



A SELECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS: TORONTO'S ITALIAN-CANADIAN COMMUNITY IN THE 1970'S

Vincenzo Pietropaolo

NOT PAVED WITH GOLD

ITALIAN
AMERICAN
museum

FEBRUARY 22 - APRIL 5, 2007 | CURATED BY MARIA COCCHIARELLI

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**ITALIAN
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m u s e u m

The Italian American Museum is extremely pleased to present Vincenzo Pietropaolo's photographic exhibition *Not Paved With Gold – Selections of Photographs: Toronto's Italian-Canadian Community in the 1970's*. This exhibition strengthens the mission of the Italian American Museum—dedicated to exploring the rich cultural heritage of Italians and Italian Americans through the presentation of challenging exhibitions, and programs. Vincenzo Pietropaolo's honest and poetic images provide our audience the opportunity for investigating similarities and differences of the Canadian experience of the Italian Diaspora. The subject of Italian immigration is full of potential for learning—especially when looking at the individual and collective struggles endured by those who have preceded us and achieved greatness. *Not Paved With Gold*, a series begun in the 1970's reminds us that Italian immigration has been consistent throughout the last century and continues even until today. Mr. Pietropaolo having arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1959 gives us a window looking into the period of the 1960's and 1970's, when the last wave of Italians arrived in North America.

It is with pleasure that the Italian American Museum is able to join with the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum to celebrate the work and experience documented by Mr. Pietropaolo and to share it with the largest possible audience in our area.

Joseph V. Scelsa, Ed.D., President



The Garibaldi-Meucci Museum is proud to be part of the traveling exhibition schedule of Vincenzo Pietropaolo's *Not Paved With Gold* begun this winter in New York at the Italian American Museum. This is a great opportunity for our visitors to gain a wider appreciation of our neighbors, to the north. Canada is a nation that shares a history intricately woven with our own.

The Garibaldi-Meucci Museum is a small, land marked historic home of the legendary hero Giuseppe Garibaldi and pioneer inventor Antonio Meucci in the heart of Staten Island. Bringing this exhibition to the "Forgotten Borough" is an important service to the Staten Island community, now approximately 40% Italian American. We hope this collaboration with the Italian American Museum exemplifies what can be accomplished in the Italian American community when organizations faced with limited resources partner in amplifying our common goals of education and preservation.

I give special thanks to Maria Cocchiarelli, and Dr. Joseph V. Scelsa, for inviting us to be part of this project. I would also like to express special thanks to Vincenzo Pietropaolo for sharing his unique vision with all of us.

Emily Gear, Director of The Garibaldi-Meucci Museum

The Italian American Museum would like to acknowledge Between the Lines Publishers, and David Vereschagin, designer of the original edition of the book *Not Paved With Gold*, published in Toronto, Canada, 2006.

ON FRONT COVER: Angelo Garro, a renowned wrought iron sculptor (second from right) with a crew of city employees installing his hand-crafted ornamental bower, in St. James Park, Toronto, during an unexpected snow squall on the first day of spring, 1983. ON BACK COVER: A couple with two of their many rabbits that they raised for food in their small backyard which itself was a haven of tomatoes and climbing beans, Beaver Avenue, 1977

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Curated by Maria Cocchiarelli

Artist's Introduction by Vincenzo Pietropaolo

L'Altra Italia in Toronto by Giuliana Colalillo, Ph.D

Vincenzo Pietropaolo's Toronto of the 1970's by Maria Cocchiarelli

The Immigrant Experience Revealed by Irene Zerbini

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Artist's Introduction **by Vincenzo Pietropaolo**

This exhibition at the Italian-American Museum in New York is particularly significant for me, for it resonates well beyond the professional and artistic achievements it may represent, and takes me back to childhood memories and experiences about immigration.



Panoramic view of Maierato, Calabria, 1995

In my book *Not Paved With Gold*, I stated that photography and immigration have been inextricably linked in my life. Growing up in rural Calabria, southern Italy, and the concept of “final departure”—the essence of emigration— had been

firmly entrenched in my inner being. Letters from immigrants in distant places were arriving regularly in the village of Maierato, my birthplace. As the houses did not have street addresses with numbers, in order to deliver the mail the postman had to rely on his detailed knowledge of almost every family in the population of 3,000. There were no mailboxes or letter slots on doors, so upon reaching the intended house, the mailman acted like a town crier calling out the name of the recipient at the top of his lungs, for everyone to hear. The addressee, usually a woman, would open the door, or perhaps hurry down a flight of stairs, and, as she clutched the letter in her hands, the look of great anticipation on her face became etched in my mind, time and time again, and as permanently as the silver salts that form images on photo paper.

The arrival of a letter became nothing less than a public event. Neighbors would gather quickly, or would lean from their windows or stoops, to hear once more the name of that

magical place that was the letter's most likely point of origin: New York. Thus words that make up the name “New York” were the first words that I learned in the English language, although in actual fact they sounded more like “Nova Yorcka” in my native Calabrian dialect. Letters also came from other cities, such as Philadelphia, Boston, or Chicago, or from other countries such as Argentina or Australia, but it was the name “New York” that reverberated most deeply with everyone. As the port of entry for most Italian immigrants that went to the United States, the name New York was bandied about town as if by second nature, and could be heard every day in the piazza, at the public fountain, in the barber shop, and every other place where people gathered. Those who were fortunate enough to have relatives in New York (which in reality could have meant anywhere in the United States) suddenly enjoyed a higher status in the community, and were considered “Americans-in-the-making.” Surely, such a family connection would one day enable them to leave the misery of the impoverished town behind and partake of the American dream.

Myth and legend of New York and America permeated our very soul. “America” became the metaphor for the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey, and the destination at the end of the long ocean voyage. In time, I learned that many of the families who had left post war Italy, had in fact gone to other countries. Nonetheless, in their minds and hearts it was always “America” that they set out for. The final destination sometimes seemed to be little more than a geographic detail.

The ocean liner S.S. Queen Frederica in New York Harbor (from a 1950's postcard)



Before my family's time to emigrate came, I remember a large poster of the ship that we were to sail on, the Greek liner S.S. *Queen Frederica*, in New York harbor beckoned by a heavenly looking Statue of Liberty. The travel agent had given the poster to us, and it had been hanging on our kitchen wall for months. Everyday I stared at it, dreaming of the mysterious voyage and the new life that lay ahead for us in "America".

It took the *Queen Frederica* eleven full days to sail from Naples across the Mediterranean Sea through the Strait of Gibraltar, across the Atlantic to the New World. In the euphoria of arrival no one seemed to notice that there was no Statue of Liberty welcoming our ship as there had been in the poster on our kitchen wall, for we had arrived not in New York, but in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We set foot on *terra firma* on April 5, 1959 at Pier 21, eastern Canada's historic point of entry for generations of new Canadians. I remember little else of the arrival, except that after we disembarked, and our immigration papers were stamped, we took a long train journey to Toronto. It was finally clear: our "America" was going to be Canada, and the fabled skyline of New York would remain an imaginary fixture.

But as I started to learn about photography, New York once again became a presence in my mind, mostly through the



Detail of Italian passport showing the artist with his mother and siblings, 1959

photographs of Lewis Hine of the immigrants arriving at Ellis Island in the early 1900's. Those images, and others such as Stieglitz's *Steerage*, had a captivating effect on me, for they showed not the New York of myth and legend in which the immigrants wanted so

much to believe, but the gritty reality of entering an unknown and harsh world with a mixture of trepidation, anxiety, and hope.

Later I came across the following paragraph, which helped me to formulate a philosophical position in my

photography, and shape my approach in photographing immigrants and workers:

"It was an old superstition, sometimes half believed by the simplest emigrants, that the streets in New York were paved with gold. When they got here, they learned three things: first, that the streets were not paved with gold; second, that the streets were not paved at all; and third, that they were expected to pave them." From *Blood of My Blood*, by Richard Gambino, as quoted in *Not Paved With Gold*, by Vincenzo Pietropaolo, 2006, p. 1.

Over time, photography has become a sort of first language for me. To be an immigrant is to have been born *elsewhere*; this is an inescapable fact that plays a fundamental and determining role in one's life. Looking back at the photographs in this exhibition, which I made mostly in the early 1970's, I realize that photography has enabled me to deal with the uprooting nature of immigration.

