



Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY



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La Colomba (the Dove) is the traditional Easter cake in Italy.

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An Italian Easter

FRANCESCA CAVALLO

Easter brings to mind egg hunts, chocolate, jelly beans, and the Easter bunny.

In Christianity, Easter is the holiest and oldest of all traditions, and it's related to the even more ancient Jewish festival of Passover, which is described in the Old Testament. Both holidays are often celebrated at the same time of year, in the same week. Passover takes place over one week in remembrance of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. For Christians, Easter commemorates the resurrection of Christ after his crucifixion.

Many things about Easter are neither Jewish nor Christian in origin. For example, the English name "Easter" and the German name "Ostern" are both derived from old Germanic roots. Also, the traditions of having an Easter eve bonfire or burning Easter wheels come from Germanic and Celtic heliolatry, or sun worship. Even the popular colorful Easter egg has its origins in another pagan belief: it was considered a symbol of

fertility in Egypt.

Today, eggs are synonymous with Easter in many countries, including Germany, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland. At the end of Lent, hard-boiled eggs are colored, Easter trees or bouquets are decorated with little wooden figurines and hollowed-out painted eggs, and people buy or bake special sweet Easter breads, often bursting with raisins.

But how is Easter viewed and celebrated in Italy? There is an Italian proverb which says: 'Natale con i tuoi, Pasqua con chi vuoi' (Christmas with your family, Easter with whoever you wish), which illustrates the fact that *Pasqua* (Easter) is considered a less intimate festival than Christmas. You probably won't see the Easter bunny if you're in Italy for Easter, but you will find some interesting Italian Easter celebrations. Like all holidays in Italy, Easter has its share of rituals and traditions. The Monday following

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Easter, la *Pasquetta* is also a public holiday throughout Italy. While the days before Easter in Italy include solemn processions and masses, Easter is a joyous celebration.

Easter mass is held in every church in Italy, and the biggest and most popular Mass is held by the Pope at Saint Peter's Basilica. On Good Friday, the Pope celebrates the *Via Crucis* or Stations of the Cross in Rome near the Colosseum. A huge cross with burning torches lights the sky as the stations of the cross are described in several languages. At the end, the Pope gives a blessing. Solemn religious processions are held in many towns on the Friday or Saturday before Easter and sometimes on Easter Sunday. Many churches have special statues of the Virgin and Jesus that play a big part in the processions. The statues may be paraded through the city or displayed in the main square. Parade participants are often dressed in traditional ancient costumes. Olive branches are often used instead of, or along with, palm fronds in the processions and to decorate churches.

Since Easter is the end of the Lenten season, food plays a big part in the celebrations. Normally we spend *Domenica di Pasqua* (Easter Sunday) with the family, engaged in the traditional act of stuffing ourselves with food, such as roasted lamb or kid, hard boiled eggs, which have been taken to church to be blessed at the end of the Mass, and of course chocolate eggs. The traditional Easter cake is la *Colomba* (the Dove), a cake similar in flavor and consistency to the Christmas cake Panettone, but baked in the form of a stylized dove.

It's studded with candied orange peel, then topped with almonds and a sprinkling of sugar to form a crisp, nutty crust.

Numerous myths surround the *Colomba* cake. According to one particularly dramatic story, the city of Milan was defending itself against invaders on Easter in 1176. Just when the Milanese seemed destined to lose the battle, three doves flew over the city. Soon after, the battle shifted and the invaders were vanquished. Legend holds that after the victory, the Milanese celebrated by eating cakes shaped like their savior doves.

Although Italians do not decorate hard-boiled eggs nor have chocolate bunnies, nor pastel marshmallow chicks, the biggest Easter displays in bars, pastry shops, supermarkets, and especially at chocolatiers are brightly wrapped *uova di Pasqua* (chocolate Easter eggs) in sizes that range from

10 grams (1/3 ounce) to 8 kilos (nearly 18 pounds).

Most of them are made of milk chocolate in a mid-range, 10-ounce size by industrial chocolate makers.

