

## HELENA ALMEIDA

May 3 - June 9, 2001

HELENA ALMEIDA'S first solo exhibition in the US surveys her black and white photoworks from the 1970s to the present. Almeida, now 67, is considered an important Portuguese artist whose work has been widely exhibited in Europe over the past 30 years.

"Pintura Habitada" (Inhabited Painting), a series of photographic portraits from 1975, depicts the artist half-length and from behind, holding a paintbrush, her face and figure reflected in a mirror larger than the photograph's surface. Into the space of the image she has inserted blue brush strokes as if executed by her photographic self, sometimes obliterating her face, sometimes commenting on the interrelation of the depicted selves. In this pivotal work Almeida combined photography and painting, exploring the formal tension between the flat factuality of acrylic paint and the illusionistic photographic space.

Created within the context of '70s feminist movements, the work reflects then current ideas of the representation of the self and injects them into the cultural domain of painting. Almeida's photographs exist in concert with those of Vali Export from the same period, in which Export treated her body as part of an urban streetscape- made the equivalent of the line of a crosswalk, for example - using additional painting to produce a visceral psychological impact. Whereas artists such as Adrian Piper, Hannah Wilke and Martha Rosler entered the public or cultural space through their performances, Almeida creates almost all of her work in her studio. There, she stages a fictional body in a black dress reminiscent of traditional Portuguese women's wear, at times disfiguring the garment with paint or additional fabric. The reduction of the photograph's tonality to a rich black and white and the obliteration of almost all detail further abstracts the images emphasizing volume and shape.

In "A Casa" (At Home) from 1982, a work measuring 6' x 4', Almeida's moving silhouette trails a slightly spiraling black tail ending in the shape of a house. "Dentro de Mim" (Inside of Me) from 2000 shows a cropped image of the barefoot artist. She presents the underside of her left foot to the viewer on which rests a rectangular mirror. The juxtaposition of the floor's notches with their reflection in the mirror creates a distorted space reminiscent of Russian Constructivism.

Her exploration of the self combined with the reduction of the visual language makes the work unique and instantly recognizable. The essential formalism which Almeida has developed in the private chamber of her studio space, gives her work its strength and immediacy.

Biographical highlights include:

Solo exhibitions at: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporânea Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Fundação de Serralves Porto, Portugal; Centro de Arte Moderna/Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian Lisbon, Portugal; Galeria Estrany & de la Mota Barcelona, Spain; Galeria Presença Porto, Portugal; Galerie e+o Friedrich Bern, Switzerland; Galeria Módulo Lisbon, Portugal and Galerie Bama Paris, France

Group exhibitions at: SITE Santa Fe; ICA London, United Kingdom; Fotoforum Kassel, Germany; Centre Georges Pompidou Paris, France; 5th International Istanbul Biennial Istanbul, Turkey; Biennale di Venezia '82 Venezia, Italy and Bienal de São Paulo Sao Paulo, Brazil

Her work is included in the collections of: Bibliothèque National de Paris Paris, France; Hara Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Japan; MACBA Barcelona, Spain; Reina Sofía Madrid, Spain and Museu de Serralves Porto, Portugal, to name a few.