



Anna Maria Maiolino

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM & PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

São Paulo–based artist Anna Maria Maiolino explores the viscosity of embodied experience, often obliquely through fragmentation and abstraction. Over the fifty-year arc of her multidisciplinary practice—which has included drawing, printmaking, sculpture, video, and performance—openings, voids, and organic materials have been central motifs, and she has focused on the body as a locus for the expression of freedom and individuality. Maiolino emigrated with her family from her native Italy to Venezuela in 1954, later settling in Brazil in 1960. In Rio de Janeiro, Maiolino enrolled in printing workshops at the National School of the Arts, then an important center for artistic activity. It was there that she became involved with the New Figuration, Neo-Concrete, and New-Objectivity movements, working closely alongside artists such as Lygia Clark, Antonio Dias, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape.

While living in Rio in the 1960s, Maiolino participated in seminal group exhibitions there at the Museum of Modern Art: *Opinião 1966 (Opinion 1966)* and Hélio Oiticica's 1967 *Nova Objetividade Brasileira (New Brazilian Objectivity)*. These shows came to define a generation of artists who, responding to what was happening in the world around them, called for a new social awareness in the arts, realized through an emphasis on the activation of the body and an empowerment of the spectator. In his definitive essay, "General Scheme of the New-Objectivity," Oiticica writes, "Here social underdevelopment signifies, culturally, the search for national characterization, which specifically translates itself in this first premise, to constructive will." According to Oiticica, the constructive will was an artistic mode of resistance against external colonizing forces, in addition to a clarion call for artists to take a position in relation to "political, social, and ethical problems."¹

By the 1970s, when many Brazilian artists were engaging with critical social and political issues, the Brazilian military dictatorship had reached its bleakest period, and its brutality became a subject for Maiolino's work. The military had taken power in 1964 when its leaders toppled the leftist government of President João Goulart in a coup d'état supported by President Lyndon Johnson and the U.S. government. It was the first among several violent regimes to seize control of a Latin American country from a socialist government following the rise of Communist states such as the U.S.S.R. and Cuba. In Brazil, after 1968, "the military became increasingly repressive, censoring the press ever more stringently, provoking an armed guerilla movement, and using torture in their efforts to stamp out all opposition."² The regime would last for over twenty years—a period that witnessed hundreds of deaths, thousands of torture cases, and innumerable human rights violations—until Tancredo Neves was elected president in 1985 and a process of redemocratization began.

In-Out (Antropofagia), made in 1973–74 upon Maiolino's return to Brazil after a brief period in New York, was the first of several films that responded to the political repression of the military dictatorship. In this work (now converted to video but originally shot on Super 8 film), we see a close-up of two mouths—one male wearing black lipstick, and one female wearing red lipstick—attempting to communicate while obstructed by various objects. First, we see tape covering the woman's mouth—an overt reference to censorship. Then we observe her mouth trying to produce an utterance as

various objects intervene, including an egg (as if the mouth is giving birth) and string, which multiplies even as it is being swallowed and regurgitated. The title, moreover, is a reference to Oswald de Andrade's influential *Manifesto antropófago (Cannibal Manifesto)*, which attempted to ground Brazil's syncretic modernism in the symbolic cannibalization and inventive reprocessing of other cultural and linguistic influences. Drawing upon the indigenous Tupi tribe's custom of devouring its enemies in order to build strength, Andrade allegorically invoked cannibalism to reaffirm "the ethical formula of the relationship with the other that governs and transfers this ritual to the sphere of culture."³ Referring to the Tupi practice, Maiolino states, "This is the perfect meaning of this Super 8 [film]: to eat the repressive organs of the dictatorship, the enemies of freedom at that time."⁴ Although anthropophagy is an overt reference in the work, other themes emerge as well, specifically that of communication between male and female subjects, and the passage between interior and exterior spaces of the body. Thus, the fact that it is the woman's mouth whose utterance is repeatedly impeded becomes significant, particularly in the context of the 1970s when Brazilian society was principally male-dominated.

In two subsequent works, *X* and *Y* (both 1974), Maiolino again focuses on close-up shots of faces. In the former, she intercuts frames of an eye with those of snapping scissors, with the final frames depicting splattered blood. The insinuation of violence—immediately calling to mind Luis Buñuel's seminal slicing of an eye in *Le chien Andalou (1928)*—is more overt here than in any of Maiolino's films. In *Y*, a woman (Maiolino herself) is blindfolded while she emits a cry. The titles of these two works, when considered together, ground them in elemental signifiers of sexual identity—the *X* and *Y* chromosomes. In *Ad Hoc (1982)*, the camera homes in on another part of the body in the act of expression: the hands. Maiolino pairs her recording of hands, set against a black background, with a male voice-over, both of which communicate excerpts from the writings of the French playwright Antonin Artaud, who believed in enunciation and physical expression as liberating forms. In each of these works, a human body struggling to find a mode of corporeal expression becomes a metaphor for overcoming censorship and political repression.

