

RIVISTA



2024

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35 BIS Prize Winners 2024

The British-Italian Society and the Society for Italian Studies announce with pleasure the winners of the biennial BIS Prizes.

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The British-Italian Society enjoyed another full and varied programme in 2024, with twelve events culminating in a memorable and well-attended Leconfield Lecture in November and our Christmas dinner in December. I should like to thank everyone involved in arranging, organising and running all parts of our programme, and above all Rhuna Barduagni, our fantastic Events and Communications Officer.

We began with a joint event in February with the Venice in Peril Fund, Claire Judde de Larivière talking on *Pioneering Environmentalists? Pollution and Society in Late Medieval Venice*, a thought-provoking look at past concerns that resonated with contemporary ones. In March, our Honorary Director Susan Kikoler gave an entertaining and informative virtual tour through her *La Mia Siracusa*. In April, Professor Roberto Maiolino gave a wonderfully illustrated lecture on discoveries in space *From Galileo to Modern Astronomy*. In May, Lara Veroner introduced us to the pioneering female artist Fede Galizia: *a Still-Life Pioneer in Counter-Reformation Milan*.

May also gave us a chance to meet many of our members along with our friends from the Club di Londra at a summer drinks reception generously hosted by our President Olga Polizzi. We were privileged to welcome as Guest of Honour Professor Michael Mainelli, 695th Lord Mayor of the City of London. In June, a rare privilege, a behind-the-scenes guided tour of the Gucci store in London and its modern art collection. July saw our annual lecture in memory of Charles de Chassiron, the Society's much-missed Chairman of many years, given by Dr Andrea Mattiello on *Women in the Arts of Byzantium* – a fascinating account of an under-told aspect of Byzantine history and art.

In September, we enjoyed an evening of music and readings on the theme of *The Madrigal Reimagined*, a launch event for the Monteverdi String Band's new CD. In October, our Trustee Caroline Moorehead spoke in conversation with me about *A Man of Honour: Leonardo Sciascia and his battles against the mafia*. I thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity to have a talk in a new 'chat-show' format. November's Leconfield

Lecture at the Italian Cultural Institute was by Professor Stephen Gundle: *Two Faces of the Post-War Italian Film Industry: Dino de Laurentiis and Suso Cecchi d'Amico*, an insight into the career and works of two of Italian cinema's leading figures.

We are grateful to all our speakers for giving us such a varied, interesting and professional series of lectures.

The Society made grants during the year to support worthy artistic and other projects in line with its aims: £1,500 to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford's successful campaign to save a precious *Fra Angelico Crucifixion* painting for the public, as well as:

- £450 for recording the Italian audiobook of a dual language storybook for children, *Un Bambino di Nome Porro*.
- £800 towards the performance costs of a new opera *Aqua Tofana*, at the Cockpit Theatre in London.
- £500 to the *Festival della Musica Italiana a Londra's* celebration of Puccini's centenary with a concert focused on developing young performers and audiences.
- £500 to pianist Margherita Torretta's project on *Elisabetta de Gambarini*, 18th century Italian-English composer, harpsichordist and singer.
- £500 to Peggy Nolan to support new recordings of string quartets by *Luigi Boccherini* at the Royal Northern College of Music.

This year we welcomed two new Trustees, Roberta Faccio and Carla Passino (our new Programme Director). In the autumn we said farewell to our long-serving Trustees: Vice Chairs Sidney Ross and Eugenio Bosco, and Trustee Tina Villarosa. All have made an outstanding contribution to the Society over many years. Sidney and Eugenio have become Honorary Directors following their terms as Vice Chair.

We are grateful to our Patron, His Excellency Ambassador Inigo Lambertini, for the generous support that he and his team have given us this year. We also warmly thank Dr Francesco Bongarrà, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, and his staff for their valued collaboration.

Finally, I should like to thank Philippa Leslie for producing another great edition of this magazine. I hope that you enjoy it!



Celebrating 100 years of opera at the Arena di Verona

Deputy Artistic Director, Stefano Trespidi with Rivista Editor Philippa Leslie

The Arena di Verona's outstanding acoustics have inspired efforts over the centuries to stage spectacles in the splendid auditorium. But it was not until the early twentieth century that the initiative of tenor Giovanni Zenatello and theatre impresario Ottone Rovato, who also admired its wonderful acoustics, led to the staging of operatic performances in the magnificent pink and white stone Roman amphitheatre. The first opera performed there was *Aida*, on 10 August 1913, honouring the composer Giuseppe Verdi on the 100th anniversary of his birth. He had been commissioned to write it by the Egyptian Khedive, Ismail Pasha, and it was premiered on 24 December 1871 to

celebrate the opening of the Opera House in Cairo. A resounding success at Verona, it has been offered almost every year since, with the exception of the world wars (1915-18 and 1940-45).

Since that first performance the Arena has hosted a range celebrated artists, from Tito Gobbi to Maria Callas, Luciano Pavarotti to Jonas Kaufmann, and a range of productions. In 2013, the Fondazione staged a revival of the 1913 production. Throughout 2023 the Arena di Verona Opera Festival celebrated its 100th anniversary and during its annual summer Festival staged 50 splendid performances, opening the Festival with the now traditional offering of *Aida*.

But for the occasion in 2023, the Arena moved away from the Zeffirelli-influenced interpretation, staging a new production with Stefano Poda and incorporating modern elements in the Egyptian setting, with spectacular costumes and featuring the acclaimed soprano Anna Netrebko.

Some *Aida* productions have featured special innovations – in 1953 a water pool was created for *Aida* by silent cinema director Georg Wilhelm Pabst. He wanted to create an image of the Nile on which small Egyptian boats could sail, and the idea was adapted again by Pier Luigi Pizzi in the 1999 production. It was Pabst, too, who introduced a great number of animals on stage, including elephants,



Opposite page: Bizet's *Carmen*; this page top left: crowds jostle into the Arena in 1913; top right: Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*; above: the Arena illuminated; right: Verdi's *Aida*; below right: the packed arena at twilight.

horses and camels – a spectacle which has become a prominent feature of many *Aida* productions since.

Stefano Trespidi, Deputy Artistic Director since 2019, and Veronese by birth, spoke to the Society about the world famous amphitheatre and his own involvement with the Festival. Trespidi grew up more or less around the corner from the Arena, took his Masters diploma in theatrical production at La Scala in Milan, and has worked with many directorial productions teams since, including collaborations with, among others, Franco Zeffirelli, whom he first met in 1995, and with whom he worked on *Il Trovatore* in 2001, *Carmen* in 2003, *Butterfly* in 2004 and *Turandot* in 2010.

His long collaboration with Franco Zeffirelli led to restaging his iconic productions worldwide, for example, his '*Carmen*' production in 2003. Trespidi's work has extended to prominent theatres

worldwide, as well as contributing to the opening event of the 2nd National Ecclesial Conference at the Arena di Verona in 2007. His dedication to the Fondazione Arena di Verona has culminated in his being appointed to the role of Deputy Artistic Director of the Fondazione in 2019.

The impact of the Arena di Verona and the charm of the candle ceremony

Stefano Trespidi concluded his talk with a short description of the stunning Arena di Verona in Piazza Bra, now the centre of his beloved city, noting that when it was constructed in 30 AD, it was in an area which was then outside the city walls. It can today accommodate up to 22,000 spectators. The summer opera seasons have been staged every year since 1913 and he mentioned that many other musical events take place there too. Among the enchanting traditions is the audience lighting of candles right around



the auditorium as the twilight fades into the navy blue summer night before the overture to each performance.

Opera aficionado and BIS member Michael Nathanson concurs:

*I recall the very special atmosphere there on a late warm summer evening with a gentle breeze, a full Arena and the audience all holding candles. It was on such an evening that I was lucky enough many years ago to be in the audience watching a magnificent production of *Nabucco*!*



Pioneering environmentalists?

An exploration into pollution and politics in late medieval Venice

Claire Judde de Larivière

Jane E. Everson reports on an interesting exploration

One of the enduring myths among British tourists where Venice is concerned is the smell from the canals. But as Claire Judde de Larivière emphasised in the course of her stimulating exploration of late medieval Venice, the Venetians themselves were, from early on in the life of the city, preoccupied with the miasma and the resulting 'mal aria'. Hence they were driven to seek solutions to the pollution of the lagoon and the canals, and so can be considered early environmental pioneers, developing a series of often stringent regulations for waste management and the care of the waterways which were the lifeblood of the city.

Professor Judde de Larivière began by illustrating the geography of the lagoon which is fundamental for understanding the problems which the Venetians of previous centuries faced, and which have not disappeared even today. The lagoon, which covers some 550 square kilometres (about the size of the Isle of Man, as she helpfully underlined) is composed of a brackish mix of salt water from the Adriatic, flowing in and out on the tides each day, and fresh water pouring in from the rivers which empty into the lagoon, especially the Brenta. These rivers, which rise originally in the Alps, bring with them

regular amounts of debris and human waste, as well as alluvial mud. Thus the lagoon itself is constantly battling with waste.

Environmental thinking in late medieval Venice

Professor Judde then outlined the origins of the city and how it was built on marshy islets or 'barene', with the buildings then constructed on foundations of wooden piles driven deep into the mud and constantly in the water. It was essential to protect the margins of the 'barene' on which buildings were raised, and for this

purpose waste products could be useful, both small – fragments of pottery for example – and large, even a whole galley! By the late middle ages, in a habitable area of just eight square kilometres, Venice was a densely populated city. Between the aftermath of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, the population doubled, from 60,000 to 120,000. This meant a concomitant increase in both consumers and producers, both producing various types of waste resulting from a variety of trades – construction, manufacture, food production and marketing – and made for an increasing fragile ecological balance. It was here that politics had to come into play. In addition to the Senate and Council, the major political bodies, there were dedicated ministries or magistracies dealing with issues relating to water (canal regulations, wells, etc.) and to health. The archives of these bodies contain a wealth of rich and fascinating detail on the development of environmental thinking in late medieval Venice.

Waterways – the life blood of the city

On the question of water, the feared ‘acqua alta’ was already a problem in this period, but was mainly restricted to the autumn and spring – the period of the equinoxes – and when the scirocco, blowing up from the south, drove water in from the Adriatic through the ‘bocche di porto’ along the long stretches of lidi. A particularly memorable ‘acqua alta’ was recorded by Marin Sanudo in his diary for October 1521. Nevertheless, the Venetians of the later middle ages were more preoccupied with the opposite problem, termed ‘acqua secca’, when the canals dried up, exposing seaweed, rubbish, mud and debris, producing the typical stench or miasma, and causing the wooden foundations of the built city to dry out dangerously.

