

Ovunque Siamo: New Italian-American Writing

COVID-19 Issue I



MUTE POETS

by Paola Corso

After Ferlinghetti's "Blind Poet"

(to be performed while wearing a surgical mask)

No sitting on a stoop—
Phyllis steps above,
Gabriella steps below,
me in the middle.

The Ferlinghetti Girls are furloughed.

We've suspended
our *Zuppa Nella Stoop*
open mics where we make
a pot of soup to share
on Phyllis' stoop,
send loving barbs from bards
to neighbors passing by
as we toast with Prosecco,
lick luscious lips
made by the chocolatier.
I bought bunches of escarole
and cans of cannelloni
for Italian greens and beans
but they're on ice
in the big freeze
ever since the cad isn't
with his caddie on the green,
isn't railing away at rallies

and let the doctor step
up to the mic to speak science.
Our bunny baskets were filled
with hand-sewn masks
the color of eggshell blue,
pink peeps, and jellybean cheer.
We're not boardwalking our poems
in our stay-at-home state,
wondering where
our next roll of toilet paper
is coming from,
baking too many cookies
and reading about a dutiful son
standing in a bucket truck
three flights up
outside his elderly mother's
nursing home window
so he can visit with her.

Furloughed

Ferlinghetti Girls who've got
his Coney Island of the mind.
Our voices penetrate
polypropylene plastic,
voices loud enough
to blow your house down
as mother poet
Maria Mazziotti Gillan would say,
voices in three-part harmony
of our Italian American experience
as women who don't wave
wooden spoons to get you to *mangia*,
but stitch and stitch and stitch
like garment workers embroidering
our stories together,
sharing the same seam

as we sing.
Aswesing.

Bio: Paola Corso is a literary activist, photographer, and author of six books of poetry and fiction, all set in her native Pittsburgh where her Italian immigrant family worked in the steel mills. Corso's latest books are *The Laundress Catches Her Breath*, winner of the Tillie Olsen Award in Creative Writing, *Once I Was Told the Air Was Not for Breathing*, a Triangle Fire Memorial Association Awardee, and forthcoming *Vertical Bridges: Poems and Photographs of City Steps*. She is co-founder and resident artist of Steppin Stanzas, a grant-awarded poetry & art project celebrating city steps. Visit paolacorso.com