"My art is grounded in the belief of one universal energy which runs through everything: from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy."

Ana Mendieta

Sono lieto di poter presentare la prima retrospettiva di Ana Mendieta in un museo pubblico italiano. La mostra offre al pubblico, non solo italiano, un conside - revo numero di opere dell’artista cubano-americana: oltre 130 lavori realizzati tra il 1972 e il 1985, scelti tra i più significativi della prolifica produzione che l’artista ha saputo lasciarci in così pochi anni di vita, sono allestiti nel par - ticolare spazio della Manica Lunga. La mostra presenta il suo personalissimo alfabeto visionario e materico, magico e poetico, politico e progressista. Il pro- getto, si propone di rileggere la figura dell’artista come pioniera di performance, video, Body Art, fotografia, Land Art e scultura nel Ventesimo secolo. Uno dei contributi unici di Mendieta è la sintesi di queste forme in un linguaggio visivo fresco che ha influenzato una generazio- ne di giovani artisti.

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I don’t think that you can separate death and life. All of my work is about those two things—its about eros and death and life.

"Non posso pensare che la vita e la morte possano separarsi. Tutti i miei lavori sono su questi due temi, su, eros, vita e morte."

Ana Mendieta
Why is Ana Mendieta retrospective more important than ever within the panorama of European exhibitions?

The decision to present Ana Mendieta’s work emerged from a desire not only to familiarize the Italian public with this complex and hidden artist who worked with unbridled vitality between 1972 and 1985, but also to recover the Museum’s commitment to be a presence on an international scene that also to reinforce the Museum’s complex and hidden artist who, for the most varied reasons, have remained in the shadows, or at least in the memories of few.

It is easy to retrace the history of contemporary art through the usual known faces, to whom we accord recognition and total respect, but at the risk of repeating myself, the Museum has a commitment to search the discontinuity of history, aspiring to inform public debate on many different protagonists.

Art is an encyclopedic form of our being and feeling. Mendieta is a real artist, strong and fascinating, which has been selected by episodes both fortunate and tragic in her life, someone who, from her (after) time and become one of its pioneers. While this young woman in search of her own art and love of art and making her first steps, a variety of art movements was exploding. She, a Cuban exile, was able to take part in the rise of the young generation in the footsteps of Land Art, Body Art or performance art and their predecessors: happening, body art, and art directed by Bruce Nauman. In Abramovic’s steps, from Joan Jonas and Vito Acconci, to Isabelle Huppert and the choreographer Martha Rosler, she adds to her growing repertoire, the sense of the work.

Why is an Ana Mendieta retrospective more important than ever within the panorama of European exhibitions?

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Fue durante mi infancia en Cuba cuando por primera vez me fascinaron las culturas y el arte primitivo. Parece como si estas culturas estuvieran dotadas de un conocimiento interno, una cercanía a las fuentes naturales. Esta sentido de lo mágico, el conocimiento y el poder que se encuentran en el arte primitivo ha influido en mi actitud personal al hacía la creación artística. Durante los últimos doce años he estado trabajando en el exterior, en la naturaleza, explotando la relación entre yo mismo, la tierra y el arte. Me he sumergido en los elementos mismos que me produjeron, utilizando la tierra como lienzo y mi alma como instrumento.

Ana Mendieta penetrates the elements she draws, photographs and sculpts; she always penetrates them as a protagonist of the cycle of life and death, never just looking through the keyhole.

1 My art is grounded in the belief in a Universal Energy which runs through every living thing [...] My works are the irrigation veins of a Universal Energy which runs through everything. Through them occur the ancestral sap, the original life, the primal essence, the unconscious thoughts that animate the world. There is no original past to redeem; there is the void, the void, the uncharted, the uncharted earth of the beginning, the time that from within the work looks upon us. There is above all the search for origin. (Ana Mendieta, English translation in June Mcbride, Where is Ana Mendieta, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999, p. 34.)

2 I was during my childhood in Cuba that I first became fascinated by primitive cultures. It seems as if these cultures are provided with an inner knowledge, a closeness to natural resources. And it is this knowledge which gives reality to the images they have created. This sense of magic, superstition and power: found in primitive art has influenced my personal attitude toward art-making. For the past twelve years I have been working out in nature, exploring the relationship between myself, the earth and art. I have thrown myself into the very elements that produced me, using the earth as my canvas and my soul as my rode. (Ana Mendieta, English translation in Phoebe Gray, eds., Women Artists of Color, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999, p. 118.)
Il mio pellegrinaggio a Roma mi portò a provare contatto con l’Arte di New York – ma non intenzionalmente. Pareva che quell’epoca fosse passata trent’anni. La miainterpretazione era stata di stabilire la storia in un mutuo confronto tra persona e storia, pensando che la cultura sia il simbolo di una storia, penso che la cultura sia la memoria della storia. 

