

The Job of Promoting Contemporary Italy

i-Italy Team (May 25, 2017)



A large part of my job entails presenting contemporary Italy to Americans already familiar with our prestigious past, explaining that our country isn't just its glorious Renaissance. Contemporary Italian culture is an integral part of our country that we want to promote "as a system.". Interview with Director of the Italian Cultural Institute of Los Angeles, Valeria Rumori.

Valeria Rumori has a wealth of experience promoting Italian culture. Previously at the Italian Cultural Institutes of San Francisco and Marseille, France, in Los Angeles she is now at the helm of an enormous administrative district encompassing 8 states and 2 consulate territories, Los Angeles and Houston, TX, with which the institute actively coordinates and collaborates. Her agenda is clear and coherent: to promote an image of Italy not only as a country with a glorious past but, above all, as a culturally vibrant place in this day and age.

Your jurisdiction is enormous. How popular is Italy among your constituents?

Wildly. Italianness is cool here. It's admired by people from every social rank and generation. I'll give you an example. As you know, our institute offers language and culture courses organized by the



nonprofit group Lingua Viva. The courses also include workshops for tourists and film buffs, workshops in eno-gastronomy, literature, and art history. Recently we had a workshop in renaissance cooking with appearances by chefs, food bloggers and sommeliers.

How do you engage the city's existing makeup to promote Italian culture? One would imagine, for example, that your schedule of events revolves a lot around film...

Since we're in LA, paying particular attention to film is almost obligatory. But it is always a means of achieving our chief aim, which is to introduce people to contemporary Italy, meaning its artistic, cultural, and regional features. Take the many initiatives to promote our country as a location for moviemaking, like the Filming in Italy Festival inaugurated last February with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Film Division and the Italian Trade Agency of Los Angeles. We had many star guests come who had either personal or professional ties to Italy, residents of the City of Los Angeles like directors Oliver Stone and Jonás Cuarón, the actor and producer Riccardo Scamarcio, actors Jeremy Renner and Nat Wolff, as well as the grandchildren of Gregory Peck, the unforgettable star of Roman Holiday.

Basically, since the image Americans have of Italy is linked to the movies of the 1950s and '60s—particularly to certain classic American productions, Cinecittà and Italian neorealism—bringing cinema back to Italy is a way of introducing Americans to the “new” Italy. Is that right?

Exactly. Another example of that approach is a series of initiatives developed in collaboration with the Italian National Tourist Board, or ENIT, in Los Angeles. Last April 11, along with Toscana Promozione Turistica, we organized “Toscana: Set Cinematografico Naturale,” an event devoted to the natural, artistic and architectural beauty of Tuscany, followed by a wine and regional cuisine tasting. It's an integrated promotional strategy combining film, art, tourism and eno-gastronomy. And Italy has a commercial stake in it, since the Regione Toscana offers financial incentives to movie productions that choose to shoot in the region.

This approach is also deeply integrated into the life of the city; you team up with other major events here that are directly or indirectly connected to Italy. Can you give us a few examples?

A good example is a collaborative effort in the works with the Getty Center. From May to July, the Getty will host two important vedutisti shows entitled The Lure of Italy: Artists' Views, with masterpieces by foreign artists on their Grand Tour of Italy; and Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe, a collection of paintings that immortalized particularly important historic events that occurred in Italy and Europe in the 1700s.

Simultaneously, the institute has inaugurated A Grand Tour in Contemporary Italy, an exhibit curated by the Centro Cinema Città di Cesena featuring photographs of regional sets of the most important Italian films from the 1940s to 2016. Then on 18 May there will be The Lure of Italy—Today, which puts a contemporary spin on the classic Grand Tour, seeking out lesser known tourist destinations, trends, and industries in which Italians excel.

Do you communicate with other cultural industries in the city?

All kinds: from literature to figurative art to opera to fashion to contemporary independent music. But with spring upon us, we might single out design, which will be the focus of the major international event in the coming months.

Design is another one of those industries in which Italians excel, and our focus on it is partly the result of the Italian Government and the Washington Embassy. Last March the Italian Consulate General and the Institute organized [Italian Design Day](#) [2] at the prestigious Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood. For the event— which saw the collaboration of the Triennale di Milano and the [Ministries of Foreign Affairs](#) [3] and International Cooperation, Economic Development and Culture & Tourism—two “ambassadors” of Italian design, architects Lorenzo Damiani and Elena Pacenti, talked about the history, new trends and Italian creative contribution to the industry.



Furthermore, for Los Angeles Design Week this June we'll present [Emilio Cavallini: Harmony Runs on a Thread](#) [4], an exhibit curated by art critic Peter Frank that sheds light on the Italian fashion designer and entrepreneur's career. Cavallini's work is the product of his experience in the contemporary fashion industry and the industrial production of his famous legwear.

Cavallini recently designed the "IIC Los Angeles Creativity Award" specially for us, an original work inspired by the Pantheon ceiling, which recognizes Italian creative excellence in the world. Thus far the award has gone to actor/producer Riccardo Scamarcio, makeup artist and 2017 Oscar winner Alessandro Bertolazzi, and Ethan Peck, the grandson of Gregory Peck.

The term "contemporary Italy" has come up several times in this interview. Is that the agenda?

A large part of my job entails presenting contemporary Italy to Americans already familiar with our prestigious past, explaining that our country isn't just its glorious Renaissance, that modern Italy is commercially and touristically viable. The culture—contemporary Italian culture—is an integral part of our country that we want to promote "as a system," in tandem with other Consulates, the Italian Trade Agency, the Tourist Board, and the Italian-American Chamber of Commerce.

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