

## FERGUS McCAFFREY, NEW YORK

### CAROL RAMA

SEPTEMBER 8-OCTOBER 22, 2016

OPENING RECEPTION: SEPTEMBER 8, 6:00-8:00 PM

Fergus McCaffrey is proud to present a major exhibition of paintings, assemblages, and works on paper by the late, great Carol Rama (1918-2015). The exhibition will feature more than forty works and is the largest presentation of Rama's work in the United States since her 1998 retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston.

Rama, who was self-taught, spent most of her life in Turin, Italy. An outlier in artistic circles in her hometown, Rama valued her independence and refused to adhere to any one specific movement or style, choosing instead to create a diverse body of work driven by her feelings and emotions. While known in her hometown, Rama was internationally "discovered" when Lea Vergine included her in the groundbreaking 1982 exhibition *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia, 1910-1940*. A feminist artist "avant la lettre," Rama made often discomfiting work that challenged preconceptions about representations of sexuality and the body.

Beginning in the 1930s, Rama created an aesthetic vocabulary filled with icons that were linked to issues of real-life mental illness, financial ruin, and suicide, woven together with a mythologized biography. Her early figurative watercolors, from 1936 on, were censored as obscene by the Italian government in 1945 for perverting normative behaviors and challenging notions of public decency.

In 1948, Rama exhibited at the Venice Biennale for the first time. Perhaps as a consequence of the reception to her prior work, she joined the Movimento Arte Concreta (MAC) in 1950 and began work on methodical geometric abstract forms that were free of bodily reference. This period gave way in the early 1960s to works that writer Edoardo Sanguineti would label *Bricolages*. Rama was deeply influenced by Sanguineti's experimental poetry, which employed multiple languages and linguistic styles to create textual collages. In her *Bricolages*, Rama made use of materials such as glass eyes, medical syringes, animal claws, metal scraps, and decorative beads to create intensely visceral and uncanny works on paper and board.

In 1970, there was a decisive switch in Rama's work with the introduction of rubber, and this material would come to dominate her practice for the next decade. Rama's father had owned a bicycle tire factory in Turin before his suicide, and the worn, punctured, and repaired rubber tires in these *Gomma* works function much like aged human skin. However, the stark geometric forms and color tones, limited to a range of black and flesh-colored rubber, lend the work a minimalist and industrial aura. At times, the bicycle tires are left hanging, deflated like flaccid intestines from a phallic hanger (derived from a sculpture that Picasso had given her), in a more bodily and transgressive use of the material.

During the 1980s, Rama returned to figuration and an unapologetic representation of orifices and sexualized body parts, often created upon architectural or engineering plans. In the 1990s, news reports of an epidemic of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease) in Europe attracted Rama's attention and empathy. Embedded in the series *La mucca pazza* (The Mad Cow) are issues of deviance, madness, death, and sexuality. The teats of cows have become interchangeable with human breasts, while feverish cows' teeth and human dentures have been combined in composite portraits where cow and man become one. In these images, Rama reconnects with her work of the 1930s, updated to reflect fantasy made real.

Rama is currently the subject of a European retrospective entitled *The Passion According to Carol Rama*, on view through early 2017, that travels to the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; the Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Tapiola, Finland; the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; and Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin. She received the Golden Lion award at the Venice Biennale in 2003. Her 1998 retrospective was arranged by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and traveled to the ICA in Boston.

## ABOUT FERGUS McCAFFREY

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Natsuyuki Nakanishi, Kazuo Shiraga, and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists such as Jack Early, Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, and Sigmar Polke.

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