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Traduzione dall’inglese di Enza Sicuri
Ana Mendieta. She Got Love 30.01 - 05.05.2013

Itali-Ana, Mendieta in Rome

Director of Operations – of how Ana and her friends in Rome – from reading her letters and talking to people who worked with parents of how Anna was more than a pilgrimage to Rome. I was aware of Ana’s love for Rome – from reading her letters and talking to people who worked with parents of how her homeland (Cuba) during her adolescence, having been torn from me homeland (Nature)."

I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body. Having been torn from me homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence, I was overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast out from the womb (natura)."

En etcheco de un árbol vivo Ana

My first steps towards her studio at The American Academy – the one where she planned to stay – was where I realized this was more than a pilgrimage to me. It was where she created it was more than art history. It was my history – my family’s history. In an interview with art historian Joan Marter, Ana said, “I am very interested in history. I think that culture is the memory of history”. History fascinated Ana, which is another reason why she loved Rome so much. And I was beginning to see how she came to this as I followed the path that led to her studio – near the Pantheon at The Academy. This was the place where she created her final works – the wood with hollowed out trunks and the trunks which were carved and burned with gunpowder. Pasquale in Ana’s works is The Tree of Life. This is a theme, which can be traced to her early childhood play work created in Iowa where she covered herself in mud and stood against a large tree. Through the years Ana had made reference to the tree in many of her works, as she had done the same in New York. But I wasn’t prepared for what would happen next. Now the same city would entice me, would make me feel like Ana’s same in New York before leaving for Rome with similar challenges.

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Retracing my aunt, Ana’s, footsteps became a sort of pilgrim-age as we came to Rome. Walking through the cobble streets I wondered how many times she had done the same – how many times had her feet touched these same streets? She got love 30.01 - 05.05.2013

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El árbol conmovido allá en su seno

Yo soy el árbol conmovido y triste

A la niña una flor dejó caer.

En el tronco de un árbol una niña grabó su nombre en blanco decha.

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En el tronco de un árbol una niña grabó su nombre en blanco decha.

The first two trunks, the elm tree from Villa Sant’Angelo, had been cut in half and created the first two trunk pieces. The second trunk, the grounds of The American Academy, was cut in half and became the third and fourth trunk pieces. The trunk from The Academy was a planta - (cymcarus) tree like the one that line the Tiber River. Ana had continued to use nature from an area that was important to her but was now bringing nature into the studio.

He told us how she burned shapes into the trunks using gunpowder and how she was supposed to travel with her to Los Angeles to create similar trunks at MacArthur Park. I asked Carmine about the shields and the missing handle. He confirmed that they had created a handle in the first trunk in Paquin’s studio but that Ana had cut it off. I asked him whose idea it was to create the handle. “It was Ana’s idea to make the handle and Ana’s idea to cut it off,” he replied. I asked him if the idea she had chosen to do so and he said that she realized it wasn’t nec-

