

Mendes
Wood
DM

Rua da Consolação, 3358 Jardins
01416-000 São Paulo Brazil
T +55 11 3081 1735

Rua Marco Aurélio, 311 Vila Romana
05048-000 São Paulo Brazil

www.mendeswooddm.com

Anna Bella Geiger

Circa MMXIV, Imagination is an Act of Freedom

Curated by Bernardo Mosqueira



(to my love)

Anna Bella Geiger is one of the most important Brazilian artists of the 20th century. Her work features a rich diversity of media and procedures which never fails to surprise us, the deeper we delve into it. Anna Bella is one of the most experimental artists in the history of Brazilian engraving, one of the most relevant purveyors of the New Figuration, a recognized pioneer of video art in Brazil and part of the first generation of conceptual artists in Latin America. Her critical position has made her forever consider her very existence in the world and, as such, Place, Action, Identity and Subject – and her body of work has been largely characterized by constant, radical internal ruptures. This exhibition, which marks the beginning of Mendes Wood DM's representation of Anna Bella Geiger and the research for a large book on her over 60-year career, features work produced from 1954 to 2014.

Born in 1933, the daughter of Jewish immigrants from Poland, Geiger began her study of the arts alongside a young Lygia Pape at Fayga Ostrower's studio. At that time, in the early 1950s, her work was very much linked to abstract informalism, but, in 1965, she abandoned it in favor of figuration with the series known as “Viscerals.” To create these pieces, Anna cut the engraving plates (traditionally rectangular) into the shapes of human organs and went on to explore the insides of metal as if examining the pieces of a body that feels pain.

Mendes Wood DM

Rua da Consolação, 3358 Jardins
01416-000 São Paulo Brazil
T +55 11 3081 1735

Rua Marco Aurélio, 311 Vila Romana
05048-000 São Paulo Brazil

www.mendeswooddm.com

In the early 1970s, Anna Bella Geiger began to engage in experimental educational activities connected to the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. Based on a study of the symbolic through her obsessive readings of Jung and Mircea Eliade, she decided to propose that her students investigate the *Center* utilizing the Earth's surface and tools that they brought with them to Marapendi Lagoon, such as shovels, rakes, hoes and ropes. The experiment was photographed and gave way to an audio-visual exhibition comprised of a slide projector and sound effects.

In 1970, Anna Bella Geiger began working on a series known as “Polarities,” in which words are of great importance. Rather than simply positioning complementary or opposing feature, here Geiger indicated coexisting elements which, due to the image-word relationship, questioned duality itself through inversions, disorientations and annulments. This sort of strategy, which approximated the axis of imagination to the axis of reflection and encouraged critical activity, is an important characteristic of works of art produced in Brazil under the military government.

In 1970, Anna managed to get some of the first photos of the moon's craters directly from NASA. Anna Bella is married to geographer Pedro Geiger, and they, like many of their friends, were involved in the left-wing political struggles in Rio de Janeiro. With four children, in a context of severe repression in which there was much fear in openly discussing the political situation in the country, Anna began printing lunar surfaces in order to create a neutral territory where she could speak freely. Much like those who stood atop soapboxes in the city squares of London.

Also during this time, Anna Bella began developing her illustrated “notebooks”-- small artist books in which she explored issues that she considered pressing, such as the art system, the history of Brazil, Brazilian culture, the relations between the First and Third Worlds, etc. In the book titled “Admission,” which parodies an ordinary school notebook, Anna Bella inserted expressions like “Hélio Oiticica” in a multiple-choice question about tropical products as part of an investigation of the formation of Brazilian identity. In one titled “The History of Brazil illustrated in chapters,” Anna Bella utilized a series of photo copies of Victor Meirelles's painting “The First Mass in Brazil” to recount the history of the colonial period from a critical point of view and also comment on the recurring massacres of indigenous communities in the 1970s. It is these notebooks that presented the original images of the famous “History of Brazil: Little Boys and Girls.” The notebook titled “About Art” originated some important pieces which the artist would develop over the years in the form of drawings, engravings, paintings and videos like *Bureaucracy*, *Ideology*, etc. In the notebooks, “New Atlas I” and “New Atlas II,” Anna Bella intensifies her subversive relationship with maps.

At that time in the 1970s, Anna Bella Geiger came to understand maps as instruments utilized to determine one's own location, as well as the location of others, and, that as such, they are efficient in maintaining dominance and cultural and political hegemonies. To investigate and act upon cartographic representation would thus be taking direct action on the relationships of control. Perhaps a different map was necessary for a different world, and these pieces by Anna Bella are examples of cartography created by a marginalized individual “at the center” of the world, and no longer the dominant individual. Her notebooks and other works produced at this

Mendes
Wood
DM

Rua da Consolação, 3358 Jardins
01416-000 São Paulo Brazil
T +55 11 3081 1735

Rua Marco Aurélio, 311 Vila Romana
05048-000 São Paulo Brazil

www.mendeswooddm.com

time actively question Europe's central position on the world map and in culture, making Anna's artwork crucial when thinking about the decolonization of art and Brazilian culture and the beginning of intentionally post-colonial art in Brazil.

After participating in several São Paulo Biennials, Anna contributed a piece to the 34th Venice Biennale entitled “Our Daily Bread.” It is an example of the pieces she developed in the 1970s and '80s in the form of postcards and amateur photography.

In the 1990s, Anna began developing a series known as Borderlines, filling the drawers of old, metal filing-cabinets with wax, in which she embedded the shapes of maps as well as other elements such as columns, angels, numbers, lines and diagrams. The drawers serve as metaphors for knowledge itself, whose fluidity is marked by the pigmentation of the wax's movement.

In the 2000s, Anna resumed her work with maps from the 1970s and paintings from the 1980s, creating new “Soft” pieces, upholstered paintings stretched over elliptical surfaces, but with sewing this time instead of paintings. Even more recently, Anna has been combining the human figure with the map format in a new kind of engraving for the first time.

The subtitle of this exhibition has appeared in writing in the artist's notes, texts and work since the 1970s. Anna Bella Geiger's work is a strong evidence of imagination as an act of freedom; it is proof of the powerful resistance of the possibility of wishing. In Rio de Janeiro, Anna Bella is known for a famous expression that she repeats to this day in her classes at the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts. After making a scathing affirmation, she smiles and says: “I'm just kidding. No I'm not.” Maybe she is: it is joking as a way to critique the culture.

Bernardo Mosqueira
October / 2014