

FUTURE

7.3. ———
13.7.2025

Carol

Rama

A Rebel of
Modernity

Press Kit

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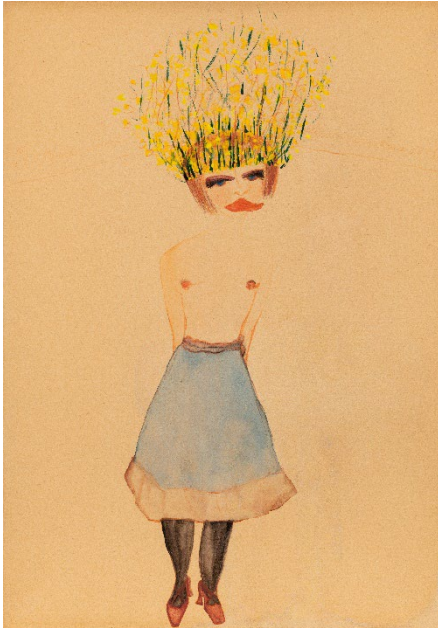
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Sexuality, madness, illness and death are the big themes that the Turin artist Carol Rama (1918–2015) addressed in her work. Like many other outstanding avant-garde women artists, she achieved recognition late in life, among other things with the Golden Lion of the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003. Between 7 March and 13 July 2025, the Kunstmuseum Bern is giving this non-conformist and pioneer of feminist art her first major retrospective in Switzerland. With around 110 works from a 70-year career, *Carol Rama. A Rebel of Modernity* presents the many facets of a body of work marked by rebellion, radicalism, an experimental spirit and a diversity of materials. Independent of schools and artistic groups, this self-taught artist created an unconventional, provocative and also very personal oeuvre that cannot easily be placed under any clear categories.

The influence of her own biography: sexuality, madness, illness and death

Sexuality, madness, illness and death are the big human themes running through her work.

'For me work, painting, was always something that made me feel less unhappy, less poor, less ugly and even less ignorant... I paint to heal myself.'

Carol Rama interviewed by Corrado Levi and Filippo Fassati in: C. Levi, P. and F. Fassati and I. Schaffner, 'Carolrama', in *Impresa per l'arte contemporanea*, 4 January 1997, no page number.

The artist was born in Turin in 1918, the youngest daughter of Marta and Amabile Rama. Her father's firm made car parts and initially allowed the family to lead a middle-class lifestyle. During her adolescence, Carol Rama experienced her parents being placed in psychiatric institutions. When she visited her mother in the clinic I Due Pini, she became increasingly resistant to socially imposed rules and pressures, gender categories and gender roles, as well as notions of female sexuality. Her father died in 1942, probably from suicide after his firm went bankrupt.

An artist who constantly reinvented herself

In the early 1940s Carol Rama moved into her studio apartment in Turin, which would become the lifelong centre of her artistic work and a meeting place for intellectuals and creative people. Carol Rama developed new artistic approaches every ten years or so. In the exhibition these are presented in six chapters, each devoted to a particular phase of her output. The prelude to the exhibition consists of central works in black and red from different phases of her career.

***Appassionata*: painting as provocation and rebellion**

In the mid-1930s Rama decided to become an artist, and to counter the dominance of men in art and in everyday life. Her series of erotic watercolours *Appassionata* (The passionate one), produced between 1936 and 1946, catapulted her into the centre of the avant-garde. In these works, she focused on bodies, gender and sexuality in the context of social norms. Naked figures are shown in a moment of extreme vulnerability, yet they emanate a strong sense of autonomy. They are female rebels – like the artist herself. The watercolours were due to be exhibited in Turin in 1945. But according to the artist, even before it opened, the exhibition was closed on police instructions for obscenity. With these works, Rama left the middle-class conservative environment in which she had grown up, and Catholic Italy under fascism, far behind, and paved the way for contemporary feminist art.

Anti-portrait: reduced expressivity

From the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, in parallel with this, Rama produced oil paintings on canvas, most of them portraits or self-portraits. She largely liberated the portrait from resemblance to the model. Reduced in their expressivity, the figures look flat, almost disembodied, a collection of coloured patches. Some lose their shape, merge with grotesque and surreal elements, and turn into hybrid beings.

Movimento Arte Concreta: the further journey to abstraction

After the end of the Second World War, artists around the world turned towards abstraction. To distinguish itself from the art of fascism, with its realistic aesthetic, non-figurative art with an abstract-geometrical pictorial language also gained in importance in Italy. Rama joined the group Movimento Arte Concreta. She now found her way to a clear, abstract pictorial language, and began experimenting with different media.