The silting up of the canals and waterways was a major problem which the authorities fought repeatedly to control through laws and regulations. To silt from alluvial deposits was added rubble and waste from building sites with the city undergoing a building boom in the fifteenth century to address the

increased population. To this debris was added wood waste from ship building, with the associated chemical products, as well as domestic waste which was also often dumped in canals. Even some of the water-based trades curiously contributed to the problems of keeping the canals flowing freely. Some of the techniques used by fishermen, in particular the growth of large reed beds to supply baskets and other useful fishing tackle, could impede the flow, as did the creation of pontoons in canals, to trap fish and enhance the catch; to say nothing of boats either just left to sink or deliberately wrecked. Yet since all this evidence comes from contemporary documents, it is clear that already in the fifteenth century, the Venetian authorities were well aware of the importance for good health of good water management.

Reuse and recycling

In defence of the Venetians it should be said that what would now be called the rate of recycling was markedly high. Resources of many kinds in Venice itself were scarce and expensive if brought in from outside. Thus the goods of the rich filtered downwards through a constant process of reuse and recycling to the poorer classes, and even animal waste served as manure in the cultivated areas of the ‘barene’. Nevertheless the authorities recognised that in order to prevent excessive dumping in the canals, arrangements needed to be made to provide an alternative. Officials were appointed to regulate the collection of waste and prevent dumping in canals; and ‘casse’ or ‘cassoni’ (nowadays ‘bidoni’) were placed around the city. This then posed the problem of what to do with the waste collected in the ‘casse’ – for which the solution was similar to landfill ideas today. Waste was transported to unbuilt-up areas of the city and even to monastery gardens, and deposited there. One of these landfill dumps – that of San Andrea de Zirada is the modern Piazzale Roma: there’s a thought for when you next step off the bus!

Waste water – domestic and commercial – discharged into canals through drain holes at the base of buildings (‘gatoli’) was clearly understood to be a health hazard. Certain trades were identified as particularly problematic in this respect – notably butchers with the associated slaughter houses, and dyers and soap manufacturers who used a variety of



Opposite page: *Embarkation of the Doge of Venice* by Leandro da Ponte Bassano; above: “Doctor Schnabel”, engraving by Paul Fürst (1656). Plague doctors wore masks with a curved beak filled with aromatic herbs and spices to protect from bad smells and disease.

chemical products which they discharged into the canals with waste water. Consequently in the course of the period both butchers and dyers were moved out from the centre of the city to the northern outskirts of Cannaregio.

But as with modern regulations on waste, good intentions could only go so far. Commercial concerns could be more easily policed than individual households. And the authorities themselves sometimes produced contradictory rules. Regulations concerning the disposal of fish and flour which had gone bad and which constituted a well understood threat to health were to be thrown into the canals!

Protecting the lagoon

There was thus no shortage of measures promulgated to protect the lagoon and to manage the production and disposal of waste in medieval and early modern Venice. And if these measures do not quite correlate with modern environmental planning, nevertheless they indicate an awareness of the fragility of the lagoon environment and the need to preserve it as both an economic resource and a viable and healthy living space. It is in this sense that it is appropriate to consider Venice in the early modern period as a pioneer of environmentalism.



La Mia Siracusa

a talk by Susan Kikoler

Richard Northern, Trustee and former Chair, on an affectionate portrait

In March, Susan Kikoler, Honorary Director of the Society, gave us an affectionate portrait of the Sicilian city of Siracusa. In a wide-ranging talk, Susan managed to cover the history of this ancient city since its foundation by Greek colonists in 734 BC together with a description of its most important attractions and cultural sites, while conveying a real sense of how life is lived in the city today and what makes it special for her. Typically, Susan also entertained us with a series of amusing and perceptive anecdotes, which brought the city and its people to life.

Susan explained that her relationship with Siracusa had begun in the 1970s, when, after leaving university, she had spent four years teaching English there. The students she had taught, from all walks of life, had welcomed her into their families then. Many of them remain close friends more than 50 years later.

From a 5th Century BC powerful city state to modern importance after Unification

Siracusa had developed into a powerful city state by the 5th Century BC. In 413 BC, it defeated a powerful Athenian fleet sent to besiege and capture it, a turning point in the Peloponnesian War. Dionysius, the Tyrant of Siracusa, later proved impervious to advice on governance from Plato, who visited the city no less than three times. This led the frustrated philosopher to comment that Syracusans were not interested in anything except three good meals a day! Archimedes' ingenious schemes managed to defend Siracusa against the Romans for a while, but the city eventually succumbed in 212 BC, and became an important Roman province. After periods of Arab, Norman, Byzantine and Spanish occupation, the city was decimated by a cholera epidemic in 1837.

It regained its regional importance after Unification.

Syracusans are sometimes known locally for their lack of sophistication and initiative and for their cultural snobbery. A popular saying has it that a Syracusan will sit under a fig tree and wait for a fig to fall into their lap rather than pick one from the tree!

Susan gave a well-illustrated tour of the classical sites in the city's Parco Archeologico. The Greek Theatre, dating from the 5th Century, stages classical plays in Italian every two years, and occasionally opera, but is now becoming fragile. Concerts are held instead nearby at a temporary theatre around the Altar of Hieron, a former temple of Zeus. The former Roman theatre served for a while as an open-air cinema. Other sites on Susan's tour included the Archaeological Museum, with its wonderful collection of Greek coins, and the fountain of Arethusa,



Opposite page: Night view of the fountain of Arethusa in Ortigia; top left: Siracusa Temple Fountain; top right: Cathedral of Syracuse; left: late c19th engraving of *The Death of Archimedes*; above: Cordari Cave in Neapolis Archaeological Park

a symbol of the city. Siracusa also has a long tradition of paper-making from local papyrus and of the manufacture of local jewellery.

Susan recommended a visit to one of Siracusa's many catacombs. The Catacomb of San Giovanni hosts magical evenings in August with candlelit tours narrated by actors and accompanied by flute players. St Paul is believed to have preached to Jewish inhabitants in the catacombs on a visit in 61AD. By the 15th Century, Siracusa had a vibrant Jewish population of 30,000; but the city's Spanish rulers expelled them in 1493 against the wishes of the local Catholic population. Restoration of an old house in Ortigia has recently revealed a Jewish Mikvah dating from the 6th or 7th Centuries.

Ortigia, the historic centre of Siracusa, is now principally a tourist destination, and many former inhabitants have moved to

the suburbs. The heart of Ortigia is Piazza Duomo, a grand square. The Duomo itself is built on a temple to Athena, and incorporates Greek columns in its façade. A whole Greek city lies beneath modern Ortigia. The statue of Santa Lucia, who was from Siracusa and is its patron saint, is an object of great devotion in the cathedral, and is credited with a miracle during a 16th Century plague. The Basilica of Santa Lucia on the mainland contains a Caravaggio painting.

Susan then recounted the little-known stories of a number of remarkable Siracusans of the modern era including the Beneventano del Bosco family, and their historic residence, the Marchese di San Giuliano and the Marchesa di Cassibile, on whose land the Italian surrender was signed in 1943. In most cases, Susan had heard these stories from direct descendants of the great men and women.

Vivid colours, fresh scents, orange blossom, sea shells and roasting peppers

For Susan, Siracusa means: vivid colours, fresh scents, orange blossom, sea shells and roasting peppers, but above all a warm, open-hearted population. Everyone in Siracusa seems ready to share their life story with you. Chance encounters on local bus journeys had produced charming stories of larger than life characters. Susan summed up her relationship with Siracusa in a personal anecdote from the 1970s.

The father of one of her pupils happened to be the Director of the Port. When a ship from the US 6th Fleet paid a visit to the city, he asked Susan to act as interpreter. The US officers were delighted to meet her. "Oh, you are Miss Susan". Clearly no visit to Siracusa at the time was complete without an introduction to the city's famous English teacher!



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All images © NASA/Top: Lagoon Nebula (Hubble); bottom left: Crab Nebula (JWST); bottom right: Carina Nebula (JWST)

From Galileo to modern astronomy

– From the origin of galaxies to life on other planets

A talk by Professor Roberto Maiolino

Peter Jones marvels at these discoveries

In April, Roberto Maiolino, Professor of Experimental Astrophysics at the University of Cambridge and Honorary Professor at University College London, gave us an – in every sense – stellar talk on astronomy from Galileo to the present day.

Professor Maiolino guided us expertly from Galileo Galilei's ground-breaking discoveries in the 16th century, via the latest technological developments, including spectacular images produced by the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), to plans for new telescopes in the near future. Professor Maiolino illustrated his talk with beautiful, at times simply breath-taking, images from the JWST and other telescopes.

In the time of Galileo (1564 – 1647), Professor Maiolino pointed out that with no modern light pollution, a clear view of the night sky was a common experience.

Prior to Galileo, the orthodox view was the Ptolemaic model, which placed the earth at the centre of the universe. But this model struggled to account for the motion of the planets, and alternative hypotheses and mathematical models were in

Galileo's discoveries triggered a revolution in scientific method

circulation too even before Galileo's time: as far back as the third century BC, Aristarchos of Samos posited that the universe was much larger than generally thought and that the earth moved around the sun, not the other way round.

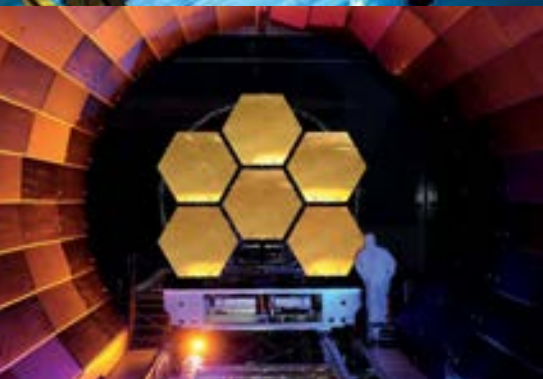
In the decades before Galileo, Nicolaus

Copernicus revived and developed Aristarchos's thinking. And such alternative ideas were not necessarily considered problematic – rather, a testing of hypotheses. Indeed, in 1533 Pope Clement VII requested the publication of such alternative views. Copernicus's thinking was in turn developed by others, including by the English astronomer Thomas Digges and by German Johannes Kepler.

Galileo's telescopic observations however transformed such alternative hypotheses from interesting theories into reality.

Above: Inspection of a gold coated primary mirror segment of the James Webb Space Telescope [photo by Drew Noel/NASA]; opposite page: The Lagoon Nebula, taken by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope in 2018





Galileo in fact made several telescopes, with varying degrees of magnification. Through them, he was able to observe fainter objects and understand that the Milky Way was composed of hundreds of stars. Closer to earth, he observed the detail of the moon's surface, Jupiter's four largest moons and their motion, and the different phases of Venus.

