

ANA MENDIETA- A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Ana Mendieta was a Cuban-American female artist, whose work was a continuing search for identity throughout her life. She often searched for her roots in the earth itself, using it directly in her art and with her own body. This “return to the earth” was a metaphor for her life on many levels. Mendieta refers back to the Earth as a sense of home, literally and figuratively, as a tie to feminism and her womanhood, and her bond with religion, particularly the pagan-inflected, Cuban Catholicism known as Santeria. Tying her body to the land is how she felt an abundance of power and found her real niche.

Mendieta utilized the earth and the land for most of her artistic career, which spanned from roughly 1972 to 1985, when she fell to her untimely death at age 36. Many know her for her death rather than her life, as Carl Andre, famous minimalist artist and her husband, was accused but acquitted of pushing her out of their 34th story window to her demise. Mendieta’s art was often overshadowed- a problem many women artists encounter. Yet, Mendieta’s posthumous notoriety helped redress her

artworks. The search for Ana Mendieta's identity continues even after her death, as her work continues to be redressed and more recognized in current times.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Ana Mendieta- A Search for Identity,” presented by Stephanie Finkelstein, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ana Mendieta: Identity Quest

Ana Mendieta was a Cuban-American artist who, after her exile from Cuba, embarked upon a personal journey to discover who she was and where she belonged. Those words “who” and “where” are poignant, as they are repeatedly brought up in researching Mendieta as an artist. She worked in and with the landscape for most of her artistic career spanning roughly the years between 1972 to 1985, the year she fell to her untimely death at age 36. All of her work spoke to who she was as a woman, a Cuban American, and an artist.

Her tumultuous life undoubtedly led her to art as a personal release. Mendieta’s strong sense of womanhood prevailed, even as her sense of self had been questioned and displaced. She believed the female body always belonged to the landscape and to nature. The earth is “mother” and the female body has the potential to be “mother”, connecting both women and the earth as continuums of the life cycle. Not only was her femaleness a connection directly to the earth, but also her earth-works helped her to be an autonomous woman, sacred to herself, above the role of only a sexual object to men. She found strength in her womanhood through the earth, exacerbated by its deep ties to ancient cultures, like the religious cult Santeria, where feminist views reigned supreme as female deities and goddesses gave women power. Woman’s union with the earth brought Ana in touch with the goddess spirit, gave her back her body and gave her a sense of personal force. All of these reasons--cultural, religious, and feminist-- made the earth so important to Mendieta and

shaped her art and healed her soul. Ana used these elements to send great universal messages to society, telling us “where” and “who” she was as well.

Ana Mendieta has been seen in many lights, making her work the subject of numerous theories in art criticism. She has been seen as the ur-feminist, returning her body to mother earth; the Cuban exotic, drawing from a variety of romanticized Caribbean spiritual traditions; and the psychologically damaged exile seeking to heal her divided identity through art. Other views, in turn, have seen her to be variously considered an essentialist, an exemplar of postmodern hybridity, a victim of patriarchy, a post-colonialist, and a pioneer of post-minimal art strategies.¹ Perhaps a reason she is so hard to classify is due to the fact that Ana Mendieta’s work only makes sense when one respects its ambiguity.

Ana Mendieta is best-known for her early performance pieces, earth-body sculptures, and permanent sculptural objects produced from 1972 to 1985. She used her body, or a measure of it, to create an extensive corpus of work that was executed in nature, performative in character, rich in process, and multilayered in content. Consistently drawing upon diverse sources—including autobiography, trans-cultural myths, Catholic subjects, Western and non-Western art, archaeology, as well as everyday life--Mendieta’s work has inspired intriguing discussions among art historians and shifts in critical interpretations of her work. She explored the shifting boundaries of several emerging genres: performance, body art, and installation art, and clearly thrived in an atmosphere that encouraged experimentation, daring, and trial by error. Mendieta defined many of the parameters of her practice, created a language with which to express an art-life dialogue, and embraced interdisciplinary aspects

¹ Eleanor Heartney, “Rediscovering Ana Mendieta”, Art in America 92, 10: 138.

of performance. Her complex strategies made working outdoors and in unusual places and situations suitable and preferred. This dynamic work has contributed significantly to the art history of her time, when performative actions were primary constituents of the period's dominant avant-garde practice.²

The transient status of Ana's works, sites abandoned to either destruction or change according to climactic and other conditions, function like a contemporary production of site-specific archaeology which proceeds to play havoc with conventional notions of cultural time, of past and present.³ Ana Mendieta was a true master of creating beautiful and powerful work, as well as work that explored and exuded truthfulness to herself as a woman and the roots of her culture through a merging of body art, performance art, and the deterioration in nature.

This thesis will focus on Ana Mendieta as a Cuban-American female artist and her search for identity within her art. An exploration of her biography will be discussed leading into a discussion surrounding the major phases of her artwork. In addition to her earth-works, a discussion of how her other work plays a role in her artistic offerings as a woman will be explored, showing the vital role they played in her artistic expression. The landscape and her use of it and her work with it led to her personal Renaissance on many levels which are revealed through my research. As stated by Mendieta, "I have thrown myself into the very elements that produced me. It is through my [art] that I assert my emotional ties to the earth

²Julia P. Herzberg, "Ana Mendieta: The Formative Years", *Art Nexus* 1, 47 (January/March 2003): 54.

³Irit Rogoff. *Terra Infirma: geography's visual culture*. (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2000), 128.

and conceptualize culture.”⁴ Although she was not as well recognized as her many of her male counterparts (a problem shared alike by many women artists), her work and life have been given increasing attention in recent years.

⁴ As stated in *Unseen Mendieta* by Olga Viso, ed., 229. Ana Mendieta, artist statement, 1983, Ana Mendieta Papers, Galerie LeLong, New York.

CHAPTER 2

ANA MENDIETA: BIOGRAPHY AND OVERVIEW OF HER ART

Pain of Cuba body I am my orphanhood I live. In Cuba when you die the earth that covers us speaks. But here, covered by the earth whose prisoner I am I feel death palpitating underneath the earth. And, so, as my whole being is filled with the want of Cuba I go on to make my mark upon the earth, to go on is victory. ---- Ana Mendieta, June 1, 1981¹

Ana Mendieta was born on November 18, 1948 in Havana, Cuba, to parents Raquel and Ignacio. She and sister Raquelín were sent to the United States on September 11, 1961, by their father under “Operation Peter Pan”, a program created to send Cuban children to the United States to escape the new Fidel Castro Marxist-Leninist government. This program was masterminded by the C.I.A. in cooperation with the Cuban Catholic Church after the Castro Revolution to prevent Cuban children from being sent to the Soviet Union. Being separated from her family and her native country left Ana feeling disconnected the rest of her life. As she was shuttled from a Catholic orphanage and various foster homes, her life was marked by her constant displacement.

After the turmoil of a few foster homes and one boarding school, her living situation stabilized in Iowa. It is here that Ana Mendieta would really start her creative career. In 1965, Ana Mendieta graduated from Regis High School and enrolled in Briar Cliff College in Sioux City, Iowa. Later, in 1966 Ana’s mother and brother left Cuba on a Freedom Flight and settled in Iowa near Ana and her sister; their father was still in prison from 1962 in Cuba for allegedly collaborating with the United States Central Intelligence Agency prior to the

¹ Olga Viso. *Unseen Mendieta*. Munich: Prestel Publishing, 2008.

Cuban Missile Crisis. All of this strife and abandonment left Mendieta with a lack of a true sense of self, and a longing for home without really having a clear idea of what “home” really was. Yet, throughout her journey, she somehow felt that Cuba was her safe ground, the one place that would bring her scattered life full circle back to where it all started, back to herself.

In 1967, Ana transferred to the University of Iowa in Iowa City and studied the art of primitive and indigenous cultures. Her interest was fueled in large part by Santeria, an Afro-Cuban religion that combined ideas from the Yoruba in Africa with Catholicism. As a child, Ana was introduced to Santeria by the African-Cuban servants who lived in her home. Their wonderful story-telling not only greatly interested her, but also in her later years would bring her back to her roots, and would provide her with a sense of comfort. Santeria taught her through powerful tales that the earth is a living entity from which one gains power. Santeria is one clear starting point for Ana Mendieta’s earth work which will be discussed in great detail further in this thesis. This segment of her work served as the catalyst that brought her back from a place of despair and loneliness to a personal renaissance for Mendieta.

In 1969, Mendieta began graduate studies in painting and met artist and Professor Hans Breder, with whom she developed a professional and romantic relationship. In 1970, Breder established the Intermedia Program at the University of Iowa as a formal degree seeking program and, at the same time, founded the CNPA, or Center for New Performing Art. Ana was very involved in both programs, modeling for Breder and participating in Robert Wilson’s CNPA in body movement, and eventually performing in a couple of Wilson’s productions. These experiences were important outlets for Ana, as her work in the

studio did not hold enough power to show the ideas and images she wished to convey. Ana wrote, “I decided that for the images to have magic qualities...I had to go to the source of life.”² Through performance art Ana Mendieta found herself drawn to the earth as a strong medium, drawing upon her childhood remembrances of Santerian beliefs. Although raised as a Catholic, Ana wrote the following:

Now I believe in water, air, and earth. They are all deities. They also speak. I am connected with the goddess of the sweet water-...it is raining a lot. Those are the things that are powerful and important. I don't know why people have gotten away from these ideas.³

In 1971, Ana Mendieta took her first trip to Mexico to do field research for her summer coursework in archaeology. After completing her first MFA in 1972 in painting, she abandoned that media to concentrate fully on mixed media and performance art. These efforts led to her first earth-body work *Grass on Woman* (Fig. 1), in which she lay face down in a green lawn appearing to fuse her body into the natural landscape, and her first performance piece, *Death of a Chicken* (Fig. 2), in which she held the flailing carcass of a decapitated chicken as the blood splattered across her body. Both of these pieces were pivotal for this body of work. Although very different from each other in medium and format, both were milestones in Mendieta's transformative creations. The first piece shows her submerged into the earth claiming themes of rebirth and regeneration. The second work symbolized her desire for the spiritual power of ancient cultures and her desire to re-create primordial rituals of blood sacrifice in celebration of the earth mother. These themes run

² Ana Mendieta as quoted in Jane Blocker, *Who is Ana Mendieta?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press) 1999, 45.

³Linda Montano. “An Interview with Ana Mendieta.” *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000., 396.

throughout her oeuvre, and will be noted in depth as I look deeper into Ana Mendieta and her trajectory of work. At this point, her art changes dramatically. She abandoned painting and chose to work with blood, fire, earth, water, and air in her search for self-healing. It were as if Mendieta needed to leave her “mark” on nature and on culture, her signature made not with the hand alone but with the whole person so that she, as an individual and as the archetypal female presence, would not disappear without trace.⁴ Although the performances themselves were purposefully transitory, Ana photo-documented the experiences to make certain the records of these works survived.

1973 marked the year that Mendieta created a series based upon violence against women, inspired by the rape and murder of a University of Iowa student (see below. p. 14). She also traveled again to Mexico with Breder and other Intermedia students and created her first *Siluetas* works in the archaeological zone of Yagul, her first being noted as *Imagen de Yagul* (Fig. 3). This piece was noted as the first in a long successful series, her hallmark in a long line of meaningful *Siluetas* to be detailed in much depth later in this paper. In 1974, on another return trip to Mexico with Breder she continued to produce other *Siluetas* performances at Yagul as well as in the church complex at Cuilapar de Guerro. Simultaneously, she produced some films documenting the perishing of endangered species of birds. In 1975, Ana Mendieta created *Siluetas* at Old Man’s Creek in Iowa, continued her trips to Mexico with Breder, and started working with fire and pyrotechnics in the fall with

⁴ Shifra M. Goldman. *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994., 237.

the assistance of Professor Julius Schmidt. She was taking her work on a natural journey, without resisting her impulses, letting her emotions dictate where her art should go.

