



# Lo Studio dei Nipoti

## FOUR ARTISTS



# Lo Studio dei Nipoti

FOUR ARTISTS

Catalog for an exhibition at the  
John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

September 12, 2013–January 10, 2014



## LO STUDIO DEI NIPOTI: FOUR ARTISTS

That the work of these four artists should appear together is fortuitous, yet it bears a touch of happenstance. All took part in the first year of an unusual residency, Lo Studio dei Nipoti (the studio of the grandchildren), and so they found themselves together in a medieval Italian *borgo*, far from home. Founded by the Seattle artist Rose Michelle Taverniti in 2009, Lo Studio began as an online community for artists of Italian, chiefly Southern Italian, descent. Taverniti believed that Italian-American artists—particularly those a generation or two from immigration—deal with fairly specific, culturally unique concerns and issues. Her ambition, however, was to establish a residency program in her ancestral town of Monasterace, on the southern coast of Reggio Calabria province, and three years later, in the spring of 2012, she accomplished this.

The Lo Studio residency is an immersion experience. Living and studio quarters are scattered throughout the little hilltop town, in buildings, some very old, rented from people there, a situation in which interaction and witness become unavoidable. Monasterace's economy has been agricultural for a millennium or more, and the town has no hotels, few eateries, and fewer English speakers. For artists who wish to confront the world left by their forebears, it offers a memorable view of a place and a way of life so tradition-bound that many young people there continue to leave in search of greater opportunities elsewhere.

Without surprise, memory—cultural as well as personal—is virtually thematic in the work here. Put another way, memory is a kind of shadow presence, or an old, barely visible wound. This may be most apparent in Taverniti's frottage drawings, the life-sized rubbings of graphite on drafting film, taken from the time-textured doors and stone walls of the town and then reworked in the studio. This is a forthright imagery of encounter, as the artist strives to bridge decades as well as continents, to return home in the deep beds of consciousness and in fact, in order to establish a continuity at once actual and symbolic.

Cianne Fragione's works on paper enact a parallel journey, one in which an intensely personal studio process takes up a variety of materials to mine memories and emotions of such depth that they might otherwise resist articulation. Process and materials extricate, demonstrate, evoke, creating an emanative visual poetry. Fragione is always sensitive to her environment, and the drawings from Monasterace invoke the space and briny light of the Mediterranean landscape, as well as the compressed structure of the ancient town, its narrow laneways and tiny piazzas, the voices of black-clad women in robust exchange. The addition of old lace as a collage element, which occurs in three works, may refer to her Sicilian immigrant grandmother, a seamstress, though it simultaneously acts as color, shape, and line, while the vivid atmosphere of her material labor is touched by both affection and an interrogative instinct.

Nancy Agati's sculptural installations take up kindred themes. In *Sewn Line* (2010), the use of white stitching as drawn line on delicate white paper suggests a binding seam as well as a kind of spectral genetic memory, while the inclusion of an antique sewing machine and table insists that the work as a whole take its place in the world that we ourselves inhabit, a world in which the past exerts itself mysteriously on the present. Memory is not fanciful. An actual substance, rather, bound to the lives of subsequent generations, however obscure or enigmatic that connection appears to the eye. Thus, too, *Botanica* (2007) emerges from Agati's day-to-day observation of the alterations of seasonal time on the

small details of the places around her, the unassuming natural objects that she gathers conscientiously and reassembles in accordance with an interpretive order of her own. Handling and saving confer a tenuous reassurance, a kind of safety, and so, like Taverniti and Fragione, she never relinquishes the physical actuality of things. The sheaves of *eastwest* (2010) become, in this sense, the artist's own book of the world, its text inscribed in her chosen language.

In this group, Marisa Tesauro is most willing to court extremities of ambiguity, inference, and humor, a strategy carried forward with the adept wit that informs *Materia Prima*, a small bronze replica of a cinder block, and *That Which Was Left* (both 2011–2013), nineteen tiny bronze moving boxes. Disparities and contradictions of scale vie with formal replications that ostensibly refer, in the former work, to building, and in the latter to relocation, transition, cartage, time. Tesauro, like Agati and Fragione, embeds her work, as well, with latent allusions to some of the characteristic modes of Italian immigrant labor in the United States. Since the 1960s, artists have used scale to force viewers to reimagine the possibilities of meaning in otherwise prosaic objects, and among Tesauro's bronzes, formal reference and the burnished gleam of fine metal, in combination with placement and setting, will also invoke issues related to the subjective, perhaps archeological traces of memory in a contemporary urban environment of extreme temporality. And like the other three artists, her attention to craft provokes a compelling mood of interiority and patient care.