This last was a remarkable discovery, showing that Venus orbited the sun, and that therefore the Ptolemaic model of an earth-centred solar system was wrong, and Copernicus's sun-centred model correct. However, even Galileo's observations, pushing new technology to its maximum, had limits. Unable to get a sharp enough image of Saturn's rings, Galileo thought that he was observing a triple planet.

Galileo's discoveries triggered a revolution in scientific method, not just in astronomy. For this reason, Galileo has been called the father of modern science as well as of modern observational astronomy. Further discoveries and understanding, including Isaac Newton's theory of Universal Gravitation, built on the foundations that Galileo created. So too did the evolution of observational astronomy, through Newton's first reflective telescope in 1668, to modern earth-based telescopes such as the Very Large Telescope in Chile in 1998. However, ground observation has limits because of the earth's atmospheric absorption and turbulence.

The astonishing JWST, the ultimate time machine

Hence the decision to put telescopes into space, first the Hubble Space Telescope in 1990, then the JWST (James Webb Space Telescope) in 2021. Professor Maiolino took us through the astonishing scientific and engineering story of the JWST's design, development and operation. The telescope is so large that it had to be folded on top of its Ariane 5 launch rocket and unfolded in space in a process of space origami.

The JWST is optimised to observe in the near-infrared spectrum. Its 6.5m diameter mirror compared to Hubble's 2.4m enables it to collect more light, enabling it to view objects too distant or faint for Hubble, and to see through space dust clouds. Such a leap in observational sensitivity, equivalent to the upgrade from Galileo's telescopes to modern ones, has happened rarely in the history of science.

Professor Maiolino shared some sensational images of planets and moons as seen by the JWST, including a plume of water ejected into space from Saturn's moon Enceladus, whose sub-surface oceans could conceivably provide an environment for life.

Beyond the solar system, it was now possible to infer the existence of 'exoplanets' (planets around other stars) by detecting signs of their transits across their stars' faces, and even to deduce such exoplanets' atmospheric composition. Professor Maiolino noted the recent discovery of an exoplanet two and a half times the size of earth whose chemical signature suggested that it could be an ocean planet, with the potential to have

Top left: JWST sunshield membrane at Mantech, Hunstville, ready for precise measurement of its three dimensional shape; Opposite page: Pioneer Astronomers: Top row: Galilei's first drawings of the moon after seeing it through his telescope in 1609; *Self-Portrait in a Circle of Friends from Mantua* by Rubens c.1602. Galilei is the third man on the left and the *Aurora Borealis* is in the distance; Middle row: Kepler's model of the Solar System from *Mysterium Cosmographicum*; portrait of Kepler c.1910 by August Köhler, after a 1627 original; Bottom row: "Toruń" portrait of Nicolas Copernicus c.1580 (unknown artist); Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, published in 1543.

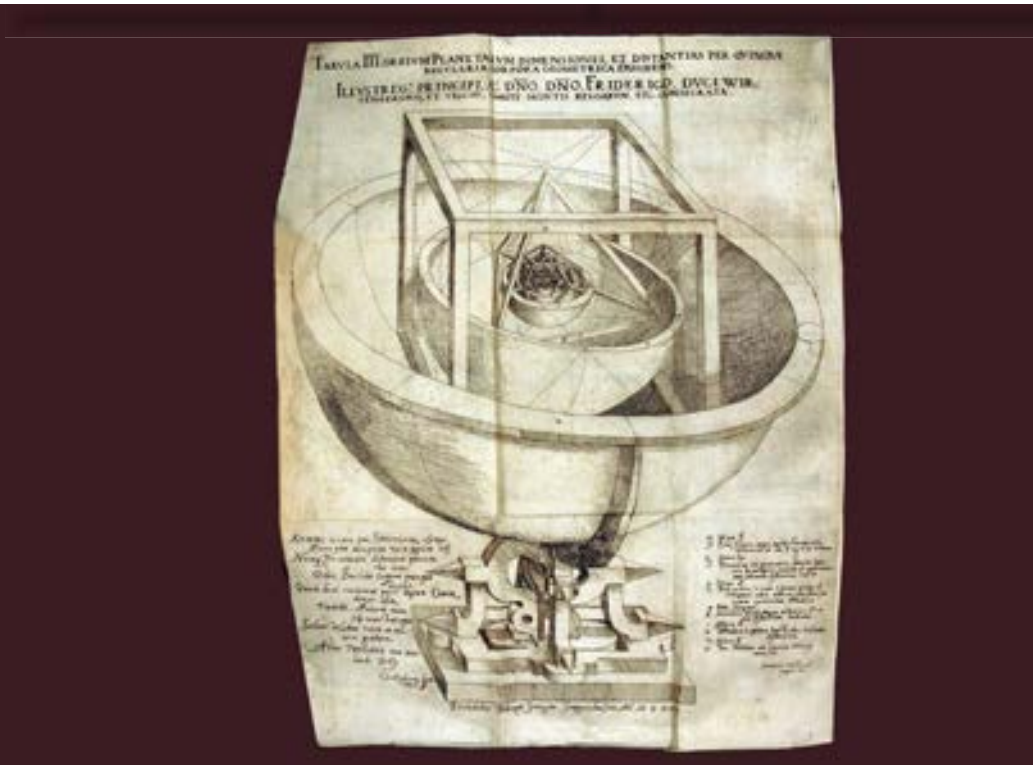
developed some forms of life. It would be exciting to be able to view smaller, rocky earth-like exoplanets in the habitable zones around stars.

Data and observations from the JWST made it possible to look deeper into space, and therefore, given the time taken for light to reach earth, further back in time. In a sense, JWST acted as the ultimate time machine, allowing us to see galaxies in their earliest periods of formation, and discovering evidence of the existence of heavy chemical within the first 500 million years of the universe, much earlier than previously thought, which must have been produced by stars. It was also possible to study the origin and nature of black holes, including through observations from the Event Horizon Telescope, which had produced the first image of the shade of a black hole at the centre of a galaxy.

Constructing the largest telescope in the world

Despite the success of the JWST and the Hubble Space Telescope, however, there remained a role for earth-based observation. The Extremely Large Telescope (Professor Maiolino acknowledged that scientists were not very imaginative when it came to naming their incredible devices!), in size comparable to the Colosseum, was being constructed now in Chile. This, the largest in the world, should be operational from 2027.

The desire to see and understand further and better was as strong now as in Galileo's time. Professor Maiolino's talk left us in awe and wonder at it all, but also in no doubt about the debt owed to Galileo Galilei.





Fede Galizia:

a still life pioneer in Counter Reformation Milan

A talk by Lara Veroner given at the Medical Society, London on 15 May 2024

An appreciation by Diana Darlington

Fede Galizia (1578-1630) was born in Milan, the daughter of a miniaturist, Nunzio Galizia. She painted both portraits and religious subjects but is now best known as one of the earliest painters of Still Life. Fede had little formal education, did not marry or have children, nor did she travel, unlike other female artists of the period, such as Sofanisba Anguissola who worked in Spain at the Royal Court. Fede earned her living as an artist during the period of the Counter Reformation in the Catholic Church.

Lara concentrated her talk on Fede's Still Life painting but also considered her work as a portrait painter and painter of religious subjects. Perhaps her best known portrait is that of Paolo Morigia, superior general of the Jesuits. This portrait, much praised by the sitter himself, has been dated to c.1592-95. The inscription on the

portrait is believed to have been added at a later date, probably post 1668, after it entered the collection of the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

Fede's religious subjects, not a common genre for female artists of the time, included an *Adoration of the Magi* commissioned for a church in Naples and a version of *Nole Me Tangere* which is now in the Brera, Milan.

Still Life painting – a new genre

The idea of painting Still Life was quite new at the time, with Caravaggio being an early exponent of the genre. Fede was influenced by his *Basket of Fruit*, now in the Ambrosiana and one of the earliest of such works. Like this work of Caravaggio's, Fede executed her Still Life works in a restrained style, usually with simple arrangements of fruit in a bowl.

Cardinal Federico Borromeo (1564-1631) was a leading figure of the Counter Reformation and a great patron of artists. He founded the Biblioteca and the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana to which he left his extensive art collection. Borromeo was a patron of Jan Brueghel the Elder, another early exponent of Still Life but in a very different style to that of Fede Galizia. Brueghel's *Vase of Flowers with Jewel, Coins and Shells* in the Ambrosiana is the earliest documented painting of its type. It is an explosion of colour, consisting of about a hundred different types of flowers, some of which are very rare. (Borromeo said this of the work "Brueghel painted a diamond on the lower part of the vase... to show that the value of his work was equal to that of the jewel and this is the price that we paid to the artist.") Although some twenty-nine per cent of the Cardinal's

FIDES GALICIA VIRGO PVNDCIA ATAT IVE ANSVIII OPVE HOC.
 DIVLI MORRIGI SIMVLACRVM ANN 7E GRATI ANIMI ERGO EFFVXIT
 ANNO 1396



Opposite page: *Cherries in a silver compote with crabapples on a stone ledge*; this page top left: *Portrait of Paolo Morigio (1596) with detail (below)*; right: *Judith with the head of Holofernes (1596)*

donation to the Ambrosiana consisted of landscape and Still Life painting, the latter were never referred to as such at the time. The genre was so new that no words had been found to describe it.

It appears, however, that Borromeo was not a patron of Fede Galizia and it may be that their paths never crossed.

Why Galizia was forgotten for so many years

Lara considered why Fede was forgotten after her death, citing five possible reasons. First, there are very few engravings mentioning her name – prints were an important way for an artist to get recognition. Secondly, because most artworks were held in private collections, they remained inaccessible and thus unknown until modern times. Thirdly, Fede was a woman and no matter how talented, few early female artists received recognition until the twentieth and twenty first centuries. Some female artists of the late Renaissance, such as Sofonisba Anguissola, were better known, but Sofonisba had travelled extensively both within Italy and to

Spain, whereas it seems that Fede remained in Milan. Finally, many works by female artists, particularly religious paintings, were attributed to male artists. Fede's *Judith and Holofernes* was only correctly attributed to her as late as 2004. Many of her Still Life works were ascribed to Flemish artists copying her style.

Also, towards the end of her life, there was a gradual deterioration of quality, again making attributions difficult. Only two of her Still Life paintings are signed and dated. These and other influences made correct attributions very difficult for a long time.

Lara then looked at one Still Life in particular: *Cherries in a Bowl*, now at Kensington Palace in the Royal Collection. On the back are the initials CR, for Charles I. As late as 1984, it was being attributed to an unknown Dutch artist. It had been acquired by Charles I in 1628 when he purchased artworks from the Gonzaga Collection. It was unattributed when in the collection of

Charles II but was admired enough by the King to hang in his dressing room.

