’s Autoritratto (1969) and Rivolta Femminile (1970). When interviewed in 2018, Vergine also asserted that Futurist women frequently anticipated developments of 1970s feminism, but unfortunately Io dico io did not reach this far back to look at parallels between the two radical moments of 1909 and 1968.

In Milan, I talenti delle donne was a city-wide initiative focusing on women in the arts. The inaugural exhibition in this series was dedicated to Adriana Bisi Fabbri, one of Italy’s most talented avant-garde artists whose work crossed the lines of Liberty, Symbolism, and Futurism. L’intelligenza non ha sesso. Adriana Bisi Fabbri e la rete delle arti 1900-1918 opened at the Museo del Novecento on December 3, 2019 and closed far too quietly on March 8, 2020, buried beneath news of the unfolding global pandemic. It was exactly the kind of exhibition those of us researching Futurist women have been longing for: a show born of a heretofore untapped archival fount (the Fondo Bisi Crotti). Luckily, the curators produced an excellent catalogue bursting with informative texts that helps us to appreciate Bisi Fabbri’s wit, talent, and social capital for the first time, filled as it is with dozens of high-quality reproductions of illustrated letters, caricatures, political cartoons, posters, self-portraits, and paintings. It is not accidental that Claudia Salaris chose Bisi Fabbri’s face for the cover of her new book, thus celebrating a remarkably brilliant artist who died tragically young of tuberculosis in 1918.

Milan prolonged I talenti delle donne into 2021 and another highlight of the program is a retrospective on Tina Modotti: Donne, Messico e libertà (MUDEC, May 1 – November 7, 2021). Yet, even with this active public push for attention, creative women account for 16% of the 2021-2022 exhibition schedule in the city, that is twelve out of seventy-two. This disappointing realization is exactly in line with the findings of a 2019 study by Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin that surveyed twenty-six art museums and institutions in the United States and looked at the global art market over the past decade. In “Women’s Place in the Art World: Why Recent Advancements for Female Artists Are Largely an Illusion” they described how “even as museums signal publicly that they are embracing alternative histories,” the numbers tell a different story. Only 11% of all acquisitions and 14% of exhibitions at these museums were of work by female artists. Women artists constituted only 2% of worldwide auction sales (artist Adrian Piper wrote a riposte to Burns and Halperin’s article, calling for the press to realize its role in the lack of exposure afforded to women artists)

In her most recent book, Artemisia Gentileschi and Early Modern Feminism in Europe (2020), Mary Garrard writes that “feminist movements never last more than one generation, each advancing wave followed by an undertow of backlash.” Gentileschi and Bisi Fabbri rode the tail end of two such rising feminist tides. Bisi Fabbri died too young to see the backlash, but the peak years of Mori’s personal and professional life unfolded during the Ventennio, Mussolini’s twenty-year premiership, a time marked by increasing restrictions on women’s personal lives and professional opportunities. Nevertheless, it is heartening to remember that even during these years she could separate from her husband and leave her son in the care of her mother to devote herself to becoming a professional artist. Research shows that in the long term, Fascism’s attempts to stymie women’s professional advances failed. Even in times of backlash, the creative spirit is resilient.
REFLECTION PIECE

Lost to Time’s Embrace: an Artist’s Perspective on Italian Funerary Monuments from the 19th and 20th Centuries

By Carson Barnes

Historian Heather Cox Richardson writes that Elizabethan women of the early 1600s “worked, gave birth, reared children, created, loved, worshipped, and died without moving the levers of power.” While her words may apply to the women of Italy as well as other nations, my work as an artist attempts to trace the life and agency of Italian women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by reinterpreting their stone portraits in public and funerary monuments. These Italian artifacts also represent, for me, the source of great sculptural work worldwide, studied and admired by artists like Dolores (Lola) Mora, who worked in Milan with Giulio Monteverde and then returned to her native Argentina for a long and successful career as a sculptor.

Over the past seven years, I have located these works, photographed them, and produced finished prints showing who these mostly forgotten women were, who sculpted them, how their lives were like and unlike ours. Many stories are incomplete (the history of women, as well as of women artists, largely overlooked and sometimes actively suppressed), some sculptors unknown. Research, a modest library, and a great deal of luck, have given me an insight into their lives, how they laughed, raged, were inspired, loved – though occasionally lack of sources made any reconstruction of context impossible.

