



MUSEU
D'ART CONTEMPORANI
DE BARCELONA

THE PASSION ACCORDING TO CAROL RAMA

- ▶ MACBA brings together 200 works spanning eight decades (1936–2006) in the largest retrospective of the artist to date
- ▶ Ignored for decades by official art history discourses for her challenge to the dominant narratives, Carol Rama was not recognised until 2003 when she was awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale
- ▶ An essential artist for understanding the mutations of contemporary art and the work of later artists such as Cindy Sherman, Kara Walker, Sue Williams, Kiki Smith and Elly Strik

Title: *The Passion According to Carol Rama* **Opening:** Thursday 30 October 2014, at 7.30 pm **Dates:** from 31 October 2014 to 22 February 2015. **Organisation:** Exhibition conceived by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAMVP), organised by MACBA and co-produced with PARIS MUSÉES / MAMVP, EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (IMMA) and GAM – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin. **Curators at MACBA, EMMA, IMMA and GAM:** Teresa Grandas and Beatriz Preciado **Curator at MAMVP:** Anne Dressen

The 'advantages of being a woman artist', according to the Guerrilla Girls are 'knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty. Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled "feminine". Being included in revised versions of art history.' All these predictions have come true in the case of the Italian artist Carol Rama, to whom the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) dedicates a large exhibition.

Ignored for decades by official art history discourses, Rama's work, spanning eight decades (1936–2006), challenges the dominant narratives and offers a dissident representation of female sexuality. With a selection of two hundred works, this exhibition offers a guide through the artist's various creative moments, which are indispensable for understanding the later production and work of many relevant twentieth century artists.

Born in 1918 to a family of industrialists in Turin, Carol Rama never received any academic artistic training. Ingrained in her early work are the traces of her experiences of institutional confinement (it is believed that her mother was admitted to a psychiatric hospital) and death (her father committed suicide). In the **1930s and forties**, Rama began to invent her own visual grammar through figurative watercolours signed *Olga Carolina Rama*. Her *Appassionatas* and *Dorinas*, with amputated limbs and stuck-out tongues, are the sick and institutionalised bodies that the work of the artist makes visible, elevating and praising them with vitalistic and sexualised representations, and reclaiming them as subjects that have political agency and experience pleasure. These early works confronted the normative ideals of gender, sexuality and cognitive and physical normality imposed in Mussolini's Italy, and were therefore censored as 'obscene' by the Italian government when they were first exhibited in 1945.

Rama would interpret the censorship of her first exhibition as an 'invitation' to abandon the problematic figurative motifs and begin what was, to use the artist's own words, an 'abstract war'. In the **1950s**, Rama became involved with the Concrete Art Movement in order, according to the artist, 'to provide a certain order' and 'limit the excesses of freedom'. Her work would be signed, from this moment on, as *Carol Rama*. The name *Olga*, like the figurative work that had triggered censorship, was eliminated.

Little by little, Rama began to undo the geometric conventions of the Concrete Art Movement while also experimenting with new materials and techniques. This turn towards abstraction led her to experiment with Informalism and Spatialism in the sixties and to develop her 'bricolages': organic maps made with fingernails, cannulae, mathematical signs, syringes and electrical components.

The works of this period fortuitously reorder organic and inorganic material, equations from the nuclear bomb, names like Mao Tse Tung or Martin Luther King, in order to make artefacts that are both alive and denaturalised. Rama's *Bricolages* question the experience of reading: these texts and images are no longer intended to be read, or merely seen, but rather to be 'experienced' with all of the senses.

By the end of the **1960s**, the Italian art scene was saturated with the male figures of Arte Povera (Alighiero Boetti, Giuseppe Penone, Giulio Paolini, Mario Merz, Pino Pascali, Michelangelo Pistoletto...), with the rare exception of women like Marisa Merz. A woman-without-a-man, surrounded mainly by friends not linked to Arte Povera and/or homosexuals, Rama remained on the outskirts of the Italian art scene between 1960 and 1970. However, if we pay close attention to her work of this period, it is impossible not to see parallels and resonances with Arte Povera. Excluded from the main scene, Rama's work remained invisible.

