

## PRESS RELEASE

*Mika Rottenberg*

Curated by Lorenzo Balbi

MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna | Sala delle Ciminiere

31 January - 19 May 2019

Opening: Wednesday 30 January 2019 h 6.00 pm

*Bologna, 29 January 2019* - From 31st January to 19th May 2019 MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna is happy to be presenting **Mika Rottenberg's first Italian institutional solo exhibition**, curated by Lorenzo Balbi.

This Argentine born artist who grew up in Israel and is now based in New York is a centre stage player on the contemporary world scene. She appropriates the imposing volumes of the Sala delle Ciminiere on the ground floor, besides the museum's Foyer, to animate **eleven of her most recent productions** - sculpture objects and video installations - famous for their **sarcastic and bizarre narrative register**.

Rottenberg uses the various languages of film, architectural installation and sculpture to explore the concepts of class, work, gender and value by means of visual image devices which throw light on the connections and concealed processes behind apparently unrelated global economies. Interweaving fictional and documentary data in stories in which geographies and narratives collapse into surreal non-sense, the artist creates complex allegories on the capitalist system which regulates the human condition and massive goods production processes.

Her work highlights themes such as the inequalities caused by the currently dominant economic model and the fragility of the human body using **humour**, the **absurd** and **confusion** as her key lenses. With a fundamentally sculptural approach, the artist frequently begins a project by seeking well-known female interpreters for their unusual body characteristics such as body-builders, and then builds elaborate sets as 'costumes' for her artists who, in turn, become the theatre in which audiences experience the videos.

From farmed pearl production (*NoNoseKnows*) to the millions of bright colours in a Chinese supermarket (*Cosmic Generator*) to wet wipes made from the sweat of other people (*Tropical Breeze*), the worlds the artist conjures up with her visual creations are populated by uncommon people hard at work - with a resigned zeal which betrays their awareness of wasted lives - on banal and repetitive activities to whose abstruse logic they seem hostages with no escape route.

Rottenberg's work offers penetrating criticism of the absurd working conditions imposed by the neo-liberal model in which the precariousness of the gig economy has transformed millions of people into impoverished workers. While artificial intelligence and automation threaten a great many jobs, the human presence would appear to be fundamentally important in this precarious system, apparently perennially on the point of collapse both logically and materially.

Exploring the seduction, magic and desperation of our hyper capitalist, globally connected status quo, Mika Rottenberg's narratives draw on cinematic and sculptural traditions to forge a new technicolour language which explores the dynamics of work in the era of globalisation, value production and increasingly extreme monetisation of relationships: grotesque considerations on traumatised human lives.

On the occasion of the exhibition **three new works** produced by MAMbo together with two important European museum institutions, Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art London and Kunsthau Bregenz, are exhibited: *Ponytail (Orange)*, *Smoky Lips (Study #4)* and *Untitled Ceiling Projection*.

The exhibition opens on Wednesday 30th January 2019 in the context of the seventh edition of **ART CITY Bologna**, institutional programme of exhibitions, events and special initiatives sponsored by the Municipality of Bologna in conjunction with BolognaFiere on the occasion of Arte Fiera.

During the Bolognese weekend dedicated to contemporary art, the exhibition observes **extraordinary opening hours**: Friday 1st and Sunday 3rd February 10.00 am - 8.00 pm; Saturday 2 February 10.00 am - midnight; **free ticket during the three days**.

Saturday, **February 2 at 11.00 am**, the museum's Conference Hall hosts a dialogue between **Germano Celant** and **Mika Rottenberg**, with introductory greetings by **Lorenzo Balbi**.

In conjunction with the opening of the exhibition an **Edizioni MAMbo instant book** with an inedited essay by Germano Celant is available.

The exhibition is organized with the support of the **Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna**. Special thanks to Eurovideo s.r.l. and Delverde Industrie Alimentari S.p.A.

## BIOGRAPHY

Mika Rottenberg is born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1976.  
She lives and works in New York, NY.

