

## MARTHA ROSLER

### 1981(the year the future began)

28.09.17 > 24.11.17

Opening: Thursday 28th of September

6:30 PM- Conversation between Martha Rosler and Jorge Ribalta



àngels barcelona is pleased to present *1981 (the year the future began)*, an exhibition of photographs taken by Martha Rosler in 1981 at a key moment in the neo-avantgarde politicization of her work.

Taking a micro-historiographical approach, the show presents three distinct photographic series from that year — each reflecting a different facet of the Latin American liberation struggles that were counterpoint to the region's early encounter with neoliberalism. In January of 1981, Rosler travelled to Cuba as part of a group of artists and intellectuals (many of them friends) organized by Ana Mendieta and Lucy Lippard. Then, in late April, she spoke at the panel on “photography as struggle” at the second Coloquio Latinoamericano de Fotografía in Mexico City, after which she joined in the May Day demonstration in the center of the city. A couple of days later, on May 3, she marched to the steps of the Pentagon in Washington D.C. as part of the largest anti-war demonstration in a decade, opposing U.S. intervention in El Salvador.

In addition to her photographic work, Rosler's writing from this period contributed decisively to a paradigm shift in documentary discourse that was, in many respects, tied to the democratic struggles in Latin America. In 1981 as well, she published *3 Works*, a book that compiled some of her key works from the 1970s including *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* and *The Restoration of High Culture in Chile*, alongside her seminal 1981 essay “In, Around and Afterthoughts... On Documentary Photography.” In June of that same year, she published her review of Susan Meiselas' photobook *Nicaragua*. This was also a crucial moment biographically, as it marked Rosler's return to New York after more than a decade in California and Canada. Many of these texts, and others, will be available to view in the exhibition. Several of her videoworks that center on Latin American political themes and events will be screened, including *Watchwords of the 80s*, a performance about the new regime of neoliberalism and its effects on the region.

Rosler's solidarity with the Latin American democratic struggles of the 1970s is essential for understanding the politicization of her work. The revolutionary movements became the opposite side of the coin of 1980s neoliberalism. Similarly, the critical “reinvention” of documentary photography and the reaction against the first symptoms of the regressive political wave were part of the same ideological and aesthetic agenda. In hindsight, 1981 represented the end of the potentiality, openness, and experimentation of the 1970s (a product of post-1968 progressive public policies worldwide), and the effective beginning of the Thatcher-Reagan era, which determined the entire political and cultural landscape of subsequent decades.

But, simultaneously to its historical edge, this exhibition raises important questions for today. As we enter the Trump era, the images from 1981 join the current moment of meaning and become active members of a conversation between the artist, the period of time in which they were produced, and the minds of contemporary viewers. Even more so than before, we consume the world through images, and any response to them is rooted in our social knowledge of the world. That is to say, if we surround ourselves with images that emphasize the aesthetics and form of a neoliberal society over their political dimension, they will also breed an imperialist and conformist sensibility across all aspects of cultural life. In this respect, *1981 (the year the future began)* offers us an archeology of the present.

The works presented in this exhibition have remained unpublished until now, with the exception of the Cuba photographs, which were exhibited in 2012 at Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery in New York and Galleria Raffaella Cortese in Milan.

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**BIO**

**Martha Rosler** is an artist, theoretician and essential figure of contemporary feminist discourses; as well as being among the first generation of artists who worked with video. In her works Rosler uses video, photography, text, installation and performance with which she dissects the boundaries between the public and the private sphere, the social and the political. Her committed work analyzes postmodern society and tends to center around public space and city planning, exploring themes that fluctuate between everyday life and the media, architecture, the spaces created by it and the people who inhabit them. She has also published numerous books of her works as well as essays that explore the role of photography and art, public space, transportation, as well as access to housing, gentrification and homelessness.

Martha Rosler was born in Brooklyn, where she continues to live and work. She attended the Brooklyn College of the City University of New York and the University of California, San Diego, where she received her BFA and MFA respectively. She has had numerous solo exhibitions at various institutions, internationally, including MACBA, Barcelona (2000, 2017), Seattle Museum of Art (2016); Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2013), MOMA, New York, (2012); The Centro José Guerrero, Granada (2009-10); La Virreina, Barcelona (2010), the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2007); the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (1990); and the Dia Art Foundation, New York (1989). She has been included in numerous group exhibitions at institutions such as the Hamburger Kunsthalle (2017), The Serralves Museum, Porto (2017), The Brooklyn Museum, New York (2015); The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015); the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2013); the LA Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, (2011), Skulptur Projekte Münster 07; dOCUMENTA 7(1982) & dOCUMENTA 12 (2007), Kassel; the Venice Biennale (2003); the Liverpool Biennial (2004), Tate Modern, London, and many other international and national venues. Rosler has also published 17 books of photography, art, and writing, in several languages. Her work has been recognized with numerous prizes including the Guggenheim Museum Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010, Spectrum International Prize in Photography (2005), and Oskar Kokoschka Prize (2006) and this year she has been awarded with the Hamburg Lichtwark Prize.