



The Amleto  
and Donato Sartori  
International  
Mask Museum,  
Abano Terme

# Villa Trevisan Savioli, the location of the Amleto e Donato Sartori International Mask Museum

is situated in Abano Terme, a spa location that was already celebrated in Roman times, the villa was one of the more important travel inns for Venetian noblemen. The building goes back to the first half of the 17th century, but the present layout was set out in the 18th century. The Villa, owned by the local Community, has been given out for the use of the Centre for Masks and Sign Language Structures that conceived the project for this museum that is unique in the world: modern, dynamic, experimental, with materials to see and be used, open to the young that want to learn the art of masks and to the studios that wish to examine this subject. The Museum is also a combined centre for promoting and improving culture, art and shows and makes available its own spaces for



cultural and artistic events, meetings, photographic services, television and cinema recording. Sited beside the central block are the Teaching Laboratory, Management, Offices and Projection Room.

## Activities

The activities are based on scientific research for the Masks and Gestural Structures Centre and its team of collaborators, in arrangements with museums and academies throughout the world. The Museum and the Masks Centre are seats of learning (International Seminar “Art of the Mask in the Commedia dell’Arte” – 23rd edition, 2009), theatrical collections and videos, updating courses and teaching in collaboration with the University of Padua/DAMS, conferences and workshops on conservation, restoration, painting, sculpture, photography, etc.

The educational courses are carried out by specialists and provide teaching laboratories for school use, introductory workshops, guided visits, conferences and other popular types by design.

The activities of the Museum are supported by the Cultural O<sub>2</sub> Association “Friends of the Sartori Museum”.





# The Sartori: a family of artists.

All of humanity has adopted masks since the beginning of civilisation: their use and significance has changed according to the current situation at that place, and yet it has always been an integral part of social communication.

Amleto and Donato Sartori, inheritors of an ancient and long-forgotten art, brought to life this precious instrument of communication.

Amleto (1915-1962), a noted figure sculptor in the Veneto region, already began his own creative work in 1928 with his first sculptures and grotesque masks.

Immediately after the Second World War, when Italy felt the need to rediscover its own cultural roots, he dedicated himself to researching theatrical masks. The artist gave his life to lengthy research into the mask of the Commedia dell'Arte and the techniques belonging to this artistic phenomenon that had remained in oblivion for over two centuries.

This led to the discovery, although it might be better to say invention, of the method of making leather masks and their meaning. On the death of Amleto at the apex of his career, his apprentice son Donato, a sculptor and performer, inherited the cultural and technical wealth of his father and continued the research from there, enlarging it, perfecting it and adapting it to the

requirements of contemporary cultural society.

The Sartori have tackled the most diverse theatrical work, from Goldoni to Pirandello, from the classical theatre to Shakespeare, from Molière to Ionesco, then the travelling theatre, collaborating closely with prestigious directors such as Jean Louis Barrault, Giorgio Strehler, Eduardo De Filippo, Peter Oskarson, Jacques Lecoq, Moni Ovadia, Dario Fo, etc.

for whom they have created theatrical masks, always advancing their artistic and professional knowledge gained in over eighty years of research in the field.

In 1979 Donato Sartori, together with the architect Paola Piizzi and the stage designer Paolo Trombetta, founded the Masks and Gestural Structures Centre in Abano Terme to continue experimental research in the fields of sculpture, graphic art and gestures,

organising seminars, exhibition workshops, installations and performances in the major cities of the world

from Paris to Tokyo, from Peking to Rio de Janeiro, in Copenhagen, Monaco, Vienna, Nancy and often in the framework of the Biennale, in Venice.

Today, the Centre actively collaborates to carry out educational and artistic activities in the territory and promote and carry out multi-faceted cultural activities in important countries of the world.



