

EMMA

Carol

Rama

PASSION
ACCORDING TO
CAROL RAMA/
14 Oct 2015 – 10 Jan 2016

English

Carol Rama
2003



Passion According to Carol Rama

EMMA is proud to present the art of Carol Rama (1918–2015) a ground-breaking avant-gardist in her first ever extensive retrospective. The touring exhibition features some 200 works from 1936–2005.

Carol Rama was a female artist of the modernist era who created art outside accepted canons and resisted being pigeon-holed into any of the 20th century art movements. For this reason, Rama has remained relatively unknown to the wider public, but in her day she was quite famous in avant-garde art circles and society. The contemporary perspective enables us to see Rama's sensitive and psychologically charged work on its own merits as pioneering and independently avant-garde art unrestrained by formal rules. Rama's recurring themes – sexuality, madness, animalism, life and death – are relevant and poignant today.

Snubbed for decades by official art history and the field of art in general, Carol Rama's art was "rediscovered" first in the 1980s. Today, she is considered an artist whose oeuvre has influenced many artists of following generations, such as Cindy Sherman, Kara Walker, Sue Williams, Kiki Smith and Elly Strik. Her work has appeared in numerous group exhibitions alongside such names as Louise Bourgeois, and in 2003 Rama received a Lifetime Achievement award at the Venice Biennale.

The exhibition is produced by MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona), MAMVP (Musée d'Art moderne de la ville de Paris) and EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art. The exhibitions at MACBA and EMMA are curated by Teresa Grandas (MACBA) and Paul B. Preciado. An extensive exhibition publication was published in early 2015. After EMMA, the exhibition continues its tour to Ireland, Dublin's Irish Museum of Modern Art IMMA, and from there to GAM – the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Carol Rama's native Torino.

ARTIST NAMES
CAROL RAMA

Olga Carolina Rama was born in 1918 to an industrious business family in Torino. She made her first works in the mid-1930s. She painted on recycled paper using watercolours. Her colour scheme was intense but calm and delicate. It seems to be at odds with the subject matter, which is evocative, provocative if not pornographic.

Rama never had formal artist training. In her own words, she was uneducated and wild and had no patience to see through any of her studies. Her personal archive, however, attests to the opposite. Rama has closely followed the development of European art: art magazines and books collected over decades betray a professional who keenly studied the world of art.

The artist's self-created myth of an uncivilised is finally debunked when looking at Rama's social life: She knew and made an impression on many Italian and international artists at different times. For sixty years, one of his closest friends was Eduardo Sanguineti, a politician and reformer of Italian literature. She charmed the surrealist Man Ray, and knew

Pablo Picasso and the pop artist Andy Warhol. Rama seems to have attracted people with sharp intellect and a wish to break boundaries.

Carol Rama recounted anecdotes through the materials she chose, which make the works reach the viewer's very sense of touch, beyond analytical thinking. In the 1960s, her materials included syringes, mail bags, nail polish, and in the 1970s mostly bicycle tires, which were a reference to her father's factory that had manufactured bicycle parts.

Previous spread *Nonna Carolina*, 1936. Owned by the Fondazione per l'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea-CRT and on loan to the Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, at the Castello di Rivoli Museum d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin

Carol Rama in her atelier home, Turin. © photo: Pino Dell'Aquila © Archivio Carol Rama, Torino 1989





Appassionata / Appasionate, 1940.
Fondazione Guido e Ettore de
Fornaris Galleria d'Arte Moderna
e Contemporanea di Torino
© photo: Gonella 1999

“I wish
I’d met you
earlier.”

–PABLO PICASSO TO CAROL RAMA–

The discarded materials tell the story of a forsaken girl whose beloved father committed suicide in 1942. Rama’s mother suffered from mental health problems and spent a short period confined to a psychiatric hospital. Rama has said that she makes art to heal her own anxiety. Yet she has no qualms admitting she is mad and probably does not even want to be cured. Madness seems to be a means of expression for Rama, a trademark of a kind. In interviews she comes across uninhibited, provocative and shameless woman who could not care less about convention and social norms.

EXHIBITION THEMES

The exhibition forms a whole with figurative and non-figurative works and the different techniques and materials employed showcasing the major themes of Rama's work.

