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Cutting-Edge Italian Textile Design Embarks for Miami Beach this November

Made in Italy: MITA Textile Design 1926–1976 (*opening November 16, 2018*)
*a traveling exhibition from The Wolfsonian's sister museum in Genoa,
showcases 50 years of bold commissions produced for
world fairs, private homes, clubs, and ocean liners, including the Andrea Doria*

*Trendy, innovative designs by leading artists encompass the avant-garde movements
of the day, from Futurism to Abstract Expressionism*

MIAMI BEACH (October 24, 2018) — Coming to The Wolfsonian—Florida International University next month is a special exhibition co-organized with The Wolfsoniana, the museum's sister institution in Genoa, Italy, in cooperation with the Consulate General of Italy in Miami. *Made in Italy: MITA Textile Design 1926–1976*, on view November 16, 2018–April 28, 2019, will explore fifty years of collaboration between the Genovese textile firm Manifattura Italiana Tappeti Artistici (MITA) and artists such as Fortunato Depero, Gio Ponti, and Arturo Martini. Pulling works from both the Wolfsonian and Wolfsoniana collections in a rare joint presentation, *Made in Italy* reflects the expert craftsmanship and full diversity of MITA's production over its five-decade span. Original works, design drawings, and photographs will illustrate the firm's remarkable output of rugs, tapestries, limited-edition art panels, printed fabrics, scarves, and major commissions that carried the banner of modernism from the age of Fascism into the 1970s.

"Made in Italy illustrates a cross-section of Italian creativity orchestrated by one of the most resourceful entrepreneurs of the twentieth century," said Silvia Barisione, Wolfsonian curator, who

organized the exhibition alongside her Wolfsonian counterparts, Matteo Fochessati and Gianni Franzone. “It is truly unique to see designs of such a wide variety of art movements and styles produced by a single company. Through them, we can trace not only a succession of multitalented artists, but also an evolution of taste—a keen eye for that ‘next big thing’ in art.”

Added Fochessati: “MITA’s textiles travelled around the world, participating in important art exhibitions and defining the interior design of major Italian ocean liners, which Gio Ponti considered ‘floating art galleries.’ But the greatest MITA innovation was in bringing avant-garde artistic languages into everyday life.”

Founded in 1926 by Mario Alberto Ponis, MITA was formed “with the aim of using new mechanical inventions in the manufacture of classic hand-knotted rugs”—thus merging new technologies with artisanal traditions for a characteristically Italian approach to industry. MITA began working in concert with creative thinkers on the forefront of modernism such as Fortunato Depero, Mario Labò, and Gio Ponti, who produced rug patterns and designs that captured the aesthetic spirit of Futurism, Rationalism, and the Novecento movement, respectively. Many of these partnerships lasted for years and were represented in submissions to world’s fairs and the esteemed Triennales of Decorative and Modern Industrial Art in Milan. Objects in this first section will include design drawings, ceramic pieces, and original rugs.

Made in Italy continues the narrative thread of MITA’s history with photographs documenting the construction of a Rationalist-inspired factory in Nervi, a suburb of Genoa, in the late 1930s. Designed by Luigi C. Daneri, the new headquarters embodied the most modern trends at the time with a three-story, functionalist structure boasting a flat roof, clean lines, and ribbon windows that allowed natural light to flood the workspace. In MITA’s signature mix of old and new, Daneri blended contemporary elements like poured concrete and glass blocks with traditional, local building materials such as slate, terrazzo, and painted stucco. Though inaugurated in 1941, the factory was quickly converted into a military supply facility for the production of life jackets, emergency food bags, and helmets during the Second World War, and was ultimately occupied by the German army following the Italian armistice.

Most of *Made in Italy*’s materials date to after the war, when MITA greatly expanded its offerings beyond rugs to include tapestries, fabrics, and other products. Collaborating with the most inventive and experimental artists of the period—many of them revolving around the magazine *Domus*—Ponis extended MITA’s visual vocabulary to include geometric abstraction, graphic illustration, and more, realized most vividly in limited-edition art panels printed on hemp or linen and signed by the artists. MITA began tackling ambitious projects for private homes, bars, clubs, and restaurants, and its influence was cemented with the firm’s participation in *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today*, a trendsetting exhibition that toured the U.S. in the early 1950s.

MITA’s fifty-year reign culminated in large postwar commissions for Italian ocean liners and shipping companies. Ponis teamed up with naval interior designers Gustavo Pulitzer Finali and Nino Zoncada to create eye-popping tapestries, curtains, and furnishings that adorned lavish spaces on the vessels, most notably the first-class reading room of the ill-fated *Andrea Doria*, which sank in 1956. These artists’ work often extended to designing the fleets’ promotional materials, so vintage advertising posters, brochures, and drawings will be paired with photographs of MITA’s ship decorations *in situ* to represent this swansong era.