All eggs contain a surprise. The very best eggs are handmade by artisans of chocolate, who offer the service of inserting a surprise supplied by the purchaser. Car keys, engagement rings, and watches are some of the high-end gifts that have been tucked into Italian chocolate eggs in Italy.

Another traditional Easter dessert that's popular in Naples and southern Italy is *pastiera*, a ricotta and whole grain pie with a mouthwatering aroma so distinctive that any blindfolded Neapolitan could instantly identify it. *Pastiera* is considered by many to be one of Italy's most important desserts. It is prepared in special pans, whose edges angle slightly outward. The pie is often given away as a gift and always in the pan it was baked in because of its fragile pastry. The pie needs to rest for two days for the flavors to meld, so it's traditionally finished on Good Friday so that it will be ready for Easter. *Pastiera* has become so popular that it is now available year-round in Naples.

The day following *Domenica di Pasqua* is *Lunedì di Pasqua* (Easter Monday), better known as *Pasquetta* (Little Easter) or *Lunedì dell'Angelo* (Monday of the Angel). The name *Lunedì dell'Angelo* refers to the Gospel story in which the women who went to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body the day after Easter were told by an angel that Jesus had been resurrected. This day is probably the most popular part of the festivities for Italians, and it's traditional to celebrate *Pasquetta* with a "*gita fuori porta*" (a trip outside the city gates), usually for a picnic with friends. One interpretation of this tradition comes, once again, from a Gospel story which recounts that on the day of the resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples who were travelling to Emmaus a few kilometers outside the city gates of Jerusalem. The *gita fuori porta* tradition could be seen as a kind of "re-enactment" of this story, although like many traditions most people are not really aware of its origins. A way to spend the *gita fuori porta* is a visit to a small historical town. Many of these towns will hold an event, such as an antique market, and will be packed with tourists. Whatever is done for *Pasquetta*, the deciding factor is, of course, the weather: everybody always hopes for a beautiful sunny warm day.

I wish to everybody a peaceful and happy Easter. *Buona Pasqua a tutti!*

Natural Selections
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NATURAL SELECTIONS WANTS YOUR ART!

Whether you can't stop drawing while waiting for the bus, or taking a walk around the city; if photography is your passion, or if you're more of a painter, this is your chance to share your art. Beginning in 2016, *Natural Selections* will publish a picture of the art we receive every month. To take advantage of this opportunity, email us your work with a title, a brief description, and your name. We'll make sure to include it in a future issue. We hope to receive several images to create an open space for art!

We'll be delighted to receive your artwork, please email hi-res image or vector files to :

nseditors@rockefeller.edu

Autism Awareness

GUADALUPE ASTORGA

April is National Autism Awareness Month. April 2 is a day meant to create consciousness, tolerance and acceptance of people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A better inclusion in society is essential to increase their quality of life and expectations.

Autism spectrum disorder encompasses a vast range of behaviors, genetic mutations and neurophysiological conditions. For this reason, it is difficult to find common traits that unanimously describe people with ASD.

It is well known that those with autism have a different perception of the world. They have a strong sensitivity to sensorial stimulus, such as light and sound, that is mild for most people. As these stimuli can be extremely disturbing for people with ASD, they may consequently avoid them with behaviors that appear incomprehensible from the outside. However, it is a natural reflex in all living beings to elude harmful stimuli, it is probably one of the adaptive behaviors that enabled us to survive on earth. How different would these behaviors appear if we were all aware of the reason behind them? Were that the case, we would probably support them instead of meeting them with a frightened expression. It is therefore crucial to generate awareness in society about the sensorial hypersensitivity of people with autism in order to integrate and accept them, instead of excluding them due to ignorance.