More than a year has passed since the end of Lo Studio's initial residency season, and bits of news drift back from Monasterace. The deaths of several elderly citizens, always congenial as they sat by their front doors in the shade of morning. Another cycle of processions, the bearing of saintly effigies through the town, clusters of photographs arriving by email, the same faces, gestures, houses in the near background. The mayor's abrupt departure from office, her efforts to revitalize the town stymied at last by pressure from the 'Ndrangheta, an event that appeared as an item in a number of American papers. We look at the work here. Who would care to define what, exactly, is Italian American about it? Or what is Italian, and what American? Or how such things attain dimensionality in the work itself? Though we may never be able to answer such questions with perfect clarity, still we know that some of the answers are here, felt, recognizable, unmistakably so, in the midst of objects in lively conversation with one another.

— BRUCE NIXON

Bruce Nixon has been writing about art since the mid-1980s. He is the author of *Things That Dream: Contemporary Calligraphic Artists Books*, published by Stanford University Libraries in 2012, and has also written about Manuel Neri, Charles Ginnever, Wally Hedrick, Hassel Smith, Frank Lobdell, and Younhee Paik, among others. He was editor-in-chief of *Artweek*, a monthly journal of West Coast contemporary art, from 1990 to 1996.

## PLATES







FIGURE 1

Nancy Agati  
*eastwest*

mica mounted to black paper, stitched, on pedestal, 2010  
30 x 44 inches (76.2 x 111.8 cm)



FIGURE 2

Nancy Agati  
*botanic*

plant specimens on slate, wax, lab table, lamp, magnifier, stool, 2007  
60 x 24 x 30 inches (152.4 x 60 x 76.2 cm)



FIGURE 3

Nancy Agati  
*Sewn line*

tearaway paper with sewn drawings, sewing machine and table, 2010  
28 x 40 x 18 inches (71.1 x 101.6 x 45.7 cm)



FIGURE 4

Cianne Fragione

*no flower dies at the end of its quite like the sunflower (bow)*

lithographic crayon, Conté crayon, graphite pastel, collage, and oil on paper, 2011

45 x 37 inches (114.3 x 94 cm)



FIGURE 5

Cianne Fragione

*for no flower dies at the end of its quite like the sunflower does (black lace)*  
lithographic crayon, Conté crayon, graphite pastel, collage, and oil on paper, 2011  
51 x 37 inches (129.5 x 94 cm)



FIGURE 6

Cianne Fragione  
*Mezzogiorno (studio window)*  
oil, collage, and mixed media on paper, 2012  
32 x 24 inches (81.3 x 61 cm)



FIGURE 7

Cianne Fragione

*for no flower dies at the end of its quite like the sunflower does (lace on bottom)*  
lithographic crayon, Conté crayon, graphite pastel, collage, and oil on paper, 2011  
41 x 29.5 inches (104.1 x 74.9 cm)



FIGURE 8

Cianne Fragione

*Monasterace, now cat's done mewing, bedroom's touched by white moon*  
lithographic crayon, Conté crayon, graphite pastel, collage, and oil on paper, 2012  
45 x 37 inches (114.3 x 94 cm)





FIGURE 9

Rose Michelle Taverniti  
*Allargarsi il cuore* [For one's heart to lighten]  
graphite on drafting film, 2008  
73 x 74.5 inches (185.4 x 189.2 cm), life size, Monasterace



FIGURE 10

Rose Michelle Taverniti  
*Settimo* [Seventh (piece & house)]  
graphite on drafting film, 2008  
78.5 x 46 inches (199.4 x 116.8 cm), life size, Monasterace