1. Amleto Sartori, bronze sculpture, created in 1961 for the Kursaal gardens in Abano Terme. A copy of this sculpture was donated to the Mask Museum by the city in 2001.
2. International seminar/workshop of Art of the Mask, Abano Terme. Masks and Gestural Structures Centre.
3. *Arlecchino Gatto*, mask by the Sartoris, lesson/demonstration by and with Dario Fo. Painted and coated leather. State University of Rome, 1980.
4. Amleto Sartori in his studio.

On display in the International Mask Museum is part of the precious collection of theatrical masks resulting from the artistic production of the sculptors Amleto (1915-1962) and Donato Sartori over more than eighty years of creative activity, as well as an extraordinary quantity of masks, traced to geo-ethnic- anthropological origins and creations coming from the most significant cultural areas of the planet that have been collected from years of travel and cultural exchanges. The intention of the museum is to exploit, look after and make known the heritage of masks , underlining their cross-cultural value, their potential to be vehicles for knowledge and comparison between different cultures in time and place. For this purpose, the works have been sub-divided into three large sections:



### Ethnology and Anthropology.

The collection follows the history of civilisation through many important, ritual and tribal functions, which hand down and communicate through symbolic forms.

It is made up of ritual, propitiatory and evocative masks that originate from Russia, Japan, China, Indonesia, New Guinea, India, Africa, North America, Latin America, Europe, supplied from tribal objects, costumes, musical instruments, etc., as well as from masks, documents, articles and objects connected with theatre and rituals.

A separate section is given over to civilian masks (fashion, sport, protection, work, etc.). Around 1,600 works are exhibited



1. Erinni, Sartori mask, The Oresteia of Aeschylus, director Jean Louis Barrault: painted and coated leather. Paris, Marigny Theatre, 1955.
2. Donato Sartori, Argivo, chorus of the old Oresteia of Aeschylus, director Peter Oskarson. Vibraphone mask in resin, Gävleborg (Sweden) Folk Teatern, 2001.
3. New Guinea, basin of the Sepik River, initiation mask with the nose elongated in the form of a beak . The framework is made with an intertwined basket of swamp fibres and the surface is covered by clay painted with vegetable colours. The added decoration are feathers from the Casuarinus, a sacred bird from that place.
4. Urban masking, Donato Sartori, Masks and Gestural Structures Centre, Venice, Carnival, *Amarcord* 2003.

in rotation with temporary shows on the ground floor of the Museum.

### Theatre.

The Sartori, in tackling the various theatrical situations with their eclectic artistic activity as sculptors, painters and poets, as well as an acute observation and interpretation of these times, are led to create masks for the most important shows in the world; masks made from various materials (wood, leather, metal and others), sculptures, theatrical costumes, accessories, imprints in plaster and terracotta, bronzes, precision castings, projects, preparatory

designs, exhibition and educational material on the techniques of mask making all express the graphic and pictorial work of the two sculptors. There are around 2,000 exhibits of the most important that form the heart of the Museum.



### Urban masking and gestural structure.

Inquiry, study and experimentation with a new class of mask related to contemporary demands of a multi-disciplinary nature (visual arts, theatre, music, dance, gesture).

This research produces a sort of multi-media mask-cum-sculpture that is called Gestural Structure and the design and production of performances and spectacles on a vast scale called Urban Masking. Plastic artwork, graphic artwork, documents and educational/exhibition materials. Around 400 of them. In the Museum a whole room is fitted out with a luminous installation of panels that represent the more important stagings of the Maskings created throughout the world.







The Gestural Structures are exhibited in two rooms. The Masks Centre also sets out a photographic, cinematographic and video archive of 12,000 items, as well as books, publications, newspapers, historical iconography – around 4,000 items – that are made available for study and research.

### The exhibitions.

The ground floor is reserved for temporary exhibitions prepared with works, finds, costumes and masks from the prestigious Sartori Collection made up not only of the results of the creative work of the two sculptors, but also from works, costumes, masks, furnishings, votive and cult objects from every part of the world. The exhibition route of the Museum is spread along the three floors of the Villa.