Many of the works on view in *Made in Italy* come from the M.A. Ponis MITA Archive, which is on long-term loan at The Wolfsonian, supplemented by selections from The Wolfsonian and Italian collections. Highlights of the exhibition include:

- Futurist drawings for rugs (1927) by Fortunato Depero shown alongside his famous “bolted” book, which features a special dedication to Ponis and was designed to destroy neighboring books when shelved;
- A design drawing (1935) and corresponding MITA rug with Gio Ponti’s playful chair motif, revealing Ponti’s habit of humorously representing a decorative object in a pattern for a textile;
- Two drawings by designer Ettore Sottsass Jr. and ceramicist Antonia Campi, MITA’s winning submissions in a rug design contest held at the 1947 Milan Triennale;
- *Whirl*, an art panel (1957) by Eugenio Carmi rendered in an Abstract Expressionist style and exhibited at the Fundación Mendoza in Caracas in 1959; and
- 1950s–60s souvenir scarves sold through ocean liners’ on-board boutiques and presented to female voyagers at the end of a cruise, including one by Enrico Paulucci designed for the famous *Leonardo Da Vinci*, the *Andrea Doria*’s replacement.

“*Made in Italy* is The Wolfsonian’s first collaboration on this scale with our sister museum, The Wolfsonian,” said Wolfsonian director Tim Rodgers. “We’re excited to draw the link between these two great institutions, both the brainchildren of Micky Wolfson, and create a dialogue that provides our visitors with a Genovese experience right here in Miami.”

“This opportunity to shed light on the shared heritage of Genoa and Miami, both port cities, is once-in-a-lifetime,” agreed Cristiano Musillo, Consul General of Italy in Miami. “I can think of no better way to tell the story of Italy’s incredible design impact—through works that are so authentically Italian.”

An English-language exhibition catalogue with essays by Silvia Barisione, Matteo Fochessati, Gianni Franzone, and Paolo Piccione will accompany the exhibition, published by Sagep Editore, Genoa.

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Credits

Made in Italy: MITA Textile Design 1926–1976 is organized by The Wolfsonian–Florida International University in Miami Beach and The Wolfsonian–Palazzo Ducale Fondazione per la Cultura in Genoa, in cooperation with the Consulate General of Italy in Miami. Additional support is provided by the Consular Agency of the United States of America in Genoa, Mediterranean Shipping Company S.A., Blu Logistics Italia Srl, and Dietl International Services.

About The Wolfsonian–Florida International University

The Wolfsonian–FIU is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, historical, and technological changes that have transformed our world. The collection comprises approximately 180,000 objects dating from 1850 to 1950—the height of the Industrial Revolution through the aftermath of the Second World War—in a variety of media including furniture; industrial-design objects; works in glass, ceramics, and metal; rare books; periodicals; ephemera; works on paper; paintings; textiles; and medals.

The Wolfsonian is located at 1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL. Admission is \$12 for adults; \$8 for seniors, students, and children ages 6–18; and free for Wolfsonian members, State University System of Florida staff and students with ID, and children under 6. The museum is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 10am–6pm; Friday, 10am–9pm; Sunday, noon–6pm; and is closed on Wednesday. Contact us at 305.531.1001 or visit us online at wolfsonian.org for further information.

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About Florida International University

Florida International University is classified by Carnegie as a “R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity” and recognized as a Carnegie Community Engaged university. It is a public research university with colleges and schools that offer bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral programs in fields such as business, engineering, computer science, international relations, architecture, law and medicine. As one of South Florida’s anchor institutions, FIU contributes almost \$9 billion each year to the local economy. The university received honors in all categories of The Chronicle of Higher Education’s “2017 Great Colleges to work for.” FIU graduates are consistently among the highest paid college graduates in Florida and are among the leaders of public and private organizations throughout South Florida. FIU is Worlds Ahead in finding solutions to the most challenging problems of our time. FIU emphasizes research as a major component of its mission with multiple state-of-the-art research facilities including the Wall of Wind Research and Testing Facility, FIU’s Medina Aquarius Program and the Advanced Materials Engineering Research Institute. FIU has awarded more than 220,000 degrees and enrolls more than 56,000 students in two campuses and centers including FIU Downtown on Brickell, FIU@I-75, the Miami Beach Urban Studios, and Tianjin, China. FIU also supports artistic and cultural engagement through its three museums: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, The Wolfsonian–FIU, and the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU. FIU is a member of Conference USA and more than 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. For more information about FIU, visit fiu.edu.

About The Wolfsoniana–Palazzo Ducale Fondazione per la Cultura, Genoa

The Wolfsoniana–Palazzo Ducale Fondazione per la Cultura, the Italian partner of The Wolfsonian–FIU, focuses on the study and exhibition of decorative and propaganda arts spanning the same period as the Wolfsonian collections. The Wolfsoniana opened as a study center in 1993 and expanded into a museum in 2005. Located in Genoa, its collection comprises a significant portion of Italian materials collected by Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. and gifted by him in 2007 to the city.