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Cultivating Heroes:  
From Dante and Caboto to Mussolini,  
The Public Art of Montreal's Italians in the 1920s – 1930s

Anna Maria Carlevaris

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in  
The Department  
of  
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## ABSTRACT

Cultivating Heroes: From Dante and Caboto to Mussolini,  
The Public Art of Montreal's Italians in the 1920s – 1930s

Anna Maria Carlevaris  
Concordia University, 2004

The first commemorative public art works commissioned by the Italians of Montreal were produced in the period between the two world wars. They are *Dante* (1922), a bronze bust made by Carlo Balboni, originally located in Lafontaine Park; *Giovanni Caboto* (1935), a bronze statue by Guido Casini in what was once called Western Park; and a mural painting by Guido Nincheri completed in 1933 for the Church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense in the Mile End district. The works were made to mark historical anniversaries that were important to Italian national identity as it was developing during this period in Montreal, in Italy, and throughout the Italian diaspora. This geographically fragmented nationalism was made more complex still by the difficult social and economic realities of immigrant life. Given the precarious status of Italian immigrants, the valiant qualities and extraordinary achievements of the heroes represented in the artworks helped promote group solidarity and confidence. However, the cultural icons were also used to support the ambitions of the Italian elite who managed and directed the sponsorship of the works. The works were used to lobby for a greater share of social and political power both inside and outside the community. The two most important groups in Montreal, the English and the French, also benefited from these same historical icons in their competing efforts for political and cultural primacy in Montreal. All hoped to capitalize on the national pedigree these mythic figures seemed to confirm; a cultural heritage that was as much based on fiction as it was on history. The illustrated discussion examines the complex web of rhetorical conventions announced by art when it is made to speak in the public interest.

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Dedicated to my brothers, Giorgio and Giuseppe.

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Laura Santini, *Trampolino*, 2001, steel, 6 x 11 x 3.5 m, Leonardo Da Vinci Centre, Montreal. Photograph by A. Carlevaris.

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Things tumble with increasing rapidity into an irretrievable past. They vanish from sight, or so it is generally believed. The equilibrium between the present and the past is disrupted. What is left of experience, still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, has been swept away by a surge of deeply historical sensibility. Our consciousness is shaped by a sense that everything is over and done with, that something long since begun is now complete. Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists

- Pierre Nora<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, under the direction of Pierre Nora, English edition edited with a forward by Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 1.

## Introduction

### Public Art and Public Memory

Commemorative public art plays an instrumental role in the formation of a group's cultural identity. Such objects as monuments, plaques, and cenotaphs address the historical events, actions, and protagonists that contribute to a group's historical sense of itself. These objects represent the past, anchor the present, and serve as a guidepost to the future. As historical markers they are the backdrop to, or focal point of, ceremonies and rituals that organize the calendar of communities and nations. As spatial markers they convert a landscape into territory; they outline a collective geography. Furthermore, public artworks are a mode of public speaking; they address the members of a group but also those outside of it. They are reference points in narratives that explain and justify, even as they project and invent, notions about who a group believes itself to be and what it stands for. Subject to the cultural inflection, social pressures and political forces, public art reflects the context of its time. However, as many contemporary historians and philosophers of history have argued, the "past is a contested territory."<sup>1</sup> Because they have the power to bring together or disrupt the lives of communities, representations of the past are invaluable and closely guarded commodities.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Rudin, "Contested Terrain: Commemorative Celebrations and National Identity in Ireland and Quebec," *La Nation dans tous ses états : le Québec en comparaison*, eds. Yvan Lamonde and Gérard Bouchard (Montreal: Harmattan, 1997), 183-204.

The retrieval of history is made possible through its representations, such as monuments and other markers, that act as stabilizing agents in the life of the group. The patrimonial record created by these objects forms the visual counterpart to a nation's narrative account of itself. Because they are thought to reflect the facts upon which they are based, these representations lend legitimacy to founding myths and legends. Patrimony – the architectural and artistic endowment of a nation – becomes the material link with the past. Historians who have examined the relationship of “sites of memory” and the national myths they keep alive include writers such as Pierre Nora and Andreas Huyssen. Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* began as an attempt to “create a vast topology of French symbolism” by analysing the places where collective memory is “rooted.”<sup>2</sup> But, according to Nora, the end of the project uncovered a topography of fault lines. He discovered that, given modernity's “accelerated” sense of history, each attempt to preserve the past through its representation was met by an equal force that threatened to annihilate it, the immanent amnesia of modernity. Out of this desperate situation has emerged a “cult of remembering” that Nora locates in the nineteenth century and the rise of modern nation states. In the same sense, the sites of memory that are discussed in the following pages identify a time of rapid change and rupture with the past.

The idea that a monument is site, that is, a space in which people act, extends the experience of art to include the social interactions that take place around public art and which contribute to the construction of social memory. Sociologist Paul Connerton has added a further dimension to the memorialization process of public sites by situating his

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<sup>2</sup> Nora, P. and Andreas Huyssen, “Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6.2 (1993): 249-261.



analysis within the framework of performance, such as the parades, rituals and ceremonies that are attached to the sites of memory.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, but from the perspective of another discipline, anthropologist Victor Turner has written of performance as a way in which the social body maintains its psychic integrity by engaging in acts, repetitions, and ritualised activities that transform myth into collective memory.<sup>4</sup> What the approaches of Turner, Connerton, and Nora suggest to historians and to art historians is that monuments and other forms of commemorative public art have affective consequences beyond their aesthetic effects or perfunctory roles as historical illustrations.

In the attempt to unpack the possible meanings or uses that can be ascribed to the artworks in this study, it has been necessary to glide along the periphery of art history, discussing art not only in terms of artistic merit but also according to its socio-cultural function. Here, the public art of immigrant Italians is interpreted as a desire for identity, or alternately, as a claim for social agency. From this perspective, art is seen as a cultural artefact, a product of social relations as well as a force generating meaning and effects both within and outside its local environment. The works are seen not solely as aesthetic objects but as part of the “visual culture” of daily life. They are examined according to anthropologist’s Clifford Geertz’s notion of “thick description.”<sup>5</sup> This theoretical view is based on the assumption that communities have an active, affective relationship to art that is neither uniform nor constant but marked by historical circumstance and local contingency. As part of the visual culture that fills the space of a community, art is not

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

simply a product of culture but a producer of cultural meaning. According to this vantage point, art articulates a cultural position that is grounded in a socio-ethnic context determined by economic and political forces. How art mediates this context and maps the parameters of possible meanings that could be attributed by its audience to its context-world, is the subject of this enquiry. By extension, these connotations guide what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has called the “habitus” or way of relating to, or acting in, the world.<sup>6</sup> To Bourdieu, the habitus is more than an unconscious adherence to social conventions, it is a complex region where “symbolic capital” is trafficked amongst people engaged in negotiating social positions and helps focalize the worldview that frames group identity.

### Italian Immigration and Settlement

Establishing the panorama of the early immigration period is the subject of Chapter One “Surplus Labour: Italian Immigration, 1860s to 1920s.” These pages review the social, economic, and political factors that contributed to a massive exodus in the nineteenth century from Italy to cities around the world. Outlining the historical context of Italian immigration to Canada as a whole is made possible through the work of historians such as Robert Harney and Bruno Ramirez.<sup>7</sup> These scholars are central to the body of Italian Canadian historical work; their analyses have helped outline the economic and social

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<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or, The Economic World Reversed.” *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature / Pierre Bourdieu*. ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia UP, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Robert F. Harney, *Italians in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario: 1978). Bruno Ramirez, *Les premiers Italiens de Montréal. L'origine de la Petite Italie du Québec* (Montreal: Boréal Express, 1984).

landscape of the nineteenth century. Their works reveal the density of international influences, from the economic to the political, that contributed to mass emigration. Through demographic detail and the study of labour practices they uncover the social inequities that impacted immigrants' lives before, during, and after migration. The Little Italies of New York City, Toronto and Montreal are examined to illustrate the type of living and working conditions that immigrants experienced as ethnic outsiders.

### Italian Immigrant Artists

Although a general history of Italians in Canada has been documented over the last twenty years, the study of Italian immigrant artists lags far behind. Given that Italian artists, as the American literature tells us, were sought after commodities, the absence of more research is curious. Chapter Two, "The Italian Immigrant Artist Experience to the 1920s," presents an overview of the professional activities and working conditions of Italian artists in the North American context. The migrancy of artists has contributed to the difficulty in collecting data and assembling it into a cohesive account. This problem suggests that it is not simply a matter of locating more archival documentation but of devising new approaches and reformulating art historical questions and methods so that they more firmly grasp the role and variety of economic factors that impact migrant populations. The economic framework that played such a key role in the lives of Italians also raises issues related to the social status of the immigrant art workers within their profession. Because of their impermanent and transient residence, they did not establish roots within the social and art institutions of the host countries. The economic necessities

that underline the immigrant experience impacted artists' choices in terms of where and what they produced. When linked to issues of social difference, economic realities limited the professional possibilities of many first generation Italian artists. At the same time, the 'new world' provided economic survival that was largely impossible in Italy, and the possibility of learning new trades such as stone-cutting and foundry work. Reflecting on the state of historical studies on Italian artists in Canada, Laurier Lacroix suggests that Italian artists have been excluded from Canadian art history not simply because of a lack of research, in part due to their migrant status, but also due to a bias generated by hierarchically structured notions of aesthetic value.<sup>8</sup> Most of these workers were employed as decorative artists, stone-cutters, and moulders, and while essential to the production of art and architecture, rarely attained the status of the easel artist. Art historians Luc Noppen and John Porter have added to our historiographical understanding of the contribution of Italian immigrant artists in Canada and Quebec.<sup>9</sup> Noppen's analysis has revealed that while Italian-trained artists were sought after for their specialized and efficient skills, they were also viewed as decadent influences on the practices of local artists with whom they competed for commissions.

The issues become more complex still when we consider the role played by nationalist sentiments in the historiography of art and discussions about foreign influences on national art. In Quebec hierarchical notions about artisanship, technique, and materials,

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<sup>8</sup> Laurier Lacroix, "Italian Art and Artists in Nineteenth-Century Quebec: A Few Preliminary Observations," *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada*, eds. Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino (Montreal: Guernica, 1989): 163-178.

<sup>9</sup> John Porter and Leopold Désy, *L'Annonciation dans la sculpture au Québec, suivi d'une étude sur les statuaires et modeleurs Carli* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1979) 135-136. Luc Noppen, "Le rejet du plâtre dans l'étude de l'art ancien du Québec : un point de vue," *Revue d'ethnologie du Québec* 1 (1975): 25-48.

became interpolated with notions of national identity. Because of their working methods, Italian immigrant artists could not help but be drawn into art historical debates that viewed their influence as detrimental to established artistic and cultural traditions. While on the one hand the legacy of Italian art was valorized, especially the Renaissance period, on the other hand immigrant artists sometimes found themselves excluded from advantages available to their colleagues.

In recent years more research in the history of Italian immigrant artists has appeared in the United States, such as the encyclopaedic reference books by Jaffe and Soria,<sup>10</sup> but Canadian research is virtually absent. Although, in the 1970s, important archival research was produced on Italian decorative artists in Quebec, none specifically addressed the issue of ethnicity. Only one publication offers a relevant historical overview: an essay on nineteenth-century decorative artists by Laurier Lacroix in the 1989 anthology *Arrangiarsi* (co-edited by Perin and Sturino). In his capacity as a university professor, Lacroix has encouraged further research that resulted in a thesis on Nincheri's stained glass work, one on Italian statuary artists in nineteenth-century Quebec, and another on an early Quebec Italian miniaturist painter.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Irma B. Jaffe, *The Italian Presence in American Art 1760-1860* (New York: Fordham UP, 1989) and *The Italian Presence in American Art 1860-1920* (New York: Fordham UP, 1992). Regina Soria, *American Artists of Italian Heritage 1776-1945* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson, 1993). Irma B. Jaffe, "Art," in *The Italian American Experience: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Salvatore J. La Gumina et al. (New York: Garland, 2000) 32-40.

<sup>11</sup> Raymonde Vanasse, "Guido Nincheri, verrier 1914-1970," (M.A. Thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1995). Luce Vignola, "Essai de définition: Les sculpteurs, statuaires et ornementistes italiens à Montréal de 1862 à 1880," (M.A. thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1996). Anne-Elisabeth Vallée, "L'art de la miniature au Bas-Canada entre 1825 et 1850: Gérôme Fassio et ses contemporains," (M.A. Thesis, Université de Québec à Montréal, 2003).

Students of another principal researcher in decorative arts and sculpture history, Jean Bélisle, have contributed theses on the nineteenth-century sculptor Luigi Capello and movie theatre decorator Emmanuel Briffa.<sup>12</sup> Modest exhibition catalogues on Guido Nincheri, such as those by Paul Labonne and Ginette Laroche, have appeared in the last few years thereby bringing together important visual and archival information. While serving as rare introductions to a largely unexplored oeuvre, they fail to situate Nincheri within his community or the wider socio-historical period. Here, as in other art historical examples, the research takes little account of ethnic and immigrant status other than in an incidental way. Lacroix was alone in breaking new ground when he raised questions about this lacuna, although he attributed it to the hierarchy of genres within the institution of Fine Arts. In most cases, the ethnicity of the artists, and in particular their immigrant status, is established a priori as an empirical fact without theoretical implications to the art historical aim of producing a chronology of names and artefacts. This dissertation attempts to use published archival information, and newly collected data, within a critical framework that focuses on issues of identity. While the archival work is far from complete, the direction of the questions posed and the context within which the issues are presented, offer a new vantage point from which to examine a relatively unexplored topic.

Whether as artist or as dockworker, the social exclusion that many immigrants experienced as temporary or new residents, played a powerful role in their desire for

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<sup>12</sup>Alexandra Shtychno, "Luigi Giovanni Vitale Capello a.k.a. Cappello (1843-1902), Itinerant Piedmontese Artist of Late Nineteenth-Century Quebec" (M.A. thesis, Concordia University, 1991). Philip Dombowsky, "Emmanuel Briffa Revisited" (M.A thesis, Concordia University, 1995).

public monuments. The marginal status of Italian immigrants in Montreal predisposed them to read their public artworks as models for their own collective identity and self-imagining. In this respect, the artworks provided an edifying function, helping to elaborate a nascent ethno-national imagination formed in the transitional space between old world and new. Italians in Montreal, as was the case in other major points of settlement such as New York City, found themselves entangled in power struggles at all levels of their social lives. Social, political, and religious demands competed for their allegiance. Whatever conceptions of themselves were forming, or to which they aspired, were subjected to these surrounding pressures.

### Italian Nationalist Icons

The political context of Italian nationalism as it developed from the post WWI period through to the Fascist era, forms the background to the discussion of the Dante monument in Chapter Three, “The Politics of Patria.” The heroic figural monument represented by the Dante statue introduces Italian nationalism and the use of conventional honorific displays. The sculptural work promotes *italianità*, a sum of cultural, social, and artistic qualities, or *Italianicity*, a vague but useful term borrowed from Roland Barthes.<sup>13</sup> Barthes describes it as an “axis of nationality” where “associative fields, even in opposition to one another, come together”... “not Italy, but the condensed essence of everything that could be Italian.” Barthes points out that the fields (or “paradigmatic articulations”), exist in the common domain of “ideology” which “cannot but be single

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<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” translated by Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977): 32-52.

for a given society and history... ." In other words, the idea of *italianità* proposes a unity of identity even while it is constructed out of fragmentary and contradictory concepts. One of the goals of this dissertation is to demonstrate the "fields of associations" that came into focus at the time the first monuments to *italianità* were being raised in Montreal. In turn, the fields are shown devolving from a variety of origins both inside and outside the Italian community but finding a shared focal point in and through these monuments. All the different factions and their competing agendas sought the same historical legitimacy that these monuments seemed to provide to their common desire for ethno-political status, regardless of whether it meant maintaining status or achieving it. The *Dante* emerged in a period of heightened nationalism that developed in the post-WWI period as many countries discovered the social value of commemorative monuments. For Italians, this was also the eve of the Italian Fascist state and the "new Italy" that would follow.

#### The Campaign for Cabot

In Montreal, Italians found themselves drawn into the ethno-linguistic conflicts between the English and French, hostilities that were made worse by religious sectarianism. The participation of the Italian community in these debates demonstrates a willingness to appease and, at other times, to antagonize the balance of power. The currency of historical icons in the contest for cultural primacy and social supremacy is made evident in the elaboration of the contexts that produced the Cabot monument – the focus of Chapter Four, "The Monument to Giovanni Caboto." The stratification within the



community itself, seen in its political and class divisions, and the impact these conflicts had on the artworks themselves, is also made evident in the circles of patronage that supported their making. The question of power is nowhere more acute than in the inter-war period when the Italian Fascist state became directly involved in the lives of Italians in Montreal. This is a tense period that saw Italy's relationship to Canada transformed, leaving the Italians of Montreal and their supporters in difficult circumstances, including mass internments as enemy sympathizers once Canada entered the Second World War.

For Canadians italianicity was a changing concept, nuanced according to time, place, and cultural baggage. Lacroix and Noppen have offered an understanding of what this term meant in relation to nineteenth-century art in Canada. Historians such as Harney and Ramirez, amongst others, have suggested a general description of how the Canadian state viewed Italians. Angelo Principe, in an unpublished dissertation, offers a comprehensive historical overview of the reception of Italians in Canada.<sup>14</sup> Non-academic writers of Italian descent have attempted to construct a sense of *italianità* through historical chronology, such as the works by Vangelisti, Mingarelli, and Spada.<sup>15</sup> While a precise historical methodology lacking in the latter works, they nevertheless offer, in their subjective naiveté, a sense of Italian Canadian historical consciousness. In the same way, the artworks discussed here also articulate an identity based on an idea and image of the past seen as if it were a stage upon which unique individuals provoked momentous

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<sup>14</sup> Angelo Principe, *The Concept of Italy in Canada and in Italian Canadian Writings from the Eve of Confederation to the Second World War* (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Guglielmo Vangelisti, *Gli Italiani in Canada* (Montreal: Chiesa Italiana di N.S. della Difesa, 1958). Giosafat Mingarelli, *Gli Italiani di Montreal: note e profili* (Montreal: Centro italiano attività commerciali-artistiche, 1957). A.V. Spada, *The Italians in Canada* (Ottawa, Montreal: Canada Ethnia, 1969).

events. The visual and semantic references are common ones, especially the Italian Renaissance which, by the nineteenth century, had become an overused symbol for the civilizing force of Western culture. But the Renaissance, as the generating force behind modern culture and civility, held a special meaning for Italians in Montreal. As outsiders to the circles of social and cultural power around them, it was particularly important to establish a positive profile in terms that could be easily understood according to a common vocabulary. Appropriate for the times, this was done through the language of nationalism and the motif of the Renaissance hero.

Historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and Gérard Bouchard have focused their work on the uses of tradition in forming national genealogies, affiliations and distinctions.<sup>16</sup> These authors outline the origins of traditions in order to amplify their instrumental value in sustaining national identities. Bouchard, for example, examines national histories as fictionalized accounts for defining sameness and difference between the ‘new’ and ‘old’ world. His comparative study of the national founding myths of new world nations, their popular rituals, and creation of patrimonial record, corresponds to Anderson’s notion of nation-ness as “collective imagining” and Hobsbawm’s idea of the “invention of tradition.” All three authors situate these discursive strategies across a wide geographical and political terrain characterizing nation-ness as modern phenomena not limited to particular political formations. For Italian immigrants it was fundamentally important to claim the weight of tradition in order to legitimize their social worth, but it

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<sup>16</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1992). Gérard Bouchard, *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde, essai d’histoire comparée* (Montreal: Boréal, 2000).

was equally crucial to demonstrate that their traditions were not alien to the host country. The Renaissance, through its artists and navigators, provided this link and was frequently cited as evidence of a shared genealogy (the Latin race) and cultural lineage (the origin of Western civilization).

Hayden White and Roland Barthes have confronted the rhetorical functions of history writing and identified the narrative structures that have guided the leading modern European historiographers and philosophers of history.<sup>17</sup> White contends that “the forms used to represent history also explain it” and that style is a means for creating the illusion of unity and coherence. White, like other structuralists, has been concerned with the figural structures by which meaning is not only communicated but also created, and the nature by which these textual representational systems are used to support worldviews. Barthes’s analysis of the “discourse of history” is directed at historical texts; nevertheless, his ideas stimulate our understanding of how history is constructed or represented. He identifies two types of “shifters” that enable the historian to authorize his/her statements. The first is through “listening” – the historian acts as a “witness” to events that unfold before him. In the present study, we will see how the artworks are seen as illustrations of history. The artist may embellish history but ultimately does not betray its facts. A second shifter is through narration. Although historical texts rely on the idea of historical time, they “accelerate” it or selectively “amplify its depth.” The third shifter is the timing of history’s entry into the present, that is, how it is “inaugurated” into “paper

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<sup>17</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973). Roland Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” translated with an introduction by Stephen Bann in *Comparative History: A Yearbook*, 3 (1981): 3-20.

time” (the time of the historian’s textual utterance or, literally speaking in this case, the inaugural address). The most significant point Barthes raises, which applies to this study of monuments, is that the Real (fact) is only a construction of historical discourse: “in objective history, the ‘real’ is never more than an unformulated signified, sheltering behind the apparently all-powerful referent. This situation characterizes what we might call the *realistic effect*.”<sup>18</sup> It is the reality of history that seems to precede, and lend weight to, the artworks whose realistic portrait styles are seen in indexical relation to the characters they represent and the historical events to which they refer.

The rhetorical means by which the Italian Fascist state “invented traditions” and “inaugurated” the past into the present, through the recycling of history, is especially relevant to the subject and period of the dissertation. The evolution of Italian Fascism from a political platform to a way of life was produced over a two-decade period and created an ideology that filtered through every aspect of institutional and social life. Historians of Italian Fascist activities in Canada, such as Bruti-Liberati, Perin, and Principe, have outlined the intricacies by which the Fascist state involved itself in the social life of immigrants outside Italy through its organizational, promotional, and funding services.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the work of these authors, including the archival documentation they have uncovered, has been instrumental in establishing the political landscape against which the artworks are discussed. Perin has contributed to the analysis

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<sup>18</sup> Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” 17. See also Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Roberto Perin, “Making Good Fascists: Counselor Propaganda and the Italian Community of Montreal in the 1930s,” in *Minorities and Mother Country Imagery*, ed. G. Gold (St. John, Nfld: 1984): 136-158. Luigi Bruti-Liberati, *Il Canada, l’Italia e il fascismo, 1919-1945* (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1984). Angelo Principe, *The Darkest Side of the Fascist Years: The Italian-Canadian Press: 1920-1942* (Toronto: Guernica, 1999).

of the relationship between the Italian state and Montreal's Italians. His work has shown how all levels of government, both in Italy and in Canada, played a hand in shaping the Italian community's relationship to Italy and to Italian politics. Principe has established a wider historical context for understanding the reception of Italian Fascism and Italian nationalism in Canada by looking at the internal politics and opposing factions within the Italian communities themselves. Together, Perin and Principe have helped clarify an important period in the history of Montreal out of which emerged artworks that were both admired and denounced in their time.

#### The Fresco of Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense

The creation of 'new traditions' was especially well mastered by the Italian Fascist state. Cues were drawn from a revived relation to historical periods associated with Italian political and cultural strength, in particular Imperial Rome and the Renaissance. The iconography of power included what Emilio Gentile has called a "sacralized political vocabulary."<sup>20</sup> Through its language and imagery, Christianity was appropriated as a system of signs that encouraged social compliance to the State. At the same time, the Christian motifs seemed to dispel or dissipate overt political manipulation in the lives of its citizens. Both the historical and religious re-cycling facilitated the implementation of new traditions whose legitimacy was secured by the weight of ritual and institutional power to which they were attached. Through public spectacles such as commemorative ceremonies, parades, and public speeches, a system of public address was established

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<sup>20</sup> Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1996).

between the State and masses. An efficient and well-organized system for disseminating propaganda, including the use of modern technologies such as cinema, communicated the new *italianità* throughout the Italian diaspora. Through a network of consulates and established institutional and social organizations such as those of school, church, and leisure clubs, Italian Fascist nationalism was encouraged and sustained worldwide.

The reliance on Catholic imagery and its use in the sacralized vocabulary is indispensable to examining the integration of sacred and secular references in Nincheri's church fresco commemorating the Conciliation pact of 1929. This is the subject of Chapter Five, "Sacred Politics: The Fresco of Notre-Dame-de-la Défense." Working from Gentile's and Spackman's studies of Fascist rhetoric and its reliance on religious reference, the iconological program of the church fresco takes on a specific political reading.<sup>21</sup>

Although many writers, such as Antliff and Braun, have drawn links between Fascist spectacle and modernity – a critique that can be traced back to Walter Benjamin – the concern here is more with performative and affective aspects of art in the public domain rather than with spectacle *per se*.<sup>22</sup> Thus, spectacle is interpreted not as a screen in the domain of 'sight', but as a 'site' in the literal sense, where worldviews are announced, confirmed, and remembered through ritual, commemoration, and parade. While Nincheri's church fresco seems to suggest a different type of viewer relationship than that of the outdoor monuments, the space of the church itself is treated as an active site of

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<sup>21</sup> Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Mark Antliff, "Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity," *The Art Bulletin* 134.1 (2002): 148-169. See also Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969): 219-54.

social performance and collective intent that cannot be divorced from its visual experience. In its surrounding architectural structure, and considering the special significance of the church within the community, the painting provokes questions similar to those posed of the sculptural works which were also focal points of social activity.

In the analysis of the fresco painting, pictorial representation, as a field within which power is deployed, is addressed through the semiotic approach of Louis Marin. In his studies on the relations between absolutism and representation, Marin has described a method by which power is displayed and made omnipresent.<sup>23</sup> The application of Marin's ideas to the artworks under analysis help us understand how art may not only represent power but create relations of power. The works draw the viewers into a relation which, due to its framing (such as the inaugural addresses, the religious ceremonies), defines the nature and limits of the viewer's relationship to the art. In the case of the Nincheri mural, the viewer's role is but one: to witness a consolidation of power. This dissertation attempts to articulate, in a number of ways, the "deep structure of the historical imagination"<sup>24</sup> that supports the making of commemorative art in public spaces and the relationship it has to the collective viewer. Although this study focuses on a specific historical period, it also raises issues that are relevant to a broader field of ethnic history. Who did Italian Canadians think they were? Who do they think they are today? These are difficult questions. This Introduction concludes with an overview of the theoretical

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<sup>23</sup> Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha Houle, foreword Tom Conley, *Theory and History of Literature*, 57 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> White, *Metahistory*, ix.

notions that underline the motivation behind investigating the relationship of public memory to collective identity.

### Italian – Canadian

While historians have been primarily concerned with collecting demographic data and tracing archival minutiae, they have not been able to address the discursive nature of the immigrant experience as one based on ‘difference’. The notion of “sojourning-to-settlement” is a useful theoretical paradigm that illustrates the move of an immigrant population from a society’s margins to its centre, but it seems to imply that the immigration experience ends once permanent residence is achieved. The following study proposes that ‘immigrant’ is a discursive term, constantly making and remaking its subject across time and geographies. The question of Italian Canadian identity, and issues related to its historical self-consciousness, along with directions for further research, are addressed in the Conclusion “Hunting for Heroes, Old and New”.

There are theoretical assumptions which underline this study and, in matter of speaking, precede it and pose its most difficult question: What does it mean to be an Italian Canadian? The term is often described with words that are used as adjectives or nouns: “immigrant, minority, and ethnic.” The latter is the most confusing. As the sociologist Werner Sollors has pointed out, the term ethnicity is fairly recent to our vocabulary.<sup>25</sup> It usually implies a common ancestry, real or supposed, expressed and confirmed in shared

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<sup>25</sup> Werner Sollors, ed. *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989); see also Anthony D. Smith and John Hutchison, eds. *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996).



symbolic elements. Ethnicity is historically tied to notions of nationalism and retains an emotional intensity because of its relation to kinship. It is often used together with the term minority and the idea that it is a sub-group, more or less distinct, from a dominant majority. This definition necessarily raises issues related to self-determination and power and becomes precarious when the essentialist model of ethnicity comes into play. Thus, the concept of an 'immigrant identity,' is related to other terms used to describe and name the group in this study. It is not meant to be a "fixed" notion but a pliable one that suggests the notion of "difference," subjectivity encircled by its other.

Diaspora is a concept that takes into account the experience of displacement and exclusion experienced by dislocated populations in their host countries, and the ways in which this limitation is overcome through the idea of a transnational identity. The theoretical explorations of Stuart Hall and Chantal Mouffe view diasporic identity as an alternative to the notion of national citizenship and the fragmentation of pluralism.<sup>26</sup> The ambiguity of belonging that characterizes an immigrant minority is nowhere more evident than in the designation "Italian-Canadian" because it implies a split or weakened subjectivity. In recent years this term has raised concerns amongst a younger generation of writers who came to the fore in the 1980s, such as essayist-poets Antonio D'Alfonso and Pasquale Verdicchio.<sup>27</sup> They add a critical perspective on issues of class and ethnicity, bringing into their analysis the theoretical ideas of writers such as Antonio

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<sup>26</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990). Chantal Mouffe, "For a Politics of Nomadic Identity," *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, eds. George Robertson *et al* (London: Routledge, 1994): 106-113.

<sup>27</sup> Antonio D'Alfonso, *In Italics: In Defence of Ethnicity* (Toronto: Guernica, 1995). Pasquale Verdicchio, *Devils in Paradise: Writings on Post-Emigrant Cultures* (Toronto: Guernica, 1997).

Gramsci.<sup>28</sup> Gramsci's Marxist interpretations are important to these writers. Gramsci identified culture as a weapon of social control and recognized the north-south division of class inequality in Italy, which D'Alfonso and Verdicchio have adapted to their analyses of Italian immigrant life and its relation to dominant cultures. It is because of this theorization that the Italian-Canadian experience began to be described in the 1990s in post-modern terms – 'diaspora,' 'trans-nationalism' – absorbing as well elements of postcolonial critique – 'subaltern,' 'otherness.' Since then, literary criticism has displayed a more evident effort to link Italian immigrant identity to something greater than its own historical contingency in order to integrate it within a global context of 'migrancy' and 'displacement.' Thus, some recent publications have included contributions by researchers working in other Italian immigrant settings such as England and Australia.<sup>29</sup>

Authors such as Linda Hutcheon, however, suggest that a hyphenated identity can be empowering, challenging monolithic culture and nationalisms by elevating the intrinsic value of 'hybridity.'<sup>30</sup> The idea that immigrant identity is socially amorphous and transitional, tempers the meanings of both 'ethnic' and 'national' thus giving its post-modern connotation. The term 'Italian immigrant' functions discursively indicating a process of identity formation grounded in a specific historical moment (the moment of migration), and thereby avoids adopting essentialist connotations. In other words, "immigrant" is a time-based, historically-grounded concept, not an intrinsic one. The

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<sup>28</sup> Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10.2 1987: 5-27.

<sup>29</sup> Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Linda Hutcheon, "Cryptoethnicity," *Beyond the Godfather: Italian American Writers on the Real American Experience*, eds. A. Kenneth Ciongoli and Jay Perini (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997): 247-257; *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

immigrant experience is a useful model for examining the idea of 'difference' because it makes visible the process by which group affiliation is negotiated and its symbolic structure built at a crucial time of its collective development. The immigrant experience also allows one to address issues related to nationalism, territory, language and culture, without having to focus on an analytical model based on the nation-state. As Hutcheon argues, like the post-modern subject, the immigrant is de-centred. As an impermanent historical category, immigrant identity is useful to understand the material history that circumscribes the desire for collective identity and at the same time avoids the problematic universalizing category of the ethnic subject. In doing so it sidesteps the formed subject (the essential subject) for one 'in the making.'

It is no coincidence that the rise in historical research on Italian Canadians coincided with the appearance of state-sponsored multiculturalism in Canada in the 1970s and, in a related context, to the developing academic field of minority ethnic studies that attempted to define the contents and limits of the field within the Canadian context. It is against this background that creative writing by novelists and poets of Italian descent emerged as a dynamic force by the early 1980s. Although literary critique has emphasized creative production, it has helped develop an awareness of immigrants not solely as objects of historical and social study but as protagonists within history. In other words, it has made subjectivity, i.e. the Italian immigrant experience, a legitimate focus of attention albeit difficult to grasp or name given its permeable outline. The implications of this resistance to naming are implied as much by Hutcheon's term "cryptoethnicity," an ethnicity that "dare not speak its name." Writers' creative works have shown how the instability of the

immigrant experience amplifies disconnection with the past (and thus its post-modernist quality) while soliciting the obsession to return to it (*nostalgia*). The following pages will examine another form of Italian immigrant memory-work, the commemoration of heroes through art in public spaces.

## Chapter One

### Surplus Labour: Italian Immigration and Settlement, 1860s-1920s

#### Exodus

For the residents of cities such as New York and Montreal the tens of thousands of Italian immigrants who spilled off ships and onto the streets seemed like an “invasion of strangers.”<sup>31</sup> Their weird dialects and peasant clothing seemed out of place in the urban landscape, but they were announcing the new cosmopolitan character of the modern city. They were, for the greater part, economic refugees. Their presence was the result of massive changes in modes of production accompanied by inadequate social infrastructures that displaced populations and set them on migratory routes. Eric Hobsbawm has written that the “surplus labour” that flowed first north to Europe and later to the New World, was inherent to modern capitalism rather than its by-product.<sup>32</sup> Italian immigrants, like other materials along the shipping routes, were another form of export. While the wave of new immigrants created further social upheaval and misery, for both the sending and receiving countries immigration was ultimately about trade – human or otherwise.

Following the unification of Italy in 1861 the movement of Italians became easier, both within Italy and to destinations beyond its borders. Previously, in what had been

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<sup>31</sup> James S. Woodsworth's *Strangers within Our Gates or Coming Canadians* (Toronto: 1909) reflects Canadian ambivalent attitudes towards immigrants. The book resembles Jacob Riis's *How the Other Lives* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890) in form and content and indeed quotes Woodsworth.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York : Delacorte Press, 1969).

essentially an un-industrialized economy, the free circulation of labour had been hampered by a 'feudal' system of land ownership, an artisanal 'guild' system, and a manufacturing sector locked in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Economic development flourished with industrialization, particularly in the Northern region; nevertheless, many skilled workers were displaced, thereby forming the first post-unification generation of immigrants. In the later part of the century semi-skilled and unskilled workers would make up the bulk of the surplus labour that left Italy, an "exodus" that grew from 130,000 in 1869 to 875,000 in 1913.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Italian press expressed patronizing sympathy for its lost sons, the movement of migrant workers went largely unsupervised by the Italian government.<sup>34</sup> However, as reports of dismal living and working conditions grew, a government body overseeing emigration was established in 1901 when the *Commissariato Generale della Emigrazione* was formed. The bureau sought to protect emigrants from the abuses generated by the immigration network of travel agents, middlemen, employers and others who profited from the commerce of migration. This body remained in place until the early 1920s when Italy came under Fascist rule and a new approach to emigration and its management emerged.

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<sup>33</sup> Statistical information is taken from Alain Painchaud, *Les Italiens au Québec* (Hull, Québec: Les éditions Asticou / Les éditions Critiques, 1988); and from G.B. Sachetti, *Un Secolo di Emigrazione Italiana: 1875-1976* (Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1978).

<sup>34</sup> Nicoletta Serio, "Canada as a Target of Trade and Emigration in Post-Unification Italian Writing" in *Arrangiarsi*, 91-117.

In post-unification Italy, workers gravitated to Europe. By the later part of the century, however, the New World became the preferred destination: the United States, Argentina, and Brazil received three quarters of all immigrants. Canada, on the other hand, received less than one per cent of the total. The semi-skilled and unskilled workers of this stage of the migration movement found employment with railways and ports, and in natural resource industries such as timber and mining. The transient settlement pattern reflected the seasonal character of their employment; most attempted to return to their villages during periods when work was in short supply. The demographics of emigration are closely related to the immigrants' regional origins and the particular socio-economic characteristics of these areas. Generally speaking, Italy was divided into two main regions consisted of the industrialized and wealthy North, and the Centre-South, primarily agricultural and underdeveloped. Before 1900, the North produced 60% of total emigrants. After 1900, as emigration grew, more began to leave from the peasant South – il *Mezzogiorno*. Between 1895 and 1935, 80% were Southern agricultural workers. The growing disparity between North and South was in part due to the North's closer contact with European economic networks. In contrast, mismanagement of resources, crushing debt, and oppressive working conditions provoked poverty and unemployment in the South thus creating the "Southern Question," the most important political-economic problem of the times in Italy. One 'solution' was emigration. For critics of the state, such as the communist and social theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the "southern problem" originated in the intrinsic failings of capitalist society and its dependency on the class divisions generated by its economic program.<sup>35</sup> Gramsci recognized the links

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<sup>35</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question / Antonio Gramsci*, translation and introduction by Pasquale

between economy, culture and social class, and how this compilation of factors contributed to the 'racial' stereotyping of the southerner.

The turn of the last century marked the high point of the entire period of modern emigration; over ten million people left Italy between 1880 and 1910. Between 1913 and 1920, the yearly average was over 400,000 (although emigration slowed during World War I); 1913 marked the high point with over 800,000 leaving Italy. The primary destination was North America, followed by Argentina. When Benito Mussolini came to power in 1922, emigration dropped from an annual 400,000 to 250,000 between 1921 and 1930, and to less than 71,000 between 1931 and 1940, virtually stopping between 1941 and 1945 during WWII.

During the Fascist regime one quarter of Italian-born nationals were actually living abroad. The sheer numbers of people living outside Italy, but who were still linked to their village of origin through extended families, led to the Fascist state's reassessment of emigration. During Mussolini's reign, from the 1920s to 1945, the state initially discouraged emigration in order to boost demographic goals, but later, realizing the propaganda potential of the diaspora, accepted it as a useful tool for imperialist expansion. Nevertheless, between 1922 and 1930 over two million people left Italy, a number that would have been greater if not for the United States' Immigration Act of 1921 which severely curtailed all emigration, a reduction further aggravated by the Depression of the 1930s.



Canada's experience was closely tied to the American, the latter shaping the pattern and nature of migrant movement in the former. Compared to the American example the percentage of emigrants going to Canada was very small; however, it was significant in the context of the total Canadian population. Between 1896 and 1925, 4% (173,000) of new Canadian immigrants were Italian. In the early period of Western settlement under Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton, immigration was seen as strictly an economic issue, a perception that was reflected in an 'open door' policy. While ethnic biases certainly coloured Sifton's views, his selection of labourers was determined by the specific needs of various economic sectors. However, in the post-Sifton era the process became more restrictive, reflecting the increasingly xenophobic attitude of the general public: foreigners were no longer simply a matter of economics. New legislative measures taken in 1904 and 1911 determined that the choice of immigrants should now be based on social "desirability" rather than the needs of industry.<sup>36</sup> The turn of the century was a period of heavy immigration, but the greatest number of Italians would emigrate in the modern post-war era.

#### Little Italies: New York City

By 1910 nearly 550,000 people of Italian heritage – first and second generation – lived in New York City which was the major debarkation point for all emigration to North and South America. That New York was the immigrant gateway had repercussions for

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<sup>36</sup> Donald Avery, *Dangerous Foreigners: European Immigrants and Labour Radicalism in Canada 1896-1936* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979).

Canada because many of the newly arrived would make their way to Canada in search of work. Canadian social reformers and policy makers made ample use of the American experience, often turning to its sociological and statistical studies to develop a Canadian position. New York presented the model against which other cities measured their own immigrant problem. The largest Italian neighbourhood in New York was the Mulberry District in lower Manhattan.<sup>37</sup> Together with the Five Points district it was one of the (in)famous slums of New York.

