

## Reflections on the Monteverdi Award Experience from the 2015 Winners

**Morganne Howell**

There is no more suitable a place to have begun my thesis research on the Italian concept of *Bella Figura* and an aesthetic lifestyle than Monteverdi. Beauty is manifest not only in the elaborate gardens and in the view overlooking the mysterious Val D'Orcia, but in the daily life of the place. I retreated into the routine that Monteverdi offered, finding the pertinent questions in the space it provided and taking the time to look slowly for answers. Occasionally venturing out by train to nearby towns and cities to explore and conduct interviews on the *Bella Figura*, I happily returned to this academic base. I would discuss what I learned over boisterous family meals with the staff or in short seminars with the guests, relating my research to current events in Italy, such as the Venice Biennale. Between research time tracing Italian values of *decorum* back to Cicero and conducting interviews on contemporary Italian community life, I had the opportunity to attend wine tastings, cooking classes, and local concerts with a variety of visiting artists and travelers.

I cannot thank the wonderful and gracious Cioffi family enough for their generous scholarship, without which I would not have been able to have had the remarkable and formative experience I did at the beautiful Monteverdi.