

'Ana Mendieta: Traces' at The Hayward Gallery in London

TRACES OF A TRAGIC LIFE

At the height of her artistic career, Ana Mendieta tragically passed away at the age of thirty-six in 1985. She left a large body of almost unknown works that has recently been reevaluated thanks to the exhibition 'Ana Mendieta: Traces' at the Hayward Gallery in London.

Romina PROVENZI

Mendieta's first solo show in a British public institution showcases a mix of super-8 films, photographs, slides, drawings, prints, objects, sculptures, personal writings and notebooks. Curated

by Stephanie Rosenthal, chief curator of the Hayward Gallery, the exhibition wants to highlight how Mendieta created her works so that the public can gain a better understanding of her art.

Born in Cuba in 1948, Mendieta left Cuba at the age of twelve when her family decided to flee the country to escape Fidel Castro's revolution. In 1961 she ended up with her older sister in Iowa, United States, and faced a different culture and a new language. Her early exile caused a strong need of expressing her uneasiness as a young adult, which helped her to become a prolific art student at the University of Iowa in the 1970s. Her art took inspiration from a sense of displacement as a human being and from her research of cultural identity. Both were originated by her personal experiences early in life.

DEATH AND LIFE

The last room of the exhibition, but the first as you enter the gallery, is filled with wooden structures immersed in a darkness which gives a funeral sense to the surroundings. It makes us understand what Ana Mendieta once said: "All of my work is about those two things – death and life". In this room, the curator displayed personal writings from Mendieta's personal archive and a selection of slides that the artist did not print as photographs, but kept in her studio as a personal record of her work.

The initial rooms of 'Ana Mendieta: Traces' showcase works from the start of her artistic career. While at university the artist produced very private performances in which someone else documented her physical presence in outdoors locations. Mud, leaves, feathers or other natural materials often covered the artist's body in her immersion into nature. Mendieta described those performances as "a search to find my place, my context in nature". Soon after she began to replace her own body with its imprint and said "I can do something, step away from it, and see myself there afterward". She left traces of her body in nature, in sand, mud, fire, rocks and other materials, documented them herself and called them 'Siluetas'.

DEATH AND RITUAL

Many examples of the 'Silueta'-Series made from 1973 to 1980 are displayed in the exhibition: photographs of female silhouettes in grass, in sand and dirt, or silhouettes of fire that she filmed. The series counts more than one hundred works and represents the core of her practice. Mendieta

described them as "I thought about it as having nature to take over the body, in the same way that it had taken over the symbols of past civilizations. Nature is really the most powerful thing there is".

Core of her practice is the theme of death and ritual derived from her interest in the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería as well as ancient Mexico. That explains the use of ox blood and blood colored paint in works such as 'Rastros Corporales (Body tracks) 1974', when the fully clothed Mendieta dipped her arms in blood and then pressed them against the paper hung on the wall above her head. While her body gradually moved to the floor, she left marks of blood on the paper. The result are breath-taking works on paper.

Towards the end of the exhibition, the last three rooms summarize the works she made in New York and Rome in the 1980s. In 1982 the artist started to create permanent outdoor sculptures and experimented with low-lying floor sculptures, using sand and earth mixed with a binding element. In 1983 Mendieta moved to Rome and continued to create permanent sculptures as 'Silueta-like' floor sculptures, from sand and earth, and the 'Arbol de la Vida (Tree of life) 1984',

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the first sculpture she made of wood. She kept alive the relation between art and nature until her tragic death which sadly stopped the development of her artistic maturity.

Cuba always played a central role in her life and art, and she reconnected with it shortly before dying. Mendieta went back to visit Cuba for the first time in 1981, and it gave her new artistic strength. She finally felt reconnected to her origins.

Ana Mendieta died on September 8, 1985 in New York City. She fell from her 34th floor apartment in Greenwich Village, where she lived with her husband, minimal artist Carl André. André was acquitted of murder. His lawyer described the death of Mendieta as 'an accident' or 'suicide'.

'Ana Mendieta: Traces' till December 15 at the Hayward Gallery, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XZ, www.southbankcentre.co.uk



Ana Mendieta, 'Untitled (Body Tracks)', 1974, colour photograph, lifetime print, 25,4 x 20,3 cm, collection Igor DaCosta, © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York en Paris en Alison Jacques Gallery, London

The London Art Scene in October

FRIEZE MONTH

October in London equals art. Since the first edition of Frieze Art Fair in 2003, London has seen an increasing amount of art related events being held in October every year. The Frieze Art Fair, launched in 2003 by Oxford's graduate Amanda Sharp and by Matthew Slotover, is the sun around which a variety of art fairs, museums' exhibitions, auctions' sales, private views, orbit.

