

VILLAROSSA VOICE

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY IN FLORENCE NEWSLETTER FOR STUDENTS, FACULTY & STAFF

Truth or Dare, Toscani Style

Caroline Elo
Staff

A young woman’s ass, up close and personal in 70’s style hot pants, a newborn still with umbilical cord, blood-stained, and coated in vernix caseosa, a nun and a priest sharing a heavenly kiss—these are some of Oliviero Toscani’s most well-known images created for advertising campaigns. His art is the art of provocation, making direct, politically INCORRECT, and categorical statements both with his words and the unashamed images that he creates. His favorite subject: human beings, “because they are extreme, terrible and good,” a seemingly contradictory and intriguing statement by the artist. SUF students, no matter what their major, are privileged to have been exposed to this Dynamo’s art and lecture, while a select group of studio art students even had their art personally critiqued by Toscani. The Maestro is inspirational and leaves his audience believing that all we need to make the

world a better and more civilized place is the courage to be creative, the courage to tap into the creativity that is inside all of us. The events of April 2nd started with a press conference at the SUF Gallery for the opening of the Toscani exhibit: “Art in the Service of Power: Ethics and Social Responsibility in Advertising.” In the exhibit are images from the artist’s prolific career in advertising and magazine work over the last three decades, augmented by larger than life close-ups of death row inmates, exhibited alongside the text from interviews conducted with the inmates and intended to be a catalogue. The inmates answer questions about their memories of childhood, their mother, their favorite foods on the “outside,” their last memories before they were locked up. Reading their words, one almost forgets that these are murderers talking; they sound like us....this is perhaps the point of discomfort to which Toscani wants to bring us, “These photographs show clothes you cannot buy, people you want to eliminate! Everything is wrong with these pictures. This is what gets the thoughts turning, the blood pumping, the discussion going. If people don’t talk about the art, it is not art, or in any case it’s not good art.” Art must provoke to do its job, this is pure Toscanian philosophy. At the press conference SUF professor of marketing Simone Anselmi, who had the idea and the contacts to bring us the photographer, stated, “There are a growing number of students coming to Italy to study business,



Toscani event photography: Francesco Guazzelli

Oliviero Toscani and SUF Director Barbara Deimling during the press conference

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This page:
 Top: Jesus Jeans ad campaign, 1973;
 Center: a panel from the Death Penalty exhibit;
 Bottom: the clothing company Nolita accepted
 Toscani's proposal to speak out against the clothing
 industries emphasis on thin fashion models through a
 billboard campaign, 2007

Opposite page:
 From top to bottom, scenes from the conference, the
 press conference, and the exhibition



Truth or Dare, *continued from page 1*

and at SUF we wanted to give them something they wouldn't get in the U.S.—Oliviero Toscani. Toscani is modern, where so much of Italy is not." His art, although commercial, stimulates more than just the consumer; it stimulates the thinker—a revolutionary thought: mass media can bring us to reflect on our values. It's good for American students to see American culture (death penalty photos) through the eyes of an Italian visionary. Says SUF Director Barbara Deimling, "This is international education at its best."

The press conference was followed by a lunch for selected studio art students and professors, Toscani, and members of his team: Niccolò Donzelli (CEO at La Sterpaia), Stefano Beggato (Production Manager at La Sterpaia). La Sterpaia, in the Parco di San Rosore, Pisa, is an innovative, creative factory not unlike a Renaissance artist's *bottega* and is inspired by Andy Warhol's famous Factory in New York City of the 60's and 70's. Toscani, upon leaving La Fabbrica where he was tied to creating ad campaigns for one brand alone, Benetton, wanted to start a new "factory" where he and his talented team, many of whom are young interns, can work for any client, any brand. Toscani seems to thrive on the energy of young people. In fact, at La Sterpaia they only accept interns under 25 years of age. This interest in youth was reflected in the way he interacted with SUF students, conversing naturally with them, engaging them in open dialogue, and provoking them to think and question. Students sat at the lunch encircling the Maestro, asking rapid-fire questions to which he responded in turn.

An interesting question asked at the press conference was, considering China's blatant infringement on human rights, how the photographer felt about boycotting the upcoming Olympics in China. Toscani made a strong argument against boycotting as it impedes dialogue and communication, and has a detrimental effect on culture.

