





AGNESE DE DONATO Donne non si nasce, si diventa. 1970. Stampa fotografica ai sali d'argento.

Studying feminist texts of the 1960s-80s is, for me, strategic rather than nostalgic: a pointed response to contemporary lethal attacks on women and reproductive rights. Such attacks are in full force across the Americas—all those lands rebaptized after Amerigo Vespucci—but I have had my eyes on the American South, where the violence wreaked by anti-abortion legislation seems especially acute. Of the many approaches we might have taken while curating a symposium on gender, translation, and activism, our committee was guided by translations of the work of Italian feminists of this era. Our title, *Alfabeti del Corpo*, for example, references the work of [Tomaso Binga](#), who in the '70s made the alphabet out of her naked body and used this “font” in poems I first encountered in Alex Balgui and Mónica de la Torre’s recent [expansion](#) of the canon of concrete poetry via translation (to include women).

Many of our conversations leading up to the symposium trucked in Italian Marxist feminist, workerist thought, for example by Silvia Federici and Leopoldina Fortunati, as it has been taken up in other languages from Brazil to Argentina to Iran; as well as translations into Italian of Black American feminists like Angela Davis who engaged the work of their Italian Marxists coevals and continue to inspire Italian activists. Take also the image we chose as the symposium’s emblem, a double exposure by Agnese de Donato, described by [Collezione Donata Pizzi](#) as “the manifesto of Roman feminism” (although titled with a translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s quip, *Donne non si nasce, si diventa*). In the background there’s a kind of spectral Kate Bush being, eyes wet with liner and emotion. She is soft and pretty and enormous, looming large though behind the “new woman” marching forward braless, fist raised, and chanting slogans.

The Collezione’s description implies a kind of political progression in the image; but I prefer to think of the large woman crowned with flowers as a kind of protective witch rather than a point of departure. When I did some light research, it was bittersweet to find a facsimile of the photograph published in the first issue (1973) of *Effe*, a Heresies-esque Italian feminist art journal which de Donato co-founded. The image introduces an article celebrating the legalization of abortion in the United States, “Femminismo Usa/ battaglie, sconfitte, conquiste.” Maybe we can read this archival photograph, then, as a talisman in current battles or as a hopeful augury?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Montana Ray holds an MFA in poetry and translation and a PhD in comparative literature from Columbia University. She teaches writing and translation at NYU. Her first book of concrete poetry, *(guns & butter)*, was described by Cathy Park Hong as a mix of “Apollinaire with Pam Grier.” Her recent translations include Chilean icon Pedro Lemebel’s baroque chronicles of travesti culture in 1970s Santiago and the visual poetry of Brazilian artist Yhuri Cruz. A 2023 NYSCA/NYFA nonfiction finalist, her current work explores connections between the US South and Latin America. <https://www.montanaray.com>