Romina PROVENZI

Every year the London museums mount their most important shows in October. Among others, Whitechapel Gallery is presenting Sarah Lucas' first major solo show in a UK public institution, while Tate Modern opens a blue chip exhibition of Paul Klee and a show of Brazilian Mira Schandel. The Hayward Gallery mounts two separate solo shows respectively of Ana Mendieta and photographer Dayanita Singh. Meanwhile the Serpentine Gallery opened the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, a 900 square metres former warehouse in Kensington Gardens. The Grade II listed building (listed as of special historical importance) dates from 1805 and has undergone a 14.5 million pound refurbishment with the renovation designed by superstar architect Zaha Hadid.

SATELLITE ART FAIRS

October is definitely the time in the year to hold

a major art fair in London. This year there is the first fair of African art in the UK called '1:54', fifty-four being the number of sovereign countries in Africa. It is to be held at Somerset House on the Strand. As in the past years, PAD London presents in Berkeley Square a mix of design and modern art. More independent are the Sunday Art Fair, which takes place at the Ambika space in Marylebone Road, and Moving Image that comes back to the Bargehouse on the Southbank. East London will host The Other Fair which is dedicated to undiscovered and unrepresented artists. It's a unique platform to showcase their work in front of an audience of art professionals.

AUCTIONS

The major auctions' houses are holding their most important sales during Frieze week as well. First comes the Contemporary Art sale at Bonhams, followed by Sotheby's and Phillips. Christie's holds a Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening and Day Sales at the end of the fair's week as every year. Price records might be reached at the auctions, which consequently is



Bernar Venet, 'Three Indeterminate Lines', 1998

going to impact positively on the volume of sales at the art fairs.

FRIEZE AND FRIEZE MASTERS

Under their tents in Regent's Park, both Frieze London and Frieze Masters hold their private views on October 16 and are open to the public the next day. This year Frieze London celebrates a decade of existence. A change in the design of the fair marks the beginning of a new phase in its existence. Additions to last year's participants include: Blum & Poe (Los Angeles), Galerie Max Hetzler (Berlin), Goodman Gallery (Johannesburg), Maccarone (New York), Overduin and Kite (Los Angeles) and Rodeo (Istanbul). In total 152 galleries are representing thirty different countries. Highlights of this edition include the section of 'Frieze Projects', where a new curator, Nicola Lees, has worked on a programme that focuses on interactions between play, governance, sovereignty and how these exchanges can be shown through participatory contemporary art practices. Before joining Frieze, Nicola Lees has worked at the Serpentine Gallery, London.

Other highlights includes 'Frame', a section introduced in 2009 and dedicated to solo artist presentations by galleries which exist less than eight years, and 'Focus', a selection of galleries not previously seen within an art fair context and presenting a curated project for the fair. While walking from Frieze to sister fair 'Frieze Masters' at the northern west corner of Regent's Park, the Sculpture Park shouldn't be missed. There is temporary display of outdoor sculptures from artists Elmgreen & Dragset, Joan Miró, Yinka Shonibare, David Shrigley, Rachel Whiteread and Richard Woods among others. Clare Lilley,

Director of Program at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, made the selection of works for the second year mixing new work by established contemporary sculptors alongside historical sculptures.

Frieze London, from 17 to 20 October, Regent's Park, London, www.friezelondon.com

GALLERY WALK IN LEIPZIG

In September, almost simultaneously with Berlin's Gallery Week, another city celebrated contemporary art and its actors. The international jet set put up with a two hour drive to see shows and celebrate the parties in Leipzig, Saxony, Germany.

Ekaterina RIETZ-RAKUL & Steve SCHEPENS

'From Cotton to Culture' is the motto of Leipzig's cultural centre –the Spinnerei. It is situated in the building of an old cotton mill (hence the name). The former industrial site was reformed into a hub for culture and contemporary art, now occupied by numerous galleries and artist studios, architecture studios and an artist materials shop; as well lofts and restaurants. Several times a year the galleries organise an event called the 'Galerien-Rundgang', or the gallery walk. Apart from art, one might want to visit one of many parties, dinners and alike, accompanied by omnipresent fashionable hipsters. The local galleries also invite several international galleries to exhibit at the location, also this time each local gallery hosted a foreign invitee.