

ANTJE GAMBLE

Italian Culture as White Culture in Postwar United States

When American art and architecture critic Aline B. Louchheim highlighted the work of modernist sculptor Marino Marini in an exhibition review for the *New York Times* in 1950, she began by describing the artist's physiognomy. It was the description, Marini's "gently sensual lips" and "high forehead" that told readers about the sculptor in her article.¹ These traits suggested, according to the critic, that Marini had an "ancestor [who was] one of the Florentines... whose pristine profiles was [sic] caught by Antonio Pollaiuolo [... or] a descendant of Verrocchio's 'David'." Louchheim's description stands out in the reviews of Marini's work, on both sides of the Atlantic, in the lengthy description of his physiognomy.² In the broader American context, this description of Marini is illustrative of the disjunctive acceptance of Italian modernism into the Western canon as dictated by American institutions.³ His physiognomy connected the modern Italian to the great humanist tradition of the Renaissance, of which the US saw themselves as inheritor.⁴ As part of their burgeoning Cold War strategies, the US wanted to be seen as inheritor of humanism because they were positioning themselves to lead Western culture.⁵

The US as humanist inheritor was also influenced by shifting racial politics in the US. For example, after Second World War, Italians started moving out of their urban enclaves, such as East Harlem (NY), into which they had been segregated.⁶ This is just one external marker to the shift of Italian Americans' place in America's racialized society. Marini and his work served as an ideal representation of the humanist heritage of Western culture and its constructed beginnings. The artist and his work also served as the face, quite literally, of broadening definitions of whiteness in America's racialized society. Italian artists and designers became the physical manifestation of the new postwar white Western culture that was being inherited by the Americans from European humanist traditions.

Italian modern art's patronage by US institutions was part of an effort to secure American cultural hegemony after Second World War. Support for Italian modernism was used to both present the US's place as inheritor of Western white culture and also to secure Italy, and its culture, as part of the

modern East/West divide of the Cold War. Importantly, it was not a natural nor neutral progression that led to Italian modern art being part of the Western art historical canon.⁷ Rather, key figures in elite cultural circles chose to include Italian modern art in order to uphold evolving ideas of whiteness and Western culture. The use of exhibitions at the beginning of the Cold War, oftentimes directly funded by the US government, worked to incorporate Italian modern art into the developing canon of Western modern art history. Exhibitions served as a way to present Italy and its culture as prime examples of capitalist democracies within the racialized-white West in this new Cold War global climate.

This article will focus on the moment of the American “Cultural Cold War” when Western culture was set up to be in opposition to communist Eastern culture in the USSR and its allies. The “Cultural Cold War” interacted with shifting ideas about race in the US with regard to Italians and Italian Americans.⁸ Exhibitions like MoMA’s 1949 *Twentieth-Century Italian Art* [fig. 1] and the 1950–53 *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* not only opened markets in the US for Italian material culture, but also helped establish this cultural link between the US and Italy’s humanist past. Though this work had begun before the war, the postwar shift to supporting modern art and design was important to solidifying America’s position as the Western cultural leader.⁹ As many have shown since Serge Guilbaut’s 1983 book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, the US and its allies worked, sometimes in disagreement, to fight for American cultural supremacy within the West during the Cold War.¹⁰ Italy played a key role in this space not only because of the peninsula’s legacy (namely ancient Rome and the early modern period, or Renaissance), but also because of its strategic geographical location on the Mediterranean.¹¹ Recent scholarship by myself, Raffaele Bedarida, Elena Dellapiana, and others have shown that Italian modern art, design, and architecture was having a moment in the US after Second World War.¹² This paper builds on this scholarship by track how exhibitions of Italian art in the US after Second World War presented Italian culture as white culture to strengthen American claims to Western humanist culture at the same time that Italian Americans were working to be seen as fully, culturally white in their communities.

The intersections of politics, economics, culture, art, and race are at the heart of the importance of looking at exhibitions of Italian art in the post-Second World War US. Bringing in research from fields outside of art history are, therefore, necessary. In part, this study serves to add the context that scholars like Miguel Mellino have called for since the 2010s. As Mellino wrote:

what still needs to be done [in the study of postcolonial Italy's relationship to "capitalist modernity"] is to dislocate modern Italian history — particularly the nation-building process — and put it back into the global context of what Peruvian postcolonial theorist Anibal Quijano has called "the coloniality of modern capitalist power [...]."13

Though Mellino considers constructions of "race, racism, and racialization" inside Italy, a broader look at Cold War-era geopolitics fits within his linkages between capitalism, colonialism, and racism.¹⁴ For example, the reassertion of Italy's place as a capitalist democracy after Italian Fascism's fall was important on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁵ At the same time, Italy wanted to keep the political and cultural power that it lost with the war and with the dissolution of their colonies in North and East Africa.¹⁶ Likewise, the US wanted to shore up power in the Mediterranean at the beginning of the Cold War and make sure they were seen as the inheritors of the patrimony of Western culture.¹⁷

Conceptions of US racial whiteness in the first half of the twentieth century put Italians in proximity to whiteness. Positioning Italians as not fully white, specifically not culturally white in the US, served political actors as well as individuals. The construction of the Western canon of art history, for instance, relied on hierarchies of race, nationality, and even artistic medium (painting is art but ceramics are craft, for instance). These contexts are connected to the politics in Italy and the US that helped secure Italian cultural productions as part of the Western canon. From Fascism to the Cold War, Italy was strategic politically both for its physical proximity to the *East* and its Communism. At the same time, Italy was valuable for its humanist legacy. For the US to present itself as the inheritor of Western culture from Europe, it had to incorporate Italy into the colonial hierarchies of white and western. Just as Mussolini weaponized Imperial Roman and Early modern culture to justify his claims to establish a "Third Rome", the US deployed Italian art and culture in the Cold War. One way they did this was by supporting, overtly and covertly, postwar Italian art and design exhibitions in the US and throughout Europe. US exhibitions that packaged postwar Italian art and design as Western, democratic, capitalist, and therefore white, Italian modern art validated the Western art history canon as part of American-lead humanist culture.

Italian Americans and Their Proximity to Cultural Whiteness in the US after Second World War

Italian Americans and recent Italian immigrants to the US were experiencing a rapidly shifting political and social environment in the decade after the Second World War. This was, in part, because Italian Americans were becoming considered culturally white in the US. Since race is a cultural construct, it

works inside and outside of legal channels, often in seemingly contradictory ways. As sociologist Erik T. Writters notes, “whiteness is ‘done’ through culture” and “is in a constant state of working and reworking.”¹⁸ Whiteness is as constructed and ever shifting as the definitions of Western culture. Culture itself is used to construct racial hierarchies; and art is a powerful cultural tool in creating ideas about race.¹⁹ The integration of Italians and Italian Americans into whiteness is connected to Italian modern art and design’s integration into the Western canon after Second World War.