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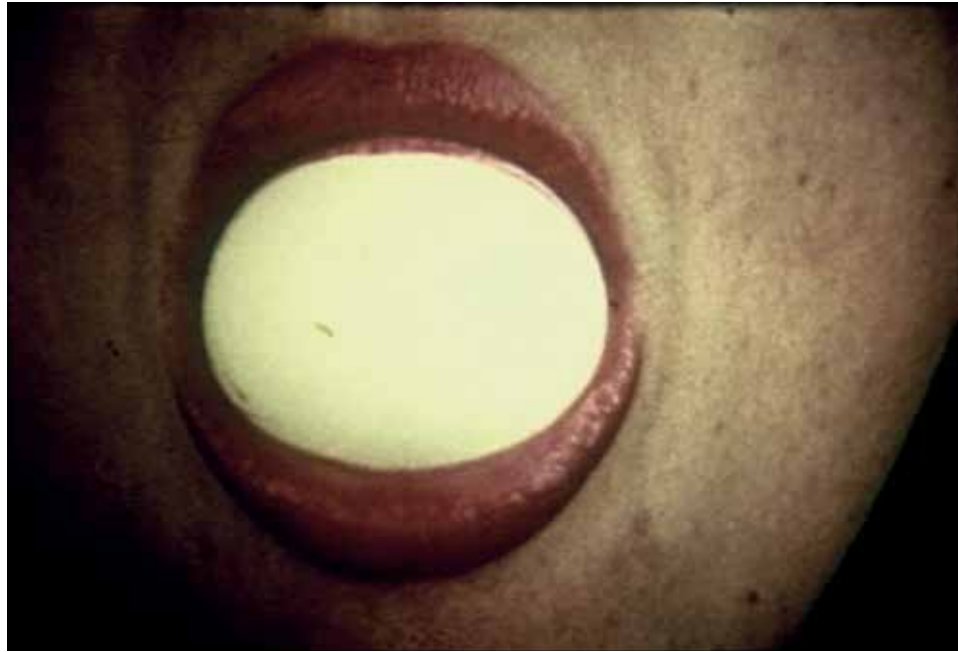
CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR

1. The New-Objectivity movement was also directly related to the Tropicalia movement. For the exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira (New Brazilian Objectivity)*, Oiticica made an installation entitled *Tropicalia*, giving rise to the term. Tropicalia, which encompassed many popular forms of media and performance, became the more widely adopted term. See Hélio Oiticica, "General Scheme of New-Objectivity," reprinted in *Tropicalia: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture (1967–72)*, ed. Carlos Basualdo (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2005), 221, 222.

2. Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 159.

3. Suely Rolnik, "Beyond the Identity Principle: The Anthropophagy Formula," *Parkett* 55 (1999), 187.

4. Anna Maria Maiolino in *Anna Maria Maiolino*, ed. Helena Tatay (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies and London: Koenig Books, 2010), 50.



Biography

Anna Maria Maiolino has lived and worked in São Paulo since the 1970s. Born in 1942 in Scalea, Italy, she emigrated with her family to Caracas, Venezuela in 1954 and in 1960 enrolled in the painting and engraving workshops of the National School of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro. In 1967 her work was included in *Nova Objetividade Brasileira (New Brazilian Objectivity)*, organized by Hélio Oiticica at the Modern Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro; this groundbreaking exhibition came to define the Brazilian countercultural movement in the visual arts, music, poetry, film, and theater. In 1971, after living in New York for a couple years, Maiolino received a fellowship to attend the International Graphic Center Workshop at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn. Over the course of her fifty-year career she has been in countless exhibitions. Select solo exhibitions have taken place at Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), São Paulo; the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (2010); Camden Arts Centre, London (2010); Pharos Center for Contemporary Art,

Cyprus (2007); Miami Art Central (2006); and the Drawing Center and Art in General, New York (2001). Her numerous group exhibitions include: *Thought and Gesture*, La Verrière, Brussels (2013); Documenta 13, Kassel (2012); *Contemporary Cartographies: Drawing Thought*, Fundación La Caixa, Madrid; many editions of the Bienal de São Paulo, including the 29th (2010); *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Biennale of Sydney (2008); *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007); *Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2005); and *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, Institute for Contemporary Art, Boston (1996).

She is the recipient of many awards and distinctions including the Mario Pedrosa Prize from the Brazilian Association of Art Critics in 1989 and the 1994 Award from the Association of São Paulo Art Critics (APCA).

Works in the exhibition

In-Out (Antropofagia)

1973–74
Super 8 film transferred to DVD; black-and-white and color, sound; 8:14 mins
Collection of the artist, courtesy Hauser and Wirth, New York

X

1974
Super 8 film transferred to DVD; color, sound; 3 mins
Collection of the artist, courtesy Hauser and Wirth, New York

Y

1974
Super 8 film transferred to DVD; black-and-white, sound; 2:28 mins
Collection of the artist, courtesy Hauser and Wirth, New York

Ad Hoc

1982
Super 8 film transferred to DVD; color, sound; 3:43 mins
Collection of the artist, courtesy Hauser and Wirth, New York

FRONT

Still from *Y*
Photo: Max Nauenberg, courtesy of the artist.

ABOVE

Still from *Ad Hoc*
Photo: Regina Vater, courtesy of the artist.

NEAR LEFT

Still from *X*
Photo: Max Nauenberg, courtesy of the artist.

FAR LEFT

Stills from *In-Out (Antropofagia)*
Photo: Sigmund Zehr, courtesy of the artist.

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