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MARIA LAI LEGARSI ALLA MONTAGNA

“This is what art is for: to make us feel more united. Otherwise we’re not human beings.”

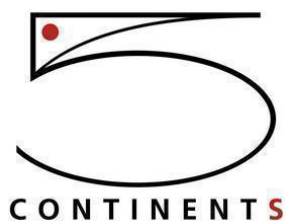
Maria Lai

It was 8 September when Maria Lai decided to “tie together” the houses of the inland town of Ulassai in Sardinia, where she was born.

The houses and their inhabitants, who live in the shadow of the local hill's cliff face, were the protagonists in the first relational work ever attempted in Italy. Maria Lai created a work that would involve the whole town and would actually be performed by her fellow citizens. The idea was to connect all the buildings to one another with a ribbon that would then be tied to the mountain above to symbolise a common purpose among men in their relationship with nature and art.

This was a totally new enterprise which arose by listening to people. When Maria Lai interviewed the townfolk, she came to understand the kind of attachments that formed in the tight-knit community – the bad blood, outright feuds and even hidden romances – and realised she had to overcome the inhabitants' diffidence. So the idea came to Maria Lai of making these bonds within the town visible by using different types of ribbon according to the nature of the relations that existed between families and from one house to the next. Where there was a family connection and close ties of affection, a piece of special festival bread would be added; if the bond was one of friendship, then a knot would be made in the ribbon; and if she found sheer hostility, the ribbon would remain just as it was, with no other adornment.

Maria Lai. Legarsi alla montagna is a book that draws us right into this unforgettable collective performance that Maria Lai staged forty years ago. Much of the merit goes to the powerful photographs of Piero Berengo Gardin, who recorded the whole event, and which the Sardinian artist retouched with a blue felt-tip pen, transforming the pictures and leaving her own moving imprint on the record of her live work in Ulassai.



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The book will be co-published with Fondazione Maria Lai in a bilingual Italian/English edition.

Piero Berengo Gardin (Venice 1933, Rome 2009). Architect, director, historian and critic of photography, journalist, music lover, an eclectic, anomalous and very modern intellectual, never tired of the discipline in which he practiced, it was almost impossible for him to choose between his many passions, which became indispensable tools of his work. In RAI since 1969, he has been author and director of award-winning documentaries on architecture on Palladio, Titian, Alvar Aalto and the designer Tapio Wirkkala, on music with Outis, the work of Luciano Berio, on art with the programs "Museo e città", "Great Medici Exhibitions of Florence", "Paul Klee", and photography with the popular serial program "L'Italia nel cassetto". For the Contrasto editions he edited the translation of Robert Capa's diary, "Fuori fuoco". Professor of History and Technique of Photography at the Experimental Center of Cinematography in Rome and Photography, Television and Urban Environment at the Faculty of Architecture at La Sapienza University in Rome, he has been a photo critic for the newspapers "Il Messaggero", "Paese Sera" and the "Secolo XIX".

Elena Pontiggia teaches Art History at the Academy of Brera and the Polytechnic of Milan. She contributes as an art critic to various newspapers and magazines. Since 2011 she has been writing for "La Stampa". He is particularly interested in Italian and international art between the two wars and in the relationship between modernity and classicism. He is interested in poetic writings, publishing the main theoretical texts of artists, from Cézanne and the avant-garde, to Pollock. Since 2001 he is part of the Scientific Committee of the Fondazione Stelline in Milan. Previously he was part of the Scientific Committee of the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan (until 1993) and of the Board of Directors of the Quadriennale di Roma (from 2002 to 2006).