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# The *Nave Italia* and the Politics of Latinità: Art, Commerce, and Cultural Colonization in the Early Days Of Fascism

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During 1924 the *Nave Italia* visited every Latin American city with a significant Italian community. This ship carried industrial and artisanal products, and numerous artworks by commercially successful but aesthetically conservative Italian artists. The *Italia* aimed to establish commercial partnerships with the emerging markets of Latin America, and to extend the political influence of Italy across the Atlantic. To do so, the organizers emphasized the concept of *latinità*, suggesting a common heritage shared by Italy and Latin America. This paper analyzes the artistic content of the *Italia* and how it manifested the ambiguities of Fascism's project of cultural colonization of Latin America. While most visitors of the *Italia* did not notice any anticipations of Fascism in the artworks on view, the Mexican Muralists did. I argue that their violent reaction towards the art on the *Italia* indicates the presence of embedded traces of Fascism in the apparently inoffensive aesthetic of the decorative objects and artworks sent to Latin America.

KEYWORDS Italian Fascism, Mexican Muralism, decorative arts, Giulio Aristide Sartorio, Giovanni Giuriati, *El Machete*

'Sono oggi fieri e fedeli gli italiani all'estero' read a motto on the walls of the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (Figure 1). The fascist regime's concern for the 'Italians abroad' was meant to distinguish it from previous administrations. Many viewed the massive emigration of Italians to the Americas, particularly to Argentina, Brazil, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela, as an ignominy. It was because post-unification Italy offered few opportunities for social and economic improvement, they pointed out, that between 1880 and 1930 more than seventeen million peasants and working-class

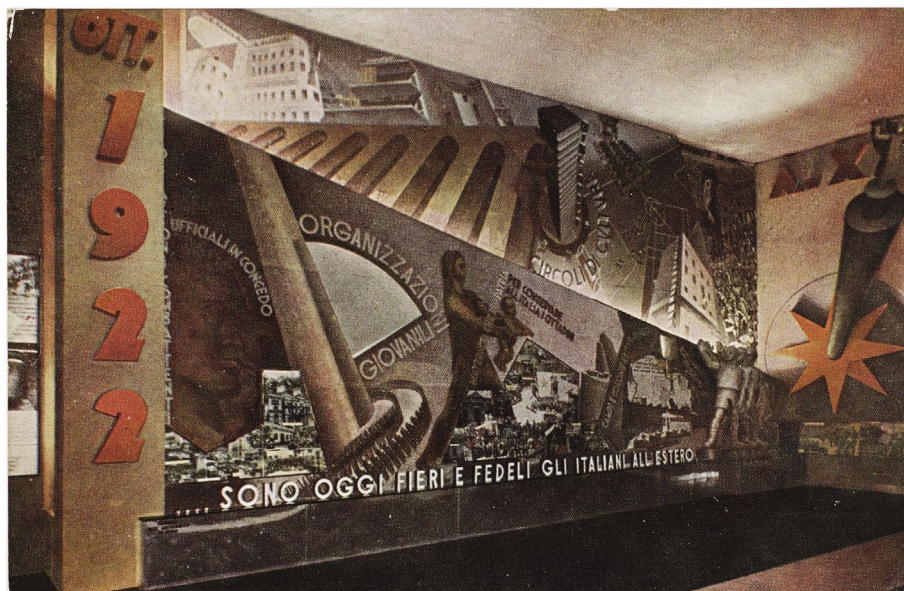


FIGURE 1 Postcard Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista – Sala dei Fasci all’Estero [Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution – Hall of the Fasci Abroad], c. 1932. Istituto Italiano d’Arti Grafiche, Bergamo. 3 ½ x 5 ½ inches (9.0 x 14.0 centimeters), The Wolfsonian–Florida International University, Miami Beach, Florida, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, XB1992.443.5. Photo: David Almeida.

Italians were forced to leave their country to seek their fortune overseas.<sup>1</sup> Yet politicians and entrepreneurs countered that the Italian immigrants offered a potential resource that could help the economic and political influence of Italy in the American continent.

With this in mind, between February and September 1924, the *Nave Italia*, an Italian commercial ship, visited Latin American harbours with large emigrant Italian communities (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> The expedition was under the patronage of Gabriele D’Annunzio and newly-appointed Prime Minister Benito Mussolini. The avowed aim of the *Italia* was to form commercial partnerships with the emerging markets of Latin America, and to resume relations with the estranged emigrant Italian communities.<sup>3</sup> The expedition had been under development since 1921, yet the newly established fascist government supported this project as a way of establishing a network of committed Blackshirts in

<sup>1</sup> Andreina De Clementi, ‘La “grande emigrazione”: dalle origini alla chiusura degli sbocchi americani’, in *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana*, ed. by Piero Bevilacqua, Emilio Franzina, and Andreina De Clementi (Roma: Donzelli, 2001), pp. 187–211.

<sup>2</sup> The ship was launched in 1899 as the German mercantile transatlantic *König Albert*; in this capacity, it crossed the Ocean several times bringing emigrants to America. During the First World War, Italy requisitioned it and transformed it into a hospital ship, *Ferdinando Palasciano*. At the end of the war, it was considered war booty and kept by Italy. It was reconverted as an ocean liner and renamed *Nave Italia*. After the trip to Latin America, the *Italia* was sold and, in 1926, dismantled.

<sup>3</sup> It is not a coincidence that in May 1924 an international conference on immigration and emigration took place in Rome under the patronage of Mussolini’s government: ‘La grande politica del lavoro e della ricostruzione del Governo Fascista. Il Presidente inaugura in Campidoglio la Conferenza internazionale dell’Emigrazione’, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 16 May 1924.

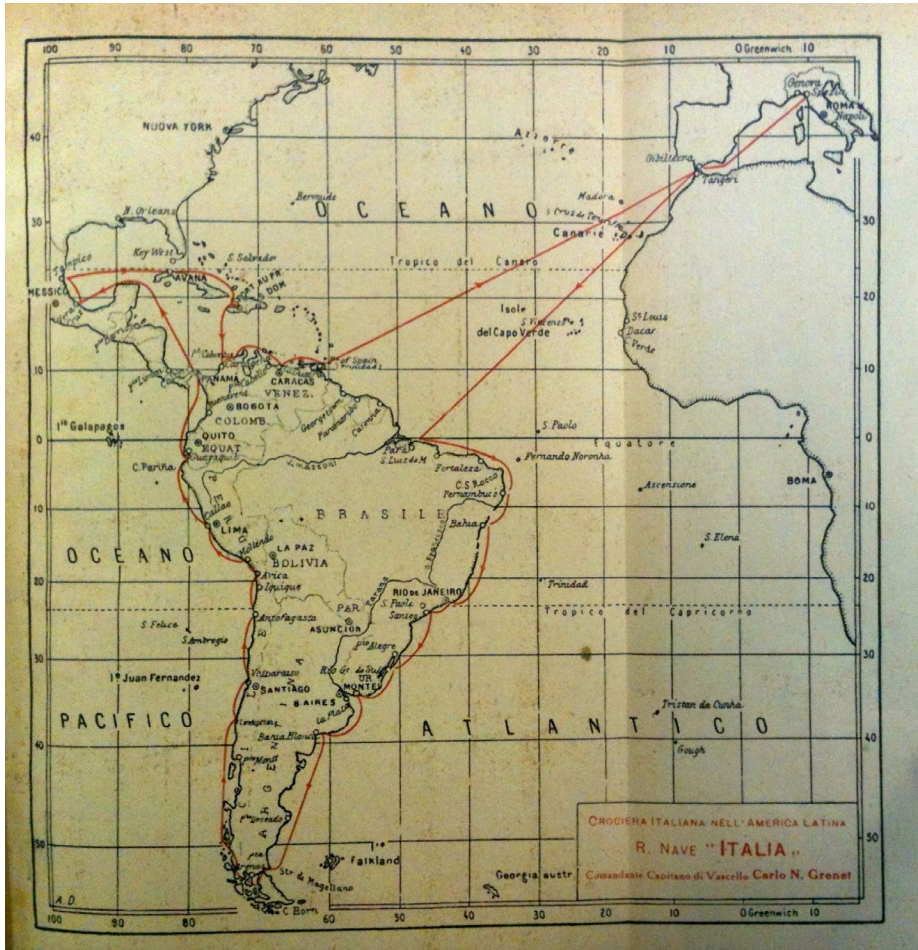


FIGURE 2 Manlio Miserocchi, *L'America Latina attraverso il mio oblò* (Pistoia: G. Grazzini Editore, 1925).

Latin America, and to retrieve control of the *fasci all'estero* initiated in the early 1920s by sympathizers of Mussolini.<sup>4</sup>

The ship carried industrial and artisanal merchandise, an early display of 'made in Italy' that showcased the modernity and inventiveness of Italian manufacturers. The image the *Nave Italia* projected was one in which Italy had flourishing industry, an

<sup>4</sup> For the *fasci all'estero*, see Domenico Fabiano, 'I fasci italiani all'estero', in *Gli Italiani fuori d'Italia. Gli emigranti italiani nei movimenti operai d'adozione 1880-1940* (Milano: Angeli, 1983), pp. 221-36; Luca de Caprariis, 'La lega italiana per la tutela degli interessi nazionali e le origini dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1923)', *Storia Contemporanea*, 16. 2 (1985), 203-50; Emilio Gentile, 'La politica estera del partito fascista. Ideologia e organizzazione dei fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1930)', *Storia Contemporanea*, 26.6 (1995), 897-956; Luca de Caprariis, "'Fascism for Export'? The Rise and Eclipse of the Fasci Italiani all'Estero', *Journal of Contemporary History* 35. 2 (2000), 151-83; Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo, *Il fascismo e gli emigrati. La parabola dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1943)* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2003).

organized government that aided economic growth, and thriving political institutions. The *Italia* also transported five hundred paintings and sculptures of commercially successful Italian artists, with the striking absence of all avant-garde movements. The presence of art in what at first sight seems only a commercial initiative manifests the ideological complexity of the *Nave Italia* enterprise.

An analysis of the reports by the journalists and organizers covering the trip shows a recurring reference to *latinità* as a common trait that bound Latin American countries to Italy in a privileged way on the basis of their alleged commonalities of culture, history, and tradition.<sup>5</sup> While fascist imperial projects, such as the conquest of Ethiopia or Eritrea, claimed the right of a superior civilization to conquer inferior ones, the politics of *latinità* emphasized the commonalities between the ‘colonizer’ and the ‘colonized’, avoiding a racist discourse while still underlining the superiority of Italy.

In this essay, I will analyze the artistic material carried by the *Italia* and discuss how it manifested the ambiguities of *latinità* and Fascism’s project of cultural colonization of Latin America. In particular, I will explore how the content of the *Italia*, with an aesthetic very different from the state-sponsored fascist art of the 1930s and 1940s, could be deployed for the purposes of the recently established regime. In 1999, the *Italia* expedition was the subject of an exhibition in which the views of Latin America painted by Giulio Aristide Sartorio (1860–1932) during the trip were shown. Yet the very thorough catalogue of this show did not consider a crucial aspect of the expedition: how its reception in Mexico revealed the complex ways in which the art on the *Italia* fitted within the rhetoric of *latinità* and its imperialistic ambitions.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, while most of the Latin American visitors of the *Italia* did not pay much attention to the artworks on view, or notice in them any traces of Fascism, the Mexican Muralists did. As I will argue, the violent reaction that Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and other participants of the Taller de Gráfica Popular (Workshop of Popular Graphic) had with regards to the art on the *Italia* indicates the presence of embedded traces of Fascism even in the apparently inoffensive aesthetic of the decorative objects and paintings sent to Latin America.

