

5 May 2025

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Daniela Zedda, Maria Lai, 2003.
Archivio Daniela Zedda
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Magazzino Italian Art Brings *Llèncols de Aigua*, an Expansive Installation by Designer Antonio Marras and the Late Artist Maria Lai, to the United States for the First Time

May 17, 2025–July 28, 2025

Installation Accompanies the First Retrospective in the U.S. Dedicated to Lai's Work, *Maria Lai. A Journey to America*.

On May 17, Magazzino will host a symposium dedicated to Lai's life and career.

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Cold Spring, New York (May 5, 2025)—Magazzino Italian Art is proud to announce that it will present the first installation in the United States of *Llèncols de Aigua*, a gallery-size collaborative artwork by the internationally renowned designer Antonio Marras and the artist Maria Lai (1919–2013), opening to the public on May 17, 2025, and continuing through July 28.

Marras and Lai, both Sardinian artists deeply connected to the poetics of fabric and memory, developed a shared language made of gestures and cloth. As part of this intense collaboration, in 2003 in Alghero, Sardinia, they created *Llèncols de Aigua*, a Catalan title that translates into "Sheets of Water."

The installation consists of long white sheets hand-stitched and adorned with antique nightgowns embroidered with phrases collected by Lai during an educational project with children.

The work, which belongs to Marras's private collection, will be installed in the isotropic room of the Museum's Robert Olnick Pavilion (designed by architect Alberto Campo Baeza), the symbolic heart of the building: a cube, pierced at each corner by square windows that create a continuously evolving play of light and shadow.

The presentation of *Llèncols de Aigua* accompanies Magazzino's exhibition *Maria Lai. A Journey to America* (through July 28), the first retrospective in the United States dedicated to the artist. Both the retrospective and *Llèncols de Aigua* are curated by Paola Mura, Artistic Director of Magazzino.

Llèncols de Aigua is one of many works that Lai made in collaboration with artists working in other media. Among those projects is *Per Ille*, a musical performance done with Ille

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Strazza in 1984 in Rome (presently on show in the exhibition *Dialogues Between Italy and America: Jannis Kounellis, Maria Lai and Lucio Pozzi* at the Italian Cultural Institute of New York, also curated by Mura); *Frammento della casa della stazione* (1996); a project for the Venice Architecture Biennale with architect Giovanni Maciocco; and project for the Time in Jazz Festival with trumpeter Paolo Fresu and singer Elena Ledda.

On May 17, to celebrate the exceptional installation, Magazzino Italian Art will inaugurate a day-long symposium dedicated to Maria Lai's life and career. The event is coordinated by Nicola Lucchi, Director of Research and Education.

Adam Sheffer, Director of Magazzino Italian Art, said, "Among the core missions of Magazzino is to expand the narrative of Italian post-war art to bring fresh perspectives into its remarkable history. This rarely seen installation, a key part of *Maria Lai. A Journey to America*, is a testament to that mission, bringing to light an artist who is in many ways a crucial missing link in the story of Italian art since 1945."

Paola Mura, Artistic Director of Magazzino Italian Art, said: "Maria Lai conceived of art as an interweaving of many threads: aesthetic, ethical, narrative, and relational. Her collaborations with Antonio Marras, in fabric and memory, reveal not only her commitment to dialogue, but also her belief that creation is a plural act. Through these encounters, art became, for Lai, not a finished object, but an ongoing conversation."

Antonio Marras said, "Meeting Maria Lai marked a real turning point in my approach to art, and other things too. I had a special relationship with her, a harmony of interests and ideas that live on today, unchanged. She was an extraordinary presence in my life. She gave me the strength to speak through images. She taught me to see things which cannot be seen."

Nicola Lucchi, Magazzino's Director of Education and Research, said, "It is a pleasure to invite the public to hear and meet a roster of outstanding scholars and artists offering fresh perspectives on Maria Lai's work and its continuing impact. We look forward to a lively, eye-opening day of art, insight, and conversation."

