



Italian Historical Society of America

Newsletter

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Tutto Italiano **Benvenuto a Tutto Italiano**

Last year, celebrations were held throughout the world for the 500-year anniversary of May 2, 1519, the day Leonardo da Vinci died. France, in particular, planned “[one of the most expensive exhibitions ever staged](#)” in the country, “the first time that such a large number of Leonardo’s drawings, sketches, writings and paintings have ever been brought together.” (Major celebrations were held in Italy – [Celebrando Leonardo 2019](#) in Verona and [Celebrating Leonardo da Vinci](#) in Florence and other towns in Tuscany.) The [exhibit at the Louvre](#) – home to the *Mona Lisa* – was more than ten years in planning; but how did the painting and da Vinci become French assets?

An email from [Sandro Bonaiuto](#) started the research to find the answer. Sandro, an Italian American sculptor who studied art in Italy, mentioned the exhibit “Léonard de Vinci” at the Louvre and brought up the French translation of da Vinci’s name. Born in 1452 in Vinci, a small town near Florence, Leonardo showed an early interest in art; and in his mid-teens, he began a workshop apprenticeship in painting, sculpture, and mechanical arts – casting, drafting, drawing, metal and wood work, and other technical skills. At 20, da Vinci was accepted into the guild for Florence’s painters, but he continued to stay at the workshop for five more years.

In 1482, da Vinci moved to Milan and joined the court of Duke Ludovico Sforza, staying for 17 years as a painter, technical advisor for architecture and defense, mechanical engineer, and planner of court festivals, along with many other tasks. When Sforza was defeated during the Second Italian War, da Vinci went to Venice, but he was back in Florence by the early 1500s where he received a commission to paint a portrait of the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, the painting that most sources claim is the *Mona Lisa*.

From 1513 to 1515, da Vinci lived in the [Belvedere Palace](#) at the Vatican, leaving when King Francis I offered him a position in his French court as the king’s painter, architect, and engineer. Moving to France in 1516, da Vinci brought many of his paintings – he often took years to complete a piece – and brought two of his pupils and assistants, [Salai](#) and [Francesco Melzi](#), with him. They moved to Amboise, into the Château du Clos Lucé, within viewing distance of Château d’Amboise, the King’s castle.

It’s been noted that before da Vinci left Rome, he had health issues, and in France, his health deteriorated. Three years after moving to Amboise, da Vinci died. His estate was divided between Salai – who had returned to Milan the year before da Vinci died – and Melzi who inherited a large portion of da Vinci’s estate. It was Salai, though, who gained possession of the *Mona Lisa*, and sold it to King Francis I, making it part of the royal collection and in the initial group of artworks that formed the foundation of the Louvre museum.

According to his will, da Vinci was interred in St. Florentin Church, on the grounds of Château d’Amboise, remaining there until the French Revolution (late 1700s) when the church was destroyed and his coffin was dismantled. On a visit to Amboise, Sandro was told the nails from da Vinci’s coffin were melted to make bullets, and da Vinci’s bones were scattered. During an excavation of the demolished church in 1863,

bones and other artifacts were found, with claims they were the remains of da Vinci. Without any verification, the remains were buried in a new tomb created for da Vinci in St. Hubert Chapel, also on the grounds of Château d'Amboise; and a notice advises they are the "presumed remains." Biographies of da Vinci note his nomadic lifestyle and his sense of not belonging anywhere, and some believe the discovery of his remains is fabricated.

Sophie Chauveau, French author of the book *Léonard de Vinci*, writes, "[There is no gravestone real or figurative for the greatest artist of the Renaissance](#). Nothing? Not the smallest trace. A man who scattered traces of himself all his life, as if to cover his footsteps, sees his wishes literally granted in his death. He rests nowhere."

And Sandro agrees, "In conclusion, he is nowhere. The French have a lot of nerve."

