

ART WORLD

Money, Natural Beauty and Great Art Make St. Moritz Art Masters 2015 Irresistible

Hili Perlson, Wednesday, August 26, 2015



Francesco Messina's sculpture is part of the St. Moritz Walk of Art, that places sculptures in public spaces across the city

Photo: Giancarlo Cattaneo, courtesy St Moritz Art Masters

There are plenty of reasons to visit St. Moritz in the Swiss Alps at the height of summer. When ski season is over, the picturesque towns along the Engadine river become hosts to a number of cultural events, including a jazz festival and an old-timer show, not to mention the breathtaking vistas that await hikers. But another great reason to take the nearly four-hour train ride from Zurich to St. Moritz is the 10-day festival [St. Moritz Art Masters](#).

Now in its eighth year, this edition is thematically dedicated to Italy. With Venice just a few hours away, the theme actually makes for some unexpected connections—perhaps even more so than previous editions' focus on countries like China or Brazil. Many works on view by the likes of [Lucio Fontana](#) or [Paolo Scheggi](#) have not been shown in decades, and Marco Voena, the powerhouse art dealer of [Robilant & Voena](#), is credited for making many of these shows materialize.

Sam Keller, director of [Fondation Beyeler](#) who is also on the selection committee for this year's St. Moritz Art Masters, told artnet News that the country focus is not without its challenges. "Artists do not necessarily create connected works only because they share the same passport. Therefore it is more difficult to make a concise show than with other curatorial approaches."

However, he added, "the advantages of this festival are its diversity in content and locations. Scattered throughout the marvelous Engadine valley and including cultural and commercial and outdoor spaces, it invites visitors to combine experiences of nature and art in a special way."

With dozens of artists featured in a host of spectacular locations, we've gathered some of the festival's most unique highlights.



Agostino Bonalumi, *Untitled* (1969-2007) Installation view at Chesa Planta, Samedan,
 Photo: Giancarlo Cattaneo, courtesy St Moritz Art Masters ©copyright Agostino
 Bonalumi, courtesy: Robilant + Voena, London – Milan – St. Moritz

1. Chesa Planta, Samedan

An exhibition of works by Agostino Bonalumi, Paolo Scheggi, Enrico Castellani, and Fausto Melotti at the Chesa Planta in Samedan was the indisputable highlight and the one show on everybody's lips during opening weekend.



Paolo Scheggi, *Zone riflesse in diagonale con, prima costruzione in sezione*, (1964)
 Installation view at Chesa Planta, Samedan,
 Photo: Giancarlo Cattaneo, courtesy St Moritz Art Masters, ©Paolo Scheggi,
 courtesy: Robilant + Voena, London – Milan – St. Moritz

The radical experimentation characteristic to this generation of post-war Italian artists is juxtaposed with the bygone exuberance of the aristocratic Planta family's mansion. Room after room of heavy antique furniture, velvety wallpapers, and a slightly spooky baby chamber rich with white lace details, revealed themselves as the perfect settings for Scheggi and Bonalumi's three-dimensional monochromes.



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale, Attesa*, (1960) and Piero Manzoni, *Pacco in carta di Giornale adagiato è fissato su tela*, (1961) installation view at the reformed church, St. Moritz.

Photo: Giancarlo Cattaneo, courtesy St Moritz Art Masters; © Lucio Fontana, courtesy: Robilant + Voena, London – Milan – St. Moritz; Piero Manzoni courtesy Imago Art Gallery, Lugano

2. Reformed Church, St. Moritz

A striking exhibition of works by [Lucio Fontana](#) and [Piero Manzoni](#) revisits the artists' challenging approaches to the nature of the art object, going far beyond painting with achromes, slashed canvases, and unusual materials such as Murano glass shards. Manzoni, who's a generation younger than Fontana, takes the radical subversions further towards irony and societal critique, and thankfully, the historical weight given to this exhibition in the church setting doesn't take away from the works' poignancy.



From the exhibition "Lam and Italy" at Galerie Gmurzynska, St. Moritz

3. Wifredo Lam at Galerie Gmurzynska, St. Moritz

Several galleries participate in the festival with shows that add an important layer to the Italian theme: Rather than an insistence on nationality, the thematic focus extends to biography. Cuban-born Wifredo Lam spent many formative years in Europe, first in Spain, in the late 30s, where he struck up a close friendship with Pablo Picasso, and later on in the 60s in Italy—an influential period in the artist's oeuvre.