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Due accostamenti drammatici segna-no l’inizio e la fine di questa vita. Il primo è l’abbandono forzato di Cuba e della sua famiglia nel 1961 all’età di do dicì anni, insieme alla sorella Raquel, e l’arrivo negli Stati Uniti, con l’adolescenza passata tra istituti religiosi e famiglie adot- tive. Ana Mendieta e la sorella, infatti, partecimarono al progetto di protezione e supporto americano anticonfessionale, a Cuba, di cui il padre faceva parte. Il secondo è la sua tragica morte nel 1985 caduta dal 34° piano di un grattacielo a New York, 1985) è l’immagine di una siluetta umana che brucia, tra fiamme, fumo e macchie di erba e di fiori – e il fuoco – polvere da sparo, fuochi d’artificio, brezza, noci di cocco, sabbia, muschio, prato, rocce, cumuli di fango, nubi con coccio, sabbia. Materiali che si elevano dalla loro condizione fisca per ricostituire al loro stesso natura che l’artista scoprì nella sua terra – il muschio, la prateria, come dura performance emotiva e spirituale. È solo durante il suo periodo roma-no (1983-1985), con la residenza all’amERICAN Academy e il suo primo grande studio, che inizia a riflettere sul problema della realizzazione di ope-re anche di carattere digitale per avviare a pavimenti con impatti di taverne e salvi provenienti da luoghi diversi, poggiate su tavole di legno (Mud Figure), di tradizione messicana e Italia come spazio artistico, ma anche cul- turale, sociale e politico. Sono serie fotografiche del suo corpo rivestito da melagrana, come un obbligo del suo corpo, su pannelli di vetro, con un carico, ma la sentenza non ha mai e che moltiplica la visione rendendola re- sistente, che moltiplica l’arte della vita e la vita a istante mobile. Il soggetto diventa immediata- mente plurali: c’è un concetto di condi-zione della propria individualità per un discorso collettivo, universale. Nella prima opera dell’infinita serie delle Siluetas de Cohetes (1972–1980), è evidente che l’intero corpi umani sono pavimenti con impatti di taverne e salvi provenienti da luoghi diversi, poggiate su tavole di legno (Mud Figure), di tradizione messicana e Italia come spazio artistico, ma anche cul- turale, sociale e politico. Sono serie fotografiche del suo corpo rivestito da melagrana, come un obbligo del suo corpo, su pannelli di vetro, con un carico, ma la sentenza non ha mai e che moltiplica la visione rendendola re- sistente, che moltiplica l’arte della vita e la vita a istante mobile. Il soggetto diventa immediata- mente plurali: c’è un concetto di condi-zione della propria individualità per un discorso collettivo, universale.
Ana Mendieta. She Got Love 30.01 - 05.05.2013

a rich and vital body of work about fifteen years produced of nature as on her own body. A woman who had lived fifteen years ago produced a rich and vital body of work (drawings, sculpture, performance, photographs, videos, installations), in which she sought to understand and explain the secret of that universal energy that is the human being. The female silhouette that appeared there – the female divinities through which she returned to the energy of the female body, her body, with a primordial and visceral physicality. The body becomes a means for the artistic object and then the tool, the means of her message. Her body becomes a means for the emotional involvement of the public, a sensitive and living space of direct communication. In her "being" simultaneously an idea, flesh, image and place of the work of art, she is connected to Body Art, for she pursues the idea of total art, where the boundary between art and life is a movable moment. The subject becomes immediately plural, there is a concept of sharing one's individuality through a collective, universal discourse.

In the first work in the infinite Siluetas series (1973-1980), Mendieta appears naked in an Aztec tomb, covered in grass and flowers. In 1975, however, her body in fact disappears, replaced by the siluetas, symbolic forms and materials that evoke it: burnt wood, sand eroded by waves, moss, peonies, carved rock, a pile of branches, petals of flowers, a floating tree trunk, water congregated into ice. She becomes a simulacrum, represents and transfigures her body, turns it into an icon, like that of Nature, that of History. It is a state of transubstantiation, of mutation in process: the artistic object materializes and dematerializes in the very flesh of the earth and of nature, an obsessive repetition that multiplicates the artist's vision, rendering it immaterial and linear.

The artist that reflects on her own extremely personal interpretation of Land Art, contrary to monumentality, with the human figure always at the center of the tableau. When she returns to the landscape, she chooses a completely plein-air process, immersed in the environment.

When she returned to the landscape, she modeled and sculpted organic camouflage, rediscovering that existing in harmony, an element that involves every natural and existing, represented metaphorically, on the one hand, in the siluette, and, on the other hand, literally as living performance, using natural material. Existing in harmony, an element among elements, disappearing into an aura that envelops the human figure, she slathers her body with sacrificial offerings, to a green tree to offer sacrifices, to leave traces, to write and to evoke (the series Untitled – Body Tracks, the video Caras de Roca con Copa, 1975). They are simultaneously bearers of destruction and regeneration, pictorial and theatrical elements. Death is passage, never an end point – a change of state within a biological order.

In many works she creates between 1972 and 1973 at the University of Iowa, a period of extremely intense experimentation, she explores bodies as an artistic space, but also and absolutely one that is cultural, social and political. This is central to her research, because the female body becomes a ruin of mutations, warpings, adhesions to cultural stereotypes of a male society. Her body, like that of millions of other women, is modified with makeup, wigs, teeth, false (fig. 4), but it also ‘turns itself into Nature’.

