

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

509 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011

**Marianne Boesky Gallery to Open Maria Lai Exhibition at Aspen Location,
Marking the Artist's First Solo Show in the U.S. in More Than Five Decades**

On View February 23 - April 8, 2018

Opening Reception February 23, 6:00-8:00 PM

Marianne Boesky Gallery is pleased to present *Invito a Tavola*, an exhibition dedicated to the work of artist Maria Lai (1919–2013) at Boesky West in Aspen, Colorado and on view from February 23 through April 8, 2018. The exhibition highlights Lai's career-long commitment to community, from her early drawings depicting the women of her hometown in Sardinia to a major late-career installation that invokes ideas of communion and for which the exhibition is titled. *Invito a Tavola* marks Lai's first solo exhibition in the U.S. since 1956, and provides an intimate portrait of the late artist through one of the most enduring themes from her illustrious sixty-year practice. The exhibition is the first organized by the gallery since it commenced representation of the artist's archive in November 2017, and serves as a precursor to a broader exhibition of Lai's work in New York in 2019.

The exhibition is anchored by the installation *Invito a Tavola (The Invitation Table)*, which is comprised of a large-scale table, measuring approximately nine feet in length and three feet in width, set with terracotta-cast breads and books. The work, created in 2004, expresses Lai's deeply felt belief that art provides essential nourishment for the soul, and at the same time suggests the importance of breaking bread as a means of binding communities together and healing discord. The installation also underscores Lai's experimentation, play, and mastery of materials, which can also be seen in her extensive work with textiles. *Invito a Tavola* has not previously been displayed in the U.S., and is one of only two such installations produced by the artist. The second is on display in Lai's birthplace, Ulassai, at the Stazione Dell'Arte, a museum dedicated to Lai's work.

The exhibition also features a selection of Lai's early drawings, which depict the women of Ulassai in their daily routines. Inspired by the poetry and teachings of her close friend and mentor Salvatore Cambosu, and concerned in particular with the female voice, Lai developed a rhythmic visual language that interpreted the domestic and social lives of these women. Her drawings and watercolors, produced between 1958 and 1965, gave way to a deep and long-lasting engagement with the loom and textiles—one that would shift her focus from realistic representation to an interrogation of gesture and the collective experience. Indeed, the large-scale tapestry included in *Invito a Tavola* includes the line, "Every work of art must become bread to be shared at a common table."

Perhaps even more than her object-based practice, performance and community-activated engagement were at the core of Lai's career. Her most famous of these works is *Legarsi alla Montagne (To Bind to the Mountain)*, which she created in 1981 as a "monument to the living" in response to a request to make a war memorial in Ulassai. In this social action, inspired by a local legend, neighbors tied blue fabric together, creating a single ribbon that wove around homes and other structures until it encircled a peak that overlooked the town. The performative work served to physically and metaphorically bind the town, mountain, and people, establishing a sense of community and bringing the individual into a bigger whole. This work led to the development of other social actions initiated by Lai in cities across Italy and Europe.

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“We worked very closely with Maria Sofia Pisu, Maria Lai’s niece, to develop this exhibition as an introduction to the artist’s diverse and dynamic practice, which encompasses drawings, watercolors, sculpture, textile-based works, performances, and community actions. In selecting the works to best re-introduce, and in some instances, introduce for the first time, this exceptional artist to American audiences, we kept coming back to notions of community. Throughout her long and celebrated career, Maria Lai’s commitment to her home community in Sardinia and to the importance of art as a unifying experience never wavered. The object-based works in *Invito a Tavola* frame the spectrum of singular approaches she took to expressing this devotion. We are delighted to present this first exhibition at Boesky West, where the experience of Maria Lai’s captivating works is further accentuated by the beautiful Aspen landscape,” said Marianne Boesky. Indeed, the Aspen landscape and mountains recall the mountainous terrain of Lai’s Sardinia—and her hometown Ulassai in particular. Even such subtle connections became explicit and important decisions for Boesky West to premiere these pieces from Lai’s career within the United States.

More About Maria Lai

Maria Lai was born in Ulassai, Sardinia in 1919. Though her early artistic endeavors took her to Rome and Venice, she was often drawn back to the customs and histories of the island, and in particular to the lives and voices of the women who lived there. Over the course of her illustrious sixty-year career, her work was shown extensively in solo exhibitions throughout Italy and Europe, and she was invited to participate in group shows across the globe, including at the Venice Biennale of 1978. In addition to her visual and social arts practice, which encompassed works on paper, sculpture, textiles, performances, and community actions, Lai collaborated with several theater companies, including Fueddu and Gestu. She received a degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice in 1943, and in 2004, she was awarded an honorary degree in Literature from the University of Cagliari. Following her death in 2013 in Cardedu, institutions in the towns of Cagilari, Nuoro, and Ulassai came together to present a major, joint retrospective of Lai’s work. Most recently, her work was included in documenta14 in Athens and the Venice Biennale, both in 2017, and in March of 2018, the Uffizi Gallery Museum in Florence, Italy will open a retrospective of her practice.

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For more information about Maria Lai, please contact Gallery Director Mary Cecilia Mitsch at mary@boeskygallery.com or 212.680.9889. For press inquiries, please contact Alina Sumajin, PAVE Communications and Consulting, at alina@paveconsult.com or 646-369-2050.

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