

Who is Ana Mendieta?

Analytical Essay

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The Book “Who is Ana Mendieta?” Is a visual glimpse at the course of famous Cuban/ American artist and feminist, Ana Mendieta's life. The book commences with a detailed preface which acts as a walk through of all things Ana accomplished, changed, survived, loved and most of all, hated. The preface takes on the role of both a “memoire: as well as a contextualization for the graphic images, words and thoughts that unfold themselves throughout the rest of the book.

A child succumb to the Peter Pan program and ripped from her her former life in Cuba, Ana was relocated to live among Americans in foster home foyers for most of her childhood years. Lost in a world different than the one she longed for at home, Ana was constantly ridiculed and made to feel out of place in the crucial teenage years of her development. Overtime, Ana developed an incredibly unique view on the world that surrounded her. Belittled by the people around her for most of her life, she sought refuge in her art. Earning a degree in painting at the University of Iowa, Ana discovered a part of herself and her psyche both of which fuelled the rest of her career. Driven by the “downfalls” which came with being a woman from a different cultural background in an otherwise “white” demographic, Ana slowly became enraged with social norms that prohibited feminism and feminist themselves to strive for equality, as well as the repossession of their sexuality which otherwise only existed through “a mans fantasy”. A couple of key events that occurred throughout her time as a student became the main principles behind the crusade she later embarked on to artistically showcase the female form and ultimately link it to nature. The most prominent of these events would be the rape and murder of Sara Ann Otten which occurred on the University of Iowas campus while Ana herself was a student.

Ana also became increasingly bothered with the lack of female artists featured in her art history textbooks. Schools in other words were (and still are) teaching young kids that women

minus a couple (Marie Curie for example who is mentioned in the book), had not accomplished anything that helped advance society in any way up until recently. Eager to leave her mark, Ana acted as the first of many artists (whom then followed) to produced art that represented the female form from all perspectives. Ana played a lot with the idea that everything was “derived” from the female form, working on numerous paintings of landscapes who's shapes and curves seemed to morph into shapes resembling those of female organs. In a sense, Ana broadened the conversation that people started to have about art. She fiercely rejected claims that female nudity in art was in part “narcissistic” and called out men whom both rejected female sexuality all why prying on it like animals. Pushing limits and breaking boundaries, Ana created a lifetimes amount of work, leaving behind an extremely large collection. Her death, in its own way followed the tone which unfortunately seemed to follow her everywhere she went like a dark cloud over her head. Brutally and abruptly pushed out of a window (or having jumped), Ana fell to her death from her apartment window on the thirty-fourth floor in New York City. Like most things in her short and rather troublesome life, her death was never avenged and justice was unfortunately never served.

The place of women in art is a topic that we're only now starting to really dive into. Cast aside for hundreds of years, history has tricked us into believing that women were of no use to society and its advancements for a very long time. This slowly started to shift during the twentieth century as more and more women joined the world of literature and later on, art. An example of leading women in an other-wise male dominated environment would be Marcelle Ferron, born in Louisville Quebec in 1924 whom went onto become one of the “Automatistes”. The “Automatistes” were a group of painters driven by the “stream of conscious writing”. They

were among the first brave young artist to incorporate this modern train of thought into the way they painted. Stepping away from Classicism. Marcelle became integrated in their group and worked closely with this new style. The group would meet to discuss “marxism, surrealism and psychoanalysis, all subjects looked down on by the church.” Marcelle is also the only female artist to ever sign the Refus Global. By 1970, Marcelle had forged her talents into another medium being stained glass, another art form she conquered. Growing immensely popular over the years, Marcelle built a career primarily off art and is now among the most respected female artists of her time. Her signature on the Refus Global is the most important piece of evidence we have in concern to her contribution to not only art but also society, singlehandedly proving the importance of the feminine role.

The second Canadian artist worth mentioning would be Joyce Wieland, born in Toronto in the year 1931. Wieland was involved in both film and painting. She used film to illustrate issues as well as gender-biased norms which existed within her surroundings at the time. Her storytelling abilities as well as her eye for film went on to grant her much recognition, especially throughout her time in New York (1962-1971). Wieland was awarded the honour of being the *first female artist* to receive her own exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, which in the end, prompted Wieland to return home and launch herself back into her Canadian roots. From student, to painter, to wife, to activist and finally divorcee, Wielands presence as the first female artist to receive her own exhibition paved the way for all female artists that have and will follow directly behind her. Choosing to pioneer instead of accompany, Wielands divorce and her success after it is a testament to young women everywhere who throughout history have been shunned for choosing career, pride and self love over romance.

“Who is Ana Mendieta” is an example of post-modernism all within itself. The book can almost be described as an out of body experience. Like most post-modernist artworks, time is not always lined up. The book commences with a summary which is set in the past tense. We learn that she Ana is dead before we know that she has lived at all. The illustrations that follow then take us through her waking life, and as we reach the end of the book we jump back into death and out of it again towards the end when we read about “opinions” and analysis of her art and the deeper corners of her mind. The illustrations represent post modernism simply because they include visuals that were previously rejected by society and church. The book is a walkthrough of femininity and fertility. In Mendieta's eyes, all nature should be linked to femininity through the common link of fertility. These are conclusions and arguments only post-modernism can support. Her forward thought processes can be closely affiliated with Marcelle Ferron and her willingness to accept and debate topics which were otherwise frowned upon, for example Marxism, psychoanalysis (which we can immediately sense in Anas work), as well as surrealism. Both of these women are in my opinion are responsible for advancements in art but most importantly they act as a pilgrim in history in relation to the way young women are now able to view their own sexualities. Ana especially forged the way for so many women, not only artists to *not* see womanhood as a “burden”. Wherever a societal issues in regards to women existed, Ana was ready to confront it. That is who Ana Mendieta is.

1,406 Word Count.

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