Bricolage: experiments with material as protest

In the early 1960s Carol Rama opened up the flat canvas and extended it with objects from her everyday life. In a time of social and political upheaval, critique of consumerism and protest against traditional western art history, art and the everyday were to be brought together. This radical demand was also being made by the artists of Arte Povera, which later formed in Turin. Rama painted with glue, enamel, oil and spray paint, she used iron filings, paint tubes, dolls' eyes and much else. In 1964 the poet Edoardo Sanguineti, a close friend of Rama, described her experiments with material as bricolage (DIY). This everyday concept, to which Claude Lévi-Strauss gave a theoretical charge, went on to establish itself in western art history.

Gomme

From the early 1970s onwards, Carol Rama's work was distinguished by almost minimalist compositions. In her group of *Gomme* (tyres), she mounted opened bicycle or car tyres on canvases, making form, space and time her theme. However Rama broke through the minimalist severity and created multilayered, ambivalent works with an intense physical presence. In Turin, dominated as it is by the Fiat car factory, there was no shortage of used rubber. These works also contain memories of her father and his firm.

Late return to figuration

In the 1980s Carol Rama returned to figurative representation. The Transavanguardia movement was coming into being in Italy. Its painters devoted themselves once again to traditional media and motifs such as panel painting and figures from classical mythology. These tendencies are also apparent in Rama's works. In the 1970s, she met the gallerist Luciano Anselmino, who already represented Man Ray and Andy Warhol at his Galleria Il Fauno in Turin – and soon represented Rama as well.

A long journey to recognition

Carol Rama achieved recognition late in her career. In 1980 her work was shown in the ground-breaking group exhibition *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia 1910-1940* (The Other Half of the Avant-Garde 1910-1940) held by Lea Vergine in the Palazzo Reale in Milan. The artist commented on being awarded the Golden Lion at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 in the following terms:

'It pissed me off, sure, because if I really am so good, then I don't get why I had to starve for so long, even if I am a woman.'

Carol Rama, quoted in Lea Vergine, *L'angoscia è un trip*, in: Exh. Cat. Milan, 1985, p. 45

An exhibition by the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt in collaboration with the Kunstmuseum Bern

Opening

The opening of the exhibition will take place on

Thursday, 6 March 2025 from 18:30.

Admission to the exhibition is free on this evening.

Curator

Livia Wermuth

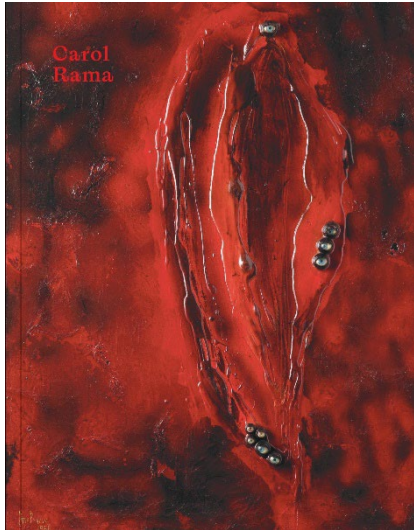
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Kanton Bern, Burgergemeinde Bern, Stiftung Gegenwart

Media preview

We cordially invite you to the media preview with curator Livia Wermuth on
Wednesday, 5 March 2025 at 10:00 at the Kunstmuseum Bern.

Please register via press@kunstmuseumbern.ch.



Catalogue

Carol Rama. A Rebel of Modernity

Published by Martina Weinhart
With contributions by Martina Weinhart, Florian Werner and Elena Volpato as well as a biography by Theresa Dettinger and a joint foreword by Sebastian Baden, director of Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, and Nina Zimmer, director of the Kunstmuseum Bern

Publication in German and English

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2024: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz
König

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Available in the museum shop for CHF 35

Digital Guide

There is a freely accessible Digital Guide to accompany the exhibition. It can be accessed from Wednesday, 5 March 2025 via QR code or guide.kunstmuseumbern.ch/en/carol-rama.



Digitorial®

Innovative and extraordinary. Uncompromising and unconventional. Discover the great unknown of modernism – Carol Rama with the free Digitorial® from Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, offering interesting background information as well as art and cultural-historical contexts related to the exhibition.

The free digital information service is available in German and English at rama.schirn.de/en/.