My training is as an artist rather than as an art historian, and while I always welcome the input of specialists, my work has been facilitated by a wealth of information available on the internet that would have formerly required months of correspondence and travel to consult physical records – though I still consulted libraries, census entries and death certificates. The life I reconstructed most successfully is that of Lucia Varrese, a pianist who died aged only sixteen of typhus, and is now buried in Rome’s Cimitero Monumentale del Verano. I was lucky enough to find a living descendant of a cousin who was able to verify her relationship to Lucia with a jpg file of a black and white photograph of her ancestor, likely the same studio portrait the sculptor used for his model. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find a signature on the marble portrait, and the family does not have any records of the commission. The portrait is vivacious, so much so that I wonder whether Leone Tommasi of Pietrasanta might have sculpted her in the two years he spent in Rome between 1920 and 1921, just the time of Lucia’s death, when as a young sculptor he might have been interested in any commissions available.

Many such funereal portraits are of course made using live models, not photographs of the deceased (especially so with the Liberty and Symbolist movements), and it has long been the case that sculptors mostly do not reveal, and perhaps do not even remember, the names of their models. When relatives, children or spouses are used as models, a little research often uncovers their identity: Leonardo Bistolfi used his wife Maria Gusberti as one of the figures for the plaster model of his monument to Senator Rosazza in Buenos Aires, as demonstrated by a comparison with a pen and ink portrait of the woman. The question of models can carry some controversy, like that surrounding the gender of the well-known and much imitated Oneto angel sculpted by Giulio Monteverde. However, a comparison with the face of the sculptor’s youngest daughter Corinna, whom he sculpted repeatedly throughout her childhood, confirms that the
model was indeed Corinna at about age seventeen. Interestingly, Corinna may have been a sculptor herself, as suggested by her lean yet muscular arms. The use of family members as models is interesting, as it was arguably during this period that this role developed as a profession in earnest, after being considered a disreputable activity for a long time.

Thus far, this work has been shown in four museums in the United States, numerous one-person and group exhibitions as well. Viewers often remark on how they are moved by these women and their stories. Many had not realized that, prior to the advent of antibiotics, people commonly died of bacterial diseases; that large numbers of women died in childbirth, of sepsis or simply bleeding out; that a misfortune could result in loss of autonomy in living situations; that, on the other hand, lives could be long, fulfilling, and filled with love despite the lack of now seemingly indispensable modern conveniences.

The main idea my work wants to carry through to viewers is that these women’s stories and lives were much like ours, yet they were braver than many of us might be in the face of the great challenges they were required to endure. Their emotions were arguably more intense than ours, and even though the conditions of their lives were remarkably different from ours, I think they are worth remembering.

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By Her Hand. Artemisia Gentileschi and Women Artists in Italy, 1500 – 1800
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford
September 30, 2021 – January 9, 2022

Centered around Artemisia Gentileschi, this exhibition showcases the accomplishments of a diverse group of women artists – from court painter Sofonisba Anguissola to pastel artist Rosalba Carriera – whilst also offering an opportunity to view Artemisia’s Self-Portrait as a Lute Player next to a related painting from the National Gallery in London. Sheila Barker mentions this show in her review of Le Signore dell’Arte, p. 5-7 in this issue.

MEDIEVAL BOLOGNA. ART FOR A UNIVERSITY CITY
Frist Art Museum, Nashville
November 5, 2021 – January 30, 2022

The first museum exhibition in the United States to focus on medieval Bologna, this show explores the development of the city as a center for learning and manuscript production. It features nearly seventy objects spanning from the mid-1200s to 1400, from the first great flowering of manuscript illumination in Bologna to the beginning of the construction and decoration of the Basilica di San Petronio. Although manuscripts are a highlight of the show, paintings and sculptures are also included.

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2021-2022 EXHIBITIONS

Titian. Women, Myth & Power
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston
August 12, 2021 – January 2, 2022

This exhibition reunites, for the first time in over four centuries, the Stewart Gardner’s Rape of Europa with its five companions, recreating the whole series of the six poesie that Titian painted for King Philip II of Spain. The only American venue of this exhibition, which, in slightly different iterations, was shown at the Museo del Prado in Madrid and the National Gallery in London (see our Spring Issue, 2020 for an interview with the curator), the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum also features newly commissioned responses by contemporary artists Mary Reid Kelly, Patrick Kelly and Barbara Kruger.