Events during the Maria Lai Symposium will include:

- A keynote address by Dr. Alessandro Giammei, Assistant Professor, Department of Italian Studies, Yale University
- Scholarly talks by Michele D'Aurizio (UC Berkeley) and Saskia Verlaan (CUNY Graduate Center)
- Artist Martha Tuttle in conversation with Magazzino's Director, Adam Sheffer
- Artist Marcello Maloberti in conversation with Magazzino's Artistic Director, Paola Mura
- Conversations and testimonies about Maria Lai from friend and collaborator Mila Dau
- A guided tour of the Maria Lai exhibition led by artist Melissa McGill, in partnership with Paola Mura

Tickets to the Maria Lai Symposium will be \$30 for adults and \$20 for seniors. They include Museum admission

About Antonio Marras

Antonio Marras was born in 1961 in Alghero, Sardinia, an island that has deeply influenced his stylistic philosophy and where he continues to live and work today. Since 1987, when he designed his first collection, Marras has stood out for his experimental approach and his ability to "feel" the different realities around him, and the connections with art, music, dance, theater, and cinema. Fashion, for him, is a link with other languages, a new alphabet

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for communicating with others. The recipient of numerous awards, Marras designs, installs, invents, and produces tirelessly. In 2011 he participated in the Venice Biennale, and in 2013 he received an Honorary Degree in Visual Arts from the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera in Milan. In 2016 he had a survey exhibition, *Nulla dies sine linea*, at the Triennale di Milano. He also curated the exhibition *Trama Doppia. Maria Lai, Antonio Marras* in Palazzo Lanfranchi in Matera, during its year as European Capital of Culture in 2019.

His rebellion against extremism and “purity” is a distinctive feature of his work, which ranges across fashion, art, architecture, and design.

About Maria Lai

Maria Lai (1919–2013), one of Italy’s most celebrated contemporary artists, was born in Ulassai, Sardinia. Her early life in this remote village, surrounded by rugged landscapes and rich oral traditions, profoundly influenced her artistic journey. Lai began drawing before she could write, using bold lines to narrate stories, laying the foundation for her lifelong exploration of storytelling and memory.

In the 1930s, Lai’s artistic potential blossomed under the mentorship of writer Salvatore Cambosu, whose teachings on rhythm and poetry shaped her creative approach. In 1939, she moved to Rome to study art, later continuing her education at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice under the sculptor Arturo Martini. His philosophies on voids and essence deeply influenced her work.

Initially rooted in figuration, Lai’s art evolved dramatically in the 1960s and 70’s as she embraced abstraction, experimenting with textiles, looms, and humble materials. Her journeys to America exposed her to avant-garde movements and indigenous traditions, enriching her practice with vibrant colors and cosmic themes.

Works like *Tele cucite*, *Telai*, *Libri cuciti* and *Lenzuoli cuciti*, *Geografie*, marked her transition into creating symbolic narratives that explored memory, identity, and humanity’s connection to the universe.

In the 1980s, Lai pioneered relational art with projects such as *Legarsi alla montagna*, where she used art to foster community engagement. Her *Fiabe cucite*, interwove myth and collective memory, solidifying her place in Italy’s avant-garde.

In her later years, Lai created large-scale installations and founded *La Stazione dell’Arte* museum in Ulassai, leaving a lasting legacy. Her works, celebrated globally in exhibitions like the Venice Biennale and Documenta, continue to inspire, bridging personal and collective narratives with universal themes of connection and resilience.

About Magazzino Italian Art

Magazzino Italian Art is a museum and research center dedicated to advancing scholarship and public appreciation of postwar and contemporary Italian art in the United States. Located in Cold Spring, New York, the museum was founded in 2014 by Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu.

In 2017, the first building, designed by architect Miguel Quismondo and set within several landscaped acres of the Hudson Highlands, was inaugurated with an exhibition drawn from the Olnick Spanu Collection and dedicated to Margherita Stein, founder of the historic Galleria Christian Stein in Milan and a key advocate and supporter of the artists associated with Arte Povera.

Created as an educational not-for-profit museum, Magazzino Italian Art increased its indoor space by two-thirds in September 2023 by opening the freestanding Robert Olnick Pavilion designed by architects Alberto Campo Baeza and Miguel Quismondo and named in memory of philanthropist and art advocate Robert Olnick. This new building provides a multipurpose room with auditorium capabilities, a store, and Café Silvia serving Italian specialties.