

Cuneo

A FAMILY OF EARLY CALIFORNIA ARTISTS



JULY 16 – SEPTEMBER 27, 2009

Presented by the Museo ItaloAmericano

Cuneo: the Museo celebration of Italian immigration begins



COVER: **Rinaldo Cuneo** *Three Panel Decorative Screen; Lake, Hills, Trees and Nude*, c.1920. Collection of Gordon Cuneo

OPPOSITE PAGE: **Cuneo Family at the corner of Grant Avenue & Lombard** (From right to left) Cyrus Cuneo, Giovanni Cuneo, Annie Cuneo (middle), James McLean (first husband of Erminia), Clorinda Cuneo (in front of James), Egisto Cuneo (back, directly in front of flag), Evelina, Clelia, Erminia (Minnie) (front with nephew Desmond)

ABOVE: **Cyrus Cuneo** in his studio, c. 1905–1916. Photographer unknown

THE MUSEO ITALOAMERICANO, HAVING JUST COMPLETED ITS THIRTIETH year in existence, proudly continues to achieve its core mission to sustain and promote Italian-American art, film, language, and general culture, thereby preserving the heritage of Italian-Americans for future generations.

The Museo recognizes that a vital component of its mission is to research, collect, display, and preserve historical material pertaining to the experiences of the Italian immigrants, primarily those who came, and continue to come, to the West Coast and, more particularly, to Northern California.

The Museo is therefore dedicating the substantial portion of its thirty-first year to exhibits, lectures, and other activities that focus on Italian immigration. The Museo is most pleased to begin this year of programming by presenting *Cuneo: A Family of Early California Artists*. This exhibit is a retrospective of the art of three brothers, Rinaldo, Cyrus, and Egisto Cuneo, who were born in San Francisco in the late nineteenth century into a family that had immigrated to Northern California from Liguria, Italy in the 1850s.

The Cuneo brothers were fortunate to be born into a family who supported their artistic ambitions. They were raised amidst a newly emerging artistic community in San Francisco that embraced the post-Impressionist movements of Europe. Although divergent aspirations drove them in varied directions across the world, each brother's life was strongly rooted in the San Francisco Bay Area and the fabric of the Italian-Americans who built their lives here.

In 1990, the Museo featured Rinaldo's paintings in a group exhibition of California landscape painters, and we recently showcased two of his paintings from our collection. The Museo is delighted to present this exhibit, which constitutes the first time in which the work of these three brothers is exhibited together and accompanied by a narrative celebrating the Cuneo family's influence as one of the earliest Italian families to arrive in San Francisco.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Executive Director, and staff of the Museo ItaloAmericano, I wish to acknowledge the generous financial gift of support from Doris Cuneo Maslach in order to produce this exhibit guide as well as a special thanks to her granddaughter, Tanya Zimbaro for narrating and illuminating the history of this remarkable family.

Mark Schiavenza
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS



A Family of Artists in San Francisco



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP LEFT: **Rinaldo Cuneo** in his kitchen, c. 1920s. Photographer unknown

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP RIGHT: **Cuneo Family Women** (clockwise from upper left) Erminia, Clorinda, Clelia, Annie Cuneo (mother), Evelina. Photo: Kohle Studios

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: **The Cuneo Family**, c. 1899. From left to right: Cyrus (age 20), Clorinda (age 18), Rinaldo (age 22), Egisto (age 9), Annie (age 47), Evelina (age 16), Clelia (age 11), John (age 51), and Erminia (age 27)

ABOVE: **"Before the reign of the Ubiquitous Press Photographer: Artists of the Illustrated London News"**, Cyrus Cuneo is at his easel in the right foreground.

AMONG THE FIRST FIVE HUNDRED ITALIAN FAMILIES TO LIVE IN SAN Francisco in the mid-nineteenth century, the pioneering Cuneo family became distinguished for their artistic achievements. Three brothers — Rinaldo, Cyrus, and Egisto Cuneo — broke from the business mold of many Italian-American men of their generation, by pursuing their passion for art. Born and raised in San Francisco, they each heeded the call of London and Paris, and studied art abroad. Cyrus became an expatriate and famous illustrator and painter in England. Both Rinaldo and Egisto returned to their native California, the primary subject of much of their artistic work.

