

“Ripping posters off walls is the only compensation,  
the only way to protest against a society that  
has lost the taste for change  
and fabulous transformations.”  
(Mimmo Rotella, 1957)

## **Mimmo Rotella and Giorgio Marconi** **A history of art and friendship**

**Opening: 24 November 2016 at 18.00**  
**from November 25 to February 4, 2017**

Only a few years after Fondazione Marconi's last exhibition dedicated to Rotella on the *retro d'affiches* (2013), this new show forms part of a series entitled *Mimmo Rotella 2016*, which began in September in different venues throughout Milan.

This fitting homage, which coincides with the tenth anniversary of Mimmo Rotella's death (Catanzaro 1918 - Milan 2006), is promoted by the Mimmo Rotella Institute.

Set up in 2012 by Inna and Aghnessa Rotella with the aim of compiling the catalogue raisonné, improving understanding of the figure and the art of Mimmo Rotella and promoting his work at the national and international level, the Mimmo Rotella Institute is directed by Antonella Soldaini with the scientific support of Veronica Locatelli.

The *Mimmo Rotella 2016* initiative intends to highlight and valorise the artist's multifaceted work which, in addition to the famous *décollages* and *retro d'affiches*, comprises a series of experimental works based on different techniques, such as photographic reportages, *artypos*, *effaçages*, *frottages*, sculptures, *blanks* and the *sovrappittura*.

In the early Fifties, Mimmo Rotella was struck by the posters he saw on the walls of the Piazza del Popolo in Rome and began to appropriate them, rip them and glue them directly on canvas. Once attached to the support, he worked on them further on the front and/or back. This process was the advent of the *décollages*, in other words, superimposed layers of torn paper, never randomly chosen, compiled with the intention of achieving a balanced composition, with precise relationships of colour and material.

As well as a clear expression of dissent against traditional painting, the gesture of tearing the posters was a way for Rotella to take control of an aspect of reality. In fact, in 1960, Pierre Restany included him in the Nouveau Réalisme group.

Studio Marconi was to prove a privileged vantage point for witnessing Rotella's way of working and prolific output as it continued to change and evolve over the years.

Mimmo Rotella and Giorgio Marconi had in fact already met in the Sixties, a time when Rotella was travelling frequently between Milan and Rome. However, their long and successful association began some years later, with an important exhibition, *Rotella 'coperture' 1980* (1981).

This exhibition marked the first appearance of the *blanks*, which Pierre Restany defined as a “sure and attentive judge” of Rotella's artistic evolution. They are works that emphasise nothingness, the collapse of the poster as a source of information, signalling that their display time has definitely expired.

“In order to cancel the overlapping visual messages on billboards, the specialists cover them with a layer of plain paper, usually white. Into the folds, the ridges, the creases and cracks of this whiteness, Rotella's appropriative instinct straightaway recognised the quality of a full emptiness, the presence of absence and a place waiting for an infinite number of images.” (P. Restany, *Rotella 'coperture' 1980*, 1981)

Just a few years later came the exhibition *Cinecittà 2 Cine Rotella* (1984), whose works were based on posters dedicated to Hollywood movies and Sixties films that Rotella initially re-photographed in colour, printed in the desired format and then painted.

The collaboration between Mimmo Rotella and Studio Marconi continued with a number of key exhibitions: *Rotella. Décollages 1954-1964* (1986); *Mimmo Rotella. Sovrappittura 1987* (1988); *Lamiere*, which then moved to the Show Room Castelli in Naples (1989); *Avanguardia '60 Baj, Rotella, Spoerri*

(1990); *Mimmo Rotella. Ready Made 1990-1991* (1991); *Rotella for Swatch* (1994); and *Mimmo Rotella. L'arte oggi* (1999).

Even after the artist's death, Fondazione Marconi continued to organise monographic exhibitions of his work, such as *Mimmo Rotella. Opere 1949-1998* (2010) and *Mimmo Rotella. Retro d'affiche* (2013).

Today the Marconi collection includes works ranging from the first *décollages* of the early Fifties to the *sovrappitture* of the Eighties and Nineties.