[Vinci, Italy – Exploring the genius of Leonardo in his hometown](#)

[The Unknown Life Of Leonardo Da Vinci In France](#) (Culture Trip, October 2016)

[Leonardo da Vinci five centuries on: Louvre in Paris opens long-awaited exhibition](#) (BCC; October 2, 2019)

[Leonardo da Vinci: A major international exhibition on one of the world's most famous artists](#). (Louvre, Fall 2019)

[Leonardo da Vinci 2019 Louvre Paris Museum Exhibition](#) (YouTube Video)

[The World's Original Touring Leonardo da Vinci Exhibition](#)

Then and Now

From the art of a Renaissance master to the art of a contemporary master, [Frank Stella](#) is often cited for his unconventional use of shapes and patterns in creating his abstract art. Born in Massachusetts in 1936 to Italian American parents, Stella learned about the techniques of abstract art in high school and later at Princeton University, where he studied history. His frequent visits to art galleries in New York City, along with influences by Jackson Pollack and other abstract artists of the mid-twentieth century, strengthen his interest in developing his artistic abilities, and in 1958, he moved to the city to further his career as an artist.

That year, he started work on paintings with a repeated pattern of black stripes along the top and side edges of the canvas and descending inwards. The paintings, [Black Series 1](#), brought immediate attention to Stella's work, and some of his pieces were included with a group of other artists on exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in 1960. Ten years later, [his art exhibit at the MOMA](#), gave him the distinction of the youngest artist to have a solo presentation at the Museum.

An expansion of his style, from using colors to using a variety of shaped canvases, further opened and defined Stella's artistic nature, and in the 1980s, he broadened his work to include three-dimensional shapes and later, free-standing sculptures. In comparison to his Renaissance counterpart, Stella used wood, metal, and other materials to create art, and added the modern techniques of screen-printing, lithography, and etching to his numerous skills.

Stella's art has been exhibited throughout the world and is included in numerous museum collections. He continues to work out of New York. Early in his career, he said, "What you see is what you see." Stella provides an interesting collection to study.

[Frank Stella: American Painter and Printmaker](#) (The Art Story)

[The Black Paintings](#)

[Frank Stella: Exhibitions and Online Works](#) (Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

[The Constellation of Frank Stella](#) (The New York Times; March 18, 2020)

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[Giovanni Boccaccio is well known for writing \*The Decameron\*](#), 100 stories told by 10 women and men living in a country villa as they wait out the Black Plague. [Alessandro Manzoni](#), author of *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*), the classic novel about love and misfortune, describes the plague in Milan during the late 1620s. Although *I Promessi Sposi* is required reading in Italian schools, and *The Decameron* is often referred to as a masterpiece, both books are being reexamined for how the authors described the social, economic, and political effects of a pandemic.

[Boccaccio's Life and Works](#) (Decameron Web, Brown University)

[Italy's Answer to Coronavirus is a Classic Published Almost 200 Years Ago](#) (Literary Hub; March 19, 2020)

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[Anthony van Dyck](#), a Flemish painter strongly influenced by Peter Paul Rubens, was in Palermo, Sicily in 1624, arriving shortly before the plague made another round through the island, and staying until the quarantine was lifted the following year. Around the same time, what appeared to be the bones of [Santa Rosalia](#) – said to be the daughter of a Duke and a descendant of Charlemagne – were found in a cave on [Mount Pellegrino](#). Legend states that Santa Rosalia died in 1160. During the plague she was seen by a local villager who she told to find her remains and carry them in a procession through town to end the epidemic; and it ended shortly after. Santa Rosalia was declared the patron saint of Palermo, and van Dyck was commissioned to paint a series of portraits to commemorate her patronage. Her Feast Day is September 4th.

It's noted that while van Dyck was in Sicily, he met with the aging portrait painter Sofonisba Anguissola, who – earlier in her career – was acquainted with Michelangelo and was court painter to Phillip II of Spain. (See my article "[Italian Women of the Arts](#)" [posted on La Gazzetta Italiana](#). Biographies and resources for Anguissola, Plautilla Nelli, and Artemisia Gentileschi are on the website of the [Italian Historical Society of America](#). A [major exhibit of Gentileschi's work](#) was scheduled to open April 4th at The National Gallery in London, but has been postponed until further notice.)

[Saint Rosalie Interceding for the Plague-stricken of Palermo](#) Painting by van Dyck at the (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

[Van Dyck in Sicily: Painting and the Plague 1624-25 at Dulwich Picture Gallery](#) (Culture 24; February 24, 2012)

[Brush with the Black Death: how artists painted through the plague](#) (The Guardian; February 15, 2012)

[Santuario di Santa Rosalia](#) (Cave Shrine on Monte Pellegrino)

[Images: Sanctuary of St. Rosalia](#)

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A Jesuit priest, biologist, and physiologist, [Lazzaro Spallanzani](#) (1729-1799) was one of the first [originators of experimental work in biology](#). His research in living organisms was further expanded upon by Louis Pasteur. Spallanzani attended the University of Bologna, where his physics professor was Laura Bassi, the first woman elected to the Academy of Sciences of Bologna. (Learn more about Laura Bassi and find additional resources through my article posted on the [Italian Historical Society of America](#).)