"There is a parallel between boycotting and censorship, both are reactions that block communication, in a sense putting one's head in the sand, turning one's back." By refusing to acknowledge a photo and the societal problem it comments on, dialogue is refused. His response to the idea of boycotting the Olympics in China was, "China needs our criticism; everyone needs criticism."

In fact, for the second event of the day Toscani critiqued a selection of studio art students' work. This undoubtedly was an intimidating experience for the students but also an invaluable opportunity to listen, think, and reflect on what they want to communicate through their art and how to do this powerfully. Students' opinions of



When looking at one of Toscani's images, the viewer is confronted with a new world, new ideas, and new ways of thinking. Toscani takes risks creating them, and you are challenged to take the risk with him.

Toscani's method of critique ranged from "honest," "direct," "captivating," "stimulating," and "provoking." Despite the level of his celebrity, he related to the students as equals. He conducted the critique with humor and a dash of showmanship, which one student described as crazy, "I think the reason that craziness worked was because it got people to think and to talk. That's the most important thing no matter what conclusion is reached, to think and then talk, and then to think again." Toscani is passionate, and the most important message the students came away with is that without passion art is empty, and little is communicated. Passion is a key ingredient in creative expression, without it everything else is just a shell: in Toscani's words, "a technical masturbation."

The day's events continued with an evening lecture held at the Istituto degli Innocenti and culminated with the opening reception for the Toscani exhibit at the SUF Gallery, (open to the public through May 31st, Thursday-Saturday, 5:00-8:00 pm). Both events were highly successful with maximum turn-out, the lecture being standing-room-only to a crowd of over 500 people. In her opening speech for the lecture, Barbara Deimling drew a wonderfully fitting analogy between the experience of study-abroad students at SUF and the often jarring experience one has when confronted with Toscani's art, "A university seat in Florence is not a comfy chair. The culture our students encounter is not meant as a finishing school but as a challenge to craft with their own hands a society that they can both love and believe in." Similarly, when looking at one of Toscani's images, the viewer is confronted with a new world, new ideas, and new ways of thinking. He takes risks creating them, and you are challenged to take the risk with him. As Deimling said, "The more Oliviero Toscani makes us uncomfortable, rises us to action by violating our thresholds of the expected....the more welcome he is at any institution that values learning not as an end but a beginning." In his lecture Toscani gave a history of his career and projected hundreds of images from his prolific career, tracing his evolution as an artist from innovative fashion photographer to art photographer making social commentary in the form of ad campaigns. Toscani said, "There is no such thing as art photography, reportage, or commercial photography; there is image making." And it is a market, of which we are all a part. He warned that young people are unaware of this, and that they need to learn that everyone is part of this market—our lives are lived out in this market. Everyone must find his/her place in the market.

The President of the Region of Tuscany, Claudio Martini, not only showed his support by making a welcoming speech, but stayed for the entire lecture. Martini complemented SUF for organizing such events as they are opportunities for Americans and locals to come together in dialogue. He further commented that Tuscany/ Italy runs the risk of being stuck in its glorious past, and this is why it is so important to talk about technology, creativity, and communication, all of which Toscani represents.

Toscani, when asked if there is any subject he would consider taboo, sacred, or off-limits, replied, "No, only in a future, more civilized society will we be able to look at any image and not be disturbed." He stated that artists who challenge us can lead us to go to new heights with our own creativity and teach us to be fearless. So although, to quote Toscani, "The three things we need to live are bread, love, and health." I would venture to say we need a fourth to live soulfully: photography—image-making that is as unashamed and fearless as that of Oliviero Toscani himself.

The Role of the Artist: Oliviero Toscani

Commentary by
Douglas Harper
Duquesne University

Perhaps a word of explanation is called for. I am a sociologist and photographer, currently teaching at Duquesne University's Rome campus.

Professor Alick McLean of the Syracuse Florence Campus, a friend and colleague, invited me to Oliviero Toscani's recent lecture and also invited

my comment. I had seen Toscani's Benneton photos on previous trips to Italy and, like many, had wondered about the story behind them. The answer was more complex and interesting than I could have imagined.

Babies come from the human body, as does excrement. Toscani has photographed both, but he made the shit beautiful and the baby terrifyingly bloody, vulnerable, seemingly not ready for the world. Every picture serves one source of power or another, Toscani tells us; nothing made to be seen is suspended without context. Acknowledge it, and then, deal with it. Use this understanding to advance an idea you think is worth advancing. But don't play naïve.

