



3401 Pleasant Valley Road, Vernon, BC V1T 4L4 250-275-1525 [www.caetani.org](http://www.caetani.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 30, 2021

## Renowned Caetani Artwork Returned to Vernon

*North Okanagan community welcomes the return of Recapitulation series painted by renowned Vernon artist Sveva Caetani. The artworks have spent the last 35 years in Edmonton at the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.*

VERNON—The Caetani Cultural Centre Society is excited to announce that Sveva Caetani’s iconic life work, *Recapitulation*, has returned to Vernon permanently.

The series, which includes more than 50 unique watercolour paintings documenting Caetani’s life story and outlook on life, has been under the care of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) in Edmonton for close to 35 years.

The AFA shipped the paintings to the late artist's childhood home in Vernon, which now serves as the Caetani Cultural Centre, on March 19. The intention is that they will now be displayed in the community that Caetani loved.

This summer, the Caetani Centre is offering tours of Sveva’s artwork along with Caetani family artifacts and memorabilia for the first time since the house was donated to the Greater Vernon community in 1994.

“The Caetani Cultural Centre Society is very excited to have this iconic work back in Vernon where it belongs,” said society President Sherry Price. “The timing is perfect as we are finally ready to open the house to the public.”

The past few years have seen a concerted effort by the Caetani society to bring the house up to code to accommodate public access as well as the various Caetani collections – artwork and artifacts in the Caetani Society’s own collection; artifacts which until recently were housed at the Greater Vernon Museum and Archives; and the return of the *Recapitulation* series of artworks from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA).

Both timing and hard work have made these partnerships between the Caetani Centre, the Vernon Museum and the AFA possible, with the hope to involve other organizations and individuals to consolidate the significant Caetani collection further. A significant private donation and years of concentrated fundraising and support from local businesses, artists and community supporters have made the return of the works possible.



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“We have received many donations from other organizations, individuals, and people who were friends of Sveva during her lifetime,” said Caetani Centre Executive Director Susan Brandoli. “The Caetani house was Sveva’s home for many years, where she created her work, entertained and mentored so many local artists, writers and creatives of all ages and abilities over the years. She wanted to leave her house as a legacy to the community, a place for inspiration and where the work of being an artist is celebrated.”

Sveva’s story has already been the inspiration for many books and films, and the Caetani Centre expects to be busy once its doors officially open this summer.

COVID-19 guidelines and protocols will be in effect. Tours are expected to begin by July and will be limited to small groups and/or bubbles following public health guidelines. To book a tour online, visit [Caetani.org](http://Caetani.org) or call the Caetani Centre office at 250-275-1525.

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**IMAGES ATTACHED:**

Sveva Caetani and “Workmanship” watercolour painting

Sveva Caetani, opening of Recapitulation Series

Sveva Caetani. Working on unfinished piece

Caetani Centre unloading Recapitulation collection at Caetani Centre, March 19, left to right: Alan Brandoli, Klaus Jaeger, Board President Sherry Price, Past-President Angelika Jaeger

**About Sveva and the Caetani family:** (pronounced Svey-va Kye-tan-ee)

The Caetani story illuminates many issues that still resonate today: art, history, immigration, colonization, mental health, overcoming adversity, and celebrating the human creative spirit.

Descending from Italian royalty, Sveva Caetani represented the last of an ancient line that traces its roots back over 1,000 years and includes two medieval popes and noted politicians, academics, artists, writers, and musicians.



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2021 marks the 100th anniversary year since the family immigrated from Italy to Canada. The patriarch, Leone Caetani, Duke of Sermoneta, and his 16 other titles, was a parliamentarian and celebrated scholar of Islam. With the rise in fascism following WWI, out of all the places in the world he had travelled, he chose Vernon, having visited the Kootenays once for bear hunting in the 1880s and writing a published account of his travels in the book, *Selkirks*.

Leaving Italy abruptly and under somewhat mysterious circumstances, the small family arrived on the shores of Okanagan Landing by paddlewheel with 33 trunks. There, they would live a life of wealth, privilege, travel and luxury throughout the Roaring Twenties until the economic crash of 1929 decimated their fortunes.

Following the death of Leone in 1935, the story takes an ominous and disturbing turn as the young Sveva was kept a prisoner in her own home for over 25 years by her mother, Ofelia. Both mother and daughter were devastated by Leone's death. Ofelia, fragile both mentally and physically, chose to take her daughter into self-imposed exile, shielding her from her friends and refusing to let Sveva out of the house for many years. During this time, Ofelia also denied her daughter the simple joys of painting and creativity that she had been brought up to enjoy while her father was still alive. Sveva was left with books sent by an aunt, her father's library, and her own thoughts.

It was not until her mother's death in 1960 that Sveva, now in her early 40s, began to paint and draw and write once again, culminating in an explosion of creativity after so many years of suppressing her talents. Her economic circumstances dictated that she find work for the first time in her life, and she was hired to teach at St. James Elementary School in Vernon. She later attended the University of Victoria and obtained her teaching certificate, and returned to the North Okanagan, where she taught at Charles Bloom Secondary School in Lumby for several years.

Around this time, Sveva began work on what would become the penultimate achievement of her creative accomplishments, a significant series of more than 50 large-scale watercolour paintings, documenting her story and journey through life, entitled *Recapitulation*.

In the mid-1980s Sveva approached the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) collection with a generous offer to donate the entire *Recapitulation* series to the AFA collection in Edmonton with the agreement that the AFA would preserve the series adhering to archival standards for storage, presentation and display. The AFA also provided access to the collection through exhibition loans and an online database. The collection was exhibited throughout Alberta and select public galleries in BC while in the custodianship of the AFA. Curators, historians, writers and the general public accessed the collection for a variety of projects from research to exhibitions to publishing.

The *Recapitulation* series of artworks were, in effect, "saved" from being separated and dispersed into obscurity by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which accepted the collection and preserved it in its entirety, as Sveva intended upon her death in 1994.



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Now, after more than 30 years since the first *Recapitulation* painting travelled to Edmonton, the Caetani Society has brought Sveva home at last. The works have been returned permanently to the care and collection of Sveva's namesake legacy, the Caetani Cultural Centre Society.

Sveva Caetani has served as a muse, mentor and inspiration for many different students, artists, and writers. Several books and two films have been published/released about her work and life story, with more in the works. Her iconic interviews with CBC Radio greats Vicki Gabereau and Paul Kennedy (*Ideas*) will be included as part of the Caetani Centre display, along with her original artwork, family artifacts and additional audio-visual material. The most recent spotlight on her work was on CBC's Sunday Edition with Micheal Enright in January 2020.