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Contact: Nancy Lee, Manager, Public Relations, 310-443-7016, nlee@hammer.ucla.edu

**Hammer Museum Presents *Marisa Merz: The Sky Is a Great Space*
Co-organized with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, On View June 4 – August 20, 2017**



(Los Angeles, CA)— The Hammer Museum presents [*Marisa Merz: The Sky Is a Great Space*](#), the first U.S. retrospective of the Italian painter, sculptor, and installation artist **Marisa Merz** (b. 1926, Turin, Italy). Bringing together five decades of the artist’s work, the exhibition includes Merz’s early Arte Povera experiments with non-traditional materials and processes; the enigmatic heads and faces she created in the 1980s and 1990s; and her installations that balance intimacy with impressive scale. Organized by the Hammer Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Marisa Merz: The Sky Is a Great Space* is on view from June 4 through August 20, 2017 and is accompanied by Merz’s first monograph to be published in English.

“As the only female member of the Arte Povera movement, Marisa Merz has been overlooked for decades and we are thrilled she is coming into a prominence that she so well deserves,” **Hammer Director Ann Philbin** said. “This exhibition will familiarize audiences with the prodigious talent and influence of Merz’s understudied body of work.”

“The work of Marisa Merz exists in the intersection of art and life that has become so central to contemporary practice,” said **Hammer Chief Curator Connie Butler**. “Her challenging and evocative body of work is deeply personal, as much a response to her own experience as to art history and the milieu of contemporary Turin and postwar Italy.”

Marisa Merz gained international prominence as part of the circle of artists associated with **Arte Povera** in the late 1960s. An avant-garde movement that rejected Italy’s material wealth in favor of “poor” materials, Arte Povera was identified with the radicalism of the student movement but proclaimed no stylistic or ideological credo except the negation of existing codes and art world limitations.

- Merz’s earliest work, begun around 1966 in the house she shared with husband, artist **Mario Merz**, is a tangle of molded aluminum hung from the ceiling that combined sharp, rough metal edges with soft, biomorphic contours, expanding the existing conception of a ‘mobile’ into a colossus.
- In the late 1960s, she went on to create a series of powerful works from non-traditional materials that referenced both her family life and the broader Italian tradition of polymaterialism: sculptures of rolled up blankets bound with nylon thread that were occasionally used as props in

performances by her husband; a plywood swing for her daughter that joins sculptural rigor with youthful play; and a series of knitted nylon wire sculptures, including the iconic booties that the artist sometimes wore herself.

- In the 1970s Merz's trademark installations of humble materials—delicate copper wire, bowls of salt water, knitting needles—grew more and more complex.
- After 1975, the artist began sculpting a series of small heads, often roughly modelled in clay and unfired. These were debuted in the 1980s and would become emblematic of the artist and her late work.
- In the last two decades, Merz's work has grown even larger and more complex. Individual pieces continue to be integrated into multimedia installations of varying size and intricacy. Her painting and graphic work has also grown more elaborate, combining collage elements and diverse materials including tape, mirrors, binder clips, bottle caps, and metallic pigments, such as recent group of large paintings of winged angels, which contrast a striking beauty with a surprising absence of sentimentality.

After being well received by New York Audiences, *The Sky Is a Great Space* makes its West Coast debut. Organized in close collaboration with the Fondazione Merz, Turin, the Hammer's presentation includes drawings and two large floor installations that were not shown at the Met Breuer. The large-scale floor pieces, using tulle, copper wire mesh, lighting equipment, and pipes, evince the signature balance between rough industrial materials and homespun fabrication which have become central to Merz's signature aesthetic.

CATALOGUE

This generously illustrated monograph offers readers the chance to appreciate the range of works by Marisa Merz. The book brings together fifty years of painting, sculpture, and installations and offers the first precise chronology of her life and work to appear in print. The most authoritative analysis of her work to date, the catalogue includes previously unpublished texts and poetry by the artist, an illustrated exhibition history, as well as insightful new essays by leading scholars and curators. Contributors include **Ian Alteveer, Connie Butler, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Leslie Cozzi, Teresa Kittler, Marisa Merz, Cloé Perrone, Lucia Re, and Tommaso Trini.**

RELATED PROGRAMS

A rich slate of public programs will accompany and expand upon the exhibition, including screenings, exhibition walkthroughs, panels and lectures. See hammer.ucla.edu for a full list of related programs, including:

Screenings

Connie Butler and Tacita Dean with a screening of 'Mario Merz'

Thursday, June 8, 7:30pm

Hammer chief curator Connie Butler outlines the artist Marisa Merz's challenging, evocative body of work and its relationship to her domestic space and family life. Butler's presentation is followed by a screening of the short film *Mario Merz* by artist Tacita Dean. The film portrait captures Marisa Merz's husband, the artist Mario Merz, months before his death. Followed by a discussion between Butler and Dean. (2002, dir. Tacita Dean, 16mm film, color, optical sound, 8 min.)

