

Dismantling an Art History of Eugenics: Fascist Propaganda and Visual Rhetoric in *La difesa della razza*

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Abstract

There is substantial scholarship on how art historical (particularly Greco-Roman) imagery was co-opted by Italian Fascists to articulate their antisemitic mission for racial purity. However, what often gets lost in this analysis of particular, isolated instances of Fascist propaganda are the sustained campaigns underpinning this historical, ideological, and racial rhetoric. To that end, the 1938-1943 Italian Fascist publication *La difesa della razza* has been isolated as exemplary of the years long process that went into crafting such parallels. The combined Classical, Medieval, Renaissance, and modern art examples that accompanied the magazine's rhetoric are inherently anachronistic—meaning chronologically incongruous or out of place—and as such could only function when thoroughly decontextualized. To undo these problematic and racially charged simplifications of art images, the messy and multi-layered histories of these objects have been recomplicated so as to render their Fascist reinterpretation infeasible and contradictory to its own intentions. By isolating the recurrence of particular art historical examples, manipulations of historic images, and intriguing visual collages and constructions, this paper highlights instances of contradiction or inconsistency in *La difesa*'s racial rhetoric. This process was guided by a multi-faceted methodology and atypical iconographic approach deemed necessary to conduct ethical and responsible art historical scholarship around *La difesa*. Several of the defining characteristics of this methodology include thinking about how art objects (and their reproductions) exist out of and across time, how memory plays into the reception and deployment of art objects, how the material of a given object influences perceptions of its value, and ultimately how the periodized structure of art historiography facilitates simplistic rhetorical constructions. Lastly, given the adaptation of *La difesa*'s artistic appropriations and visual tactics across contemporary Neo-Fascist propaganda, this project has considerable salience well outside of art historical academia.

Keywords: Fascism, Propaganda, Visual Analysis

1. Introduction

In the late 1930s and early 1940s Fascism seemed an unstoppable force. The Fascist machine cultivated by Benito Mussolini was organized, militant, and unwavering. Yet for all its power, much of this movement's strength originated in rhetoric. Key to the cultivation of Italian Fascism was the construction of a unified and superior Italic racial genealogy. A number of regime efforts ranging from its colonial project to the architectural razing and reconstruction of Rome went into this identity construction. A particularly salient element in the Fascists' web of propagandistic machinery was the bi-weekly publication, *La difesa della razza: Scienza, Documentazione, Polemica*. When the *Gran Consiglio del Fascismo* passed a series of explicitly antisemitic racial laws in 1938, the regime felt that a substantial body of racial propaganda needed to bolster this decision in the public eye.¹ The *Ministero della Cultura Popolare* followed suit with the publication of *La difesa della razza*. Telesio Interlandi (the magazine's director) himself said, “[n]oi dobbiamo chiarire le posizioni razziali che hanno provocato la legislazione razziale, e darne le giustificazione scientifica e storica” ([w]e have to clarify the racial positions that provoked the racial laws, and give them scientific

and historic justifications).² This was to be accomplished through a blend of “...divulgazione scientifica, di documentazione preziosa, di polemica vivace” (...scientific disclosure, precious documentation, and lively controversy).³ As an official propaganda tool of Fascist race relations, this periodical sought to cultivate a unified Italian racial identity by means of scientific and cultural argumentation.

Though *La difesa della razza* had an initial run of 140,000-150,000 copies, its distribution had dwindled down to about 20,000 copies by the time the magazine switched ownership from the *Ministero della Cultura Popolare* to the publisher Tumminelli two years later.⁴ In spite of this drastic decline in patronage, there is no denying that at one time *La difesa della razza* had a massive distribution and was covered extensively by other press and propaganda outlets.⁵ Though lost to collective memory for several decades following the war, *La difesa* has again become a prominent symbol of World War II era antisemitism. Today, frequent but shallow citations of the publication’s covers and photospreads have made it necessary to more deeply analyze its visual and textual rhetoric. Counterintuitively, the magazine’s resurgence in public consciousness has contributed to the shallowness of its remembrance.

Frequently, *La difesa* juxtaposed art objects from different historical periods in order to forge an ideological connection between the two. This constitutes a strategic use of artistic anachronisms. In essence, an anachronism is something that is incongruous with its present moment, something that is chronologically out of place or belongs to another period. A single issue of the periodical (even a single page spread) might juxtapose Medieval prints with Nazi-era imagery or Renaissance paintings with contemporary photographs. Thus, *La difesa*’s visual rhetoric functioned by simplifying the competing histories and contexts of the art objects it reproduced. By separating artworks from their original and continually evolving contexts, the Fascists could easily ascribe to them their own invented meanings. Given that it was through such references that the Fascists were able to articulate their beliefs on race in a way that would be popularly comprehended, it is essential to dismantle this visual rhetoric through an ethical art historical approach. To subvert the publication’s problematic simplification and ideologization of art objects, I analyze *La difesa*’s visual tactics with an eye towards the ideological inconsistencies hidden within them. I re-complicate the messy and multi-layered histories of the art objects appropriated by the magazine in order to render its Fascist rhetoric unstable and contradictory to its own intentions. This approach ultimately weakens the identity-driven hierarchies that were created and used to justify Mussolini’s racial legislation.