In 1976, Mendieta traveled with Hans Breder to Europe still doing performances and continuing to make *Siluetas* in the summer in Mexico with natural materials found at La Ventosa. During this year, she executed her silhouette of herself with fireworks that she commissioned from a local fireworks maker in Oaxaca near Yagul. The image was ignited one evening as the sun set. In the fall, back in Iowa she created her *Tree of Life* series (Fig. 4) as well. *Siluetas* works with snow and ice were central a year later, along with her *Fetish* (Fig. 5) and *Ix-Chell* series in Iowa at Old Man's Creek. She also created *Tumbas* or Tombs there as well. In addition, experiments with pyrotechnics continued, with Mendieta ending the year utilizing ice and snow once again as a medium for her *Siluetas*. As her themes remained strong and concise, Ana Mendieta was clearly using art to write her autobiography as a Cuban-American woman.

In 1978, Ana Mendieta relocated to New York City hoping to develop her career as an artist. She performed *Body Tracks* (Fig. 6.1-6.3) at Franklin Furnace, dipping her arms in a bucket of blood or paint, for different variations, and dragging them down a wall. She also attempted to create *Siluetas* within a museum by making a natural tableau at the College of Old Westbury. She made *Siluetas* in the landscape of upstate New York and returned to Iowa in the summer to make *Siluetas* using natural materials as well as volcanic mounds fired with gunpowder. 1979 marked the year Ana was reunited with her father, Ignacio, after eighteen years of separation. With her family more intact she began to pursue opportunities to travel to Cuba through various cultural organizations in New York. She also returned to

Iowa in the summer to create variations on her *Volcano* (Fig. 7.1-7.6) and *Tree of Life* series. Mendieta taught at the College of Old Westbury, New York, as an adjunct professor and made works in upstate New York. She also became a member of A.I.R., Artists in Residence, Inc., a women's gallery. During her first solo exhibition at A.I.R., she met American minimalist sculptor Carl Andre through mutual friends. This meeting would irrevocably change her life in many ways.

In January of 1980, Mendieta returned to Cuba under the auspices of the Circulo de Cultura Cubana, an organization founded by Cuban exiles to promote cultural exchange and relations between the United States and Cuba. In the spring, she again taught at the College of Old Westbury, New York, and in April she created several outdoor works as a visiting artist at Kean College in New Jersey. For the group exhibition *Art Across the Park*, she created a gunpowder piece in the Harlem Meer in Central Park. In the summer, she returned to Oaxaca and La Ventosa in Mexico with Breder, filmed gunpowder works at San Felipe, and carved figures into earthen embankments. After this trip in 1980, her romantic involvement with Hans Breder ended and her relationship with Carl Andre deepened. Over the next five years they spent considerable time together travelling as well as working in New York. At this point in her career, Ana Mendieta's personal and professional lives were truly evolving. Professionally, she was moving forward, gaining both experience and recognition. Personally, her returns to Cuba really continued to fill the void she had since she was a child. By this time, she had used many geographical areas to claim a sense of self, yet Cuba was what she seemed to need for her to feel a true sense of home. Whether or not she would ever choose to call it home again, Cuba was truly her roots.

In 1981, Ana Mendieta was a visiting artist at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She again made gunpowder works, this time in the sand dunes between Illinois and Indiana. In March, she created a *Silueta* in a Georgetown cemetery for the Washington Project for the Arts, and in May made one at La Cuarta Bienal de Medellin, Columbia. She then returned to Cuba in January and July and made carved and painted works in limestone rock in Varadero and Jaruco, respectively called the *Rupestrian Sculptures* (Figure 8). In September, she was a visiting artist at Alfred State University, New York, and made goddess figures outdoors at a nearby hill site. In the fall, she traveled to Miami and created *Ochun* (Fig. 9) and *Ceiba Fetish* as a guest of the Frances Wolfson Gallery at Miami-Dade Community College. She also began to make drawings in her New York studio. This return to the studio marked something new for Mendieta. After traveling throughout various countries to find a home, her return to Cuba as an adult allowed her to be more introspective in her work again. The need to literally delve into the land lessened as she felt more whole and could now be more comfortable cloistered in her private studio, we can conclude.

Her experiments continued. She was a guest of Real Artways at the Hartford Art School in Hartford, Connecticut and in 1982 she made *Arbitra* (Fig. 10), a female witness figure carved and burned into a seven foot tall tree trunk. She worked on a rock quarry in Pennsylvania and carved *Labyrinth of Venus* (Fig. 11) onto a rocky cliff overlooking Lake Ontario in Scarborough, Ontario. She began to make leaf drawings (Fig. 12) and started a book project in the fall to document her *Rupestrian Sculptures* made in Cuba at Jaruco National Park. She had a solo exhibition at the Lowe Art Museum in Miami Beach featuring four independent sculptures of moss, plants, and stone. She also exhibited outdoor mud coil

sculptures at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, as a guest of the University Art Museum. In 1983, Mendieta created outdoor spiral figures in sand on Cape Cod and Long Island beaches. She then made a series of sand sculptures in Miami and spent time in the summer with her parents in Iowa where she made another mud coil series near Old Man's Creek.

Ana Mendieta was awarded the Rome Prize, giving her a one-year residency at the American Academy in Rome beginning in October 1984. Here she created a series of low-relief sculptures made of sand and earth with binder which she exhibited in Rome at the Galleria de Piano. Working with Italian craftsmen she created freestanding totemic sculptures of burned and carved wood. Extending her stay beyond her one year residency, she rented a studio and apartment on the Academy grounds. Travelling extensively with Andre, she visited many parts of Italy and prehistoric sites in Malta and Ireland which served as strong inspirations for the development of large-scale artworks. She participated in *Land Marks: New Site Proposals by Twenty-two Original Pioneers of Environmental Art* at Bard College, Annadale-on-Hudson, New York, proposing *La Maja de Yerba* (Figure 13.1-13.2). She also created *Furrows* (Fig. 14), an outdoor earthwork on the lawn, as a visiting artist at the Rhode Island School of Design.

In 1985, Ana Mendieta married Carl Andre on January 17 in Rome in a private ceremony. She then developed a commission for the MacArthur Park Public Art Program for the Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles, including seven outdoor totemic sculptures titled *La Jungla*. She returned to New York in August. On September 8, 1985, she fell to her death from her 34th floor apartment window that she shared with Andre.

There were speculations about Andre's involvement in her death, yet no conviction followed. This tragic mystery is still unsolved. Debate still remains over whether Ana committed suicide or was murdered. Carl Andre was put on trial for the second degree murder of Ana Mendieta in 1988. Andre chose to be tried before a judge only, with no jury being present, and he was eventually acquitted of all charges, as his lawyer convinced the judge of the possibility that her death was a suicide. Ana was scheduled to have the first major retrospective of her work in New York only a few weeks after her death. Some members of the art and feminist communities still believe that her death was as a result of foul play and not suicide.

Ana Mendieta's first retrospective exhibition was in 1989 at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and traveled to LACE, Los Angeles, and the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado through 1990. Although often overshadowed by Andre's fame during Ana's short life as an artist, since her death her work has become more recognized and analyzed. Much is still left unanswered, making the life and art of Ana Mendieta an enigma that keeps unfolding.⁵

⁵ Many sources were used in noting her biographical facts including: Olga Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body* p.35-221, 224-239., Olga Viso *Unseen Mendieta*, p.7-23, 77-79, 109-111, 153-155, 199-201, 229-232, 279-284., Eleanor Heartney, "Rediscovering Ana Mendieta" *Art in America* v 92, I 10 p. 138-143., and Hillarie Sheets, "Unraveling the story of Ana Mendieta" *ARTnews* v 103 (2004) p. 48-50, Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?* p. 1-27.

CHAPTER 3

MAJOR PHASES OF WORK IN HER EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY

Ana Mendieta's work took many paths as she attempted to overcome her feelings of displacement and to celebrate her strong feelings about womanhood. Each phase of her art is inspired by her paths in life--events that occurred or choices she made. As a result of her experiments, Ana Mendieta's work contributes to the full range of avant-garde movements of the 1970s and 1980s: conceptual art, performance art, body art, earth art, and feminist and identity art. For this reason, her art simply cannot be encapsulated within one art historical genre. Yet, there are several congruent themes that guide her work. My intent is to explain these major themes and techniques in her work and explicate them through discussions of her most important pieces.

The media's exploitation of violent crimes against a woman became the starting point for Ana Mendieta's early work. This theme led to a technique of jarring performance work. At the University of Iowa on March 13, 1973, a student, James V. Hall, murdered nursing student Sara Ottens. Her body was found lying face down in one of the bedrooms of a co-ed dormitory. Because a bloody broomstick was found lying next to her, it was assumed that a sexual assault had occurred prior to the murder.¹ In response to one incident, Mendieta created several performance pieces around the subject of rape of which only photographic evidence survives. As stated by the artist,

¹This was the first incident of a student homicide in the university's history. Details of the crime were reported by Mary F. Rohner 'Probe into slaying of Coed to be Widened' *Iowa city Press-Citizen* 17, March 1973.

When a young student at the University of Iowa was found murdered after being brutally raped...I started doing performances as well as placing objects and installations in public places in order to bring attention to this crime and all sexual violence.²

She performed *Rape Scene* (Fig. 15) in her own studio apartment on Moffit Street in Iowa City in 1973 as her graphic reminder of the atrocity of rape. The goal of her performance was to create shock in the minds of those who witnessed her re-enactment of the crime. She depended on the cooperation of other artists as she composed her performance, and she was meticulous in its execution. She wanted the angle of her performance to be just right as her classmates entered the apartment. She also needed to experiment with rope-typing techniques and body positioning so that she could remain still for hours at a time. She assumed the attacker would not want to look at his victim, so she positioned herself lying over the table, half naked, face down, with her eyes open.³ Mendieta used several buckets of beef blood to cover herself as the victim and the inside of her apartment. To recreate a crime scene, the apartment was also given a disheveled appearance. With the help of fellow student and friend Sheila Kelly, she was left, tied up, with the apartment door open knowing that friends and students had been invited over and would be arriving shortly. As people arrived, they would find the door slightly ajar and be faced with a dark room. A single light illuminated the artist stripped from her waist down, smeared with blood, and stretched over bound to a table; there were broken plates and blood all around her. Over a period of two hours, visitors came and went and Mendieta posed perfectly still. Spectators were truly

² Arlene Raven. "We Did Not Move from Theory We Moved to the Sores Woods." *Rape, Exhibition Catalogue*. Columbus: Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art, 1985. ,5

³ Stacey Schultz. "Naming in order to Heal and Redeem: Violence Against Women in Performance." *N. paradoxa* 23 (2009): 36-44, 40.

shocked by such an overtly bloody work. Her courage to create such an “in your face” piece to prompt attention is further underscored by the fact that Ana Mendieta was the only female student in her class.⁴ Because it was a performance piece only photographs exist now to document it; a series of still photographs were shot to resemble a news documentary of images from a real crime scene.⁵

Ana Mendieta’s physical and photographic representation- a response to an actual rape and murder that happened nearby- focused on the experience of the ‘reality’ of the event, and capitalized on its ambiguities. In the actual performance, the viewer was encouraged to empathize with the situation and the victim. The documentary quality of the photographs also encouraged the viewer to see this as a “real” event, one which has been witnessed and recorded. As editor and author, Ana Mendieta controlled how her experience was presented, highlighting the drama of both herself and the viewer actually experiencing the aftermath of a rape.⁶

As Ana Mendieta continued to expand her trajectory of work she started utilizing the earth, the land that surrounded her, directly in her art and connected with her body. Her trips with Breder to Mexico starting in 1971 and continuing through that decade contributed to this theme. This technique was in line with her theme of returning to the purity of the earth for a sense of identity. Her reverence for the land was instilled within her due to a myriad of reasons, starting with her early childhood in Cuba and the Santeria religious movement. In

⁴ Schultz, *Ibid.*,41.