In 1855, 968 people claimed to be Italian or of Italian parentage. Many of the early settlers were political exiles, intellectuals like the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi. Some, like Garibaldi, returned to Italy but others stayed and established themselves as professionals. From the 1870s, Southern transient unskilled labourers began to arrive in the city. The work that was to be found was primarily in the building trades where one's most important asset was brute force. The flood of immigration from the 1880s to 1910 displaced the Irish from public work jobs and led to openly hostile relations between the two groups of immigrants. By 1890, 90% of workers employed by the public works department were Italian. It was at this time that women began to work in the needle trade, particularly in home finishing, where in 1901 they made up 95% of workers. However, Italians also generated their own economy with spin-off businesses related to *festas* (saint-day cards, fireworks, statuary, and wax moulds), and a host of

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<sup>37</sup> George E. Pozzetta, "The Mulberry District of New York City: The Years before World War One," in *Little Italies in North America*, eds. Robert F. Harney and J. Vincenza Scarpaci (The Multicultural History Society of Ontario: Toronto, 1981).

other jobs related to their immigrant circumstances (travel and employment agents, bankers, foreign exchange bureaus, speciality food merchants, translators, etc).

Cultural life consisted of music and amateur theatre presented in saloons, where card playing and lotteries also took place, and in the great number and variety of clubs and associations. However, even though some associations did embrace more than village-oriented membership, the overall network remained fragmented and individualized reflecting the parochialism that characterized the chain migration progress itself. While the first Italian parish was established in 1866, it was not till the early 1890s that churches became an important social agent – before then priests were largely ignored. As immigration changed from sojourning to settlement, and moral values of family and children's education became of concern to newly established families, the church's role as an agent of social control and guidance became more influential.

Mulberry District was extremely poor, even before the influx of Italians. Tuberculosis and rickets were rampant among the slum tenements that were built front to back, a practice that was later outlawed. The seasonal nature of men's work led to the common phenomenon of crowds of men loitering in the streets, thus contributing to the perception that they were lazy and unproductive. This misconception with the Southerner's darker complexion led to some of the same racial bias inflicted on African-Americans. In the literature of social reform, there was a concerted effort to improve the life of immigrants and to raise their social profile by drawing attention to the picturesque examples – the organ grinder, shoe shine boy, flower seller, rag pickers, food vendor. Whether as

criminals or picturesque characters, the Italian type resonated as both a new and old subject. In the 1904 newspaper story “Le tour du monde,” a reporter and artist visit Montreal’s Immigrant’s Aid Office to study the types and customs of different European races. Their account seems to revel in the exoticism of the Italian types: “...l’artiste prend un croquis d’un plus agé d’entre eux, un bon vieux Piémontais qui fume un court brûle-gueule, en songeant, sans doute, à la patrie lointaine, aux rives enchanteresses du Po, au beau pays de soleil que peut-être, hélas, il ne reverra jamais plus”<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 1). To the larger public, street types came to represent the entirety of the Italian presence and concealed their larger network of socio-economic relations that included employers, middlemen, and clients who all benefited from ‘cheap labour.’

#### Canada: Strangers Within Our Gates

Italian nationals learned of the immigration scene in the New World because of New York City and other American capitals, but information about Canada remained sketchy. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Italy published very little information on Canada. Nevertheless, British and Canadian material was being read, including the Canadian government’s promotional literature on settlement of the Canadian West. However, as more information about Canada began to flow to Italy so did accounts of the impoverished living conditions that many immigrants found once in the New World. Rather than taking direct intervention, Italy relegated its responsibility to the Italian Immigrant Aid Society of Canada, a group of business and social elites – *padroni* – that functioned under the tacit approval of the Italian state. Both Italy and Canada accepted

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<sup>38</sup> “Le tour du monde,” *La Presse*, 17 May 1904 : 1.

the Society's mediating role as employment agent and bank loan officer. While the Italian press expressed a desire to protect Italy's native sons from unscrupulous travel agents and landlords, maintaining a positive international image took precedence over social obligations for both Italy and Canada. As Nicoletta Serio has pointed out, the actual fate of immigrants was less important to both the sending and receiving countries than the smooth exchange of trade in the service of mutual economic development. Even as restrictions in Canadian Immigration policy were being enacted, Canada participated at the Milan fair of 1906 with an elaborate pavilion that promoted both its products and its agricultural opportunities to those who met the immigration criteria.

In the nineteenth century, Montreal was the primary destination for Italian immigrants with smaller pockets appearing in Toronto. West of Toronto, smaller cities such as Sault-Ste-Marie, which was a major Great Lakes port, were also settled. Winnipeg became the largest western immigrant destination, while a few scattered settlements appeared in Alberta and in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. The earliest immigrants were single males skilled in trade or artisanal work; they were replaced by non-skilled workers in the late nineteenth century. Similar to the American situation, work was found on large construction sites such as railways and canals, and in natural resource industries.

Economic conditions in Canada demanded unskilled labourers who were willing to endure the provisional and physically demanding type of work that was needed to lay tracks and dig sewers. For example, in 1904, out of 8,576 employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway, fully 3,144 were Italian.

In 1904 a Royal Commission was announced specifically to address the trafficking in migrant labour. Its findings have provided historians with an understanding of how the *padroni* operated. The *padroni* worked as middlemen between companies and workers and profited from the constant movement of workers, from Italy to Canada, city-to-city, work camp to work camp. Men were often recruited directly from American cities, a labour practice that had been outlawed in the United States since the 1880s. At the end of the work season, some moved into the urban centres while others returned to Italy. It was not long before the *padroni* established businesses which recruited directly from Italy, usually in consort with the steamship lines that provided passage, as well as others who profited such as the landlords and food merchants. While the 1904 Royal Commission chastised the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) for its inability to oversee employment practices, individual *padroni* were targeted as the key abusers.<sup>39</sup>

Neither Canada nor Italy encouraged emigration to Canada. In fact, immigration minister Clifford Sifton actively discouraged Italians as being unsuitable to Canadian conditions. Nevertheless, “target migrants,” – workers needed for specific work projects – were often found through the fraudulent advertising practices of the *padroni* and their associates. Invariably some migrants found themselves stranded with too little earnings to buy passage home. Canadian statistics say very little about this continual traffic in labour or about how many found themselves penniless and in debt due to false promises of work.

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<sup>39</sup> *The Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Immigration of Italian Labourers to Montreal and the Alleged Fraudulent Practices of Employment Agencies: Report of the Commissioner and Evidence* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1905).

Harney writes that, for some, sojourn turned into exile. He refers to this situation as an “existential limbo” within which these men and their families back home in Italy lived.<sup>40</sup>

The traffic in human cargo was assisted by the process of migration itself – the “migration chain.”<sup>41</sup> Word of mouth led to a steady exodus, entire villages emptied as emigrants encouraged kin to follow. Thus, for example, the early period of Montreal’s Italian community can be traced to a few dozen villages in the Molise and Campania regions of the Centre-South. Historians such as Robert Harney and Franc Sturino have argued that, to some extent, the chain migration helped deflect government’s control over the selection process. Through the village ‘grapevine,’ workers kept abreast of news; they relied on their extended support system especially when reality did not match expectations. Canada’s sponsorship laws, which allowing those already admitted into the country to act as financial guarantors, facilitated kinship support. Robert Harney has written about the pathological aspects of migrating, which he says has been overlooked in studies focusing on economic issues. While he acknowledges that uprootedness was an important factor, he points out that the continuing bond to the village of origin offered some compensation. Harney explains that the males who emigrated did so based on decisions that had been reached by the entire family, for the sake of the family. Thus, the belief that family ties had not been broken, nor suspended, mitigated the brutality of the experience.

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Harney, “Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930,” *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America*, eds. Betty Boyd Caroli, Robert F. Harney, and Lydio F. Tomasi (Multicultural Society of Ontario: Toronto, 1978) 206-230.

<sup>41</sup> Bruno Ramirez, “Workers Without a Cause: Italian Immigrant Labour in Montreal, 1820-1930,” in Perin and Sturino, 119-134.

By 1911, two-thirds of Italian immigrants resided either in Toronto or Montreal, reflecting their attraction to urban centres, a trend that would continue in the post-WWII era. In Ontario, smaller cities such as Hamilton developed their own communities, whereas in Quebec, Montreal was the first choice of settlement throughout the history of Italian immigration to the province. While this tendency to congregate in urban centres seems to contradict the description of these people as “peasants,” as the labour historian Bruno Ramirez has pointed out, agricultural workers were town-centred, living in Italy in what he has called “agro-towns” rather than on isolated farms.<sup>42</sup> Seasonal workers employed in outlying regions were more likely to find work in cities in off-peak periods, especially as the demand for large-scale infrastructure building projects grew. At the same time, there were more opportunities for changing professions: moving from blue collar to white collar or becoming small business owners after having raised the capital from working on construction sites.

The Canadian public’s awareness of foreign immigrants was based on anecdote as well as on first hand experience of observing unemployed workers congregating around boarding houses in the downtowns of major cities. The general public’s attention to immigrants’ plight was part of a wider concern for growing poverty in cities. The sociological and urban reform literature that provided the public with its information on immigrants was often directly based on British and American sources. As the United States was the primary debarkation point, and had a much greater experience of the immigration

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<sup>42</sup> Ramirez, “Workers without a Cause,” 119-134.



phenomena, Canadians often turned to American texts to understand Canada's own 'immigrant problem.' In 1909 James Woodsworth, a Methodist minister and social reformer, wrote a study that attempted to introduce the various new ethnicities to the Canadian middle class. Woodsworth identified Italians as the largest new ethnic group which, as a result of the increasingly restrictive American policy, would tend to "crowd more and more into Canada." In *Strangers Within Our Gates*. Woodsworth's intentions were twofold: to assure Canadians that "strangers" would not disrupt the existing social order, and to facilitate the immigrants' integration. His strategy was to educate his readers with information gleaned from statistical data and sociological assessments. Nevertheless, the reformer's text reflects the ambivalence and stereotypes witnessed in Jacob Riis's account of Mulberry Bend in New York and, in fact, quotes the later throughout the book. What both authors demonstrate is the endurance and pervasiveness of the idea of Italy within the European imagination as a historical-pictorial subject, a view that largely excludes contemporary Italy.

An Italian! The figure that flashes before the mind's eye is probably that of an organ-grinder with his monkey... . The figure of the organ man fades away, and we see dark, uncertain figures, and someone whispers, "The Mafia" – "the Black Hand." Soft Italian airs, Italian landscapes! Not for a moment do we connect such ideas with Italians. Garibaldi and Mazzini – what have they to do with "dirty Dagos"? Of few peoples have we so many unreconciled, detached ideas. Rome, Naples, Venice, Milan – these cities we know, but their citizens are strangers: and yet there is no people we should know better.<sup>43</sup>

As if wishing to resolve the picturesque with the salubrious aspects of Italy, Woodsworth seems to attribute the conflicting images of Italy to difference within the Italian race

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<sup>43</sup> Woodsworth 160.

itself, a view reflected in his choice of the chapter subtitle “Italians – North and South.” Northerners, whom he compares to Scandinavians and Germans, are described as taller, lighter, prosperous, literate and skilled. Southerners are shorter, darker, destitute, unintelligent, illiterate, and unskilled. Southerners are further divided according to moral characters of cities, with Neapolitans gravitating towards criminality. Quoting Riis, Woodsworth agrees that in general the Italian is “hotheaded” but honest and as “inoffensive as a child.”<sup>44</sup>

### Montreal: *Une promiscuité dangereuse*

While Italians eventually settled throughout Canada, the most important destination in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Montreal.<sup>45</sup> Shipping and railway networks were located in the city, making it a transfer point for people and trade to the rest of Canada and to the United States. It was in Montreal that the first Italian colony was established, thus becoming the largest concentration in the country up to the 1950s. Historian Bruno Ramirez is one of the first to study the period within which the Italian “colony” became “Little Italy,” a transitional period he identifies with a fundamental change of social status from ‘sojourner’ to ‘settler’, ‘migrant’ to ‘immigrant.’ While the bulk of immigrants arrived around the turn of the last century, there was nevertheless a small but well assimilated group already living in the city.<sup>46</sup> Successfully employed as

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<sup>44</sup> Woodsworth 160-166.

<sup>45</sup> Bruno Ramirez, *Les Premiers Italiens de Montréal: l'origine de la petite Italie au Québec* (Montreal: Boréal Express, 1984). For an early history of Toronto's Italians see John E. Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity, 1875-1935* (Kingston ON: McGill-Queen's Press, 1988).

<sup>46</sup> In the seventeenth century northern Italians were enlisted in French regiments that were stationed in New France. In the early nineteenth century we have individuals such as Donegani, of the well known Donegani

merchants, hotelkeepers, and justices of the peace, these individuals became the *prominenti* (prominent men) in the social, economic and political life of immigrants who followed later. Because the *prominenti* were already integrated into the social fabric of the *bourgeoisie*, many having married into Francophone families, they were of higher class than the unskilled workers who arrived en masse in the late nineteenth century.

As a transportation centre, Montreal was not simply a transit point for migrants but benefited from spin-offs of this traffic. For example, it was in Montreal that the migrants remained between jobs, sometimes by choice, at other times because they were stranded because of lack of work. According to the (incomplete) church records of Montreal's first Italian parish, *Madonna del Carmine*, founded in 1905, half of the four thousand Italians known to the parish were single males. Like elsewhere, many of these men were sent off to work camps far from urban centres to lay down rail, but they returned to the city when work was scarce or in winter, when it was impossible to work. As Harney has indicated, these men remained closely tied to their families back home. For many, the city was simply an address to which mail was delivered. Unlike the established Italians, or *prominenti*, migrants concentrated close to the services they needed such as the *banchieri* or work agents, travel agents, and food vendors, and lived in areas where inexpensive rooming houses could be found. These were located near railway yards and docks close to Montreal's downtown, generally the more run-down areas of the city. Ironically, the seasonal nature of employment would lead untrained workers to develop new skills for

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Hotel. Perhaps the most socially important names of the later part of the century are H.M. Catelli and archbishop Paolo Bruchesi.

which they had no previous experience. They now had access because they were related to trades identified with Italians, such as food vendor and shoe repair man.

Often families who had already settled took in boarders. Lack of work made it impossible for men to afford a return trip home, so they remained unemployed and crowded into rooming houses. The mobile nature of this illegal population, packed into unregulated living quarters prompted civil investigations. In *La Presse*'s March 3, 1905 "Un foyer infect,"<sup>47</sup> two reporters describe a lodging that housed forty people and whose unhygienic conditions, they claimed, threatened the health of all (Fig.1). The "repulsive odours" ("les odeurs devenant de plus en plus repoussantes") that were alluded to repeatedly seemed to underscore the undesirable character of the inhabitants. While highly descriptive, the report offered no explanation as to who these people were – other than Italian – or why they were gathered together in these cramped conditions. It seems that part of the reason for alarm was the fact that seeing so many men gathered together with 'nothing to do' was reason enough to summon the authorities. When arguments between men flared, the 'visibility' of these incidents turned them into next morning's newspaper copy – "Le quartier italien de Montréal, rue Sainte-Agathe a encore une fois servi de scène à un drame sombre où le couteau a joué son rôle néfaste."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, for the most part, Montreal's migrants were a ghost population that did not exist according to official records.

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<sup>47</sup> "Un foyer infect," *La Presse*, 3 March, 1905: 12.

<sup>48</sup> "À coups de couteau," *La Presse*, 18 April, 1904: 1.

The lawlessness of these transients was of concern to the Italian elite, for they recognized the negative implications this cast upon all Italians. Two strategies were used: the first was to regulate the stream, and the second was to attribute asocial behaviour to class and regional differences. One of the most publicized ‘power struggles’ is known as the Cordasco affair, the problem that led to the Royal Commission of 1904. Antonio Cordasco, over a short period of time, had become Montreal’s most successful employment agent as the Canadian Pacific Railway’s exclusive representative. In 1904 thousands of men seeking work arrived in the city only to find that there wasn’t any. Since those responsible for employment were in close contact with the travel agents, it is likely that the situation could have been averted. The report sought to address the corruption in the trade in human labour. However, Harney has suggested that the fact that the report generated so little public interest or real changes because the real impetus for the investigation was led by *prominenti* and *notabili* (Italian counsellor officials) who wanted to halt Cordasco’s influence, which had reached cities across North America and Europe. Cordasco’s economic power was a direct affront to the more established power brokers, such as the Immigration Aid Society led by Count Mazza and commercial leaders such as C.H. Catelli and Alberto Dini, all tacitly supported by both Italian and Canadian governments. Cordasco’s maverick approach did not suit the balance of power. According to Harney, the fight reflected a “crisis of representation,” i.e. the right to represent the community within negotiations and to claim true Royal ties, represented by Count Mazza and his direct ties to Italy’s King. Probably as a publicity stunt, Cordasco was crowned the “King of the Italians,” an obvious affront to the *prominenti*’s authentic royal ties. Mazza’s involvement in the running of the Society led to heated arguments

where some claimed that the Italian government interference was coloured by anti-Southern sentiments. At the basis of these power struggles was the commerce of migration which offered substantial rewards: the spin-offs included, amongst other things, the appearance of banks that specialized in the transference of remittances, that is, the salary that was regularly sent to families back home.

As the transition between migrancy and immigration took place, workers married and started families thus further extending kinship links between their adopted home and their hometown. Unlike the provisional and purely economically motivated structures of the worker ghettos of the early period, the first Italian neighbourhood that sprung up around the church of Madonna del Carmine,<sup>49</sup> incorporated the social networks of the home village. Mount Carmel Church was established in 1905 by Archbishop Bruchesi as an Italian parish in order to minister to the community, however, at this time the religious observance was rather nonchalant. The church seated 240 persons and yet the Italian population numbered anywhere from 4000 to 7000 at this time, depending on the work season. But as the requirements of the settlement grew, such as the need for a bigger Italian language school, a new neighbourhood came to be established further north in the Mile End District. People moved to the north end of the city where there was better, affordable housing, the accessibility of open fields for foraging, and the availability of vegetable gardens that helped supplement meagre salaries. The founding of Madonna

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<sup>49</sup> *Madonna del Carmine* was located near the intersection of Berri and Dorchester streets; it no longer exists. Between 1900 and 1910 other pockets of Italians were situated in the parishes of Saint-Joseph, Saint-Henri, Pointe-Saint-Charles ("Goose Village"), and Hochelaga. Demographic statistics are taken from Painchaud and Poulin, *Les Italiens au Québec*.

della Difesa Church, in 1911, signalled the completion of the geographical shift of the population from downtown Montreal and began the second stage of immigration. It also marked a new stage in Italian history in the city. By the early 1920s the Little Italy of the Mile End district offered the stability and security that allowed a formerly migrant 'colony' to recognize itself as a 'community.' By 1921, only 10% were unattached persons, and the ratio of women to men began to rise, as did family units. From 1901 to 1921 the number of Italians grew from 1,398 to 13,922.

At this time, the means of social control began to be institutionally governed rather than solely controlled by the *padroni* (foremen, bosses), *prominenti* (business leaders), and *nobili* (government affiliated). The new parish's social prominence grew together with the community as the first parish's influence diminished. Unlike the earlier church, the new one made a concerted effort to become involved in the education needs of the community, quickly acting to accommodate the growing number of children. Italians first showed political activism in education when they organized to elect candidates who helped the Italian school enter the Montreal Central School Commission, thus allowing it to benefit from municipal funding. Other nodes of social interface were the corner grocery stores whose credit system of payment relied on a shared level of trust between storeowner and client; thus, social respectability became a mode of community self-policing. While saloons were early gathering places for the migrant male workers, grocery stores served as the first 'social clubs' for families.

The role of Italian women in Montreal reflects the economic factors that determined the overall pattern of immigration.<sup>50</sup> In 1911, women made up one-third of the total number of Italians in Canada; in 1921, their numbers rose to nearly 70%.<sup>51</sup> As discussed above, until the end of the nineteenth century, men emigrated alone. Most of these were single, and expected to return to their village once a substantial cache of funds was accumulated. But links to the women (mothers, wives) were maintained even if they appeared suspended. Women's roles in the work force were limited if one considers the traditional definition of paid labour. In fact, women were essential to the commerce of settlement as housekeepers for thousands of temporary boarders. Because male boarders, lived with families, the issue of trust and respectability was primary; this was secured by accepting boarders that were *familiari* (kin) and *paesani* (home-villagers). Thus private homes, like grocery stores, became transition zones between private and social spaces. As fraternal associations and benevolent societies proliferated in the post-WWI period, the community's power was dispersed along a variety of channels for which the parish acted as a symbolic and geographic centre. While some attempts were made to unify the various clubs, most retained their independence. This was due in part to the culture of *campanilismo* (parochialism) which subsumed all other allegiances, including that of nation. While emigration slowed considerably due to new restrictions imposed in 1924, the link to one's village remained strong especially since remittances continued to flow back to the home country to support family members.

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<sup>50</sup> See Caroli *et al*, Part II, 79-186, and in the same publication, Robert Harney, "Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930," 206-230.

<sup>51</sup> Bruno Ramirez, *The Italians in Canada*. Canada's Ethnic Groups, No. 14 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1989) 8.



Although World War I temporarily halted the flow of immigration, by the end of the 1920s the Italian community had established itself and the transition from sojourning to settlement was complete. Mile End's Little Italy was clearly demarcated as an ethnic entity, with its own parish, school, small enterprises, and leisure sites. Its stability was insured by the affordability of housing, by integration within the francophone working class with whom links had been forged through marriage.<sup>52</sup> Smaller neighbourhoods existed elsewhere in the city, and a minority of Italians were non-Catholics and therefore attached to other religious bodies, but Mile End was acknowledged as the heart of 'Little Italy.' The generic name 'Little Italy' suggests that these neighbourhoods were smaller versions of larger 'originals' that existed elsewhere. But the diminutive "little" also infantilises the community, recalling the 'picturesque' characterizations that accompanied so much of social commentary on, and description of, Italians. This view was shared not only by fellow Montrealers but also by Italian nationals who ruled immigrants' institutions and social activities. For the social hierarchy, Little Italies were nothing more than an anachronistic imitation of the 'real' Italy. As Italian communities grew, the existence of 'ethnic enclaves' drew the attention of sociologists intent on studying the "problem with cities." While to them Little Italy may have seemed like an ethnic enclave reproducing Italy in Montreal, it was in practice an entirely new construction. The *italianità* it displayed emerged in a "third space" between Italy and Canada, a hybrid

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<sup>52</sup> Sylvie Taschereau, *Pays et patries: mariages et lieux d'origine des Italiens de Montréal, 1906-1930* (Montreal: Université de Montréal, 1987).

space where the immigrant context displaced transitional ideas of nationalism and citizenship.<sup>53</sup>

The global economic forces that brought Italians to Montreal directly influenced the demographic and social structures of their community. The attitudes with which they were received in their host countries – an ambivalence that alternately viewed them as picturesque, criminal, and strange – influenced their self-perceptions as social outsiders. At the same time, the working class character of the community and its southern regionalist culture separated the majority from its own social hierarchy. The development of Little Italy into clearly defined neighbourhood with its own social institutions and networks, demonstrates the affirmation of a collective identity that was nevertheless buffeted by external and internal social pressures. One of the most important early sociological studies of Montreal's Italians was a McGill University thesis written in 1939.<sup>54</sup> Charles Bayley's collection of data provides an invaluable demographic portrait. By the 1930s the community's social infrastructure was in place, a second generation had matured; its first monuments shared the urban landscape with fellow Montrealers. The transition from sojourning to settlement seemed concluded but a new chapter opened. Completed on the eve of World War II, the thesis suggests the kind of intense scrutiny that was focused on Italians and their activities during the Italian Fascist period. The

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<sup>53</sup> Theresa Fiore, "Refiguring Urban Space as Thirdspace: San Diego's Little Italy" in *Adjusting Sites: New Essays in Italian American Studies*, Filibrary No.16, eds. William Boelhower and Rocco Pallone (Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum, 1999) 89-110.

<sup>54</sup> Charles M. Bayley. "The Social Structure of the Italian and Ukrainian Immigrant Communities in Montreal, 1935-37" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 1939); see also Harold A. Gibbard "The Means and Modes of Living of European Immigrants in Montreal" (M.A thesis, McGill University, 1934).

'new Italy' impacted the lives of Italians immigrants worldwide, including those in Montreal.

## Chapter Two

### The Italian Immigrant Artist Experience to the 1920s

#### Making America Beautiful

The Italian artists who came to North America in the nineteenth century belonged to the same great movement of people who journeyed across the Atlantic seeking financial security for themselves and their families. However, unlike the unskilled labourers (the bulk of whom arrived late in the century) artists were trained workers who fulfilled the newly formed nations' needs for a specialized and experienced workforce. Even before Italy's emergence into a nation-state in the 1860s, Italian artisans were in high demand in Europe. In the art capitals of Paris and London, sculpture studios and foundries sought them out for their stone-carving skills and expertise as *formatori* (moulders). It was inevitable that the reputation of Italian artisans would become famous outside Italy considering that European artists had been drawn to Rome and to Italian academies for generations. Foreigners studied in Italy in order to learn method and technique but also because cities such as Rome and Florence were ideal classrooms. There, master works could be observed first hand. In addition, Italy's cheap labour provided artists with a choice of expert stone-cutters they could hire as inexpensive studio assistants. The benefits led many foreigners, like the Canadian Antoine-Sébastien Falardeau (1822-1889), to establish permanent studios in Italy where they produced works that were displayed and sold to a non-Italian market. Later in the nineteenth century, as Italy's

academies fell out of favour and Paris became the centre of the art world, Italy became a kind of artistic ‘backwater’ not to be revived again until the end of the century.

But even before artists and other cultural tourists set off on their journeys, Italy was already known to them through reproductions – engravings, marble copies, and inexpensive plaster copies made by Italian *figurinai* for export to foreign Italophiles (Fig. 2). Itinerant bands of figurine vendors were prominent in the major capitals of Europe since the 1820s at least. In the following poem, the author laments the plight of child vendors – who were often seen displaying wares on a plank they held above their head – by reflecting on the plaster busts of poets (Fig. 3):

Were I to arbitrate betwixt  
His terra cotta, plain or mix'd,  
And thy earth-gender'd sonnet;  
Small cause has he th'award to dread: –  
Thy Images are in the head  
And his, poor boy are on it!<sup>55</sup>

While street merchants represented the banal image of Italian art, its aesthetic and philosophical ideals impacted the art institutions of modern Europe nonetheless. Italy had an equally powerful influence on the development of visual culture in North America.<sup>56</sup> It is well known that Rome's classical art was central to Thomas Jefferson's designs for Washington's Capitol building program, as it was for the whole Neo-Classical movement, but the role of Italian immigrant artists in recreating this ideal was central. When the construction of the Capitol began in the late 1700s, the lack of local expertise

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Paris, London, and New York* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992): 25-26.

<sup>56</sup> See Jaffe and Soria.

provoked the chief architect Benjamin Latrobe to demand the importation of foreign artists because “the Capitol was begun when the country was entirely destitute of artists, and even of good workmen in the branches of architecture, upon which the superiority of public over private buildings depends... .”<sup>57</sup> Two of the earliest artists to be commissioned for American public art were Giuseppe Franzoni (d.1815) and Giovanni Andrei (1770-1824). They came to Washington in 1806 from Carrara, a city famous for its marble quarries. The imported artists were accomplished in a number of methods – stone-carving, plaster work, clay modeling – and worked in both sculpture and ornamentation. Although they were hired because of their skills (and on personal recommendation), they, like the millions of Italians that would follow, relied on family ties. The two were not only cousins, they were brothers-in-law as well. The link to home was also sustained through the use of assistants who worked in Carrara, crafting individual components such as column capitals. Consequently, prior to the 1860s, Italian workmanship was responsible for virtually all of the sculptural ornamentation of the Capitol, and was produced within a network of affiliations that reached beyond the immediate parameters of the patron-artist relationship.

Within a generation, Americans began to complain that there were too many foreign artists and that the creation of a national art should give preference to native artists.<sup>58</sup> By the 1860s, as more American artists became involved in public art, fewer Italians were

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<sup>57</sup> George Gurney, *Sculpture and the Federal Triangle* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985) 28. See also Jaffe, 1989 and 1992.

<sup>58</sup> As a response to this, Horatio Greenough became the first native-born artist to be given a major sculptural commission for the Capitol. But he too found it necessary to travel to Rome to further his technical abilities before beginning his commission. Unlike the cultural tourists typical of Grand Tour excursions who mixed an aesthetic education with pleasurable diversion, Greenough was one of many American artists who went to Italy on a ‘working holiday’ to obtain professional training.

employed for major sculptural work; however, they continued to be important to architectural ornamentation, a trade that was in high demand because of urban expansion. The kind of expertise required by this work was plentiful in Italy, where academically trained artists found themselves out of work. For some migrant artists, like Pietro Cardelli, who found themselves in a “nation bereft of art,” it may have seemed like a type of exile: “I console myself by seeing that I am gaining my living.”<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, economic survival (which at times included escape from Italian creditors) led some Italian artists to settle permanently in North America, passing on their skills to a younger generation – their own children or kin – who followed in their steps.

Together with stonework, which was necessary to architectural ornamentation, Italians were also active in foundries making moulds and finishing poured metal works. Although the influence of Italian art lessened after mid-nineteenth century and the taste for marble sculpture was replaced by bronze and the French Beaux-Arts style, Italian expertise was still necessary. The enthusiasm for the lost-wax technique in bronze work, a process that was largely underused and had nearly been ‘forgotten’ by sculptors, depended on specialized technical skills that Italians possessed. By the 1880s, Italian artists were being drawn to work in American foundries, often under the watch of Italian foremen. In New York City the Roman Bronze Works was a leading workshop for lost-wax production, and was able to provide a service to American clients equal to that of Europe. The firm was of such renown that artists such as Suzor-Coté<sup>60</sup> and Alfred Laliberté, two of Canada’s more important early twentieth-century sculptors had some of their sculptures

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<sup>59</sup> Soria 52.

<sup>60</sup> My thanks to Laurier Lacroix for bringing to my attention Suzor-Coté’s use of the foundry.

poured at the foundry, including Laliberté's monument *Dollard des Ormeaux* (erected in 1920).<sup>61</sup> This foundry, and others like it throughout the Americas and Europe, together with carving and moulding workshops, employed Italian workers who came and went with the currents of the art market, circulating within an international arena of art and labour.

### Their Hands Never Soft

What is evident is that the Italian aesthetic was not only important to the rise of a national art in North America, but that it was Italian labour that played an active role in making art and training local artists. Italian artists, first and second generation, were central to the development of an urban American aesthetic as the decorators and builders of cities.

Attilio Piccirilli, one of the most successful sculptors of his time, recognizes his contribution to the making of modern America when he writes

... cities and towns from coast to coast and every one of them needing to be beautified. At first everybody was too busy making a country out of wilderness to think of beauty! They built ugly houses and buildings which could be put up in a hurry. But now it must all be done over again. I'm tired of hearing people talk as if America was finished. What has been done? Not much that doesn't need to be torn down and down over again...<sup>62</sup>

The range of types of works produced by Italians was wide; they worked as *figurinai*, *stuccatori*, scenic artists, marble carvers, wood carvers, stone-cutters, bronze casters, iron

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<sup>61</sup> Nicole Cloutier, *Laliberté* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1990): 85, 87-88.

<sup>62</sup> Attilio Piccirilli, "Pride in American Citizenship," *A Documentary History of the Italian Americans*, eds. Wayne Moquin and Charles Van Doren (New York: Praeger, 1974), 391.



mongers. Together with work usually associated with art commissions such as church and funerary art, architectural sculpture and ornamentation, they also produced craftwork ranging from fine furniture, glasswork, and jewellery, to carrouseles, puppets, and saint-day wax statues. In recent years, a few American art historians and critics have noted that the work of Italians, which has been “in plain sight all along,” has remained largely unrecognized in the context of art historical discourse in the United States.<sup>63</sup> According to American historian Regina Soria, the omission of Italian artists from cultural history and art history is due in part to conventions intrinsic to the institution of art history, in particular, the separation between high and low art.<sup>64</sup> Italians were recognized as skilled artisans and technicians but seemed to rarely emerge as artists in their own right. This generally held view is confirmed by Adeline Adams who, in 1923, wrote “American sculpture has learned its art from France, its craft from Italy.”<sup>65</sup> For Soria, however, the attribution was influenced by ethnic and class bias that she believes made immigrants’ status as professional artists more difficult to achieve, a discrimination she ascertains is made evident by their poor wages and their designation as ‘stone cutters’ rather than ‘sculptors’. The flexibility of their practice – for example, their equal ease at designing an architectural façade or painting a religious fresco – has made these artists more difficult to categorize by historians of art. The variety of skills was in part due to the nature of their training but was also symptomatic of their predicament as immigrant workers. The insecurity of earning a livelihood demanded more concessions, more flexibility in their careers. However, while some who had ample training had to satisfy themselves with

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<sup>63</sup> Review of *American Artists*, *Archives of American Art Journal* 3.3 (1993): 29.

<sup>64</sup> Soria 12.

<sup>65</sup> Adeline Adams, *The Spirit of American Sculpture* (New York: National Sculpture Association, 1923), 218-219.

accepting commissions that were ‘beneath’ their professional abilities, others who arrived with little skills had the opportunity to learn new ones on job sites to which their ethnicity allowed them to gain entry, such as foundry work. Thus, inequity and opportunity were both possible outcomes for Italians who chose to leave their home for a new, unknown land.

Many of those who emigrated belonged to artist-families, some of whom traced their skills back generations, or from towns associated with particular trades such as the *figurinai* of Lucca or the stone-cutters and carvers of Carrara. One of the more famous families was the Piccirilli of New York City. The patriarch of this ‘clan’ was Giuseppe, a stone carver from Massa, a town close to Carrara, who, with his wife and six sons settled in New York City in 1888. With his sons, Giuseppe established a veritable “sculpture factory” at their home and workshop. The eldest son, Attilio, who had been sent to receive training at the Academia of San Luca in Rome, achieved success as an artist in his own right, but his brothers’ work was also admired. Attilio was one of the artists commissioned to work on the Federal Triangle buildings in Washington but is especially notable for major public art commissions such as the *Maine Memorial* in New York City. Art writer Adeline Adams compared the brothers to the early Renaissance Pisani brothers, who, she felt it necessary to point out, were also from Tuscany. This may have been an attempt to compensate for Attilio’s precarious position between sculptor and decorative artist, for the latter term, then as now, connotes an inferior status. That the Piccirilli were able to accept all types of commissions, from decorating fireplace mantles to public monuments, reflects the nature of their training as well as the necessities of

running a new business in an unknown city. Immigrant artists forged their careers through risk taking and learning from experience. Attilio, reflecting on his career, recalled that he never allowed himself to be too closely identified with a particular skill (which would be an admission of a lack in other areas); on the contrary, he boasted that his speciality was “everything!”<sup>66</sup>

The fact that so few Italians were perceived as artists, even though so many were employed in the arts, has a great deal to do with the perception that Italian art was purely about skill of execution (technique), an idea that certainly influenced Adams’s qualified praise of Attilio as an “exception” to the rule.<sup>67</sup> The numbers of Italian immigrant artists who rose to prominence and achieved the respect of the art community were few, in terms of their numbers, but several individuals did achieve recognition. Gaetano Cecere, for example, was awarded the Prix de Rome in 1920, and Oronzio Maldarelli won a Guggenheim Grant in 1931. Nevertheless, many were able to achieve a measure of success that would not have been likely in Italy at the time and they did gain entry to institutions such as the National Academy of Design.<sup>68</sup>

The story of the Piccirilli is remarkable as well for the fact that father Giuseppe benefited from having six sons to carry on the family tradition of stoneworking. But there was also a seventh child, a daughter. A telling commentary on the status of Italian women artists can be found in a contemporary article on the Piccirilli studio where the author comments

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<sup>66</sup> Adeline Adams, “A Family of Sculptors,” *The American Magazine of Art* 12.7 (1921): 223-230, 224.

<sup>67</sup> Adams, *The Spirit of American Sculpture* 218-219.

<sup>68</sup> Giuseppe Piccirilli emigrated because of overwhelming debt that would have stalked him and his family for many years. Adams, “A Family of Sculptors” 224.

that the last child, the daughter, was a case of bad luck!<sup>69</sup> While Italian women artists existed, they were rare. Certainly this is due to the cultural conventions that limited women to the domestic sphere, a fact that was partly responsible for the high numbers in “home finishing” jobs (which were also one of the lowest paying types of work). While the story of immigrant women artists has not been studied, some names do emerge. Even though they are anomalies, they provide insight into women’s experience in the arts.

Concetta Scaravaglione (1900-1975) was one of the two women sculptors hired to work on Washington’s Federal Triangle.<sup>70</sup> Scaravaglione was the daughter of agri-workers who emigrated from Southern Italy at the turn of the century. Her monumental sculptures reflect her respect for the peasant roots of her Calabrian heritage, a respect she expressed publicly: “My family brought to America what so many Italian families have brought from out of the way villages to crowded sidewalks: courage, knowledge of hard labour, and capacity for work... They have ingenuity, and from infancy they understand simple living. They expect few material comforts. Their hands are never soft.” While she acknowledges that these “hill folk” are “picturesque to look at, backward in their custom, primitive in their outlook,” as an insider she recognized the value of a peasant heritage in her professional life: “hands of course are in a sense only tools ... but if trained young they obey better. Curiously they have a memory of their own.” What is fascinating about this first-person account are the attitudes so common to peasant society, such as the

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<sup>69</sup> Adams, “A Family of Sculptors” 224.

<sup>70</sup> The freedom of the American experience was in part due to immigrant parents who had little time to watch over their children in an urban setting. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Tina Modotti who is known for her radical lifestyle was the daughter of a stonemason who immigrated to San Francisco in 1913.

notion that physical work is the centre of one's life and that 'opportunity' is due to divine grace rather than to individual will.<sup>71</sup>

In the streets of New York's Little Italy Scaravaglione recognized a similar kind of brutality "pressing hard on them every second of the day". While no one in Little Italy ever talked about art, she writes, they did talk about life. It was the vivaciousness of the community as it was lived on the street that marked her: "this seething, vigorous, immigrant life enchanted me. It was so lively and exciting and it was impossible to be lonely for a second." Scaravaglione's recollections of Little Italy at the turn of the century are quite different from the dens of poverty and criminality that were portrayed in the reports of social reformers. Instead, she recalls a sense of community and creative stimulation. Her best known work, the *Woman with Mountain Sheep*, displayed at the New York World Fair of 1939, alludes to the "hill people" that shaped her life. The archaic-like figures reflect a Modernist aesthetic that sets her apart from the more romanticized figurative production of artists such as Attilio Piccirilli (a generation older than she). Nevertheless, Scaravaglione's relation to the wider context of immigrant Italian art is difficult to evaluate given that she belongs to a minority within another minority; in Soria's 1993 dictionary of Italian artists in America, women make up less than 5% of the total.

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<sup>71</sup> Concetta Scaravaglione, "My Enjoyment in Sculpture," *Magazine of Art* 32 (1939): 450-455, 451.

*La décadence italienne: Italian Art and Artists in Nineteenth-Century Canada*

Similarly to Americans, Canadian artists and patrons were drawn to European art capitals – English speaking artists gravitated to England, French speaking artists to France, Belgium and Switzerland.<sup>72</sup> Laurier Lacroix lists ninety-eight painters in Quebec who are known to have travelled to Italy to view the master works and to learn lessons in technique. Of these, we can include Napoléon Bourassa (1827-1916), Eugène Hamel (1845-1932), Théophile Hamel (1817-70) and Charles Huot (1855-1930). By mid-century, Paris began to replace Rome as the centre of art (particularly important to Quebec artists); nevertheless, ‘study trips’ to Italy remained a common practice. By the late nineteenth century cities such as Venice, which hosted an international art biennale, took on their own particular attraction for modern Canadian painters such as William Brymner (1855-1925) and James Morrice (1865-1924).<sup>73</sup>

The experience of Italian immigrant artists in Canada was in many respects similar to those in the United States, however, their numbers was much smaller. Some of the same attitudes towards Italian art existed in both countries. For Canadians, Classical Rome and the Florentine Renaissance formed the basis of Italian art; its contemporary art was unknown and of no interest to both the public and art patrons. Italy’s art initially came to

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<sup>72</sup> Artists also travelled to Munich and Madrid. David Karel, *Dictionnaire des artistes de langue française en Amérique du Nord: peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs, graveurs, photographes et orfèvres* (Quebec: Musée du Québec, 1992).