Mika Rottenberg's film installations explore the seduction, magic, and desperation of our hyper-capitalistic, globally connected reality. Female workers produce goods in strange factories that follow elaborate manufacturing rationales. Rottenberg's cinematic works, which have a surrealistic aesthetic and are rigidly structured in a spatial sense, emphasize the interrelation between labour, economics, and the production of value, and how our affective relationships are increasingly monetized. The artist weaves documentary elements with fiction to create complex allegories for the living conditions experienced within our global systems.

Rottenberg was recently honored with the 2018 Kurt Schwitters Prize, which recognizes artists "whose work features a reference to Kurt Schwitters and is distinctive for venturing into new realms of artistic creativity and artistic imagination, or whose work contributes to linking and integrating the artistic genres."

She was also awarded 2018 Smithsonian American Art Prize. "The prize is awarded to an artist...producing the most distinctive and outstanding work today."

She opened two new solo exhibitions at the Bass Museum, Miami (December 2017-April 2018) and over the entire building of Kunsthau Bregenz (April-July 2018). Rottenberg was chosen as the inaugural artist to open the new Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art in London, and her show there was presented throughout the entire new building (September-November 2018). Rottenberg's recent video *Cosmic Generator* was part of the Skulpture Projekt in Münster. It is now in the permanent collection of the Louisiana Museum of Art in Denmark and was on display at the US pavilion at the Venice Biennale for Architecture.

Several solo shows have been dedicated to the artist's work in the past years: Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2016), Israel Museum (2014), and Magasin 3 in Stockholm (2013). In 2015, her work *NoNo-seKnows* was featured in the Venice Biennale as part of an exhibition curated by Okwui Enwezor: "All the World's Futures." Rottenberg's work was also showcased at the Whitney Biennial 2008 and the Taipei Biennial 2014.

Her major video installations are part of collections such as the Guggenheim Museum, The Museum of Modern Art in NY, The Whitney Museum, The Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art in Oslo, the Julia Stoschek Collection, FRAC, and many more.

## LIST OF WORKS

(Long captions curated by MAMbo Educational Department and Anna Montagnini)

### *Tropical Breeze*, 2004

Video sculpture

3' 45"

Variable dimensions

Collection Pasquale Leccese

Courtesy of Le Case d'Arte, Milan

Two female figures are an integral part of an absurd production line manufacturing lemon-scented handkerchiefs. The scene moves from the back of the van to the driver's cab and back again, and the sequence is recreated through a horizontal system of strings and pulleys, where Felicia the dancer hangs handkerchiefs on a line, passing them to Heather the bodybuilder. Heather then mops up her sweat on each handkerchief, and sends it back, completing the production cycle.

The solid link between the machinery, human beings and consumer goods is crystallised into the action of the two women, revealing Mika Rottenberg's interest in a female world with sometimes surprising physical forms, where unconventional bodies challenge the norms of conventional beauty.

### *Sneeze*, 2012

Single-channel video

3' 02"

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of Collection Antoine de Galbert, Paris

Men in jackets and ties sit at their desks in a non-descript room. Their red, bumpy and oversized noses herald the arrival of an action beyond their control: a sneeze. The jerk of the body, as natural as it is unpredictable, leads to a cause-and-effect chain reaction, a surreal production line where each sneeze produces a rabbit, steak or lightbulb from their nose. The lightbulb, a reoccurring element in Mika Rottenberg's work, is a subtle reference to one of the first experiments in cinema, *Kinetoscopic Record of a Sneeze*, filmed by Thomas A. Edison in 1894.

Under the table, the men squeeze their feet with long varnished nails in the vain attempt to anchor themselves to the ground and keep hold of the energy that is about to be lost through the sneeze.

***Bowls Balls Souls Holes (AC and Plant), 2014***

Video with sound and sculptural installation

27' 54"

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

In this video, female figures act within a highly confined space, while viewers enter the room through a revolving opening in the wall.