Their father, Giovanni (John) Cuneo, was born in Liguria, but was still an infant when he immigrated to the United States; in 1854, he came to San Francisco from Philadelphia. Their mother, Annie Garibaldi, was born in Boston in 1852, after her Italian father and French mother emigrated from France, having left Italy after the unsuccessful attempt of the Italians under Giuseppe Garibaldi to free Italy from the Austrians in 1848. The Garibaldi family came to San Francisco in 1864, and John Cuneo and Annie Garibaldi were married in 1871. John Cuneo was a merchant, court interpreter, landowner, and Director of the Columbus Savings and Loan Society. On his death in 1916, his wife was elected to his vacancy, becoming the first woman bank director in the United States.

Annie and John Cuneo had seven children, and lived in a home on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco's North Beach district. The house was destroyed in the Great Earthquake and Fire of 1906; sadly, the losses included frescoes of Lady Godiva and Falstaff that had been painted by the young Rinaldo for his mother. The Cuneo family fled to Oakland, but soon returned to rebuild on the same site. Egisto later lived in this post-earthquake cottage on Grant Avenue, a block from the home and studio of his brother Rinaldo.

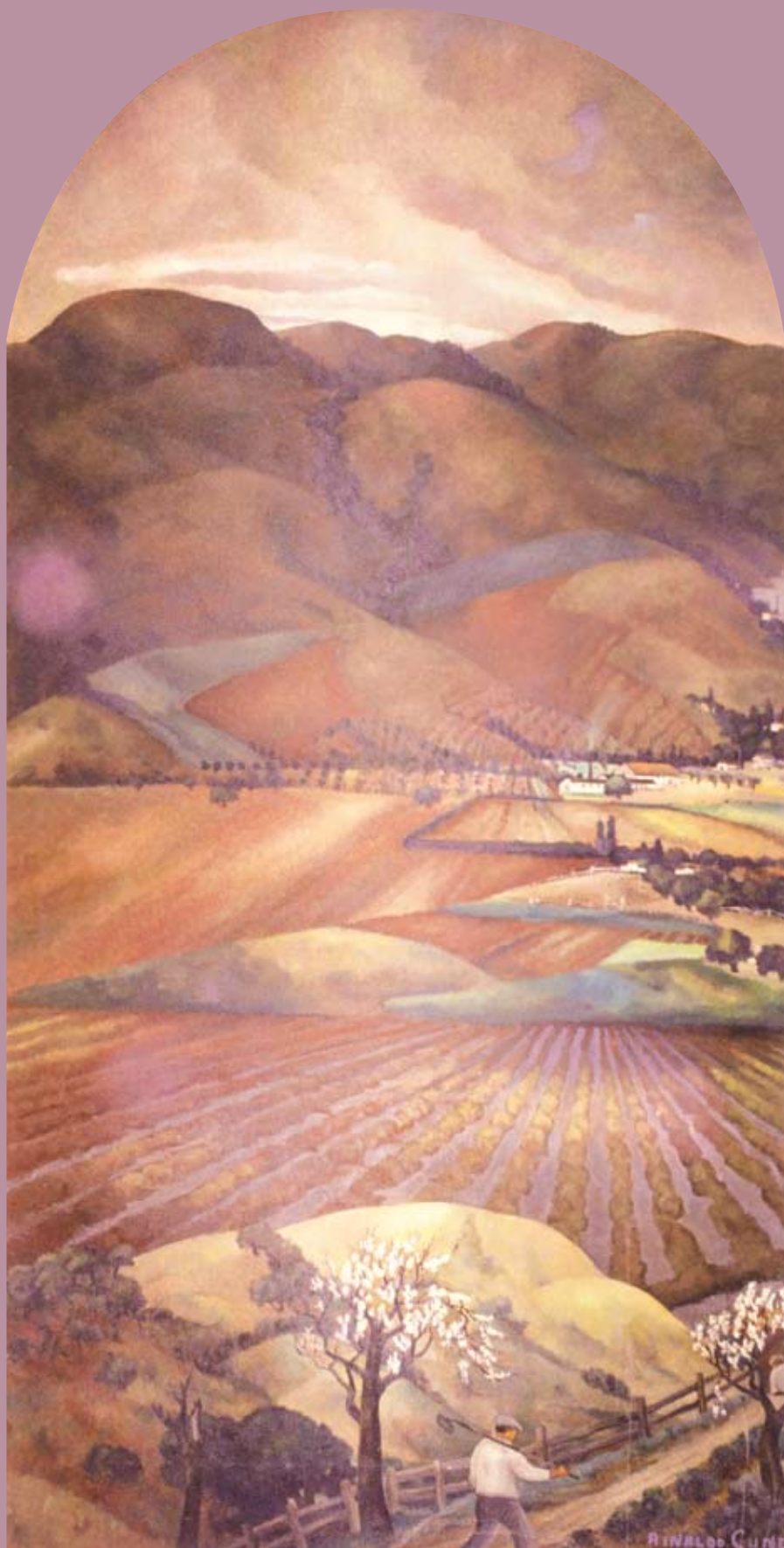
Both the Cuneo and Garibaldi families were deeply involved in the arts in San Francisco. Several Garibaldi family members were founding members of the Tivoli Opera Company in San Francisco and all four Cuneo sisters were musically inclined. These four beautiful women — Erminia, Clorinda, Evelina, Clelia — married prominent Italians. Evelina's husband, Louis Mastropasqua, was an architect known for several landmark buildings in the area, including the fanciful restaurant, Julius' Castle, on Telegraph Hill. Erminia, the eldest of the siblings, married Ettore Patrizi, publisher of the daily Italian newspaper *L'Italia* and director of the Italian Chamber of Commerce. Cyrus's first published work had appeared in *L'Italia* when he was sixteen. The Patrizis were opera enthusiasts, hosting numerous events in their home and were instrumental in bringing in traveling companies to the area. In a dark chapter in the history of Italian-Americans in California, twenty Italian-Americans in San Francisco were accused of being pro-fascist. *L'Italia* was declared Italian Fascist propaganda during World War II and Ettore, 77 years old, and a U.S. resident and naturalized citizen since 1899, received his exclusion order while in the hospital. He left for Reno and died during the separation.