Rediscovery of early female artists in 20th and 21st centuries

The "rediscovery" of early female artists in the twentieth and twenty first centuries has been fuelled by exhibitions, such as *Women Artists 1550-1950* at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the publication of books, many by feminist writers. Museums have also begun collecting the works of early women artists. Prices of examples sold at auction have reached sums in excess of \$2 million, reflecting the current taste for Still Life works, showing a change in collecting tastes. We can expect more works to be re-attributed as research continues.

Lara Veroner studied Art Business at Christies and gained a Master's Degree in Fine and Decorative Arts from Sotheby's Institute of Art with a thesis on Fede Galizia. She is also a lawyer dually qualified in Italy and New York.



Women in the arts of Byzantium

The Charles de Chassiron lecture, held on 15 July 2025, was delivered by Dr Andrea Mattiello

Dr Mattiello introduced the evening with three statements: that we have no knowledge of who made what in the Byzantine world; that women were less represented in the arts than men; and that they tend to hide from history – most texts are written by men for men and that is true of the Byzantine empire.

That said, he proceeded to reveal that there are many examples of depictions of women throughout the period, in manuscripts, in mosaics, frescoes, sculptures, which tell us something of their world – powerful and aristocratic as indicated in their dress and jewellery, or their contribution when occupied – as midwives or as weavers, as scholars holding scrolls, as personifications of the female virtues.

But throughout these eleven centuries, the Byzantine empire suffered from not being the Roman empire.

Representation of women in the Byzantine era

The timeline from Trajan, from Spain, to the extension of the Roman empire, equals a new phase. These are the heirs of Rome, who felt Roman until 1453 and the fall of Constantinople.

The 19th century historian Edward Gibbon considered that the Byzantine empire was a finger, in relation to the Roman empire. At the end of the 19th century a play produced in France, 'Theodora', was based on one of the histories (which was a fake account of

the life of Justiniana). There's also a 19th century painting of Empress Theodora, where she is presented as decadent. She allowed marriage between classes of the population. We know this because of texts written by women, for example, in an 11th century papyrus text written by the daughter of Emperor Alexius. But we need to look beyond the texts, to social histories and to the arts.

Other examples: there is a second century Egyptian portrait of a woman who is depicted wearing earrings; there's a mosaic in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, from 500-550 AD which shows a woman wearing jewels and a crown. A gold coin of 337 AD portrays an Emperor accompanied by a virtuous female figure suggests power and an involvement with trading – she has her foot on the prow of a boat.

There are traces of imperial portraiture – with the portrayal of female members of the imperial family in 441-50 in Constantinople, such as Solidus of Pulcheria whose likeness appeared on coins of the era. There are sculptures of Fausta and Fluccilla. In Ravenna a mosaic of Galla Placida is extant – she was a regent but had coins produced which depict her (426-430). The empresses were members of the establishment, capable of being patrons.

In the Metropolitan Museum there is a late 4th – early 5th century sculpture, a portrait bust of a woman of the Byzantine world (which is also referred to as the East Roman world). We don't know her name but she is obviously powerful.

In the Vienna Dioscurides folios in the Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek there's an image of a woman enthroned, possibly African, donating a manuscript and shown as the personification of magnanimity – she is a scholar, founder, patron.

Another example can be found in the 6th century church of Sts Segius and Bacchus, Constantinople (Istanbul). We see the role of Theodora as patron and we see a monastery. She is clearly important – her name is sculpted in the church, on a cornice.

There's a 6th century mosaic portrait of Theodora in San Vitale in Ravenna – unusual because at the time official portraits of women were not allowed. And in the late 9th century (around 820s) another work of Theodora with her daughter, now in a document in Cambridge. In Hagia Sofia, Istanbul, another apse mosaic illustrates Theotokas and Christ Incarnate.

The Middle Ages change the icon

By the Middle Ages, the Virgin is the most important depiction. The 5th century *St Thecla with wild beasts* (she was an early Christian saint who could calm beasts; her pose is very powerful) is a sculptured medallion, now in Kansas City. By the early 7th century the Virgin has become a cult, which is also evidenced in an early hymn (*Ostrakon with a Troparion* – ostraca are texts written on broken pottery), made in Byzantine Egypt and displayed in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.



Opposite page: Pair of bracelets, 500–700 AD from the Met Museum Collection; top left: 11th century mosaic of the Virgin and Child from Hagia Sofia; top right: Ghirlandaio's fresco of the 'Birth of St John the Baptist' in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence; above: coins depicting Solidus of Pulcheria; right: detail from 6th century mosaic portrait of Theodora in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna.

In 1045 a mosaic in Kiev shows the Virgin standing, hands raised – as the protectress.

In 1050 a cameo in the Metropolitan Museum is of the Virgin and Child.

In the 11th century, too, a relief created of the Virgin in Hagia Sofia is now in Washington.

There are other depictions of the Virgin, for example, in the 1258 Hyperpyron of Michael VIII Paleologo, also in Washington. 1261 sees the last of the Byzantine Empire.

And in a 1420 map of Constantinople, the Virgin is presented as protectress.

The iconography of women working

In a 6th century wall hanging showing Hestia with Polyobus the women are shown holding up words which are attributes of women – and Hestia is not an empress.

Most activities performed by women of a certain status show women spinning and there are archeological findings of needles and spindels.

In the Byzantine empire midwifery was a very important practice and an 11th century artefact in the Vatican shows Rebecca giving birth to Jacob and Esau; a 15th century MSS in Cambridge presents the birth of John the Baptist.

Decorative aspects

Jewellery: In many Byzantine artefacts, jewellery is shown. For example, pieces in the Metropolitan Museum which date between 500-700, show outstanding craftsmanship. Aristocratic women sustained this art form. Our visual vocabulary for jewellery today is very much part of those times.

All these visual examples assign women a better role than that recorded in texts. Objects linked to weddings: for marriage rings, interestingly pagan iconography was used as well as Christian iconography. In Hagia Sofia, mosaics of 1118-34 are depictions of families, empresses as important patrons – the women are wearing jewels, which denotes that they are powerful members of society.

Clothes: kaftans were worn by senior families – the Paleologico family, who ruled Mystras in the Peloponnese for two hundred years, wore kaftans embroidered with their symbols. In a church in the town there's a painting of a woman, who may be Isabelle de Lusignan, wife of the first despot of Mystras, Manuel Kantakouzenos (1348-1380). Coats of arms were very important

in the medieval world – represented in the fresco of Isabelle with a rampant lion and a cross. She is presented as a very important personage – a queen and a diplomat.

In the Ghirlandaio fresco of the *Birth of St John Baptist* in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, women appear in the scene dressed elegantly. All these images show a clear appreciation of the female role in society, from positions of power and influence to craftsmanship and everyday tasks.

Influences in apparel come down through the ages, and in this century, a Dolce and Gabbana exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in 2013 clearly shows the influence of these Byzantine clothes.



The madrigal reimaged –

A concert by the Monteverdi String Band

With Susan Kikoler

A Madrigal is a poem, often a ‘miniature scene’, on a romantic or pastoral subject, whose flexible rhyming scheme offers composers great scope for creativity. The Monteverdi String Band’s joyous concert for BIS members on Monday September 23rd at the University Women’s Club, celebrated the launch of their new CD, *The Madrigal Reimagined*. The charming performance demonstrated the transformation and blossoming of this lyric from its origins as a gentle part-song, often performed as private entertainment amongst friends in Northern Italy in the fourteenth century, to its zenith in the mid seventeenth century. By then, it had become international and both the dramatic cornerstone of Opera, through Monteverdi’s genius, and an essential part of formal Italian court celebrations. One

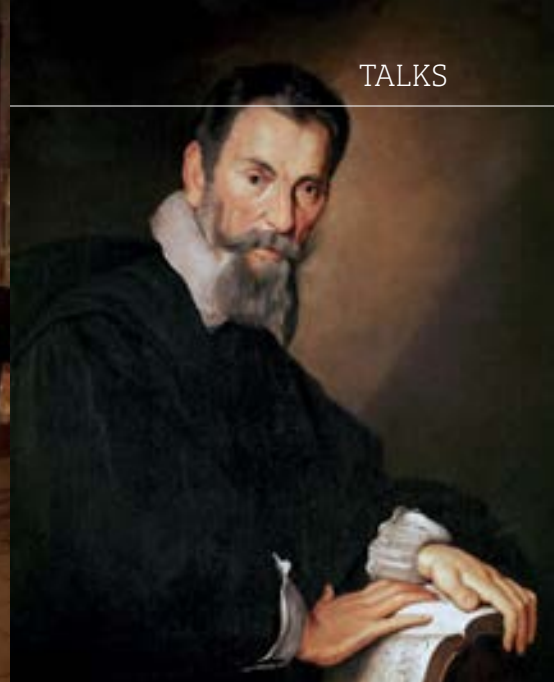
such exemplary occasion was the wedding in Florence in 1589 between Ferdinando de’ Medici and Christina of Lorraine, when it is thought that Galileo Galilei, the son of a lutenist, may have participated, so numerous were the musicians required for this grand event.

The evening was an education and a total delight

In 2003 with increasing public interest in early music and realising that, while there were many excellent wind and brass ensembles dedicated to music of this period, there was no equivalent “string band”, Oliver Webber and Wendy Kelly

founded the five-piece MSB. It was made up of two violins, two violas and a bass violin, using specially created instruments modelled on those used by Monteverdi and his contemporaries. The strings are made entirely of sheep-gut with no metal winding, the bridge has a different shape, height and thickness from the modern violin and the strings pass over the bridge at a different angle. Even the bows are specially designed, based on an original from 1590s Padua. For the BIS concert, the Monteverdi String Band were joined by soprano Hannah Ely, and Toby Carr on lute and theorbo.

With music spanning the period from the mid sixteenth to mid seventeenth centuries, the first sequence demonstrated how the same lyric, *Cruda Amarilli*, could inspire two composers, Johann Nauwach and Claudio Monteverdi, to create music



Opposite page: “The Concert” by Gerrit van Honthorst (1592–1656); top left and below: the Monteverdi String Band in concert; left: Score cover for Monteverdi’s 1638 masterpiece “*Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi*” (The Madrigals of War and Love); top right: Portrait of Monteverdi by Bernardo Strozzi (c. 1630); above: Lutenist Toby Carr; above right: Soprano Hannah Ely.

in very different styles. Another sequence highlighted the importance and versatility of *diminutions* in madrigal performance – improvised ornamentations whereby a flourish of many shorter notes is created from one longer one.

Interspersed within the programme were entertaining readings of contemporary comments: one, by Pietro della Valle in his 1640 treatise on ancient and modern music, berated singers or musicians who hogged the opportunity to create all the diminutions themselves and left no scope for others to show off their skills, while the composer and theorist Giovanni Artusi,

in his aptly named *The Imperfections of Modern Music*, failed to appreciate Monteverdi’s fourth book of madrigals and took him soundly to task for his new style of composition.