## The organization of the *Nave Italia*

The *Italia* represented a prominent example of the convergence of interests of Italian industrialists and the recently appointed fascist government. Although its promotional materials prominently featured the names of D’Annunzio and Mussolini, the organization

<sup>5</sup> On Gabriele D’Annunzio’s theorization of the concept of *latinità* as a justification for the occupation of the Balkans and North Africa, see R. H. Rainero and Stefano B. Galli, eds, *L’Italia e la «grande vigilia»*. Gabriele D’Annunzio nella politica italiana prima del fascismo (Roma: Franco Angeli, 2007); Filippo Caburlotto, ‘D’Annunzio, la latinità del Mediterraneo e il mito della riconquista’, *California Italian Studies Journal*, 1.1 (2010), 1–14. For the concept of *latinità* broadly understood, see Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia. Ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1997); Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002); Stefano Trinchese ed., *Mare nostrum. Percezione ottomana e mito mediterraneo in Italia all’alba del ‘900*, (Milano: Angelo Guerini e Associati, 2005); Emilio Franzina, *Una patria espatriata. Lealtà nazionale e caratteri regionali nell’immaginazione italiana all’estero (secoli XIX e XX)* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Bruno Mantura, Bernardino Osio, and Maria Paola Maino, eds, *Sartorio 1924: Crociera della Regia Nave ‘Italia’ nell’America Latina*. [Mostra, Roma, Istituto Italo – Latino Americano, 9 Dicembre 1999–5 Febbraio 2000] (Roma: Ed. De Luca, 1999); Bernardino Osio, ‘Quando la cultura italiana era il “pane Quotidiano”’, *Politica Internazionale* no. 1/2 (1999), 233–37. In that same year, Maurizio Vernassa explored the reception of the *Italia* in Argentina: Maurizio Vernassa, ‘Una crociera di propaganda’, *Politica Internazionale* XXIX, 1/2 (1999), 213–22.



FIGURE 3 Galileo Chini, Poster *Crociera Italiana nell'America Latina* [Italian Cruise in Latin America], 1923, Offset lithograph, 75 3/8 x 55 1/8 inches (191.5 x 140.0 centimeters), The Wolfsonian–Florida International University, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Promised Gift, ITC2004.6.20. Photo: Lynton Gardiner.

of the Latin American trip was the conclusion of almost forty years of attempts to use ships stocked with Italian products to establish commercial partnerships with emerging markets (Figure 3). As early as 1885, Goffredo Canepa, owner of an import-export firm

based in Genoa, proposed in vain the organization of a travelling exhibition of Italian merchandise. ‘Il paese che non esporta merci, esporta uomini!’, he exhorted. Like many of his contemporaries, Canepa viewed commercial expansion both as an alternative to emigration as well as a patriotic mission, akin to that of the military navy.<sup>7</sup>

The initiative for the *Italia* expedition was jointly presented by Alessandro Mondolfi, secretary of the *Sindacato Finanziario Italiano* who had lived in Venezuela, and Senator José A. Tagliaferro, the president of the Venezuelan Senate who was of Italian descent.<sup>8</sup> Tagliaferro, with the support of President of Venezuela Juan Vicente Gómez, an admirer of Mussolini, pressed the *Duce* as soon as he became Prime Minister to support the project. Both countries were interested in strengthening their economic relationship: Venezuela needed to sell its oil, and Italy needed new markets for its industries. The trip was quickly extended to include other Latin American countries and became a cultural and ideological enterprise, rather than a merely commercial one. The plurality of interests that inspired the *Crociera* was explicitly stated in its catalogue:

La nostra Crociera [...] non ha scopi puramente reclamistici [...] ma tende altresì [...] allo stabilimento e il consolidamento di rapporti più intimi fra l'Italia e i popoli dell'America Latina a noi legati per vincoli così molteplici di razza, di sangue, di tradizioni, di storia, di rapporti culturali e commerciali [...] È un lembo d'Italia che portiamo a toccare i lontani porti della latinità [...] E per questo in essa hanno un posto eminente la cultura e l'arte: sono questi i segni tangibili e indistruttibili della nobiltà del nostro sangue.<sup>9</sup>

The trip of the *Italia* coincided with the period of incubation of Fascism: during the eight months that the ship was in Latin America, the fascist party won its first election, the socialist senator Giacomo Matteotti was assassinated, and Mussolini put in place the conditions that allowed his takeover of power in 1925. A fascist network of cultural institutions and state-funded artists had not yet been developed, so the *Italia* marshaled representatives of a previous artistic and institutional period. Many of the organizers of the expedition were close associates of D'Annunzio and prominent figures of irredentism. Giovanni Giuriati, the Ambassador Extraordinary of the *Italia*, participated in the seizure of Fiume, and he was advisor to D'Annunzio during the occupation of the city. In 1913, Giuriati became the president of the association ‘Trento e Trieste’, which promoted the recuperation of the territories annexed to Austria. Eugenio Coselschi, who was in charge

<sup>7</sup> ‘Similar to our beautiful warships, which sail the seas visiting distant countries as a symbol of the political power of our country, rightly anxious to assert itself everywhere and to make our tricolor flag respected and admired, [the Travelling Exhibitions] should [...] show to the whole world that our country, as well as excelling in the sciences and the arts, also participates in the successful competition of labour with other nations, attracting the attention and admiration of everyone.’ Goffredo Canepa, *Cronistoria delle Esposizioni Galleggianti progettate ed organizzate dal 1885 al 1907 compilata da Goffredo Canepa-Gerente la Ditta Esportatrice Canepa e Soci di Genova Intorno alla Costituzione della Compagnia Italiana per le Esposizioni Galleggianti Genova. Prima Crociera Oceanica Occidentale (America del Sud, del Centro e California)* (Genova: Stabilimento Tipografico Unione Genovese, 1907), p. 32–33.

<sup>8</sup> Enrico Carrara, *Ventotto porti dell'America Latina fra Atlantico e Pacifico con la R.a Nave 'Italia'* (Torino: Alberto Giani Editore, 1925), p. 101.

<sup>9</sup> *Crociera Italiana nell'America Latina. Anno 1924. Fiera Campionaria Navigante. Industria–Arte–Cultura. Catalogo Ufficiale* (Milano: Casa Editrice di Pubblicità F. de Rio, 1924), p. xviii. The *Crociera* had three commissars: Alberto Passigli was in charge of the organization of the trip as the ‘Commissar for the Industry’, Eugenio Coselschi was the ‘Commissar for Culture and National Propaganda’, and Leonardo Bistolfi and Giulio Aristide Sartorio were the ‘Commissars for Art’.

of the cultural programme of the *Italia*, was D'Annunzio's secretary during the Fiume adventure. Like Giuriati, he was a member of the 'Trento-Trieste'.<sup>10</sup>

This explains why the rhetoric of irredentism was a leit-motiv in the expedition of the *Italia*, so much so that it almost reads as an instance of displaced *irredentismo*. For instance, the expedition carried mementos of the Italian participation in the First World War in order to donate them to Italian schools in Latin American cities. The *Italia* also brought a series of urns forged by the sculptor Romano Romanelli and filled with land from the Carso; sixteen of these urns were donated to Italian communities in Latin America, and in Buenos Aires the urn was carried in a procession through the city.<sup>11</sup> In several harbours, Italian veterans visited the *Italia* and considered the trip as a due homage to their sacrifice for the motherland. For example, in Rio de Janeiro a group of veterans gave the authorities of the *Italia* a branch of Brazilian palms to be deposited on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Rome.<sup>12</sup> Many emigrant communities, such as the one in Chipilo (Mexico), were gifted a stone from Mount Grappa, witness to a key battle during the First World War.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the fascist component of the expedition was evident as well. Giuriati marched on Rome in 1922 at the head of the Venetian fascists. In many seaports, he wore the black shirt, and his explicit affiliation to the fascist party made it evident that the expedition was not only an Italian project, but more specifically a fascist project.<sup>14</sup> The authorities of the *Italia* already used the term 'fascist' interchangeably with 'Italian', wore the black shirt, performed the Roman salute, and sang fascist anthems. The *Italia* even had a *fascio* on board; only thirty-five of the almost seven hundred passengers were part of it, but it included prominent members of the expedition, such as Giuriati himself and the artistic commissar Sartorio (Figure 4).

A diverse group of seventeen journalists participated in the expedition. Some of them, such as Piero Belli (the chief of the *Italia*'s press agency), Enrico Carrara, and Manlio Miserocchi, wrote memoirs of their trip to South America in addition to their periodical dispatches to their newspapers.<sup>15</sup> The journalists approached the *Italia* with very distinct voices. Piero Belli, for instance, had participated in the March on Rome and was a member of the *fascio* on board. Thus his narrative emphasized the local population's

<sup>10</sup> After his experience with the *Italia*, Coselchi was appointed as the organizer of European movements favourable to Fascism. In 1933, in fact, he became president of CAUR (Comitati d'Azione per la Centralità da Roma), an international organization that facilitated the collaboration between fascists in Italy and abroad.

<sup>11</sup> Piero Belli, *Al di là dei mari* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1925), p. 45 and 214.

<sup>12</sup> Belli, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> On the Italian war monuments honouring Italian soldiers in the First World War, see Anna Maria Fiore, 'La monumentalizzazione dei luoghi teatro della Grande Guerra: il sacrario di Redipuglia di Giovanni Greppi e Giannino Castiglioni', *Annali di architettura*, 15 (2003), 233–47; Marco Mondini, 'Le sentinelle della memoria. I monumenti ai caduti e la costruzione della rimembranza nell'Italia Nord orientale (1919–1939)', *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi*, XL (2006), 285–89; Laura Wittman, *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning, and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). On the symbolic role of the Monte Grappa in the cult of the fallen soldiers, see Livio Vanzetto, 'Monte Grappa', in *I luoghi della memoria. Simboli e miti dell'Italia unita*, ed. by Mario Isnenghi (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1996): 367–72.

<sup>14</sup> In the first government formed by Mussolini in 1925, Giuriati was appointed Minister of Public Works. Four years later, he became President of the Chamber of Deputies, an appointment he kept until 1934 when he became Senator. In 1930, he was nominated Secretary of the fascist Party, a position he renounced a year later.

<sup>15</sup> Belli, *Al di là dei mari...* Enrico Carrara, *Ventotto Porti dell'America Latina fra Atlantico e Pacifico con la R.a Nave 'Italia'* (Torino: Alberto Giani Editore, 1925); Manlio Miserocchi, *L'America Latina attraverso il mio oblò* (Pistoia: G. Grazzini Editore, 1925); Enrico Rocca, *Avventura sudamericana* (Milano: Alpes, 1926).





