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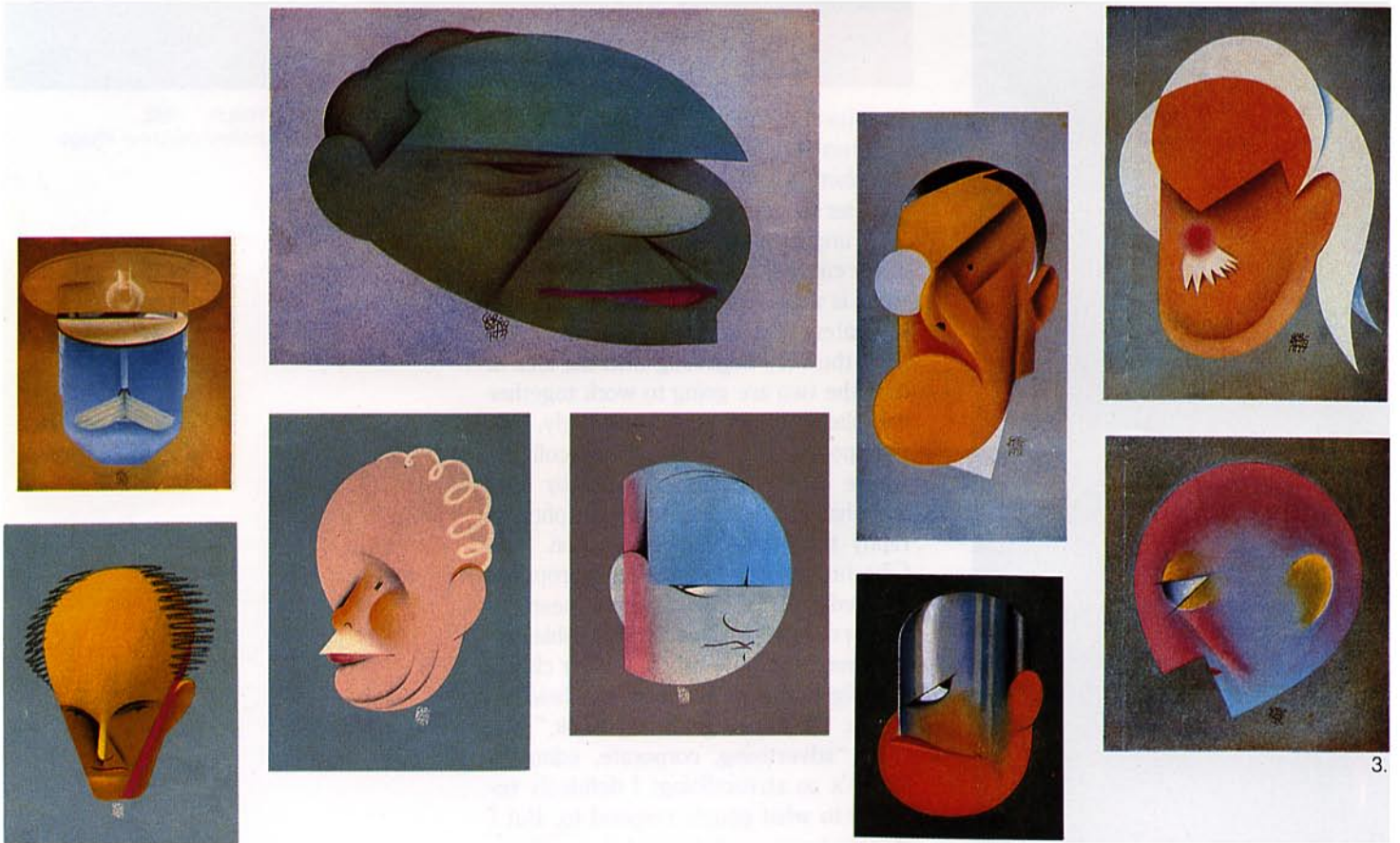


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Paolo Garretto: A Reconsideration

By Steven Heller

He was a world-renowned caricaturist in the 1920s and '30s. Then Garretto's reputation declined, partly because he was tagged a "Fascist Artist"—a former member of Mussolini's honor guard. But it is time to take another look.



3.

During the 1920s and '30s, the Italian Paolo Garretto was a giant of international advertising design and editorial art, as inventive as A.M. Cassandre, as prolific as Jean Carlu, as witty as Miguel Covarrubias. There was hardly a noteworthy American magazine that had not published his work at one time. There were virtually no French, Italian, English, and German poster hoardings or kiosks on which his advertisements did not regularly appear. His airbrushed caricature epitomized Deco styling. His geometric design captured the romance of the industrial age. Paul Rand called him "one of the world's most formidable draftsmen." Yet by the 1950s his work was rarely seen. Art directors called his work anachronistic, a vestige of prewar innocence. As happens to all stylists, the vicissitudes of fashion took their toll. Garretto's approach was no longer in demand, eclipsed by Modern and faux Modern tendencies. Though he never completely vanished from view, and continued working until his death in 1989, he would today be recalled only as a relic of the years between the wars were it not for the Postmodern ethos that causes designers to quote, borrow, and steal from history. In one such appropriation, Garretto's spirit, if not his actual form, was briefly revived.

During the '30s, Garretto's fame in the U.S., especially among knowing New Yorkers, derived from the frequency with which his work appeared in *Fortune*, *Time*, *Vogue*, and the *New Yorker*, but even more directly from his close identification with the original *Vanity Fair* until it folded in 1938. As one of *Vanity Fair*'s graphic triumvirate (the others were caricaturists Miguel Covarrubias and William Cotton), Garretto was regularly featured on its covers and inside pages. In 1983, when the inheritors of Condé Nast's publishing empire decided to revive the mothballed *Vanity Fair*, they tried to imitate its original tony formula. Because Garretto had given the magazine a portion of its graphic identity, it was reasoned that a modern-day Garretto would provide the same allure. Caricaturists were found who were practicing similar *Moderne* conceits, but who unfortunately lacked the insight and intelligence that Garretto brought to his pictures which made them transcend mere ephemeral *style*. It was further reasoned that if Garretto himself, who had not worked for Condé Nast for 40 years,

were alive and still capable of making art, perhaps he would lend a nostalgic glow to the fledgling publication. In fact, Garretto was then in his early eighties, and living in Monte Carlo. He was located by Lloyd Ziff, then *Vanity Fair*'s art director, who commissioned him to do several covers. They were, however, rejected by the new editors for apparently being *too* nostalgic.

Ziff's discovery awoke my own interest in this artist, which actually began after I had been introduced to his work some years before. Late in 1986, I began a regular correspondence with Garretto that continued until a month before his death last year. My questions to him focused on his professional life, the development of his distinctive style, the people he knew and admired, and why he had faded from view. Well into our correspondence, I somewhat timidly broached the subject of his early involvement with the Italian Fascist party and the reports I had read of his having designed the Fascist uniform and been one of Mussolini's elite bodyguards. From the outset, his letters to me were surprisingly candid, open, and warm, and amidst the countless references to, and apologies for, his failing health, he recalled his many triumphs, failures, and mistakes, including his flirtation with Fascism. This article is based on (and liberally quotes from) these letters; it also draws on conversations with people who knew him and on some additional biographical material.

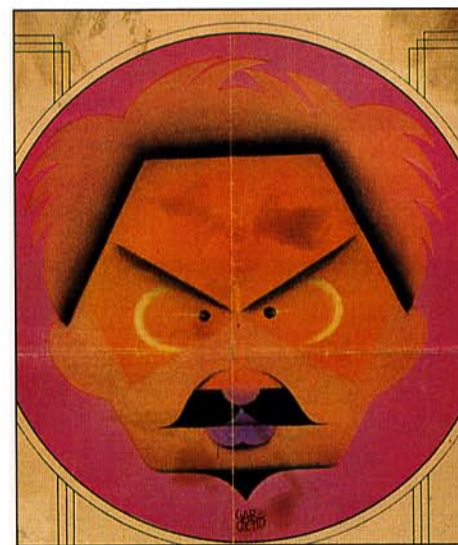
Paolo Garretto was born in 1903 in Naples. "I began doing caricatures when I was very young, just as an amusement," he writes, "never thinking that I was going to be a caricaturist all my life." In 1913, when Paolo was 10, his family moved to America so that the elder Garretto, a scholar from the University of Pisa, could do research for a history of the U.S. that had been commissioned by an Italian publisher. "I knew very few English words at the time," Garretto recalls, "and was only able to explain myself in school through drawings on the blackboard." The family ended its stay in 1917, when, with war raging in Europe, Garretto's father was recalled to serve as an officer in the Italian army. Paolo and his mother settled briefly in Florence. At war's end, his father became a professor in Milan, and Paolo attended the Fine Art School of Brera, where, he muses in one of his letters, "I always had trouble with my professors inasmuch as I

1. Paolo Garretto, still in his early twenties, rose to become one of Europe's most prolific advertising and editorial artists. In this 1927 photograph, the young Garretto stands before a concert poster he designed for Maurice Chevalier.