It was Monteverdi, of course, who provided the sublime conclusion to the evening with various extracts from *L’Orfeo*, some instrumental, others highlighting the bravura, warmth and sensitive interpretation of Hannah Ely’s singing, whether plaintive or triumphant.

The evening was an education and a total delight with many new faces in the audience – a brilliant start to the BIS

Autumn Programme. Fortunately, both for those who missed the event and for those many attendees who will wish to re-live it, this glorious music is now available to all on the Resonus Classics CD – *The Madrigal Reimagined*.





A man of honour:

Leonardo Sciascia and his battles against the mafia

Chair Peter Jones in conversation with Caroline Moorehead

Peter Jones opened the conversation, held on 7 October, observing that Sciascia is well known in Italy, but not in Britain. Author Caroline Moorehead agreed – perhaps there are not many translations of his work – but went on to note that he was a very good writer, and to trace his life and work for her fascinated audience.

Leonardo Sciascia was born in Sicily in 1921, during the fascist era, dying in Palermo in 1989, during the worst period of corruption – a period significant for his approach to taking moral positions.

He defined his life as fighting corruption. He was a profoundly moral man, from a modest background, self-taught, very well versed in the literature of Germany, France and Spain. He became Italy's moral voice, which led him into

trouble. He attacked magistrates Falcone and Borsellino – and Falcone was on record as saying “Now we are all dead men.” And in fact they were both killed, but after Sciascia had already died.

Sciascia went to school in Caltanissetta. He loved pens and writing. Aged 11 he wrote his name as ‘Leonardo Sciascia, writer’. He became a teacher, but didn’t like it. The boys loved him, however! Then after 10-15 years he had made enough money to become a full-time writer. In his first book, which he printed privately, the characters are animals, symbolising fascism. He wrote his best book, his autobiography, at the age of 30 – about teaching boys who didn’t want to learn! The boys were very poor and almost certainly hungry.

And he spoke about the mafia, which no

one did at that time. Italo Calvino became his editor and suggested he write fiction. He wrote *The Day of the Owl (Il giorno della civetta)*, published in 1961, which became a great success. In it he defined the mafia, how and where it worked. He said ‘You’ll only find them through the bank accounts: go after the money’. Before this, no one had written fiction about the mafia.

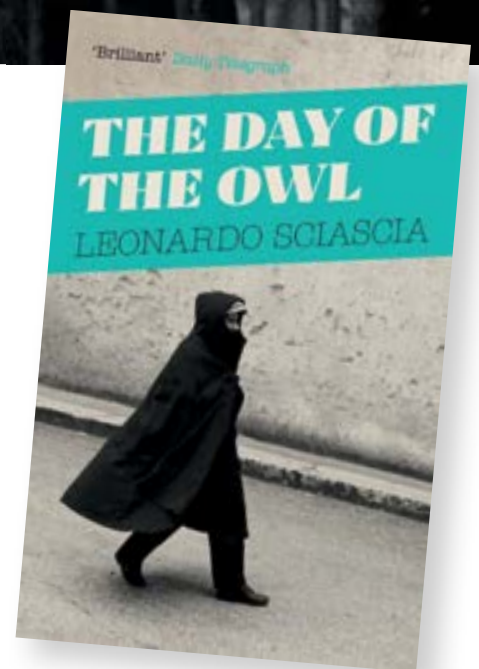
He became a politician, reluctantly, on the left, but not a communist. He stood as an independent in Palermo, but didn’t like it, and stood down.

The Aldo Moro saga

Sciascia hated the Christian Democrats (CD). Then the kidnap of former prime minister and President of the CD, Aldo Moro, on 16 March 1978 shocked



Opposite page: Sciascia with "mafia hunter" judge Paolo Borsellino; above left: *Avanti!* news coverage of Aldo Moro's assassination; left: a 1900 map showing mafia presence in Sicily; above: mafia bosses attend the "Maxi" trial in Palermo, which ran from 1986 to 1992; right: book cover of *The Day of the Owl*.



the nation, and his many letters (86), written over his 55 days in captivity, were published in the press. Moro starts to realise that he won't be saved, and the tone of the letters changes (some assume there were skeletons that could be revealed). Every newspaper coverage was about Moro. Italy came to a standstill. Moro realises he is going to die as the establishment abandons him. Sciascia had no sympathy for Moro, but the CD had abandoned their President, and that shocked him. He wrote a book of accusations, analysing Moro's letters (which also held clues as to where he was being held).

Italy's moral voice

Sciascia then became an MP – and then stepped down. He was reluctant to give interviews, but wrote for the *Corriere* and *La Stampa*, but stayed in Palermo, researching and writing 'gialli' and 'inchieste' – about events in history that he felt were misrepresented. He wrote

two pages every morning and two every afternoon – and then went to bed!

He always wrote on his small, green Olivetti typewriter – and the first reader was always his wife. The second was Italo Calvino, his editor, but they fell out – Sciascia felt Calvino was too intransigent.

An unmistakable language to express what he saw

His village was surrounded by sulphur mines, was very poor, unsafe. Work was there or on the land. So he grew up with the feeling of crushing poverty and a sense of desperation which he didn't want to lose. He hated corruption, so justice drove him. He didn't want to teach or to offer resolution – he wanted to lay down what he saw. And he wanted to find a language which was unmistakable.

He used literature to show what justice was. His books included *L'affaire Moro*; and *Le parrocchie* (a poignant memoir of Sicily). He was praised but also attacked. He was anti-state, anti mafia, anti the Church. And the Christian Democrats. No writer of our time has attracted so much attention. Today, his school is a museum, his village is a shrine. He is very famous in Sicily.

And on current Italian issues? He published a collection of short stories in *The Wine-Dark Sea* – one is about migrants going to America which reveals a scam.

Caroline Moorehead concluded her spell-binding address: "I so admire him, a wonderful writer. Here is someone with no truck with sleaze, not interested in being liked. He was famous for never speaking at receptions, nor as a Deputy in Rome – nor, for example, with a junior assistant where he was observed as not speaking. His reply: "We've already said everything."

Caroline Moorehead's book will be published in the autumn.

Philippa Leslie is Editor of Rivista



Leconfield Lecture 2024

Dino De Laurentiis and Suso Cecchi D'Amico

Two faces of the postwar Italian film industry: a talk by Prof. Stephen Gundle

Eugenio Bosco was there

The 2024 Leconfield lecture was delivered by Stephen Gundle, Professor of Film and Television Studies at Warwick University, who previously held academic positions at Cambridge, Oxford and London before he moved to Warwick in 2008. His research interests lie in the fields of film and cultural and political history, with a special emphasis on Italian cinema and other media. He is the author of books including *Bellissima: feminine beauty and the idea of Italy* (2007), *Glamour: A history* (2008), *Mussolini's dream factory: Film stardom in fascist Italy* (2013) and *Fame amid the ruins: Italian film stardom in the age of neorealism* (2019).

This lecture examined two people, two giants and architects of Italian cinema, who were not household names like some actors and directors but who nonetheless played a vital role in the industry's success: the producer Dino De Laurentiis

(1919-2010) and the prolific screenwriter Suso Cecchi D'Amico (1914-2010). Both engaged more with cinema as an industry than as art. They worked not only with artistic directors but with the makers of the comedies and genre films that were the bread and butter of Italian film production.

De Laurentiis and Cecchi D'Amico worked over the same period of years but it is not clear if they ever met. Their ways of operating could hardly have been more different: flamboyant and visionary in the case of the former, discreet and practical in the case of the latter. Nevertheless they had some things in common – their nicknames (Dino and Suso were not their real first names, which were Agostino and Giovanna); their long careers and their ability to operate at multiple levels.

Their different paths reflected the gender dynamics of the film industry in Italy at

that time. Most producers, production personnel and even screenwriters were men; Suso was a rare influential woman and one of few female writers.

Their backgrounds were very different: De Laurentiis was an outsider. He came from Naples and from a pasta-producing family. He was an actor first and then an executive producer for the leading production company Lux – developing his own projects. He started producing in 1946 and embraced neorealism. However he had an eye for entertainment as well, as the movies *Il bandito* and *Riso amaro* showed. From 1953 he cooperated with Carlo Ponti but three years later they split – Dino had a higher level of ambition and was also interested in engagement with American cinema. Cecchi D'Amico, by contrast was an insider. She was the Rome-born daughter of the writer and critic Emilio Cecchi, who ran the Cinema

Left: Suso Cecchi D'Amico co-wrote the screenplay for the classic *The Bicycle Thieves* (1948); below: studio poster for the 1980 space opera *Flash Gordon*, produced by Dino de Laurentiis.



Flaiano – for Cecchi D'Amico there were no conflicts. She got along with everybody; she was accommodating and pragmatic. She had a modest vision of her own work; she did not consider it art but rather a craft. She was keen on rich tones, but her style was not expansive; sparse dialogue was preferred. Unfortunately, she threw away most of her personal papers, so her way of interacting with others has to be reconstructed from the archives of the directors with whom she worked, including Blasetti and Visconti.

When we look at their achievements, the temptation is to single out one work that somehow represents their most significant achievement. For De Laurentiis, his *King Kong* of 1976 was the film with which he most identified personally. He was in his element as a showman and this was the ultimate monster movie, a very expensive and risky project which was a success. Despite various crises, in the end, it even gained some Oscar nominations. Cecchi D'Amico's equivalent film would probably be *Il gattopardo* (The Leopard), the extraordinary Visconti movie adaptation which almost bankrupted the production company but was a great critical and artistic success. But, in a way, her early films with Blasetti (*Fabiola* and *Peccato che sia una canaglia*) are also worth mentioning. It was with these films that she established her expertise not only with writing female characters but above all with questions of structure and architecture.

The lecture concluded with the question as to whether these two figures met and knew each other. Although a comment is attributed to Cecchi D'Amico in her interview-biography to the effect that 'Dino non e' antipatico ma rozzo' there are no pictures of them together and there is no definite evidence, Professor Gundle concluded, that they actually ever met. However, they certainly corresponded as the screenwriter authored two of the producer's moves (*I due nemici* and *Lo straniero*) and there are records of two projects that did not come to fruition.

Eugenio Bosco is a former vice-chairman of the British Society and he is currently Honorary Director

this is now Cinecitta' World, a theme park. The complex enabled him to make movies in English for the international market.

However, alongside big budget crowd-pleasers, he also produced quality movies like Fellini's *La strada* and *Le notti di Cabiria*, as well as Italian style comedies with Sordi and Gasman. He became a public commentator on movies and sought to influence government policy. However, the 1965 cinema law in Italy, which banned state funds for films not made in Italian, prompted him to move to the US in 1973 where he produced a series of successful movies like *Serpico* and a big-budget remake of *King Kong*.