FIGURE 4 'Fascio di Bordo. R.N. Italia. Crociera America Latina 1924', in Piero Belli, *Al di là dei mari...* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1925).

enthusiasm for Fascism, for Mussolini, and for 'the new Italy'. If Belli's interlocutor was someone interested in the possibility of divulging fascist ideology among Italians overseas, Misericocchi and Carrara spoke to the industrial class and to Italian investors. They focused on the conditions for emigration, analyzing each country mostly in terms of its potential for industrial expansion.

### 'A navigating exhibit'

In order to transform it into a 'floating exhibition', the interior of the *Italia* was completely gutted and replaced with a series of rooms, halls, and salons. Industrial artifacts, regional crafts, and luxury products provided a multifaceted image of Italy as an industrial power that was nevertheless attuned to the importance of beauty and regional identities. As I will show in the next pages, the dialectic of modernity and tradition was central in the rhetoric of the *Italia*, and an integral part of its project of cultural colonization.

The visitors were dazzled by the variety of objects on display. Rocca observed: 'Dalla seconda passeggiata all'ultimo fondo l'occhio volenteroso poteva già scorgere un succedersi di quasi ordinate meraviglie. I marmi di Carrara e la 519 FIAT, le maioliche di Montelupo e i cristalli di Murano; l'Isotta-Fraschini, i pizzi veneziani e un carro d'assalto; bombe d'aeroplano, strumenti di precisione e un Cristo del [Leonardo] Bistolfi, i fantocci

di Lenci e la severa sala del Libro; la banca, il bar, il padiglione delle industrie femminili.<sup>16</sup> Specific rooms were dedicated to military weapons, agricultural machinery, furniture, perfumes, medical instruments, marbles, silk, wool, wine, pens, toys, cars, and bicycles, among other industries. Individual rooms were allotted to traditional crafts, divided by region: the Venetian salon, for example, showcased the products of the Venetian companies Cappellini (glassware) and Iesurum and Fortuny (artistic fabrics). The *Italia* also included thematic rooms. This practice was typical of international expositions and decorative arts fairs: instead of displaying crafts isolated from each other, the custom was to recreate a typical bourgeois interior and insert these objects into it, so the public could imagine the look of their own homes if they acquired any of these goods. On the *Italia* there was a room dedicated to the Italian book, decorated by the eclectic architect and interior designer Adolfo Coppedè. There was also an exhibit on Fiume, Zara, and San Marino, a reproduction of Dante's 'studiolo', and a view of Florence in the fifteenth century, reconstructed by the painter Ezio Giovannozzi.<sup>17</sup> The *Italia* included an exhibit on Christopher Columbus, organized by the Chamber of Commerce of Genoa, and one with photographs and memorabilia of the First World War.<sup>18</sup>

The effect of these thematic rooms was not only to motivate viewers to acquire the numerous commodities that were exhibited in them, but also to give locals and Italian emigrés a vicarious experience of Italy. The best image of the country crossed the Atlantic, manifesting the difference between the Italy that the emigrants had left and the one they were currently seeing. Clearly this argument was fallacious, as the largest number of emigrants had left the poorer regions of Italy where conditions of life were mostly unchanged. Nonetheless, the construction of these spaces of commodity and culture aimed to create a sense of belonging to a great tradition, both in emigrant Italians and in local Latin Americans, reunited under the comprehensive label of *latinità*: the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the enterprising Venetians, Christopher Columbus, and the heroes of the First World War were presented as a shared past that united all 'Latin' people.

Many of the craftsmen and decorative artists who exhibited in the *Italia* had shown their work the previous year in Monza during the First International Exhibition of Decorative Arts, with the significant exception of the Futurists who were included in Monza but absent on the *Italia*.<sup>19</sup> This exhibition helped the organizers of the *Italia* establish commercial relations with the well-known companies Cappellini, Venini, Richard Ginori, Cantagalli, Chini, Fortuny, Bellotto, and Mazzucotelli, internationally recognized examples of 'made in Italy'. The promotion of decorative arts and crafts helped to employ women, who were displaced from industrial production after the men returned from the front, and the veterans of the First World War, who in many cases had physical or mental disabilities and were more suited to low stress jobs such as crafts production than to an industrial environment.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Rocca, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Crociera Italiana*, p. LXIX.

<sup>18</sup> Miserocchi, p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> Guido Marangoni, La prima mostra internazionale delle arti decorative nella Villa Reale di Monza, MCMXXIII: notizie, rilievi, risultati (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1923); Catalogo della prima mostra internazionale delle arti decorative: consorzio Milano-Monza Umanitaria (Milano: Casa Editrice d'Arte Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1923).

<sup>20</sup> Maria Paola Maino, 'Valori naviganti', in Sartorio 1924: *Crociera Della Regia Nave 'Italia' nell' America Latina. [Mostra, Roma, Istituto Italo - Latino Americano, 9 Dicembre 1919 - 5 Febbraio 1920]*, ed. by Bruno Mantura, Bernardino Osio, and Maria Paola Maino (Roma: Ed. De Luca, 1999): 63-64 (p. 64).

The objects on the *Italia* were eclectic, referencing many styles, historical periods, and leitmotifs. While some of these objects still manifested aspects of *Art Nouveau* — such as the curved line, the ambition to create various objects in a uniform style, the presence of biomorphic patterns, and the recuperation of Medieval or Renaissance motifs — others anticipated aspects of *Art Déco*, which would become dominant after the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* — such as the simplification of form, the introduction of geometrical shapes, and the insertion of classicizing themes.<sup>21</sup> These differences notwithstanding, the *objects d'art* were clearly identifiable as Italian. In the European outburst of decorative arts after the First World War, Italian craftsmen and designers aimed to find a niche that would distinguish their products from those produced by the French, the Germans, or the Austrians. Not only a rhetorical notion, 'Italianness' became a mercantile necessity, a signature style that could compete with other European rivals. As vague as *latinità*, the 'Italian style' in the decorative arts was manifested through the revival of historical motifs derived from various periods, the use of traditional techniques, a particular attention to detail, and the rejection of mere practicality in favor of beauty.

## The artistic programme of the *Italia*

In addition to industrial and decorative objects, the *Italia* also transported five hundred paintings and sculptures of commercially successful Italian artists. They were displayed on the stern deck of the ship, and placed on movable walls that allowed them to be brought inside in case of bad weather (Figure 5).<sup>22</sup> Belli noted: '[sull'*Italia*] si passa dal quadro al cannone al profumo senza ombra di scosse brusche, senza durezza di contrasti [...] L'arte e l'industria dovunque si inseguono e si accapigliano nella forma del più stretto amplesso: per ricordarsi ed esaltarsi insieme'.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the art was displayed at the same level as commercial products, and journalists mentioned in the same paragraph engines and stained glass windows, fridges and artistic fabrics. All the works on the *Italia* were for sale and were rotated in every seaport.

The regulations for the artistic content of the *Italia* stated that only 'the artwork that, after rigorous scrutiny, will be considered worthy of representing Italian art abroad' would be exhibited.<sup>24</sup> Leonardo Bistolfi (1859–1933), and Giulio Aristide Sartorio were in charge of conducting this 'rigorous scrutiny.' The sculptor Bistolfi was an influential promoter of Italian decorative arts, particularly those in the *Art Nouveau* style. The year before the *Italia* expedition, he was nominated senator and president of the Monza International Exhibition of Decorative Arts.<sup>25</sup> Sartorio, who unlike Bistolfi joined the *Italia* expedition, was a successful decorative artist and painted friezes for the Venice

<sup>21</sup> Rossana Bossaglia, 'Arti decorative e Déco' in *La Metafisica: gli anni Venti. Volume secondo*, ed. by Renato Barilli e Franco Solmi (Bologna: Comune di Bologna, 1980), pp. 145–49.

<sup>22</sup> *Crociera Italiana nell'America Latina*, p. LXVIII.

<sup>23</sup> Belli, pp. 29–30.

<sup>24</sup> *Crociera italiana nell'America Latina. Gruppo belle arti. Regolamento*. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale Antichità e Belle Arti, Div. XIII, 1923–26, b.89.

<sup>25</sup> Bistolfi began his career as an anti-academic sculptor, rejecting the naturalistic tradition and adopting symbolist idioms in his funerary sculptures and monumental works. He was also an influential promoter of Italian decorative arts, particularly those in the *art nouveau* style. In 1902, he had organized the first international exhibit of modern decorative art in Turin, and he was also the founder of *L'arte decorativa*, one of the most important vehicles of the new style in Italy. For more on his work, see Rossana Bossaglia, *Bistolfi* (Roma: Editalia, 1981).



FIGURE 5 'The Peruvian president on the *Italia*', *Revista Mundial*, Lima (Peru), July 1924.

Biennale and the Italian Parliament.<sup>26</sup> The *Italia* transported sixty battle scenes painted by Sartorio during the First World War, and a mythological mural frieze that the artist refurbished from previous mural projects. Sartorio also designed some of the promotional material for the enterprise. One of his postcards, for example, was based on a decorative panel that Sartorio had designed in 1906 and then recontextualized to celebrate the Italian victory in the recent world conflict (Figure 6). Classicizing figures support a medallion with the names of the most important Italian theatres of war (Carso, Piave, and Vittorio Veneto), under an inscription with the date of the Italian victory over Austria, while a quote by Mussolini reminds the viewer that in America there are Italians who 'are waiting for the *Nave Italia* as a living testimony of the distant motherland'. Both Bistolfi and Sartorio, then, were artists who bridged the distinction between fine and decorative arts, and who in their own practice embodied the ideological role that art was given on the *Italia*.

While a catalogue of the artworks on the *Italia* has not survived, in the 1999 exhibition on the *Nave Italia*, Teresa Sacchi Ladispoto partially reconstructed the exhibition's

<sup>26</sup> In his youth, Sartorio had frequented the group of Decadentist intellectuals around Gabriele D'Annunzio and Francesco Paolo Michetti. In the 1880s and 1890s, Sartorio's painting was heavily influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, whom he had personally met on his 1893 trip to England, and whose work he had reviewed for the Italian public in several articles. On Sartorio, see Giuliana Pieri, *The Influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on Fin de Siècle Italy: Art, Beauty and Culture* (London: Maney Publishing for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007); Bruno Mantura and Anna Maria Damigella, *Giulio Aristide Sartorio: figura e decorazione* (Milano: F.M. Ricci, 1989); Pier Andrea De Rosa and Paolo Emilio Trastulli, *Giulio Aristide Sartorio: il realismo plastico tra sentimento ed intelletto* (Rome: Orvieto arte cultura sviluppo, 2005); Renato Miracco, *Giulio Aristide Sartorio, 1860–1932* (Firenze: Maschietto, 2006).

