



LANGUAGE IS A VIRUS
The female voice of the Italian art in search of freedom during isolation

25 May - 14 June 2020
open-air exhibition on kulturtavlorna curated by Adriana Rispoli

Francesca Grilli
Loredana Longo
Marzia Migliora
Rosy Rox
Marinella Senatore

Italian Cultural Institute C.M. Leric Stockholm

Language is a virus is an open-air exhibition curated by Adriana Rispoli for the **Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm** during the Covid19 emergency. As a response to the suspension of all the activities, art pursues its continuous dialogue with life by experimenting new expressive formats that can be enjoyed by the public.

Language is a virus uses advertising posters as technique and Stockholm's streets as exhibition space. Although Sweden decided not to put restrictions as in Italy, cultural places such as museums, galleries and theaters have been closed to the public¹. In this moment of forced isolation, the city offers a space for communication to five Italian female artists: **Francesca Grilli, Loredana Longo, Marzia Enhance, Rosy Rox and Marinella Senatore**. The real urban space - not merely a virtual one - is used as an organized place where it is possible to communicate beyond domestic walls and geographical borders. At the same time, the advertising posters become an artistic medium with several sociological and psychological implications. In the urban environment, art retain its autonomy and generates relationships: the art's space is the space of freedom. Thus, the recipient is no longer a consumer but an active user.

Language is a virus is named after a song by Laurie Anderson, one of the greatest and most eclectic artists of our time. In this performance-track from 1986, she quoted William Burroughs's² words: "the most dangerous virus was language". The Institute's "exhibition" wants to point out both the liberating power of the verbal and visual language and its subversive ability to appropriate the poster, that Marshall Mc Luhan would consider a cold medium³. The purpose of this exhibition is to capture the attention of the passer-byes when they casually roam on the streets. It aims to stimulate a reflection on this particular moment we are living


¹ Subverting the classical canon of the public-private binomial is an imperative of the suspended time that we are experiencing and will certainly also lead to a change in the traditional dynamics of the art-public relationship. However, this is an essential relationship, art feeds on its public and makes sense to exist only if shared. Therefore, using mainstream advertising methods inhabiting urban poster spaces, in *Language is a virus* is not only a mimetic strategy of appropriation of public space by art to cross the walls of the white cube, of the elite places assigned to art, but a reason *sine qua non* to keep open the necessary relationship that art has with the viewer


² "The most dangerous virus was language" prophesied the Beat Generation icon in the 1960s in *The Ticket That Exploded*, an anarchist novel in which he experimented with his cut-up technique, true cut-outs of words, of small sentences, which were then mixed by changing the original sense, but perhaps creating another logical or illogical sense.


³ In *Understanding Media* of 1962 Marshall Mc Luhan observes that each medium has characteristics that involve the spectators in different ways and introduces their classification in hot and cold depending on the level of participation required in understanding the message. In this case, the manifesto can be considered a cold medium because it implies a high degree of participation or completion by the public.


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in, a moment of social isolation, and a moment when the domestic burden seems to fall almost exclusively on its female component. Women are asked to be workers, but also daughters, mothers, teachers, cooks, servants. The choice to involve five female artists wants to reply to this female condition and as much as an opportunity of discussion.

From May 25th to June 14th, *kulturtavlorna* - Swedish capital city billboards - become the exhibition supports, used by the artists to communicate their messages linked to their personal researches. **Francesca Grilli** elaborates the results of her performance *Sparks*, carried out with a group of girls in Tallin during the Saal Biennial. She investigated the reversal of the relationship between childhood and adulthood through the learning of palmistry. *Can you transform the invisible into the visible?* is an extremely pertinent question asked by the young participants during the preparation of the performance and it is shown by a handprint, the symbolic surface for the future's interpretation. *The Hope still Lives and the Dream shall never die* is the quote chosen by **Loredana Longo**, who in the prolific *Carpet* project builds a bridge between East and West by embroidering with fire populist phrases commonly pronounced by Western leaders on traditional oriental rugs. The carpet is the symbol of a domestic dimension and here it becomes the support for populist quotes that belong to a collective sphere. Here, the artist appropriates the power that language exerts on the crowd by quoting Ted Kennedy's words Hope and Dream, which do not differ much from the ones used by politicians today. *Happy Days S.B.* by **Marzia Migliora** is part of her large installation *Lo spettro di Malthus, la gabbia*, that is currently exhibited at the Serlachius Museums in Mänttä, Finland. The phrase Happy Days S.B. is a quote from Samuel Beckett's play. The artist engraved it on the four sides of a salt's block, that is commonly used as a food supplement in horse breeding. Horses consume the block by licking it, until it completely disappears. The work refers to an illusory and fleeting vision of happiness and wealth: in the past, salt was the first exchange and trade object among peoples. *Happy Days* can sarcastically be referred to these days of fear and confinement in Italy. The performer **Rosy Rox** resorts to body language and its symbolic value by proposing one of her quarantined exercises. *AGILE* becomes the protest of an artist who normally bases her work on the relationship with the audience. In the solitude of her home, she finds an ironic outburst in the semantic game of the box and the word aiming to testify the woman's and artist's condition: FRAGILE. *Stay Woke* by **Marinella Senatore** is a work from the collages' series *Can one led a good life in a bad life*, made with materials collected during the participatory works of The School of Narrative Dance. She brings together images of movement and words that have been shared during the workshops. *Stay Woke* wants to encourage to resistance: the silhouette of a "fighting" dancer with her solid roots in the nature stands out against a white background full of allegorical visual elements, such as the beehive and the flower that covers her face.

These artists transform the street of Stockholm in an *obliged museum*, as the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva would say. *Language is a virus* is an answer to the need of freedom and communication researched both by art and women. It aims to overthrow the relationship between public and private and to discard women's potentially passive condition⁴ during this forced isolation.

For more information, please visit the Institute's website: www.iicstocolma.esteri.it

⁴ On the role of passivity attributed to women in society, see Carla Lonzi *Let's Spit on Hegel* 1970