Dealer Gian Paul Saratz at the opening of "Lam and Italy" at Galerie Gmurzynska
Photo: Giancarlo Cattaneo, courtesy St Moritz Art Masters

Lam set up a studio in Albissola, where he settled with his wife and three sons for 20 years. Fellow artist Asger Jorn encouraged him to explore the local pottery making techniques, and the show at Galerie Gmurzynska focuses on Lam's ceramics, while shedding light on his years in Italy with additional archival material.

Lam's paintings, drawings, ceramics, and later on, sculptures, often featured hybrid figures influenced by Afro-Cuban Spiritism, depicting powerful gods part-human, part-animal in a combination of modern styles. This exhibition kicks off a fall season dedicated to rediscovering Lam's unique work, with a major show opening at Centre Pompidou in Paris on September 30, and traveling to Tate London in 2016.



Marino Marini, Installation view at St. Moritz Art Masters 2015
Photo: Giancarlo Cattaneo, courtesy St Moritz Art Masters; Robilant + Voena, London
– Milan – St. Moritz ; Toninelli

4. Gym at the Schulhaus, St. Moritz

Presented on one long rectangular plinth, bronze sculptures by Marino Marini offer an unusual approach to the chronological survey, in the unlikely but compelling setting of a school gym. While earlier works show a more figurative representation of horses and riders, the later offerings—mostly created in the aftermath of WWII—become increasingly abstract and expressive.



Mimmo Rotella (detail)
Photo: courtesy Robilant + Voena, London – Milan – St. Moritz

7. Hotel Kempinski, St. Moritz

Mimmo Rotella experimented with a wide range of techniques, perhaps most famously with *décollages*, which were also featured in a recent survey show at Robilant+Voena, London. Made of posters the artist assembled from billboards across the city and then tore away at, the works are negative collages made of rips and cuts that expertly mine the disorienting clamour of the city, and the pre-packaged glamor of film posters.



Angelo Bozzola *Funzione di forma concreta* (1956)
Photo: Courtesy St. Moritz Art Masters

8. Hotel Nira Alpina, Silvaplana

The restaurant on the top floor of the Nira Alpina hotel boasts of one of the best views in the Lower Engadine Valley, but it's getting some serious competition from the striking works of Angelo Bozzola, expertly hung in the spacious but cozy dining area. The brightly colored, abstract paintings and the artist's metal sculptures reveal his elegant approach to concrete art, free of references and figurations.



Luca Pancrazzi, *Maseratirundum* (2007)

Photo: Giancarlo Cattaneo, © Luca Pancrazzi, Courtesy Galerie Andrea Caratsch, St.Moritz Art Masters

9. Forum Paracelsus, St. Moritz

It wouldn't be St. Moritz without a bit of bling. Artist [Luca Pancrazzi](#) brings his sculpture *Maseratirundum* to the historical thermal baths at the Forum Paracelsus. The sculpture is in fact a Maserati Quattroporte covered in 800 kilograms of glass shards. The Maserati, though challenging to enter, is fully functional and a video shot during the 2nd Moscow Biennale in 2007 shows the car driving through Moscow's wide streets.



Salvo, installation view at French Church, St. Moritz Art Masters 2015,
Photo: Giancarlo Cattaneo, courtesy St Moritz Art Masters, ©Salvo.

Other contemporary festival highlights not to be missed include the oil paintings by [Salvo](#) installed within the wooden interior of the French Church, tucked away on a hill behind the Forum Paracelsus. The Kempinski hotel shows works by Berlin-based artist [Paolo Bottarelli](#) that,

although contemporary, seem as if they could have stemmed from various different movements throughout the 20th century. (The young artist's works were a hit, and several sold on opening day).

The Hotel Castell, owned by collector Ruedi Bechtler with Iwan and Manuela Wirth as partners, has a top-notch art collection in its magical location over the town of Zouz. Taking the short drive from St. Moritz is rewarded by highlights such as [James Turrell](#)'s *Skyspace Piz Uter* (2006) or an outdoors sculpture by [Tadashi Kawamata](#) that uses water from the nearby brook.

The festival's director, Philipp Noller, revealed to artnet News that next year's theme will be America, while the 10th anniversary edition, in 2017, will bring the focus back to Switzerland—if this year's high bar is anything to go by, both upcoming editions sound like events well worth adding to your summer agenda.

St. Moritz Art Masters 2015 – Country Focus ITALY takes place from August 21 – 30, 2015

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