2. Historical Precedents of Racialized Identity Formation

Though studies of the Italian Jewish experience so often focus on the travesties of World War II, the historical experiences of Jews in Italy had long been paradoxical and consistently “...marked by oscillations between tolerance and persecution.”⁶ A prominent example is the *Risorgimento*, the political and social movement for Italian unification that culminated in the formation of the Italian state in 1870. The *Risorgimento* was a watershed moment not only for the Italian populace as a whole, but was also of particular poignance to Italian Jewish history. Italian Jews enthusiastically participated in this national movement and “...play[ed] a decisive role in the development of the new political culture and in creating the emotional appeal of the nation.”⁷ Following the success of Italian unification, Jews were integrated and accepted into the new Italian state and the Jewish community could “...aspire to the highest levels of society.”⁸ This then largely remained the case through the first sixteen years of Mussolini’s regime.

Although the creation of the Italian state coincided with the emancipation of Italian Jews, the *Risorgimento* also laid rhetorical groundwork that the Fascists would later appropriate for their antisemitic mission decades later. The *Risorgimento*’s effective unification of a heterogeneous Italian population was something the Fascists doubtlessly hoped to replicate. A key component of the *Risorgimento* thinkers’ ideological unification was the simultaneous racialization and nationalization of Italian identity. Without a coherent racial and national identity there would have been minimal mobilization to unify the Italian state. Mussolini faced a similar dilemma when establishing his Fascist regime in that Italy had existed as a nation for barely fifty years upon his assumption of power. Regional identities still took precedent over a sense of national belonging. To overcome many of the roadblocks to an Italian *national* identity, Mussolini saw fit to cultivate a distinctly Italian *racial* identity. The easiest means by which to create a new sense of self was in opposition to an “Other,” thus the Fascists constructed the Italian race in opposition to a Jewish counterpoint. The Fascist reification of “self” through juxtaposition against an “Other” imitated the tactics of racial mobilization established in the *Risorgimento*. Poidimani describes this reemployment of *Risorgimento* tactics in that, “...la propaganda razzista del regime di Mussolini abbia utilizzato la stessa—e già sperimentata—strategia: produrre nuovi elementi ideologici richiamandosi a qualcosa di già familiare alla cultura italiana” (...the racist propaganda of Mussolini’s regime utilized the same—and already tested—strategy: producing new ideological elements while recalling something already familiar to Italian culture).⁹ Race was, once again, promoted as a cornerstone of Italian

identity—yet this time not to mobilize national unification, but to instead mark the difference between Italians and the Semitic or colonial “Other.”¹⁰

The 1938 race laws thereby codified the racial categorizations that the Fascists had long been formulating. Jews were not permitted to enter into military office or become teachers and were also excluded from schools, banks, and civil service providers. These race laws simultaneously persecuted Jews while also separating them from the Italian population at large. Servi articulates the underlying intention of these initiatives in that, “...the ‘Jewish problem’ was raised and utilized to teach the Italians what they should not be, using the Jew as a personification of the most complete antithesis.”¹¹ The Fascist regime found, when confronted by the inherent frictions of a unified Italian populace, that their most effective method for unification was a tactic of identity constitution via racial opposition.

3. Processes of Visualizing the Semitic “Other”

The magazine’s contributors ultimately sought to cultivate among their readers a visual vocabulary of racial features that could be used to identify Jews among their neighbors, coworkers, and even passersby. This perceived urgency to clarify visibly Jewish characteristics stems from Interlandi’s fear of the “invisible” Jew.¹² For instance, an article on “Judeoscopia” remarks that, “[n]on è ebreo soltanto che è nato ebreo; ma anche chi si comporta come tale” ([s]omeone is Jewish not only if they are born Jewish, but if they behave as such), and assertively proclaims, “[b]isogna colpire gli ebrei clandestini” ([i]t is necessary to catch undercover Jews).¹³ These claims exhibit a marked fear not just of stereotypically “recognizable” Jews, but particularly of those who might go unnoticed. From this standpoint, the magazine’s persistent attempts to clarify and categorize visible racial characteristics can be read as an over-compensation for the inevitable impossibility to visualize their real threat—the invisible, passing Jew. This inevitable failure by no means discouraged *La difesa* from articulating a visual shorthand for the Jewish race. Rather, it made their attempts all the more persistent (and frankly, desperate).

