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Ulla Weber (ed.)

Fundamental Questions

Gender Dimensions in Max Planck Research Projects

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Between Commitment and Disengagement: The Art of Women in Rome in the Sixties

Giorgia Gastaldon
Bibliotheca Hertziana

ABSTRACT
My research project is dedicated to the work of several Italian female artists active in Rome in the 1960s. Part of the generation born between the 1920s and the 1930s, they shared the need to coin their own personal and subjective notion of being a woman, despite the fact they had been forced between the influence of the Fascist feminine culture in which they grew up and the feminist movements that characterized 1968. My research questions focus on potential connections between art made by women and the rise of feminist movements in Italy in the 1960s. The research investigates how hard it was to be a female artist in the Sixties and how many stereotypes an Italian woman artist had to deal with at that time (and still do today).

My postdoctoral research project was developed at the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome, and focuses on the art of women who were active in the Italian capital city during the 1960s. The project is part of Rome Contemporary, a research initiative started at this same Institute and dedicated to the study of the artistic context in Rome, covering a chronological timeline which spans the WWII post-war period to the present.[1]

My research focuses on the work of women belonging to the generation born between the 1920s and 1930s, who grew up during the peak of the fascist regime and who became active as artists only in the post-WWII period. This generation was characterized in particular by the necessity to articulate and coin its own personal and subjective notions of womanhood. These artists were constrained between the two contrasting polarities of the cultural impact of fascism and the recent feminist revolution. In fact,

1 I would like to especially thank Tristan Weddigen, Maria Bremer, Marica Antonucci, and Marieke von Bernstorff for their support with the present research. Where not stated otherwise, translations are mine.

during their upbringing, they had been strongly influenced by the female culture of fascism, which expected women to be subordinate to men as wives and in their primary role as mothers. On the other hand, however, they could certainly not recognize themselves as part of those generations who benefitted immediately and directly from the feminist revolution of 1968; from the feminist theory which followed in the 1970s; or from the debate within similar movements which had developed, for example, across the border in France and in the United States.

These artists found themselves acting within an isolated context of minority. Among its many achievements, feminism highlighted the underrepresentation of the female gender within the world of art. Therefore, beginning in the 1970s, cultural professionals—critics, gallerists, museum and institutional representatives—started acting more carefully in their choices favoring women. At the same time, and acting in parallel, this period witnessed the birth of a series of institutions and spaces dedicated solely to women artists. None of this existed in the 1960s and, as a result, females in this decade lacked the tools which would arrive later.

For all these reasons, during the 1960s, the female artists belonging to this generation had to develop a pre-feminist female identity within their artistic research, which was individual and subjective, before the establishment of a collective one. The Italian movements did not appear miraculously and autonomously between 1968 and 1970, but were nurtured by the suggestions and ideas that had been circulating around the country since the early 1960s. Female artists, writers and art critics who were active in that decade spread these first feminist movements through their research and actions, without the need for labels, and oriented their cultural work in such a direction. It was during the 1960s that the first fundamental writings of feminist thought were published in Italy, including *Le Deuxième Sexe* by Simone de Beauvoir—published in France in 1949, but only translated into Italian in 1961—and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, a volume published in the United States in 1963 and translated into Italian one year later.[2]

Furthermore, in Italy, the relationship between art and "the birth of feminism" was particularly strong. As evidence of this link, it is sufficient to consider the circumstances in which the first Italian feminist manifesto —*Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile* (1970), which means "manifesto of feminine revolt"—was written by three authors: Carla Accardi, Carla Lonzi and Elvira Banotti, two of whom came from the world of art—namely, a

2 *Beauvoir*, 1961; and *Friedan*, 1964.

