

MARIA LAI

pagine

opening: Thursday 18 January 2018 – 18.00

closes: 5th May 2018

opening hours: Tuesday to Saturday, from 16.00 to 20.00

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STUDIO STEFANIA MISCETTI is delighted to present **Pagine** (*Pages*), a solo exhibition dedicated to the work of Maria Lai, one of the most important Italian artists of the late twentieth century, whose output was recently celebrated at the 57th Venice Biennale, and as part of both the Athenian and Kassel editions of Documenta 14.

Pagine is the fourth solo exhibition dedicated to Maria Lai at the gallery, following on from the 1991 performance-installation, *La leggenda di Maria Pietra* (*The Legend of Maria Pietra*) and the solo shows *Una fiaba infinita* (*An Endless Fairytale*) in 1994 and *A portata di mano* (*Within Arm's Reach*) in 2005, as well as a long series of talks and introductions.

More than an anthology, **Pagine** seeks to pay homage to a tireless and versatile artist, one to whom the history of the Studio Stefania Miscetti is indelibly linked.

The exhibition, made possible thanks to the support of the Maria Lai Archives, brings together approximately forty pieces created between the 1950s and 2000s, ranging from work on panels and paper to ceramics, books and fabrics. The 'pages' alluded to in the exhibition title are both those literally present in the pieces exhibited, and metaphorically those relevant to the artist's personal story. Every one is emblematic of a vital and irrepressible research process which embraced, from her years at the Academy of Fine Arts onwards, a diversity of materials and techniques: from the drawings and paintings of the 1950s, to the work with fabrics, looms, bread and terracotta in the 1970s, up to the performances and environmental actions undertaken in the 1980s – including the seminal piece of collective direct action, *Legarsi alla montagna* (*To Tie Oneself to the Mountain*) in 1981. Following an interest in theatre and local action in the 1990s, in the 2000s the artist's main priority shifted to her work with schools.

This panoramic is completed by five documentaries dedicated to the artist: *Legare collegare* by Tonino Casula, *Maria Lai. Inventata da un dio distratto* by Marilisa Piga and Nicoletta Nesler, *Le fiabe di Maria Lai* by Francesco Casu, *Ansia d'infinito* by Clarita di Giovanni, *Maremuro. Appunti per un dialogo realmeraviglioso* by Massimiliano Bomba and Gianluca Scarpellino. A host of photographic and other archive material related to the artist's past work with the Studio will also be available to view at the gallery.

Stefania Miscetti would like to thank Chiara Manca, Maria Sofia Pisu and Francesco Proia for their invaluable contributions to the exhibition.

Maria Lai was born in Ulassai, in the province of Nuoro, in 1919.

After completing a teacher training diploma she moves to Rome in order to pursue her studies at art school; from 1943 to 1945 she works under the tutelage of Arturo Martini at the Venice Academy of Fine Arts.

During the 1950s and 1960s – a period marked by a connection to literature that will prove fundamental, most notably with Salvatore Cambosu and Giuseppe Dessì, who introduce her to the world of folk legends and traditions – she primarily focuses on line drawing and the painting of subjects related to the world of Sardinia and begins working on bread sculptures.

This experimentation with materials and techniques continues into the 1970s, culminating in the creation of looms, geographies and books, particularly memorable among which is the *Libro scalpo (Scalped Book)* presented in Venice in 1978.

During the 1980s, as well as creating her most important geographies and cosmogonies, she dedicates herself to local-level action and performances in Sardinia; among these, along with the aforementioned *Legarsi alla montagna*, of particular note is the recovery of the Ulassai public bathhouse in 1988, made possible thanks to the involvement of Costantino Nivola, Guido Strazza and Luigi Veronesi.

The 1990s are characterised by projects such as *Su barca di carta m'imbarco (On a paper boat I'm setting sail, Atelier sul mare di Messina, 1997)*, *Il tempo dell'Arte (The Time of Art, Su Logu de s'Iscltura di Tortoli, 1999)* and *Olio di parole (The Oil of Words, Museum of Oil of Sabina, 1999)*.

In the following years, as well as continuing her research into the use of ceramics, wood, iron, cement and other synthetic materials, she also works in theatre, writes essays on the role of the artist and the reading of works of art, and works with schools.

In 2004 she received an Honorary Degree in Literature from the University of Cagliari, and in 2011 the Premio Camera dei Deputati (Chamber of Deputies Award).

Of the many exhibitions in which she has taken part, the following merit particular mention: the first solo exhibition of drawings curated by Marcello Venturoli at the Galleria dell'Obelisco (1957); the first exhibition of looms at the Schneider Gallery (1971); *Materializzazione del linguaggio (Materialization of language, as part of the Venice Biennale, 1978)* on the invitation of Mirella Bentivoglio; *A matita (In pencil, Galleria Comunale di Cagliari, 1988)*; *Inventare altri spazi (Inventing other spaces, Scuderie di Palazzo Ruspoli, 1994)*; *La natura dell'artificio (The nature of artifice, AAM, 1994)*; *Come un gioco (Just like a game, MAN, 2002)*; *I libri di Maria Lai (Maria Lai's Books, Gnam, 2003)*; *Italics. Italian Art between Revolution and Tradition: 1968-2008 (Palazzo Grassi, 2003, and Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, 2008)*; *L'arte ci prende per mano. 100 opere di Maria Lai dal 1942 al 2011 (Art takes us by the hand. 100 pieces by Maria Lai from 1942 to 2011, MUSMA, 2014)*; *Ricucire il Mondo (Restitching the World, Nuoro, Cagliari and Ulassai, 2014)*.

The largest collection of artworks by Maria Lai is held at the Stazione dell'Arte, a foundation inaugurated by the artist herself in 2005.

Her work has been acquired by numerous Italian and foreign collections including the Civic Museums and the National Picture Gallery of Cagliari, the Museum of Art of the Province of Nuoro, the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Rome Quadrennial in Rome, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto, the Museum of Contemporary Sculpture in Matera, the Ancona Pinacoteca, the National Library of Florence, the Donnaregina Museum of Contemporary Art in Naples, the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Olnick-Spanu collection in New York.