

## Ketty La Rocca

(La Spezia, 1938 – Florence, 1976)

Ketty La Rocca's artistic research developed entirely within the double incubators of verbal and visual language. Her earliest works, visual poetry, emerged in relationship to her involvement in Gruppo 70. These were freely laid out collages, composed of advertising images and writings cut out from newspapers and magazines. The themes are those that were shared by Gruppo 70: characterised by a mordant critique of consumer society – with particular attention to the representation of women – in a dramatic confrontation with the shocking photographic realism of the reportage from Vietnam or the poorest areas of the world.

The collages from the mid-1960s were followed by other series, including one dedicated to the reworking of texts in the graphic code of street signage. Two others, among her most well-known, *In principio erat* (*In the Beginning There Was*, 1971) and *Appendice per una supplica* (*Appendage for a Supplication*, 1972), investigate the communicative possibilities of the gesture and the corporeal image in place of the word. In the latter work, the irony of her early pieces has already vanished, leaving room for a more open scepticism about the possibility of communication and a significant mirroring of image and word. This awareness of the impossibility of meaning led to a series of works called *Polittici* (*Polyptychs*), one of which is *Pietà* (1974), where Ketty La Rocca's point of departure is a black-and-white image of the most well-known works of Italian art, taken from books or from the archives of the Alinari brothers; in subsequent phases she replaced the outlines of the image with her own handwriting. She uses writing to cancel out the image, and for a moment that elision becomes an elegant lacework that still has the power to evoke the beauty of what she is annulling. As with her collages, La Rocca had once again chosen to not produce new images. It seemed to her that there were already too many of them in the mass media. The fact that a single film could contain approximately fifty million images made her shiver, as if faced with the century's overabundance.

In her practice of the annulment and calligraphic translation of the history of art, as well as images taken from Hollywood or shot in art exhibitions, there was a hypothesis of reappropriation: "The David, for example, no longer exists," she wrote in 1975. "The real one is the one on postcards or the more refined one in photographs for tourists or art history books, and yet this is why it is so mysterious, and if I want a David all for myself, I can only remake one, reconstruct it for my memories, custom-made for my way of being, feeling, living." During the period when conceptualism, spreading internationally, lived on ironic or tautological relationships between the photograph and the caption, Ketty La Rocca identified an entirely personal path toward the regeneration of the two languages, imbued with a new existential attitude.

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In 2018, the Fondazione purchased the video *Appendice per una supplica* (1972) on behalf of the GAM in Turin. The work, which is added to the two works on paper already in the collection, is not just one of the most representative examples of Ketty La Rocca's brief career, but it is also a key element in art history, representing a very early experiment with video in Italy. Shot using a fixed camera, the work highlights La Rocca's hands, undertaking a choreography of simple and repetitive gestures: palms turned up or downwards, open or clasped together. In the central sequence, the hands of a second person surround those of the artist, who continues to carry out the same movements within the space, now more restricted than before; in the last part, her hands, finally free again, count on her fingers from one to five in a childish manner. *Appendice per una supplica* is positioned in a very precise moment in La Rocca's research, one in which the gestural dimension is isolated and intensified at the cost of the word. While her debut in visual poetry had brought her closer to a reflection on the structures of communication, the 1970s marked her lasting interest in spontaneous and preverbal languages. The images of the body take the upper hand, and the artist does no more to them than intervene with her minute handwriting in which, in the works from her final period, all that remains is a hammering repetition of the word 'you'.

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