⁵ Catherine Grant. “Private Performances: Editing Performance Photography.” *Performance Research*. 7 (2002): 37.

⁶ Grant, *Ibid.* 38.

Santeria, nature is a manifestation of the Gods, and through nature one can have direct contact with them. This holistic belief in the harmony of the universe with humans, nature, and Gods linked as one led Ana to the development of the use of the earth in her quest for a way to convey her highly personalized art. The worshipping of female deities also played a large role in her earth-works, as her femininity became a source of power for her as well. Clearly motivated by feminist theory and issues, such as violence against women, Santeria found a place in her growing feminist consciousness of the early 1970s. She identified with women on more than one level, beyond woman being a repressed minority. Being Cuban, she understood what it meant to be relegated to the category of disenfranchised people of the Third World. This link with the Third World countries strengthened her ties with her Cuban roots and the Santeria religion she learned there, shedding light on the notion of some gods having both male and female aspects, as in Santeria.⁷ These beliefs were clearly in opposition to the highly masculine doctrines of Catholic Christianity. The idea that parts of religion can and are being dominated by women is strictly against Catholicism, the religion she was raised as in Cuba and immersed in when she arrived in the States. In this regard, her interest in Santeria could even be viewed as a protest against Catholicism's doctrines, especially the Church's attitudes towards women, sexuality, and the female body. This shift from the heavenly force of Catholicism to an earth-centered Santeria with a relation to the goddess is a very telling component in Mendieta's work.⁸

⁷ Arturo Lindsay. *Santeria Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996, 191.

⁸Ibid, 191

Beginning with *Grass on Woman* induced by her trip to Mexico that helped her to connect to Cuba, the homeland she longed for, the *Silueta Series* emerged, as well as other Land Art pieces. In Ana Mendieta's *Silueta Series in Mexico, 1973-1977*, she used her body in the landscape literally, then figuratively, merely leaving traces of it as she traversed new areas of art. She combined body art, performance art, and earth art to make a collection of work that leaves one in a positive and contemplative state. Organic life is implicit and explicit everywhere in her work as she embeds herself in the earth or carves herself with the earth repeatedly yet in different manners. Yet, in each performance, she dissolves into the earth as she becomes one with it. Her *Silueta Series* (Fig. 16.1-16.2) used natural sites that are ordinary, that is, they have no sense of a particular topography. We feel the site is a familiar territory which allows us to imagine a multitude of settings in our own ideas. As a body artist in a sense, she transfigures herself to evoke elusive ideas relating to nature and life. In this series, she used her body as a mediating metaphor between human subjects, societies, and the material environment.⁹

Her first work in the actual *Silueta* series was produced in 1973 in Oaxaca, Mexico, *Imagen de Yagul*. Rejecting the social boundaries of art such as studios, galleries and museums, she completely engrossed herself within the earth as she covered her whole inert, naked body, lying rigidly, corpse-like in a Lakota tomb with an immense sprouting bouquet of little white flowers on long green stems ostensibly emerging from her body. Her chest, head and loins are hidden by the overgrown flowers, evoking the idea of the Tree of Life,

⁹ Anne Raine. "Embodied Geographies: Subjectivity and Materiality in the Work of Ana Mendieta." *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*. London: Routledge, 1996, 233.

reviving the ancient association between the woman's body with Mother Earth as she lay in the womb-like cavity. Some also see a Tree of Life association as a concept derived from medieval representations of the mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection, or even as a sign of eternal renewal in the cycles of life.¹⁰ However, this piece goes beyond ancient associations of the female body, although these concepts are very present and will be discussed later. Ana's intent was not necessarily meant to be associated with Christ, but perhaps religion as a whole. In studying this piece objectively and subjectively, limitless possibilities arise along with a plentitude of concrete ideas that *Imagen de Yagul* produces. Ana Mendieta's piece was a product of self-healing as well as a powerful experience for the viewer, full of symbolism and energy.

This act of stripping off her clothes and climbing into the sepulcher produces a set of binaries: essence and inessence, nature and culture, primitive and civilized, and cosmos and history.¹¹ The piece became a personal experience to the artist, as well a symbolic story for the viewer. It seems potentially self-centered, yet its aim was not for only Mendieta. In her return to the earth, she suggests a symbol of the ageless unity of femaleness with the earth. Also implied is the surrender of her youth to the infinity of earth and the concept of regeneration associated with the flowers. Also implicit in the work is the transitory element of time. She cannot lie there forever, nor will the flowers she holds stay alive indefinitely. These aspects of the work remind the spectator of the mutability of life with the promise of rebirth. Works from this series, captured in photographs, function like snapshots of a lost

¹⁰ Donald Kuspit. *Redeeming Art: Critical Reveries*. New York: Allworth Press, 2000., 214.

¹¹ Jane Blocker. *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity and Exile*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999., 55.

country where one may never return.¹² This piece is an irretrievable moment, yet it was caught as a photograph which can be looked at over and over as well as be reproduced, keeping the moment alive.

Although the truth remains that nature is transitory, a sense of timelessness also prevails within the context she chose. Being surrounded by stones and dirt whose lifetimes are primitive shows the earth as an eternal force existing before “history” as we know it. These ancient stones and dirt signify the beginning of the formation of the earth, going beyond the age of the Zapotec culture to which the tomb belongs. The stones, the grave and Mendieta’s body tell a story of time and history.¹³ Tombs are the most fundamental cultural manifestations as they separate the dead from the living, but the stones - the make-up of the earth - truly begin the story. Mendieta writes, “I bought flowers, lay in the tomb and was covered by [the] white flowers. The analogy was that I was covered by time and history.”¹⁴

Reverting back to her choice of using the Zapotec monument as her site plainly was a statement of Mendieta’s own psychological struggles. The Zapotecs were the only Meso-American people who resisted the Aztecs. In so doing, the Zapotec people stood for reclamation of identity and rebellion against domination.¹⁵ Her choice to lie with the earth, particularly in that site, shows her desire to link back to her ancestral past as well as a desire to claim her identity. Her exile and subsequent life as a Latin-American woman in Eurocentric New York obviously made her feel different, almost as if exiled again as a

¹²Ibid., 96-97

¹³Ibid., 56

¹⁴ Linda Montano. “An Interview with Ana Mendieta.” *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000., 66

¹⁵ Mary Sabbatino, “Ana Mendieta Silhueta Works: Sources and Influences”, *Ana Mendieta*. Helsinki Art Museum, 1996., 48

Cuban living in America. She was recording herself in the earth, in the tomb, just as the grave implies ancient cultures and excavations. She claimed a small part of the earth just for that moment as her own, making her feel as if her exile were assuaged. A return to the matriarchal family was attested to as well as a marking of the land for Mendieta as an individual, constructing subjectivity as it related beyond herself, and to the rest of the world's people, as the earth is a universal essence. While reuniting with the earth in solitude, she spoke to a multitude of people.

In Ana Mendieta's earth-works, she invokes reconsideration of body and earth, "female" invoking the idea of gender, and "earth" invoking the idea of nation. By engaging earth as a material and as a theme, she places the two ideas in dialogue with one another.¹⁶ Seeing her body on a rocky cold ground with fresh flowers brings about feelings and thoughts about femininity and the constructs of being female in addition to the challenge imposed by that status. It brings the idea of woman to the forefront as it seems natural, fruitful, sexual, and tied to the earth - The Universal Mother. Seeing her "fragile" body with its fleeting existence situated in the "powerful" and eternal tomb shows a dichotomy, making the viewer empathetic to her plight. Although she was undoubtedly a strong, empowered female, *Imagen de Yagul* leads to a feeling of her delicacy which she possessed as well.¹⁷ This "womb" she settled herself into was sexual and maternal, a fundamental source of life. It signified her homeland, prehistoric origins and a link to her ancestry, yet also gave a sense of a mother's protective womb, a fully female form in the crevice into which she climbed.

¹⁶ Blocker, *ibid*, 26.

¹⁷ *Ana Mendieta: Body Tracks*. Lucerne: Kunstmuseum Luzern, 2002., 33

Others saw gender as a large component in her work as well, as said best by art critic

William Zimmer in 1979,

Mendieta offers photographs of alterations she has made on landscape sites. These marks are dubbed ‘Silhouettes’ but are really vaginas on the hillside or on the grass. The Abstract Expressionists wished to identify their bodies with the earth, but as men couldn’t come this close.¹⁸

Mendieta’s womanhood was clearly central to her life and her work, alongside her quest for cultural belonging, as she aimed at revitalizing ancient goddess cults and religions while respecting and using ideas from Santeria with their gods (or female orishas as they are called). This female-centered religion formed her spiritual roots. Her staged rituals made her into an orisha of sorts, with the flowers creating the effect of making her into an offering. Santerian beliefs gave her power and strength which she could then transfer to others. Her art defeated century’s old male hierarchies, which led to rape of the land and rape of females, leading to the detriment of society as a whole.¹⁹

Ana Mendieta was very aware of and proud of her womanliness, yet had to wrestle with herself as a sexual object to men. Sexually, she demanded to keep the fate of her body in her own hands, owning herself completely.²⁰ She felt purification with the elements as she enacted her art as they liberated her from sex, as if she were virginal and pure from men’s sexual advances.²¹ She sought to make her body autonomous as stated earlier, turning herself into “Silhouettes” in various manners. Her “body-as-trace” addresses the spectator’s own interpretative body and thwarts its conventionally masculinist, colonizing “gaze” by

¹⁸ William Zimmer. “Artists Only”, *SoHo Weekly News*, 1979, 33.

¹⁹ Lindsay, *ibid*, 192

²⁰ Kuspit, *ibid*, 213

²¹ *ibid*, 216

ritualizing and in many cases, erasing the “actual” body from view.²² Thus, *Imagen de Yagul* satisfied her cultural longings, religious ideals, and her pride in her femaleness.

Ana Mendieta’s continued fascination with burial customs and traditions from Santeria and ancient cultures led her to explore the use of fire as an element of purification and personal transformation in her art. The technique of using flames was born from this theme. The artist’s use of fire was also inspired by a variety of Mexican popular traditions, such as the lighting of the candles around graves for nocturnal Day of the Dead vigils, the ritual burning of paper-mache figures of Judas during Easter season festivals, and the burning of the elaborate constructions of cane and fireworks, castillos or castles, for seasonal church festivals.²³ Moving forward by removing her literal body and using its outline led to her first “Silhouette” (or *Silueta*) with fire as an active agent in 1975. *Alma Silueta en Fuego* or *Soul Silhouette on Fire* (Fig. 17.1-17.4) in 1975 was inspired by images of souls in purgatory from popular Mexican culture. The work was made during the fall on the banks of the Iowa River, substituting her body with its essence by leaving behind only her outline in the earth.