This fixation on *l’eterno ebreo* or “eternal Jew” was largely articulated through a deliberate politicization and racialization of Italian art—particularly from the Classical and Renaissance periods.¹⁴ Take as a case study one of the more recurrent visual examples of the historical Jew: Judas. Used time and again across the publication, Giotto’s *Kiss of Judas* (completed between 1304 and 1306) depicts the moment wherein Judas identifies Jesus, leading directly to his arrest [Fig. 1]. As it appeared in *La difesa della razza*, the painting was always cropped to showcase Judas’ face pressed up against Jesus’ own [Fig. 2]. Here the emphasis is not on the narrative of the surrounding scene, but rather on the physiognomy of its two primary subjects. The aquiline nose and broad forehead of Jesus are shown in perfect opposition to Judas’ curved nose and furrowed brow.



Figure 1. *The Kiss of Judas*, Giotto, 1304-1306.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiss_of_Judas



Figure 2. *La difesa della razza*, October 5, 1940, 26.

http://digiteca.bsmc.it/pub/images/materiale_a_stampa/periodico/Difesa%20della%20razza/CFI0351533_1940_00023/CFI0351533_1940_00023_026.jpg

In a similar vein, another famed scene reproduced in *La difesa* (this one occurring in the biblical narrative just prior to the kiss of Judas) is that of Leonardo’s *Last Supper* [Fig. 3]. Because of his celebrated roles as both an Old Master painter and scientific innovator preoccupied with anatomical study, Leonardo’s body of work epitomized the

magazine's cultural and biological blend of antisemitism. At the intersection between art and science, Leonardo's work slotted perfectly within the biologizing cultural framework of *La difesa*. The publication valorized how, in the *Last Supper*, "Leonardo portò le caratteristiche somatiche dell'ebraismo al massimo dell'inumanità e della perfidia" (Leonardo brought Jewish somatic characteristics to the height of inhumanity and treachery).¹⁵ Reproductions not just of the painting itself, but also of Leonardo's preparatory anatomical sketches of Judas were included in the magazine. Within this biblical context, Judas' curved brow and hooked nose became weighted with implications of the traitorous Jewish character. Ultimately, this and other adaptations of Catholic Renaissance imagery are clear-cut examples of *La difesa*'s construction of a political antisemitism based on the foundations of Catholic anti-Judaism.



Figure 1. *La difesa della razza*, January 20, 1940, 24-25.

http://digiteca.bsmc.it/pub/images/materiale_a_stampa/periodico/Difesa%20della%20razza/CFI0351533_1940_00006/CFI0351533_1940_00006_024.jpg

4. The Making of Monsters

To reiterate, *La difesa della razza* was always paradoxically enmeshed in efforts to clarify the racial categories it routinely asserted as self-evident. This failure to concisely define the Jewish race through physiognomy alone is most clearly exemplified by *La difesa*'s reliance on zoomorphic imagery and parasitic symbols. When facing the impossibility of visualizing the "invisible Jew" that Interlandi so feared, *La difesa* turned to parasitic and zoomorphic caricature. As Asa Mittman notes, the monstrous can be read as a symbol of "...the failures of our systems of categorization."¹⁶ Further, rather than teaching its reader anything substantive about what it means to be Jewish, such caricatures are ultimately more illustrative of the beliefs and fears of their makers. Halberstam asserts that monstrous and zoomorphic imagery, "...tells us nothing about Jews but everything about anti-semitic discourse which seems able to transform all threat into the threat embodied by the Jew."¹⁷ Though these cartoons can be subversively read as indications of *La difesa*'s fears and failures, this caricatured imagery was still effective in fostering further dehumanization, hatred, and fear towards the Semitic "Other." To quote Mittman again, "...the monster is known through its *effect*, its impact," and—as exemplified not only by the magazine's popularity at the time of its making but its continued notoriety today—its impact was indeed effective.¹⁸

Evidently, subtlety was by no means a guiding concern of the publication's editors and contributors. In spite of the crass nature of these recurring symbolic caricatures, several nuances of Fascist antisemitism can be gleaned from a close reading of these insensitive caricatures. Jews were figured as everything from snakes and spiders to bats and vultures across the publication. For instance, an article on "Psicologia Criminale Ebraica" (Jewish Criminal Psychology) is accompanied by a drawing of a vulture looming over a burning city [Fig. 4]. The vulture's face caricatures the physiognomic Jewish type (as outlined time and again across the magazine) with a hooked nose, curled hair, hunched posture, and furrowed brow. These features were then overlaid atop a Star of David to render this comparison even more explicit. This image of the vulture—and in particular the strings of blood dripping from its beak—characterizes Jewish peoples as parasitic. The magazine's written rhetoric further cements these assertions of

