

MoNA

Museum of Northwest Art

Interactive Gallery Guide



Italo Scanga, Pilchuck Glass School, 1986, Color photograph

***Permanent Immigrant:
Italo Scanga in the Dale and
Leslie Chihuly Collection***

February 18 - May 14, 2023

Italo's Story

More than twenty years after his death, Italo Scanga (1932-2001) is not forgotten, but his influence and role in contemporary art from the 1980s on, in New York as well as the West Coast, have not been fully appreciated. Born in the village of Lago, Cosenza, Scanga immigrated to the US with his mother at age 15 leaving behind the deprivation and poverty of WWII-ravaged Southern Italy. Scanga was never fully at home on either continent. He was, in fact, a permanent immigrant.



Italo Scanga, Photograph 11, no date, Black and white silver gelatin print, 8" x 8"; Courtesy of the Italo Scanga Foundation

His life and art were cut into those two parts: Italy and America. Not that he made art while in Italy as a child, but his training with a furniture maker in his native village inspired his reverence for material construction, as well as cauterizing his memories of wartime hardships and paternal abandonment (his Italian father, who worked as a laborer for the railroad in a Pennsylvania mining town, couldn't get the whole family out of Italy before the war). As a teenager, Scanga fell in love with America and was seduced by its openness, its consumer profusion after a childhood of poverty and food insecurity, and its possibilities for individual freedom despite the history of prejudice and arrogance of power. He also felt the attraction to his roots as he traveled back and forth to Italy and Europe for years, revisiting his childhood village in the late 1950s.

Friends: Dale and Italo

Italo Scanga and Dale Chihuly first met at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1967, while Italo was a guest lecturer and Dale a graduate student. Their lifelong friendship was based on a mutual love of making art, road-trips for antiquing and finding lost treasures to incorporate into their art, and a passion for Italian food and wine. They shared an aesthetic of spontaneity, found objects and bright color.



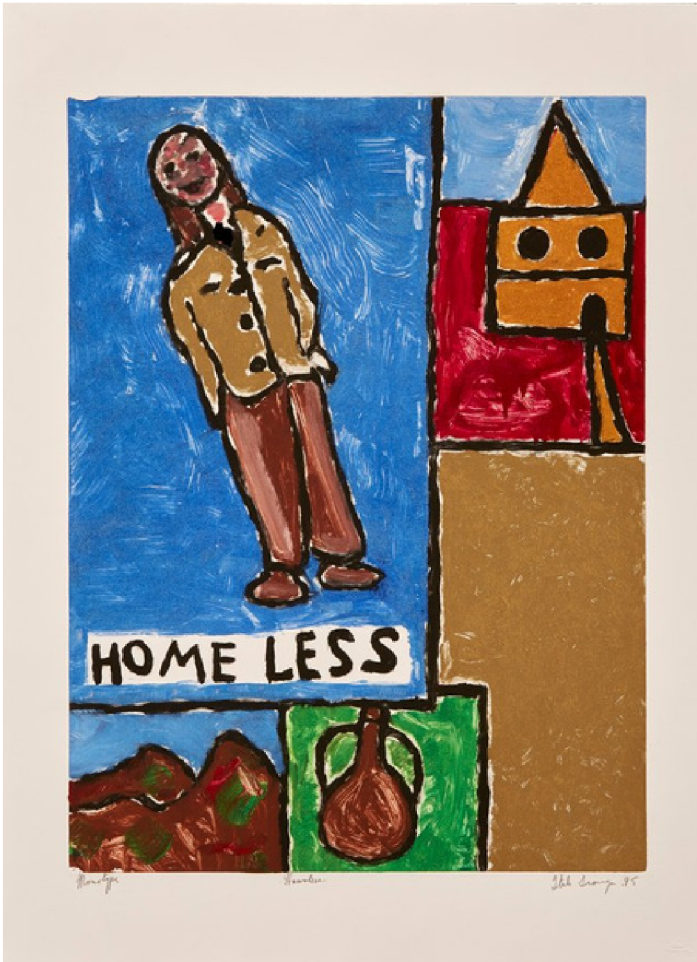
When Chihuly invited him to come to Pilchuck Glass School as artist-in-residence in 1973, Scanga had blazed a trail in the East Coast art world: his installations at landmark New York city venues like White Columns were widely hailed in all the major art publications of the day by significant art critics and curators, all following his solo debut at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, in 1972. Scanga would continue to teach at Pilchuck every summer until his sudden death in 2001.