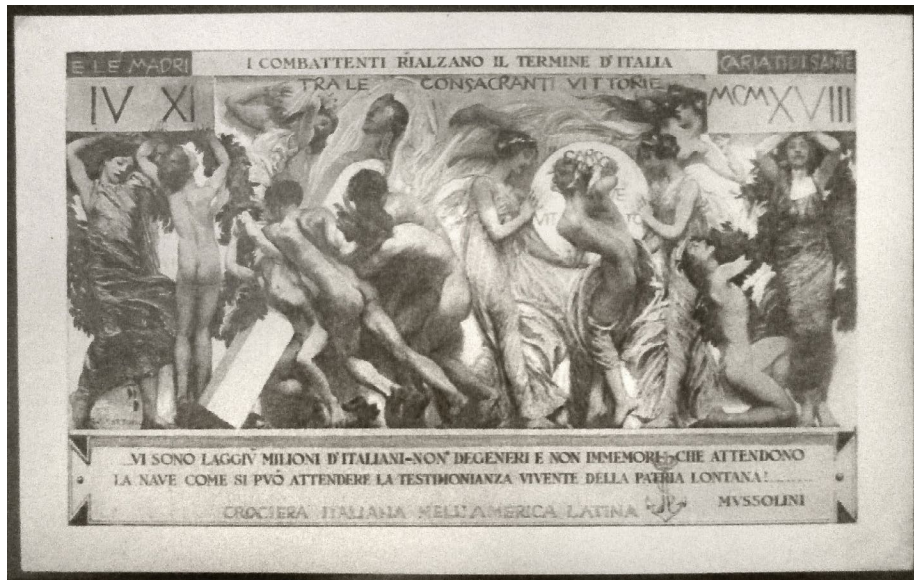


FIGURE 6 Giulio Aristide Sartorio, Postcard *Crociera Italiana nell'America Latina* [Italian Cruise in Latin America], 1924, 3 ½ x 5 ½ inches (9.0 x 14.0 centimeters), The Wolfsonian–Florida International University, Miami Beach, Florida, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection TD1989.75.6.

artistic content through a souvenir album of the expedition published in Bahia Blanca (Argentina), reviews of the exhibition, official documentation of the project’s administration, and Latin American collections of Italian art.<sup>27</sup> These sources confirm that the *Nave Italia* carried no work by the Futurists, the Metafisica artists, or the Novecento group supported by Margherita Sarfatti, Mussolini’s cultural advisor at the time. The works on the *Italia* were not by the internationalist Italian avant-garde, but rather by the Italian artistic regional schools of the nineteenth century, labeled *Ottocento*, commercially successful among the middle-class, and promoted during the 1920s as an Italian path to modernity and as an alternative to French Impressionism.

For the *Italia*, every region chose the best and most representative artists of their area. The regionalism of Italian painting during the 1920s was a widely observed phenomenon.

<sup>27</sup> Teresa Sacchi Lodispoto, ‘La crociera della Regia Nave *Italia*: dal progetto al viaggio’, in Istituto Italo-latinoamericano, *Sartorio 1924: Crociera della Regia Nave ‘Italia’ nell’America latina*. [Mostra, Roma, Istituto Italo - latino americano, 9 dicembre 1999–5 febbraio 2000] (Roma: Ed. De Luca, 1999), pp. 12–23. The catalogue also reproduces a spread of the *Album Ricordo della visita Bahia Blanca della R.Nave- Esposizione Italia*, a catalogue published in the Argentinian city of Bahia Blanca to celebrate the arrival of the *Italia*. To my knowledge, the only copy of this *Album* is in the Biblioteca Popular Bernardino Rivadavia, Bahia Blanca (Argentina). This source is particularly precious because in its central spread, it reproduces twenty-four of the artworks included in the *Italia*. In his book on the Mexican Muralists, art historian Jean Charlot mentioned other works: ‘Also exhibited in the flesh, together with his masterpieces, was Giulio Aristide Sartorio, painter of “Prelude to Spring”, “Evenings in the Roman Countryside”, “The Wise and Foolish Virgins”, and so on. His equal in talent, Leonardo Bistolfi, dubbed “the sculptor of thought”, was represented by such allegories, tenderly caressed in marble, as “The Sphinx”, “Beauty and Death”, “The Spirits of Youth at the Tomb of a Young Poet”, “Sorrow comforted by Memories”’. Unfortunately, Charlot did not indicate the source for this list. Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920–1925*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 249.

For example, in 1921, presenting an exhibit of post-war artists in the Galleria Pesaro in Milan with many of the artists later included in the *Italia*, Ugo Ojetti claimed that artistic regionalism was a marker of Italian inventiveness.<sup>28</sup> The art critic Mario Vannini Parenti, who selected the artworks for the Museum of Italian Art in Lima (donated by the Italian community in 1922 and containing works by many artists represented in the *Italia*) also observed such a phenomenon. When justifying his choice of artists for the museum, which was visited by the authorities of the *Italia* as an example of Italian entrepreneurship and culture in Latin America, he noted that due to the pluralism of Italian art, a complete overview of its manifestations necessarily included diverse styles.<sup>29</sup>

This understanding, therefore, explains the plurality of styles, quality, subject matter, and media of the works of art included in the *Nave Italia*. The artists represented on the *Italia* did not belong to the same regional school or to the same generation. Some of them, such as Mario de Maria or Sartorio himself, belonged to the generation born around the 1850s–1860s, inspired by the English Pre-Raphaelites and the German Symbolists, cosmopolitan and in contact with European *fin de siècle* artists. Others, like Beppe and Guglielmo Ciardi, spent all their lives in Venice and thrived in the Italian market but not abroad. Side by side with Antonio Mancini and Ettore Tito, artists honoured with museum acquisitions and gallery shows, exhibited commercial artists like Achille Beltrame, famous for his covers of the popular *Domenica del Corriere*.

However, even if the quality and fame of the artists of the *Italia* were diverse, a close overview of their careers shows that none of the artists mentioned in the reports of the ship was completely unknown in 1924. This does not necessarily mean that the many others whose work was on sale were equally famous - probably only the best known were mentioned in the reports - but it does indicate that the *Italia* was not a mere show of mediocre art, as one could wrongly suppose today based on the absence of most artists currently included in the art canon. Ettore Tito had a retrospective at the Venice Biennale in 1912, in which *Portrait of Marina Volpi*, one of the works sent on the *Italia*, was exhibited (Figure 7). Beppe and Guglielmo Ciardi, and Girolamo Cairati (erroneously marked in the *Album Ricordo* as Girolamo Sala) participated in various Venice Biennales — Ciardi was even mentioned in an article by Vittorio Pica published in *The Studio International* in 1925.<sup>30</sup> Francesco Jerace and Davide Calandra sent to Latin America bronze copies of monuments done for important public commissions: Jerace's frieze for the University of Naples (1910) and Calandra's monument to Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli (1909). In the *Italia*, Carlo Balestrini showed *Gathering Ice Near Milan*, which had been presented in the Milan Permanent Exhibition of 1903; the work was reviewed in the important art magazine *Emporium*.<sup>31</sup> Although these artists do not currently figure in the canon of Italian modern art, in the 1920s they had national, and at least in the case of the Ciardis, also international, reputations.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Arte Italiana contemporanea. Catalogo con prefazione di Ugo Ojetti e note biografiche compilate da Vincenzo Bucci* (Galleria Pesaro: Milan, 1921), no page.

<sup>29</sup> Vannini Parenti to the Organizing Committee of the Museum, 11 April 1922, quoted in Mario Quesada, *Museo d'arte italiana di Lima*, 1st ed. (Venezia: Marsilio, 1994), pp. 14–15. Despite its pretense of inclusiveness, like the *Italia* the Italian Art Museum in Lima did not contain any work by the Futurists, the Metafisica artists, the group of Valori Plastici, etc.

<sup>30</sup> Vittorio Pica, 'Italian Art at the Venice International Exhibition', *The International Studio. An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, October 1909, p. 270.

<sup>31</sup> Efraim Boari, 'L'esposizione di primavera alla Permanente di Milano', *Emporium*, XVIII, 1903, p. 157.

<sup>32</sup> I am thankful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out to me this important issue.



FIGURE 7 An example of the artwork on the *Italia*: Ettore Tito, *Ritratto di Marina Volpi* (1912).

However, the most evident commonality between these artists is that they were all untainted by any association with avant-garde movements. What is more, modernist Italian artists of the time frequently criticized the style pursued by the artists on the *Italia*, considering it stale, nostalgic, and not representative of the contemporary artistic landscape. Sartorio, in particular, was interpreted as the embodiment of the aesthetically conservative artists who were commercially successful and monopolized artistic institutions and public commissions. For Carlo Carrà, for example, Sartorio was ‘an archetype of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, worn out and spiritually inert’.<sup>33</sup> Giorgio Morandi, too, wrote that all his adult life he had ‘feared the resurrection of Ogetti, Ettore Tito and Sartorio’, examples of the official and grandiose art of Umbertine Italy.<sup>34</sup> After visiting the Galleria d’Arte Moderna in Rome in 1919, which included works by Sartorio, Tito,

<sup>33</sup> Carlo Carrà, ‘Giulio Aristide Sartorio’, *L’Ambrosiano*, 7 October 1932.

<sup>34</sup> In a letter to Mino Maccari from 1963 quoted in Janet Abramowicz, *Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 27.

and Mancini, Giorgio De Chirico did not find any valuable art, describing Tito's work as 'una pittura che pare eseguita con delle saponette liquefatte'.<sup>35</sup>

Yet while they were viewed negatively by many avant-garde artists and are now almost forgotten by scholars, the artists on the *Italia* seemed to conservative critics, and to sections of the Italian cultural establishment, better prepared to renew a dialogue with the public, a dialogue that had been purportedly broken by the intellectualism and excessive complexity of the avant-garde. All the identified artists on the *Italia* manifested an attention to the craft of painting, a renewed love for the human figure, and of the preferred *Ottocento* motifs: sentimental scenes, landscapes, genre painting, portraits of heroes, representation of regional costumes, and depictions of life in the countryside. In the mid-1920s, these characteristics were not viewed as negative. As gallery owner Lino Pesaro observed in 1931, in opposition to the modernist aesthetic of the Novecento group that he championed in the 1920s and that by then was prominent in fascist institutions, '[se l'Ottocento] è stato rivalorizzato non si è dovuto solo ai mercanti e agli scrittori. È l'arte che si è imposta, come i nostri occhi hanno saputo rivedere e rivendicare'.<sup>36</sup> His defense of the *Ottocento* emphasized the legibility of this art and the aesthetic pleasure that it could provide, two qualities that in his view were absent from current art styles. As a side note, the fascist artists engaged with public art during the 1930s and 1940s also pointed out the importance of legibility, albeit with a different aesthetic. While Mario Sironi, Massimo Campigli, Achille Funi, and Carlo Carrà were conversant with the international avant-garde, they also pursued a form of art that did not require the mediating interpretation of a critic, nor an extensive cultural background.<sup>37</sup> The art on the *Italia* could then be considered as an anticipation of some of the social values pursued by the art now mostly associated with Fascism, the mural painting that decorated public buildings during the last decade of the *ventennio*.

In opposition to the avant-garde, which cherished intellectual complexity and difficulty as a marker of artistic quality, the *Ottocento* style was easily comprehensible and effortlessly appreciated. The disillusionment with both the programmes of national renewal before the war and the formal innovations of the avant-garde led to the return to a concept of Italianness that referred to a pacified version of the nineteenth century: respectful of regional specificities, nostalgic for a bucolic countryside, suggestive of romantic scenes and feelings, and evocative of heroic gestures. The works of art on the *Italia* were reassuringly familiar, while also providing legitimate occasions of pride for the mastery and fame of many of the artists represented. The language of the avant-garde, too international, could not be easily marshaled for a nationalistic project that needed immediate and unambiguous references to Italian culture, landscape, and style. Conversely, naturalism and realism, the most common styles among the artworks included in the *Crociera*, were a form of accessible and comprehensible art that produced an immediate aesthetic pleasure: the kind of art that could be easily appreciated by emigrant Italians and local élites, who the organizers of the *Italia* considered to be unsympathetic to avant-gardist innovation.

