

## MIRELLA BENTIVOGLIO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

The Italian Embassy in Athens, the Italian Cultural Institute of Athens and the Gramma\_Epsilon Gallery are proud to present: Mirella Bentivoglio. The Other Side of the Moon, to be inaugurated 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022, International Women's Day.

The exhibition, created in collaboration with the Mirella Bentivoglio Archive in Rome, pays homage to this influential Italian artist in the centenary of her birth. It is the first time a retrospective dedicated to Mirella Bentivoglio (Klagenfurt 1922 - Rome 2017) has been hosted in Greece.

The Italian Ambassador in Athens, Patrizia Falcinelli, declared: *"Through this exhibition, we want to give the Greek public the opportunity to get to know the extraordinary personality of Mirella Bentivoglio, an artist and multifaceted personality, who is one of only a few who have inspired the Italian and international art scene. We chose to inaugurate the exhibition on the occasion of International Women's Day, 8th March 2022, which is of course no coincidence: our intention is to pay homage to Mirella Bentivoglio not only for the intrinsic artistic value of her work, but also for the example she has set for hundreds of artists, and for everything she has done during her long career to promote female art."*

The exhibition, curated by Paolo Cortese and Davide Mariani and first held in the museum dedicated to Maria Lai in Sardinia in 2021, highlights the depth and complexity of Bentivoglio's poetry, and includes more than fifty works, photos, videos and drawings that not only illustrate the most significant periods of her curatorial and artistic career, but also invite reflection and dialogue on subjects that are still currently relevant.

From concrete poetry to visual poetry

Spread over two venues, the Italian Cultural Institute and the Gramma\_Epsilon Gallery in Athens, the collection traces key stages in Mirella Bentivoglio's biography and artistic journey. It starts with her experimental work in the 1960s and 1970s, when she was mainly involved in Concrete poetry, where meaning is transmitted through the shape of the composition of words and letters of the alphabet, such as 'Story of Monument' (*Storia del monumento*), created with Annalisa Alloatti in 1968, 'Cage (I have)' (*Gabbia HO*, 1966-70), 'Success' (*Successo*, 1969). Her Visual poetry followed, characterized by the introduction of slogans and elements of pop culture, such as her renowned 'I love you' (*Ti amo*, 1970).

Many of her works in those years explore aspects of modern society, such as consumerism, which she openly and fervently criticized, as seen in 'The consumed consumer' (*Il consumatore consumato*, 1974) or 'Heart of the obedient female consumer' (*Il cuore della consumatrice ubbidiente*, 1975), and her witty interpretation of the coca cola logo: "I noticed that by placing the two 'C's' opposite each other to make a heart shape - and their shape alone made this possi-

ble (I did not have to change anything), the 'oca' (goose) appeared of its own accord", affirmed Bentivoglio in one of her last interviews in which she identified the 'female-goose' as a principal ally of consumerism.

The exhibition also documents her main environmental interventions from the mid 1970s. The most notable of these were: 'Egg of Gubbio' (*L'Ovo di Gubbio* 1976), 'Poem to a Tree' (*Poesia all'albero*, 1976), 'And=conjunction: head-on collision, immobilizing locking' (*E=congiunzione: Scontro frontale, Incastro immobilizzante*, 1978-81), 'An 'E' of 'E's', (*Una "E" di "E"*, 1979-1981), 'Operation Orpheus' (*Operazione Orfeo*, 1982) and 'Field-book, Agri-culture' (*Libro campo, Agri-cultura*, 1998). The strong symbolism and identity connotations in each work carry the potential to create new and meaningful relationships with the surrounding landscape.

### The female touch

Among the many issues explored by the artist, that of gender undoubtedly played a key role, as seen in many of her works on show, including: *DIVA/NO*, 1971, 'Tombstone to the housewife' (*Lapide alla casalinga*, 1974) or 'Cancelled', (*La cancellata*, 1977-98). In these works, Bentivoglio affirms that female emancipation is possible, but not a foregone conclusion, as she herself reminds us: "*there was a habit of considering women aesthetically present only as housewives; female scientists were acknowledged, but not female artists*".

