IAMLAs Exhibition The Sicilian Cart: History in Movement

What really is remarkable about the upcoming exhibition, The Sicilian Cart: History in Movement, hosted at the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles (IAMLAs) from June 30th to January 7th, is that its Executive Director, Marriana Gatto, since she was a child, has been nursing and nourishing an intimate fascination for those exceptional means of transport—the Sicilian carts—having even ever seen a full-scale one with her own eyes.

Two years ago, Giuseppe Giuffrida, a valuable upholder of a tradition that is rapidly getting lost—conceived and curated the itinerant exhibition, MUSCA (Museum of Sicilian Cart). After the first two editions—held in different locations throughout the historical center of Taormina, Sicily—he is now enthusiastically bringing its family collection to Downtown La.

Let’s take a peek at the exhibition with Marriana Gatto first:

What is your personal connection to the upcoming exhibition, The Sicilian Cart: History in Movement?

I have been enchanted by Sicilian carts since I was a child and received a small cart as a present. I did not realize then that the “toy” was based on a real horse-drawn cart! It seemed too fantastic to be possible.

My grandmother, Maria Anna Cortese Gatto, was from Lucca Sicula, a village in the province of Agrigento. The Cortese family left Sicily in the late 1800s and entered the United States through the port of Louisiana. Following the abolition of slavery in the United States, many Sicilians served as agricultural laborers in the American South. Her family worked in the fields before saving enough money to send for the family in Sicily, and then moved west.

This exhibition is very special to me because it provides an opportunity to showcase Sicily’s immense beauty and history, and, a century later, represents my family’s immigration story coming full circle.

Could you expand on the partnership between IAMLAs, MUSCA and Dolce & Gabbana in the realization of the exhibition?

As part of a City of Los Angeles delegation organized by Councilman Joe Buscaino, IAMLAs’s president, Paul Pagnone traveled to Sicily last summer. During his visit to the MUSCA exhibition in Taormina, he was captivated by the carts, and befriended the curator, Giuseppe Giuffrida.

Paul then introduced Mr. Giuffrida and I via email, and we began chatting about the possibility of putting together an exhibition. The MUSCA, and Giuseppe in particular, became wonderful collaborators. It’s not every day that two organizations can assist one another in achieving their respective missions so seamlessly.

As a historian, I was interested in using the carts as a vehicle for understanding Sicily, its multi-layered history, and the many cultures that have influenced the island. Beyond their striking appearance, carts are fascinating on many levels—from the craftsmanship requiring the collaboration of several craftsmen, to the role that the carts played in transmitting culture, history, and values pictographically during an era when many people were illiterate.

While the motor vehicles long replaced the carts as the primary means of transportation, they continue to occupy a revered place in Sicilian popular culture.

The first representation of carts in popular culture that came to mind was Dolce & Gabbana’s recent collections in which the carts’ motif figures prominently.

Francesca Guerrini, the IAM LA’s manager of program and development, reached out to Dolce & Gabbana’s team. They provided an introduction to SMEG, the Italian upscale appliance manufacturer, with which the fashion house collaborated to produce a limited-edition of appliances featuring the cart’s theme, which we are excited to showcase in the exhibition.

And now let’s hear Giuseppe Giuffrida’s take:

I drew you to this traditional and extraordinary form of art, the “Sicilian cart”!

My namesake grandfather was a carter. He used to drive a traditional cart around Sicily, predominantly carrying fruits and wheat, but also building materials, like red clay and stones.

In the 1960s, with the introduction of the first motor vehicles, the likes of trucks and small vans, he “upgraded” to those new means of ground transportation to deliver the goods.

My father, next-to-last of my grandfather’s seven children, was very close to him and, as a young artist, followed the family tradition, by starting twenty years ago a collection of “parade” Sicilian carts, decorated with gouache.

Despite I was only one year old, when my grandma passed away, I had the chance to hear a lot about him and his carts by some of his friends.

I carried out a series of informal chats with artists, musicians, carters who had worked with him, most of whom are also family friends. That fieldwork made up half of my historical investigation, while the other half consisted in studying books about the Sicilian carts.

The more I investigated, the more I got enamored by this fascinating form of art.

Could you outline the history of the exhibition of which you are curator, MUSCA (Museum of Sicilian Cart) – held for the first two years in Taormina, Sicily, and this year finally in L.A.?