Judaism as “...parassita, non vive con noi ma di noi” (...parasite, it does not live with us but of us).¹⁹ This interconnection of textual and visual rhetorics is concisely typified by the caricatured Jewish mushrooms in Figure 5 which were accompanied by the explanatory caption, “[g]li eterni parassiti” ([t]he eternal parasites) [Fig. 5].²⁰ In this particular cartoon, the mushroom cap functions as caricature in two distinct ways. It at once hearkens to the racial trope of the hat-wearing Jew, but at the same time its curved form mirrors the bulbous nose that was stereotypically attributed to the Jewish facial type.²¹



Figure 2. *La difesa della razza*, July 20, 1939, 32.
http://digiteca.bsmc.it/pub/images/materiale_a_stampa/periodico/Difesa%20della%20razza/CFI0351533_1939_00018/CFI0351533_1939_00018_032.jpg



Figure 3. *La difesa della razza*, March 5, 1939, 34.
http://digiteca.bsmc.it/pub/images/materiale_a_stampa/periodico/Difesa%20della%20razza/CFI0351533_1939_00009/CFI0351533_1939_00009_034.jpg

Zoomorphic imagery was also employed to represent the Jewish threat in more abstract terms than these explicit cartoons. A particularly striking example is the cover of a 1939 issue which is composed of a sculpted marble female whose cropped head is dwarfed by an immense, creeping spider [Fig. 6]. The Jewish spider was a visual trope that frequently recurred throughout the magazine and would as a result have been familiar to its audience. The unease this image evokes in the viewer is immediate and fueled not just by arachnophobia, but by the uncomfortable juxtaposition of smooth white marble with the textured, prickly body of the spider. Here, the spider's metaphorical connection to the Jewish threat manifests not through external attributes, but through the connotation of its encroachment onto the pure, racial ideal of antiquity.

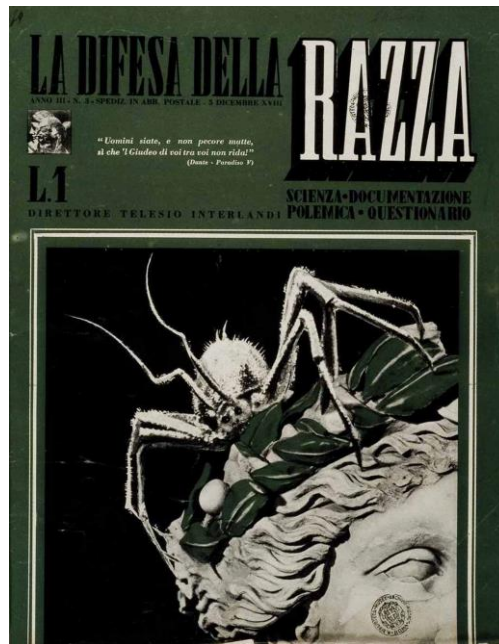


Figure 4. *La difesa della razza*, December 5, 1939, cover image.
http://digiteca.bsmc.it/pub/images/materiale_a_stampa/periodico/Difesa%20della%20razza/CFI0351533_1939_00003/CFI0351533_1939_00003_001.jpg

However, pathological *figures* are not the sole constitutive elements of this branch of visual rhetoric. Color also played an essential role in the processes of pathologization enacted by these caricatures. Recently, Classical scholarship has begun to not only recognize but also revalorize the primary role of color in marble statuary and architecture. Though Classical sculptures are typically a monochromatic white in their current state of preservation, they were once brightly colored. The significance of this disparity between contemporary appearance and original form extends well beyond pigmentation and into the realm of ethnic and racial color. In reference to marble, Neoclassical sculpture, Charmaine A. Nelson asserts that "...whiteness was not accorded the value of a color but was situated as a universal category, a starting point that could be departed from, so much so that altering the uniform whiteness of marble was accorded the status of a violation of primary truth."²² Nelson describes the intentionality of marble whitewashing as "chromophobia." Though Nelson articulated her argument in 2007, it took another decade before the implicit racism and historical whitewashing engendered by marble sculpture became a lively scholarly and popular debate. With her article "Why We Need to Start Seeing the Classical World in Color," Sarah Bond catalyzed an unprecedented number of popular news sources and classicists to problematize the whitewashing of Classical sculpture. Bond initiated impassioned discussions of "[t]he ties between barbarism and color, civility and whiteness," that permeate our contemporary understandings of the Classical period.²³ This white marble image of the Classical past creates "a false idea of homogeneity" around the racial composition of the ancient Mediterranean.²⁴

The intense backlash that Bond received for her work shows a persistent unwillingness from the general public to revise our understanding of Classical sculpture.²⁵ Yet a more subtle and invidious manifestation of disciplinary racism is exemplified by the earlier writings of a female scholar of color (Nelson) being ultimately supplanted by and attributed to the latter work of a white female scholar (Bond). This example of a biased historiography at work is a

poignant reminder to remain vigilant of the scholarship we choose to promote and to consider the implications of that which we choose to forget.