painter (Accardi), and an art critic and historian (Lonzi).[3] As friends and colleagues, Accardi and Lonzi first collaborated in the development of certain actions of feminist activism. However, they eventually ceased working together due to different points of view about the possibility of actually changing the system of the arts, which they perceived as patriarchal and sexist, towards a feminist perspective. Carla Accardi thought that women artists should be able to carry on their activity and career, trying, with their actions, to effect change within the world of art as it had been up until that moment and trying, with their works, to achieve new and more equal spaces of visibility.[4] By contrast, according to Carla Lonzi, such a change was not possible and she chose to put an end to any form of professional relationship with contemporary art—a field in which she had been particularly active as a critic and curator of exhibitions during the 1960s. She expected, and almost demanded, that her female colleagues, who were active in more traditional expository circles, embrace the same attitude.[5]

Furthermore, Rome certainly represents a special place for the study of these phenomena, as they played a crucial role in the development of Italian feminist movements. Besides being the city where, in the early sixties, Accardi and Lonzi first met, Rome also provided the context within which Rivolta Femminile, one of the most important militant feminist groups, was founded; and which was soon followed by many other groups in Italy. For all these reasons, Rome represented a privileged location for the incubation of feminist turmoil and upheaval, even before 1968.

Together with Milan, Rome also benefited from privileged relationships with other countries such as France, the United States and Great Britain, which proved fundamental for the development of a feminist consciousness, as well as new ideas of contemporary art aesthetics.

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3 *Lonzi/Accardi/Banotti*, 1974. The third author, Elvira Banotti, in addition to being a feminist activist, was a long-time journalist and writer.

4 It is in this direction that we should interpret the initiative, managed by Carla Accardi, together with other artists including Eva Menzio and Suzanne Santoro—carried out by Cooperativa Beato Angelico, an expository space opened in Rome in 1976 and dedicated specifically to the art of women. Accardi recalled in an interview in 2004, "We knew everything, were aware of everything, in fact we opened a small gallery where we organised some exhibitions. I left it in the end because those kinds of discussions tended to limit me." ("*Noi sapevamo tutto, eravamo al corrente di tutto, infatti abbiamo messo su una piccola galleria dove abbiamo organizzato qualche mostra. C'erano delle giovani, facevamo delle riunioni. Me ne sono andata alla fine perché quelle discussioni tendevano a bloccarmi*"), from *Obrist,* 2004.

5 For further information on the relationship and the differences between Lonzi and Accardi, refer to: *Iamurri*, 2016; and *Zapperi*, 2017 (in particular Chapter 5).

It is also necessary to remember that Rome in the 1970s was the undisputed capital of Italian television and cinema and, thanks to the competitiveness of the production expenses of Cinecittà Studios, also became a branch of the great American cinema. From the end of the Second World War, this phenomenon accelerated cultural exchanges between Rome and the United States, which was also particularly active in the field of contemporary art, thus starting the debate around the new forms of cultural colonialism that were imposing a new consumerist lifestyle on European countries, as well as more elaborate, although still traditional, visions of social roles.

The 1960s therefore represented a crucial time in history for the development of forms of gender consciousness in Italy. By that time, Italian women had started to be aware of their own position and condition within society, going through a true "gender crisis". It is a historical fact that in Italy—more than in other Western countries—women have always represented a type of "reserve army;" after being mobilized and inserted into roles of responsibility during times of emergency, they were then invited to return to their domestic environments once danger had been evaded. Things were no different with the Second World War, and data on female employment in the years starting from 1945 fully confirm this tendency. As a matter of fact, in 1962, the increase in the rate of female employment in Italy completely stopped. From 1958 to 1963—the five years of the so-called "Italian miracle"—women still had good opportunities for employment, although many of them, especially those belonging to the richest classes, had already resumed a fully domestic life. At the first signs of the economic crisis which gripped the country between 1963 and 1964, it was clear how job positions occupied by women would be the first to be sacrificed. However, "a massive cut of female labor" was registered: "between 1959 and 1965, the specific rate of the presence of women in the job market was reduced by over a million units […] In general, the national index of female occupation registered during these five years saw a neat decrease of 15.6 points."[6]

The women of this new generation were increasingly excluded from the manufacturing workforce, and were certainly involved in a less active way in society when compared to their mothers and grandmothers. For them, a

6 "[fu registrata] una massiccia espulsione della manodopera femminile [...] fra il 1959 e il 1965 il tasso specifico di presenza delle donne nel mercato del lavoro si ridusse di oltre un milione di unità.[…] In generale, l'indice nazionale di occupazione femminile registrò in questi cinque anni una diminuzione netta di 15,6 punti"—*Lussana*, 2012, p. 25.