There are also notable differences in people with ASD in their ability to localize their attention on single tasks. While it is generally challenging to captivate their attention



with things they don't find interesting, once something has caught their attention they can spend long periods of time focusing on such activities. A great example of this is the number of outstanding artists and musicians with ASD. An open question for scientists and physicians is whether this ability to focus on one thing at a time is also related to their social withdrawal. Understanding the brain circuits required to localize attention as well as those required to establish social interactions and empathy with other people is certainly essential to developing therapies to integrate people with ASD into society. However, understanding and societal acceptance is also crucial to reduce their social withdrawal.

A rather worrisome subject concerns the general panic originated almost twenty years ago about a possible relation between autism and vaccines, in particular the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine.

This controversy was originated by a biomedical research [article](#) that intended to show that this vaccine caused several behavioral and physiological disorders, including autism. However, strong irregularities during data collection and analysis were found in this work, and it had to be retracted by the authors after no other group could reproduce the results. Extensive [research](#) in the past fifteen years demonstrated that there is no evidence for a relationship between vaccines (including ingredients present in them) and autism. Unfortunately, the unfounded belief that vaccines can cause autism continued to grow and spread around the world causing a large number of parents to stop vaccinating their children. This leaves both children and adults vulnerable to severe complications including pneumonia, encephalitis, blindness, diarrhea, ear infections, paralysis, and death.

As vaccine-preventable diseases are nowadays rarely found in several countries, one may think that they have already been eradicated. However, the infectious agents that cause them are still present in some parts of the world and can easily spread and infect anyone who is not immunized. This has already lead to significant measles outbreaks in unvaccinated populations in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom as well as the United States. This could have easily been prevented by vaccination. We cannot go backwards in history and waste years of medical and scientific advances. The risk of not taking vaccines far surpasses that of taking them. It depends on us to make responsible and informed decisions about vaccination in order to protect ourselves as well as those around us.

APRIL IS NATIONAL AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

join us in
CELEBRATION



awareness

action

acceptance

inclusion

appreciation

Culture Corner

Art review: “The Berlin Painter and His World: Athenian Vase Painting in the Early Fifth Century B.C.”; Princeton Art Museum, March 4 – June 11, 2017

BERNIE LANGS

There are certain types of art exhibits that are more difficult to take in than others. I have always found, for example, that illuminated manuscript displays require a very tiring amount of concentration, though the effort is well worth the wonder evoked. Exhibitions of sculpture, unless of ancient pieces, and drawings (excluding those from the Renaissance) require a great deal of disciplined looking to garner the rewards of understanding.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, I would often visit exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and explore the permanent collection at length. At times, I'd be the only person lost in The Met's side rooms displaying a huge inventory of ancient Greek vases, drinking cups, oil vessels, etc. There were cases and cases of them, many works graced by explanations written on typewriters indicating years of neglect and lack of attention. A few years ago, that all changed. The prize vases are now on glorious and ordered display, dozens of smaller, “lesser” works are upstairs from the main floor of the Leon Levy and Shelby White Court in a large, new repository and massive “study” space of ancient treasures that draw only a few curious, and, at times, quite knowledgeable viewers.

“The Berlin Painter and His World: Athenian Vase-Painting in the Early Fifth Century B.C.” at the Princeton Art Museum (March 4 – June 11, 2017) is a rare kind of exhibition. I can't recall a major museum show featuring ancient Greek vases, let alone one centering around the works of an individual artist from this obscure period when attributions are hard to come by. I had no idea what I'd find when I drove out to Princeton on a March morning, but I had high hopes that the illustrious Ivy League institution would do the subject justice.

The magnificent exhibit is the fruit of decades of study on individual hands that can be catalogued from the time around 500 B.C. and later. Sir John D. Beazley (1885 – 1970) is noted by the curators as the first scholar who began cataloging vases to individual painters and The Berlin Painter is one of those who left no signature, but surely a recognizable and signature style. When one is dealing with the subject of actual artists from the Golden Age of Greek art and be-

yond, those of us who love art history are in awe of the mere mention of a sculptor, such as Praxiteles (4th century BC), or Apelles, a painter also of the Hellenistic Period. There are no remains of either of their outputs, but many “copies” and much speculation about what they produced and just what their works may have looked like. Apelles was legendary even in the days of Julius Caesar and inspired the Renaissance artist Botticelli to attempt to recreate one of the artist's most famous works from antiquity (“The Calumny of Apelles”).

