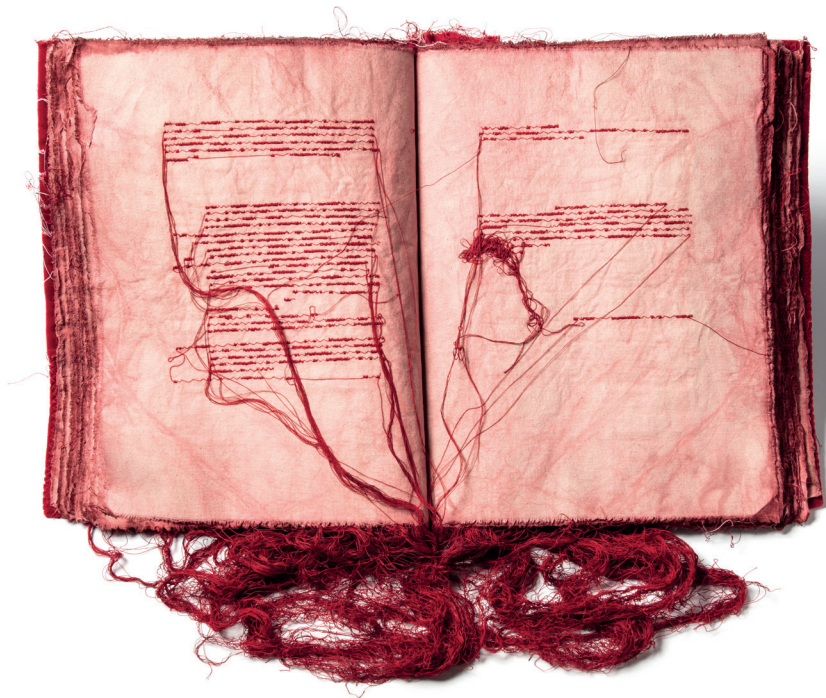


# MARIA LAI



## The Diaries of the Soul

**Curatorship:**

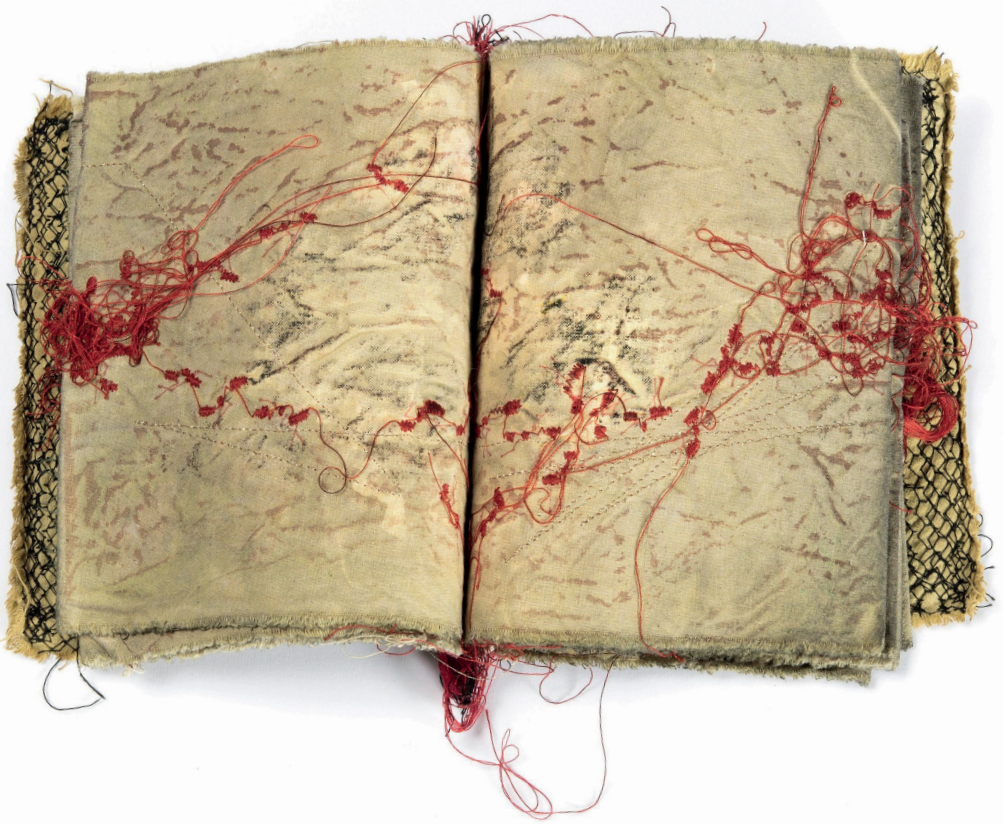
Bartolomeo Pietromarchi and Luigia Lonardelli

**FROM  
MARCH 14**

**Tuesday to Sunday. Free admission, May to September: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. October to April: Noon to 8 p.m.**

**HOTEL DE INMIGRANTES**

Antártida Argentina Ave. (between Dirección Nacional de Migraciones and Buquebus), Puerto Madero



The MUNTREF, which was founded in 2002, is a social and political outreach project of the UNTREF from an artistic and cultural perspective. As such, at every moment it reports on problems such as the gender issues today, in order to contribute positively to the process of accelerating equality.