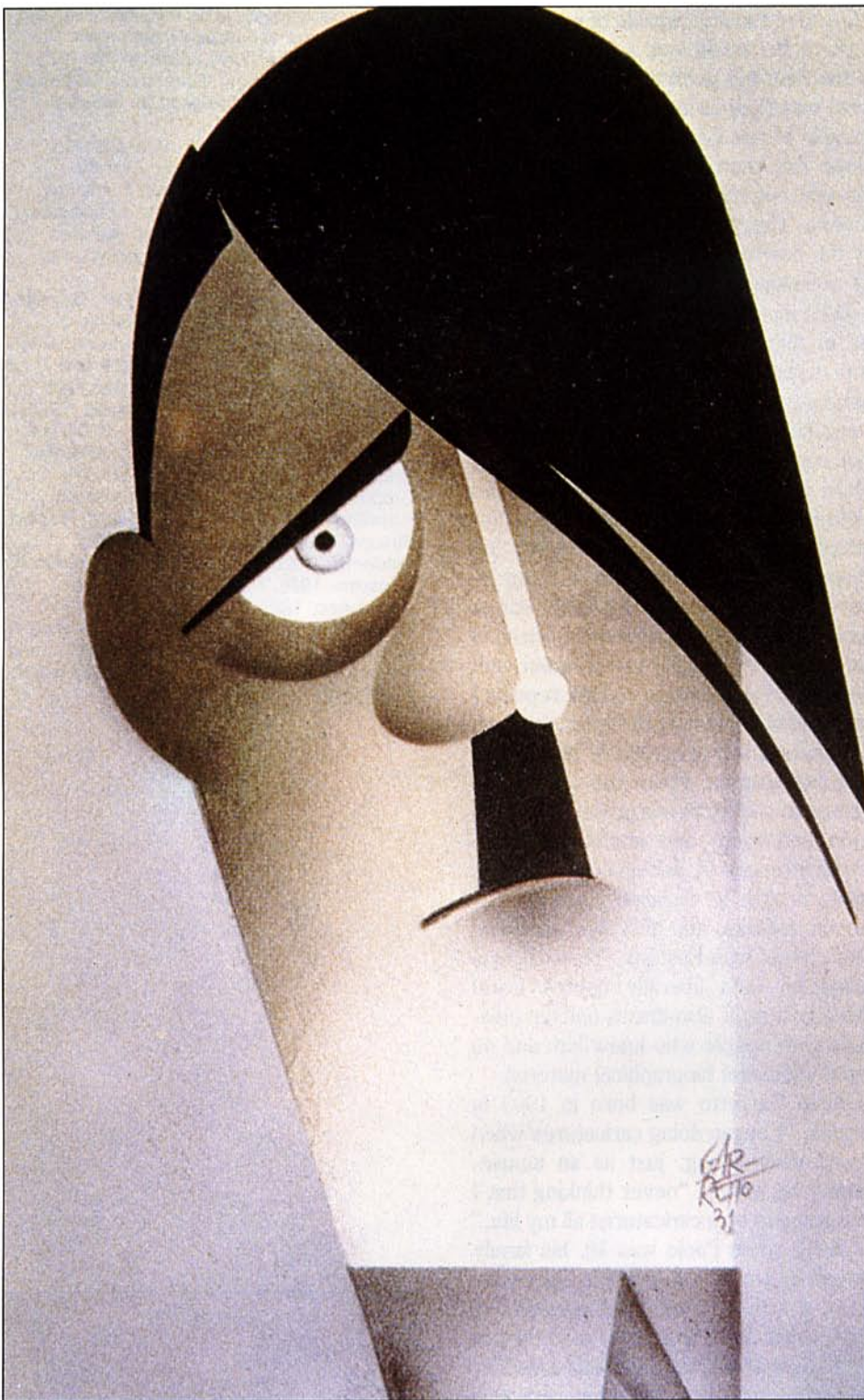
2. As a student in Rome in 1922, Garretto joined the Italian Fascist party. Ever the estheticist, he disliked the ad hoc uniforms worn by Mussolini's legions and so designed his own black ensembles. These sketches (credited to Garretto) show variations on a theme.

3. First with pastel and later airbrush, Garretto became a master of what *The Graphic* of London called "new ideas in color caricature." These are early portraits from British and German publications. Top row, left to right: Field Marshal Earl Haig of Bemersyde, 1927, *The Graphic*; Baron Beaverbrook, 1927, *The Graphic*; Sir Austen Chamberlain, 1926, *The Graphic*; David Lloyd George, 1927, *The Graphic*. Bottom row, left to right: Wilhelm Furtwängler, 1929, *Berliner Illustrated*; Richard Strauss, 1929, *Berliner Illustrated*; Paul Hindemith, 1929, *Berliner Illustrated*; Benito Mussolini, 1926, *The Graphic*; Gabriele D'Annunzio, 1927, *The Graphic*.

4. Garretto's work first appeared in America in Sunday newspaper supplements. Here is Leon Trotsky, 1930, in the *New York Sunday World* magazine.



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liked Futurism and Cubism and they did not like the [odd] way I saw our models. For I did some sketches in the manner of these movements that shocked my teachers." Garretto's naive interest in the avant-garde and his youthful rebellion against authority were consistent with the political turmoil brewing in post-war Italy that was splitting society into two extremes—Communism and Fascism—and that ultimately led the nation to its totalitarian destiny.

In 1921, Garretto's father assumed a teaching post in Rome and Paolo enrolled in the Superior Institute of Fine Arts to study architecture. He and some friends began to frequent Rome's famous Café Aragno, where artists, actors, and politicians assembled to drink, eat, and debate the hot issues, and where Paolo began drawing crayon caricatures of these celebrities on the white marble tabletops. "One night I happened to sketch a good one of Pirandello and a better one of Marinetti, and a journalist who was there asked me to sketch them on paper. His name was Orio Vergani, a poet and writer of comedies, and soon through him I began to sell my caricatures to the Roman newspapers." His drawing thus became more than a hobby, and he decided that he, too, would be a journalist. "I did everything from then on . . .," he recalls, "writing little pieces that I illustrated and doing posters and decoration for the movies." In fact, the fickle Garretto temporarily switched career ambitions toward the film industry after assisting one of his professors, who was a scenic artist for the original *Ben Hur* when it was being filmed in Rome. Director Fred Niblo used Garretto as a translator and hired him to do some graphics as well. However, the tiring daily routine on the set was "not for me," writes Garretto.

