

GALERIE LELONG

528 West 26th Street New York, NY 10001

T 212.315.0470 F 212.262.0624

www.galerielelong.com

13 rue de Téhéran 75008 Paris

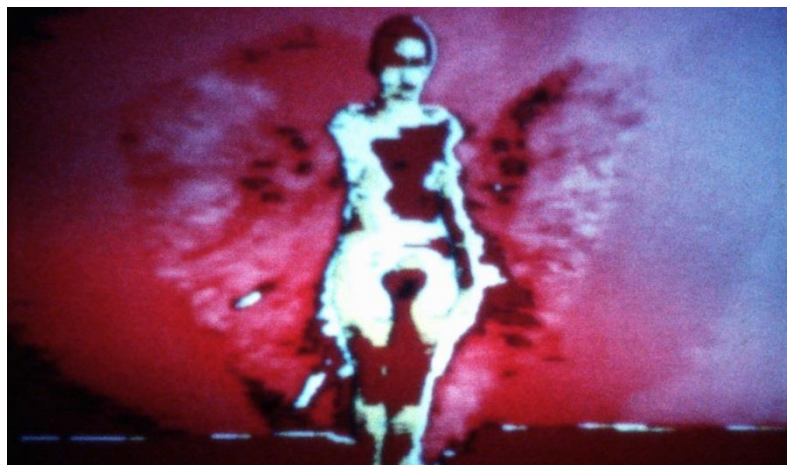
www.galerie-lelong.com

Modern Painters

March 17, 2016

by Chloe Wyma

Review: Ana Mendieta at Galerie Lelong in New York



Ana Mendieta, "Butterfly" (1975), Still from super-8mm film transferred to high-definition digital media, color, silent. Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York

Though Ana Mendieta made more than 100 short films in her short life, we nonetheless tend to think about her work in still images and about the artist herself as a kind of *idée fixe*. Mendieta is best known for her outdoor performances, for which she staged her body in various states of integration with the landscape—covered with flowers and mud or indexed by silhouettes and indentations left on the terrain. Known to us mostly through photographs, these so-called earth-body works evoke the self-primitivizing goddess politics of seventies feminism

and the artist's sense of alterity as a Cuban émigré. Meanwhile, the performances' poetics of erasure can't help but look like intuitions of her untimely death.

Devoted to Mendieta's underrepresented film production, this show includes 15 recently digitized works, nine of which are exhibited for the first time. Here we encounter Mendieta not as a mythic essence but as a mercurial, technologically oriented experimentalist.

Of the newly discovered works, the most strange and wonderful is *X-ray*, 1975. A cinefluorography machine records the black-and-white contours of Mendieta's skull while she recites nonsensical monosyllabic vocal exercises, audio from which fills the gallery. If Mendieta is too often reduced to an elusive body, here we literally go inside her head.

An overwhelming gothic sensibility pervades. In *Sweating Blood*, 1973, we watch a close-up of the artist's face, held almost perfectly still against a black background. Slowly, blood begins to pool near her hairline, trickling down her impassive face. Gore and viscera reappear in *Moffitt Building Piece*, 1973, made in response to the murder of a University of Iowa student. She placed a puddle of entrails on the street, surreptitiously filming the mostly unfazed reactions of passersby.

Mendieta's art courts mythology; it arouses cultish fascination, inspiring ritual and enchantment in even the most bone-dry materialists. It's easy to forget that this chthonic magic is always technologically mediated. *Energy Charge*, 1975, opens on a wintry, gray-

scale landscape filled with barren trees. A humanoid figure enters the frame from the bottom left and is quickly absorbed into the shadowy trunk of a mangled tree. After a pregnant pause, the gloomy landscape is ignited. The branches of the tree turn red and the figure reappears as a fiery cruciform silhouette, and then vanishes. The red figure is an editing trick, created with a 16-channel video processor, but this technologically enhanced body in the landscape also prefigures 1976's *Anima, Silueta de Cohetes*, in which Mendieta burned a wicker effigy rigged with explosives on a beach in Oaxaca, Mexico.

It's worth keeping in mind that the works on view were made while Mendieta was earning an MFA in the Intermedia program at the University of Iowa. A ludic, experimental attitude pervades the exhibition, and with it, a certain unevenness. Some works feel less like accomplished films than academic exercises. But perhaps because of this, the show makes new inroads into her work, bringing temporality—and its dialectics of drama and boredom—to bear on her beautiful, seemingly out-of-time art.