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From Italy to America: Photographs of Anthony Riccio

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From Italy to America: Photographs of Anthony Riccio Exhibition Catalogue

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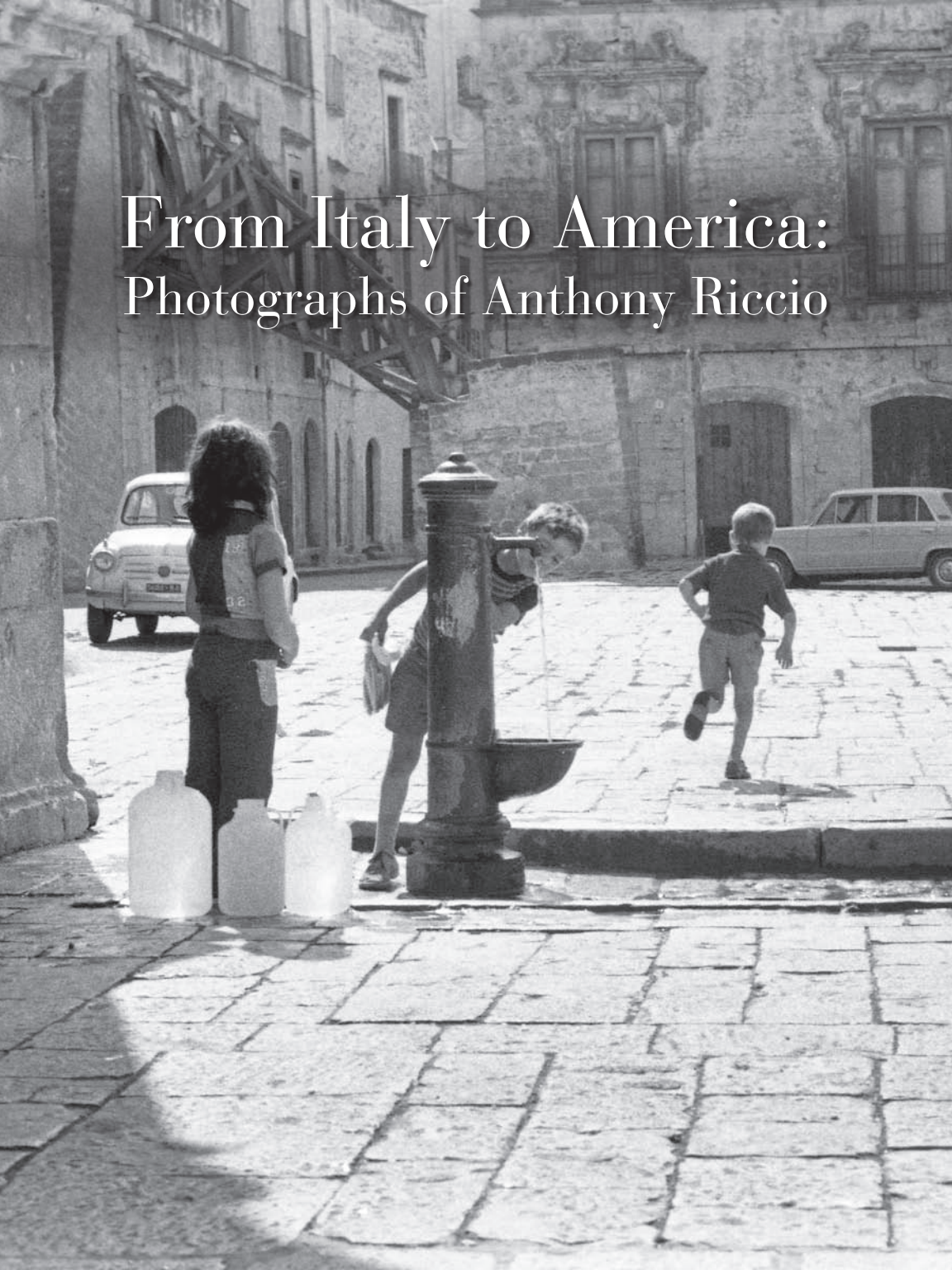
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From Italy to America: Photographs of Anthony Riccio





Cesarina Russo Riccio Looking Out on Fairmont Avenue, 1981

From Italy to America: Photographs of Anthony Riccio



February 1 - March 30, 2012
The Bellarmine Museum of Art

For Anthony Riccio a picture truly is worth a thousand words.