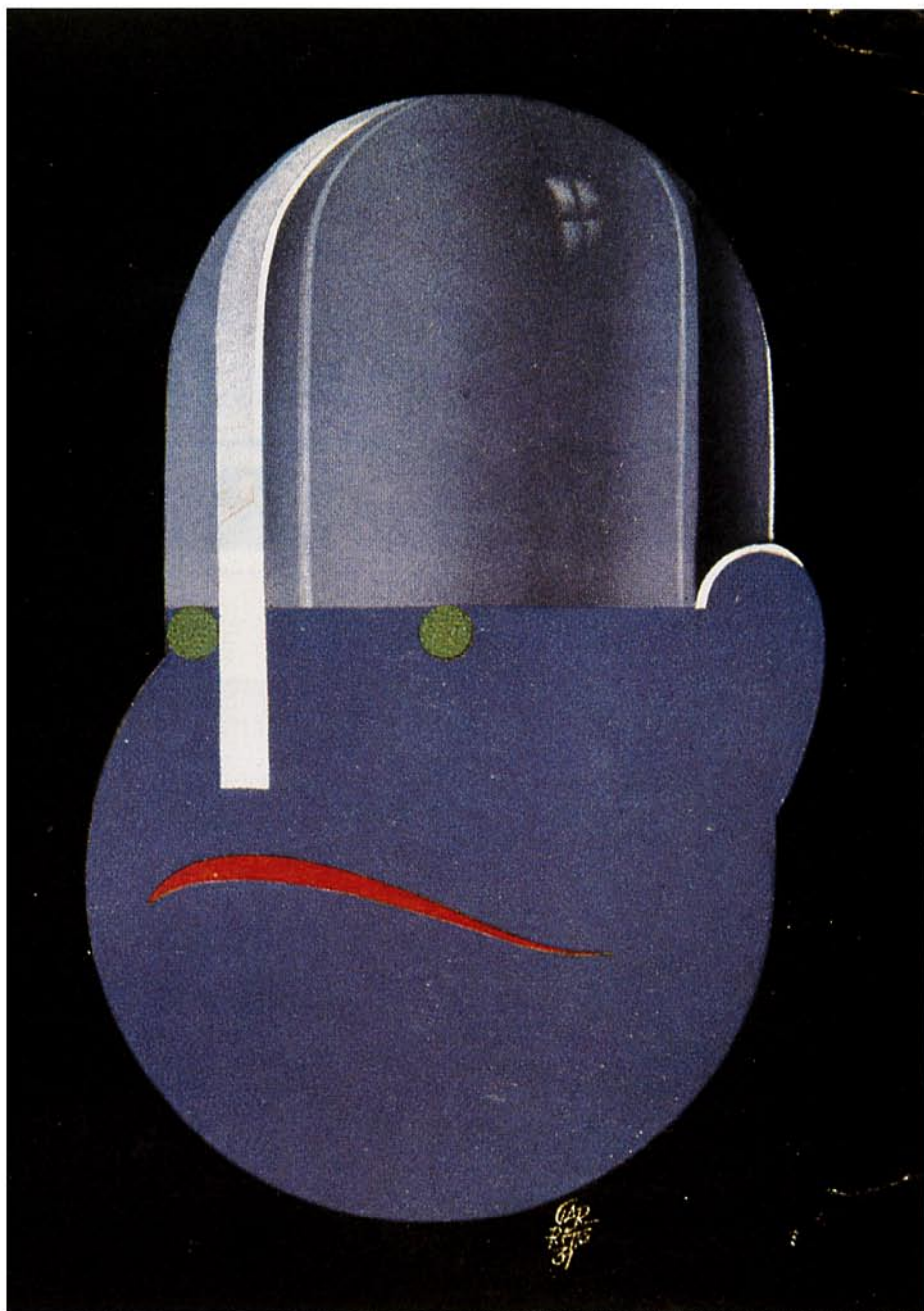
Soon the world intruded into the young Garretto's free and easy life. As a boy, he had developed a visceral and lasting anti-Communism upon learning that the Imperial Russian family, "including little [Prince] Alexis," was murdered by the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution. "I can still remember my father reading the article [about their assassinations] to my mother, who was horrified." Then, in 1921, as Italy's political situation grew more chaotic, an incident occurred that shocked Garretto into taking what was for him a moral stand.

"During the anniversary of the 1918

victory over Austria,” he relates, “my father went to a gathering at the tomb of the unknown soldier where he was assaulted and beaten by a mass of Bolsheviks. Father came home with a head wound, his uniform in pieces, his war decorations stolen. We were all furious! But father was one of the best men who lived in Italy. He told us to be calm and said about his foes in true Christian spirit: ‘They do not know what they are doing.’ But in those years nearly all my good friends were Fascists [because they too hated the Communists]. At school and [Café] Aragno they all asked me why I did not join them. But my father had forbidden me to adhere to ‘that bunch of people who are not worth more than the Communists,’ and in those times one generally listened to fathers. Then one day in June 1922 a bunch of Communists passed [my house] shooting, hollering, shouting, and carrying red banners. We all went to the balcony to see what was happening and saw them beating the local food merchant, stealing his wine, flowers, fruits, salamis and hams. They also smashed in the windows of the corner café before running away. The next day I went to the ‘Fascio’ [Fascist headquarters] to join the Fascist party. But I was too young and was told to join the ‘Vanguardists’ [the Fascist youth movement] until I turned 21 years old.”

Garretto’s father was furious with his son for disobeying him, and was heard to say, “I have three sons—two are OK, but the eldest is crazy in the head.” Yet Garretto, like so many other young Italians, had been swept by revolutionary fervor as well as swept off his feet by the glamor of Benito Mussolini’s blackshirted legions. The only problem Garretto had was a sartorial one: “I did not like the way they were all dressed up: they had only one common garment—the black shirt. As for the rest of their uniform, they wore anything they liked, such as long pants of any color. So I designed for myself a uniform that was all black—shirt, cavalry pants, and boots: My friends who liked the attire copied it. In fact, four of us, Mario and Carlo Ferrando, Aldo Placidi and me became known as the Musketeers.”

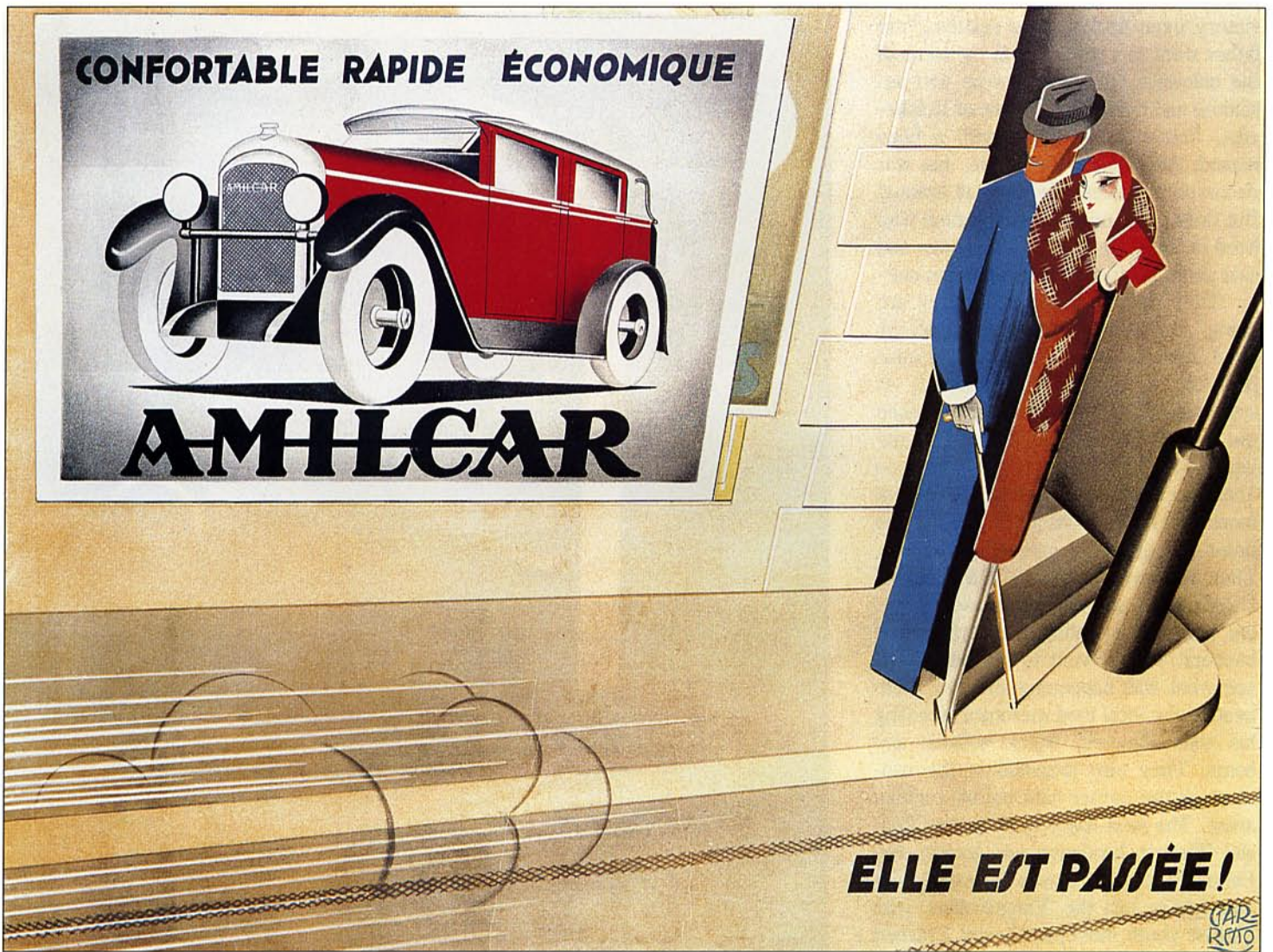
By accident, this ad hoc collegial group became Mussolini’s formal honor guard. For in 1922, after being rebuffed by Parliament in a crass bid to increase Fascist representation, Mussolini called



