

Frammenti (2003)

interview with Carol Rama

by Beppe Calopresti

DVD, Dur. 31 min.

I'm a person who very easily says things she shouldn't, so I refrain, I'm not a ballbuster, not a schemer, anything but... I thought Carol Rama was more artistic, it sounds a bit provincial, but that's what I am... Olga Carol Rama sounded a bit Sing Sing, like a trial, isn't it? How strange, I'm crazy, maybe I put my actions on trial.

My family... I had a sister who was born in Argentina because my father was there many years ago, then my father became an industrialist, he set up a bodywork shop and hired Valletta, Vittorio Valletta, as an employee; then Vittorio Valletta got an offer from Fiat and went there, and he made Fiat, because he was a man who only thought about work... all he needed was some furniture to sleep on, he also slept at Fiat. Valletta left my father and went to Fiat, and Fiat put everybody else out of business, including my father. I was 14, I didn't understand at first, then I realized we didn't have the same furniture as before, because they repossessed and seized everything, and the few things I have here are left because they needed restoration, they took everything and we became real tramps...

My apartment is full of trash but also of interesting things...

Beppe Calopresti: This room is gorgeous.

My mother... a woman who put up with my father in an exaggerated way, the family was quite tragic, I'd rather not talk about it.

(Carol Rama sings)

Umberto of Savoy

Of the chosen family

Sing a song of joy

A song of affection

From the youthful dawn

You represent us

And then I took a bow. Savoy was very amused, he was very tall, he put his legs along the length of the chair, so he was higher... I had already met him at opening of the center for the religion teachers, so I sang 'vai via picardu'... and they grabbed me and took away my medal.

(Carol sings)

They took away my medal, they sent me back to October... but I went to pose for Gemma Vercelli. I already felt like a model when I was a kid, right? And then this thing, for women, undoubtedly increases intelligence, that is it helped me a lot more, this way of being off the map, rather than being respectable, because being respectable has never helped me, and because the people I loved were always the others, never that bunch... but this has happened to everyone, I think.

I was staying with this girlfriend of mine whom I didn't pay, and I made little drawings that I sold cheap. I had met painters, critics, I had met Carluccio who helped me a lot, he bought my first paintings for a museum, but he also bought some things for himself, I think I gave him the most beautiful drawings I did when I was 15. I had Mollino and Morbelli who bought things from me every now and then. And Mollino was fond of me, and at the time that moved me a lot, because every so often he would stick his tongue in my mouth when he kissed me, and that scared me a little. Also because I knew nothing, I was a fabulous jerk... I liked Carluccio a lot.

But Mollino was a reckless nut who always had four ideas at once, never one idea at a time, and he got into lots of trouble, though he was very talented, very intelligent, very educated, very rich, but he too was surrounded by a very bad crowd... that was fatal for everybody.

Then I met Casorati, who really protected me and helped me to reach my goals, in short he got me into Galleria La Bussola, at the time it was very important to have a gallery like that... and there was a very good owner, a doctor, who was timid but quite knowledgeable.

Then many sad things happened, that caused me to always think about those things, and the only moment in which I could break free of those problems was when I was working, so I worked

constantly. It has always been like that, because I put art first and foremost, before everything else, even before love, before desire, before everything...

And then there is another thing... This work was such a commitment, as expression, expressing myself, that it got me away from normal feminine behavior, I don't know... "that one looks like a horse, that one looks like a mule, that one is ugly, that one's a jerk". You see, I am different, I don't think I'm better but I'm different, you will almost never hear any bad gossip from me, also because I have had to spend time with all kinds of people, with very few that were alike, so I had to defend everyone a little, in short, and first of all I had to defend myself...

Though I have never done that very well... I've always tried to be careful about getting mad, no? Also because when it happens, I get mad at myself, because I too have made many mistakes... Though they are mistakes that I like, otherwise I wouldn't make them, of course...