Once again, for this reason, we started the year by dedicating ourselves to putting on stage the work of women artists who have not yet had a monographic exhibition in our country. We did this, for example, with the Brazilian Anna Bella Geiger (2018), the French-Moroccan Leila Alaoui (2018), the Polish Angelika Markul (2018), the Peruvian Claudia Coca (2018), the Argentinian Marina De Caro (2018), the Brazilian-Argentinean Carla Zaccagnini (2019) and the American Martha Rosler (2019).

We also dedicate our efforts to focus on the work of artists to whom an exposition would not have been dedicated, or have been absent for many years, as was the case with Gertrudis Chale's (2007) anthological

**Untitled, 1991**

Wire, cloth  
18 x 16 cm

Private collection  
Photo Giorgio Dettori  
Courtesy Archivio Maria Lai  
© Archivio Maria Lai by SIAE 2020

exhibitions, Marcia Schwarz (2008), Raquel Forner (2013), Graciela Sacco (2014 and a tribute in 2018), and Annemarie Heinrich (2014). All of them were the result of long research and management projects. On the other hand, the research and production of collective exhibitions such as *Migrations (in) Contemporary Art* (2015), among others, led us to reinforce this path presenting mostly female artists works.

Today, in 2020, we choose to continue this tradition by presenting *Constellations. A Selection of Works from the FRAC Collections* at the MUNTREF Museo de Artes Visuales. A project organized from a series of micronarrations linked to aesthetics and contemporary works by Estefanía Peñafiel, Ymane Fakir and Kapwani Kiwanga. Meanwhile, at the MUNTREF Centro de Arte y Naturaleza, we present works by Bruna Esposito, an Italian artist whose work is centered on the four elements; furthermore, at the MUNTREF Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, the halls are occupied by the works of Italian conceptual artist forerunner of relational art Maria Lai, the outstanding Chilean photographer Julia Toro and the powerful artist from Tucumán Carlota Beltrame. In all cases - and continuing with our "art for all" - it is the first time that an exhibition dedicated to each of them is displayed in the varied public eye of Buenos Aires.

I would like to thank the joint effort carried out with the MAXXI-Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo in Rome and the support of the Italian Council, as well as that of the Italian Embassy in Argentina. I also thank the collaboration of the FRAC, the French Institute and the French Embassy in Argentina and the collaboration of the House of the Province of Tucumán in Buenos Aires.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the enormous work of the MUNTREF team led by Dr. Diana Wechsler, artistic director of the MUNTREF and BIENALSUR, which allows to move forward with these ambitious projects. This sum of effort allows us to enjoy the experience offered by these wonderful artists.

**Aníbal Y. Jozami**  
**Rector UNTREF**  
**General Director MUNTREF**



**Untitled, 1965**

Wood, thread, gouache  
150 x 54 x 5 cm

Private collection  
Photo Lorenzo Palmieri  
Courtesy Archivio Maria Lai  
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A journey from the 1960s, through Maria Lai's life, during the moment when the artist decisively shifted the direction of her activity. The exhibition itinerary is not displayed in a chronological order. It focuses on constant cross-references and interlinkages between each work, like a great woven pattern which is based on art experience. The selection of the works - that are sometimes "Untitled" because they are the result of intimate and daily creativity - pays homage to an often interrupted research, which returns, in some cases after many years as apparently postponed discussions.

The exhibition includes a selection of looms; a group of works that, from the mid 1960's, involved Maria Lai in an "everyday materials" research; materials which were either recovered or derived from the Sardinian tradition, conceived as a shift away from the artist's previous phase which was more clearly identified with Modernism. The thread appears as a predominant element in the looms: as a material and a concept of the work in a simultaneous way. In the same way that the artist's life and research are crossed by the desire of linking distant elements, the work is a connecting "thread" which can re-stitch the meaning of things. The loom unites this reflection with that of the warp: a basic scheme on which to elaborate infinite variations.

In the sewn fairy tales, the artist raises fresh questions concerning the potential of imagination as a basis for every learning and knowledge process. As Maria Lai said in 1994, underlining the distance between this research and the child's environment, "art is an adult's game", an invitation to re-examine our own insecurities and bring back into play the creative possibilities that are no longer remembered.

In the early 1980s, Maria Lai conceived the first works that she would continue to produce until the 90's in parallel with her sewn books. Due to a rereading of Sardinian folktales or of tales of her own invention, the artist developed a world of characters who



live in complex situations and adventures but finally find a definitive path to salvation.