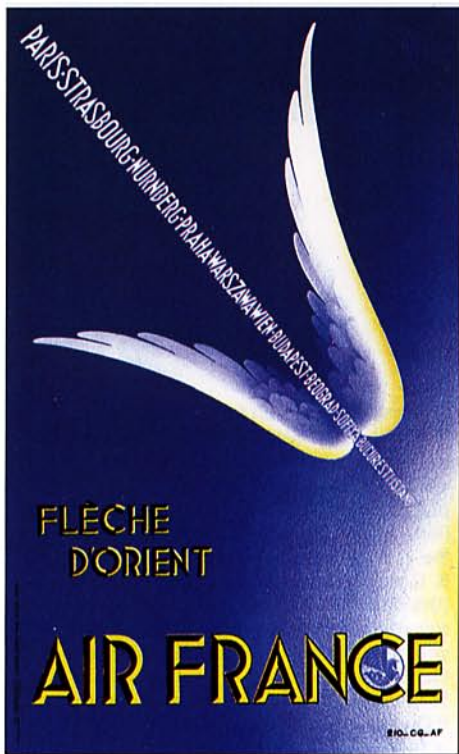
5. In this photograph taken by Alexey Brodovitch, Garretto (right) is shown with his friends M.F. Agha (center), art director for *Vanity Fair* and later all Condé Nast publications, and fashion illustrator Vertes (left), whom Garretto helped get passage to the U.S. before World War II.

6. Garretto did so many caricatures of Hitler (this one is from *Vanity Fair*, 1931) that it is truly remarkable that the Gestapo did not arrest him when, in 1944, he was interned by the Germans in Hungary.

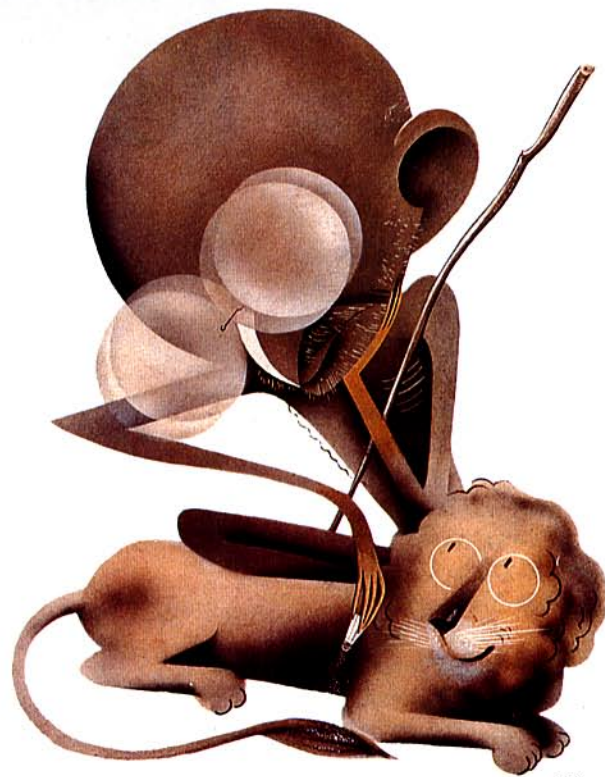
7. Garretto also did a number of renditions of Il Duce in the form of a futuristic robot (this one is from *Vanity Fair*, 1931).



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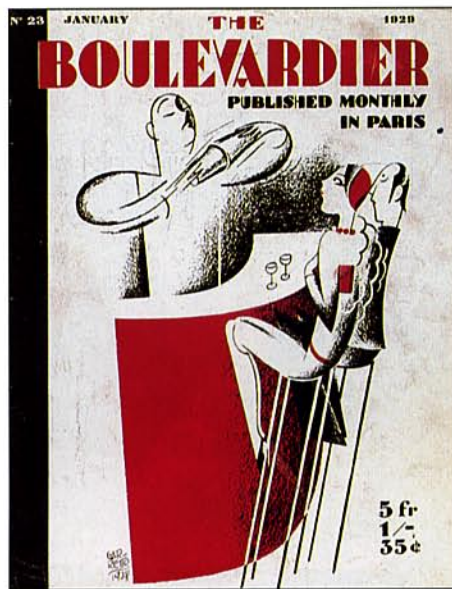


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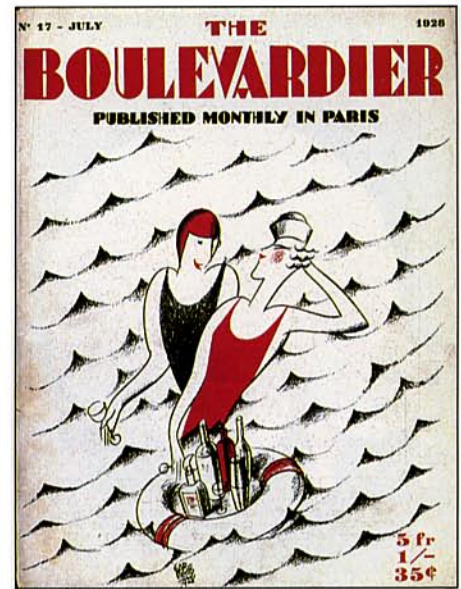
forth his legions—the famous March on Rome—who surrounded the Royal Palace as he presented an ultimatum to King Victor Emmanuel. The king received the would-be dictator and succumbed to his show of intimidation by naming him premier. Garretto recalls the thrill of being there that day: “Mussolini and the other Fascist leaders came down among us. The Musketeers were all lined up at attention, and when Mussolini saw us in our crisp new uniforms he asked Gino Calza-Bini, the founder and leader of the Roman *Fascio*, ‘Who are these?’ My friend Placidi was prompt to answer: ‘We’re the Musketeers!’ To which Mussolini responded, ‘. . . they shall be my Musketeers!’ and passed on. In the evening we were ordered to the *Fascio* and told that we would become 33 instead of four. Calza-Bini was happy and we were, too, but we did not know what kind of an ordeal it was going to be from that day on. . . . This was the beginning of a period that [in hindsight] I did not like at all.”

With Il Duce’s approval, Garretto became a charter member of the *manipolo*, or honor guard (a formation of 33 men based on Julius Caesar’s plan of military organization in which three *manipoli* make up one *legione*, or company) whose express task was to escort Mussolini and his four lieutenants to various ceremonies. “There were always six or eight of us on duty,” says Garretto. “And who was the one that was nearly always on duty? Not being married nor having no business to attend, I was one of those. You can imagine my life at home,” he writes. “My father was furious inasmuch as I could not attend my Art Academy and continue studying to become an architect. My mother was worried to see me always on the run, but there was nothing to be done. For in the meantime Mussolini had founded the *Milizia Volontaria Sicurezza Nazionale* [the Volunteers for National Security] which enlisted all its Fascist members for life. So I found myself militarized forever.”

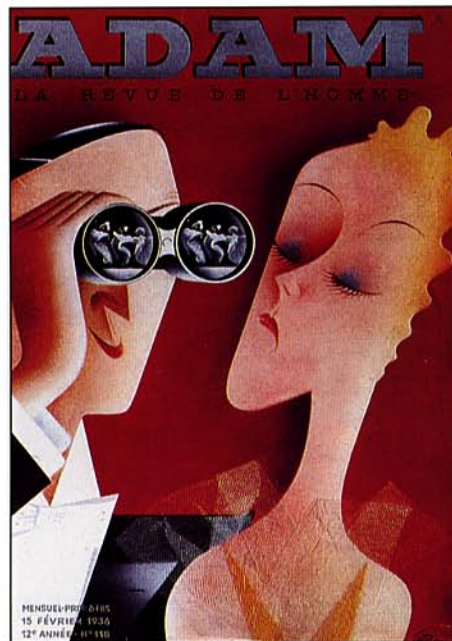
Garretto’s conscription lasted only one year. Though his biography in a 1934 issue of *Vanity Fair* called him an “enthusiastic Fascist and founder of Mussolini’s . . . body guard,” he insists it was an act of folly that he soon regretted. It was his father who rescued him, interceding on his behalf with the general in command of the *Milizia*. He explained to the general that his son’s military duties were ruining



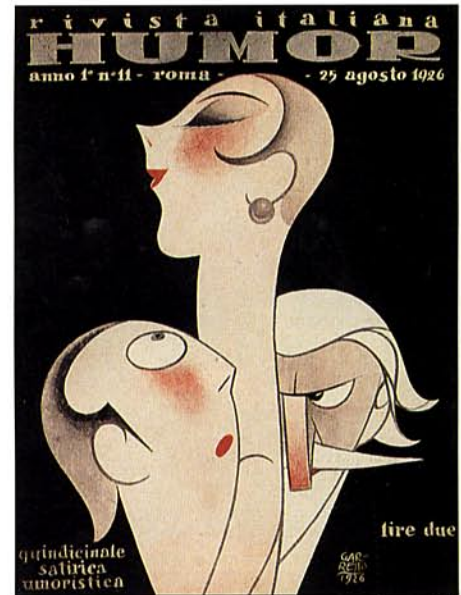
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8. Garretto was a prolific advertising artist in Paris. His poster for Amilcar, 1929, was rendered with airbrush.

