

When the logo becomes art

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Italy lacks art clearly identifiable as feminist. In the country's artistic output we can, however, find numerous traces of a widespread desire to represent difference. In the exhibition *Autoritratti. Iscrizioni del femminile nell'arte italiana contemporanea*, (Self-Portraits. Female inscriptions in Italian contemporary art), sponsored by [MAMbo](#), this desire is supported by a variety of positions and methods.

The exhibition (at MAMbo until September 1) tells us about the work of female artists who have shown a great wish for change. We interviewed **Chiara Pergola**, one of the artists on this project, who has used, among others, the UniCredit logo to create her piece for this event.

The work you created for the exhibition 'Autoritratti' (Self-Portraits) is meant to focus the attention on the logo. In your work, you redefine this symbol through visual and semantic discontinuity: after assigning a letter to each logo, you use them to make a sentence. Can you tell us what inspired you to create this project?

«On the one hand, I find it interesting to create language from a collection of symbols that are all around us, but that we're not normally aware of or don't even think of as symbols. On the other hand, I want to demonstrate that one can always exercise more freedom when it comes to language. All those symbols that are being continually created through human endeavor, which we think of as deliberate, contain an unknown part, and this is a place we can explore. By entering this new space we can redefine ourselves, without losing that which we have already, but rather unleashing new possibilities. For me, this process started while I was working on the project; I began in June 2012 by contacting various companies for permission to use their brand logos in an unexpected way; this stage proved crucial for me because I initiated a dialog on how a logo, which encapsulates a company's image, might be displayed following a logic which doesn't draw from marketing but from a process of composition; during this stage, all parties engaged in dialog were acting as both artist and audience, since the work itself had taken shape through a series of observations en route. Then, naturally, I had to work through the process at a visual level to reach completion, seeking to restore the quality and sense of the project to yet another party: the visitors, who in turn complete the work within the museum».

The sentence chosen, which includes the UniCredit logo among the various logos used, is presented as a puzzle to be decoded. In the light of your research, this element of interaction with the end-user has proved to be essential. In a context where modern art often seems out of reach, how important do you think interactive art is, where the public plays an active role in the work?

«I believe we must reestablish the feeling that art and culture in general are for everyone; it should be perceived as a shared resource from which to draw on and take inspiration and from which no one feels excluded; whether direct participation helps this process of inclusivity, I couldn't say; actually, I think a sense of deep engagement can also be created through a contemplative relationship with an artistic work. I don't believe there is a recipe for reaching people, and the desire to communicate gives life to research of very differing kinds. It's true that a lot of my works include the possibility of interaction with

the viewer, but this is merely a suggestion; in this piece, the encryption is in fact an "offer of dialog": of course, decoding the text allows the visitor to grasp something of my way of looking at things, an initial reflection; but I think the most important thing is to enjoy the work freely and independently, a process which can evolve in ways I would never have predicted».



'Autoritratti' is about the work of female artists that have displayed a great urge towards change, able among other things to radically renew the artistic language. What they have in common is the choice to always express themselves as individuals, without the need to create a real female art movement. Finding definitions which are too rigid for one's way of acting and thinking can often lead one to become detached; the feeling here is that these artists, through this choice, have shown themselves to be far more open to the outside, focusing their work on dialog. What is your opinion on female art? Do you think the decision to avoid labels has in the end proved positive?

«Undoubtedly, labels and clichés do not make good art, which should begin as a gesture of openness; talking about "female art" is likely to evoke stereotypical, reductive ideas that do not correspond to complex processes which are very different from each other. It is a different thing, however, to display solidarity with one's gender: gender studies, which mainly evolved in Anglo-Saxon countries and have important roots in feminism, allowed the introduction of new paradigms in the West based on the concept of difference. This, at a time when multiculturalism is an inescapable fact, represents an enormous asset which I think we must appreciate and make visible. And I think it's a great thing for all of us, both women and men, to discover that something of value has in fact emerged for us, even from within a particular group whom we did not expect to identify with».

Alongside the best-known international artists like Tatiana Trouvé and Anna Maria Maiolino, I find it very interesting that it has also been decided to present in parallel artists from the Bologna area; their presence and contributions, especially in public art and within the context of relational art - I'm thinking of Mili Romano, Alessandra Andrini, Annalisa Cattani - with initiatives and projects often far from the art world's spotlight, have stimulated and helped us to reflect on important issues concerning people's real lives. This opening up to dialog is also a feature of your work - how important do you think it is for artists to work and interact with local people?

«I believe that this interaction is very important and, in any case, inevitable: after all, no matter what we do, we do it within a particular society and region. Even for artists whose work appears a long way from the idea of a direct and shared relationship, there is a moment when a thought or an action finds interaction with others; this may be more or less evident; but in the end even moments of "study" are shaped by a series of meetings, which come together in the work. So it is important to create a double movement: on the one hand, actions are required that can bring people closer in, that have an immediacy, but it is equally important to encourage the desire to improve one's skills, also to understand what at first may not appear immediately accessible. As for myself, I try to find a balance between these two opposites, but I think in general it is essential that diverse inputs coexist. The variety of experiences within this exhibition highlight for us the chaos of the situation; indeed, the image we see at any one time is not fixed, but continuously evolving. If we accept the idea that the boundaries and the very concept of what we see are shifting, which change with us because what we consider important changes, perhaps we can regain trust in a genuine engagement».

And finally, good luck from UniCredit!

By Francesca Pagliuca