

November 2015

Il Gazzettino

Message from the Board

The holiday season is upon us and we look forward to celebrating with you at our upcoming events. We are thankful for your support and the opportunity to share this special time of year with you.

Wishing you and yours happy and safe holidays and a wonderful New Year. Buone feste, buon anno, e buon appetito!

Abbracci,

Friends of Italy Society of Hawaii Board
info@friendsofitalyhawaii.org

In this issue:

1 Message from the Board

1 Upcoming Events

Parliamo Italiano Social
Holiday Party

2 Recent Events

Wine Tasting Social

3 Feature Story

The Theft of the Mona Lisa

5 Announcements

Love Among the Ruins at the
Hawaii International Film Fest

Upcoming Events

Parliamo Italiano Social

Join us Thursday November 19, 2015 from 6:00-8:00pm at Panya Bistro. Enjoy a night of speaking Italian over Roberto's finest pizza. All language levels are welcome! This event is free; food and drink is not included.

Holiday Party

Join us December 18th from 5:30 to 9:30pm at the Mr. and Mrs. DeLuca's home for our Annual Christmas Party. This event is open to members only: \$45 for adults, \$25 for children. There is limited availability so reserve your spot by December 11. We are thrilled to have it at such a beautiful location and so grateful to the DeLuca's to opening their home to us.

Recent Events

Wine Tasting Social

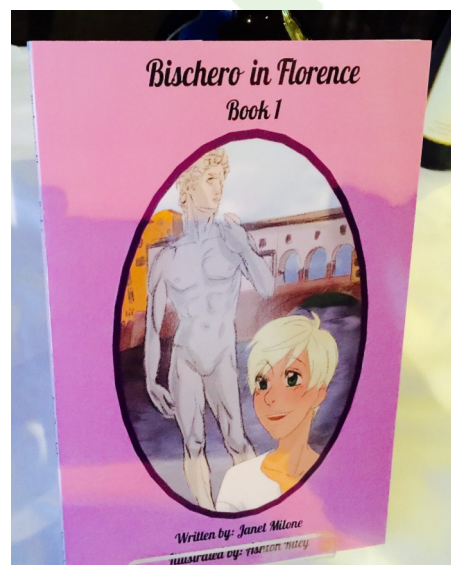
On October 23rd, we enjoyed a wine tasting and a book discussion by Janet Grace Milone, author of the new book: *Bischero in Florence: Travel Guide for Parent and Child*. The wine was flowing, the food was delicious and the conversation was terrific as always.

A sincere thanks to Margaret Rufo for opening her home to us for this lovely event!

We are thrilled so many of you could join us!



Janet Grace Milone



The Theft of the Mona Lisa

By Mark Ethridge

Most of us assume that Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece, the Mona Lisa, has sat serenely in the Louvre in Paris, peaceful and undisturbed for centuries (despite some notable attempts to deface it). However, this is not the case. The Mona Lisa was stolen in 1911 and remained out of sight for over two years. Even more remarkable is that it appears that the painting was stolen not primarily for money but as a matter of Italian national pride...



The story begins with Vincenzo Peruggia, an Italian hired to make glass casings for paintings at the Louvre. On August 20th, 1911, Peruggia hid in the museum closet knowing that the museum will be closed the next day. He went to the Mona Lisa display, took it out of its case and frame and places the painting under his work smock. He tried to exit the building but found that the door was locked and he did not have a key. A plumber with a key passes by and opens the door. This was not unusual since paintings were often removed for repairs. In another stroke of luck, the guard station has been left unattended because the guard was on a break. So Peruggia simply exits the Louvre with the painting under his cloak. Peruggia then takes the painting back to his apartment in Paris where he hides it for two years, wrapped in a blanket inside a trunk under his bed. He is questioned by the police, but he states that he was working at a different location the day of crime and his alibi is accepted.

Throughout Paris and the whole world, the theft and the frantic police investigation generated a tidal wave of publicity. *The New York Times* headlines: "60 detectives seek stolen Mona Lisa, French public indignant." People even started coming to the museum just to look at the empty spot where the painting had been displayed. The painting, which was not as well-known as it is today, becomes instantly recognizable. Many people in the art world are questioned. Even Pablo Picasso was a suspect at one point.

The Theft of the Mona Lisa (*cont.*)

Two years after the theft, Peruggia contacts an art dealer in Florence and returns to Italy to arrange a meeting. In the meantime, he keeps the painting in an apartment in Florence. He explains in the letter which he signs as Leonard that he is an Italian who had been “suddenly seized with the desire to return to [his] country at least one of the many treasures which, especially in the Napoleonic era, had been stolen from Italy.” The truth is that the Mona Lisa was never stolen by the French, but was in fact purchased for a sizeable sum by Francis I from Da Vinci’s heirs, after his death in France. He also mentioned that, although he was not setting a specific price, he was not a wealthy man and would not refuse compensation if his native country were to reward him.

The art dealer and the director of the Uffizi Gallery met with Peruggia, authenticated the painting and they eventually convinced Peruggia to leave the painting at the Uffizi Gallery. Immediately after, the thief is arrested by the Italian police. He is put on trial and receives a light sentence of only seven months in jail, but since he had already been detained for that amount of time, he is released. Later, he even enlists in the Italian Army during World War I.



Police photo of Vincenzo Peruggia

Peruggia is hailed as a hero by many in Italy. There is some sympathy in Italy for Peruggia’s arguments that the Mona Lisa should be reclaimed by Italy. After disagreement within the Italian Parliament about whether the painting should be returned, the minister of public education has the final word. “The *Mona Lisa* will be delivered to the French Ambassador with a solemnity worthy of Leonardo da Vinci and a spirit of happiness worthy of Mona Lisa’s smile,” he announced. “Although the masterpiece is dear to all Italians as one of the best productions of the genius of their race, we will willingly return it to its foster country ... as a pledge of friendship and brotherhood between the two great Latin nations.”

But not before a triumphal tour throughout Italy. The painting finally finds its old resting place in the Louvre on January 4, 1914.

The Theft of the Mona Lisa (*cont.*)



The Mona Lisa in the Uffizi Gallery during December 1913

There is an alternate version of this story that was published in 1932 by a Hearst newspaper reporter who claimed that although Peruggia did steal the painting, he was hired by an art conman named Eduardo de Valfierno. The painting was stolen so that forgeries could be pawned off on unassuming American millionaires as the authentic “stolen” painting. This theory has never been authenticated.

Announcements

Love Among the Ruins —Hawaii International Film Festival

The Italian film, "Love Among the Ruins" will screen as part of the Hawaii International Film Festival on Friday, November 20, 6:00 P.M., Koko Marina, and Sunday, November 22, 5:30 p.m. at Dole Cannery.

This is a faux-documentary about the miraculous discovery and restoration of a long-lost Italian silent film. The film is in Italian with English subtitles.

<http://www.loveamongtheruinsmovie.com/trailer/>



Friends of Italy Society of Hawai'i
P.O. Box 1376 Honolulu, HI 96807