

The Butterfly Effect. Occurrences and Recurrences of History

A glimpse of Valeria Costa's works

Curated by Valentina Gioia Levy

*A tyrant institutionalizes stupidity,
but he is the first servant of his own system*
Gilles Deleuze

This series of Valeria Costa's works, which is exhibited for the first time outside Italy, was realized between the end of the '70s and the first half of the '80s.

Those were troubled years for Italy both in domestic and in foreign politics. Inside, the country was shaken by a series of violent terrorist attacks between extreme right-wing and far-left groups facing each other. While outside Italian politics was facing several challenges including that of mediating with a sometimes cumbersome ally like the United States. By adopting choices that were often defined by the media as *pro-Arab*, Italy was trying to play a peacemaker role between the Mediterranean countries.

The drawings on display were made by the artist between the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s. Costa liked to visually rework the news reported by Italian media that in those years mingled with those of the crisis and conflicts in North Africa and Middle East. The portrait of Muammar Gaddafi, for example, was made by the artist during the years of tension between Libya and the United States of Regan. Some decades later, after the violent death of the dictator and the dramatic events that followed, this portrait seems to put the observer in front of many questions about the present and the future of Libya and the neighboring regions.

The three paintings, on the other hand, are part of a series of neo-expressionist works that the artist created around the seventies, focusing on the suffering of the human being and, in particular, of women. The horrors of the war that the artist lived in the years of her youth revived in her memory every time the newspapers transmitted images of conflicts in the Middle East.

Valeria Costa was born in Rome in 1912 and started her artistic career in the late '30s, in the middle of the fascist era, when it was very difficult for a woman artist to find her place. In the first part of her life, she mainly worked alongside her brother Orazio Costa as costume and theatrical set designer.

Over the course of almost six decades, she explored several genres and styles of painting. In the 30s and 40s her works were characterized by the fascination for the new German objectivity and the Italian magical realism. In the postwar and especially in the 50s she was inspired by the life of the Roman bourgeoisie and the decadency of the modern life and her works seem immersed in a kind of "*Felliniesque*" atmosphere in between neorealism and surrealism. Between the late 50s and the 60s, while she started experimenting with abstractionism her figurative works turned toward a new-expressionist style becoming schematized, distilled and charged with aggressive brush strokes. This gestural violence suited better the themes that the artist began to face in those years.

She painted and drew every day of her life, but even in Italy her paintings were rarely exhibited before the second half of the 80s. Today the most part of these works are part of the collection of Valeria Costa Piccinini Heritage Fund, a non-profit organization created in 2018 by the artist's daughter and grandchildren to preserve and promote the artist's legacy. The collection spans over more than six decades and encompasses almost the entire production of Valeria Costa. It consists of more than 2,000 documents and works including paintings, drawings, sketches of stage sets and costumes, travel diaries and photographs.