This wide-ranging and important selection enables further study of Rotella's artistic contribution, which evolved through various techniques and forms of expression throughout the course of his career.

Among the works on display are *Estropeado* (1960), *Le cachet* (1960), *Scotch Brand* (1960), *Il punto e mezzo* (1962), *Mitologia* (1962), *Viva America* (1963), the great *blank Untitled* (1980-81), and *La lezione di anatomia* (1987).

### Biographical notes

Mimmo Rotella was born in Catanzaro in 1918. After graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples, in 1945 he moved to Rome. 1949 saw the creation of his first phonetic poems, the *Epistaltici*.

Awarded a Fulbright Foundation scholarship, between 1951-52 he was a resident at the University of Kansas City, and in 1953 began making his first *décollages*: posters he tore up according to "research that doesn't rely on aesthetics but on the unexpected, on the same moods as the material", Rotella stated.

In 1955 he held his first solo exhibition as a *décollage* artist at the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan.

During the second half of the Fifties he began to devote himself to figurative *décollage*, which led to the *Cinecittà* series made using film posters. He chose Marilyn Monroe as the main female subject, thus contributing to her mythical status and making her an icon of his work. In 1960 he was invited by the critic Pierre Restany to join his Nouveau Réalisme group, founded the previous year. Rotella exhibited at Galerie J in Paris, the Festival du Nouveau Réalisme, and the major exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at the MoMA, New York.

In 1963 he began his first "Mec Art" works. The following year he was given a room at the XXXII Venice Biennale. In 1966 he exhibited his first *artypos* (printing proofs reproduced on canvas) at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice and at the Galerie Zunini in Paris. In 1970 he began to create his *effaçages* and *frottages*.

In 1972 he published his first autobiography, *Autorotella: Autobiografia di un artista*, and soon afterwards prepared the collection of his phonetic poems. After definitively settling in Milan in 1980, he began to develop his *blanks*: torn advertising posters he covered with monochrome strips of paper. These were presented at the Galerie Denise René in Paris and at Studio Marconi, Milan in 1981.

He took part in the *Italian Art 1960-1982* exhibition organised at the Hayward Gallery in London, and in the 1986 group show *Les Nouveaux Réalistes* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

In 1986 he produced his first *sovrappitture*: figures, symbols and graffiti on torn posters glued onto sheet metal panels. In the Nineties he took part in several group shows, such as: *Italian Art in the 20th Century 1900-1988* and *Pop Art* at the Royal Academy in London; *Art et Publicité* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris; *High and Low* at the MoMA and *Italian Metamorphosis* at the Guggenheim Museum, New York. Many museums and other venues have held important anthologies and retrospectives of his work, such as the one organized at the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain in Nice (1999). In 2000 the artist set up the Mimmo Rotella Foundation, presently under the presidency of Rocco Guglielmo and the direction of Piero Mascitti. In 2001 he was dedicated a solo room at the Venice Biennale curated by Harald Szeemann; in 2005 some of his large-sized works were displayed at the Tinguely Museum in Basel and at the Palais des Nations Unies in Geneva in the exhibition entitled *Mimmo Rotella. Avenue Rotella* (2005) and curated by Germano Celant. Mimmo Rotella died in Milan on 8 January 2006.

His work is still shown on numerous occasions at prestigious museums in Italy and abroad. Important among these was the group show *Nouveau Réalisme*, organised in 2007 at the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais in Paris and revived at the Sprengel Museum in Hannover.

In 2008, the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome hosted the exhibition *Pop Art 1956-1968*, and the GAM in Turin presented *Collage/Collages dal Cubismo al New Dada*. The same year saw the exhibitions *Mimmo Rotella. Lamiere*, curated by Alberto Fiz at the MARCA, Catanzaro, and *Europop* at the Kunsthaus, Zurich.

Finally, in 2009 Rotella's work was shown at the exhibitions *Italics. Arte italiana fra tradizione e rivoluzione 1968-2008*, curated by Francesco Bonami at Palazzo Grassi in Venice, and *Nouveau Réalisme dal 1970 ad oggi*, at the PAC in Milan, curated by Renato Barilli.

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### Free entry

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