<sup>35</sup> Giorgio De Chirico and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, 'La Galleria d'Arte Moderna a Roma. (Valori Plastici, luglio 1919)', in *Il meccanismo del pensiero: critica, polemica, autobiografia, 1911–1943* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1985), p. 116.

<sup>36</sup> Lino Pesaro, 'Luci e ombre del Novecento. Ultima ... ma non definitiva', *Il Regime Fascista*, Cremona, 11 July 1931.

<sup>37</sup> 'A large conception, robust means of execution, the immediate evidence of elements, to be comprehensible to every mentality.' O.I. Taddeini and L. Mercante, *Arte Fascista, arte per la massa* (Roma: Editrice Nuova Europa, 1935), p. 33.



## Cultural imperialism: the rhetoric of *latinità*

The accounts of the *Italia* trip — official reports, books and articles written by journalists on the ship, press releases, etc. — clearly distinguish this enterprise from other forms of imperialism, such as the English, German, or French conquest of colonial countries. In opposition to these forms of military occupation, during its early years the fascist government underlined its pursuit of a form of cultural imperialism, based on a kinship of culture and history. The project of the *Nave Italia* testifies to the early internationalism of the fascist movement: in 1919 the ‘Programma di San Sepolcro’ stated that the movement was against ‘l'imperialismo degli altri popoli a danno dell'Italia e all'eventuale imperialismo italiano a danno di altri popoli; accetta il postulato supremo della Società delle Nazioni e presuppone l'integrazione di ognuna di esse’.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the nation was conceived as an experience of collective solidarity rather than violent occupation. As Emilio Gentile has observed: ‘L'espansionismo fascista non si prefiggeva allora un programma di guerre e di conquiste coloniali, ma sosteneva la necessaria ed inevitabile diffusione del genio italiano nel mondo, attraverso i commerci, l'emigrazione, la cultura’.<sup>39</sup> This explains why in the reports, newspaper articles, and books on the *Italia* published during the 1920s, no mention is made of military expansion or occupation of Latin America, while emigration policies, market expansion, and cultural development are emphasized.

What is more, the cultural and spiritual primacy of Italy with respect to other nations was demonstrated by its choice to avoid military expansionism. In an article published in 1920, Giuseppe Bottai pointed out:

Gettarsi pel mondo con una decisa volontà di bene, significa valorizzare, ovunque, le proprie qualità di razza, non con mire sopraffattrici, ma, anzi, in rapporto alle peculiarità dei vari popoli. Significa regalare al mondo, solcato dalle varie sensibilità in contrasto, una sensibilità ricca, varia, duttile, geniale come la sensibilità italiana. [...] Una politica coloniale come questa [...] si risolve in un anticolonialismo vero e proprio, in rapporto agli attuali sistemi di colonizzazione e di espansione. Significando cooperazione intima, morale e intellettuale coi popoli, un'espansione del genere di quella da noi disegnata non può che essere rivoluzionaria, antimperialista e, data l'attuale dislocazione coloniale, antiinglese, ferocemente e disperatamente antiinglese.<sup>40</sup>

To underscore the cultural and spiritual aspect of the enterprise, the rhetoric that accompanied the *Italia* appealed to the concept of *latinità*, intended as the common root from which Italians and Latin Americans stemmed. *Latinità* was prominently used in the interventionist press during the First World War, encouraging Italians to intervene in the war on the Allied side on the basis of the shared cultural tradition between Italy and France.<sup>41</sup> D'Annunzio, for example, published an ‘Ode pour la Résurrection latine’ in

<sup>38</sup> Benito Mussolini, ‘Programma di San Sepolcro. Fondazione dei Fasci di Combattimento’, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, March 24, 1919.

<sup>39</sup> Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia Fascista (1918–1925)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), p. 208.

<sup>40</sup> Giuseppe Bottai, ‘Politica coloniale ardita’, *L'Ardito*, 23 October 1920.

<sup>41</sup> On the contraposition between *latinità* (Latinity) and *germanesimo* (Germanity), see, among others, Rosario Romeo, ‘La Germania e la vita intellettuale italiana dall'Unità alla Prima guerra mondiale’, in *L'Italia unita e la prima guerra mondiale* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1978), pp. 109–41; Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi fine secolo: la cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1985); and Seamus Dunn and T. G. Fraser, *Europe and ethnicity: The First World War and contemporary ethnic conflict* (London: Routledge, 1996).

the French newspaper *Le Figaro* in August 1914. Given the importance of D'Annunzio in the practical and ideological configuration of the *Nave Italia*, it is not surprising that the concept of *latinità* figured so prominently on this trip: as the catalogue stated: 'questa Crociera [...] vuole essere e sarà l'inizio e il consolidamento di un ulteriore ravvicinamento, fra la nostra e le Nazioni del Sud e del Centro Americano, nel nome sacro della Latinità'.<sup>42</sup>

*Latinità* justified the Italian intervention — cultural, not military — in Latin America by emphasizing the spiritual commonalities between the 'motherland' and the 'colonies', while underscoring the cultural dependency of Latin America on Europe. In fact, since its first usage by French intellectual Michel Chevalier in 1836, the term 'Latin America' interpreted the American nations in which Romance languages were spoken as related in a privileged manner to the Southern nations of Europe. This validated an ideal pan-Latin alliance between the Latin nations of Europe and the Latin nations of America, in opposition to England, Germany, and the United States.<sup>43</sup> Thus, while the reference to the term *latinità* seemingly put Italy and Latin America on the same level and denied Italy's imperialistic interests, in truth it revealed a colonial reading of the continent, one that excluded the indigenous people and represented the American population as subaltern, dependent, and merely instrumental for European political struggles.

Sartorio's mural frieze, which decorated the grand staircase of the *Italia*, summarizes the discourse on *latinità* (Figure 8). The frieze was a reworking of another that Sartorio executed in 1904 for the Italian pavilion in the International Exhibition in Saint Louis. It was composed of six panels, each with symbolic figures and a message in Italian that recapitulated the spiritual purpose of the enterprise: 'Idea-Mondo latino mediterraneo'; 'Fede-Mondo latino oceanico'; 'avvenimento d'arte e di cultura'; 'immagine di vita e lavoro'; 'miracolo di scienza e di ardimento'; 'lirica fantasia di attività'.<sup>44</sup> The propagandistic aim of the frieze — typical of other decorative projects by Sartorio — is evident in the text's message, which creates a connection between the Mediterranean basin and Latin America under the concept of 'Latin World' and underlines the leadership of the former (the 'idea', the rational aspect) over the latter (the 'faith', the promise, the still unrealized future).

Likewise, the iconography and style chosen by Sartorio underscore the colonial aspect of the notion of *latinità*. The panel 'Faith-Latin Oceanic World' depicts a winged figure and two colossi, which support an unusual map of Latin America. By placing the continent horizontally instead of vertically and avoiding any representation of the Northern part of America, this map isolates the region from its geographic neighbours and creates an artificial discontinuity between the 'Latin' and the 'non-Latin' parts of the continent. The map is also fragmented, as neither Mexico nor the islands of the Caribbean are represented even though the *Italia* visited them. The athletic colossi manifest the

<sup>42</sup> Crociera Italiana, p. xix.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), p. 80.

<sup>44</sup> After the return of the *Italia* to Italy, the frieze was dismantled and kept by Sartorio. Parts of it reappeared on the market in 1973, but only four fragments of the original frieze have been preserved. The only known picture of the frieze from the ship's voyage, published in the newspaper *Mundial* of Lima, shows a partial view of the original. Pasqualina Spadini, *Un fregio di Giulio Aristide Sartorio* (Roma: Galleria dell'Emporio Floreale, 1974); Pasqualina Spadini, *Giulio Aristide Sartorio (1860–1932): nuovi contributi, anni difficili (1922–1932)* (Roma: Galleria Campo dei Fiori, 1999).



FIGURE 8 Giulio Aristide Sartorio, *Fede-Mondo Latino Oceanico*, oil on canvas, 1924, private collection (Viareggio, Lucca).

influence of classical sculpture, in particular the Elgin marbles that Sartorio examined when visiting London in 1893. The female winged figure, on the other hand, reveals the importance of Symbolism, in vogue in *fin de siècle* Italy, and of the Pre-Raphaelites, of whom Sartorio was an early admirer. The figures on the mural refer to the European tradition: the classical models, the Christian references, the frieze-like disposition, even the wavy lines typical of *Art Nouveau*. In its evocation of the ‘Latin Oceanic World’, Sartorio’s mural does not manifest any reference to the particularities of the American continent: neither in terms of history nor race is there any indication of the difference between Latin America and Italy. Even the flora represented in this panel — the lily — is not common in South America. In its reference to purity and virginity, the lily represents how the Italian visitors understood America: as an empty land, a *tabula rasa* where Italy could project its civilizing mission.

Indeed, analyses of the *Nave Italia* have failed to note that the descriptions of Latin America by the Italian visitors admirably mentioned the continent’s natural beauties, but were blind to its social conflicts. Minimal mention was made of the indigenous populations, and no acknowledgment of ‘mestizaje’ or of the class struggles in these countries was given. In the eyes of the Italians, Latin America was a blank slate: they

paid no attention to the history of these populations before or after the arrival of the Spaniards. Little interest was shown in the social, economic, and cultural condition of the current population. The travelers of the *Italia* were above all interested in the Italian emigrant communities and their (greatly exaggerated) contributions to the economic and political development of these nations. For example, Piero Belli described Latin American cities in this way:

Una città americana — e dell'America del Sud — ha sempre tutte le caratteristiche del nuovo, del troppo nuovo, sorto in una specie di improvvisazione quasi frenetica, per il bisogno quasi spasmodico di arrivare presto a fare di ogni città una grande città, quasi che loro urgesse di paragonarsi subito a quelle dell'Europa, e quasi dominate dalla smania di riempire in pochi anni il vuoto e il silenzio di troppi secoli. Gli è che il Nuovo Mondo ha trovato tutto fatto. E non gli resta, naturalmente, che da copiare.<sup>45</sup>

As Latin America was described as a continent without history, in permanent competition with Europe, the Italian intervention was justified. According to the journalists and organizers of the expedition, only through an Italian emigration and cultural intervention would it be possible for Latin America to become truly 'modern'. Sartorio was the only visitor to pay some attention to autochthonous culture; for instance, in his report to Mussolini after the end of the trip he described pre-Columbian monuments and paid attention to the peculiarities of the Latin American Baroque. But he was equally blind to contemporary Latin Americans as historical subjects.<sup>46</sup> The more than sixty views of Latin America that he painted during the trip of the *Italia* concentrate on landscapes and religious buildings of the seventeenth century. Few humans appear, and when they do they are only folkloric figurines, such as mariachis playing music in Mexico City. For Sartorio 'dal giorno che le repubbliche sud americane si divisero dalla Spagna, esse si sono isolate dalla storia diretta e sono rimaste con una congerie di monumenti che emergono dalla vita pratica ed economica moderna come fossero rovine ancora intatte'.<sup>47</sup>

Latin America was considered the perfect space for cultural colonization: appropriately similar to Italy for the latter to be able to influence and mold it, but also sufficiently underdeveloped to admire the motherland and be willing to imitate it. The *Nave Italia* is thus an instance of an anomalous form of imperialism that fascist Italy also pursued in regions like the Balkans or France, where the rhetoric of 'civilization' versus 'barbarity', typical of military imperialism, could not be utilized.<sup>48</sup> The actual content of *latinità*, though, was extremely vague, including such things as Catholicism, Byzantium, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the common linguistic roots of Romance languages, and the presence of emigrant Italian communities. As Sartorio observed: 'Il centro della latinità è uno, ma la circonferenza in nessun luogo'.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Piero Belli, p. 112.

