

Anna Bella Geiger
Circa MMXVIII Human Landscape
18/04 – 26/05 2018

For at least the last two years, I have been interested in establishing ontological motifs in conversation with my earlier themes. Though this show includes several new works, they possess an intimate synergy with my works from other times, other decades. I am not discussing a purely formal coherence, but also a conceptual meaning, which precedes the formal intention.

Anna Bella Geiger, 04 April 2018.

It is with great pleasure that Mendes Wood DM presents Anna Bella Geiger's first solo exhibition in Belgium. Born in 1933 in Rio de Janeiro, Geiger is a multidisciplinary artist, known for her skill as a draughtsman, painter, engraver, illustrator, and as a pioneer of video art in Brazil. Many of the works included in this exhibition elude conventional categorization and are testament to Geiger's interpretation of art making as an experimental *mélange*, distilled from a comprehensive knowledge of techniques.

Widely recognized as one of the most important artists working in Brazil today, Geiger was central to the canonical establishment of Brazilian abstraction, video art and conceptual art. She studied at the National School of Philosophy (Rio de Janeiro), New York University and the New School for Social Research (New York) under Hannah Levy Deinhard. Her study of abstraction prompted the spontaneous methods and rigorous concern for form, which she famously championed throughout her career.

Presented at the first National Exhibition of Abstract Art in Rio de Janeiro (1953), her early works marked her departure as a groundbreaking artist as well as an influential art historian and teacher, with her contribution to seminal texts such as *Geometric and Informal Abstractions: The Avant Garde of the Fifties* (1978).

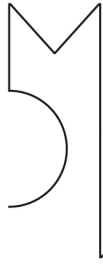
The introduction of etching and engraving in the 1960s manifested a radical formal and thematic shift in her practice, as Geiger began a restless search for the 'inner body.' *Limpeza do Ouvido com Cotonete* (Cleaning the Ear with a Cotton Bud), 1968, is a key example of this body of work, which critic Mario Pedrosa dubbed as the artist's 'visceral phase.' Combining aquatint and engraving, the sinuous, fleshy ear is counterbalanced by the rough scratches that compose the finger tips. The ear is bisected, showing its internal organic structure, alluding to an inner versus an outer body, a public versus a private sphere. The cotton bud potentially trespasses into the ear, hovering on the frontier between the surface and the internal.

Deeply influenced by the social and political dynamics of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964- 1985), Geiger continuously expanded on the issue of a natural or bodily territory as a political arena. By intermingling the organically supple with the haptic mechanical precision of cartography, Geiger arrived at her "geo-poetry."

Her continuous re-imagination of a topographical intersection between the natural and the methodical can be observed in *Rolinhos* (Little Scrolls), 1998, and *Sobre Nácar* (On Mother of Pearl), 2003. Here, Geiger moves from encasing map-like scrolls in led engraved plates to lining the inside of a shell with metal map etching. She transfers a symbiotic play between two forms, the case and the scroll, into a

Mendes
Wood
DM

13 Rue des Sablons / Zavelstraat
1000 Brussels Belgium
+ 32 2 502 09 64
www.mendeswooddm.com
@mendeswooddm



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synthesis, a single object, which is both the contained natural item, a shell, and the man-made method of containment, the map.

Particularly during the military dictatorship, when Geiger's husband, a geographer, was arrested for his political beliefs, Geiger turned to non-traditional media to document her artistic actions or performances and to return to questions of the body. Beginning with polaroid photographs she eventually began making film in 1974, where she continuously tested her body and endurance. For example, one of her earliest films, *Passagens* (Passages), 1974, shows the artist walking up and down stairs, over hours of filming, she did become physically exhausted. The work has a simultaneously humorous and ominous effect, as she walks and climbs, never arriving at an endpoint. Geiger was such a pioneer of the medium that within a year of production she was highlighted at the first video art exhibition *VIDEOART* at the Institute of Contemporary Art of Philadelphia (1974).

Drawing inspiration from her early studies of linguistics and phonetics, Geiger's recent geo-poetic works continue to challenge traditional, colonial, or north-orientated topographies by prioritizing the southern hemisphere. Works such as *Oribis Descriotio com Mapa Mundi e as 3 Graças* (Descriptive Orb with a Map of the World and the three Graces), 2018, from the *Fronteiriços* (Borderlines) series, combine Latin and ancient roman motifs while excluding central Europe from the map. Made from old iron archive cabinets filled with encaustics and engravings, the work makes an eloquent political gesture, as the boarder of the map is marked by the limits of the archive cabinet so too can our global understanding be limited by access to information.

Geiger drew from a medley of sources to catalyze the trajectory of her practice and to continuously re-imagine existing modes of production. Her pioneering technical and material experimentation has remained in a permanent state of re-invention and flux over the last six decades of her career as she continues to test the formal and thematic boundaries of her practice.

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[@mendeswooddm](https://www.instagram.com/mendeswooddm)