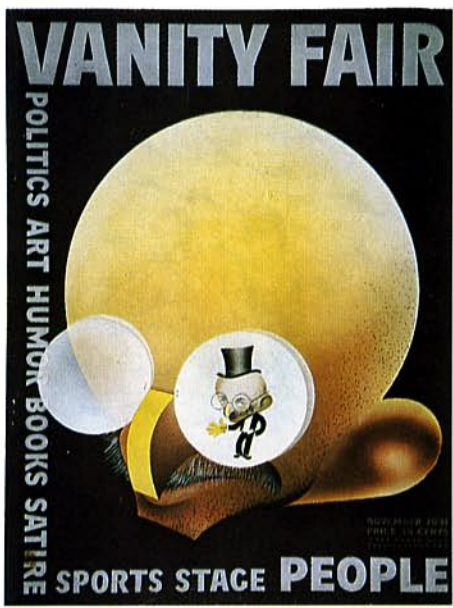
9. As an adjunct member of Alliance Graphique, the ad agency run by Cassandre, Loupot, and Carlu, Garretto designed a poster for Air France’s *Fleche d’Orient* route.

10. This caricature of Gandhi, 1930, which appeared in *The Graphic* and was reprinted in *Fortune*, prompted Clare Boothe Brokaw (later Luce), an editor at *Vanity Fair*, to urge Garretto to draw for her magazine.

11,12. Garretto worked for dozens of magazines in Europe, among them *The Boulevardier*, a publication for American expatriates in Paris. These covers were pen-and-ink, 1928 and 1929.

13. *Adam*, a French fashion magazine, was one of Garretto’s regular clients. This airbrushed cover was done in 1936.

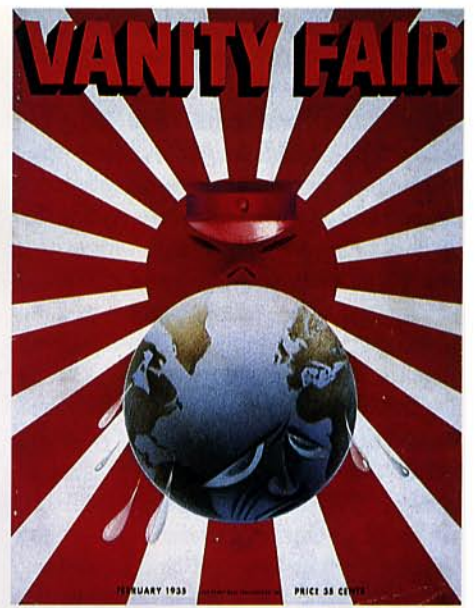
14. When Garretto first started out as a caricaturist, he worked for a few Roman humor periodicals. This cover is for a 1926 issue of *Rivista Italiana Humor*.



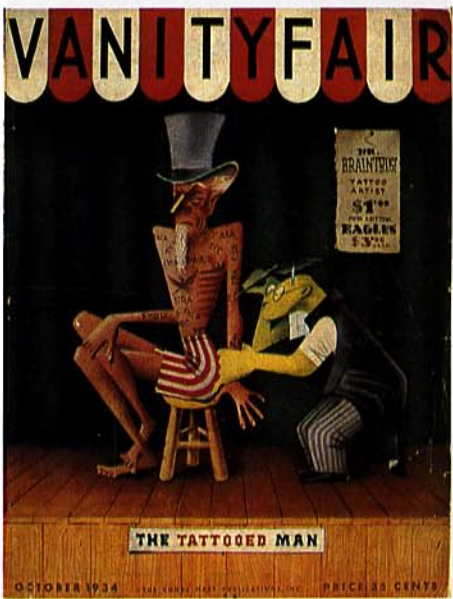
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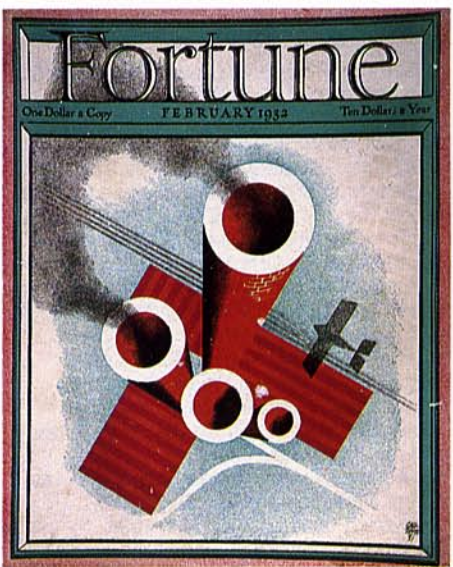
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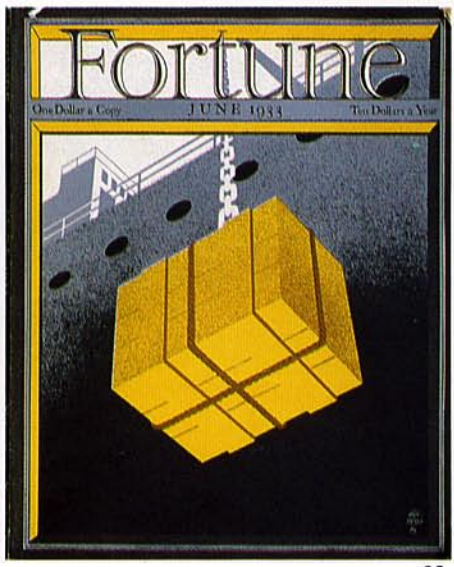
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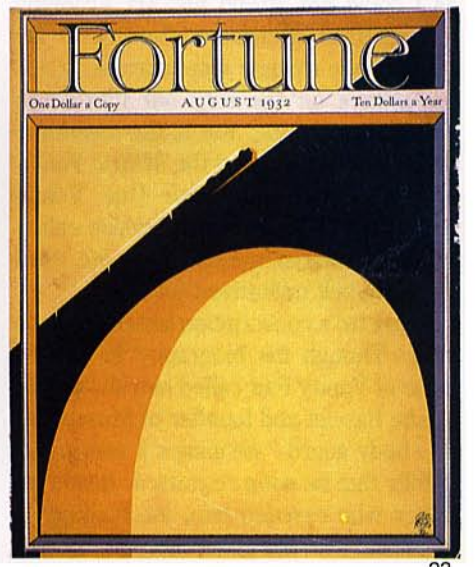
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his chances for a position in architecture, and asked if Paolo could be given a leave of absence until graduation. Miraculously, the general agreed. "He asked me to give my name, date of birth, and address to his secretary," recalls Garretto, "who typed it up, got [the paper] signed, and gave it to my father. We bowed, went outside, and to our surprise we saw on the paper that he had signed a permanent discharge." To this day, it is still a mystery whether the order was deliberate or a classic example of Fascist efficiency.

