

ITALIAN ORAL HISTORY INSTITUTE

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September 2005

Leo Politi at the Watts Towers Arts Center

A Leo Politi retrospective exhibition, ***Leo Politi: Artist of the Angels***, will be held at the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department Watts Towers Arts Center (Noah Purifoy Gallery) from October 23 to December 4, as part of the multimedia festival: ***Italian Los Angeles: Celebrating Italian Life, Local History and the Arts in Southern California***, beginning in October, Italian Heritage Month.

Luisa Del Giudice, Director/Founder of the Italian Oral History Institute and festival curator, is delighted by this meeting of two great Los Angeles icons: Leo Politi and Sabato (Simon) Rodia (1873-1965), builder of the Watts Towers, both of Italian heritage. As an ethnographer and folklorist, she is especially interested in Rodia as a brilliant folk artist in the Italian tradition, and in Politi's strong folk art sensibilities. She says: "When I conceived the idea of a festival focusing on a largely invisible local Italian community, Politi and Rodia were the first on my list. Further, they were engaged in deep cross-cultural dialog themselves and offer us important opportunities to continue that dialog."

The Watts Towers Arts Center will offer the first ever comprehensive exhibition of the works of renowned and much-loved Los Angeles artist and writer, Leo Politi (1910-1996). "The Watts Towers Arts Center is pleased to host this exciting and ground-breaking exhibition," said Arts Center Director Rosie Lee Hooks. "As our Center's heritage is built on many master artists of world renown, this is the perfect venue to highlight the work of Leo Politi. Simon Rodia's success story exemplifies the rich cultural community that he came to, to support his artistic expression."

Guest curators will be Don Shorts, Dolores Fisher (both from Ventura's Old California Store), and Ann Stalcup (author of a recently-published biography on Leo Politi, *Leo Politi: Artist of the Angels*, based upon oral history research). Their goal is to include works spanning the artist's entire career: paintings, illustrations, children's books (Caldecott Medal 1949), and books on Los Angeles' historic districts (such as *Bunker Hill*, 1964). Shorts notes, "I am especially interested in introducing the public to Leo's early works so it can be seen that Leo Politi was truly one of California's most important creators of fine art."

An opening reception with Italian specialties, is planned for Sunday, October 23 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. During the reception, author Ann Stalcup will present her enjoyable slide evocation of Leo Politi's life and work, and will introduce living characters from Politi's children's books. The Politi family, instrumental in producing this exhibition, will also attend.

This exhibition is part of a multimedia festival, produced by the Italian Oral History Institute, entitled: ***Italian Los Angeles: Celebrating Italian Life, Local History, and the Arts in Southern California*** (October and November, 2005). Look for exhibitions, lectures, book presentations, concerts, traditional music and dance workshops, tours of Italian Los Angeles, and more. Note especially the lecture on **"The Watts Towers of Los Angeles and La Festa dei Gigli of Nola: A Shared Tradition," November 2, 8:00 p.m. at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, 1023 Hilgard Ave., Westwood**, focusing on the town of Nola's "dancing tower" tradition (by folklorist Dr. Joseph Sciorra, of the Calandra Institute, CUNY). Further, on Sunday,

November 6, Prof. Gloria Ricci Lothrop (Whitsett Professor of California History Emerita, CSUN), will lead a **cultural & historic tour: "Chi Siamo: Italians of Los Angeles,"** which will include the historic Pueblo and a special tour of the Watts Towers.

This festival also inaugurates the recently launched web site: www.ItalianLosAngeles.org (The Italian Resource Guide to Greater Los Angeles) and is offered in conjunction with a major international conference, ***Speaking Memory: Oral History, Oral Culture and Italians in America***, the 38th annual meeting of the American Italian Historical Association. Conference attendance is by advance registration and pre-payment only: <http://www.iohi.org/aiha/conferenceregistration.html>. Most festival events however, are free and open to the public. Please visit: <http://www.iohi.org/aiha/festivalregistration.html> for festival program, updates, and registration form.

The Watts Towers Arts Center is located at 1727 E. 107th Street, Los Angeles, California, 90002. For more information, call (213) 485-1795, or visit: www.culturela.org. Gallery hours are: Tuesday - Saturday: 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.; Sunday: Noon - 4:00 p.m. Watts Towers Tours are offered: Friday: 11:00 a.m - 2:30 p.m.; Saturday: 10:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.; Sunday: 12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

The Politi exhibition is made possible by the Italian Oral History Institute; the Watts Towers Arts Center; the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department; the Politi Family; and the Friends of Leo Politi.

The festival and conference, which are held under the auspices of the Consulate General of Italy in Los Angeles, are sponsored by the Italian Oral History Institute; the American Italian Historical Association; Istituto Italiano di Cultura; George L. Graziadio Center for Italian Studies at California State University, Long Beach; National Italian American Foundation; UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Center; UCLA Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center; UCLA Center for European and Eurasian Studies; UCLA Department of Italian; UCLA Ethnomusicology Archives; UCLA Oral History Program; City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department; The Watts Towers Arts Center; The Association for Cultural Equity at Hunter College, New York City; Frank de Santis; St. Alban's Episcopal Church; San Gennaro Foundation Los Angeles; Italian Organic Wines by Dynamic Imports; and Villa Scalabrini; with the support of the Politi Family and the Friends of Leo Politi.

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