

C H A R I M

Constanze Ruhm, a woman's work is never done –
the culture of women
for the preservation of humanity

01.11. – 21.12.2024

A feminist does not lend her hand; she too curls her fist.

(Sara Ahmed)

Constanze Ruhm's latest project - consisting of a 2-channel video installation, a series of posters and photographs as well as an edition of graphic works - forms the final part of a trilogy of installations. This trilogy was created between 2021 - 24 parallel to the production of the feature-length film *È A QUESTO PUNTO CHE NASCE IL BISOGNO DI FARE STORIA*, which premiered at FID Marseille in 2024, and also includes the two-channel installations *LA STRADA (È ANCORA) PIÙ LUNGA* (2021) and *A SHARD IS A FRAGMENT OF A LIFE* (2023). The final installment of this series, *A WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE (THE CULTURE OF WOMEN FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HUMANITY)*, ties in with the themes of the previous works and completes the overall picture of the series.

The feature-length film *È A QUESTO PUNTO CHE NASCE IL BISOGNO DI FARE STORIA* takes various aspects of the life and work of Italian feminist and author Carla Lonzi as its starting point. Lonzi, a protagonist of the feminist revolts of the 1970s and 1980s, dedicated the last years of her life to researching a group of French proto-feminists of the 17th century known as "Les Précieuses". After her premature death in 1982, the project remained unfinished. In 1992, the publication *ARMANDE, SONO IO!* appeared, documenting Lonzi's notes, thoughts and sketches on the history of this protofeminist group.

Lonzi's interest in the history of "Les Précieuses" arose in connection with a personal crisis and against the backdrop of her examination of gender relations and role models, but also with regard to her reflections on the feminist Roman collective *Rivolta Femminile*, which she co-founded. In her search for historical role models, the "Précieuses" seemed to her like an "echo of history": a historical horizon and at the same time a group of real women with whom she could identify herself and *Rivolta Femminile*. The question of how to develop a new approach to feminist historiography is at the heart of Lonzi's research and thus also of the film. It oscillates between fiction and reality, between real and invented documents (because "memory begins in an invented world", as the Neapolitan feminist collective *Le Nemesiache* writes), and at the same time becomes an archive of feminist art itself.

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This creates a new and different relationship between past and present, which includes an experience that was previously considered worthless: that of women. By applying a retroactive feminist gaze, “history” is reopened and appears as an unfinished, ever-changing process whose scenes and images are reflected by the shards of a broken mirror (once the one that reflected the representations of women produced by patriarchy): Fragments that in the end are put together by the women to form a new image.

This mirror - its fragments - reappears in *A WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE (THE CULTURE OF WOMEN FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HUMANITY)*: the shards become signal bodies, weapons and pieces of an incomplete puzzle. In dealing with these fragmentary elements, the new work takes up an idea by Carla Lonzi that she developed in her publication *Taci, anzi parla. Diario di una femminista* (1974). In one entry, Lonzi expresses her wish to make a film about women's gestures:

21 Aug. Once again I felt the urge to make films about the gestures of women who provide for the livelihood of mankind: who clean, take care of children and the sick, etc. The title: “The culture of women for the preservation of mankind”. Becoming aware of one's value, not only practical but also cultural, can be a way to understand who we are and where we come from. I just want to film the gestures to show how much skill and experience they require. (...)

Carla Lonzi wanted to film these gestures to show how much skill and experience they require: “Gestures written in the air, like a tightrope walker, gestures from the air - our lives are built on these gestures”, as she puts it elsewhere. *A WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE* therefore focuses on the gesture as a central figure and illuminates it from different perspectives and with different media. The video installation concentrates on two re-enactments of historical feminist artworks that already played a key role in the feature-length film *È A QUESTO PUNTO CHE NASCE IL BISOGNO DI FARE STORIA*: On the one hand, some paintings by the famous Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi are restaged, in which she processes the brutal experiences of violence to which she was exposed in her life. On the other hand, the Super 8 film *IL PIACERE DEL TESTO* by Adriana Monti from 1977, which documents a meeting of the group *Sessualità e Scrittura* of the Milanese feminist collective Col di Lana, has been reconstructed through a re-enactment. This film was originally produced in the 1970s as an audiovisual supplement to the feminist magazine *Zig Zag*. Quotes from the publication *Willfull Subjects* (2014) by the author Sara Ahmed on the subject of “feminist gestures” accompany the visual course of the video: “*The arm: a ghost, a menace, a trace. If she persists, she is willful. And her arm comes up. When a history is not over, the arm comes up.*”

As long as history is “not over”, the gesture remains: as a ghost and a threat, as a reminder, a trace and a call to action. This exhibition tells of women's experiences, their strategies of resistance and the writing and rewriting of history - and of the fact that “women's work” can never be completed, it will never be done.

(Constanze Ruhm, October 2024)

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