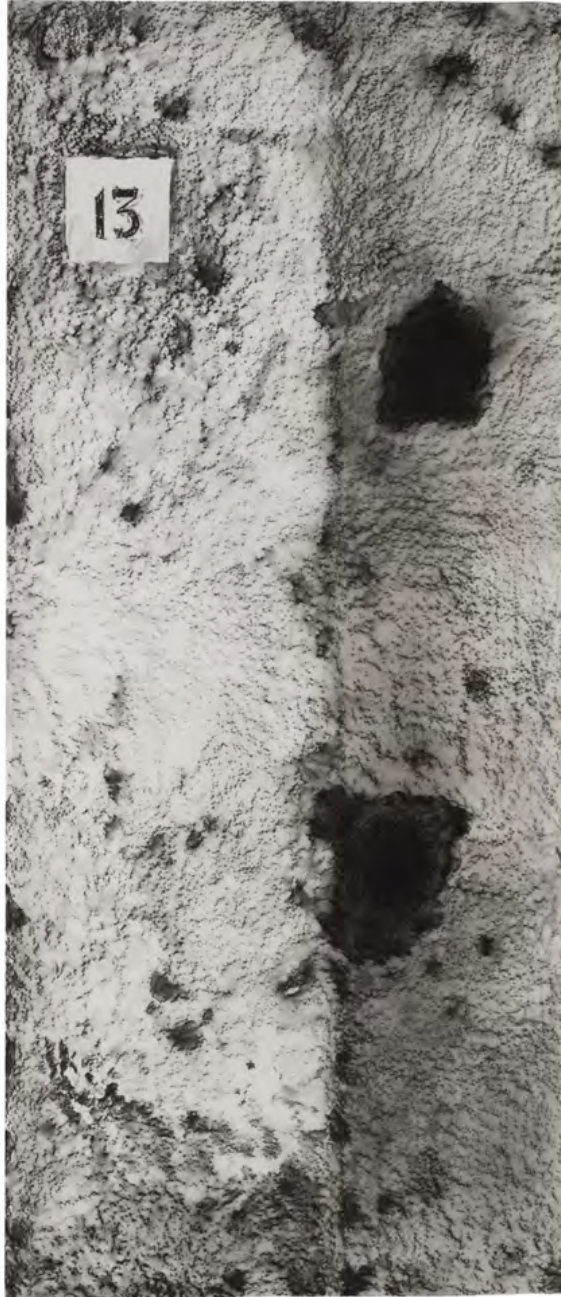


FIGURE 11

Rose Michelle Taverniti

*Casa*

graphite on drafting film, 2008

73 x 31.5 inches (185.4 x 80 cm), life size, Monasterace

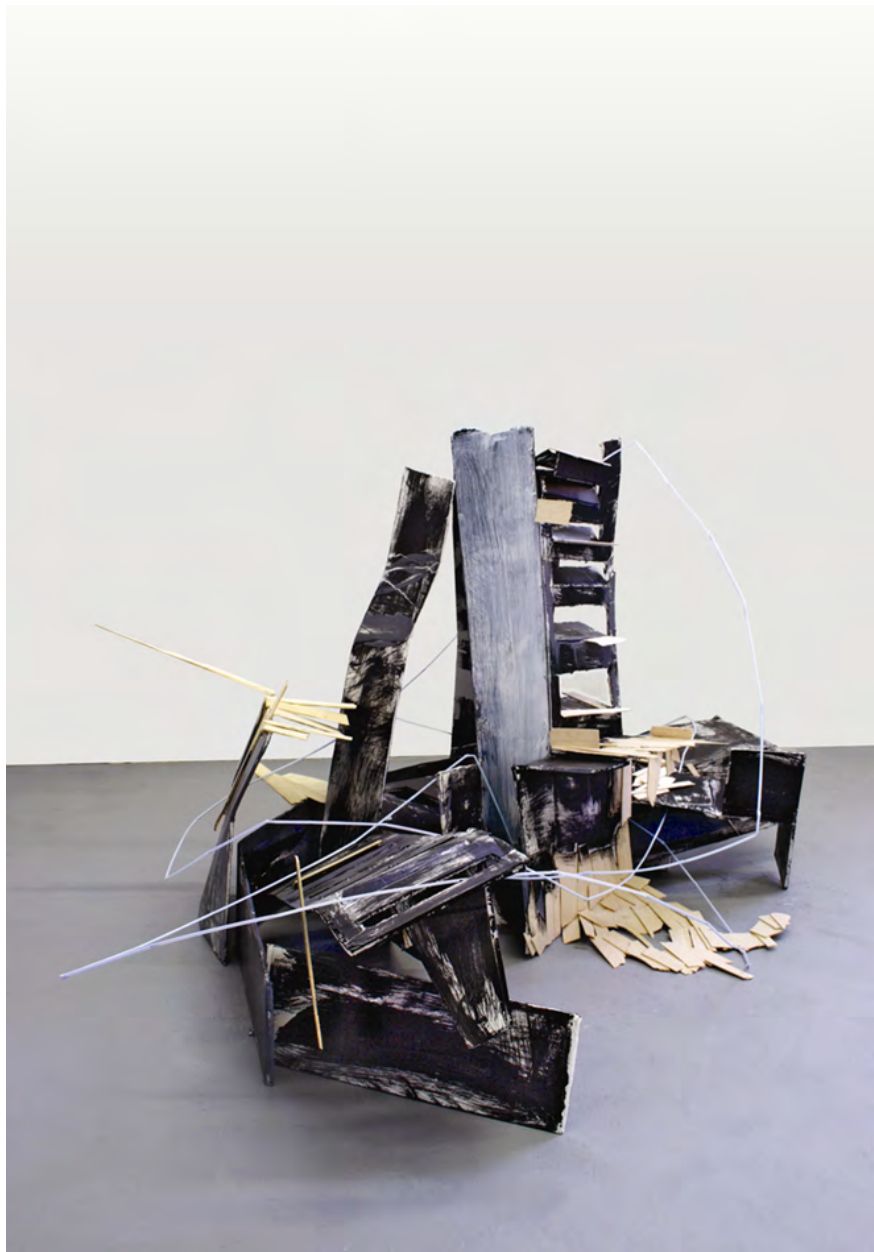


FIGURE 12

Marisa Tesauro

*Structure 87 of the Poetic Message*

foamcore, paint, wood, plastic, and glue, 2011/2012

48 x 48 x 28 inches (122 x 122 x 71.1 cm)



FIGURE 13

Marisa Tesauro  
*Materia Prima*  
bronze, 2011/2013  
3 x 1 x 1 inches (7.6 x 2.5 x 2.5 cm)



FIGURE 14

Marisa Tesauro

*That Which Was Left*

19 bronze pieces, 2010/2013

each piece  $\frac{1}{2}$  x  $\frac{1}{2}$  x  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (1.3 x 1.3 x 1.3 cm)

## NANCY AGATI

### Artist Statement

Objects found, the discarded  
are resurrected  
as forms to be considered, to be reconstructed

things noticed from the periphery  
are extracted directly from nature  
or sidewalks

I have a penchant for elegance, a sense of order,  
to investigate pattern and geometry  
the essence of the natural state

it involves a process of subtraction  
of stripping down to the thinnest layer  
to be rebuilt, altered and situated

poised for reflection  
or simply to notice

then again, continue to transform into further entities

Within my work I examine visual relationships and transformations found in nature. I am interested in elements from nature that communicate the passage of time and illustrate cyclical occurrences in life. I continuously explore the concept of the ephemeral. The process that I choose, or often invent, to create a piece determines the work, which attempts to straddle the line between sculpture and drawing.

NANCY AGATI was born and raised in upstate New York; she has a B.F.A. in painting and printmaking from Alfred University School of Art and Design, and a master's degree from The University of the Arts in Philadelphia. She has exhibited her work in Philadelphia and nationally, with solo exhibitions at Pentimenti Gallery, Philadelphia; Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts, Harrisburg; The Crane Arts Building, Philadelphia; Abington Art Center, Jenkintown; and ARC Gallery and Educational Foundation, Chicago. Agati was a recipient of a Windows of Opportunity Award from the Leeway Foundation in 2000, and she was granted an Artist in Residence at the Santa Fe Art Institute, Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2004. She maintains an active studio practice near the wooded acres of Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, which along with the contrasting city streets offer an abundance of source material.