Oliviero Toscani was introduced by Barbara Deimling, Director of Syracuse University in Florence, who spoke about the ethical responsibility of art. She also hinted at the controversy she had weathered when Toscani insisted on a poster advertising his lecture showing an ad he had made some decades ago: a shapely female posterior (his girlfriend at the time, he told the audience) in revealing jean shorts across which was written "Chi mi ama mi segua" (the words of Jesus: "Who loves me will follow me.") On the jeans and below the brand identification: Jesus Jeans. Original American fabric.

Toscani was a ruffled man, wearing red rimmed glasses of his own design. He said he was going to show us his work, but it that it was not particularly well-organized because he had never archived it; it was just a bunch of copies he had handy. He spoke informally and teased the audience, remembering, for example, how great it had been to be a fashion photographer in the late 60s: "plenty of beautiful women around!" He appeared to have made casual decisions that had connected him to some of the most powerful advertising campaigns of recent times. But we were not into the presentation very deeply when two things became clear: Toscani is a remarkable photographer and is deeply committed to social justice. He also has a terrific sense of humor and clearly enjoys being the naughty photographer of modern advertising.

He photographed the most banal of subjects with a maniacal intensity. His book on the city of Livorno included images of seven or eight thousand residents and a project early in his career, from which he showed us a contact sheet, consisted of individual portraits of several tens of thousands of patrons at a hip bar in Manhattan; work he did for several years from eleven till 4 am, while, he noted, showing up for work in the morning hours. It was in the bar he met Andy Warhol, who later became his subject.

He showed images from a series of books and campaigns published adjacent to his advertising work: nude anorexics pictured in gorgeous black and white, lit as models and photographed with large negative cameras; the ravages of anorexia almost impossible to look

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A day with Oliviero Toscani: press conference at 11am; lunch with selected studio arts students at 12:30pm, followed by a critique of selected works by studio arts students; lecture to a standing-room-only crowd of over 500 people at the Salone Brunelleschi in the center of Florence; the opening of the exhibit *Selected Works by Oliviero Toscani* at the SUF Art Gallery, 8pm.

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at. He showed pictures of Italy's WWII concentration camps and portraits of now-elderly Italians who remembered a Nazi massacre; a collage where Berlusconi was morphed into Mussolini and a series of nudes, again in black and white, where the models were aged victims of osteoporosis. He cloaked the bell tower in Venice's St. Marks's piazza while it was under repair with a full-sized image of the leaning tower of Pisa, which, he said, lead tourists to frantic consultation with their guide books. The audience laughed; a good joke. In fact, a terrific joke.

How had Toscani evolved from photographing beautiful women to social commentary? The turning point appears to have been a revelation, when working for United Colors of Benetton, that since the "products were more or less the same" why not leave them out altogether? Benetton agreed and what followed was arguably the most famous transition in modern advertising: ads for clothes that never showed clothes. Instead there were photographs of condoms of many colors to encourage AIDs awareness and the somber lettering on the lower corner, like an afterthought: United Colors of Benetton. Photos of a white hand holding the hand of a black child; a black and a white child, facing each other on potty chairs; a collage of a hundred or so penises and vaginas; United Colors of Benetton. Photos of war and poverty: United Colors of Benetton. Toscani didn't tell us what the company's thoughts were on these issues, but, he said this revolution made Benetton money and thus gave Toscani a freedom few could imagine a photographer savant to ever gain in the halls of international fashion capitalism.

He ended with prepared comments, he said "he'd done his homework." The role of the artist is to deconstruct power; to challenge stereotypes and shock the world out of its complacency. Creativity is communication; but most artists retreat to the banal and the boring; creativity stripped of passion. The world is not a good place; fifty percent of those living have not heard a phone ring; seven percent are on line. Our world is characterized by war, pollution, avoidable disease, poverty. Use art to fight for an awareness of our essential sameness; explore the human animal in all our constructions; reveal our sins in order to bring these issues into our awareness. This is the role of the artist, no matter who is paying the bills. But, he repeated, art becomes ever more boring, predictable and empty as our challenges face us every day more directly.

At the end of the talk an individual asked: "Is there any place you would not go with this work?" Toscani paused, and then answered in the negative. But I think that was not the honest answer. Toscani's encourages us to see our common humanity. His most difficult images make this point most strongly. And, indeed, there is a universe of images that would fall outside that mandate. They would not be made by Toscani, the angry jokster of the advertising world.



