

Marcia Hafif, Carol Rama, Mario Schifano: Selections from 1958–1981**Fergus McCaffrey St. Barth**

June 22 – August 20, 2020

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present *Marcia Hafif, Carol Rama, Mario Schifano: Selections from 1958–1981*, on-view through August 20, 2020, at the gallery's St. Barth location.

Marianne Moore, the acclaimed modernist poet, explores the notion that although an artwork can be approached, approximated, purchased, and enjoyed, it can never be possessed in a manner that divests it of the spiritual forces of its creation. In her poem, "When I Buy Pictures," Moore describes herself as an "imaginary possessor" because she is not only imagining the process of buying a painting, but also realizing that she can never own the spirit of the work and its genesis.¹ The idea Moore is interrogating is one of perception—an idea particularly relevant to three artists working in Italy in the 1960s: Marcia Hafif (1929–2018), Carol Rama (1918–2015), and Mario Schifano (1934–1998).

Carol Rama, working in Turin, experimented with the inclusion of a variety of materials from wallpaper and syringes to taxidermied eyes and rubber (a nostalgic reference to her father who owned a tire manufacturing company). Rama mined her personal history for both subject matter and material. As curator and historian Rudi Fuchs once wrote, "I see her drawings and pictorial objects as pages from a private notebook addressed to private people elsewhere."² Rama's use of found and forgotten materials suggests her supreme awareness of what was occurring in the artistic communities throughout Italy at the time (in 1967, Germano Celant coined the term "Arte Povera" for those artists exploring the use of nontraditional materials). Rama was creating work in-line with contemporary artistic trends, but with a subjective twist inspired by her own personal life.



Meanwhile, Rome in the 1960s had become a city of conspicuous consumption, and artists like Mario Schifano responded to this rapidly changing environment—particularly to the abundance of advertising. He presented logos such as "Esso" and "Coca Cola" cropped and in sections with loose painterly strokes undercutting and deconstructing the commercialization of Italian culture in the 60s. These icons were familiar to the viewer because of their

omnipresence in the media, with each viewer bringing their own associations to the brands. The deliberately painterly way in which Schifano created these works convey his perception of the increasingly commercial world and his way of trying to make sense of it.



In 1961, American artist Marcia Hafif moved to Rome, where she began creating a body of brightly contrasting, two-colored works exploring the figure/ground relationship, balancing both shape and color. She dubbed these works "Pop Minimal" as Pop had clearly inflected her palette though the paintings lacked recognizable images, and rather, were of an ambiguous nature. Hafif often re-visited and repeated certain motifs in her works

including a hill form, organic geometric shapes, and references to the body. Using a Minimalist vocabulary, she alluded to things in and of the world. As she once wrote, “For me they are all experiments for the purpose of seeing more closely.”³

Moore favors a perception that is “lit with piercing glances into the life of things,” and as indicated through their respective practices, Hafif, Rama, and Schifano would certainly agree. These artists provoke the imagination of the viewer, prompting them to make a series of visceral associations while each artist explores their own idiosyncratic interests. The complex way of looking at the things in the world, the sparks that animate and mysteriously connect our personal experiences to our collective ones are all at play. Through an encounter with these artists’ pieces, the viewer can recognize both themselves and the world.

About Marcia Hafif

Marcia Hafif (née Woods) was born in 1929 in Pomona, California. She studied at Pomona College from 1947 to 1951, marrying Herbert Hafif. After interning at Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1961, she moved to Rome, where she spent the next eight years making her first body of mature work. She exhibited these paintings, which she referred to as “Pop Minimal,” at her first solo show at Galleria La Salita in 1964. Returning to California in 1969—and leaving painting for a time to experiment with film, photography and sound installation—Hafif completed an MFA degree at the University of California, Irvine. In 1971, she moved to New York to search out a return to painting during a time when the validity of the medium was in doubt. Exhibiting for more than eight years with Sonnabend Gallery in New York and Paris from 1974 to 1981, Hafif developed body of work that would become the basis of what she came to call *The Inventory*. Hafif continued to work on her *Inventory* paintings until her death in 2018.



