

## MASSIMODECARLO

### MARIA LAI

Massimo De Carlo is pleased to present three solo presentations by Andra Ursuța, Maria Lai, and Carl Andre. Spanning several generations and countries, the exhibition explores three unique and idiosyncratic voices in various trajectories of art history, with each artist displaying a distinct approach to their practice, unified by a level of intensity towards the subject matter chosen.

Born and raised in Sardinia, Lai's hometown, Ulassia, proved to be a lifelong source of inspiration for her multifaceted practice. For this presentation of Lai's work, Massimo De Carlo is pleased to present a series of works unified by the usage of thread.

This literal and metaphorical 'thread' is woven through Lai's entire career; as Lai exhibited profound artistic talent from a young age, going on to become the first woman to study sculpture in the Accademia di Belle Arti under Arturo Martini. During the tumultuous early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lai toyed with various artistic movements such as Arte Povera, Conceptual Art, and Art Informel, and developed a long-standing interest in materials in their organic forms. Additionally, Lai's passion for literature and poetry spiked, developing highly symbiotic relationships with many poets and writers including Giuseppe Dessì and Salvatore Cambosu, who was the artist's teacher and mentor.

Through harbouring these relationships, Maria Lai increasingly gravitated towards Sardinia, rediscovering and finding much inspiration in the customs, traditions and stories of the lives of the people there. Cambosu once gave the artist a crucial word of advice – to “follow the rhythm.” Although Cambosu was referring to harmony and scansion in poetry, these words of counsel take shape in Lai's work, in the precise technique, and the clarity and occasional edgy lines of Lai's aquarelle and drawings, as well use of textiles in sculptural pieces.

Thread as a material is found in every single work presented, from *Spazio e telaio*, a sculpture of a distressed loom, abstracted with wood, thread and twine, to *Nostalgie*, part of her Sewn Books series. The thread's significance to Lai's oeuvre is unmeasurable, symbolising the harmony and coming together of elements, the alternating rhythms of words and silences, full and empty spaces, spoken and written words and the exploration of the infinite and the unknown. In all of Maria Lai's work, the gesture of weaving becomes a meditation conducted in solitude, an intimate reflection on the meaning of community, history and tradition, a poetic attempt to recreate a bond between an archaic past and a present in which memory and its transmission appear to have lost their value.

Over the course of Maria Lai's illustrious sixty-year career, work was shown extensively in solo exhibitions throughout Italy and Europe, and was invited to participate in group shows across the globe, including in the Venice Biennale of 1978. In addition to Lai's visual and social arts practice, Lai collaborated with several theatre companies, including Fueddu and Gestu. Most recently, Lai's work was included in documenta14 in Athens and the Venice Biennale, both in 2017.

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Maria Lai was born in September 27th, 1919 in Ulassai.

Her solo exhibitions include: *Maria Lai*, MAXXI, Rome, (2019); M77 Gallery, Milan, (2018); Uffizi Galleries, Palazzo Pitti, Florence (2018); Museo della Scultura Contemporanea Matera (MUSMA), Matera (2014); Isabella Bortolozzi Galerie, Berlin, (2010); Galleria L'elefante, Treviso (2008); Inaugurazione Stazione dell'arte, Ulassai (2006); Museo d'Arte Provincia di Nuoro (MAN), Nuoro (2002); Istituto Internazionale per l'arte Contemporanea, Rome, (1996).

Her work has been part of various group exhibitions including: Massimo De Carlo, Milan/Ventura, Milan (2019); Fondazione MACC, Calasetta (2018); Venice Biennale 2017: VIVA ARTE VIVA, Venice (2017); documenta 14, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, GR and Neue Museum, Kassel (2017); Triennale di Milano, Milan (2017)

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