Mendieta dug a shallow outline of her form into the earth and inserted a life-sized cutout of her body with her arms upraised wrapped in fabric. The *Silueta* was then set alight at sunset and as it smoldered and burned it was documented by a Super 8 film and by two well-known still photographs. The site of this action and the charred *Silueta* became the

²² Amelia Jones. *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1998, 31

²³ Viso, *ibid*,153

location for another recorded action that fall, *Corazon de Roca con Sangre* (Fig. 18). She often returned to favorite sites and recycled former *Siluetas* to create new ones.²⁴

Specifically, the film begins with her being wrapped and covered in a shroud of a white sheet. This white sheet was then burnt and destroyed. Nothing was left but a darkened, scorched form of burning ashes in a hollowed out earthen form, her former self. What this sequence points to is the disappearance and absence of the body through what remains, a trace. While the silhouette produced the idea of disembodiment, the ashes marked the trace of the body. What is constitutive of the trace is its erasure, a lack of origin or originary presence, because the trace never refers back to an original marking.²⁵ She used this technique as a way to search for her identity, or lack thereof, due to her Cuban exile.

When the “soul” (the shroud) was drenched with combustible liquid and ignited the *Siluetas* was consumed by fire and turned into ashes. Her use of fire, which she thought of as “a very magical thing,” in tandem with the uplifted arms motif, was intended to suggest the well-known subject of the soul burning in purgatory in the Catholic tradition. This theme was seen in many examples, including artistic traditions familiar to Mendieta, such as Mexican folk art and popular religious imagery.²⁶ These diverse sources of imagery note her struggle of being caught between two religions, Catholicism and Santeria, which leads even deeper into her quest for belonging.

²⁴ Viso, *ibid*, 153

²⁵ Gloria Moure. *Ana Mendieta*. Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, S. A., 1996., 115

²⁶ Olga Viso. *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*. Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 2004, 169.

Another work in which Ana Mendieta used a representation of her body as well as the utilization of fire was *Nanigo Burial* (Fig. 19) in 1976. In this floor sculpture she formed the outline of her body using 47 black candles acquired from a New York specialty shop for ritual accessories patronized by devotees of African-based religions. During this exhibition, the candles were lit and over time the molten wax created its own haunting silhouette on the gallery floor.

The Nanigos established in Africa in 1836 have been and remain a highly feared community in Cuba. Suspicions of them of kidnapping members of affluent white families in the first two decades of the twentieth century resulted in the lynching of five of them in Cuba. Ongoing race wars in Cuba affected all Afro-Cuban religions in Cuba for the next fifty years, and still are only partially lifted. As Ana was aware of these acts at an early age, she titled this piece “to give light” to the Nanigo; she then called forth empowering spirits in support of the Nanigo. She may have also been alluding to the links between the living and the dead, allowing for dual energies which are crucial underpinnings in these religions. Her sister, Raquelín, subscribes to the interpretation that many of her sister’s works, like this one, were a way to exorcise her fears derived from strong childhood memories.²⁷ Clearly, religion and Mendieta’s choice to move away from Catholicism to folk beliefs are seen in pieces such as this one, a theme seen throughout her oeuvre.

In her early performance pieces, Ana used her own body as a symbol for various feminine issues, ranging, as we have seen, from rape to more broadly interpretive issues of women linked to the earth forces and regeneration. Her works transitioned from using her

²⁷Ibid, 64-65

actual body in performances to silhouetted shadows of herself. Through inspirations from popular Mexican folk traditions (such as Day of the Dead rituals, Easter season festivals, and other seasonal church festivals), Ana relied more exclusively on fire. *Soul Silhouette on Fire* and *Nanigo Burial* poignantly serve as examples of the artist using fire as a new medium as well as her shift towards eliminating her literal body from the *Siluetas*. At this point in her career, Ana introduces one of the most powerful themes in her art: the quest for identity with Cuba as her homeland.

As she returned to Cuba for the first time in 1980 since her exile in 1961, her stay led to a culmination of her *Siluetas* pieces, almost as if she had come full circle. She made seven trips over the next four years, during which time she initiated and elaborated a new series bringing her back home. Her re-connection to her father, Ignacio, in 1979 after eighteen years played a part in leading her on this path to Cuba, along with her meeting in 1979 with Carl Andre and members of the expatriate Cuban community who rekindled this interest in revisiting her homeland. Central to this part of her career are artworks, started in 1981, collectively titled *Rupestrian Sculptures* or *Esculturas Rupestres*, individually titled after Goddesses and effigies. They were life-size figures carved and painted on natural limestone, many of which were created with the support of the Cuban government. The paintings have a prehistoric look, bringing back to mind ancient petroglyphs in the form of fertility figures. Unlike the *Siluetas*, which have no internal details, many of these generalized female forms emphasize breasts and genital areas, with more or less explicit references to precursors like the *Woman of Willendorf*. Ana also used paint to bring out the outlines in the carvings produced at this time, which established a connection with native Hispanic cultures. Often

Ana titled these works after pre-Hispanic goddesses venerated by indigenous Cuban peoples like the Taino and Ciboney.²⁸ For example, some names used were *Guabancex* (Goddess of the Wind), *Guanaroca* (First Woman), and *Atabey* (Mother of the Waters).²⁹

Ana Mendieta's commitment to sites, materials, and ancient female images led to *The Rupestrian Sculptures* she formed from the limestone outcroppings of Jaruco State Park (Fig. 20). This park was once home to the Taino, who were later displaced, assimilated, or decimated by Spanish colonizers. As the artist wrote in 1982, "few people have had a destiny as cruel as the Tainan which 1492 greeted Christopher Columbus in their islands." To pay homage to these people, the schematic yet sensuous curves the artist inscribed into her figures evoke the aesthetic of the Taino goddess effigies, after whom they were also titled.³⁰ Like the *Siluetas*, the forms represent a concerted effort on Mendieta's part to "repatriate" displaced groups to symbolically reunite them with their origins as well as their homelands. They also strive to reaffirm those belief systems destroyed, repressed, or denigrated by more powerful groups, whether male or of European descent, or both. Animating these two bodies of work--*The Siluetas* and the *Jaruco Images*-- therefore is a powerful dialectic of domination and resistance.³¹ She documented these works in 8 x 10 and 60 x 40 inch black and white photographs. The quality of these photographs mimics the feeling of old archeological stills, an affect which adds historical nostalgia to our visual experience.

²⁸ Eleanor Heartley. "Rediscovering Ana Mendieta." *Art in America*. 92 (2004): 138-143, 142.

²⁹ Karia M Cabanas. "Pain of Cuba, Body I Am." *Woman's Art Journal*. 20 (1999): 12-17, 14.

³⁰ Kelly Baum. "Shapely Shapeless: Ana Mendieta's Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints- Face) 1972." *Record of the Art Museum* 67 (1980): 87.

³¹ *Ibid.* 88

Giving life to what was formerly destroyed, in her motherland, where she had been mothered, is clearly a new theme in Menedieta's life and art that helps resolve her search for a personal renaissance. The themes of exile, separation, absence, dislocation, and loss are constant and infuse her work with personal pain. The parallel focus on reunion, the regenerative, ancient fertility cults, and the archetypal mother and goddess imagery point to the healing and mastery of that same pain.³²

Olga Viso, writer and historian, visited the site in Varadero where, with her cousin, they found these life-sized Amerindian figures carved in rock. In her own words she related to what Ana was doing and how it tied her with Cuba on many levels. She states,

It was a very charged site and had all the dimensions of history for her. Ana loved the idea that someone could find these and not know if they were some ancient petroglyph or something contemporary.

Going further, she stated,

The Cuban government embraced her as much as she embraced them in the beginning, she was a good propaganda tool. Here was an artist speaking positively about Cuba to North Americans. But it began to change after she started developing friendships with artists and seeing a more complicated side of Cuba.

This series was a clear return to home for Ana Mendieta, fueling her assertion and quest for meaning in her life through her art, and did bring her full circle, as an artist, and as a Cuban-American woman.³³

After making a few more works in the Cuban landscape in the early 1980's, she continued to examine the formal qualities of her sculptures in the landscape in other locales. Such examples are seen in her archive filled with unpublished slides and printed contact

³² Danielle Knafo. "In Her Own Image." *Art Criticism*. 11(1996): 1-19, 14.

³³ Hilarie M. Sheets. "Unraveling the Story of Ana Mendieta." *ARTnews*. 103 (2004): 48-50.

sheets. These art works were informed by her study of ancient cultures in Ireland, Egypt, and Malta. She visited these sites in 1984-85 with Carl Andre as they traveled along the Nile and elsewhere on their honeymoon. These experiences inspired Mendieta to consider translating her human-scaled earth work to larger public scale works. Yet her work still stood apart from other earth work artists. She herself asserted, “My work is basically in the tradition of the Neolithic artist. It has very little to do with most earth art. I am not interested in the formal qualities of my materials, but their emotional and sensual ones.”³⁴

She continued to produce pieces in this new, larger scale, capitalizing on public settings as she accepted numerous visiting artist opportunities. By creating more permanent works outdoors, her works became less transient between the fall of 1983 and the summer of 1985. She also returned to her studio in Italy where she had lived earlier, extending her residency, to experiment with new materials like beeswax and wood veneers, as well as to research new processes like sand casting. These experiments, along with unrealized project design proposals, suggest she was on her way to redefining her aesthetic. For example, she described a plan to create seven sand-cast sculptures that would vary from six to seven feet tall, two to three feet wide and nine to ten inches deep in an undated proposal for Art on the Beach. These works were to be installed facing the ocean and two or three foot intervals forming a loose semi-circle. By her estimate, the total installation would have measured about thirty-five feet across. Each sculpture was to be shaped in a highly stylized human form with distinctive carving.³⁵

³⁴ Viso, *ibid*, 232.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 281.

Ana Mendieta returned to the United States in 1984 through September 1985 to work on public projects and commissions. During the last few years of her life, Ana started making permanent, independent objects, breaking away from documenting temporary performances. She still sought to create sculptural art fusing earth and body with the spirit of her first *Siluetas* as she maintained an abiding respect for nature and the cycle of life and death. In this way, she succeeded in preserving in her mature works some key attributes of her early art.³⁶ For example, *Totem Grove* 1984-1985 (Fig. 20) found in her studio at the time of her death was a series of tree trunks with carved and blackened markings. There was no succinct definition of their meaning yet these works may have accompanied the aforementioned *La Jungla* of 1985. Unfortunately, there is not much to be found about these late works in Ana Mendieta's papers and drawings. One short paragraph from Ana, written in 1984, is some help in understanding her late works:

During the past 10 years my work, as a dialogue between nature and the mythical female body, has evolved dialectically in response to diverse landscapes as an emotional, sexual, biological affirmation of being. Opposed to the earthworks of the 1970's, which use nature in its most literal sense, my purpose and interest is rooted in nature's symbolic meaning. My works do not belong to the modernist tradition, which exploits physical properties and an enlarged scale of materials. Nor is it akin to the commercially historical-self-conscious assertion of what is called post-modernism. My art is grounded on the primordial accumulations, the unconscious urges that animate the world, not in an attempt to redeem the past, but rather in confrontation with the void, the orphanhood, the unbaptized earth of the beginning, the time that from within the earth looks upon us.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid, 284.

³⁷ Ibid, 293

CHAPTER 4
STATE OF RESEARCH: EXPLORING AND REDRESSING HER
ABSENCE IN THE ART WORLD

Much has been written on Ana Mendieta by critics, other artists, and art historians in an attempt to understand the meaning of her art and its relevance. Although interpretations of Mendieta's art and her art historical position vary considerably, I believe there are several prominent themes that run throughout the literature on her. I chose what I believed are some of the most relevant writings that form a strong state of research on Ana Mendieta and her art.