In *La difesa della razza*, chromophobia was intentionally exploited as an abstract means to visualize the invisible Jewish threat, particularly in regard to miscegenation. Color was used in *La difesa* both to accentuate zoomorphic figures as well as to abstractly visualize Jewishness in its own right. As quoted by Nelson, David Batchelor describes how, "...Color is made out to be the property of some "foreign" body—usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer of the pathological....Color is regarded as alien and therefore dangerous..."²⁶ A 1940 issue cover, for instance, shows how color was employed as a visual element to abstractly represent intangible concepts such as miscegenation and racial impurity [Fig. 7]. This particular cover is simple, yet incredibly striking. A nude woman looks down in horror as a green contagion flows through the veins of her right arm—notably the side infiltrated by this green coloration. Another intriguing dynamic of this cover is that though the photographed face is that of a modern woman, her chest and torso have been blurred in such a way as to render her body reminiscent of the soft, worn "flesh" of Classical Greco-Roman statuary. Juxtaposing this cover with the *Venus de Milo* showcases the similarities between the Venus sculpture's naturally worn marble surface and the intentional blurring of the female figure in *La difesa* [Fig. 8]. The visual congruity between this woman's flesh and the sculpted marble Venus further mark the green contagion as alien, parasitic, and impure. Through this simultaneous Classicization of her bodily form and the contemporaneity of her facial features, this figure's pathologization is intended to connote the eternal threat of miscegenation.



Figure 5. *La difesa della razza*, September 5-20, 1940, cover image.

http://digiteca.bsmc.it/pub/images/materiale_a_stampa/periodico/Difesa%20della%20razza/CFI0351533_1940_00021-22/CFI0351533_1940_00021-22_001.jpg



Figure 6. *Venus de Milo*, Alexandros of Antioch, 100 BCE. <http://mentalfloss.com/article/65911/15-things-you-should-know-about-venus-de-milo>

This particular cover is a good example not only of how color was frequently an abstract symbol of miscegenation but also of how the publication's visual and textual rhetorics worked in concert with one another. For example, the figure's distressed reaction towards the green contagion in her right arm serves a dual purpose. Not only does her downward facing expression guide the viewer's eye across her green veins, the angling of her gaze and the crook of her elbow further lead the viewer's eyes towards the bottom-left tagline for the issue. The cover reads, "Questo numero di 64 pagine è soprattutto dedicato ai problemi biologici e politici della razza di più viva attualità" (This 64 page issue is dedicated above all to the biological and political problems of the most viscerally discussed race). The cover thus cues the reader into the fact that this issue will discuss miscegenation through both political and biological lenses.

5. The Classical Form as both an Anthropological and Art Historical Object

One of the earliest covers of *La difesa* depicts the sculpted face of Antinous, whose cheek has been marred by a black thumbprint incised with a Star of David at its center [Fig. 9]. Antinous was an imperial consort to Emperor Hadrian known for his incredible beauty and narcissism.²⁷ It is important to note not only the divine beauty which Antinous symbolized, but also the profound melancholia he too came to represent.²⁸ Speculations have abounded around the possible intentionality of Antinous' watery death in the Nile River, but regardless his image is inevitably paired with a knowledge of his fate. Antinous' beauty that was also "colored by an element of anxiety," was transformed by *La difesa* into a new order of anxiety with the addition of an ink thumbprint.²⁹ Though the Star of David clearly aligns this blemish with Judaism, it is the thumbprint itself that incorporates a racial dimension into this condemnation. As an immediately recognizable symbol of a person's genetic makeup, this inked fingerprint (combined with the Star of David) alludes to the indelible stain of racial mixing.³⁰ Antinous' downcast eyes and somber facial expression—which outside of this reproduction would be seen as indicative of his tortured character—were thereby recast as a mourning for the racially pure Classical ideal he represents. Yet although Antinous' face is reproduced by *La difesa* as an emblem of racial purity, Antinous was ironically enough an ancient Bithynian.³¹ This is equivalent to a modern day east Mediterranean or Turk and therefore was not in line with the Aryan genealogy *La difesa* sought to establish.