How they worked: Suso – Not so much an art as a craft

Cecchi D'Amico was the exact opposite. Far from being a workaholic, she did not even have a proper office. She preferred to be close to her husband, the musicologist Fedele D'Amico, and her family and worked from home. She was nevertheless not working entirely on her own. Teams of writers would meet at her house; indeed, she was frequently the only woman in a male-dominated group. But she was not marginal; in fact she was the chief screenwriter, the best paid in the team and the one who made sure film scripts written by many worked well. Although clashes between movie directors and screenwriters were common – such as the well-documented clashes between De Sica and Zavattini and between Fellini and

company in the early 1930s. She studied languages and worked as a translator before being invited to work on film scripts.

How they worked: Dino – big budget and quality movies

Their ways of working were also different. De Laurentiis was flamboyant and abrasive but he could also be charming. He was a workaholic, frequently working 15-16 hours a day. He was keen on PR and self-promotion. His family and their lifestyle – including villas on Via Appia Antica and in Cap Ferrat – was also a big component of his public image.

When he married the star of *Riso amaro*, Silvana Mangano, he established the model of the producer plus actress alliance that would be widely imitated in Italian cinema. He even created his own film production complex not far from Rome, dubbed Dinocitta' (after Cinecitta'). Today



Mary of Modena: James II's dazzling queen

Historian Justine Brown on the little known Italian queen consort who brought Italian baroque culture to England

Mary of Modena (1658-1718), wife of James II and VII, is the only Italian queen consort of England, Scotland and Ireland. James reigned from 1685-1688, at which point the couple had to go into exile in France with their infant son, James Francis Edward Stuart.

Thereafter Mary of Modena was known as the 'Queen over the Water' to the Jacobites, supporters of James's line, to whom Mary was a beacon. And she was Bonnie Prince Charlie's grandmother. She was an extraordinary woman who brought Italian baroque culture to England. We have had plenty of French consorts, but only one Italian. Mary really deserves more attention.

She is little known to us because James II (and VII of Scotland) was deposed in

1688 in a coup known as the 'Glorious Revolution' which is covered rather briefly in standard history. But the dislodging of the traditional Stuart line is also the foundation of our modern constitution. It affected England's relationship with Scotland and Ireland and the matter is still quite politically sensitive.

The Revolution had much to do with the fact that James was a Catholic convert, and when Mary gave him a son it looked like there would be a Catholic succession again.

There were other issues too, such as the ongoing power struggle between the monarchy and Parliament. But James was an anointed king born into the royal family, which carried a great deal of weight.

So in order to de-legitimise him in the public mind, much propaganda had to be generated. Queen Mary and their little son were hidden away as a result.

What is her background?

Mary of Modena, daughter of Alfonso IV, Duke of Modena and Reggio, was born Maria Beatrice Eleonora Anna Margherita Isabella d'Este. Of the noble Este family who ruled various duchies in northern Italy before the 19th century and were great patrons of the arts, she was raised in Modena's splendid Palazzo Ducale.

The arrival of the Mazarinettes

Mary's mother, Laura Martinuzzi, was one of the seven famous nieces of Cardinal



Opposite page: Mary with her son James, by Benedetto Gennari II c.1690; above left: the splendid ceiling of the Palazzo Ducale, where Mary was raised as a child; above right: King James II in 1680, painted by Godfrey Kneller; Mary in 1687 painted by Godfrey Kneller.

a baby, suggested her as a candidate to marry the king's brother.

The new queen was young, elegant and intelligent, warm and charming. She spoke several languages and loved poetry. Like her brother Francesco II, Mary adored opera, which was a relatively new musical form. She was also very devout and had wanted to become a nun and join the Sisters of the Visitation convent, which her mother had founded in Modena.

But James' ambassador convinced Duchessa Laura that Mary should marry the Duke of York, who had fallen in love with her portrait. At first Mary protested quite passionately, but then she received a letter from the Pope – he convinced her that the oppressed Catholics of Britain and Ireland needed her help.

Mary's new life in England

Some shocks were in store: there was a big age gap between Mary and James. She was his second wife, and there were two Protestant step-daughters who expected to succeed to the throne. And James was quite a womaniser, which was humiliating. Also, living in a majority Protestant country at a time of intense religious division was difficult. She had arrived just before Guy Fawkes Day, and there were bonfires, effigies, and chants. Because of James' conversion to Catholicism, Parliament were trying to annul her marriage before it could be consummated. They nicknamed their new queen 'the Pope's daughter'. Despite their differences, the couple

became very attached. There were to be many political difficulties ahead, and they were forced into exile three times.

Mary's cultural impact in the British Isles

Mary built on the long Este tradition of artistic patronage. As Duchess of York and later as Queen of England, Mary commissioned works of art from painters like Benedetto Gennari. Because she was beautiful and powerful, Sir Peter Lely painted her repeatedly; she inspired many poets, especially the great John Dryden.

She also attracted talented young ladies to court and encouraged them to develop proficiency in poetry and painting. And she helped bring Italian opera to England. For example, her brother Francesco sent the celebrated castrato Sefauci to London, whose performances made quite an impression.

Mary of Modena as queen

Onlookers were astonished by her beauty and majesty at the coronation. She was greatly committed to the role of queen and in many respects was a great asset for King James. Like all consorts her first duty was to produce children, ideally males. The great irony of Mary's life was that the birth of a son, instead of strengthening the Stuart monarchy, actually threatened to overturn it completely.

Justine Brown's *Mary of Modena: James II's Dazzling Queen* (pub. 2025, Pen & Sword books)

Mazarin (Mazzarino). He took them to live at the French court when he served the young Louis XIV as chief minister. Mazarin's enemies nicknamed them the 'Mazarinettes'. They made quite an impact at the French court, and Mazarin found very favourable matches for them.

Why was Mary of Modena chosen for James?

It had everything to do with France. The Modenese were allied to the French at the time and England was balancing two potential alliances: France and Holland.

James' older brother was Charles II and James was then Duke of York and a widower. He was Charles' heir because the king had no legitimate children—many illegitimate ones from royal mistresses, but none with his wife, Catherine of Braganza. Louis XIV, who was like a father to Mary, whose own father had died when she was



Interpreting the Divine Comedy

Jane E. Everson, with Catherine Keen, explores recent interpretations in the creative arts

In addition to the regular advertised programme of events for 2024, members of the British Italian Society were invited to attend a one-day seminar on *Dante and the Divine Comedy: Conversations around Interpretations in Movement, Music and Performance*. This was organised by Professor Catherine Keen of University College London and Professor Jane Everson, Trustee of the Society. The seminar took place on May 10th and was also available for attendance online.

The aim of the seminar was to explore recent interpretations in the creative arts, in particular in dance and in music, of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Such interpretations raise particular challenges – namely how to convey the meaning of Dante's poem without using any words. The main stimulus for the seminar was the recently premiered ballet of choreographer Wayne McGregor, entitled *The Dante Project*, an ambitious three-act ballet interpreting all three sections of the *Comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.

Professor Everson opened the proceedings and summarised some of the earlier ballet interpretations of Dante's poem: Frederick Ashton's wartime ballet *Dante Sonata*, inspired by the music of Liszt; and Ronald Tice's literal narrative

of the *Inferno*. She pointed out that since 2000 there have been many other ballet versions of one or other of the cantiche, but none before *The Dante Project* attempted to cover the whole poem. McGregor's ballet is of special interest because he worked so closely with the composer Thomas Adès and the designer Tacita Dean, thus covering several of the non-verbal creative arts.

Movement and light and paradisaical joy

The first session included two papers both on McGregor's ballet. The first, again by Professor Everson, was titled: '*Interpretation and the Limits of Interpretation*'. This discussed, in order, the relative merits of each of the three acts, noting the difference between *Inferno*, which is largely a narrative interpretation of a selection of canti, the *Purgatorio* which emphasises Dante's love for Beatrice, and the abstract patternings of the *Paradiso*. She noted that some scenes from the *Inferno* are very successfully rendered in movement, but others prove harder to follow, especially as McGregor does not adhere to the same order of sins as Dante. *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, in her view, are harder to engage with – for different reasons. The sense of progressive purgation in *Purgatorio* is lacking, while

in *Paradiso* the lighting (or lack of it) and the types of movement seem rather far from Dante's ideas. The second paper, by Heather Webb (Cambridge), brought a more positive perspective to bear on *Paradiso*. Taking a more strongly visual approach, she considered gesture, in particular circular patterns, and colour to highlight the possible debt of McGregor to Botticelli and Blake in forming his interpretation. She traced in particular how the effects of movement and light create an immersive experience for the audience, using the projection of light onto moving bodies to create conjoined attention between the dancers of stage and the theatrical audience in ways that fulfil Dante's emphasis on the paradisaical joy that resides both in seeing and being seen.

Musical responses to Dante's Purgatorio

The second session considered Thomas Adès' score for *The Dante Project*, with papers by Helena Phillips-Robins (Oxford) and Lachlan Hughes (Durham). Adès is internationally renowned for his many compositions. His score for the whole *Dante Project* was completed in advance of the ballet, though with close collaboration with the choreographer. Adès had long been familiar with Dante's poem, and,



Opposite page: Studio Wayne McGregor's *Danté Project* at the Royal Opera House (2021); Illuminated codex *Purgatory canto I* (c1398) by Simone Camaldolese and assistants.

as the papers in this section showed, the composer drew on a range of musical sources and ideas for the ballet score: Liszt's 'Dante Sonata' in *Inferno*; Syrian Jewish chants of the Psalms in *Purgatorio*; inspirations from several classical composers for *Paradiso*. The first paper explored how the music responded to Dante's positioning of purgatory in space and time. In combining recorded music and live performance in *Purgatorio*, Adès mingles his own responses to personal and community connections with the song traditions of the Adès synagogue in Aleppo into a reflection on *Purgatorio*'s themes of community, reciprocity, and liturgical continuity and change, as the souls in Purgatory return upwards to the Garden of Eden (Earthly Paradise). The second paper also considered the score's musical allusivity. It argued that Adès engages a form of musical 'plurilingualism' analogous to Dante's, that celebrates the pleasures

of allusion rather than the anxiety of influence in the way that it embraces creative dialogue with poetic and musical predecessors.

The novel interpretation of Satan

In the third session Francesca Southerden (Oxford) discussed the novel interpretation of Satan at the end of McGregor's first act. Satan is cast as a woman, danced by a ballerina dressed in a pink all-over leotard. Though this seems a wilful misinterpretation, and perhaps even open to charges of misogyny, what is in effect conveyed through the pas de deux of Dante and Satan is Dante's susceptibility to temptation and misinterpretation – Satan is fused with the infamous 'femina balba' of *Purgatorio* XIX. The movements given to the Satan figure are alluring and seductive but also reptilian, while Dante is closely involved and extricates himself in the dance with Satan and the angularity and horizontality of the dancing bodies

translates Dante's preoccupation with moral descent through hell towards the negative materiality of Satan as fallen angel.

