

Marianne Boesky Gallery To Represent Archivo Maria Lai

Works by the Artist will be Shown at Art Basel Miami Beach And in a Solo Exhibition at Boesky West, Aspen, Opening in February 2018

Marianne Boesky Gallery is pleased to announce representation of Archivo Maria Lai (1919-2013), marking the first time the artist will be represented in the U.S. Lai's expressive compositions—made from a spectrum of materials, including watercolors, fabric, and clay—were influenced by literature and the oral histories of her birthplace, Sardinia. Her works, which were recently featured in *Viva Arte Viva* at the 57th Venice Biennale as well as at documenta 14, seamlessly combine the essence and traditions of her home with a universally compelling aesthetic vocabulary. Marianne Boesky Gallery will present a selection of cast and sewn works from Archivo Maria Lai at the upcoming edition of Art Basel Miami Beach at Booth B11, and will open the artist's first solo exhibition in the U.S. since 1956—organized in collaboration with Lai's niece, Maria Sofia Pisu—at its Aspen location, Boesky West, on February 16, 2018.

Performance and community-activated engagement is 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 her hometown of 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.

A sense of rhythmic gesture pervades Lai's diverse and dynamic practice. 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 visual language that interpreted the domestic and social lives of women in Sardinia. Her early watercolors and drawings, which depicted women in their daily routines, gave way to a deep and long-lasting engagement with the loom and textiles. With her *Telai (Looms)*, which she first presented in 1971, Lai liberated the loom of its function, joining its physical frame with the woven objects it produced in a series of sculptures. With this action, Lai shifted her focus from realistic representation to an interrogation of gesture and the collective experience, leading to the development of a wide range of textile-based works. Her deconstructed and woven canvases, sewn books, and maps created with thread and twine all present a mysterious, inscrutable language and universe that also feels readily familiar. This material play extended to investigations of clay, slate, paper, and even bread.

The upcoming exhibition at Boesky West will offer an intimate portrait of Lai's oeuvre, introducing audiences—many for the first time—to her innate ability to marry technical skill and collective tradition with her boundless imagination. Among the included works will be a selection of early watercolors, examples of her sewn textiles, and a table installation, which features cast bread as well as cast books, drawn from Archivo Maria Lai. The exhibition at Boesky West, which will remain open through April 8, 2018, will serve as a precursor to a broader exhibition of Lai's work in 2019 at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York. Likewise, the exhibition anticipates a survey of Lai's career at the Uffizi Gallery Museum in Florence, Italy to open March of 2018.

"I first saw Maria's work at a collector's home, and was immediately taken with it. It is, of course, beautiful and compelling from a purely aesthetic perspective, but her ability to take simple materials and transform them into complex and poetic sculptures resonated with me. She had an uncanny ability to stitch together a kind of universal

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experience that brings together disparate viewers and inspires both personal and shared responses,” said Marianne Boesky. “I am so delighted that Maria’s family was open to working with us, and am very much looking forward to helping to broaden understanding and knowledge of her practice.”

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, 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.

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