Like most children I adapted quickly to life in the New World. I understood that there was one basic reason why we and thousands of others had come to Canada - work. Immigration became a life-long search for work, the key to a better life. Talking about work in our community in those days was as natural as breathing. It became the very stuff of life, which permeated our parents' very being. It was such an intense



Cover of *Weekend Magazine*, October 5, 1974

pre-occupation that it was transferred to us, the children, as if by osmosis and as naturally as parental love.

I remember happy occasions like wedding banquets in church basements, where the children played between the rows of long folding tables, waiting for the meal to start, which was usually greasy but delectable fried chicken. The adults greeted each other warmly, always asking about work first, and only then inquiring about the health of the rest of the family, and perhaps about news from Italy.

"Buona sera, Bruno. Are you working?" Giuseppe might

ask, embracing his *paesano*, or fellow villager. And Bruno might answer, “Why, yes, I just got a job working on Highway 401. Pick and shovel. A good job.” Only then would it be appropriate for them to talk about more “mundane” matters. Therefore it was natural for me to equate immigration with work, for we were economic refugees, and the haven that Canada offered us was based on work.

I first documented my family, and then my community. One of my earliest recollections of my father, the *contadino* (peasant farmer) now turned construction worker, was of his arrival home at night during the summer months. Haggard, sweaty, and tired, he always entered through the back door that opened onto one of those minuscule backyards that are typical of the Victorian semi-detached houses in Toronto’s historic Little Italy. He put down his black, dusty lunch box, and removed his hard hat. Then sitting in a low chair in the kitchen, he proceeded to remove his mud-encrusted work boots. His feet were sweaty and smelly, the source of many an affectionate joke in the family. As he removed his socks, his toes wiggled, as if breathing after a day of being constrained in wool and steel-toed boots. His feet, which hardly ever saw the sun, were stark white, and bleached, in stark contrast to his deeply sunburned face and arms. The evening light, entering from the window at his back, engulfed him in a warm glow. My father savored the moment. For me, it was a stunning sight, forever etched in my memory, a photograph that I did not make.

Whenever I used to drive with my father through the streets of my adopted city, Toronto, he would inevitably point out certain buildings or streets where he worked as part of a construction crew. And, again, he would tell me yet another anecdote about the vast quantities of bricks that he carried around that site; or the overtime that they were required to do, pouring cement foundations in the wintry dark days of November; and sometimes he remembered a job site where an accident occurred because of lax or non-existent safety regulations.

Through it all, his telling and retelling exuded a strange pride, not showy and loud, but a quiet pride, subtle and sweet, that always triggered memories of the lush taste of Sicilian prickly pears that he would buy for me around Christmastime. I began to realize that my father was not merely a worker, but a

builder of my new country, which he helped to build by carrying bricks and mixing mortar. He related to the city through work. His were the words of an elder, warm and caressing, and as I relive them, my mind comfortably wanders back and forth in time, and I recall my own way of relating to the city, through the photographic encounters that have spawned many of the images in the book and exhibition.

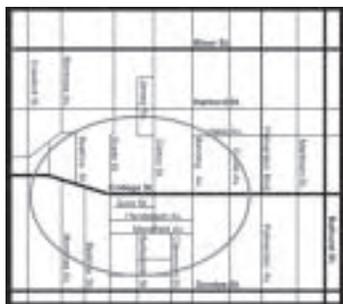
One memorable occasion I was photographing a group of men playing *bocce*, and one of them stopped me and demanded to know why I was taking these pictures. As I sheepishly offered that it was my modest intention to do a book about immigrants, he declared in a dead-pan voice: “make sure you tell the truth about immigration”. And what would that be, I boldly asked. His reply, once again, was decisive and swift: “*L’America non è oro; è lavoro. E il santo dollaro non è’ altro che dolore.*” (America is not gold; it is work. And the sacred dollar is nothing but pain and suffering.)

In both the book and the exhibition, I did not concern myself with trying to define an entire community. Each image is the result of a personal experience that occurred during an unplanned voyage of self-discovery; a voyage for which I never had to leave the physical confines of my neighborhood. It is a voyage that started with the *Queen Frederica*. I still have a postcard of that ship sailing in New York harbor, on the wall above my worktable. Even if I don’t look at it too often these days, I am always conscious of its presence, and it reminds me of my ongoing journey.

Vincenzo Pietropaolo would like to thank the following people for their support and contribution to this exhibition and catalogue: Maria Cocchiarelli, Curator, without whose vision this exhibition would not have been possible; Dr. Joseph V. Scelsa, president of the Italian American Museum; Michael Esguerra, graphic designer, for his creative approach to the exhibition catalogue; Emily Gear, Director of the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum; Irene Zerbini and Giuliana Colalillo for their essays; Laura Springolo and Domenico Pietropaolo for their help in translation.

L'altra Italia in Toronto by Giuliana Colalillo, Ph.D.

The images captured in this exhibition invite us to explore the *italianità* of the common people, the *contadini*. These unskilled peasants turned miners, loggers, construction workers, seamstresses and factory workers, immigrated to the United States, South America, and later to Canada by the thousands from an Italy which had little in common with the grandeur of Rome or the cosmopolitanism of Milan. *Not Paved With Gold* gives a positive appraisal of the sacrifice and quiet dignity of the Italian immigrants who came to the New World in search of a better life—if not for themselves, then for their children and grandchildren.



Toronto's historic Little Italy

By the time many of these images were made, the second, and by far the largest wave of Italian immigration to Canada was coming to an end. Whereas the peak years of Italian immigration to the United States occurred at the turn of the twentieth century,

Canada received its largest number of immigrants from Italy after World War II. Fully 40% of the influx of postwar Italian immigrants who undertook the trans-Atlantic journey in the 1950s and 1960s to Canada made Toronto their home. This Canadian city thus joined the ranks of New York City, Buenos Aires, and São Paulo as one of the largest Italian settlement areas outside Italy. Between 1951 and 1981, a period during which Toronto's population doubled, the population of Italian descent grew tenfold from 30,000 to over 300,000. The *ambiente* captured in these photographs reflects a community which, by the early 1970s, has “arrived” and feels comfortable in its own geographical space.

Robert Harney, a Harvard-educated American who became the pre-eminent historian of Italian-Canadians while teaching at the University of Toronto, noted that we must be careful not to write a history “which searches for the ‘great tradition’ at the expense of the ‘little tradition’ of common people.” He warned of the danger of limiting our academic attention and literary efforts to telling the stories of the *notabili*, while ignoring the stories of the ordinary Italians who built our cities, worked in our factories, and raised their families in the United States or Canada. This exhibition and the book on which it is based, lives up to that advice and gives presence to the faces and the everyday activities of the common Italian immigrant. Eschewing ancestor-worship, the images in the exhibition give proper place and perspective to the history created and bequeathed to us by our peasant, artisan, and labourer parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

The post World War II Italian immigrant diaspora saw over one million men, women and children leave the war ravaged and impoverished regions of the Italian *Mezzogiorno*—the entire southern part of the country - as well as several northern districts. Conditions for welcoming Italian immigrants to Canada changed following World War II especially once the *Enemy Alien*

Act, which banned Italians from immigrating to Canada, was lifted in 1947. Many of the people portrayed in this exhibition likely disembarked at Pier 21 in Halifax – the Ellis Island of Canada.

Similar to the experience in the United States, the Italian immigrants in Canada saw themselves as Calabrians, Abbruzzese, Molisans, Friulans, Sicilians, and so on—in other words, they identified strongly with the region of Italy from which they came. For most of the Italian newcomers, it was the first time that they had met *paesani* from other parts of Italy, or had to understand another Italian dialect, often quite unlike their own. This diversity of language and the need to communicate using a vocabulary resonant with an urban environment gave birth to *Italiense* (Italian + *inglese*, i.e., English), a unique form of word construction which combines English language words with Italian sounds and word endings. The homogeneity attributed to the Italian community by the larger Canadian society took shape only over time, and largely in the second and third generations.