Hafif’s work has been exhibited widely in Europe and the United States. Recent major exhibitions include *Marcia Hafif, The Inventory: Painting*, Laguna Art Museum, 2015; *Marcia Hafif: The Italian Paintings 1961–69*, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, 2016; and *Marcia Hafif, The Inventory: Paintings*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and Kunsthau Baselland, Switzerland, 2017; *A Place Apart*, Pomona College Museum, Claremont, California, 2018; *Marcia Hafif. Films*, Lenbachhaus, Munich, 2018; *Marcia Hafif Remembered*, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, 2018; and *Marcia Hafif, Inventory*, MAMCO (Musée d’art modern et contemporain), Geneva, 2019.

About Carol Rama

Carol Rama was born in Turin, Italy in 1918. Her seven-decade career spans media, incorporating watercolor, prosthetic eyes, used rubber bicycle tires, taxidermied animals, bear claws, and teeth to explore the body, sexuality, and desire. Rama’s work has long been considered subversive for her treatments of eroticism, repression, madness, and liberation: her first renderings of sexually explicit couplings, images of the electroshock treatment of the insane, and acts of bestiality in the 1930s and 40s were censored by Italy’s wartime Fascist regime. These works represent an explosion of female sexual defiance in the face of confinement and oppression.

For decades, her psychosexual paintings, drawings, and evocative assemblage-style abstractions went largely unnoticed by the art world. Rising to international acclaim only

recently, Rama was awarded the Golden Lion at the 2003 Venice Biennale, and her work has been the subject of major retrospectives at the Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris in 2015 and the New Museum, New York in 2017. Rama died in Turin in 2015.

About Mario Schifano

Born in Homs, Libya in 1934, Mario Schifano moved to Rome in the immediate post-war period. After abandoning his studies, he worked as an assistant to his father, an archaeologist and restorer at the Villa Giulia Etruscan Museum. He initially painted Informalist-style works, which he exhibited in his first solo show at Galleria Appia Antica in Rome. He subsequently participated in a group show titled *5 pittori – Roma '60*, curated by Pierre Restany, alongside artists Franco Angeli, Tano Festa, Francesco Lo Savio, and Giuseppe Uncini, which led to critical interest in his work in Italy and abroad.

Moving away from Informalism, Schifano's work took the form of many thematic cycles. Employing elements of popular culture and urban iconography in his practice, such as brand logos and advertisements, he was often considered within the context of Pop Art, exhibiting alongside Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein in the famous *New Realism* exhibition at Sidney Janis Gallery in New York (1962). Schifano's work has been exhibited in institutions worldwide including the Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1981; Royal Academy, London, 1989; Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, 1989; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1994; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, 1997; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, 2008–2009; Musée d'art moderne Saint- Etienne Métropole, France, 2009; and Fondazione Marconi, Milan, 2005, 2006, 2013, and 2018. Schifano died in Rome in 1998.

About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey represents an increasingly global group of post-war and contemporary artists from the United States, Europe, and Japan. For over a decade, the gallery has developed a multifaceted program, representing over 24 artists and estates worldwide. Internationally recognized for its promotion of postwar Japanese and seminal western artists, Fergus McCaffrey has locations in New York, Tokyo, and St. Barth. In March 2020, the gallery launched its fully virtual, fourth location, FM Virtual, accessible 24 hours a day on fergusmccaffrey.com.

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Images: 1. Carol Rama, *Malelingue*, 1981. Ink and acrylic on paper, 23 1/4 x 18 1/8 inches (59 x 46 cm) © Archivio Carol Rama, Torino; 2. Mario Schifano, *Coca Cola*, 1978. Oil on jute and wrapping paper, 43 1/4 x 31 1/2 inches (110 x 80 cm) © Archivio Mario Schifano; 3. Marcia Hafif, *Untitled*, December 1966. Acetate on paper, 13 3/4 x 13 3/4 inches (35 x 35 cm) © Estate of Marcia Hafif

¹ Moore, Marianne. "When I Buy Pictures" in *Poems*. London: Egoist Press, 1921

² Mundici, Maria Cristina. *Carol Rama*. Milan: Charta, 1999

³ "Marcia Hafif," January 18, 2019. <https://www.pomona.edu/museum/exhibitions/2018/marcia-hafif>.