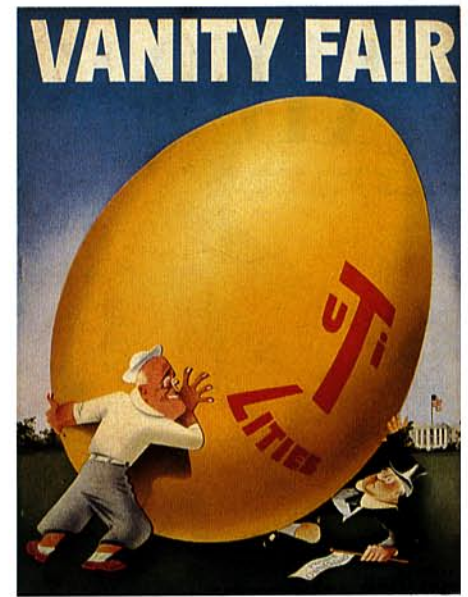
Regarding his embrace of Fascism, Garretto writes, "I consider all these years of my youth a great, useless lesson inasmuch as I am still not able to say what is right and what is wrong." Nonetheless, Garretto recalls 1925, the year of his reprieve, with a palpable sense of joy and innocence: "Aside from the Academy I started to really live." Though happily drawing caricatures for Roman newspapers and satiric journals, his primary aim was to get a passport and start traveling. The first stop in what would become a peripatetic lifestyle was Paris, where Garretto hoped to find a market for his caricatures (which, by his own description, were "very different and modern"). But after two weeks, having not made any significant contacts, he returned to Rome. In 1927, he was urged by some former art school friends to return to Paris; since they had found work there, they assured him he would, too. They had been hired by Dorland Advertising, then the largest agency in the world. Garretto was introduced to their boss, a Mr. Maas, who loved his drawings and suggested that he go to London, where there were many magazines printed in color that required good illustration. Maas was the representative for the "Great Eight," a group of British publications that included *The Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, *The By-stander*, and *The Tatler*. Armed with a glowing letter of recommendation, Garretto took off for London, where he presented some decidedly unconventional caricatures of Austen Chamberlain, Lloyd George, D'Annunzio, and Mussolini. "They [the editors of *The Graphic*] asked me to leave the drawings as well as my address in Paris so they could contact me. However, after a few weeks without any word from them I returned to Rome [dejected] and proceeded to focus my energies on getting my architecture degree."

The impatient Garretto had given up too soon. One day, shortly after he had returned to Rome, he recalls receiving a phone call from one of his friends in Paris, who said excitedly, "Paolo . . . how did you do it? How did you get into the British press?" The friend explained that in the current issue of *The Graphic* were four color caricatures with a caption announcing that these were "new ideas of a young French caricurist." Garretto was ecstatic (though he didn't much care to be "branded as French") and bought all the copies of *The Graphic* on sale at his local newsstand. He also learned that the Great Eight was looking all over Paris for him so that it could award him a contract for regular contributions. Thus began what Garretto calls "the beginning of my international artistic adventure."

Much happened to him in 1927. In addition to embarking on his road to world fame as a graphic artist, "I also married, went to live in Paris and worked in London," he writes. "But my wife [Ariane] did not like London so I had to commute every week by airplane (in Fokkers from the war that were adapted by Air France to make the trip over the Channel)." Over the years he made hundreds of caricatures for the Great Eight, as well as for advertising clients. "It was pleasant for a while," he writes, but then, "with the years passing by, the faces to caricature were becoming scarce." To find other challenges he began doing some work in Italy for *Gazzetta del Popolo* in Turin (a newspaper for which he also designed a new format), *Rivista del Popolo d'Italia* (Mussolini's flagship magazine), and *Natura*, a beautiful Milanese magazine for which he designed covers that were reproduced in leading advertising arts magazines in Europe and the U.S.

The late 1920s were not only a time of political upheaval, but a period when artists believed in the power to affect people's thinking through graphic art. "As all others, I was pushed by Cubism [and] Futurism (what our professors had called 'stupid inventions to get attention and fame any way possible'). I tried very hard to be different," writes Garretto about the genesis of his personal style. "We were all conscious that we were pushing and trying to change something or everything."

Garretto's graphic approach was based on simplification of primary forms

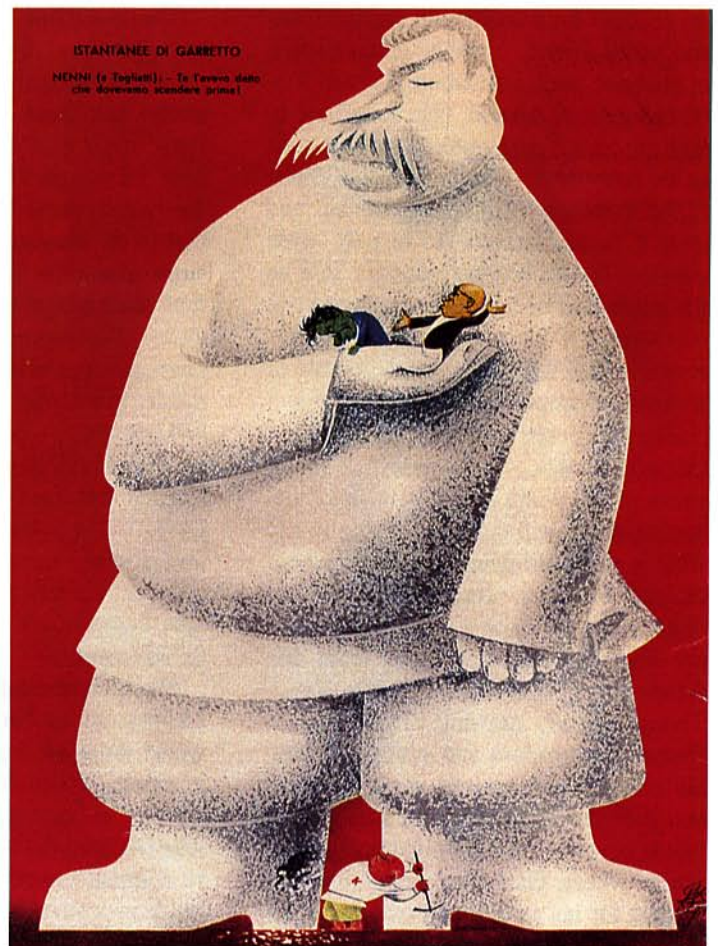


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15. As one of a graphic triumvirate that included Miguel Covarrubias and William Cotton, Garretto worked regularly and happily for *Vanity Fair*. This Gandhi cover appeared in 1931.
16. *Vanity Fair*. FDR manipulates labor and management, 1935.
17. *Vanity Fair*. Japan's influence on world politics, 1935.
18. *Vanity Fair*. Welter of Federal agencies festoon Uncle Sam, 1934.
19. *Vanity Fair*, 1934.
20. *Vanity Fair*. Charles Lindbergh and his wife, Anne, 1935.
21. For *Fortune* magazine, Garretto usually did more design-oriented covers that romanticized America's industrial and commercial might. This cover is from 1932.
22. *Fortune*, 1933.
23. *Fortune*, 1932.
24. *Vanity Fair*. FDR and the economy, 1935.



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26.



"SOUTH PACIFIC"

A MANIA, A PHENOMENON

By Allene Talmei

Illustrated by Garretto

On Eighth Avenue, a small store sells like *South Pacific* ticket stubs and programs to those unfortunate souls who feel that their social life requires proof that they have seen this musical play; famous around the world. For those misfortunates are not among the two-and-a-half million who have seen either the New York company or the national company. They have not contributed a nickel to the seven-and-a-half million dollars at the box office or to the almost two million profits since *South Pacific* opened with abnormal boxoffice on April 7, 1949.

Some students of Americana call the hysteria over the tickets a form of mass psychosis, comparable to the dance mania of the sixteenth century. (Two and a half months ago the national company came into Chicago with a half a million advance sale, and in Cleveland, after only one Sunday advertisement more than \$623,000 in mail orders was returned; the theatre's capacity for the run was only \$142,000.) Other students have said that *South Pacific* is merely an expert reduction of the old plot line of romance, frustration, and union, which is a little like saying that *Mary Martin* is a rag, a hunk, and a hunk of short hair. Actually, anybody, anybody of genius could have done it; it took the quiet genius of Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein, 2nd, Joshua Logan, Jo Mielziner, and James A. Michener to do it. Although many have tried to nail the cause of its

fabulous record, the answer may be partly that it is like Carl Sandburg's "The three tailors of Tinley Street, signing themselves, 'We the people.'" For the people in *South Pacific*, which, as everyone knows, is set during World War II on a Pacific isle, are we, the people. Their lives are roused in family, children, ex-courts. They wash their hair, and, even in the middle of tragedy, they are tourists collecting souvenirs. They feel deeply the strongest emotions and they laugh and cry, and some weep. Technically, they may be listed as an Army nurse, a shy gladiator, a bunch of Seabees, a Tongkinese mother and her gentle daughter. Unlike the scampy little characters of *Out of This World*, who have no past, no future, and a transparent present, unlike the semi-artificial characters of *Call Me Madam*, the people of *South Pacific* are observed humans.