<sup>46</sup> A. Sartorio, 'Per l'avvenire dell'arte italiana nell'America Latina', *Nuova Antologia*, LIX, CCCXVI (December 1924), 228–56.

<sup>47</sup> Letter of Sartorio to Viezzoli, August 1925, Ermanno Viezzoli, 'G.A. Sartorio nell'America Latina', in *Il dramma dell'espressione. Studi d'arte moderna*. (Trieste: Anonima Libreria Italiana, 1928), pp. 209–16, (p. 209).

<sup>48</sup> Stefano Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale: diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918–1943* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005); Emily Braun, 'Leonardo's Smile', in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, ed. by Roger J. Crum and Claudia Lazzaro (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 173–86.

<sup>49</sup> Giulio Aristide Sartorio, 'Per l'avvenire dell'arte italiana nell'America Latina. Relazione a sua Ecc.za Benito Mussolini, Presidente del Consiglio e Ministro degli Esteri', in *Sartorio 1924*, p. 107.

This *pan-latinism* contrasted with the growing influence of the United States, which appeared guided by purely economic interests. The Panama Canal was inaugurated in 1915, and in that same year the United States occupied Haiti, which the *Italia* visited in September. Italian cultural colonialism was also an alternative to the influence of Spain in Latin America, interpreted as a decaying and reactionary nation.<sup>50</sup> Italy, on the contrary, was presented as modern like the United States but without its rapacious interests on the continent, and as historically prestigious as Spain but with more impetus towards progress. Italy aimed to have a mediating role between tradition and progress: modern and intellectually developed, as the commercial samples in the *Italia* showed, but also committed to culture and spiritual values, as emphasized by the artistic content of the ship.

The emphasis on the commonalities between Latin America and Italy provoked an ongoing interest in the region that continued throughout the rest of the fascist *ventennio*. To ease both the Italian public's hunger for information about Latin America and the emigrants' interest in the motherland, several newspapers specializing in the continent were also founded in the 1920s: *La Rivista d'Italia e d'America* (1923–1928), *Vie d'Italia e dell'America Latina* (1924–1932), and *Colombo* (1926–1931), among others. In 1926 F.T. Marinetti travelled to Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina for a very successful lecture tour; he returned to Argentina in 1936 for the International Congress of the Pen Club.<sup>51</sup> During the 1930s Mario Appellius, Armando Cipolla, Emilio Cecchi, and other Italian writers visited Latin America and published travel books that were very well received by a public eager for news from the other side of the Atlantic. In 1930, Margherita Sarfatti organized an important exhibit of the Novecento group shown in Uruguay and Argentina with great public success.<sup>52</sup> Three years later, Buenos Aires was the venue for an Exhibition of Italian Architecture, organized by the *Direzione degli Italiani all'estero* in Rome and the local and filo-fascist *Istituto Argentino de Cultura Itálica*.<sup>53</sup>

The *Italia*, however, differed from these later projects because of its anomalous mixture of commerce and art, mercantile interests and cultural aims, heir to the nineteenth-century tradition of World Fairs or International Exhibits. Before the *Italia* raised anchor, Giovanni Giuriati stated:

[Questa nave] solcherà il mare, carica di documenti umani e, più ancora, di affetti e di memorie, una nave che l'Italia manda ai suoi figli transoceanici. Non vuole essere una fiera di campioni; ma compendiare la multiforme attività dello Stato, delle arti, delle lettere, delle industrie e dei commerci. Non è una mostra, ma una testimonianza. Non è un affare, ma un gesto di amore e una promessa.<sup>54</sup>

Giuriati thus insisted on the double sense of 'campione' meaning a commercial prototype used to engage in commercial relationships, and an example of what a country has achieved, of its creativity, strength, and power. I will argue that the careful choice of

<sup>50</sup> Eugenia Scarzanella and Angelo Trento 'L'immagine dell'America Latina nel Fascismo italiano', in *Il mondo visto dall'Italia*, ed. by Agostino Giovagnoli (Milano: Guerini e Associati, 2004), p. 226.

<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey T. Schnapp and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, 'Brazilian Velocities: On Marinetti's 1926 Trip to South America,' *South Central Review* 13, 2/3 (1996): 105–56; May Lorenzo Alcalá, *La esquivia huella del futurismo en el Rio de la Plata: a cien años del primer manifiesto de Marinetti* (Buenos Aires: Patricia Rizzo Editora, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> *Il Novecento italiano a Buenos Aires*, 'Poligono', Milano, no. VIII, IX, X, June–August 1930, p. 437.

<sup>53</sup> 'Mostra di architettura italiana a Buenos Aires', *Il Tevere*, 3 February 1934.

<sup>54</sup> Pietro Belli, 'La Nave Italia è salpata dalla Spezia', *Il Corriere Italiano*, Roma, 19 February 1924.

industrial commodities, artwork, and decorative objects made it possible to transform the *Italia* from a sample exhibition into political propaganda. The goods that the *Italia* shipped were commercialized as a way to acquire a putative Italian identity through the possession of an object produced in the motherland that clearly avowed its origin. Therefore, while on principle *latinità* was an inclusive notion aiming to transcend class boundaries, the commercial aspect of the *Italia* excluded those emigrant Italians and Latin Americans who could not acquire the luxury goods that the ship carried. Additionally, even the distinctively propagandistic side of the enterprise disregarded the disempowered members of the Italian emigrant communities, as it needed prominent and well connected individuals to establish political and intellectual relationships with the local authorities.

Despite the systematic class-blindness of the *Italia*, the journalists' reports did mention, albeit coyly, economic and social differences among the Italian communities in Latin America. They expressed admiration for the small but uniformly prosperous communities, such as the Italians in Lima or Valparaíso, industrialists and bankers very influential in local politics.<sup>55</sup> Problems arose, though, when the expedition encountered the Italians in big cities like Buenos Aires or São Paulo. Here it was impossible to ignore the class differences among Italians, and the absurdity of an endeavour that pretended to be in dialogue with 'all Italians of America', as if they were a uniform and homogeneous group. The authorities of the expedition, for example, were embarrassed to discover the strong presence of dialects among emigrant Italians: Italian communities were primarily composed of workers who emigrated from Italy due to poverty, and the majority of them had no formal education whatsoever.<sup>56</sup>

Even more traumatic was the discovery that this enormous mass was not only discriminated against by the local population, but also taken advantage of by the Italian industrialists. For example, when visiting a prosperous Italian *fazenda* in Brazil, the expedition could not but notice that the exploited agricultural workers were also Italian.<sup>57</sup> Thus, for this large sector of the Italian emigrant community, the *Italia* did not bring the expected message. Its luxury goods were out of reach, and the nationalistic rhetoric did not answer the more immediate concerns of the poor. Despite its rhetoric of an all-encompassing *latinità* and its fascist discourse of class-inclusiveness, the *Italia* was unmistakably aimed at the middle-classes: it catered to their taste and relied on their conservative politics to promote the cause of Fascism in Latin America.

## The reception of the *Italia* in Latin America

The memoirs of the journalists usually recount the reception of the Italian mission in positive terms. Piero Belli, for instance, described frequent scenes in which Brazilians sang *Giovinezza* or the Italian anthem, or where 'Italianness' was identified with 'Fascism'. Manlio Miserocchi and Enrico Carrara also highlighted the enthusiasm of the locals for Italian products, and the high numbers of visitors to the ship — in Montevideo, for example, seventeen thousand people visited the ship in the span of four days.

<sup>55</sup> Carrara, p. 54.

<sup>56</sup> Carrara, p. 32.

<sup>57</sup> Miserocchi, p. 68.

Nonetheless, a review of Giuriati's private papers, some insinuations in the accounts of the journalists, and the local Latin American press also manifest some hostile reactions, aimed more at the fascist component of the expedition than at Italy itself.<sup>58</sup> For instance, the governor of the State of São Paulo refused to give Giuriati military honors. After the murder of Matteotti, hostilities became more numerous: in Valparaíso an anarchist group disturbed some of the activities planned for the Italian visitors, and at the University of Santiago, students interrupted the official speeches screaming 'Viva Matteotti'. Yet soon after, at least in Belli's account, public opinion ceased to be interested in the case, considered 'a purely judiciary issue', in Belli's chilling words.<sup>59</sup>

The hostilities in Mexico, however, were particularly remarkable, as they focused on the artistic content of the ship and thus evinced the entwining of style, class, and politics of the *Italia*. The *Italia* arrived at the Veracruz seaport on 22 August, staying in Mexico until 30 August. Up to the last minute, the authorities were hesitant to visit the country, as there were rumours that 'an army of Italian communists in voluntary exile' threatened to attack the ship if it were to stop in Mexico.<sup>60</sup> However, they decided to continue their planned itinerary. The Italian perception of Mexico as a hostile country was furthered because during its stay the Italian legation was continuously escorted by a military contingent, for fear of an armed attack. Indeed, the Federación Obrera de Tampico (Worker Federation of Tampico) and the Mexican Communist Party organized strikes and demonstrations, and published pamphlets informing on Fascist violence and the homicide of Giacomo Matteotti, whose body had been found on 16 August.<sup>61</sup> For this reason, the Mexican authorities discouraged the Italians from wearing black shirts during their visit, even if the hostile reception was minimized and the majority of newspapers fully supported the visitors. In Veracruz, 10,000 people visited the ship in its first day at the harbour, even if the Federación and the Communist Party had invited Mexicans to boycott the *Italia* in solidarity with the Italian working-class.<sup>62</sup>

Despite their worry about Mexican hostility, the Italians arrived in Mexico quite enthusiastic about the post-revolutionary regime of Álvaro Obregón. He avowedly defended the values of the Communist Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, and during his years in power promoted the distribution of land to the peasants. However, Obregón directly appointed his successor Plutarco Elías Calles and violently repressed any opposition. When his Minister of Finance questioned Obregón's choice of successor and rebelled against him, the president crushed the rebel forces and had them executed.<sup>63</sup> In 1924, Obregón was in his last year in office, and Calles was to be sworn in as president in November, so the reception of the Italian visitors was one of the last acts of Obregón's presidency. It was already well known that Calles' policies were more conservative than his

<sup>58</sup> 'La Crociera della Nave *Italia* e la sua propaganda a rovescio', *Corriere della sera*, 8 July 1924.

<sup>59</sup> Belli, p. 304.

<sup>60</sup> Belli, p. 274.

<sup>61</sup> '¡Alerta trabajadores de Veracruz! ¡Boycot al Barco Fascista!', *El Machete*, 21 August 1924.

<sup>62</sup> Rocca, p. 289; '¡Alerta trabajadores de Veracruz! ¡Boycot al Barco Fascista!', *El Machete*, 21 August 1924.