Catherine Keen concluded the session with a paper on the figure of Matelda in the Earthly Paradise at the end of *Purgatorio*. She brought out very effectively the way in which this scene, though initially not easy to understand, does translate Dante's narrative at this point, again through attention to Dante's words about movement and phrases about dancing all through the *Purgatorio* and the interpretation of these by the choreographer, set against Tacita Dean's striking scenography of an Edenic tree.

The day ended with a viewing of a number of scenes from the video of the ballet, and a Round Table. The different approaches and reactions of the various speakers had provided a rich basis for discussion and further reflection, with participants noting that their original ideas had been modified in the course of the day, often in a more positive direction.

The Dante Project remains in the repertoire of the Royal Ballet and is available as a video from the Royal Opera House Covent Garden.

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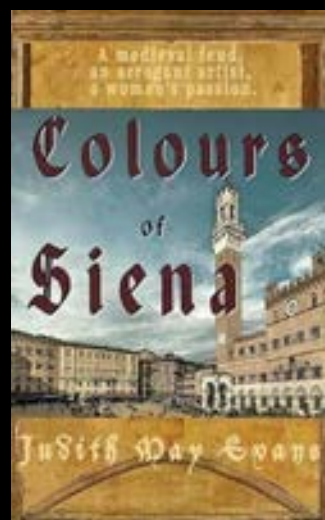
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JAVE (Contd.)

roads for 600 yards or so then stopped and had a conference. They decided with the approval to carry on hoping that the others had got away. They moved ~~XXXX~~ off a gorge a short distance when they came under fire again, they immediately went to ground and crawled into a ditch. They then decided to wait for the moon to set before attempting to go on again. Just as the moon set the Germans raided Nettuno and Anzio. They waited for this to finish and then set out. After covering a short distance they were fired on again and though that the position was hopeless and that they would have to give themselves up. They decided to have one more try and carried on. Source who was leading the party saw a sound and ran for it, he crawled to the top and was immediately fired on. Source was not hit but the girl was seriously wounded in the neck and Capt. Gatenby was wounded in the arm. This post turned out to be an American one and after source had made himself known they carried the girl to the hospital. She was operated on but died the next day. Capt Gatenby was put aboard a hospital ship.

The kindness of strangers

Sir Nicholas Young has just stepped down as Chairman of the Monte San Martino Trust

He tells the story of the Trust and of his own father's experiences

The Trust was set up as a charity in 1989 by Keith Killby OBE Cav Uff, a former WW2 prisoner of war in Italy, who had received enormously brave and generous help from many impoverished Italian farming families who sheltered him during his escape after the Italian Armistice in September 1943. Many thousands of escaping Allied prisoners were in a similar position. Keith established the Trust as a means of thanking the Italian helpers, by funding bursaries to enable their children (and now grandchildren) to come to England to learn English.

As the Trust gained support from Keith's fellow prisoners, he started to collect their stories and became, in the process, a mine of information about an extraordinary period in the War when total strangers risked their lives to help their country's former enemies escape.

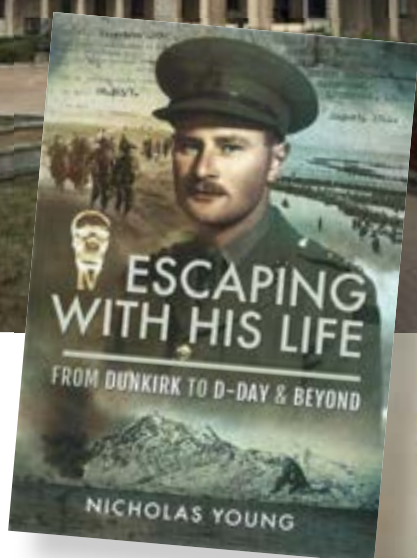
In the mid-1990s, I was researching the wartime adventures of my father Leslie Young, which included a period of imprisonment and then six months on the run in Italy. I read about the Trust in a newspaper article and contacted Keith for help. He was able to introduce me to six people who had been in the same prison camp near Parma in northern Italy as my father, and not long after that I became a MSMT Trustee and later its Chair – a position I was delighted to hold for 20 years, stepping down only at the end of 2024.

'Old soldiers' and war reminiscences

Like so many 'old soldiers', my father told me almost nothing about his war – a very busy one, as it turned out. It wasn't until literally two days after he died, in 1986, that I discovered a small notebook in his bedside cabinet, its fragile pages covered in tiny and almost illegible pencil scribbles.

Months later, after I had succeeded in transcribing it, what emerged was a daily diary of life in a PoW Camp, and months on the run in the Apennine and Abruzzo mountains after his escape. He named neither people nor places, obviously afraid of betraying his helpers but, with help from Keith Killby and his trustees, I was eventually able to work out his 500-mile escape route down through Italy, visiting every single one of the often tiny communities where he found shelter, and even meeting up with some of the families who had helped him.

By that time, I had also been able to track his footsteps right through the War, from Dunkirk to Norway with the Commandos, then on to North Africa where he was captured, into Italy and then over the Channel soon after D-Day through France, Belgium and Holland to the German border in 1944. I was determined



Left: public domain; all other images courtesy MSMT Trust

Opposite page: Debriefing notes describing the concluding moments of Major Leslie Young's escape from PG 49 prison camp at Fontanellato; top left: the prison camp today; top right: painting of Major Leslie Young; right: Eugenio and Silvia Elfer; above (inset) *Escaping with his life*, (Pen & Sword, 2019). Available from Amazon or the publisher.

that his grandchildren should learn about all this, and so wrote **Escaping with his Life*, published in 2019.

How the MSMT has grown

MSMT has remained remarkably true to its origins, and we now provide more than 40 bursaries to young Italians each year to come to England for a month to learn the language – for many of them it is a truly transformative experience – we even have a former student as a Trustee. All those escape stories which Keith collected have now been digitised and made available through the Trust's website msmtrust.org.uk, the original accounts being now at Cambridge University Library, where Ruth Murphy, a post-doctoral student will soon, funded by the Trust, be working closely with our academic research partners Istituto Parri in Milan and the Casa della Memoria in Servigliano in Le Marche, to

shed further light on the many courageous Italians who risked their lives under Nazi occupation to help escapers, and also with the US National Archive which has recently agreed to make available online thousands of files relating to Italian helpers, all funded by MSMT. The Trust has also published several books related to these stories including most recently *The Girl with a Peach* by another Trustee, Anne Copley.

All this work is a living memorial to the Italian helpers, whose bravery is also commemorated with a permanent monument at the Eden Camp Military Museum near York – and is celebrated with our annual Lunch for families and supporters at the RAF Club in London, with guests including His Excellency the Italian Ambassador. As a charity, we rely on their generosity and that of other supporters and foundations to be able to carry on the work.

The courage of escapers and their helpers

The story of the Italian escapers and their helpers is still very much alive amongst the descendants of former PoWs – and few weeks go by without some new family getting in touch with the Trust to try and find out more about the Italian adventures of a relative and the people who helped him.

Personally, I am now in regular contact with four of the families who helped my father – including the de Michelis family in Corvaro in the Abruzzo, who nursed him under the very noses of the German garrison in the town when he contracted pneumonia in the winter of 1943/44, and the Jewish Elfer family whose two children Eugenio (age 23) and Silvia (19) tragically died guiding my father through no man's land between the German and Allied forces fighting at Anzio. Two other families



MSMT Trust

Left: Sir Nick Young with his wife Helen and members of the *de Michelis* family in Corvaro; above: MSMT founder Keith Killby, who served as an ambulance and medical orderly before his imprisonment and subsequent escape.

miraculously got in touch having seen 'thank you letters' that I had pinned up in their communities when I was retracing my father's footsteps through the mountains.

The links I have formed with these families – who literally helped save my father's life – now span four generations: we see or are in contact regularly, and rejoice as we celebrate bonds formed in wartime and which have now lasted through 80 years of peace between our two countries.

President Ciampi at the 75th anniversary

When launching the MSM Trust's first commemorative walk in Sulmona 2001, the President of the Italian Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, recognised the significance of what happened in Italy after the 1943 Armistice for humanity as a whole when he said:

'In quelle giornate, in quel momento di crisi profonda delle strutture dello Stato, rinacque l'Italia vera. Fece il suo ingresso in scena il popolo italiano, con la sua antica civiltà, con la sua grande umanità.'

In the troubled world of today it is perhaps still worth reflecting on the kindness which so many Italian people showed to strangers who turned up on their doorsteps asking for help.

The personal stories

Of course, the story I know best is that of Eugenio and Silvia Elfer, mentioned above. As the children of wealthy Jewish parents living in Rome, their lives were in danger after the Nazi occupation of their country, and the family fled into the mountains. Eugenio and Silvia immediately joined a local Partisan band, offering to guide

escapers south through the mountains to the coast in the hope of meeting up with the invading Allied armies. By the time they set off with my father and his New Zealander chum the Allies had landed at Anzio, and an almighty battle was in progress as the Germans tried to push the Allies off their narrow beachhead.



In the troubled world of today it is perhaps still worth reflecting on the kindness which so many Italian people showed to strangers who turned up on their doorsteps asking for help.

Undaunted, the two young partisans carried on, slipping through the German lines, and navigating minefields on hands and knees. They were spotted by a German patrol which opened fire, killing the boy. His sister wanted to stay with his body, but the escapers begged her to move on with them towards the American lines. Tragically, with the lines in sight, an American patrol

opened fire, hit the New Zealander in the shoulder, and Silvia in the throat. My father eventually persuaded them to stop shooting, and Silvia was taken to the American field hospital on the beach at Anzio where she died the next day.

Upon hearing of the deaths of his children, their father Antonio died soon after, but their mother Elisa found her daughter's body in the US War Cemetery at Anzio and brought it back to a Jewish cemetery in Rome to be buried with her father. Eugenio's body was eventually unearthed in a ditch near Anzio in 1947 and identified, and also brought back to the family grave. Elisa herself lived on alone in Rome until she was 105 and she too could be buried with her loved ones. My wife and I visit the grave whenever we are in Rome.

Human nature in challenging situations

As I found during my 13 years as CEO of the Red Cross in the UK, dealing with disasters and conflicts all over the world, the capacity of the human spirit to cope with tragedy and terrible events is often extraordinary, humbling and deeply inspiring. People will help each other, even when they themselves have nothing and have lost everything. I have found the same inspiration in the stories of the Italian people who risked their lives helping Allied escapers in World War Two – how lucky we have been in this country to have lived lives in relative peace and security for so long, and how wonderful it is that, thanks to Keith Killby and the Monte San Martino Trust, so many stories of escape and the kindness of strangers can be preserved and celebrated.