Race for immigrants to the US often shifted their own preexisting understandings of race, which were often different in their countries of origin. Even if they already held racial privileges at home, American writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin described how the American racialized system was paramount to US culture. He wrote: “It bears terrifying witness to what happened to everyone who got here, and paid the price of the ticket. The price was to become ‘white’. No one was white before he/she came to America.”²⁰ Baldwin was alluding to way in which immigrants to the US would leave behind practices, customs, and language, as they were made to embrace a hegemonic white racial identity within the US. Of course, many immigrants would have embraced cultural assimilation, but what is important for Baldwin is that the US racialized system was more endemic to culture than in Europe, for instance, because of the legacy of colonialization and chattel slavery.²¹ Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Italian immigrants became less segregated in the US. First, Italians segregated amongst themselves into regional groups, then unified in a national identity of Italian Americans, and then, after Second World War, into broader white communities.²² For Italians, a position as white became more urgent during and after Second World War because of the shifting international political landscape.²³

Within scholarship on race in the US, studies of race have extensively looked at the systems of oppression that affected Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC). However, there are a growing number of more studies that have looked at how various ethnic groups became white over time.²⁴ Unlike BIPOC immigrants, Italian immigrants had some legal protections but did not benefit culturally from whiteness until the second half of the twentieth century.²⁵ The first important shift came in the late-nineteenth century, when attitudes towards non-Anglican European immigrants started to change, bringing more European groups closer to whiteness; though they were the lowest in the nineteenth-century European racial hierarchy.²⁶ Italian American and Italian immigrants’ raised proximity to whiteness did not protect them from racial violence at the end of the century. For example in 1891, eleven Italians were lynched by a mob after a “acquittal

of nine alleged Mafia members believed responsible for killing New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessy.”²⁷ This event was closely followed by a national celebration of the holiday for Christopher Columbus in 1892 – it would not become an official national holiday until 1964.²⁸ This holiday became important to the Italian American population over time. As historian Thomas J. Schlereth shows, Columbus was first used as a symbol in a search for a national American identity by Anglo Americans since the 1790s.²⁹ It is not until almost hundred years later that celebrations of the historical figure within Italian American communities become popular and when they saw him as “an American ethnic saint in an era of unprecedented immigration.”³⁰ The shifts in the holiday symbolizing Italian American identity seem to follow the shifts in Italian American’s racial status in the US.

Though Italians were legally “white on arrival,” as historian Thomas Guglielmo has termed their legal status in the US, their experiences in the racialized hierarchies of American culture were more complicated.³¹ These legal privileges included the rights to naturalize as US citizens and have full voting rights, like other white Americans. This meant that Italian Americans did have many privileges within US society that their BIPOC neighbors did not, even if they still experienced discrimination because of their liminal status with regard to cultural whiteness. However, their legal status did not protect them from legal discrimination.

Scholar and memoirist Louise DeSalvo’s examination of her grandmother’s naturalization in the US in the 1890s illustrates the double-edged whiteness held by Italian immigrating to the US in the first half of the twentieth century. DeSalvo grandmother’s papers recorded her as “color White; complexion Dark.”³² As she emphasizes that this description as “complexion Dark” could not have been a phenotypical observation, because “my grandmother was most certainly fair.”³³ The coding of her visibly fair complexion as “dark” was meant to signal her otherness as an Italian in America. These distinctions were made to show immigrants that though they were able to gain citizenship because of their European whiteness they were a not fully-white American. The Immigration Act of 1924 specifically restricted immigration of Italian immigrants alongside other liminally-white European groups. Historian Peter G. Vellon shows that support 1924 bill highlighted specific anti-Italian sentiments among some “old stock” Americans.³⁴ This happened because the construction of whiteness was not so clear cut; “an immigrant might be considered white [legally], yet at the same time be perceived as racially distinct from other whites.”³⁵ It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the 1924 bill was repealed.³⁶

With these shifting ideas about race, Italian Americans and recent Italian immigrants to the US were often “placed between whites and blacks.”³⁷ This started to shift more dramatically after Second World War at the beginning of the Cold War. Discussing the often-parallel Jewish-American experience, anthropologist Karen Brodtkin writes:

programs [helping GI’s] reinforced white/nonwhite racial distinctions even as intrawhite racialization was falling out of fashion. This other side of the coin, that white men of northwest European ancestry and white men of southeastern European ancestry were treated equally in theory and in practice with regard to the benefits they received, was part of the larger postwar whitening of Jews and other eastern and southern Europeans.³⁸

Italian Americans were not passive actors in these shifts either. Before and after Second World War, they began to make moves to differentiate themselves from the Black communities that they had once been an integral part. Rising anti-black violence among the Italian American community was one signal to the Italian American push to be perceived as culturally white in the US.³⁹ These “complicated and contradictory ways Italians have adopted and challenged the practices of white supremacy” showed they were gaining access to cultural whiteness in the US.⁴⁰ The colloquial knowledge of this shift to whiteness is still discussed by Black folks today, from the 2002 NYC radio deejay at WAXQ-FM Chuck Nice making the remark “Italians [*sic*] are niggaz with short memories” to the jokes about Italian Americans being People of Color in the film *Sorry to Bother You* (Significant Productions, 2018).⁴¹

These internal and external moves to secure a place for Italian Americans as culturally white became interconnected with American Cold War politics. For example, in response to the 1952 immigration act – which had replaced the 1924 law – the American Committee on Italian Migration (ACIM) critiqued the law by saying that “Italy would go Communist, and the already delicate equilibrium in Western Europe would tilt toward the Soviet bloc” if poor Italians were not allowed to emigrate to the US.⁴² Among other things, the predominant religion of most Italian Americans, Catholicism, played to their favor. A public anti-communist stance was being championed by key American Catholics, including Joseph McCarthy.⁴³ The church also supported groups like the ACIM with resources for their advocacy.⁴⁴ The immediate decade after the Second World War saw continued legal exclusion of Italian immigrants in the US, on the one hand, and moves by the Italian American community to be seen as fully white, on the other. None of these shifts, however, were neutral or natural. They were individuals, communities, and governments working to reorient in the new Cold War context of America’s capitalist democracy.

Western Culture as White Culture

The social status of Italians in the US was connected to the related cultural construction of so-called Western culture. Similar to the cultural dichotomy of black versus white in terms of race, the West is a social construction. Modern ideas of East and West are essentially a rebranding of Orient and Occident – terms still used in Italian today: *oriente* and *occidente*.⁴⁵ Neither sets of terms are neutral; both are constructed from the perspective of Europeans (more specify Northern Europeans) and facilitate various forms of power (colonial, religious, etc.).

As Edward Said outlined in his canonical text on *Orientalism*, the separation of Orient and Occident simplified the complexities of culture in order to create a hierarchical order.⁴⁶ Historian Georgios Varouxakis tracked the usage of terms like West and Western in the British lexicon to be a specific replacement for the term “Occident.”⁴⁷ It was used in the nineteenth century to reflect the geopolitical differences both between UK and their colonies specifically and also between Europe and Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and so-called “Oriental” Jewish people more broadly.⁴⁸ As Said had already alluded, the East/West construction brought in issues of colonialism, race, and religion that were all at (messy) play together.⁴⁹ These hierarchies overlap and informed racial hierarchies. It is this Eurocentric understanding of history that generated the modern ideas about Western culture – what fits in it and what does not fit in the Western canon of art history. The Ancient Greek states, the Roman Empire, and Ancient Egypt are part of the Western art historical patrimony, while the pre-Christian Germanic people, the Romani, Jewish Europeans culture are not.