Anger is a thing you try to tame, but it consumes you like a drug. It is something you really enjoy thinking about, but then you are so unhappy to be saddled with it, because you can't get free anymore, it is a sort of violence against ourselves. And then I don't have much self-control... would you like a chocolate?

Here are some friends, Anselmino, Pasolini, Man Ray, but in New York I was with Anselmino, we were in a big hotel and we knew only artists, painters, we saw Warhol again, and Leo Castelli, Castelli introduced us to his painters. Anselmino was really good, really intelligent, and he was surrounded by extraordinary people, though he said it was for the money, the things... it doesn't matter what you are, then... if you are a friend of Anna Falck it's because you are a friend of her millionaire husband...

And back then there were millionaires who sold drugs... not lowlifes, poor people, as in Piazza Vittorio where you find kids who will sell you something... there were millionaires selling drugs, when I was there in the Seventies... probably when you are desperate drugs help, I tried it once, they offered me some cocaine, but luckily it made me feel sick, I was lucky...

This is Bertasso, this is Luciano Anselmino, this is Valeri, this is me, this is Nasi... and Man Ray, he was a person who knew how to love in an immediate, courteous way... on the airplane he grabbed your arm as if he was going to die, but instead I was the one who was dying, he had just found a loving way to comfort me without making me feel uncomfortable. He was very unhappy, because he had had a very bad case of polio. He was great, a Jew of great culture... I believe that counts a lot...

I've never been very cultured, and that has filled me with despair, but by spending time with people who were more intelligent than I am, like him, and now like you, I free myself, I don't know why, I manage to have a bit of courage.

The body is your coachwork, whether you like it or not it is the continuation of your discourse, I believe it accompanies much of what you say. The feet are the base, so the foot has an extraordinary importance, and sex, that depends where it is, if it's in the head, the body, the desires, if it has to be stimulated, it depends on what role it plays... sex is not just that organ that expels what it has to expel, it is something that also has to express, but it is very difficult, very...

We never have just one idea, at least I have lots of them, overlapping... instead, in paintings I can do it... I began to put objects, patches of cloth, rags, then I began to choose inner tubes because they were also very familiar... I have always worked instinctively, like now, my way of drawing, of painting... then the objects can be anything, a piece of tin, a piece of fabric, it doesn't matter, just as the color does not have importance... now it has a bit more, now unfortunately I have a little experience, but that's negative, at least I think so...

And I saw these women squatting on the ground with their legs open and their ass in the air and I believed the whole world was like that... that helped me a lot, I mean I didn't pay attention to the fact that they were disturbed, also because I didn't want to accept the idea that my mother was sick, though...

Beppe Calopresti: You would go back there...

I went to visit her. I learned from these sick, disturbed people to be very exhibitionist, and then, not having had an extraordinary education, I got my learning there... I must say, with my experience, that I have become much more acute in understanding people, more than others, though I didn't have a lot of education (sound of a crow)... well, will you listen to that whore? Maybe she's calling me: here I come! I too will start to fly, at night I live on the roof, in a crazy world.

But the important friends were the ones who were better educated than me, who taught me something, and the others were important because they had a role to play, at Einaudi or at the Regional administration, or here and there... I hung out more with writers, because painters tend to be jealous, you know... but really basic kinds of jealousy... then it is also that I am a bit touchy with them, yes, it's true, as soon as I see a colleague I start to feel afraid, because they've always had it in for me, yes, yes.

Beppe Calopresti: They did?

Of course, being a woman, you can imagine... also because when you are a painter you think you're somebody, it is a profession where you decide, one fine day, that you become one, all you have to do is a little wall someplace.

I met Pasolini through my friends at Einaudi here, I invited Pasolini to Anselmino's because he had said bad things about Sanguineti in an article, that is why I am not in that photograph, I didn't want to be in it.

Beppe Calopresti: He criticized Sanguineti?