<sup>63</sup> Jaime Tamayo, *El Obregonismo y los movimientos sociales: la conformación del Estado moderno En México (1920–1924)* (Guadalajara, Jalisco: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2008); Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810–1996* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998); José Alfredo Gómez Estrada, *Lealtades divididas: camarillas y poder en México, 1913–1932* (México, D.F.: Instituto Mora ; Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2012).

predecessor's: during his tenure, he stopped the distribution of land, violently repressed strikes, and opposed workers organizations.<sup>64</sup>

The parallels between Obregón and Mussolini's rule were not lost on the Italians. In a diplomatic dispatch exchanged between the two countries' Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Italian Minister implored the Mexican Minister to allow the use of the black shirt, as it was instrumental in 'contributing to the principle of hierarchy and discipline so energetically defended by this Mexican government'. The Italian Minister further claimed that the *Italia* manifested 'the program of concrete and fecund Latin fraternity that [the Italian] government is promoting and that I am sure will resonate in Mexico, avant-garde of *latinità* in the new World'.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the Italian visitors perceived a commonality between Italy and Mexico based on the common use of force: in the Italians' interpretation of Mexico, this was a country where violence was used for political purposes, much like the Fascist forced conquest of power. As Giuriati responded to a Mexican journalist who inquired about the Matteotti homicide, 'I do not think that there is a big difference between your democracy and Fascism, because your democracy also uses force when necessary'.<sup>66</sup>

These similarities were also evident to the Mexican Muralists. In March 1924 Xavier Guerrero, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros founded an illustrated mural newspaper, *El Machete*, to voice the concerns of the working class affiliated with the Communist Party.<sup>67</sup> Covering political current events and international news, *El Machete* kept Italy's right-wing politics under close observation. For example, in early May 1924 it published an article that clarified the connections between capitalism, the Catholic Church, and the fascist movement, and how in recent elections Fascism served conservative forces by violently preventing socialists and communists from being elected and by attacking left-wing newspapers.<sup>68</sup> In August of that same year, *El Machete* translated an article published in the left-wing Italian newspaper of Chicago *Il Lavoratore* in which the end of the fascist regime was given as imminent.<sup>69</sup> In a note to this article, the editors of *El Machete* wondered:

<sup>64</sup> In 1929, Calles also promoted the foundation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario [National Revolutionary Party], the party that would rule Mexico for the next seventy years and that identified itself with the nation, aiming to reunite all classes and sectors of Mexican society. It is quite possible that the process of formation and foundation of the PNR was inspired by Fascism, as the Mexican government was well-informed about Italian politics of the time, and Calles was an admirer of Mussolini's political project. Indeed, both parties aimed to unite all classes in a superior national project that would transcend social differences, and to disempower the working classes while apparently proposing a third way between Liberalism and Communism. See Franco Savarino Roggero, *México e Italia: política y diplomacia en la época del Fascismo, 1922–1942* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> Franco Savarino Roggero, *México e Italia: política y diplomacia en la época del Fascismo, 1922–1942* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2003), p. 63.

<sup>66</sup> *El Demócrata*, 26 August 1924.

<sup>67</sup> On *El Machete*, see Mari Carmen Ramírez, 'The Ideology and Politics of the Mexican Mural Movement: 1920–1925' (Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1989); Alicia Azuela, 'El Machete and Frente a Frente: Art Committed to Social Justice in Mexico', *Art Journal* 52.1 (1993): 82–87; John Lear, 'La revolución en blanco, negro y rojo: arte, política y obreros en los inicios del periódico *El Machete*', *Signos Históricos*, 18 (December 2007): 108–47. I thank Professor Lear for providing me with an illustrated copy of his essay, and for recommending additional bibliography.

<sup>68</sup> Spineli Aldo [Aldo Spinelli?], 'El Fascismo, el Proletariado y la Democracia burguesa', *El Machete* (1–15 May 1924), 8.

<sup>69</sup> 'El Pueblo Italiano abatirá muy pronto al Fascismo asesino. Lo que no dice la prensa burguesa', *El Machete* (3–9 August 1924), 2.



While all democratic and liberal newspapers worldwide protest against the Fascist government of murderers, the liberal press in Mexico remains silent. Everyone has protested the murder of Mateotti. Yet none of the liberal and democratic newspapers in the capital have responded to our invitation to do the same. Do they approve Fascist crimes? How much do they charge the Minister of Italy in Mexico for their silence?<sup>70</sup>

The editors of *El Machete* were thus very upset about the imminent arrival of the *Nave Italia*, which the Muralists described as a ‘slap in the face to the Mexican working class’ (Figure 9).<sup>71</sup> During the week of 26 August to 4 September 1924, *El Machete* appeared with a comical skit — probably written by Siqueiros’ wife, Graciela Amador — that commented on the visual presentation of the *Italia* and described its crowded and highly decorated interior:

Remember, Pipi, those halls so rich  
Jam-full of statues and pictures.  
Such painting makes our heart twitch.  
Such art our aloofness punctures!

Indeed, dreary the Bistolfis  
Glazed with tears, my sight.  
My joy bubbled and fizzed  
To see those nudes throbbing and white.

Of Sartorio the genial output  
Pleased me most of this varied fare.  
It shames the monkeys rolled in soot  
That our local daubers call fair!

To opulent curves and lines musical  
Our artists prefer monkeyshine.  
They paint scarecrows with shapes whimsical  
That heap ridicule on mine and thine.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> ‘Mientras todos los diarios democráticos y liberales de todo el mundo protestan contra el gobierno Fascista de asesinos, la prensa liberal de México guarda silencio. Todo el mundo ha protestado por el asesinato de Mateotti. Pero ninguno de los diarios liberales y demócrata de la capital ha contestado a nuestra invitación para hacer lo mismo. ¿Aprueban acaso los crímenes Fascistas? ¿Cuánto cobran al Ministro de Italia en México por su silencio?’ ‘El Pueblo Italiano abatirá muy pronto al Fascismo asesino. Lo que no dice la prensa burguesa’, *El Machete* (3–9 August 1924), 2.

<sup>71</sup> ‘...la clase trabajadora de México [...] recibe un bofetón en pleno rostro con la visita de la ‘Italia’, ‘¡Alerta trabajadores de Veracruz! ¡Boycot al Barco Fascista!’, *El Machete*, August 21, 1924. Other articles on the *Italia* were: ‘La nave Italia mensajera de Mussolini, arribará en breve a Veracruz’, *El Machete*, 15 July 1924; ‘¡Alerta trabajadores de Veracruz! ¡Boycot al Barco Fascista!’, *El Machete*, 21 August 1924; ‘Viva la Rusia de los Soviets! La Nave Italia, arsenal de fascistas’, *El Machete*, 21 August 1924; ‘Llega a México la mafia de las camisas prietas’, *El Machete*, 28 August–4 September 1924; ‘Cómo y por qué nació y ha conquistado el Poder: sus resultados’, *El Machete*, 28 August–4 September 1924; ‘Se fue la nave Italia!’, *El Machete: órgano del Partido Comunista de México, sección de la Internacional Comunista*, 4 September 1924. I am grateful to Paul H. Thomas from the Hoover Institution Library (Stanford University) who helped me retrieve and consult these articles.

<sup>72</sup> Cited and translated in Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920–1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 250.

Periodico Semanario

Vale 5 centavos

EXTRA

EXTRA No. 1 | Responsable: XAVIER GUERRERO | Mexico, D. F., cuarta semana de agosto de 1924

El machete sirve para cortar la caña, para abrir las veredas en los bosques umbríos, decapitar calcebras, tronchar toda cirata, y humillar la soberbia de los ricos impías.

# LLEGA A MEXICO LA MAFFIA DE LOS "CAMISAS PRIETAS"

Los Trabajadores de Toda la Republica y de Todas las Tendencias, Deben Unir su Protesta por la Delegacion del Gobierno de Mussolini, Asesino de Obreros y Campesinos Italianos.—A la Obra, Camaradas

ESTE ES EL MOMENTO DE HACER UN FRONTE UNICO DE PROTESTA CONTRA LA REACCION REACCION ITALIANA, QUE SE PRESENTA A LA REACCION MEXICANA, COMO SIEMPRE QUE SE TRATA DE CONFIAR AL ENEMIGO COMUN, LOS TRABAJADORES DE TODAS LAS TENDENCIAS DEL UNICO Y VERDADERO FRENTE UNICO, RECORDANDO QUE FUE LA PALA REQUETA Y CONDENACIONAL DEL FASCISMO ITALIANO EL REVELAR SU PODER COMO MALLARDO DE LOS TRABAJADORES.

EL PARTIDO COMUNISTA DE MEXICO DELEGACION DE LA TERCERA INTERNACIONAL CONVOCABA A LOS TRABAJADORES DE TODOS LOS SINDICATOS Y PARTIDOS LABORALES, Y ORDENABA A REALIZAR EL FRENTE UNICO ANTI-FASCISTA CONSIDERANDO LA REACCION MEXICANA COMO EL FRENTE UNICO PROLETARIO DE LA CLASE OBRERA.

Subscribese a "EL MACHETE"

El Gobierno del General Obregón, que Proclama Insistentemente su Revolucionarismo, Comete Actos Serviles con los Reaccionarios más Criminales del Mundo, a los que Agasaja Como Buenos Amigos

EL GOBIERNO FASCISTA DE MUSSOINI, ASIGNO DEL PROLETARIADO ITALIANO, ESTA EN SU PAPER MANDANDO LA NAVE "ITALIA" PARA HACER PROTESTAS EN AMERICA, PARA QUE EL GOBIERNO MEXICANO DE OBREGON, QUE SE PROCLAMA AMIGO DE LOS TRABAJADORES, QUE PAPER, HACE BUENOS AMIGOS CON GRANDES NUMEROS OFICIALIZADO A LOS AMIGOS REACCIONARIOS, ESTA PERDIENDO LA ILUMINACION IMPOSITA QUE EL SIGLO DE LA REVOLUCION MEXICANA, ABRA TRAZO VIOLENTO, A LOS PIES DE LOS VERDADEROS DE TRABAJADORES QUE VIVEN EN EL MUNDO OBRERO.

LOS SECRETARIOS DE ESTADO QUE FORMAN PARTE DE UN GOBIERNO MEXICANO, CUSTAN EL DERECHO DEL PUEBLO EN PROTESTA LA LEGISLACION DE UNA REFORMA, REACCIONARIA, CON OBLIGACIONES DE SER "MACHETE" Y EMPLEANDO RESTRICCION, CON FINES FISCALIZADOS Y CONVENIENCIAS, SE SUSTAN A LOS TRABAJADORES DE MEXICO, QUE SE SIENTEN HONRADOS EN CLASE E IDEAL DE LOS TRABAJADORES AMERICANOS Y OBREROS POR LA "MAFFIA" MEXICANA, QUE GOBIERNA EN ITALIA, PARA SEGURIDAD DE LA BUN GUERRA, LOS ABANDON DEL EJERCITO MEXICANO, DEL EJERCITO DE LA BUNOVA COPIA, SE DISMINUYAN PROYECTANDO AL PAIS DE LOS AMIGOS FASCISTAS.

EN EL PROXIMO NUMERO, LO QUE PARA EL LA CANABA DE SINDICATOS.

