

# SIENA COMES TO LONDON: ART, FLAVOURS AND AROMAS IN A TOUR OF THE SENSES

By Annalisa Coppolaro

The National Café “conquered” by the Sienese for an evening dedicated to art and culture of the heart of Tuscany: could there be anything more intriguing?

While the National Gallery and its exhibition appear in the world media, the Tourism Department of the Siena Council and the Opera della Metropolitana, the Garden Hotels and other Sienese institutions have presented *Renaissance Siena* by offering a long evening of Tuscan flavours to accompany it. Excellent taste experiences before and after the guided tours of the exhibition with a brilliant guide, Dr Elisabetta Marchi.

A different and tasty way of exploring the exhibition *Art for a City*, sponsored by the Monte dei Paschi di Siena bank, which has brought to London in this autumn-winter over a hundred masterpieces from several world collections, some of which restored for the occasion. From Siena have arrived some important works as well, like the wooden statue coming from the Contrada dell’Oca and the beautiful altar piece by Matteo di Giovanni coming from Asciano, one of the jewels of this event.

The great idea behind this exhibition is the occasion to admire works by artists that are not really known in the United Kingdom. In the British galleries in fact there is a lot of medieval art, from Duccio to Simone Martini, while only few people know artists like Domenico Beccafumi o Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Neroccio di Bartolomeo, Signorelli, Pinturicchio and so on. Masters who introduced, often maintaining the gold background tradition (a byzantine tract), all the principles preached by Piero della Francesca in Arezzo. The glorious Sienese school, which had followers everywhere, did not finish with the beginning of Modern era: the painters’ and sculptors’ workshops were for many centuries the avant-garde of Italian art. The visits of great masters like Raffaello and Donatello (both featuring in the exhibition) had a big effect over the artists of the Sienese Republic. Brilliant are the examples of sculptures like the *stiacciato* works by Donatello and Francesco di Giorgio Martini and, still by Francesco, also a fantastic *Male Nude With a Snake*. We shouldn’t forget the fine artisans, the

ceramists, the furniture creators, and all those who worked in those decorative arts still present in Siena (and at the V&A in London) have also been included in *Renaissance Siena* by the curators. So, this event features many examples of decorated manuscripts, ceramic tiles once in noble residences, furniture from Palazzo Petrucci, today empty, so it has an even greater importance to understand the life in Siena during the last years of its glorious Republic.

The idea of accompanying the visits to the exhibition with a cultural and gastronomic evening and a selection of Sienese events, together with the launch of a bilingual video created by Simonetta Losi and Riccardo Domenichini for the Opera della Metropolitana di Siena, was born to underline the continuity of tradition in Sienese arts and culture.

“At the table we love intense flavours and long cooking times. Prosciutto, black crostini, pici – handmade spaghetti – and panforte cake are part of our DNA like Gothic painting. I am not exaggerating: our pork is still of the Cinta Senese breed, featured in the frescoes of the Good Government painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1337-39)”. This comment by Donatella Cinelli Colombini, responsible of the Tourism section of Siena Council, also tells a lot about the philosophy of a town which maintained tradition while looking ahead to new technologies. Let’s not forget that Siena was the first Italian town to have complete cabling, back in the Nineties... So, no more aerials and antennae on the roofs: another way to go back to its magical classic medieval looks.

*For further information:*

*Siena: [www.comune.siena.it/turismo](http://www.comune.siena.it/turismo)*

*Opera della Metropolitana di Siena: [www.operaduomo.siena.it](http://www.operaduomo.siena.it)*

*Santa Maria della Scala: [www.santamariadellascala.com](http://www.santamariadellascala.com)*

*Universita' per Stranieri di Siena: [www.unistrasi.it](http://www.unistrasi.it)*

*Terre di Siena: [www.terresiena.it](http://www.terresiena.it)*

*Garden Hotels: [www.gardenhotels.it](http://www.gardenhotels.it)*