"golden world" had been promptly created—a new culture to which women were supposed to adapt, both publicly and privately. The sixties represented the so-called "golden age of the housewife," both in Italy and in the rest of the Western world, which was effectively described by Fiamma Lussana in a study dedicated to the Italian feminist movements. She states: "[T]he economic growth is accompanied by the great illusions of the achievement of wealth, the happiness of appliances, the building of an imaginary modern and accomplished woman. Starting from 1954 with the advent of TV shows, models of behavior, lifestyle and consumer choices started to change."[7]

Thus, the stimlui linked to the "Italian miracle" started to act, for strictly economic reasons, on the elaboration of precise female models whose omnipresence made them the instruments by which one oriented one's lifestyle and subsequent consumerist behavior. The formulation of a definite image of the "perfect housewife" played a crucial role in this direction; it was, in fact, carpet-bombed by all the media that were accessible to women, from television to women's magazines, including Italian publications such as *Amica*, *Grazia*, *Annabella*, and Gioia. As feminist journalist Giovanna Pozzuoli perceptively noted in 1976, "the existence itself of a specialized female press 'for the women', besides its implicit paternalism, reveals the true intention of anchoring women to an institutionalized image of femininity, providing them with 'suitable' cultural products and relegating them to a particular universe, whose borders are being 'dictated'… [by] putting itself within the system and its requests, and by motivating its choice according the usual logic of profit (to be liked by the possible highest number of female readers), female press is contributing to keeping women in their present condition, perfectly functional to the conservation of the usual relationships of capitalist production."[8]

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7 "alla crescita economica si accompagnano le grandi illusioni del raggiunto benessere, la felicità degli elettrodomestici, la costruzione di un'immaginaria donna moderna e realizzata. A partire dal 1954, con l'inizio delle trasmissioni televisive, cominciano a cambiare i modelli di comportamento, stili di vita, scelte di consume"— *Lussana*, 2012, p. 26.

8 "l'esistenza stessa di una stampa femminile specializzata "per le donne", al di là dell'implicito paternalismo, rivela il chiaro intento di ancorare la donna a un'immagine istituzionalizzata della femminilità, fornendole prodotti culturali "adatti" e relegandola in un universo particolare, i cui confini vengono "dettati". (…) Ponendosi all'interno del sistema e delle sue richieste e motivando la sua scelta secondo la consueta logica del profitto (essere di gradimento a quante più lettrici-tipo possibile), la stampa femminile contribuisce a mantenere le donne nella loro attuale

The model of the "perfect housewife", elaborated in Italy between the fifties and the sixties, expected women to be young, attractive, modern, and supported in their household chores by the use of a series of brand new appliances, the possession of which made them progressive and accomplished. By that time, Italy was the number one exporter of appliances in the world, mostly refrigerators and washing machines—a situation which should not be forgotten.[9] Considering how household chores were certainly the main occupation and preoccupation of the women described in these predominant models, advertisements never missed the chance to display the "perfect housewife", transformed into an intelligent consumer because her whole identity was bound up with the possession, or lack of, the most modern appliances, which were true status symbols for young Italian women in the 1960s. An advertisement dating to 1966 perfectly exemplifies this attitude. Aimed at promoting a new model of washing machine (the Candy Superautomatic 5), its text stated: "She is a 'Mrs. Candy', so intelligent and modern, her washing machine is Candy" (see Fig. 1).[10] The subject of this advertisement was not a housewife, but an employed woman—a nursery teacher, depicted in her workplace, dressed in a blue uniform and surrounded by small children. Despite this, she was defined as "intelligent and modern", just like her washing machine; she was not defined by her personality or profession, but by the far-sightedness with which she had chosen the brand of her household's appliances.