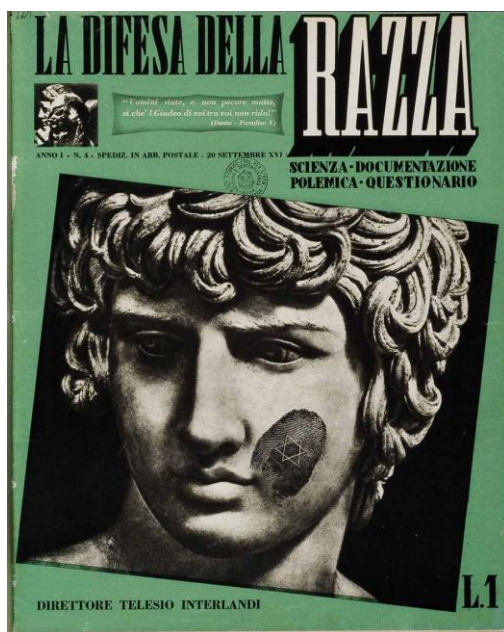


Figure 7. *La difesa della razza*, September 20, 1938, cover image.

http://digiteca.bsmc.it/pub/images/materiale_a_stampa/periodico/Difesa%20della%20razza/CFI0351533_1938_0004/CFI0351533_1938_00004_001.jpg

Adding even more irony to Antinous' adaptation by *La difesa* is the fact that one of the only certainties of Antinous' actual life was his romantic and sexual relationship with Emperor Hadrian. In the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, Antinous became "...the most prevalent classicizing icon of male beauty...as a central figure for developing gay identities."³² Antinous' role as a symbol for queer communities directly negates the heteronormativity and hypermasculinity of Fascist gender politics. Be it the sexual relationship between Hadrian and Antinous, the homosocial culture that predominated in ancient Rome, or even the homosocial art mentoring relationships under which many Classical Greco-Roman male nudes came to be sculpted, the many and evolving contexts of Antinous' marble reproductions prove to have a decidedly homoerotic spin. Given the incongruities Antinous represented for both Fascist racial and gender politics, how then did this image function so effectively for *La difesa's* racial rhetoric?

Though Classical sculpture was made adaptable to Fascist ideology, this did not prevent *La difesa* from further racializing such images through visual modification. One such example is their alteration of the *Dying Gaul* sculpture, a Roman marble copy of a third century BCE Greek bronze original [Fig. 10].³³ This sculpture has been canonically understood to indicate the nobility of one's enemy in military defeat. In a press release for the sculpture's traveling expedition, Earl A. Powell III (the director of the National Gallery of Art) described it as, "[a]n image of a conquered enemy, the sculpture represents courage in defeat, composure in the face of death and dignity."³⁴ Yet in *La difesa*, the *Dying Gaul's* appearance has been doctored so that its face is no longer that of the dying Gaul himself, but of a modern man propped and sleeping against a furniture support [Fig. 11]. To match this iconographic manipulation, its attendant article is entitled "[d]al Gallo morente...al Gallo dormiente" ([f]rom the dying Gaul...to the sleeping Gaul).³⁵ Through this alteration, the meaning of the overall work shifts significantly. Transforming this artistic subject into a sleeping man rather than a dying warrior strips the figure of its nobility. The magazine thereby replaces the noble Gaul of the past with a lazy, sleeping "Gaul"—here symbolic of the racial other more broadly—of the present.



Figure 8. *The Dying Gaul*, 200 BCE. <https://www.vulture.com/2016/07/dying-gaul-is-a-world-masterpiece-about-death.html>

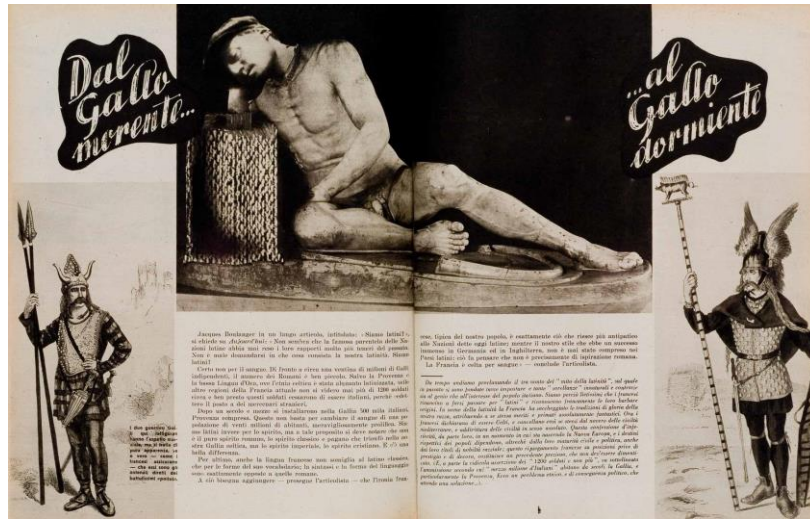


Figure 9. *La difesa della razza*, September 20, 1942, 12-13.

http://digiteca.bsmc.it/pub/images/materiale_a_stampa/periodico/Difesa%20della%20razza/CFI0351533_1942_00022/CFI0351533_1942_00022_012.jpg

