NAPLES
CABINETS OF WONDER
Cucinello Presepe, 1879
Figures, 18th–19th c.
Museo Nazionale di San Martino, Naples

Michele Cucinello, an architect and playwright, was born in 1823 to an educated Neapolitan family. He composed plays and even wrote the lyrics to Giuseppe Verdi’s national anthem *La Patria*, but Cucinello’s career was hardly lucrative. Despite his lack of financial success, Cucinello collected *pastori* thanks to his family’s economic standing, purchasing them from aristocrats after the *Risorgimento*.

In 1879, Cucinello donated his impressive collection to the San Martino Museum, designing and assembling the theatrical scene with the help of a team of architects and artisans. This ensemble of over 781 objects depicts three principle scenes (the Annunciation to the Shepherds, the Nativity, and the Inni). Its operatic display has served as an inspiration for subsequent *presepi*. *(text by Olivia Vanni, ’13)*
Musician, c. 1780
Giovanni Battista Polidoro (active 1781-1802)
Terracotta, glass, wood, wire, fabric, and metal
H: 17 ¾”
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

OPPOSITE
Cuciniello Presepe,
24” × 24”, 17” deep
Museo Nazionale di San Martino, Naples
Fisherman
Lorenzo Vaccaro (1655-1706)
Terracotta, glass, fabric, and net
H: 11 ¼"
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh
Modeled after Neapolitan fishermen, this figure also evokes Jesus’s disciples as “fishers of men.”
La Castagnara (Chesnut-Seller)
Attributed to L. Mosca (active 1721-1785)
Banco Di Napoli Presepe
Palazzo Reale, Naples

In the eighteenth century some workshops specialized in presepe clothing alone, stitching wonderfully detailed clothes that today are ethnographic snapshots—brocade jackets and hose as worn by Neapolitan well-to-do or regional headscarves of peasant women in from islands off the coast.
Princess with Parrot
Giuseppe Sanmartino (1720-1793)
Private collection, Naples

OPPOSITE
Il Bestemmiaatore
(the Blasphemer-center figure)
Giuseppe Sanmartino (1720-1793)
Scarabottolo (vitrine)
Private collection, Naples

Sanmartino is most famous for his Christo Velato (Veiled Christ) in the Chapel of San Severo. The mastiff, an ancient Neapolitan guardian, is attributed to the Vassallo brothers.
The Dying Gaul (formerly known as The Dying Gladiator)
Photo-intaglio
Walker & Boutall
The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry, vol. 2
Edited by E. H. Coleridge
New York: Scribners, 1899

The Dying Gaul, in the Capitoline Museum, is a Roman marble copy of a lost late third-century BCE Greek sculpture. The Roman marble, which surfaced in the early seventeenth century, was widely copied by artists and became a “must see” on the Grand Tour. Sanmartino sculpted a number of mendicant (beggar) presepe figures with a pathos and physical presence also found in The Dying Gaul.
La Nativita, 1988
Nello D’Antonio (b. 1953)
30 figures (including the animals)
Private collection, Torre del Greco

D’Antonio, an architect by training, is one of today’s premier presepe artists. His work, which brings a lush naturalism to the traditional Neapolitan style, is in many private and public collections, including the Vatican’s. In La Nativita, d’Antonio has placed himself kneeling before the Child.
D'Antonio's drawing for the oasis.

Oasi nel Deserto e Mercato Orientale, 2006
Private collection, Torre del Greco
Artisan at work, 2013
Workshop of Giuseppe and Marco Ferrigno
Via San Gregorio Armeno, Naples
The family workshop has been making presepe figures in the traditional Neapolitan style since 1838.

OPPOSITE
Gennaro Carpi in his shop with presepe armatures, 2011
Via San Gregorio Armeno, Naples
The narrow alley in the heart of old Naples is filled with presepe workshops that are open year round. Visitors from all over come to buy something special for their family presepe. Shops brim with camels, lambs, donkeys, cows and nativity figurines styled for presepi in all sizes and priced for all wallets, as well the world's current angels and demons—Silvio Berlusconi (with fangs), Mario Balotelli, Steve Jobs with his new iPad in 2011, Pope Francis in 2013.