

Craftsmanship Documented

Joey Skee (February 28, 2011)



Italian Americans at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On March 9th, curator Jayson Kerr Dobney will present on “The Neapolitan Instruments Makers of New York” at the Calandra Institute as part of its “Philip V. Cannistraro Seminar Series in Italian American Studies.”



It has long been noted that Italian immigrants and their descendants excelled in various types of craftsmanship. From [embroidery \[2\]](#) to [stone carving \[3\]](#), artisanal work has been a fundamental part of Italian experiences with migration and labor. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has contributed an exciting new chapter to our understanding of Italian artistry in the New World.

The exhibition “[Guitar Heroes: Legendary Craftsman from Italy to New York \[4\]](#)” (February 9-July 4, 2011) features the work of three Italian-American luthiers working in New York City and surrounding area: [John D’Angelico \[5\]](#) (1905-1964); [James D’Aquisto \[6\]](#) (1935-1995); and [John Monteleone \[7\]](#) (1947-). Exhibit curator Jayson Kerr Dobney situates these stringed-instrument makers within “a tradition that spans hundreds of years and two continents. They are the direct descendants of the Neapolitan craftsman who came to New York in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century.” The exhibit (and accompanying publication) does an excellent job of tracing the connections between Bavaria in the fifteenth century, [northern Italy \[8\]](#) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, [Naples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and finally New York City \[9\]](#)—“a vibrant center of Italian-American culture”—in the twentieth century.





Archtop guitars, New Yorker models, 1958 & 1959, John D'Angelico

The exhibition “offers an extraordinary opportunity to consider the continuity of a traditional craft and its constant adaption to meet the ever-changing needs of musicians and markets.” Perhaps the exhibit’s greatest contribution is simply resurrecting the names of Italian immigrant craftsmen of violins, mandolins, and guitars from the fading pages of history, such as:

- [Joseph E. Bini](#) [10], guitar maker who emigrated in the 1840s from the Veneto, who worked at P. T. Baruum’s American Musuem
- Angelo Mannello, from Morcone (Benevento province), arrived in 1885 and known for his ornately inlayed mandolins
- Neapolitan Luigi Ricca arrived in 1886 and mentored Charles Biggio, Antonio Grauso, and A. Russo
- Antonio Carlucci, who worked for the Schmidt factory in Jersey City and taught John DeJulio
- Violin-maker William Pezzone
- [Nicola Turturro](#) [11], who invented the “mandolira” and the “peanut” ukulele
- Mario Maccaferri, born in 1900 in Cento (Ferrara province), designed the jazz guitar adopted by Django Reinhardt before emigrating to the Bronx where he introduced mass-produced plastics ukuleles and guitars in the 1950s-60s
- Raphael Cini, born in 1905 in New York City and had a workshop at 57 Kenmare Street where his nephew John D’Angelico trained
- Violin-maker Mario Frosali
- Vincent DiSerio, trained in [D’Angelico’s workshop](#) [12]
- [Robert Benedetto](#) [13], Bronx-born (1946), self-taught guitar maker

The exhibit and Website feature extensive audio and video components of [interviews](#) [14] and [musical performances](#) [15] that enhance our appreciation of this craftsmanship. On March 9th, curator Jayson Kerr Dobney will present on “The Neapolitan Instruments Makers of New York” [at the Calandra Institute as part of its “Philip V. Cannistraro Seminar Series in Italian American Studies](#) [16].”



Apprentice and Master

James D'Aquisto (left) and John D'Angelico (right)

D'Angelico Guitars

37 Kenmare Street, New York City ca. 1960

Archives of the National Music Museum, The University of South Dakota

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- [3] http://www.amazon.com/Freeing-Angel-Stone-Piccirilli-Sculpture/dp/097034032X/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1298245644&sr=1-3-fkmr0
- [4] <http://blog.metmuseum.org/guitarheroes/>
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- [12] <http://orgs.usd.edu/nmm/Tours/LillibridgeGallery/DDGWorkshop.html>
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