

BID

International Women's Biennial

We live in a time that constantly demands to be named. In an era of clusterisation, where it becomes more important for an algorithm to recognise what is being discussed than to attempt to understand the present, every transformation seems to require a word to contain it, every crisis a term to render it intelligible. When categories begin to waver, the temptation is to rigidify them: to ask words to impose order, to hold together what no longer stays still, and to restore an appearance of calm. Rather than questioning the systems of thought adopted so far and imagining new ones, there is an insistence on naming, classifying, and further categorising.

Every name is a container, wrote Anselm Strauss in *Mirrors and Masks*, yet one might argue that some words, more than others, never arrive alone. Among these, the word woman always comes laden with what it is asked to be.

Quite simply, it is enough to open any dictionary to grasp how the word woman is a body under pressure, upon which roles, expectations, promises and guilt are deposited as the world around it changes shape—a change that is not always welcomed. Woman is a sensitive surface: collective desires, political nostalgias and social fears are impressed upon it. Each era leaves a different mark, as if time itself were seeking form there. It is called upon to hold together what fractures: origin and future, care and sacrifice, protection and control. The more the present falters, the more this word is charged with meaning.

Even before designating someone, woman designates a burden: an excess of meaning that shifts over time, mutates, and is reformulated. In this sense, it does not describe an identity, but reveals what a society projects onto it. Yet precisely these projections, when naturalised or assumed to be necessary, become reductive and limiting. In attempting to stabilise what is unstable, they end up containing, normalising and closing down a field of possibilities that could instead expand, exceed and transform.

Born in Trieste, every two years an occasion returns: the International Women's Biennial. An occasion that, even simply by invoking in its name this obsolescently binary category, seeks first and foremost to test how a word returns, in what ways it does so, and upon which bodies it insists. Not always in the same way. Not always on the same body.

Woman moves through time like an echo: it contracts, expands, accumulates meaning. It is called upon to explain, to justify, to safeguard, to endure. Expectations, nostalgias, fears and promises of the future settle upon it. The Biennial is born within this echo: not to fix its meaning, but to listen to its distortions; not to establish who belongs within it, but to observe, each time, where we stand with the flowers.

The International Women's Biennial does not take woman as a natural category nor as a closed identity. It approaches it as a cultural universe, as a sensitive surface onto which relations of power, economies of desire, political narratives and forms of exclusion are projected and inscribed. Within this framework, the patriarchal distinction between genders is not simply overcome, but counter-operated: in its very obsolescence, it reveals its banality. It is from here that the Biennial works by contrast, attempting to initiate counter-narratives capable of disarticulating what appears given.

This is not about denying differences, but about removing them from their normative function. Woman is neither an origin nor a destiny, but an unstable, traversable position, continuously rewritable. From this instability, an expanded field can emerge, capable of accommodating sensitivities that go beyond gender and of unsettling the dispositifs that regulate belonging, roles and expectations.

In this sense, each edition of the Biennial takes shape as a situated exercise in critical expansion: a moment to reflect, from within one's own historical time, on what can and must be questioned, and on what emerges as necessary to imagine, articulate or render visible. Rather than offering answers, the Biennial works through overflow, opening spaces in which categories can be crossed, exceeded and renegotiated.

From this perspective, the International Women's Biennial presents itself as a critical outpost in which woman is not understood as a subject to be represented nor as an identity to be delimited, but as a methodology to be counter-activated. A methodology capable of interrupting interpretative automatisms, destabilising what appears natural, and making visible the forces at work in processes of definition, exclusion and normalisation. The Biennial does not ask who is a woman, but what becomes possible when the word woman ceases to function as a descriptive category and is taken up as a critical tool. Each edition activates this methodology in relation to its own time, interrogating what is projected, what is contained and what exceeds, opening the word woman as an operative field of critical and political imagination.