Building for Democracy: an Architectonic Revolution

“As a mathematician, I think in terms of axioms on which we can construct everything else. And that is how I came up with a proposal for the city of Medellín. The first problem was inequality, and to start working toward equality you must improve education—public education.”

Brenda Cooke
Staff

“Public education must be the motor of social transformation.” With these words the former Mayor of Medellín Sergio Fajardo completely captivated the attention of well over 300 people, from the Italian and SUF communities, who attended the architecture symposium entitled, *The Political Dimension of Architecture*.



The symposium was organized by the SU Florence School of Architecture and the *Osservatorio sull'Architettura della Fondazione Targetti*, in collaboration with the Town Councillor for Urban Planning of Florence, Gianni Biagi. After a brief introduction by Mark Robbins, Dean of the School of Architecture on the SU home campus, and Francisco Sanin, Coordinator of the SU Florence School of Architecture, Fajardo took the podium and for well over an hour his charismatic manner and clear, concise presentation took the audience through a captivating and eye-opening presentation. Perhaps due to his background as a professor of mathematics, he makes redeeming a city seem as easy as $2 + 2$. And perhaps due to his very *lack* of a background as a politician, he was easier to believe, Fajardo explains that in 1999, with a group of 50 like-minded persons from various sectors of the Medellín community—academia, cultural organizations, social organizations, NGOs, and businesses, all of whom were, in one way or another, interested in working for the good of the city—he began a grass roots movement, knocking on doors and drumming up support for a new political agenda. “*Del miedo a la esperanza*: from fear to hope,” says Fajardo. “Our first challenge was to transform politics, and we realized that to do that *we* had to become the politicians, because politicians are the ones who have power.”

Fajardo based his revolutionary administration on the conviction that architecture is for everybody, and that not only the rich, luxurious areas of a city are in need of urban growth and renewal. “Our most beautiful buildings,” maintains Fajardo, “must be in our poorest areas.” Through his administration he has intervened in the very infrastructure of the poor hillside *barrios*, building transportation, parks, libraries, museums and schools. But we’re not talking pre-fabricated concrete, functional yet lacking in design and spirit. His administration has specialized in spectacular new buildings and parks designed by some of the top architects in the world.

With a confidence and lucidity that makes the listener wonder why no one else had already solved this dilemma, Fajardo states, “We had to build Medellín’s most beautiful buildings in the places where there had never been a real state. The first step toward quality education is

the dignity of the space. When the poorest kid in Medellín arrives in the best classroom in the city, there is a powerful message of social inclusion. That kid has a newfound self-esteem, and he learns math more easily. If you give the most humble neighborhoods beautiful libraries, you make those communities proud of the libraries. That is powerful. We are saying that that library or school, with its spectacular architecture, is the most important building in the neighborhood. And it is sending the rest of society a very clear message of social transformation. This is our revolution. The most powerful people see us focusing on the most humble, and they are supporting us—that is an important achievement.”

Fajardo has turned the city of Medellín into a showcase for new educational and architectural



Symposium event photography: Caroline Elo

This page:
Rendering of the
Library-Park San Javier;
Sergio Fajardo;
SU Florence architecture
students listened atten-
tively to Fajardo. Over
300 people from the
Florentine and SUF
communities attended the
Symposium.

Opposite page, top to
bottom:
Orquideorama, the
Medellín Arboretum;
The new Metro Cable
carries people to and
from Santo Domingo
Savio, a hillside slum that
is home to 170,000
people. The Library-Park
España is visible in the
background;
Children enjoy the newly
built library in Santo
Domingo Savio.

projects. He increased city spending on education, bringing it to 40 percent of Medellín's annual budget, while also raising spending on public transportation. Five new libraries are at the center of his social policies, as well as a sprawling public science center and dozens of schools. He also expanded public transportation by building aerial cable cars up into the slums on the city's hills—a cost efficient, genial solution to getting the poor and stranded down from the out-lying mountains into the fabric of the city.

