

## 10 Christmas Gifts Italy Gave the World

Judith Harris (December 22, 2014)



It's fashionable to build numbered lists, so here goes with 10 Christmas gifts which Italy gave the world in 2014. These gifts range from a coffee maker for an international space ship to eco-friendly fashions, and from ancient art to rubbish art.

ROME - It's fashionable to list things by numbers, so here goes with 10 Christmas gifts which Italy gave the world in 2014. In the Christmas stocking have been gifts ranging from a coffee maker to eco-friendly fashions, from rubbish art to ancient art.

1. BELLS: Bells rang out and bystanders applauded on July 23, two years and six months after the Costa Concordia sank and drowned 32 people, the gigantic cruise ship was successfully refloated and hauled away from the port of Giglio to Genoa, 200 miles distant. The ship, which weighs in at 114,500 ton, is to become scrap metal for recycling. For a video, see [>>>](#) [2]



2. **HELPING THE HELPLESS:** Throughout Italy volunteers, including countless young people, are helping the homeless, who include a large number of migrants, but not only. As it has for the past 16 years the St. Egidio charity is distributing pamphlets which list places where the homeless and needy can receive food, shelter and clothing. In a single night recently in Milan 2,637 people were listed as homeless; of these, one out of three (36%) was Italian, double the number of the previous year, when only 17% were Italian. In Genoa, similarly, the number of homeless Italians has doubled in five years. Nine out of ten are men, whose average age is 42. Pope Francis donated sleeping bags and food at Christmas to the homeless sleeping rough around the Vatican.

3. **BLAST-OFF COFFEE:** Not only did Italian Air Force Capt. Samantha Cristoforetti become the first Italian woman in space, but as she traveled into orbit in November she hauled along a 20-Kg coffee machine made by Lavazza and the engineering firm Argotec, specialist in space food, whose designers had to devise “extraterrestrial” capsules that work in microgravity. Now able to enjoy an espresso with her on the International Space Station (ISS) are American and Russian cosmonauts. For the video see [>>](#) [3]

4. **FASHIONABLE FAKES:** The many worldwide who oppose the wearing of the fur of dead animals will take pleasure in seeing the newest Italian fashions. Among the Italian fashion leaders who took giant steps in 2014 toward making truly trendy what are called “eco pellicce” (environmentally friendly furs) were Trussardi, Gucci and Kaos. “Real furs are superfluous today,” opined one designer.

5. **THE ACTOR IS A LADY:** At age 78 Virna Lisi died of cancer in her home in Rome in December. The extraordinarily beautiful actor first became a star in the Fifties in a film, “Lo Scapolo,” with Alberto Sordi. She went on to win top prizes in Italy and at Cannes and indeed was so successful, as is known only now, that the American Mafia took her in their sites and tried to induce her to move to Hollywood. She had no knowledge of who those approaching her were, but decided that at any rate she preferred her career and life at home in Italy with her architect husband Franco Pesci and son Corrado, born in 1962. It was Corrado who just revealed the Mafia’s interest in turning her into a U.S. star big time. For a scene from one of her best films, “Signore e signori,” see [>>>](#) [4] [text-underline:none">](#)

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6. **PIAZZA PURITY:** Rome Mayor Ignazio Marino has blocked the invasion of supposedly Christmasy stalls in one of the world’s most beautiful piazzas, Piazza Navona. Once an elongated horseshoe-shaped race track for the emperor Domitian, the piazza became a market square during the Renaissance, when it was moved by Michelangelo from the Capitoline Hill. More recently it became a jumble of stalls for a prolonged Christmas season, where traditional craft items were sold, such as figures for the nativity scenes. In recent years the market lost its character by an invasion of trashy objects far from the Italian tradition and manufacture. Ignoring the predictable protests at the radical change, the city is holding events for children in the now tidy space.

7. **RUBBISH ART:** A special Christmas exhibition at the Carlo Bilotti Museum, which is in the Orangery of Villa Borghese in Rome, shows works of art by sub-Saharan African refugees made of 10 tons of plastic waste. Sponsors are the city of Rome itself, REFUGEE ScART (an Onlus), the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR and the Jesuit Centro Astalli, which works especially with youth to help refugees. Any income from the effort goes to the refugees, but, through the charity Emergency, the refugee artists



are giving back a portion to a mobile health unit for the needy at Castel Volturno. Through Feb. 1.

8. CLIMBING THE COLUMN: Trajan's Column inside the Roman Forums dates from around 113 AD to celebrate the Romans victory of the Dacians. The column stands about the height of a 10th story building, or 30 M high, which means that its remarkable pictorial diary in bas relief of that victory cannot readily be seen and admired. Now, thanks to the Roman cultural administration, each scene has been photographed for display on nearby panels. Not all are edifying – this was war, after all – and many of us were shocked to see (now that we can see it) a scene of three evil Dacian women torturing a Roman prisoner of war.

9. COLOSSEUM SHORED UP: Finally, after years of indecision, work to shore up the weak one-quarter of the Roman Colosseum is well underway. That weak side rests not upon rock, as does the other three-quarters, but upon the softer soil of a drained river bed, which had brought to that portion 16 inches of subsidence.

10. FOOD IN ART: No Italian list could be complete without mention of food. "Il Cibo nell'arte" (Food in Art) is an exhibition of 100 works from the Renaissance through Andy Warhol that will be on view in Brescia from Jan. 24 through June 14, with a catalogue by the Milan publisher Silvana Editoriale. The Milan Triennale will also exhibit a show on Arts and Food in conjunction with the Expo, April 15 – Nov. 1.

Because I live in Rome, the list is disproportionately Roman, for which I apologize. It would be delightful to hear readers' ideas of other gifts Italy gave to others in the world this year.

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[2] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/10985273/Costa-Concordia-celebrations-begin-as-cruise-ship-heads-for-scrapheap.html>

[3] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/space/11245245/ISSpresso-space-coffee-machine-to-be-delivered>

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