

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: Royal Holloway, University of London</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics</p>
<p>Title of case study: The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians, 1918-2005 – Dr Giuliana Pieri</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The research project ‘The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians 1918-2005’ has facilitated a better understanding of fascism and its legacy by challenging preconceptions about Benito Mussolini and examining the legacy of his leadership ‘cult’ in Italy and beyond. The project achieved impact on CULTURAL LIFE through collaboration with a professional curatorial team in an exhibition at a significant UK gallery, the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art in London, engaging in the process with a wider, non-academic audience. The project’s public engagement activities and the production of teaching resources in a variety of media have also had an EDUCATIONAL impact, improving public awareness of the propaganda strategies of Fascism.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research for this project was undertaken by Dr Giuliana Pieri (Reader in Italian, Royal Holloway) at Royal Holloway between 2006 and 2010. It was conducted with co-investigators Prof. C. Duggan (Reading) and Prof. S. Gundle (Warwick) and a team of postdoctoral research assistants (Simona Storchi, Sofia Serenelli, Vanessa Roghi and Paola Bernasconi) and PhD students (Alessandra Antola and Eugene Pooley) as part of the AHRC-funded research project <i>The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians 1918-2005</i>. The focus on Mussolini has proven illuminating to a non-academic audience curious about the relationship between politics, society and culture. Pieri’s contribution to the project focused on aesthetics and the visual components of the cult, especially the fine arts (painting and sculpture). Using little known material drawn from private collections and archives Pieri was able to show that seemingly contrasting iconographic references, encompassing Classical, Renaissance, Modernist and Avant-Garde models, were in fact used to highlight facets of Mussolini’s public persona. Images of Mussolini, whether in propaganda or works by prominent artists, embraced the principle of ‘organised confusion’ – an approach which gave a misleading sense of stylistic freedom in the art produced in Fascist Italy.</p> <p>Two major outputs of the project were especially informed by Pieri’s research (and also achieved impact): Pieri’s co-curation of an exhibition, and a series of documentary films exploring aspects of the cult of the <i>Duce</i> both during and after Fascism, a hitherto underexplored field. Pieri’s work revealed the mechanisms that allowed the creation and development of the official iconography of Mussolini, and generated new interpretations of the reception of images of the <i>Duce</i> in the postwar period, and of the role of the arts in the fall of the dictatorship. The exhibition ‘Against Mussolini: Art and the Fall of a Dictator’, which has a permanent online presence at www.mussolinicult.com, was held at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art in London, one of the most significant venues for modern Italian art outside Italy, and was jointly curated with the Estorick’s curatorial team. The organisation of the exhibition and the selection of material to be exhibited, for which Pieri wrote the accompanying labels and notes, and which included many works previously unseen in public and never before seen in the UK, arose directly out of Pieri’s research in the project. The focus on the role of the Fine Arts is an area which has hitherto been marginalized in studies of Fascist and Anti-Fascist propaganda.</p> <p>Pieri’s contributions to the volume <i>The Cult of the Duce</i> and two of the three documentary films produced for the project (<i>Fascism and the Cult of the Duce</i>; and <i>Mussolini after Mussolini</i>), both featuring interviews with Pieri, offer new insights into two key, understudied areas in the personality cult of Mussolini: the iconography of Mussolini, which is more complex and nuanced than previously thought, and the postwar cult of Mussolini. which cast new light on the way in which ideological discourses in the postwar period influenced the critical and public reception of</p>

Mussolini's image.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Research Project:

1. AHRC-funded Research Project. *The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians 1918-2005*, (£482,500, 1/09/2006-1/09/10. Pincipal Investigator: Prof. S. Gundle (Warwick). Co-investigators: Prof. C. Duggan (Reading) and G. Pieri.

The final report was submitted to the AHRC, to its satisfaction, in October 2011.

Key Outputs of the Project:

Exhibition:

2. *Against Mussolini. Art and the Fall of a Dictator*, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 22 September – 19 December 2010.
The exhibition has a permanent website: www.mussolinicult.com

Broadcast media:

3. *Mussolini: The Story of a Personality Cult*. A series of three documentary films (written by Vanessa Roghi, 2010):
 - i. 'Fascism and the Cult of the *Duce*'
 - ii. 'Predappio: Past and Present in Mussolini's Birthplace'
 - iii. 'Mussolini after Mussolini'

(Pieri was interviewed in i and iii).

Printed media:

4. S. Gundle, G.Pieri and S. Storchi eds., *Against Mussolini. Art and the Fall of a Dictator*, exhibition catalogue (London: Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2010). Includes: G. Pieri and S. Storchi, 'Art Against Dictatorship: from Unrest to Resistance', pp. 36-43 .
5. G. Pieri, 'The Body of the Dictator: Iconography and Aesthetics of the Cult of the Duce', in *Figura Umana: Normkonzepte der Menschendarstellung in der italienischen Kunst 1919 bis 1939*, ed. by Edgar Leuschner (Petersberg: Imhof, 2012), pp. 201-12
6. C. Duggan, S. Gundle and G. Pieri eds., *The Cult of the Duce. Mussolini and the Italians from 1914 to the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). Includes: Duggan, Gundle and Pieri, 'Introduction', pp. 1-8; Pieri, 'Portraits of the Duce', pp. 161-77; Pieri, 'The Destiny of the Arts and Artefacts', pp. 227-40).
7. G. Pieri, 'Introduction' with S. Gundle and C. Duggan, in *The Cult of Mussolini in Twentieth-Century Italy*, special issue of *Modern Italy*, May 2013, pp. 111-15.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The project was conceived and delivered with the intention to reach and to influence the wider public. The beneficiaries of the research include members of the general public who attended the exhibition, internet users visiting the permanent project website, and students and schoolchildren viewing the documentary films produced by the project. The underpinning scholarly research is

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fully embedded in the impact-related activities listed below.