<sup>73</sup> David McTavish, *Canadian Artists in Venice, 1830-1920* (Kingston, ON: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1984).

be known in Canada through merchants, the clergy, and collectors.<sup>74</sup> The dominance of the Catholic Church in Quebec provided a steady stream of correspondence and travel between Quebec and Europe, and contemporary Italian works were regularly purchased to decorate local churches and seminaries. Paintings were commissioned, and on occasion an Italian painter was summoned to work on site. The attraction of Italian art was as much due to its quality as to its aura that conferred respectability upon those associated with it, whether as artist or patron. Professional copyists such as Falardeau, who lived in Florence from 1848, generated quality reproductions that made ‘originals’ accessible to a wider market of buyers. This vogue for Italian art led some artists such as Antoine Plamondon (1804-1895) to denounce the practice of importing art which he felt was motivated more by fashion than by aesthetic judgement. In 1870, Plamondon felt strongly enough about this to publish an open letter on the subject: “je n’y ai rien vu qui pu ravir personne, surtout rien de nouveau.”<sup>75</sup> A century later the art historian Gérard Morisset echoed the same sentiment: “la décadence italienne s’insinue petit à petit ... une admiration sans borne pour tout ce qui est romain, un emballement naïf à l’égard des artistes italiens qui quittent leur pays pour venir nous prêcher la *religion de l’Art*.”<sup>76</sup>

The influence of Italian art on early Canadian art is known, especially in the context of church patronage, but tracing the history of the presence of Italian artists in the country is more difficult. This is due to the lack of documentation, the anonymous nature of workshop production, and the itinerant nature of the artists’ lives. In 1989, Laurier

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<sup>74</sup> Laurier Lacroix, “Italian Art and Artists in Nineteenth-Century Quebec, a Few Preliminary Observations,” in *Arrangiarsi*, 163-178.

<sup>75</sup> *Courrier du Canada*, 1 July, 1870: 3, quoted by Lacroix, fn. 7, 175.

<sup>76</sup> Gérard Morisset, *Coup d’œil sur les arts en Nouvelle-France* (Québec, 1941), 87- 88.

Lacroix listed thirty Italian-born artists who are known to have been active in Canada prior to 1914; Luce Vignola lists thirty-two statue makers active in Montreal from 1862 to 1880. Labour historian Bruno Ramirez, citing the Montreal census, lists fifteen Italian artists in 1870 and nineteen in 1881.<sup>77</sup> As in the American example, most of the artists were northerners, many were either academically trained or came from families of artists, and they were skilled in a variety of techniques. One can surmise that the journey from Italy to Canada was not a direct one for most of these artists. For example, prior to settling in New York City in the 1880s the Piccirilli had worked in several cities in Europe and beyond – London, Glasgow, Cairo. Similarly, F.X. Sciortino, who worked in Montreal after WWI, had travelled from his native Malta, to Italy, Cuba, the United States, settled in Montreal but continued to take on commissions outside Canada. Like other migrant workers, artists followed where the market led. Many are those of whom little is known and remain ‘anonymous’ in the history of Canadian art, especially those who worked in ephemeral trades such as scenic painting (for theatres, travelling shows, etc.).

Some early nineteenth-century Italians have emerged out of the past. Painter Angelo Pienovi (1773-1845), was summoned to Montreal to decorate the interior of Notre-Dame Basilica starting in 1838. Pienovi’s range of production – “Churches, architecture, Salons, Landscape, decorations, in oil and temper” – reflects the same kind of versatility that was typical of many immigrant artists.<sup>78</sup> Gérôme (Giuseppe) Fassio (1789-1851) is another early documented example. Like others, his journey to Canada was not a direct

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<sup>77</sup> Ramirez, *Les Premiers Italiens* 16.

<sup>78</sup> Author’s translation of the original in Lacroix 171.



one; he left his native Corsica (then under French rule for no more than twenty years) to work in various European cities, and in New York before arriving in Canada. He worked in Montreal, and later Quebec City, as minaturist and art teacher.<sup>79</sup> Luigi Cappelo, born in Turin in 1843, belonged to the northern migration of skilled workers for whom access to the Europe, and the New World beyond, offered work opportunities. He seemed to have had a fairly successful career working as a portraitist, decorative painter and as an art teacher. In the 1840s several artisans lived in Montreal: fine furniture maker Molinelli, sculptor Giorgio Baccarini, master mason Guidi, *figurinaio* Giovannetti. It is not known how these artists' lives were linked to other cities, nor how commissions were exchanged, opportunities found or lost elsewhere. One need only think of the boarding house system<sup>80</sup> and 'chain migration' to be reminded of the network immigrants created for themselves and within which they circulated 'outside' the domain of institutional controls and protection. Like the migration experience of unskilled workers at the turn of the century, artists summoned others to whom they were associated by kinship, *accademia*, or hometown, bringing skills and learning new ones through apprenticeship.

The migration pattern of artists is evident in the story of the Catelli firm, which began its statuery business in Montreal in 1848. Two years previously, Carlo-Onerato Catelli had emigrated from Como, in northern Italy, to join an uncle already living in Montreal. In 1867, Carlo-Onerato entered into a business partnership with Thomas Carli (1838-1906) with whom he collaborated for ten years, after which time Catelli sold his share to Carli.

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<sup>79</sup> Morriset, 90-91, David Karel, "Fassio, Gérôme" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VIII (Toronto: 1985), 320-322. See also Vallee.

<sup>80</sup> Vignola's research reveals that sometimes several artists boarded at the same address.

The latter was born near Lucca, a city famous for its stone and plaster work, and had settled in Montreal in 1858 after having worked for several years in Europe and the United States. Prior to joining Catelli, Carli worked as a *formatore* with Giorgio Baccerini for whom he did the moulding for the exterior statues on the façade of Notre-Dame. Carli's brother, Jean, came to Montreal with two of his sons to work with Thomas, also after having worked in Europe and the United States; Jean's wife and three more sons followed later (his son Americ settled in Boston to work as a copyist). By 1890, Carli employed twenty-two permanent employees.<sup>81</sup>

Catelli began a business with which Italians had long been associated, the production of small, inexpensive plaster figurines for the bourgeois consumer of decorative objects and clergy intent on decorating their churches and schools with devotional art. As statue-makers, or *figurinai*, they produced relatively inexpensive art for a mass public through 'factory' production methods. As the examples of the Carli and Piccirilli workshops demonstrate, kin were necessary to the beginnings and growth of Italian owned enterprises. As the transition from migration to settlement took place, younger members of the artists' families became assimilated into institutional networks; the second generation of the Carli family provides an example of this.

Thomas Carli's eldest son Alexandre, a first generation Canadian, took over the "T. Carli" firm after his father died in 1906. Alexandre ran the company together with his three brothers who handled all aspects of the enterprise from production, management,

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<sup>81</sup> Vignola 55.

sales and accounting. By the time Thomas the patriarch passed away, Alexandre had established himself in the city as sculptor, having shown at the Art Association of Montreal in 1891 and 1892. As of 1899 he was as a modeling teacher at École de arts et métiers de Montréal, where he had been a student. The fact that the Carli sons were all first generation Montrealers eased their integration into the art community's business and institutional network, which also included a relationship with the extensive and influential network of Catholic clergy linked primarily with the francophone community. When the Carli firm merged with the Petrucci workshop in 1923 and became T.Carli-Petrucci Limitée, it was employing up to sixty workers and exported products internationally to the United States, Mexico and other Canadian provinces.

Alexandre was the last Carli to actually be employed as sculptor in the firm, a tradition that ended in 1934.<sup>82</sup> Alexandre's technical experience, his language fluency, together with his intimate knowledge of the city's art institutions was beneficial to his business concerns. His relationship to Alfred Laliberté (1878-1953), one of the cities leading sculptors, and his former student at the École des arts et metiers, developed into a secure business relationship. The Carli studio would pick up Laliberté's terracotta models and make two or three moulds for the artist. For Laliberté and other clients, works of both high and low quality were made depending on the clientele. Iconographic details were checked against Bollandistes publications, which were standard reference sources for

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<sup>82</sup> Paul Petrucci joined his father Nicholas around 1945 and carried on the business to 1965 when it finally ended. A separate branch of the business was begun by Aimé Petrucci and Apollo Carli when they became associates in 1926 and formed "Petrucci and Carli," and were soon joined by their sons and by Carlo Carli who had been doing monumental figure work in South America. See Vignola, and John Porter and Désy, 135-136.

religious imagery. When these were not sufficient, personal contacts in Rome verified information at the Vatican Library. The studio soon learned that including written attestations with the statues was especially pleasing to clergy. However, the workshop's success was also due to its ability to produce in quantity. The studio's efficiency seems to be supported by Laliberté's observation that Carli regularly 'switched' the heads of the religious statuary in order to cut on time and labour costs. The price of the object reflected the amount of work employed and the quality of the materials used: plaster, stucco, Caen stone dust, and *scaliola* (fake marble), natural marble, bronze, lead or copper plated wood, artificial stone (marble dust), paper mâché, and gold and silver finishing.<sup>83</sup>

Art historian John Porter has commented on how difficult it is to form a detailed picture of the workshops that were integral to the production of Canadian statuary art, a problem due in part to the lack of documentation on daily activities and workers.<sup>84</sup> In the context of immigration history, this is neither unusual nor limited to the subject of art. As both Soria and Lacroix have written, the lacunae may also be attributed to the hierarchy within the arts, a factor, Soria suggests, compounded by ethnic discrimination. The history of Italian immigrant artists must be considered within the larger history of migrant labour and global economics. Writing on the history of French painters in Canada, David Karel draws attention to the family ties that linked artists across national boundaries confirming, what has already been shown to be the case with Italian artists, that migrancy was a fundamental aspect of their lives.

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<sup>83</sup> Porter and Désy.

<sup>84</sup> Porter and Désy 127.

The transience of the artists' lives raises the issue of legitimacy and social authority that comes with permanent settlement. The lack of 'rights' certainly worked against the railway workers who were hired and fired *en masse*. Similarly, legitimacy could be used to bar artists from commissions. Laliberté's request that the call for submission for the Des Ormeaux monument be limited to "Canadians only," in order to promote local artists and to shed dependency on Paris, excluded some recent immigrants such as F.X. Sciortino (1875-1958).<sup>85</sup> Sciortino publicly voiced his criticism of Laliberté and of the jury in a letter published in *Le Pays* in 1919, where he accused those involved with "protectionnisme et népotisme" of having predetermined the outcome: "à quoi bon organiser des concours nationaux ou internationaux?"<sup>86</sup> Sciortino also accused Laliberté of historical inaccuracy of which the learned committee should have been aware. On his part, Laliberté accused Sciortino of being a sore loser: "parmi des concurrents déçus, il y avait un Italien, artiste gonflé de prétentions, mais aveugle sur sa faiblesse. Il ne voulait pas accepter son échec et reconnaître la valeur des autres. Sous le coup de sa déception et ne se tenant pas encore pour battu, il commença à injurier le comité, les juges et surtout l'artiste choisi."<sup>87</sup> Laliberté goes on to say that Sciortino's attempt to have the *Star* publish the English version of his letter was stopped after the newspaper made a call to Émile Vaillancourt, a member of the committee and a friend of Laliberté's, and sent one of its journalists to evaluate the aesthetic merits of Sciortino's submission.

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<sup>85</sup> Aline Gubay, "Three Montreal Monuments: An Expression of Nationalism," M.A. thesis, Concordia University, 1978: 22.

<sup>86</sup> *Le Pays*, 4 January, 1919: 3; and "Francesco Saverio Sciortino" artist file, Museum of Fine Arts, Malta, and personal conversation with son Joseph, September 29, 2003. Sciortino often signed 'F.X.' rather than 'F.S.'; in Canada he used "Francis" rather than "Francesco."

<sup>87</sup> Alfred Laliberté, *Mes Souvenirs*, foreword Odette Legendre (Montreal : Éditions du Boréal Express, 1978) 83.

Laliberté's support of local artists seems disingenuous considering the trans-national context of art, its sizable immigrant makeup and the nature of migrant artists' lives. Sciortino is a case in point. Francesco Saverio Sciortino was born in 1875 in Malta of Sicilian parents. He and his two brothers studied at the *Regio Istituto di Belle Arti* and at the British Academy in Rome through the sponsorship of the Maltese governor. He became the first foreigner to head its Fine Arts Department of the University of Rome where he had been teaching since 1903. While working on a commission in Cuba, he was encouraged by the British counsel to go to Canada. In 1913 he emigrated to Montreal where he found work with Carli, who was the central contractor for most of the major sculptural work in Montreal. He also worked with Guido Nincheri on several church interiors, including Saint-Léon-de-Westmount, where he produced reliefs of the Stations of the Cross, and later, architectural ornamentation for the (second) Sun Life Building. His works can be found in England, Cuba, Italy, Malta, Montreal, Toronto, Halifax, Boston and Cleveland. Besides architectural sculpture and ornamentation for public monuments, churches, and funerary art, he also produced portrait busts. Sciortino's quick and open criticism of Laliberté was in part assisted by his proficiency in English and French (while his ability to speak Italian suited his work with Italians in Montreal and Toronto).<sup>88</sup> Sciortino's sense of himself as an 'international artist' was deflated by the parochialism of Montreal's art scene which at this time, particularly in public art and in the case of the Dollard Monument, was guided by nationalist fervour.

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<sup>88</sup> "Francesco Saverio Sciortino" artist file, and personal conversation with son Joseph, September 29, 2003.

Laliberté expressed disparaging comments on another Italian sculptor, although in this case the tone is a patronizing one. Guido Balboni (1860-1947) worked in the Carli studio, and it is through Carli that Laliberté came to know him: “de toute petite stature, prompt, nerveux, un cerveau demi-enfant, demi-homme faisait du petit sculpteur italien le type d’homme sympathique et inoffensif... N’a jamais pu s’habituer au progrès moderne ... rien fait d’extraordinaire malgré qu’il avait une certaine habileté.”<sup>89</sup> Balboni may not have been an outstanding artist, but he did think of himself as something more than a moulder or stone cutter. He showed work with the Art Association of Montreal (1909-10, 1928-29, 1935) and with the Royal Canadian Academy (1927, 1931).<sup>90</sup> Most of the works shown were plaster portrait busts, with a couple finished in bronze; his only permanent work is a bronze bust of Dante which was erected in Lafontaine Park in 1922. If not for the Dante piece and, ironically, Laliberté’s comments, Balboni would be forgotten entirely. Without an archival trail and without works in public sight, other immigrant artists also sink into historical anonymity.

Luigi Capello (1843-1902) is another example of an Italian artist who has come to some attention because of his relation to ‘canonical’ figures. Capello, who originated in the northern Italian town of Turin, exhibited landscape paintings with the Art Association of Montreal in 1880 and 1883, and with the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1880, 1882, and 1887. He produced oil paintings and mural paintings (*fresco secco*) for numerous churches and chapels, as well as some theatre decor and portraits. Capello’s

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<sup>89</sup> Alfred Laliberté, *Les Artistes de mon temps* (Montreal: Boréal Express, 1986), 130-131. The writings were assembled from a manuscript that was unfinished at the time of the artist’s death.

<sup>90</sup> The R.C.A. shows alternated between Toronto and Montreal; in 1927 and 1935 they were in Montreal.

life has generated some interest within art history research, particularly in Quebec, because he is known to have been a teacher and employer of the symbolist painter and church decorator Ozias Leduc (1864-1955), who in turn influenced the abstract expressionist Paul-Émile Borduas (1905-60).<sup>91</sup> While Leduc is seen as an important figure in the history of modern art in Quebec, Capello remains a largely unknown decorative artist and teacher of ‘technique.’

Considering the lack of documentation and the subsequent disappearance of many artists from history, it is surprising that others who achieved a fair measure of success in their own time continue to remain absent from art history. Emmanuel Briffa (1875- 1955), originally from a Maltese family of artists, arrived in Montreal in 1917 after having worked in the United States for about eight years.<sup>92</sup> Briffa studied at the *Accademia di Santa Lucia* in Naples and in Rome where he studied at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* at the same time as Sciortino (it may have been Sciortino, also Maltese, who encouraged Briffa to leave for the United States).<sup>93</sup> Briffa was a prolific movie house decorator, a trade that was much in demand in the silent film era when movie houses modeled on European opera houses began to flourish in every major city in North America, including Montreal. His accomplishments include the decoration of the first ‘movie palace’ in North America, the Allen in Winnipeg in 1919. He had developed expertise in this speciality from commissions in Italy and, before coming to Montreal, he worked in Detroit as a painter of architectural ornamentation. Briffa’s first recorded Canadian commission was the

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<sup>91</sup> See Shtychno.

<sup>92</sup> See Dombowsky.

<sup>93</sup> Briffa’s son suggests that a professor in Rome, likely at the *Accademia di belle Arti* where he was a student, made the suggestion to go to Canada. Dombowsky, 16.



Belmont Theater in Montreal, which opened in 1920. At the Belmont he worked with Guido Nincheri, whose reputation as a mural painter was developing at this time. Briffa worked with other Italian artists as well, most importantly De Giorgio Limited, a plastering firm responsible for most of the decorative plaster work in Montreal movie-houses and theatres in the 1920s.<sup>94</sup> As Dombowsky has shown, Briffa was active in Montreal in the 1920s (and possibly as early as 1915), but the remainder of his career up to his retirement in the late 1940s remains largely undocumented. Besides working in Detroit, Briffa was also active in cities throughout Canada. In Montreal alone he worked on over twenty-six movie houses; unfortunately, many of these have been destroyed.<sup>95</sup> In the hierarchy of the arts, where decoration and ornamentation fall below easel painting, architecture, and sculpture, the work of Briffa has been of more interest to architectural historians than art historians. While movies and their sites were massively important to the visual culture of the early twentieth century, their relationship to the conventional subjects of art history, such as painting, has been ignored.

### *Sculpteurs profanes*

The case of Briffa demonstrates how the status of Italian artists within the history of Canadian art has been compromised not only by lack of archival sources but also by the nature of art historical discourse which has displayed a double-blindness towards the minor arts and the issue of ethnicity. Briffa's central role in the history of movie theatre

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<sup>94</sup> Artists included Antonio De Giorgio, Adolpho Salmasso, Giuseppe Guardo, and Conrad Ignacolo. Dombowsky, 55.

<sup>95</sup> Dombowsky; see also Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Houses: Great Treasures of the Golden Era, 1884-1938* (Waterloo, ON: Penumbra Press, 1993).

decoration in Canada remains outside the domain of traditional art history. The artist's development of the "atmospheric" theatre aesthetic (a *gesamtkunstwerk* approach where the entire space is used in a thematically based illusionist program) falls outside the purview of art historical writing on the period of the 1920s and 1930s. Canadian art historians have focused on locating signs of modernity, which, by and large, they have associated with easel painting. Artists such as those of the Group of Seven were promoted for their innovative vision that critics treated as evidence of Canada's definitive break from its colonial past. While in Quebec art writers such as Jean Chauvin viewed the Group of Seven as a regionalist phenomena, they identified with the Group to a certain extent. Chauvin viewed the Toronto-based artists as working in the same spirit as the Quebec modernists whose primary concern was not with colonialist rupture but with liberation from Quebec's conservative culture.<sup>96</sup>

The focus on modernism has obscured – even denied – the possibility of other discussions about Canadian art of the 1920s and 1930s. This perspective has excluded forms and practices of art making that took place outside the institution of fine art. In particular, because so many artworks by Italian artists were produced for conservative patrons, i.e. the clergy, the art historical significance of these artists has been defined and limited by the anti-modernist stance of their employers and promoters. The 'conservative vs. modern' debate presupposes a central authority against which a minority struggles to

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<sup>96</sup> Esther Trépanier, "Nationalisme et Modernité, la réception critique du groupe des Sept dans la presse montréalaise francophone des années vingt," *Journal of Canadian Art History*, XVII, 2, (1996): 28-53

assert itself but denies the possibility of other subject positions.<sup>97</sup> These other sites include the Italian immigrant artist who belonged neither to the status quo nor to those who sought to differentiate themselves from that authoritative voice. In addition, the economic situation, which cannot be separated from their social dislocation as immigrants, determined both their initial introduction into the art milieu as well as the limits of their professional mobility within that environment.

The motivations of native-born artists and art writers who sought to advance their own careers and ideas contributed to the perception that Italians were ‘art workers’ rather than independent artists. Plamondon’s general critique of imported artists, and Laliberté’s more personal attacks, were supported in part by an attitude that conflated ethno-nationalist issues with questions of aesthetic judgement. Luc Noppen, writing on the use of plaster in statuary and architectural ornamentation in nineteenth-century Quebec, has outlined the bias against the materials and techniques employed by Italian immigrant artists.<sup>98</sup> As Noppen suggests, the arrival of plaster symbolized the end of a Quebec craftsmanship, which in the mythos of the early twentieth-century art writers such as Marius Barbeau was associated with the French Renaissance, the Ancien Régime and France. Barbeau’s backward looking nationalism led him to view modernity as a corruption of nationalist identity. Thus, for him, Italian sculptors represented a threat not so much because they were Italian but because they were associated with modern techniques of ‘factory production’:

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<sup>97</sup> Although outside the scope of this study, the relationship of later Italian Quebec artists to modernist aesthetics and, in particular, to non-figurative art, would be interesting to discuss in the context of the ideas raised in this chapter.

<sup>98</sup> Noppen 25-48.

L'abbé Demers, malgré son allégeance aux classiques, donna cours à un expédient qui bientôt causa un dommage irréparable. Il permit à Regali, artisan italien, de coller ses moulages de plâtre à la voûte de la basilique, pendant que Thomas Baillairgé continuait de cheviller ses sculptures aux murs massifs de l'ancien temple. Ceci tuera cela! Le plâtre avait manifestement de grands avantages sur le bois. Ses formes stéréotypées coûtaient moins cher. L'inertie et la correction même de la surface plaisaient au bourgeois, pour qui tout nouveau est tout beau. La vitesse dans l'exécution présentait un progrès; les procédés mécaniques en travail l'emportaient d'emblée sur le ciseau. On oublia l'art et la pensée! ... Le plâtre à l'italienne, au lieu du bois, voilà le premier grand coup que l'étranger donna à la tradition canadienne.<sup>99</sup>

Curiously, the Italian *stuccatori* and *formatori* who were needed to supply the demands of the building boom of the early twentieth century (including the churches that were intimately tied to cultural survival), and had developed skills and techniques that allowed the production to proceed at a sufficient pace, were criticized for debasing the national aesthetic. The craftsmanship of wood carving, as exemplified by Louis Jobin, was replaced by modern Italian techniques of simulation, such as *scaloglia* (fake marble), and efficient production by factory-workshops such as the one run by Carli and Petrucci. The desire for 'Italian tradition' had more to do with the needs of the market than with aesthetic ideals. With modernity, Italian craft had become thoroughly commodified as a signifier of "aura" and a vehicle of "cult status."<sup>100</sup>

In Barbeau's writing it is difficult not to see the ethno-social implications of his national-aesthetic argument. Because the history of Italian immigrant artists is tied to labour

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<sup>99</sup> Marius Barbeau, *Au Coeur de Québec* (Montreal : Les Éditions du zodiaque, 1934), 131-132.

<sup>100</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, ed. and introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968).

history as much as it is to art history, one must be cautious not only when speaking of 'Italian art' but also of 'Italian artists'. It is important to differentiate between the content and style of Italian art (Renaissance and Classical motifs and iconography) from the uses to which it was applied. And one must distinguish between Italian artists associated with the academic tradition and those who arrived as immigrant art-workers. The letter (predominantly male) artists' sense of identity and social status were influenced by their region of origin and by the cultural attitudes of their receiving countries, broadly, in terms of social attitudes and, specifically, by the competitive nature of the market. 'Italy' or 'Italian' was not a collectively shared concept. Italian artists themselves did not share a common notion of nationhood but were profoundly marked by regional identity and bias. Curiously, as in the case of Barbeau and Morisset, they were criticized for not being Italian enough, i.e. for not using more traditional, artisanal techniques: "c'est d'elles que nous est venue une bonne part de mauvais gout."<sup>101</sup>

The study of Italian artists in Canada and Montreal is a problematic one. Limiting criteria to place of birth, and/or language is a practical tool but, without an investigation of the immigrant context, it is an insufficient and even misleading approach. In David Karel's monumental dictionary of French language artists in North America, the difficulty of creating a register based on language is apparent and offers an example of the pitfalls of such a venture. Clearly, Karel has made an effort to integrate the migrant experience of French-speaking artists whose history, in many respects, is similar to that of Italians. At the same time, Karel has sought to make a unity of this global dispersal and trans-

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<sup>101</sup> Morisset, *Coup d'œil* 44.

nationalism by basing his selection on the criteria of language. Some first-generation Canadian artists such as Alexandre Carli (born Montreal 1861) are included while others who developed French language fluency after immigration, such as Guido Nincheri, are excluded. Furthermore, this seems to suggest that Carli was not using his mother tongue with his employees, business partners, and family.

The most problematic aspect in Karel's language-based selection is the theoretical supposition that language is a determinant of cultural identity. Karel offers an overview of the philosophical history of the idea that language is an index of culture, citing a lineage of theorists from Von Humboldt to Panofsky. He observes that for these theorists language and culture originated in a common *weltanschauung*: "la créativité d'un peuple se manifeste, cela est évident, par le truchement de sa langue. Toutefois pour Humboldt, une langue exprime directement cette créativité."<sup>102</sup> It is an argument that presupposes both a unified language and unified collective identity that maintains its integrity across, or against, the influence of historical factors. In the case of Italian immigrant artists (and other migrant populations), economic and social determinants of immigrant experience cannot be ignored. Taking these factors into consideration means letting go of some familiar monolithic notions of identity. Italian immigrant artists were as much formed by their origin as their destination and the journey in between. A different approach is needed other than the usual art historical parameters based on national identity and style. Central to this alternative approach is a closer inspection of the ethno-economics of the art market which traded not only in art but in artists as well. The dissonance between the

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<sup>102</sup> Karel xiii.

'idea' of Italian art and the social reception of immigrant Italians needs to be considered in order to make sense of the conflicted subject positions imposed upon immigrant artists who were neither fully 'Italian' nor fully 'Canadian.'

## Chapter Three

### The Politics of Patria

#### The Unknown Soldier

After World War I commemoration became a national obsession not only in Italy but also in all countries that had been involved in the war. The ceremony for the Unknown Soldier was invented at this time, and its formal rituals included wreath laying, processional marches, marching bands, and speech making.<sup>103</sup> Its rhetorical turns adopted metaphors of Christian sacrifice that included frequent allusions to martyrdom. On November 4, 1921, at St. James Cathedral in Montreal a ceremony honouring the Unknown Italian Soldier took place for the man who “gave his life for the cause of freedom” (Fig. 7). Local newspapers were caught up in the solemn atmosphere and fanfare that accompanied the ceremony: “little children of every Italian school were present in large numbers. Soldiers and aviators wearing the honors of many an alpine battle attended in full military uniform. The ceremony was a spectacle representing all the splendour of pomp and grace of church and state.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990).

<sup>104</sup> “Montreal honors unknown Italian who died in action,” *The Montreal Star*, 4 November 1921: 3; “Service honoured unknown soldier,” *The Gazette*, 5 November, 1921: 10; “Les italiens vont honorer dignement le soldat inconnu,” *La Presse* 31 October 1921: 3.



The date was selected to coincide with the ceremony that was taking place at the “Altar of the Country” in Rome.<sup>105</sup> It was officiated by Archbishop Georges Gauthier; guests included local dignitaries, embassy officials, and Italian war veterans. That evening a banquet hosted by the Italian Embassy was held at the Monument National. It was not the first event commemorating the Great War. A mass for the Italian Red Cross was held in Montreal on May 10, 1917, when the Italian church, Notre-Dame-de-la Défense, was “decorated in black” and attended by Italian marines and dignitaries such as the Italian and French Consular staff. At a mass on September 21, 1919, a ceremonial sword was blessed, dedicated and delivered to General Armando Diaz of the Italian army. Public ceremonies such as these rallied people under the Italian flag. Italian War Veteran associations across Canada became the organizing vehicles for events such as the special masses and parades around which the rest of the community gathered (Fig. 6). Italy’s war effort, proved by the tremendous numbers of casualties provided a unifying force for Italian immigrants, who, one must recall, originated from different regions of Italy.

At the same time, the war helped integrate them into Canadian society, boosting their collective moral because of the enthusiastic reception with which such commemorative events were received in their host country. A bronze relief of a laurel crown was added to the Edith Cavell monument in Toronto as a donation by the Italians of Toronto in 1922. The inscription, “Lest We Forget, Società Italo Canadese, 11th Nov. 1922,” made the

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<sup>105</sup> The tomb to the unknown soldier in Rome was finished in 1924 and is located at the monument to King V. Emmanuel II (built 1885-1911); it is also known as the “altar of the nation.”

Italian presence in the city evident, as too Canada's debt to Italian veterans.<sup>106</sup> (Fig. 8). As Angelo Principe has pointed out, the original plan was to erect a separate memorial to Italian soldiers but after some protest that a second memorial would overshadow the first, a laurel leaf relief was added to the existing one instead. Located in what was the heart of Toronto's Little Italy (the Ward), the relief not only paid tribute to Cavell's heroism, it also served to mark a 'territory'. Another example of this double loyalty is the special mass commemorating the death of Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier, held in Montreal's Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense in 1919. The mass, celebrating Laurier's importance to Canada, was given entirely in Italian.

#### Dante and Modern Italy

The hunt for national heroes, and occasions to be reminded of them, that had begun after WWI found an appropriate occasion during the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the medieval poet Dante Alighieri's death in 1921. Guglielmo Vangelisti, the parish priest at the time at Notre-Dame-de-la Défense, recounts how he initiated the drive to have Suzanne Street in Montreal renamed Dante Street so that the Italian "colony" would have a permanent record of the anniversary. Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense, the Italian mother church, was located in Little Italy, with its façade on what was then Suzanne Street. In his promotion of the project he described Dante as a "model Catholic and exponent of true Christian

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<sup>106</sup> Cavell was a British nurse executed by the German army in 1915. Principe writes that two Italian physicians at Toronto General Hospital, who had both been vice-consuls, suggested the compromise, Gabriele Scardellato and Manuela Scarci, eds. *A Monument for Italian-Canadian Immigrants: Regional Migration from Italy to Canada* (Toronto: The Department of Italian Studies, University of Toronto with the Italian-Canadian Immigration Commemorative Association, 1999): 3-4.

doctrine and of the Italian language.”<sup>107</sup> However, city hall was not easy to win over. In an attempt to find a compromise amongst the opposing views, a resolution was made to rename a street in the St. Michel district. Displeased, Vangelisti was invited to argue his case directly to the city councillors. He recounts how he was shocked and angered when one of them expressed ignorance of Dante’s importance. In the end, the decision was taken to retain Dante ‘Avenue’ in St. Michel as well as Dante ‘Street’ in Mile-End. The parish celebrated its victory with a *festicciola* (small public celebration). On August 27, 1922, three months after the official change, the street signs were solemnly inaugurated to the sounds of *O Canada* and the Italian Royal Anthem. Thus began, as Vangelisti writes, a “true wave of dantesque spirit” with editorials appearing in both *L’Araldo del Canada* and *L’Italia*.<sup>108</sup> The publisher of *L’Italia*, he points out, was also responsible for the commissioning of a sculpture of Dante, the first public monument by Italians in Canada.

On October 22, 1922, a bronze bust of the medieval poet Dante Alighieri was erected in Lafontaine Park in Montreal. (Fig. 9, 10). Sitting on a granite pedestal base, the monument was placed at the south-west corner of the park on an island bounded by Sherbrooke and Cherrier streets and appropriately facing the Municipal Library.<sup>109</sup> The desire to undertake such a costly project had been catalysed by the success achieved with

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<sup>107</sup> “Ora Dante Alighieri, altissimo poeta e sommamente cattolico, si trovava a essere per noi come l’esponente della vera dottrina cristiana e in pari tempo della nostra lingua,” Vangelisti 213-214; Vangelisti belonged to the Order of the Servants of Mary, he was parish priest 1913-1925 and 1940-1951.

<sup>108</sup> During WWII some city councillors argued to have the name of Dante Street expunged, “We have no German street names in Montreal ... why should we have an Italian name?” *The Montreal Herald*, 25 February 1941, City of Montreal Archives, Dossier de Presse, D.3020.17.

<sup>109</sup> In 1962 the artwork was moved to what is now Dante Park, adjacent the Church of Notre-Dame-de-la Défense, in “Little Italy.” See “Conclusion.”

the naming of Dante Street. The monument was paid for by a subscription process organized by *L'Italia* whose new editor, Camille Vetere, made a “short patriotic speech in Italian.” The crowd of “several hundreds” included many dignitaries such as the mayor, clergy, veterans, and *prominenti* such as C.H. Catelli (son of the sculptor Carlo-Onerato Catelli). Also present was the Italian Counsel Giulio Bolognini, who a year later in a report to Mussolini warned that Canadians viewed Fascism as “undemocratic.”<sup>110</sup>

The spokesperson at the event was Cesare Consiglio who announced in French:

A Montréal, la plus grande ville latine de l'Amérique du Nord, les Italiens sont heureux d'offrir ce buste de leur grand poète, pour orner un des plus beaux parcs. Nous croyons que ce monument vous inspirera, nobles citoyens de cette ville, les sentiments les plus sympathiques pour les Italiens, non seulement de cette ville, mais pour ceux qui viendront. En effet, rien ne pourra arrêter le courant d'immigration, vu que notre Italie est trop étroite pour sa population qui augmente sans cesse. Mais nous aimons toujours ardemment notre mère-patrie, et vous qui avez combattu avec nous dans la Grande Guerre ne pouvez blâmer ce noble sentiment.<sup>111</sup>

In the post-war period Dante was an especially charged symbol. In keeping with the odd euphoria created in celebrating the war fallen, a monument to an established hero found a receptive audience.<sup>112</sup> The poet was the ‘father’ of the Italian language because he chose to write *The Divine Comedy* in the modern vernacular rather than Latin; and he ushered in the Renaissance, which was seen as the beginning of modern Italy. The poet also came to stand for modern Italy’s self-consciousness of its own historical and cultural legacy.

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<sup>110</sup> Misspelled in the press reports as “Bolognesi”; an excerpt from the report is quoted by Principe, 42.

<sup>111</sup> *La Presse*, 23 October 1922: 7. The same excerpt is reproduced in Pierre-Georges Roy, *Les monuments commémoratifs de la province de Québec*, Vol.1, (Québec: Commission de monuments historiques de la province de Québec, 1923); “Memorial to Poet Dante Unveiled,” *Montreal Gazette*, 23 October, 1923: 4. (Canada began a historic sites and monument program in 1919.)

<sup>112</sup> Soria states that the first Dante in the United States was by Paolo Abbate, with a bust in Newburgh, New York, and copy in Providence, Rhode Island, 1921. *Fratelli Lontani: Il Contributo degli artisti italiani all'identità degli Stati Uniti (1776-1945)* (Napoli : Liguori Editore, 1997), 56.

Dante was revered as a ‘great man’ embodying the tradition of the *grandi uomini* of the early Renaissance, a theme explored by poet Petrarch and painter Giotto. Dante’s ‘internationalism’, that is, his importance to Western culture as a whole, is recognized in the editorials that were devoted to the anniversary by both the French and English press, and affirmed by Mayor Médéric Martin’s wish to see more monuments in the city’s parks dedicated to “great men of humanity.” Martin’s sense that Dante was a shared cultural hero is also alluded to by his comment that the site, facing the Municipal Library, had been expressly chosen to illustrate the value of Dante’s literary contributions.

Nevertheless, an editorial in *Le Devoir* wondered whether Dante as the poet of Christianity would be more at home in a French-Canadian *quartier*. The author doesn’t explain his comment. Did he mean that English-speaking Montrealers were mostly non-Catholics and thus could not appreciate Dante’s religious and historical context? Or did he mean to suggest that Dante belonged to a different cultural tradition, referred to at this and other inaugurations as that of the “Latin race.” At the same time, the writer recognized the political strategies at play when he added that the Mayor might win more votes at the next election if Italians supported him.<sup>113</sup>

The donation of the Dante statue to the city of Montreal was a public relations coup. Nevertheless, Consiglio’s speech has an apologetic tone: he asked to be excused for expressing patriotic attachment to another country and pleaded for tolerance in the name of the many more Italians who would immigrate and likely feel similar patriotic sentiments to their homeland. He justified his requests on the ‘latin’ bond that established

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<sup>113</sup> “Un monument de Dante,” *Le Devoir*, 23 October, 1922: 1, 2.

a racial confraternity between Italians and francophones. At the same time, he drew links with Canada (and France) by referring to their shared experience as World War I allies. These national links were reaffirmed in Consiglio's mention of other Renaissance figures such as Columbus and Cabot, thus reinforcing Italy's centrality in the founding of the New World and its cultural traditions.

The indisputable heroic dimensions of Dante made the work a suitable inclusion in Roy's 1923 collection of Quebec monuments, a project that was underwritten by the establishment of Quebec's *Commission des monuments historiques* in 1922. The rush to claim heroes and erect monuments, in their honour, in stone and bronze coincided with a period of growing nationalist fervour in Quebec. Lafontaine Park became the focal point for nationalist symbols, including the site of the *Dollard-des-Ormeaux* monument by Alfred Laliberté, raised in 1920 (Fig.16), and the site of Quebec's annual *fête nationale*, the St-Jean-Baptist parade. Consiglio's reference to the various "firsts" of Columbus and Cabot was a subtle political manoeuvre in the wider contest for nationalist supremacy.<sup>114</sup>

#### Carlo Balboni

As in most of the press reports on the various inaugurations in the city, artist Carlo Balboni (1863-1947) was given little attention. Even well known Alfred Laliberté seemed a secondary figure in the news accounts of the festivities and fanfare that accompanied the official welcome of his public artworks. The little mention of him relates to the Dante

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<sup>114</sup> "Un monument de Dante," *Le Devoir*, 23 October, 1922: 1, 2

work. He was born on June 28, 1863, in Cento, Italy, near the northern city of Ferrara.<sup>115</sup> He studied at the Academia San Luca in Rome with Giulio Monteverde (1831-1917) and seems to have still been in Cento as late as 1884-85.<sup>116</sup> He exhibited portrait busts at the Montreal Spring Exhibitions as early as 1909 and as late as 1944.<sup>117</sup> He worked in the Carli and Petrucci workshop where he was came into contact with Alfred Laliberté. The latter's description of Balboni as "un cerveau demi-enfant, demi-homme" (quoted in full in the previous chapter) is the only account we have of him. Laliberté's view of Balboni as a mediocre sculptor must have been reinforced by the inevitable comparison of their works which were both located in Lafontaine Park. Laliberté's massive and flamboyant tribute to the French-Canadian hero Dollard des Ormeaux (1920) dwarfed the modest Dante. Balboni seems to have played an inconspicuous role within the Italian community. Published references to him are few, they include a short notice in the New York-based *Carroccio* stating that his Mussolini bust was "discovered" in the school attached to the Church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense<sup>118</sup>; it is unknown who commissioned it, but it is likely the same one that was shown at the Spring Exhibition of 1927. Interestingly, Balboni showed a bust of "Giovanni Caboto" in the Spring Exhibition in 1931, likely in advance of the Cabot anniversary in 1934.

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<sup>115</sup> Vangelisti 214.

<sup>116</sup> A marble bust (1884) and two terracotta medallions (1885) are located in the Pinacoteca Civica di Cento (correspondence with Director Fausto Gozzi). He is described as an American living in Montreal in E. Bénézit's *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs de tous les temps et de tous les pays par un groupe d'écrivains spécialistes français et étrangers*, new and revised, ed. Jacques Busse (Paris: Grund, 1999), 394.

<sup>117</sup> Evelyn De R. McMann, *Montreal Museum of Fine Arts formerly the Art Association of Montreal: spring exhibitions 1880-1970* (Toronto: UP, 1988); *Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts / Academie royale des arts du Canada: exhibitions and members, 1880-1979* (Toronto: UP, 1981).

<sup>118</sup> *Il Carroccio*, April 1927: 545; this was a New York-based monthly that occasionally included news items on Italian Canadians; it was pro-Fascist and ran from 1917 to 1935.