Yes, in an article, so I called Pasolini and I told him you are really a bastard, and he said yes, you're right! I said, we're at Fregene, do you want to come? I was at the station waiting for him because none of them knew him... but he was a beautiful person... really... a fascinating man, you could understand why he was a homosexual... Was I in love with him? No, but when you admire someone, you like them, falling in love is not so far away. And I admired him very much, he made stupendous films, stupendous, especially the one about Callas, marvelous, fantastic (Medea, ed.).

The risk of having these different desires is something that affects everyone, because I too have been affected by those who are a bit different. But on that level I must say that you no longer have inhibitions, qualms, and then I am astonished... because the gay is much more feminine than women, who no longer understand anything... and then they are willing to say that if they have a son they hope he will be gay, which is something that astonishes me... there you can see that they have thrown everything away, not just the desire of pleasure, but even the image of pleasure that is a sort of immunity against the years... maybe that's it...

Beppe Calopresti: And you? How did you feel in the midst of that world, what did you do?

I played the dummy, like now, what could I do? I tried to understand them and to love them just the way they were... they are convinced, if they go to Rome or to Paris, that they are irresistible, and this is not even a feminine thing, it's precisely gay... I think a gay man feels like less of an idiot than a man who isn't gay ... women are ballbusters, women in love, lesbian or hetero, in any case they are ballbusters, you know, they want to be romantic, to be women of letters, erudite, they want to be taller, thinner, younger... something is always missing, right?... what a pain in the ass...

women, unfortunately, are stupider than men, there is no doubt about it, they are targeted more, understand? They've already had a hassled youth, a love story that didn't work, another that worked and then ended... and then it is all in that framework... and they don't know that you take up with someone, then you leave them, it's only human... gays understand that better... well, actually I'm not so sure they understand it better...

Edoardo was a breathtaking person, I mean I was so in love with this man, even now, that when I am in front of him I am paralyzed, I don't know the reason... it's just his voice, his manner... I have always been someone who fell in love with everyone, who gave everyone a little joy, not because I said something, but inside me... nevertheless, my love stories have also always been difficult, and very temporary, too... the ones that were a little more intense ran the risk of dying, at times... it happens to everyone. But I have never thought love was so important, though there was plenty of it, which is fine... If I had gotten married to someone like Mollino, someone important, no... I would have had to think about that person, not just about myself, and that seems like it would be a big effort because I am not capable, I'm not a person who would be capable of being a wife, I have never wanted to have children, never, never... so I do not feel mutilated because I am old, an old maid, with no kids... no. You can't have just one person close to you for ten, fifteen, twenty years, you'd have to be a millionaire, then you go on trips, you leave that person every month.... then things can continue... but if that is not the case it is a royal pain... also because I think that being on your own, for years, is one of the most beautiful things in life, it's fantastic, just to think, to study, to dream... to augment the zero of persons, always alone, it's marvelous. People seldom love this thing, instead I have loved it very much, very much. This has helped me, because in life – I have had a very hard life – being alone, well, was a little better. And then the people I loved did not love me, I would have married Mollino, but he was much older than I was. As an image, also Edoardo, but his wife Luciana is perfect for him, they've had three children... I don't know... I married painting, yes, there's no doubt.

Now, also when I'm at Franco's, I realize I work in the same way I did when I was fourteen... that is, I have more ability, more experience, but I am still just the same, I haven't changed...

The idea of having an illness is frightening, not because you are going to die, because when you are 85 years old that can happen, but because it might make you suffer before dying, taking away the ability of intuition, making you stupid, that's it.... That's what scares me. However, I think lucidity is something you have to cultivate, every day, not saying stupid things, or if you say them you ought to know they are stupid. At times I am struck by just how good I am, there's no doubt about that... I

didn't think I had the potential... I mean, what am I going to do with the Leone d'Oro, it's true, what do I need it for? At this point it's time for a coffee? Do you want one too?

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