## EL FASCISMO ITALIANO. - Cómo y Por Qué Nació y ha Conquistado Poder; Sus Resultados

...no se puede hablar del fascismo italiano sin referirse a la guerra mundial. Italia fue arrastrada a la lucha de la guerra obligada por el imperialismo francés y especialmente inglés, del cual, en el día de hoy, se desea alejarse. La guerra italiana no se aprobó nunca en los años sucesivos de cuando entre las naciones americanas y de hoy, y entre a hoy como en un punto de vista de la guerra mundial.

"El día de la guerra" hacia por fascismo. La duración de la guerra y la duración de la guerra, han dividido internamente a la burguesía y a la clase obrera, han dividido internamente a la burguesía y a la clase obrera, para que los milicianos italianos más fuertes y más alertas y represente la guerra como mejor trata el momento de la guerra.

...después de la guerra, el modo de la burguesía italiana... estar en Italia una gran cantidad de granos de trabajo, pero no se puede prescindir de los granos de trabajo, pero no se puede prescindir de los granos de trabajo, pero no se puede prescindir de los granos de trabajo, pero no se puede prescindir de los granos de trabajo, pero no se puede prescindir de los granos de trabajo.

Italia fascista, que he sido el único enemigo de la guerra, y que muestra el proletariado, arrastrado día a día con la revolución. La Confederación General del Trabajo llegó a tener dos millones y medio de miembros. El Partido socialista viene disminuyendo sus miembros.

Para el Partido socialista no era su parte revolucionaria, no revolucionaria, y el confederación general del Trabajo, año de 1919, estaba dirigido por los grupos reformistas.

Los trabajos, el proletariado italiano tenía una organización profesional, profesional, y a la vez, la formación de los sindicatos y organizaciones, respetando con la cooperación de los sindicatos por las labores y de las fuerzas por los comunistas, y a los partidos autoritarios del fascismo representado por el momento de los sindicatos de los italianos en Trieste, representada a los que representan los sindicatos una cantidad de más de dos millones, representando con el momento de las labores en Trieste y con la ayuda de las intervenciones de Trieste como resultado que el momento de los sindicatos.

Por otra parte, la propaganda, representada, que he sido el único...

chea obrera y la guerra, seguida por los grandes hechos de los industriales italianos de guerra y de sus empresas de guerra, y de los grandes proletarios del ejército, armada, obra de la vida pública italiana.

En consecuencia, en el momento de la vida nacional en el año 1919-1920.

El momento de la guerra mundial, en un momento cuando se desarrolló el movimiento del proletariado italiano, cuando se desarrolló, según se mencionó, a una participación con figuras de los comunistas, inclusión de la guerra de guerra, representando un clima de guerra, el ITALIA NOSTRA "Pueblo de Italia en guerra por la guerra y la guerra." En consecuencia, en el momento de la vida nacional en el año 1919-1920.

Los comunistas de revolución social que el Partido socialista italiano, después de la guerra, y la cooperación de los sindicatos y de los comunistas, y la burguesía a formar un ejército para una guerra, representada, que he sido el único...

FIGURE 9 'Llega a México la mafia de los «camisas prietas», El Machete: órgano del Partido Comunista de México, 28 September 1924.

The Muralists were aware that the works included in the *Italia* were not representative of the Italian artistic production of the 1920s. Siqueiros travelled to Europe in 1919, and in Milan he encountered Carlo Carrà and Giorgio De Chirico.<sup>73</sup> Rivera lived in Paris during the 1910s and 1920s, where he befriended Amedeo Modigliani and Gino Severini.<sup>74</sup> In 1920 and 1921, Rivera visited Italy, and in his autobiography he claimed to have known Margherita Sarfatti, Valentine de Saint-Point, and even Mussolini during his Parisian years.<sup>75</sup>

Additionally, the Muralists were familiar with the work of Bistolfi before the arrival of the *Italia*. In 1904, the dictator Porfirio Díaz commissioned Italian architect Adamo Boari with the construction of a theatre to commemorate the centenary of the Independence of Mexico from Spain. Boari designed the Palacio de Bellas Artes in an eclectic style, and commissioned several European artists, among them Bistolfi, to decorate the façade and the interiors (Figure 10). In his signature *Art Nouveau* style, Bistolfi's lunette included several figures, representing Harmony flanked by Music and Inspiration, surrounded by cherubs and other mythological figures (Figure 11). The construction of the building, aiming to showcase the power and stability of Díaz's rule, was interrupted in 1916 after the start of the Mexican Revolution, in which Díaz was overthrown, and the Palacio de Bellas Artes was completed only in the 1930s.<sup>76</sup>

For artists like the Muralists, engaged in developing an art for the masses, committed to workers' rights, and politically involved with the recuperation of the indigenous roots of Mexico, the art included in the *Italia* seemed not only merely artistically outdated, but politically treacherous. Its aesthetic was favoured by the middle and upper classes under the dictatorship of Díaz. These social strata looked at European models to gain cultural prestige, to justify their oppression of the lower classes, and to erase the indigenous past of Mexico. When the *Italia* arrived in Mexico in 1924, carrying art in the same style privileged by rich Mexicans fifteen years before, and now only accessible to the post-Revolutionary middle class, the Mexican Muralists uncovered the connections between this conservative aesthetic, its bourgeois base, and the potentially totalitarian politics of Fascism, both in Italy and in Latin America. As they denounced even before the *Italia* docked in Veracruz:

<sup>73</sup> Octavio Paz, *México en la obra de Octavio Paz. Vol. III. Arte de México: Los privilegios de la vista* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), p. 252.

<sup>74</sup> Oliver Olivier, *Diego de Montparnasse* (México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1979); Ramón Favela, *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Years* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1984); Luis-Martín Lozano, *Diego Rivera y el Cubismo: Memoria y Vanguardia* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Jean Charlot, 'Diego Rivera in Italy', *Magazine of Art*, 46. 1 (1953), 3–10; Clara Bargellini, 'La recreación del arte italiano en la obra de Diego Rivera', *Tiempo y arte. XVI Coloquio Internacional del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1989* (México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1991), pp. 369–87; Diego Rivera and Gladys March, *My Art, My Life. An Autobiography* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1960), pp. 220–21. Even if Diego Rivera's memory was often untrustworthy, Philip Cannistraro considers this episode authentic and cites it in his biography of Margherita Sarfatti: Philip V. Cannistraro, *Il Duce's Other Woman* (New York: Morrow, 1993), pp. 435–38.

<sup>76</sup> The theatre was officially inaugurated in 1934. To purify the building from its pre-Revolutionary implications, as well as from the conservative references in its style, Siqueiros, Rivera, Orozco and Tamayo decorated its interiors with murals.



FIGURE 10 Adamo Boari, Palacio de Bellas Artes (Mexico City), 1904-1934. Image in the public domain, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palacio\\_Bellas\\_Artes\\_Mexico\\_Marzo\\_2010.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palacio_Bellas_Artes_Mexico_Marzo_2010.jpg).



FIGURE 11 Leonardo Bistolfi, 'Birth of Venus', Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City (Mexico).

The *Italia* [...] will arrive to our harbors as a pretend “ambassador of good will” from the Italian to the Mexican people, when in Italian prisons languish thousands of workers, communists, anarchists, syndicalists, socialists [...] The *Nave Italia* — despite the capitalist press’ protestations to the contrary — [...] does not represent the Italian people or Italian labour, but the work of

the renegade Mussolini and the bourgeoisie that supports him as its guard dog against proletarian organization. The merchandises that the *Nave Italia* exposes represent the painful labour of the workers and peasants from that country, produced under the whip of the overseer, who again sees in the worker an ancient beast of burden because fascist terror has dismembered and suppressed syndicates.<sup>77</sup>

In a vignette published in *El Machete* when the *Italia* left Mexican shores, a caricaturesque male figure, dressed in black with a white skull on the chest, is represented carrying a model ship of the *Italia* (Figure 12).<sup>78</sup> This male character, with traits that resemble Giovanni Giuriati, Álvaro Obregón, and Plutarco Elías Calles, is lionized by a group of kneeling men — some wearing the black shirt — who worship him. The vignette ridiculed the amicable reception that the allegedly revolutionary Mexican authorities reserved for the Fascist visitors. In this friendliness, the Mexican Muralists perceived the distressing early symptoms of Calles' reactionary politics and his subjugation of the working classes, as well as the future totalitarian derivatives of Fascism, already visible in the homicide of Matteotti.

The *Italia* project avowedly criticized traditional colonialism because of its violence and military implications, and pretended to use culture to extend the spiritual, not the territorial, legacy of Italy. For the Mexican Muralists, however, in its choice of artistic style and commercial products, the *Italia* clearly manifested the bourgeois and totalitarian politics of Fascism. The concept of *latinità*, despite its pretense to inclusiveness, excluded those populations who did not descend from the Europeans. Thus, the *Italia* advocated a political rule that omitted both the indigenous population and the majority of Latin Americans, who were the fruit of five hundred years of *mestizaje*. After its independence from Spain, Latin American countries struggled to achieve a balance between recognizing both their pre-Columbian and their European roots. The *Italia*, however, completely ignored this attempt, and proposed a return to the subaltern role of America with regards to Europe. Additionally, in its choice of framing *latinità* as a trait that could be acquired through the purchase of luxury merchandise, the *Italia* also revealed that *latinità* was only available to the bourgeois population of Latin America.

While the intertwining of style, class, and politics was not immediately visible to most Latin American and Italian observers of the enterprise, for the Mexican Muralists it was quite clear. Detecting the uncanny similarities between the taste of the high bourgeoisie under Díaz's dictatorship and the preferred style of the early fascist regime, Siqueiros, Rivera and Guerrero anticipated the totalitarian drifts of Fascism that would become clearly visible a couple of months later, when in January 1925 Mussolini proclaimed himself dictator of Italy and announced the dismissal of Parliament. Therefore, albeit

<sup>77</sup> 'El 'Italia' [...] llegará a nuestros puertos como un pretendido 'embajador de cordialidad' del pueblo italiano al pueblo mexicano, mientras en las cárceles de Italia agonizan millares de trabajadores comunistas, anarquistas, sindicalistas, socialistas... [...] La nave 'Italia' — aunque la prensa capitalista diga lo contrario [...] — no representa al pueblo ni al Trabajo italianos, sino al Gobierno del renegado Mussolini y a la burguesía que lo sostiene como su perro guardián contra la organización proletaria. Las mercancías que expone la nave 'Italia' representan el trabajo doloroso de los obreros y campesinos de ese país, realizado bajo el látigo del capataz, que al estar desmembrados y suprimidos los sindicatos por el terror fascista, vuelve a ver en el trabajador la antigua bestia de carga'. 'La nave Italia mensajera de Mussolini, arribará en breve a Veracruz', *El Machete*, 15 July 1924.

<sup>78</sup> 'Se fue la nave Italia!', *El Machete: órgano del Partido Comunista de México, sección de la Internacional Comunista*, 4 September 1924.



FIGURE 12 '¡Se fue la nave Italia!', *El Machete: órgano del Partido Comunista de México*, September 4–11, 1924.

in an embryonic stage, the particular connections between Fascism, the bourgeoisie, and totalitarianism were already visible in the *Italia*, which was already ideologically fascist without being, from an aesthetic point of view, immediately identifiable as such.

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