The most current book about Ana Mendieta is *Who is Ana Mendieta?* by Christine Redfern and Caro Caron, with an introduction by Lucy Lippard in 2011. This mash-up comic is created from various digital and print sources. It uses bits of selected existing quotes and texts by Ana that were combined and placed alongside Caro Caron's drawings. It also uses excerpts from original material to write "newspaper articles" called *Blind Spot* that reflect many events and accomplishments involving women that become hidden in our collective memory, creating a blind spot.¹ The history of the comic book can trace its beginnings to the seventeenth-century and "caricatures" named for drawings by Annibale Carracci, in which the artist drew quick pen portraits of well known persons with exaggerated features. The modern word "cartoon" derives from the Italian word "cartone," referring to large scale drawings used to transfer images to murals or canvasses. In modern times, Honoré Daumier

¹ Christine Redfern and Caro Caron. *Who Is Ana Mendieta?* New York: the Feminist Press, 2011, 39.

published several satirical political cartoons in France's *Journal* and in America, slightly later, Thomas Nast established the modern newspaper editorial cartoon. Comic books are an art form that have been in existence since the late 1930s in America and have grown from what some previously perceived as only pulp books for children to more serious material. In the 1960s, comics were given a more respected place by Pop Art and in the 1980s the comic book became seriously design conscious. As the medium evolved, it has been used for graphic memoirs, even citing the story of the Holocaust as with *Persepolis: the Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi.² Comics can be seen as either cinematic or novelistic depending on their scope and intention. The comic form is more visual than prose. The comic form can get across the image of a physical setting or person or object much more easily than prose- they can just "show it"- as too much dialogue takes up too much space.³ Comics can offer a mix of satire and seriousness.

Mostly illustration, this book is aimed at recognizing Ana Mendieta as a feminist, one of many feminist women artists who made a strong statement yet were barely recognized for their accomplishments. It also explores her volatile relationship with Carl Andre and how her death was curiously tied to him (although he was acquitted). Lucy Lippard described the book as "... a diatribe against violence against women, an activist protest in itself, one that Mendieta would have approved of even before her death."⁴ The format of the book, the graphic novel form, is ideally suited to insurrection as it was heir to Latin photo-novellas and

² Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (Philadelphia: De Capo Press) 2007, 12.

³ Ibid, 25-26

⁴ Redfern and Caron, *ibid*, 9

the wave of women's comics that rose up in the 1960s. As it is graphically enhanced and not purely textual, it becomes more accessible and effective, as noted earlier. Christine Redfern and Caro Caron have taken on the Mendieta story as a microcosm of the societal fear of women that in turn engenders women's fear of men.⁵ This book also speaks of Ana as a feminist and political artist who was often seen by critics as "white" probably because of her upper-class background in Cuba. However, she was in fact "brown" and strongly identified with people of color. Her personal history was at the heart of her personal lack of identity and her ongoing sense of isolation. Her work was a process of self-discovery, self-affirmation, and exorcism of pain--not narcissistic as seen by some because she used her own body as a raw material.⁶

Her death is described as one of millions of suspicious deaths of women despite years of feminist struggle. It is related to current times, where the issue is all too present, in view of the unsolved murders of hundreds of women around the city of Juarez and northern Mexico. The directness of this graphic novella is the ideal vehicle, says Lucy Lippard, for the outrage women feel about the extent of domestic and general violence against us, and avenging the loss of women like Ana Mendieta.⁷

This book brings to life what many want to ignore: Ana Mendieta's life and the circumstances of her death. It puts her in context with other artists, such as Carolee Schneeman, Hannah Wilke, Frida Kahlo and the Guerilla Girls. It portrays Ana as strong yet pushed aside in her life and in her death because she was a woman. Also in the book, we

⁵ Ibid, 10

⁶ Ibid, 14

⁷ Ibid, 15

learn that when this book was brought before an editorial committee in New York City for review, no one under forty recognized her name (although she still is probably the most famous Cuban artist of the twentieth century). *Who is Ana Mendieta?* is not an attempt to defend the art of Ana Mendieta. Rather, it is a confrontation with the void into which her work, like the work of so many other women, has fallen.⁸

In following this trajectory, *Where is Ana Mendieta?* by Jane Blocker in 1999 starts by bringing attention to the protestors in front of the Guggenheim museum in New York in June of 1992.⁹ This demonstration was in response to a variety of injustices: not just the exclusion of women from an art museum, but their persistent absence from a wide range of domains of power; not just the marginalization of people of color, symbolized by Ana Mendieta, but the seemingly institutional sanction of a judicial verdict that pronounced Carl Andre innocent of having killed her.

The question on the banner held up by protestors, “*Where is Ana Mendieta?*” is rhetorical; that is, it asks but really does not want an answer. The literal answer is that her ashes are buried in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and that, in itself, is painfully dissatisfying. By asking where she is, her protestors are really asking where she is not. It makes palpable and demands a space for Mendieta’s incoherence and illegibility within terms of the permanent

⁸ Ibid, 40

⁹ This protest was organized by the Women’s Action Coalition (WAC), formed in 1991. At this time, the group numbered about fifteen hundred nationally and included Raquel Mendieta, and Lucy Lippard, among others. According to Raquel Mendieta, the specific invocation of Ana Mendieta and Carl Andre by her group was not sanctioned by the larger organization because it feared alienating the art world leaders loyal to or associated with Andre.

collection. It performatively reproduces her absence and makes her an elusive powerful figure.¹⁰

By asking the question, where is Ana Mendieta? the protestors neatly summarized the central paradox of writing about this artist. They are effectively articulating the perception that despite 25 years of critical success and worldwide exposure, Mendieta is missing. It brings to light the questions: to what degree can Ana Mendieta, about whom scores of articles, reviews, and catalogs have been written, whose work has been shown in over a hundred exhibitions around the world, be in need of such rescue? To what degree is she in peril of being forgotten? The complex answer combines her celebrity, critical acclaim, and exposure from the raw circumstances of her death; remembrance is a process and is carried out through constant repetition and renewal. “Where?” serves as a living reminder rather than a stone marker for that loss.¹¹

This protest and subject of this book bring forward the sense that Ana Mendieta’s dislocation persists. She is tied up with many things whose regular disappearance from the art world is mystifying and shocking. Even in 1992, after twenty years of feminist art, the Guggenheim so unapologetically set forth its myopic vision of modern art. Five years later, in 1997, *Artnews* published its list of “the fifty most powerful people in the art world” which included only six women and one non-white man. The politics of backlash remind feminists that gender equality is neither simple nor final. “Where?” can be a powerful weapon in which

¹⁰ Blocker, *Ibid*, 2

¹¹ *Ibid*. 2-3

feminism and multiculturalism are officially approved tourist attractions on a new world map.¹²

Ana Mendieta's short life, aesthetic choices, gender, ethnicity, and politics have contributed to her absence from a variety of discursive sites. The question the title asks interrogates her absence, but also reveals a willful refusal to appear as an act of transgression. By asking "Where?" and being unable definitively to provide an answer, this question places her in motion, thwarting the logic of fixed categories and making space for alternative identifications. The question is a metaphor for the task of writing this book, as the question posed, "Where is Ana Mendieta?" also means, where can history locate her? Locating meaning both "accidentally to find" and "intentionally to position." Can she be found in her works of art? Can her works of art help reconstruct her complex identity, or be used to limit the categories by which her identity itself is defined? What investments do historians bring to the work of finding her?

Jane Blocker explains her project as being twofold. First, by identifying Ana Mendieta within art history, finding a place for her in art, her ethnicity, her nationality, and her gender. She sketches her relation to conceptual and earth art, post minimalism and feminism, critical theory and performance art, to claim that her work made a significant contribution to postmodern critical practice. At the same time, Blocker wants to recognize the inherent limitations of fixing her place in art history.¹³ In conclusion, Blocker describes Ana Mendieta as an artist who is unclaimed by historical discourse. She finds herself in a

¹² Ibid. 3

¹³ Ibid, 3-4

contradictory position of wanting to save her both through history and from history. Her task was to produce a narrative about her, legitimize her work, and to claim a space for her in the art historical canon; She answers the question “Where?”¹⁴

In writing this book about Ana, Blocker recognizes that one of the greatest achievements in Mendieta’s art is that it does not fit perfectly into any art historical discourse. Her work is not completely unprecedented, but it does ask art history to let go of the past, which by definition it cannot do. It challenges us to come up with new methods of critical and historical analysis that preserve the past through repetition rather than storage. We need an art history that does not save, but that performs. How else will we be able to write ourselves out of the ill-fitting categories that all artists of this period, not just Mendieta, are stuck? This book was aimed at placing Ana Mendieta within a set of issues that matter in her lifetime and still matter today.¹⁵

Unseen Mendieta by Olga Viso in 2008, the current leading authority on the art of Ana Mendieta¹⁶, emphasizes the fact that despite major survey exhibitions by museums in the United States, Europe and Latin America, a large body of her work is still unknown. Viso’s emphasis is not about Ana as woman but a study about her as an unknown artist. Viso brings to life the hundreds of slides, photographic negatives and contact sheets as well as revealing pages from the artist’s sketchbooks. These works are organized to defining themes of her

¹⁴ Ibid. 132

¹⁵ Ibid. 133-34

¹⁶ Director at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis currently, previously she was the director of the Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C. as well as the curator of Contemporary Art since 1995. In that capacity she organized the exhibition *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985*, which opened at the Whitney Museum in NY in 2004 as well as at the Miami Art Museum and the Des Moines Art Center. She has devoted much of her career to contemporary art of Latin America.

work, providing us with a visual survey of her entire career. The thirteen year period that Ana Mendieta produced art has often defied classification due to her pioneering and diverse work, and the fact that she resisted labeling herself. She was an artist with transcultural identity who used a variety of media to produce and/or document her work. She also explored complex issues involving cultural identity and human sexuality as her work was an extension of herself and her own internal struggles. These elements all led to a hybrid practice that defied the language of traditional art history.

Mendieta resisted the language she felt the art world would impose upon her by developing her own vocabulary to describe her approach. For example, she used the term “earth-body work” to describe her performance based actions in the landscape as she resisted her art being classified as “performance” in the strict sense, as she did not require an audience or public platform for that body of work to be activated or completed. This language also recognized the syncretic nature of her practice that freely borrowed archetypal symbols from a variety of cultures as well as her own mixed heritage as a Cuban American. Yet, her attempts to clarify her art did not eliminate the misunderstanding of her work and the contributions her art made to twentieth-century art. Her tragic, untimely death helped perpetuate misconceptions about her work during the following decades.¹⁷

A complete picture of her production as an artist was obscured until the late 1990’s by the limited access to her archives. With her death being so sudden, her family had no idea how to manage her estate, and she was not formally represented by a gallery. This archive which included thousands of 35mm slides, eighty-one Super 8 film reels, hundreds of printed

¹⁷ Viso, *Ibid*, 8

photographs, black and white negatives and contact sheets, as well as loose drawings, sketchbooks and correspondence was in a state of relative disarray. She was still emerging as an artist establishing her career. In 1991, after being consumed by the trial of Carl Andre, her family started comprehensively assessing the archive after Galerie Lelong in New York assumed representation of the estate that same year. At that point, scholars began to investigate her legacy and more of her works were made public through exhibitions, publications and the posthumous photographic edition of twenty images of *Siluetas* made by the artist in Iowa and Mexico in the 1970's¹⁸. For over a decade after her death, her art was known and primarily understood through these prints and a selection of drawings and sculptures presented by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, in 1988.¹⁹

It was not until the mid-1990s that the works created at The University of Iowa in the early 1970s were seen, including photographs and short films of live actions and studio performances. The avid interest of scholars researching her, including Julia P. Helzberg and Gloria Moure, led Galerie Lelong to provide greater access to the archive by organizing the inventory of 35 mm slides in 1998-99. In early 2000, the Mendieta family and Galerie Lelong began to restore the Super 8 films, a process that is ongoing. All of these efforts led to new research of Ana Mendieta.²⁰

As new revaluations of her art continued, she is now seen as contributing to major international movements in art of the 1970s, including feminist art, conceptual photography

¹⁸ Mary Jane Jacob. *Ana Mendieta: The Silhouette Series 1973-80*. New York: Galerie Lelong, 1991., 9.