Italo Scanga (left) and Dale Chihuly, 1993, Black and white photograph



The Exhibition

Permanent Immigrant: Italo Scanga in the Dale and Leslie Chihuly Collection draws extensively from the private collection of the



Italo Scanga, Homeless, 1995, Monotype on paper, 30" x 22"; Pilchuck Glass School

artist's long-time friend to demonstrate the wide range of subjects accompanied by recurrent autobiographical themes such as food and sustenance, architecture, religious iconography and sense of belonging, and the landscape of his native Lago in Calabria. The exhibition puts the Italian-American artist's oeuvre into perspective, shedding light on how his World War II experiences of food shortages and deprivations informed his sculptures both in his choice of materials and conceptual assemblage.

Scanga's art is a link to the post-war Italian art movement Arte Povera (Poor Art) which is characterized by the use of humble, unconventional materials and found objects in undemonstrative installation sites. His painted wooden figures made at Pilchuck Glass School emerge in the 1980's artistic landscape as key examples of the rise of Neo-Expressionism in American art at the time. These works re-introduce personal content such as consumerism, alcoholism, and the primacy of food.



Italo Scanga, Fear, Shellac and oil paint on wood, 87" x 40" x 22";
Courtesy of Chihuly Studio

Using alder logs and branches, the Fear sculptures of the 1970s and 80s are anthropogenic shapes that confront the anxieties of modern life and provoke a subjective and personal response. “Fear of alcohol”, “fear of buying a house”, “fear of a tornado” and so on are also a throwback to the horrors of the artist’s childhood in Italy and wartime hardships of poverty, food insecurity, and the arrogance of power.



“Everything Matters”

What status has the artist bestowed by placement and the infusion of a story? To explore these objects and spaces in a meaningful way requires an investigation of multilayered stories that are deep, complex, and meaningful. Assemblages raise intriguing questions.

Scanga’s life and art were cut into two parts: Italy and America. What sense of dislocation resulted from being moved from country to country, experiences with different cultures and languages, are interlaced in his art?

Arte Povera

Italo Scanga's installation and conceptual art evolved because of his awareness of extraordinary consumer waste. The precepts of the Italian movement "Arte Povera," the Italian words for "poor art," was a conduit for him to convey his memories metaphorically with farm tools, shovels, rakes and the like. The most distinctly recognizable trait of Arte Povera was the use of commonplace materials that evoked a pre-industrial age, such as earth, rocks, clothing, paper and rope: literally 'poor' or cheap materials that they repurposed. These art practices presented a challenge to established notions of value and propriety, as well as subtly critiquing the industrialization and mechanization of Italy at the time.