“Early in his life he heard the calling . . . Talented and eager he became a student who with enthusiasm and patience sought to learn in order to be able to express later that love of beauty, that inborn something we call art. Along then on that hard and torturous road that leads to Art he started, step by step, trying, stumbling along, struggling, but always with vigor and determination. Always alert and studious he knew the great Art traditions of the past, and passing through the many influences in the Art of our days and always true to his ideals he finally arrived at a clear, personal interpretation of the land he loved so well, the California soil . . . his life he devoted to Art.”

—Gottardo Piazzoni

San Francisco Art Bulletin,
April 1930



Rinaldo Cuneo

RINALDO CUNEO (1877–1939) WAS A RENOWNED ARTISTIC PERSONALITY in Northern California during the 1920s and 1930s, and was called “the Painter of San Francisco” in 1938. His early work reflected the influence of the pastel palette and brushwork of French Impressionism, but his painting style and color palette constantly evolved. He was accomplished with the portrait and still life genres, but became primarily known for his landscape paintings of the region. He was one of the first artists to capture the beauty of the rugged hills and coastline of Marin County.

Rinaldo joined the US Navy when he was twenty and saw action as a gunner on *The Oregon* during the Spanish-American War. Returning home in 1898, he joined his father at work in the family’s steamship ticket agency. He took night classes at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art in San Francisco, studying under Arthur Matthews, Arthur Putnam, and Gottardo Piazzoni, the latter of whom became a private instructor and a lifelong friend. His fellow artists included Ralph Stackpole and Maynard Dixon. During 1911 he studied for a time at the popular Académie Colarossi in Paris.

He returned to the Bay Area to explore the dynamic earth patterns of the hills, the rural farms, and the rooftops of the city skyline. Rinaldo depicted a range of landscapes, from the bridges at San Anselmo to the mountains of Inyo County. Despite his increasing popularity and recognition, he was unable to make a living from his art and worked at the Crowley Launch and Tugboat Company, the busy life of the waterfront becoming a favorite subject. In the late 1920s, he became one of the first artists to utilize the format of the decorative screen. The genre allowed him to create a window out into a landscape that often had fantasy elements in the treatment of the figures, such as hills transformed into the figure of a reclining female nude. Only a handful of these three-paneled and five-paneled screens are in existence today.

