



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **“One day we must meet”: Art and National Identity in Fascist Italy and New Deal America, 1933–41**

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My goal during this fellowship is to complete an ongoing research project that compares the art policies of Fascist Italy and New Deal America. The resulting intercultural study will examine the shifting forms of Italian and American artistic self-representation in the period of diplomatic relations between the Roosevelt and Mussolini governments, from the peak of political cordiality in 1933 to World War II.

By focusing on a series of exhibitions of the work of living artists that the Italian regime sent across the Atlantic—from the “Century of Progress” Chicago World’s Fair of 1933–34 to the New York World’s Fair of 1939–40—I will explore the diplomatic mission assigned to modern art in fashioning the image of Fascist Italy for a U.S. audience. I will also consider the role of art and art criticism in defining the national identity of New Deal America and determine how art contributed to the rising political antagonism between the two countries.

The Smithsonian libraries and archives will be essential resources in tracking the reception of the Italian exhibitions in American cultural circles. How did Italy’s promotional image contribute to the burgeoning art culture in America? To what degree did the presentation of Italian art under the umbrella of state patronage lead Americans to compare it with federal New Deal support to artists?

I will reconsider the debate on American art within the New Deal for its historical and ideological analogies with Italian Fascist cultural policy. Both Italian and American governments assigned art a role in the shaping of national self-consciousness. Their respective cultural brokers elaborated a similar-sounding rhetoric centered on analogous aesthetic values and social programs. However, beyond comparable subject matter, the rhetoric veiled opposite ideologies.

Comparing and contrasting the agendas of Fascist Italy and New Deal America will enhance our knowledge of the arts under dictatorships and democracies, and bring new light to the indoctrination of the masses in the dramatic years before World War II.