Political anatomy – people and their taboos

The *Appassionatas* and *Dorinas* of Rama's 1930s and 1940s watercolours made visible a body that questioned the Fascist heroic ideals of health and virtue. The artist created her own idiom, which was also a protest against the modernist expressive practices. Rama's trademark, the ornamentally engraved wooden frames were, too, a clear gesture against Modernism. Of the contemporary styles of the time, Cubism appears in Rama's works as spaces that have unreal perspective. The fleshy colours of the Fauvist colour palette and the wet lusciousness of the watercolour, in turn, convey bodily lust. In Rama's works, the body is damaged and menacing, bruised and battered or lusty. However, Rama always presents the feminine, sick or disabled body as active and vital. Rama used

her motifs – the tongue sticking out, the genitalia, polished nails – to break the innocence of watercolours, which had been deemed as a feminine and innocent form of painting.

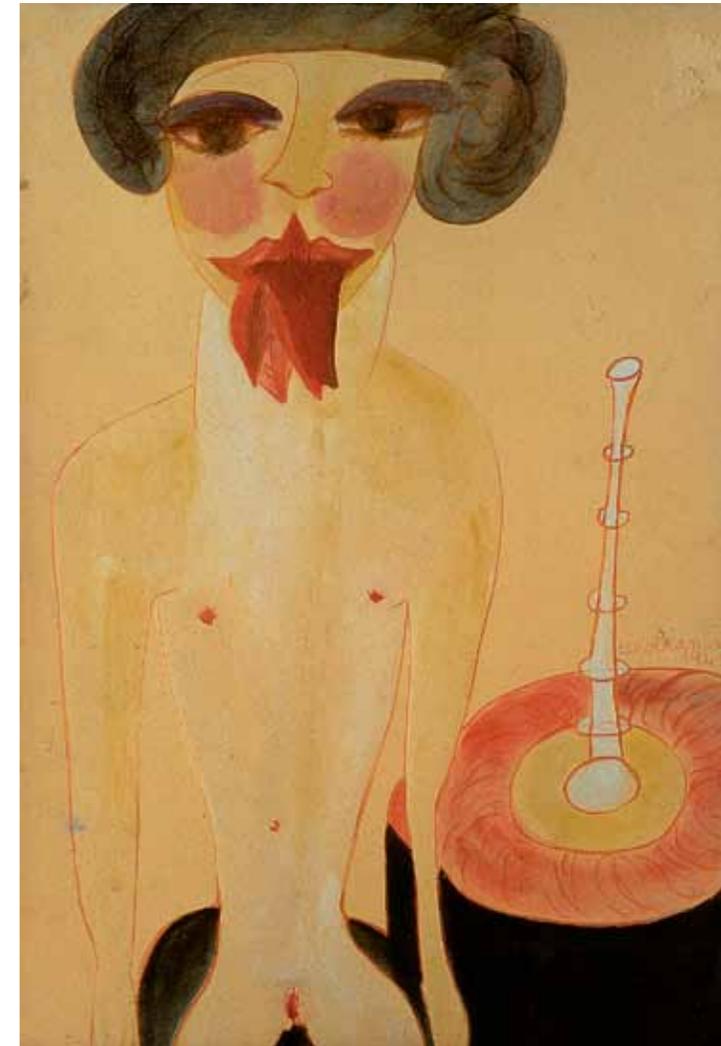
Organic abstraction

In the 1950s, Carol Rama temporarily joined *Movimento d'arte concreta* movement, which represented the concrete art movement in Italy. After rectangles and oblique shapes Rama moved on towards informality in the 1960s. Named *Bricolages*, Rama combined organic and inorganic materials in her works as if in random: used syringes, the nails of stuffed animals, faux fur and parts of electrical appliances, such as circuit boards and batteries. She tied the materials into relief-like paintings with a technique in which the stickiness of resin and glue, the shiny enamel and the vibrant line of ink create an illusion of bodily fluids. The vacant stare of the artificial eyes frequently used in the *Bricolage* series meets the eye of the viewer, like a voyeur caught in the act.

“The tongue
is a part of the body
which I like best,
because it's
always the same,
it never ages.”