It was Toronto's West End, specifically the stretch of College Street between Euclid Avenue and Crawford Street—now known as Little Italy—that became the meeting place where this mixture of *italianità* was focused. This area was a lifeline: a place to meet friends and relatives, play a game of *bocce* in the local park, or a round of *briscola* in a backyard. Replacing the Jewish and Anglo-Saxon residents who were moving away, the Italian immigrants soon became the proud owners of the proverbial “*casetta in Canada*” (a popular Italian song of the 1960s), one of the Victorian homes on tree-lined streets such as Euclid, Manning, and Clinton. Having their own house was a critical factor in realizing their success in ‘*l'america*.’

Paralleling the American experience, Italian immigrants in Canada were involved in pivotal, if tragic events, which paved the way to subsequent reforms in safety and labour laws, thereby creating more humane working conditions and providing improved benefits for all workers. In once such instance, the death of five Italian immigrant construction workers who died while excavating for water mains at Hogg's Hollow (Toronto) in 1960, forced the government to establish a Royal Commission of Inquiry which resulted in a major overhaul of Ontario's workplace and safety laws.

Within the immigration history of both Canada and the



United States, the contributions of Italian immigrant women are often overlooked or underestimated. Yet the economic and sociocultural roles played by female immigrants belies the stereotype of females frozen in a cultural time warp. Through their unpaid domestic and child-rearing activities, their frugality and cost-cutting practices such as systematically preserving fruits, and canning vegetables at peak harvest times, these women made a substantial contribution to the well-being and viability of the family. In addition, significant numbers of Italian immigrant women in Toronto entered the paid labour force, providing cheap labour as seamstresses, cleaners, and hospital or factory workers. Working outside the home also reaped personal benefits for the Italian immigrant woman: for example, it allowed her to master the transportation system and navigate the city, learn some English language skills, and most importantly, gave her the chance to meet and develop friendships with immigrant women from different parts of the world or other regions of Italy with whom she had a common bond. Ironically, this engendered a degree of independence and socialization that would not have been possible for these women in the isolated villages and towns where they had been born.

The Italian immigrants in Canada, who formed the last great wave of Italian immigration to North America, have remained an urban group, with over ninety percent living in cities and towns. Toronto has by far the largest concentration, easily surpassing that of Montreal. Based on the religious traditions



OPPOSITE PAGE | Workers finishing cement on the 14th floor of Harbour Castle Hotel on Toronto's waterfront, 1973

THIS PAGE, FAR LEFT | Two boys caught in a fierce down pour on Harbord Street and Ossington Avenue, 1974

THIS PAGE, NEAR LEFT | Girl wearing her First Communion dress waits for the feast of St. Anthony to get underway on Grace Street, in the center of Toronto's Little Italy, 1971

of their home towns and villages, Italian immigrants set out to re-create centuries-old customs in the streets of Toronto by celebrating patron saints or other key events in the Roman Catholic Church calendar. The Good Friday procession of St. Francis of Assisi Church, one of the first of many such religious events held throughout the summer months in the streets of the city, has long overtaken the San Gennaro celebration in New York City as the largest Italian religious festival in Canada or the United States, attracting tourists and pilgrims from southern Ontario, the north-eastern United States and beyond.

But the influence and contributions of Italian-Canadians go beyond the trappings of food and culture. At the same time that Vincenzo Pietropaolo was moving into the world of documentary photography, a sizeable percentage of other young Italian-Canadian adults, who had come to Canada as children but were educated in Toronto, were beginning their careers—either in the growing number of institutions and organizations of the Italian-Canadian community, or in business, industry, and other sectors of the larger English-speaking city. This generation has had a transformative impact on Toronto's economic, social and cultural infrastructure. It has swollen the ranks of teachers across the province of Ontario, has produced lawyers and legal experts who can serve the community in both languages, has contributed to academic pursuits in post-secondary education, has produced important politicians at the local and national level, and has made significant inroads into the literary and artistic landscape

of Canadian society. The children of these young, educated professionals continue to build, develop, contribute and transform their country of birth and allegiance—a path previously trod by the descendants of those Italian immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island at the turn of the century.

The images in this exhibition capture a time and place that no longer exists. Vestiges of the Toronto Italia created by postwar Italian immigrants can still be found in the historic Little Italy area scattered among the newly gentrified houses and laneways which were once so lovingly transformed and maintained to suit the needs of their immigrant owners. In creating a welcoming, lively *ambiente* to nourish their nostalgia for a way of life they had given up upon immigrating, the postwar Italian generation bequeathed a trendy and much-valued neighbourhood to the citizens of the city of Toronto. Luckily, through his photographs and evocative reminiscences of his own journey from immigrant child to photo artist, Vincenzo Pietropaolo offers us all the opportunity to value the stories and see the dignity of the “little people” whom history often overlooks.

Giuliana Colalillo is Professor, Learning Design at Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning. She was born in Italy, and immigrated with her family to Toronto as a child. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto, where she completed a dissertation on the value structures of Italian immigrant families. She has written a number of articles on Italian Canadian immigrants, with a special focus on the role of women. Her latest article, “The Italian Canadian Presence on the Internet: Are we there?” was published in *The Virtual Piazza*, a special issue of the journal, *Italian Canadiana* (2006), published by the University of Toronto.

Vincenzo Pietropaolo's Toronto of the 1970's

by Maria Cocchiarelli



ABOVE | Elderly couple and a young man enjoy a performance during the annual CHIN Radio International Picnic, then held on Toronto's Centre Island. The couple had recently immigrated to Canada in order to join their children all of whom had long ago left their native Sicily. 1973

The experience of viewing Vincenzo Pietropaolo's photographs from the series *Not Paved with Gold* will transform the viewers' understanding of the Italian Canadian community in Toronto, as it existed during the 1970's. The images on view at the Italian American Museum represent a portion of the 86 in the photo essay contained within Pietropaolo's recent publication of the same name. Photographing ordinary moments in his communities' workday, Pietropaolo reveals the *extraordinary* in his subjects' struggles, triumphs and continued relationship to their homeland—*Italy*. The sampling of twenty-nine images on view in this exhibition parallels the themes running throughout this significant body of work. Images of labor, rituals, family life, and childhood composed with a formal aesthetic and sensibility to his subject matter comprise the collection. From the compositional strength of these photographs one would not know that a young Pietropaolo created this body of work at the beginning of his career in his early 20's and late teens.



ABOVE | A couple with two of their many rabbits that they raised for food in their small backyard which itself was a haven of tomatoes and climbing beans, Beaver Avenue, 1977



NEAR LEFT | A man wearing a traditional *basco* chats with the artist at the corner of College and Clinton Streets, the heart of Little Italy, 1975



RIGHT | A woman walks by a life size *presepe*, or nativity scene, mounted annually in the yard of St. Francis of Assisi Church, Little Italy's main parish, on Grace Street and Mansfield Avenue, 1970

Since the 1970's, Pietropaolo has produced over 6 books and photo essays that reflect his range and maturity as a social documentary photographer. As a record of the 1970's in Toronto's Italian Canadian community Pietropaolo's work remains unique. This community has evolved since this time, many have moved out of the *old neighborhood* as their status changed while Pietropaolo's work remains as a record of the period and a reminder of what has passed.

Jill Delaney, photography archivist, Library and Archives Canada has noted that Pietropaolo's photography can be situated within a humanist documentary movement which took place in Canada from the late 1950s to the 1980s. Many of these works are included in the archive's collection of 25 million photographs, dating from the 1840s until the present, as well as in the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, both housed in the nation's capital, Ottawa. One hundred and thirty one prints by Pietropaolo from various portfolios strengthen the mandate of this Federal Agency to "collect photographs that document Canadian history and society—its social, political, economic and cultural life. With major communities in both Montreal and Toronto, Italian-Canadians form one of the country's largest ethnic groups. Three of Pietropaolo's collections within LAC focus on Toronto's Italian community from 1971 to 1982, and help to document its vital role in the development and life of that city and of the nation as a whole. The photographs document both the every day life and work of the community, as well as Good Friday traditions." ¹

NEAR RIGHT | A bread dough mixing machine operator working in Crupi Brothers Bakery, on Dundas Street west and Euclid Avenue, 1973. In the Library and Archives Canada Collection (not on view)



BELOW | Two priests and a parishioner laugh off the rain and return to the parish, having given in to the inclement weather and cut short St. Anthony's procession, 1969. In the Library and Archives Canada Collection (not on view)