He also increased small loans for entrepreneurial projects for small businesses, and strongly believes the poor will develop the skills they need to compete through these investments in education and new public spaces, reflecting a faith in architecture to help achieve this goal. Obviously, the first question that comes to mind after seeing the dazzling array of new build-ings and transportation his administration is responsible for bringing into existence in just four years is, where is the money coming from? Fajardo says that tax collection in Medellín increased by 20 percent under his administration. He stressed the importance of transparency in convincing the business community and others to pay more taxes. "Once the businesses see where the money really goes, and see concrete, tangible results within the community, they see how much this can help them, and they pay," he says.

The second problem Fajardo's administration tackled was violence. "In Medellín we had violence due to drug trafficking, violence with deep roots and profound effects on the society. My approach was to treat these challenges like math problems: for every decrease in violence, we *immediately* increased social opportunities, working in tandem. Every day must be a little better than the day before. You need security for democracy, and for that we needed more police—as long as they were police who respected human rights." The results speak for them-selves: from 6,500 murders in Medellín in 1991 (381 per 100,000 inhabitants) to approximately 700 murders in 2006, (about 30 per 100,000 inhabitants). That is less than all other comparable cities in Latin America, and in fact below that of Washington, D.C. Through his support of ambitious and successful public works schemes and regeneration projects, and vastly improved security, Medellín has been revitalized on a massive scale, and in the process has become the perfect case study for innovative urban planning and social poli-cies—in short, a new democracy. Fajardi concludes, "Of course there are still problems. But with our history, the key is to keep building on the positive—because that will make people believe, which will help us solve the problems that remain."

Fajardo was followed by the Greek-born architect Elia Zenghelis and a truly thought-provok-ing talk about architectural globalization which, he believes, breeds architecture that threatens the survival of the planet. "Aesthetics as a 'goal' fuels consumption. The processes of individ-ualism is no longer sustainable," says Zenghelis, and argues in favor of a "return to the Big Scale project within the cities; a project removed from aesthetics, located once more, in the political domain. The big scale project can sharpen the vitality of political struggle."

Italian architect, urban planner and director of the design magazine *Abitare*, Stefano Boeri wrapped up the symposium. Boeri's research on architecture and urbanism focuses on the new conditions for a modern European city, which must, he says in a statement that sums up the theme of the seminar, "include the ethics of daily life into architecture."

Faculty Watch

The following three faculty members presented at the Renaissance Society of America annual conference held in Chicago earlier this month (April 2-5). Along with these faculty members, several of SUF's former Fine Arts graduate students also presented papers, including: Sebastian Bentkowski, Sally Cornelison, Alexandra Korey, and -in the same session- Diana Bullen, Robert La France, and Lia Markey.

Matteo Duni



Matteo Duni organized a panel, “Critics of the Witch-hunt,” as well as presented a paper, “A Renaissance Lawyer Confronts the Witch-hunt: Gianfrancesco Ponzinibio” at the RSA conference. The paper discussed the important role of men of law, jurists and lawyers, who opposed the witch-hunters’ ideas. Matteo focused particularly on an important, but little-studied figure, Gianfrancesco Ponzinibio, a lawyer from Piacenza whose book *De lamiis et excellentia iuris utriusque* (*On Witches and On the Excellence of Civil and Canon Law*, 1520) was the most radical attack on the belief in witchcraft to that date.

Sara Matthews Grieco



Sara Matthews-Grieco organized a panel entitled, “Thinking about Visual Literacy: Color, Text, Media, Audience.” The panel was chaired by Dennis Romano (Maxwell School, Syracuse University), and featured three papers: Louisa Matthew (Union College) spoke on “Reading Color in Sixteenth-Century Venice”, Sara Matthews-Grieco read a paper entitled “Making Pictures That Speak: Early Emblematism and the Codification of the Visual Idiom” and Alexandra Korey, former SUF Fine Arts graduate student who has just completed her doctorate in Art History at the University of Chicago, presented material on “Visual Literacy and Textual Literacy in Leo X’s *Giochi di Putti* Tapestries.”

