For Immediate Release

THE ONASSIS CULTURAL CENTER TO EXPLORE THE ROLE OF HEROES IN SOCIETY
IN THE EXHIBITION HEROES: MORTALS AND MYTHS IN ANCIENT GREECE,

On View in Manhattan from October 5, 2010 through January 3, 2011

NEW YORK, NY, October 4, 2010 – The age-old figures of Herakles, Odysseus, Achilles and Helen continue to fire the popular imagination today—and so does the concept of heroes, which began with the stories and images of these and other fabled Greek characters. Yet the very word “hero” has a different meaning in our society than it did in an ancient Greek world that seemed, to its people, to be alive with Greek heroes and heroines. To provide a better understanding of the lives, fates and meanings of the first heroes and heroines, to explore the inherent human need for heroes and to give audiences an opportunity to measure their own ideas of heroes against the ideas represented by a wealth of extraordinary Classical Greek artworks, the Onassis Cultural Center in Midtown Manhattan will present the exhibition Heroes: Mortals and Myths in Ancient Greece, on view from October 5, 2010 to January 3, 2011. Admission is free.

Heroes brings together more than ninety exceptional artworks focusing on the Archaic, Classical and the Hellenistic period (6th – 1st century BC), drawn from collections in the United States and Europe. Through these objects, which range from large-scale architectural sculptures to beautifully decorated pottery and miniature carved gemstones, the exhibition shows how the ancient Greek heroes were understood and how they served as role-models. It also explores this human need for heroes as role models through the arts of one of the oldest and most influential civilizations in history.

Heroes has been organized by the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, in cooperation with the Frist Center for Visual Arts, Nashville, the San Diego Museum of Art and the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA).

“People today think of the Greek heroes and heroines as great fictional characters invented by poets and storytellers,” stated Ambassador Loucas Tsilas, Executive Director of the Onassis Foundation (USA). “But to the ancient Greeks, these were real men and women who had lived, died and then somehow transcended death. On behalf of the Foundation, we are proud to present Heroes: Mortals and Myths in Ancient Greece, exploring the original concept of heroism through a presentation of outstanding works of art that span more than six centuries.”
Highlights of the exhibition include a bronze Corinthian helmet from 700-500 B.C. (The Walters Art Museum); a black-figure amphora depicting Achilles and Ajax playing a board game outside Troy (late sixth century B.C., Royal Ontario Museum); a black-figure column krater (c. 510 B.C.) depicting Odysseus escaping from the cave of the cyclops Polyphemos (Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe); a marble sculpture of the torso of an heroic athlete (Roman copy after an original by Polykleitos, c. 430 B.C., The Walters Art Museum); a sculpture of Herakles as a beardless youth, based on a Hellenistic model (first or second century A.D., Staatliche Museen zu Berlin); a marble sculpture of the head of Polyphemos (first or second century A.D., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston); a marble relief sculpture of scenes from the Trojan War (first half of the first century A.D., The Metropolitan Museum of Art); and a gold medallion with the bust of Alexander the Great (c. 218-235 A.D., The Walters Art Museum).

The first section of the exhibition, “Heroes in Myth,” presents objects depicting moments in the life cycles of four major figures—Herakles, Achilles, Odysseus and Helen—suggesting the complexities inherent in the ancient Greek concept of heroism. Although common motifs emerge, such as the extraordinary parentage and births of the heroes, the remarkable deeds they accomplished in early youth and their frequently troubled experiences in marriage, the character traits, struggles and deaths of these four figures were distinctly different. Perhaps the quality that most strongly links them all, in the words of contributing scholar Corinne Ondine Pache, is their “becoming immortalized after death.”

The second section of the exhibition, “Heroes in Cult,” expands on the belief in the hero’s survival after death by illuminating the ancient Greek practice of worshiping heroes at local shrines. Heroes were regarded “as founders, protectors, healers or helpers, but also as dangerous and haunted revenants who had to be appeased,” writes the curator of the exhibition Dr. Sabine Albersmeier. “The Greeks held festivals in their honor, performed rituals and sacrifices, gave them offerings and asked for favors such as protection, fertility or healing in return.” Documenting the practice of hero worship are objects including votive reliefs, votive offerings and grave monuments.

The third section, “Heroes as Role Models,” brings the exhibition closer to our modern ideas of heroism by exploring how ancient Greek warriors, athletes, musicians and rulers modeled their behavior, and sometimes their images, on heroes. Objects on view range from black-figure vase paintings of soldiers and racing jockeys to coins bearing the images of kings dressed as Herakles.

**Additional Programs**
Guided tours of the exhibition will be offered to the public every Tuesday and Thursday at 1:00 p.m. Tours can also be organized upon request for school groups. A comprehensive brochure will also be offered free to visitors.

**Catalogue**
Accompanying the exhibition is a 328-page, fully illustrated catalogue, edited by Sabine Albersmeier, exhibition curator and former Associate Curator of Ancient Art at the Walters Art Museum. Published by the Walters Art Museum, the catalogue includes 154 color, 107 duotone and 9 black-and-white illustrations and features essays by the scholars Michael J. Anderson, Jorge J. Bravo III, Gunnel Ekroth, Guy Hedreen, Ralf von den Hoff, Jennifer Larson, Jenifer Neils, John H. Oakley, Corinne Ondine Pache and H.A. Shapiro.
**Exhibition Tour**
Curated by Dr. Sabine Albersmeier, *Heroes: Mortals and Myths in Ancient Greece* debuted at the Walters Art Museum (October 11, 2009 – January 3, 2010) and has traveled to the Frist Center for Visual Arts, Nashville (January 29 – April 25, 2010) and the San Diego Museum of Art (May 22 – September 5, 2010). The final presentation of the exhibition will be at the Onassis Cultural Center.

**Support**
The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. This presentation of the exhibition is funded by the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA).

**About the Onassis Cultural Center**
The Onassis Cultural Center is the public forum of the Onassis Foundation (USA), an affiliate of the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation established according to the will of the Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis upon his death in 1975. The Onassis Foundation (USA) aims to disseminate Greek culture and civilization of all time periods in the United States of America. The Center seeks to give the public greater access to significant aspects of Greek culture through its ongoing series of exhibitions, lectures, musical events, literary evenings, and theatrical performances. To learn more about the Foundation and the Onassis Cultural Center, please visit [www.onassisusa.org](http://www.onassisusa.org).

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*Image Captions/Credits (in order of appearance)*
*Herakles as a Youth*, First–second century A.D., Roman copy after a Hellenistic original, Marble, Height 30 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo ©Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulterbesitz / Art Resources, NY (Johannes Laurentius).