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Mario Sironi. Sintesi e grandiosità
Museo del Novecento, Milan
July 23, 2021 – March 27, 2022

Curated by art historian Elena Pontiggia and director Anna Maria Montaldo, the retrospective show features more than 100 works which illustrate Sironi’s different artistic moments: Symbolism, Futurism, Metaphysics and...
Expressionism. The urban and industrial landscapes, for which he became well known, are also displayed. The exhibition acts as a reconsideration of Sironi’s work, showing some rare and inedited material.

**Realismo Magico**
**Palazzo Reale, Milan**
October 19, 2021 – February 27, 2022

Featuring seventy pieces – including paintings, drawings and bas-reliefs – the show, curated by art historians Gabriella Belli and Valerio Terraroli, focuses on Magical Realism, the movement officially recognized by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 and legitimized in Italy in the 1970s by art critic and dealer Emilio Bertonati. Realismo Magico finds its protagonists in artists such as Felice Casorati, Giorgio de Chirico, Carlo Carrà, and Gino Severini, who mixed a realistic style with surrealist atmospheres.

**Maurizio Cattelan. Breath Ghosts Blind**
**Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan**
July 15, 2021 – February 20, 2022

Ten years after his last appearance, Maurizio Cattelan returns to Milan, where some of his most provocative artworks were conceived. The show’s curators – Roberta Tenconi and Vicente Todoli – design a monumental exhibition which, in three acts, recreates the disconcerting moments of life. “Breath” consists of Carrara marble sculptures depicting a man and a dog, both asleep. “Ghosts” takes further an artwork displayed at the 1997 Venice Biennale, where thousands of stuffed pigeons populated the space. Finally, “Blind”, a wooden and steel monolith pierced by an airplane, recalls the 9/11 tragedy.

**Mario De Biasi. Fotografie 1947 – 2003**
**Casa dei Tre Oci, Venice**
May 13, 2021 – January 9, 2022

Curated by Enrica Viganò, a photography critic, together with Archivio Mario De Biasi, the exhibition – which displays 256 artworks – is the largest ever dedicated to De Biasi. The show features the entirety of the photojournalist’s production, starting from his amateur debut, through his collaboration with Epoca magazine and up to his late works, devoted to “Mother Nature.” For the first time, De Biasi’s photographs – divided in ten macro sections, from historical events to abstract and conceptual shots – are presented next to his drawings.

**Tullio Pericoli. Frammenti**
**Palazzo Reale, Milan**
October 13, 2021 – January 9, 2022

The exhibition is conceived as a reflection on, as well as a tribute to, Tullio Pericoli, an artist who has experimented with various forms of expression, including illustration, painting and theatrical work (set and costume design). Curated by Tullio Pericoli himself together with art critic Michele Buonuomo, the exhibition features more than 150 works, including the artist’s late production, mainly focused on landscape. A whole room is dedicated to portraits, creating a sort of gallery of protagonists of our age, both from Italy and elsewhere.

**Gabriele Basilico. Territori intermedi**
**Museo Civico Castello Ursino, Catania**
September 18, 2021 – January 6, 2022

Produced by Fondazione OELLE Mediterraneo Antico and Archivio Gabriele Basilico, the exhibition – curated by Filippo Maggia – focuses on works which received little attention in the past. The 120 photographs on show – more than sixty
unedited – consist of studies and final works which have been discarded due to the patrons’ instruction. The shots, taken between the 1980s and the first decade of the 2000s, reflect Basilico’s exploration of urban space and architectural landscape.

**Palcoscenici archeologici. Interventi curatoriali di Francesco Vezzoli**
*Brixia. Parco Archeologico and Santa Giulia, Brescia*
June 11, 2021 – January 9, 2022

This site-specific project, installed by Filippo Bisagni, presents eight artworks by Francesco Vezzoli alongside objects from antiquity. They are scattered between Brixia Parco Archeologico di Brescia Romana – where the famous ancient sculpture “Vittoria Alata” (winged victory) was found and is today kept – and the Complesso Museale di Santa Giulia. The project was the winner of the Italian Council competition in 2019, an initiative intended to promote Italian contemporary art in the world. Vezzoli’s work was chosen because of its ability to connect archaeology and contemporary art.