Their comic moments come from their gay hearts; the jokes are not those intimate references meant for the factory of columnist's eyes, or those faded straw-figures references of Hollywood. In *South Pacific*, Nellie (in a Little Rock, Arkansas, falls in love like people from Biberfeld, Maine, or from Chicago, Illinois. When, in the third song, "Tain' Soldiers," Nellie, so young and immature, looks about to marrying an older man and asks, "Wonder why I feel jittery and jumpy? I am like a schoolgirl, waiting for a dance," and Encke de Beoque. (Continued on page 226)

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VOUVE FEBRUARY 1, 1951

VOUVE FEBRUARY 1, 1951

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27.

into iconic depictions and loose but poignant likenesses. Vibrant, airbrushed color was his trademark, and he also experimented with different media, including collage and modeling clay, which proved fruitful. Without his superb draftsmanship, what is now pigeonholed as Deco styling would surely have been just a superficial conceit; but this pitfall was avoided, so acute was his conceptual work and so deft his decorative work. Writing in a 1946 issue of *Graphis*, his old friend and sponsor from the Café Aragno days, Orio Vergani, describes Garretto's ingenuity this way: "Once the constructive theme of his images is discovered, Garretto proceeds to the invention of the media necessary for executing them. I believe he has painted, or rather, constructed his images with everything: scraps of cloth, threads of rayon, with the bristles of his shaving brush, with straw, strips of metal and mill board, with iron filings and sulphur, tufts of fur and wings of butterflies. His colors are born of a strange alchemy of opposed materials in the light of an artificial sun; he seeks for the squaring of shade as others have sought for the squaring of the circle."

Though Garretto lived and worked out of his flat in Paris, the City of Light was no more than a base from which to seek assignments from publications and agencies in other major world capitals. He often visited Berlin, where he worked for the *Berlin Illustrated News*, *Leipzig Illustrated*, *Der Querchnitt*, *Der Sport im Bilder*, and other publications (until Hitler assumed power and expelled many of the Jews on the creative staffs of these journals). In London he did advertising work through the London Press Exchange, the most important advertising brokerage in the British Empire, largely because Charles Hobson, its director, asked him to do some "modern and surprising posters." Owing to his own globetrotting and the consequent lack of time for what he refers to as "mondanities," or social amenities, Garretto had not nurtured many friendships in Paris. He did, however, know such French masters of poster art as A.M. Cassandre, Jean Carlu, Charles Loupot, and Paul Colin, and was briefly connected to their advertising "agency," Alliance Graphique, as a result of his friendship with a Montmartre printer named Dupont. For this agency he did a sketch of a poster for Air France's new airline, La

Flèche d'Orient, which was immediately bought by the client, apparently ruffling the feathers of the other Alliance members, whose own attempts to sell their ideas had failed. To avoid such silly rivalries and business minutiae, Garretto handled most of his other advertising accounts himself, working directly with the client.

Around this time he met Alexey Brodovitch at his office at Les Trois Quartiers, the chic Parisian department store where he was art director. It was an acquaintanceship that would have interesting consequences later in Garretto's career. "I had seen some of Brodovitch's work," recalls Garretto, "and was very enthusiastic about his new way to advertise men's clothes, shoes, and women's beauty products. For me, an admirer of the [raucous] Futurists, it was very exciting to meet this very calm, controlled Russian."

Garretto's caricatures began being published in the U.S. in the late 1920s, first by the *Philadelphia Ledger* and the *New York Sunday World*, and then *Fortune* magazine, which also had him do covers. Later, he did portraits for *New Yorker* profiles, but his chief American exposure was in *Vanity Fair*, an affiliation initiated in October 1930, when Clare Boothe Brokaw (later Luce), one of that magazine's chief editors, requested his services in a "flattering but unexpected" letter sent to his Paris home:

Dear Monsieur Garretto,

The Editors were very much impressed with your cartoon of Gandhi in the August issue of Fortune. We had also in our files some excellent caricatures made by you for the December, 1927 issue of the Graphic. It occurred to us that you may possibly have some other caricatures of prominent people, or cartoons of a political, artistic, or social nature, which you may be able to send us. We should be very glad to consider them for publication in Vanity Fair.

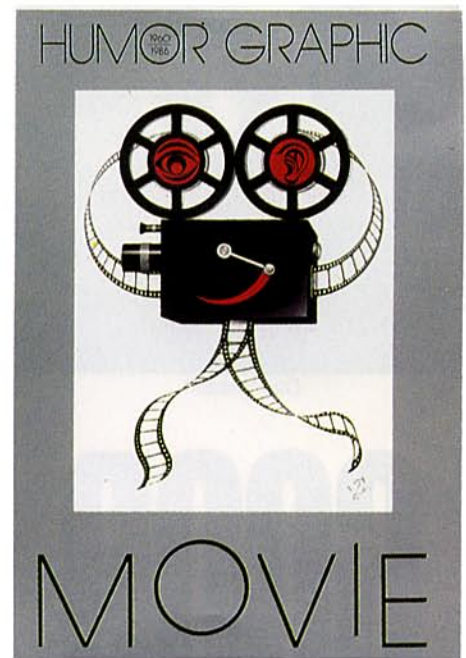
Garretto, however, did not respond until late December after Brokaw persisted in a second note:

We are indeed anxious to see your work, and if there is something we can use, are anxious to do so in a forthcoming issue.

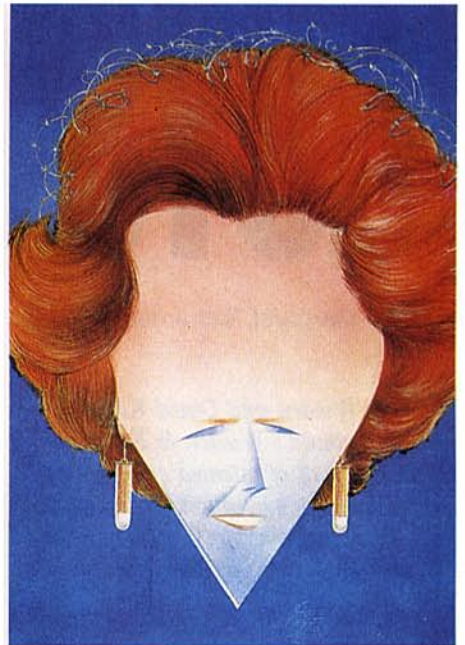
Garretto no longer hesitated, and im-

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Steven Heller's recent book is *Designing with Illustration* (Van Nostrand Reinhold); his forthcoming book is *Low Budget/High Quality: The Art of Inexpensive Visual Communications* (Watson-Guption).



28.



29.

25. After the war, Garretto was not used as much in the U.S.; his main clients were in France and Italy. This cover for *Arbiter*, a men's fashion magazine, was done in 1951.
26. For a number of years, Garretto contributed a weekly graphic commentary to the Italian newspaper *Segue*. The subject of this one, done in 1953, was Joseph Stalin, another sinister character in Garretto's life.
27. Garretto's last significant work shown in the U.S. was for a story on the musical *South Pacific*, published in *Vogue*, 1951.
28. In 1986, Garretto was still very active, though in his eighties, as evidenced by this catalog cover for an exhibition of humorous film.
29. Though his later caricatures were not as forceful as his earlier ones, Garretto continued to the end to render the famous and infamous, such as Margaret Thatcher, 1982.

Paolo Garretto

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mediately sailed to New York to meet his new clients. "Aside from the satisfaction that I always had through my work, I must say that the Vanity Fair period was really the most exciting of my life," he recalls with distinct melancholy about the passing of that special time. "I never had the slightest problem with them— [Frank] Crowninshield was a kind and most comprehensive editor, and what can I say of those beautiful and bright, intelligent Clare Boothe Brokaw and Helen Lawrenson [another Vanity Fair editor]? It was really a joy for me to go to New York every time. Not to speak of my friendship with M.F. Agha [Vanity Fair's art director] whom I had met first in Berlin when he was art director of German Vogue." He spent time with Condé Nast in Paris and New York, stayed at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, and cultivated friendships with many of New York's rich and famous. It was a charmed life.