¹⁹ Petra Barreras del Rio and John Perreault. *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*. New York: The New York Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987, 9.

²⁰ Viso, *Ibid*, 9

and land art. She has joined the roster of other performance-based and environmental artists as we have a deeper understanding of her pioneering work as an intermedia artist. Despite her growing recognition, a great deal of her work still remains unseen and unknown even to knowledgeable scholars of contemporary art. The fact that these and other works remain hidden is not surprising as Mendieta had not resolved how to present her works publicly; additionally, she lacked exhibition opportunities and financial resources to create broader exposure of her art.

Over the past decade, the artist's representatives as well as curators, including Viso, have struggled with how best to present this unseen aspect of her production. Olga Viso's volume is an earnest attempt to bring to light the rich body of Ana Mendieta's unseen works in a manner that respects the integrity of the artist's practice. Her aim is to make available more of Mendieta's prolific production and reveal her tremendous spirit of experimentation and demanding and rigorous methods. Hundreds of completely unknown images are reproduced in this book as well as previously unpublished views of more familiar pieces which deepen our understanding of the artist's intentions in creating them. The thematic grouping of these works is how the author chose to represent them and to give them a narrative and continuity.²¹

The sketchbook pages reproduced by Viso show the translation of Ana's ideas and research into realized works of art; the drawings also confirming that her works were well-planned and thought out, rather than completely spontaneous actions. The selection of photographs shows the variations on her *Siluetas* and her return to favorite work sites such as

²¹ Ibid, 12

Old Man's Creek in Iowa City. Viso's chronology of Ana's life and career further underscores the importance of her working sites. The final chapter in this book presents project proposals reproduced for the first time and highlight her potential evolution as an artist had she lived beyond age 36.

Although all of these works were chosen by Viso and not the artist, Viso makes clear that the choices were informed by more than five years of extensive research, intimate knowledge of the artist's archive, and approximately one hundred interviews with the Mendieta family, artist peers, curators and friends. Her aim was simply to reveal the raw originality of who she feels is one of the most inventive and iconoclastic artists of the late twentieth century.²²

Also by Olga Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985* in 2004 is a study of the various interpretations of her art. For some, her work in nature is a nostalgic return to an ancient past rife with mystical and metaphysical associations; for others, her body-centered, performance-based actions are grounded in the reality of the present and address female identity and women's ongoing struggle for voice and authority. Still others consider her expressions of loss and absence, which are related to her own exile from Cuba at a young age, as personally charged and at times highly emotional. For many, her art subtly embodies the conflicts of identity commonly suffered by displaced individuals. For Olga Viso, it is the ability of Mendieta's art to engage viewers in a range of complex

²² Ibid, 13

discourses, during and after her lifetime, that has given her work such lasting power and influence.²³

Viso discusses Mendieta's use of the female form as representative of a universal power that gives Ana's work great emotional poignancy sometimes leading to limited, stereotypical interpretations of it. Until the mid-1990s, Ana's work was rarely considered outside the context of feminism or the works of other exiles or artists of Latina heritage. This stereotype was reinforced in the press after her death in 1985. Consistently focusing on her gender and Latina identity along with the violent nature of her demise, writers saw Mendieta and her art as symbolic voices against male violence and their marginalization of women in the art world.²⁴

Viso does focus on Mendieta's life and death contributing symbolically to the ongoing feminist cause. She cites the potent example of the event that the WAC, Women's Action Coalition, held on June 25, 1992, just before the public inauguration of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's New York SoHo branch, where five-hundred member faction of the WAC demonstrated with signs reading "Where is Ana Mendieta?"²⁵ She goes on to discuss how, in the mid-1990s, the perception of Mendieta began to shift. Ana began to join the lexicon of conceptual and performance-based artists of her own generation, such as Marina Abramovic, Hannah Wilke, and Adrian Piper. She also was linked to her immediate predecessors such as Vito Acconci, Richard Smithson and Carolee Schneeman. Her work

²³ Viso, *Ibid*, 21

²⁴ *Ibid*, 25

²⁵ For more information regarding this protest, consult Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performance, and Exile* (Durham and London: Duke University Press) 1999.

was recognized by many as having a forceful power focusing on critical discussions on gender and identity related topics while resisting essentialist categorization. Further, Ana's approach continues to have relevance for artists working today where rigid notions of ethnicity are challenged while preserving aspects of individual and cultural histories.²⁶

Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985 by Olga Viso builds on the more expansive dialogue surrounding Mendieta's art that has emerged in the academic and critical press since the mid-1990s. Covering a period of nearly fifteen years, this study traces the artist's development from her early performance based works made at The University of Iowa in Iowa City to the evolution of her *Siluetas* series and earth-body sculptures and her final bodies of work from the 1980s where she attempted to make her ephemeral works more lasting and permanent.²⁷

In looking at the questions, "Who is Ana Mendieta" and "Where is Ana Mendieta" we are faced with poignant truths that have different trajectories, yet the same implications. In looking at "Who?", Ana Mendieta was a Cuban-American woman, and an artist who delved into a myriad of art forms including performance and earth works. She created works that spoke to the ideas of feminism as well as displacement, as she herself was displaced by the Cuban Revolution at a young age. She ended up married a famous Minimalist artist, Carl Andre, and after a volatile relationship was dead not long after from a fall out of her apartment building's window.

²⁶ Ibid, 26

²⁷ Ibid, 26

Mendieta was a strong, outspoken, woman who shared all of who she was and what she believed in through her art in various forms. In looking at the literature, we are clear that Ana Mendieta was an artist that one cannot put in any art historical context without some overlapping due to her individual and specific ways of working. This inability has been difficult for art historians and critics alike as it is preferred for artists to fit neatly into a designated area. Ana Mendieta was a true artist, a sister, a daughter, and a wife, whose life was ended way too early and without true resolution.

In looking at “Where?”, in a literal sense, Ana Mendieta surfaced in Iowa after her Cuban exile, and then worked all over the world, including other U.S. cities including New York, where she ended up living, and Cuba where she reclaimed her roots. The word “where” more importantly lends to her significance in Twentieth Century art. The lack of exposure for women artists as a whole affected Mendieta’s lack of personal exposure, and it could be argued that the fact that she was Cuban, another “other”, also played a part in this problem. Her contribution to Twentieth Century art is huge, as she tackled subject matter that were often taboo, such as rape and religion, as well as using forms that were not easily digested by all, such as her naked body and her use of blood. Her work fits in part with the performance art and earth work scenes, yet she also produced drawings and sculpture putting her in the realm of a more refined visual artist. She moved back and forth between these medias, using film and photographs to document much of her work, although much was left unseen until more recent times. Most importantly, in asking “where?”, I will now examine Ana Mendieta’s exhibition history, and correlate it with a growing recognition of her and her work, showing how it has been redressed in current times. The correlation between Mendieta

and her relationship with Carl Andre leading to this recognition is something that also must be noted, as his notoriety potentially helped to place her on the artist map as he was well-known. As the exhibition history is evaluated, it will help determine this fact as well.

Ana Mendieta had sixty-nine group shows from 1975 to 1985, the year of her death. The most in one year was fourteen. That year was in 1981, one year after her relationship with Carl Andre got serious. Ten were in 1979, the year she met Carl Andre, and seven were in 1980, the year her relationship with Andre grew. These facts lead me to believe that her romance with a well-known male artist did, in fact, elevate her status. Only eleven group shows followed her death from 1986 to 1989. Then, in a seemingly renewed interest there were over 250 group exhibitions from 1990 to 2011. This number is a clear indication that her work is being recognized and appreciated.

As for solo exhibitions, Mendieta had fifteen from 1976 to 1985, often one a year. In 1986, following her death, not one solo show occurred. From 1987 to 2011, forty-three solo exhibitions happened.²⁸ This rationale aligns with the thought process that went along with her group shows. Her group exhibits as well as her solo exhibits increased in more recent times, after a dip at the time of her death. It is encouraging that her works are being shown, whether in group or solo shows, and at a much faster pace. Along with books like *Unseen Mendieta* by Olga Viso and the unveiling of many of those works by her family and the Galerie Lelong in New York, Ana Mendieta's art works have been continually made visible and continue to gain momentum. It is easier now to find out "where" Ana Mendieta is, and to

²⁸Galerie Lelong

learn more about “who” she was, which shows growth in the art historical world that with hope, will continue to expand and thrive.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Ana Mendieta Reconsidered

Ana Mendieta's works, to me, are highly personal and emotionally charged. Over her career they were created at first to evoke emotion in others, later morphing into works that seem to be made more for her own self. A central event in her life was her return to her homeland Cuba, after which we see a growing self-fulfillment in her art. Throughout her entire career, her feminist stance was always clear, and she remains for me to be one of the most important women artists, both past and present. Her work is challenging to put into any art historical context as she straddles many media. To me, the fact that she was a woman, and a woman of color, clearly lends to her lack of notice as an artist. Her relationship with Minimalist artist Carl Andre, despite speculations about his role in her death, helped catapult her career. The dialogue regarding her work will continue because of the myriad concepts, materials, and formats she used for her art. In the end, Ana Mendieta is a profound female Latina artist; more broadly, she is a true artist who should be recognized as a true visionary whose work will never be forgotten and continues to be researched and discovered.

The work in the last decade of Ana Mendieta's life was closely tied to the earth, starting with her *Siluetas* in Mexico, leading her to Iowa, Cuba, and Europe. She produced over 200 works where she used the earth as a sculptural medium using sand, rocks, mud, soil, clay, flowers and more. Using all of these sites and products of the earth showed her thoughts on the changes in ideas of culture and time. Her work is meant to defy cultural time as a

progressive sequence. This construction of collective history was based on gender, race, and alternative cultural specificity while it worked against art's traditions, negating all forms and boundaries.¹ Her work had power and magic with its mixture of philosophies provoked by the anti-art movements in the 1960s and 1970s, feminist issues and elements related to Santeria rituals.

Her dedication to the earth can be linked to an African custom Ana Mendieta found analogous to her work. With this custom, the men from the Kimberly seek their wives from various other areas and bring her home to wed. The wife brings with her a sack of earth from her homeland, and every night eats a little piece of that earth to help transition her from her homeland to her new home.² This beautiful custom speaks about Mendieta's work, and it is clear why a written description of this custom was found in a letter she wrote in the early 1980s. The following passage written by Ana stresses the importance of the earth to her art:

I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette). I believe this has been direct result of my having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence. I am overwhelmed by the feeling of being cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe. It is a return to the maternal source. Through my earth/body sculptures I become one with the earth...I become an extension of nature and nature becomes an extension of my body. This obsessive act of reasserting my ties with the earth is really the reactivation of primeval belief...[in] an omnipresent female force, the after-image of being encompassed within the womb, is a manifestation of my thirst for being.³

¹ Vera L. Zolberg and Joni Maya Cherbo, ed. *Outsider Art: Contesting boundaries in contemporary culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 167-168.

² *Ibid.*, 162.

³ Ana Mendieta, unpublished statement 1981, quoted in many sources including, Donald Kuspit, *Redeeming Art*, 218.