Betty Friedan's sensational journalistic enquiry, *The Feminine Mystique*, arrived to denounce the falseness and inadequacy—as well as, perhaps, the chauvinism—of this particular female model. Published in the United States in 1963, it was translated just one year later into Italian as *La mistica della femminilità* (see Fig. 2).[11] The report denounced the disquieting feelings which animated the lives of the "perfect American housewives", who,

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condizione, perfettamente funzionale alla conservazione degli stessi rapporti di produzione capitalistici"—*Pezzuoli*, 1976, p. 13.

9 Le Officine meccaniche Eden Fumagalli (OMEF) in Monza, started the production of Candy appliances in 1946. In 1957, the Candy Bi-Matic, the washing machine which revolutionized the international system of household appliances, was first launched in the market. In the mid-1960s, this enabled the Italian factory to reach the European peak of production and sales of washing machines, competing with the well-established British factory, Hoover. See *Asquer*, 2007.

10 In: *Tempo*, 16 February 1966 (back cover).

11 Betty Friedan's volume was translated into Italian exceptionally quickly, considering the times and practices that were typical of the publishing environment at that time. It is not a coincidence, in fact, that the initiative was carried out by Edizioni di Comunità, a publishing house founded in Milan in 1946 by Adriano

when interviewed one by one by the author, testified to common discomforts and described in very similar ways a sort of "unexpressed problem" which characterized their daily lives. Friedan started her essay with these words: "I came to realize that something is very wrong with the way American women are trying to live their lives today […] I sensed it first as a question in my own life, as a wife and mother of three small children, half-guiltily, and therefore half-heartedly, almost in spite of myself, using my abilities and education in work that took me away from home […]. The problems and satisfaction of [our] lives […] simply did not fit the image of the modern American woman as she was written about in women's magazines [...] There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique".[12]

Friedan's volume brought to light the sense of frustration women felt by internalizing the strong discrepancy between what they were, or wanted to be, and what society expected them to be. Women felt, in short, "made up"; what they were did not correspond to a personal journey of accomplishment of the self, of their desires, or of their aspirations, but was a continuous and exhausting attempt to adhere to a stereotype designed and imposed by the market and a patriarchal society.

Friedan's journalistic inquiry immediately resonated worldwide and prompted many other female scholars to continue research in the same direction. In Italy, for example, many publications followed which denounced these mechanisms. Particularly in the 1970s, many female authors printed essays denouncing the work of female magazines, accusing them of being ideological tools for spreading and perpetuating gender stereotypes. For example, in 1975, in addition to the previously mentioned *La stampa femminile come ideologia* (*Female press as ideology*) by Giovanna Pezzuoli, the Guaraldi publishing house printed *Naturale come sei* (*Natural,*

Olivetti. Betty Friedan, a journalist with a degree in psychology, was later one of the founding members of the National Organization for Women (NOW Organization, 1966), the first feminist organisation in the United States of America.

12 "C'è qualcosa di fondamentalmente errato nel modo in cui le donne americane cercano di vivere la loro vita e l'ho avvertito dapprima nella mia vita, come moglie e madre di tre bambini che stava adoperando le proprie capacità e la propria istruzione in un'attività che la teneva lontana da casa, traendone quasi un senso di colpa": "i problemi e le soddisfazioni delle nostre vite (…) non s'attagliavano all'immagine della donna americana moderna di cui si scriveva nelle riviste femminili (…). C'è una curiosa discrepanza tra la realtà delle nostre vite di donna e l'immagine a cui cercavamo di conformarci, quell'immagine che a un certo punto ho deciso di chiamare la mistica della femminilità"—*Friedan*, 1964, p. 9.

