

A Modern Bacchante of the nineteenth century who inspired the Avant-garde....

Isadora Duncan in Italy

April 13-September 22

Villa Bardini Museo Bardini, Florence

Lori Belilove reviews, reports, reflects...

Florence, Italy. I flew from NYC via London to Florence and arrived in time to catch the evening hours at the Palazzo Pitti, where I went crazy taking photos of the beautiful art work everywhere ... all my dancing barefoot sisters were there - almost coming to life!



First thing the next day I made my way to the Museo Stefano Bardini at the Villa Bardini where the exhibition is housed. The grand gardens transported me and climbing the hills to the villa refreshed my traveling legs.

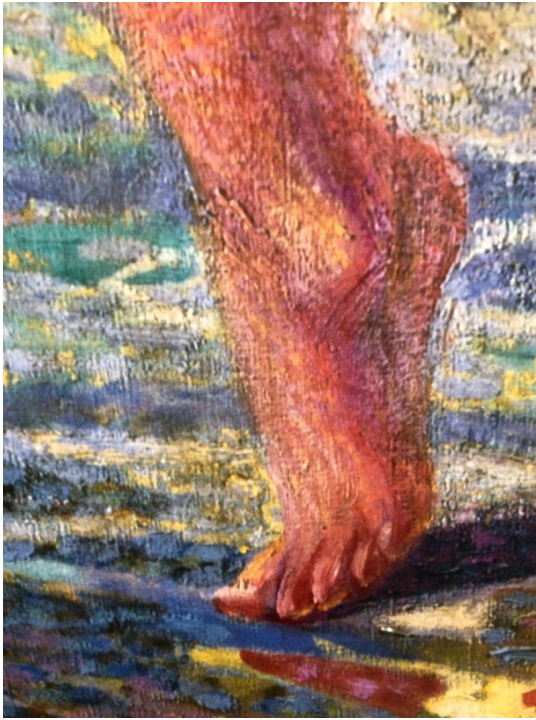
I was initially invited to be a part of the exhibition after conversations with the extra-ordinary Italian dance historian and Duncan researcher Patrizia Veroli, who was referred by my dear friend and colleague, Lynn Brooks, former chair of dance at Franklin and Marshall College. Patrizia was one of the main collaborators for the exhibition along with Maria Flora Giubilei and Carlo Sisi with primary funding by Fondazione CR Firenze.

We met there and toured the entire exhibition followed by one of those long European lunches with her colleagues. There, I learned the background stories around the exhibition.

I understand the initial inspiration for the exhibition was on the theme of the "dancing (nymph) woman," where Isadora was the "informed protagonist" in the rediscovery of the female body influencing movement and the arts celebrating the "expressive" body (according to the press release), but there was no explanation of this in the materials presented. The common thread in all of the works on view was their reflection Duncan's extensive connections to Italy.



For myself, I will re-name the exhibition: "Spirit of Woman: An Homage to Isadora Duncan". There were certainly pieces of Isadora - plus photos and memorabilia including books and programs, but many of the pieces were of unidentified women dancing in tunics or in the nude. I was not disappointed, though.



Immediately I found the stunning painting by Plinio Nomellini of young Isadora with a red scarf playing by the seashore. It turns out the painting was one large piece with the water extending to her right, but was later cut into two paintings. Both pieces were exhibited side by side. Yes, Isadora loved the sea!

On my return visit, I noticed others taking in the exhibition. Going from room to room, I observed many young women (dancers?), as they wandered throughout – their minds and hearts curious about Isadora's spirit, and I think a bit astonished at just how modern Isadora feels. I was reminded of myself, young and thirsty for the essence of this woman. I almost lived at the museums and sites in Greece so many years ago – in particular the Archeological Museum in Athens. Isadora can touch us deeply.

Each room was devoted to an aspect of Isadora's life – lovers and friendships – the children, and her many followers - primarily by Italian artists, but not exclusively.

There was the Gordon Craig room, the Eleanor Duse room, and the Paris Singer room with the children. There was a room with a stunning self-portrait of Romano Romanelli (image on the right), the sculptor and father of her third child.



Alternately, artists rendered many pieces that captured the rounded "Isadorian recumbent earth-bound figure in lament." One favorite of mine (hardly done justice in the catalog) was quintessential Isadora/ quintessential woman by Dario Viterbo. She was outstretched like a puddle of a woman, kneeling with her chest on the floor in supplication of life itself (image below on left). I loved it!



