

The Art of Saving Art: Italian Foreign Policy and Cultural Heritage

Roberta Cutillo (January 08, 2020)



In honour of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations presents an exhibition at the UN Headquarters in New York. On view through January 17, 2020. "We are proud to have been able to bring this exhibition at the beginning of an important year, the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, which for us is an occasion to relaunch and reinforce the multilateralist message," comments the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, Mariangela Zappia.

Titled 'Recovered Treasures: the Art of Saving Art,' the art exhibition organized by the [Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage](#) [2], the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities illustrates the



vastly important work carried out by the special unit of the carabinieri - the “art squad” - dedicated to safeguarding and recovering the art and heritage of Italy and the world.

On view are fifteen masterpieces recovered by the Carabinieri, including a relief from Palmira, Renaissance paintings, ancient amphorae and an illustrated manuscript.

During the two-week display at the UN headquarters, from January 8-17, officers of the Carabinieri Command will offer guided tours, especially targeted to young students.

The works are accompanied by a series of wall panels explaining the role of the Command (TPC), which was established 50 years ago on May 3, 1969, a year before the 1970 UNESCO Convention inviting member states to set up dedicated services to safeguard their cultural heritage entered into force.

An operational branch of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, the TPC is made up of around 270 highly qualified and specially trained military servants. They work both nationally and internationally to investigate, solve, and prevent cases involving art thefts, forgeries, illegal excavations, the trafficking of antiquities, and the protection of cultural heritage sites. They are active all across the globe, particularly in some of the most difficult conflict-heavy areas such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, the Balkans, and so on.

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“We want to support multilateralism, to support the UN, and we’re doing it in many ways, including through the recovery of these incredible artworks. We do it because we believe that it means recovering cultural identity, which is not only important for how it represents our history, our past, but also for our future.”

The TPC Command often handles elaborate cases involving different players that operate within vast international criminal circles. The ability to exercise international cooperation is therefore of key importance. These carabinieri are mediators exercising cultural diplomacy, one of the major strengths and focuses of Italian diplomatic efforts.

“This exhibition is also a way of remembering what Italy has traditionally always done for the protection of culture within the UN,” continues Ambassador Zappia. “Not only with the adherence to the #Unite4Heritage campaign, the famous blue helmets of culture, to which we were amongst the very first to adhere, but also with our efforts towards obtaining a reform of the security council focused on the protection of cultural heritage in situations of conflict, which lead to a historical, groundbreaking resolution in 2017, which we want to invoke with this exhibition.”

An exhibition which was met with great interest, as witnessed by the large crowd present at the opening on January 7th, which included UN Secretary General António Guterres, who spoke to the



importance of the work carried out by the unit, particularly in times of conflict.

Given the universal relevance of the subject, the exhibit, which has already been shown at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris this past October, is set to travel to Beijing later this year.

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[1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/mariangelazappiaonujpg>

[2] <http://www.carabinieri.it/multilingua/en/the-carabinieri-tpc>