

KETTY LA ROCCA

10 June – 12 August 2016

Wilkinson is pleased to present the second solo exhibition at the gallery of work by Ketty La Rocca.

The show will present some of Ketty La Rocca's earliest works and focuses on the moment she joined Gruppo 70, a group of artists, musicians and poets based in Florence. The group was active from 1963 – 70 and developed a body of work that became known as *poesia visuale* (visual poetry). In a recent essay on this movement Alberto Salvadori described their activities as signaling 'the dawn of semiology – these were the years in which visual poets worked without the support of the militant critics of the time.' This was seen as a significant moment for Italian art as Gruppo 70 aimed for a new visual language, one that brought both aesthetics and technology to bear on consumerism and the mass media.

In particular, one of La Rocca's aims was to liberate the depiction of women from its contemporary contexts, both in the patriarchal Italy of the 1960s and in the flood of consumer imagery emanating from television, advertising, and the cinema. Her early collage works mimic and undermine the commercial imagery of the day. She presents texts in the style of advertising slogans, subverting their meaning through a play on words that draws out their ambiguities, and elaborates her ideas through the pairing of such texts with images drawn from populist magazines, newspapers and the like.

La Rocca was one of only two female members of Gruppo 70, the other being Mirella Bentivoglio. Both felt the need to represent their individual presence as women artists within a male-dominated scene. La Rocca's work borrowed from linguistics to provide a novel means of self-presentation. She repeatedly deploys the letter 'i' and the letter 'j', for instance, signifying the first-person pronoun in Italian and French, respectively, as in the sculptural works in the upstairs space. These consist of a Perspex wall-mounted letter 'i', with the dot on the floor made into a mirrored form, along with some 'j's in the form of two-dimensional wall works and a human-height sculpture. La Rocca created several 'i's and 'j's in multiple formats throughout her career, all of which provided a sort of duplication of the self through a linguistic referent, creating a concrete metaphor for the artist's presence. Other works in the upstairs space mimic the graphic design of road signs in her native Florence, the use of the arrow being of particular interest. Like a pointed finger, the arrow is an indexical sign, its meaning dependent on a physical correspondence between it and the direction it indicates. The text appearing on La Rocca's sign once again refers to the self and its aspirations, as the word *mia* (my) replaces the expected road-number reference, and the words *sun'Inizativa* (an initiative) replaces the destination of a particular town or village.