

PRESS RELEASE

## AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME AWARDS PRESTIGIOUS MCKIM MEDAL TO ITALIAN ARTIST LUIGI ONTANI



Luigi Ontani, «mar'DEI guttAvi», Tableau Vivant, 2009, 14 paper maché masks. Courtesy Galleria Valentina Moncada

Rome (May 19, 2011) - The American Academy in Rome is delighted to announce that Italian artist Luigi Ontani is the 2011 McKim Medal Laureate. The award celebrates Ontani's artistic achievements and contributions during his influential 45-year career in the art world. Ontani will be honored with the McKim Medal on Thursday 26 May, which will be presented to him at the 7<sup>th</sup> annual McKim Medal Gala at the Villa Aurelia of the American Academy in Rome.

Adele Chatfield-Taylor, President of the American Academy in Rome stated: *"The Trustees of the American Academy in Rome established the McKim Medal to honor exceptional individuals whose work has had a significant impact on the arts and humanities, and exceeded the boundaries of Italy and the United States. We are happy to present this year's McKim Medal to Luigi Ontani, whose work has inspired generations of artists worldwide. On behalf of the Academy, I would like to express our gratitude for the Italian and American patrons and sponsors who make this award, this glorious evening, and the Italian fellowships each year at the American Academy in Rome possible."*

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Robert Storr, who will present the Medal to Ontani, commented: "*Long before 'globalism' became a household term and artists everywhere started routinely moving from country to country and from culture to culture, Luigi Ontani was bridging the gap between Italy and India, antiquity and contemporaneity while freely availing himself of multiple media and inventing for himself a polymorphous persona that up ends essentialist identities of all sorts. In significant measure the "Trans" in the Transavantguardia derives from the example of his travels between East and West and his migrations from sculpture to ceramics to photography. With alternately shy and shameless wit, elegant sleight of hand, and a genuine appreciation of aesthetic mystery Ontani is one of the great Dandys of his age, a high style subversive whose influence has yet to be fully felt.*" A leading figure in the art world as artist, curator, critic, dean of the Yale School of Art, Mr. Storr has been awarded the medal of *Chevalier des arts et des lettres* by the French Ministry of Culture and was named Director of the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, becoming the first American to hold that distinction. He has served as an American Academy in Rome Trustee since 2010.

This year's McKim Gala is chaired by Valentina Moncada di Paternò, together with Founding Chair and Academy Trustee, Verdella Caracciolo de Benedictis and Honorary Chair, Mrs. David Thorne. Proceeds from the event support fellowships to Italian winners with important opportunities to pursue their individual studies and engage in an international dialogue. The funds raised allow Italian artists to join the Academy community each year, and support an exchange program for scholars in the humanities that links the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa to the American Academy in Rome.

**Luigi Ontani** (b. 1943) is considered one of the most influential and innovative Italian artists working today. He is best known for his *tableaux vivants*, works in which he is often the subject, where he combines Western and Eastern iconographical traditions while referencing historical, allegorical and mythological themes. Ontani's *tableaux vivants* have significantly influenced performance artists working in Europe and the United States today.

Ontani has been working across multiple media since 1965, beginning with the production of mixed media works, "oggetti pleonastici," and continuing his experimentation in photography, creating life-size prints, performance, video and film (G.A.M. Turin and New Tate London). An avid traveller to India since the early 1970s, his *oeuvre* reflects the influence of Eastern palettes and tradition, and is imbued with Ontani's own other-worldly, aristocratic dandyism. By 1977 Ontani began producing watercolors and hand-painted sepia prints, employing local photographers from India, with whom he continues to collaborate. He also began creating wooden and Murano glass sculptures, and large paper-maché sculptures, producing masks that range from his early 70s *commedia dell'arte* series to his most recent projects that incorporate masks from around the world. Ontani works internationally with local artists and artisans from craftsmen in Bali, Indonesia to the ceramic studios of the Bottega Gatti in Faenza.

Ontani has exhibited in many of the most important museums and galleries around the world, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Museo Reina Sofia, Villa Stuck Monaco, and the Frankfurter Kunstverein. He has participated in several editions of the Venice, Sydney, Lyon and Manifesta biennials. He has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including: L'Attico di Sargentini Rome, Lucio Amelio Naples, De Appel Amsterdam, Sonnabend Gallery Paris and New York, Luciano Pistoia Volpaia in Chianti, Lorcan O'Neill Rome, Valentina Moncada Rome. His major retrospectives include: MoMA PS1 (2001), S.M.A.K. in Ghent (2003-2004), MAMbo in Bologna (2008) and the Capodimonte Museum in Naples (2009). Ontani recently staged performances at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 2010, and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in 2011.

### **The McKim Medal**

The McKim Medal was established by the Trustees of the American Academy in Rome in 2005 as an annual prize that honors an individual whose work internationally – most particularly in Italy and the United States- has contributed significantly to the arts and humanities. Named for Charles Follen McKim (1847-1909), noted architect who established the Academy in 1894, the Medal recognizes an individual whose work and life exemplify creative and intellectual exchange across the arts, scholarship, language, and culture. Previous McKim Medal laureates include Umberto Eco, Ennio Morricone, Renzo Piano, Miuccia Prada, Cy Twombly, and Franco Zeffirelli.

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The McKim medal was designed by Cy Twombly. This year's medal has been crafted by goldsmith Marcello Rocchi, and is a gift of Valentina Moncada di Paternò.

### **The American Academy in Rome**

Established in 1894 and chartered by an Act of Congress in 1905, the American Academy in Rome is a leading center for independent study and advanced research in the arts and humanities. Situated on the Janiculum, the highest hill within the walls of Rome, the Academy today remains a private institution supported by gifts from individuals, foundations, corporations, and the memberships of colleges, universities, and arts and cultural organizations as well as by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Each year, through a national competition, the Rome Prize is awarded to approximately thirty individuals working in ancient, medieval, Renaissance and early modern; modern Italian studies; architecture, landscape architecture, design, historic preservation and conservation; literature; musical composition; and visual arts. The annual application deadline is 1 November. The Academy community also includes a select group of Residents, distinguished artists and scholars invited by the Director, as well as Affiliated Fellows, and Visiting Artists and Scholars.

For more information please visit: [www.aarome.org](http://www.aarome.org)

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