RIGHT | Statue of the *Addolorata*, Our Lady of Sorrows, which depicts the mother of Jesus in mourning, and is carried through the streets of Little Italy during the Good Friday procession, 1971. In the Library and Archives Canada Collection (not on view)





FAR RIGHT | Two girls lean on a popcorn vendor's cart in a moment of reflection during the Feast of the Most Holy Maria Our Lady of Sorrows, celebrated by the *paesani* of the town of Modugno, Italy, on Grace Street, 1970

NEAR RIGHT | Young boy in Sunday suit waiting for the commencement of the Feast of St. Anthony, one of the numerous religious festivals held in Little Italy, 1971



LEFT | Young boy being given a helping hand at the Feast of St. Anthony, Grace Street, 1971

RIGHT | Children and elderly men accompany altar boys who are "official" participants in the Good Friday procession, Grace Street, 1975



In 1959, Pietropaolo immigrated to Canada from Maierato, Calabria in southern Italy. A boy of eight, Pietropaolo experienced for the first time, a sea voyage, leaving his town, friends, and old life behind. This experience becomes pivotal in determining his identity as an artist. An indelible image in Pietropaolo's mind, influencing his aesthetic as well as his search for meaningful content is Alfred Stieglitz's *Steerage*, from 1907. Stieglitz's work in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art,² records an earlier wave of immigration at the turn of the century, and has evolved over the last hundred years from a strict document to a loaded iconic artwork. Stieglitz who is mostly remembered as the dissident founder of the Photo-Secession group furthered his interests to advance photography as an accepted art form equal to painting and sculpture throughout his career. Usually photographing subjects from a formally aesthetic viewpoint, of established writers and artists such as Georgia O'Keefe, his wife, it was the unidentified parties in the *Steerage* that evoked such emotion within the photographer at the end of his life by stating, "If all my photographs were lost and I'd be represented by just one, the *Steerage*, I'd be satisfied."³

Interestingly in *Not Paved With Gold*, Giuliana Colalillo notes in her essay *L'altra Italia in Toronto* that Italians arriving in Canada in the 1950's and 60's comprised "the second and by far the largest wave of Italian immigration in Canada."⁴ These become the subjects in Pietropaolo's Toronto of the 1970's where one sees the daily life of those immigrants who had established roots and a new identity after only a few decades. Many of their Italian customs, habits, and interests remain intact in a new land through habitual reenactments of certain rituals and activities. Pietropaolo is able to enter into this world by license of being *one* of them. The viewer is privy to a world normally not viewed, especially in the 1970's in Toronto. These are the Italian-Canadian immigrants living their lives separately in communities distinct to themselves and taking part in labor and customs not associated with fashion or art photography.



LEFT | On Good Friday, the bier and the cross are carried through the streets of Little Italy, part of an elaborate re-enactment of the passion of Christ. The event has become the largest Italian religious gathering in North America, 1971



RIGHT | The procession of St. Anthony crawls its way down Grace Street in heavy rain, 1969



One is reminded of the photo documentary work of James VanDerZee who explored several decades of African American life in Harlem, from his studio on 125th Street, beginning in 1916. VanDerZee left a unique portrayal of his community from an insider’s perspective. Almost a century later, these photographs remain as a poignant record that informs the viewer of a specific time, and place while expressing universal themes.⁵ Pietropaolo’s work has withstood the test of time—these images are almost 40 years old. As time passes the work may be seen as *more* than a document. The photograph becomes a frozen moment meant for the viewer to contemplate. As each human drama unfolds within these pictures their historical significance is strengthened by the aesthetic influence contained within.



NEAR LEFT | The September ritual of winemaking. Pietropaolo comments that “by November 11th the feast of San Martino, it had turned into wine.”⁶

LEFT | At the end of the procession, the nuns are attracted to a table that offers religious objects for sale, while the girl dressed as an “angel” concentrates on her popcorn and balloon, Grace Street, 1970

TOP OF PAGE | Joe Patti outside of his ice truck with driver Vincent Cannistraro. Photographer James VanDerZee, in New York, 1931. In the Italian American Museum Archive Collection (not on view)

Not surprising is Vincenzo Pietropaolo’s early inspiration by another social documentary photographer named Lewis W. Hine, a trained sociologist and educator who celebrated the philosophy of John Dewey through his mentor Professor Frank Manny. Manny encouraged Hine to study photography as a vehicle for social change. Lewis Hine soon began a series on immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. Hine worked for the National Child Labor Committee in New York in 1908 and over the next eight years helped influence changes that affected more humane child labor laws and exposed the exploitation of children under the age of 14 in the work place. Always remaining objective in his choice of subject, Hine exerts a strong viewpoint, as does Pietropaolo.



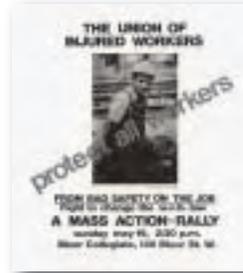
Similarly Pietropaolo sets the stage for the viewer to interpret the reading of the work. He has noted that as “Susan Sontag has written that the photograph is made by the person who sees it.”⁸ Exemplifying this philosophy is the story of Walker Evans’ photograph “Graveyard Houses and Steel Mill in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania” from 1935. In this black and white photograph of the graveyard is depicted a huge marble cross in the left foreground with cemetery markers represented in the middle ground, while in the far distance one sees the smoke stacks of the steel mill. The reading may be historical or aesthetic, both befit the image. However, 40 years after the photograph was taken the real story emerged. This is the recollection of the chief of the Historical section of the Resettlement Administration (created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in 1935 as part of his New Deal programs intended to help Americans through the Great Depression—photographers were given work to document aspects of American life) who recounted that soon after the photograph was released a woman requested a copy of it. When, she was questioned why she said “I want to give it to my brother who’s a steel executive. I want to write on it, “*Your cemeteries, your streets, your buildings, your steel mills. But, our souls, God damn you.*”⁹

ABOVE, FAR LEFT | Italian Family enroute to Ellis Island. Lewis Hine, New York, printed 1938 (created 1905-1926). In the New York Public Library Archive Collection (not on view)

ABOVE, SECOND FROM LEFT | Anna Scicchilone and her children at Ellis Island, 1905. In the New York Public Library Archive Collection (not on view)

ABOVE, SECOND FROM RIGHT | Child Labor, ca.1909. In the New York Public Library Archive Collection (not on view)

ABOVE, FAR RIGHT | Montaria family making flower wreaths in tenement apartment, 1912. In the New York Public Library Archive Collection (not on view)



“One of my photographs had been used on the organizing poster (here Pietropaolo refers to the 1974 workers organized meeting for solidarity to receive just compensation for work and injury). On the Italian language version, a bold, red graphic had been written across the image of a worker: *lottare* (struggle).”⁷



ABOVE, LEFT | Older Italian immigrants walk the picket line at Artistic Woodwork, a picture framing company, Densely Avenue. Pietropaolo was commissioned by a magazine to create a series of photographs that depicted “moments of humanity” in the otherwise bitter and violent strike, 1973

LEFT | A community meeting held at the West End YMCA to discuss unemployment insurance problems with government representatives, College Street. The meeting was held in Italian, with translation provided by the artist’s brother, 1973

NEAR RIGHT | An Italian construction worker at a demolition site, Bay Street. Pietropaolo recounts that the man reminded him of his father, and how much he was struck by his gaze, and whose “eyes told me to release the shutter,” 1972



FAR RIGHT | Angelo Garro, a renowned wrought iron sculptor (second from right) with a crew of city employees installing his hand-crafted ornamental bower, in St. James Park, Toronto, during an unexpected snow squall on the first day of spring, 1983





More directly, Pietropaolo has acknowledged the aesthetic influence that Paul Strand and Eugene Smith have had to his work. Smith's *A Spanish Village* reminded Pietropaolo of his own village in Italy.¹⁰ In 1953, by then already acknowledged as a photographer, Paul Strand joined forces with Italian, Neo-realist screenwriter Cesare Zavattini to create a book about a small town in Italy that would reveal its true essence. Luzzara (the birthplace of Zavattini) in the Po Valley was chosen to illustrate the collaboration of Strand's photography and Zavattini's text. Together they portrayed all aspects of the Luzzara townspeople's realities, hopes and fears. Originally published in Italian in 1955, *Un Paese, Portrait of an Italian Village* became available in English in 1997.¹¹ John Berger, writer and art critic commented on the book jacket of the Aperture edition that "The photographic moment for Strand is a biographical moment, whose duration is measured not by seconds, but its relation to a life time."¹² Unconsciously perhaps, Pietropaolo would like to provide the viewer with a glimpse into the real essence of Toronto's Little Italy as a reverential gesture. Visually inspired by his surroundings, Pietropaolo could not help but notice his father—the worker's attire each night after a long hard day as a laborer. He recounts this memory logically "One of my earliest recollections of my father, the *contadino* (peasant farmer) now turned construction worker, was of his arrival home at night during the summer months. Haggard, sweaty, and tired, he always entered through the back door that opened onto one of those minuscule backyards that are typical of Victorian semi-detached houses of Toronto's historic Little Italy. He put down his black, dusty lunch box and removed his hard hat. Then, sitting in a low chair in the kitchen, he proceeded to remove his mud-encrusted work boots."¹³ Pietropaolo continues to describe the scene, while the viewer is struck by the visually detailed blow-by-blow account of such a mundane moment, but is it?

