

# THE THERESA AND LAWRENCE R. INSERRA ENDOWED CHAIR IN ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES



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A generous gift made by Lawrence R. Inserra Jr. established the Theresa and Lawrence R. Inserra Endowed Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies at Montclair State University. The Inserra Chair is dedicated to the promotion of Italian culture with particular emphasis on international migration and the exchange of ideas, practices and goods over the centuries, especially between Italy and the United States. The gift, named in honor of Mr. Inserra's parents, has transformed Italian studies at Montclair State and has enabled the program to reach thousands of students, academics and members of the public with an interest in all things Italian.

Dr. Teresa Fiore has held the Chair since its inception. Fiore received a BA from the University of Trieste and a PhD from the University of California, San Diego. Her research interests include 19th-, 20th- and 21st-century Italian literature, Italian cinema, Italian American culture and immigration in contemporary Italy, with a theoretical focus on space. She has published, spoken and taught extensively on Italian language and culture, as well as on the Italian American experience.

During her tenure as Inserra Chair, Fiore has established Montclair State University as an active center of Italian culture, hosting colloquia, lectures, film series, concerts and art exhibits throughout the year while developing specific student-centered initiatives designed to create future professional opportunities and serve high school students. In the process she has secured partnerships with governmental and educational institutions, cultural organizations and agencies, including the Italian Embassy in Washington, D.C., the Italian Consulate in New York, the Cineteca di Bologna, La Mama Theater Company, New York University,

Columbia University and the University of Florence. Her impact on the Italian program and on campus life has earned her the 2015 Dean's Award for Service.

Because of the broad array of programming provided under the auspices of the Inserra Chair — an average of eight interdisciplinary programs a year — students who study in Montclair State's Department of Spanish and Italian learn not only to communicate well in Italian but also gain insights into contemporary Italian culture, Italy's rich intellectual and artistic past and the ways in which Italian culture has become deeply imbedded in the American consciousness. Programming offered to the campus and the broader community touches a wide array of topics and disciplines including immigration, food, regional culture, history, design, music, fashion, art, literature, business and entrepreneurship, cinema and theater. This diverse and immersive palette of offerings enriches the experience of all students on campus and draws audiences from the surrounding communities to campus.

Under the auspices of the Inserra Chair, Fiore has created a thriving, interdisciplinary, intellectual community that is focused on Italian cultural studies and also interacts and collaborates with academic departments across the campus. She has launched a rich and varied calendar of programming, regularly bringing distinguished scholars, authors and performers to campus for seminars, lectures and events aimed at a variety of constituencies. These events have brought to campus a wide range of audiences, expanding both the reach and impact of the programs that the Inserra Chair supports.



# ON-CAMPUS EVENTS



An enthusiastic audience of more than 500 was treated to a conversation with Pulitzer Prize-winning writer **Jhumpa Lahiri** (*The Namesake*) about the Italian language and culture as a conduit for creative freedom. For three years Lahiri lived in Rome, exploring issues of language, culture and belonging. Lahiri's decision to become proficient enough in Italian to author a book is an illuminating story about the power of falling in love with a language and pursuing the study of it, even as an adult and with no specific family or professional tie to it. Lahiri had just returned from Italy when she visited campus, and had recently been awarded the National Humanities Medal at the White House (Fall 2015).

The award-winning Italian theater company Teatro delle Albe performed its powerful play concert, **Rumore di Acque** (*Noise in the Waters*), which addresses the perils of migration routes in the Mediterranean. The company also conducted a workshop for a group of high school and Montclair State students using, as a centerpiece, verses of Italian Renaissance poets Boiardo and Ariosto. This program was presented along with the Office of Arts and Cultural Programming/Kasser Theater at Montclair State University. Additionally, the duo I Fratelli Mancuso, featured in *Rumore di Acque*, offered a workshop on Sicilian music (Spring 2014).

An on-campus screening of ***The Rule***, a documentary by Italian American directors Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno, with subtitles created by Serena Pederali, an Italian student at Montclair State, shed light on the ways in which the Benedictine monks of Newark Abbey achieve success with inner city African American and Latino young men using the sixth-century rules of Italian Saint Benedict of Nursia (Fall 2014).

