



EWVA European Women's Video Art

Anna Valeria Borsari - Biography

Anna Valeria Borsari was born in Bazzano, a provincial town near Bologna, where her mother had taken refuge from the bombing of Bologna towards the end of August 1943. Ever since her childhood, she showed a strong propensity for drawing and painting, but her parents chose to enrol her at a classical high school instead of an art high school. She later earned a BA in Literature and Philosophy, with a thesis on André Malraux, whose various editions of *Musée Imaginaire* had fascinated her, and whose *Antimémoires* were the subject of an essay she published. After graduation she won a scholarship to carry out further research in linguistics, the philosophy of language, and perception. When she came to know the new conceptual art movement, she found strong similarities between it and her studies and interests. In 1970 she became a visiting professor of Romance Philology at the University of Bologna, and in the same year she narrowly escaped death from an embolism caused by a clumsily executed injection. After this dramatic event she made a series of radical life choices: she quickly married, immediately conceived a child, and decided to devote herself consistently to the visual arts, which was her greatest passion. She thought of her work as “strictly related to everyday life”. For her, art had to stop claiming to be autonomous, which had turned it into being self-referential (see her paper in *Alcuni aspetti della critica analitica*, conference proceedings, GAM, Bologna, 1976-'77). She carried out long-term research in several domains: in 1976 one of her solo shows had the same title (*Del riferimento e dell'identità*) as a linguistics article she published in the journal, “Lingua e stile”. The following year she exhibited at Ginevra Grigolo's innovative gallery (G7 studio) in Bologna, which showed works by such artists as Sol Lewitt, Giulio Paolini, Giuseppe Penone, Luca Patella and others. Again in 1977 she began collaborating with the well-known Cavallino gallery of Venice, where she created her first video. Then, in 1978, she exhibited at Schema in Florence, and later in Bologna with Mario Diacono, and in Rome with De Crescenzo. In 1977, she had begun working with Radio Alice, and had created a couple of episodes for a program on visual art, shortly before the radio was shut down by the *carabinieri*.

Moving away from her previous experiences and conditionings, she came to develop her own working mode. “I no longer have the anxiety of those who keep bumping their head against a glass that separates them not only from the world, but from their own self as a part of the world. And I am ‘writing’ this transition in the things I do”: this is what we read in a letter written to Filiberto Menna, dated 24 February 1977 (Cfr. *Opere*, Electa, 1996, p. 34). This process, which is visible in works such as *Narciso*, *Attraversarsi*, *Autoritratto in una stanza* and *Chi ha vissuto qui / qui è vissuto*, and later in the series of *Madonne di monete e cereali*, which she performed in three Italian piazzas in 1977, 1978, and 1979, entailed overcoming the approach to conceptual art that had characterized her work from the beginning. Since then she has used various tools for creating her works, and has no longer been afraid of bringing photography and video closer to a style of painting and figuration that she had developed, and also closer to the physical and material aspects of places.

In the early 1980s, while our culture was going through a radical transformation, Anna Valeria Borsari continued to work against the current –refusing to adapt to the new trends, and continuing to privilege non-institutional places and indoor and outdoor urban spaces, rather than private

galleries and commercial channels of distribution. Her works could stay where they had been placed, and change their appearance in the place for which she had conceived and produced them, so that they could “share the destiny” of these places (see A. V. B., *Gli occhiali a specchio*, in G. Baruchello, A.V. Borsari, E. Fantin, F. Vaccari, M. Vaglieri, *Nel segno di Giotto*, APM, 2008, p. 105). During this time she created: *Altrove*, in an abandoned flat (1980); *Il sangue è rosso, il rosso è un colore* (1981), in the old Hospital in Rimini; *Donna isola e ponte* (1982), on an island on the Reno river, where the artist engraved a temporary image of a woman. This work was presented in the Aula Magna of the Milan Polytechnic Institute by several teachers and scholars, among whom was Omar Calabrese, who stressed the innovative nature of this experience and its difference from *land art* (see O. Calabrese, 1983, in *Opere*, Electa, 1996, pp. 114-115).