Not for Pietropaolo, as this is where he gets his meaning in the passage of little minutes and seconds, as do the visual records he processes. He deciphers *his* visual world for the viewer to see logically, subjectively, and Pietropaolo loads the images with the opposite of logic—his heart. Providing text for some of his photographs Pietropaolo reminds us of his humanist values, his Italian ancestry, and interest in socio-political reform.

My mother left for Canada in 1959; one of her sisters had already left for Argentina in 1946. Twenty-five years would pass before they would meet again, at Toronto International Airport, where, ironically, my father had one of his first jobs. For countless immigrants, Toronto has truly lived up to the meaning of its name in the Huron language: "place of meeting."¹⁴

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP | The final farewell between a mother and son. The artist's grandmother says goodbye to her son, who is returning home to Argentina after visiting his mother in Toronto, 1975

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM | The artist's mother and her sister meet for the first time after twenty-five years at Toronto International Airport, 1971

Just as Lewis Hine coined the term “photo story” to define his work as a social commentator, Pietropaolo gives us the ordinary story while making it into something extraordinary. Perhaps, the early struggle of watching his father, a laborer existing within a new land toughened Pietropaolo’s resolve to make the struggle easier for future generations of his family and extended family. His ability to see the potential for a powerful photograph expresses his extraordinary talent while continually allowing the viewer insights into socio-political realities of that time.



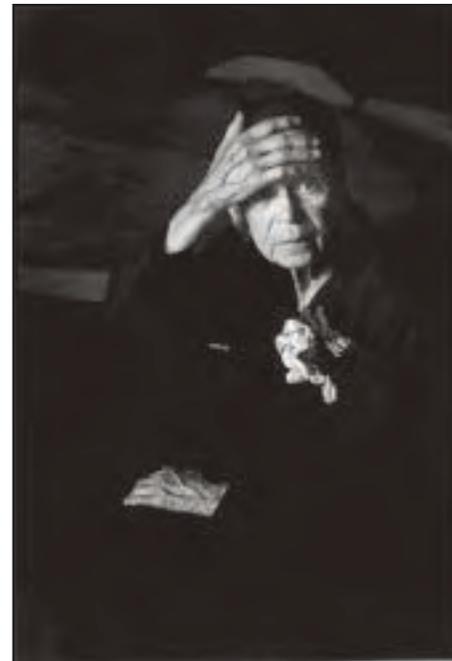
Within Pietropaolo’s series *Not Paved With Gold* are images that venture into the realm of the symbolic. Stieglitz focused on Georgia O’Keefe’s hands as the subject of his work “A Portrait,” in 1920. In this photograph, O’Keefe’s hands become the defining symbol of her personality. “Speaking with Hands,” photographs from the Buhl Collection, 2004, shown at the Guggenheim Museum explored this theme further. The survey show included works from the past as well as contemporary photographers equally obsessed with the expressive qualities contained within such a small part of our anatomy—the hands. The photographs on this and the following page speak to the viewer by providing a window into a deeper understanding of the human condition.

The timeless quality captured by Pietropaolo when photographing his grandmother will awaken the viewer to memories of our past and hint at our inevitable future.

ABOVE, LEFT | The artist’s grandmother, newly arrived from Italy, plays with a grandchild in their tiny backyard, where she also grows herbs and vegetables in bushel baskets, 1971

ABOVE, RIGHT | A man’s hand meets the carved hands of the statue of St. Bruno, 1981

“I affectionately referred to her as *Nanna*, Calabrian dialect for grandmother. Though she had never ventured more than fifty kilometres from her place of birth, she came to Toronto at the age of seventy-six, soon after she became a widow. Overnight, she had traveled from a rural Third World village in southern Italy to the modern world of Toronto, in order to be with her children and grandchildren.”¹⁵



FAR LEFT | Lighting a cigarette during a public meeting held to discuss the plight of injured workers, West End YMCA, College Street, 1973

NEAR LEFT | Worshipper's hands during the midnight mass at Easter, St. Francis of Assisi church, Grace Street, 1971

ABOVE | Portrait of Nanna, the artist's grandmother, at a family wedding, 1974



Footnotes

¹ Quoted from a phone interview with Jill Delaney, curator of the Library and Archives Canada, 2007
² Alfred Stieglitz: *The Steerage* (33.43.419). In *Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/stgp/hod_33-43-419.htm (October 2006)
³ Katherine Hoffman, Stieglitz, *A Beginning Light*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 237
⁴ Vincenzo Pietropaolo, *Not Paved with Gold, Italian-Canadian Immigrants in the 1970's*, Between the Lines Publishers, Toronto, 2006, p. 5
⁵ Philip Cannistraro, Editor, *The Italians of New York, Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement* (New York: Mondadori Printing, 1999), an exhibition catalogue for the New-York Historical Society and the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, p. 52
⁶ Vincenzo Pietropaolo, *Not Paved with Gold, Italian-Canadian Immigrants in the 1970's*, Between the Lines Publishers, Toronto, 2006, p. 66
⁷ Vincenzo Pietropaolo, *Not Paved with Gold, Italian-Canadian Immigrants in the 1970's*, Between the Lines Publishers, Toronto, 2006, p. 108

⁸ Quoted from many phone interviews with the photographer, Vincenzo Pietropaolo, 2006, 2007.
⁹ Roy E. Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In this Proud Land: America 1935 – 1943 as Seen in FSA (Farm Security Administration) Photographs* (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1973). Note: The Farm Security Administration replaced the Resettlement Administration in 1937 p. 43
¹⁰ Vincenzo Pietropaolo, *Not Paved with Gold, Italian-Canadian Immigrants in the 1970's*, Between the Lines Publishers, Toronto, 2006, p. 10
¹¹ Paul Strand, and Cesare Zavattini, *Un Paese Portrait of an Italian Village, Aperture*, 1997
¹² Paul Strand, and Cesare Zavattini, *Un Paese Portrait of an Italian Village, Aperture*, 1997, back cover
¹³ Vincenzo Pietropaolo, *Not Paved with Gold, Italian-Canadian Immigrants in the 1970's*, Between the Lines Publishers, Toronto, 2006, p. 2
¹⁴ Vincenzo Pietropaolo, *Not Paved with Gold, Italian-Canadian Immigrants in the 1970's*, Between the Lines Publishers, Toronto, 2006, p. 20
¹⁵ Vincenzo Pietropaolo, *Not Paved with Gold, Italian-Canadian Immigrants in the 1970's*, Between the Lines Publishers, Toronto, 2006, p. 98

Maria Cocchiarelli is an artist, educator and museum professional of Italian ancestry. She has traveled extensively throughout the United States—working in all three areas. She studied Art History in Florence, Italy. Both paternal and maternal grandparents were born in Southern Italy. Her art work is included in public and private collections throughout the United States and abroad. Most recently, she has concentrated her efforts on the changing exhibitions and permanent collections of the Italian American Museum, as the Curator of Collections. This past year she was married to fellow-artist Brendt Berger, in New York City.