Biography

1918

Olga Carolina Rama is born on April 17 in Turin. Rejecting the number 17, which is considered unlucky in Italy, she always gave her birthdate as April 16 or 18.

1920s

Rama's father runs the company Carrozzeria Amabile Rama, a manufacturer of car parts.

1929

Rama's father's company goes bankrupt during the Great Depression.

1933

Rama's mother, Marta, has a stay at the psychiatric women's clinic I due Pini due to a neurological illness. Rama will refer to the clinic in the titles and motifs of numerous watercolors that she paints in the 1930s and 1940s.

1942

Her father Amabile Rama dies at the age of fifty-two, possibly by suicide. Turin is evacuated in December due to Allied bombing. Rama flees with her mother and older sister Emma to Burolo.

1940s

Rama moves into an attic apartment at 15 Via Napione in Turin, which she also uses as a studio. She will live there for the rest of her life. From the late 1940s onwards, Rama regularly invites intellectuals and creative talents to her home and studio.

1945-48

The first exhibition of Rama's watercolors is installed. According to Rama's account, the exhibition is closed by police order even before it opens due to obscenity.

In 1946, Rama meets the poet Edoardo Sanguineti. They will remain close friends until his death in 2010. That same year, Rama is represented in a group exhibition at Galleria La Bussola in Turin, directed by Felice Casorati. In 1947, Casorati promotes a solo exhibition of Rama's work at Libreria del Bosco.

1950 / 1952 / 1956

Participation in the 25th / 26th / 28th Venice Biennale.

1953

Rama joins the Turin branch of the artists' group Movimento Arte Concreta (MAC). Further members from Turin are Annibale Biglione, Paola Levi-Montalcini, Adriano Parisot, and Filippo Scroppo.

1971-74

In her last solo exhibition at the Galleria La Bussola in Turin, in 1971, Rama presents for the first time works made with inner tubes, the so-called *Gomme*. That same year, Rama meets the gallery owner Luciano Anselmino, who represents international art stars such as Man Ray and Andy Warhol at his Galleria Il Fauno in Turin (from 1976 in Milan). He soon began to represent Rama as well.

1979

Rama presents her watercolors from the 1930s and '40s to the public for the first time in a solo exhibition at the Galleria Martano in Turin. The exhibition is organized by Liliana Dematteis.

1980

Rama's work is shown in the groundbreaking group exhibition *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia 1910-1940*, curated by Lea Vergine, which opens at the Palazzo Reale in Milan and then travels to Rome and Stockholm.

1985

Lea Vergine curates Rama's first major retrospective at the Sagrato del Duomo in Milan. This retrospective makes Rama known to a wider public.

1993

The curator of the 45th Venice Biennale, Achille Bonito Oliva, dedicates a special room to Rama in the Italian Pavilion, designed by Corrado Levi.

1998

The exhibition *carolrama*, curated by Maria Cristina Mundici, is shown at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

2003

At the 50th Venice Biennale, under curator Francesco Bonami, Rama is awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement.

2010

The Archivio Carol Rama is founded in Turin.

2015

Carol Rama dies on September 24 in Turin.

2019

Carol Rama's home and studio in Turin is made accessible to visitors.

2022

Rama's watercolors are shown as part of *The Milk of Dreams / Il Latte dei sogni*, the main exhibition for the 59th Venice Biennale, curated by Cecilia Alemani.

2023

Carol Rama. Catalogo ragionato 1936-2005 is published (English version: *Carol Rama: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2024). The catalogue raisonné provides a comprehensive overview of Carol Rama's artistic oeuvre.

Accompanying programme

Friday, **7 March 2025**, 15:00

Talk in the exhibition with Cristina Mundici (Archivio Carol Rama, Turin), Martina Weinhart (Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt) and Livia Wermuth (curator). In English

Workshops

Cool Kids

Saturday, **28 June 2025**, 10:15-12:00

Art Workshop in English for Kids and Teens (ages 6-14)

Information on all guided tours, workshops and other offers at

kunstmuseumbern.ch/en/calendar

vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Press images

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01

Carol Rama

Untitled (Self-portrait), 1937
Oil on cardboard reinforced with canvas
34,5 × 27 cm
Ursula Hauser Collection, Switzerland

