

## Anna Maria Maiolino

(Scalea, Cosenza, Italy, 1942)

Anna Maria Maiolino's art emerges from a close connection with her personal biography. Born in southern Italy, at the age of twelve she emigrated with her family to Venezuela. As she recalls, this early experience of being uprooted from her native land played a decisive role in her subsequent path: "I lost the idea of logic, the need to be consistent, to follow an orthodoxy. I gained my freedom." And she adds: "Working as an artist allowed me to place my feelings in the world... And to transform this 'lack' into a compensation through a constant process of elaboration of signs and metaphors... For me, to form myself as a person, to learn to be in the world with its nastiness and beauty, was also a way of forming myself as an artist." The difficulties of an uncomfortable existence in a foreign land, including the daily need to relate to a still-incomprehensible language, weigh profoundly on her memory of those years. Later, family ties, language, and food, along with the precariousness of human existence, become fundamental themes in her research, composing a sort of archetypal alphabet, the elements of which she utilizes in drawings, films, sculptures, and installations. Close to circles of the neo-concrete movement in Brazil, since the late 1960s, Maiolino shared their avant-gardist impulse, which anticipated various international artistic expressions and above all the idea that the work, more than an object or a machine, is, instead, a living body. In the 1970s, in open conflict with the military dictatorship that held Brazil in a repressive vice-like grip, the artist experimented with a series of actions, sometimes structured in the form of a game that involved spectators, inviting them to participate in the creation of the work; active in alternative spaces managed by artists, she began to deal with the open space of the street.

*Entrevistas (Between Lives)*, the three photographs in the collection (originally shot by Henri Virgil Stahl), refer to the eponymous performance the artist enacted in 1981, in Rua Cardoso Junion in Rio de Janeiro. The images show the lower detail of the artist's body while she walks, unsteadily, almost on her toes, along a paved street scattered with hundreds of fresh eggs. Initially conceived during the period of the so-called "democratic opening," years when civil society in Brazil was beginning to win back power from the military regime, the performance, which called for the active participation of the public, was replicated on numerous occasions, including within the spaces of museums. Rich in symbolic values, from the common expression *pisar em ovos* (walking on eggs) to the artistic reference to Lucio Fontana's egg, it fully manifests Maiolino's intention to employ primary elements, the significance of which are accessible, even on a level that precedes language, and which can involve body and mind in a unique sensory experience related to the infinite cycle of human life. As Maiolino concluded in a brief text that accompanied the presentation of the performance: "Thus we relive that which has been forgotten and step by step we recall that which is known." (MB)