

# CARDI GALLERY

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Mimmo Rotella, *Le sourire Rama*, 1973, Artypo-plastique, 60 x 98 cm (23 5/8 x 38 5/8 in)

## MIMMO ROTELLA

### Beyond Décollage: Photo Emulsions and Artypos, 1963-1980

February 19–December 18, 2020  
22 Grafton Street, W1S 4EX, London

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*"I felt the need for self-renewal, the need to discover something new, and the 'reportage' emerged. More than a year has already passed since I began... to reintegrate the reality atomised into so many little pieces of paper, using photographic clippings". (Mimmo Rotella, 1965)*

Cardi Gallery London is proud to present *MIMMO ROTELLA. Beyond Décollage: Photo Emulsions and Artypos, 1963-1980*. Perhaps best known for his Décollages made of distressed street posters ripped from the walls of Rome, "Beyond Décollage" establishes Mimmo Rotella (1918 – 2006) as a major pioneer of the Pop Art movement, who worked simultaneously with Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. The exhibition clearly shows how the visionary Italian artist was amongst the first to use a photographic process to print a kaleidoscope of iconic images onto traditional materials associated with conventional art, such as canvas and paper.

Rotella created an art form that would chronicle his time and marry the power of iconic film and popular imagery to the history of painting. He did so by inventing new techniques to transform the traditional canvas into a photographic surface, a space for layering, printing and exploring what an image could be. The artist experimented with developing photographs on canvas in his *Photo Emulsions* and with layering and overprinting found images with newsprint and all manner of popular media in his *Artypos*. These mixed media works convey Italy's emerging post-war consumer culture as a multifaceted montage. His appropriation of images of cultural icons - from La Dolce Vita to Jacqueline Kennedy, from the first space walk to the kidnapping of Aldo Moro - veer from the playful and colourful to the historic and traumatic. Rotella's works create a portrait of Italy during its economic boom as it rebranded itself with modernity in the post-war decades.

Curated by Antonella Soldaini, in collaboration with the Mimmo Rotella Institute, Cardi Gallery hosts the most comprehensive exhibition of Rotella's practice ever seen in the UK with 74 works which will fill all five floors of the gallery's historic townhouse in Grafton Street, Mayfair. This is also the only exhibition to include such a full selection of the artist's important *Photo Emulsions* and *Artypos* from the 1960s through the 1980s. Cardi's exhibition also coincides with the publication of *Volume II (1962 – 1973) of the Mimmo Rotella Catalogue Raisonné* by Germano Celant, which will be launched in the coming months.

Based between Rome, Paris and Milan, where he settled in 1980, Rotella was active on the international art scene from the 1950s. Progressively moving beyond the mere aesthetic value of the composition, by 1963 the Italian artist ventured into the technical realm of photomechanical reproduction, instead appropriating found posters for their content and the symbolic value of their images. Rotella's practice became associated to the Mec-Art movement, while developing in parallel to that of masters of American Pop Art, who included his contemporaries Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns, several of whom became friends. Rotella took part in the seminal 1964 Venice Biennale, where he presented a series of influential Décollages poster works – progenitors of Italian Pop art. Although Pop is often seen as an American art form, and Rauschenberg famously won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1964 (the first American to do so) it is noteworthy that artists on both sides of the Atlantic were incorporating mass media popular imagery into their work.

*"At the time, I tried to explain how these [photo emulsions on canvas] were not photographs. From the very moment a photograph was projected onto canvas, it ceased to be one; it had transformed into a work of art, having thus all the necessary characteristics of an artwork".*

(Mimmo Rotella, 1965).

*"While my new things do not belong to painting at all, but only to this gesture of reproducing images".*

(Mimmo Rotella, 1969)

Rotella would select images from magazines or from his own works, photograph them, and project their enlargements onto a canvas primed with photographic emulsion. His visual vocabulary is incredibly rich - often veering towards blues, greens and sepias - and populated by images from films (*812*, 1963), advertising (*Accogliente*, 1963), erotica (*Agony*, 1969), the news (*Italy's trial*, 1979), as well as from his own Décollages (*Linea B1*, 1963) and photographic portraits (*Paco Rabanne*, 1967). These mysterious and complex works – on display in the current show – opened the doors of the Mec-Art (Mechanical Art) group to Rotella, who in 1965 was invited by its theorist, the French art critic Pierre Restany, to take part in the important exhibition *Hommage à Nicéphore Niépce*. Bégulier Bertini Pol Bury Jacquet Nikos Rotella.

By the mid 1960s, Rotella had developed another technique, this time bringing together “art” and “typography”: the Artypo. In a process of appropriation of found objects, the artist would select posters from among the printing proofs typographers had discarded, which he then either mounted on canvas (*Uomo donna*, 1966), waxed canvas (*L'auto*, 1969), metal sheet (*Veberton*, 1977) or laminated (*Le chaud sourire*, 1973), all on display here. These proofs – meant merely to control registers and quality of both colours and images – presented a collection of randomly placed images with areas of overprinting, entirely dictated by the element of chance. They constitute a Babel of meanings where the arbitrary juxtaposition of diverse content reveals the infinite potential of mass communication.

This exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated scholarly catalogue, including essays analysing the artist’s production through the key examples of *Photo Emulsions* and *Artypos* produced between the 1960s and 1980s most of which are featured in the show.

*MIMMO ROTELLA. Beyond Décollage: Photo Emulsions and Artypos, 1963-1980* is curated by Antonella Soldaini, Director of the Mimmo Rotella Institute. Founded in 2012 by the artist’s wife Inna and daughter Aghnessa, the Institute aims to preserve and promote Mimmo Rotella’s legacy and work at an international level.

#MimmoRotella

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## **PRESS**

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