Dante's face was familiar, already known through numerous preceding representations of the poet. Balboni repeats the standard depiction: an angular face with a stern expression marked by a furrowed brow and lined, turned-down mouth. This portrait-type is very similar to a sixteenth-century bronze bust of the poet in the Museo Nazionale in Naples.<sup>119</sup> In fact, Pierre-Georges Roy's 1923 text states that Balboni did use the Naples piece as his model<sup>120</sup> (Fig. 12, 13). The poet is shown with cap and large sleeves falling over the arms crossed over the chest. The hands clasp a book over the heart; *La Comedia* is clearly legible on the cover. The eyes are cast slightly downward from the erectly held head. A triangular composition is shaped by the crossed arms that form the basis of the triangle, and the pointed hat that is its apex. The triangular shape is reinforced by the front of the granite pedestal whose flat surface is shaped in an elongated inversed triangle. At both lateral sides of the pedestal a bronze stack of four books are naturalistically depicted (Fig. 11); each stack rests on top of a small Doric column that is attached to the pedestal; a small laurel branch sits on top of one group of books. Some titles are visible: *Vita Nuova*, *Convivio*, *De Monarchia*. The asymmetrical arrangement of the books gives the appearance that the poet himself has casually placed them there. The books seem to have an indexical relation to the poet not simply because they were authored by Dante, but because they appear to have been handled by him.

A *Gazette* report written at the time of the inauguration states that the work seems more appropriate to an indoor space than an outdoor one. This is because, in the context of other monuments that display full figures in active poses (for example, the highly

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<sup>119</sup> Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., *The Portraits of Dante* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1921): 38, 40.

<sup>120</sup> Roy 337.



dramatic Dollard in the same park), Balboni's work seems psychologically removed from the world around it. Dante is portrayed as a patrician figure, almost arrogant in its intellectual acuity. Immediately below the bust an inscription reads "Dante"; further down along the central shaft of the pedestal and above a palm leaf another text states "La colonie italienne à la ville de Montreal."

In his study of Montreal public monuments made between 1891 and 1930, Alan Gordon's thesis asserts that the "contest" amongst social groups to claim public spaces for historical identity was "fundamentally ideological."<sup>121</sup> While the English and the French were the major players, smaller ethnic groups such as the Irish, Jews and Italians also struggled for their "claim to legitimacy." But Dante was considered a *progenitor* not only by Italians but also by the English and French. While the competition between the different groups is evident, what Gordon overlooks is that groups such as "the Italians" also argued among themselves. Although Italians agreed that Dante was important, what kind of Italy (Socialist, Fascist, modern, traditional, etc.) such a figure represented was debatable. Nevertheless, while Italians' political views represented both ends of the political spectrum, for and against Fascism, they shared the same desire to capitalize on a national history comprised of individuals that, like the Dante figure, had long been seen as a heroic model of *italianità*.

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<sup>121</sup> Gordon, Preface xi.

## The Cult of Mussolini

The Dante monument, and the enthusiasm it generated, originated in the period of intense nationalism and social unrest that Mussolini would exploit when he 'officially' came onto the world stage with his symbolic March on Rome on October 28, 1922. The rise of Italian Fascism in Italy corresponds to the period within which the Italian communities in Canadian cities began to form themselves into Little Italies, neighbourhoods of permanent settlement that began to experience a sense of social belonging. Thus, by the early years of Mussolini's ascendancy to power, Italian immigrants in major Canadian cities had established networks that included social clubs, newspapers, language schools, in addition to grocers, travel agents, banks, and doctors and catering to their needs.

Historian Angelo Principe has written that prior to the 1930s most Italians in Canada had little interest in Fascist politics, nevertheless, some attempted to promote the movement.

Because of the indifferent reception to Fascism, those interested in promoting it turned to publishing their own newspapers such as Montreal's *Le fiamme d'Italia* and Toronto's

*Gente Nostra* and *Corriere Italiano*. *Gente Nostra* was bilingual (Italian and English) and

started in 1927 by the futurist admirer Francesco Gualtieri who, the following year, also

founded the Toronto branch of the Italian Veteran's Association. The group's nationalist

position was clearly aligned with Fascism, but the two threads of patriotism and politics

were not easily distinguishable. For example, in 1928 Gualtieri laid a wreath at the

Cenotaph in Toronto on Armistice Day and later participated at an event commemorating

the March on Rome, thus courting both the Centre and the Right. Interestingly, the

Council General of Italy and the head of the press of the North American Fascist League

were also present at both events.<sup>122</sup> Some of the people attending the inauguration of the Dante in 1922 would also become key political players, founding the first Fascist Club in Montreal in 1925. One of these was Camille Vetere who later was officially appointed by the *Segretaria Generale* to be the Fascist trustee in Canada. Nani Castelli, the former editor of *Le fiamme d'Italia* of Toronto, later joined Vetere who was editor of the Fascist paper *L'Italia*. Nani had been part of the militia that joined the poet turned soldier Gabriele D'Annunzio when he attempted to retake the city of Fiume in 1919-1920.<sup>123</sup>

In the 1920s in Montreal, as in the rest of Canada, Fascism was not a dirty word. It was seen by many as a successful opponent to Communism and a liberator from the bureaucratic ineptitude that had taken hold of Italy and other industrialized countries in the early twentieth century. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the threat of Communism persisted and in Canada the radicalism of trade unions, the rise of the C.C.F., and major strikes (such as the Winnipeg general strike of 1919) suggested the possibility of a growing radicalist movement in Canada.<sup>124</sup> Mussolini's ability to halt Communism's advance in Italy was viewed as a sign of success not only against an anti-capitalist political ideology but all radical labour initiatives. His tactics, including teams of *squadristi* who bullied and coerced dissenters into submission, were overlooked in favour of the seemingly positive aspects. He promised to protect capitalism through the

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<sup>122</sup> Principe, *The Darkest Side* 47-48.

<sup>123</sup> Principe 43-46. Principe describes Castelli's chaotic life: he began as an anarchist, saw active duty in WWI, joined D'Annunzio's militia, emigrated first to New York and then to Montreal working as a journalist where he became an "ultra fascist" and "futurist," was arrested for spousal abuse, renounced Fascism by the mid 1920s, subsequently moving to Mexico where he worked as a journalist in the late 1920s.

<sup>124</sup> The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was the precursor of the Social Democratic Party of Canada.

application of the political-economic concept of “corporatism,” a means of coordinating social and industrial networks and circumventing the role of unions. This idea was pleasing to conservatives, business people, and the Catholic clergy in Quebec. Il Duce’s charismatic power is revealed in Prime Minister Mackenzie King’s personal comments written in his diary in 1928: “when one hears how he [Mussolini] came with his blackshirts to the King, offered his services to clean up government and House of representatives filled with communists, banished them all to an island, cleaned the streets of beggars, and the houses of harlots, one becomes filled with admiration. It is something I have never seen before and one feels it in one’s bones.”<sup>125</sup>

Mussolini’s success in implementing “the third way,” the alliance between the State, Industry and Church, was admired by many Europeans. The Conciliation on February 11, 1929 (also known as the “Concordat” and “Lateran Accord”), overcame some of the doubts surrounding the Vatican’s role within Fascist Italy. Mussolini’s seeming respect for the Church’s independence was especially pleasing to the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Quebec which was as powerful as government. The *ultramontains* in Quebec had resolutely defended the Pope against the incursions by the Italian state that had annexed the Vatican in the nineteenth century as part of national unification efforts. At that time Quebecers had rallied to the Church’s defence, many enlisting as Zouaves to protect the Vatican from military incursion. Residual apprehension lingered in the 1920s, especially as Mussolini’s strength increased, but was defused once Mussolini and Pope Pius XI signed the document that attested to their mutual sovereignty. Shortly after the signing of

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<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Principe 51.

the accord in 1929, Premier M.L.A. Taschereau had expressed the following: “Mes paroles seraient incomplètes si je ne disais à l’éminent homme d’état qui dirige l’Italie que son dernier geste lui a attiré l’admiration et la reconnaissance de tous les catholiques de l’univers.”<sup>126</sup> The same sentiment was expressed by Henri Bourassa who, in an editorial entitled *Deo Gratias!*, drew a parallel between events in Italy and the protection of French cultural rights:

*Le Devoir* de lundi nous apporte deux nouvelles propres à remplir d’allégresse tous les cœurs catholiques et canadiens-français : la signature des traités conclus entre le Saint-Siège et l’Italie; et la soumission “sans restriction” des catholiques franco-américains naguère frappés de censures ecclésiastiques. ... Demain comme hier, ils ont le droit et, à certains égards, le devoir de travailler sans relâche à la conservation de leur idiome particulier, au développement de leur culture propre, dans le cadre normal de la vie nationale américaine et selon l’ordre établi par l’Eglise pour le maintien de l’unité dans la foi, la morale et la discipline.<sup>127</sup>

By the 1930s public opinion had begun to change, especially after 1935-36 when Ethiopia was invaded and Italy’s imperialist ambitions became evident. While in the United States the FLNA (Fascist League of North America) was forced to disband, in Canada Fascists enjoyed the freedom to parade in blackshirt through the 1930s. Considering the ambivalent if not supportive environment outside the Italian community, Italians came to accept the legitimacy of the Fascist position and to equate it with nationalist identity. In particular, *prominenti* and petit-bourgeoisie began to see that Fascism carried a certain social capital (at least during the period that Mussolini was seen in a positive light) and were eager to participate in the ceremonies and gatherings

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<sup>126</sup> “Deo Gratis !” *Le Devoir*, 13 February 1929: 1.

<sup>127</sup> “Deo Gratis !”

officialiated by representatives of the Italian state. With the concerted effort by Italian state officials to propagandize Fascism in the guise of patriotic display, most working class did not distinguish between political ideology and pride of homeland. Mussolini's high ratings and the positive implications this had for Italy as a whole, compensated Italians' sense of being socially inferior, a stereotype that until quite recently had continued to haunt the community.

The role of consulate staff was crucial in advancing a positive perception of Italian state; promotional activities extended not only into local community affairs but into wider Montreal circles as well. While the first Fascist papers and attempts to form clubs made little inroads, once the *Segretaria Generale dei Fasci Italiani all'estero* was formed in Rome in 1923, later efforts became more successful. The *Segretaria Generale* was formed specifically to address the issue of Italians living outside Italy. Following its directives, consulate representatives made concerted efforts to participate not only in local affairs but also in the wider Canadian cultural communities. While this served their propaganda purposes, it also provided local Italians with valued social opportunities. Ethnic pride no longer needed to be restricted to the borders of Little Italy but could be displayed alongside the other main ethno-linguistic groups, the English and the French.

The intrusion of Fascist politics into the life of the working class was achieved by repeatedly equating Fascism with patriotism and by fabricating or locating public forums within which nationalist pride could be openly paraded. Although there was resistance, over the twenty-year period of the regime, Fascism came to envelope all aspects of daily

and institutional life. Events marking the commemoration of World War I were especially good venues for mixing with the elite of the French and English communities; these opportunities became increasingly better orchestrated and resourcefully organized over the years (through, for example, an efficient system of press releases and public lectures). Another illustration of skillful social management was the merger of a number of social associations into the *Fronte Unico Morale*, a decision that facilitated the coordination and oversight of social activities. In addition, the appointment of clergy, teaching sisters and bank administrators sympathetic to the Fascist cause furthered the political aspirations of the Italian state. Five *Case d'Italia* (Fascist centres) were built, community social programs, including language schools, were put into place; and a number of state offices were opened across Canada. The Italian state's global reach across a diaspora that counted in the millions was strategically planned and tactically executed. The propaganda and lobbying potential provided by Italians living outside Italy (many of whom had not applied for new citizenship) was recognized early on when these issues were addressed by the first Congress of Fascists Abroad held in Rome in 1925.

How love of Patria was exploited amongst the working class speaks to the efficacy of Fascist tactics and their ability to cultivate popular consent. Patriotism filled the void in which Italian Canadians found themselves as an ethnic-linguistic minority. Now *italianità* could be made visible and actively performed. Government staff facilitated social unity by orchestrating ceremonial events that were accompanied by rhetorical excess that repeatedly outlined the group identity in positive terms. The bombastic language, the 'decorative aspect' of its protocols and public events, belied Fascism's real

power, which lay in its ability to transfix audiences in a sustained state of euphoric union. Italian government interference in immigrant communities was not heavy-handed (officially, harassment was not condoned). In fact, the Italian representatives made a determined effort to blend into the community and to participate within the institutional network of the host nation without incurring negative publicity. During “Italian Week” at the Canadian National Exhibition in 1934 and at the Canadian Club in Toronto, Italian speakers promoted Italian culture; smaller, more informal public talks were given in the homes of the cultural elite such as Senator Rodolphe Lemieux in Montreal.<sup>128</sup> State memoranda frequently commented on the need to restrain over-enthusiastic followers and staff that acted independently, especially when the tide of public opinion began to turn negative in the mid 1930s. Outside Italy, the Fascist state’s self-promotion depended on its intelligence-gathering skills and its social visibility. By being everywhere, at every social function and ceremonial event, its legitimacy was reified and its authority normalized. For example, the “first Fascist artwork” to appear in Canada was a gift from the Governor of Rome to the City of Toronto in 1934 in honour of the city’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary; a bronze replica of the *Lupa Romana* (she-wolf with Romulus and Remus) was presented to the city (as it had been to other cities in North America).<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Luigi Pautasso, “La Donna italiana durante il periodo Fascista in Toronto, 1930-1940,” in Caroli *et al*, 168-186.

<sup>129</sup> It is described as the “first fascist monument” by Principe “Italian Canadian Monuments,” 4. The gift is announced in the *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 5 Sept. 1934: 7 and *Evening Telegram* (Toronto) 4 Sept. 1934: 2. Ironically, the work was removed from public view at Toronto’s city hall after complaints were lodged about its “offensive” subject matter; after the war began it was melted down in protest against Italy.



To understand the appeal of Fascism, and to see it as more than a political platform, one must take into account its ‘totalising’ nature. Mussolini was deliberate in his efforts to refashion an entire nation; to *fascistize* meant to politicize culture. This was done by appropriating the past and its symbols, particularly those of Imperial Rome, in order to emulate preceding epochs of collective glory and power. Paradoxically, Fascism also associated itself with modernity, marrying the ancient past with the future in an aggregate of iconographic historical symbols and modern design. Taken all together, Fascist culture was both old and new and showed itself in every aspect of Italian culture from language, to dress, to art. This is what Walter Benjamin meant when he referred to the aestheticized politics of Italian Fascism,<sup>130</sup> which was founded on the experience of the spectacle. In Italy, cultic-religious aura was put to the service of the state through the recycling of symbols and rituals that were efficiently disseminated through new technologies and a modern notion of citizenship. Fascist style became a rhetorical device for refashioning the Italian masses, for producing a national identity that drew its authority from symbolic vocabulary based on historical memory while signalling its dynamic character in its association with modernity. Although the symbols were archaic, Italian national regeneration was not based on a passive nostalgia but rather on a violent rupture with the recent past of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, and, thus, was *ultra-modern*.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations*: 217-251.

<sup>131</sup> Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

It is difficult to over emphasize Mussolini's centrality to Italian Fascism and to its  
visuality. Like a logo, or icon, his image (and voice) existed everywhere.<sup>132</sup> The principle  
of the omnipresent ruler is an aspect of power that has been explored by writers such as  
Louis Marin.<sup>133</sup> In his study of the Sun King Louis XIV of France, Marin proposes that  
the absolutist king deployed the signs of his power by in effect duplicating his authority  
through his image (coins, medals, etc). Marin draws a parallel between the way royal  
power is made visible and aspects of Catholic theology and liturgy. In the idea of Real  
Presence, the process of Transubstantiation renders Christ visible, material, and multiple  
in the sacred ritual known as the Eucharist. That is, the Eucharist is both *sign* of Christ's  
presence at the same time that it *is* God present ("le portrait de César, c'est César").  
Marin's ideas are important for the way they allow us to understand the relationship  
between power and its representation. Specifically, they demonstrate how political  
authority is not limited to policy, and how institutional administration and representation  
are not simply the instruments by which power is integrated into the polity. Rather,  
official aesthetics is seen as a dynamic element that constructs power. In other words, a  
sign or representation is not separate from its referent.

Marin's approach is useful to the study of Fascist iconography, and in particular to  
Mussolini's image. By collapsing two discursive domains into one, the political and the  
religious, Marin underscores their commonalities in terms of how a ruler (a king, a god)  
exerts authority by essentially being everywhere at once. Thus, what is important here is

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<sup>132</sup> Luisa Passirini, "L'immagine di Mussolini: specchio dell'immaginario e promessa di identità," *Revista di storia contemporanea*. 3 (1986): 322-349.

<sup>133</sup> Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*; see also Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study of Medieval Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957).

that the nature of power and the way power is symbolized are not separate. Furthermore, as Marin writes, “power does not *exist* anywhere, it can only be *exercised*,”<sup>134</sup> in other words, it is discursive. In an essay on the nature of charisma, anthropologist Clifford Geertz examines how social power is performed. Geertz compares temporal and sacred authority in the ways ritual and symbol are used to establish the place of power as the “active centre(s) of social order,” “the loci of serious acts,” that render the figure at the centre, the king or god, charismatic. In other words, it is the state of being at the centre that enables power to exist. Geertz writes that it has less to do with attraction for the participants than with being “near the heart of things.” It is the “vast universality” of the centre that confers upon sovereign power its “inherent sacredness.” As Geertz says, we can come to understand the power of kings by looking at how the power of gods is discharged through rites and images. Like Marin, Geertz argues that a clear distinction between “the trappings of rule and its substance cannot be made, what is important is understanding the way they are transformed into each other.”<sup>135</sup>

The period of Italian Fascist supremacy has been called a *regno della parola* (a regime of the word) with Mussolini’s name at its centre.<sup>136</sup> Like the cultural theorists who have examined the discursive nature of power and its deployment, literary theorists such as Barbara Spackman view Fascist language in the same light. A rhetorical style she

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<sup>134</sup> Louis Marin, “The Narrative Trap: the Conquest of Power,” *Ideological Representation and Power in Social Relations: Literary and Social Theory*. Trans. R. Sanderson. Ed. Mike Gane, (London: Routledge, 1989): 108.

<sup>135</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power,” *Culture and Its Creators*, eds. Joseph Ben-David and Terry Nichols Clark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 150-171.

<sup>136</sup> See Spackman. See also Simonetta Falasca Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

identifies as “simple, clear, masculine” and of “concise clarity and monumental relief.” Spackman believes that the religious terminology in Fascist speech has been under examined because it has tended to be seen as an example of irrational character of the movement in general. However, in the context of borrowed allegories, such as those related to Imperial Rome, its connotational function was essential. The continual link drawn between past and future suggested a “homogenous unity of history,” an effect that was further enhanced by the use of Christian iconography. Metaphors of Christian martyrdom (and attendant connotations of sacrifice, faith, etc.) were successfully deployed in the creation of Italian nationalism and aligned, in paradoxal fashion, with racial memory of a glorious Imperial Roman past. Emilio Gentile has called Fascism “a political religion.” He has interpreted the use of Christian metaphors as a strategy for gaining support based on emotional appeal. Legitimacy was sought through association with the Catholic Church and emulation of religious ritual, pageantry and tradition. This is especially evident in the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution that included a Chapel of the Martyrs and a recommendation of an *imitatio fascisti*. As Spackman writes, Fascism’s heterogeneity was masked by the ideologies it appropriated and subsumed under its own name. Borrowing Catholicism’s language and images was a way of creating a “homogeneous” ideology. To this end, the “resemanticization” of terms such as “authoritarian democracy,” “conservative revolution,” “ecclesia of militants,” and “holy communion of war,” became emblematic of Fascist global takeover of difference, including that of the dissenting voice.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics*.

That Mussolini chose to announce his platform on Assumption Day – the Catholic Church’s religious holiday marking the ascension of the Madonna into Heaven after her death – was an obvious tactic to exploit religious symbols. A similar strategy is marked in the naming of a Fascist Mother’s Day on December 24, thus making Italian mothers’ role sacred by analogy. In a popular ritual known as the ‘ring ceremony,’ women gave up their gold wedding rings to the state, in exchange for cheap metal ones, as a contribution to the war effort. This rite was performed in churches, thereby not only sanctifying the act, but symbolically marrying all women to the state, i.e. Mussolini. The following is a description of one of these ceremonies in Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense in Montreal:

Sixteen blackshirts marched down the aisle behind flag bearers and faced the altar. Two girls dressed in Red Cross uniforms and four in Fascist costume of black tam, white waist, and black skirt, were present to assist. The priests blessed the new steel rings. Father Manfredi, in an appeal filled with emotion and pleading, addressed the mothers. The ceremony, he told them, had been performed everywhere in Italy. This sacrifice was to be an expression of faith not only to the Mother Country but also to their husbands.<sup>138</sup>

Fascist law codified traditional Catholic values for heterosexual relations, paternalism and the sanctity of the nuclear family. For both Church and State marriage existed to produce children. Male homosexuality was outlawed as well as the sale of birth control measures; single men (unless infirmed or engaged either as soldiers or priests), were taxed in excess and their professional mobility curtailed. Mussolini in a paraphrase of Hegel stated, “he who is not a father is not a man” (1928). And in an echo of the preceding statement recalls the mythic past and the potential future, the Fascist apologist

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<sup>138</sup> Bayley 161.

Aringoli said – “the Italian of today, like the Roman of yesterday, is not a man if he is not a father and if he is not a soldier” (1938). After the Lateran Accord of 1929, Catholic propagandists pursued their work through the state school system and social agencies that were staffed and trained by the State. Although women had already been active in these roles, increasing state intervention now absorbed the social work of women into national objectives. In effect, Italian women were being *nationalized*, just as European men had been in the nineteenth century.<sup>139</sup>

As we have seen, the First World War promoted a sense of national pride in Italian immigrants in Montreal, and other cities outside Italy, and helped develop a collective sense of self that seemed to rival that of village and region. Italian War Veteran Associations became meeting places for discussion of Italian politics and Mussolini’s ideas about the new Italy. The Fascist leader’s call for a re-vitalized national self-consciousness was received by many as prophetic judgements. Italian war veteran Guido Casini played a pivotal role in the promotion of Mussolini’s ideas in Montreal when he was summoned from Italy to create a monument to another hero of italianità – Giovanni Caboto.

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<sup>139</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

## Chapter Four

### The Monument to Giovanni Caboto

The monument to John Cabot stands in Cabot Square (formerly Atwater Park) in downtown Montreal. It is 4.4 metres high and is comprised of a bronze statue on a six-sided granite pedestal and base elevated on three steps (Fig.17). On the bottom of the pedestal, three low-relief bronze panels illustrate scenes from the navigator's voyage to the New World. The artist, Guido Casini, has rendered the figure of Cabot according to other conventional pictorial depictions of the explorer that show a bearded man in Renaissance dress. The multi-layered clothing gives the figure a large frame. Feet are planted well apart as if balancing on the heaving deck of a ship. The body twists slightly, turning forward at the waist with the right hand raised high over a deeply furrowed brow. The face, crowned by thick hair pushed back by the imaginary wind and outlined by the heavy beard, recalls that of Michelangelo, or his *Moses*. The hand that hovers before the face is large and heavy – it too reminds one of Michelangelo and *David's* colossal hands.

The scenes on the base illustrate a narrative sequence of events; they demonstrate Barthes' notion of "narrative shifting," where time is condensed, sped up, and amplified. The panels give history a metonymic form by constructing it as an epic, a chronology of actions and events (Fig. 20). In 1935 the scenes were described as follows: "Cabot and son Sebastien from Bristol receive blessing of the Bishop of Bristol and 'bon voyage'

from the authorities”; “Cabot receives from Henry VII the patent to travel and take possession of new lands in the name of His majesty”; “Cabot and Sebastien plant flags of England and Venice on Canadian soil.”<sup>140</sup> The statue functions differently from the panels, it “draws history towards a metaphorical form that borders upon the lyrical and symbolic.”<sup>141</sup> The romanticized Cabot suggests the character traits of heroes, abstract qualities such as strength, wisdom, intelligence, and bravery. The Cabot represented by the artist’s sculptural portrait looms above and beyond history proper as a type of ideal man.

The last panel scene, the planting of flags, was the most problematic and the source of a great deal of controversy. Its contentious claim, that Cabot was the discoverer of Canada, became the focus of a heated debate that absorbed Montrealers for more than a decade. Cabot as “discoverer” is shown in a pivotal moment, at the mythic origin of Canada’s existence when it ‘came into view’ and thus into history. Cabot became a prized icon because he is key to a chain of associative links that support claims of cultural legitimacy and primacy in the present. In this argument, Cabot’s origins were ultimately linked to the pedigree of Canadians and to racial conceptions of nationalism.

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<sup>140</sup> Two years before it was officially erected, pictures of the statue were published in Lawrence J. Burpee’s “John Cabot, Who Sought Cipangu, and Found Canada,” *Canadian Geographical Journal* (June 1933): 259-267. The article mentions that the inauguration of the statue will coincide with the arrival of Balbo, head of the Italian airforce. This article was attacked by pro-Cartier supporters in *Le Devoir*, 10 July, 1933.

<sup>141</sup> Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” 15.



## Balbo's Visit

The potential for the Cabot project to generate positive propaganda is clear if one considers that the head of Mussolini's air force, General Italo Balbo, had been originally scheduled to officiate at the inauguration in 1933. In July of 1933, Balbo and an air fleet were to cross the Atlantic on their way to Chicago's World Fair. Several of the fuelling stops were to take place in Canada, including at Longueuil, which was directly across the Saint-Lawrence River from Montreal.<sup>142</sup> In an article on Cabot published in the *Canadian Geographical Journal* of June 1933, the monument was announced as "about to be" and "having been" unveiled that very month. Pictures of the monument, which at that point was still in storage, were used to illustrate the article; one of the captions states: "It is singularly appropriate that [the monument] is being unveiled on the occasion of the visit to Canada of the Italian Air Force squadron which is flying from Italy to the World's Fair at Chicago. Aerial trail blazers pausing to honour a pioneer compatriot explorer in the land he discovered."<sup>143</sup> It is easy to see how Cabot the navigator and Balbo the aviator were conflated into the same generic type of heroic adventurer.

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<sup>142</sup> Balbo and twenty-four planes stopped at the airport of Fairchild Aircraft Limited (absorbed by Pratt & Whitney) in Longueuil directly across from Montreal; federal, provincial, municipal and international representatives were present, as well as Fascists in dress shirt and a band. See "L'Armada de Balbo à Montréal," *La Patrie* 20 July 1933: 5. Regardless of Balbo's successful visit it is safe to assume that his visit was not well received by all, for example, local Communists would have held a contrary view. For an overview of Balbo's visit see Filippo Salvatore, "Italo Balbo a Montreal: Tra Politica Aeronautica e propaganda," in *Italo Balbo: Aviazione e potere aereo: atti del convegno internazionale nel centenario della nascita, Roma, 7-8 novembre 1996, a cura di Carlo Maria Santoro* (Roma: Aeronautica militare, Ufficio storico, 1998), 303-330.

<sup>143</sup> Burpee 259. How Burpee attained the information is unknown, but Roberto Perin's study of the propaganda efforts of the Italian Embassy suggests an avenue of enquiry. Perin, "Making Good Fascists," 136-158.

Although the inauguration did not take place at the same time as Balbo's visit on July 14-15, 1933, it is important to underline the significance of the aviator's visit to the city for Cabot supporters. The impact the event had on the public as well as the wide and enthusiastic coverage it received in all the major newspapers, and on radio, explains why the missed opportunity inflamed the political rhetoric and hardened positions on both sides of the Cabot debate. Balbo's reception as celebrity reveals the public's fascination with aviation and their perception of aviators as the quintessential symbol of the modern adventurer. Balbo's political function, as the head of Mussolini's air force, seems to have played a secondary role to his identity as celebrity. In fact, when questioned by reporters on Mussolini's intentions, Balbo's reassuring answers went unchallenged. His politically non-threatening position was reinforced when he paid a visit to the cenotaph in Dominion Square and laid a wreath at its base, thus a reminder of the debts owed to Italy as an ally partner in WWI, notwithstanding the "one hundred Black Shirts" who accompanied him throughout the visit. This perception was strengthened by repeated references to the Latin roots that bound Italians and French together: "Les Canadiens-français, de par leurs origines s'apparentent à la race latine et sentent qu'ils ont les liens de consanguinité avec leurs frères d'Italie."<sup>144</sup> Balbo's written account of the visit highlights the natural confraternity between the French and the Italians, which he saw shaped by race and religion. Unlike the "nude and severe" churches of the English "conquerors," he praised the French churches such as the "miniature Saint Peter's with the façade of Bramante, cupola of Michelangelo, and colonnade of Bernini" and the "three towers, squared flanks,

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<sup>144</sup> Minister Duranleau, quoted by Salvatore in *Fascism and the Italians* 313.

and Gothic rose window of Notre-Dame-de-Paris.”<sup>145</sup> It would have been a spectacular public relations victory to have Balbo present at the inauguration, but because of the ongoing controversy surrounding Cabot’s historical claims, Balbo came and went and the monument remained in storage. The disappointment with the protracted arguments are expressed in a poem by Liborio Lattoni, a Montreal Fascist and Protestant minister, whose poetry celebrating Mussolini had been published by the New York-based Fascist Italian monthly *Il Carroccio*. The poem also appeared in the Toronto Italian language newspaper *Il Bollettino* in 1934:

Escape the tomb wherein you lie  
Illustrious spirit, and come be with us:  
Behold the monument that in your name  
We dared erect ... then let your lashes fly.

We deemed ourselves both worthy and adept  
To tell the world of your exalted worth:  
We felt as Titians... yet our boasting was  
Mendacious ranting as you well may see.

To the savage will of petty minds  
We bent our heads and uttered not a word,  
And suffer that this shame should also still live on.

Escape then your tomb with firm thongs  
Feel free to flail us till deep in our hearts  
We know our strength to be completely crushed.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> The two Montreal churches referred to are Marie-Reine-du-Monde Cathedral and Notre-Dame Basilica. “Contro le nudi e severe cattedrali calviniste, metodiste, evangeliche dei conquistatori inglesi, i canadesi di razza francese, hanno costruito le volte dorate del barocco di Re Sole, anzi hanno addirittura rifatto, in piena Montreal, un San Pietro in miniatura con la facciata di Bramante, la cupola di Michelangelo, e il colonnato del Bernini: oppure hanno ricostruito, sempre in miniatura, le due torri mozze, i fianchi squadrati e il rosone gotico di Notre Dame de Paris.” Italo Balbo, *La Centuria Alata* (Milano :1935): 258.

<sup>146</sup> Translated by Celestino De Julis from the original Italian published in *Il Bollettino*, 5 January 1934, translated version and original in Principe 67-68; see also Lattoni’s poem “Per l’annuale della Marcia su Roma,” *Il Carroccio* October 1925: 320.

## The Inauguration

On Saturday, 25 May 1935, the statue of the navigator John Cabot (*Giovanni Caboto*) was unveiled in what was then known as Western Park, at the corner of Saint-Catherine and Atwater streets directly across from the hockey arena known as the Forum (Fig. 23). The plaque describing the subject and the donor reads: “Giovanni Caboto, The Italians of Montreal”. Typical of such ceremonial events the atmosphere was both festive and formal, the fanfare included marching bands, parading cadets, banners, children waving flags, and dignitaries in silk ties and morning coats. Guests included delegates of several countries, federal and provincial representatives, municipal leaders, local businessmen, clergy, university representatives, and a large number of the city’s Italian community who were there to see their gift of a public monument officially presented to the city of Montreal. In a newspaper photograph one can see the officials lined up on the grandstand. Below them, the head and shoulders of young men, cadets and boy scouts standing amongst the flags, including *avanguardiste* and *ballila* who were Benito Mussolini’s ‘young Italians.’<sup>147</sup> The photograph, and the event it documented, was intended to be seen as a portrait of international cooperation, civic solidarity, and social pluralism. In retrospect, the confraternity appears illusory at best, deceptive at worst. It is a troubling family portrait for only a few years later, when the War Measures Act was evoked, many of those present would be interned at Camp Petawawa in Ontario. The complex history of the Cabot monument – the reason it was commissioned, the controversy it engendered, and the artist who produced it – is governed by the expectations of those who came

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<sup>147</sup> *Avanguardiste* and *ballila* are para-military ranks created during the Fascist era for boys aged 14-18 and 8-14 respectively.

together to commemorate it. Marked by rituals, legends, and monuments, the past becomes a disputed territory claimed by many who are motivated by conflicting ambitions; the story of the Cabot monument is a case in point.

The principal speaker on the day of the inauguration was the Italian Consul General in Ottawa, Luigi Petrucci, who was accompanied by the Montreal Consul Giuseppe Brigidi. Brigidi, who was stationed in Montreal from 1934-36, had become a familiar face on the local scene. The consul immersed himself in public life, participating at festivities, banquets, and ceremonial events across the city. His colleagues and superiors who worried that his actions could be construed as political meddling with the potential to backfire, met his activities with anxious concern. Regardless of political recklessness, Brigidi's political savvy together with his determination was successful in raising the public profile of the city's Italians who numbered 25,000 at this time. Nevertheless, the social conditions of Italian immigrants in Montreal were secondary if not absent from his list of priorities, for his duties and loyalties lay with the Italian state. The primary task of both Petrucci and Brigidi was to maintain normal relations between Italy and Canada throughout the Fascist era; they accomplished this by emphasizing similarities between the two nations and overlooking their differences. In his speech at the inauguration of the Cabot statue, Petrucci focused on Italy's historical ties with the city's two main linguistic groups, stressing their common status as 'world powers.' The diplomat reminded his audience of the debt owed to Italy's great navigators whom he cast as the civilisers not only of the New World but of the Western world: "(they) ignited the torch of civilization

even as Rome and the Occident was still under the barbarians.”<sup>148</sup> Legitimized by historical precedent and made fashionable through historical romances popular at the time, the story of John Cabot served as an excellent instrument in the rhetoric of national propaganda. The ‘fanfare’ at the event was to include a parade with thirty-five allegorical floats including the Cabots, father and son, on board the *Matthieu*, but it isn’t clear if this is what actually took place.<sup>149</sup>

The actual date of Cabot’s discovery is June 24, however, as this is also the nationalist holiday of Quebec, an alternate but no less important date was chosen. The new date of the unveiling coincided with three important national holidays: in Canada it marked Empire Day (now known as Victoria Day); in Quebec it was known as Dollard-des-Ormeaux Day; and in Italy the date commemorated the nation’s entry into the first World War alongside the Allied Forces. The consuls’ joint strategy in promoting Italian interests in Canada drew strength from the legacy of the Great War. As Petrucci said, “[the day] served to cement the bonds of friendship between Italy and the British Empire and the Republic of France.”<sup>150</sup> Italians in Canada, including Italian war veterans, were often present at commemorative ceremonies of all kinds, as for example at the solemn mass for the Unknown Soldier held in Montreal in 1922. Against this background in which

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<sup>148</sup> “... dans un moment où Rome et l’Occident gisaient sous l’étalon des barbares, et tout flambeau de civilisation semblait éteint.” “La colonie italienne présente à Montréal la statue de Cabot,” *Le Canada* 27 May 1935: 7, 14.

<sup>149</sup> Principe has suggested that it did go ahead as anticipated several years earlier and reported in *Il Carroccio* (New York) June 1927: 641. For other references about the Cabot monument in *Il Carroccio* see: Feb. 1925: 243; April 1925: 457, and Sept. 1925: 271.

<sup>150</sup> “Empire Days of Consul,” *The Montreal Gazette*, 25 May 1935: 5; “Statue of Cabot is given to city,” *Montreal Daily Star*, 27 May 1935: 5.

memories of the Great War lingered, Mussolini's activities, although of concern to some, generally did not raise significant objections.

With the Conciliation of 1929, with which the Vatican and the Italian state recognized their mutual sovereignty, suspicion about Italy's expansionist ambitions had been temporarily allayed. The agreement was especially pleasing to Quebec whose Roman Catholic majority viewed it as a safeguard of its religious heritage. Even by 1935, as Mussolini's imperial aims became clear with the invasion of Ethiopia, the public remained ambivalent. The Cabot monument emerged in a period when public opinion by and large was in the process of redirecting itself from a pro-Italy to an anti-Italy stance; the evidence of these shifting, contradictory political sentiments is apparent throughout the course of the 'Cabot affair.' Fascist parades in the streets of Montreal were neither unknown nor illegal. Only members of the local communist party (which also included Italians) actively protested. Thus, it was not odd to have Petrucci present as an official guest at the 1935 Empire Day jubilee year celebration in Montreal or to have him address the public on CKAC radio that same day.<sup>151</sup> To a general public, the participation of Italian officials and local Fascist groups at the Empire celebrations was neither offensive nor remarkable. In this atmosphere, when the Cabot statue was unveiled only a few days later, Mayor Camillien Houde, could not but agree that the gift was a welcome symbol of the historical and modern ties "binding Montreal's descendants of Italy, France and England."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> "L'attachement des Italiens au Canada," *La Presse*, 25 May 1935; *Gazette* 25 May 1935: 5.

<sup>152</sup> "Cabot's statue is presented to city," *The Montreal Gazette* 27 May 1935: 4.

The pro-Cabot campaign had begun in 1925 on a date meant to coincide with the annual Birth of Rome celebration held by Fascists in Italy (and abroad). Although the first *Fascio* (Fascist) club was not to begin until later that same year, many of the participants were the same, including Camillo Vetere publisher of *L'Italia*, a fascist newspaper. On the initiative of the Order of the Sons of Italy (*Ordine Figli d'Italia*), a solemn ceremony was held to honour Cabot the –“discoverer of Canada” – at the *Monument National* building that included Italian veterans, Vetere, and the Mayor, with the hope of beginning a campaign for a national “Cabot Day.” While those with specific political intentions had their own designs on the monument, for most of the Italians, who as immigrants felt themselves to be outside the centres of social and economic privilege, claiming Caboto as one of their own was an equally pressing concern. This is why it was important for all supporting the campaign to have the backing of civil authorities such as Mackenzie King and Mussolini, both of whom sent congratulatory telegrams. In his “greetings from the homeland” (*saluto dalla Patria*) Mussolini targeted the emigrants’ sentimental attachment to their roots:

Italians of Canada: I am grateful to the courteous invitation by the Committee to honour John Cabot, to be able to send my greetings from the homeland across the same ocean the great navigators first tried to carry the signs of civilization. John Cabot, whose name you honour as the man who discovered the land upon which you now live as welcome and hardworking guests, is a symbol of geniality and the audacity with which our great fathers and now our tenacious brothers brought and bring still to the new land, Work and Life. In the great nation that welcomes you with brotherliness and in which you raise high the millennial race, Italy reaffirms its antique greatness across the oceans and recognizes you as its best sons, with you today remembers the glorious name of John Cabot.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> “Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti,” *Il Carroccio* Sept. 1925: 271.



However, the history of the Cabot campaign is also marked by anti-Fascist protest. Anti-fascists, such as the vocal Antonino Spada criticized the Fascist appropriation of Cabot and what he saw as state interference in local affairs. Yet, to limit the Cabot monument story strictly to a Fascist or anti-Fascist context would be to distort the significance of Cabot to the Italian community as a whole and to restrict nationalist sentiment to a political reading. After all, Spada, a staunch socialist, was just as eager to celebrate Cabot as a national hero. For many, nationalist fervour had little to do with political ideology and more to do with a social sense of group belonging and the desire for a distinctive history. Cabot, along with other 'founding myths' figures, was a charged symbol whose historical value was intimately tied to current needs to assert nationalist identity.

