

## SAN FRANCISCO ITALIAN COMMUNITY

CATHERINE ACCARDI

## Lucia Gonnella – An Italian Artist in Love with San Francisco's North Beach

“Art is life. Art is movement. Only through art I feel deep delicate sensations.”

Lucia Gonnella

San Francisco can boast about many things, including its rich and varied cultural heritage.

The North Beach district, sometimes called Little Italy, evokes Italy's cultural heritage. Many consider this neighborhood a slice of Italy. It is in North Beach that we find Lucia Gonnella, an Italian born artist who understands why so many adore North Beach as much as she does.

*L'Italo-Americano* was fortunate to meet and chat with Lucia in the classic Caffè Puccini, one of North Beach's treasured and enduring Italian establishments. During our conversation, Lucia shared her passion for art and for San Francisco.

When asked what brought her to San Francisco she replies, “I came to San Francisco by chance. It was my Italian friend that proposed me to come to the City for a week trip while I was staying in San Diego. My idea was to live there and at first I didn't want to visit San Francisco, but in the end I accepted. This was at the beginning of my experience in the US. It was probably because SF looked special, more international. I started to live in the City 11 years ago.

“At the beginning, though I found accommodation in the Downtown, I always liked to walk to North Beach and to Fisherman Wharf during the weekends. I was usually following my sensations and my intuitions; there was not a rational, specific reason. One day in 2007 I started living in North Beach.”

“I was looking for myself and exploring what I would



Lucia in North Beach, San Francisco. Courtesy of Lucia Gonnella

have liked to do here in the US. I was not aware of being an artist, though I was drawing and painting since I was child. When they asked me if I was an artist I was always saying ‘No,’ because I had artist's block. Then, one day the concierge at the Small Business Administration said, ‘Why don't you meet Martha Zlatar? She is an amazing art coach. She can help you.’ In effect, meeting her changed my life. She helped me through different tools to unblock myself until I finally understood that my mission is that of creating, not for success, but for myself. It is a long healing process.

“After a few months, I real-

ized that I always had the wish to paint outdoors, but in Italy I was ashamed to do it. First I started painting the roses on Lombard Street and then San Francisco views and buildings. I spent a lot of time doing watercolors on Fisherman Wharf. Then finally I started painting in North Beach streets and on Washington Square, where I did lots of watercolors of the church. So I became aware of being a *plein air* painter.

“One day, as I was painting near Columbus and Grant Avenues, I started meeting artists from North Beach related to Caffè Trieste or Caffè Puccini. On May 2011, in Vesuvio Café at the show organized by Elizabeth Ashcroft ‘Art in The Alley’, I met artist Fanny Renoir, a well-known poet and writer, who has been my mentor and friend for five years now. With her I did lots of shows at Live Worms Gallery, producing three. I also met Ronald Sauer and Rebecca Peters, two great artists and show producers, and took part in many of their exhibitions.

“I think that, first of all, in San Francisco I found myself and in North Beach I found an artist community that supports me. The light of San Francisco is sometimes similar to that of Southern Italy, the combination of the different shapes of the sky, buildings, and trees inspires my art.

“Besides, I think in every

corner of North Beach or San Francisco I can find something to paint. In North Beach in particular there are many businesses concentrated in a few blocks: these stores are so colorful and characteristic.”

Lucia describes how Italy and her Italian heritage influence her art. “I think Italian heritage influences me in the way I paint San Francisco. Some people say that I see San Francisco with Italian eyes and that in my paintings San Francisco looks like Italy. In effect, I paint sometimes parts of San Francisco that remind me of Italy. For instance, the San Francisco Art Institute with its tower surrounded by buildings reminds me of old Italian villages, the same for Coit Tower with the buildings and houses at the bottom.

“I am probably influenced by Italian art, having lived most of my life in Italy and having been a student of Sergio Albano in Torino and Sabrina Capraro in Milano. These artists were inspired by Carlo Carrà and Italian masters of the 20th century.”

Teaching art to members of NEXT Village SF came about in a fortuitous way. “I was brought by chance to NEXT Village. I was in Maui for a vacation when I received an email by a certain Michael, there was no last name, asking if I was willing to take his place in teaching watercolors for NEXT Village and I was happy to

accept though it looked like I didn't know him at all. I think here again the North Beach art community helped me: then two days ago I found out that Michael Leonard, an artist and art professor from Caffè Puccini gave them my name.”

Lucia has six art books and a chapbook of poems which she describes in this way: “I have six books about my artwork, done between 2007 and 2013. All are available on Blurb. The first two are about San Francisco, *San Francisco Cityscapes and Life*, I and II. The third is about Bari, Italy, my town and the fourth about nudes, *Women: color and beauty*. The fifth is *For Horse Lovers Everywhere* and is about watercolor of horses. The sixth, *Hawaiian Times*, is about Maui where I spent a lot of time. Three years ago I started to write poems in Italian and now I have one chapbook, *Canticles of Love*, a translation of my Italian poems, ‘Cantici d'amore,’

done by Ronald F. Sauer, also an amazing poet. The chapbook is available at City Lights Books.”

Lucia likes to say, “The places I paint choose me,” rather than the other way around. Explore and enjoy those places by visiting her website at <http://www.luciagonnella.com>, her Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/lucia.gonnella>, and Instagram at [https://www.instagram.com/gonnella\\_lucia](https://www.instagram.com/gonnella_lucia).

ITALIAN COMMUNITY SERVICES provides Bay Area Italian-American seniors and families with trusted resources to help them live healthy, independent and productive lives. We are committed to honoring and preserving the Italian language and culture, with an emphasis on the strength and support that comes from family, community, education and goodwill.

- Translation for seniors/new immigrants
- Community service coordination
- Information and referrals



ITALIAN  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICES

Preserving Our Culture. Serving Our Community.

CASA COLONIALE JOHN F. FUGAZI  
678 GREEN STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94133  
415•362•6423  
WWW.ITALIANCS.COM