



WOMEN ON THE RISE!

TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS: Ana Mendieta

THEMES:

- Representation of the female body
- Earth art
- Photography
- Performance art

FEATURED WORKS:

Silueta Series (various years) and *Untitled: Glass on Body/Glass on Face* (1972)

RESOURCES:

Links to images

- http://artscurriculum.guggenheim.org/lessons/movpics_mendieta.php
- <http://www.artnet.com/artist/11662/ana-mendieta.html>
- <http://www.galerieelong.com/> (click on "artists" and go to "Estate of Ana Mendieta")

Books and Media

- *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body* by Olga Viso (2004): Hatje Cantz Publishers
- *Ana Mendieta* by Raquelin Mendieta (2001): Poligrafa
- Documentary Film: <http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c323.shtml>
- *Writing Your Way: Creating a Personal Journal* by Ellen Jaffe (2001): Sumach Press

DISCUSSION POINTS AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

- Do Ana Mendieta's images in nature make the viewer think more about life or death?
- Why do you think she created *ephemeral* artworks?
- How do the images from *Glass on Body* and *Glass on Face* make you feel? Are they disturbing or playful? How do you think she wants the viewer to react to them?
- Do you think that people would look at her work differently if she were still alive?
- What do you think Ana meant when she said that if she hadn't discovered art she would have been a criminal?

MATERIALS FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT: Ana Mendieta

Face Imprints and Silhouettes

- Acrylic display frames or plastic/plexi-glass cover removed from inexpensive frames
- Camera (digital or film)
- Antiseptic wipes and paper towels
- Several bags of garden rocks found in hardware stores

PROCEDURE FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT:

This lesson has two hands-on components. The first (project “A”) is the face imprint exercise inspired by the *Glass on Body* series. The second (project “B”) is a silhouette project inspired by the *Siluetas* series. Project B will necessitate fair weather, but variations could be implemented indoors if necessary.

Project A

- Students will take turns manipulating their faces on the plastic while other students capture the images with the camera (settings will have to be adjusted to reduce glare)
- Plastic is cleaned after each turn
- Photographs will be printed / developed and returned to students

Project B

- Instructor will divide rocks up into several small buckets (rocks will need to be rinsed to remove sand prior to the workshop)
- Students will form groups of 2
- One student will lay down on a grassy area in a pose of their choice inspired by Mendieta (e.g. facing up with arms raised; on their side with one arm raised)
- The partner student will trace the pose with rocks
- Once the outline is completed the student will carefully step out of the silhouette (students may need assistance)
- Students will take turns photographing the silhouette
- Photographs of silhouettes will be returned to students

APPLICABLE NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS (GRADES 5 -12):

- NA—VA.5-8.1 (9-12.1): Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- NA—VA.5-8.3 (9-12.3): Choosing and Evaluating A Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA—VA.5-8.4 (9-12.4): Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures



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STUDENT HAND OUT: Ana Mendieta

Ana Mendieta (b. 1948—Cuba)

Ana Mendieta's family was involved in the opposition against Fidel Castro, who rose to power in the late 1950s. Her parents believed it was dangerous for her to remain in Cuba. Twelve-year-old Mendieta and her sister were sent to foster homes and orphanages in the Midwestern U.S. through the "Peter Pan" program until their family arrived in 1966. In an essay, Raquel, Mendieta's sister stated, "Ana became interested in art during the second semester of our third year away from home. It was, I believe, the worst year without our family. We were separated for the first time since our arrival and had, by then, suffered many levels of abuse at the hands of our keepers. She was a junior in high school, and was told by the art teacher that she had absolutely no talent. In spite of this opinion, she continued to study art."¹

After high school, Mendieta studied art at the University of Iowa, where she learned about **performance** and **conceptual** art. Her most important body of work is the *Siluetas* series, where she used her body to create **silhouettes** in the earth using flowers, water, twigs, blood, stones, and firecrackers. Through these actions Mendieta formed a connection between her body and the earth. This symbolized her feelings of separation from her family and her homeland, Cuba.

Mendieta's life was tragically cut short. She had been living in New York for several years after graduating from the University of Iowa with her husband (artist Carl Andre) in a high-rise apartment building. In 1985 she fell from the window of her apartment and died instantly. Although it is known that their relationship was violent at times, the case charging Andre with her death was dismissed due to a lack of evidence. Despite her early death, Ana Mendieta's work has been included in numerous exhibitions and her art is the subject of many books. She has earned a place in art history as one of the most important female artists of the 1970s generation. Mendieta's passion and need for art is revealed in this quote from an interview where she said,

"I know if I had not discovered art, I would have been a criminal. Theodore Adorno has said, "all works of art are uncommitted crimes." My art comes out

¹ Raquel Mendieta "Childhood Memories: Religion, Politics, Art" in *Ana Mendieta* ed. Gloria Moure. 1996, Ediciones Poligrafa S.A. and Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea.

of rage and displacement. Although the image may not be a very rageful image, I think that all art comes out of **sublimated** rage².”

Vocabulary

Several definitions derived from Guggenheim Arts Online (<http://www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum/lessons/start.php>) and PBS Art21 educator resource guides (<http://www.pbs.org/art21/>).

Silhouettes - A drawing consisting of the outline of a figure, usually a human profile, filled in with a solid color.

Body Art - Works in which the body of the artist is used to create work (instead of a camera, paints, canvas, etc.). Sometimes the work is created in private and documented with photographs/video recordings or is presented in public as a performance.

Conceptual Art - Work in which emphasis is placed on the processes of producing ideas rather than on the art objects themselves.

Earth Art - Art that transforms an area of land using rock, soil and other natural materials.

Ephemeral Art - Works of art that exist only for a short time.

Performance Art - A work that features a performance by an artist that could combine elements of theater, music, and the visual arts.

Sublimate -To keep oneself from acting on impulse.

² Ibid p. 93

