

The Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris is presenting France's first retrospective devoted to Italian artist Carol Rama. Long sidelined by art history and the feminist movement, Rama's work ranges through all the avant-garde movements of the 20th century (Surrealism, Concrete Art, Pop Art, Arte Povera, Soft Sculpture...) while defying any pigeonholing. The ferocity of an oeuvre oscillating between abstraction and figuration calls on us to take a fresh look at official art currents and established categories.

*The Passion According to Carol Rama* offers an overview of a multi-faceted body of work, its scenography taking the form of a fragmented 'anatomy' that combines the chronological and the thematic in a thoroughgoing revelation of Rama's obsessive complexity.

This is a hybrid oeuvre in which subject and medium coalesce, from mouth/watercolour to penis-breast/rubber and eye/bricolage. A seeming jumble of themes and materials, Rama's different series in fact come together as a coherent whole, tackling notions like madness, fetishism, ordure, abjectness, pleasure, animality and death.

Born into a traditional Catholic bourgeois family in Turin in 1918, this self-taught artist has said, 'I did not have painters as masters; the sense of sin is my master'. Beginning with the early 1930s watercolours that caused censorship clashes, she developed a distinctive visual system at odds with normative, male-dominated modernism. In 1950 her work took an abstract turn, moving towards a personal, organic vision of Concrete Art and then to the *Bricolage* series, for which she embedded readymade objects like doll's eyes, animal claws and furs in the paint. In the seventies she began using strips cut from bicycle tyres as sensual, minimalist 'image material'. In 1980 she reverted to figuration with watercolours painted on architectural illustrations. Her most recent major series, dating from the 1990s, takes its inspiration from 'mucca pazza' (mad cow disease) and consists of provocative rubber compositions that could be termed 'Queer Povera'.

Despite a solitary, eccentric existence far removed from movements and the fashionable, Rama has always mixed with artists and intellectuals, among them Carlo Mollino, Edoardo Sanguineti, Lea Vergine and Man Ray, as well as meeting Pasolini and Andy Warhol. She now appears as a figure crucial to any understanding of the representational mutations in the art of the 20th century. Winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 2003, she was invited again in 2013, and her work has become the focus of intense interest on the part of museums, art historians and other artists.

Exhibition conceived by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAMVP), organized by the MACBA and coproduced with

PARIS MUSÉES / MAMVP, EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (IMMA) and GAM – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin.

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