The story they watch begins with the front of a hotel illuminated by the moon. Within it, a woman, laying on a mattress, looks up at the night sky through a hole in the ceiling. This is the start of an improbable routine where strange mechanical contraptions surround her and produce energy. At the ring of an alarm clock everything is disconnected and the woman goes to her workplace. This is an underground bingo hall where she lazily announces the winning numbers to an audience of women who repeat the same gestures again and again. The female announcer feeds the chain of players and similarly supplies "food" (coloured clothes pegs, as a symbol of the search for beauty) to a male figure. This is Gary "Stretch" Turner, who is recorded as the man with the most elastic skin in the world. The clothes pegs on his face end up by splitting apart, metaphorically representing the destruction of the male component.

A single figure is outside this setting. Totally unconcerned by the game taking place, a woman is woken from time to time by a drop of water falling from a hole in the ceiling, and then cyclically falling into an apparently very deep sleep. The circular form that runs through the entire video is the same that generated her visions, underlining the interior soundness of her being and symbolising a rejection of the system.

***NoNoseKnows, 2015***

Sculpture and video installation

22'

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Technical sponsor: Delverde Industrie Alimentari S.p.A.

Starting from the relationship between Fordism and imagination, this work explores the intricacy of manufacturing mechanisms and investigates the process of turning senses into commodities. Executed in part using documentary extracts, *NoNoseKnows* was filmed in China's Zhuji province, where fresh water pearls are produced. Two work scenes overlay each other. The actual repetitive work of young women who seed the shells, open them and select the best pearls without a break, is interspaced with a fantastic, surreal scenery where a fan blows air onto flowers, causing a woman to sneeze, and her sneeze produces plates of food that are not eaten but continue to accumulate. This ludicrous production line and mechanical actions make a disproportionate use of resources and repeats over and over without end.

***Cosmic Generator, 2017***

Sculpture and video installation

Ca. 22'

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

With *Cosmic Generator*, Mika Rottenberg is exploring the seduction and desperation of our hyper-capitalism and our globally-connected world.

At the border between Mexico and California, an underground tunnel frontier connects the cities of Mexicali and Calexico, with the entrance to the concealed passage being located inside the Dragon Restaurant, in the Mexican Chinatown. The viewer will think of Trump's wall and, on the exact night of his election, Rottenberg, on a flight from China, came up with an idea. She imagines that anyone entering the tunnel in Mexico will not emerge in the USA but in an enormous warehouse in China, a shiny and garish kingdom of plastic dominated by the horror vacui (fear of the empty) of useless overproduction, that generates a feeling of senselessness.

The reality of the work is less brilliant, it is always unemployed, silent single women, and sleep seems the only bodily resource yet to be exploited by the system. Capitalism does not seem to be embarrassed by its own folly, but - in the words of the artist - it's as if an inflatable boat from China can reach Texas faster than a Mexican. Tunnels and walls are two human-made constructions that are opposites only on the surface. In reality they are both tied to feelings of closeness, on the one side opportunity and desire, on the other, fear and threat.

***AC and Plant, 2018***

Air conditioner, plant, pot, water

51 x 33 x 40 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

An old air conditioner and a houseplant are bonded in an absurd interdependency. Water drops drip from the air conditioner, bounce on the pot, brush the leaves and are absorbed in the soil. In *AC and Plant*, the artist builds an unexpected circuit, staging a kind of ecosystem where one faulty element (air conditioner) ensures the survival of the other (plant). The surprising and poetic bond between man-made object and nature originates and persists in a very normal environment, a transit zone where passers-by are given an unusual sensory experience.

The installation hinges on a nondescript residual setting, a service area used simply to pass through.

***Finger, 2018***

Artificial finger, mechanical system

7 x 13 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

In the wide empty space of MAMbo's Sala delle Ciminiere makes its presence felt. This finger twirls without stopping, as if it were a self-sufficient organism, with its own life, absurd, funny and, at the same time, totally repulsive.