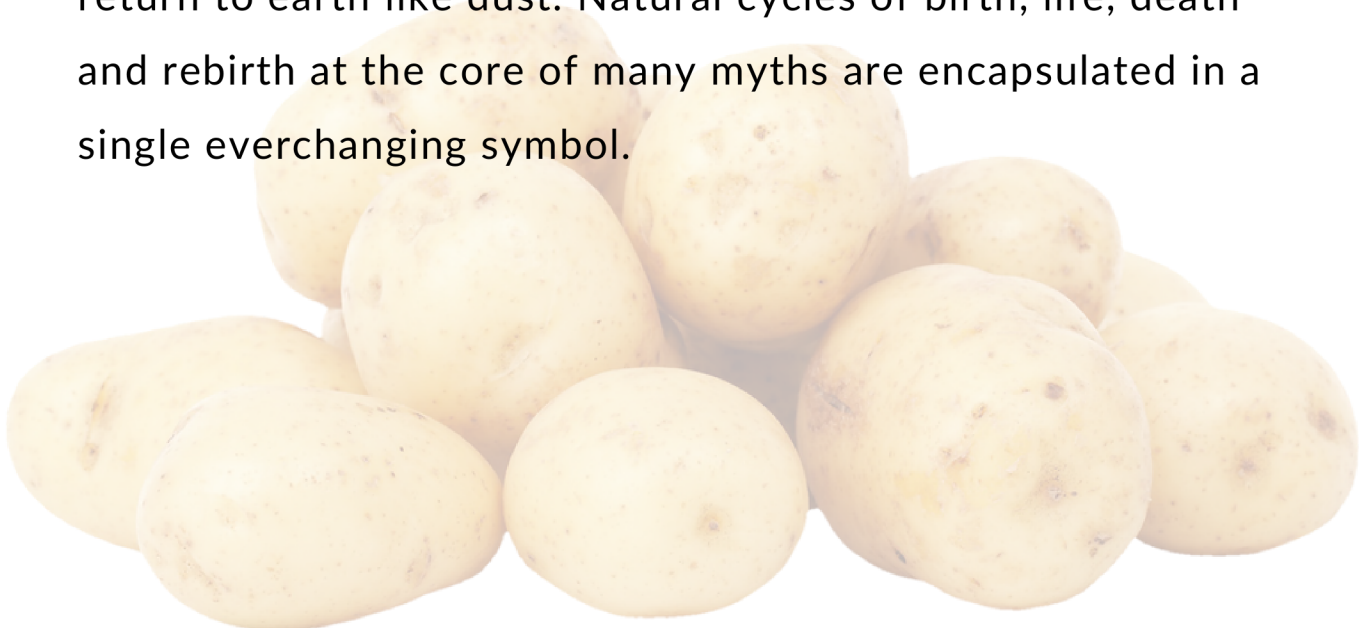


Italo Scanga, Potato Famine (with Madonna), 1979, Wood, potatoes, cloth, plaster, and acrylic, 41" x 10" x 8"; Courtesy of Chihuly Studio

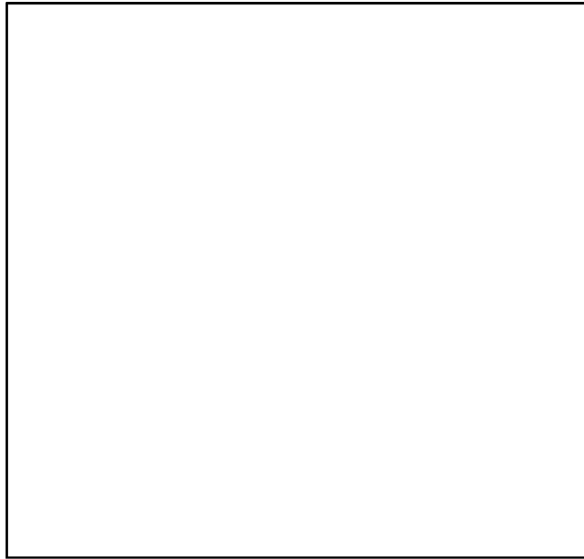


The 'Potato Famine' sculpture touched on Arte Povera as Scanga created a eulogy to the cataclysmic event in European history in the late 1840's when the one million Irish farmers and peasants died due to an extended *Phutophthora Infestans* fungus attack on the white potato plants and another million emigrated. Waves of economic upheaval and disease among the poor rural class decimated the population from 7 million to under 3 million. Scanga's research revealed the inhumane absence of aid from landlords and the ruling class moved him to create his sculptures. His 'Potato Famine' sculpture is a reminder of universal political injustices wherever they occur.