Occident/Orient, West/East are distinctions that have guided the development of the field of art history since the European Enlightenment. Though the field has started to shift, most art history surveys have Italian art history include numerous Catholic altarpieces by everyone from Giotto to Verrocchio but not a single item now housed in the Museo Ebraico (Jewish Museum) in Rome. This shows that it was not just someone’s physical position in Europe or on the Mediterranean that situated their cultural patrimony within Western art history. Even within one location, Italy, not all their cultural patrimony would count as Western. Beyond religion, growing conceptions of race placed modern Italians outside the canon in the beginning of the twentieth century. In the books, Italian art is ostensibly omitted between Bernini’s Baroque sculptures and Boccioni’s Futurist paintings, as if the three centuries between those two did not exist. Just as Mussolini strategically chose Imperial and not Republican Rome to champion under Fascism, these canon choices within art history were political as much as aesthetic. Politics, economics, religion,

culture, and shifting ideas about race during the European Enlightenment influenced the Western art historical canon that was the foundation for American art historians and curators after Second World War.

The explicit connection between art history and race, at least in American scholarship, starts with the work of Kymberly Pinder, in her 2002 book *Racing Art History*.⁵⁰ Since this foundational volume, there has been more scholarship of both race inside art and art history and also the variety of art omitted from the Western canon.⁵¹ It is not just historical art that has been framed inside or outside the Western canon. For modernism in particular, “as a product of the Enlightenment epistemology, [modern art] has operated as self-evidently ‘universal’, silencing the histories of the non-West.”⁵² Therefore, it is important not only to recognize the constructed and biased nature of the canon, but also to understand the canon’s broader social and cultural impacts.

The construction of the West, just like the Western canon of art history, relied on a racial hierarchy to get and maintain power. Institutions like the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) actively used their exhibitions to shape these ever-evolving ideas about Western culture and whiteness before and after Second World War. One of the latest books on MoMA, by Caroline M. Riley, highlights the museum’s use of politics and culture in intentional canon creation.⁵³ Similarly, the often-contradictory nature of connecting modern Italian culture with the dominant white Western culture is evident in a variety of ways. The press around Cold War exhibitions illustrated the shifting position of Italians inside the American racialized culture in real time. As with the description of sculptor Marino Marini that opened this paper, images of Italian artists also reflected the othering of contemporary Italian people in the US.

For the 1950-53 *Italy at Work* exhibition in the United States, a photo of Lucio Fontana was used to entice exhibition viewership for the opening to readers of *Interiors* magazine [fig. 2]. The caption reads: “In a whitewashed cell at Albisola, on the Italian Riviera, Lucio Fontana works his sophistication into ceramics with a texture as rough as the bare walls around him.”⁵⁴ Fontana pensively looking at his ceramic creations reads as the old world, as a man connected to his past, to the land that made the clay. The only discussion of his work in the accompanying article reiterates the caption of the illustrated image: “Fontana showing his powerful achievements in clay in a vaulted, whitewashed stone cell in Albisola, lighted by a barred window and one light bulb.”⁵⁵ The text for this article reinforces this orientalizing view of Fontana, discussing the curatorial research trip to Italy as a “shopping trip” for exotic wares without broader aesthetic or historical context.

Of course, Fontana would have been keenly aware of the positionality in such a photograph. He had been working in ceramics for two decades, in part, as

Iria Candela has described, because “modeling [in clay] gave the artist room for spontaneous gesture and free experimentation with form.”⁵⁶ Beyond the materiality of the ceramic media, as Candela, Sharon Hecker, Anthony White, and others have shown, Fontana’s interest in the intersections of high and low connect this work to his work that was praised in high art circles.⁵⁷ However, Fontana’s voice and agency is missing from the *Interiors* article. Nowhere do they acknowledge Fontana’s really avant-garde use of ceramics, his experiments in media like neon, nor the broader import of his work internationally. I would even suggest that this is likely why the 2019 show *Lucio Fontana: On the Threshold* at the Met Breuer sparked so much discussion about Fontana’s American reception at midcentury.⁵⁸

By comparing this “Romanticizing” image of Italian aesthetic production, borrowing Paulo Scrivano’s terminology, to others made to represent Fontana as a genius artist, the framing of Fontana as other is stark.⁵⁹ Like the famous 1962 images by Italian photographer Ugo Mulas, the less often reproduced photographs by German photographer Charles Wilp [fig. 3] create a sharp contrast to the image used in *Interiors*. In Wilp’s photos, taken around 1960, Fontana is dressed in a tweed suit and red tie, standing to the right of a matching red slash paintings. Wilp’s photos of Fontana show an artist and his work in a more authoritative way. Fontana is shown looking out at the viewer, meeting their gaze. These are images of an artist-genius, an artist who knows his and his works’ value. In contrast to the image used to illustrate the *Interiors* magazine article, he is an artist and not a romanticized craftsman. For an American audience, the contemporary Italian artist Fontana was Western because of his artisanal connection to the Italian Renaissance. He was framed as other (not fully white) in the *Interiors* article because of the still liminal space Italians held in the US. Despite Fontana’s innovative use of ceramics in his contemporary artistic practice, his work was presented in proximity to folk art of the non-white groups in Europe (Jewish, Romani, Pagan, etc.). Distinctions of high and low, art and craft happening in the early twentieth century therefore likewise informed and were informed by other cultural constructions of East/West.

These images are coded with cultural as well as political value. The *Interiors* image was produced for the publicity, or better yet propaganda, for a US Marshall Plan funded exhibition of Italian design. It was meant to show the American public how quaint Italian producers were, how they were slowly starting to make work after the devastation of Fascism. These small simple people, making simple things, deserve the power of American consumerist support. On the other hand, Wilp’s images engaged with a contemporary trend of capturing artists, following the likes of Hans Namuth’s photographs of Jackson Pollock in 1951. These are images that fit Fontana into a

contemporary art context alongside the other greats of the postwar period. Despite Fontana's own connection between his ceramic work and those in traditional and non-traditional high art media, for an American audience, the *Interiors* magazine image and accompanying article does little to make that link.

Thought it was important to American cultural elites for modern Italian artist patrimony to become part of the Western canon, as I have discussed elsewhere, the lingering understandings of Italians as only liminally-white in the American racial hierarchy still peeks through.⁶⁰ Among other historical prejudices, the country's physical proximity to Africa and leftist political undercurrents both made the incorporation of Italian modern art into the modern Western canon tangled. Even as their work was being championed as part of the new modernist art history of the West, Italian artists still were held to the racist standards of the American racial hierarchy. This was only amplified during the Cold War, where distinctions between West and East gained even more political and cultural import globally.

Cold War Politics and Italy in the West

The US political interest in Italy started before the First World War as the popularity of leftist politics grew during the period of liberal Italy and continued in the interwar period as Mussolini took over and established the fascist state. American official support for Mussolini under pre-war Fascism see parallels in the postwar support for Italy. In 1929, German-Swiss author Emil Ludwig interviewed Benito Mussolini for the *New York Times*. In the interview, Ludwig outlined:

there seems to me to be a distinct contrast between the Italian and Russian methods, which formerly were so alike... [and Mussolini's] belief in his new form of State might bring him to the point of not desiring to see it established anywhere else.⁶¹

Fascism was modernizing the *backwards* and therefore liminally-white Italy illustrated in Grand Tour novels; however, fascists were not as much of a political threat as the Soviets. Not only would Mussolini not enact Italy's colonialism beyond interests outside the West (tellingly, it was ok that he was colonizing parts of North and East Africa), but his strong control of the peninsula would mean that Communism would not spread there from the recently established USSR.

