

Oscar Nominations 2012: Italian Creativity is Still in the Game

Natasha Lardera (January 24, 2012)



Despite the elimination from the Foreign Film Category, Italy is represented at the Academy Awards in two important categories: Art Direction for Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* and Short Film Animation for Enrico Casarosa's *La Luna*. The former welcomes long-time favorites Dante Ferretti and Francesca Lo Schiavo while the latter introduces Pixar's story artist Enrico Casarosa.

Nominations for the 84th annual [Academy Awards](#) [2] were announced this morning with *Hugo* by [Martin Scorsese](#) [3] leading the way with 11. The Italian-American director (one of the nominations is for Best Director) was reached by the [Hollywood Reporter](#) [4] and his comment was "I am deeply honored to have been nominated by the Academy for my work on *Hugo*. Every picture is a challenge, and this one - where I was working with 3D, HD and Sacha Baron Cohen for the first time - was no exception. It's a wonderful feeling to know that you've been recognized by the people in your industry. I congratulate my fellow nominees. It's an impressive list, and I'm in excellent company."

He was not working first time with the Oscar-winning Italian duo Dante Ferretti (production design)



and Francesca Lo Schiavo (set decoration) who have been nominated in the Art Direction category.

[Wikipedia](#) [5] writes that “In his career, Ferretti has worked with many great directors, both American and Italian, such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Federico Fellini, Terry Gilliam, Franco Zeffirelli, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Anthony Minghella and Tim Burton. He frequently collaborates with his wife, set decorator Francesca Lo Schiavo. Ferretti was a protégé of Federico Fellini, and worked under him for five films. He also had a five collaboration with Pier Paolo Pasolini and later developed a very close professional relationship with Martin Scorsese, designing seven of his last eight movies.” His first Academy Award was for his work on Scorsese's *The Aviator*.

In an interview published in *Variety* Ferretti had to say ““Martin Scorsese is a genius to me ... when you work with him you are working with a master director. He brings out the best in everyone that they can bring to a film.” At the moment of the interview he was in London working on *Hugo*.

Hugo is based on Brian Selznick's 2007 book “*The Invention of Hugo Cabret*” and was shot on a full-scale train station set built from scratch, directly inspired by Selznick's illustrations. “It was really as if my drawings had come to life around me, except everything was bigger and more beautiful than I even could have imagined,” Selznick, who was particularly struck by the production, having done theater set design at [Brown University](#) [6] in Providence, R.I. said in an interview for [The Los Angeles Times](#) [7].

The article explains how the Italian husband-wife team constantly turned to the source material to create the look of the 1930s-era tale about an orphan who lives in a train station. “The book looks like a storyboard, [which] helped me a lot,” Ferretti said (the book contains 284 pages of drawings that tell the story as much as the 200 or so pages of text).

In addition to the novel, Ferretti and Lo Schiavo were inspired, just like the book's author, by the history of pioneering filmmaker Georges Méliès. “The turn-of-the-last-century inventor is incarnated in the book as well as the film adaptation as Papa Georges (Ben Kingsley), the owner of a toy shop in the station modeled after photos of the real toy booth Méliès operated,” *The Los Angeles Times* article continues. “To create a historically accurate look, Lo Schiavo painted several period toys to make them look new but also made hundreds of toys from scratch — teddy bears, dolls, horns, balls, model ships, miniature carousels and more, plus the wind-up automaton central to the story.”

This was not the only nomination for Italians working in Hollywood. The Short Film (Animation) category finds, amongst its nominees, Italian born filmmaker Enrico Casarosa with *La Luna*.

On [www.thefilmexperience.net](#) [8] blogger Michael Cusumano writes in his interview with Enrico Casarosa (interview done months before the nomination) “*La Luna* is a fable about young boy caught in an inter-generational conflict as he joins his Papa and Grandpa for the first time in their nightly work. The slow reveal of the exact nature of that work is one of the film's delights which also include its elegant dialogue-free storytelling, glowing moonlit atmosphere and an especially lovely Michael Giacchino score. *La Luna* is the baby of Enrico Casarosa, who is making his directing debut with this love letter to his Italian roots. He began with Pixar as a story artist on *Cars* and *Ratatouille*, and he is currently working as Head of Story for an upcoming feature.”

By reading the interview we learn that Casarosa originally is from Genoa and he grew up with is grandfather in the house who did not get along with his father... so as a child he found himself stuck between the two. “That feeling of being a little bit stuck in the middle was something I was after. And I would be really fun to try to give a positive message of a kid choosing his own - you know - it's not Papa's way, it's not Grandpa's way, but it's his own way. So he finds his own road. I thought that was worth sharing, it could be the core of it,” Casarosa says to Cusumano in his interview. His inspiration was not just personal experience, he mixed it with something more “fantastic” that comes from Italo Calvino's style. “He has, all through his novels and short stories, making the very fantastic juxtaposed with very simple characters, peasants, so that's the kind of a feel I wanted to capture,” Casarosa continues.



La Luna is presented with Brave (2012) [Pixar](#) [9]'s dark tale of a rebellious princess that will come out next summer.

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