

## BIOGRAPHY

Rosaria Abate

Mirella Bentivoglio was born to Italian parents in Klagenfurt (Austria) in 1922. She had a multilingual upbringing in German-speaking Switzerland and in England, where she obtained her Diploma in Proficiency in English. She began writing and publishing poetry in Italian and in English when she was young, (edited by Scheiwiller and Vallecchi, and edited by Giorgio Caproni, Italo Defeo, Mario Praz). She then found her vocation for expression in language and image, and joined the international neo avant-garde verbo-visual artistic movements of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and became one of its main protagonists. In 1968, she qualified as a lecturer in Aesthetics and History of Art in the Italian Academies.

She began her experimental work in Concrete Poetry, Visual Poetry and Visual Writing. In the 1960s she began her personal style of Object Poetry, in the 1970s she began experimenting with performances, Action Poetry, Environment Poetry and the insertion of symbolic structures with a linguistic matrix into public spaces.

She held her first solo show in the Gallery of Arturo Schwarz in Milan, in the winter of 1971. This was followed by numerous other shows mainly in public galleries, in Italy, Spain, Germany, England, Holland, Czech Republic, United States, Brazil, Japan, (presented by Italian and international art critics, including Enrico Crispolti, Gillo Dorfles, Frances Pohl, Krystyna Wasserman). Other solos were held in the Pictogram Gallery, Rome (1973), at the Studio Santandrea, Milan (1975), at Centro d'Arte Il Brandale (1976), Savona; and the anthologies at Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome (1996), the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington (1999), and the exhibitions held at the Oculus Gallery, Tokyo (2010), and at Pomona College, Claremont (2003 e 2015).

She participated in collectives in museums, galleries and universities in Europe, America, the East and Far East, Canada and Australia. She exhibited nine times at the Venice Biennial (in 1969 and 1972, twice in 1978; in 1980, 1986, and 1995; in 2001 with a performance and finally in 2009). She presented three times at the Sao Paulo Biennial in Brazil, between 1973 and 1994, three times at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (between 1978 and 1982); at the Quadrennial in Rome in 1996, at Documenta, Kassel, in 1982; at the MoMA, New York in 1992; at Palazzo Pitti, Florence in 2001 and at the Expo, Milan in 2015.

Her installations and her stone and wooden structures are part of permanent collections in Italian Museums (Macro, Rome; Ca' Pesaro Museum, Venice; Musma, Matera); her wall pieces and object poems made of various types of material are in the permanent collection at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington; the Getty Institute, Los Angeles; the MoMA, New York; the Mart, Rovereto; the MAC, Sao Paulo, Brazil; the Sackner Archive, Miami; the Uffizi Gallery and the National Library in Florence, and among collections of visual poetry in various other museums.

She held phonemic performances on various occasions in Italian theatres (Alessandria, Rome), and in Los Angeles (at the Brewery Gallery and Italian Institute of Culture), and at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Her main intervention in public space took place during the Biennial in Gubbio (1976 and 1979) and in other country locations in Umbria (1982-85): the interventions were documented by a

personal room dedicated to the artist, in the last edition of the Gubbio Sculpture Biennial (2016–2017). Other interventions were hosted in the Villa Buttafava park in Lombardy (2002–2006); along the banks of the Moldava in Prague (2005), in the courtyard of the Quaroni church in Matera (2007); in the Viterbo countryside 'Field-book', (*Libro campo*, 1998). She received particular praise in the press for her verbo-plastic structures in her collaboration in the project to restore Piazza Augusto Imperatore in Rome (2001).

She became an active theorist of verbo-visual art: see the entry on Visual Poetry in the 1978 supplement for the Universal Encyclopedia of Art (*Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Unedi,) that she wrote in essay format on invitation by Argan. She wrote numerous monographs and essays dedicated to the study of visual language from Futurism to the present day. Her book, in collaboration with Franca Zoccoli *Le futuriste italiane nelle arti visive*, ed. De Luca 2008, (Italian women Futurists in Visual Art), received considerable attention in newspapers and specialist press. Mirella Bentivoglio dedicated the first section of the book to women futurists operating in language and image who had slipped through the net of historical records. Her research is a detailed and updated version of the volume edited in English by Midmarch Arts Press in New York, 1997.

