

Staging Injustice: Italian Art 1880–1917 (New York, 29–30 Apr 22)

Center for Italian Modern Art, New York, Apr 29–30, 2022

Deadline: Feb 28, 2022

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Staging Injustice Study Days

Keynote speaker: Vivien Greene, Senior Curator, 19th- and early 20th-century art, Guggenheim Museum

The exhibition *Staging Injustice. Italian Art 1880-1917*, curated by Giovanna Ginex and on view at the Center for Italian Modern Art (New York) from January 25 to June 18, 2022, focuses on Italy's socially engaged art of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. During the decades between 1880 and the end of World War I, Italian artistic production prominently featured a strong adherence to contemporary social themes. To this day, however, fin de siècle Italian socioeconomic history and artistic developments have received scant attention in the United States, and CIMA's project intends to shed light on these subjects.

Those decades were a time of explosive socioeconomic tensions for the recently unified Kingdom of Italy: abandoned in conditions of neglect or violently repressed by the army's artillery during legitimate protests, many Italians abandoned the motherland in search of a better life in the Americas and northern Europe; among those who remained, many embraced the egalitarian ideologies of revolutionary socialism and anarchism. The rapid industrialization of the early 1900s also gave rise to many familiar aspects of mass society: the emergence of new social actors, such as factory workers and their labor unions; the growth of literacy and the exponential rise of newspaper circulation; the rise of the Socialist Party and the spread of anarchist ideals. Women too played a key role in the social development of the young Italian nation: Maria Montessori's radically innovative pedagogy, Sibilla Aleramo's feminist writings, and Matilde Serao's investigative journalism are just three examples of an intellectual vivacity that invested all fields of culture. At the same time, violent state repression of discontent, colonial wars, and a looming global conflict between the great European powers made Italy a social and ideological powder keg, ready to detonate at any minute.

Giacomo Balla, Emilio Longoni, Angelo Morbelli, Plinio Nomellini, Giuseppe Pellizza, Medardo Rosso, are just a few of the many painters and sculptors whose work captured—and most importantly, embraced—the socio-political atmosphere of those decades. They lived side-by-side with the journalists, novelists, and ideologues that animated crowded squares, mobilized strikes, and incited revolutionary action.

In a time of persistent sociopolitical tensions and renewed calls for a fair treatment of all people,

regardless of race, creed, gender, nationality, class, and walks of life, CIMA's exhibition looks back at the history of Italian art with the certainty that culture can help us find ways to move forward with the crucial conversations we still face. Taking cue from the stimuli this exhibition offers and current scholarship on art and social justice from around the globe, the 2022 CIMA Research Fellows invite proposals for the Staging Injustice Study Days. The conference will take place on April 29-30, 2022.

While CIMA's stated goal is to hold the conference in person, in New York, the organizers will continue to monitor the evolving Covid-19 situation and adjust the format as needed, with the possibility of moving to a hybrid model that would allow participation via Zoom.

The conference wishes to highlight the main themes that emerge from the exhibited works: we seek to gather scholars from diverse fields—including history of art and architecture, social history, studies in literature, photography, and cinema, and Italian Studies—to investigate the themes at the center of the exhibition within and outside of established critical frameworks.

Topics may include (but are not limited to):

- The representation of social issues among late-19th- and early-20th century artists, in Italy and beyond
- The circulation and collecting of late-19th-century Italian art in the United States
- The relationship between late-19th- and early-20th-century artists and anarchism
- The representation of migration, labor, protest, and inequality in contemporary art
- The problematic role of colonialism and orientalism in fin-de-siècle Italian art
- The role of feminism and of the women's suffrage movement in turn-of-century artistic circles.
- The relationship between the visual arts and radical pedagogies
- The embrace and rejection of positivism in both culture and politics
- The representations of Italy's "Southern question," both artistic and literary
- The artistic representation of the Italian diaspora
- The emigration of Italian artists in the United States at the turn of the century
- The visual arts and political propaganda
- The tensions of the post-unification era in literature, music, film, and the visual arts

Please send an abstract (250–300 words), title, and a short biography (100–150 words) in English to info@italianmodernart.org with the subject line "Staging Injustice CFP" by Monday, February 28, 2022. Please send these materials in a single PDF document. Please do not send multiple attachments.

Reference:

CFP: Staging Injustice: Italian Art 1880-1917 (New York, 29-30 Apr 22). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 9, 2022 (accessed Aug 31, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35865>>.