On each floor there is a route plan and explanation available to the visitors that allow them to critically study the museum collection. On the ground floor the bookshop is the area used for temporary exhibitions. Starting on the second floor, the visit route shows historical greco-latino masks, sculptures in wood, bronzes, ceramics, lacquers, and masks of the Commedie del Ruzante, a reconstruction of a mask



sculptor's studio, historical costumes and theatrical masks of the Commedia dell'Arte in embossed leather.

Some have suggested that masks have descended directly from the Atellans; this was a type of theatre of farce originating in Atella, a city in Campania, whose actors in 211 BC started to amuse



5. Sartori masks, Harlequin servant to two landlords by Carlo Goldoni, director Giorgio Strehler, Milan, Piccolo Teatro, 1967.
6. Costume worn by Ferruccio Soleri, historic Harlequin in the Piccolo Teatro of Milan. The original costume is typical of that worn by servants: blouse and wide white trousers that because of dirty and heavy work are often patched with pieces of a different colour.
7. Amleto Sartori, Ruzante, 1955, *The Reasonings of Ruzante*. Lacquered hollow wood.
8. The actor Moni Ovadia speaking with a zoomorphic mask made by Donato Sartori and from the Masks and Gestural Structures Centre. The Violinist on the roof, taken from the stories of the Ukrainian writer Sholom Aleichem, Bologna, Arena del Sole, 2002.

the rabble of the city with impromptu recitations, jokes and jests, hiding their faces behind grotesque masks. But rather than continuing and repeating this, with maintaining itself up to the Middle Ages, one has to believe that such masks developed spontaneously during the Renaissance as living and sincere expression of the eternal human adventure. In the dialectal comedies of the first half of the 1500s there emerged Angelo Beolco of the Veneto, called the Ruzante, an actor, writer and the first to bring onto the scene his actors speaking in the local dialect and at the same time creating a fixed type, that is a mask. The Commedia dell'Arte in its golden age, between the

end of the 1500s and that of the 1600s, was a varied and complete artistic show, a type of theatre in which there needed to be great vivacity, talent, and readiness. The texts of the plots or scenes, that is the story lines of the action of the comedies, were very poor, but everything was rendered lively and rich by improvisation, the secret of this original manifestation of Italian theatre.

On the first floor there are exhibits of theatrical masks of the Commedia dell'Arte used in the theatre of the 1900s and the plain and expressive masks for theatre schools. The Gestural Structures: a meeting between the mask, the fundamental research subject of Donato Sartori, and contemporary sculpture. Intended as total masks, they are offered as visual communication objects and are created through a multiplicity



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*“At one time masks were used in warfare, when war was considered as an art. There was a time in which masks were used for ceremonies, because it was thought that the normal appearance was not sufficiently striking. The moment came in which masks were chosen by the great of the classical theatre: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. The time came in which the lofty actor did not want to cover his face and so threw away the mask. A time for children’s games and masked parties. Today we must create a new mask, refusing to trawl over the archaeology of the past, that manages to give a face to the spirit of the actor to make greater theatre”.*  
E. G. Craig, English director and scenographer (1872-1966).



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of experiences of seminars/workshops in the most diversified cultural situations in the world. Instead, urban masks develop like a spider’s web during a performance that, through the distortion of the urban space and sound and gestural stimulation, focus attention



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9. *Atellana*, painted and coated leather. In several past years of study in Greece and Magna Graecia, Donato Sartori discovered that the mask with the characteristic open mouth was not used as a megaphone, as supposed and popularised in past centuries, but for the type of satire that caused laughter and identified the personality.
10. *Personality*, Sartori mask, the fable of the changed son by Luigi Pirandello, director Orazio Costa. Painted and coated leather. Milan, Piccolo Teatro, 1956.
11. Donato Sartori, Study for a medieval Nordic mask. *Hellequin*, 1992, china and gouache.
12. Nancy, France. Urban masking in Place Stanislas on the occasion of the Carrefours contemporary art exhibition. Donato Sartori, Masks and Gestural Structures Centre, 1982.



Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999)  
defined the neuter mask as follows:

*"It is the basic mask that will then illustrate the differences from the other masks. It is with it that they will know how to wear all the others. It is a mask without any particular expression, without a typical personality, that neither laughs nor cries, that is neither sad nor happy, that rests on silence and a state of calm".*



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on the complexities of the territory, trivialised by habits and the customary, in which the action is taking place. Gesture, image and sound offer a new use for the urban space to the public spectator who of necessity becomes an actor in a collective action that for a moment restores the tribal rite, the dances and the game which has for too long lost its former meaning.



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- 13. *Male Neuter*, Sartori mask. Natural leather. Paris, École Internationale de Théâtre "Jacques Lecoq", 1958.
- 14. *David* of Michelangelo, gestural structure by Donato Sartori and the Masks and Gestural Structures Centre, covered leather. Florence, Porta Romana Art School, seminary/workshop, 1981.
- 15. *Zani*, Mask of the Sartoris. The comedy of the East. Covered leather. Strsburg, Centre Dramatique National, 1951.
- 16. *Urban Masking*, Donato Sartori and the Masks and Gestural Structures Centre, Copenhagen, Radhuspladsen, 1984.
- 17. Donato Sartori, *Myological*, Gestural Structure for the film *The masks of the Sartoris*, made by the German television company WDR, Padova, 1987.



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Comune di  
Abano Terme



Centre for Masks and Gestural  
Structures Amleto and Donato  
Sartori International Mask Museum

Created with the help of:



## Amleto and Donato Sartori International Mask Museum

Città di Abano Terme  
Villa Savioli Trevisan  
via Savioli, 2 - corner via Pio X  
tel. 049. 860 1642  
fax 049. 861 0091  
e-mail: [info@sartorimaskmuseum.it](mailto:info@sartorimaskmuseum.it)  
Paola Piizzi - Director of the International Masks Museum of  
*Amleto and Donato Sartori*  
Donato Sartori - Director of the Centre for Masks  
and Gestural Structures

### Annual opening hours

Tuesdays 9.00 - 13.30  
Wednesdays and Fridays 9.00 - 13.00 / 14.30 - 18.00  
Sundays 14.30 - 19.00  
Sundays (from 2nd May to 30th September) 17.00 - 22.00  
And every day by prior booking

### Annual closures:

August and public holidays.

**Entrance tickets:** full 7 Euros, reduced 5 Euros, free  
(where provided for). With PadovaCard: reduced price ticket.

### Museum Services:

- Possibility for guided tours in Italian, English, French and German for groups (minimum 20 people).
- Conference visits on specific subjects.
- Educational activities for schools of every kind and level.
- Access for the handicapped.
- Parking.

### To reach the Museum:

**Motorway A4** Turin-Trieste, exit "Padova Ovest"  
A 13 Bologna-Padua, exit "Terme Euganee"

**Railway** Line Bologna-Padua, train station for  
Terme Euganee at Montegrotto, take the M and T  
Bus routes to Abano.

Line Milan-Venice, Padova station, take the bus  
routes A, M, T, AT direct to Abano.

Venice "Marco Polo" Airport (60 Km):  
Direct bus route from the airport to Abano.



### Tourist Office

IAT Abano Terme  
Via Pietro d'Abano 18  
tel. +39 049 8669055  
[infoabano@turismotermeeuganee.it](mailto:infoabano@turismotermeeuganee.it)

Riviera dei Mugnai, 8  
35137 Padova  
Tel. +39 049 8767911  
Fax +39 049 650794

[www.turismopadova.it](http://www.turismopadova.it)  
[www.turismotermeeuganee.it](http://www.turismotermeeuganee.it)



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