

**TEXT FOR THE CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION "FEMMINILE ALTROVE ("FEMININE ELSEWHERE")-
CORDOBA/BRATISLAVA/DUBLIN/ROME: ROSALBA CAMPRA, PETRA FERIANCOVA', MICHELLE ROGERS"
SALON PRIVE' ARTI VISIVE GALLERY, ROME, MAY24/JUNE 15, 2000**

FEMMINILE ALTROVE

Cordova Bratislava Dublin Rome

The choice to bring together in this exhibition the Argentinian writer Rosalba Campra, Petra Ferinacova' – born in Slovakia – and the Irish Michelle Rogers, was dictated by the desire to compare the artistic language of three non-Italian women who came to Rome for different reasons. Speaking with them, I experienced the magic of the daily dichotomy between mental and verbal expressions (thinking in one language and speaking in another one), and observing their work I sensed how they were able to harmonize in their artistic creations, their own internal lexicon with new elements coming from living in a foreign country. In the artworks of Rosalba Campra, Petra Feriancova', and Michelle Rogers, one can see elements which can be traced back to the confrontation between their cultural background and the new country where they chose to live, a confrontation which was decisive in the genesis of their work. In this diversity between languages, cultural backgrounds, and the country they now live in, one can find the inherent personal characteristics of each artist.

In the intimate, personal work of Argentinian writer Rosalba Campra – like fragments of an imaginary book of memories – one can see how being a foreigner entails a physical and mental distance, which one feels collectively, as the country one left, but on a personal level as well. In order to make her art pieces the artist used delicate papers – bark and parchment – on which she attached a series of manuscript papers from 1920 (a number of Magistrate's acts from Guatemala on matters of outstanding debts mainly). On this paper base she then superimposed a series of images and she wrote on each piece a text which hints, symbolically, at her re-interpretation of the old document's subject matter. Having come in contact by pure chance with these objects – eg. the lottery papers - she now holds fragments of a past which doesn't belong to her, that no one remembers (in "Memory I", "Memory II", and "Memory III") and hands out these memories to us as a gift. From the imaginary memories of her childhood when she played with her grandparents, the artist puts back together, in the three following memories, the pieces of a puzzle of her own story, as in a dream. Reading the work of Rosalba Campra one senses that her study on the subject of Memory is linked to her feeling a longing for her country of origin and not being completely at ease, not fully belonging to her new adoptive country. With regards to the story, the past, and memories of someone, while painting is composed by an accumulation of images, writing on the other hand, reveals its secrets in a slower fashion.

The young Slovak artist Petra Feriancova' uses her stay in Italy to make a very personal formal linguistic research in which her paintings – composed of original, or man-made antique prints – bear Latin words which belong to both Italian and Slovak, or new words that are the result of the contamination between the two languages, and are thus made up. By decontextualizing the ancient images – obtained from a Nordic almanac of mysteries – from their uniquely informative role, the artist seeks to give back to the images a purely aesthetic value. Through slogans remindful of advertising campaigns, she engages the user with coded messages through words/images associations. On one of the paintings exhibited, Petra Feriancova' made a charcoal drawing of two woollen foxes, which was later fixed on the canvas. Through the use of wool, she symbolically hints at the foxes precious fur, and the word "Vox" appearing on the painting is used for its onomatopoeic value, and a sound which is similar to the word "fox". Obliquely hung on the wall, the paintings specially made for the exhibit present themselves as objects, or enlarged pages of a book. In order to share her life experiences between two cultures with us, Petra Feriancova' has created, in a playful and

ironical manner, words that are born out of the fusion between Slovak and Italian. In a world of fantasy it is still possible to imagine two countries, Tranquitania (Italy) and Neuroland (Slovakia), in which a bilingual dictionary translates words that do not exist: Simpatipatia/Rome; Minotraumus/Bratislava; Cazzelatte/Caffèlatte; Sachertorture/Sachertorte...

Well-known in her native Ireland, where she has been commissioned to do several works, such as a view on the city of Dublin recently, Michelle Rogers has always made oil paintings; first using pressed discarded objects which she inserted in her works, and she later made a series of large paintings portraying historic battles. Then one day she comes to Rome for a wedding, and makes a fortuitous magical discovery, seeing the works of Caravaggio in the Contarelli Chapel of San Luigi dei Francesi. Determined to study the masterpieces of the Master of Baroque in depth, Michelle Rogers obtains a grant from the Art Council, and moves to Rome. In search of a personal way to re-interpret in a contemporary way Caravaggio, she fills several notebooks with sketches of the Master's work, and then, almost for fun, she asks a transvestite friend to mimic Caravaggio-like poses for her, thereby finding the key for a direct discussion with the adored painter. Starting from a series of masterpieces of the painter, from which she borrows the whole pattern of composition and the "chiaroscuro" technique, Michelle Rogers substitutes Caravaggio's protagonists with real-life transvestites she paints. Following Caravaggio's steps, she starts, technically speaking, with a coating of the dark background, on which she then progressively adds colours, creating the composition of the scene. In the sets of the Irish artist we encounter a levelling-down to the simplicity of daily life, so characteristic of Caravaggio's work: disguised as saints and madonnas, the unusual models go about their daily routines moving and gesturing as gay and transvestites do. By immortalising transvestites, Michelle Rogers brings people who are being marginalised by society on the forefront of the art scene, and the strength of her paintings lies in having succeeded to resuscitate Caravaggio as a transgressive agent provocateur. Ironically, like Caravaggio, one of the paintings of the Irish artist commissioned by a gallery was later refused at the exhibition where it was supposed to be shown.

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