The [Lazzaro Spallanzani National Institute for Infectious Diseases](#) (INMI Lazzaro Spallanzani, *Istituto nazionale per le malattie infettive L. Spallanzani*) also known as

the Spallanzani Hospital is the leading Italian institution for research on contagious diseases. Media company [We the Italians](#) “has started a fundraising campaign to help the Spallanzani Hospital, the most important Italian hospital for contagious diseases, to fight coronavirus.” [Donate to help Italy](#).

[Updates on the Corona virus outbreak in Italy and the Venice Region](#)

[Italy Observes Moment Of Silence For COVID-19 Victims, As Case Numbers Plateau](#) ((NPR News Update; March 31, 2020)

[Italian doctors make Coronavirus breakthrough](#) (Wanted in Milan; February 3, 2020)

### **Visit Italy**

Spend some time browsing and shopping in the beautiful shops of Venice.

[Made In Italy: Venice Artisans Guide for Best Handcrafted Items to Support Local Makers.](#)

Read about life in Venice during these trying times.

[The Beauty of Venice: Secret Gardenscape](#)

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Watch episodes of the popular Detective Montalbano television series for free until April 30th. (Italian with English subtitles.)

Andrea Camilleri published his first book featuring Detective Montalbano – *The Shape of Water* – in 1994, when he was in his late 60s. Four books and five years later, Detective Montalbano premiered on television and has continued since. The popularity of his detective novels has produced location tours, recipes, and a town that changed its name. [Camilleri died last year](#), but his final book, [The Safety Net](#), debuted on television this past March.

[Detective Montalbano Series One](#): “Murder, betrayal, office politics, temptation... it's all in a day's work for Detective Salvo Montalbano. Filmed in the ancient, sun-washed Sicilian city of Ragusa Ibla, the series is based on the international best-selling mystery novels by Andrea Camilleri and stars Luca Zingaretti.”

[Andrea Camilleri had a late but great career in crime writing](#) (The Guardian; July 17 2019)

[Andrea Camilleri: a life in writing](#) (Interview, The Guardian; July 6, 2012)

[A guide to the locations of the Montalbano TV series](#)

From the Italian American Press

The Italian American Press offers a great selection of books – culture, history, memoirs, art, family, food, the supernatural, the natural beauty of Italy, and more – for every interest. Help preserve Italian American heritage and history. Support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian American and Italian culture and let them know you found their books on the Italian American Press.

New on the Italian American Press

In 2017, [Kazabo Publishing](#) began “bringing great literary works from all over the world to English language readers.” Its concept of translating best sellers from other countries into English has opened a new market for anyone interested in contemporary Italian novels. Most of the books that have been translated are by Italian authors from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and offer a regional look into that time period in Italy.

Director of New Authors, Chiara Giacobbe, has a “degree (Laurea) in Classics from Italy and a Master's Degree in Comparative Literature from the University of California

at Santa Barbara,” and occupies her time “reading, writing, and translating,” with Italian literature a “main focus.” She notes, “Kazabo Publishing grew out of the realization that traditional publishers were not bringing lots of great books to English language readers. ... I studied these authors in school and I never imagined that I would actually be responsible for introducing some of their works to the English-speaking world!”

[Kazabo books listed on the IAP](#) include *Death in a Bookstore* a mystery novel by Augusto De Angelis, and several books with a collection of short stories: *The Demon Deer* by Grazia Deledda, *Heart Conditions* by Matilde Serao, and *A Touch of Classics* with stories by six authors. Books are available in ebook or print format and can be downloaded directly from the Kazabo website.

[Kazabo Publishing Releases Augusto De Angelis's Classic "Whydunit" Death in a Bookstore](#) (We the Italians, December 2, 2019)

Make Italian American Movies

Almost any book listed on the Italian American Press would make a wonderful movie. Here are nine from IAP featured authors (including me) and potential genres. To read a synopsis and for more information, go to [Make Italian American Movies](#) on the IAP. If you are on Twitter, Instagram, or other social media, please share. Reach out to actors, filmmakers, directors, and producers.