*The Sewn Books* describe Lai's special ability to conceive creativity as a kind of gift and to relate to the people close to her, either emotionally or intellectually, whether those figures are poets or philosophers which she feels connected to. Hence, in the titles of *The Sewn Books* you will find quotations from the artist's favourite texts and poems, as well as her practice of offering these works as gifts; these works were born in the domestic intimacy of a daily relationship with the material they are made of.

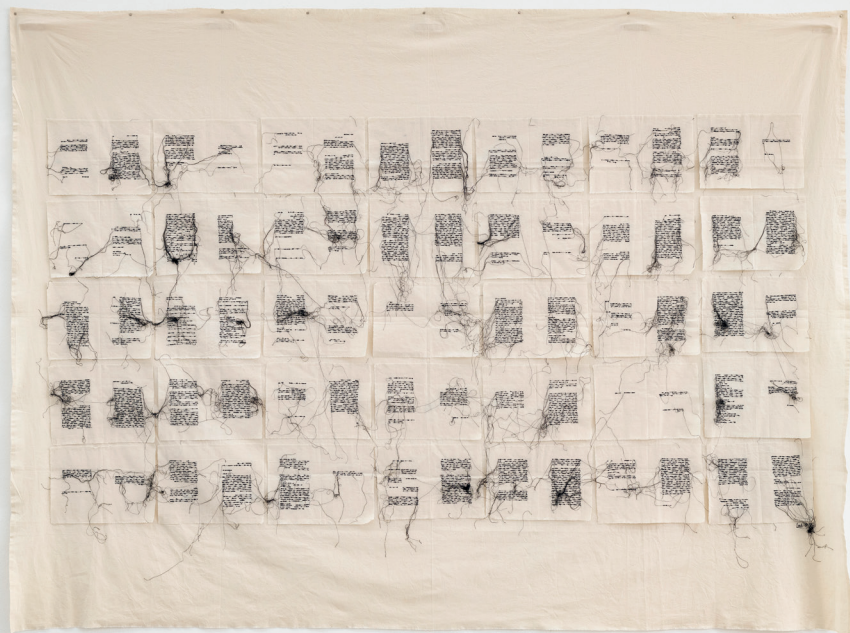
The writings that the thread imitates refer to the imagination of pre-literacy and childhood,

and are a means of reflection on the artist's personal experience and on the processes of collective elaboration that underlie the forms of written knowledge. The works gathered here are generally the result of a production halfway between unconscious creative action and the desire to make the artistic object remain anonymous. They are proof of an inner landscape that sees the creative act as a way to connect with the people and the things that surround the artist. Terracotta, sand, cloth, thread, bread, velvet, enamel and gouache, all combined with found and recovered materials, contribute to create a personal symphony of materials and techniques that, with a sharp and iconic gaze, question the recognition of the most elementary forms.