"While the popular image of a woman was someone sewing and caring for the family, a kind of angel of the hearth," says Davide Mariani, "for Bentivoglio this concept needed to be overturned by claiming a new role in society."

This is epitomized in the iconic writing on a T-shirt in 'Correction, linguistic promotion of sewing', (*Correzione, promozione linguistica del cucito*, 1988), which says: 'ðə-~~n~~et/fear, I am a woman' (*niente/abbiate paura, sono una donna*).

### The Other Side of the Moon

The exhibition provides an insight into the creative, yet scantily explored universe of numerous other women artists. There are works, photos and material from archives that Bentivoglio herself included in national and international events to highlight common denominators in verbo-visual art by artists such as: Tomaso Binga, Irma Blank, Francesca Cataldi, Betty Danon, Chiara Diamantini, Anna Esposito, Elisabetta Gut, Christina Kubisch, Maria Lai, Sveva Lanza, Paola Levi Montalcini, Lucia Marcucci, Silvia Meija, Valeria Melandri, Gisella Meo, Anna Paci, Giovanna Sandri, Greta Schödl e Simona Weller.

According to Paolo Cortese: "*Undoubtedly the most outstanding of Bentivoglio's curatorial activity, that literally made history, particularly for women in the visual art scene, was when she gathered eighty women artists working on the expressive potential of 'language and image' and 'language and object' to exhibit in 'Materialization of Language' at the 1978 Venice Biennial*".

"The Other Side of the Moon exhibition owes much of its inspiration to this particular experience", concludes Mariani, "the title is borrowed from an Eos publication of an artist's book created by Bentivoglio in 2013. On one page she imposes the moon's surface on the Earth and on the other is an unpublished poem from 1978. The verses describe a female-moon satellite, initially depicted as a

*body that obediently orbits the planet before announcing, in rebellious tones, prophetically: 'we are happily being born'."*

There is a bilingual catalogue to accompany the exhibition, in English and Italian, edited by Postmedia Books, with critical essays by Davide Mariani, Rosanna Ruscio and biographical and bibliographical information by Rosaria Abate.

#### Mirella Bentivoglio

Mirella Bentivoglio was a poet, artist, critic, curator and a key figure in the Italian and international verbo-visual art scene. She was born in Klagenfurt, Austria, in 1922, to Italian parents and had a multilingual upbringing in German-speaking Switzerland and in England (where she obtained her Proficiency diploma in English). She began writing and publishing poetry in Italian and in English when she was young, (edited by Scheiwiller and Vallecchi, and reviewed by Giorgio Caproni, Italo Deleo, 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. She died in Rome, aged 94, in 2017.

#### Personal exhibitions

Mirella Bentivoglio had numerous solo shows, mainly in public venues, in Italy, Spain, Germany, England, Holland, the Czech Republic, United States, Brazil and Japan, (presented by Italian and foreign critics such as Enrico Crispolti, Gillo Dorfles, Frances Pohl e Krystyna Wasserman). Some of her most memorable anthologies were held in the Galleria Schwarz Gallery in Milan (1971), in the Pictogram Gallery in Rome (1973), at Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome (1996) and the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington (1999), and more recently in the Oculus Gallery in Tokyo (2010), Pomona College in Claremont (2003 and 2015), the Gubbio Biennial (2016), the Gallery of Engraving in Brescia (2018), the MACMA (Matino and Lecce, between 2011 and 2013), the Nuova Era Museum in Bari (2018) and the Conceptual Gallery in Milan (2019). In 2019, a solo show of more than forty of her works from the Garrera Collection, was presented at the Laboratory of Contemporary Art Museum at the Sapienza University in Rome.

#### Collective exhibitions

She participated in collectives in museums, galleries and universities in Europe, America, the East and Far East, Canada and Australia. She exhibited ten times at the Venice Biennial: in 1969 and 1972, twice in 1978 and again in 1980, 1986, 1995, 2001 and 2009 and her work will be present at the 59<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Biennial *'The Milk of Dreams'*, in 2022, curated by Cecilia Alemani. She took part in the XI National Quadrennial in Rome, 1986, and participated in the Sao Paulo Brazil Biennial three times between 1973 and 1994, and three times at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, between 1978 and 1982. Her work was on show at Documenta Kassel in 1982, the MoMA in New York in 1992, Palazzo Pitti in Florence in 2001, Milan Expo in 2015, and the Getty Center in Los Angeles in 2018.

