

## The 2023 Rex Procession: "Palio di Siena"

Tuesday, February 21, 2023  
New Orleans, Louisiana

(With Selected Content Links)

**Special Sesquicentennial Float:** Inspired by a similar float from 1892's *Symbolism of Colors* parade, this riderless float was designed and built to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rex Organization, incorporated as the School of Design. Hercules and Zeus support the Rex coat of arms composed of the Carnival colors of purple, gold and green. The regal scroll reads "Rex Proclaims Carnival, 1872, *Pro Bono Publico*."

**1. Rex, King of Carnival, Monarch of Merriment** Rex's float carries the King of Carnival and his Pages through the streets of New Orleans each Mardi Gras. In the early years of the New Orleans Carnival, Rex's float was redesigned each year. The current King's float, one of Carnival's most iconic images, has been in use for more than fifty years.

**2. His Majesty's Bandwagon** From this traditional float, one of the Royal Bands provides lively music for Rex and for those who greet him on the parade route. One of those songs will surely be the Rex anthem: "If Ever I Cease to Love," which has been played in every Rex parade since 1872.

**3. The King's Jesters** Even the Monarch of Merriment needs jesters in his court. Rex's jesters dress in the traditional colors of Mardi Gras – purple, gold and green. The papier mâché' figures on the Jester float are some of the oldest in the Rex parade and were sculpted by artists in Viareggio, Italy, a city with its own rich Carnival tradition.

**4. The Boeuf Gras** The *Boeuf Gras* ("the fattened ox") represents one of the oldest traditions and images of Mardi Gras, symbolizing the great feast on the day before Lent begins. In the early years of the New Orleans Carnival, a live *Boeuf Gras*, decorated with garlands, had an honored place near the front of the Rex Parade. The *Boeuf Gras* returned in 1959 as a stately papier mâché sculpture.

**5. The Butterfly King** Since the earliest days of Carnival, butterflies have been popular symbolic design elements, their brief and colorful life a metaphor for the ephemeral magic of Mardi Gras itself. The invitation to the 1882 Rex ball added butterfly wings to the King of Carnival, creating the enduring image of "The Butterfly King." The Butterfly King float, introduced in 2012, was the first new permanent float to join the Rex procession in many decades.

**6. Title Float: "Palio di Siena"** Much as Carnival helps define New Orleans, the centuries-old traditions of the *Palio* help define the ancient Tuscan city of Siena. As they have since the Middle Ages, costumed bareback riders representing each of Siena's *contrade*, or neighborhoods, try to stay on their horses as they race around Siena's town square, the *Piazza del Campo*. The winner claims the *palio*, the victor's banner. Siena's colorful traditions and pageantry inspire the 2023 Rex procession, *Palio di Siena*.

**7. Palio di Siena** The prize won by the winner of this remarkable horse race is a long banner of painted silk, always bearing the image of the Madonna. Intensely competitive *contrade* (neighborhoods), each with distinctive symbols and colors, honor their centuries-old traditions as they strive to win the *palio*. Each Siennese *contrada* is represented by a float in the 2023 Rex parade.

**8. Etruria** The Etruscans ruled central Italy, now the regions of Tuscany and Umbria, for nearly a millennium. Hilltop dwellers, they were the founders of ancient Sena, now Siena. Their rich culture profoundly influenced civilizations that followed, and their artistic legacy lives on, particularly in the distinctive Etruscan sculptural style.

**9. Pius II-Piccolomini Pope** The Piccolomini family, one of Siena's ancient noble dynasties, made their fortune in merchant banking. Two members of the Piccolomini family became Popes—Pius II in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and Pius III in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Pius II is also remembered as a prolific writer and poet.

**10. A Streetcar Named Desire** Streetcars are an important symbol of New Orleans, and this iconic float honors the best known of all New Orleans' streetcar lines. This permanent float depicts "The Streetcar Named Desire," made famous by the playwright Tennessee Williams. Self-powered, it is the only Rex float not pulled by a tractor.

**11. Drago (Dragon)** Originally associated with the bankers' guild, Drago's symbol is a flying dragon carrying a light blue banner. Its motto reflects the dragon symbol: "The heart that burns in my chest becomes flame in the mouth..." Drago's colors are rose and green, trimmed in yellow. The Drago *contrada* won *palios* in 2014, 2018 and 2022.

**12. Oca (Goose)** Oca's symbol is a crowned goose wearing a blue ribbon displaying the Savoy cross around its neck. Its colors are green, white and red. The heroism of soldiers of the Oca *contrada* earned it a place among the four *nobile contrade*. The Oca motto, "*Clangit ad arma,*" means "call to arms."

**13. Bruco (Caterpillar)** Over the centuries, many residents of Bruco's neighborhood worked in the silk trade, which might explain its symbol: a crowned caterpillar crawling on a rose. Bruco's colors are green, yellow and blue, and it has won the *palio* 37 times, most recently in 2008.