## CIANNE FRAGIONE

### Artist Statement

As an Italian American, I cannot hope to separate or quantify that which is Italian from any other aspect of my life. While some traits or characteristics may be more apparent than others, where does one end and another begin? As a condition of life for the second-generation immigrant, it can be a dilemma. I was raised in an Italian immigrant community, a rich, vivid experience and one that I treasure, and I can identify certain aspects of my upbringing that find their way into my work, if residually—an idiomatic sense of color, a love of handcraft, a feeling for materials, a sense of tradition and time, an appreciation of the religious culture and its symbols, and a pleasure in landscape, especially gardens. It is for these reasons that my handling of materials and mark-making so often bear the physical atmosphere of my encounter with a specific place or inhabited environment, as does the addition of worn, fragmentary objects from ordinary life as collage or assemblage elements.

In any case, I cannot separate one influence from another, whether artistic or cultural, Italian or American. As an artist, however, I must always satisfy the conditions of art if the work is to be successful, and with my orientation to process and its dynamic engagement with materials and imagery, I remain continually sensitive to an ongoing need for balance, structure, texture, illumination, mood, and above all, a sense of ambiguity, that the work never be just one thing or another. I turn, therefore, to a wide variety of materials, application techniques, and a concentrated, moment-to-moment participation in the construction of the work itself in order to explore how a deep sense of self or self-identity can be disclosed as imagery. This might be seen as a kind of reverse archeology, an embedding of the issues, questions, and indeed the consciousness of dual cultural identity into the work for the purpose of being viewed—by myself and others.

With the thought of establishing the work within the broader context of the art world, I concur with the Gateway Arts Center curatorial statement that accompanied an exhibition in 2013: "Fragione's art pours over with the physical material of paint and mark-making as an act of exploration. Her complex use of color and her layered covering-up of forms create images that reveal themselves slowly and with great reward. As an inheritor of the San Francisco Bay Area School of abstract expressionism, her paintings . . . are at once of this time and also firmly rooted in the uniquely American abstract expressionist tradition." I strive to carry that tradition into the present in a tangible, authentic way.

All of the work here was done during or resulted from a two-month residence in Monasterace, a small town along the Ionian coast in the province of Reggio Calabria, Italy. For me, this body of work contains all the elements of particular interest to me—visual, material, cultural, social—as it took place on the landscape of my ancestors—and it embodies, too, my desire to present work of a thickness, density, and unity sufficient to convey and project these confluent elements, work that is intricate in its means and complex in its meanings, both inextricable from the Italian-American experience and fully realized as art.

CIANNE FRAGIONE is a painter and assemblage artist. Her work is characterized by an interest in materials and process, and she often moves between genres, testing their boundaries in pieces that combine elements of both—*works on paper*, a combination of painting, assemblage, and collage elements, typifies this approach. Her paintings are built from many layers of paint, handled in a variety of ways, which create dense, textured surfaces that produce the effect of strong inner illumination and atmosphere. In Fragione's thirty-year career, her work has appeared in solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States and abroad. In 2011, she was a fellow at Soaring Gardens, a studio-residency of the Ora Lerman Charitable Trust in rural central Pennsylvania. She received an M.F.A. in Painting/Mixed Media from Fiberworks Center for the Arts/John F. Kennedy University, Berkeley, California, and she maintains a studio in Washington, D.C. Fragione is represented by Burton Marinkovich Fine Art.



## ROSE MICHELLE TAVERNITI

### Artist Statement

#### Concadence / Calabria

Recently I had the unusual privilege of a two-and-a-half month artist residency in my ancestral town of Monasterace, Calabria, in the far south of Italy. The work I set out to do was to make lifesize graphite drawings derived from the sensory and emotional energy present in this eleventh-century hill town environment. In order to receive maximum benefit, I needed to attune myself to the place while keeping ego and habit from creeping into the work. My solution was to begin each drawing by doing a frottage (rubbing) of a selected site of interest to me and then return to the studio with my collected data, applying my skills to bring the piece to maximum clarity and impact. The results are ten large, grommeted-together drawings in graphite on drafting film. The works, which feel like artifacts themselves, allow a degree of intimacy with the place while holding a magnifying glass to some of the emotional content I found. The idea of “concadence”—or the combining of cadences—was a guiding principle for my existence in Calabria as well as for producing the art. After dreaming this word, I imagined the energy trails of people, both past and present, overlapping and creating a new harmonic integration. My motivation for concadence is to address the need for healing a hundred years of dislocation within the family—on both sides of the ocean. Our country is largely made up of immigrants and descendants who are often unconsciously affected by severed families. Concadence is a way of managing our energy to make repairs today, allowing us to both follow our own paths and also be admitted into our ancient families.