Born and raised in New Haven, Connecticut, Mr. Riccio has spent the past four decades documenting, in word and image, the experiences of Italians and Italian-Americans not only in Southern Italy – from Campania to Sicily – but also in the culturally rich immigrant communities of Boston’s North End and his native city’s “Little Italy.” That Riccio was able to create these revealing and sensitive portraits speaks to the trust he inspired in those with whom he worked. Breaking through the usual “veil of silence” in which elderly Italian-Americans typically enveloped themselves to guard against the unwarranted hostilities of outsiders, the artist was welcomed into his subjects’ homes and lives. That trust is evident in the stories that these, the so-called *anziani*, shared with Riccio. It is also written on their countenances, which bear witness to an era marked not only by grueling physical labor and taxing living conditions but also by enduring faith as well as an unwavering commitment to family, friends, and country, both natal and adoptive. These are the people – their stories and their lives – that Anthony Riccio introduces us to through his incredible body of work.

The Bellarmine Museum of Art is sincerely grateful to Mr. Riccio for allowing us to mount this fine exhibition and for his boundless energy and enthusiasm for this project from start to finish. We are also indebted to Dr. Mary Ann Carolan, chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures and director of the Italian Studies program at Fairfield University, who originally conceived of this show and proposed the deep involvement of students enrolled in her Italian-American Experience class. Thanks, too, to those same students who labored long and hard on the exhibition’s information panels as well as the many external parties who lent their time and talents to provide the fullest possible range of complementary programming in support of this endeavor.

From Italy to America: Photographs of Anthony Riccio would not have been possible were it not for the generous support of Fairfield University, Nestlé Waters North America and its S. Pellegrino® Sparkling Natural Mineral Water, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. To them we say *grazie mille*.

Jill Deupi, J.D., Ph.D.

Director, Bellarmine Museum of Art

Assistant Professor of Art History, Fairfield University



My Daily Prayer (Pisticci, Basilicata), 1975



Monte Taburno (Campania), 2009



Antonietta Marrone, Salem Street (North End of Boston), 1979

The works in the exhibition *From Italy to America: Photographs of Anthony Riccio* in the Bellarmine Museum of Art represent decades of work by the artist, a native of New Haven, Connecticut. Anthony Riccio (b. 1952), who now resides in Westbrook, grew up in an Italian neighborhood in the Elm City surrounded by his extended family. After college, he studied art history with Syracuse University in Florence. While in Italy, Riccio visited Alvignano and Cescheto, the towns from which his grandparents emigrated. In those towns, as well as others he visited in Campania, Riccio captured the rural south in the 1970s with his sharp eye and deft skills with the camera. Upon his return to the United States, Riccio became the director of the North End Senior Citizen Center in Boston. There he conducted oral history interviews and photographed elderly Italian-Americans of the North End neighborhood for what would become his first publication, *Boston's North End: Images and Recollections of an Italian-American Neighborhood* (Center for Migration Studies, 1998; Globe Pequot, 2006). The success of that book led to Riccio's next project, an oral history of his native New Haven. *The Italian-American Experience in New Haven: Images and Oral Histories* (State University of New York Press, 2006) includes over 100 images that grace 450 pages of first-person narratives about life in Italian immigrant neighborhoods. Riccio's most recent publication, *Cooking with Chef Silvio: Stories & Authentic Recipes of Campania* (State University of New York Press, 2010), co-written with Silvio Suppa, chef and owner of four restaurants on the Connecticut shoreline, tells the story behind the food that appears in these award-winning recipes. Images from this guided tour of the cuisine, culture, and history of the Campania region add a contemporary perspective to the ancient lands of southern Italy featured in this exhibition.