**Pietro Consagra. La materia poteva non esserci**
*Collezione Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati, Lugano*
September 12, 2021 – January 9, 2022

The first exhibition dedicated to Pietro Consagra by a Swiss public institution (MASI), this show features sixty-four artworks dating from the 1950s to the early 1970s. Curated by art critic Alberto Salvadori in collaboration with Archivio Consagra, the exhibition highlights how the Sicilian artist’s production – spanning from painting to sculpture, from drawing to jewellery, from furniture to architecture – was never meant for its own sake, but always as a form of often critical participation in the society in which Consagra was living and working.

**Fattori. Capolavori e aperture sul ‘900**
*Galleria d’Arte Moderna (GAM), Turin*
October 14, 2021 – March 20, 2022

Devised by GAM curator Virginia Bertone and scholar Silvestra Bietoletti, the show is produced and promoted by GAM, Fondazione Torino Musei and 24 ORE Cultura. The sixty artworks on display include large size canvases, panels and a selection of etchings. Spread over nine sections and covering a time span from 1854 to 1894, the paintings reflect the different styles used by Giovanni Fattori during his career, from the experimentation of the Macchiaioli to his late works, treating subjects such as Risorgimento battlefields, rural landscapes and portraits of Tuscan people.

**Divisionismo. 2 Collezioni**
*Galleria d’Arte Moderna (GAM), Milan*
November 19, 2021 – March 6, 2022

The show, curated by art historian Giovanna Ginex, displays thirty artworks by some of the most important Italian artists who shared the Divisionist experience: from Giacomo Balla to Umberto Boccioni, from Giovanni Segantini to Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo. Their work is characterized by a vivid chromatism and by a dynamism which later inspired the Futurism movement. Many of the paintings – some of which belong to GAM and some others to Pinacoteca Cassa Risparmio Tortona – feature the city of Milan, which bore witness to the birth of Divisionism at the first Triennale di Brera in 1891.

**Canova tra innocenza e peccato**
*MART, Rovereto (Trento)*
December 18, 2021 – April 18, 2022

Held on the occasion of the second centenary of Antonio Canova’s death, the exhibition illustrates the influence of the artist’s work on contemporary art, especially on sculpture and photography. Produced by MART curators Beatrice Avanzi and Denis Isaia – in collaboration with Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, based in Possagno – the project, with its 150 artworks on show, focuses on the similarities, as well as on the contradictions, between Canova’s sculpture and the work of twenty and twenty-first-century artists such as the sculptor Constantin Brancusi, and photographers Helmut Newton, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Mimmo Jodice.
Sargent, Whistler, and Venetian Glass: American Artists and the Magic of Murano  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.  
October 8, 2021 – May 8, 2022

This exhibition brings to life the Venetian glass revival of the late nineteenth century and the artistic experimentation the city inspired for visiting artists. It is the first comprehensive examination of American tourism, artmaking and art collecting in Venice, revealing the glass furnaces and their new creative boom as a vibrant facet of the city's allure. After closing in Washington, D.C., this exhibition will travel to the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas.

Tina Modotti: Donne, Messico e libertà  
MUDEC, Milan  
May 5, 2021 – November 7, 2021

Part of the Milanese initiative I talenti delle donne (cf. Jennifer Griffiths’s reflection piece above), this exhibition explores the work and life of unconventional Italian artist, activist and actress Tina Modotti. In spite of her brief life, Modotti inspired a generation with her political engagement and her art, becoming an icon in Mexico and inspiring admiration in figures like Pablo Picasso, Rafael Alberti and Pablo Neruda, who wrote a poem for her.

NEWS & NOTES

Syracuse University  
College of Arts & Sciences

Syracuse University offers the oldest MA Art History Program accredited in the United States where two out of three semesters are spent in Italy, with a primary base in Florence. Now is a good time to start thinking about applying. Various levels of financial support are available, and the deadline is 15 January. Further information is available here.