Cabot was an important figure for the English and French communities as well which, along with the Italians, sought to include him in their own pantheon of national heroes. Because of this, the history of the Cabot monument is coloured by the ethno-linguistic arguments of the day, debates that were grounded in a contest for social power and cultural legitimacy. Patriotic one-upmanship was one way of symbolically extending the thrust and parry of political wrangling. As wreaths were being laid at the foot of Queen Victoria on Empire Day, the Dollard monument, and Quebec heritage, was being feted in another part of the city. Not to be excluded from press coverage, delegates scrambled from one ceremony to another in a delicate political dance in which Italian diplomats also participated. The Consular staff saw the benefit of adding an Italian figure to the landscape of city monuments and actively helped the Cabot project become a reality. Although the statue had been almost entirely funded by the local Italian community,

raising \$10,000 (to which the city added \$1000 for its base and installation), Brigidi arranged for the costly shipment from the foundry in Florence, where the bronze had been poured.<sup>154</sup>

Brigidi also immersed himself in the press war centred on the statue's attribution of Cabot as the 'discover of Canada'. For some years French-Canadians had viewed the campaign as favouring the English community and challenging Jacques Cartier's primacy.<sup>155</sup> After nearly a decade of preparation, spearheaded by the Italian Montreal-based weekly *Il Cittadino*, the argument erupted onto the pages of *Il Cittadino*, and *Le Devoir*, with regular participation by the other Montreal papers. Since 1929 when *Il Cittadino* had announced the proposal to donate a statue of Giovanni Caboto to Montreal, local newspapers, and in particular *Le Devoir*, had entered into a series of public arguments over the legitimacy of Cabot as the discoverer of the New World, against *Il Cittadino* and *La Patrie* which were pro-Cabot. *Le Devoir* undertook the work to "examine, study and analyse the documentary evidence" according to a published collection of documents.<sup>156</sup> The conclusion, as it was pronounced by Emile Benoist of *Le Devoir* on June 5 1933, was that there was no proof that any of the Cabots (Father John, sons Sebastien and Sanche) ever set foot in America or even set eyes on it. After all, he

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<sup>154</sup> *Il Cittadino* 27 September 1930, quoted in Angelo Principe "Chronicles from Cabotia: 1925-1935" in Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, ed., *Attraversare gli Oceani da Giovanni Caboto al Canada Multiculturale* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1999): 121.

<sup>155</sup> There were dissenting views. See *La Patrie*, June 1933, Archives of the City of Montreal, Dossier de Presse, D.3020.10.

<sup>156</sup> The base study was Henry Percival Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1543: A Collection of Documents* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1911). It's interesting to note that Cabot's nationality is still unclear; Luca Codignola, a Canadian Studies scholar specializing on "the age discovery," said that given a choice he preferred to think of Cabot as a Spaniard, Luca Codignola, unpublished paper presented at the "Emigrante to Canadese: the Italian Canadian Project" conference, Ottawa, May 14, 2004.

argued, “isn’t the first obligation of a discoverer to prove his claim?” The inconclusiveness of Cabot’s significance was confirmed by Lionel Groulx, the dean of Quebec historians, who at lectures given at Université de Montréal later in the year reaffirmed doubts about the Cabot claim.<sup>157</sup> Given this, Benoist accused Montreal’s Italians of demonstrating bad form by planning to inaugurate the statue on the eve of the city’s four-hundredth-anniversary celebration of Cartier’s landing who had “claimed Canada in the name of the King of France.” In the face of this, the Italians’ act was “provocative.” The journalist stated that the issue was not whether the Italians could raise their own monuments, but the accuracy of historical record. In order to dispel accusation that its argument was based on “racial fanaticism” (*fanatisme de race*), *Le Devoir* published supporting corroborating statements from English speaking historians.

From the onset of the protracted debate, the city had been prudent in reserving the right to authorise the inscription. In June 1933, city alderman Léon Trépanier announced that while the city was willing to accept “an illustrious navigator” or “a celebrated explorer.” it would not accept as *Il Cittadino* proposed “Giovanni Caboto, scopritore del Canada” (John Cabot, discoverer of Canada). A compromise was reached, and Cabot was mutually recognized as the “man who first landed on the shores of Labrador.” The final dedication, in three languages, was abbreviated to “Giovanni Caboto – gli Italiani del Canada” (John Cabot – the Italians of Canada). The prolonged nature of the affair which by this time was nearing the eve of the Cartier celebrations, led the Italian consul general to announce the postponement of the inauguration to June 1934, a decision for which *Le Devoir* was

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<sup>157</sup> “Le cours de M. l’Abbé Groulx : La découverte de l’Amérique du Nord,” *La Presse* 22 December 1933: 5.

grateful to the Italians. It should be noted that, throughout the debate, Brigidi had played an active role by soliciting documentation and academic support for the pro-Cabot campaign. Much had been invested in the project and the decision to postpone must have been difficult to concede but, as Brigidi said, insisting too much could have been interpreted as “excessive patriotism.”<sup>158</sup> Ironically, the opportunity to display Italian patriotism had been at the forefront of the Brigidi’s (i.e. the Italian state) motivation for being involved to such a degree in a local event. The effort dedicated to the project must have been considerable and the propaganda potential must have been estimated as worthy of the planning that went into it.

While Fascists saw the Cabot event as a vehicle for promoting the Italian state, many local Italians saw the figure of Cabot as a symbol of their own diasporic identity. Geographically dislocated from their origins, which they saw as tied to town and family rather than to the nation-state, the idea of a transnational ‘italianicity’ was both reassuring and empowering. However, these desires, and the attendant fears they were based on, were easily exploited and appropriated by Fascist propaganda efforts. In the first congress of “Fascists abroad” held in Rome in 1925 the “problem of emigration” was turned into an instrument for promoting Fascist expansionist ambitions. Acknowledging the economic conditions that generated emigration, and not wanting to alienate emigrants’ sentimental and cultural ties to their homeland, the Italian state actively lobbied for emigrants’ allegiance by allowing for dual citizenship. In addition to welcoming emigrants back into Italian citizenry, the state actively supported emigrant activities in

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<sup>158</sup> *La Presse* 9 June 1934, City of Montreal Archives, Dossier de Presse, D.3020.10.

their ‘host countries’ recognizing the promotional opportunities inherent in such a strategy.

The instrumental role designed for emigrants in Italy’s dream of empire was evident on the day of the Cabot festivities. Fascist youth organizations, parading in uniform, displayed a banner that read “Half of the world would belong to Italy if we were to claim all the lands discovered by Italians.”<sup>159</sup> The imperialist ambitions of the Italian state became reality with the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-36, evident in the editorial “Ethiopia is Italian” that was published in the Toronto Fascist paper *Il Bollettino* on May 8, 1936: [They] “have begun where the legions of the Roman Empire had left off and have gone beyond, reaching the Ethiopian plateaus which ancient Romans had never conquered.”<sup>160</sup> Italy’s imperialist aspirations were championed in Italy with a call to *romanità*, the mythologizing of Ancient Rome, and in the active pursuit of colonial conquest, most obvious in the invasion of Ethiopia. While emigration had earlier been championed as a way of dealing with the lack of work, it now became a means for expanding Fascism abroad. In other words, in a reversal of power relations, the emigrant had become the colonizing agent. When Mussolini sent his congratulatory telegram on the occasion of the Cabot inauguration, he clearly referred to the Italian emigrants as “guests” who like the preceding voyageurs were carrying with them the memories of an “ancient and great race” (*stirpe millenaria ...l’antica grandezza*). The aim was to de-nationalize

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<sup>159</sup> *L’Italia* 18 May 1935, translated in Principe 68-69.

<sup>160</sup> *Il Bollettino* 8 May 1936, translated in Principe 209-11.

(*snazionalizzazione*) emigrants' attachment to their new country through the fanning of the flames of Italian patriotism.<sup>161</sup>

Canadian historians such as Roberto Perin and Angelo Principe have explored the means and methods by which Italian consular staff became involved in the daily lives of Italian immigrants. They have shown, for example, how staff facilitated the integration of newly arrived priests and nuns, bankers, and diplomatic staff into the social-institutional network. The support is implicit in the growth of three fascist newspapers in the 1930s which were forums for news and propaganda. (It should be noted that Italian socialist and anti-fascist newspapers also circulated in Canada.) However, even as Italian immigrants became pawns in consular staff's promotional efforts, many were grateful for the financial and institutional support. Ambivalence also coloured the immigrants' relationship to the English and French into whose political arguments they became entangled.

Some French Canadian politicians, such as Mayor Camillien Houde, supported Italian community initiatives because Italians as a group were seen as being pro-Catholic and thus could be courted to join in his fight against the English federalists. Houde was instrumental in making possible another visible sign of Italy's presence in Canada. The year after the Cabot monument made its appearance, the Italian state commissioned the construction of a building in Mile End. The *Casa d'Italia* was one of a series of buildings (but the only one to remain after the war) that were direct importations of what in Italy

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<sup>161</sup> "Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti," *Il Carroccio* (New York) Sept. 1925: 271. See also *Il Carroccio* Feb. 1925: 243; and *Il Carroccio* April 1925: 457.

were known as *Case del Fascio* (Fascist centres) (Fig. 25). It was paid for by the Italian state and by the community through fundraising. With Houde's efforts, the land was given to the Italians by the City of Montreal. Designed by architect Patsy Colangelo (1907-1984),<sup>162</sup> it is a modest structure with little embellishment but the swelling western façade and linear decorative details identify it as an art deco building. The dedication incised into a wall of the foyer makes a clear assertion of Mussolini's imperialistic aspirations and the understanding that all the emigrant Italian communities, both in and outside Italy, belonged to 'a people.'

Amore di terra lontana  
 Fierezza di razza  
 Volontá decisa di superamento  
 Inspirarono  
 La collettività italiana  
 Nella costruzione  
 Di questa casa d'Italia  
 Solennemente inaugurata  
 1 novembre 1936 XV E.F.  
 Primo anno del rinnovato impero  
 Regnando Vittorio Emanuele III  
 Il vittorioso re ed imperatore  
 Duce Benito Mussolini<sup>163</sup>

The timing of this building's appearance, on the heels of the Cabot, consolidated the Italian state's presence in Montreal and raised the profile of the local Consul in the city's

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<sup>162</sup> Pasquale Colangelo was born in the USA in 1907 and emigrated to Montreal in 1909. He worked on many architectural projects including institutional, industrial, and private buildings, and the Italian church *Madonna della Consolata* (1952). A C.P.R. bursary allowed him to begin studies at the Art Association of Montreal.

<sup>163</sup> Love for a distant land / Pride of a people / Decisive desire to excel / Inspired / The Italian community / In the construction / Of this Italian centre / Solemnly inaugurated / 1 November 1936 [year XV Fascist Era] / First year of the revived empire / Reigning Vittorio Emanuele / The victorious king and the emperor / Duce Benito Mussolini. My translation. In 1961 on the occasion of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary the inscription was extended to include the names of those who supported its construction, including Mayor Camilien Houde.

political affairs. One must recall that at this time Montreal had the most Italians in Canada, thus the co-existence of the monument and building was a political coup for the embassy. Houde's efforts were symbolically compensated when he was awarded the title of *commendatore* (Knight) by the Italian state. His participation in such events together with his anti-conscription and anti-federalist stand led to his internment as an enemy of Canada during WWII. The war also led to the *Casa d'Italia*'s confiscation by the Canadian government from 1941 to 1948.

However, the historical record of support for Italian Fascist politics *per se* has been difficult to clarify because of pro-nationalist sentiments and activities that define this period of Montreal history. While a McGill University thesis of 1939 indicates that the Fascio membership totalled 210, of which 60 were regularly active, the accuracy of this estimate has been questioned as being either too high or too low considering that misinformation may have been purposefully given to the interviewer.<sup>164</sup> Italian consulate staff carefully monitored the attitude towards Fascist activities in Montreal, and other cities. Interestingly, they did not encourage overly patriotic or spontaneous display; for example, orders from the *Segretaria Generale dei Fasci all' Estero* instructed that a celebration in Montreal in 1926 be kept "private." The festivities, marking the "March on Rome," included Guido Casini, the artist responsible for the Caboto statue, who also happened to be the president of the Montreal *fascio*.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Bayley 183; Perin disputes Bayley's numbers, he writes that Brigidi was suspicious of Bayley and may have intentionally mislead his inquiries, Perin "Making Good Fascists," fn. 6, 156-7.

<sup>165</sup> *Il Carroccio*, Oct. 1926, 459.



## Guido Casini

Guido Casini, like so many other trained Italian artists and craftsmen, emigrated because skills such as his were in high demand in Montreal (Fig. 21). According to the registration form he deposited with the National Gallery of Canada, the artist immigrated from Castelfiorentino, near Florence, to Montreal on December 24, 1924. From 1905 to 1910 he studied at the Professional School of Decorative and Industrial Arts in Florence. He remained in Florence from 1910 to 1913 to study at the Accademia with sculpture professor Augusto Rivalta. The following year he was in Rome, studying under sculpture professor Ettore Ferrari at the Accademia of San Luca. He was awarded several prizes, including bursaries that allowed him to study in Venice, with professor Pietro Canonica at the Accademia, and in Ravenna. His professional life was interrupted by the war when he was conscripted into the Italian army, and spent “nine months in the trenches on the side of the Allies,” emerging as a lieutenant in the Alpinist Regiment.<sup>166</sup>

Once in Montreal Casini, like other recently emigrated artists such as Guido Nincheri, became employed in the production of sculptural and decorative work that was being commissioned throughout the province of Quebec, ranging from churches and public monuments, to funerary sculpture and portrait busts. His Montreal commissions included the relief medallions of the Stations of the Cross in the Church of Sainte-Catherine

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<sup>166</sup> “Artist’s Information Form” in the Guido Casini Artist File in the Archives of the National Gallery of Canada. The date of birth is incorrect on the form (it is likely that someone other than the artist typed and translated the information). It is not known when the form was completed but it was not before 1940. According to immigration records he made a subsequent trip to Italy in 1926, and returned with his wife, Albertina E.G. Bausi (1903-1974).

(which was later demolished), and those in the Churches of Saint-Léon-de-Westmount and Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense where he worked with Guido Nincheri. Outdoor works included Curé E.F. Baillairgé (Verchères, Quebec, 1930); the statue of the sower on the monument at Lake St. John; and “Le Monument aux Martyrs Canadiens” erected in 1940 outside the Church of St. Michel de Sillery, commissioned by the Barsetti firm of Quebec City.<sup>167</sup> As an academically-trained artist, Casini quickly integrated himself into the institutional fabric of the Fine Arts scene and began to exhibit with the Royal Canadian Academy as early as 1927, and appeared in the Spring Shows of the Art Association of Montreal in 1928, where in 1931 he exhibited the plaster model of the Cabot sculpture<sup>168</sup> (Fig. 22).

As a veteran of WWI Casini became active in Montreal’s fascist activities including as the president of the Fascio in 1925 and of the Italian War Veterans Association in 1940, a few months before Canada’s entry into war. Nevertheless, Casini had earlier applied and been granted naturalization status in 1930, a fact he deliberately emphasized in his National Gallery of Canada registration, likely in an effort to be accepted by the Canadian art establishment. One of the works he exhibited at the Royal Canadian Academy of Art was a photograph of a war monument he had created for his hometown

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<sup>167</sup> See Denis Martin, *Portraits des héros de la nouvelle-France, images d’un culte historique*. (Montréal : Hurtubise HMH cahiers du Québec, 1988). See also Ginette Laroche, “L’iconographie jésuite et ses implications culturelles dans l’art et la religion des québécois (1842-1968),” PhD Dissertation, Université Laval, 1991.

<sup>168</sup> Evelyn de R. McMann, *Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Formerly Art Association of Montreal: Spring Exhibitions 1880-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988): 62. *Royal Canadian Academy of Arts / Académie Royal des arts du Canada: Exhibitions and Members, 1880-1979* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981): 65.

in 1924<sup>169</sup> (Fig. 24). The monument is unusual for it depicts the war hero as dead rather than living as was normal for Tuscan war monuments. Casini shows the nude corpse being carried on the shoulders of fellow troops, displaying the idea of martyrdom that was to become such a prevalent iconographic theme in the visual culture and ‘sacralized’ language of Mussolini’s regime. Certainly, the idea of the soldier as ‘martyr’ and the religious association this suggests was developed in the war mythologies of all the nations that had suffered enormous losses in World War I, especially once ceremonies to the Unknown Soldier began to take place. It should be remembered that in Montreal, in 1922, at a church ceremony in honour of Italy’s Unknown Soldier, several of the participants became founders of the city’s first *fascio* when it was instituted in 1925. Casini’s success with the theme of martyrdom, religious and otherwise, may have won him some admirers including those who commissioned the ‘Canadian martyrs’ monument in Quebec City.

What relation Italian artists had to the war and in turn to the nationalism that was developing in modern Italy (a country that had only been officially unified since 1864-65) is a thorny question. Some, like poet Gabriele D’Annunzio, interpolated the artist’s self-image as a ‘visionary’ into the civic role of citizen. D’Annunzio in particular became the model for a new romantic ideal of the poet-soldier (*poeta-soldato*) and first developed the rhetoric of religious politics that Mussolini would adopt as his own. Coming out of the Great War where he had seen frontline action, and with D’Annunzio as a national hero, Casini may well have seen his professional role as a artist tied to his military

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<sup>169</sup> Gigi Salvagnini, *La Scultura nei Monumenti ai caduti della prima Guerra Mondiale in Toscana* (Florence : Opus Libri, 1999): 42-43.

experience where he had witnessed trench warfare first-hand. In the American-based Italian-language newspaper *Il Carroccio*, Casini is described as having participated in the March on Rome in 1922, when Il Duce made his audacious move into the heart of Italian politics, an event that eventually led to the capitulation of the government and the beginning of the Italian Fascist state. Mussolini's frequent references to art-making (he sometimes compared himself to a sculptor) may have influenced the young Casini who, shaped by the D'Annunzian landscape of the poet-soldier, was drawn to the aesthetics of power. Casini's supporters admired his fidelity to "our glorious traditions of classical art," enthusiasm for Fascist ideals, and saw him as the "spirit of the new Italy":

un esempio vivo di entusiasmo e di passione italiana, di dedizione al dovere, rivelando nella condotta civile di ogni giorno lo spirito dell'italiano nuovo ... fedele alle gloriose tradizioni classiche della nostra arte ... oggi come ieri è sulla breccia, pronto a dare la parte migliore di se stesso per il trionfo della buona causa fascista, di cui fu tenace assertore nei primordii del movimento, nelle giornate della rivoluzione, nella Marcia su Roma, all quale partecipò come valeroso ufficiale della Milizia.<sup>170</sup>

The example of the Cabot statue demonstrates how Italy's exploitation of earlier high points of Italian history helped create a national mythology, but Italy was not alone in its use of historical re-cycling. History as 'legend' is a common ploy in the fabrication of all modern nation-states and, as Eric Hobsbawm has argued, can be "invented" as need be.

As Hobsbawm writes, a "factitious continuity" is necessary to create a sense of

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<sup>170</sup> a lively example of enthusiasm and Italian passion, of dedication to duty, living the civil life of today in the spirit of the new Italy, loyal to the glorious classical traditions of our art ... today as yesterday is on the ground, ready to give his best for the triumph of the good Fascist cause, of which he was a tenacious supporter in the early days of the movement, in the days of the revolution, in the March on Rome, in which he participated as a valiant officer of the militia. My translation. "Profili: Guido Casini," *L'Araldo del Canada* 1 November 1930: 3.

legitimacy based on permanence (i.e. tradition).<sup>171</sup> Italy's relationship to its cultural past is especially significant in terms of its artistic traditions which at this time were being re-interpreted to meet its modern predicament, conditions that included a fragmented, barely-formed state and a citizenry still largely composed of a peasant class. The Renaissance became a powerful symbolic ground for creating a sense of a national self, given even greater weight by the universal meaning it held for Western culture as a whole. Thus, Renaissance heroes like the artist Michelangelo, the poet Dante, and the explorers Columbus and Caboto, made frequent appearances in rhetorical displays from staterooms in Rome to Italian language schoolrooms in Montreal. Absorbed by the nationalist fervour of the time, Casini's statue was admired because Cabot was a cultural icon that belonged to an uninterrupted historical chain of great men – Michelangelo, Dante, Caesar – who now more than ever represented the 'new Rome.' It should be noted that these ideals of strength were male and therefore the bearers of patrimonial continuity (like property carried by male heirs) and the genealogical 'blood' that now extended to the New World – "our great Fathers ... tenacious brothers" Mussolini acknowledged in his laudatory statement to the organizers of the Cabot campaign (*i nostri grandi Padri ... tenaci fratelli*).

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the visual rhetoric of Fascism was solely Mussolini's creation. Although Renaissance historical figures were frequently inserted into Fascist propaganda, their cult status as national heroes had been developing since the mid-nineteenth century. When the idea of the Cabot monument was officially announced in

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<sup>171</sup> Hobsbawm, Introduction, *The Invention of Tradition* 1-14.

1925 it emerged out of the same patriotic wave that bore figures of the distant and near past into the realities of the present, including Dante who had been successfully introduced into Montreal in 1922. While it is true that the story of the Cabot monument includes Fascist protagonists, there were certainly non-Fascists, including Italian Communists, who welcomed such public displays of Italian cultural pride and heroic adulation. While on the one hand the complexity of political motives seems to defy a single reading of the monument's meaning, on the other, it illustrates how representations of history are used instrumentally to shape the past according to the present. In terms of nationalist sentiments, what Cabot and the other heroes of this period show is the significance of founding myths in the shaping of collective belonging and the way they formally initiate the narrative structure we call 'national history.' For the Italians of Montreal, Cabot not only belonged to the Renaissance and the beginnings of modern Italy but also marked the continuity of that heritage into this 'new world,' where it could claim legitimacy alongside the patrimonial pantheons of the English and the French. The metaphoric power of the Cabot figure as explorer, sea traveler, and displaced person was not lost on immigrants who recognized its symbolic worth in jockeying for social space between English and French heroic icons. Cabot was many things to many people but what he had in common for all was the charismatic aura of the hero: forward-driven, victorious, and virile. In the contest for power, and the struggle for ethnic and cultural legitimacy, Cabot was valuable currency indeed.

Mayor Houde had proposed changing the name of the site to 'Place Jean Cabot' but considering the uneasy situation of politics in Europe, the suggestion was never followed

up.<sup>172</sup> While there was disappointment on the part of the organizers with the site selected for the statue, Western Park, because it was adjacent to a busy bus terminal,<sup>173</sup> those opposed to the Cabot project linked the site to the English supporters because it was located near a predominantly English-speaking section of Montreal called Westmount. A letter of complaint addressed to Mayor Rinfret from Le Cercle Félix-Martin of the A.C.J.C.<sup>174</sup> dated May 2, 1931 stated:

À la veille des grandes fêtes qui se dérouleront l'an prochain à l'occasion du V<sup>e</sup> centenaire de la découverte du Canada par J. Cartier nous estimons mal venue cette initiative de la colonie italienne de Montréal. Il faut être aveuglé par un fascisme exagéré pour se permettre une telle liberté à l'étranger. L'insulte est d'autant plus cuisante que le monument sera situé dans la section anglaise de notre ville.<sup>175</sup>

Although the writer uses the word “fascism” to describe the city officials’ decision to support the Cabot monument, the word is employed to describe what he perceived as City Hall’s lack of open and fair consultation process rather than as an explicit reference to a political ideology (i.e. the Fascist Party). Italians and English are given equivalent status in a criticism that is essentially based on ethno-linguistic nationalism.

The nationalist basis of the Cabot debates began to alter as Italy’s imperialist intentions became clearer towards the late 1930s. Once Italy declared war on France and England (Canada) in June 1940, public opinion, which had been gradually moving against Italy in

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<sup>172</sup> “Le Monument Jean Cabot,” *Le Devoir* 27 May 1935: 8.

<sup>173</sup> In the late 1950s, city commissioner Alfred Gagliardi attempted to have the monument moved to Little Italy, *Montreal Matin*, 14 May 1958, Montreal City Archives, Dossier de Presse, D.3020.10.

<sup>174</sup> Association catholique de la jeunesse canadienne-française (A.C.J.C.) was responsible for nationalist projects such as the fund-raising campaign for Laliberté’s *Dollard des Ormeaux* monument (1920).

<sup>175</sup> Letter to Mayor Fernand Rinfret from Henri N. Guilbault, May 2, 1933, Montreal City Archives, Dossier de Presse, D.3020.10.

recent years, turned decisively against Mussolini. The Cabot monument once again came into discussion, but the recollection of the debates was influenced by current world events. *The Montreal Herald*, which earlier had been supportive of the Cabot campaign, reversed its position once the war started. In a 1941 article speculating on German and Italian plans to invade North America, the Cabot monument was condemned as part of a larger, sinister plot: “We remember the strange circumstances in which Montreal received a gift from Mussolini, confirmation of Italy’s pretensions on Canada based on discovery... .”<sup>176</sup> But *Le Devoir* prided itself on having been the only paper to argue against the Cabot, whose advocates it claimed had been mostly Anglo-Saxon. *Le Devoir* goes further, arguing that it is precisely because of the English support and of misleading Ottawa publications, that Italians and the Italian consulate, were encouraged to pursue their campaign. “C’est quand il en était temps encore que le *Devoir* s’est levé et a su faire échec à la propagande la moins recommandable du régime fasciste d’Italie.”<sup>177</sup> However, the paper neglects to mention that at the time of the debate its anti-Cabot rationale had been based on the issue of historical accuracy and not on the political intentions of Mussolini; at no time had it made any negative remarks against the Italian state.

The last attempt before the start of World War II to court Montreal citizenry into accepting an Italian cultural hero was the short-lived campaign to have a street named after the inventor Marconi. Marconi died on July 7, 1937. Soon after *L’Italia* petitioned to have Park Avenue, a main traffic artery, renamed Marconi Avenue. The proposal was accepted with modification; city hall offered to rename a smaller street in Little Italy.

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<sup>176</sup> *Montreal Herald* June 1941, Montreal City Archives, Dossier de Presse, D.3020.10.

<sup>177</sup> *Le Devoir* 19 June 1941, Montreal City Archives, Dossier de Presse, D.3020.10.



Some of the same people behind the Dante Street campaign were active again, including the Fascist activist Camillo Vetere. The compromise was rejected in a letter addressed to Mayor Raynault: “Nous ne pourrions pas accepter que le nom de Marconi – d’une portée et d’une résonance mondiales, auquel se trouve rattaché également un souvenir canadien – soit donné à une rue de quartier.”<sup>178</sup> In the report of the debate at city hall published in *L’Italia*, comments included the fear that the proposal could be adversely interpreted considering the political atmosphere in Europe. The mood had indeed begun to change in Canada. In 1938 Mussolini instigated anti-Semitic laws; this action together with the occupation of Ethiopia a few years earlier, produced a sea change in public opinion.

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<sup>178</sup> The correspondence was published in *L’Italia*, quoted in Principe pp.78-80.

## Sacred Politics: The Fresco of Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense

### A Mother Church

Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense (NDD), or *Madonna della Difesa* as it was originally named in Italian, was the most important Italian church in Montreal in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1939, Montreal sociologist Charles Bayley described it as “the physical manifestation of Italian strength in Mile End.”<sup>179</sup> Today the church retains its symbolic importance as the ‘Mother Church’ (*chiesa madre*) of Italians even though few Italian-speaking people reside in the neighbourhood. For the most part, the Italian presence is limited to shops and restaurants along Saint-Laurent, Dante and Mozart streets, and around the edges of Jean-Talon Market. The demographic change reflects the shifting population of the post-war immigration period when a new generation of immigrants settled in districts outside the boundaries of Mile End. While the City of Montreal has promoted the ethnic character of “La petite Italie” through such gestures as the installation of a truncated triumphal arch at its southern end (at the intersection of Saint-Laurent and Saint Zotique), in reality it is only a vestige of a once ‘living’ Italian neighbourhood. Nevertheless, in 2001, NDD was recognized as an official Canadian Heritage Site, a designation that protects it from future demolition (Fig. 26).

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<sup>179</sup> Bayley 147.

Documentation provided by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada indicates that the church's recognition as a nationally important structure was not based on its overall aesthetic merits but on its historical-cultural worth.<sup>180</sup> In fact, its designation as national monument was a contentious issue that required further "clarification" from the nominators, the National Congress of Italian Canadians.<sup>181</sup> In the end, the church was recognized as an "icon of the ethnic community." Ironically, the church is Italian in name only as only a small portion of its now reduced congregation is Italian. As the church's current caretakers have said, children of second and third-generation immigrants who come to the church for services such as funerals and weddings do so for sentimental reasons.<sup>182</sup> While the clergy is disappointed with the new realities, they admit that the fees charged for these services help the church cover essential maintenance costs. The pilgrimage by children and grandchildren confirms that the church has indeed become a monument. To many for whom being Italian has become more a question of choice than of descent, the church is a symbolic site for commemorating an imagined past rather than a remembered one.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense, Montréal, Québec, Supplementary Information 2001-17, and Submission Report 2000-17A, B. The church of Saint-Léon (Saint-Léon-de-Westmount), whose interior was remodelled and redecorated by Nincheri 1928-44, 1957, was declared a national historic site in 1997.

<sup>181</sup> N.C.I.C. was formed in 1974; for an interesting assessment of its politics see Franca Iacovetta and Robert Ventresca "Redress, Collective Memory, and the Politics of History," in Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin, and Angelo Principe, eds. *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 379-412.

<sup>182</sup> Interview with parish priest, Giuseppe Manzini, f.s.c.b., 2 Oct. 2003.

<sup>183</sup> Historical and cultural contexts influence individuals' perception of their ethnicity; an important contributing factor in ethnic immigrant communities is generational difference. For an overview of ethnicity as a historically produced subject, see Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

The early history of the NDD parallels the growth of the Italian community in Canada from one of a sojourning, migrant population to an established, distinct cultural community. This historical self-recognition was apparent in the community's plans for a new church whose beauty and grandeur would be read as a statement of collective pride and a symbol of success. NDD came to replace the first Italian church Madonna-del-Carmine (Our Lady of Carmel / Notre-Dame-de-Carmel), founded in 1905 and located on Dorchester and Saint-Hubert. The older church lost its pre-eminence as Italians moved further north to larger properties in the Mile End district and away from the congested downtown area where Italian workers lived in order to be close to the rail yards and docks. Mile End was close to another railway hub, the C.P.R.'s Angus Yards, but in addition offered the benefits of a more suitable domestic environment that included ample garden plots for growing vegetables, the like of which did not exist in grocery stores. The church's name can be traced back to Casacalenda, a town in the Molise region in southern Italy from where a large number of Montreal's Italians originated. "La Difesa" is the name of a neighbourhood in Casacalenda where in the late nineteenth century a miracle attributed to the Madonna was believed to have taken place.

NDD became an important focal point for Little Italy, or *la colonia* (the colony) as it was referred to at the time. Many social activities were tied to the church; these ranged from festive celebrations like saint day processions, and social pastimes like theatre, music, card playing, and suppers, that were held in the adjacent church hall where mutual aid societies and clubs often met. As already mentioned, the variety and prolific number of these clubs was a phenomenon common to all Little Italies and integral to social

networking. Particularly important to the church were religious ceremonies of marriages, baptisms, and funerals, that brought families and *paisani* (townsfolk) together to reaffirm social ties and to inaugurate new ones. Funerals were especially important; helping people pay for them was one of the most important roles of the mutual aid societies. In another Montreal sociological thesis of 1934 the author wrote, “In the Italian national community, the whole family status is called to attention at the funeral of any one of its members,”<sup>184</sup> in other words, funerals became a way of summing up the social value of an individual and, thus by extension, the particular family’s worth to that of the larger collective. It is against this background that one must consider the symbolic centrality of NDD to the community’s sense of itself as a network of familial and social connections. One must remember that churches are only the concrete manifestation of a social unity called the “parish.”

The parish contributed to maintaining social cohesion and the persistence of a group identity in a city and country where immigrants lacked historical roots necessary to cultural legitimacy. NDD was much more than an architectural structure or even a purely religious space, it was a site where collective identity was formally authorized and the rupture of immigration interpreted as continuity. As the historian Gérard Bouchard writes, rupture and continuity are at the heart of New World nation formation. While Bouchard addresses only the experience of cultural majorities, the nationalist aspiration of the Italians of Montreal is worthy of comparison. Similarly to new nations like Canada, Italians found themselves in the ambivalent position of needing to claim

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<sup>184</sup> Gibbard 159.

continuity with the past while at the same time marking the beginning of a new chapter as *Italo Canadesi* (Italian Canadians).<sup>185</sup>

### Building the Church

In the late nineteenth-century Roman Catholic Italians in Mile End did not have their own church but attended the French language church of Saint-Edouard (1895), and later moved to the newly built Saint-Jean-de-la-Croix (1901). Francophones who also made up the majority of the working class neighbourhoods and industries where Italians lived and worked, frequented these churches. This class relationship, together with a shared religion, tied these two linguistic groups into a common class-consciousness. Social contact encouraged an exogamous marriage pattern so that by the first generation many merged families of Italian and French 'stock' had come into being.<sup>186</sup> At Saint-Jean-de-la-Croix, Italians occasionally heard a sermon delivered in Italian. According to oral testimonies, a dispute that arose between Catholic and Protestant Italians in the neighbourhood, led to a confrontation with the church's pastor and the decision by the Catholic Italians to leave the parish and petition for one of their own. This became a reality in 1910 when the parish of NDD was formally founded. The following year a provisional church was established at Dante and Drolet streets (2810 Drolet); the building also included a school on the second floor. It was replaced by the current structure that

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<sup>185</sup> Gérard Bouchard discusses majority cultures but his notion of rupture/continuity is a useful one for understanding immigrant communities. See Bouchard *Genèse des nations*.

<sup>186</sup> Sylvie Taschereau's detailed demographic study of Italians in Montreal 1906-1939 illustrates the process of social diversification that took place over the course of a generation. See Taschereau *Pays et patries*.

faces Dante Street to the north, Henri-Julien Street to the west, and Alma to the east. Construction of the church, which began in 1918, was made possible by monies provided mostly through donations and funding drives organized by community associations. From its inception it was planned as the central element of a larger complex that would include a school and convent. Its main construction was finished in 1919, but the elaborate interior decorations would take another fourteen years to complete. The construction contract was given to Domenico Giovannini (also known as John Dominique), who was the only one to supply a guarantee. Because of the Spanish Flu of 1918, when the church was temporarily closed, the blessing of the corner stone was postponed to November 24, 1919.

The most useful written account of the church's history is by one of its former pastors Guglielmo Vangelisti O.S.M. (Order of the Servants of Mary).<sup>187</sup> He arrived in 1912; he was church pastor from 1913 to 1925 and again from 1940 to 1951. He published his account in 1955, with a second edition appearing three years later. The book not only provides a wealth of details about the parish's early years, but also offers a history of Italians in Montreal and, more generally, their history within Canada. The centrality of the parish to the community's early history makes the book an invaluable reference even though the author has not included any documentary sources. While his account is clearly subjective, it nevertheless offers a first hand account by someone who lived at the heart of the community. As pastor, Vangelisti was privy to the news and gossip that circulated

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<sup>187</sup> Guglielmo Vangelisti, *Gli Italiani in Canada* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Montreal: 1958; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1955). Vangelisti (1883-1959). The best published illustration source is by P. C.M Menchini, OSM, *Chiesa della Madonna della Difesa – Guida Storica Descrittiva / Notre Dame de la Défense Guide Historique / Our Lady of Defense Church – An Historical Guide* (Montreal: 1965); Menchini was parish priest 1955-1965.

at all levels of the social and clerical hierarchies, and these anecdotes enrich his account while detracting from its historical reliability.

The Archbishop of Montreal Paul Bruchesi (1855-1939) was supportive of the community's drive for a new church and school.<sup>188</sup> He had been instrumental in founding the first parish Madonna del Carmine in 1905, obtained funds for the new one, and in 1912 petitioned and received more monies directly from the Vatican.<sup>189</sup> He had also been central in facilitating the arrival in Montreal of the Order of the Servants of Mary (O.S.M.), an order that had been founded in Florence in 1233. The OSM was given charge of the religious and social welfare of the Italian colony. The same year the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception arrived to work as teachers in the parish school, their first mission in Canada.<sup>190</sup> The Servants began their residency in 1911 taking over the duties that formally had belonged to Jesuits, a transition that also took place at Madonna del Carmine.

The first OSM pastor was I.M. Francesconi, whose Florentine roots made him culturally and linguistically distinct from the congregation which was composed of southerners for the most part. Vangelisti acknowledges this difference when he writes that Francesconi was a "good orator" because he was able to make himself "generally" understood by the

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<sup>188</sup> The Bruchesi (Bruschesi) had resided in Canada since 1813; Bruchesi had been ordained Bishop in 1897.

<sup>189</sup> \$4000 was shared by both Italian churches. It should be noted that the world Eucharistic Conference was held in Montreal in 1910 and that this may have facilitated Bruchesi's request.

<sup>190</sup> *Suore Francescane Missionarie dell'Immacolata Concezione.*



congregation who spoke “dialect.”<sup>191</sup> By 1913 Francesconi returned to Florence and was replaced by Vangelisti, also a Tuscan, who was already at the church in a subordinate role. While Vangelisti does not elaborate on his remark about the cultural differences between the majority and its church leaders, the comment does reflect broader socio-political realities. The political implications of the north-south opposition influenced socio-economic affairs both in Italy and in its ‘colonies’ where a hierarchical social system pitted the *nobili* and *prominenti*, against the southern working class majority.<sup>192</sup> The Tuscan character of the church hierarchy and its decorative influence problematizes its description as the symbol of *all* Italians in Montreal.

The most important day of celebration was the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, the feast day of the Madonna della Difesa, but by the 1920s, two other feast days were added: Saint Anthony of Padua, and later, the patron of the OSM, the *Addolorata*, or Madonna of Seven Sorrows. Vangelisti admitted that these feasts served two different functions, religious devotion and social pastime – a fact he accepted as equally necessary to working class life. He also recognized immigrants’ desire for solidarity at a time when many felt “ashamed to be Italian”; he observed that many took on English and French names to escape negative stereotyping promoted by frequent news reports on local mafia. A church without a hall in which to socialize did not fulfil its full obligations to the parish, Vangelisti asserted. Thus, in the early years of the parish the building of the church itself was put aside for lack of funds and attention was given over to the construction of a hall

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<sup>191</sup> Francesconi was part of a group of three priests sent to Canada from Italy; they were joined by more OSM from the United States. Vangelisti 190.

<sup>192</sup> See Chapter 1.

in 1913, which is attached to the east side of the church. Over the years its theatre stage would present excerpts from operas and other musical recitals, religious and melodramatic plays such as *The Two Little Orphans (Le due orfanelle)*, films,<sup>193</sup> and even Greco-Roman wrestling. The hall was also a place for card-playing, family parties, and club events.

### The School Next Door

The educational needs of the community's children received serious attention from the start with the establishment of a school and the introduction of a teaching laity; given that the school was part of the church complex, it is important to discuss its history. Although the first parish of Madonna del Carmine (MDC) already had a school, the new neighbourhood of Mile End required its own. It should be noted that welfare of its children was also the rationale for the founding of The Orphanage of Saint Joseph in 1922, located adjacent to MDC.<sup>194</sup> In 1916 a funding petition to the Montreal School Commission was successful in obtaining \$10 per child and registration in the larger school board. The petition was instigated because Italians were not receiving municipal financial support for their own school even though they were paying school taxes. It was promoted through a campaign to win the election of two commissioners who supported

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<sup>193</sup> It would be interesting to find out if Fascist films were shown. The Italian government regularly circulated newsreels outside Italy. See Bruti Liberati for mention of films shown in Vancouver. Urrichio mentions that the Catholic Church was a strong advocate of films as moral teaching for the masses (of course these were films about morality). Considering that religion and politics often merged at this time, just what was shown is thought-provoking.

<sup>194</sup> *Orfanotrofio italiano San Giuseppe* was run first by the nuns of the Servants of Mary; it was located in newly purchased real estate at St. Andre and Dorchester, near the Church of Madonna del Carmine. The sculptors Alexandre Carli and Nicola Petrucci were both involved in the fundraising.

the Italians against competing interests of the St-Edouard school. Nevertheless, the school soon became too small and some classes were moved to provisional spaces like stores and private homes. In 1919 religious services were ‘moved’ into the basement of the building and the school was expanded from the second floor to the ground floor, with some of its costs defrayed through rental charges to the Commission.

A new school at Drolet and Belanger – named after the Florentine Saint Giuliana Falconieri, founder of the Caped Sisters of the Servants of Mary (*Suore Mantellate dei Servi di Maria*) – was inaugurated in 1925.<sup>195</sup> In 1932 yet another school, Notre-Dame-de-la-Deféense, was built on Henri-Julien, facing the east side of the church (the first school was demolished, boys moved to Santa Giuliana which was made gender appropriate by renaming it San Filippo Benizi). The new school was grander than any that had preceded it. Funded by the city and designed by Eugène Larose (1900-1972), its style displays a modern, simplified form nearly devoid of surface ornamentation except for two hand-carved reliefs of children’s figures on the staircase of the central entrance. Its sizable dimensions, three stories tall and covering nearly a full city block, together with the fact that it was next door to NDD, enhanced the architectural presence of Italians in the city. The architectural complex of school, church, and social hall, together with the surrounding shops and homes, established an architectural landscape that clearly defined the limits of ethnic enclave.