In addition to his photography, Riccio is known for recording oral histories in Boston, New Haven, and Italy. His work draws on a multitude of voices, rather than on a singular authorial voice, that together portray the diversity of the Italian-American experience. Riccio's anthologies of oral histories document the lives of Italian immigrants as well as the places they inhabited. Had the author not interviewed his subjects, personal memories of joy and despair, prejudice and kindness, work and family life, politics and religion would have been lost, depriving future generations of crucial insights into the everyday life that make history come alive. Riccio's celebration of the ordinary makes a profound impact on his readers and viewers alike. The stories he records, like the photographs he takes, testify to the power of storytelling as a way to study history and society. These stories, like the images that accompany them, are a fundamental part of our individual and



Guaglione (Rome, Lazio), 1975



Frank Corolla in his Shoeshine Shop, 1981

collective experience as a nation. At once unique and universal, they tell of the struggle to become a new citizen, while remaining Italian, in 20th-century America.

From Italy to America: Photographs of Anthony Riccio reflects the migration of millions of Italians to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century. Italians fled poverty, mostly in southern Italy, where they faced dire economic conditions, social unrest, and disillusionment with the political reforms of the Italian unification movement (*Risorgimento*) with an ancient and apparently well-founded distrust of authority. The desperate masses were mostly illiterate farmers from southern Italy, a region that offered little hope for survival let alone financial advancement. Their westward voyage was arduous from the moment they decided to leave their inland towns to travel to the port cities, where vessels would take them on their transatlantic journeys. Most Italians traveled in steerage class. True to its name, steerage (which referred to the section of the ship near the rudder that provided the cheapest passenger accommodations) was uncomfortable and unsanitary with little light or fresh air, rancid food, and cramped quarters. The promise of a better life carried these emigrants along on their journey.

Assimilation to the American way of life was difficult for Italian immigrants as they confronted perceptions that they were undermining unionized labor's gains by undercutting wages, lacking in intelligence due to their inability to speak English, and essentially unclean thanks to the abominable living conditions and dangerous work they found in America. Italian immigrants confronted racial prejudices and political injustices as well despite their ever-increasing numbers. From 1880 to 1920, more than 4 million Italians immigrated to America, with about 80 percent coming from southern Italy, and Sicily and Campania in particular. In the 1920s, the combination of legislation limiting the number of immigrants to the United States as well as the onset of the Depression slowed the flow of Italians into this country.

Italians delighted in the celebrations and traditions that they brought with them to the New World. The religious processions held in the streets and in churches, meetings convened in mutual aid societies, and meals shared with friends and family at home offered a sense of familiarity and community to the newly arrived as they sought to become Americans. At the center of many of these gatherings was food, which always played a critical role in Italian-American culture, and Italian culture before that. Italians in this country continued their habit of shopping in specialty stores on a daily basis to find the highest quality ingredient for their meals. The table in Italian-American homes, like those in Italy, was the locus of family



Nick Argiro Buying his Daily Fruit on Salem Street (North End of Boston), 1982

communication and sensual appreciation of nature's bounty. It was also the place where stories were repeated, thus establishing familial oral histories that insured the continuity of the Old World in the New, from one generation to the next.

Thanks to Riccio's careful attention to the details of the individuals and their environment, we have a vibrant picture of daily life, or *quotidianità*, that connects Italy and America through customs, traditions, food, and activities. Taken together, these images weave a tapestry of life that is far richer than formal or official photographs due to their striking individuality. Riccio's work visually describes the physical, emotional, and spiritual sensibilities on both sides of the Atlantic as well as the transformation of Italians from emigrants to immigrants. His photographs respect and honor the individual as a contributor to the ethnic community, and by extension, to our nation. While these images tell a part of the story that links two countries through the great migration that began in the late 19th century, they also shed light on the experience of all Americans, since at one point or the other in the past nearly all of our families have struggled to assimilate as immigrants in this new country.