One of the top ten local painters during this period, he was involved in major art exhibitions from 1916–1939. After his first show in 1913, he had numerous exhibitions at local galleries and museums, including the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, the San Francisco Museum of Art, and the de Young Museum. His works were also shown in San Diego, Santa Barbara, New York, and abroad in Rome and London. The Public Works of Art project commissioned him to paint two of the lunette murals of Bay Area farm hills in 1934, located inside the foyer of Coit Tower. He died in 1939 during the World’s Fair held on Treasure Island. The glowing lights of the fair at night were one of his last subjects. Despite his successful exhibition history, the economic climate of the depression left him without a market for his work and thus he was haunted by a sense of failure. According to columnist Herb Caen, his wife discovered “more than one hundred hitherto unseen Cuneo paintings, hidden in his two studios — in corners, in trunks, under books (some even hanging turned to the wall by the artist).” Much of this work was shown in three one-man retrospectives after his death: the San Francisco Museum of Art (1940), the de Young Museum (1949) and Gallery of Fine Arts in San Francisco (1961).



OPPOSITE PAGE: **Rinaldo Cuneo** *Bay Area Hills* 1934. Oil on Canvas, 108" x 54". Photo: from *Coit Tower San Francisco: It's History and Art*, by Masha Zakheim, photo by Don Beatty. Courtesy of Volcano Press ©2009 (www.volcanopress.com).

ABOVE: **Rinaldo Cuneo** in uniform, Purdy Company, 1897. Photo: High Grade Photographs & Portraits.



Andrew C. ...



OPPOSITE PAGE: **Rinaldo Cuneo**, *Urban Park*, c.1920. Oil on canvas, 23" x 20", Collection of the Museo ItaloAmericano

TOP: **Rinaldo Cuneo**, *The Embarcadero at Night*, c.1927-1928. Oil on plywood, 34" x 36", Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of James and Linda Ries in memory of H. Edmund Ries. photo ©2009 Museum Associates/LACMA

BOTTOM: **Rinaldo Cuneo**, *California Hills with White Boat*, c. 1930. Oil on Canvas, 19.5" x 23.5", Collection of the Museo ItaloAmericano

Cyrus Cuneo



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP LEFT: **Cyrus Cuneo**, *Wife Nell, In Garden*, 1907. Oil on Canvas, 19.5" x 12.5", Collection of Barbara Cuneo Stone's Family

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP RIGHT: **Cyrus Cuneo**, *Self Portrait*, 1910. Oil on canvas 19.5" x 12.5", Collection of Steven Maslach

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: **Cyrus Cuneo**, *The Dancer*, 1909. Oil on Canvas, 9.75" x 14", Collection of Gordon Cuneo

ABOVE: **Cyrus Cuneo** in his studio, c. 1905–1916. Photographer unknown

"There is absolutely no limit to the variety of the subjects, which range from dainty jewel-like decorations, to scenes of Oriental magnificence; from pictures of primitive savagery or barbaric splendor to episodes of ultra-modern type. The work is riotous in its prodigality, magnetic in its enthusiasm, masterly in its handling of pure, luscious color." —Terence Cuneo

"It is impossible to know Cuneo without feeling the glamor of his intense personal charm. He was so completely unaffected, so utterly earnest about his work, so readily enthusiastic and interested in ideas, so generous to his comrades with praise, and helpful with criticism — altogether so genial and vividly sympathetic — that, going to him as a stranger, one left him as a friend." — Percy Bradshaw

CYRUS CINCINNATI CUNEO (1879–1916), NICKNAMED CIRO, HAD HIS EYE set on Europe at an early age. He studied locally at the Mark Hopkins Institute. As a fly-weight boxing champion at the Olympic Club in San Francisco, he saved his prize money to travel to Paris, where he paid for his art training by teaching boxing in the Latin Quarter.

The prolific draughtsman studied at the Académie Colarossi in Paris for nearly four years. He became the massier, or head student, at the academy of the Victorian master, James McNeill Whistler. Cyrus went on to teach his own illustration class, with the help of his wife, Nell Tenison, an accomplished fellow artist, and the subject of several of his surviving paintings. The couple both worked as professional illustrators for magazines and novels. For the *Illustrated London News*, Cyrus covered the death of King Edward VII in 1910, and the Coronation of George V. He produced a series of celebrity portraits from 1908–1911. He was a member of the Royal Institute of Oil Painters in London, and from 1905 to 1912, he exhibited at the Royal Academy. His paintings of World War I were well received, and one auction raised money for two ambulances bearing his name during the war.