Scanga's choice of the white potato is a symbol for peasant life he intends to evoke. The dusty tubers retain much of their earthy character - a humble metaphor for the meager existence of the rural working class. The real potatoes eventually sprout greenery and if left in place long enough return to earth like dust. Natural cycles of birth, life, death and rebirth at the core of many myths are encapsulated in a single everchanging symbol.



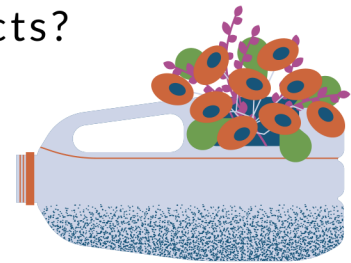
Choose a sculpture in the exhibition to look at and ask questions. Sketch it below!



The object I chose is a

It's new role is to convey
ideas about -----

What ideas does the artist
mean to share by using
these objects?



Was this Upcycled? (using discarded ordinary materials)

How was this object **repurposed** and used in ways different from what its intended purpose was?

What is the object's **new role**?

Tell about the object's shift from having a specifically designed use to fulfilling a new designated repurposed role.

How do the materials and the processes used convey an artist's ideas? Do you have different ideas on how to use this object? What helped you form your opinion?

Scanga's found-object sculptures have a renewing quality because of how he has altered them layered with ideas.

The key part of the message is _____.
What makes artwork a product of the artist's experience?
What do you think _____ represents?

Work through the medium of different kinds of things and the interconnections that occur between them...is it possible to think through things?

What personal value do these objects have?

What memories or significant experiences do these objects hold?

What do we not want to forget?



The retention of memory often occurs through photographs or things we collect. ***Do you have a special collection of things that are meaningful to you?***

Our choices to own, display, or discard the various things in our lives is based on what we value and believe. How do we make decisions about what to keep and what to let go? How does what we recycle, deposit in the trash, or give away reveal something about how we view the world? How do objects define our identity or heritage? It is the stories that reverberate around an object that affect how the object is regarded.

What does the object reveal about the conditions surrounding when it was made or its place in a museum now? Has its social significance changed over time? Does it enable us to experience a time apart from our own contemporary world?

Visual Thinking Strategies

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a research-based teaching method that promotes aesthetic development, including critical thinking and communication skills. Here at MoNA, we use VTS to engage students and general visitors with art encouraging them to observe closely, think critically and discuss respectfully; however, VTS can be effectively used across curricula. VTS teaches participants to take the time to observe closely, describe what they see in detail and provide evidence for their observations. Students learn that their reflections and thoughts are valued and appreciated in this inclusive teaching method.

To facilitate a VTS discussion, you first encourage viewers to take a quiet moment to observe the work you are going to explore. Then you ask the following questions and paraphrase the responses without adding any of your own judgements. You can insert additional vocabulary and point to specific parts of the artwork.



VTS provides a structure with simple rules that open a world of possibility. Three VTS questions initiate an active process of discovery when looking at art. Listen carefully to and acknowledge every answer while looking at the image, pointing to details they mention and paraphrasing what is said. Facilitate the discussion as it progresses, linking converging and diverging opinions to help synthesize a variety of viewpoints. Encourage inquiry by keeping the process open-ended to stretch and search for information beyond first impressions.

These three VTS questions ask everyone to focus, become reflective, and to question - the basis for critical thinking. Answering the questions is engaging and fun because no one is going to be wrong.

What's going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say...?
What more can you find?

For more information about
Visual Thinking Strategies,
visit www.vtshome.org
or scan this QR code!



**Generous support for the exhibition and education programs
is made possible in part by the following:**

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Special thanks to the Italo Scanga Foundation and our education partners:

Glass Art Society and Pilchuck Glass School.

Media sponsorship is provided by Cascade Public Media (KCTS9 & Crosscut)
and Skagit Valley Living magazine.



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