In 1983, Anna Valeria Borsari published her book, *Lancillotto liberato*, and in 1984 she was awarded a position as associate professor of Romance Philology at the University of Bologna. At the Engineering Faculty of the same university, in the same year, with the collaboration of G. Calzolari and G. Zucchini, she organized the conference *Ipotesi d'artista: studi, ricerche, idee e progetti per modificare il mondo* (proceedings published by Nuova Alfa). It was an interdisciplinary conference that called into question the art system as it was developing at that time. Among the participants were Filiberto Menna, Mauro Ceruti, Patrizia Vicinelli, Claudio Costa, Pierluigi Tazzi, Giovanni Accame and Adalgisa Lugli. Borsari later became the editor of a journal with the same name, “*Ipotesi d'artista*” (1988), on the theme of symmetry (with contributions by Ervin Laslo, Gillo Dorfles, Dadamaino, Michele Emmer and several other authors). The publication, however, was discontinued as AVB fell ill with a mysterious disease, which paralyzed her social and working life for years. Again in 1988 one of her works, *Paesaggio, da una serie di dipinti perduti*, was among the artistic experiments that appeared in the magazine “Alfabeta”. It was a painting of which only a verbal description survived, a narrative that accompanied the photographs documenting Borsari’s ephemeral works, which were destined to be ‘lost’ in the location where they had been created. This was part of the idea of “dematerialization” which AVB had been working on since 1977, and experimenting with in different ways. Once again she was going against the grain, rejecting the widespread use of painting typical of those years, and embracing instead something similar to the philosophical process that had led Lyotard to create his exhibition, *Les Immatériaux* (1985).

In 1994 Anna Valeria Borsari chose to resign from her job as a university teacher. A retrospective exhibition, held in 1996 at the Sale Museali in Siena (catalogue published by Electa, with texts by O. Calabrese and G. Giorello), was followed by *Suonare Borsari* (1996-97, in a Milan apartment that had been her studio), and *Confusione* (a ‘marriage-opera’ she did with Dino Pes in a Venice hotel in 1997). In the same year, following a dramatic series of events that involved some people very close to her, Borsari founded the voluntary association “Percorso vita”, which was active for a decade (also organizing cultural events) in supporting people suffering from psychic damage. There followed more works conceived for specific locations (*Spaccato urbano*, 1998; *Manifestazione*, 2000), and one, *Lotteria* (2000), in which visitors could win by lottery some of her personal belongings (letters, photographs, mini phone-books, books, etc.), and later *Monumento al mare* (2001). Starting in 2003, Anna Valeria Borsari has developed a series of works focusing on social issues (*L'Arte come cura del Mondo / Il Mondo come cura dell'Arte: Proposta abitativa*, Care Off, Milan; *Se i papi non hanno più bisogno dell'arte*, 2005, Museo Lab., La Sapienza, Rome; *Condomini, grattacieli ed ecomostri*, 2006, Palazzo del Podestà, Rimini; *Final*, 2008; and *Fuori dal monumento, volantini*, 2009, on the Monte Sole massacre, with a publication by Campanotto, 2010).

In 2007 she moved to Milan permanently, and there, along with some artist friends, she founded the association AR.RI.VI (Archivio Ricerca Visiva). In 2012 a partial retrospective exhibition of her work was held at Fondazione Mudima (with a catalogue introduction by F. Tedeschi and texts by

R. Daolio, E. De Cecco, P. Fabbri, E. Grazioli, and G. Zanchetti). She took part in the conference *Naturtale e/o artefatto* at the Department of Earth, Geological, and Environmental Science of the University of Bologna, creating an installation with video, entitled *Musei del vento*, in the adjacent Museo Paleontologico (see proceedings, Mimesis, 2015). Between 2013 and 2015, AVB conceived and developed a project on *Il ruolo del pubblico nell'arte contemporanea*, for which she has written several articles in a special blog, www.arteperchi.org (see *Arte per chi*, A+MBookstore, 2015).