ROSE MICHELLE TAVERNITI was born and raised in Seattle, Washington. She earned degrees in painting at the University of Washington, Seattle, and at Pratt Institute, New York. She has produced work and shown it periodically across the United States and, since 2007, in Italy as well. She has taught art at all levels of educational institutions, experience that helped her prepare for the personally and artistically challenging environment in Monasterace.

## MARISA TESAURO

### Artist Statement

I am a multidisciplinary artist whose work explores anthropological traces in architecture and objects and our collective and individual relationships to the built environment, while also contemplating the temporality of modern, everyday life and ironic situations that define our contemporary societies. My work shifts between the past and the future, creating a hybrid that is both an archeological ruin and a new construction. Using repurposed and basic construction materials combined with traditional sculpture materials to further evoke a sense of irony and temporality, my work exists in the fragile place between construction and destruction.

My process is an accumulative one; I gather ideas, research, take photos, do drawings, and make impromptu maquettes alongside the larger sculpture and installation pieces. I am interested in all phases of the process and consider the preliminary photos, drawings, and maquettes to be finished works in their own right. Material choices play an important role in this accumulative process as I use the tactile nature of the materials to evoke certain ideas and sensations either by manipulating the material or by using its inherent qualities. Because of this, I use a large range of materials that range from low-end construction materials and repurposed materials to those used in traditional sculpture such as bronze and porcelain.

Scale disparities have always been of interest to me. I like to work with miniature scale and large scale, combining and contrasting the two extremes and using the existing architecture and spaces to further address scale relationships and how the viewer interacts with the work. The miniature scale pieces serve as representations or recollections of an event in terms of the relationship between human scale and the miniature object: We tend to relate to miniature objects in a way that is about a representation of an event, a period, a time or place, a trinket or souvenir to recall or mark. I like to play with this relationship in the miniature pieces. In going from large scale to miniature scale I can create micro-worlds and relationships within the larger environment or space where the work is installed.

The three pieces that have been selected for this exhibition are *Structure 87 of the Poetic Message*, *That Which Was Left*, and *Materia Prima*. The concept of façade, primarily in architecture, is something that I have been exploring for some time. With the piece *Structure 87 of the Poetic Message*, I explore the façade, treating it as a rigid skin by simplifying the forms and therefore only alluding to structure. Some event has occurred that has left the structures hollow, and the configuration of the elements evokes a sense of decay: The skin-like façades are collapsing and going to pieces. It seems as if the organic line that weaves in and out of the façade pieces is holding the entire sculpture together in a suspended state that could last one second or ten years. *That Which Was Left* is a piece that consists of nineteen miniature bronze replicas of cardboard moving boxes. Some of them appear to have been abandoned and damaged by time; their supposed material contents have long been forgotten. Another hint of objects left behind or left to the elements that tells a story of the passing of time through a miniature replica of an everyday object like a cardboard box, *Materia Prima* is also a miniature bronze replica of the common cinder block that takes on new meaning through material and scale. I often see cinder blocks and their fragments scattered throughout the urban built environment. Are they going to be used to construct some grand structure, or have they been discarded and left as rubble? It is this question that led me to transform the simple object into a miniature monument, and it is this question that drives my creative process to convey this place between construction and destruction, artifact or new construction.

MARISA TESAURO received her B.F.A. from Rhode Island School of Design. Her work has been exhibited in the United States and in Europe, most recently in the Spanish Sculpture Biennial in Valladolid, Spain, and in Bronx Calling: The Second AIM Biennial at the Bronx Museum. Her site-specific installations have been shown at Eyebeam Gallery and with No Longer Empty at the Andrew Freedman Home in New York City, at La Escocesa in Barcelona, Spain, and at the Catoio Add'u Padizzu in Monasterace, Italy. She has been awarded a Full Fellowship at the Vermont Studio Center and received the Yvonne Force Award. *Content* magazine recently published a book by Tesauro titled *Strutture* that combines her sculptural work with her photography and textual drawings. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.





John D. Calandra Italian American Institute  
Queens College/CUNY  
25 West 43rd Street, 17th Floor  
New York, NY 10036  
212-642-2094  
[www.qc.edu/calandra](http://www.qc.edu/calandra)