The decade after the fall of Fascism the push to bring Italy into the fold of the West increased during the burgeoning Cold War. Communism was an *Eastern* political ideology, in opposition to Western capitalist democracy. For Italian

Americans and for the US Government alike, there were fears that Italy would fall the Communist expansion in Eastern Europe. This was immediately evident to leaders of both countries. Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi's 1947 visit to the United States reflected his use of this fear to vie for more US support of Italian reconstruction efforts. De Gasperi spoke publicly of a wish "to convince the American authorities that [Italian] economic necessities and the need to normalize political life [...] should be dealt with as a single problem."⁶² The equation of economic stability to political stability, both against resurgent Fascism and also against Communism, is inherent in the understanding of American Cold War ideals.⁶³ Economic, political, and cultural control linked here.

Italy's position in these early Cold War policies was central to the American project. As historian David Ellwood notes, "the Marshall Plan in a country like Italy was never just an abstract affair [...] Nor was it merely another weapon in America's Cold War anti-communist crusade."⁶⁴ This was because of the unique qualities of the new constitutional democracy as well as the country's important cultural history within the West (namely Italy's humanist history). One of the ways that the US Government worked within this complex postwar Italian context was by funding exhibitions of Italian art and material culture in the US. These initiatives not only served to bring Italian modern culture into the white West but also helped Italian cultural elites rebuild. This rebuilding of the Italian cultural elite class was both ideological and financial. They could separate themselves from any possible connections to either Fascism or Communism (the second was only in some cases), at the same time as they found new wealthy business connections in the robust American markets.

Italian Americans also participated in these Cold War initiatives as a way to both solidify their cultural power in the US racialized society as well as support the incorporation of the post-fascist Italian state into the Cold War alliance with the US. The leading figure in this is antifascist, Jewish Italian, and recent American immigrant and intellectual Max Ascoli.⁶⁵ Ascoli was founder of the Handicrafts Development Incorporated, a private organization to help artists and artisans in Italy, and the organization CADMA (*Commissione Assistenza Distribuzione Materiali Artigianato* or Artisan Materials Distribution Assistance Commission), headed by theorist and art critic Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti.⁶⁶ After the war, these organizations would be utilized by the Marshall Plan funded organization the CNA (*Compagnia Nazionale Artigiana* or National Artisan Company) and was funded through the U.S. Export-Import Bank under the Economic Recovery Program (ERP) starting in 1947.⁶⁷ The American arm of CNA was the New York City based House of Italian Handicraft (HIH) of which Ascoli was on the board.⁶⁸ In addition to supporting these organizations, Ascoli's writings also championed the Cold War ideals that capitalist

democracies not only made stable nations but were necessary for good cultural production.⁶⁹

These US Government funded initiatives (CNA and HIH) were one of the avenues in which American museums organized exhibitions of Italian Art and material culture. As these Marshall Plan initiatives were forwarding loans to Italy's various industries, American cultural elites were eyeing Italian modern art and design for incorporation into the still-developing modern canons.⁷⁰ This necessitated Italians, and Italian Americans with them, move from liminally-white to fully, culturally white.

US Exhibitions Presenting Italian Modern Art as White Western Culture

Through public and private ventures, exhibitions did political work. The postwar Venice Biennale, for instance, were not only a symbol of Italy's rebirth after Fascism, but also an international arena for political power.⁷¹ Exhibitions in the US also helped to secure American cultural soft power during the early Cold War.

American post-Second World War exhibitions were often publicly funded, though in most cases, the government support was covert. For example, initial investment in the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) important 1949 exhibition *Twentieth-Century Italian Art* [fig. 1] was kept hush-hush as to not sully the public presentation of curatorial objectivity. The exhibition's early curatorial research trip to Italy was funded by Marshall Plan funds through the Office of International Information and Cultural Relations (OIC).⁷² Yet, co-curator Alfred H. Barr, Jr. wrote to Charles Rufus Morey (Barr's former mentor at Princeton, who had become the American Cultural Attaché in Rome) that "if it were to appear that the exhibition was officially sanctioned or supported it would immediately be discounted by artists and critics everywhere."⁷³ The public perception that the MoMA's exhibitions were objective and not politically motivated is aligned to the ideal of the Western canon, one in which Barr was a key figure in developing.⁷⁴ As with earlier Orientalists described by Said, Barr weaponized the rhetoric of scholarly objectivity to make choices that had serious cultural impacts.

Exhibitions, like this one at MoMA, needed to be publicly perceived as politically neutral to keep their cultural authority. This helped the institution build its position as an authority in canon formation. MoMA curators were keenly aware of their role in canon formation: "[e]xhibitions are sites of experimental art history, where curators act as arbiters of taste, selecting artists, both new and old, for art critics and general visitors."⁷⁵ For MoMA's integration of Italian modernism into the Western canon, curators wrote that

Italian modern art had been “neglected” by Americans, in part, “because of two formidable counter-attractions in Europe – the Parisian present and the Italian past.”⁷⁶ This telling line in the exhibition catalogue’s introduction was not part of the canon *a priori* like “the Parisian present and the Italian past.”⁷⁷ In this case, Barr and co-curator James Thrall Soby, from their position as white arbiters of Western culture, were inviting Italian modern art into the modern canon through their show.

Their curatorial choices reflected this move to bring Italian modern art into this canon, which necessitated the perception of modern Italy as part of the white West. One way they accomplished to prove modern Italian art’s viability in the Western canon, and by proxy Italian’s *whiteness*, was by editing out key parts of fascist era art.⁷⁸ From reducing Futurism to its pre-First World War moment (this had already been done in the 1936 *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition by Barr) to separating artists like Lucio Fontana, Giorgio Morandi, and Marino Marini from the sponsorship that they received under the fascist state, the MoMA exhibition created an easily dismissed version of Italian fascist art for their American audiences. Other edits by Barr and Soby that helped to separate Italian modern art from Fascism, including the ratification of the Novecento group as the primary iteration of fascist art. This selection made it easier to expunge the deep connections many important modern artists had to the fascist state. *Twentieth-Century Italian Art*, conversely, came to present Italy and correspondingly Italian art as free, democratic, and, therefore, worthy of a place within the Western art historical canon.⁷⁹

Another way this was done at MoMA was by presenting Italian modern art as “formal exercises that allied Italian artistic production with that of America’s cultural (and political) allies.”⁸⁰ As art historian Kristina Wilson has shown, however, “Barr posited that a work of art whose formal sophistication was complemented by significant social content had a greater value to society than a work concerned only with stylistic experimentation.”⁸¹ By presenting Italian modern art as politically neutral, MoMA curators were using coded language understood by Western viewers that Italian art was part of their culture; the culture associated with white people of the West.

For *Twentieth-Century Italian Art*, this “value to society,” as Wilson puts it, was allied with the Cold War need to bring Italy into the fold. Museums were key interlocutors of these actions. In 1948, US Ambassador to Italy James C. Dunn wrote as much to Nelson A. Rockefeller (son of one of MoMA’s founders, then, current MoMA Museum President, and future Vice President of the US) that *Twentieth-Century Italian Art* was intended to “help our relationship with other countries, and [...] [give] to those who are really trying to improve their own situation and that of their respective countries.”⁸² MoMA and its curators

were part of a vast network of public and private entities supporting Cold War initiatives. These initiatives were invested in making sure Italy, Italians, and their cultural production were solidly part of the white West in the fight against the *Eastern* communists of Soviet Russia and their allies.

