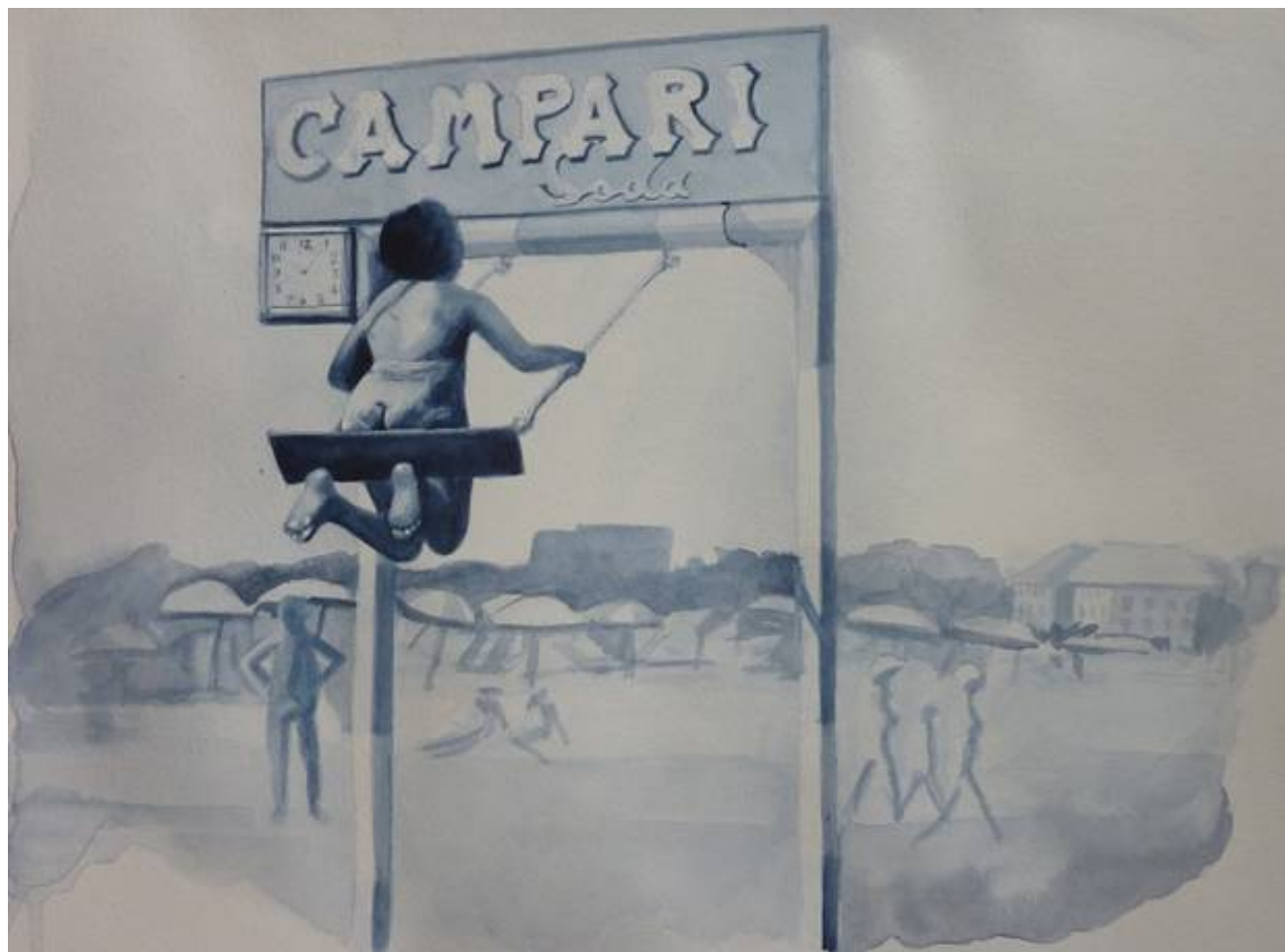




"Ciao Italia!" Paris Remembers Immigrants from Italy

Judith Harris (September 28, 2017)



Immigration in the past, when Italians flooded into France, has lessons for today. Preparing for the future, Italian Interior Minister Minniti balks at the word "emergency" applied to immigration and sets new guidelines,

ROME -- First came 420,000 immigrants into France in just four years and then, in the next two decades, a horde of another 800,000. This was not all that long ago: their home country was the Italy of the First World War and then of the two decades of Mussolini Fascism. Writing in L'Espresso magazine, architect Cesare de Seta, who teaches at Naples University, reminds us of the fascinating exhibition "Ciao Italia! A century of Immigration and Italian culture 1860 - 1960," held in Paris's Museum of Immigration in the Palais de la Porte Dorée.



Curator Dominique Paini opened the exhibition, which just closed after three months, with an installation by Moataz Nasr of eight white Piaggio Vespas set into a circle, entitled "Vacanze Romane", as in the 1953 movie starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck, "Roman Holiday". (Nasr's challenging short film "The Mountain," shot in Egypt, was featured this summer in the Egyptian Pavillion at the Venice Biennale.)

The Italian migrants arriving in France, beginning in the second half of the 19th century, were "so numerous that their immigration remains, even today, the most important in France," said a review in the Paris edition of Time Out. "The cultures of the French and of our Italian neighbors, or rather, our Latin cousins, are sometimes near but different. They are not always comparable, but complementary."

Not all went smoothly. In 1851, when some 63,000 arrived in France in a single year, resentment brought a number of violent incidents including in Marseilles. At the medieval town of Aigues-Mortes in Southern France eight Italians who had come to seek work in the ancient salt mines were murdered. But at the same time numerous Italians living in France were celebrated, among them musicians and artists like Giovanni Boldini, Amedeo Modigliani, and Futurist Gino Severini.

From the exhibition French President Emmanuel Macron could learn a lesson or two, sentenced de Seta. "President Macron should consider taking a kindly look at 'Ciao Italia!', especially since it contradicts some of his unfortunate phrases." And not only words: last July Italian resentment of Macron burgeoned when he decided to nationalize a major shipyard owned by South Korea over which Italy's Fincantieri was bidding. Some in Italy complained that Macron's decision to nationalize the shipyard ignored EU rules on free movement of capital, with the result that a Corriere della Sera cartoon showed Macron head-butting Italian Premier Paolo Gentiloni. Already a number of big French companies had gained large stakes or even control over such Italian companies as Parmalat.

Today's immigrants arriving into Italy remain top news. On Tuesday the Washington Post ran an analysis of Italy's claim to have found a solution to the migrant problem facing Europe. As I was writing this Fox News reported that Italian neo-Fascists are getting a boost from anti-migrant sentiment. It also made international headlines that Interior Minister Marco Minniti has proposed erasing the word "emergency" when applied to immigration. Speaking in Rome Sept. 27, Minniti proposed that the government make deals with Libya and other African countries that will develop a "welcoming policy" and that Italy foster integration for those holding refugee or "subsidiary protection" status. Integration, said Minniti, requires a "mutual renegotiation."

Those migrants accepted into the program will be expected to adhere to Italian values, know and respect the Italian constitution, respect freedom on religion and will be encouraged to be active citizens through local volunteering. Italy will be expected to help with the socialization of minors. For details, see the interesting article [>>](#) [2]

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