The Immigrant Experience Revealed

by Irene Zerbini

Irene Zerbini is a journalist and sociologist who spent the first thirty years of her life in Rome and Milan. She worked in the news department of RAI, the Italian state television broadcaster. After moving to Canada, she succeeded in turning her long-time passion for radio into a career. In her programs, she discusses culture, politics, and social issues, but above all, she provides a forum for men and women who are able to communicate how worthwhile it is to live one's life fully. She interviewed Vincenzo Pietropaolo, which is how they met.

et's pause for a moment before looking at Vincenzo Pietropaolo's photographs. The fact that we are already inside this museum probably means that we have a university education, almost certainly have been to high school (like the 80% of people who benefit from cultural activities in Canada and the United States), and most likely we have never had to emigrate. Yes, we have probably traveled, or have chosen to live overseas. But moving or transferring to a new job is not the same as emigrating, which means having to leave everything— not because one wants to, or perhaps because one seeks adventure, but because there is no alternative to a better future.

Raising your family and living to the end of your days in the country of your birth may seem like a very natural process, but for millions of people, that is a privilege or a dream, even today. Maybe it didn't happen to us, but it is the lot of the women who clean our apartment, look after our children, serve us coffee this morning, or the men who repair the plumbing in our condominium, or drives our taxi.

BELOW | Clothesline with worker's pants in a backyard, where every square inch of soil is often used to grow vegetables, 1976 (not on view)



Perhaps it was our parents or grandparents who emigrated. The history of immigration is the history of the millions of human beings that turn up in the official statistics only because of their economic role, or whose cultural and religious differences often cause unwanted shake-ups in the “natural order” of things that so many would like to preserve unchanged. As long as immigrants are courteous, silent, and grateful, they are actually tolerated with a measure of benevolence. Conscious of this reality, progressive groups in society sometimes fight for their basic human rights.

If we look at Vincenzo Pietropaolo's photographs carefully, maybe we will have a point of access to that universe which exists around us, a universe of dreams, aspirations, hard work, but also of irony, laughter, traditions and rituals, that enrich our own individuality. Vincenzo Pietropaolo's camera has extracted the history of a specific ethnic community, the Italians in Canada, drawing it from its past and placing it at the center of our field of view.

BELOW | The artist's
parents asleep,
“watching” television,
Euclid Avenue, 1972
(not on view)



Who, but Vincenzo Pietropaolo would have transformed into an icon, a pair of worker's pants that hang from a clothesline, over rows of tomatoes in the backyard (*Clothesline, Euclid Avenue, 1976*). Or an elderly couple overcome by sleep as they sit on the sofa (*Watching television, 1972*)? Or a Italian worker who in his spare time dedicates himself to reconstructing his own piece of Italy, by building a *pergola* with discarded or found materials, the same kind of *pergola* which well-to-do tourists seek out in Tuscany, in their quest for the quintessential pleasure of life? Commenting on *Harvesting backyard grapes, North York, 1978*, Pietropaolo explains:

“Long before the concept of recycling or of found materials had become fashionable, either in language or in practice, immigrant households had found unique uses for the discarded pipes: they became building materials for the pergola, or grape arbour, which quickly became an identifying feature of virtually every Italian-Canadian backyard of the period. In the backyards of houses on streets with names like Euclid, Grace and Beatrice, pairs of worker's pants were ubiquitous on the clotheslines. Well worn and patched, heavy with water, the pants hung low, dripping on the staked tomato plants that were parts of the same story.”

Like the photographer, thousands of people, children of immigrants and non-immigrants alike, were present at a procession in the heart of Little Italy, or may have been leisurely walking on a sidewalk, brushing against construction workers without even being aware of them.



Change their place of origin, their way of dressing or their faces, their estrangement—the way they live together on the margins of society—is but the same destiny that is shared by millions of other people in many nations today. It is not mere chance that the course of his research took the artist to Mexico and Jamaica to document seasonal workers who come to Canada and the United States, or the fishermen, miners, and industrial workers across Canada, all of whom have an ethnic background different than his. Many tell stories, but few have the talent to extract a *History* with a camera from the ordinary reality in which they are immersed. The third eye of Vincenzo Pietropaolo, the camera that from a young age accompanied him wherever he went, has captured moments, which we would not have been otherwise privileged to see.

ABOVE | Harvesting
grapes in a suburban
backyard, North York, 1978
(not on view)

BELOW | Sewer worker,
King and Spadina, 1974
(not on view)



Concerning his *Sewer worker, King and Spadina, 1974*, Pietropaolo states:

"I was walking around the corner of King and Spadina, in the middle of winter, when I came upon a deep hole, freshly dug for sewer repairs. I stopped to look and was surprised to see that a man more than sixty was inside, shoring up one of the walls, his shovel right behind him. He was just another anonymous construction worker, unseen and unknown. Hidden below the surface of the street, completely cut off from the activity above, he could just as well have been miles away from the bustling street."

LEFT | Garment workers
on the main floor of the
McGregor Socks factory,
Spadina Avenue, 1974

Who, if not someone with the ability to extrapolate such a story literally from a hole in the ground, would have paused to photograph a woman who is almost being swallowed up by the mountain of socks that she has manufactured that day? (*Main floor, McGregor Socks factory, Spadina Avenue, 1974.*) Or the worker who walks along the assembly line of weaving machines to whom she will sacrifice her youth, revealed by the sensuality of her uncovered legs? (*Weaving machines, garment factory, Spadina Avenue, 1974.*)

Pietropaolo's *Not Paved with Gold* does not speak only of his "Italian heritage." As an artistic body of work, his photography goes well beyond the narrow confines of "documentary". Every photograph in *Not Paved with Gold* is a portrayal of the tribulations of human beings who have not given up their desire to shape to their own destiny. That is why they left their native country. That is why they left behind a life limited by poverty but nonetheless one full of meaning for

them, in which knowledge of language and customs would have spared them the arduous task of ceaselessly reconstructing their identity. These are photographs that describe the hardship of uprooting. The freedom to leave is in fact a negation of the very liberty that the French revolution proclaimed as the right of every individual, and in reality, the moment of departure for the immigrant becomes a moment of clear disadvantage. The artist himself made the trip to the Americas (whether it was Canada, the United States, Argentina or Australia matters little, for it was the metaphor of the promised land).

In the photographs made by Pietropaolo, the departure from the place of origin has already taken place. The protagonists in his narrative of immigration have crossed over, and have made the transition towards the new world. In the stories of those who returned home, this new galaxy was always so positive, so benevolent and welcoming that indeed, the sidewalks were described as being dusted with gold. Whoever



BELOW | A woman tends the rows of weaving machines in a garment factory on Spadina Avenue, 1974 (not on view)



returns home wants to be perceived as the protagonist of a “success story”. He cannot tell of the difficulties, the marginalization, the disappointment, or the tears. It is a global phenomenon, not limited to Canada or the United States. Just ask the young men and women who, in contemporary times, return home to their native African continent, or the children in eastern Europe, whose mothers are forced by heartless legislation, to leave them behind when they seek work abroad, in Italy, France, or Germany. They have all come to believe in the “golden” life style beyond the areas of darkness and uncertainty, into which their family members were forced to venture. Vincenzo Pietropaolo, with his visual moments captured in time, has shed light into this darkness.

The photographs of immigration that can be garnered from the archives of newspapers, or museums present us only with the most “topical” of moments: the landing, the ship, the cardboard suitcase, the wedding, and the solemnity of the parade on the street. Few have ever investigated the ritual of ordinary, daily

life and all the minutiae that constitute it. One hundred years ago, it was Lewis Hine, the American sociologist turned crusading photographer, who documented the lives of New York’s immigrants. In Europe, in the 1960’s, it was the Swiss photographer Jean Mohr who documented the journey of southern European men from the Mediterranean basin to industrialized northern countries like Germany or Belgium. Few others have dedicated themselves to the documentation of the successive waves of immigrants. It is in the context of this largely unexplored world that Vincenzo Pietropaolo has found his inspiration.

And they are the kinds of photographs that those who are portrayed in them would never have requested. So distant from the family album, where each member of the group lines up rigidly in front of the flash and the camera lens, with smiles worn like facial adornments and shoes dutifully shined. So far removed from the rhetoric that can conveniently hide the abject lack of institutional interest in the destiny of immigrants.

Of course, not all Italians portrayed by Pietropaolo arrived believing in the myth of the sidewalks being paved with gold. Without exception, all had embraced the hope inherent in the very act of departure that the fruit of their labours would have one day resulted in some vaguely discernible, yet tangible, recognizable harvest.