For the outstanding (and new to me) sculpture by Leonardo Bistolfi (image above on right), I gave the title "Love," which drew heavily from Bourdelle's drawings of Isadora and reminded me of her Brahms dance suite, "The Many Faces of Love". In touring the exhibition with Patrizia and friends, I commented that Isadora's primary, recurring message was LOVE. They smiled knowingly.

Sweet photos covered some rooms wall-to-wall, giving a towering presence of Isadora. Very effective. Isadora, blown-up and bigger than life, was a very effective aspect of the show – she was large and all encompassing over the exhibit tables of her own memorabilia. I was happy to be observed by her.

Every room offered sculptures and figurines, notably the famous "dancing Tanagra" that was said to have been beside Isadora's night table. I was able to identify many dances from her repertory that have been passed down through generations of Duncan Dancers that I perform with my company today.

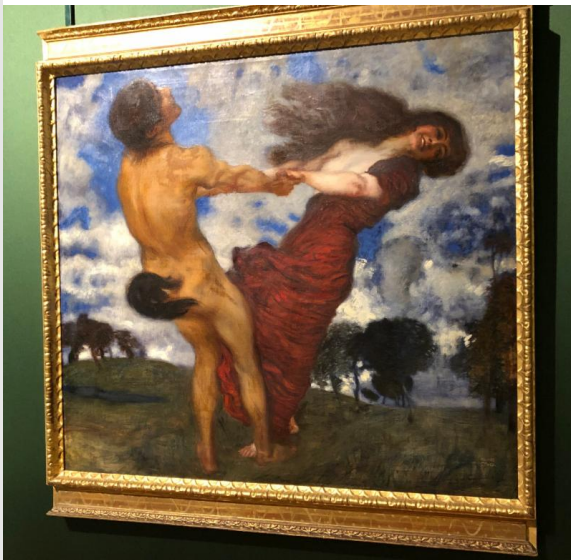


One dance, *Les Funerailles* (music by Lizst), was captured in photography and sculpture. Uncanny for its similarity, see the sculpture, below, by Libero Andreotti and the 20X24 polaroid photo of me taken by marvelous American dance photographer Margaretta K. Mitchell.



Spinning and circling is a trademark of Duncan dancing. I was struck by the painting of the satyr and long-haired woman in red spinning and easily

compared it to the wonderful photograph of the Beliloveables (Morgana Cragnotti and Samantha Vicens) from a performance at the Lyndhurst Gardens in Westchester, NY. Enjoy.



And how was Isadora perceived when she first came upon the scene, performing in the gardens and salons of Europe? The photo of the men, enlarged on the wall of the main room, was striking to me for how it really was then - looking at their faces we get a whole story of her unabashed statement of female freedom and the guts to present herself whole-heartedly, no matter what people thought.

As for the video component of the exhibition, I understood the preliminary plan was to have 3 stations set up throughout the various rooms – one entirely devoted to the award-winning documentary **Isadora Duncan: Movement From the Soul**, and two others covering the moving image of dance from the era. Funding for it was cut so the plan shifted.

In its place, was one room dedicated to a video installation curated by dance historian Veroli and featuring yours truly Lori Belilove performing *Narcissus*, *Blue Danube*, and *Dance of the Furies* - all excerpts from my documentary, *Isadora Duncan: Movement from the Soul* - and included fabulous footage from the 1905 *Serpentine Dance* (Loïe Fuller); 1914-1926 *Hexentanz* (Mary Wigman); 1929 *Heretic* (Martha Graham); 1930 *Baccanale*, *Tannhäuser* (Rudolf Laban and Kurt Jooss), among others. I felt I was in fine company.



The video installation may be viewed upon request to info@isadoraduncan.org.

My Italy experience also including visits to the major museums in Florence a Madonna image (Botticelli). When I walked by this painting, I had a flash of the wonderful photo of Isadora with her children; coupling these two images together sums up Italy and Isadora for me.



Overall, the collection was so rich. I want to go back every day to see my barefoot dancing sisters in this extraordinary collection of the dancing female and the era of "Isadoraian" inspired movement. In fact, this exhibition, more than any I've seen, documents the explosion of freedom in movement that Isadora pioneered.

The Isadora Duncan Foundation is appropriately credited in the immense catalog, which can be found on Amazon, and if you don't venture to Italy, see www.villabardini.it.

In summation, I asked Veroli her finale assessment of the exhibition. "Whatever the black points - this exhibition is a miracle. Italy is not a place for dance. It is more open to opera and music. In my opinion, dance is now in a period of decay and this exhibition is a MIRACLE!"

- Lori Belilove

(Please excuse any discontinuity for portable devices)

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