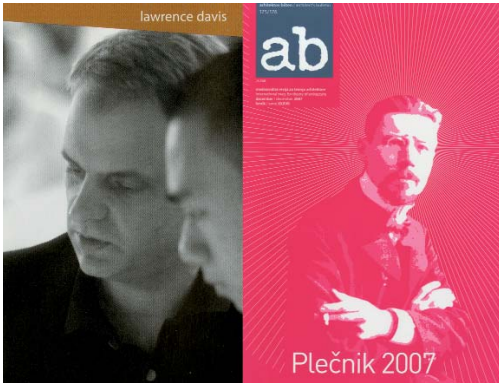
Jonathan Nelson



Jonathan Nelson has spent a lot of time on the road this semester. In February, he gave a paper in Rome on “Michelangelo’s Female Figures,” at a conference celebrating the publication of Cristina Acidini’s important book on *Michelangelo Pittore*. Jonathan argued that not all of Michelangelo’s women look like bodybuilders; rather, “for female figures, form follows function.” In late March, Jonathan gave two talks in Tokyo (see related article) then continued on to the Renaissance Society of America meeting. Here he had co-organized a session, dedicated to “Unacceptable Art: Rejected Commissions in Renaissance Italy,” together with Richard Zeckhauser, a professor of economics at Harvard. Their book, *The Patron’s Payoff. Conspicuous*

Commissions in Renaissance Italy (Princeton UP), is now in press. This project led to the paper on their current research, on the importance of dissatisfied patrons. In Chicago they spoke about “Quality Control for Commissions: The Potential for Rejection or Replacement.”

Lawrence Davis



The article “The Alternative Modernity of Jozef Plečnik,” by Larry Davis was recently published in the December 2007 (no. 175/176) issue of *AB* [*Architect's Bulletin*] edited by Bostjan Vuga. The issue is especially dedicated to the work of the influential Slovenian 20th century Architect Jozef Plečnik on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his death. Davis’s article speaks from the point of view of an architect and examines the “modern” aspects of Plečnik’s work, a body of neoclassical and figurative projects that are contemporary with the more familiar Modernist of the middle of the 20th century. The issue features articles by Vuga, Winka Dubbeldam, Kenneth Frampton, Juregen Meyer, as well as other respected scholars and critics.

Tokyo Journal

Until May 18, the *Venus of Urbino* is not on view...in Florence. She is currently the centerpiece of a splendid exhibition at the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo: “The *Venus of Urbino*. Myth and Image of a Goddess from Antiquity to the Renaissance.” In the main room, against a bright

Jonathan K. Nelson
Coordinator
Dept. of Art History

red background, you can see Titian’s masterpiece and another work usually found in the Galleria dell’Accademia: the *Venus* designed by Michelangelo and painted by Pontormo. These competing ideals of beauty were the focus of a paper I delivered (after a trial run here at SUF): “The Battle of the Female Nudes.” This was part of a conference on erotic art, organized by Prof. Michiaki Koshikawa (Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music), that provided a rare and exciting opportunity for American, Italian, and Japanese scholars to exchange ideas and compare approaches. As a sign of respect for the three foreign speakers –Marzia Faietti, Bette Talvacchia, and myself— the Japanese gave their papers in Italian; with simultaneous translation, the audience could follow all. Interestingly, both the exhibition and conference were sponsored by a newspaper, *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, something that never happens in the West. While in Tokyo, I also gave an informal talk about my own experience as an exhibition curator to Professors Koshikawa’s graduate



students, all of whom study Western art, from Bellini to Rothko. The group very kindly led my wife Silva Catitti and I on an excursion to see a nearby ancient Buddhist shrine. Conversation flowed, especially over dinner in a wonderful traditional restaurant. In the photo of this magical evening, we stand before Philippe Stark’s *Super Dry Hall*, together with our gracious host and his students: Hiroyo Hakamata, Mutsuki Iwaya, Yujin Tashiro, Sayaka Ando, Akimi Iwaya, Yuiko Mukasa, Aya Onose, with Maria Fukada and Naoko Matsuda behind the camera. Let’s hope we can welcome them at SUF one day soon!

Volunteering for a Super Friday

Almost every student at SUF knows what “storytelling” is. Twenty-five Italian elementary school students. Two or three SUF students. Read Dr. Seuss. One hour. Sounds like fun. How about 150 students in one day? Now that’s a Super Friday!