Unfortunately, many know Ana Mendieta, for her death rather than her life, as her death is still unsolved. Mendieta's posthumous notoriety helps spread the knowledge of her art. Our growing knowledge of her art explains the rise of her popularity, surpassing her burdens of being a Cuban woman artist.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1

Ana Mendieta, Untitled (*Grass on Woman*), 1972, photographer unknown, color silver gelatin photograph, 8" x 10", Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden [Viso, Olga. *Unseen Mendieta*, 77]



Figure 2

Ana Mendieta, Death of a Chicken, 1972, photographer unknown, 35 mm color slide, New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 44]



Figure 3

Ana Mendieta, Imagen de Yagl, 1973, photographer unknown, chromogenic print, 20 x 13 ¼", San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 109]



Figure 4

Ana Mendieta, Untitled (*Tree of Life* series), 1976, photographer unknown, Type c photograph, 33.6 x 50.7 cm, New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 120]

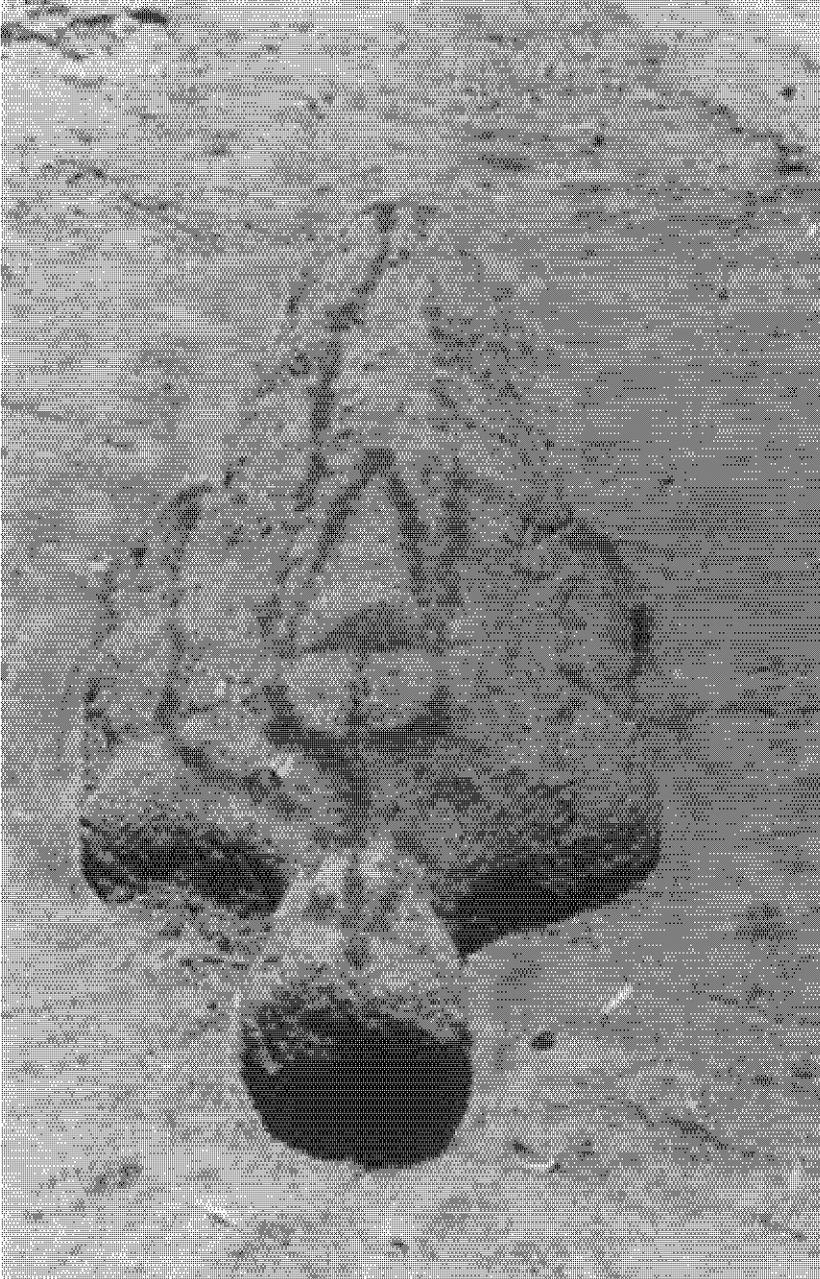


Figure 5

Ana Mendieta, Untitled (*Fetish* series), 1977, photographer unknown, 35 mm color slide, London, Phillips de Pury & Company [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 144]

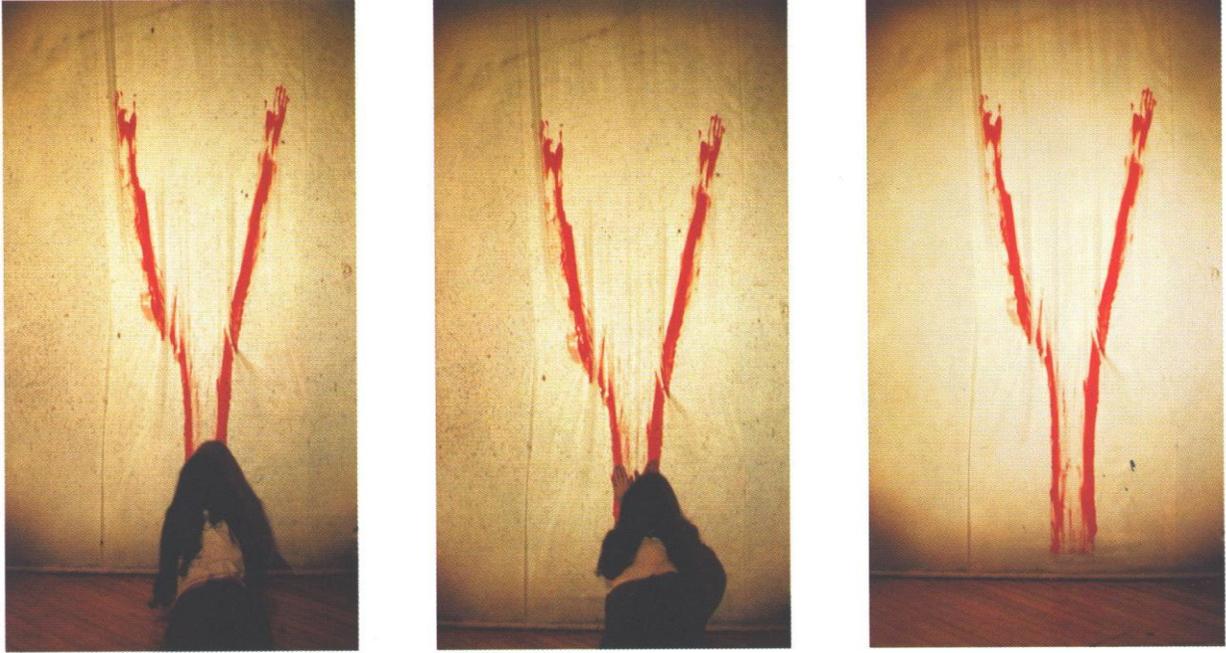


Figure 6.1-6.3

Ana Mendieta, Body Tracks, 1978, videographer unknown, 35 mm slides and Super-8 color, silent film, New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga, *Ana Mendieta : Earth Body*, 211]



Figure 7.1-7.6

Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Volcano series)*, 1978-1980, photographer unknown, x 13 ¼" x 20", Los Angeles, Griffin Gallery [Exhibition Catalog, *Ana Mendieta: Body Tracks*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, 2002, pp. 108-111]



Figure 8

Ana Mendieta, Guabancex, Goddess of Wind (*Rupestrian Sculptures*, selected image), 1981-85, photographer unknown, black & white photograph, 8" x 10", New York, Collection Raquelin Mendieta Family Trust [Viso, Olga, *Ana Mendieta : Earth Tracks*, 1993]



Figure 9

Ana Mendieta, Ochun, 1981, photographer unknown, 35 mm color slide, New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 198]



Fig. 10

Ana Mendieta, Arbitra (Witness), 1982, photographer unknown, Lifetime color photograph, 8" x 8", New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 286]



Figure 11

Ana Mendieta, Labyrinth of Venus, 1982, photographer unknown, black & white photograph, 52 ½" x 39 ¾", New York, Galerie Lelong [<http://galerielelong.com/artist/ana-mendieta>]



Figure 12

Ana Mendieta, Leaf Drawing, 1982, Design on leaf, 5 ½" x 3 ¾", New York, Galerie Lelong
[<http://galerielelong.com/artist/ana-mendieta>]

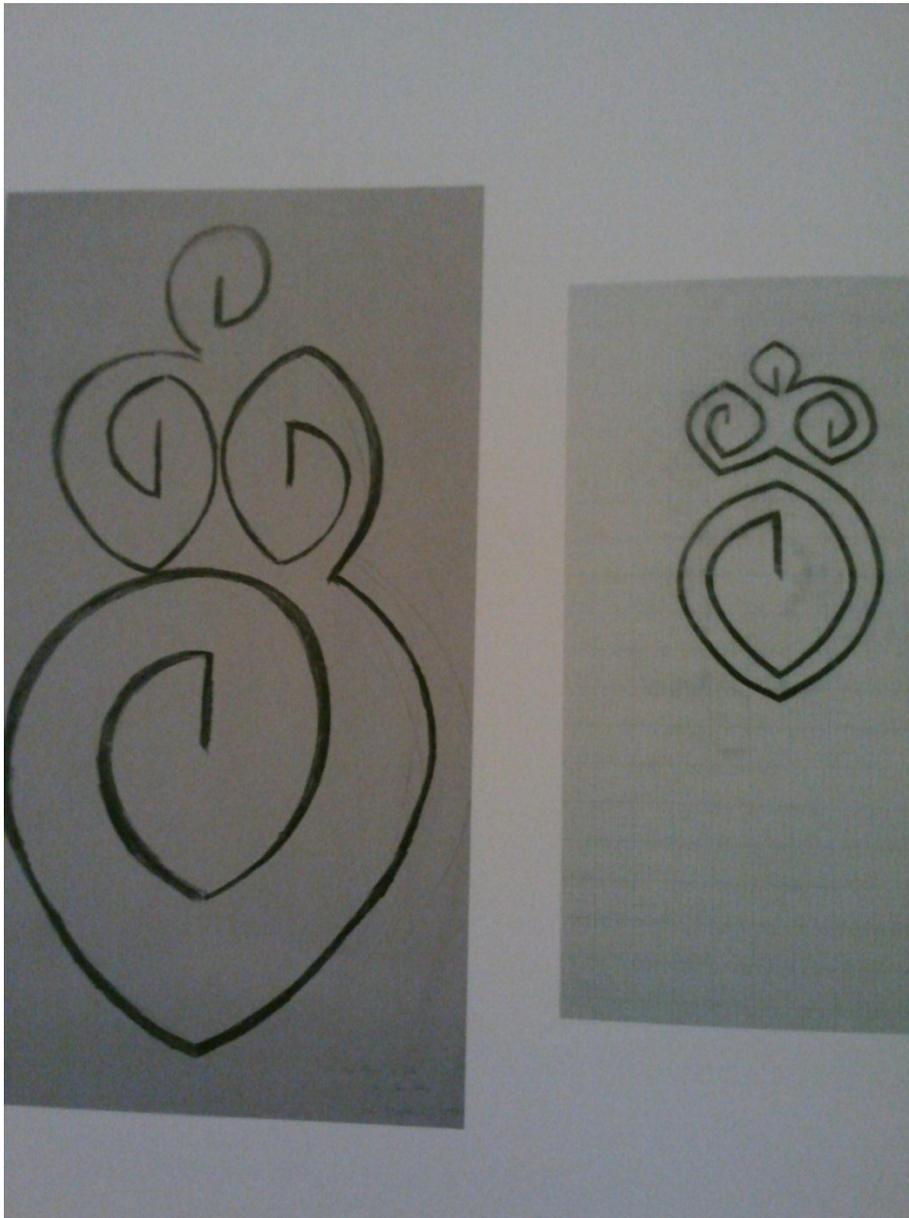


Fig. 13.1-13.2

Ana Mendieta, Left: La Maja de Yerba, 1984, Graphite on paper, 101" x 56", New York, Collection Diane and Bruce Halle, Right: Study for La Maja de Yerba, Pencil on graph paper, 42" x 21 ½", New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 292]



