

ARTFORUM

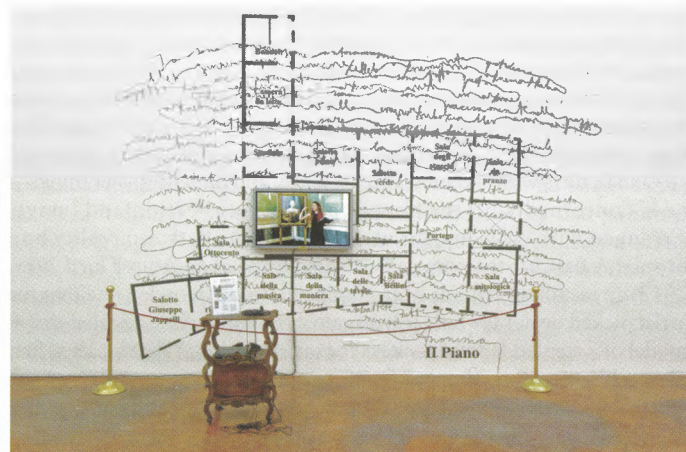
BRESCIA, ITALY

Chiara Fumai A PALAZZO GALLERY

Shut Up, Actually Talk, 2013, the video installation at the gallery entrance in Chiara Fumai's exhibition "With Love from \$inister," depicts a female figure with her contours in a state of disintegration, the hair arranged in something resembling an Afro, the body squeezed into a tight dress, the facial features taut, and the eyes wild: a phantasmagorical apparition, an ectoplasm, a coagulation of vibrations. This dramatic specter recalled the complex system of works that Fumai presented at Documenta 13, where she played P. T. Barnum's fake "Circassian beauty" Zalumma Agra, but with the nineteenth-century sideshow attraction interpreting the words of the famous Italian feminist Carla Lonzi and her organization Rivolta Femminile (Female Revolt).

Lonzi, who was born in Florence in 1931 and died in 1982, is a constant point of reference in Fumai's work. After graduating with a degree in art history, Lonzi, who studied under Roberto Longhi, worked as an art critic until 1970, when, having become deeply involved with feminism, she founded Rivolta Femminile and its publishing house. All of Fumai's research seems to follow Lonzi's writings. These offer a visceral reflection of anger over the oppression of women, reflecting a period of extreme protest, and have clearly aroused Fumai's passion. Her studies have led her to compare her experiences as a woman and as an artist to those of other women intellectuals whose expressions went beyond accepted boundaries and were capable of challenging the historical structure of patriarchal society.

Fumai is interested in women who have played marginal roles in history and in those who have succeeded in gaining recognition for voicing their dissent. In her work, the stories of these women are woven



into a dense tangle from which it seems impossible to trace the origins of their discourse. This show brought together a striking array of personages and personalities, including not only Zalumma Agra but also the nineteenth-century Italian spirit medium Eusapia Palladino and the revolutionary theorist Rosa Luxemburg. Even some men were included; for example, the magician Harry Houdini, whom Fumai evokes in juxtaposition with Luxemburg in her sound piece (on vinyl), *Free like the speech of a Socialist*, 2011. The most striking work, however, was a video shot during an unruly performance at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice in 2013, where the artist had been invited to exhibit when she won the Furla Prize that year. Fumai is shown playing the role of a guide who introduces visitors to the foundation's permanent collection, which is filled with masterpieces. She lingers before each painting and proposes a personal interpretation. During the course of this visit, however, Fumai's narration is interrupted at regular intervals by strange and sudden gestures. She is channeling an anonymous threatening message left on the answering machine of an ultraleftist feminist group in the 1970s, but spelling out the most extreme words by using the International Phonetic Alphabet, since she refuses to pronounce them. It's as if she is being intermittently possessed by a force she cannot resist.

—Marco Tagliafierro

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.