Anna Maria Maiolino  
May 25 – July 30, 2014

Studying at São Paulo State University, the artist was exposed to various cultural movements, such as the Tropicalía movement, which encompassed many popular forms of media, and the Neo-Concrete movement, which focused on the activation of the body and an empowerment of the arts, realized through an emphasis on the activation of the body and an empowerment of the spectator. In his definitive essay, "General Scheme of New-Objectivity," Oiticica writes, "Here social underdevelopment signifies, culturally, the search for national characterization, which specifically translates itself in this first premise, to constructive will." According to Oiticica, the constructive practice—which has included drawing, printmaking, sculpture, video, and performance—openings, voids, and organic materials have been central motifs, and she has focused on the body as a locus for the expression of freedom and individuality. Maiolino emigrated with her family from her native Italy to Venezuela in 1954, later settling in Brazil in 1960. In Rio de Janeiro, Maiolino enrolled in printing work-shops at the National School of the Arts, then an important center for artistic activity. It was there that she became involved with the New Figuration, Neo-Concrete, and New-Objectivity movements, working closely alongside artists such as Lygia Clark, Antonio Dias, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape.

By the 1970s, when many Brazilian artists were engaging with critical social and political issues, the Brazilian military dictatorship had reached its bleakest period, and its brutality became a subject for the arts, realized through an emphasis on the activation of the body and an empowerment of the spectator. Maiolino’s work. The military had taken power in 1964 when its leaders toppled the leftist government of President João Goulart in a coup d’état supported by President Lyndon Johnson and the Brazilian military dictatorship had reached its bleakest period, and its brutality became a subject for artistic expression: the hands. Maiolino pairs her recording of hands, set against a black background, with a tape covering the woman’s mouth—two mouths—one male wearing black lipstick, and one female wearing red lipstick—attempting to communicate while obstructed by various objects. First, we see tape covering the woman’s mouth—an obvious reference to censorship. Then we observe her mouth trying to produce an utterance as various objects intervene, including an egg (as if the mouth is going birth) and string, which multiply even as it is being swallowed and regurgitated. The title, moreover, is a reference to Oswald de Andrade’s influential Manifesto antropófago (Cannibal Manifesto), which attempted to ground Brazil’s syncretic modernism in the symbolic cannibalization and inventive reprocessing of other cultural and linguistic influences. Drawing upon the indigenous Tupi tribe’s custom of devouring its enemies in order to build strength, Andrade allegorically invoked cannibalism to reaffirm "the ethical formula of a relationship with the other that governs and transfers the ritual to the sphere of culture." Referring to the Tupi practice, Maiolino states, "This is the perfect meaning of this Super 8 film: to eat the repressive organs of the dictatorship, the enemies of freedom at that time." Although antropófago is an overt reference in the work, other themes emerge as well, specifically that of communication between male and female subjects, and the passage between interior and exterior spaces of the body. Thus, the fact that it is the woman’s mouth whose utterance is repeatedly impeded becomes significant, particularly in the context of the 1970s when Brazilian society was principally male-dominated.

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

Anna Maria Maiolino has lived and worked in São Paulo since the 1970s. Born in 1942 in Scalea, Italy, she emigrated with her family to Caracas, Venezuela in 1954 and in 1960 enrolled in the painting and engraving workshops of the National School of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro. In 1967 her work was included in Nova Objetividade Brasileira (New Brazilian Objectivity), organized by Hélio Oiticica at the Modern Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro; this groundbreaking exhibition came to define the Brazilian countercultural movement in the visual arts, music, poetry, film, and theater. In 1971, after living in New York for a couple years, Maiolino received a fellowship to attend the International Graphic Center Workshop at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn. Over the course of her fifty-year career she has been in countless exhibitions. Select solo exhibitions have taken place at Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), São Paulo; the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (2010); Camden Arts Centre, London (2010); Pharos Center for Contemporary Art, Cyprus (2007); Miami Art Central (2006); and the Drawing Center and Art in General, New York (2001). Her numerous group exhibitions include: Thought and Gesture, La Verrerie, Brussels (2015); Documenta 13, Kassel (2012); Contemporary cartographies: Drawing Thought, Fundação La Caixa, Madrid; many editions of the Bienal de São Paulo, including the 29th (2010); On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century, the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Biennale of Sydney (2008); Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007); Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2005); and Inside the Visible, Institute for Contemporary Art, Boston (1996).

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

**Works in the exhibition**

**In-Out (Antropofagia)**

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

X
1976
Super 8 film transferred to DVD; color, sound; 3 mins
Collection of the artist, courtesy Hauser and Wirth, New York

Y
1976
Super 8 film transferred to DVD; black-and-white, sound; 2:28 mins
Collection of the artist, courtesy Hauser and Wirth, New York

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

The MatriX program is made possible by a generous endowment gift from Phyllis C. Wattis and the support of the BAM/PFA trustees.