Photo: Archiv Ursula Hauser Collection
© 2025 Archivio Carol Rama, Torino

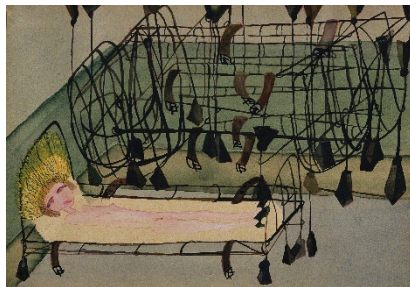


02

Carol Rama

I due Pini (Appassionata) (La signora Macor), 1939
Watercolor, tempera, and coloured pencil on paper
33,7 × 23,6 cm
Private collection

Photo: Pino Dell'Aquila
© 2025, Archivio Carol Rama, Torino



03

Carol Rama

Appassionata, 1940
Watercolor, tempera, and coloured pencil on paper
23 × 33 cm
GAM – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Fondazione Guido ed Ettore De Fornaris
Courtesy Fondazione Torino Musei

Photo: Studio Fotografico Gonella, by courtesy of the Fondazione Torino Musei
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04

Carol Rama

Untitled, 1950
Oil on canvas
80 × 100 cm
Private collection, Turin

Photo: Gabriele Gaidano, Turin
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05

Carol Rama

La linea di sete [The Line of Thirst], 1954

Oil on canvas

60 × 50 cm

GAM - Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Museo Sperimentale. Courtesy Fondazione Torino Musei

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06

Carol Rama

Untitled, 1959

Fabric sewn onto fabric

200 × 180 cm

Casorati Family, Turin

Photo: Emanuelle Riccio, Studio Sant'Orsola, Torino
© 2025 Archivio Carol Rama, Torino



07

Carol Rama

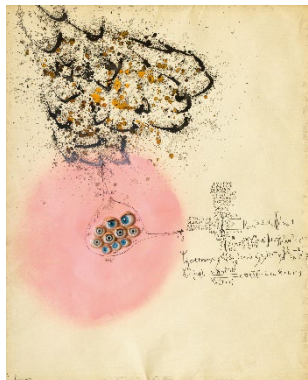
Untitled (Maternità) [Maternity], 1966

Enamel paint, glue, and dolls' eyes on canvas

90 × 70 cm

Private collection, Turin

Photo: Gabriele Gaidano, Turin
© 2025 Archivio Carol Rama, Torino



08

Carol Rama

Untitled, 1967

Ink, glue, dolls' eyes, and spray paint on paper

58 × 46,5 cm

Private collection

Foto: Norbert Miguletz
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09

Carol Rama

Man Ray, 1984

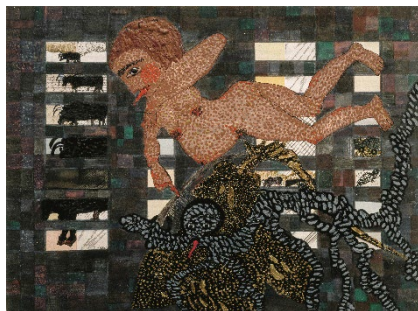
Ink and felt-tip pen on paper

22 × 17 cm

Collezione Mario De Giuli

Photo: Massimo Forchino

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10

Carol Rama

Annunciazione [Annunciation], 1985

Mixed media and taxidermic eyes on canvas-reinforced paper with previous interventions

42,5 × 57,3 cm

Private collection

Photo: Pino dell'Aquila

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11

Carol Rama

Il chiodo di Corrado [Corrado's Leather Jacket], 1993

Bicycle inner tubes on leather jacket

ca. 82 × 58 × 8 cm

Private collection

Photo: Pino dell'Aquila

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12

Carol Rama

La mucca pazza [The Mad Cow], 1997

Tempera, leather and bicycle inner tube on US mailbag (including the rope, metal cinch, and grommets), mounted on wooden frame

79,5 × 59,5 cm

Private collection

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13

Carol Rama in her home and studio, 1994

Photo: Pino Dell'Aquila
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14

Carol Rama in her home and studio, 1994

Photo: Pino Dell'Aquila
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Current and upcoming exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Bern

Marisa Merz. Ascoltare lo spazio / Listen to the Space
until 1 June 2025

Kahnweiler & Rupf. A Friendship between Paris and Bern
until 23 March 2025

Kunstmuseum Bern of the Future. The Architectural Competition
until 28 September 2025

Kirchner x Kirchner
12.9.2025–11.1.2026

Opening hours

Tuesday
10:00–20:00

Wednesday–Sunday
10:00–17:00

Monday closed

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