

PRESS RELEASE

## ANA MENDIETA: SILUETA AND SILENCE

19 FEBRUARY – 20 MARCH 2010

OPENING: 18 FEBRUARY 2010, 6 – 8PM



*It is this sense of magic, knowledge and power, found in primitive art, that influences my personal attitude to art-making... I have been working out in nature, exploring the relationship between myself, the earth, and art... Through my art, I want to express the immediacy of life and the eternity of nature. Ana Mendieta, 1978*

The first ever exhibition in the UK devoted solely to the work of Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) reveals the enduring power of one of the most singular voices in contemporary art. Despite a number of major museum surveys in Europe and America since her tragic death at the age of 36, and being represented in such renowned collections as the Met, the Whitney, the Guggenheim, SFMOMA and the Pompidou, Mendieta's unique fusion of performance, body, land and process art practices has until now only been on view in Britain, and only recently, as part of the permanent collection at Tate Modern. This survey of work that has rarely been seen anywhere in the world focuses on vintage photographs of her *silueta* series, a number of films of her performances and a restaging of an important performance-installation piece, affording a rare opportunity for British audiences to discover in depth this inimitably passionate artist. An artist who both inhabited and transcended her status as a woman and a Latin American émigré, Mendieta's generous embrace of a wide range of media, from film, photography, drawing and installation, and her poetic, meticulous explorations of the complexity of human identities foreshadowed many disciplinary and conceptual developments in art during the last two decades, making her one of the most significant yet unacknowledged artists of the late twentieth century.

Ana Mendieta's *silueta* works, created in locations throughout Iowa and upstate New York, Mexico and Cuba between 1973 and 1981, all centre on the female form, specifically the form of the body of Ana Mendieta. Her silhouette was deployed in a range of site-specific interventions that were simultaneously specific to her person, and redolent of the archetypal goddess figure so prominent in the cultures of Central America and the Caribbean that fascinated her. Using materials to hand in nature, including crevasses in the landscape, stone, soil, wood, flowers, fire, smoke and water, Mendieta's recurring body was always evanescent, vulnerable to the ravages of the elements and to time. Yet the insistent repetition of her silhouette as moments on the earth, in the sea and in the air (and their documentation on colour photographs, 35mm slides and Super 8 film) suggests an appeal to a female presence that, however elusive, could not be disallowed.

Mendieta's dedication to conceptualizing and expressing an immanence of the feminine was indelibly attached to her desire to address her consciousness of self as a displaced Third World subject. She was absorbed in the histories of indigenous cultural rupture and the emergence of colonial hybrid systems of belief and practice, especially in the Americas - an interest that became artistically manifest in a prolific commitment to exploring the ritual substance of human being. Often articulated through idioms obviously owing much to Mesoamerican, Latin Catholic and Afro-Caribbean rites and symbols, but pointing towards a more essentialist conception of global culture, Mendieta produced a number of performances and installations which engaged directly with notions of death, purification and rebirth, and their expression, indeed production, through the ceremonial. The exhibition presents poignant and dramatic images of these performances and restages her 1976 work *The Burial of Nāñigo*, an installation of black ritual candles which, after being left to burn over time, assume the shape of a black *silueta*. This piece, which alludes to both the Abukuà, an Afro-Cuban brotherhood that intrigued Mendieta, and the Mexican Day of the Dead, and which also creates and recreates the form of a woman in smoke and wax, poignantly fuses the major themes of Mendieta's art, and intimates the abiding longevity of her work.

The exhibition is organised in cooperation with Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection and Galerie Lelong. Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) was born in Havana, Cuba, and was sent to the USA without her parents in 1961 during the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution. She trained at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. Important solo exhibitions include *The New Museum of Contemporary Art*, New York (1987); *Helsinki City Art Museum*, Helsinki (1996); and the *Hirshhorn Museum*, Washington, D.C., curated by Olga Viso (2004, travelled to *Whitney Museum of American Art*, New York, *Des Moines Art Centre*, Iowa, and *Miami Art Museum*, Florida). Significant recent group shows include *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (originated at LA MOCA, 2007) and her work is still on view as part of *Elles* at the Centre Pompidou. Her work also features in many major public collections, including the Guggenheim, the Met, the Whitney and MoMA in New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; the Centre Pompidou in Paris; the *Musee d'Art Moderne et Contemporain*, Geneva; and Tate Collection, London.

**NEXT: TOMORY DODGE, 26 MARCH - 24 APRIL 2010 – OPENING, 25 MARCH 2010**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS OR IMAGES, PLEASE CONTACT**

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