In England, a call to restore a nineteenth-century copy of Leonardo’s Last Supper in a small parish church in Hertfordshire led restorer Ronald Moore’s attention to another Last Supper that has been hypothesized to be an original by Titian or his workshop. The most telling evidence for attributing the work to Titian, is that Moore and associate Patricia Kenny found the word “TITIANVS” after removing varnish and examining the work via ultraviolet light. Moore’s work appears in Titian’s Lost Last Supper: A New Workshop Discovery published in August 2021 by the Unicorn Publishing Group.

In New Rochelle, New York, while visiting the Church of the Holy Family, art historian Tom Ruggio of Iona College chanced to observe an otherwise obscure painting of the Holy Family with the Infant St. John. Having gone unnoticed since its erstwhile appearance in the space in the early-1960s, Ruggio and collaborators have firmly attributed the artwork to the Florentine Baroque painter Cesare Dandini (ca. 1595–1657). How the Church of the Holy Family came to acquire this masterpiece remains unknown but the public will have the opportunity to see it displayed in full splendor as part of a special exhibition entitled “Cesare Dandini’s Holy Family with the Infant St. John: A Rediscovered Florentine Baroque Masterpiece,” curated by Ruggio in Iona College’s Ryan Library until December 17, 2021.
The drama of the Salvator Mundi has unsurprisingly continued with the very recent release of a documentary by Andreas Koefoed entitled The Lost Leonardo. Reviews of the film by David Trigg and Jonathan Jones succinctly summarize the timeline of events, the major players involved, and the implications for casual viewers and those professionally invested in the byzantine process through which the painting came to light, was auctioned as the most expensive painting in history, and then disappeared entirely.

For those familiar with or interested in Catherine Fletcher’s The Black Prince of Florence, Italo-African writer/actor/auteur Daphne Di Cinto has directed her debut film entitled Il Moro about Alessandro de’ Medici (1510–1537). Il Moro is currently circulating within film festivals as a 20-minute short and a trailer can be viewed on YouTube.

The restoration of Michelangelo’s Pietà Bandini has now been completed. Funded by the US non-profit organization Friends of Florence, the restoration began in 2019 but was halted numerous times because of the pandemic. The work highlighted that all of the statue’s four figures were carved from a single marble block from the Seravezza quarries, and not from Carrara, as previously believed. These investigations also confirmed that the marble was defective and therefore hard to work, which may explain why Michelangelo left the statue unfinished.

Italian Art Society Membership and Donations

Please join or renew your IAS membership today. Members are encouraged to pay on-line through our user-friendly website. If you wish to send a check, contact our Treasurer Antje Gamble. While the IAS will continue to offer student membership at $20.00 and regular membership at $35.00, there are now several levels of membership for both individuals and institutions or businesses. In addition to our new Sospeso membership, detailed here on p. 3, our Patron and Donor memberships, at $100.00 and $250.00 respectively, allow generous members to support programming, awards, scholarship, and additional endeavors. We have also added three further levels of institutional membership for especially generous benefactors, and two kinds of institutional memberships. Institutional members include programs, organizations, or universities that want to promote the study of Italian art and architecture through support of the IAS. Thank you for your continued membership. Please encourage students, colleagues and organizations to join.

As a non-profit organization, the IAS seeks donations from individuals and organizations wishing to promote the study of the visual arts and architecture of Italy, from prehistory to the present. Funds will help support the IAS’s annual operations, including travel grants for graduate students and emerging scholars who are presenting their work at conferences in the USA and abroad, as well as research and publication grants. The IAS seeks general operating contributions, and is also happy to work with donors to direct contributions toward specific purposes, including travel grant support and the establishment of research or publication funds. If you have questions, please e-mail our Treasurer Antje Gamble.

Newsletter Contributions and Notices

IAS members are warmly encouraged to write for upcoming issues of the IAS Newsletter. For the Winter issue, we are looking for reviews of shows listed in the exhibition section, news of recent conservation campaigns in Italy, and articles on research topics or new methodologies. If you are interested in writing a feature (approximately 800-1200 words), please contact the editor at any time, or by January 7 for the next issue. Deadlines for IAS newsletters are: Fall Newsletter: news deadline September 7/publication date October 7; Winter Newsletter: news deadline January 7/publication date February 7; Spring Newsletter: news deadline May 7/publication date June 7.

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