Carlo Russo, Taverna Saticula (Sant'Agata de'Goti, Campania), 2009



Palmina and Luigi Mansi's Cave (Ravello, Campania), 1974

With his photographs, Anthony Riccio invites us into the lives of his subjects as they practice their daily routines in their homes, on the streets, and in their places of employment. Members of the Fairfield community have appreciated learning from Riccio at the numerous presentations he has conducted on campus. Our students have been fortunate to work closely with Riccio in order to understand the Italian-American experience from the distinct vantage point of oral history, the personal recollection of private and public moments of exaltation and despair. Now that Riccio's gifts as a photographer are assembled for the first time as a museum exhibition, we hope that you enjoy the simple beauty of the images that tell their own tale from Italy to America.

Mary Ann McDonald Carolan
*Director, Italian Studies, & Chair, Department of Modern Languages & Literatures,
Fairfield University*



J & N Market, Corner of Prince and Salem Street (North End of Boston), 1980



Naples, 1973



Mailboxes on Cooper Street (North End of Boston), 1981



Mary Ginnetti, in her Kitchen in the Annex, 1999



Archway of Pietrasanta (Pietrasanta, Tuscany), 1976



Marianna D'Antonio (North End of Boston), 1980



Modern-day Zampognari in the North End at Christmas, 1980

Checklist of the Exhibition

ITALY:

1. *Monte Taburno* (Campania), 2009
2. *Wedding Procession* (Sippiciano, Campania), 1973
3. *Zi' Giuannina* (Sant'Agata de'Goti, Campania), 2009
4. *Carlo Russo, Taverna Saticula* (Sant'Agata de'Goti, Campania), 2009
5. *My Daily Prayer* (Pisticci, Basilicata), 1975
6. *Guaglione* (Rome, Lazio), 1975
7. *Children at Play in an Alley* (Rome, Lazio), 1975
8. *Archway of Pietrasanta* (Pietrasanta, Tuscany), 1976
9. *The Fountain Place* (Bitonto, Puglia), 1975
10. *Palmina and Luigi Mansi's Cave* (Ravello, Campania), 1974
11. *Naples*, 1973
12. *Si al Fascismo* (Bitonto, Puglia), 1975

BOSTON:

1. *Antonietta Marrone, Salem Street*, 1979
2. *Frank Corolla in his Shoeshine Shop*, 1981
3. *Mailboxes on Cooper Street*, 1981
4. *Modern-day Zampognari in the North End at Christmas*, 1980
5. *J & N Market, Corner of Prince and Salem Street*, 1980
6. *Nick Argiro Buying his Daily Fruit on Salem Street*, 1982
7. *Mary Nastasi Walking Barefoot in the San Rocco Procession*, 1981
8. *Marianna D'Antonio*, 1980

NEW HAVEN:

1. *Mary Ginnetti, in her Kitchen in the Annex*, 1999
2. *Salvatore "Gary" Garibaldi, at the Santa Maria Maddalena Society, Wooster Street*, 1999
3. *Maryanne Santacroce and Mother Antonette Coppola*, 1999
4. *Luisa DeLauro and Daughter, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro*, 1999
5. *Rose Gherardi, Artist at Work in her Studio, Hamden*, 1999
6. *Cesarina Russo Riccio Looking Out on Fairmont Avenue*, 1981



Josie DeBenedet, in her Kitchen (North Haven), 1998

From Italy to America: Photographs of Anthony Riccio

February 1 – March 30, 2012

All works on loan from the artist

All photographs digitally scanned from 35mm original negatives
Epson UltraChrome photo black ink printed on Museo Silver Rag fine art paper

FRONT & BACK COVERS

Fountain Place (Bitonto, Puglia), 1975



Luisa DeLauro and Daughter, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, 1999



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**Arts &
Minds**



Fountain Place (Bitonto, Puglia), 1975



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