For other exhibitions, like the 1950-1950 *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* exhibition, the US State funding was overt. *Italy at Work* was produced under the auspices of the Marshall Plan, openly funded through the CNA. The exhibition came three years after the 1947 *Handicraft as a fine art*, organized by HIH. As part of their official mission as a state-sponsored exhibition, both *Italy at Work* and the earlier *Handicraft as a fine art* were meant to spark an American market for Italian goods to support their economic recovery. Again capitalism, democracy, and culture were being linked explicitly to bring Italy and the US together during the early Cold War.

Italy at Work was a huge exhibition, even by today's standards, with over 2,500 individual objects. Organized in collaboration between Meyric R. Rogers, Curator of Decorative and Industrial Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), and Director of the Brooklyn Museum Charles Nagel Jr., their two home institutions were the first two legs of the multi-state tour that traveled to thirteen institutions between 1950 and 1953.⁸³ This exhibition had a far greater reach than the previous show at MoMA, with over half a million visitors across all thirteen venues.⁸⁴

Since this exhibition was openly funded by the US Government, organizers were more explicit in the political import of the show. They claimed the variety of objects displayed in the exhibition, everything from a Lambretta scooter to children's toys made of straw, was meant to reflect a newly liberated "Italian vitality that [...] stored itself up during the long, grey fascist interim, waiting for this day of sun again."⁸⁵ In short, Italy was no longer fascist and it had reignited the earlier heritage to become a productive member of the West.

Yet, the liminal space that Italian's held in the American racial hierarchy of whiteness still pervades the exhibition's texts, as already alluded to in the *Interiors* image of Fontana that was used to publicize the opening of the show at the Brooklyn Museum in 1950. In the introduction of the exhibition catalogue, Rogers writes that the show was "designed to give the American public the pleasure that comes from seeing objects made in our own time [and] that are at once useful and beautiful or stimulating to the imagination."⁸⁶ The various works created by Italian artists, architects, designers, artisans and craftspeople were there, ultimately, for American "pleasure." This can also be attributed to the complexities of the Western art historical canon, which categorized some media (painting, sculpture, etc.) as art and some media (ceramics, textiles, furniture, etc.) as craft. The exhibition

Italy at Work illustrates a complicated web of references in which knowledgeable white audiences would easily navigate Italy's previously outsider space in Western culture and their newly necessitated insider space during the early Cold War.

Italian art and design served the US Cold War initiatives in a variety of ways. It positioned the US as inheritor of the humanist heritage that Italy possessed, which itself was posited as the foundations of white Western culture. Not just inheritor either, the US was positioned as the savior of Italian culture (from both Fascism and Communism). Exhibitions like *Italy at Work* and *Twentieth Century Italian Art* helped to bring Italians and Italian Americans into whiteness, in part, because of the import of Italy (culturally and geographically) in the Cold War. If Italian artists and designers were fit to be showcased in major exhibitions at places like MoMA and the Art Institute of Chicago, then they had to be fully, culturally white. Therefore, their political alliance was strengthened as being on the side of white Western capitalist democracies and not the Eastern Bloc of communists and non-whites.

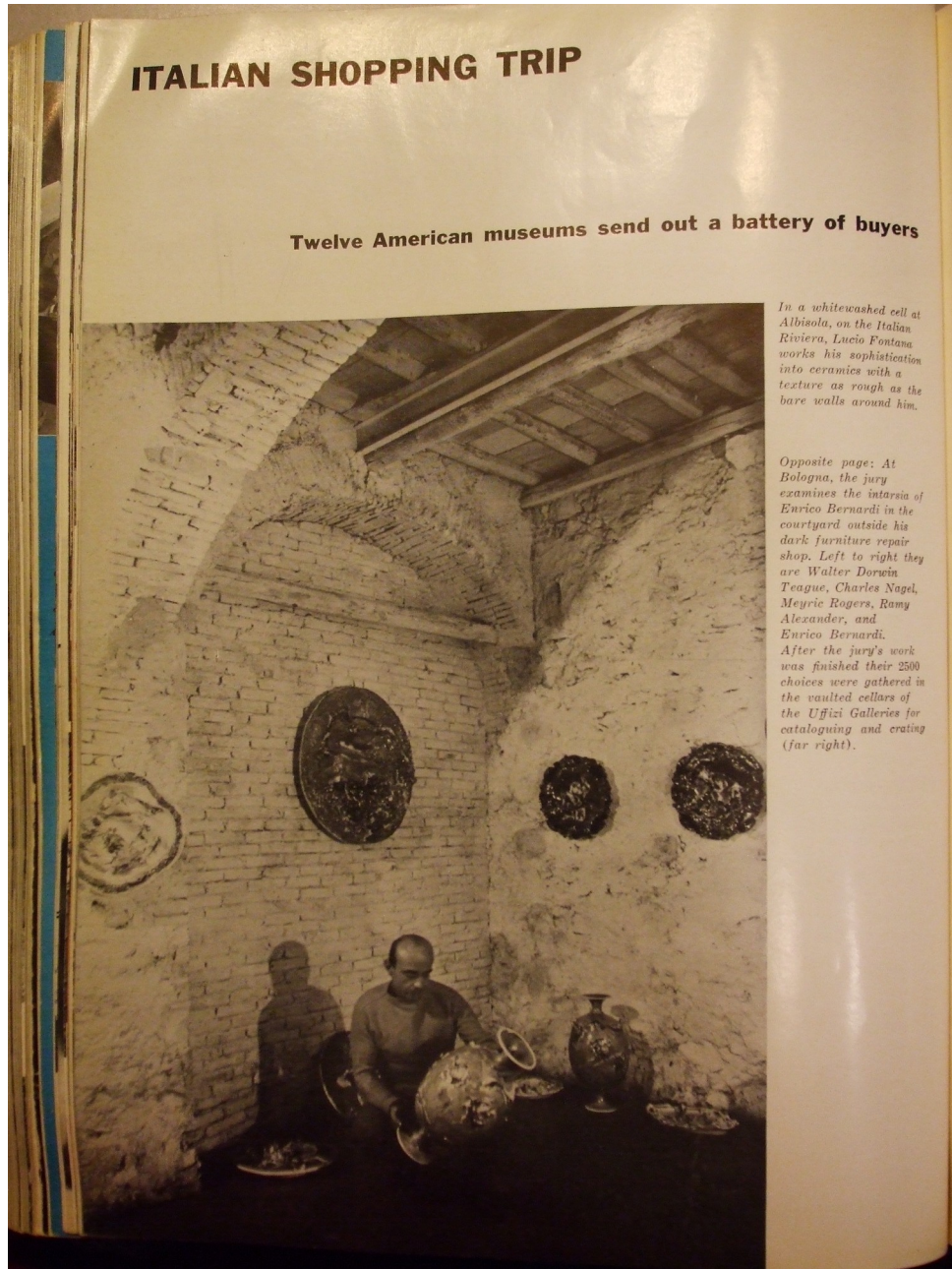
PLATES



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This image will display properly on a monitor calibrated to 5500 K, 2.2 gamma when using the embedded working space profile

1 Installation view of the exhibition *Twentieth Century Italian Art* (June 28 – September 18, 1949). Photographic Archive, The Museum of Modern Art Archives. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



ITALIAN SHOPPING TRIP

Twelve American museums send out a battery of buyers

In a white-washed cell at Albisola, on the Italian Riviera, Lucio Fontana works his sophistication into ceramics with a texture as rough as the bare walls around him.

