

Press Release

1 April 2015

Max Mara Art Prize for Women: Corin Sworn

20 May-19 July 2015

Media View: 19 May 2015, 10am-12pm

Whitechapel Gallery (Gallery 2)

The Whitechapel Gallery presents a major exhibition by Glasgow-based artist **Corin Sworn** (b.1976) for the fifth edition of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women, a biannual award established in 2005 to promote and support women artists in the UK.

Sworn creates films and installations deeply rooted in research, weaving together history with memories and fragments of true or imagined stories. Her new large-scale installation draws from the characters and tales of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, improvised plays from the 16th century that originated in Italy where they continue to be of great cultural importance. Featuring a dramatic stage set with props, costumes, sound and video elements the new work is a result of Sworn's 2014 Italian residency awarded as part of the Prize.

Performed by travelling troupes of actors who existed on the fringes of late-renaissance society, *Commedia dell'Arte* dramas featured figures with exaggerated expressions and gestures. The characters of *la commedia* have influenced artists and writers for hundreds of years, from Shakespeare and Marlowe to Goya and Picasso.

Sworn is interested in how mistaken identity was frequently used as a literary device in early theatre productions. Actors in radically different guises, such as a woman dressed as a man, a master dressed as a servant or a lord as a beggar played with the perceived fixity of insignia and rank.

Early actors and the characters they took on pointed to social freedoms and mobility but also anxieties around misrecognition and social instability. The work adapts a famous 16th century case of imposture in response to these themes. The installation features fragments of sound and video, and is built through sourced and handmade props and costumes derived from the text *Scenarios of the Commedia Dell'Arte*, by Flaminio Scala, an actor and manager of one of the most pre-eminent theatre companies of the renaissance.

Sworn also researched the circulation of clothing of the time and collaborated with the Max Mara fashion house to produce costumes for the work. Based on sketches of garments made by the artist, the detailed costumes included in the installation were developed by the designers and skilled craftspeople at the Max Mara headquarters in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

The exhibition continues to Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia on 3 October 2015.

Corin Sworn was selected as the winner of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women by a judging panel including Whitechapel Gallery Director **Iwona Blazwick**, gallerist **Pilar Corrias**, collector **Candida Gertler**, artist **Runa Islam** and curator and writer **Lisa Le Feuvre**.

Based on her winning proposal for the Prize, the artist was awarded a bespoke 6-month residency in Italy divided between Rome, Naples and Venice. Sworn spent the residency immersing herself in the culture of each city, studying traditional plays and meeting actors and experts in the *Commedia dell'Arte*. She also visited important architectural sites including Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio's *Teatro Olimpico* in Vicenza, whose grand trompe-l'œil stage set is the oldest in the world.

Iwona Blazwick, OBE, Director of the Whitechapel Gallery said: 'For the fifth edition of the Prize we are presenting the culmination of Corin Sworn's research from her residency, which gave her an opportunity to sample the culture and fascinating history of theatre in Italy. Sworn's thorough exploration of *la commedia* and its complex impact on contemporary culture is original and fascinating. Her sensitive eye and intelligent interpretation of theatrical devices and scenography has been transformed into an arresting and complex visual installation, which will take us on a memorable journey.'

Luigi Maramotti, Chairman of Max Mara said: 'The Max Mara Art Prize for Women in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery nurtures the creative talent of the next generation of female artists. In this fast-paced world we offer the gift of time in which to make a new work of art. From Rome to Venice, Corin has been inspired by the legacy of the *Commedia dell'Arte* in Italian cultural life, and we are honoured to help bring this artist's vision to life and also create handmade costumes from our fashion house. We look forward to seeing this new commission at the Whitechapel Gallery and sharing this with audiences in Italy at the Collezione Maramotti.'