With these combined Classical examples in mind, let us now consider the unspoken historical frames at play in *La difesa*'s reuse of Classical imagery. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, known as the father of both archaeology and modern art history, was perhaps the most instrumental individual in idealizing the Classical male figure.³⁶ Winckelmann has been assigned such historiographic importance for the fact that he was the first scholar to attempt "...systematic stylistic analysis, historical contextualization, and even iconographical analysis..."³⁷ Winckelmann argued that artistic style is indistinguishable from the character of its makers, thus legitimizing the practice of racial attributions in art history.³⁸ Winckelmann thus forged an unprecedented link between formalism and historicism that facilitated important epistemological ties across art history and anthropology.³⁹ Though Winckelmann did not make explicitly racial arguments about art objects, he did attribute cultural worth to artistic capacity. Mariana Aguirre articulates this phenomenon by connecting, "...Winckelmann's description of the psychology of a particular group of peoples that created works of art and his work towards a biological concept of style, which contributed to the rise of a racialized language and methodology in art history."⁴⁰ Both art history and anthropology attributed a sense of meaningfulness to artifacts as they related to the people and cultures that created them.⁴¹ Donald Preziosi similarly notes that art history, as practiced in the Hegelian tradition, assumes stylistic change over time to signify deeper shifts among the collective which enacted these stylistic alterations.⁴²

On the one hand, the mythical perfection of this marble statuary signifies the aspirational position of Imperial Rome in the Fascist imaginary. Concurrently, Classical imagery served as a grim reminder of the influx of outsider forces that supposedly initiated the fall of Rome. Ancient Rome thereby embodied the racial purity the Fascists strove for through the 1938 race laws. Given the prominent position of ancient Rome in Italian collective memory, "...classical Roman history was generally considered to be national Italian history."⁴³ The immediate recognizability of Classical imagery endowed its adaptation with a distinct unificatory potential. On the one hand, Classical imagery stands as an exemplar of racial physiognomy and character, while on the other it serves as a deterrent against racial miscegenation and a justification for the impunity of the regime's codified racial laws.

The magazine was building off of a tradition of *romanità*, meaning that, "[a]ncient Rome had become an increasingly important reference point for Italians since the reunification of the peninsula....The Fascist regime, building on this tradition, made extensive, if heterogenous, use of the Roman past."⁴⁴ It is precisely this selective reuse of ancient Roman values and imagery that fed into the inconsistency of *La difesa*'s conceptualization of Italian history. While the Fascists were not unique in their reliance on *romanità*, there are essential differences in how they conceptualized of this historical frame as compared to prior movements (such as the aforementioned *Risorgimento*). According to David Baum, Interlandi sought to recast Roman history, "...not as a narrative of the triumph of racial and cultural assimilation, but as the centuries long struggle between the Romans and the Semites."⁴⁵ In doing so, to be Italian was to be antisemitic, thus refiguring antisemitism "...from an accidental feature of late Roman society, to an essential feature—of Roman civilization itself."⁴⁶ As such, the eternal quality attributed to ancient Rome was inherently ahistorical and thereby slotted perfectly within the magazine's anachronistic rhetoric.

In many ways, the magazine's interpretation of art history comports with canonical delineations. Both *La difesa*'s history of art as well as the traditional discipline are based on a strict structure of periodization. The canonical acceptance of historical periods strengthens the rhetorical effectiveness of the publication's artistic anachronisms. For instance, canonical associations of artistic genius and innovation with the Classical and Renaissance periods allows *La difesa* to make shallow, uninformed use of such objects that still retain connotations of artistic and cultural superiority. Therefore, cultural eminence exhibited in artworks became extrapolated in *La difesa* as evidence of racial superiority. Art objects became valued for their evidentiary role in illustrating the consistency of particular racial characteristics, qualities, and capabilities across time. *La difesa* even argued that artistic representations of desirable racial characteristics prime viewers to seek these traits out in future partners.⁴⁷ Thus, art objects were framed eugenically both as a means to highlight cultural and racial superiority as well as to prevent future miscegenation.

6. Conclusion

It has been just over 80 years since the initial publication of *La difesa della razza*. Though the magazine is now firmly established as a record of Fascist antisemitic sentiment in World War II, it is still a living document. *La difesa* cannot be tucked away like a bygone relic, for the hateful ideologies that prompted its creation and fueled its rhetoric continue to persist. *La difesa della razza* lives on not only in the written histories within which it is cited, but as an influence for racist and xenophobic propaganda today. Forces of both antisemitism and anti-Fascism are barreling towards a critical point in Italy and Europe, not to mention the United States. There are ample current events that testify to this pivotal moment. Yet, the increased visibility and prevalence of antisemitism today is accompanied by an emerging consensus on its continued existence. There is also evidence that the Italian government is finally adopting a firmer, censorious position towards Italy's Fascist legacy. In 2018 at an event to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Italy's antisemitic race laws, Italian President Sergio Mattarella remarked, "[i]t is surprising to hear, even today, from some quarters, that fascism had some merits but made two serious mistakes: the racial laws and the entry into the war... Racism and war were not deviations or episodes from its way of thinking, but the direct and inevitable consequence."⁴⁸ Ultimately, it would be ineffectual to dissociate Fascism from Italian heritage. Fascist ideology is a prominent aspect of Italy's past that must be actively remembered in order to ensure its prevention now and for the future. Italians have long adopted a retrospective mentality when envisioning the future, it is now time they do so ethically by consciously reworking Italy's dubious relationship to its Fascist past.