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<sup>195</sup> The girls were moved to the new school; boys remained at the old one (headed by Wilfred Leduc until 1954).

From the start, Mile End's Italian children had been taught in Italian and English but by 1912 the school found itself embroiled in the language politics of the city. As Vangelisti states, in order not to seem partial either to the French or the English so as "not to become anyone's enemy," the school opted to teach all three languages. But after being accepted into the School Commission in 1916, the teaching of Italian became more of a problem, "our language came to be seen as intrusive and almost illegitimate, bilingual Canada does not recognize any other idioms other than French and English." By 1931 the school was forced to limit Italian language instruction to only the first two years of schooling so that children could be "prepared for their First Holy Communion." The teaching of Italian was essential to the needs of the community and couldn't be separated from its sense of *italianità*, a concept that was itself undergoing radical transformation under the leadership of Mussolini's management of the Italian nation.

It is clear that the survival of Italian culture was central to the school and to the community. The teachers attempted to keep the "flame of *italianità*" lit through the teaching of Italian language, history and geography, while the rest of the curriculum remained the same as that of other elementary schools. The goal to "teach Italian children the beautiful language of the motherland [*madre patris*]," was encouraged by the teachers who were not immigrants themselves but Italian nationals appointed to the school by their superiors. In 1922 a visit to the school by Consular staff took place (the first had been a full ten years earlier). By this time 750 children were enrolled, a number that had doubled over the intervening decade. As reported in *L'Araldo* the Consul encouraged the children to "love their country of origin." One can assume that the Consul's words were

buoyed by WWI commemorations of recent years and the celebrations for the Dante anniversary year of 1921. The plan to raise the Dante statue in Lafontaine Park later that year was an anticipated event whose discussion filtered through the community and was common knowledge to all.

While the teaching of Italian had been a political problem since the school's inception, it was a concern that had been primarily framed as an issue of language legitimacy. Ironically, this sense of being excluded from the majority was contrasted with the patronizing sympathy on the part of some Italophiles. For example, in 1925 Judge Amedée Monet, who had been invited to an event at the school, remarked that the children's skilful use of three languages made it impossible to tell that they were Italian if not for the "vivaciousness of their expression and their handsome 'brownness'" ("la vivacité de leur regard et leur agréable figure brune"). However, in the late 1930s some English-speaking critics were less concerned with the issue of language than with political connotations of the school's curriculum. Toronto-based magazines such as *The Canadian Forum* and *Saturday Night* attacked the Italian schools in Canada for their Fascist indoctrination of children, as did the Italian Canadian anti-fascist press.<sup>196</sup> Over the course of Mussolini's reign, Italy's education system had become thoroughly marked by Fascist propaganda. Since schoolbooks in Montreal were the same ones that were used by children in Italy, it was inevitable that the children were receiving the same Fascist-influenced teaching, particularly since Italian nationals were sent from Italy to oversee

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<sup>196</sup> Roy Davis, "Primers of Treachery," *Macleans Magazine*, 1 Sept. 1940: 9, 30.

schools in Toronto and Montreal as of 1934.<sup>197</sup> The classes also funnelled children into the Fascist youth associations such as the *balilla* and *piccole italiane* and others that, like the Boy Scouts, were based on military models. From these ranks outstanding children were sent to summer camps in Italy or to the Perini Camp in Rawdon, Quebec.<sup>198</sup> This situation came to a head in 1939 in Toronto where municipal authorities, after a campaign by several anti-fascist groups, banned Italian schools. (This was a mixed blessing to Italian anti-fascists who had only wanted the political content censored, not the closing of the schools).<sup>199</sup>

### Design and Decoration

The splendour of the new church was a great improvement over the older Madonna del Carmine that had been described as “big enough but no art treasure” involving “neither a Michelangelo nor a Brunelleschi.”<sup>200</sup> Vangelisti acknowledges Guido Nincheri (1885-1973) as the church’s chief decorator and architect. According to the author, Nincheri “designed” the church but because of a lack of accreditation had to enlist the help of architect Roch Montbriant in order to have the plans approved by the Quebec Order of

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<sup>197</sup> “Tutti i bambini italiani amano Mussolini, il Duce che guida la nuova Italia e che senza riposo lavora per il bene della patria.” “Tutti i bambini intonano un inno, poi passano dritti e salutano. Salutano la bandiera e pensano: alla patria lontana.” (All Italian children love Mussolini, il Duce (the leader) that guides the new Italy and that without rest works for the good of the homeland. All the children sing the anthem, stand straight and salute. They salute the flag and think of the homeland far away.” My translation). As reported in the socialist newspaper *Il Lavoratore* (Toronto), 19 March 1936, and quoted in Principe, *The Concept of Italy* 404. Principe describes the accompanying illustration as “a child with his arm raised in the fascist manner.”

<sup>198</sup> *L’Italia nuova* 16 July 1938, quoted by Principe in *The Concept of Italy* 318.

<sup>199</sup> Principe, *The Concept of Italy* 286.

<sup>200</sup> “Non si puo dire sia un cimelio d’arte. Si vede bene nè Michelangelo, nè Brunelleschi, nè altro architetto dello stesso valore, vi hanno lavorato intorno,” Vangelisti 157. This church was built as an extension to what had been the former home of Lord Dorchester after whom the boulevard had been named (now known as Boulevard René Levesque).

Architects. It is styled in Italianate Romanesque according to a Greek cross plan, with a semi-circular apse slightly longer than the other arms, and surfaced in stone covered brick.<sup>201</sup> The original design had asked for a *campanile* (bell tower) which was never built although evident in Nincheri's preliminary sketch.<sup>202</sup> (Fig.27, 28). However, the overall appearance retains his historically influenced conception. The contrasting bands of colours on the exterior brickwork, and in the interior, the continuous arcades surmounted by circular windows, and Lombard bands below the gables, contribute to the building's stylistic integrity and historical reference.<sup>203</sup>

Besides being responsible for most of the interior paintings, Nincheri also designed much of its interior, including the marble pulpit, carved by Enrico del Bono at *L'Arte del Marmoro* workshop in Florence and installed in 1933. The design combines both Romanesque and Byzantine styles and shows representations of the Mystic Lamb and the Four Evangelists. He also designed the confessionals and pews (the original layout of the pews was altered in order to create another aisle and the pews replaced). Nincheri continued to introduce new elements after WWII, including Florentine-styled marble rededos, altar and altar rail carved by the Tuscan workshop of Giorgio Puliti of Pietrasanta, which was installed in 1949. In 1952 an oil painting of Saint Maria Goretti (shown in high heels) was added; in 1959 Nincheri decorated the cupola, partially

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<sup>201</sup> *HSMBC* Report 548.

<sup>202</sup> At the second level, all three elevations feature a marble rose window, framed in brick that were added after the initial construction (date unknown). *HSMBC* 548.

<sup>203</sup> Recent exterior changes include a combined presbytery and parish hall along the rear, 1955; a baptistery chapel, ca.1962-64; a marble Calvary group by Sebastiano Aiello Company and a war monument *Les hommes de toutes les guerres* (the men of all wars) 1952; and eight lampposts by Nincheri, 1963. The lampposts, originally designed to resemble calla lilies, were damaged during the ice storm in 1998 and have been since altered to prevent further ice damage; the exterior doors have been replaced, their frames include precast concrete blocks, *HSMBC* 549.

executed in encaustic, of the Trinity with angels. Several other additions were made in the 1960s although Nincheri was no longer living in Montreal; these included, in 1964, a side altar executed by the Biagini de Pietra Santa company, and an oil painting of the “Seven Holy Founders” of the OSM.

The arcades display the “virtues of the principle saints”: apostolate, penance, contemplation, and virginity. Each arcade shows three OSM saints and four angels holding the corresponding virtue in their hands. Stained glass painting in the rose windows of each of the three sides of the building and in the rest of the windows show some of the Doctors of the Church. In the rose window on the west wall we have the heralds of living clergy: Pope Pius XI crowned with laurel and oak leaves; in the east wall that of Archbishop Paul Bruchesi (of Montreal), and, in the south wall, that of the Servants of Mary.

Several local Italian artists, decorators, and master masons also participated in completing the interior decorations. The relief medallions of the *Via Crucis* and *Via Matris*, made of gold leafed plaster, were by the “artistic genius” of Guido Casini, who had by now already made the John Cabot statue that sat in a warehouse waiting for political arguments to settle. Many decades later, in 1965, Casini produced four wood panels carved in relief representing the Virgin and saints. Another artist, Arnaldo Marchetti, produced five oil paintings of saints installed in *marouflage* sometime in the



1960s.<sup>204</sup> A plaster-of-Paris Madonna over the east altar is based on a similar work in Casacalenda, Italy (the site of the original parish), by Amalia Dupré (1842-1928); it rests on an altar made of simulated marble, wood painted in the *scalgliolia* technique.<sup>205</sup> Some objects such as the bronze altar crucifix by Pasquale Sgandurra (1882-1956) were imported from Italy, as were other objects such as the altar candelabras that are no longer in the church's inventory.<sup>206</sup> Parishioners purchased these expensive items through donations made by individuals and by local clubs.

The decoration of the interior was on everyone's mind and Guido Nincheri was ready to begin the work, however, funds were unavailable. Work began on a modest scale beginning with an oil painting of Santa Giuliana Falconieri (Fig.41, 42). Over the sacristy, in the chapel of the congregation, he added another oil painting of the Immaculate Conception,<sup>207</sup> and behind the choir he added twelve stained glass windows of the twelve apostles. It was not until Father Manfredi arrived in the parish in 1927 that a concerted effort to begin the interior decorations began; previous to this, fundraising efforts had been less than successful. The most important areas were begun: the walls of the apse, the four arcades supporting the cupola, and the windows (the central ceiling was

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<sup>204</sup> Marouflage is a method by which a painting on canvas is attached to a wall by means of a glue to appear as if it were painted directly on the wall surface.

<sup>205</sup> Scalgliolia like other 'imitation' methods contributed to the affordable cost of the art labour and materials; it is precisely the kind of industrial techniques that were criticized by art historians such as Morisset. Amalia Dupré is the daughter of Giovanni Dupré (1817-1882), a well known early nineteenth-century Italian neo-classical sculptor.

<sup>206</sup> The crucifix was donated to the church by Antonietta D'Antonio. Sgandurra was a student and later teacher of sculpture in Florence; he was noted for his religious works; he also sculpted the four evangelists in the Church of Saint-Viateur in Montreal, decorated by Nincheri. According to Loris Palma, items such as the candelabras were sold over the years to pay parish debts. Personal interview, May 20, 2003.

<sup>207</sup> According to Loris Palma, the painting of the Immaculate Conception, which was housed in the presbytery, was removed by the last OSM when the Fraternity of the Missionaries of Saint Carlo Borromeo replaced the order in 2001.

postponed, and in fact was not officially finished until 1959). In November 1927, master wood carver from Treviso Francesco Robesco was hired to prepare the scaffolding, and in May 1928 Nincheri began to paint the apse assisted by Poggi and Trampolini. Plaster work and ornamental moulding was contributed by De Giorgio Limited and religious statuary by the workshop of Carli and Petrucci.<sup>208</sup>

### The Fresco

The showpiece of the church is the mural painting in the demi-dome of the semi-circular apse above the main altar (Fig.33, 34). It was completed by early September 1933. The lengthy period it took to finish the interior decorations was not due to the artist but to the *fabbrici* (the administrative committee) who were unable to provide steady and sufficient funding, made particularly difficult by the economic crisis of 1929. The mural, together with the four arcades of the crossing, was completed over six years from 1927 to 1933. Its spectacular quality is due to its monumental size and the over two hundred figures depicted on its fifteen hundred square foot surface.

The dizzying number of details, personalities, and groups in the painting can be condensed to a manageable few and the overall composition reduced to a basic schema (Fig. 35). The symmetrically balanced scene is subdivided into three horizontal registers. At the top, the Madonna encircled by angels; in the middle, Calvary rising above the Lake of Tears, bordered on each side by groups of holy figures; in the bottom register, the

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<sup>208</sup> See Dombowsky for more on Antonio De Giorgio and other decorators. See Vignola. See also Porter and Désy for more on statuary.

Pope surrounded by Church hierarchy (Fig. 36). To the left of the Pope and his entourage is the 'civilizing church' (Fig. 39); to the right of it; secular leaders, including Mussolini (Fig. 38). The composition also has a central vertical axis: at the top, the aureole of the Madonna; in the middle, the three crosses on Calvary; and at the bottom, the Pope. The use of colour and outline varies: figures in the top register are brilliant; in the middle zone the groups are pale and sit in a vaguely defined space; at the bottom, the colours are saturated, dark tones predominate at the extremities while at the centre the church hierarchy is a concentration of red. The figures in the bottom register evoke a corporeal realism lacking in the upper registers; they are heavily outlined and detailed. They are easily identified because of how they are rendered and because of their proximity to the viewer. Seen from the main entrance of the church, which is opposite to the fresco, the symmetry of the composition is reinforced by the architecture: the two pilasters flanking the altar area, together with the central arch, frame the composition. The high altar and crucifix form a direct vertical line with the Pope, Calvary, and Madonna at the apex of the dome (Fig.43). At a distance, the most easily visible figure is that of the Pope, whom the artist has elevated from the surrounding figures and set against a pale landscape (the Lake of Tears and Calvary).<sup>209</sup> Interestingly, the Pope although *in* the 'profane' space

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<sup>209</sup> On voit d'abord la sainte Vierge dans toute sa gloire étendant son grand manteau bleu et entourée d'anges dans le ciel. Sur la terre, dans la vallée de larmes, on aperçoit, dans le lointain, le Calvaire avec des trois croix. Du Calvaire descendent deux sentiers, où l'on voit d'abord les saints de la primitive Église, rangés par groupes. A droite, les apôtres, les docteurs de l'Église, les grands fondateurs d'ordres (les sept fondateurs des servites avec Saint François d'Assise), les vierges. À gauche les groupes de patriarches (Adam, Eve, David, Saint Joachim), des martyrs, des prêtres, des veuves. Au pied du Calvaire, il y a un lac et sur la rive, la hiérarchie : Pie XI porté sur la *sedes gestatoria*. Ici, le spectateur est charmé de voir ces figures connues parmi les cardinaux, les évêques, les chevaliers de cape et d'épée; mentionnons parmi ces personnages des cardinaux Gaspari, Pacelli, Laurenti, Sincero, Lépecier (ex-général des Servites) et Villeneuve; NN.SS. Cassulo, Gauthier et Pietro di Maria, et le Rme Père Rafaele Baldini, général actuel des Servites. Nincheri porte la *sedes gestatoria* et l'on reconnaît son fils comme enfant de chœur. Parmi les autorités civiles, Nincheri a figuré il duce Mussolini à cheval avec ses quatuorvirs [sic], les représentants de l'académie d'Italie, et parmi eux le sénateur Marconi et le duc des Abruzzes [sic] (de la famille royale) et

(the human register) seems to be in both profane *and* sacred spaces (i.e. two registers) because of the elevation of the throne.

In the following passage the pastor Vangelisti's admiration is evident: "Aggiungerò che tutto quel lavoro a fresco appare all'occhio esperto dell'arte una perfetta euritmia. Nella pittura poi dell'abside si riscontra tale vivacità d'espressione, di colori e di vita che l'occhio ne rimane incantato mentre il cuore e l'animo, come attratti da forza arcana, vengono rapiti e trasportati nelle più alte sfere dello spirito<sup>210</sup>."

Vangelisti's eurythmic response implies a harmony of the senses that is particular to the aesthetic ambition of religious art in the Baroque period. Intrinsic to this genre is the integration of the spectator's spatial awareness into the act of viewing itself. In other words, the viewer's sense of self in the space contributes to the total, and totalising, experience of the art, unlike the more usual disembodied experience produced by easel painting. Thus Nincheri's reputation is in part due to his success in reviving an art form that recalls painting's other heritage as public art. In Vangelisti's account the *experience* produced by the painting attests to Nincheri's understanding not only of the technique but the essence of mural painting which is intended to occupy a space which is more than a

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un grand philanthrope canadien, l'hon. sénateur Wilson revêtu de sa toge de docteur en droit de l'Université d'Ottawa. À gauche, on remarque l'œuvre civilisatrice de l'Église dans le monde; l'évangélisation dans les missions, et l'on reconnaît un évêque servite, Mgr Bernardi, ancien prier d'Ottawa et un Père et une Sœur missionnaire servites entourés de petits noirs. Parmi les autres figures qu'il fait plaisir de reconnaître celles des Pères Zenobio Manfriani, curé de la paroisse; Armadori, Bertsche, Etienne Cheli, tous d'Ottawa, et l'abbé Brunet, de Québec, et la mère et le plus jeune fils de Nincheri. "Mgr Cassulo à Notre-Dame-de-la- Défense," *La Presse* 22 Sept. 1933: 19.

<sup>210</sup> "I will add that all that fresco work appears to the expert eye as a perfect eurhythmia. In the painting of the apse one encounters a vivaciousness of expression, of colours, and movement that the eye remains mesmerized while the heart and spirit, as if attracted by an ancient force, are carried to the highest spheres of the spirit." (My translation.) Vangelisti 226.

wall surface *per se*. There are basic points about mural painting that distinguish it from easel painting:

technical characteristics are linked to its requirements for permanency because its survival must parallel that of the structure within which it is housed. It must have a matte surface so that it can be easily visible from all angles. The design must be appropriate to an ambulatory viewer. Its composition must adapt itself to its architectural surroundings, thus it must not only respect the structure by which it is framed but also the surface quality of the wall.<sup>211</sup>

Produced in true fresco technique (*buon fresco*), a difficult and specialized skill associated with its flowering in Western art during the Italian Renaissance when the process was refined and used extensively to decorate both sacred and secular interiors.<sup>212</sup> However, fresco steadily fell out of popular favour and was unsuccessfully revived during the nineteenth century, in part due to the lack of technical expertise. Nincheri's skills were learned while studying in Florence in a period of fresco revival. Like the return of the lost-wax process in bronze casting, Italy also reintroduced *buon fresco* into contemporary art practice in North America and contributed in part to the mural painting movement of the 1930s. Nincheri was virtually responsible for bringing it to Montreal.<sup>213</sup> While mural painting as a general pictorial method was being revived in the public works projects of the 1930s, Nincheri's application was more faithful to the traditional fresco

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<sup>211</sup> Ralph Mayer, *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1981) 316-318; and correspondence with Pierluccio Pellissier who has been a consultant on the preservation and renovation of the frescos and other aspects of the church's decoration.

<sup>212</sup> Traditional *buon fresco* is a "painting upon a wet, freshly prepared lime-plaster wall with pigments ground in water only. When the plaster dries it sets with a rocklike cohesion, and the pigments dry with an integral part of the surface. Its benefits include permanency, lack of glare, and washability. It is susceptible to acid fumes, smoke, and soot." Mayer 317. In 2004, the latter problem forced NDD to replace its wax candles with electric ones.

<sup>213</sup> Swiss born André Biéler had worked in fresco in Switzerland in 1920. David Karel, *André Biéler, ou le choc des cultures* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2003): 16.

technique which involves working on a wet surface, an especially difficult type of mural painting. For Nincheri the use of *buon fresco* did not only attest to his technical proficiency, it also linked him with the artistic heritage of Renaissance Florence. The plan and decoration of the church is the artist's tribute to his own artistic and family roots, for he was born in Prato (near Florence) and trained at the Accademia in Florence. This regionalist link also benefited the OSM whose historical roots were in Florence. The status of this artistic lineage was not lost upon his supporters, individuals such as Senator Wilson, clerics, and journalists, that is, the cultural elite of Montreal, who came to nickname the artist "Montreal's Michelangelo." The church's aesthetic authority thus satisfied the patrimonial needs of several players: the OSM priests, the Italian community at large, Italian counsellor staff, and Nincheri himself, all of whom came to see their varied ambitions focalised under the rubric of *italianità*. At the inauguration of the church on August 1, 1919, Archbishop of Quebec Bruchesi addressed the church's nationalist significance when he called it the "palatine of our language and our people in this metropolis."<sup>214</sup>

### The Inauguration

The inauguration of the completion of the apse decoration was held on September 24, 1933 (Fig. 31,32), a date chosen because it coincided with two important anniversaries: the seven-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the OSM and the feast day of the Madonna of Seven Sorrows (*Maria S.S. Addolorata*), patron of the OSM. The event was

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<sup>214</sup> Vangelisti 209.

prepared as a grand celebration and used to invite the Florentine Mgr Andrea Cassulo, the Vatican's Apostolic delegate to Canada, for his first official visit to Canada. Many other dignitaries (*autorità, nobili*) were invited: Catholic clergy from other parishes, civil leaders, Italian government representatives, social leaders, and heads of associations. Two processions were held (Fig. 30), one in the morning starting at Parc Martel at Saint-Jean-de-la Croix, that worked its way north along St-Laurent to NDD where it concluded with a show of fireworks; and one in the afternoon in honour of the Our Lady of Seven Sorrows. It moved along Dante, Casgrain, Saint-Zotique, Drolet, Belanger, and Henri-Julien and was attended by all the associations and clubs of the community and accompanied by the honour guards of Saint-Vincent-Ferrier and of Sacré-Coeur. Several local newspapers were drawn to the event by the long list of important guests and the Vatican's presence. *Le Devoir's* report stands apart from the others for its expressiveness and reveals a longstanding view of Italians and of Little Italy as 'picturesque':

On cherche le pittoresque au loin comme la fortune. On trouve plus souvent la seconde dans son lit et le premier en ne quittant pas son patelin. Les humains souffrent presque tous de presbytisme... C'est une foule canadienne, mais stimulée, aux mouvements plus vifs et aux visages plus animés... Les caractéristiques italiennes s'affirment davantage, d'autant que voici que débouchent au bout de la rue deux ardimi, je crois, avec leur uniforme bleu ardoise et leur invraisemblable képi à la calotte flasque et débordante et les fascistes. Des blocs d'ébène en mouvement que ceux-ci : bonnet de police à plumet noir, visage noir, yeux noirs, chemise noire, pantalon noir. De rares points dorés formés par les médailles, quand il y en a, et le faisceau... Les anges lui forment une gloire qui ont emprunté leurs manteaux, dont ils drapent leurs corps féminin, à la fête de couleurs d'une belle aurore italienne.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> "A N.-D. de la Défense," *Le Devoir* 25 Sept. 1933: 1.

Nincheri walked in the procession wearing his medal showing his newly acquired status as a Knight Commander in the Order of San Sylvestre. He had been awarded this title for his contributions to the glory of the Catholic Church not only because of NDD but for his many other church commissions as well (by now he had worked on a dozen churches). The grandeur of the main wall painting in the dome of the apse above the main altar was admired not only for its sheer monumentality, but also because interspersed amongst the depictions of biblical figures, it offered in meticulous detail realistic portraits of local and international personalities in clerical and civil hierarchies. The “visual pleasure” provided in by the mural is apparent in the following report by *La Presse*:

We see the Virgin in her glory with open blue mantel and angels surrounding her. On the earth, in the valley of tears we see in the distance Calvary with its three crosses. From Calvary’s two descending paths we see the saints of the ancient church arranged in groups. On the right, the apostles, the Church doctors, the founders of orders (the seven founders of the OSM with Saint Francis of Assisi), the virgins. On the left the groups of patriarchs (Adam, Eve, David, Joachim), martyrs, priests, widows. At the foot of Calvary a lake and on its shore the hierarchy: Pius XI carried on the *sedia gestatoria*. The viewer is charmed to see familiar personalities amongst the cardinals, bishops, chevaliers; Cardinals Gaspari, Pacelli, Laurenti, Sincero, Lépecier (ex-general of the Servants) et Villeneuve; NN.SS. Cassulo, Gauthier and Pietro di Maria, and Rme Père Rafaele Baldini, present general of the Servants. Nincheri carries the *sedia gestatoria*, we recognize his son as the altar boy. Amongst the civil authorities we see Mussolini on his horse surrounded by his *quandrumviri*, representatives of the Italian academies, including Senator Marconi, the Duke of Abruzzi (of the royal family) and a great Canadian philanthropist, the Hon. Senator Wilson in his toga of doctor from the University of Ottawa. To the left, we note the civilizing Church in the world; evangelism in the missions, Servant bishop Mgr Bernardi former prior of Ottawa and a Father and Sister missionary Servants surrounded by little blacks. Amongst the others we are pleased to recognize Fathers Zenobio Manfriani, pastor of



the church, Armadori, Bertsche, Etienne Cheli, all of Ottawa, Abbot Brunet of Quebec, and the mother and youngest son of Nincheri.<sup>216</sup>

There are several points to be drawn from the passage including, as the writer says, the pleasure offered by Nincheri's realistic depiction of many living personalities (the journalist has omitted to identify Archbishop Bruchesi), many of whom were active in Montreal. One can only imagine how much this was appreciated by those portrayed and by the congregation if only for the satisfaction of seeing and being seen. It should be noted that Cardinal Pacelli, who was the Vatican's Secretary of State at the time, was instrumental in negotiating the Conciliation (*la Conciliazione*), and was to become the next Pope (Pius XII, 1939-58).

The mention of the "civilizing church's" missionaries "surrounded by little blacks" draws attention to the Catholic Church's African missions, and to the contributing role of Canadian and Quebec religious lay staff, including the OSM. Some of the children have adult faces, revealing the use of photographic aids. The missionary, who raises one arm to heaven while looking down at the children, is borrowed from conventional portrayal of St. Peter Claver, whose life was spent evangelising to African slaves in South America. Given the symmetrical relation of the left hand side of the fresco to the right hand side where the Italian state is portrayed, there is also a parallel alluded to between the Church's African missions and Italian imperialist ventures. Even before Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in the mid-thirties, the Italian state had already been present in East

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<sup>216</sup> My translation. See Footnote 33. "Valley of tears" is taken from the hymn *Salve Regina*. Pope Pius XI, 1922-39. Pacelli became Cardinal in 1929, Secretary of State in 1930, and Pius XII, 1929-1958. *Quadriviri* is a Fascist term borrowed from ancient Rome signifying a group of four officials with extraordinary state powers.

Africa along with other European colonial powers. Although there was a turbulent history between the Vatican and the Italian State over the limits of their authorities (and thus the significance of the Conciliation), the Church's 'civilizing' practice in Africa benefited from Italy's state and military presence there. During the Fascist era some clergy were vocal supporters of government policy and did not see a conflict between patriotism and religious obedience.<sup>217</sup> Father Manfriani is quoted as having said, "Italy was not fighting in Africa because she is cruel ... but she was attempting to spread civilization and Christianity amongst barbarous nations."<sup>218</sup>

Of the civil figures the most significant is clearly that of Mussolini. He is in uniform on a black stallion, diagonally placed in the direction of the Pope (although like all the other figures, his face is turned to the viewer). He is shown as a young man with dark hair, before he adopted the shaved-head style that he was already wearing at this time. He is flanked by his four 'generals.' Although it is not clear who exactly requested the inclusion of the Italian leader and his men in the mural, the rationale for the decision rests on the importance given to the *Conciliazione*, a historical event that had particular repercussions not only for Italians but also for all Catholics. Nincheri has given the Pope superiority over all the religious contemporaries but also over the secular figures, including Mussolini, by raising the Pope aloft on the *sedia gestatoria*. Nevertheless, Mussolini is shown higher than every other figure. Nincheri has chosen to depict him in what would become a standard image: Il Duce riding high on a horse, a pictorial

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<sup>217</sup> Benedetto Maltempi was interned at Petawawa for his pro-Fascist activities; Zanobio Manfriani (the parish priest at NDD 1926-40) was in Italy during the internment period but was also an active supporter of Fascist policies. See Bruti Liberati 196.

<sup>218</sup> Bayley 161.

convention that had been made popular during the Renaissance and expressed qualities of dominance and virility. While the Church's ultimate authority is not challenged in the painting because the Pope is given the primary focus, the balanced and symmetrical composition integrates Mussolini into a harmonious image of moral order, authority and triumph, thereby diminishing the differences between church and state. The fresco makes visually explicit the ideological geography of *italianità* in a single, cogent cosmography within which ecclesiastical and eschatological orders found integration. Nincheri's painting can be thought of as 'triumphal art,' a tradition dating back to ancient Rome. The Italian Renaissance established the model for 'Christian triumphal imagery' where a new naturalism reinterpreted the hieratic quality of the Roman example within the context of a sacred-secular consolidation of power. In this respect, Nincheri's painting may be viewed as a modern *adventus*,<sup>219</sup> or triumphal display of authority whose presence is both a document of, and a lesson in, Italian-ness.

Italian heroes, and those who supported them, who were active in building the 'new' Italy are clearly evident. The *quadrumviri* include Balbo who, as we have seen previously, had been in Montreal recently. Balbo was more than a military leader: as an aviator, he was also a symbol of modernity that included both technical progress and individual fearlessness. The two academicians, Marconi and the Duke of Abruzzi, were also living national heroes whose successes merged modernity with Romantic individualism.

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<sup>219</sup> See Robert Baldwin, "Triumph and the Rhetoric of Power in Italian Renaissance Art," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 9.2 (1990) 7-13. Maria Antonietta Visceglia and Catherine Brice, eds. *Cérémonial et rituel à Rome, XVI-XIX siècles* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1997); Margaret Ann Zaho, "Imago Triumphalis: The Function and Significance of Triumphal Imagery for Italian Renaissance Rulers" (PhD Dissertation, University of Washington, 2000); David Cannadine and Simon Price, *Rituals of Royalty, Power and Ceremony in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987); see also Kantorowicz.

Marconi's scientific innovations came to be associated with Italy's vision of itself as a modern nation, inspiring a positive view of Italy's future. Marconi was particularly important to Italians in Canada because his wireless telegraphy innovations had been partially conducted in Nova Scotia and so he represented Italy in Canada. The Duke of Abruzzi, not only was a member of Italy's Royal Family, he was also an adventurer and explorer. Amongst his feats, he attempted to reach the North Pole and was the first to scale Mt. St. Elias in Alaska, making him another symbol of Italy in the New World. Like Marconi, he represented another potent symbol of singular individuality that since the poet-soldier Gabriele D'Annunzio, and now with Mussolini, stood for a virile, masculine sense of *italianità*.<sup>220</sup>

Amongst the Italian heroes, the only non-clerical person to be granted equal status in the fresco is the "great philanthropist" Lawrence Wilson (1863-1934).<sup>221</sup> Wilson was a Liberal senator whose career and wealth had been built as a wine importer. With the coming of prohibition in Canada and the United States in the 1920s, and the take over of liquor trade by government in Quebec after 1918, Wilson eased himself out of the business. He was Jesuit trained at Collège Sainte-Marie in Montreal, and maintained a strong attachment to the Catholic hierarchy in Quebec. He came to be admired as a philanthropist with links to numerous charitable institutions and causes such as hospitals and schools; in one newspaper report he is referred to as "Chief Sunshine Spreader" a

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<sup>220</sup> See Spackman.

<sup>221</sup> Major A.L. Normandin, ed. *The Canadian Parliamentary Guide 1934* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1934): 101. Wilson donated to universities, hospitals, and charitable residences. He supported musicians by funding study in Paris and local theatre, such as the Stella Theatre; he represented Vaudreuil-Soulanges in the House of Commons 1925-1929, and in 1930 was made Senator. He was married to Hortense Perreault, the daughter of Montreal architect H.M. Perreault. My thanks to Laurier Lacroix for pointing out that Wilson was also an art collector.

name attributed by the “Iroquois at Kingston.” In the painting Wilson is shown in his tunic of Doctor of Law from the University of Ottawa, an honorary degree he had received that same year.<sup>222</sup> He is also wearing the medal of Knight Commander of the Order of Gregory the Great that had been awarded to him the previous year by the Pope, this is an award granted to lay supporters of the Catholic Church.<sup>223</sup> Wilson was known to have argued for a Canadian embassy at the Vatican.

Wilson died a little over five months after the inauguration. His social status is evident in the newspapers’ reports of his funeral described as having been attended by “thousands,” including many of the leading government representatives, and the business and social elite of the day. His reputation was strengthened in the last years of his life when he devoted himself, as he said, to “giving my money back to those who helped me earn it.” He seemed to have a particular interest in issues of “tax evasion by the wealthy” which he called a “crime against the community.” Just before his death, there was a movement to nominate him as a candidate to the mayoralty of mayor of Montreal.

Wilson donated \$2000 towards the completion of the interior decoration of Notre-Dame-de-la Défense.<sup>224</sup> For this he was cheered at the inauguration and when he entered the church a band struck up “Oh Canada.” Over the entrance to the Italian school, where a group photograph was taken, a banner was hung reading “Vive le Grand Philanthrope”

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<sup>222</sup> Senator Maurice Riel, in an interview with Salvatore claimed that the idea of including Mussolini in the painting had come from Wilson. Filippo Salvatore, *Fascism and the Italians of Montreal: An Oral History 1922-1945* (Toronto: Guernica, 1998).

<sup>223</sup> The award was founded in 1834.

<sup>224</sup> The amount was also reported in Italian lira (25,000), *La Presse* 25 September 1933: 21.

(Fig.31). *Le Devoir* reported his speech, in which his admiration for all things Italian, including Il Duce, is clear:

Ce pays (l'Italie) n'a-t-il pas produit des génies dont les oeuvres sont insurpassables sinon inégalables ? Des géants les ont immortalisés. Dans la littérature, Dante, Pétrarque, Le Tasse pour ne nommer que ceux-là. La peinture et la sculpture ont produit des Michel-Ange, des Raphaël, des Léonard de Vinci, des Nincheri. La musique a donné des Palestrina, des Phillippe de Néri, des Grégoire-le-Grand, ces derniers depuis ont été canonisés. Ce qui prouve que l'Église a été l'instigatrice des œuvres d'art, dans tous les domaines, par ses moines, et par ses papes ... Des grands hommes, des philanthropes, vous en avez eu dans toutes les classes de la société, et maintenant que dire de celui qui, à force de volonté et de génie, est parvenu à ouvrir les portes du Vatican et faire du pape un homme libre, celui dont vous prononcez le nom avec respect et admiration, j'ai nommé : Mussolini.<sup>225</sup>

The monumental painting was made possible by a renewed patriotism for the Italian homeland, which had been growing throughout the 1920s, and was assisted in part by the active intervention by Italy and the Vatican themselves. The signing of the accord in 1929 was an event in which the nationalist sentiments of three groups – francophone Quebecers, Italian immigrants, and Italian nationals – intersected in mutual agreement. The completion of the church was integral in consolidating the community and strengthening its cultural identity, and the Italian Fascist state had certainly assisted in this. The successful growth of Fascism in Italy was due to the state's ability to integrate all aspects of cultural life, both ancient and modern, into the rhetoric of "corporatism," or the merging of individual and group in ways that earlier governments had failed.

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<sup>225</sup> "A N.-D. de la Défense." *Le Devoir* 25 Sept. 1933: 2.

The fresco's positive reception is a testament to Mussolini's success as a statesman and the attraction many felt to his political style and rhetorical agility. In Montreal opponents to his policies were a minority; anti-fascists comprised Socialists, Communists, and union activists, a number of whom were Italians, like the outspoken Antonino Spada.<sup>226</sup> Protest accompanied the inauguration ceremonies, escalating later in the day into a riot as Communists and Blackshirts violently confronted each other.<sup>227</sup> In the years before the war, bomb threats were directed at the church and clergy called for police protection. With the organization of Adrien Arcand's Nazi group and on the eve of war, *Saturday Night* warned that Arcand's leaflets had been distributed to churches including NDD.<sup>228</sup> The journalist describes the fresco that by now had become contentious to many: "one black figure overshadowed all the others, overshadows all that side of the picture, dominates everything except the Pope himself. It is Mussolini on a charger."<sup>229</sup>

### Guido Nincheri

As we have seen, Guido Nincheri was responsible for the interior decorations of NDD and for its design and was admired for this both inside and outside the Italian community. In the context of the central issue of this study, that is, the relationship of public art to

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<sup>226</sup> The editor and journalist Antonino Spada was a vocal anti-Fascist. See A.V. Spada, *Gli Italiani*; Bruti Liberati; Iacovetta, *Enemies Within*; and the Antonino Spada Papers at the National Archives of Canada.

<sup>227</sup> "Échauffourée entre Rouges et Fascistes," *La Patrie* 25 Sept. 1933: 16.

<sup>228</sup> Adrien Arcand (1899-1967) was a newspaper journalist and founder of *Le Gogul*; he was a political activist and leader of the extreme right from the 1920s. He was anti-communist, anti-Semitic, and promoted Nazism. In 1934 he founded the Parti national social chrétien, later renamed the Parti de l'unité nationale. During the war he was interred as an enemy alien; he continued to be active in politics after the war. See Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975).

<sup>229</sup> John Hoare, "Swastika Over Quebec: Party Record," *Saturday Night*, 23 Sept. 1939: 3.

Italian nationalism, questions about Nincheri's artistic production take on a specific focus. Apart from its expressed religious function, one can ask in what ways the artist's work contributed to the cultural identity represented by the church? Further still, how does the subject matter and style, while clearly guided by religious convention, contribute to a sense of *italianità*?

Nincheri was primarily a religious decorative painter who also designed a large body of religious stained glass work; although the latter is his most lasting legacy, his mural painting is also noteworthy.<sup>230</sup> His training at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence prepared him for the demands of ornamental wall painting, a technical skill which was highly sought after in North American cities.<sup>231</sup> He emigrated from Italy to Boston in 1913 (the war interrupted his original destination to South America) and was domiciled in Montreal as of 1914. Although he spent many years in Montreal he worked on commissions in many cities across Canada and in the United States. By the 1950s he had permanently relocated to Providence, Rhode Island.

An example of Nincheri's early secular mural painting displays characteristics of Liberty, the Italian version of Art Nouveau.<sup>232</sup> In Tuscany this style had been strongly influenced by English Pre-Raphaelitism because of the English 'colony' that had resided there

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<sup>230</sup> See Vanasse and Villata on Nincheri's stained glass.

<sup>231</sup> Paul Labonne and Ginette Laroche. *Guido Nincheri: A Florentine Artist in North America* (Montreal: Hochelaga-Maisonneuve Historical Society, 2001). This exhibition catalogue provides the most extensive published biographical information on the artist. See also Sylvana Micillo Villata, *Guido Nincheri: maître verrier, les vitraux des églises montréalaises* (Montreal: Société de Diffusion du Patrimoine Artistique et Culturel des Italo-Canadiens, 1995).

<sup>232</sup> A meeting hall (1911) and a private residence (1912) in Florence, the first since destroyed, see Labonne 7.



throughout the nineteenth century. As a student of Adolfo De Carolis (1874-1928) at the *Accademia*, Nincheri would have apprenticed in a decorative style that merged symbolist and neo-Renaissance elements, which was his teacher's innovative contribution to Italian art. De Carolis was a successful book illustrator, particularly known for his woodblock illustrations of works by D'Annunzio, who was also a friend. He also executed historical and sacred mural paintings for which he became nationally admired. His early death interrupted a major opus, the murals of the Podestà in Bologna, a work that was completed by his assistants (Fig. 52). This last work most forcefully displayed De Carolis's homage to Michelangelo, a point that is relevant to his student Nincheri's own production. The latter's loyalty to his teacher continued even after leaving Italy as evidenced by some remaining correspondence.<sup>233</sup> But perhaps the most telling document of Nincheri's artistic formation is a photograph from his student days around 1904-05.<sup>234</sup> Nincheri is shown on top of the roof of the *Accademia* standing between De Carolis and another teacher Giuseppe Lunardi (Fig. 50). Nincheri, slightly more elevated than the others because he is standing on the spine of the roof and thus is placed at the apex of the triangular composition formed by the figures, strikes a confident pose. Dressed in artist beret, smock and cape, with gloves in hand, he is the visual counterpart to De Carolis, also in smock and beret, proudly standing with one hand on hip. In the background we see the rooftops of Florence, Brunelleschi's *duomo* and Giotto's *campanile*. It is an image of artistic identity that, in the context of De Carolis's innovated rediscovery of mural painting and Renaissance genres, came to stand for a modern sense of Italy and Italian

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<sup>233</sup> Conversation with Roger Boccini, step-grandson of Guido Nincheri, Montreal, Sept 30, 2003.