Opposite page: At Bologna, the jury examines the intarsia of Enrico Bernardi in the courtyard outside his dark furniture repair shop. Left to right they are Walter Dorwin Teague, Charles Nagel, Meyric Rogers, Ramy Alexander, and Enrico Bernardi. After the jury's work was finished their 2500 choices were gathered in the vaulted cellars of the Uffizi Galleries for cataloguing and crating (far right).

2 Walter Dorwin Teague. "Italian Shopping Trip: Twelve American Museums Send Out a Battery of Buyers." *Interiors CX*, no. 5 (November 1950): 144.



3 Wilp, Charles (1932-2005), Lucio Fontana with a painting. Ca. 1960.
bpk Bildagentur / Art Resource, NY © Copyright bpk/Charles Wilp.

- ¹ Aline B. Louchheim, "Tradition and the Contemporary," *New York Times*, February 19, 1950, X9.
- ² This is the only mention to Marini's physiognomy in reviews of the sculptor that I've found in my extensive research. However, Louchheim does use a physiognomic description for one other sculptor, German artist Gerad Marcks, who is compared to a "Gothic wood carving." See: Aline B. Louchheim, "A VETERAN SCULPTOR LOOKS FORWARD: MATISSE PORTRAIT FROM HIS FAUVE PERIOD," *New York Times*, June 4, 1950. This may suggest her reading of sculptors was set in this way. Perhaps also, this may have been a ploy to reintegrate these former-combatant cultures back into the fold of Western cultural hegemony. Her review of the work of African American artist Jacob Lawrence does not mention his visage but a photograph of him opens the article – Marini's portrait is not included in her article. See: Aline B. Louchheim, "An Artist Reports on the Troubled Mind: AN ARTIST AND HIS TIME An Artist Reports," *New York Times*, October 15, 1950.
- ³ Throughout this paper, I will use the term "American" to refer to citizens of the United States of America with the understanding that there are two American continents that can claim this moniker. Also, inverted comas are used strategically to signal to the reader the constructed and shifting ideas of things like race and cultural difference.
- ⁴ Antje Gamble, "Buying Marino Marini: The American Market for Italian Art after WWII," in *Postwar Italian Art History Today: Untying 'the Knot'*, eds. Sharon Hecker and Marin Sullivan (New York: Bloomsbury Visual Art, 2018), 155–72.
- ⁵ I want to note that terms like "Western" and "white" are cultural constructions and do not have fixed definitions nor attributes.
- ⁶ Gary R. Mormino, "'It's Not Personal, It's Professional': Italian Americans and World War II," in *The Impact of World War II on Italian Americans 1935–present*, edited by Gary R. Mormino (New York: AIHA and John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 2007), 15.
- ⁷ The terminology of neutrality is being borrowed from the movement, and accompanying hashtag #MuseumsAreNotNeutral, created by cultural organizers LaTanya S. Autry and Mike Murawski in August of 2017 "to refuse the myth of neutrality that many museum professionals and others put forward." See "Museums Are Not Neutral," *Artstuffmatters*, <https://artstuffmatters.wordpress.com/museums-are-not-neutral/>
- ⁸ The term "Cultural Cold War" was seemingly coined by American historian Christopher Lasch in his description of the organization called Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). See: Christopher Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of The Congress for Cultural Freedom," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, edited by Barton J. Bernstein (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 322–59.
- ⁹ For a brief overview of pre-war American exhibition of Italian art see: Francesca Romana Morelli, "Italian Art Exhibitions in the United States," in *Post Zang Tumb Tuuum: Art, Life Politics, Italia 1918–1943*. Curated by Germano Celant, (Milan: Fondazione Prada, February 18-June 25 2018). Exh cat. (Milan, Fondazione Prada, 2018), 208.
- ¹⁰ For an overview of the literature on this subject, see Robert Burstow, "The Limits of Modernist Art as a 'Weapon of the Cold War': Reassessing the Unknown Patron of the Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner," *Oxford Art Journal*, 20, no. 1 (1997): 68–70.
- ¹¹ Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of The Congress for Cultural Freedom," 337.
- ¹² For example: Raffaele Bedarida, *Exhibiting Italian Art in the United States from Futurism to Arte Povera: "Like a Giant Screen,"* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Davide Colombo, "1949: Twentieth-Century Italian Art al MoMA di New York," in *New York New York. Arte Italiana: La riscoperta dell'America*. Curated by Francesco Tedeschi, Francesca Pola and Federica Boragina (Milan: Museo del Novecento, 2017). Exh. cat. (Milan: Electa, 2017), 102–9; Elena Dellapiana, "Italy Creates. Gio Ponti, America and the Shaping of the Italian Design Images / Italia crea. Gio Ponti, América y la configuración del la imagen del diseño italiano," *Res Mobilis. Revista internacional de investigación en mobiliario y objetos decorativos* 7, no. 8 (2018): 19–48; and Antje Gamble, "Exhibiting Italian Democracy in the 1949 'Twentieth-Century

- Italian Art’,” in *Modern in the Making: MoMA and the Modern Experiment, 1929–1949*, edited by Sandra Zalman and Austin Porter (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 215–29.
- ¹³ Miguel Mellino, “De-Provincializing Italy: Notes on Race, Racialization, and Italy’s Coloniality,” in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, edited by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 86–7.
- ¹⁴ Mellino, “De-Provincializing Italy,” 87.
- ¹⁵ There has been much recent work on the complexities of exhibitions of Fascism and fascist-era art and design, in particular, efforts to erase fascist connections to fascist-era art since Second World War. For example, see the recent volume *Curating Fascism: Exhibitions and Memory from the Fall of Mussolini to Today*, edited by Sharon Hecker and Raffaele Bedarida (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).
- ¹⁶ For a brief overview of the complicated nature of end of Italian colonial control, see Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, “Introduction: Paradigms of Postcoloniality in Contemporary Italy,” in Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, *Postcolonial Italy*, 1–29.
- ¹⁷ Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 24.
- ¹⁸ Erik T. Withers, “Whiteness and culture,” *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 4 (2017): 1. <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/soc4.12464> (emphasis original).
- ¹⁹ Just one example of a study of how visual culture was used to construct ideas about race is: Aston Gonzalez, *Visualizing Equality: African American Rights and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).
- ²⁰ James Baldwin, “On Being White...and Other Lies (1984)” in *The Cross of Redemption. Uncollected Writings*, edited by Randall Kenan (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 136.
- ²¹ Baldwin, “On Being White,” 136.
- ²² Stefano Luconi, “Forging an Ethnic Identity: The Case of Italian Americans,” *Revue française d’études américaines*, no. 96 (May 2003): 91–92.
- ²³ For example, see: Matteo Pretelli, “The Useless Fifth Column of Mussolini in America,” in *The Impact of World War II on Italian Americans 1935–present*, edited by Gary R. Mormino (New York: AIHA and John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 2002), 65–81.
- ²⁴ For example, see: Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York-London: Routledge, 1995).
- ²⁵ Jennifer Guglielmo, “Introduction: White Lies, Dark Truths,” in *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America*, edited by Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York-London: Routledge, 2004), 1–14. European immigrants were all considered legally white in the US since the 1790s because of the categorization at the time. Jenna Cushing-Leubner, “Discourse and Whiteness,” in *Encyclopedia of Critical Whiteness Studies in Education*, edited by Zachary A. Casey (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 134.
- ²⁶ Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 216.
- ²⁷ Jessica Barbara Jackson, “Before the Lynching: Reconsidering the Experience of Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana, 1870s–1890s,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 300.
- ²⁸ The official state stance is that the holiday was established in direct response to the lynching. Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “A Proclamation on Columbus Day, 2023,” press release, October 6, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/10/06/a-proclamation-on-columbus-day-2023/>. This is a justification commonly used against the abolishment of the holiday by contemporary Columbus apologists. For example, see William J. Connell, “Who’s Afraid of Columbus?” in *Italian Americana* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 136–47.
- ²⁹ Thomas J. Schlereth, “Columbia, Columbus, and Columbianism,” *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (December 1992): 938.
- ³⁰ Schlereth, “Columbia, Columbus, and Columbianism”: 955. Also see, Gerald McKevitt, “Christopher Columbus as a Civic Saint: Angelo Noce and Italian American Assimilation,” *California History* 71, no. 4 (Winter 1992/1993): 516–33.

