

Anna Maria Maiolino, Making Love Revolutionary, Whitechapel Gallery, London, U.K.

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Anna Maria Maiolino

← *Making Love Revolutionary*, installation view, Whitechapel Gallery, London, U.K., 2019.

Photo : Stephen White, courtesy of Whitechapel Gallery, London, U.K.

↑ *ANNA*, 1967.

Photo : Vicente de Mello, courtesy of the artist

Anna Maria Maiolino *Making Love Revolutionary*

What a time for such a statement: *Making Love Revolutionary*. London, as elsewhere—across the U.K. and the world at large—has had a rough year. Make that a rough *few*, no *several* years. The country is currently at an election fever pitch, with headline after dispiriting headline. It's hard not to note, to feel in your very bones, the terrible erosion of language, its shift to something co-opted, manipulated, and emptied of meaning, only to be filled with hatred and circular, self-defeating knowledge. By the time this review is published, we will know the outcome of all of this. But in the moment, there is hope, which always finds a way to endure. A pleasure, then, to be reminded—overwhelmed, even—upon entering Anna Maria Maiolino's expansive exhibition, which spans six decades of the artist's wide-ranging, tactile, confronting, and political oeuvre.

"Art is the activist," Maiolino has said. "Art is a political exercise. When the moment asks me to take a position, I use metaphors to speak." Maiolino has witnessed her share of moments in which to take a position, from the collective to the individual. Born in 1942, in a small town in the impoverished Southern Italian region of Calabria, Maiolino vividly recalls the hunger and poverty she experienced growing up in wartime and post-war scarcity, and later under the dictatorship in Brazil, where her family immigrated in 1954. Early woodcuts like *Glu Glu Glu*, and *ANNA* (both 1967), show stark faceless forms, bald and with gaping mouths that are starving or screaming, maybe both. Other early works, *In-Out-Anthropophagy* (1973), and *What is Left Over* (1974), use photography and film to summon hunger, and the anger and violence of the mouth—the food it consumes, the language and meaning it produces (or lack thereof). The earlier work, a super 8 film, shows two mouths framed closely—male and female—taped shut, swallowing eggs, regurgitating multicoloured strings, grimacing, while the later is one of the

artist's "photo-poem-action" works—a triptych of black-and-white photographs in which she holds a pair of open scissors to her nose and tongue.

Maiolino has referred to her work as "poetic wanderings." Indeed, her central preoccupations move agilely between forms, seizing hold of that which fits best. From the late 1990s onwards, one of the most striking of these has been her ongoing series of hand-modelled raw clay, which is coiled in heaps of long intestine-like tubes, moulded, clutched, and rolled into small shapes that bear the imprint of their maker's hands: an alphabet of embodied longing, the body making its presence joyfully felt. Maiolino's practice is hybrid and genre-less—drawings, sculpture, film, photography, sewing, kneading, writing... My nouns turn to verbs as seamlessly as her work hovers between the inert and the animate, the fixed and the processual—as if to navigate material and form is the best way to learn about oneself, who one is and might be. An insistence, perhaps, that personal growth and reflexivity, like love, are not, and never should be, revolutionary—not for the thinking, feeling, making body politic.

Emily LaBarge

Whitechapel Gallery, London, U.K.

September 25, 2019—January 12, 2020