Notes for Editors

Corin Sworn

Sworn was born in 1976 and lives and works in Glasgow. She studied a BA in Psychology at University of British Columbia, Vancouver; a BFA at the Institute of Art & Design, Vancouver and an MFA at The Glasgow School of Art. Sworn creates films and installations. In *The Foxes* (2012), recently exhibited at the 55th Venice Biennale, the artist re-examined a collection of slides taken in 1973 by social anthropologist Gavin A. Smith during his fieldwork in a highland village in Peru. While touching on Smith's original work on Peruvian land reform and tactics of peasant rebellion, Sworn's installation focused on the legibility of photographs and how they are narrated through collective discussion. Recent exhibitions and screenings include a solo exhibition at Inverleith House, Edinburgh (2014), 19th Biennale of Sydney: *You Imagine What You Desire* at Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2014), *The Rag Papers* at Chisenhale Gallery (2013), *Artists' Film International: Corin Sworn* at Whitechapel Gallery, London (2012) and *Art Now: Corin Sworn* at Tate Britain (2011). Recent group exhibitions include *From Morn' Till Midnight* at Supportico Lopez, Berlin (2013) and *Storytelling* at National Gallery of Canada (2013). She is represented by Kendall Koppe Gallery, Glasgow and Natalia Hug Gallery, Cologne.

The Max Mara Art Prize for Women in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery

Previous winners of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women are: **Laure Prouvost (2011-13)** - Laure Prouvost created an ambitious new large-scale installation for her Max Mara Art Prize exhibition, for which she was awarded the Turner Prize in 2013. **Andrea Büttner (2009-11)** - The work of Andrea Büttner was presented at dOCUMENTA (13) and was included in the Whitechapel Gallery's landmark exhibition *Adventures of the Black Square* in 2015. **Hannah Rickards (2007-2009)** - The prize enabled Hannah Rickards to realise an ambitious new work she had been researching before winning the Prize. **Margaret Salmon (2005-2007)** - Margaret Salmon travelled to Italy and created a triptych of black and white films exploring themes of motherhood. She went on to exhibit at the Venice Biennale in 2007.

A book published by Whitechapel Gallery in collaboration with Collezione Maramotti accompanies the Corin Sworn exhibition. Exploring the stages of the fifth edition of the Prize and development of the new work, the publication includes an interview with the artist and **Bina von Stauffenberg**, Guest Curator and essays by **Daniel F. Herrmann**, Whitechapel Gallery Eisler Curator.

An event at the Whitechapel Gallery on 19 June 2015, 7pm features a discussion on the work with Daniel Herrmann and **Simon Donger**, Head of Scenography from Central School of Speech and Drama.

Whitechapel Gallery

For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has premiered world-class artists from modern masters to contemporaries. The Gallery is renowned for showcasing emerging and established female artists and has presented major solo exhibitions of Barbara Hepworth (1955), Eva Hesse (1979), Frida Kahlo (1982), Nan Goldin (2002), Sophie Calle (2009), Gillian Wearing (2012) and Sarah Lucas (2013). The Gallery is a touchstone for modern and contemporary art internationally, plays a central role in London's cultural landscape and is pivotal to the continued growth of the world's most vibrant contemporary art quarter.

Max Mara Fashion Group

The Max Mara Fashion Group was founded in 1951 by Achille Maramotti and is now run by the next generation. It is one of the largest women's ready-to-wear companies in the world, with 2369 stores in more than 100 different countries.

Collezione Maramotti

On 29th September 2007 the Collezione Maramotti opened to the public in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Collezione Maramotti is a private contemporary gallery exhibiting a permanent collection of over 220 works, as well as new commissions and projects by international emerging and mid-career artists. For further information, please visit www.collezionemaramotti.org

For further press information and images contact:

Whitechapel Gallery and Max Mara Art Prize for Women

Alex O'Neill

Senior Press and Communications Officer, Whitechapel Gallery

T +44 (0)20 7539 3360 E alexoneill@whitechapelgallery.org

Collezione Maramotti and Max Mara

Laura Facco, Press Office, Collezione Maramotti

T + 39 349 25299889 E ufficiostampa@collezionemaramotti.org

or

Alice Gaini, Press Office, Max Mara

T + 39 02 77792202 E gaini.a@maxmara.it