

ARTSY

The Most Influential Latin American Artists of the 20th Century

Alex Santana | 18 November 2019

Ana Mendieta

B. 1948, Havana, Cuba. D. 1985, New York City.



Ana Mendieta, Untitled, 1981 © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong & Co. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Ana Mendieta's multidisciplinary practice questions static markers of gender identity, sexual expression, and humanity's connection to the Earth. At age 12, Mendieta was exiled from Cuba and sent to live in the United States under Operation Pedro Pan—a mass movement of unaccompanied Cuban minors, many of them children of counterrevolutionary threats to the Castro regime. Mendieta spent part of her childhood in an Iowan orphanage, and eventually pursued an education in art at the University of Iowa. It was during this early period that Mendieta began to use her own body through performance. Her multidisciplinary practice consisted of performance, photography, and video works addressing the complicated entanglements between bodies, the Earth, and death. In iconic hybrid works like her "Siluetas" (1973–80) and "Esculturas Rupestres" series, Mendieta utilized indentations, markings, and absence to imply the body and its reverberations in natural landscapes—especially female bodies, goddesses, and matriarchal figures. In her worldview—drawn from indigenous and Afro-Cuban spiritual practices from her native Cuba, as well as the experience of displacement and diaspora—birth and death begin with blood, fire sustains but also destroys, and water runs downstream, regardless of human intervention. Mendieta died at age 36 in New York City. Yet despite this tragedy, her work continues to inspire audiences today.



Ana Mendieta, *La Venus Negra*, 1981 © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong & Co. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Ana Mendieta, *Alma, Silueta en Fuego*, 1981 © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong & Co. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.