

Ana Mendieta's 'Neolithic art' recreated for major Tate Modern survey

London exhibition explores how ancient sites informed the work of the late Cuban American artist, who was best known for her performance and land art



The Tate Modern show will re-create key works from Ana Mendieta's *Silueta Series*, including *Ñañigo Burial* (1976)

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Ana Mendieta's best-known series, *Siluetas Series* (1973-80), is a collection of photographs and films that capture silhouettes of the artist's body in nature: etched in the ground, buried among flowers or even aflame. Sometimes the Cuban American artist (1948-85) is present; other times there is a faint imprint of her body. They are momentary sculptures, temporarily marking Mendieta's presence on earth.

In 1984, towards the end of her life, Mendieta began visiting Neolithic sites around Europe, including Mnajdra and Tarxien in Malta; Hadrian's Villa, Cerveteri's necropolis and Pompeii in Italy; and Newgrange in Ireland. All are places where traces of long-lost civilisations can still be felt and found carved in the ground. She began to see her ephemeral works as similar in nature, telling the journalist and art critic Channing Grey in 1984: "My work is basically in the tradition of a Neolithic art... I'm not interested in the formal qualities of my materials, but their emotional and sensual ones."

It is due to Mendieta's fascination with the emotional and sensual power of specific places that Tate Modern's new large-scale exhibition will explore her work thematically through several symbolic locations. The show will touch on her relationship with Neolithic sites, various parts of nature—like caves, woodland and water—and less tangible locations, such as "the threshold", referring to a moment of transformation.

The decision to curate in this way will allow visitors to see her work as Mendieta did—as part of a long history of expression that has deep roots in the earth and the communities preceding us. Valentine Umansky the exhibition's curator, says it is interesting that Mendieta spoke about her work being in the tradition of Neolithic art "because to people who know her work, she's the most contemporary artist —making performances and films that are experimental and ephemeral.

Actually, what she's saying is: 'In the long arc of time, I am closer to rupestrian mark making.' And I thought this was such an interesting take on her and her practice."

Simply titled *Ana Mendieta*, the survey features 150 works and is to be the UK's first major exhibition dedicated to the artist in over a decade. In addition to many pieces from her *Siluetas Series*, there will be newly remastered films, rarely seen paintings and drawings, late sculptures and restaged installations.

Ensuring visitors "feel" Mendieta's ephemeral works, the exhibition will open with *Ochún* (1981), her last moving-image work that features waves rushing around an opened human silhouette. "You step into the exhibition and suddenly you're hit by the sound of waves," Umansky says. "It slows you down, it slows your heart down, and it allows you to effectively attune to your own body."

The vitality of her momentary sculptures will be captured in the recreation of several pieces, including *Ñañigo Burial* (1976), a *Silueta* made from black ritual candles that will be lit regularly throughout the duration of the show; a recreation of the first earth-body work that Mendieta produced for an indoor gallery setting; and the restaging of a tree sculpture (first made in 1982) outside Tate Modern.

- [Ana Mendieta](#) , Tate Modern, London, 15 July-17 January 2027



Mendieta's *Untitled* (1977) from her *Silueta Series*

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There's something childlike about the second video of her covered with cow blood and chicken feathers, running with carefree abandon along a beach. At first, she's a tiny speck. Then she becomes bigger and bigger, until, in a blur, she barrels past us, and disappears. In 1985, at the height of her career, Mendieta fell 34 floors from the Manhattan apartment she shared with her husband, the minimalist artist Carl Andre; he was charged with murder, and controversially acquitted for lack of evidence. Today, her art – art that's strange and singular and feels strikingly contemporary – lives on, as long-lasting as it was short-lived.