

Galleries 1, 8 & 9

25th September 2019 – 12th January 2020

Anna Maria Maiolino: Making Love

Revolutionary



Large print Guide

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Introduction

This is the first major exhibition in the UK to survey the work of the Brazilian artist **Anna Maria Maiolino** (b.1942, Italy). Born in the town of Scalea in Calabria during WWII, Maiolino immigrated with her family to Venezuela in 1954 and then to Brazil in 1960. Spanning six decades, the exhibition explores the interrelated themes of migration, language, subjectivity, everyday life, the body, matter and materiality, which are at the heart of Maiolino's art. The exhibition begins on the ground floor with sculptures, including two clay installations made in situ, and drawings that brought Maiolino to international attention in the 1990s. In the galleries upstairs, the exhibition traces the development of Maiolino's early work, from prints made during the time of the military dictatorship in Brazil...

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...to her engagement with neo- concrete art in the early 1970s, to Super 8 films, performances and photographs of the 1970s and 1980s. The title Making Love Revolutionary refers to the Argentinean mothers who protested the disappearance of their children during the military dictatorship in the 1980s and underscores the close relationship between the personal and political in Maiolino's work.

Clay

Maiolino began working with clay to model sculptural forms, from which she made moulds, in order to cast them in another material such as plaster or bronze. For this installation, Maiolino uses her hands and repetitive gestures to mould clay into simple modular forms – balls, snakes and coils – typical techniques for working with the medium.

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Arranged on a wooden table, the forms which resemble pasta or bread rolls are left to dry over the course of the exhibition. They have the appearance of both food and excrement and, thus, link the two ends of the alimentary canal. In a second clay work, Maiolino uses nearly one ton of clay to create a heap of snake-like strands and allows gravity and air to act upon the humble yet vital material, which will dehydrate, turn to dust and eventually return to the earth. She presented a similar unfired clay work from the series Modelled Earth at Whitechapel Gallery in 1996 as part of Inside the Visible, a groundbreaking exhibition of women artists.

Clay

Maiolino plays with the conventional relationship between the finished sculpture and the intermediary mould in a number of series.

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These include Great Absences, Between Inside and Outside, Seven Segments and From the Earth – Poetic Wanderings, some of which hang on the wall and others sit on metal plinths. These works, for Maiolino, 'refer to the existence of the opposite, the absent positive that has been separated from the negative'. Akin to moulds – which hold the casting material in place as it hardens and are typically discarded once the casts are made – Maiolino elevates them to the status of art. Through form and colour, the artist also makes reference to the earth, which is continuously moulding and casting organic remains in the fossilisation process.

Drawing

Drawing has been integral to Maiolino's practice since the beginning. Her earliest drawings are largely figurative.

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In the 1970s, she began cutting, tearing, folding and layering sheets of paper, treating it as a sculptural medium. Since the 1990s in works such as Matter Actions, Codified Matter and Drop Marks, Maiolino highlights the process of making drawings through simple actions and chance.

'The ink drop falls by the action of gravity onto the surface of the paper,' she explains, 'Like the captain of a ship that holds the helm, I confidently move the raised sheet of paper with alert eyes capturing and incorporating chance'.

In drawings such as Vestiges and New Paths, small marks connect to form lines and lines become winding paths. Lines also turn into writing in works from the series In-Motion.

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Indicios

For a series titled Indicios (Traces), Maiolino stitched through paper, forming lines between two points where the thread traverses the sheet. The resulting drawings, filled with lines, crosses and webs, can be seen on both sides. Associated with the traditional 'women's work' of sewing and mending, thread has made appearances in works such as Drawing Object, Engraving Object and Book Object of the early 1970s, where it connects layers of paper as in a book. Similarly, a piece of string links three generations of the artist's family in the photograph By a Thread (1976). Examples of these works are in the first floor galleries. Repetition has been a hallmark of Maiolino drawings, sculptures, performances and films. Each mark or gesture is similar, but each is ultimately unique;

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...this repetition and difference has been key to the artist's practice and is also essential to learning language, which Maiolino has had to do as an immigrant at several different times in her life.

Politics

In 1958, Maiolino began her studies at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Cristóbal Rojas in Caracas, Venezuela and also attended courses in painting and printmaking at the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio de Janeiro, where she met the artist Rubens Gerchman. They married in 1963 and, in the following year, the military regime seized power and continued to rule Brazil for more than two decades. Influenced by the wood engraving tradition of the northeast of Brazil, Maiolino started working on woodcuts.

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She and Gerchman joined the avant- garde Nova Figuração (New Figuration), a movement concerned with popular art. Alongside a group of more established artists, including Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and Waldemar Cordeiro, among others, Maiolino and Gerchman participated in the seminal Nova Objetividade Brasileira (New Brazilian Objectivity) exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro in 1967. At a time of increasing authoritarian repression and censorship, they were committed to responding to social and political issues with works that had a collective and participatory ethos and specifically Brazilian characteristics.