–CAROL RAMA–

Opera n. 54 / Work no. 54, 1941.
Private Collection
© Associazione Archivio
Carol Rama





Arsenale, 1971.
Private Collection
© photo: Pino Dell'Aquila

Queer arte povera – well-defined and vulnerable organisms

Carol Rama's choice of materials link her work with the Italian *arte povera* but are often autobiographical. Since the 1970s, she has used the inner tubes of bicycles in her works. The daughter of a bicycle manufacturer, the material was familiar from her childhood. Rama treats the tubes like a taxidermist animal hide: she cuts them open and replaces paint and brush with the different shapes and texture of rubber. The flat, flaccid tubes worn down by light and time are like human skin: vulnerable and aged. Both the *Bricolage* series and the most simplified compositions made with bicycle inner tubing, such as the *Arsenal* works well as a number of three-dimensional object compositions representing Rama's *queer arte povera*.

In these works, materials are integrally linked with the human body – its strange, elusive, worthless and avoided side.

The ecology of the human and the animal – “The mad cow is me” (Carol Rama)

The 1980s saw Carol Rama return to figurative art. The themes and subjects matters of her early career are seen in a new light in an ecological set-up, with the needs of the human race and animals intertwining. The drawings of this period featured voluptuous, Fellinesque women, fallen angels, mythological beasts and fragmented bodies. Rama often used graph paper, maps or architectural drawings as the base for her drawings. The works strongly resemble altarpieces made for pagan gods.

In the series *Mucca pazza* (Mad Cow), Rama identifies with the “mad cow” at a time when the BSE epidemic was sweeping through Europe near the end of the millennium. The artist used this context to express the animalistic set of values as a kind of extension of feminism, but without human-centred thinking. It transgressed the boundaries of species, gender and sexuality and emphasised the common ground shared by all living creatures.

Informalism = a European post-World War II art movement that rejected figurative and geometric forms. The name comes from the French term *informel* (“without form”). The improvisatory movement drew focus on the materiality and surface of the painting. The painting in itself became a living organism.

Arte povera = (Italian for “impoverished” or poor art”) is a name given by the Italian art critic **Germano Celanti** in 1967 to a new artist group that was active in the 1960s and 1970s. In Arte Povera, industrial materials and ordinary commodities were transformed into something new through an artistic process. Used, “worthless” objects from paper to broken glass, or natural materials such as sand, wood, hay and light, were introduced into art works. Arte Povera art was often short lived, such as performances, installations and assemblages.

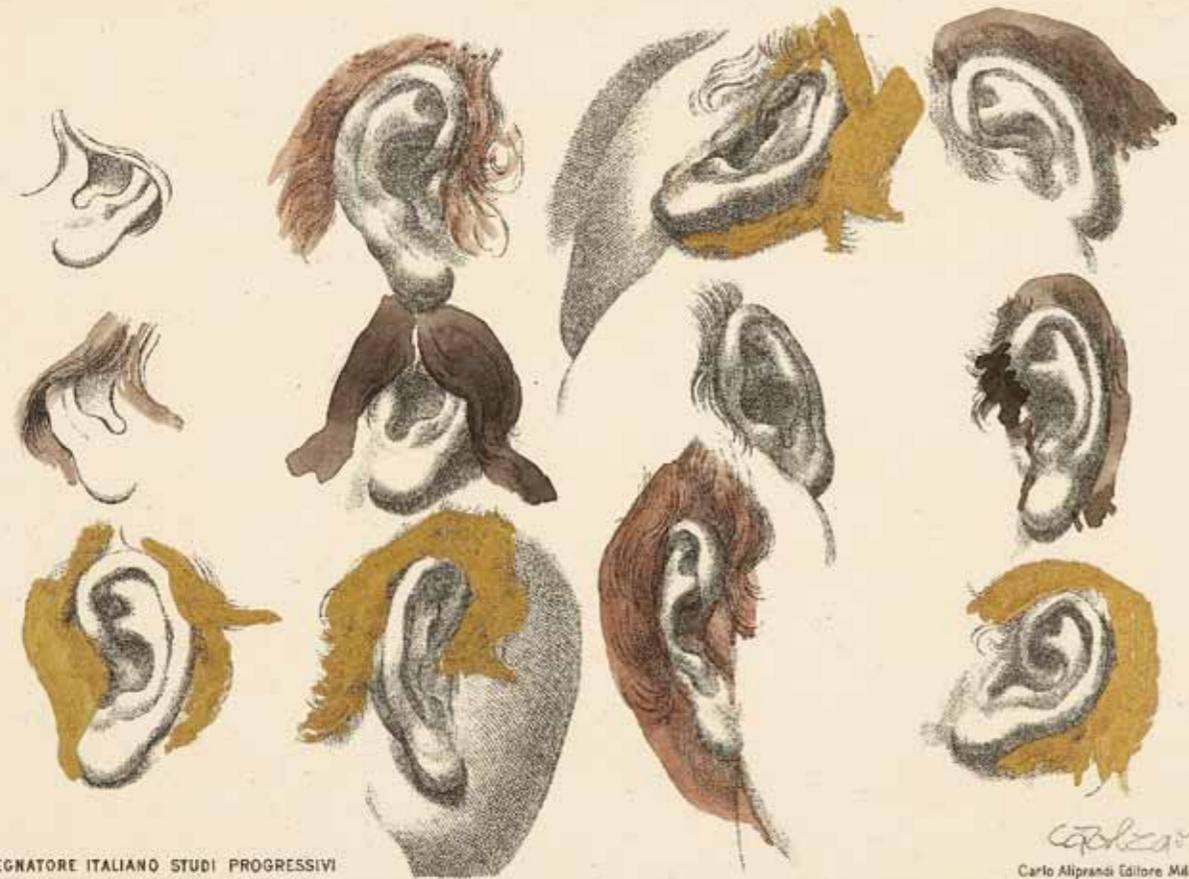
Queer = “strange” or “unusual”. Originally ‘queer’ refers to sexual or gender identities that remain outside conventional categorisation. Queer has since acquired a wider meaning, referring to any identity that questions prevailing norms.