Make It A Movie

A Camp Without Walls by Dr. Maria Lombardo

Royanna: An Extraterrestrial Affair by Raphael Ferraro

The Ghosts of the Garfagnana: Seven Strange Stories from Haunted Tuscany by Paul Salsini

Out of Rushmore's Shadow: The Luigi Del Bianco Story by Lou Del Bianco

Coal War in the Mahoning Valley by Joe Tucciarone and Ben Lariccia

Not for Self: A Sicilian Life and Death in Marion by Joseph L. Cacibauda

Vina, A Brooklyn Memoir by Joseph C. Polacco

The Seven Golden Apples by Robert Cirillo

Con Amore by Janice Therese Mancuso

Italian American Heritage Project

[From the Italian Cultural Society, Sacramento CA](#)

HOW MANY ITALIAN AMERICANS ARE IN THE U.S.? DID YOU KNOW THE U.S. CENSUS WILL ALLOW YOU TO IDENTIFY AS ITALIAN AMERICAN?

This year every household will receive a letter explaining how to respond to the 2020 Census. People may respond online or by mail. The 2020 Census will have a question which asks those people who identify as “White” to also write in their ancestry, including Italian. The last time European Americans were allowed to designate their ancestry was on the 2000 Census. In that Census around 16 million Americans chose to identify themselves as Italian Americans. They consisted of 6% of the total US population or about one out of every 20 Americans. In that Census, Italian Americans were the only European group to show an increase from the 1990 census. A national community survey in 2015 found that nearly 18 million Italian-Americans identified as Italian-American. In that survey, Italian-Americans were again the only European group to show an increase from the earlier census. Why the increase? The increase shows that Italian-Americans are very loyal to and proud of their Italian ancestry and feel a stronger connection to their heritage than other European ancestral groups. It also shows that many younger Italians are choosing to identify with and maintaining their ties to their ancestral heritage.

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Do you have children at home? Are you looking for a group project? Interested in learning more about Christopher Columbus? Lesson plans are available providing an objective learning experience and a counterbalance to what is being taught about Columbus.

Based on the three letters Columbus wrote – to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand; Luis De Sant Angel (Santangel), who helped finance the voyage; and Gabriel Sanchez, treasurer of the Monarchs – the lesson plans include Word documents with instructions and class assignments, PowerPoint Presentations, and links to websites that provide correlating information. All are available at [sharemylesson.com](https://sharemylesson.com); here are the direct links:

### ***What Did Columbus Say?***

Grades 1-2: <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/what-did-columbus-say-306521>

Grades 3-4: <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/what-did-columbus-say-306951>

Grades 5-8: <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/what-did-columbus-say-307148>

### ***Decoding the Columbus Letter***

Grades 9-12: <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/decoding-columbus-letter-307149>

Registration is required, but – unlike other websites with lesson plans – there is no fee to access or download the resources. More on the IAHP website here: [Lesson Plans](#).

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The groups opposing Columbus Day have an organized agenda to eliminate it from America; Italian Americans do not have an organized defense. The statements of truth and facts posted on so many Italian American websites are not working. Italian Americans need a nationwide program to battle the campaign to abolish Columbus Day or it will be lost; even though Indigenous People already have a designated day, and Native Americans have a day and a month to celebrate their culture.

Indigenous Peoples Day – August 9

Native American Month – November

Native American Heritage Day – The day after Thanksgiving

Learn more: [Italian American Heritage Project](#)

On The Radio

West Coast Italian Radio ([WCIR](#)), based near Seattle, is hosted by Tony La Stella and Marzia Clyons and every Monday broadcasts an hour of “everything Italian” throughout the United States. In my interview on March 23rd, we talked about the similarities between Leonardo da Vinci and Frank Stella, and books listed on the Italian American Press that should be movies. [Listen to the show and my interview](#).

Italian American News

[‘Strega Nonna’ author Tomie dePaola is dead at age 85](#) (PBS News Hour; March 31, 2020)

[Anthony Fauci was ready for this. America was not.](#) (Washington Post; March 20, 2020)

News about Italy

[“I’m just doing my job.” On call with Italy’s coronavirus doctors treating patients at home](#) (The Local.it; April 2, 2020)

[Tommy the robot nurse helps keep Italy doctors safe from coronavirus](#) (Reuters; April 1, 2020)

[ANALYSIS: Five reasons why the coronavirus hit Italy so hard](#) (The Local.it; March 30,