He lived his adult life as an expatriate in England until his tragic early death from blood poisoning — an event that may have precipitated the subsequent death of the family patriarch, John Cuneo, who was grief-stricken over the loss of his favorite son. Cyrus's artistic legacy continued with his son, Terence Cuneo, a celebrated painter and illustrator of the Royal Institute of Oil Painters in England, noted for his many portraits of Queen Elizabeth II, and the British military and railways.





Egisto Cuneo

“He was heavily involved in the Kit Kat Club. I can remember the names of a number of the artists that were in that association, and were our friends when we were there. We lived in Pearl River until I was ten and at the time it just had 5,000 people. It had all of the amenities of a small town; you know your neighbors. It was very idyllic in my memory.” — Doris Cuneo Maslach

EGISTO CUNEO (1890–1972), THE YOUNGEST BROTHER IN THE FAMILY, worked hard at various mediums under the shadows of his two artist brothers. From 1910–1916, Egisto studied art in Europe. After World War I, he continued his formal studies of etching and oil painting in Greenwich Village, New York, under the well-known artist, John Sloan. In New York, Egisto became an officer of the artists’ group, the Kit Kat Club, and his artistic work focused on nudes and illustrations. He lived in a tiny studio with his wife and two daughters, but with the birth of a third child, Egisto left his urban lifestyle and moved his family to Pearl River, New York. His oil paintings from the 1920s depict scenes of his wife, children, and neighbors around the family’s home, as well as the dramatic seasonal changes on this property. From his wife, Ruth, giving their son, Gordon, a bath, to their two daughters, Barbara and Doris, playing with parasols, these expressive portraits offer a unique and intimate look at domestic life.

In 1931, the Great Depression prompted Egisto to return to San Francisco with his family to live in his childhood home in North Beach. Struggling financially to support a family during this time, Egisto had to abandon his professional artistic career for one in real estate. He continued to paint for his own pleasure, moving into a phase of Northern California landscapes, including the family’s summer vacation spot in Blue Lakes. He taught himself photography, and furthered his interest in capturing the daily rhythms of his immediate locale. Egisto took regular walks down the length of Grant Avenue, documenting the surrounding neighborhoods: the vitality of the street life in Chinatown, the Italian-American fisherman at the Wharf, and the 1939 World’s Fair at Treasure Island.

Thus, the lives of these three artists took them in different directions, but they shared a commitment to fulfilling their personal creative vision, at times against considerable odds. Together, the wealth of artwork created by the Cuneo brothers has contributed to the artistic heritage of Italian-Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area.



OPPOSITE PAGE: **Egisto Cuneo**, *Ruth Cuneo Bathing Son, Gordon, Pearl River, New York, 1926*. Oil on Board, Collection of Gordon Cuneo

ABOVE: **Egisto Cuneo**, portrait, c. 1916-1918. Photographer unknown



Acknowledgments

This exhibit would not have been possible without the continued support from the following people; Doris Cuneo Maslach, Gordon Cuneo, Christina Maslach Zimbardo, Tanya Zimbardo and Whitney Gantz of the William A. Karges Gallery.

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In addition, we would like to thank the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Volcano Press for providing us with reproductions of Rinaldo Cuneo's artwork for this exhibit guide.

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the staff of the Museo ItaloAmericano, Paola Bagnatori, Managing Director, April Cuneo, Co-Curator and Susan Filippo, Administrator.

Angela Capobianco Little
CHAIR, ART COMMITTEE

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OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: **Egisto Cuneo**, *Planted Fields*, c. 1950s. Oil, 10.25" x 13", Collection of Gordon Cuneo

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: **Egisto Cuneo**, *Blue Lakes*, c. 1940's. 12" x 15.5", Collection of Gordon Cuneo

ABOVE: **Egisto Cuneo**, etching from *Wall's Etched Monthly*, July 1921, No.3, Vol. 2, Made & Published by Bernhardt Wall, New York City

BACK COVER: **Egisto Cuneo**, *Doris & Barbara with Parasol, Pearl River, New York*, 1928. Oil, 16.75" x 13.75", Collection of Barbara Cuneo Stone's Family



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