She held courses, seminars, conferences and lectures on the subject at University of Freiburg, Germany; ICPA Archive, St. Michael's Hall, Oxford; in the Italian Institutes of Culture in New York, Washington, Helsinki, Prague; at the Musashino University of Tokyo and the Osaka University of Arts in Osaka; at the MAC and at the Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado (FAAP), Sao Paulo, Brazil; at the Ca' Foscari University, Venice; and in various other cultural institutes around the world.

She curated and presented exhibitions and shows at the Venice Biennial (the most cited one being 'Materialization of Language', 1978), in Sao Paulo, in Medellin; Columbia University, New York; Italian Institute of Culture, Tokyo; Centro Pecci, Prato; Recife Museum, Brazil; Perth Festival, Australia; Expo-Arte, Bari; Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome; as well as in Greece, Spain, Finland, and, in collaboration, at the MoMA, New York. Her donations of artworks, (acquired while organizing events) have enriched Italian collections, such as the Mart in Rovereto, Pecci in Prato, Macma di Martino (Lecce), Maga in Gallarate.

She won scholarships and funding for research at Salzburg Seminar for American Studies (1958) and Getty Institute in Los Angeles for consultation of the futurist archives (1997). She received various awards both for her poetry, and her work as a critic and an artist, and she collaborated with various art periodicals and papers.

She died in Rome in Spring 2017. A year after her death, a Memorial Day was held at the Vittorio Emanuele National Library in Rome, to present the Bentivoglio collection, containing books and archives from the artist's apartment. In addition, in 2019, the library inaugurated, in the Spazi900 room, a section permanently dedicated to Mirella Bentivoglio, where some of her works are kept next to those of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Elsa Morante e Italo Calvino.

The city in which she lived for most of her life celebrated her memory with an exhibition at the Sapienza University Museo Laboratorio (2019), and with the reconstruction of the installation 'Tomb to hravat' (*Lapide a hravat*), originally made 1995–98 in a section of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome (2019). The spazio Lettera E Gallery in Rome, and Gramma Epsilon Gallery in Athens, which both opened in 2021, with names chosen by Paolo Cortese, pay explicit tribute to

Mirella Bentivoglio and her cultural work, with exhibitions of her work and other women's art in language and image and objects.

Some of her more recent personal shows were in Brescia (Galleria dell'Incisione, 2018); Bari (Galleria Nuova Era, 2018), in honour of the presentation of the monograph 'The 'Absent one'(L'Assente)'; Milan (Galleria Conceptual, 2019); and at the Fondazione Stazione dell'Arte, a museum dedicated to Maria Lai in Ulassai (Nuoro, 2021).

In all-women exhibitions, her work was on show in Rome (Istituto Centrale per la Grafica, 2018), Tivoli (Villa d'Este, 2019), Milan (Centro Frigoriferi Milanesi, 2019), Brescia (Galleria dell'Incisione, 2020), Como (Villa Olmo, 2022); and the specific production of the female book was inserted in the collective Volùmina atto secondo (Museo Nori de Nobili, province of Ancona, 2019, curated by Chiara Diamantini and Simona Zava), the title pays homage to the famous collective created by Mirella Bentivoglio in 1988 at the Rocca Roveresca in Senigallia.

The recent inclusions in shows dedicated to the verbo-visual theme also deserve a mention, such as the Fondazione Berardelli in Brescia (2019), Museion Bolzano and the Mart in Rovereto (Archive of new writings in the collection Paolo della Grazia, 2019); the Repetto Gallery, London (2019, 2020), and at Merano Arte (2021-22), in the show: The Poetry of Translation, where the value of translation is dedicated particularly to the adaptation of different codes and signs.

It is also worth noting her recent international participation in the exhibition of selected drawings by Italian 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, in collaboration with the Ramo collection in Milan, at the Menil Drawing Institute in Houston (2020-21). In 2018, the exhibition MONUMENTality, curated by Getty Research Institute Los Angeles, included Bentivoglio's famous anti-monument lithograph, created together with Annalisa Alloatti (1966-68). It is a historic work, often exhibited in verbo-visual exhibitions and recently at the 59<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Biennial (Il latte dei sogni/ The Milk of Dreams, April 2022).