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**IAM PRESENTS “UNMASKED: THE STORY OF THE VENETIAN CARNIVAL”  
FROM FEBRUARY 11 TO MARCH 15, 2010**

The Italian American Museum (155 Mulberry St., 212-965-9000) will present “Unmasked: The Story of the Venetian Carnival,” from February 11 to March 15, 2010. The exhibition will feature actual Venetian carnival masks, as well as acclaimed photographer Anita Sanseverino’s colorful interpretive essay of the centuries-old tradition.

Carnival masks are the hallmark of *il Carnevale di Venezia*, which began in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, and the wearing of masks and costumes was well established by 1436, when mask makers or *mascareri* were officially recognized with their own guild. Historically, masquerading was a shared practice among Venetians, regardless of social stature. It was the “great equalizer” of its day. The average citizen found that by wearing a mask they could be anyone they wished to be, regardless of their social status; by being hidden behind the mask, they could escape the restrictions of Venetian society.

Ms. Sanseverino’s vibrant and beautifully photographed essay of Venetian masks presents viewers with a visual perspective of the famed revelry and rituals of the Carnevale. With the breathtaking city of Venice as her backdrop, her well-timed camera records many faces of mystery. Lone figures that haunt, romantic couples that shout their closeness with coordinated ensembles, individuals who surrender to a united theme—all are among the thousands of free-spirited actors playing out their fantasy roles on the Carnevale stage. Her unsuspecting players silently depict why *a Carnevale ogni scherzo vale* (“anything goes at Carnevale”), unwittingly revealing what they’ve striven so hard to disguise.

“Carnevale” literally means “farewell to meat” and refers to the beginning of Lent, when Italians would refrain from consuming meat until Easter. In many parts of the world, it is celebrated as “Mardi Gras” or “Fat Tuesday.”

The Italian American Museum is located at 155 Mulberry St., at the corner of Grand St. in the heart of New York’s Little Italy. The museum’s hours are Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 AM to 6 PM; Friday to 8 PM. For more information, call 212-965-9000 or visit [www.italianamericanmuseum.org](http://www.italianamericanmuseum.org).

Founded in 2001, the Italian American Museum is dedicated to exploring the rich cultural heritage of Italy and Italian Americans by presenting the individual and collective struggles and achievements of Italians and their heirs to the American way of life. The Museum received its provisional charter from the New York State Board of Regents on June 12, 2001 and is a 501(c)(3) organization.