Amanda Kanekuni
Syracuse University

One Friday in February, two SUF students and I headed out to an elementary school in near-by Scandicci for a full day of storytelling. We were going to be working with six classes: three third grades, one fourth grade, and two fifth grades. The three of us did not know what to expect; our day started out interestingly, as we got lost navigating the multiple buildings that composed the school complex. As soon as we were settled in the “English” classroom, our first class arrived. As we went through the vocabulary, the story, and the activities, I realized that it was going to be quite a long, but exciting day. We had small breaks between classes but by lunchtime, I hardly had a voice. We had lunch in the cafeteria with a second grade class; what a great experience! The children had the opportunity to practice their English while we practiced our Italian. Just the cafeteria experience in itself was interesting; every single student eats the cafeteria food (rather than bringing their lunch from home), which is served on “real” plates with “real” silverware—not on the plastic and aluminum we are given in the States. After lunch we had three more classes and time flew by quickly. Before we knew it, it was after 4 pm and we had just spent eight hours teaching English lessons. We were exhausted. I had never imagined how much teaching and working with kids all day long takes a toll on your body. As I recounted my experiences from the day, I also realized how similar to the children I am. They are unsure about their English; I can be unsure about my Italian. In both the classroom and the cafeteria, we were equals. Most importantly, it amazed me that a children’s book entitled *Because a Little Bug Went Kachoo* had allowed us to eliminate communication barriers in a simple and beautiful way. Needless to say, Super Friday was an amazing experience.

SUF Volunteer Program: Reading for the Blind

This spring marks the first semester of the SUF Reading for the Blind volunteer program. I was immediately drawn to this program because I believe that books are a means of knowledge and storytelling that unite, that help people to share ideas across cultures.

Kimberly DiMaggio
Syracuse University

I read English books by American authors and record myself doing so for the Unione Italiana Ciechi (Center for the blind) in Florence. It takes about 15-20 minutes to read a children’s book. Just recently I have read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, one of my all time favorite books.

This is a great opportunity to be involved in the SU Florence volunteer program even if you find yourself pressed for time—you can organize it around whatever time frame works best for you. When I read the books, I am usually in my room in my host family’s house. I inform my host family and roommate that I will be reading for an hour, just so they know not to disturb me while I’m recording. And then, the rest is simple. I fix the microphone; drink some water to clear my throat and press record. First, I introduce each book, as well as state the bibliography, my name and a short summary about the author. Then I begin reading the text slowly and rhythmically, making sure to announce clearly. If I make a mistake I must re-record.

I don’t mind reading the books out loud (well, the children’s books at least for now). I know that it’s for a good cause and I give credit to those who are listening because they want to learn a new language. I admire their spirit and their will to succeed. I’m glad that I can be a part of that.

SU Florence Announces Finalists in the Academic Excellence Award

SU Florence has announced the eleven recipients of this semester's Academic Excellence Award, in the categories of Outstanding Students—for the Volunteer Program and the Internship Program—and the prestigious Coluccio Salutati Award.

The Outstanding Students from the Volunteer program are:

Annemarie Finlan, Syracuse University
Amanda Kanekuni, Syracuse University
Nicole Stanek, Syracuse University

The Outstanding Students from the Internship program are:

Simona Capisani, University of San Diego
Chelsea Kelly, Vassar College
Marissa Lorenzetti, Syracuse University

The Coluccio Salutati Award honors students with high academic achievement and engagement with the Italian culture. This is the highest recognition SU Florence can bestow upon its students. Says Prof. Matteo Duni, Coordinator of the Coluccio Salutati Award, "This semester saw more nominations of students by professors, and more essay submissions, than on any other year I have served on the committee. We honestly had a difficult time narrowing the choice down to five, there were so many strong essays."

SUF professors nominated forty-eight students and thirty-three of these students subsequently submitted an essay. Congratulations to:

Ryan Doyle, Syracuse University, *We Shall Not Cease*
Alyssa Gjedsted, USC, *The Lessons of Looking Up*
Gwen Purdom, Lehigh University, *Teach My Dog Italian*
Laura Santel, Tufts University, *Brunelleschi at the Gift Shop*
Burak Unel, Syracuse University, *A Surplus of Adjectives*

Read the essays on-line at <http://www.syr.fi.it/study-abroad-florence-excellence-awards.php>

All of the finalists will be honored in an award ceremony during the Student Day celebration on Thursday, April 24. (See page 12 for details.)



SUF internship Opportunities Grow

This semester saw a record-setting 48 students sign up for internships, in the most varied of fields. Di tutto un pò, as they say in Italian—the SUF Internship Program offers opportunities in a little bit of everything, from researching and cataloguing historical art, to marketing for an artisan's leather shop through a fashion show, to working in the SUF Art Gallery and the School of Architecture, to giving guided tours of various museums in Florence, to writing for Florentine ezines, to working in Italian elementary schools teaching architectural ideas and guiding students as they make models of historically significant sites.

