

# Galerie Francesca Pia

**Cinzia Ruggeri**  
*Finché si scherza*

**February 23 – April 6, 2019**  
**Opening Friday February 22, 2019, 17–20**

*But the rites of the family table, of the social visit, of the theatre, the cinema, the summer holiday and, indeed, of all the things that 'have to be done' constituted, for her, combined and linked together, a kind of bourgeois religion, entirely devoid of any sort of transcendency but not on that account any less carefully observed...<sup>1</sup>*

– Alberto Moravia

*Examined superficially and from the outside, the refinements of ritual can appear pointless.<sup>2</sup>*

–Claude Lévi-Strauss

Introducing the work of Italian artist and designer Cinzia Ruggeri in the pages of *Artforum* magazine, then-editor Ingrid Sischy could not avoid punning on the scalar motif that unfolded across her published portfolio. From the three-dimensional *Abito Ziggurat* (*Ziggurat Dress*, 1980s) to the *Scale Grand shoe* (1984), *Scalvino* glass (1980), and famous New Wave sheath (*Homage a Levi Strauss*, 1983) with matching green clutch and stepped leather handbag, Sischy classified the repeated “descent” from cerebral concept to physical prototype in Ruggeri’s work as *l’esprit de l’escalier*: “the witty retort thought up after the conversation is finished and one is on one’s way downstairs.”<sup>3</sup>

While the production of art and design objects follows a much longer timeline than does the nimble exercise of smart repartee, Ruggeri’s project, in retrospect, can hardly be seen as after-the-fact. Many of her avant-garde collections and creations—both independently, and for her ready-to-wear label, Bloom, Inc.—have been unofficially reprised by mainstream fashion houses in recent years (*Abito Letto/Bed Dress*, 1986; *Borsa Maiale/Pig Purse*, n.d.; *Abito Luce/LED Dress*, 1982); and her technical research into light- and heat-sensitive fabric, wearables, liquid-crystal textile (*Abito con cristalli liquidi/Liquid Crystal Dress*, 1982), and functionally hybrid garments (*Abito tovaglia/Tablecloth Dress*, 1983) anticipated the concerns of the current wave of conceptual fashion designers.

However Sischy’s remark accurately describes the linguistic seduction at play in Ruggeri’s practice, which encourages viewers to read into the bold graphic symbols and bricolaged structure of her various works, often to the end of redefining their purpose or use. If the apparel and accessories of everyday living are implicated in ritualistic social practices—thereby comprising a language of sorts—in what “style” or form can its script be rewritten? On the occasion of Cinzia Ruggeri’s first solo exhibition in Switzerland, *Finché si scherza*, the artist insists the conversation is far from over, so long as we are still in on the joke.

In the case of the small collages *Perla al porco/Pearl to Pig* and *Nessuno dei miei gattini porta gli occhiali/None of My Kittens Wear Glasses* (both 2018), the possibility of destruction or radical devaluation—of precious crystalline carbonate, of painting—is enacted pithily, pictorially. *Piovono Rane/Raining Frogs* (2018), construes an optimistic climatological scenario from the misperception of a more banal refrain on cats and dogs. *Coppola cervello* (*Coppola Brain*, 1990s) proposes the removal of all neuroses upon entering into the private house, while *Bicchiere vis-à-vis* (*Glass vis-à-vis*, 2005) replaces the “ear” of the mug with a full facial profile, its outline storing a roll of correction tape in the

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position where, anatomically, the thalamus would otherwise be. (Perhaps, a clue that communal refreshment may be perilous to motor function.) *Pas de café* (*No Coffee*, 2005) arrests that moment of high drama when the coffee pot is revealed to be empty.

After her first solo exhibition at Galleria del Prisma, Milan in 1963, Ruggeri completed her studies in fashion and apprenticed at Carven in Paris. Returning to Milan, she worked in textile and fashion design, where she soon came into contact with other radical architects and industrial designers in the mid-to late 1970s, then questioning the cultural idealization of good design, in terms of mass production and the notion of efficiency. Ruggeri's peers, the members of Studio Alchymia and Memphis, explored waste—or disciplinary indifference—and stylistic flamboyance as means of aesthetic rebellion, using advanced photographic technology and magazine circulation to disseminate ideas before there was any possibility of putting them into production. The rarefied form of experimentation enabled by this kind of “styling” also contributed to Ruggeri's free-range methodology—which produced juxtapositions and associations later labeled Surrealist—although many of her designs were in fact realized.

Considering the significance of design in revitalizing postwar Italian life, and granting it a rational structure on a grand scale—from agriculture to the automobile, the personal computer, and the Bialetti Moka Express—the rise of postmodernism marked a return to sensuousness, individuality, and a reconsideration of values. Ruggeri's playful furniture, sculpture, and other objects intended for the domestic space place emphasis on the social character of its inhabitation while absorbing and reworking Pop motifs—the elements that make up Mickey Mouse (*Topolino Puff/Baby Mouse Puff*, 1980s), or else the appropriation of her Scottish Terrier's silhouette (*Occhiali Cane/Dog Glasses*, n.d.)—and undermine the gravity of inherited bourgeois rituals within a particularly defined space of experience: the household. Ruggeri reclaims this site of reproductive labor for the artistic imagination. Furthermore, a concern for ecology—referenced in *Abito muretto* (*Wall Dress*, 1982), *Abito con Polipo* (*Dress with Octopus*, 1984), *Guanto erba* (*Grass Glove*, n.d.) and the project *Per un vestire organico* (*Towards an Organic Way of Dressing*, 1983)—feeds into the vocabulary of her practice without ever repudiating the controlled artifice of technological modernity, or merely fetishizing natural form. For Ruggeri, recognizing the fragility of meaning inherent in the rituals and articulated practices of daily life is precisely what allows existential humor to endure.

Kari Rittenbach

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<sup>1</sup> Alberto Moravia, *Two: A Phallic Novel*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 10.

<sup>3</sup> “Project: Cinzia Ruggeri,” *Artforum* 24.2 (Oct 1985): 118.