Woodcuts

At a time when Brazil was in a state of political crisis, Maiolino was also facing personal hardship as an immigrant,

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...artist and mother of two young children. She was, however, inspired to develop a series of woodcuts which engaged with both her personal and political circumstances. Maiolino adopted the traditional wood-block printing technique and the popular figuration associated with Brazil's folk literature in works such as *Anna*, *Schiii*, and *Glu Glu Glu*. The most basic bodily experiences – such as birth, nutrition, speech, desire and the functions of the digestive and excretory systems – have remained present in her oeuvre over the decades.

Between Pauses

In 1968, Gerchman was awarded a scholarship and the family moved to New York, where Maiolino encountered a network of Latin American artists who were self-exiled due to the repressive conditions in their home countries.

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Maiolino, however, spent much of her time at home keeping up with household chores and caring for the children. Her artistic exchanges were limited to conversations with avant-garde artists such as Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and Luis Camnitzer, who visited and inspired her to begin making art again. At Oiticica's suggestion, she began keeping a journal – a 'record of existing'. In the journal's drawings, she addressed women's place in the domestic setting and in society at large. Later, Maiolino writes: 'With pen and paper I work. / I draw, I narrate and illustrate everyday scenes, / notes on a reinvented reality. / These small and simple drawings that / I call Between Pauses, / are playful exercises / composed of the effects of dreams and desires.'

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Poetry and Resistance

In 1971, following a short period experimenting with paper and printmaking at the Pratt Graphic Arts Center, Maiolino returned to Brazil with her children, leaving Gerchman and New York. She continued making notes and drawings in her journal; some of which developed into poems and others into ideas for films and installations. Poetry led Maiolino to engage with the page and with ideas elaborated by neo-concrete artists, particularly Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape, and she began several series of works on paper, including *Mental Maps*, which featured the written word. During the dictatorship, which lasted from 1964 to 1985, established ideas of female identity were subverted by women artists who sought to undermine existing patriarchal regimes.

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Although women artists' work was often dismissed and regarded as banal, new transgressive and visceral images emerged, creating a new conception of the body. Maiolino responded to the oppressive social and political tensions through works on paper, artist's books, visual poems, drawings, films and performances, including the series Photopoemaction, which brought together her ongoing concerns with poetry, language, the body and action.

Neo-Concretism

Incorporating the elements of neo-concretism and working with paper as a sculptural material, Maiolino deepened her investigations of opposites – positive and negative, inside and outside – exploring the corporeal and spatial possibilities of the sheet.

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This led her to experiment with cutting, folding, tearing and burning paper and to activate both sides – revealing front and back and the space in between sheets. In a three-dimensional work from the series Drawing Object, she stitched over a void in the torn surface, the lines of thread becoming both a suture and a drawing in the hollowed out space.

Video and Performance

Maiolino's own body became the territory and the subject of creative explorations too, particularly in performances that were documented in film and photographs. In the films X and Y and the photograph What is Left Over, allusions to mutilation, torture and censorship address the status of women in society under the violent military regime.

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Maiolino employed video and installation to engage viewers and express her resistance to the political and social climate of the time. Films such as *In-Out (Antropofagia)* reflect the Brazilian concept of cultural cannibalism as a way of resisting European colonial culture influence by assimilating and transforming it into something uniquely Brazilian. Shots of mouths, both female and male, engage in a silent dialogue, while objects are swallowed and regurgitated.

Regeneration and Renewal

In the 1980s, Maiolino divided her time between Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. The gradual transition to democracy brought about hope. Maiolino began a series of photographs, installations and performances featuring eggs, a symbol of life, birth, fragility and resistance.

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In the performance, *Between Lives*, eggs are scattered on the ground; the artist's bare feet tread carefully, in a state of uncertainty.

For Maiolino, drawing had always been a form of thought and action. She developed the series *Small Notes*, which resembled studies and sketches for other works, revealing sequences of egg-shaped forms and glimpses of colour. In the ongoing series of drawings *Watery*, organic drops of black ink are unleashed, the fluid invading the spaces of the damp paper like unrestrained living organisms. At the end of the 1980s, Maiolino began experimenting with clay and a new materiality emerged in her work. A series of wall-mounted objects titled *New Landscapes* suggested the arid landscapes of her native Calabria.

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Events

Anna Maria Maiolino in Conversation

Talk

Thurs 26 Sept, 7pm

£9.50/£7.50 concs

British Sign Language Tour: Anna Maria Maiolino

Tour

Thurs 3 Oct, 6pm

Free, booking required

Audio Description Tour: Anna Maria Maiolino

Tour

Thurs 10 Oct, 6pm

Free, booking required

Big Ideas: Cecilia Fajardo-Hill

Talk

Sat 24 Oct, 7pm

£9.50/£7.50 concs

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Art and Feminisms in Latin America
Symposium

Sat 26 Oct, 2–6pm

£12.50/£10.50 concs

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