A boon to Garretto's bank account at this time was a commission from the New York office of the Italian Lines to execute some travel posters. In addition to his fee, they provided him with half-price tickets on their transatlantic steamers. Since Garretto commuted to the U.S. almost as frequently as he went to London, the savings were well appreciated. When he elected to stay at home, his working relationships were not at all hindered by what today would be considered slow means of travel and communication. Indeed, he states that it took less time in the 1930s to mail a drawing from Paris to New York (usually five or six days) than to send a package to Milan (ten to 15 days). Moreover, his rapport with his editors was exemplary. "In general I would be told that [Vanity Fair]

wanted a cover for a certain month and I would conceive it, send it, and then see it published," he explains. "Only once did I have to *rush* another cover drawing because the one I had sent could not be used." In this case, the new version became a classic example of Garretto's caricature as design in the service of polemics. It was rather prescient, too, for this 1935 cover showed the world sweating under the heat of the Japanese flag (in a reference to an important world naval convention that Japan had refused to sign). "Condé Nast wrote me a complimentary letter asking how 'I came to nurture this idea.' I told him that I knew the Japanese had no interest in signing a treaty that would limit their control. To me it was quite clear that Japan was growing fast and was very hungry for [power]." Most of Garretto's concepts were his own, and were often based on his sometimes profoundly acute, yet at other times devastatingly naive, understanding of world politics.

In addition to being a commercial artist, Garretto considered himself a journalist. As a result of his longstanding affiliation with newspapers, he was allowed to travel freely when war broke out in Europe in 1939; his membership in the Italian Press Association made it possible for him to get visas from almost any country. However, when Italy itself entered the war in 1940, with its attack on France, he was in Turin art-directing—"changing the face" of—the *Gazzetta del Popolo* and, because he was an Italian citizen, could not get a visa to return to Paris to be with his wife and son, who were stranded when the French frontier was closed to foreigners. Instead, he left for New York from Naples on the steamship *Conte di Savoia*, which was filled to capacity with Americans returning home. (On board, he shared a table with John Paul Getty, "who wanted to be left alone and was upset when he learned I was a newspaperman, but was mollified when I drew a caricature of him. He later told me to call him if I needed anything in the United States.")

Back in New York, Garretto worked for his friend M.F. Agha, who, after *Vanity Fair* folded, had become art director of all Condé Nast publications, including *Vogue*. Garretto also did covers for other clients. One such commission was earned a year before, through Brodovitch and editor Carmel Snow, who had

offered him a contract to design the 12 1940 covers for *Vogue's* competitor, *Harper's Bazaar*. But as America's relations with Germany and Italy deteriorated, Garretto's past associations would prove an insurmountable obstacle in his attempt to do more work and be allowed to stay in New York. The first problem arose with the *Harper's Bazaar* commission. Before leaving for Turin in 1939, he had completed finishes on two of the covers. When he returned the following year, he was anxious to complete the rest. But neither Snow (who was in California working with her publisher, William Randolph Hearst) nor Brodovitch (who was on vacation) could be found to discuss the jobs. "So I started to work on ideas for covers for February and March," he recalls. "Some time after this I reached Brodovitch, who told me in the nicest and kindest way he could that my contract was broken." Garretto learned from others that the reason for the terminated contract was a biography of Garretto, titled "Fascist Artist," that had appeared in *Vanity Fair* in 1934 and was now making the rounds of *Harper's Bazaar*. Given the tenor of the times, the editors refused to give this "Fascist Artist" any work. "Happily for me," writes Garretto, "I always had Condé Nast and *Fortune* to accept me, so I carried on, nevertheless with a bit of bitterness, as you can understand. I later heard from Agha that Brodovitch had told him that he suffered but had to 'obey orders.' In my opinion he obeyed orders too strictly."

Garretto (who was by now divorced) managed to get enough jobs to keep body and spirit alive, including the re-rendering of Cassandre's original *Dubonnet Man*. Garretto received this assignment from Paul Rand, then the art director of the Weintraub Agency, which handled the account. Rand recently told me, "Garretto was a masterly artist, and accepted this job without any reservation or resentment, even though I was not asking him for his own ideas."

Owing to the threat of war, President Roosevelt had stated that no German or Italian citizen could get a quota visa from the U.S. and Garretto's visitor's visa allowed him only a few months stay. Covarrubias had assured him that he could help obtain a permanent visa in Mexico, so as to avoid deportation to the Virgin Islands. Unfortunately, this never materialized. However, one of the many dignitaries Garretto had met during his

travels was Secretary of State Cordell Hull, whose good offices he now sought. He was told by an aide of Hull's that if he returned to Italy he could come back to New York to apply for permanent residency. "But there was no time for this," Garretto recalls. "Italy [had] entered the European war. (And in the meantime I married my second wife in New York.) I was arrested as were all other Italian newspapermen, and taken first to the Tombs [a New York holding prison] and then to the Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs to join the Italian, German, and Japanese diplomatic internees. After six months we were embarked on the *Grottingholm*, a Swedish boat as old as Noah's ark, to Lisbon where *wagon-lit* trains were waiting to take us to our respective countries."

Just as his association with Fascism had been tolerated in America before the war, so his farcical caricatures of Mussolini and Hitler (published in the U.S.) were tolerated in Italy—until hostilities began. Garretto had heard that Mussolini was not pleased with a certain antiwar article he had written a few years earlier. So when he returned to Rome, Garretto found himself out of favor. And when he refused to do government propaganda (because, he claims, of a signed guarantee he had made to the FBI before being deported not to engage in propaganda hostile to the U.S.), he was forced to think up some idea that would prove his patriotism and prevent his being put in prison for insubordination or treason. His brilliant solution, quite funny in hindsight, was to suggest that he teach Italian to those people conquered by the victorious Fascist forces. "I had patented an idea to teach our vocabulary through the movies," writes Garretto. "One would see a cartoon, a short (with live actors), and through the sound, the image, and written captions [one] could learn the language." Garretto was sent with his new wife, Eva, to Budapest to put his invention into practice. His stay there was pleasant enough until Mussolini was deposed, exiled, and later re-established as a puppet by Hitler. This meant that, if any Italian living in a German-occupied country did not become a "new Fascist" in support of the reinstated Duce, he or she would be interned as an enemy alien by the Germans. Internment was indeed Garretto's fate for nine months until he and his wife were evacuated by the Germans in the face of the

Russian advance. They were eventually deported to Trento, Italy, where they managed to escape from a transport train during an Allied air raid and flee to Milan. There, Garretto and his wife were helped by friends, even though they were “suspect citizens,” according to a document they were forced to carry.

With war’s end, Garretto returned to Paris as an “ex-enemy.” Though it took time to re-establish himself, he did covers for the fashion magazine *Adam* and a few other small journals. He also published a children’s book in Italy written while he had been interned in Hungary, and worked for several magazines. In 1946, with the help of some American friends, he was able to get a visa to return to the U.S. Though he was commissioned to design a perfume bottle for Lucien Lelong, he found that his work was not as sought after in the U.S. as it had been before the war, particularly by magazines. “It is not me who stopped working for the American magazines,” he writes, “but the American magazines [had] changed a lot. They published less

and less drawings. In my time, maybe there were less photographers. And the old art editors died or changed and maybe the new ones did not even know my work! My last serious appearance [in 1951] was in *Vogue*, in a special section dedicated to [the musical] *South Pacific*. So you see I did not stop. . . . They did.” Dejected, he returned to France, where he worked for the Italian magazine *Panorama* and other “low-circulation, low-paying magazines.” Eventually, owing to tax problems, he established residence in Monaco.

Until Garretto’s death in August 1989, he actively pursued his life’s work. Though in recent years he appeared only once in an American publication—in a subscription flyer for Condé Nast’s *Traveler*—many exhibitions of his work were mounted throughout Italy, and a critical biography about him was published in Naples. Yet despite today’s retro-illustrators, who have borrowed and made a success of the Garretto approach, his own contemporary work, including portraits done in his 1930s style of the

Beatles, Margaret Thatcher, and Liza Minnelli, is quite out of sync with the times; stale, even. Regardless of Garretto’s formidable drafting skills, his more recent representations of contemporary personalities lack the intuitive strength that underscored his earlier work. Perhaps it might also be argued that the famous and infamous of the 1920s and ’30s were bigger than life, while today’s are merely human scale. Maybe Margaret Thatcher’s could never be as powerfully charged a portrait as Benito Mussolini’s. When Garretto was at his zenith, he both created and smashed monumentality through the precise caricature of character and ideology. Whether his contemporary output holds up or not, the work of his heyday is sure to earn a place with the most innovative caricature and illustrative design of the golden age of graphic style.

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