as you are) by Milly Buonanno, another sociological inquiry dedicated to the gender press in Italy (see Fig. 3).[13] Then, in 1978, Rudy Stauder published the work: *Il femminese. Guida serissima al linguaggio della moda nelle riviste femminili*. This volume, whose ironic Italian title means "*Femalese. A serious guide to the language of fashion in female magazines*", unmasked the forms of manipulation directed at female readers through the construction of a "reversed vocabulary". The term "classic" was, for example, defined as follows: "[W]hen fashion houses advertise their clothes with photographic sessions in female magazines, captions overflow with the adjective 'classic', immediately turning into a synonym for dim, flat, ugly. Beware then of surrendering to the seduction of 'classic' only because it is defined as such; chances are that 90% of you will end up looking like old Aunt Esterina when she is invited to tea at 5 p.m."[14]

In the 1960s, as far as the artistic press was concerned, the situation for Italian women was unfortunately no different. In specialized magazines, women artists were in fact strongly underrepresented in numerical terms. Moreover, the few articles devoted to them were negatively characterized by a stereotypical point of view in terms of gender.

The statistical analysis of the female presence in some of the most important avant-garde magazines printed in Italy in the sixties, such as *Metro* and *Marcatrè*, shows that only 6% of all monographical articles published in those pages (i.e., those entirely dedicated to the activity of one single artist) analyzed the work of a woman.[15] In addition, the nature of these texts was, in the majority of cases, almost negligible in terms of content—mainly consisting of short paragraphs announcing the opening of an exhibition in a gallery, and almost always appearing without illustrations or pictures. Furthermore, the few images relating to women artists that were permitted (due to reasons of expense and space), were mostly photographic portraits showing the physical features of the women who were subjects of the exhibitions, rather than their works.

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13 *Buonanno*, 1975.

14 "Classico […] quando le case di confezioni fanno pubblicità ai loro abiti attraverso i servizi fotografici sui giornali femminili, le didascalie traboccano dell'aggettivo 'classico', che diventa sinonimo di scialbo, piatto, bruttarello. Guardatevi, dunque, dal farvi sedurre dall'abito 'classico' solo perché così definito: con novanta possibilità su cento finireste con l'assomigliare alla vecchia zia Esterina quando è invitata al tè delle cinque"—*Stauder,* 1978, p. 21.

15 So far, this analysis has considered the issues raised in *Metro*, published in 1960–1967, and of *Marcatrè*, published in 1963–1967. My next goal is to widen the analysis and to compare the publishing situation in the 1960s with that of the following decade.

The words chosen to describe both the artists and their works usually focused more on the artists' gender rather than on their artistic production, as exemplified by an article by Marisa Volpi, published in 1961, about Carla Accardi. Despite being a woman herself, the writer did not hesitate to title her essay "Sensibilità, ritmo e fede nel lavoro di Carla Accardi "mite e decisa" ("Sensitivity, rhythm and faith in the work of Carla Accardi, 'gentle and determined'").[16] Terms such as "sensitivity" "gentle", and "determined" are certainly not neutral and the artist could not help feel that it was her personality, not her art, being described. Accardi herself spoke several times about the forms of frustration provoked by this sort of occurrence. For example, in an interview from 2004, in recalling her condition as a woman artist in Rome in those years, Accardi stated: "I was sure I was doing something different from all other 'women artists'. To me, they were primarily painters, ladies who amused themselves by painting. I wanted to distance myself as much as possible from that image. I used to present myself as an 'artist' and not as a 'painter'".[17]

The idea of adopting certain statistical instruments to measure gender gap, thus unmasking women's underrepresentation in the world of art—especially in the years following the Second World War—lies, literally and historically, at the basis of gender studies. Linda Nochlin herself, applying gender thought for the first time to the history of art with her essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", described how the idea of breaking the silence on such an important issue as the "inexistence" of women artists in the history of art came to her in November 1970, soon after she calculated some startling statistics.[18] In an article from 2006, she wrote: "I'd like to roll the clock back to November 1970, a time when there were no women's studies, no feminist theory, no African American studies, no queer theory, no postcolonial studies". "In art journals of record, such as *ARTnews*, out of a total of 81 major articles on artists, only 2 were devoted to women painters. In the following year, 10 out of 84 articles were devoted to women, but that includes the 9 articles in the special "Woman Issue" in January, in which "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" appeared; without that issue, the total would have been one out of 84. *Artforum*, in 1970–1971, did a little better—5 articles on women out of 74".[19]