Fig. 14

Ana Mendieta, Furrows, 1984, photographer unknown, 35 mm color slide, Providence, Collection of Modern Art, Rhode Island School of Design, [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 283]



Figure 15

Ana Mendieta, Rape Scene, 1973, photographer unknown, 35 mm slide, New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga *Unseen Mendieta*, 55]



Figure 16.1

Ana Mendieta, Untitled (piece from *Siluetas series* in La Ventosa, Mexico), 1976, photographer unknown, 35 mm color slide, New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga, *Unseen Mendieta*, 11]



Figure 16.2

Ana Mendieta, Untitled (piece from *Siluetas series* in Iowa), 1978, photographer unknown, gelatin silver print, 19 1/2" x 15 1/2", San Francisco, Museum of Modern Art [<http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/9151>]

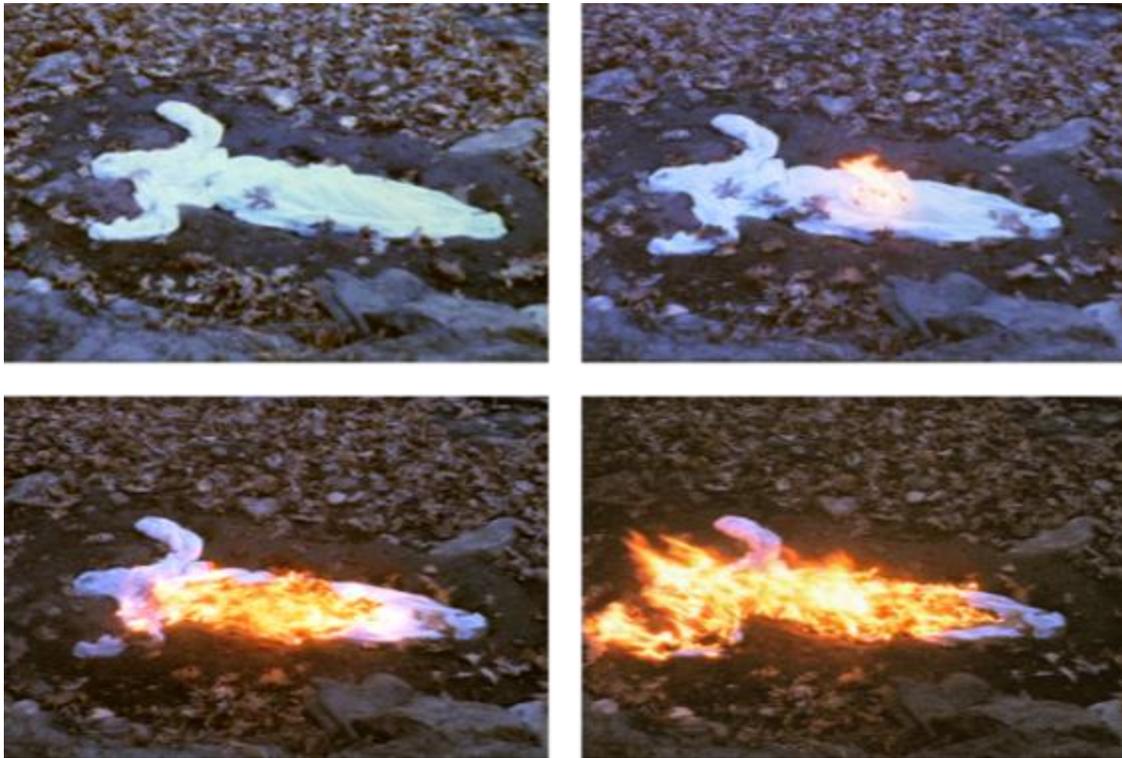


Figure 17.1-17.4

Ana Mendieta, *Alma Silueta en Fuego (Soul Silhouette on Fire)*, 1975, videographer unknown, Super-8 color, silent film transferred to DVD, New York, Galerie Lelong [<http://galerielelong.com/artist/ana-mendieta>]



Figure 18

Ana Mendieta, Corazon de Roca con Sangre (Heart of Rock with Blood), 1975, videographer unknown, 8 mm color film transferred to DVD, variable projection size (max 5' x 5'), New York, Galerie Lelong, [<http://www.phillipsdeputy.com/auctions/lot-detail/ANA-MENDIETA/NY010607/123/2/1/12/detail.aspx>]



Figure 19

Ana Mendieta, Nanigo Burial, 1976, photographer unknown, black & white photograph of installation, 60 x 40 1/2", New York, Galerie Lelong [<http://le-beau-vice.blogspot.com/2011/09/ana-mendieta-galerie-lelong-dair-et-de.html>]



Figure 20

Ana Mendieta, Totem Grove, 1984-85, series of four sculptures of wood and gunpowder, left to right: 78 ½" x 26 ½" x 24", 81 ¼" x 21 x 16", 72 ½" x 17 ½" x 13 ¼", 79 ½" x 25 x 21", New York, Galerie Lelong [Viso, Olga, *Ana Mendieta : Earth Works*, 121]

BIOGRAPHICAL TIME LINE

ANA MENDIETA (1948-1985)

- November 18, 1948 Born in Havana, Cuba to Raquel and Ignacio Mendieta
- September 11, 1961 Immigrated to the United States under “Operation Peter Pan”
- 1961 through 1965 Lived in a series of foster homes in Iowa
- 1965 Graduated from Regis High School, Sioux City, Iowa and enrolled in Briar Cliff College, Siuox City, Iowa
- January 29, 1966 Ana’s mother Raquel and younger brother Ignacio leave Cuba on Freedom Flight and settle in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, near Ana and her sister Raquelín
- 1967 Transferred to the University of Iowa, Iowa City, and studied the art of primitive and indigenous cultures during the Fall semester
- 1969 Began graduate studies in painting at the University of Iowa and met Hans Breder, a professor of art at the University whom she developed a professional and romantic partnership that lasted through the summer of 1980
- 1970 Breder established the Intermedia program at the University of Iowa as a formal degree program, in which Mendieta modeled and performed
- 1971 Traveled to Mexico for the first time and did field research in Archaeology as summer research
- 1972 Completed her first MFA, in painting, but gave up painting to concentrate on mixed media and performance. Made *Grass on Woman*, her first earth-body work, and presented *Death of a Chicken*, her first performance-based work
- 1973 Created pieces about violence against women, precipitated by the rape and murder of a University of Iowa student. Traveled to Mexico with Breder and Intermedia students and executed first *Siluetas* in the archaeological zone of Yagul, outside Oaxaca

- 1974 Returned to Mexico with Breder and made *Siluetas* at Yagul and The Church Complex at Cuilapán de Guerero, also outside Oaxaca
- 1975 After creating *Siluetas* at Old Man's Creek in Iowa, returned to Mexico with Breder and began to work with fire
- 1976 Traveled with Breder to Europe, performed *Blood and Feathers*, and created a number of *Siluetas* including one with fireworks. In Iowa, in the Fall, she initiated the *Tree of Life* series
- 1977 Created several *Siluetas* in snow and ice. Commenced the *Fetish* and *Ixchell* series at Old Man's Creek as well as *Tumbas* (tombs)
- 1978 Relocated to New York. Public performance of *Body Tracks* at Franklin Furnace, attempted to create *Siluetas* within a museum, at the College of Old Westbury. Made *Siluetas* in the upstate New York landscape and in Iowa
- 1979 Reunited with father Ignacio after eighteen years of separation and began to pursue opportunities to travel to Cuba. Returned to Iowa in the summer creating variations of the *Volcano* and *Tree of Life* series. Taught at the College of Old Westbury, New York, and became member of all women's gallery A.I.R.
- November 12, 1979 First solo exhibition at A.I.R. and met American minimalist sculptor Carl Andre
- 1980 Returned to Cuba to promote cultural exchange and relations between Cuba and the United States. Taught at the College of Old Westbury, New York. Was a visiting artist who created several outdoor works at Kean College, New Jersey. Created a gunpowder piece for *Art Across the Park*. In summer, returned to Oaxaca with Breder to do work. Her romantic involvement with Breder ended after the trip, and her relationship with Andre deepened

- 1981 Visiting artist at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Created a *Siluetta* in a Georgetown cemetery for the Washington Project for the Arts, and in May made one in Columbia. Returned to Cuba in January and July making carved and painted works in limestone rock. In September, was a visiting artist at Alfred State University making a goddess *Ceiba Fetish* and *Ochún* as a guest of Frances Wolfson Gallery Miami-Dade Community College. Began to make drawings in her New York apartment
- 1982 Guest of Real Artways at the Hartford Art School and made *Arbitra*. Worked in Pennsylvania and in Scarborough, Ontario where she carved *Labyrinth of Venus*. Began to make leaf drawings and started a book project for her *Rupestrian Sculptures* made in Cuba. Made four sculptures of moss, Plants, and stone for a solo exhibition at the Lowe Art Museum, Miami Beach. Exhibited outdoor mud coil sculptures At the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, as a guest of The University Art Museum
- 1983 Awarded the Rome prize, giving her a one-year studio residency at the American Academy in Rome to begin October
- 1984 Visiting artist at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Providence, and created *Furrows* on their lawn
- 1984 Created freestanding totemic works outside of Rome of burned and carved wood. Extended her stay in Rome beyond her residency, rented a studio on Academy grounds. Travelled extensively with Carl Andre across Europe. Participated in *Landmarks: New Site Proposals by Twenty-two Original Pioneers of Environmental Art* at Bard College, Annadale-on-Hudson, New York. Proposed *La Maja de Yerba*
- January 17, 1985 Married Carl Andre in private ceremony in Rome

September 8, 1985

Fell to her death from a window of the thirty-fourth-floor apartment on Mercer Street that she shared with Andre

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VITA

Stephanie Lynne Finkelstein was born on December 24, 1976 in St. Louis, MO. She was educated in local public schools, and graduated from Parkway North High School in 1995. She attended Forest Park Community College in St. Louis and received her Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts in 2003. She received a partial scholarship from Phi Theta Kappa Xi Epsilon Chapter and attended Webster University in Webster Groves, MO. Stephanie studied abroad in Vienna through Webster University. She received her Bachelor's Degree with a major in Art History and Criticism and a Minor in French in 2005.

After working at The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in and The Contemporary Museum of Art in St. Louis, MO in Visitor Services and Events, she moved to Kansas City, MO and started attending the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2006 for a Master's program in Art History. She attained a Graduate Curatorial Internship at The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in her first semester. While attending school, she was an Admissions Regional Coordinator at The Kansas City Art Institute and was a Volunteer Associate Curator at The Central Public Library for an exhibition showcasing Lester Goldman.

Ms. Finkelstein is currently working as an Assistant Director of Admissions at The Art Institutes International- Kansas City as she prepares to complete her Master's thesis. Upon completion of her degree, she plans to continue pursuing

her goal of working within Museum Education or Public Arts programs.

Stephanie Finkelstein is also a member of the Golden Key International Honour Society, wrote an introduction of Bill Goldston for the journal *Graphic Impressions* in the Winter/Spring 2007 edition, and was the Volunteer Manager for the Surface Design Association's Kansas City conference in 2009.