Artists and Experimental Cinema in Italy 1960-1970

Wednesday, June 14, 7:30pm

This selection of extremely rare short films, including *Il Mostro Verde*, which features Merz's *Living Sculpture*, reveals the exciting, eclectic collaborations among painters, poets, directors, and theater actors in 1960s Italy.

Films by Tonino De Bernardi and Paolo Menzio and artists such as Ugo Nespolo and Luca Maria Patella highlight an adventurous underground cinema influenced by Arte Povera in Turin, the experimental films of Cooperative Cinema Indipendente in Rome, and the American avant-garde and independent film scene.

Copresented by Archivio Nazionale Cinema d'Impresa, CSC-Cineteca Nazionale.

Conversations

“Vogliamo Tutto”: Postwar Italian Art

Tuesday, July 11, 7:30pm

Italian art after World War II experienced a remarkable renaissance as artists began experimenting with traditional forms and styles in provocative ways—from the Arte Povera movement in which everyday materials replaced the stones and precious metals of traditional sculpture, to radical innovations in design. Curator Marianna Vecellio, New Museum artistic director Massimiliano Gioni, art historians Lucia Re and Jaleh Mansoor, and moderator and Hammer chief curator Connie Butler discuss the dynamic contexts that surround Marisa Merz's work.

Copresented by the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Los Angeles.

Hans Ulrich Obrist and Connie Butler

Saturday, July 29, 3pm

Curator, critic, and art historian Hans Ulrich Obrist joins Hammer chief curator Connie Butler in a discussion on the work of Marisa Merz within the broader field of contemporary art. Obrist is the codirector of exhibitions and director of international projects at the Serpentine Gallery in London. A prolific documentarian, he has recorded nearly 2,000 hours of interviews with cultural figures including Ai Weiwei, Zaha Hadid, and John Baldessari as part of the Interview Project. His recently published books include *A Brief History of Curating* and *Ways of Curating*.

Design, Environment, Counter-Environment

Tuesday, August 8, 7:30pm

Professors Felicity Scott, author of *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism*, and Mark Wasuiuta, curator of *Environments and Counter-Environments: Experimental Media in Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, MoMA, 1972*, discuss the intersection of countercultural radicalism and Italian New Wave design in the 1960s. Together they explore how cutting-edge Italian design encompassed fashion, furniture, and architecture to reimagine every detail of Italian social and political life, from the spoon to the city.

Copresented by the American Institute of Architects, Los Angeles.

Artist Walk-throughs

Richard Aldrich, Tuesday June 6, 6pm

Anna Sew Hoy, Tuesday, July 11, 6pm

Francesco Vezzoli, Wednesday August 16, 6pm

Exhibition Tours

Sunday, June 4, 2pm & 2:30pm

Connie Butler, chief curator, and Leslie Cozzi, former curatorial associate, lead walk-throughs of the exhibition.

CREDIT

Marisa Merz: The Sky Is a Great Space is organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The exhibition is curated by Connie Butler, Chief Curator, Hammer Museum, and Ian Alteveer, Associate Curator, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The exhibition and publication were developed in close collaboration with Fondazione Merz.

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ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum at UCLA offers exhibitions and collections that span classic to contemporary art, as well as programs that spark meaningful encounters with art and ideas. Through a wide-ranging, international exhibition program and the biennial, *Made in L.A.*, the Hammer highlights contemporary art since the 1960s, especially the work of emerging and under recognized artists. The exhibitions, permanent collections, and nearly 300 public programs annually—including film screenings, lectures, symposia, readings, music performances, and workshops for families—are all free to the public.

HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION

Admission to all exhibitions and programs at the Hammer Museum is free, made possible through the generosity of benefactors Erika J. Glazer and Brenda R. Potter. Hours: Tuesday–Friday 11 a.m.–8 p.m., Saturday & Sunday 11 a.m.–5 p.m. Closed Mondays and national holidays. Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Boulevard at Westwood, Los Angeles. Onsite parking \$6 (maximum 3 hours) or \$6 flat rate after 6 p.m. Visit hammer.ucla.edu for details or call 310-443-7000.