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16 *Volpi*, 1961. As further evidence of what is mentioned above, this article only displayed a single image—a photographic portrait of Accardi.
17 Accardi quoted in: *Accardi/Beatrice/Politi*, 2004, p. 95.
18 *Nochlin*, 1971, pp. 22–39 and pp. 67–71.
19 *Nochlin*, 2006, p. 21.

"Counting themselves" and "counting" are thus concepts apparently inextricably linked when speaking about women's underrepresentation in the contemporary art world. Maura Reilley brilliantly demonstrated this idea in "Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes", an article published in 2015, in a special issue of *ARTnews* dedicated to the art of women.[20] This text consists of a statistical inquiry on the still overly small presence of female artists in the different systems of representation in contemporary art—museums, galleries, auction houses, specialized publications, international festivals—and stresses how, 45 years after "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", despite evident steps having been taken to move forward, the gender gap is still an obvious issue. Numbers, once again, prove in a tangible and "indisputable way" that there is still a great deal of work to do in that direction; "yes, we need to keep circulating the numbers. Counting is, after all, a feminist strategy."[21]

Even today, the existence and the measurement of such a gender gap in the art world—and in many other environments—is an important topic and, therefore, it is even more necessary, in my opinion, to carry on research such as the present project in the context of 1960s Rome—that is to say, the recent past of the country where my research is being conducted.

With this aim and methodology, my research then focuses on three artists who were active in Rome in the sixties and on the work they produced in those years. I chose the three protagonists of my postdoctoral project research—Carla Accardi, Giosetta Fioroni and Laura Grisi—because they belong to the same generation and, equally, because of the almost "absolute" diversity of their artistic productions, which I have interpreted as forms of individual and subjective responses to common cultural and social dynamics.

Carla Accardi, as previously mentioned, played a fundamental role in the writing of *Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile* in 1970 (Fig. 4). A feminist activist from the very beginning, she never moved away from the "abstractionist turn", from her beginnings at the end of the 1940s, when she was a militant in the Forma group. Abstract painting was often perceived as the avant-garde "par excellence" and was thus labelled as misogynist and sexist, based as it was on the mythology of the genius creator and on the aggression typical of the paradigms of both its group and manifesto. However,

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20 *Reilly*, 2015, pp. 39–47.

21 *Reilly*, 2015, p. 46. In 2018, a similar study was conducted on the Italian system of contemporary art: *Donne artiste in Italia, Presenza e rappresentazione*, Dipartimento di Arti Visive, NABA Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, Milano 2018.

Accardi found her own way of staying within the world of abstract painting. Nevertheless, or perhaps exactly for this reason, she kept practicing this form of painting, which she transformed into a type of liberation and an expression of her own autonomous individuality. Moreover, the art of Carla Accardi made continuous and free references to the language of the historical avant-gardes, especially that of Futurism—the controversial historical movement which, despite having explicitly praised its own misogyny, had actually represented, de facto, the only avant-garde involving a considerable number of women in its ranks.