Somewhere on the road between Povera, junk art and Nouveau Réalisme, the work of the Italian artist is more visceral and dirty than poor. Rama's Povera was a *Queer Povera*. She had understood that not only the inorganic materials, absorbed by the alienating process of industrial production, should be recuperated by the artist through a new utopian encounter with matter, but also that the body itself – its organs and fluids that are the objects of political management and social control – should also be recuperated and subjected to material intervention.

In the **1970s**, Carol Rama connected once again with her biography expressed through the intensity of matter. In this period the artist used almost exclusively the rubber from bicycle tires, a material she knew well because her father owned a small bicycle factory in Turin. Rama dissected the tires, transforming them into a two dimensional surface, creating forms through assemblages of colours and textures. Her tires, distressed by light and time, punctured and flat, flaccid and decomposed, are like our bodies: 'Still well-defined and vulnerable organisms.'

In **1980**, the Italian curator Lea Vergine 'discovered' the work of Rama and included a selection of her early watercolours in the group exhibition *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia 1910–1940*, a show that brought together the works of more than one hundred women artists. Paradoxically this 'discovery' served once again to make invisible the work of Rama in two different ways: on the one hand, she was 'recognised' on condition of being presented as a 'woman', while on the other this recognition was based on the presentation of her watercolour works from the 1930s to the exclusion of all else, thus eclipsing Rama's later career. Curiously the retrospective approval of the watercolours would lead Rama to recover the figurative style and 'reproduce' the early motifs of the *Dorinas* and *Appassionatas*, which, taken out of their creative context, appear now as ghostly inscriptions of the trauma of historical erasure.

Throughout the **1990s**, when Rama sought a place of identification, the artist refrained from appealing to figures of femininity and instead explored the figure of the animal infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy: the *mucca pazza* (mad cow disease). The characteristic Carol Rama motif and use of materials (the rubber, the hessian cloth of mail bags, the breasts, the tongues, the penises, the dentures...) are now reorganised to form a dislocated anatomy that no longer constitutes a body. Nevertheless, Rama would describe these non-figurative works as self-portraits.

The main recognition of Rama as an artist would not arrive until she was awarded the Golden Lion for her life's work at the 2003 Venice Biennale.

The Passion According to Carol Rama

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■ **CONFERENCE *The Other Side of the Avant-garde: Somato-political Dissidence and Aesthetics in the Art of the Twentieth Century***

With Julia Bryan-Wilson, Patricia Falguières, Jack Halberstam, Elisabeth Lebovici and Beatriz Preciado

Friday 12 December 2014, from 5 to 9 pm; Saturday 13 December, from 5 to 7 pm

Meier Auditorium. Free admission. Booking required. Limited places. In English with simultaneous translation

On the occasion of the exhibition of *The Passion According to Carol Rama*, five contemporary critics have been invited to interrogate the dominant narratives of the history of twentieth century art and its exclusion of somato-political minorities. What happens to the hegemonic narratives of the history of art if we confront them with their other subalterns? What are the relations between the languages of art and other exclusionary political and sexual discourses? Here other narratives are proposed – other stories capable of generating new forms of public visibility.

■ **EXPERIENCE MACBA – ASK THE CURATORS**

Conversation with Teresa Grandas and Beatriz Preciado

Saturday 13 December 2014, at 7 pm

Museum galleries. Admission: 5 €. Free with Passi and Friends of MACBA cards and for those attending the seminar. Booking not required. Limited places

■ **Publication in preparation:** *The Passion According to Carol Rama*. Included are texts by Anne Dressen, Teresa Grandas and Beatriz Preciado; a republication of an essay by Lea Vergine; an interview conducted by Corrado Levi and Filippo Fossati with the artist as well as a number of contributions from authors for whom the work of Carol Rama has been a key referent. Published in Catalan, Spanish, English and French, the publication is a joint venture between Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAMVP), EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art and GAM – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin.

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■ **MACBA:** Plaça dels Àngels, 1, 08001 Barcelona, www.macba.cat

■ **OPENING HOURS:** Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday: 11 am to 7.30 pm; Saturdays 10 am to 9 pm; Sundays and holidays: 10 am to 3 pm; Tuesdays except public holidays closed.