- ³¹ Guglielmo's book separates ideas of "race," which he uses in reference to Italian American's legal status, and "color," which he uses to describe the cultural prejudices against the group. Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival. Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- ³² Louise DeSalvo, "Color: White/Complexion: Dark," in Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 25.
- ³³ DeSalvo, "Color: White/Complexion: Dark," 26.
- ³⁴ Peter G. Vellon, "Italian Americans and Race During the Era of Mass Immigration," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, edited by William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York-London: Routledge, 2018), 212. The term "old stock" referred to "represented invitations to join a common north-west European group defined as "American" in opposition to southern and eastern European immigrants," which came to be used to differentiate Americans with colonial heritage and those from more recent immigrant lineages. Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 8.
- ³⁵ Vellon, "Italian Americans and Race During the Era of Mass Immigration," 213.
- ³⁶ Maddalena Marinari, "'In the name of God... and in the Interest of our country': The Cold War, Foreign Policy, and Italian Americans' Mobilization against Immigrant Restriction," in *New Italian Migrations to the United States: Politics and History since 1945*, edited by Laura E. Ruberto and Joseph Sciorra (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 59. The 1924 legislation was replaced in 1952 with similar immigration curbs. However, this bill did make a loophole for naturalization to no longer reserved to solely immigrants be of European ethnicities. "The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (The McCarran-Walter Act)," Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, United States Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/immigration-act> (accessed June 25, 2024).
- ³⁷ Stefano Luconi, "Black dagoes? Italian immigrants' racial status in the United States: an ecological view," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2016): 188; and Luconi, "The Bumpy Road Toward Political Incorporation," 319–336.
- ³⁸ Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 50.
- ³⁹ See: Gerald Meyer, "When Frank Sinatra Came to Italian Harlem. The 1945 'Race Riot' at Benjamin Franklin High School," in Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 161–76.
- ⁴⁰ Guglielmo, "Introduction: White Lies, Dark Truths," 2.
- ⁴¹ Antje Gamble, *Cold War American Exhibitions of Italian Art and Design* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 6; and Guglielmo, "Introduction: White Lies, Dark Truths," 1.
- ⁴² Marinari, "In the name of God... and in the Interest of our country," 59.
- ⁴³ McCarthy identified as Catholic. Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 27–34.
- ⁴⁴ Marinari, "In the name of God... and in the Interest of our country," 60.
- ⁴⁵ Already in the 1970s, scholars were connecting ideas of Western culture to that of the Occident. This is now a universally accepted connection in the field of sociology. For example, psychologist Joseph Goertz wrote that "the philosophy which the West developed, and the science which grew out of it as its natural offshoot, are no chance products; they are essential constituents of the Occident." See: Joseph Goertz, "'Occident': Some Thoughts on the Self-Understanding of the West," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 2, no. 4 (December 1974): 239.
- ⁴⁶ Edward W. Said, "Orientalism," *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 166. Also see, Edward W. Said *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
- ⁴⁷ Georgios Varouxakis, "When did Britain join the Occident? On the origins of the idea of 'the West' in English," *History of European Ideas* 46, no. 5 (July 2020): 569–81.
- ⁴⁸ Varouxakis, "When did Britain join the Occident?"
- ⁴⁹ The term Occidental is still used by white-supremacist groups to decry their perceived loss of Western civilization. For example, the journal *The Occidental Quarterly* (TOQ) is published by the Charles Martel Society. According to the Southern

Poverty Law Center, this is “a racist journal devoted to the idea that as whites become a minority ‘the civilization and free governments that whites have created’ will be jeopardized.” See: “OCCIDENTAL QUARTERLY,” Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/occidental-quarterly>.

- ⁵⁰ Kymberly N. Pinder, “Introduction,” in *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, edited by Kymberly N. Pinder, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1-9.
- ⁵¹ For just a few examples: Suzanne Preston Blier, “Enduring Myths of African Art,” in *Africa: The Art of a Continent: 100 Works of Beauty and Power* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996), 26–32; *The Routledge Companion to Decolonizing Art History*, edited by Tatiana Flores, Florencia San Martín, Charlene Villaseñor Black (New York: Routledge, 2024); and Tyler Stallings and Ken Gonzales-Day, *Whiteness: A Wayward Construction* (Laguna: Laguna Art Museum, 2003).
- ⁵² Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, “Introduction: Inside Modernity: Indigeneity, Coloniality, Modernisms,” in *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, edited by Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 2.
- ⁵³ Caroline M. Riley, *MoMA Goes to Paris in 1938: Building and Politicizing American Art* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023).
- ⁵⁴ Walter Dorwin Teague, “Italian Shopping Trip: Twelve American museums send out a battery of buyers,” *Interiors*, November 1950, 144.
- ⁵⁵ Teague, “Italian Shopping Trip,” 201.
- ⁵⁶ Iria Candela, “Fontana’s Odyssey,” in *Lucio Fontana: On the Threshold*. Curated by Iria Candela (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, January 23–April 14 2019). Exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019), 15.
- ⁵⁷ See: Sharon Hecker, “‘Servant of Two Master’: Lucio Fontana’s Sculptures in Milan’s Cinema Arlecchino (1948),” *Oxford Art Journal* 35, no. 3 (2012): 337–61; and Anthony White, *Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011). The exhibition and accompanying catalogue for the *Lucio Fontana: On the Threshold* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019) at the Met Breuer contextualizes these interdisciplinary projects alongside with his Italo-

Argentinian heritage. My own recent book *Cold War American Exhibitions of Italian Art and Design* looks at how works by artists like Fontana were highlighted for their innovative form and use of media, while simultaneously being used for an American project that downplayed those aesthetic concerns.