EDUCATIONAL and CULTURAL Impacts:Exhibition:

Pieri was co-curator of the public art exhibition *Against Mussolini* at the Estorick Collection. The exhibition, which received very positive reviews and media attention both in the UK and Italy, brought together a range of paintings, drawings, sculptures, cartoons, postcards and photographs produced, mainly in Italy, between the early 1940s and 1945. Collaboration with the Estorick was crucial. The director Roberta Cremoncini and staff member Christopher Adams co-curated the exhibition with Pieri, Gundle and Storchi of the project team. The Estorick itself also contributed £34,000 to the £45,000 cost of the exhibition, which brought numerous works by major artists (Guttuso, Mafai, Maccari etc) to London, together with lesser known works discovered by the project team (from, among others, the Tono Zancanaro archive in Padua, The Enrico Sturani Collection in Rome, and the Wolfson Collection in Genoa).

The exhibition was widely reviewed, especially in the Italian press. It featured in *The Sunday Times* culture supplement's top 10 art events in London for 3 weeks running. The exhibition talks, with the investigators using the material in the show to highlight their research into the cult of Mussolini. The film material is available via the project website (www.mussolinicult.com). Four videos from Pieri's gallery talks are featured here: Mafai: *Fantasia, Part 1—The Depiction of the Body*; *Fantasia, Part 2—The Troops Enjoy themselves*; Mino Maccari's 'Dux' series; Zancanaro: the Ubiquity of Mussolini's image. These talks offer clear and informative analysis for a non-specialist audience. They focus on art works brought to London for the exhibition which were produced during the Fascist era, and emphasise the decline of the cult in the years immediately following Mussolini's fall from power in 1943, when there was widespread destruction of Fascist symbols and images of Mussolini. Pieri's research on the official iconography of the regime and the multifaceted representations of Mussolini underpinned the analysis and put into context the ridiculing of Mussolini in the works and their condemnation of the violence and brutality of the regime.

Documentary films:

The research has led to the creation of teaching resources (3 documentary films) which have improved the quality of the learning experience in HE and FE-level education around the world for students learning about European History and Fascism. The three documentaries the project delivered received public screenings (University College London, 11 February 2011) and in Mussolini's home town of Predappio (25 February 2011; but note that the films are designed for use as DVDs in schools as educational resources). There was extensive newspaper coverage of the Predappio event, reflecting one of its intended functions as a means of engaging with and challenging Italian audiences and making a contribution to the process of memorialisation and reconciliation. The documentaries have generated a considerable amount of interest from non-academic users. 235 copies have been distributed to numerous university departments and schools in the UK and 15 other countries (at the request of lecturers and teachers who are using them as teaching resources). It is expected that more copies will be distributed in future.

REACH

The **reach** of the project's impact is evidenced by:

- the exhibition audience size (4,850 visitors, including 20 school parties). 700 copies of the catalogue were produced and to date nearly 600 copies have been sold.
- the documentary films' estimated audience size: approx. 16,700. 3 documentary DVDs of broadcast-quality (using archival footage and original material) were produced in both English (200 copies) and Italian (100 copies) for use mainly in higher education. They have

been distributed to 167 academics who requested them in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Italy and other European countries. A smaller number was distributed to FE lecturers and school teachers in the UK. The audience size is calculated by multiplying each academic destination by 100. Assuming use of the material over a minimum 5 year period, this estimate of audience size is cautious. Feedback suggests wide and continuing use of the material.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

The Exhibition website, including videos of gallery talks by Pieri and the other Project investigators. This source will corroborate the event and activities that took place:

1. www.mussolinicult.com

The website has received 1,594 visitors from 67 countries; 20% are repeat visitors (until May 2013; Google Analytics report). This data is not openly accessible but available on request. This data is not openly accessible but available on request

2. Documentary evidence in support of the distribution of and feedback on the documentary films is held by the project team and can be produced on request.

Reviews and reference to the Exhibition in popular media.

The following sources provide evidence of the very lively and overwhelmingly positive discussion and debate that the exhibition triggered in the media in the UK and Italy.

3. Saturday Review, 25 September 2010, 19:15. BBC Radio 4:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00twzp8#synopsis>
4. Recommendations in the *Sunday Times* 'Critical List', 3/10/17 October 2010
5. *Corriere della Sera*, 3 October and 12 December 2010
6. Sarah Whitfield, 'Art and Mussolini', *The Burlington Magazine*, December 2010, pp. 819-20
7. 'Londra fa satira sulla caduta del Duce', *Il Tempo*, 2 September 2010
8. 'A Powerful View of the Powerful', *Islington Tribune*, 17 September 2010