Left: *Red flowers* (1955), Oil on board 71.5 x 58.5 cm;
above: *The sisters* (1938), Oil on canvas 90 x 120 cm;

Maddalena Nodari:

Anticonformist artist of chiarism and abstraction

A mid century exponent of the Mantuan chiarism movement

In late 2015 a special exhibition of the works of the Mantova artist, Maddalena Nodari, was mounted at the Galleria Bassani, Castel Goffredo, MN, province of Mantova, entitled '*NeNe Nodari. Nonconformist painter between chiarism and abstraction*' bringing her work once again to public attention.

She was an anticonformist, chiarist, abstractionist, influenced first by the figurative art traditions of the Alto Mantovano, then by the chiarists – and an acknowledged female artist in the Italian chiarism movement of early-mid twentieth century.

Maddalena, always known as 'NeNe', was born in Castel Goffredo on 9 May 1915 into a distinguished local family. Young, attractive, and passionate about art, she studied painting from the age of 15, and was much influenced by the noted 'chiaristo', the Milanese Angelo del Bon, who became a family friend and who encouraged her to work hard at her art, both in sketching and painting. In

her canvases she developed a chiarist approach to expressing the light and colour of her native Lombardy – Mantua Chiarism is described as rendering 'brightness and chromatic delicacy'.

The influence of the Chiarism movement

NeNe became interested in the 'Chiarism' movement when she exhibited with a group of Chiarist artists – Giuseppe Facciotto, Umberto Lilloni (considered one of the greatest exponents of Lombard Chiarism), Carlo Malerba and Ezio Mutti in 1938 in Milan. Her work was also exhibited in Bergamo, Verona, Brescia, and later in Rome in the 1950s. Her focus then was figures and flowers. She had travelled widely with her partner the architect Ugo Sissa, and among their postings a number of years were spent in Iraq, as well as trips to Syria, Iran, Kurdistan, Babylonia, with NeNe continuing to draw and paint, especially local scenes. Returning to Italy, she encountered in Rome the work of Italian

'informal abstractionists' – especially the highly considered Giulio Turcato (whose work is now in the permanent collection of the Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna), Antonio Corpora, Piero Dorazio, and Marino Mazzacurati (the 'Gruppo degli Otto') and, much influenced by their approach, abandoned figurative representations in favour of chromatism. Her art continued to develop along themes of abstraction and chiarism, and she exhibited, to some acclaim, in Mantua in the 1980s and in 1990 and 1992, at two important exhibitions at the Palazzo Te in Mantua – 'Works 1900-1945 of Mantuan painters' and 'Art in Mantua 1900-1950'.

She died in 2004 in Rome, and two years after her death her work was again honoured with inclusion in the 'Chiarism in Mantua' section in Palazzo Te. Examples of her work are held in the permanent collections of Civic Museum of Palazzo Te and the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Alto Mantovano, Gazoldo del'Gipoliti.



The enchanting drawings of Guercino

A conversation between gallerist Stephen Ongpin and Rivista editor Philippa Leslie

In the mid summer of 2024 British Italian Society members were invited to a private view of a superb exhibition of works by Guercino: *'Felicità d'Invenzione: Drawings by Guercino'* at the gallery of Stephen Ongpin in central London. After a tour of the beautiful exhibits, Stephen sat down and discussed his career and passions with our Editor.

Stephen began by observing that his is one of the few galleries currently producing printed catalogues – they do two per year. For Guercino (1591-1666), this is the third catalogue dedicated to a single artist and the first Guercino commercial exhibition.

He explained that the gallery focuses on Old Master drawings and drawings from 16C to 20C – there's no particular theme and there's a broad range so he can buy more widely. But every summer they curate a themed exhibition, often inspired by the collections of drawing he holds – at the moment, that's between 300-400.

What drawings does he buy? "I tend to buy what I like. Often I buy a drawing and keep it for a while, so it could be 3-4 years before it goes into a catalogue." For the summer exhibitions, Stephen plans ahead, assembles the material – for example, he started buying Guercino prints 5-6 years ago. The gallery carries out detailed

research into each item – so they may live with a drawing and study it for 3-4 years. He travels with his exhibitions so, for instance, he was aiming to take what he still had of Guercino to New York in January.

The output of Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Guercino because of his pronounced squint, was extremely productive and of very varied subject matter – religious, landscapes, and images created for his own pleasure such as his caricatures. He varied his techniques too – using different media and techniques, on off-white paper, worked only on one side (as working with a pen would have damaged the other side). Some of his



Courtesy Stephen Ongpin Gallery

drawings are on ledger paper, some on blue or grey paper and he worked in pen, ink, charcoal, red and black chalk.

In this exhibition there were 27 drawings, which represent all these subjects except his caricatures. Stephen was looking for a certain kind of drawing, with attribution, and in acceptable condition. Having

The English were the first outside Italy to collect Guercino

studied the artist, he is more confident of dating the drawings. He owns 22, with 5 from private collectors who wish to sell.

For this exhibition, Stephen sourced most of the drawings throughout Europe – especially France and Germany, explaining that Italy doesn't issue export licences so there were no examples included from there. In his planning, he knew the greatest interest would come from private collectors.

Opposite page: *A Sibyl*, red chalk, 185 x 211 mm; this page left: *Virgin and child with a pot of lilies*, red chalk, 296 x 232 mm; top right: *Woman with a vase of flowers*, pen and brown ink, 257 x 182 mm; above right: *Man with a moustache and a cap, looking to the right (The Almond Seller)*, pen and brown ink, 121 x 124 mm

The family as curators

Guercino died in 1661, leaving his oeuvre to his nephews, the Gennari brothers, who had also worked in his studio (their work is well considered but not at the level of Guercino). Why so much material? Because the artist didn't let anything go – he saw all his work as personal. The Gennari kept 90% of his drawings, and they didn't come on the market for a hundred years. They framed some of the drawings, basing them on canvas and without glass. Some were stored, in 12 albums, some framed, some were on loose sheets.

By then, it was the era of the Grand Tour and an Englishman, John Bouverie, bought some of them, maybe a hundred it is hazarded. Twenty years later, Richard

Dalton bulk bought, but not everything was of the highest quality and there were some counter proofs (ie, a reversed copy of a print or drawing, made by pressing it against damp paper) among the sale. The English were the first outside Italy to collect Guercino – and as some of his best drawings were engraved, they were more widely disseminated.

Stephen emphasises Guercino's quality as a draughtsman. Some of the pen drawings can be damaged – and it is pretty self-evident if a drawing has been retouched. For authentication, he seeks a second opinion [the current Guercino scholars are David Stone, US; Nicholas Turner, UK]. And he says 'there's no substitute to standing in front of a drawing!'



Courtesy Stephen Ongpin Gallery

Left: *Head of a bearded man* (Saint Joseph?), red chalk, with stumping, 196 x 140 mm; above top: *Soldier in armour facing right*, black chalk, 270 x 197 mm; above: *Saint Christopher and the Christ Child*, red chalk, 285 x 260 mm

The 'Libro dei Conti'

To keep track of his works and commissions, all Guercino's earliest works (1613-14) were recorded in a 'Libro dei Conti'. Then a pause – he went to Rome between 1621 and 1623 – after which the account book doesn't start again until 1629. All works were listed by subject, commission, size, description, when payment was received. All his paintings from 1629 until his death are also listed. But if he received any gifts, they haven't been recorded. This helpful endeavour was undertaken by his brother, and then by his nephews. The impression is that Guercino saw it as a family enterprise, and he wanted the studio to support and help him. He took on pupils, but none are considered of particular merit – he valued

their ability to mimic his work. 'There is only one capo!' The Libro is a good reference point for researchers and is still available in a library in Bologna.

The world of Old Master drawings is very collegial, centred in London, Paris and New York. It's a very collaborative group, composed of scholars, curators, restorers, dealers. "We enjoy the camaraderie."

The challenge as a dealer/exhibitor: keeping the drawings for up to five years, and being selective and patient. Although Stephen loves all the drawings in the exhibition, his very favourite Guercino is a study for two different paintings which was in a private French collection. It is in lovely condition and had not been in the market since the nineteenth century.

Stephen, Philippine born, was educated

in England, and credits his teachers at Cheltenham and Manchester University with encouraging his love of art and art history. His interest was always in Old Masters. After university, he went to New York, starting by working at Colnaghi hanging pictures: "I loved it!" Six months into his internship, they had an Old Masters exhibition – all drawings. He was fascinated, and in the pursuit of more information about the works, started writing the catalogue entries "It was looking, then learning – we were the first catalogue with foldouts to scale, and the first with comparative works." Still today, he considers the printed catalogue to be the best marketing tool – and his website holds all of his exhibition catalogues since he established his gallery in 2006. [www.stephenongpin.com]

British-Italian Society Prize Winners 2024

The British-Italian Society and the Society for Italian Studies announce with pleasure the winners of the biennial BIS Prizes.

2024 BIS Prize for Postgraduate Students

(£500): Dr George Brocklehurst of the Warburg Institute, University of London for his thesis, *Convivial Humanism: Giovanni Pontano on the Art of Living Together*.



The competition attracted five entries at each level from different British or Irish universities on a wide range of Italian cultural themes. All the entries, which were of a high standard, were commended by the judges. As usual, each entry was anonymised and then sent to separate independent assessors for evaluation.

The undergraduate runner-up prize (£100) went to Isabel Winter of Cambridge University for her dissertation on *Second-Generation Italian Hip-hop*.

The Assessors commended the winners for producing outstanding pieces of scholarship, demonstrating originality, independence of thought, well-structured arguments and sophisticated analysis.

2024 BIS Prize for Undergraduate Students

(£250): Eleanor Summers of St Andrews University for her dissertation on *The Italian Tomato as Living Cultural Artefact*.



The judges decided to award two runner-up prizes for entries of exceptional merit. In the postgraduate category, the runner-up award (£200) went to Dr George Rayson of Cambridge University for his thesis on Dante's *Hapax Legomena* in the *Commedia: A Study of Poetic Singularity*.

Our warmest congratulations go to all the prize-winners, who also receive one year's honorary membership of the British-Italian Society. We look forward to welcoming them to a BIS event in 2025.

Welcome to our 34 new members who joined us during 2024. Please consider suggesting membership to friends, family and colleagues.

www.british-italian.org/membership/

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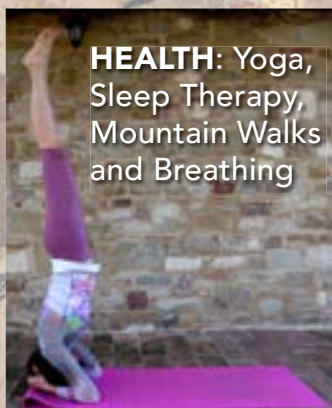
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