Says Simona Capisani, above, of her experience giving tours at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, "The intern experience is where everything came together for me—I found myself naturally drawing on things I learned from all of the various classes I am taking. For example, when I was with a group of tourists in front of artwork by Michelangelo I found myself naturally sharing information about the poetry he wrote, which I learned about in my Michelangelo class—and they were totally captivated. They had no idea he also wrote poetry, and said they felt fortunate to have a tour guide who shared their academic experience with them. The groups were so enthusiastic and full of questions, the museum literally had to push us out the door at closing time on numerous occasions."

It's All About YOU: SUF Student Day Celebration

Don't miss out on this special campus-wide celebration of a semester of exploration and cultural engagement through sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch on Thursday, April 24, 2008

4-8pm: Special opening of *Selected Works* by *Oliviero Toscani* at the SUF Art Gallery, refreshments

5-8pm: Student Art Show at Studio Arts, Piazzale Donatello 21

6-7pm: Outstanding Student Award Volunteer Program and Dr. Seuss Contest winners (Italian school children), Internship Program, and the Coluccio Salutati Award

6:50pm: *Aperitivo* - refreshments in the Villa Rossa garden

7:15pm: *I Giullari di Syracuse* theater performance in the Annex garden

8:15pm: Dinner and music under the stars in the Villa Rossa garden

Host families are welcome!



The VILLA ROSSA VOICE is the newsletter for the Syracuse University in Florence community. We welcome your questions, comments, articles and/or artwork.

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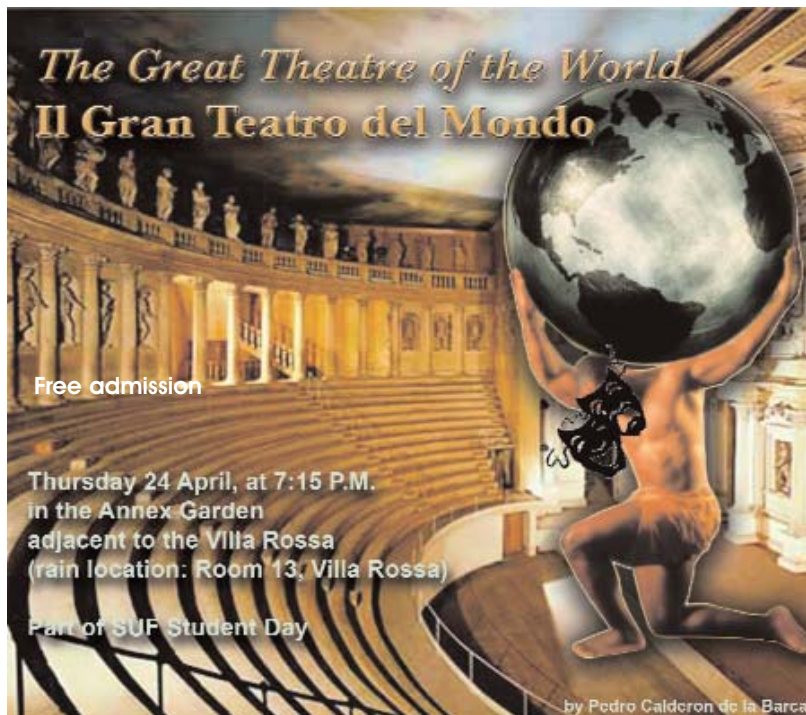
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“All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” What if this were not only an idea, but an experience to live and understand to the full? This is the essence of Calderon's classic play, first staged in the era of Shakespeare but of urgent interest even today. From rich to poor, mighty to wretched, vain to virtuous, everyone has an important part to play, performing the script that is life itself. A final celebration awaits the cast and audience of the show, that is, all humanity and all the world! Don't miss *I Giullari di Syracuse*, the SUF student-faculty theatre company.



Ischia: Student & Host Family Get-Away This month staff member Roberta Mugelli accompanied students, host families, parents from the States, and a few staff members to Ischia for the “Host Family & Student Weekend Get-Away.” Said Carmela Baruck, mother of SUF student Allison Baruck, “Being able to meet and get to know the host parents and university staff on the trip gave me some great insights into my daughter's Florence experience, as they demonstrated a warmth and dedication to the students that enabled me to know that Ali had been well-looked after, as well as having a phenomenal cultural experience.”