**14. Valdimontone (Valley of the Ram)** This neighborhood extends over a Siennese hill, which may have given its name to the *contrada*. Its symbol is a ram on its hind legs, and its motto, "*sotto il mio colpo la muraglia crolla,*" means "under my blow the wall falls."

**15. Onda (Wave)** Onda's symbol is the dolphin, its colors sky blue and white and its motto "*Il colore del Cielo, la forza del mare*" ("the color of the sky, the strength of the sea"). Onda's neighborhood extends outside Siena's city walls, as its soldiers were charged with defending Talamone, the harbor-village used by Siena.

**16. Selva (Forest)** Selva's symbol, a rhinoceros under an oak tree displaying many hunting symbols, refers to this *contrada's* historic reputation for producing the finest hunters and archers. For this reason, the Selva *contrada* was often honored to lead the

procession into the *campo*, inspiring its motto "*prima Selvalta in campo*" ("Selva, first in the *campo*").

**17. Leocorno (Unicorn)** Depicted on a background of green grass, this *contrada's* bold unicorn was taken from the coat-of-arms of the ancient Brunelli family. Leocorno's colors are white, orange and blue, and its motto, "*fiede e risana al par l'arma c'ho in fronte*" means "the weapon I have on my forehead wounds and heals at the same time."

**18. Chiocciola (Snail)** "*With slow and deliberate steps, snail takes the field to triumph...*" is the motto of the Chiocciola *contrada*; its colors are red, yellow and blue. When Chiocciola lost the 1888 *Palio*, they threw their statue of St. Anthony, their patron saint, down a well. They did not win the race again until they retrieved the statue from the well in 1910.

**19. Torre (Tower)** This *contrada's* symbol was once an elephant, and its symbol now incorporates both an elephant and a tower—Siena's *Torre del Mangia* stands in *Torre's* neighborhood. Torre's colors are crimson striped with white and blue; its motto, "*oltre la forza la potenza,*" means "beyond strength is power."

**20. Aquila (Eagle)** Representing a neighborhood near the *Piazza del Campo* and Siena's cathedral, Aquila is one of Siena's *nobile contrade*. Its symbol is a double-headed black eagle holding an orb, scepter and sword, and its colors are yellow, blue and black. Aquila's museum displays the oldest surviving *palio* (winner's banner), won by the Aquila *contrada* in 1719.

**21. Lupa (She-wolf)** Lupa's symbol, a she-wolf nursing twins, refers to the legend that Siena was founded by the sons of Remus, Senius and Aschius, who were raised by a she-wolf. Lupa is associated with the bakers' guild, and its motto references Rome, its sister-city: "The coat of arms of Rome, the honor of Siena").

**22. Istrice (Crested Porcupine)** Associated with the blacksmiths' guild, Istrice was designated a sovereign *contrada* by the Knights of Malta when they made their headquarters in the neighborhood in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Istrice's colors are white, red, blue and black, and its motto is "*Sol per difesa io pungo*" ("I sting only in self-defense").

**23. Pantera (Panther)** This neighborhood was originally settled by merchants from Lucca. The panther is Lucca's symbol and is now the symbol of this proud *contrada*. Its colors are red, blue and white, and its motto "*la pantera ruggì e il popolo si scosse*" means "the panther roared and the people shook."

**24. Nicchio (Seashell)** Nicchio is one of four *nobile contrade*, a distinction earned when its soldiers distinguished themselves in a significant 13<sup>th</sup> Century battle. Its symbol is a crowned seashell flanked by red coral branches; its colors are blue, yellow and red. Nicchio's motto, "*E' il rosso del corallo che m'arde in cor*" means "the red of the coral burns in my heart."

**25. Giraffa (Giraffe)** Giraffa's motto, "*altius caput maior gloria*" ("the higher the head, the bigger the glory"), is a perfect match for its symbol, a giraffe led by a Moor. Traditionally associated with the painters' guild, Giraffa's colors are red and white.

**26. Tartuca (Turtle)** Tartuca's motto, "*forza e costanza albergo*" ("...strength and perseverance") seems well-suited to its turtle symbol. Traditionally, this *contrada* was a neighborhood favored by sculptors. Tartuca's colors are yellow and blue.

**27. Civetta (Little Owl)** Civetta's symbol, a crowned owl sitting on a branch, is a good match for its motto: "*vedo nella notte*" ("I see in the night"). Its neighborhood, traditionally the home of Siena's shoemakers, is adjacent to the *Piazza del Campo*, and its colors are red and black striped with white.

**28. The Royal Barge** Reminiscent of a grand Viking ship, and complete with Royal Gryphon, the Royal Barge is one of Rex's iconic permanent floats. This float is the last remnant of the Royal Navy, once a feature of each Rex Parade.

**His Majesty's Royal Calliope** The Calliope provides a lively and traditional musical counterpoint and conclusion to the brilliant array of bands in the Rex Procession.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contrade\\_of\\_Siena#Aquila\\_\(Eagle\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contrade_of_Siena#Aquila_(Eagle))

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