<sup>234</sup> Reproduced in Franco Solmi, *Adolfo De Carolis, la sintesi immaginaria* (Bologna: Grafis Edizioni, 1979): 9 ; the original is in a private collection.

art. The *duomo* also appears in the distance behind the figure of Saint Giuliana Falconiere in one of the individual portraits in the Church, further marking the Church, and its chief decorator, as Florentine (Fig. 41, 42).

At the crossroad of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Liberty style was overtaken by more explicitly modern styles. Indeed, in this context, De Carolis seems dated and Nincheri conventional to the extreme. And yet, while Nincheri as a church painter was limited both by convention and by the tastes of his local patrons, he nevertheless succeeded in incorporating aspects of modernity in his uses of Italian *art nouveau* (known as Liberty). It reveals itself through the legacy of his artistic formation that was shaped by De Carolis's new pictorial vocabulary. This style could be alternately sensual and mystic, traditional in its historical references, audacious in the application of iconographic and stylistic quotes (drawn from a variety of historical periods) in a new formulation of *italianità*. The importance to this discussion is that Nincheri understood himself as 'a modern'. Under the tutelage of De Carolis, he was not simply a decorator but an artist for whom mural painting was both ancient and modern in the way that De Carolis had redefined it for Italian art (Fig. 53, 54 and Fig. 55, 56).

Nincheri's contemporaries in Montreal hailed him as a student of Michelangelo, an assessment that continues to be professed by his current supporters who describe him as a "Florentine artist working in the Renaissance tradition."<sup>235</sup> In his time, as now, his apologists overlooked the artist's Liberty and Neo-Renaissance influence, and thus his

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<sup>235</sup> Labonne and Laroche, *Nincheri: A Florentine Artist*. Newspapers continue to exploit the comparison: "Is Chateau's Art by Montreal's Michelangelo?" *Montreal Gazette*, 15 July 2003, A2-3.

modernity, preferring to see him as a classicist in order to conserve the aura attached to that claim. But Liberty was itself influenced by the modern visual culture of the cinema, which also makes its appearance in the artist's work especially in his modern, sensual female figures whose hair is contemporarily fashioned. Nincheri's ability to assimilate elements of popular culture (cinema and opera), and to appropriate a Pre-Raphaelite flavoured mystic-sensuality, displays a flexibility that was necessary to his commercial survival. Examples of this adaptability are most evident in his secular commissions such as those for the Dufresne home in Montreal. In many ways Nincheri resembles many other Italian-born artists such as the movie-house painter Emmanuel Briffa whose Italian academic training was put to the service of the modern urban experience of spectacle (Fig. 49). Liberty lent itself best to the decorative arts, where it seemed suited to the idea of luxury and pleasure promoted by the products to which it was applied. We see its influence most clearly in Nincheri's secular work such as the 'Greek mythological' scenes in the Belmont Theatre in Montreal<sup>236</sup> and in the allegorical scenes at the Château Dufresne.<sup>237</sup> But this stylistic turn is not limited to his secular work, it is also evident in NDD, from the angels, whose hairstyle recalls the 'movie vamps' of the 1920s (Fig. 44), to the Adam and Eve (Fig. 46) dressed in leafy paganism (see also Fig. 47), who seem to have stepped out of the cinema screen. Eve's cascading hair and bare breast decidedly

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<sup>236</sup> Dombowsky, 40-41. Dombowsky quotes the *Montreal Standard*, 20 November 1920: 17: "The large panels on each side of the wall represent scenes taken from Greek mythology, while the ceiling has a design of twelve beautiful women in graceful pose, who represent the working hours of the theatre. These paintings are the work of Guido Ninchere [sic]." An advertisement in the same paper on opening day states "the painting and decorations of all plaster and woodwork executed by Mr Guido Nincherie [sic]," *Montreal Standard* 16 April 1921: 28. See also Dane Lancken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden era, 1884-1938* (Waterloo, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1993): 82-85.

<sup>237</sup> Between 1920 and 1938 Nincheri used *marouflage* technique to paint the walls of the Château Dufresne, the family home of the wealthy building contractors brothers Oscar and Marius Dufresne; Nincheri rented his studio from them. Labonne, 2001, 13. Nincheri's early work as a set painter for the Boston Opera House (1913) may have brought him into contact with them.

mark her as a *femme fatale*. Here, and in other examples of his religious figures, we have a Liberty style that by the 1920s had been shaped by the visual hyperboles of the cinema.<sup>238</sup> Melodrama, historical epics, costume drama, and mania for opera – the entertainment of the masses – infiltrates Nincheri’s sacred spaces and contribute to the monumental effect and visual excess of the fresco.<sup>239</sup>

The success of NDD iconographical program in terms of the congregation’s appreciation is due to the ‘total environment’ that seemed to speak to Italian collective identity even if it was primarily religious in purpose. His ability to understand the relation between image and architecture was his strength, as too his skill in knowing how to address spectators *within* their space. As a commercial artist he matches scores of other Italian academically trained immigrant artists hired to make urban America beautiful (Fig. 48). But what distinguishes him from the rest is the degree of his success. Due as much to his technical expertise as to his entrepreneurial *savoir-faire*, his proficient output, founding of a stained-glass studio, and management of a large staff, all attest to his understanding of the business of art. In Montreal, the business of sacred art was particularly profitable. It is what drew him and an earlier generation like the Carli – who, incidentally, produced much of the statuary for NDD – to emigrate. For Nincheri, this also meant the risk of losing Florence, which, as we see in the group portrait from his student days, was central to his concept as artist. That Nincheri did not attempt to participate in Montreal’s annual

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<sup>238</sup> See Giorgio Bertolini, “Shipwrecked Spectators: Italy’s Immigrants at the Movies in New York, 1906-1916,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 44 (1999): 39-53.

<sup>239</sup> See sketch “The Penitent Mary Magdalene” (c.1931); the more obviously eroticised figures include “Woman Bathing,” sketch for the Sweets Refreshment Rooms on Saint-Catherine Street (1923, now demolished), Labonne, 22 and 23; and the decorations for the Dufresne home (1920-38).

Spring Exhibitions, as Casini, Briffa, and Sciortino had done, is perplexing given his self-promotion as a Professor of Art.<sup>240</sup> Nincheri should have gravitated towards Montreal's *accademia*; one must conclude he was simply too busy with commissions.

While we know he had painted some landscapes, dark brooding ones in the *fin-de-siècle* symbolist style, and portraits, there are not enough to establish him as other than a decorative painter.<sup>241</sup> This lack of an exhibition history has excluded him from an art history based on easel painting. Nincheri has 'risen' above the crowd of the nearly nameless Italian immigrant artists by virtue of his output (and the fact that religious art has survived better than other forms), but like countless others he was simply another migrant art worker navigating the currents of international economic forces to which the art market also belonged. The art history he more rightfully belongs to is that of visual culture and of labour history rather than with a conventional fine art discourse, the latter tending not to view the making of art as labour bought and sold, and as art as a mobile, exchangeable product. This point is important because it underlines the relevance of Nincheri's immigrant status to his social status as an artist. It must be assumed that his three month internment at Camp Petawawa in 1940,<sup>242</sup> a penalty based on his depiction of

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<sup>240</sup> In the only existing advertisement, Nincheri describes himself as "Prof. Guido Nincheri, Diploma Grand Prix, Academy of Fine Arts Florence," Advertisement, *The Montreal Churchman* 25.4 (1937): 12.

<sup>241</sup> Ginette Laroche describes Nincheri's landscapes as "revealing another side of his personality" because of their "painterly qualities" and "darker tones." Labonne and Laroche 39.

<sup>242</sup> Mario Duliani's account of his experience as an internee at Petawawa does not name the artists who were there but he writes: "Painting has also a few respectable devotees. One artist of indisputable talent is an internee who headed an academy in Montreal. Then there is a young and brilliant former student at the Brera Academy of Milan, a noted portraitist destined for a great future. There are also numerous Germans who paint flowers, animals and landscapes with a sure sense of colour. Sculpture finds one Montrealer of Italian birth a devotee worthy of his great predecessors in his county of origin." Mario Duliani, *La ville sans femmes* (Montreal: les Éditions Pascal, 1945); reissued as *Città senza donne* (Montreal: Gustavo D'Errico editore, 1946); and *The City Without Women: A Chronicle of Internment Life in Canada during*

Mussolini in NDD, was a severe strike against his social respectability as an artist in Montreal. At the time of his imprisonment his family successfully argued that the image of the Fascist leader had not been part of his original design.<sup>243</sup> While this led to an early release, the experience marked him. A more promising future in Providence, Rhode Island (within a large Franco American population), eventually lead to his permanent relocation there which he undertook gradually starting in 1941.

The artist's internment at Petawawa proved one point: that for all his regionalist sympathies with Florence as artist and citizen, an identification that made him socially superior to most working class Italians, to the Canadian state Nincheri was just another dangerous alien. Ironically, this view encouraged Italian immigrants towards stronger nationalist identification, a desire that was made stronger by a common sense of displacement. *Italianità* fulfilled the need to congregate beyond the parameters of family or town, as a defence against the social pressures from outside the community. While Nincheri and the religious order that ran NDD both identified with Florence and saw this as a means of differentiating themselves from other Italian immigrants, and thus as a sign of their own class superiority, there was nevertheless, an Italy to which they now all belonged. This generic Italy was a recent invention constructed in part by the sense of dislocation and loss produced by the immigrant experience, aggrandized by the propaganda efforts of Italian counsellor staff, and rebuked by the Canadian state. If

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*the Second World War*, translated from the French and Italian, and with an Introduction, by Antonino Mazza (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1994): 97.

<sup>243</sup> Nincheri's release from the internment camp based on the evidence of sketches supplied by his family is a frequently cited anecdote. See Salvatore.

Nincheri was hailed as another Michelangelo, it was not only because of aesthetic criteria, but also because of the nationalist sentiments this evoked in his admirers.

De Carolis, the artist's teacher, was in many respects responsible for reviving and modernizing Michelangelo. The strongest example of this is his most well known work, a colossal fresco cycle in Bologna which was begun in 1910 and finished after his death in 1928. It was seen by Nincheri before emigrating and again on a 1926 trip to Italy after he received a large payment for the decoration of Saint-Viateur Church.<sup>244</sup> Nincheri's best examples of this virile style, characterized by excessive musculature, is seen in the falling angels in the Church of Saint-Michael-the-Archangel in Montreal (1918-1926)<sup>245</sup> (Fig. 63), and, in a more ambitious but less successful series of cycles in St. Ann's in Woonsocket, Rhode Island (1941-48)<sup>246</sup> (Fig. 61, 62). While the Renaissance that was being rediscovered in Italy in the early twentieth century was indebted to English Pre-Raphaelism, its meaning in the hands of De Carolis, and in turn Nincheri, was quite different than its earlier symbolist interpretation. While it is true that Florence was Nincheri's home, Florentine art as seen through De Carolis, came to stand for all of modern Italy. As Giambi writes, De Carolis's illustrious men display a confidence and "heroic moralism" that "suffocates the intimate symbolism" of his earlier work. The characters "sacredness" is underscored by their "slow gestures," "eloquent form,"

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<sup>244</sup> My thanks to Roger (Nincheri) Boccini for information about Nincheri's 1926 trip. The decoration of the *Salone del Podestà* in Bologna was awarded to De Carolis in 1908; he moved to Bologna from Florence in 1910 to work on it; the work soon began to draw admirers, including Maurice Denis who saw it in 1914; it was completed after his death in 1928 by his assistants; much of it has since been destroyed. See Solmi.

<sup>245</sup> My conversation with Kevin Cohalan, Montreal Mile End district historian, May 3 2004.

<sup>246</sup> Paul A. Bourget and Donald L. Hoard. *Towers of Faith: St. Ann's Church, Woonsocket, Rhode Island, 1890-1990*. Woonsocket RI: St. Ann's Church Corp., 1990.

“expressionless faces;” they move like “demi-gods” in an attitude that prefigures the Fascist sensibility in art.<sup>247</sup> What De Carolis adopted was not simply a painterly style but an idea about radical self-renewal, a deliberate and wilful cultural rebirth. While Nincheri’s abilities and artistic vision fall far short of his teacher’s, his frescos in NDD capitalize on the Florentine heritage not simply because it had personal associations for both himself and the priests of the church, but because De Carolis had made it relevant again to a modern Italy, a country in search of a nationalist identity.

Nincheri has strewn contemporary heroes along the entire length of the base of the apse, which itself seems to function like a proscenium. It is an approach that De Carolis used in his tribute to Tuscany’s greatest men in a 1922-23 mural in Arezzo<sup>248</sup> (Fig. 51). In this work, famous artists and thinkers stand shoulder to shoulder in a narrow space, their figures depicted in the clarity of Pre-Raphaelite outline; at the centre of the composition is Michelangelo. While the most famous illustration of this visual concept is Raphael’s *School of Athens*, that De Carolis emulates by inserting his self-portrait amongst the famous just as Raphael had done, and that Nincheri would do as well in *his* pantheon (Fig. 37). De Carolis rejects the deep architectural setting for a shallow one that recalls an earlier Renaissance style. The sense of real bodies standing on a stage heightens, as Barthes would say, the “reality effect” and develops a sense of historical realism that implies a genealogical relation, between men, and between the group and the city of Arezzo. In Nincheri’s painting, the living personalities are distinguished from the sacred

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<sup>247</sup> Simonetta Di Pino Giambi, *Adolpho De Carolis, il piacere dell’arte* (Firenze: Pitti arte e libri, 1992): 121-123.

<sup>248</sup> *Ritratto di uomini illustri Aretini* (portrait of the illustrious men of Arezzo).



by an emphasis on outline and colour saturation. The figures are depicted in a horizontal register, in syntagmatic relation where they constitute the 'real-present.' Because of Nincheri's symmetrically balanced composition, this group is paradigmatically related to the vertical register that forms the sacred-immemorial past. By situating the contemporaries within an eschatological reading of time, Nincheri emulates the cyclical nature of sacred time. The figures along the base of the apse do not simply imitate or reflect the past, but stand in equivalence to it as only myth's anti-chronological rationale can allow. Their realism is used to negate a historical concept of time in favour of a mythic one, producing what Walter Benjamin calls "messianic time," "a simultaneity of the past and future in an all-absorbing, *engorged* present, within which the future "nests."

As Marin writes, it produces an "all-at-onceness and all-overness," a "relation of pure vision."<sup>249</sup> It becomes a history painting that masks its own enunciation, where nothing is happening and yet all is displayed. What the viewer sees is a stratified, hierarchical cosmos where power and meaning circulate uninterrupted, an epic event filled with extraordinary individuals and valorous heroes to which a working class viewer could do no more than bare silent witness. And yet, in paradoxal fashion, even as the viewer becomes invisible in the face of Divine and Secular omnipotence, his immigrant 'otherness' is, at least temporarily, dispelled. His psychic integrity is restored by the warm light generated by the centre of power, or the power of being at the centre.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*. Trans. Martha Houle. Foreward Tom Conley. *Theory and History of Literature*, 57 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>250</sup> See Geertz, "Centres, Kings, and Charisma."

The discursive nature of the artwork is underscored by Nincheri's self-portrait. By placing himself in the picture he erases himself as narrator, it is an ironic stance that demonstrates his awareness that the fiction of representation is the painter's most truthful act. Nincheri the artist has produced a picture that seems to have painted itself. It may be a show of vanity or homage, but likely a bit of both. It recalls René Payant's discussion of the painter David's relation to his patron the Emperor Napoleon, a relationship Payant sees as a symbiotic one. Like two organisms living one within the other to the advantage of both, the painter exists in the shadow of his hero in order that he may live forever – "je me glisserai à la postérité dans l'ombre de mon héros."<sup>251</sup> Nincheri, too, slides into history by slipping into the shadow of his heroes who exist at the centre of power, an *italianità* that he both depicts and embodies, and to which all eyes must turn.

By the time Nincheri finished the main fresco in NDD, in 1933, the Italian Renaissance as a nationalist symbol had already been exploited in Montreal with Dante and with Cabot (the latter was completed but in storage because of the political wrangling in which it was immersed). While the fresco's political references are explicit with the presence of Mussolini and his generals, the means with which the aesthetics support this political subject matter is less explicit but significant nevertheless, in terms of both style and materiality. The technique of fresco painting which Nincheri introduced into Montreal's church architecture was seen by himself, his supporters, and the wider art audience, both professional and lay, as an *Italian* technique. It was also historically linked to a period that in Western culture was regarded as a high point of cultural supremacy. Nincheri and

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<sup>251</sup> René Payant, "Entre (d)eux (Jacques Louis David)," in *Vedute: Pièces détachées sur l'art 1976-1987*. (Montreal: Éditions Trois, 1987): 145-160.

his patrons were audacious in the scope of their desire to create a modern panorama of *grandi uomini* in the Renaissance tradition, and that his teacher De Carolis had revived, not only in size but in its conceptual confidence as well.

The nationalist drive being promoted by the community's elite was not simply an attempt to strengthen already existing sentiments but, in reality, a concerted effort to 'invent' a national consciousness. As emigrants from poor regions such as Molise and Campobasso, parishioners' sense of group identity at the time can best be described as *campanilismo*, i.e. one 'belonged' to the area reached by the bell chimes of the local church; in other words, they were villagers first. Thinking of themselves as 'Italians' was a very new idea that only emerged as a popular concept with WWI. One of the central ideas of this study is that Italian nationalism in Montreal while directly guided by government bureaucrats, was indirectly facilitated by the ambiguous social status held by the new ethnic immigrant minority within the existing socio-political structure. In the era of 'monument mania,' issues of collective identity – language, ethnicity, religion, and class – were all filtered through the lens of nationalism. Not to claim a nationalist label meant remaining outside the circles of social and cultural power. Immigrants could only remain villagers, each with their own dialects and remembered traditions, within Little Italy. In order to exist outside the neighbourhood, to be *cognized* by Canadians, they had to become 'Italians.'

Nincheri's fresco is one example of how art could be used as an instrument in *becoming* Italian, but what this meant to the spectator – the parishioners who came in for weekly

masses, funerals, marriages, baptisms – remains an issue. On the one hand, having one's national heroes and saints symbolically present at the most solemn rituals that chart the passages of human life could be reassuring. Unfortunately, in the context of the times, the gap between the upper and lower levels of social hierarchy did not necessarily favour such an easy *rapprochement* between the audience and those depicted in the scene of power.

Nincheri's fresco painting merits being described as 'monumental' for its audacious dimensions. But it is also monumental in the figurative sense because it is a declaration of collective identity, a self-naming. It is a visual projection of a community imagining itself, mapping the limits of its conceptual territory in order to affirm its assumptions and expectations about where it came from and where it is going, integrating the ecclesiastical, eschatological into an orderly, and ordering, universe. The painting depicts the community's heroes and authority figures, juxtaposing real time against mythic time, secular power against sacred power. We have in effect a 'national portrait gallery' where saints, angels, and heads of state co-exist in what Benedict Anderson has coined an "imagined community": "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Anderson 7.

## Conclusion: Hunting for Heroes, Old and New

Since the early 1990s writers and artists have been actively examining the nature and function of monuments (including memorials, funerary markers and other commemorative objects) in order to discover how social memory is conveyed. As a form of 'public address' art has become the focus of investigations into the relationship between art and a community's historical consciousness. Monuments, such as those discussed herein, represent assumptions we have about our place in history. In doing so they both reflect and create historical fiction. Writers such as Hayden White and Roland Barthes have argued that historical texts like all representations are 'constructions.' Historical narrative organises the remnants of the past so that its relation to us has meaning. But in order to do so, the fragments of time must be arranged in a shape, which is (already) meaningful to us. This is what White is referring to when he writes that the form of historical narrative contributes to its content. The paradox of historical representation (whether as text or image) is that regardless of the facts upon which it is supposedly based, it is always subject to conventions.

The shape of history, however, is subject not only to conventions but also to intentions or motivations of those who employ it, and in this respect it can be described as rhetorical. In the preceding pages, the rhetoric of Italian Canadian historical consciousness has been described as one built on notions of the hero: men whose actions and ideas came to be seen as symbols of *italianità*, the amorphous assemblage of essential qualities that characterize the 'best' aspects of Italian culture. Renaissance figures Dante, Cabot, and

Michelangelo were used because of their powerful associative role in calling up a vision of a modern and confident Italy. The Renaissance represents a highpoint in Italian history, an age of exploration, material and cultural wealth and artistic excellence, that became a useful tool to the Italian state from its founding in the nineteenth century, up to and including the Italian Fascist period.

For the Italians of Montreal in the interwar period, paying tribute to these figures and their legacy was a way of displaying cultural pride and group solidarity. This moment of collective ascendancy marks the end of the great wave of late nineteenth-century Italian immigration. By the 1920s and 30s the first immigration period had ended; by now those who had arrived in the city had built a community with its own newspapers, parish, schools, social clubs and mutual aid societies. They had established shops and professional activities and become involved in the administrative circles of their institutions. By this time, a second generation was growing and integrating itself into the life of its neighbours who at this time were primarily working class francophones. Italian artists and artisans continued to be in demand for their technical skills and efficient working methods. The three central artists discussed in the preceding pages – Balboni, Casini, and Nincheri – were first-generation immigrants drawn by the promise of plentiful work and a network of professional and social support.

When *Dante*, the first Italian public artwork, was presented in 1922, it was proudly displayed as a symbol of Italian cultural triumph. The Italians shared the spotlight with the city's other 'founding citizens,' the French and English. As we have seen, the

Renaissance generated symbolic capital for modern Italy but also for other Western nations. By calling attention to a Latin fraternity with the French, Italians hoped to be accepted into the larger Montreal society. At the same time, the English saw Dante as a forefather of all Western literature, including their own literary heritage, and welcomed the monument into their own pantheon.

The controversy surrounding the statue of the navigator Cabot was centred on a contest amongst the French, English and Italians over the meaning of the navigator's legacy. To the English and Italians, Cabot was the discoverer of Canada, although the former saw him as a servant, and the latter as a visionary. On the other hand, for the French he was no more than a secondary figure to Cartier. Regardless of their differing perspectives, for all three groups the monument's value rested on its social currency. The Cabot legend was used to argue all their cases for ethno-cultural pedigree. The debate lingered for a decade; the compromises that were reached begrudgingly in 1935. Michelangelo, while not directly represented in any of the works discussed in this study, nevertheless was present as the spiritual force and aesthetic canon behind Nincheri's work in the church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense. As "Montreal's own Michelangelo," Nincheri shared in the legacy of an artist that Western art had adopted as its own progenitor, but Casini and Balboni could not help but also be compared to the same legacy of great Italian artists.

In all three examples, Italian culture and history were used to legitimate Italian presence in the city and to cross ethno-linguistic boundaries. Ironically, given the context of demographics and history of Italian immigration, most immigrants were working class

southerners for whom this ideal (northern) Italian past was a remote abstraction. The social negotiations that took place amongst all three ethno-linguistic groups (Italian, French, and English) were accomplished through a cultural vocabulary that had little real connection to the lives of most immigrants. Although it was meant to benefit the community as a whole, Italian art and culture remained in the hands of the social hierarchy seeking to distance itself from the working class audience which it was purported to address. The long-standing negative reception of Italian immigrants by their 'host' countries precipitated internal class divisions that were compounded by class and regional prejudices established in Italy. Thus, the idea of Italy that was celebrated was a fractured one whose integrity was formed by a network of institutional forces that spoke on behalf of its citizens.

Historians of Italians in Canada, such as Robert Harney, have been critical of the impulse to exploit history in order to promote cultural privilege, a motivation that applies to all the artworks that have been discussed. Harney writes, "the manipulation of the past to create a pedigree in the present is not unique to any ethnic group. That it happens at all is the consequence of the rather understandable but mistaken assumption that ethnic group status in North America and thus at least partly the individual's sense of "eth-class," derives from notions of being "long in the land" and of respectability.<sup>253</sup>" Referring to the writing of Marxist philosopher Franz Fanon, Harney explains how the construction of a "glorious past" is employed as a compensating mechanism for disenfranchised groups but does nothing to change social realities. He understands how filio-pietism, or heroic

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<sup>253</sup> Robert Harney "Caboto and Other *Parentela*: The Uses of the Italian-Canadian Past," *Arrangiarsi* 37-38.



adulation, helps counterbalance *atimia*, ethnic inferiority complex. But he is also highly suspicious of what he calls “*scopritorismo* – a hunt for *italianità*” as a remedy to immigrants’ sense of lack of status and social agency. As a historian he is especially critical of the practice of constructing idealized “surrogate histories” that do not reflect the lived experience of actual immigrants.

As fellow historians Roberto Perin and Angelo Principe have shown, the story of the Cabot monument demonstrates how historical events, even when their facts are less than clear, can be used to promote social power. But as this dissertation has attempted to illustrate, while these special interests existed and often times came into conflict with each other, they shared a common lexicon based on differently oriented perspectives of nationalism. The artworks – Dante, Cabot, and Nincheri’s church fresco – were all put to the service of this one central theme. In the period of monument mania that followed World War I, Italians began to raise tributes to their heroes in the same vein that the English and French of Montreal were valorizing their own. The artworks exploited icons of Italian mastery in order to elevate the social status of the group by associating it with an Italy to which the West was indebted. For some, commissioning the artworks had offered the opportunity to influence the group as a whole, for others it was a way of ballasting the social inferiority and isolation that resulted from the immigrant experience. While there were conflicts within the Italian community, based on political inflection and personal animosities, all seemed to benefit from such a promotional enterprise, until the start of WWII when the situation changed drastically. While the artworks did not explain the historical forces, political and economic in nature, that created the realities of

immigrants' lives, they offered compensation in the forms of 'positive' examples with which they could identify. As the focal points of ceremonies such as inaugural festivities, commemorative rituals, and feast day celebrations, they had an affective power over the life of the Italian community.

Harney identified some key issues in the Cabot case that he feels are inherent to the pitfalls of writing about ethnic history. Writing in the late 1980s, he recognized a division emerging between historians and the community that formed the subject of their study. In reviewing the historiography, he identified two dominant themes or tropes in ethnic history writing. The creation of pantheon, an idea to which all the works in the preceding pages subscribe, is one of these. Another is the notion of historical salvage, the compulsion to redress the inequities of the past so that they serve the "therapeutic" needs of the present. The Italians of Montreal certainly felt that artworks offered compensation for the inequities of their class and social disempowerment. Historical reconstitution, i.e. the righting of past wrongs, continues to be advocated by many groups who feel they have been collectively short-changed by historical circumstance. These include groups lobbying for redress of Italians interned during WWII as enemies of Canada. These efforts have polarized historians from the community and from each other. Franca Iacovetta and Roberto Perin have been critical of the endeavour to revise the historical record and speak politically.<sup>254</sup> This same controversy over the uses of the historical past colours the debates surrounding Mario Duliani's 1945 *La ville sans femmes*, a polemical

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<sup>254</sup> See Iacovetta *et al*, *Enemies Within*.

account of his experiences in the Petawawa internment camp.<sup>255</sup> Should the book be treated as a primary or secondary source? That's the methodological question. While internment camp experiences have been the focus of recent debates over the uses and abuses of history, Harney has pointed out that the historiography of Italian Canadian history offers many examples of *scopritorismo*, not the least being Vangelisti's text, *Gli Italiani in Canada*, which is central to this dissertation. Clearly a personal account of the history of NDD and its community, the book nevertheless provides invaluable details. As a source of information, it rests in the gray zone between primary and secondary sources and in some respects shares the problematic status of Duliani's book. The reliability of documentary sources, while clearly a serious issue in art historical research, nevertheless suggests that the weight accorded to 'evidence' is relative to the manner in which it is approached and applied.

Harney's comments influence the critical position of this dissertation that has attempted to unmask the tropes he identified as endemic to ethnic history writing. At the same time the study has sought to articulate the discursive nature of ethnic history by situating it within a confluence of factors, including the social, political, and economic forces that press upon the immigrant experience. The dissertation raised several important points that deserve further attention. The migrant experience of Italian artists presents documentary and methodological problems that impede analysis. While historians have identified the

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<sup>255</sup> Mario Duliani is identified as an Italian government spy by Luigi Bruti Liberti. He was a dramatist and journalist who arrived in Montreal in 1936 on the invitation of the Canadian Paris consul and editor of *La Presse*. He worked as a journalist for Adrien Arcand, the head of the Nazi party in Canada. He died in 1964. Luigi Bruti Liberti, *Il Canada, l'Italia e il fascismo, 1919-1945* (Roma: Bonacci Editore, 1984): 153. See also Roberto Perin, "Actor or Victim? Mario Duliani and His Internment Narrative," in Iacovetta, Perin, and Principe 312-334.

transition from migration to immigration as centred around the issue of settlement, does this concept apply to the field of (migrant) art? David Karel reflects on the complexity of writing a history of migrant artists when he states “Or, les artistes issus de ces populations ne reflètent pas toujours les tendances démographiques majeures de celles-ci, en raison de leur nombre relatif ou de leur mobilité: leur histoire obéit parfois à ses lois propres.”<sup>256</sup>

Another important issue is to further investigate the role of women in the period covered herein. Each minor history contains its own marginal histories and, therefore, more research is needed and new questions need to be posed to uncover women’s role in the history of Italian artists in Canada. Women’s economic function in managing migrants’ boarding houses is already recognized, and their organizational duties in the mutual aid societies have also been studied. Women’s social networking was important for disseminating information about social service programs. The support women’s groups provided was exploited in Italy under Fascism where their organizational skills were used to propagandize government policy. Women’s relationship to Fascism in Canada is much less understood. We have examples of how they participated in some Fascist rituals such as the ‘ring ceremony,’ which took place in churches such as NDD in order to sacralize the secular act.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Karel x.

<sup>257</sup> Bayley 161. See Antonino Spada *The Italians in Canada* 125. For women’s role under Fascism see Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). See also Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, and Luigi Pautasso, “La Donna Italiana durante il periodo Fascista in Toronto, 1930-1940,” in Betty Boyd Caroli *et al*, *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978): 168-186.

Women's iconographical status in Italian Canadian art needs to be explored, and so too their role in the production of art, whether as artists in their own right or as studio assistants. Nincheri sensualized sacred figures such as angels and employed gendered concepts in religious iconography (for example, "widows" are separated from "virgins" in the NDD fresco). The conflation between the sexual and the sacred reflects Nincheri's double role as a decorative artist (influenced by Liberty style), and as an artist employed by religious patrons, an overlap that may reflect social ambiguities and contradictions. This merging of female types is most apparent in a comparison of the nymphs painted for the Dufresne home and the angels of NDD who evoke a similar sensuality. The sexuality in Nincheri's sacred art could also be examined through a comparison with other artists such as his contemporary Ozias Leduc, the symbolist painter who was as prolific a religious painter.<sup>258</sup> Another avenue to follow is the influence of the cinema, with its vamps, strongmen, moral *imbroglios*, and epic narratives. The cinema, theatre, and opera impacted the artist's aesthetic choices and references and fascinated Montreal audiences too (to such an extent that clergy in Quebec complained that Hollywood tempted Catholics away from the Church).<sup>259</sup> In the Nincheri fresco, one could ask whether the dominant message of power is deflected or reinforced by its portrayal of women, or do the "screen vamps" direct the audience's reading of the authority figures as "just more theatre" and thus divest them of real power?

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<sup>258</sup> My thanks to Laurier Lacroix for mentioning their relationship to me. For example, Ozias Leduc (1864-1955) had religious commissions in Mile End at the same time as Nincheri, and was as prolific. See Laurier Lacroix, *Ozias Leduc: An Art of Love and Reverie* (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1996).

<sup>259</sup> Bayley mentions that even the elderly enjoyed going to the movies on a regular basis. Bayley 282. See also Bertolini. In Quebec, movie theatre owners and Catholic clergy often had run-ins with each other, but the Catholic Church was also quick to use the cinema for evangelical purposes. Roland Cosandey and François Albera, *Une invention du diable? Cinéma des premiers temps et religion* (Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992).

An additional facet worth pursuing is non-Catholic Italians' view of the Roman Catholic majority's conception of its own national and social view; certainly NDD was not the 'mother church' for all Italians. The working class Italians' long-standing suspicion of clerical hierarchy suggests that community support for official rhetoric may not have been as real as professed. From this perspective, street processions accompanying *festas*, which occurred as often as eight times a year, can be viewed as social rituals rather than strictly religious ones; performative displays of collective belonging that ceremonially marked the geographic territory of the group.<sup>260</sup>

The variety of political perspectives within the Italian community could be further questioned and researched. For example, anti-Fascism in Italian Canadian art was not discussed here given the lack of historical evidence on the relationship between the Left and Italian artists. Nevertheless, it is known that Italian anti-Fascists were active in Canada. In the United States socialists, anarchists, and communists were numerous in stoneworking professions, a field dominated by Italians (Fig. 5). This fact is important to future research because, as shown in Chapter 2, Italian artists freely moved across borders in search of work and thus may have spread these political views in Canada as well. Stoneworkers (granite cutters, carvers, polishers etc.), just as many other trade

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<sup>260</sup> See Joseph Varacalli *et al*, eds, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation* (Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum, 1999). See also Robert Adam Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2002).

workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were members of unions, participated in protests, and marched in strikes.<sup>261</sup>

Differences amongst Italians due to generational factors could also be explored. By the 1920s a second generation of Italian Canadians was growing; many had married and integrated into primarily French-speaking families. One may ask in what ways was *italianità* altered between generations within the same families and the same community? However, the period immediately after the war shapes the lives of a new, younger generation of artists is beyond the parameters of this study. Its members include figures such Frank Iacurto, Umberto Bruni, Mario Merola, and Guido Molinari. Their relation is separated by many factors related to social and aesthetic concerns, and yet the historical rupture that exists between the two warrants investigation. Iacurto, the first Italian Canadian to graduate from the École des Beaux-Arts, received a travel grant to study in Paris in the 1920s from donations collected within the community. Bruni, the second to graduate from the same institution, learned the craft of fresco, stained glass and marouflage while working as an assistant in Nincheri's Pie IX studio from 1930-34. One question that may be asked of the post-war generation is how did modernism and the rise of non-figurative art in Quebec affect these artists' sense of themselves as Italian Canadians?

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<sup>261</sup> Edwin Fenton, "Italian Immigrants in the Stoneworkers' Union," *Labour History* 3.2 (1962) 188-207. Fenton writes that the degree of Italian stoneworkers' involvement with labour organizations was mediated by the bargaining power offered by the individual groups and by limitations of language. See also Patrizia Audentino, "The Paths of Trade: Italian Stonemasons in the United States," *International Migration Review* 20 (1986): 779-795. Audentino describes the stonework trade schools in Italy and observes that the school season accommodated the migrant patterns where sons followed fathers on commissions, some lasting for several years.

While the period under analysis ends with the inauguration of the Cabot statue in 1935, how these works were perceived subsequently to the war merits further investigation. It is known that during and immediately after the war the works were criticized because of their pro-Italy association, but how Italians reacted to this situation is less clear. For example, in 1941 a movement at city hall called for the Rue Dante to revert back to its original name, Rue Suzanne, as a protest against Italy's war activities: "We have no German street names in Montreal why should we have Italian ones?"<sup>262</sup> Nincheri's fresco, covered in 1940 because of anonymous complaints lodged against its depiction of Mussolini, was uncovered in September 1947.<sup>263</sup> Its legacy has continued to shadow Nincheri's name to this day, and it contributed to the controversies surrounding the church's candidacy as a National Historic Site.<sup>264</sup>

The postwar era in Montreal ushered in a second wave of Italian immigration; southerners continued to dominate, but there were also numerous 'displaced persons' from the Friuli-Istria regions, in the northeastern part of the peninsula. In 1954, twenty years after the inauguration of the tribute to Cabot, the monument was again used to promote ethno-cultural legitimacy. Because of WWII and the Italian internments, pride once more had to be 'built up'. At the commemorative ceremony sponsored by the city of Montreal, representatives from Newfoundland were present as well as municipal counsellors such as Alfredo Gagliardi. Gagliardi, publisher of *Il Corriere Italiano* (founded 1952), was a journalist and vocal supporter of the Italian community. Once

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<sup>262</sup> *Montreal Herald* 25 Feb. 1941, City of Montreal Archives, Dossier de Presse, D.3020.17.

<sup>263</sup> "Mussolini Mural Again Displayed." *Montreal Gazette* 30 Sept. 1947: 3.

<sup>264</sup> Apart from protests that an image of Mussolini should not be included in a national historic site, the church's claim of being the "mother church" of all Italians in Canada was also disputed.



again the confraternity of shared values was pronounced when the Newfoundlander official declared, “We share with them (the Italians) a love for the history and traditions of our forefathers. We are one with them in the emphasis which they have always placed on those deep spiritual values symbolized by the home, the church, family ties, and simplicity of life.”<sup>265</sup> Interestingly, the parameters of comparison were based on class associations rather than on those of nation states, as in previous cases.

A few years later in 1962, in what had become a tradition, the same commemorative ritual was again taking place. The massive influx of foreigners was beginning to generate open hostility and Gagliardi’s remarks reflect the negative environment. As at the Dante inauguration forty years earlier, Gagliardi urged tolerance: “Faites-leur un meilleur accueil, essayez de les mieux comprendre.”<sup>266</sup> Only a few years earlier Gagliardi, who sat on the city executive, had campaigned for the relocation of Cabot to Little Italy: “les Italiens veulent voir la statue de Giovanni Caboto dans leur district.”<sup>267</sup> While this lobbying effort didn’t succeed, another one did. In 1964 Balboni’s *Dante* was moved from Lafontaine Park to its present site in what was then the recently named “Dante Park” in the “Italian district.”<sup>268</sup> The controversial origin of the Cabot monument continues to haunt it still. A commemorative plaque installed near the monument in 1997 to mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cabot’s arrival chooses its wording carefully: it refers to Cabot as the “first *Italian* to discover Canada” and describes the Italians who dedicated the monument as those who offered the monument in the name of “*he who helped them*

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<sup>265</sup> *Montreal Gazette* 21 June 1954, CMA-DP, D.3020.10.

<sup>266</sup> *La Presse* 26 June 1962, CMA-DP, D.3020.10.

<sup>267</sup> *Montreal Matin* 14 May 1958, CMA-DP, D.3020.10.

<sup>268</sup> *The Montreal Star* 1 Dec. 1962, CMA-DP, D.3020.17.

*discover this land* now become their second homeland” (my italics).<sup>269</sup> The delicate diplomacy exhibited by the dedication, which skilfully avoids the issue of whether or not Cabot discovered Canada without dropping the topic entirely, is perhaps best understood through an analogy to the French verb “caboter” which means “to coast,” or to follow a coastline without setting foot on shore.... The same adroit dodging occurred when the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Sheila Copps, declared Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense Canada’s newest heritage site on November 30, 2000. In her speech she purposefully linked the history of Italians in Canada directly to Cabot, nearly implying that he was Canada’s first Italian immigrant, without stating whether he came before or after Cartier: “from the landing of Giovanni Caboto 505 years ago, Italy’s sons and daughters have shaped Canada, have built Canada, have forged Canada.”<sup>270</sup>

The Italian Renaissance continues to generate symbolic capital. Since the 1960s, a few more Renaissance heroes have begun to peer out across the landscape of new Little Italies of St-Leonard, St-Michel, and Rivière-des-Prairies. The expansive new community complex, the Leonardo Da Vinci Centre (2002), draws its name from a well-worn cliché of cultural parentage. But there is a different type of hero on the horizon and it merits our attention. *The Monument to the Italian Immigrant Family* stands in Mississauga, Ontario (Fig. 57).<sup>271</sup> Designed by the American John Varga in 1992, it is modeled after Varga’s

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<sup>269</sup> “À Jean Cabot navigateur vénitien et premier italien à découvrir le Canada il y a de cela 500 ans – les italo-canadiens fiers de leur origines offrent cette dédicace à celui qui leur a fait découvrir cette terre devenue aujourd’hui leur seconde patrie.”

<sup>270</sup> “Speaking Notes for Sheila Copps, MP, Minister of Canadian Heritage on the occasion of the designation of the Notre-Dame-de-la Défense Church as a National Historic Site of Canada, Montréal, Québec, November 30, 2002,” Government of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage, National Historic Sites of Canada, <http://www.pc.gc.ca>, 3 March 2003.

