

## **Solo Show, Galleria Incontro, Imola, Italy - 12 – 31 January 1980**

by Lara Vinca Masini

The whole body of research carried out by Greta Schödl for some years now appears to me a far-reaching enquiry into how to give analogical artistic expression to women, and women's work with needle and thread.

Schödl herself says: "I abandoned graphic art to adopt a wider series of signs, which gradually led me to analyse vibrations and oscillations using continuous strokes on flat surfaces, and then to investigate the particular behavioural patterns of thread".

In fact, the highly distinctive features characterizing Schödl's work seem symbolically to paraphrase the deepest significance of what it is to be a woman in this world, to be part of life that slowly weaves the subtle mesh that forms the essence of femininity – a weave of intelligence, love, affect, and intense dedication to the everyday patterns of life and the elements they comprise.

Yet while Schödl captures the female traditions of millennia, hers is also a gaze that seeks out and discovers new prospects. Weaving together the 'things' of life – especially those belonging to women's lives – Schödl also succeeds in distancing herself, at times even casting an ironic eye on her subject. The transcription of the objects of this world takes on all the subtlety and finesse of an anthropological study.

Schödl's thread is her artistic 'sign', in every way similar to the archaic mark adopted by man since his cave-dwelling days to take possession of the world and imbue it with his own spontaneous expressive connotations.

As an artist, Schödl is engaged in the task of 'writing', theorizing and transposing the signified. It applies to all the objects she uses, each of which redolent with deep significance, symbolism and allusions to lived experience within the home, speaking to the particular legacy that is women's, both positive or negative. Her linear sign is syntagmatic, a concentrate of the signified and signifier, whether an old bed sheet, a grandmother's nightdress, or a much-used ironing rag. The denominations 'bed sheet', 'nightdress' and 'ironing rag' create a rhythmic regular sequence of repeated linear signs, regularly crossed by oblique sequences made up of small gilded signs – usually filling the empty areas of the same letter of the same word or syntagm – to be read vertically. These inserts 'intrude' and disrupt the orderly arrangement of signs, alluding - as Schödl herself writes - to the "relativity of the visual", and proposing "a different, even vertical, global interpretation" of the whole composition. The result is an 'ideogram', something completely and absolutely 'other' compared with the original object. Both the hand-drawn sign and the 'writing' by which women have traditionally been denoted – the weave created by needle and thread – become syntagms, signifying, yet at the same time decontextualizing the object in question. In doing away with objective representation, Schödl infuses her subject with an ambiguous symbolism often laden

with perturbing allusions to the condition of women, inferences that the original objects often conceal or distort.

Subsequently, Schödl moved away from individual objects to the symbolic representation of interiors. In other words, she left the home to confront the city and its historic symbols – columns, arches, etc. In moving into the outside world, she confronts the ‘media’ and their stereotype image of women as synonymous with beauty and fascination – the mannequin. This implies an analysis (by the artist) of the materials used in a context whose tautology is both real and transposed, in the sense that the object both ‘reflects’ its objective self but at the same time is a purely mental figment. It is a juxtaposition that seems to call into question the very concept of reality, if by reality we mean that which is visible and tangible.

Yet, while Schödl - probably with unconscious reference to surrealist automatism – gives herself over to the insistent – almost automated – ‘re-writing’ of an object to the point that its original definition is lost, at the same time, she re-appropriates that very object, encapsulating it within her own world of definitions. The sort of re-appropriation of the image enacted by Ketty La Rocca with her *Autografia del contorno* comes to mind. Iconic significance is condensed and fixed almost as if to try and slowly but inexorably blanket the whole world with symbols, and thereby undermine our entrenched definition of things.

(Translation by Stephanie Johnson)