At the Princeton show, one easily finds a name, a style, and the hand of an exemplary artist. The various figures depicted on the vases in “red figure” style are elegant, smooth, and represent everything from mythical beings, to gods, athletes, fantastic beasts, wrestlers in repose, and so on, all adorned in smooth, simple, flowing *chitons* and draperies. There are swords and war, there are mystic offerings, there is Herakles undertaking his many tests, trials and tribulations, and there is the life and leisure of the ancients. One's eyes widen in wonder at what is in the display cases.

The exhibit's explanations are concise and very much on point, giving everything from historical context to notes on how one creates these pieces of pottery. The placards for each vase were also spot on, and I never found myself reading and drifting off to mutter “that's a lot of words” which I often do. There was one very beautiful wine vessel that the museum noted was found completely intact. Most vases are pieced together from fragments, and in this exhibition, the viewer is blessed that most of the vessels displayed were not broken up too badly when they were found in either The Berlin Painter's home area of Athens or in Etruscan Italy, an export destination. I can't recall ever previously viewing a major Attic Red-figure vase that was found entirely in one piece, as if it was fresh from production and presented for use that very day in New Jersey.

When I was done visiting the galleries of the exhibition, I took in sections of the museum's permanent collection and out of nowhere, I raced back to view The Berlin Painter with fresh eyes. I now knew *how* to approach it, and how to *see* it. On this sec-



Bernie Langs / NATURAL SELECTIONS

Red-figure stamnos depicting Chiron, Nereus and Nereids, attributed to the Berlin Painter, ca. 480-470 B.C., Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich (photo: BL)



Bernie Langs / NATURAL SELECTIONS

Princeton Art Museum – second of two galleries for The Berlin Painter exhibition.

ond go-around, spending time with only the top pieces, they truly came to life and felt more vital and immediate to me. Cicero has a book called “On the Nature of the Gods” and the *stamnos* depicting Chiron, Nereus and Nereids (*see photo*) truly reflected The Berlin Painter's notion of the cosmography by which he was bound by in space and historical time. By believing one could, for a moment, see the graceful mythic beings through his eyes, the cosmic dance commences, and it really is quite a show.

Hey! Welcome to the sixth and last lesson in our series on the New York City dialect. By now you should be able to understand the natives well enough to ask for subway directions (which also makes it obvious that you are a tourist). Don't worry about being able to understand the announcements in the subway, no one can understand them.

To review last month's lesson, a number of words in the city dialect drop the "H" in words that start with that letter. The two examples are 'uge and 'uman. Here are some more examples of them used in a sentence.

- Katz's Deli sandwiches have a 'uge pile of cold cuts between two slices of bread.
- Sometimes Grand Central Station can seem like a sea of 'umanity.

This month's lesson:

The New York dialect is known for two qualities: we speak very fast and tend to blur our words together. So much so, that phrases, and even entire sentences, can seem like one word. Life in the city is fast paced, so we don't have time to even wait for the next word. Here are some examples of words in the New York dialect. Click on the links to hear the pronunciation.

- **Amirite** A word used at the end of sentence, asking for confirmation. There's nothing quite like seeing a Broadway play, *amirite*?
- **Fugedaboudit**. A word used to express resignation or forgive-



ness.

You can't drive anywhere in the city on a Sunday afternoon, *fugedaboudit*, the traffic is too much.

- **Gedoutahea** A word used to express surprise or disbelief. You got a rent controlled apartment in Chelsea for \$700 a month? *Getoudahea!*
- **Ariteaready** A word used to express annoyance at being pushed or hurried. I'm moving, *ariteaready*, I just double parked for a minute!

Final exam: see if you can interpret this conversation between two natives.

First Guy "jeetyet?" Second

Guy "No, jew?"