#### Curatorial activity

She curated and presented collectives and exhibitions at the Biennials in Venice, Sao Paulo, and Medellin; at Colombia University, New York; the Italian Cultural Institute in Tokyo; Centro Pecci in Prato; Recife Museum, Brazil; Perth Festival, Aus-

tralia; Expo-Art in Bari; Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome; in Greece, Spain, Finland and the MoMA in New York. Her donations of artworks, acquired over the years during her curatorial activity, have enriched permanent collections in museums such as the National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rome, the MART in Rovereto, the MUSINF in Senigallia, the Nori de' Nobili Museum in Trecastelli, the Pecci in Prato, MACMa in Marino and the MAGA in Gallarate.

## OLTRE LA PAROLA MIRELLA BENTIVOGLIO DALLA COLLEZIONE GARRERA

Dal 7 al 31 ottobre 2019 MLAC, Piazzale Aldo Moro 5, Roma a cura di Ada De Pirro, Angelandreina Rorro

Comitato Scientifico: Gianni Garrera, Giuseppe Garrera, Ada De Pirro, Angelandreina Rorro, Ilaria Schiaffini, Claudio Zambianchi

A distanza di poco più di due anni dalla scomparsa, il Museo Laboratorio della Sapienza dedica a Mirella Bentivoglio la prima mostra monografica nella città dove ha vissuto gran parte della sua vita. Saranno esposte circa 50 opere, tutte provenienti dalle collezioni di Gianni e Giuseppe Garrera tra le quali alcune inedite. La scelta operata vuole essere un contributo alla conoscenza di questa grande figura di intellettuale e artista anche attraverso esempi di gestazione di sue opere con l'esposizione di materiali minuti che testimoniano il percorso creativo di alcuni importanti lavori. Attraverso il confronto di opere realizzate con diverse tecniche sarà inoltre possibile verificare la qualità costante e la coerenza della sua attività artistica.

L'esposizione si concentra sull'attività verbovisiva dell'artista, trascurando volutamente l'attività teorica, che rimane comunque un imprescindibile riferimento per chi si avvicini allo studio delle varie declinazioni sperimentali della visual poetry e dell'arte al femminile.

Mirella Bentivoglio (Klagenfurt 1920-Roma 2017) ha iniziato molto giovane a comporre poesie per poi avvicinarsi con naturalezza alle ricerche sperimentali di quelle neoavanguardie degli anni sessanta e settanta che erano nutrite dall'interesse per la linguistica e l'universo della comunicazione - soprattutto la Poesia Concreta e la Poesia Visiva -, ma rimanendo sempre libera da vincoli troppo circoscritti aiutata dalla sua formazione culturale aperta alla conoscenza di più lingue e ambiti disciplinari.

La sua attività artistica si concentra quindi sul recupero del valore iconico della parola e su ogni possibile variazione del linguaggio, sulle combinazioni e gli straniamenti di senso ottenibili attraverso frammentazioni e spostamenti con risultati di sottile e a volte dolorosa ironia.

L'artista gioca tutto sull'ambiguità semantica ma carica sempre il nonsenso di qualche concetto simbolico, che in maniera quasi didascalica ci mette in guardia circa le insidie del linguaggio. Andare Oltre la parola vuol dire andare oltre la nostra assuefazione al significato corrente degli elementi linguistici: rompere il giocattolo per vederne il meccanismo interno aiuta a prendere coscienza della precarietà delle nostre certezze.

L'esposizione, in occasione della quale sarà pubblicato un quaderno di mostra, sarà aperta dal 7 al 31 ottobre 2019, dal lunedì al sabato dalle ore 15.00 alle ore 19.00

Si ringrazia l'Archivio Mirella Bentivoglio - Roma