Two years ago, I inaugurated the first edition of MUSCA at the deconsecrated Church of Mount Carmel (“Chiesa del Carmine”). The exhibition—featuring our family collection of Sicilian carts as well as traditional billboards used for the “Opera dei Pupi” (Sicilian Puppets) - lasted only a month, but we had about 2000 visitors. Some of them were second or third generation Sicilian emigrants visiting their homeland, who shared with me their emotion in looking at those pieces of art. It was a touching experience to me as well.

Last year, we replicated the second edition in a different location, Taormina’s Communal Library, at the deconsecrated Church of Saint Nicholas. This time, the exhibition lasted five months, from May till September. Among our visitors (a total of about 6000), we had the privilege to have VIPs, the likes of actress Susan Sarandon - whose grandfather on her mother’s side, Ignazio Russo. The wonderful key is decorated with a scene from Pirandello’s “Theatre,” while the cart’s left panel is based on Carmen, the right one on Rigoletto, the rear one on Otello.

Our exhibition is going to showcase also a marvelous billboard by Rosario Napoli, very talented poster designer who died at merely nineteen. It was realized in tempera over a support of two brown paper sheets connected in the middle and used to promote a representation of the “Opera dei Pupi,” the typical Sicily’s puppet theater, based on Frankish romantic poems such as The Song of Roland or Orlando furioso.

Both the Sicilian carts and this traditional marionette theatre are considered one of the most refined both artistically and in terms of content variety. The carts from Palermo had trapezoidal sideboards and the predominant color was yellow, while the ones from Catania were mainly red painted and had rectangular elements. The Palermo’s arabesque geometries and decorative motifs were inspired by the Norman-Arab culture. The painting style was mostly flat and there was no perspective.

The Catania’s painting style was nearer to the Renaissance one. However, the decorative motifs are mainly Baroque, such as acanthus’ leaves or figure-heads (sort of winged sirens), cupids.

The cart features also magnificent sculpted elements. Among these, the high point is located in the rear and called the “key,” wooden handwork locking the poles.

The highlights of this third edition, on view at IAMLA, are going to be a set of Palermo painted (supposedly in the 1960s) with scenes from Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso by Giuseppe Manfrè – an artist from Alcamo, who collaborated also with well-known Italian painter, Renato Guttuso - and a painting depicting its wooden carvings) by Giovanni Raia.

The second cart on view was particularly interesting: an artist from Paternò, a town in the province of Catania. In all the area, he was the greatest. The representation is dated, September 20th 1950, only a few years before Liotto’s death in 1956. It was built by Domenico Morabito - native of Paternò, born in the slopes of Mount Etna - and sculpted by Ignazio Russo. The wonderful key is decorated with a scene的社会功能。The first as social function. The second as form of entertainment, while the other as a means of transportation that enabled trade in the island and the second as a form of entertainment as well as catharsis and social liberation.
I giornali di Sicilia, un villaggio della provincia di Palermo, era di Lucca con la prossima mostra, il movimento? Gatto:

Carretto siciliano: La storia in animali per questi eccezionali e nutrito una profonda fascinazione che si sta rapidamente crescendo tra IAMLA, MUSCÀ e la città di Los Angeles organizzata dal con-

Premessa
di varietà di contenuti. Gli stili di Palermo siano morfi
di elementi scolpiti. Tra questi, puoi spiegare la collabora-

Questa mostra è molto spe-

nato da Giovanni Raia. Dopo l'abolizione della schiavi
ti per l'Opera dei Pupi – è durata un solo mese, ma abbiamo avuto circa 2000 visitatori. Alcuni di loro erano emigrati siciliani di secondo e terza generazione che hanno visto la loro tradizione, che hanno condiviso con me la loro emozione nel guardare quelle opere d'arte. E' stata un'esperien-

Carretto siciliano: La storia in movimento?

Questa mostra è molto spe-

vadono elementi rettangolari. Le sculture, che hanno lavorato
di contenuti. Gli stili di Palermo siano morfici e i cherubini.

Mostra allo IAMLA sul Carretto Siciliano: La Storia in movimento

Sono state incantate dai carret-

nel periodo della Louisiana. Dopo l'abolizione della schia
di famiglia Gatto, da quando erano bambini, ha coltivato
tutti trapezoidali e il colore pre
di varietà di contenuti. Gli stili di Palermo siano morfici e i cherubini.

Dopo la morte di mio nonno, gli erano affascinati dagli straordi
di contenuti. Gli stili di Palermo sono morfici e i cherubini.

Cosa l’ha portata a questa

di contenuti. Gli stili di Palermo siano morfici e i cherubini.

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