Pietropaolo’s photographs capture and preserve moments that occur afterwards, when all is said and done, at the point of encounter between illusion and reality. What emerges from each gaze, from each face, from each facial line, is the iron will for the immigrants not to alter their sense of dignity, even after discovering that in their adopted country, maybe the emperor had no clothes after all. Pietropaolo observes that,

“When they got here, they learned three things: first, that the streets were not paved with gold; second, that the streets were not paved at all; and third, that they were expected to pave them. From Blood of My Blood, by Richard Gambino, as quoted by Vincenzo Pietropaolo in Not Paved With Gold, 2006, p. 1.

At the twentyfifth-anniversary celebration of the Columbus Centre, the Italian-born former chief of police of the city of Toronto recounted that as a young officer he had to obey his superiors’ orders to go to College Street and “clear out the garbage from the sidewalks.” The “garbage” referred to were the Italians, and their suspicious and ill-considered habit of congregating in small groups, to exchange information and to catch up on news from “home”, especially after the ritual of Sunday mass.

In the Toronto of that time, there were no street benches, there was no piazza, and there were no bars with sidewalk patios until Italian restauranters introduced the idea. Still today, the urban planning programs of Canada's largest city do not envision many public gathering places, which is another culturally cold front, besides the climatic one, that Italians have had to come to terms with. And Vincenzo Pietropaolo has a particular sensitivity for the genre of street photography, having been an urban planner for seventeen years. His most recent works tell the stories of piazzas and architecture of Italy and Europe, of the boulevards, and the public open spaces created for daily social encounters and community life. This contrasts starkly with the monolithic highways that snake beside new developments in Canadian suburbs, environments created exclusively for the movement of vehicles with no thought given to accommodating pedestrians. This is further reflective of the distance between the congregating nature of people of Italian origin and the proud sense of privacy held by people of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Even the Good Friday procession, in this context, assumes a quality that is not only religious in nature, but also one of sharing, conviviality, and the renewal of identity. Pietropaolo states:

BELOW | An elderly woman rests on the sidewalk at a community festival, at the corner of College and Grace Streets, the very heart of Little Italy, 1970 (not on view)



"The idea of people praying in the streets had always fascinated me. Like most children born in Italy I had been exposed to a variety of religious processions, and other public rituals. They have a spiritual function that distinguishes them from the cultural theatrics and folkloric pageantry of 'ordinary parades'. Taking part in a procession is a religious duty, and expression of faith, but of course there is no harm in going to such gatherings for another reason: to be seen by everyone else. On certain occasions, there are moments when the sacred and the secular seem to blur, giving rise to magical encounters among the participants. As an observer, I feel privileged when attempting to record them."

BELOW | Young boy wearing a kerchief to protect himself from the rain, Feast of St. Anthony, Grace Street, 1971 (not on view)



ABOVE | Nanna, the artist's grandmother with Tina, who was named after her, 1972 (not on view)



And what of the elderly lady that is resting, seated on the corner of a sidewalk? (*Community festival Grace and College, 1970.*) In her native town, she at least would have had a chair to sit on, if not a street bench, or a café table in the piazza.

For the women in particular the effort was immense. Devoted to their husbands and to their children, to cooking, and to under paid work in factories, they did not have ownership of their aspirations except when they were for communal interest. Their voices were subjugated to those of their male counterparts whenever important decisions were made. Their isolation was doubly felt. They did not have the same freedom of movement that the men had outside the home, and social events like “English as a second language” classes were also occasions for rare moments of diversion and personal enjoyment. Through emigration, they also lost the ties to their mothers, brothers, sisters, and parental family, and often had to adapt to forced arrangements with their

husband’s family. The immigrants lived in overcrowded houses, often with several families under one roof.

Pietro Paolo’s book is a celebration of the sensitivity, dedication, beauty and intelligence of women. Ultimately, the feminine self triumphs over a history replete with adversities (*Procession, feast of St. Anthony, Grace Street, 1971; Nanna with her grandchild, 1972*). The women are hard working and proud (*Bakery worker, Crupi Brothers bakery, Dundas Street, 1973; Seamstress, garment factory, Spadina Avenue, 1974*). But they seem fragile and lost in this new nation of infinite and unbearable spaces. They are respectful of tradition (*Bride, Bellevue Avenue, 1973*) but also playfully dismissive and sensual.

ABOVE, LEFT | A baker working at Crupi Brothers Bakery, Dundas Street. Pietro Paolo recounts how from “...an early age, we were told of the sacredness of bread. Whether a long loaf or a round loaf, it must never be placed on the table face down. To do so would be to desecrate it,” 1973

ABOVE, MIDDLE | Bride, Bellevue Avenue, 1973 (not on view)

ABOVE, RIGHT | Seamstresses in the garment district centered on Spadina Avenue, Toronto, were mostly Italian and Portuguese immigrants, 1974 (not on view)

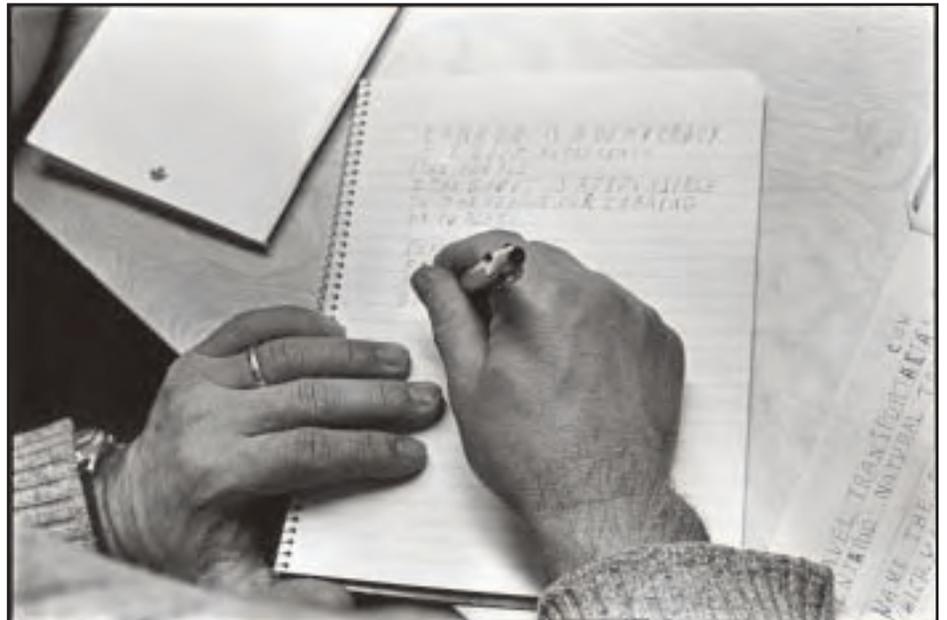
These photographs arouse one's curiosity; one would like to know more about a person, their situation, their name, and their town of origin. How was the photographer able to be there in that moment, without interfering with his presence or with his camera? The encounter between two sisters (*Sisters meeting after twenty-five years, Toronto International Airport, 1971*) both of whom had ended up in different and distant nations from where they were born, is an extraordinary example of the photographer's talent (please see page 16.) Had the photograph been taken a moment later, once they had already touched, embraced each other, and poured out tears of emotion, it would not have captured the intensity of an encounter that had been anticipated for twenty-five years.

And it is not the only moment in which we marvel at the camera's unobtrusive presence, which in someone else's hands would have certainly been invasive. To Pietropaolo it is permitted to photograph children, such as in the photograph *Children at CHIN, International Picnic, Centre Island, 1973*, or a woman who is sewing, as in *Sewing by the window, 1973*, or the open note book while one is taking notes, in *English lesson, West End YMCA, College Street, 1972*, or capturing intimate moments in church, as in *Child sleeping during midnight mass, 1972*.

BELOW | Children playing at the CHIN International Picnic, Centre Island, Toronto, 1973 (not on view)



BELOW | The artist's mother sewing by window light, 1973



RIGHT | An English as a second language class, which was attended by unemployed workers—the only individuals who had the time for such activities during the day. West End YMCA, 1973 (not on view)

BELOW | A child asleep on her mother's shoulder during the Christmas midnight mass, St. Francis of Assisi church, 1972



It is not easy to be accepted, to be invited to share intimacy, especially with a camera in hand. As a journalist, I know that certain privileges or access to the truths of daily life are not things that can be reduced to contractual imperatives. Either there is immediate trust, and you sense the mutual rapport, or you simply abandon the effort, and force yourself to discard much of the work that you may have already done. That is why some are able to get interviews and information where others never will.