- ⁵⁸ Holland Cotter, “Slashing His Way To Sublime: An innovator who made abstraction dangerous by breaking through the surface,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 2019.
- ⁵⁹ Paolo Scrivano, “Romanticizing the Other? Views of Italian Industrial Design in Postwar America,” in *The Italian Legacy in Washington DC: Architecture, Design, Art and Culture*, edited by Luca Molinari and Andrea Canepari (Milan: Skira, 2008), 156-161.
- ⁶⁰ See: Gamble, “Buying Marino Marini”; and “Exhibiting Italian Democracy.”
- ⁶¹ Emil Ludwig, “The Mussolini Behind the Iron Mask: Emil Ludwig Finds Him a Man of Nuances, Not Extremes, Who Controls His Nerves by Hard and Relentless Work,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1929.
- ⁶² Antonio Vasori, “De Gasperi, Nenni, Sforza and their Role in Post-War Italian Foreign Policy,” in *Power in Europe? Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany in a Postwar World, 1945–1950*, edited by Josef Becker and Franz Knipping (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1986), 99.
- ⁶³ Victoria de Grazia, “Visualizing the Marshall Plan: The Pleasures of American Consumer Democracy or the Pains of ‘the Greatest Structural Adjustment Program in History?’” in *Images of the Marshall Plan in Europe. Films, Photographs, Exhibits, Posters*, edited by Günter Bischof and Dieter Stiefel (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2009), 25–26.
- ⁶⁴ David W. Ellwood, “The Propaganda of the Marshall Plan in Italy in a Cold War Context,” in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945–1960*, edited by Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (London-Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 227.
- ⁶⁵ Ascoli was a central figure in American anti-Fascism and held a position in the so-called “university in exile” at the New School for Social Research in New York. See: Renato Camurri, “Idee in movimento: l’esilio degli intellettuali italiani negli Stati Uniti (1930–1945),” *Memoria e ricerca*, no. 31 (May–August 2009): 55–56.

- ⁶⁶ Nicoletta Comar, "Carlo Sbisà: Catalogo Generale Dell'Opera Pittorica" (Doctoral dissertation, Università degli Studi di Trieste, academic year 2008-2009), 23.
- ⁶⁷ *Relazione della X Commissione Permenente*, Ministero dell'industria (Roma: Camera dei Deputati, 1949) 6. Also note: this CNA is different from the still existent Confederazione Nazionale dell'Artigianato.
- ⁶⁸ Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Handicraft as a Fine Art in Italy* (New York: House of Italian Handicraft, 1947). The Marshall Plan CNA is different from the *Confederazione Nazionale Artigianato* (National Artisan Confederation or Trade Union, also known as CNA), which is a type of trade-union that continues to operate today. See: Marco De Nicolò, *Storia della Confederazione Nazionale dell'Artigianato* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2016), 16.
- ⁶⁹ For more on Ascoli and culture, see: Gamble, *Cold War American Exhibitions of Italian Art and Design*, 52–53.
- ⁷⁰ For details on what industries the Marshall Plan supported, see: *Country Data Book: All Participating Countries*, Economic Cooperation Administration (Washington D.C.: United States, 1950); and *Italy, country study, European recovery program*, Economic Cooperation Administration (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Print Office, 1949).
- ⁷¹ See: Nancy Jachec, *Politics and painting at the Venice Biennale 1948–64: Italy and the Idea of Europe* (Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, 2007).
- ⁷² Monroe Wheeler, "Memo to Alfred Barr and James Thrall Soby," April 17, 1946, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, microfilm, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington MF3153.
- ⁷³ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Letter to Charles Rufus Morey," March 25, 1948, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, microfilm, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, MF3153. For more on Barr's relationships with political officials, see: Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 19–20.
- ⁷⁴ For more on both MoMA's creation of the modern art canon, see: *Modern in the Making: MoMA and the Modern Experiment, 1929–1949*, edited by Sandra Zalman and Austin Porter (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020).
- ⁷⁵ Riley, *MoMA Goes to Paris in 1938*, 7.
- ⁷⁶ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and James Thrall Soby, foreword, *Twentieth Century Italian Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), 5.
- ⁷⁷ Barr's genealogy of abstract art in the 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* included Futurism. See: Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936).
- ⁷⁸ The best description to date of *Twentieth Century Italian Art's* connection to the Fascist exhibition programs and aesthetic ideals and MoMA's curatorial agenda is Raffaele Bedarida, "Operation Renaissance: Italian Art at MoMA, 1940–1949," *Oxford Art Journal* 35, no. 2 (2012): 147–69.
- ⁷⁹ There have been numerous excellent recent studies, including my own, on *Twentieth-Century Italian Art*. See: *Methodologies of Exchange: MoMA's "Twentieth-Century Italian Art" (1949)*, edited by Raffaele Bedarida, Silvia Bignami and Davide Colombo monographic issue of *Italian Modern Art*, January 2020, <https://www.italianmodernart.org/journal/issues/methodologies-of-exchange-momas-twentieth-century-italian-art-1949/>; and Davide Colombo, "1949: Twentieth-Century Italian Art al MoMA di New York," in Tedeschi, Pola and Boragina, *New York New York*, 102–109; Nicol M. Mocchi, "Twentieth-Century Italian Art 1949: il caso Morandi," in Tedeschi, Pola and Boragina, *New York New York*, 110–16.
- ⁸⁰ Antje Gamble, "Exhibiting Italian Modernism After World War II at MoMA in 'Twentieth-Century Italian Art'," *Italian Modern Art*, January 2020, 5.
- ⁸¹ Kristina Wilson, *The Modern Eye: Stieglitz, MoMA, and the Art of the Exhibition, 1925–1934* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 108.
- ⁸² James C. Dunn, "Letter to Nelson A. Rockefeller," April 28, 1948, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers*, Museum of Modern Art, New York; microfilmed by Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, MF3153.
- ⁸³ The twelve museums that participated in displaying versions of *Italy at Work* were: Brooklyn Museum (30 Nov. 1950–31 Jan. 1951); Art Institute of Chicago

(15 March–13 May 1951); De Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco (19 June–31 July 1951); Portland Art Museum (5 Sept.–21 Oct. 1951); Minneapolis Institute of Art (27 Nov. 1951–6 Jan. 1952); Museum of Fine Arts of Houston (13 Feb.–27 March 1952); St. Louis City Art Museum (4 May–6 July 1952); Toledo Museum of Art (7 Sept.–22 Oct. 1952); Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (27 Nov. 1952–8 Jan. 1953); Detroit Institute of Art (12 Feb.–27 March 1953); Baltimore Museum of Art (1 May–15 Aug. 1953); and the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence (22 Sept.–15 Nov. 1953).

⁸⁴ Patricia T. Galla, “Memo: List of attendance numbers at each museum,” Feb. 18, 1953, AIC Archives 305-0003.2, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

⁸⁵ “ENORMOUS EXHIBITION SHOWING ITALY’S RENAISSANCE IN INDUSTRIAL AND DECORATIVE ARTS OPENS AT BROOKLYN MUSEUM NOVEMBER 29th—TOURS U.S. COAST-TO-COAST FOR THREE YEARS,” November 29, 1950, in *Records of the Department of Public Information. Press releases, 1947–1952, 10–12/1950, 100–6*, Brooklyn Museum Archives, Brooklyn, NY.

⁸⁶ Meyric R. Rogers, “Introduction,” in *Italy At Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* (Rome: The Compagnia Nazionale Artigiana, 1950), 18.