The painter's approach to painting was pragmatic, based on a continuous negotiation with a society and an environment dominated by men. Such a dialogue was also based on the idea that, in Accardi's opinion, there existed a complete separation between her political activity (first within the Communist Party, and then among the ranks of Feminism) and her painting, as she declared on many occasions. In 1994, for example, during an inquiry on gender differences in art, Accardi stated: "especially because I am an artist, I tend to avoid sociological reflections on my work. As Virginia Woolf once stated, a too-intense political involvement weakens the aesthetic form and the creative impulse".[22]

Contrary to Accardi, Giosetta Fioroni always worked in distinctly "pop" contexts, especially in the 1960s. Starting from 1963, she created works which often included the human figure, with a clear preference for female subjects. "In those years of 'feminism'", the artist would later declare, "I was more and more interested in the topic of the female dimension, to the feelings these women expressed through their sight, in the movement of a hand, in the attitude of their figure".[23]

Fioroni never actively joined any feminist groups or movements, but her work undeniably reflected on the concept of the woman's body, on its prepackaged image, and on its commodification and cultural exploitation for commercial purposes. Within a compositional layout that was reminiscent of comics, the artist depicted female figures, and their details, with a clear pop inspiration taken from fashion photography, cinema, and illustrated women's magazines. From 1965, the artist's works began showing female figures and female-related topics drawn in the Renaissance pictorial tradition, chosen as secular stereotypes of female beauty that can be explicitly traced back to Italian visual culture, such as in the artworks: "Da Botticelli, Venere" (1965), "Nascita di una Venere Op" (1965), "Le cortigiane

22 Accardi in: *Joelson/Scott*, 1994, p. 62.
23 Fioroni, in: *Bottazzi/Elettra/Fioroni/Giosetta*, 2016, p. 28.

(da Carpaccio)" (1966), and "Da Simonetta Vespucci" (1966). In all these works, the body of the woman was reduced to a simple image—outlines and silhouettes were repeated to unmask a process of objectifying bodies and reducing subjects to mere icons, consumed by a society of images and of tourism.

The references to the world of show business and advertising were, on the other hand, much more explicit, such as in the practice of resorting to titles such as "Cosmesi" (1963–1964, meaning "the 'world' of cosmetics", "Una lacrima sul viso" (1964, meaning "a tear on your face"—taken from a popular song presented at the Sanremo Festival that year by Bobby Solo), and "Faccia pubblicità" (1967, meaning "face advertising"). From 1965 onwards, nudes also appeared in Fioroni's paintings, conceived as a paradigm of the projection of the conformist and consumerist male gaze onto the bodies of their female peers, especially actresses and models. In works such as "Nudo di Rossana" (1965) and "Ritratto di Talitha Getty" (1965), women from modern society (in the case of Getty, a model and actress) were portrayed naked, assuming poses which alluded to the canon of art history, from Giorgione and Titian, Ingres and Manet.

In the poetic of Laura Grisi, the body of the artist (rather than the female figure per se) was included in the artistic and creative processes in a particularly unprecedented way; and her works were ahead of her time.

In some of her early works, such as the "Variable Paintings" series (1965–1966), the silhouette of Grisi appears, for example, as a shadow or reflection. These works feature different levels of depth, with sliding luminous plexiglas panels, which can be moved by the viewer. These works, which remind one of shop windows thanks to the presence of plexiglas and neon, represent an attempt to overcome the immobility of painting by including variation and the real movement of parts inside the work of art. Grisi's shadow or reflection is translated into a depersonalized representation of the human figure. However, at the same time, such an intervention characterizes the work in the direction of an ambiguity of roles, a confusion between the gazer and the gazed-upon. If, on the one hand, viewers can observe the silhouette of the artist beyond the transparent plexiglas panel (which is reminiscent of a window pane, but also of the reflective surface of a mirror), they find themselves being equally observed by the artist, who stares at them while they inspect her figure and her work, in mutual voyeurism.

In 1970, the artist's daily experiences and her own body became the subjects of her research, especially in works such as "Distillations: 3 Months of Looking". These series of actions—"*Guardo il sole*" (I am looking at the sun), "Guardo l'orizzonte" (I am looking at the horizon), and "Guardo la

mia pelle" (I am looking at my skin)—took place during a journey Laura Grisi took to the Leeward Islands, Sulu Archipelago, New Hebrides, the Philippines and Malaysia. "It was an analysis of my personal, visual, and physical sensations… it was almost an analysis that could be repeated as an experiment", as she explained in an interview in 1990.[24] The artist used her own body as a place of artistic experimentation and research, recording its reactions to different, sometimes extreme, atmospheric conditions.