Vincenzo Pietropaolo knows how to earn that trust, because of the genuine respect that inspires him in every human being. Every one of his photographs tells us precisely about that. But it would not have been enough to merely draw the sometimes impenetrable curtain behind which Italian culture can also retreat to protect their private worlds. Pietropaolo remembers:

"...The time in Earls Court Park near St. Clair, when I was photographing a group of men playing bocce, and one of them stopped me and demanded to know why I was taking these pictures. As I sheepishly offered that it was my modest intention to do a book about immigrants, he declared in a deadpan voice; "Make sure you tell the truth about immigration". And what is the truth? I ventured to ask. His reply was swift and decisive: "L'America non è oro; è lavoro. E il santo dollaro non è altro che dolore." (America is not gold; it is work. And the sacred dollar is nothing but pain and suffering.)

In greater Toronto there are 500,000 Italian-Canadians. In recent years, this great metropolis, which is also the capital city of the province of Ontario, has been considered one of the more desirable places in the world for its quality of life, according to statistics and data furnished by various international organizations. If it has forged this role for itself, if it has become a sort of alternative altar to the irritating and merciless American myth, if it has more humane rhythms, more well-balanced, congenial and bearable qualities, it is in great part due to the Mediterranean characteristics which it has acquired from its newer citizens as if by osmosis; to the *Italian-ness* of its gastronomy and good dining, its manner of communicating and socializing, its dress code, its sense of home decor and design, and its way of creating an atmosphere of cordiality in the delivery of public services.

The Italians who in the 1970's were beholden to the contractors and the go betweens in business and industry, are no longer distressed, lonely men and women, and are no longer prey to isolation and urban alienation, or a distressing environment. They no longer live in homes with homily basements and overcrowded with three families, but in villa-type houses and respectable residential neighborhoods. They are movers and shakers, occupying key positions in

politics and in the economy, from financial services to tertiary industry. They have invented a new language for themselves, *italiese*, and a hybrid, which bridges their mother tongue to the official languages of their new country, allowing them to travel back and forth over a linguistic bridge. In order to get this far, they have had to strategize both as a collective force and as individuals, as families and as groups, efficiently and astutely, so as to be able to compete within the extremely dynamic population of Toronto.

Ironically, today Italy, too, is a country that welcomes millions of immigrants, much like other Western European countries, and in the same way that Canada and the United States have historically opened their doors and imported massive numbers of people. These are all nations to whom it would bode well to look at the photographs in *Not Paved with Gold*, to circulate them in schools and provoke debate, with the same energy and the same resources spent to teach schoolchildren about the Italian Risorgimento, Canadian Confederation, or the American War of Independence. In this way, perhaps those who today are forced to venture onto that same journey of immigration, would be spared some of the expected pain and suffering, as they submit to the same forces of uprooting, and elicit the same distrust that the Italians used to elicit with their impromptu gatherings in the open, their odd-looking clothes, their spicy cooking: the Latinos, like the Ukrainians, the Mexicans, the Africans, the south east Asians, the Middle Easterners, and the Filipinos, or the man who this morning was driving our taxi.

VINCENZO PIETROPAOLO

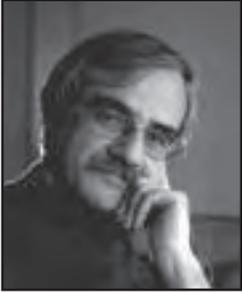


Photo by Nathan Aquila

Italian-born (1951) Vincenzo Pietropaolo is an independent photographer based in Toronto. Active in photography since 1971, he is self-taught, and since 1992 has pursued a full-time career as a freelance photographer after leaving a parallel career as a town planner with the city of Toronto. His artistry and social commitment have won him widespread recognition and awards. *Canadian Geographic* magazine recently (2006) called him “one of Canada’s pre-eminent documentary photographers.” His work exploring the immigrant experience, including Italian immigrants, migrant farm workers, and refugees in Canada has been widely acclaimed. He is noted for his documentation of the world of work and the labor movement, as well as for his exploration of urban issues in cities like Toronto, New York, Havana, and Mexico City. He lectures at colleges and universities, frequently exhibits internationally, and has published six books of photography. His work is included in many institutional and corporate collections.

TECHNICAL NOTE

All photographs are 8.5” x 12.5” silver prints made by the artist.

LIMITED EDITION PORTFOLIO

Not Paved With Gold. Limited Edition Portfolio released by Stephen Bulger Gallery and Pende Fine Arts. 2006.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 *Not Paved with Gold*. Fototeca de Cuba, Havana, Cuba.
- 2005 *Essential Work: Mexican Farm Workers in Canada*. Art Gallery of Windsor.
- 2003 *Latin Traces/Huellas Latinas: Images of Cuba and Mexico*. Ryerson Gallery, Toronto.
- 2002 *Vincenzo Pietropaolo*. 30-year Retrospective. Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto.
- 2000-2002 *Growing Cultures*. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.
- 1999 *The Streets Were Not Paved With Gold*. Pier 21, Halifax.
- 1998 *New York/Toronto*, David Mirvish Books on Art, Toronto.
- 1996-2001 *Harvest Pilgrims*. Curated by the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography. Traveled through ten locations across the Caribbean, the United States, and Canada.
- 1991 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Illustration of Jane Jacob's work, University of Toronto.
- 1995 *Safe Haven: Refugee Families in Canada*. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.
- 1994 *Peregrinos de Cosecha*. Fotoseptiembre, Morelia, Mexico.
- 1993 *Harvest Pilgrims*. Photo Passage, Harbourfront, Toronto.
- 1987 *Ritual*. Photographers Gallery, Saskatoon.
- 1985 *Primers and Kiln Hangers*. Photo Union Gallery, Hamilton, Ontario.
- 1984 *The Italian-Canadians*. Canadian Academic Centre, Rome, Italy.

SELECTED JURIED/CURATED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 *A Collected View*. City of Toronto Archives Centre.
- 2005 *Viajeros: North American Photographers' Images of Cuba*. Zoellner Arts Centre, Bethlehem, PA.
- 2005 *Paradiese auf Erden*. Credit Suisse Bonviva, Zurich, Switzerland.
- 2003 *Documents and Dreams*. Narrative 360, Vancouver, BC.
- 2003 *Growing Cultures*. Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.
- 2003 *Cuba Now: Glimpses of Daily Life*. Photo West Gallery, Philadelphia, PA.
- 2003 *Presenza*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa.
- 2002 *Making Home in Havana*. Leica Gallery, New York City.
- 2001 *Fotografía Canadiense*. Fototeca de Cuba, Havana.
- 1998 *Spirit of Resistance*. Mayworks Festival, Toronto.
- 1998 *Trois Perspectives du Mexique*. Galerie Mistral, Montreal.
- 1997 *Who Grows Our Food?* Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
- 1995 *Five Photographers*. Steven Bulger Gallery
- 1988-90 *Fotografía Canadiense Contemporanea*. Touring exhibition through Mexico
- 1988-90 *Italy Outside of Italy*. Touring exhibition, Rome and Italy.
- 1986 *Toronto in Focus*. De Meervart, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- 1983 *The Portrait*. Espace Ovo, Montréal, Québec.
- 1982 *Humor in Photography*. New York University, New York City.
- 1981 *Sights of History*. National Film Board traveling exhibition.

BOOKS

- Not Paved with Gold*. Between the Lines, Toronto, 2006.
- Making Home in Havana*. Rutgers University Press, NJ, 2002. Text: C. Lawless.
- Canadians at Work*. Canadian Auto Workers Union, Toronto, 2000. Published in French as *Canadiens au travail*.
- Kensington*. Stoddart, Toronto, 2000. Text: J. Cochrane.
- Celebration of Resistance*. Between the Lines, Toronto, 1999.
- Marco and Michela*. James Lorimer & Co. Publisher, 1978. Text: S. Repo, G. Colalillo, & V. Pietropaolo.



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