In these works she has broken down the wall separating art from life, erasing the distinction between the true and the false, between what is natural and artificial, between what is real and virtual, between what is primitive and matriarchal cultures in which Mendieta was interested – worshipers of female divinities, through which she pursued her own personal and natural role of woman, to her body as origin and site of the world's eternal spirit. It is in this way that she modelled the second wave of feminism during the Seventies, a movement, however, to which Mendieta never belonged. For her, organic camouflage, as defined by her ideas remained untouched. From the Venus of Willendorf to the neolithic civilization on the island of Malta: the artist shared with all these women, divinities, the same organic cosmology that is often represented in different forms in the Siluetas series (1973-1980), Mendieta appears naked in an Aztec tomb, covered in grass and flowers.

The poetics Mendieta created constitutes a sort of naturalism and animism, a concept of the “sacred” nature, human beings and gods are interchangeable, where there is a mingling of elements of popular culture, ancient rituals and primitive belief, polytheism and paganism, Catholicism and Santería, Mexican tradition and African Yoruba. Her point of departure is the hybrid cult of her native Cuba, from which she takes a series of elements that are material and iconographic as well as external. In her installations and performances, for example, she often uses ashes, bread, candles and gas, which pertain to Santería divination rituals (the series Fetish, Siluetas de Cofres). They like wear occur in her tree shapes (the Arbor de la Vida series) and image of hands (the wooden panel with the burned handprint).

The cult of the dead is another subject to which she dedicates many works (Black Ischel, Candis Ischel, Sáhito Ischel, Tanishi). Then there are many references to the figure of the benefactress, crucified or deposed Christ (Untitled – Blood Tracks, Mud Figure) – as fire – gas, gas, fireworks, ember, fire, flames, smoke, (the video Almas, 1973; the performances Almas, Siluetas Series and Sean College Volcano). They are simultaneously bearers of destruction and regeneration, pictorial and theatrical elements. Pictorial and theatrical elements. Death is passage, never an end point – a change of state within a biological order.

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Mendieta inizia a sperimentare la sua opera con i suoi libri fotografici, da which her video
Transformation, a her first performance works, such as works ranging from photographic series that document metamorphoses of
she uses her own figure. Mendieta begins to work prolifically, producing with art theory and practice, pervaded by feminism and by burgeoning art
relationship among the arts and animated by encounters with many artists.

La morte è un momento di rinascita, un ritorno a viscerali radici. L’arte, in questo contesto, si configura come un luogo e icona collettiva, universale.

In questi anni emerge una trasformazione dell’opera. L’artista
composta da una serie di fotografie che registra le metamorfosi del suo volto e del suo corpo come
luogo e icona collettiva, universale.

Mendieta colpita da un fatto di cronaca avvenuto all’Università, lavora ad una serie di opere sul tema della violenza contro le donne. In un corto circuito spazio-temporale passando dalla cronaca alle antiche ritualità, il sangue diventa uno degli elementi principali dei suoi lavori. Sweating Blood o Untitled (Rape Performance) sono due opere che testimoniano la violenza subita da Mendieta e sono diventate un’elemento principale della sua produzione artistica.

Ritorna spesso in Messico dove esegue molte opere, ad esempio le serie
El Laberinto de Venus, Mexico e Death of a Chicken, Silueta de Cubana. È in questi anni che si concretizza la sua identità femminile come condividuità
completa tra donna e Natura.

La violenza come fenomeno sociale e politico è oggetto di numerose opere che Mendieta realizza nei suoi ultimi anni di vita. Tra queste, va segnalato il suo lavoro su temi come la violenza domestica e la questione del genere.


Vince il “Rome Prize” e si trasferisce per una residenza all’American Academy of Rome. Viaggia molto per l’Europa, visita siti preistorici in Italia, MalDia a Stati Uniti e ha le prime avvisaglie di trasformazione. In questi anni la sua produzione artistica avvia un percorso di trasformazione. L’arte, in questo contesto, si configura come un luogo e icona collettiva, universale.

In questo periodo, Mendieta inizia a lavorare sui progetti che porteranno alla creazione del suo studio di arte intitolato a lei. Il suo lavoro si configura come un percorso di trasformazione: l’arte, in questo contesto, si configura come un luogo e icona collettiva, universale.

Mendieta, in un’intervista, ha affermato: “La morte è un momento di rinascita, un ritorno a viscerali radici. L’arte, in questo contesto, si configura come un luogo e icona collettiva, universale.}

Mendieta, conosciuta per la sua influenza sui movimenti artistici come la Land Art, la Body Art, l’Arte contemporanea e la performance, è diventata un’icona del genere femminile. La sua produzione artistica si configura come un percorso di trasformazione: l’arte, in questo contesto, si configura come un luogo e icona collettiva, universale.

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