Laura Grisi's research was always characterized by a high degree of autonomy, which isolated her from the dynamics of structured aesthetics and movements. Away from Italy for long periods of time in remote corners of the world, she was often away from art-world circles, with which she held an intermittent relationship. For this reason, her work always followed the criteria of individuality and subjectivity, also rejecting the dynamics of collective feminism. However, her female identity and body, present in many of her works dating from the sixties, were irrefutably at the center of her research.

As demonstrated here, my research project deals with the dynamics of researching individual women artists on the one hand, and community and social processes on the other, in the attempt to interpret the phenomenon of women's art in a given time and space. My research focuses on the meaning of being a woman artist in 1960s Italy, with all the practical difficulties stemming from the small visibility of their works, but also looking at the widespread gender stereotypes which led society to see women as fitting within a domestic space rather than in galleries and museums.

From this point of view, the relationship between diverse processes, that at first appear distant in time, and the active present is evident. If, on one hand, the art world today demonstrates that many steps forward have been taken, it also shows how much is still left to be achieved for the gender gap to be truly corrected and overcome. At this point in time, the contribution historical research can provide to our contemporary world takes on fundamental importance.

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24 Grisi quoted in: *Celant*, Laura Grisi. A Selection of Works with Notes by the Artist. Essay-Interview, New York 1990, p. 34.

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CAPTIONS

Fig. 1: Advertisement of Candy Superautomatic 5, in Tempo (7), 16 February 1966—back cover.

Fig. 2: Betty Friedan's La mistica della femminilità—cover of the Italian edition, 1964.

Fig. 3: Milly Buonanno's Naturale come sei. Indagine sulla stampa femminile in Italia (1975)—cover.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Giorgia Gastaldon is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History as part of the research initiative *Rome Contemporary*, with a project focused on the phenomenon of proto-feminism in the arts in Rome. In 2014, she obtained a PhD in Art History from the University of Udine with a dissertation on Mario Schifano's painting (1958–1964). At the same university, she had previously studied Preservation of Artistic and Architectonic Heritage (BA, 2007) and Art History (MA, 2010). In 2017, she was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship at the Center for Art Studies Licia and Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti (Lucca, Italy), where she developed a research project on "Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Florence: story of a vision for a city", which has now become a book (2019). Between 2014 and 2016, Giorgia spent two years as a research fellow in the framework of the ministerial project *Fondo per gli Investimenti della Ricerca di Base* "Spreading visual culture: contemporary art through periodicals, archives and illustrations". In addition to her academic career, she has been working as a curator of contemporary art exhibitions and between 2015 and 2019 she was appointed as scientific director of Palinsesti (San Vito al Tagliamento, PN). Giorgia has published several essays and scientific articles which focused, in particular, on the reception of American art in Italy in the fifties and sixties, the role played by magazines in keeping Italian artists up to date with the most recent trends in the art world, and on the cultural panorama of post-WWII Rome.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History
Research Initiative: Rome Contemporary
The Rome Contemporary Initiative aims at investigating the artistic and cultural productions of visual art, theater, film and architecture emerging in Rome, taking into account their interdependence with international debates. Identifying the respective framework of reference of these productions helps clarify the relationship between the Roman artistic and cultural scene, and its time. In so doing, Rome Contemporary takes a stand against the modern and contemporary topoi of deterritorialization. Contradicting the historiographical trend towards uniformization reinforced by the rise of global perspectives, the initiative aims at emphasizing, along with the

historical and spatial situatedness of its objects, the heteronomous character of artistic and cultural idioms. In the framework of the initiative, my project analyses the special condition of Italian women in the sixties, between gender stereotypes and identity questions, and also investigates the particular relation between the rise of the early Italian feminist movements and the cultural system of Rome.