During ***Mangia Piano: The Internationalization of Italian Local Foodways*** a panel of Italian and American experts led a lively discussion on food history, distribution, consumption and the forces of globalization and environmentally sustainable opportunities offered by traditional Italian

# ON-CAMPUS EVENTS



practices when applied abroad. Attendees were treated to a tasting of dishes inspired by the St. Joseph's Tables tradition of Sicily prepared by the students of the Food Management Program at Montclair State University under the supervision of Fabrizia Lanza, chef and Sicilian gastronomy expert (Spring 2012).

Alberto Pepe, an Italian entrepreneur and scientist, illustrated Authorea, a digital authoring tool that allows academics to seamlessly and collaboratively write rich data-driven manuscripts on the web. The event, *Digital Humanities in Authorea: New Spaces for Publishing on a Shared Free Platform*, was presented by the Inserra Chair, in collaboration with the Feliciano Center for Entrepreneurship at Montclair State University (Fall 2015).

To commemorate the *70th anniversary of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO), the Inserra Chair, in collaboration with the Center for Heritage and Archaeological Studies, the Global Education Center and the Amici Italian Club at Montclair State University, presented a roundtable discussion aimed at bringing attention to Italy's rich UNESCO heritage (Fall 2015).

To complement this discussion, the Inserra Chair is sponsoring *a video contest* for students enrolled at Montclair State University, as well as at community colleges and high schools in New Jersey. This contest will engage them first in learning about one Italian UNESCO site, object or tradition of choice, and then in creatively illustrating it through an original audiovisual work. The deadline for submissions is May 2016.

# BEYOND THE CAMPUS

An on-campus panel discussion on *The Humanistic Legacy in Renzo Piano's Architecture* featured scholars discussing Italian architect Piano's impact and influence on the architecture of the 20th and 21st centuries. It was followed by a walking tour of Piano's New York City projects. These projects include the new Whitney Museum, the New York Times building, the Morgan Museum expansion and work in progress on the campus of Columbia University (Fall 2013).

As a coda to the rich series of events that celebrated Futurism's centennial in 2009, the Inserra Chair presented *Joseph Stella's Futurism between Italy and the U.S.*, a panel discussion on the Italian American artist and his iconic futurist polyptych *Voice of the City of New York Interpreted*, which is owned by the Newark Museum. The discussion illustrated the trajectory of the artist, who emigrated from Italy to the U.S., and created with his paintings some of the most memorable images of New York City's architecture. The event took place at the Newark Museum and included a guided tour of the museum focusing on this magnificent painting and other works by Stella (Fall 2011).

In collaboration with the Coccia Institute for the Italian Experience in America, the Inserra Chair presents an annual program of *professional development for teachers of Italian*, offering financial and logistical support, as well as professional consultation. The program aims to provide a wealth of strategies and techniques that an ever-growing group of teachers from all over the country can use to make Italian language instruction come alive for students. In 2010, the first Coccia-Inserra Award for Excellence and Innovation in the Teaching of Italian (K-12) was conferred. The \$4,000 award, which is now bestowed annually, is divided equally between the recipient for professional development and his or her school to advance its curriculum and programming in Italian language and culture.



# STUDENT-CENTERED PROJECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

**Translating Voices Across Continents** is an international project developed collaboratively by the Inserra Chair, the Italian Program and Prescott Studio in Florence, Italy. The program provided Angelene Agresta, Emilia D'Albero and Marta Rusconiello, students of Italian at Montclair State University, with the opportunity to produce the English surtitles for nine prominent plays and operas being presented in Italy at the prestigious Piccolo Teatro of Milan, as part of Expo 2015.

**Business Italian Style** afforded 20 students of Italian at Montclair State University the opportunity to interview eight business people and creators active in four made-in-Italy sectors in New York City and New Jersey: design, fashion, art and food. The resulting articles in Italian, along with subtitled videos produced by the students, were posted in the online Italian newspaper La Voce di New York in four parts in February 2015 and received more than 100,000 page views.

The Inserra Chair offers an **annual assistantship**, which provides a professional opportunity to students of Italian. The Chair identifies high-achieving students to fill this role. The experience that they acquire in the position prepares them for the next steps in their careers and educations. Celina Poggiogalle, a past holder of the assistantship, is enrolled in a master's program in Florence, Italy, and Emilia D'Albero, another past holder of the position, is now working in the education and events department at La Scuola di Eataly in New York.





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