

PER TUA
INFORMAZIONE
(FOR YOUR INFORMATION)

BY JOE SANO



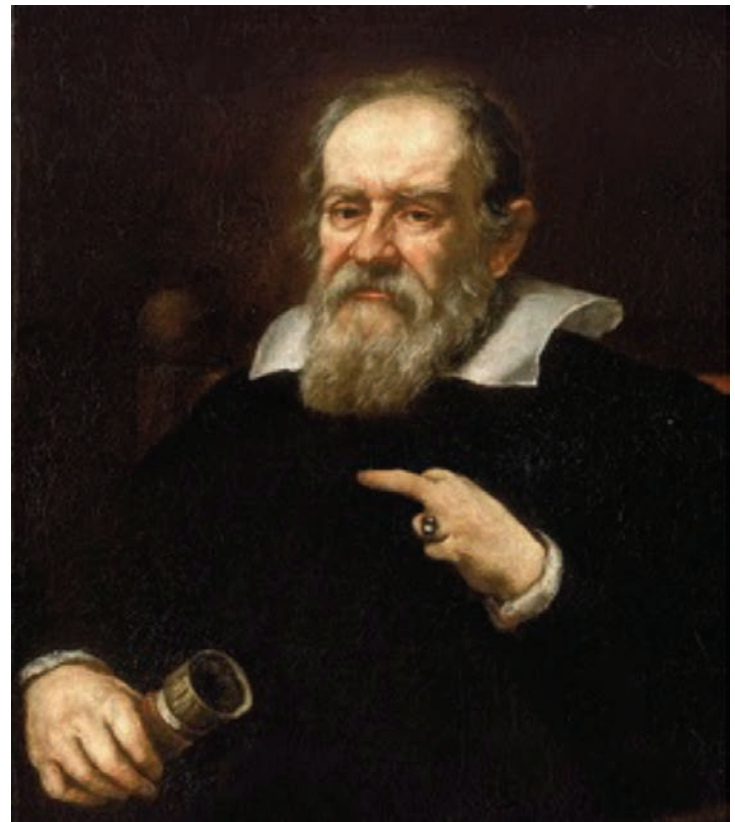
A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

What? Is that a statute of someone “Flippin the bird”?

This towering middle finger—a universally recognized symbol of defiance and disrespect—is made of fine white Carrara marble, the same material used in Michelangelo’s *David*. Forged in a classical style, the statue could easily blend in with the surrounding architecture, if not for the fact that it is, in fact, a giant middle finger.

In Italy, the middle finger gesture (extending the middle finger) is a rude and offensive gesture, similar to the “middle finger” in other Western cultures. It is often referred to as “gesto dell’ombrello” or “the umbrella gesture”. The middle finger gesture has often found its way into Italian tradition.

One such legend is that the Father of Science, Galileo Galilei’s theory of heliocentrism (earth and planets revolving around the sun) got him accused of heresy, found guilty, and under house arrest until he died. He, however, like our Milan artist, chose a visual response to those who condemned him. He commissioned a painting showing his one fingered salute to all those who condemned his teachings (see painting and display).





The “finger” painting may have led to his corpse being desecrated and his middle finger severed and put on display. It is said that his verified, mummified “finger” is still on display at the Museo Galileo (formerly the Florence History of Science Museum). So, the point here

is that the “middle finger salute” has some interesting historical as well as artistic context.

It is quite possible that the tale of Galileo’s “finger” influenced the artist in Milan.



“Il dito,” Italian for “the finger,” is a nickname for the sculpture L.O.V.E. (Libertà, Odio, Vendetta, Eternità) by Maurizio Cattelan. It is a marble hand with all fingers severed except the middle finger. The sculpture is located in Piazza degli Affari in Milan. INDEED! ...right in front of the Italian stock exchange. Originally placed as part of the artist’s 2010 exhibition, it was soon proposed to keep the piece permanently displayed.

Of course, there were months of argument and deliberation but finally the city government deflected the objections of the business community, and the stature would stay. The fact that the artist freely donated the sculpture helped seal that deal.

Il Dito has become as much of a fixture in Piazza Affari as the architecture surrounding it and remains a conversation piece for visitors and locals alike. It has often been used as the backdrop for protests, strikes, and demonstrations. One such event saw a local graffiti artist painting Il Dito’s nail pink, without permission, as a sign of protest linked to International Women’s Day. Obviously, this new artistic gesture falls

in line with the original artist’s intent to make you notice and think.

The sculpture is known for its provocative nature and has sparked debate about its meaning. It is often interpreted as a commentary on the economic crisis and the protests against high finance. It is not by accident, many say, that after the worldwide financial crisis of 2008 the artist felt that the statue succinctly summarized the feelings of Italian citizenry towards the financial markets and the excessive risks taken at that time.

However, on closer examination you will realize that the rest of the fingers on the hand are not flexed as if to flip the bird, but rather, severed. One of the most accepted interpretations of “L.O.V.E.” is that it represents a critique of the Fascist (Mussolini) salute. By depicting a hand with all but the middle finger severed, Cattelan is seen as transforming and mutilating the Fascist salute from the 1930s.

This theory makes more sense when your research uncovers that the building sits in front of the Palazzo Mezzanotte which was a 1932 architectural symbol of the Fascist era, embodying a peculiar mix of neo-classical and 20th-century rationalist styles that were popular at the time. Was it an accident or was the placement done as a thought-provoking provocation using art to ridicule Italy’s Fascist past? The artist felt it expresses disapproval of that historical period and the ideologies it represents, and its placement shines a light on the collusion between the financial industry leaders and the fascism of that era.

Others believe jokingly that it is a living tribute to all those who use hand gestures to communicate with others sharing the Italian roadways.

The one finger salute is at home in Milan as well as all of Italy, Europe and probably the world. Yet Milan is a special mix of old and new. To many it is that unique blend of the ancient with the new that makes it special. So to all those who visit Milan and do not love it, there’s a statue just for you in the Piazza degli Affari. □