I hope you have enjoyed these lessons in the New York City dialect. Listening to conversations among locals is the best way to tune your ear in to the pronunciation. It's also a great way to learn about and experience what this great city has to offer. Don't forget there are five boroughs in the city, it's not just Manhattan. There is a wealth of culture, cuisine and entertainment to explore. So many people come here every year to visit or to stay. Not only is the United Nations headquarters here, but there are over 100 different ethnicities in the city's population, that's why they call the city "The Capital of the World".

Answer: "Did you eat yet?" "No, did you?"





This month Natural Selections interviews Alicia Galicia. Food Services, RU.

INTERVIEW BY GUADALUPE ASTORGA

How long have you been living in the New York area?

I've been living in NYC for 28 years.

Where do you currently live? Which is your favorite neighborhood?

I live in Astoria and I love it, so Astoria is my favorite neighborhood.

What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated?

Most overrated in NYC I think is Time Square, nobody visiting the city misses it. Underrated, St. Patrick's Cathedral on 5th Avenue. It's a beautiful place to go, and pray and find yourself. For some people it may not be important in the way it is for me.

What do you miss most when you are out of town?

I miss the transportation. It's so easy to move from one place to another in NYC. In other places like Chicago is much harder.

Has anything (negative or positive)

changed about you since you became one of us "New Yorkers"?

I've changed in different aspects. I'm from Mexico and life there is harder. I feel that everything is possible in NYC if you pursue it. My first challenge was to learn English and I'm still trying to improve.

If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be?

The subway service. I feel we're paying more each time more, but the quality is decreasing. The trains are slower and waiting times are longer.

What is your favorite weekend activity in NYC?

I like to go to Central Park with my kids, they like to climb rocks and visit the zoo there. It's a lot of fun for them to feed the cows and goats.

What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC?

I came to work for a short time at Rockefeller and they liked my work, so they

hired me. Since the first day I loved this place. I've been here for 21 years and I love the ambience, talking with professors, students and doctors. It's a beautiful place to work and one of the best things that has happened in my life.

Bike, MTA or WALK IT???

I use the MTA because I don't have enough space in my house for bikes.

If you could live anywhere else, where [would] might that be?

I would like to go back to the country I'm from, but it's hard. I love NYC, the city that never sleeps. You have 24-hour stores, movies, and much more.

Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker?

Yeah, I feel part of NYC because I've been living here for 28 years and I've learned many things. Unfortunately, I was not lucky in my relationship, but I always teach my kids and myself to pursue your goals.

Quotable Quote

"Why are we suddenly a nation and a people who strive for security above all else? In fact, security is essentially elusive, impossible. We all die. We all get sick. We all get old. People leave us. People surprise us. People change us. Nothing is secure. And this is the good news. But only if you are not seeking security as the point of your life. Here's what happens when security becomes the center of your life. You can't travel very far or venture too far outside a certain circle. You can't allow too many conflicting ideas into your mind at one time as they might confuse you or challenge you. You can't open yourself to new experiences, new people, and new ways of doing things. They might take you off course. You cling desperately to your identity... Real security cannot be bought or arranged or accomplished with bombs. It is deeper. It is a process. It is the acute awareness that we are all utterly interdependent and that one action by one being in one town has consequences everywhere. Real security is the ability to tolerate mystery, complexity, ambiguity—indeed hungering for these things."

Eve Ensler (1953 -)



Photo Courtesy of VDAY.ORG



Life on a Roll

Pretty Old Carved Stones in France

ELODIE PAUWELS

<https://elodiephoto.wordpress.com>

Don't you like to observe the details of finely carved stones and try to feel the history behind it? Here are a few examples of those that I liked the most: the year of construction of a chimney in a modest house in a village in Corrèze, the shell-shaped motif on both sides of a door in a street of Beaune, and my favorite: a pretty young girl with braided hair on the tombstone of Philibert II, Duke of Savoy, in the Royal Monastery of Brou.