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8. Endnotes

1 This paper deliberately uses the term "antisemitism" rather than "anti-Semitism." Though both spellings are commonly used today and Microsoft Word autocorrects "antisemitism" to include a hyphen, the hyphenation of this term can facilitate problematic misunderstandings. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance released a memo arguing that "...the hyphenated spelling allows for the possibility of something called 'Semitism', which not only legitimizes a form of pseudo- scientific racial classification that was thoroughly discredited by association with Nazi ideology, but also divides the term, stripping it from its meaning of opposition and hatred toward Jews." Therefore, in the interest of not furthering the false racial classifications created by Nazi and Fascist ideology, this paper adopts the unhyphenated spelling of the term. "Spelling of Antisemitism," International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/spelling-antisemitism>.

2 Telesio Interlandi, *La difesa della razza*, August 5, 1939, 4.

All Italian to English translations (unless cited as otherwise) are the author's own with the revisionary help of Dr. Brandon Essary.

3 Interlandi, *La difesa della razza*, August 5, 1939, 4.

4 Sandro Servi, "Building a Racial State: Images of the Jew in the Illustrated Fascist Magazine, *La Difesa della Razza*, 1938–1943," in *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 117.

5 Servi, "Building a Racial State," 149.

6 Alexander Stille, "The Double Bind of Italian Jews: Acceptance and Assimilation," in *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 23.

7 Ulrich Wyrwa, "Jewish experiences in the Italian Risorgimento: political practice and national emotions of Florentine and Leghorn Jewry (1849-1860)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 16.

8 Stille, "The Double Bind of Italian Jews," 22.

9 Nicoletta Poidimani, *Difendere la 'Razza': Identità Razziale e Politiche Sessuali nel Progetto Imperiale di Mussolini* (Rome: Sensibili alle Foglie, 2009), 24.

10 Throughout this paper the language of the "Semitic" and colonial "Other" is used to delineate the categories *La difesa* constructed for its racial hierarchy. Refer back to footnote 1 for a more comprehensive explanation of the pseudoscientific racial classification of the descriptive term "Semitic."

11 Servi, "Building a Racial State," 148.

12 Francesco Cassata, *La difesa della razza: Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2008), xiii.

13 Umberto Angeli, "'Judeoscopia,'" *La difesa della razza*, January 20, 1941, 26.

14 *La difesa della razza*, June 5, 1942, cover image.

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17 Jack Halberstam, "Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's 'Dracula,'" *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 337.

18 Mittman, "Introduction," 6.

19 Telesio Interlandi, "Conoscere gli Ebrei," *La difesa della razza*, August 20, 1938, 8.

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23 Sarah E. Bond, "Why We Need to Start Seeing the Classical World in Color," *Hyperallergic*, June 7, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/383776/why-we-need-to-start-seeing-the-classical-world-in-color/>.

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25 Colleen Flaherty, "Threats for What She Didn't Say," *Inside Higher Ed*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/06/19/classicist-finds-herself-target-online-threats-after-article-ancient-statues>.

26 Nelson, "'So Pure and Celestial a Light,'" 63.

27 Bryan E. Burns, "Sculpting Antinous: Creations of the Ideal Companion," in *Ancient Sex: New Essays*, ed. Ruby Blondell and Kirk Ormand (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 286.

28 Burns, "Sculpting Antinous," 293.

29 Burns, "Sculpting Antinous," 286.

30 The researcher recognizes that fingerprints are only partly determined by one's genetic or hereditary makeup. Fingerprints are instead far more indicative of individual identity rather than genetic heritage. However, the researcher maintains this misinterpretation in the body of the text to better represent the racialized pseudoscience through which the magazine's contributors would have symbolically deployed this thumbprint.

31 Burns, "Sculpting Antinous," 288.

32 Burns, "Sculpting Antinous," 287.

33 "National Gallery of Art, Roma Capitale, and the Embassy of Italy in Washington, DC Present *The Dying Gaul: An Ancient Roman Masterpiece from the Capitoline Museum, Rome*," National Gallery of Art, November 26, 2013. <https://www.nga.gov/press/exh/3655.html>.

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