**Untitled, 1989**

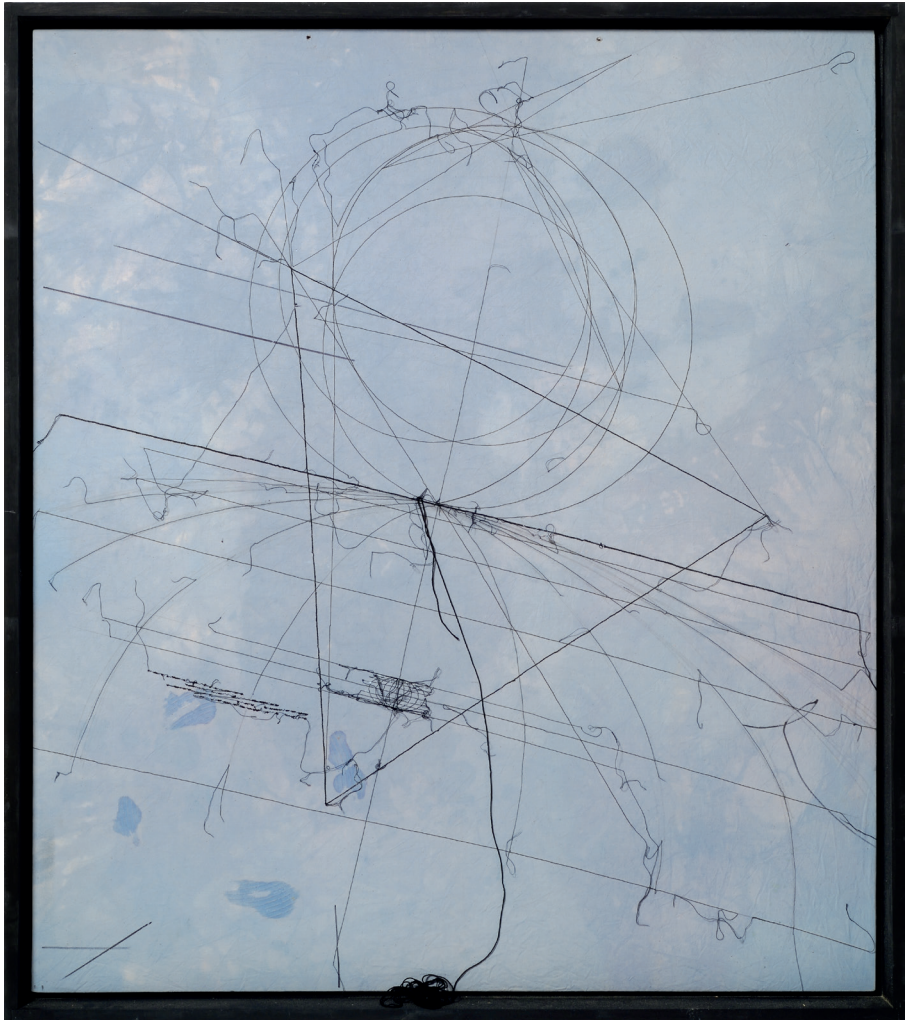
Wire, cloth  
180 x 238 cm

MAXXI collection, in the process of acquisition  
Acquired with the support of the Italian Council (2019)  
Photo Giorgio Benni  
Courtesy Fondazione MAXXI  
© Archivio Maria Lai by SIAE 2020



Research into the works called Geographies began in the late 1970s and was carried out by Lai in the following decades. In this project, looking the other way is an additional stimulus to her artistic practice. These works, which are often made in contrast to dark or clear backgrounds, seem to invite the viewer to discover other worlds and to invent new cosmogonies. In these works, the mark of the thread becomes the astronomical reference line or a path to an imaginary journey. At the same time, it suggests the possibility of

linking distant planets, which emerge almost imperceptibly from the backgrounds of the Geographies in order to emphasize their astral distance. The need to pick up distant elements in time and space - a permanent desire in the artist's research - finds here a further dimension in the evolution of one's own identity through relationships with others. Maps, scrolls, geometric shapes alluding to still unknown stars speak of distant universes, which could perhaps be reached by imagination.



Maria Lai conceived many public space interventions and collective actions during the last decades of her research, starting with *Legarsi alla montagna*. In 1981, the artist returned to her place of birth, the city of Ulassai, and invited the local community to work together to create a collective piece on a large scale which would bring back the interpersonal, unconscious and ancestral links between the urban fabric and the surrounding territory.

During this community action in a specific place inspired by an ancient local legend, with the help of the villagers, the artist tied a blue ribbon to all the houses on the mountain of Ulassai. First, the initiative was accepted only after the establishment of a code clearly indicating the kind of relationship between

the neighbors. A knot between the houses meant friendship, the absence of a knot, rivalry, and if you added a loaf of bread, love. The action began in Piazza Barigau, where usually take place the city's festivities; thirteen pieces of jean cloth were cut and sewn again to make the necessary fabric ribbon for all the streets of the city. After tying up all the houses, three Mountaineers took the ribbon to Mount Tisiddu and tied it to the top of the mountain. The action was recorded in a video made by the director Tonino Casula as well as through some pictures taken by photographer Piero Berengo Gardin, which were later retouched by the artist with a blue marker.

**Bartolomeo Pietromarchi  
and Luigia Lonardelli**  
Curators

LEFT  
**Untitled, 1994**

Wire, wood, cloth, gouache  
126 x 112 x 6 cm

Private collection  
Photo Studio Vandrash  
Courtesy Archivio Maria Lai  
© Archivio Maria Lai by SIAE 2020

RIGHT  
**Untitled, 1994**

Tempera, terracotta  
26 x 16 x 7,5 cm

Private collection  
Photo Giorgio Dettori  
Courtesy Archivio Maria Lai  
© Archivio Maria Lai by SIAE 2020





## Maria Lai

(Ulassai, 1919-Cadedu, 2013), is one of the most prominent voices in Italian contemporary art; long before the latest research on relational art, she conceived a globalized language that brings sensibility and local traditions together. Her research is at the heart of a more than ever current interest concerning the dialectic between the individual and the community and operates as a possible solution to the conflict between individual identity and public action, proposing and exploring questions.

COVER

**Untitled**, ca. 2002

Wire, cloth, gouache  
32 x 26 x 4 cm / 32 x 52 cm

Private collection  
Photo Giorgio Dettori  
Courtesy Archivio Maria Lai  
© Archivio Maria Lai by SIAE 2020

A project of MAXXI-Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo in collaboration with UNTREF, supported by the Italian Council (7th Edition 2019) program to promote Italian contemporary art in the world by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism

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