<sup>271</sup> See Scardellato and Scarci.

earlier *The Immigrants* (1986) in the port at Bremerhaven, Germany (from where many post-WWII displaced Italian immigrants sailed to Canada). It is a nostalgic rendering of what has come to represent the immigrant mythos, the panorama of exile – emotional suffering, poverty, social isolation, melancholy. The family it portrays is conventional and conventionally portrayed. The father’s arms extend around a mother and infant, and around a young boy who carries a suitcase held together by a belt (the telltale sign of the economic refugee). Regardless of the apparent stereotype, the Varga statue does constitute a subtle shift in Italian Canadian self-representation. It marks a significant departure from the Italian community’s other heroes. This new counter-hero is the inverse of Cabot. He is a victim of historical circumstance and social forces that have cast him adrift and shipwrecked on the shores of Canada. The “man and suitcase” motif has also been used in Montreal where two small-scale versions of it exist in the district of St. Leonard. The motif of the economic refugee is also reflected in artworks that pay tribute to Italian workers such as the monument to *I caduti sul lavoro* (1993), an outdoor bronze sculpture by Tony Selva at a community centre in Woodbridge, Ontario (Fig. 58). It shows a male worker struggling to raise another male lying prone below him in what seems like a construction site. The work commemorates those who have “fallen at work,” updating the convention of the ‘fallen soldier’ memorial.<sup>272</sup> The secularization and depoliticization of the contents of monuments but not of their forms illustrates the historical and transnational migration of iconic conventions and cultural traditions, at the

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<sup>272</sup> The two-metre high sculpture is on an architectural pedestal by Nino Rico.

same time as empowering their users through the ‘re-cycling’ of old symbols and stereotypes.<sup>273</sup>

The appearance of the Immigrant Monument belongs to a culture edified by multiculturalism, a social policy that made “pluralism” and “ethnic pride” commonplace ideas since its endorsement by the Canadian Parliament in 1971. While the aesthetic merits of Varga’s work may be argued, it is nevertheless a rare example of the Italian immigrant experience being foregrounded in public art. The ideas it exploits – the centrality of the nuclear family, loneliness, journeying – are all tropes in the Italian Canadian mythos that prose writers and poets first expressed in the 1980s. While these sentiments of dislocation, loss, and isolation resonate with the writers because they correspond with the immigrant experience, in the eyes of critics such as Linda Hutcheon the *nostalgia* that is evoked limits self-empowerment and growth because it lacks an “oppositional voice.”

How the past should be interpreted in public art, and whose versions of the past should take precedence, are questions that have proliferated rather than been reduced by the politics of multiculturalism. Cross-cultural shopping, even while promoting pluralism, has led to a growing desire to conserve the boundaries of difference. Globalization has amplified rather than diminished questions about national and ethnic identities. National borders are not only contested from without but also from within by a variety of minor voices demanding to be heard. In this context, national history becomes a multiplicity of

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<sup>273</sup> My discussion with Olivier Asselin.

discontinuous narratives invested with varying degrees of public authority rather than a monolithic certainty. However, those who write about, or represent, ethnic history must contend with what Harney identifies are the pitfalls of ethnic history writing. The tendency to exchange one master narrative for another without critical intervention contributes to the proliferation of conventions and the recreation of history based on notions of pedigrees and pantheons. Two recent public artworks demonstrate very different approaches to representing, and coming to terms with, the Italian immigrant past. The newest is a copy of a World War I monument located in the region of Molise and from whose ancient history the subject of the work is taken: *The Warrior of Sannita* (2004), with sword, shield, and enormous helmet, looks very much like a Roman centurion and is sorely out of place on the front lawn of the modern Leonardo Da Vinci Centre (Fig. 59). Seen together with the decorative sculptural ‘logo’ on the building, a copy of Da Vinci’s *Uomo Universalis*, both objects seem to suggest the same clichéd concept of history as a lineage of heroes and spectacular achievements (the building is dedicated to the “genius of Leonardo”). On the other hand, *Trampolino*, located a few metres away from the former, is a witty comment on immigrant labour history that escapes sentimentality and affectation (Fig. 60): a stylized silver body perches on the handle of a giant red trowel (the type of tool used by construction workers); the sleek figure is poised ready to dive into the (imaginary) swimming pool the tool has helped construct. In this work the contemporary artist and the ‘cement finisher’ seem to bridge each other across a common history of Italian immigrant art and labour.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> The original three metres bronze *Warrior of Sannita* is by Giuseppe Guastalla and was made in 1922 to commemorate WWI fallen soldiers of Pietrabbondante, Molise. The subject is based on the Sanniti defence against Hannibal in 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC; the Sanniti were native to the Molise region and were colonized by the

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Romans. The copy was donated to the Leonardo Da Vinci Centre in 2004 by Italians from the Molise region of Italy. Laura Santini, *Trampolino*, 2001, steel, 6 x 11 x 3.5 m.

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Kevin Cohalan, personal interview, May 3, 2004.

Giuseppe Manzini f.s.c.b., personal interview, October 2, 2003.

Loris Palma, personal interviews, May 20 - September 20, 2003.

Joe Sciortino, personal interview, September 21, 2003.



1. Immigration Centre, Montreal. From "Le tour du monde." *La Presse*, 17 May 1904: 1.

Bottom left insert: Italian boarding house scene. From "Un foyer infect." *La Presse*, 3 March 1905: 12.



2. *Figurinaio*, plaster figurine sellers, Lucca, Italy.



3. Child selling plaster figurines, early nineteenth century.



4. Artisans of the T. Carli-Petrucci statuery firm, working under the direction of Alexandre Carli, Montreal, ca.1925.



5. Italian stoneworkers (displaying radical newspapers), May Day, Barre, Vermont, ca. 1905.



6. Italian reservists, WWI, Toronto, 1915.



7. Memorial mass for Unknown Italian soldier, Montreal, November 4, 1921.



8. Bronze laurel crown on the Edith Cavell monument, Toronto, donated by the Società Italo Canadese, November 11, 1922, in memory of the fallen of WWI.



9. *Dante (La mort de Dante)*, by Carlo Balboni, bronze, 1922, at original site in Parc Lafontaine, Montreal; inscription “La colonne Italienne à la Ville de Montréal.”



10. *Dante*, inauguration ceremony, October 23, 1922.

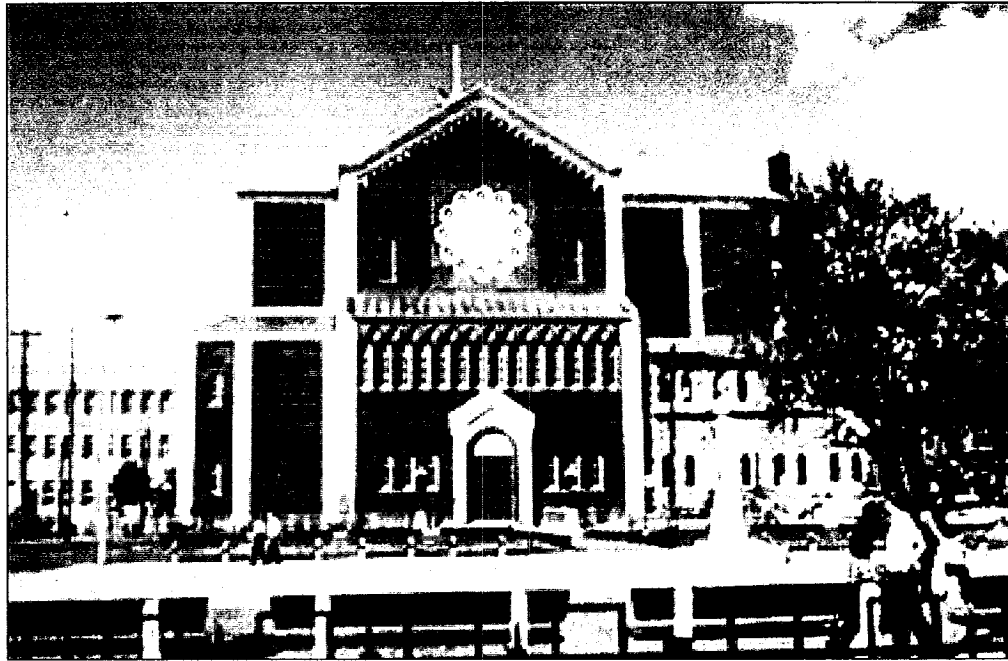


11. *Dante*, detail.



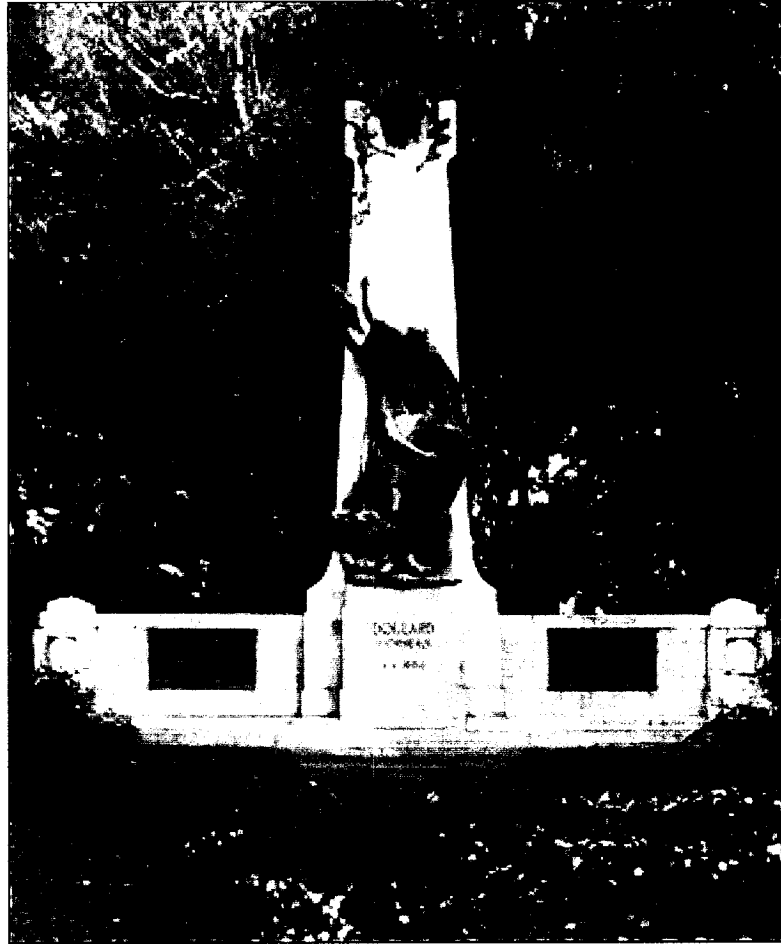


12. (above) 13. (below). *Dante*, bronze, early sixteenth century, Museo Nazionale, Naples, Italy; said to have been the source for Balboni's *Dante*.



14. (above): *Dante*, present location, Parc Dante (formerly Parc Alma), Dante Street, next to Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense church.

15. below : Dante monument in Parc Alma (now Parc Dante) next to Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense Church; in far left background is Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense school; ca. 1965.



16. *Dollard des Ormeaux* monument by Alfred Laliberté, Parc Lafontaine; inaugurated 1920.



17. *Giovanni Caboto*, by Guido Casini, Western Park (later known as Atwater Park, now called Cabot Square), ca. 1935.



18. (above). - 19. (below): *Giovanni Caboto*, 2004.



20. Bronze reliefs on Cabot monument.

Top: "Cabot and son Sebastien from Bristol receive blessing of the Bishop of Bristol and *bon voyage* from the authorities."

Middle: "Cabot receives from Henry VII the patent to travel and take possession of new lands in the name of His majesty."

Bottom: "Cabot and Sebastien plant flags of England and Venice on Canadian soil."

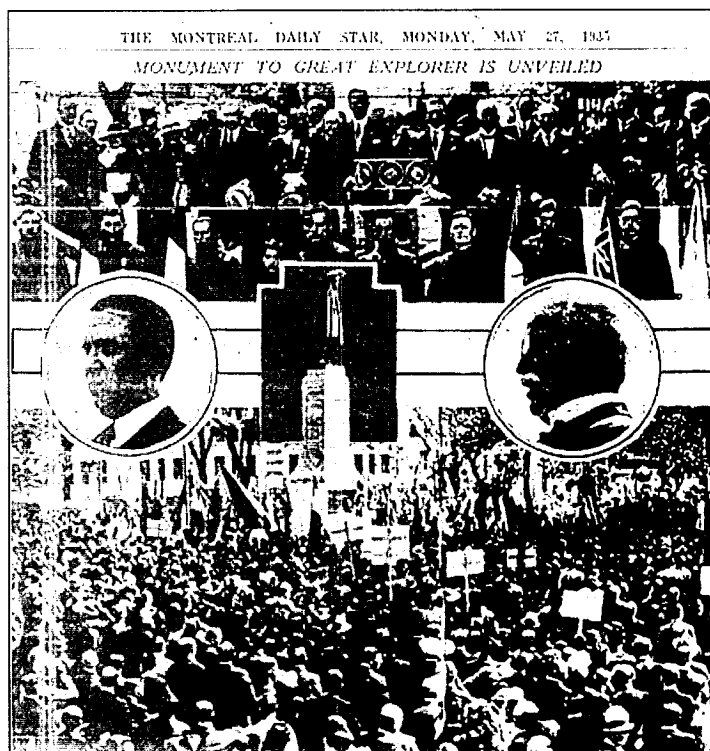
From Lawrence J. Burpee, "John Cabot, Who Sought Cipangu, and Found Canada," *Canadian Geographical Journal* (June 1933): 258, 266.



21. Guido Casini working on the Cabot statue, Montreal, ca. 1925. From *L'Araldo*, 1925, an Italian Canadian newspaper.



22. Caboto committee, ca. 1931. Plaster maquette is in background; the maquette was exhibited at the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts show in Montreal, 1931.

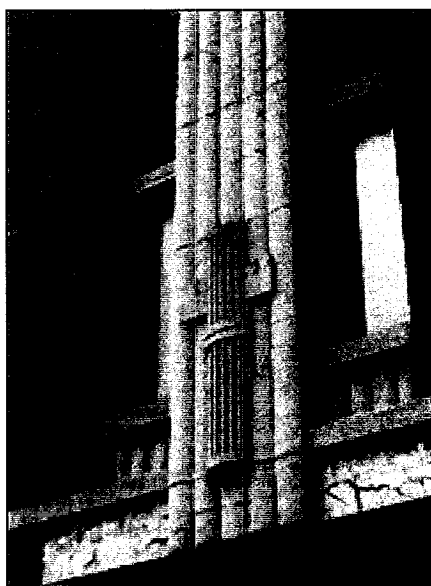
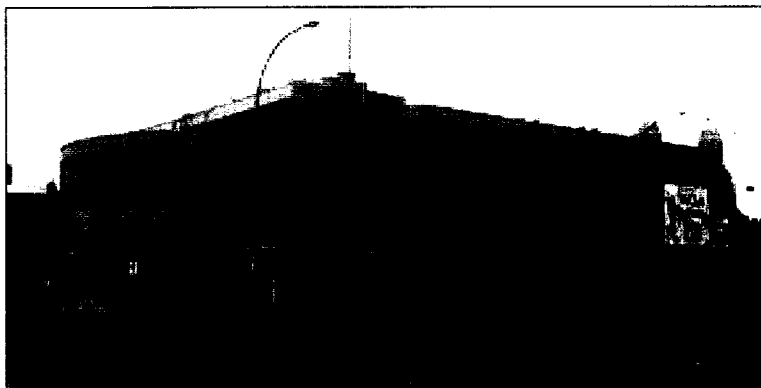


23. Inauguration of Cabot monument, May 25, 1935. Round inserts show Italian Consul Petrucci on left, and C.H. Catelli on right. Mayor Camillien Houde, wearing ceremonial gold chain, is on grandstand; "blackshirts" are in foreground.





24. Monument to Italian WW I fallen soldiers, by Guido Casini, Castelfiorentino, Italy, 1924. A photograph of the work was exhibited in 1927 at the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts show, and in 1928 at the Spring Exhibition of the Art Association of Montreal (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts). In the exhibition records "Firenzuola" is given as the name of the town. Casini was born in Castelfiorentino, a town close to Florence.



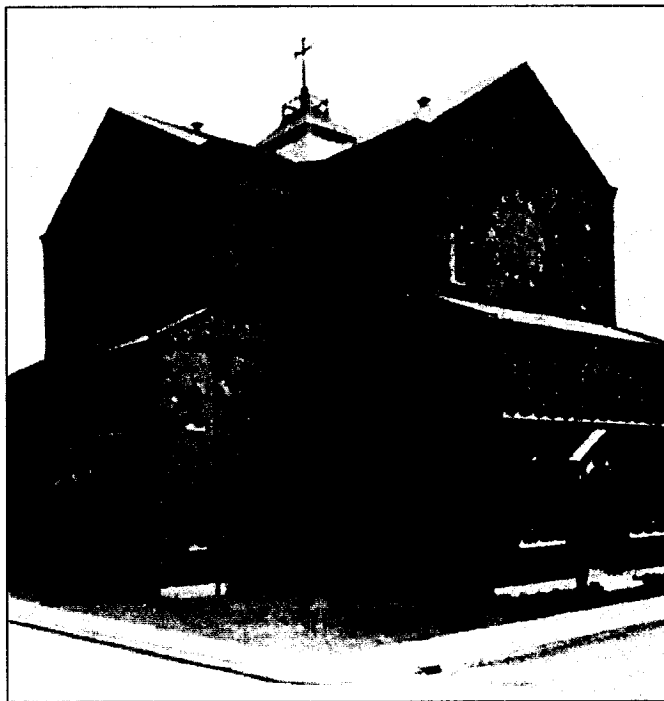
25. Casa d'Italia, Montreal, architect Patsy (Pasquale) Colangelo (1907-1984), built 1936. Out of five Fascist centres in Canada, it is the only one to remain after WWII. It was paid for by donations and by Italian state funds; Mayor Houde donated the land on behalf of the City of Montreal. Bottom: *fascio* ornamental detail.



26. Notre-Dame-de-la Défense church, Montreal, as seen from the north-east. The church faces Dante on the north, Henri-Julien to the east, and Alma to the west.



27. Proposed design for NDD by Guido Nincheri, made between 1913-1918.



28. NDD, finished church, 1918.



29. Guido Nincheri with NDD building committee. Nincheri is second from the right, bottom row. On his right is parish priest Maltempi, directly behind Maltempi is Vangelisti who wrote a biography of the parish and of the Italian community in 1955. From Guglielmo P. Vangelisti, *Gli Italiani in Canada*. 2nd ed. (Montréal: Chiesa Italiana di N.S. Della Difesa:1958).



30. Religious procession, Dante Street in front of NDD, n.d. On the float is the statue of the 'Madonna della Difesa', patron saint of NDD. It is a plaster copy by 'Carli & Petrucci' of the nineteenth-century original by Amelia Dupré located in Casacalenda (Molise) Italy.



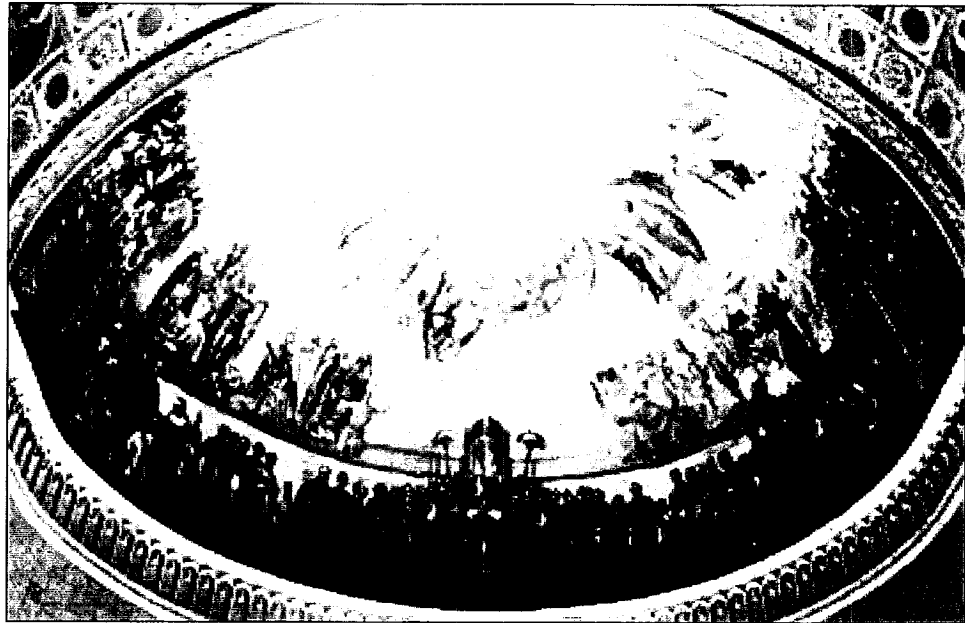
31. Inauguration of the completion of the interior decoration of NDD, September 25, 1933. Bottom row, left to right, starting 7<sup>th</sup> from left, Senator Lawrence Wilson, Guido Nincheri, son Giorgio Nincheri, ornamental plasterer Anthony Di Giorgio, Achille Corbo, son Gabriele Nincheri. Middle row, 3<sup>rd</sup> from left, sculptor N. Petrucci. Top row, 3<sup>rd</sup> from left, Mrs Guido Nincheri. Photographed at main entrance of NDD school. Banner reads “Vive le Grand Philanthrope Canadien” in reference to benefactor Wilson.



32. Inauguration of the completion of the interior decoration of NDD, September 25, 1933. Nincheri is short man front row, to his left Apostolic Delegate Andrea Cassulo. Nincheri is wearing the star of Knight Commander in the Order of San Silvester, that was awarded to him by Cassulo on behalf of Pope Pius XI for service to the Church (i.e. religious art commissions).



33. NDD, interior, apse and semi dome. Viewed from above the main entrance on Dante Street. All colour views of the interior are ca.1965. The original pews designed by Nincheri were replaced by this time in order to have a central aisle.



34. NDD, central fresco in semi dome of the apse. Note that Pope Pius XI is literally in bottom register of figures but 'visually' is positioned between bottom register (earthly space) and middle register (sacred space). Bottom and middle registers are divided by the Lake of Tears (a reference to the hymn Salve Regina). Not clearly visible in image is Calvary and Three Crosses directly behind/above Pope.

35. (below): legend of the iconographical figures as they are grouped in the composition.

ANGELS

ANGELS      SALVE REGINA      ANGELS

ANGELS

CALVARY

CONFESSORS - MARTYRS - PATRIARCHS      APOSTLES - BISHOPS & DOCTORS - FOUNDERS

SAINTS, O.S.M.

LAKE OF TEARS      LAKE OF TEARS

POPE

MARRIED SAINTS  
& WIDOWS - MISSIONARIES - SACRED AUTHORITY - CIVIL AUTHORITY - VIRGINS





36. NDD, central fresco, detail, *Sacred Authority*, Pope Pius XI on the *sedia gestatoria* (portable throne) surrounded by Church hierarchy. Nincheri's son Giorgio was the model for the altar boy on the right. The artist often used family and assistants as models. His wife was the main model for female figures.



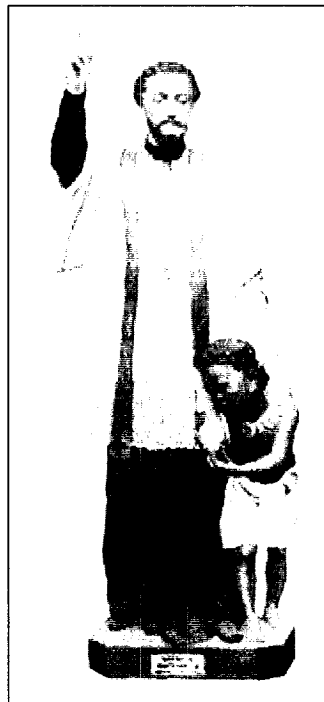
37. *Sacred Authority*, detail showing Nincheri's self-portrait; he is in the centre of the frame in blue.



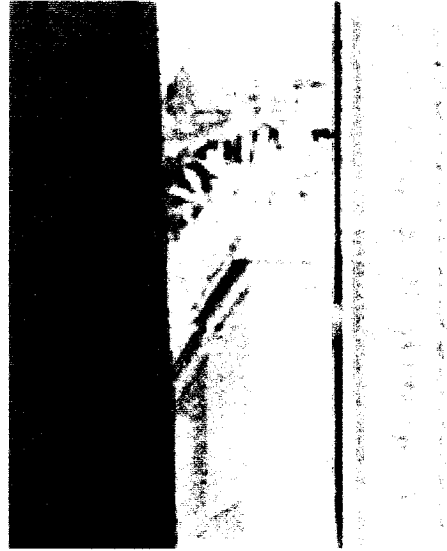
38. NDD, central fresco, detail, *Civil Authority*, Benito Mussolini on horseback; the figures in military uniform from left to right are Michele Bianchi, Emilio de Bono, Cesare de Vecchi, and Italo Balbo (Balbo had been in Montreal two months earlier when he and his air squadron landed on the way to the Chicago World's Fair). To the right of Balbo are Guglielmo Marconi (inventor), Senator Lawrence Wilson (local benefactor), and the Duke of Abruzzi (mountain climber). Note that by this time Mussolini was already sporting a shaved head, unlike Nincheri's version.



39. NDD, central fresco, detail, the Missionaries.



40. Saint Peter Claver, plaster statue, ca.1912 (it is not in NDD). Claver was a Jesuit; however, the missionaries in the fresco belong to the Order of the Servants of Mary.



41 (left) – 42. (right). NDD, Saint Giuliana Falconiere, *marouflage* painting by Guido Nincheri. Detail on right shows Florence in background. This saint is associated with the Florentine OSM (Order of the Servants of Mary).

43. Below: *Salve Regina*, Madonna and angels.





44. Central fresco, *Salve Regina*, angels.



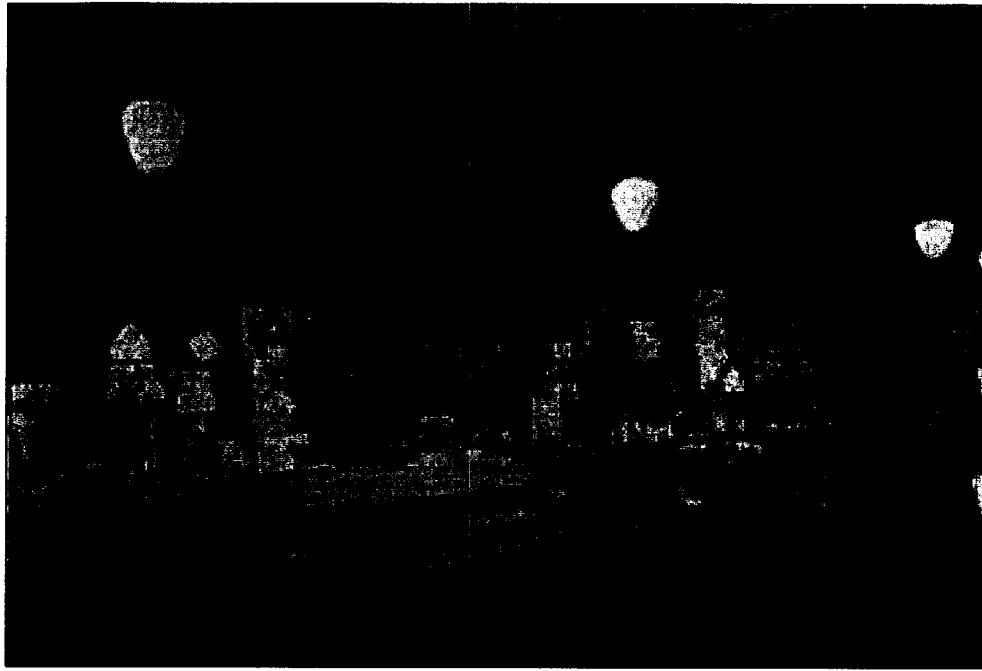
45. Interior of Château Dufresne, Montreal; detail of ceiling painting (*marouflage* technique) by Nincheri, 1927-1935. The Dufresne brothers were successful building contractors; Nincheri rented his studio on Pie IX Boulevard from them.



46. NDD, central fresco, detail of the Patriarchs: Adam and Eve.



47. Guido Nincheri, Eve, St. Ann's Church, Woonsocket, Rhode Island, 1940-48.



48. Interior of Venus Sweets Refreshment Rooms, Montreal, decorated by Nincheri ca. 1923; note female nudes on upper portion of walls.



49. Interior of the Belmont Movie Theatre, Montreal, ca. 1920: the paintings of allegorical scenes are by Guido Nincheri. The ornamental plasterwork is by Anthony De Giorgio who often collaborated with Nincheri, including NDD.



50. Left to right : Adolfo de Carolis, Guido Nincheri, Giuseppe Lunardi, on the roof of the Accademia in Florence. Adolfo De Carolis, Guido Nincheri, and Giuseppe Lunardi, Florence, ca. 1907. Photograph is in private collection.

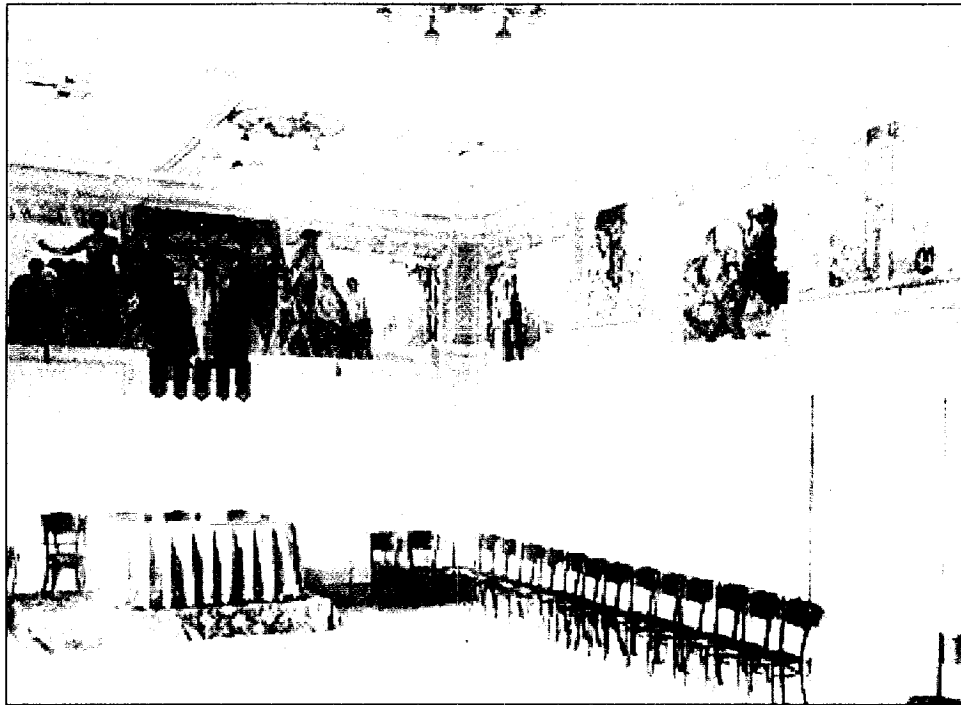




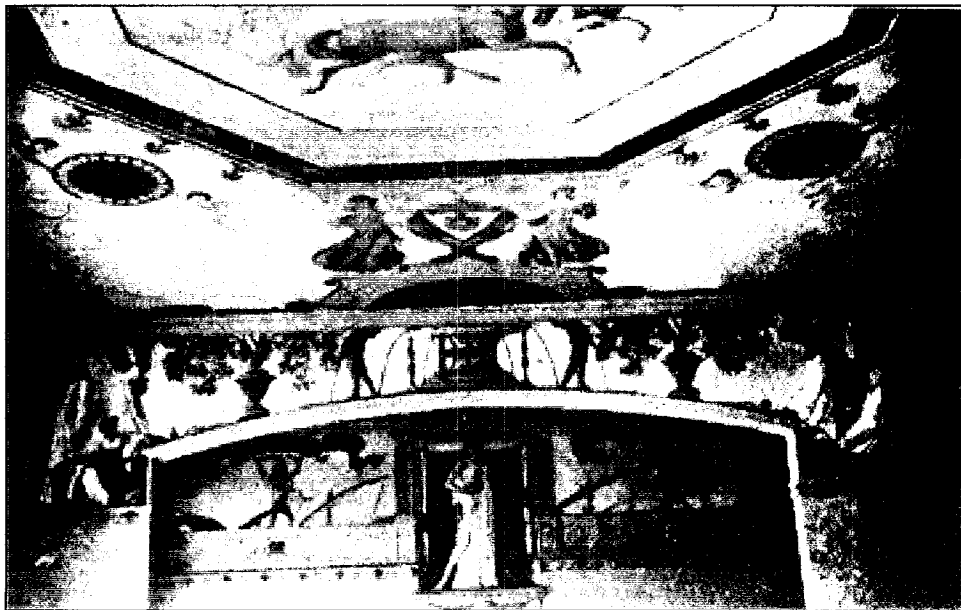
51. Adolfo De Carolis, "I Grandi Aretini", oil on canvas sketch for tempera wall decoration in the Salone del Consiglio in Palazzo della Provincia, Arezzo, 1922-23.



52. Adolfo De Carolis, detail, "Italicus," oil sketch, 1912, for fresco cycle in Palazzo del Podestà in Bologna, begun 1910, completed posthumously.



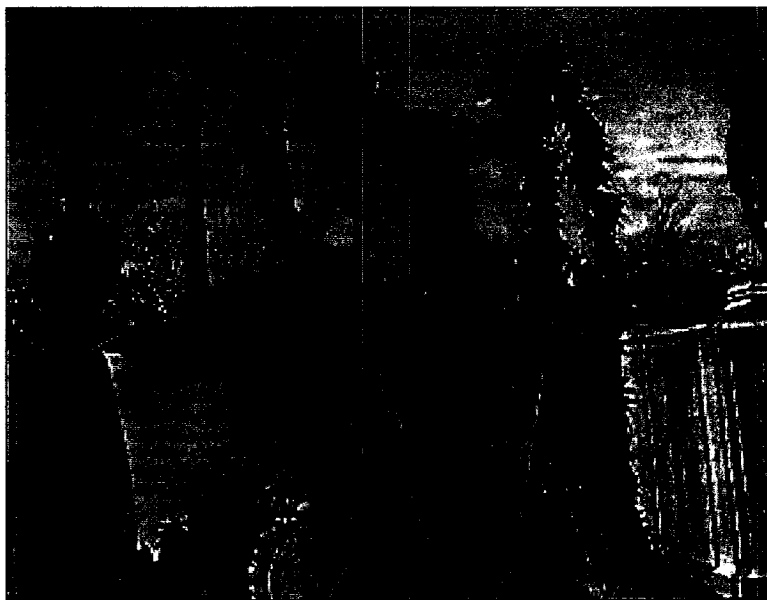
53. Meeting hall of Società di Mutuo Soccorso di S. Marco Vecchio, Florence, decorated by Nincheri, 1911.



54. Adolfo De Carolis, detail, wall decoration in Villino Regis de Oliviera di Roma, 1905.



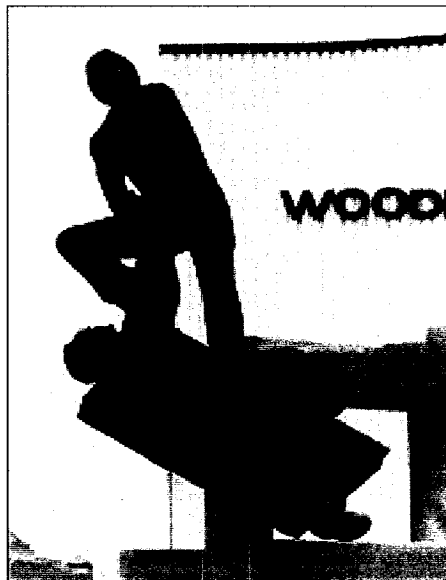
55. Adolfo de Carolis, *Le Castalidi*, tempera and gesso, 1905.



56. Château Dufresne, Montreal, detail of wall decoration "Allegory of the Arts" by Nincheri, between 1920-1935.



57. John Varga, *Monument to the Italian Immigrant Family*, 1992, bronze on polished stone pedestal, 3 m, Mississauga, Ontario.



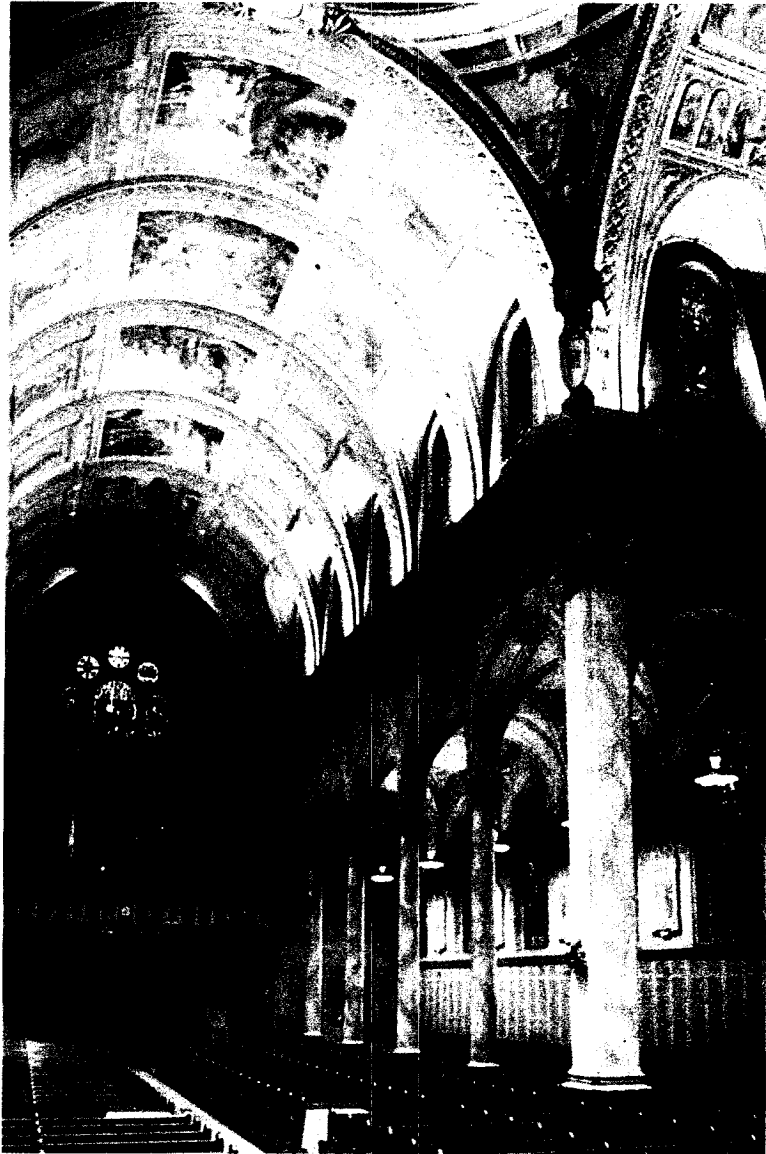
58. Tony Selva, *I cadutti sul lavoro* (fallen workers), 1993, bronze on cement pedestal, 2 m, Woodbridge, Ontario. Architectural pedestal by Nino Rico.



59. "The Warrior of Sannita," reproduction ca. 2004, bronze on granite pedestal, 3.5 m, Leonardo Da Vinci Centre, Montreal, (original, 1922, Pietraabondante, Italy).



60. Laura Santini, *Trampolino*, 2001, steel, 6 x 11 x 3.5 m, Leonardo Da Vinci Centre, Montreal.



61. St. Ann's Church, Woonsocket, Rhode Island,  
Nave ceiling, Guido Nincheri, 1940-48.



62. St. Ann's Church, Woonsocket, Rhode Island,  
Nave ceiling, detail, Creation, Guido Nincheri, 1940-48.



63. L'Église Saint-Michel-Archange, Montreal,  
detail, Fallen Angel, Guido Nincheri, ca.1915 - 1921/1927