The true-sized middle finger with its comically long and well-looked-after nail, is transformed by the artist into a mobile sculpture, a sort of primordial mechanism without purpose that, by moving, brings about an awareness of the body.

*Finger* is inserted in the wall. In balance between dominion and submission, and between being able to act and having to endure, the finger is a metaphor for precarious overloaded systems and the excesses of our interconnected global economies.

***Ponytail (Black), 2018***

Hair, mechanical system

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

A long pony tail of false hair flaps mechanically and hypnotically, a repeated action that is as intriguing as it is unsettling. *Ponytail (Black)* emerges directly out of the museum wall and induces the viewer to imagine the negated body, which is both evoked and confined.

Mika Rottenberg, with her interest in femininity and the role of women's bodies, used a mainly female hairstyle as the part to indicate the whole, an intentionally excessive artifice that at first seduces and attracts the viewer, but then, as soon as the observer approaches, reveals itself to be artificial.

***Ponytail (Orange), 2018***

Hair, mechanical system

Variable dimensions

Courtesy Collection Scott and Margot Ziegler

Produced by Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London; Kunsthaus Bregenz; MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

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***Untitled Ceiling Projection, 2018***

Multichannel videoinstallation

Ca. 7'

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Produced by Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London; Kunsthaus Bregenz; MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

A hand wearing a woollen glove steadily breaks brightly coloured light bulbs placed on a transparent surface.

The observer views the scene from the same angle as the camera recording the action, so that the viewer's body becomes an active part of the installation, set within its physical and sound space.

The video wall installed on the ceiling creates the effect of a kaleidoscope, placing viewers in a position subordinated to what is happening above their heads. Human energy, occupied in the work of destruction rather than of production, transforms objects from one material state to another, where the lightbulb fragments create a haphazard abstract composition, changing randomly and continuously.

***Smoky Lips (Study #4), 2018-19***

Single-channel video installation

2' 56"

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Produced by Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London; Kunsthaus Bregenz; MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

In Mika Rottenberg's artistic practice, architectural space is often marked by unusual openings. Walls become similar to white skin with pores populated by repulsive inhabitants, artificial fragments of sensual bodies that are camouflaged, but only in part, with their surroundings. A full-sized silicon mouth emerges from the wall. The slightly open smoky lips, invite the visitor to peer between them, as if through a peep hole, and watch the video hidden behind with its clear references to surrealism. The story is set in a Mexican hotel where bizarre characters appear in front of a fountain shaped like a champagne glass, performing for a single spectator. The rhythm of their actions is punctuated by visual and acoustic elements that evoke the circular cyclicity of time.

## TECHNICAL SHEET

### Exhibition title

*Mika Rottenberg*

### Curated by

Lorenzo Balbi

### Promoted by

Istituzione Bologna Musei | Area Arte Moderna e Contemporanea

### Venue

MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna  
via Don Minzoni 14 | 40121 Bologna - Italy

### Dates

31 January - 19 May 2019

### Opening

Wednesday 30 January 2019 h 6.00 pm

### Opening hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Festivities h 10.00 am - 6.30 pm; Thursday h 10.00 am - 10.00 pm

On the occasion of ART CITY Bologna 2019:

Friday 1 February h 10.00 am - 8.00 pm

Saturday 2 February h 10.00 am - midnight

Sunday 3 February h 10.00 am - 8.00 pm

### Ticket

Temporary exhibition full € 6 | reduced € 4 | Card Musei Metropolitan Bologna € 3

Full cumulative ticket temporary exhibition + MAMbo / Museo Morandi Permanent collection € 10

Reduced cumulative ticket temporary exhibition + MAMbo / Museo Morandi Permanent collection € 8

Free during ART CITY Bologna 2019 (1 - 2 - 3 February)

### Publishing

Instant book Edizioni MAMbo

### General information

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