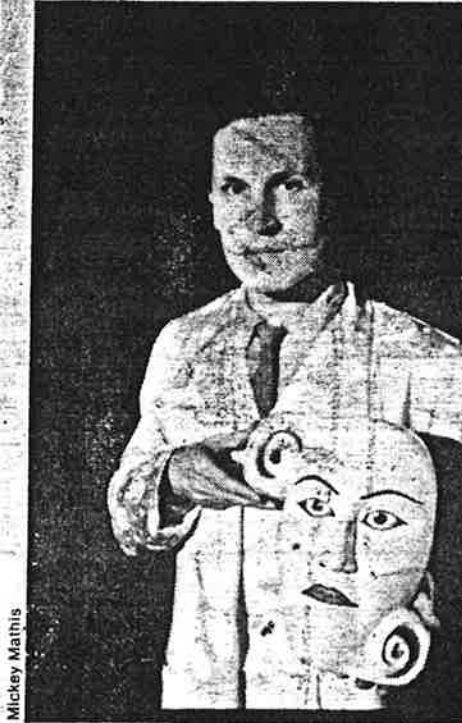


LUIGI'S TV ("tableau-vivant") at the Kitchen

By ROBE.



Mickey Mathis



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LUIGI ONTANI

3/30/83, The Kitchen presents Luigi Ontani's "...bal'OCCHI...". The title plays on the Italian words for toy, dance, eyes and Bali. After starting about 30 minutes late, Ontani's performance ended in less than 13 minutes. During the piece, the Japanese man next to me sat amused and yawning. My friend, who had nearly gone into insulin shock in the lobby, thought about blood sugar, not Luigi's t.v. ("tableau-vivant").

Luigi's body was on display in the center of a white, circular, paper space. Twelve stone-like masks (actually made of bread and gesso in honor of the Kitchen) were placed at equal intervals. In the center of this mask clock was Luigi on his back in a white suit, with a red mask with three white eyes and a spitting image of Pinocchio's carrot-like nose. Slides of giant eyes bracketed the room, while the audience gathered on the edge of the circle to look. Every few seconds, one of Luigi's 56 drawings were projected onto the circle. No music, just the tapping sound of the mouth on Luigi's wooden mask. No gestures, except for the rising of his breathing belly.

This was the work of an apparition. During an interview at the Caffè Primavera, Ontani noted that he wants to be a mystic. "I hope to reach a high essence. And I

hope to do it through my art. I don't pray, for instance, but I have a wish to be on a higher level." His statements are so much in orbit, so inner-made that, like it or not, Luigi is a true believe in his own pure intentions. "Without bragging, my art is just a natural instinct." Probably from a rich family, Ontani has all the appearances of a shy, eccentric prince.

Luigi's masks (in fact, they were all made by a Balinese craftsman) were his way of relating to the audience. Incidentally, the audience seemed dead, humorless, masochistic, undemanding. The Balinese masks over both feet, on his belly, and on his head were more vital.

The silence around Luigi's body, his wooden, buccal sounds and the slides of mermaids, saints, icons with three legs, made the Kitchen the site of a cryptic rite. There was a tremendous loneliness in and around the artist. I questioned my reason for being at this ceremony. It was a copy of an ancient ritual without substance or reference points.

The "performance" was like TV—television, rather than tableau-vivant. The heavy

passivity made it that way. Ontani explains: "I am distant as an individual, so I'm distant as a performer as well. Maybe this is because I want very much to communicate with the audience. I think to be distant means to go deeply. I do not need to give pleasure to the audience with a kiss, with an orgasm."

"I want to create an image that has minimal movement. Minimum gesture. Minimum event. Minimum space and minimum time. Everything restricted." About Pinocchio's mask, Ontani conceived a minimum music, "a minimum dialogue."

His concern is images. He has absolutely no interest in the technical aspects of his peices. He farms out all the work. Regarding the tableau-vivant, Luigi refers to it as "an apparition of my own inability." Energy, gesture occur around him; he simply lies there and breathes. Pinocchio is his symbol of "inutility." Pinocchio is the lie at the center of the performance. Pinocchio is also the persona of New York City with its defects. This, Ontani says, is his view of old long nose.

Sitting in the cafe with Luigi and Bruna, my friend from Rome, Ontani summed it up: "I can be with you this hour as a work of art." Ah, to be a painting, a sculpture or a snapshot!