“I only feel safe
when I am standing
in front of a blank sheet.
It is the only thing
that relieves my fears.
Painting is
my transgression.”

–CAROL RAMA–

Bricolage, 1967.
Private Collection, Torf
© photo: Tommaso Mattina





IL DISEGNATORE ITALIANO STUDI PROGRESSIVI

Carlo Aliprandi Editore Milano

C'È UN ALTRO METODO PER FINIRE

EXHIBITION PROGRAMME

- Sat 17 Oct 2 p.m.** **Tour with an art expert**
With Reetta Kalajo, Chief Curator, Education and customer service
- Sat 24 Oct 4 p.m.** **October Passion**
Compañía Kaari & Roni Martin:
La Femme Rouge, flamenco
4:40 p.m. An artist's view on passion and visuality: Kaari and Roni Martin with violinist Sanna Salmenkallio
- Sat 7 Nov 2 p.m.** **Tour with an art expert**
Pilvi Kalhama, Museum Director
- 28 Nov 2 p.m.** **Flamenco**
Compañía Kaari & Roni Martin /
The Raven, flamenco
> part of WeeGee's Christmas event
- Sat 9 Jan 16 1 & 3 p.m.** **La ultima opportunità**
Katri Kauppala: Performance: Six Touches
2 p.m. Tour with an art expert:
Tiina Penttilä, Curator
2-4 p.m. Open workshop: The Garden of Love,
painting and embroidery

*C'è un altro metodo per finire, ancora /
There is Still Another Method for Finishing, 2003.*
Private Collection, Turin
Photo: Andy Keate

Discussion events in co-hosted
by the Feminist Association Unioni



- Wed 4 Nov 6-7 p.m.** **Art and the power of money**
Discussion event on artists' income and the funding of art. Who gets to be funded and on which terms? Who uses the power to decide? With curator and diversity expert Ahmed Al-Nawas, artist Minna Henriksson and Senior advisor Veli-Markus Tapio from the Finnish Cultural Foundation

- Wed 9 Dec 6-7 p.m.** **Carol Rama and sexuality in art**
Further information will be published at a later date: www.emma.museum/puheenvuorot

Secret Diaries

To explore the feelings aroused by the exhibition, visit the activity space *Secret Diaries*, where you can hide your own secrets and emotions in the pages of old books and share them.

Bookable guided tours

Art Quarter, Art Hour, Art Bridge and Children's Hour and Children's Quarter

Read more about the workshops and guided tours on EMMA website

EMMA Club offers special programmes and benefits www.emma.museum/emmaklubi



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, Torino.