

PIERO GILARDI

Presentation

Born in Turin, 1942. In 1965 he first realized his famous nature Carpets (tappeti natura) works made of polyurethane that he's gonna expose at the gallery Sperone (Turin) in 1966, then in 1967 at the gallery Sonnabend (Paris) and at the gallery Fischbach (New York).

From 1968, he stop producing artworks by engaging in the path of art criticism and becoming the correspondent for the magazine *Flash Art*. Traveling in Europe and the United States, he has introduced in Italy the works of Richard Long, Eva Hesse, Jan Dibbets, Bruce Nauman, and collaborates in the realization of two international exhibitions: *When Attitudes Become Form* (Bern, 1969) and *Op Losse Schroeven* (Amsterdam, 1969) who show the artistic stakes of the moment (Arte Povera, Land Art, Antiform Art).

In 1969, he began to take part in a long activist and transcultural experience which aims at the theoretical analysis and the conjunction «Arte Vita» (Art Life). As a political activist and leader of the young culture, he leads various collective creativity experiences in urban and «global» peripheries, such as in Nicaragua and Indian reserves in the United States, as well as in Africa. He went back to his artistic activity during the 80's performing interactive installations that talk about our relationship to nature and the world, by offering the visitor the opportunity to be part of the work. These proposals seek, among other things, to raise awareness on ecological issues by grasping the contribution of technology and science to the art world; in 1988, he co-founded with Piotr Kowalski and Claude Faure the association Ars Tecnica in Paris.

From 2003, he promotes the project of the Living Art Park of the City of Turin where summarize all his experiences related to the dialectic Nature-Culture. In 2012, his works are exhibited in a major traveling exhibition (Castello di Rivoli, Turin ; Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven ; Nottingham Contemporary Art, Nottingham).

In 2017, the MAXXI in Rome, dedicates him a retrospective «*Piero Gilardi. Nature Forever*» which shows the different aspects of his work.

Né à Turin en 1942. A partir de 1965, il réalise ses tapis nature (tappeti natura) en mousse polyuréthane qu'il expose à la galerie Sperone (Turin) en 1966 puis en 1967 à la galerie Sonnabend (Paris) et à la galerie Fischbach (New York).

A partir de 1968, il interrompt la production d'œuvres en s'engageant dans la voie de la critique d'art et en devenant le correspondant de la revue *Flash Art*. Circulant en Europe et aux États-Unis, il fait connaître en Italie les travaux de Richard Long, Eva Hesse, Jan Dibbets, Bruce Nauman, et collabore à la réalisation de deux expositions internationales : *When Attitudes Become Form* (Bern, 1969) et *Op Losse Schroeven* (Amsterdam, 1969) qui montrent les enjeux artistiques du moment (Arte Povera, Land Art, Antiform Art).

En 1969, commence une longue expérience activiste et transculturelle qui vise à l'analyse théorique et à la conjonction «Arte Vita» (Art Vie). En tant que militant politique et animateur de la jeune culture, il mène différentes expériences de créativité collective dans les périphéries urbaines et «mondiales» au Nicaragua et dans les réserves indiennes des États-Unis, ainsi qu'en Afrique. Il reprend son activité artistique au cours des années 80 réalisant des installations interactives qui parlent de notre rapport à la nature et au monde en offrant au visiteur la possibilité d'être partie prenante de l'œuvre. Ces propositions cherchent notamment à faire prendre conscience des enjeux écologiques en se saisissant de l'apport de la technologie et de la science dans le monde de l'art ; avec Piotr Kowalski et Claude Faure, il est cofondateur de l'association Ars Tecnica à Paris en 1988.

A partir du 2003, il promeut le projet du Parc d'art vivant de la Ville de Turin où se résument toutes ses expériences relatives à la dialectique Nature-Culture. En 2012, son travail est exposé lors d'une grande exposition itinérante (Castello di Rivoli, Turin ; Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven ; Nottingham Contemporary Art, Nottingham).

En 2017, le MAXXI à Rome, lui consacre une retrospective « *Piero Gilardi. Nature Forever* » qui montre les différents aspects de son œuvre.



Robert Heald, Piero Gilardi & Joshua Petherick - *Pastorale*, Wellington, UK, 2019



Biodiveristà, 2019

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

50 x 70 x 20 cm (19.69 x 27.56 x 7.87 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19002



Biodiveristà, 2019

polyurethane foam

mousse polyurethanique

50 x 100 cm (19.69 x 39.37 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19022





Maschera di Agnelli collaudatore, 1986

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

50 x 50 x 60 cm (19.69 x 19.69 x 23.62 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19024



Conchiglia e spugna, 2019

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

50 x 70 x 20 cm (19.69 x 27.56 x 7.87 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19003



Amarilli, 2019

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

40 x 40 x 15 cm (15.75 x 15.75 x 5.91 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19004



Sorbo e pere nella neve, 2019

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

40 x 40 x 15 cm (15.75 x 15.75 x 5.91 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19005



Cappero sulla spiaggia, 2018

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

100 x 50 cm (39.37 x 19.69 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19023



Biennale di Anren, view of *World Wide Protest*, China, 2018







IGLOO, 1967

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

200 x 200 x 130 cm (78.74 x 78.74 x 51.18 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19006



Ceppo di banano e cedri, 2018

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

70 x 70 x 20 cm (27.56 x 27.56 x 7.87 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19001



Palma caduta e banano, 2018

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

70 x 45 x 15 cm (27.56 x 17.72 x 5.91 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19020



Neve in scioglimento, 2018

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

150 x 150 cm (59.06 x 59.06 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19021



Mostra Decorum, view of *Tappeto Natura Angurie* (1967), Shanghai, China, 2014









Vestito-Natura Anguria, 1967

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

180 x 70 cm (70.87 x 27.56 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19009





Van Abbemuseum, *Collaborative effects 1963 - 1995*, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 2012





Castello di Rivoli - Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, *Piero Gilardi. Collaborative Effects 1963-1985*, Torino, Italy, 2012





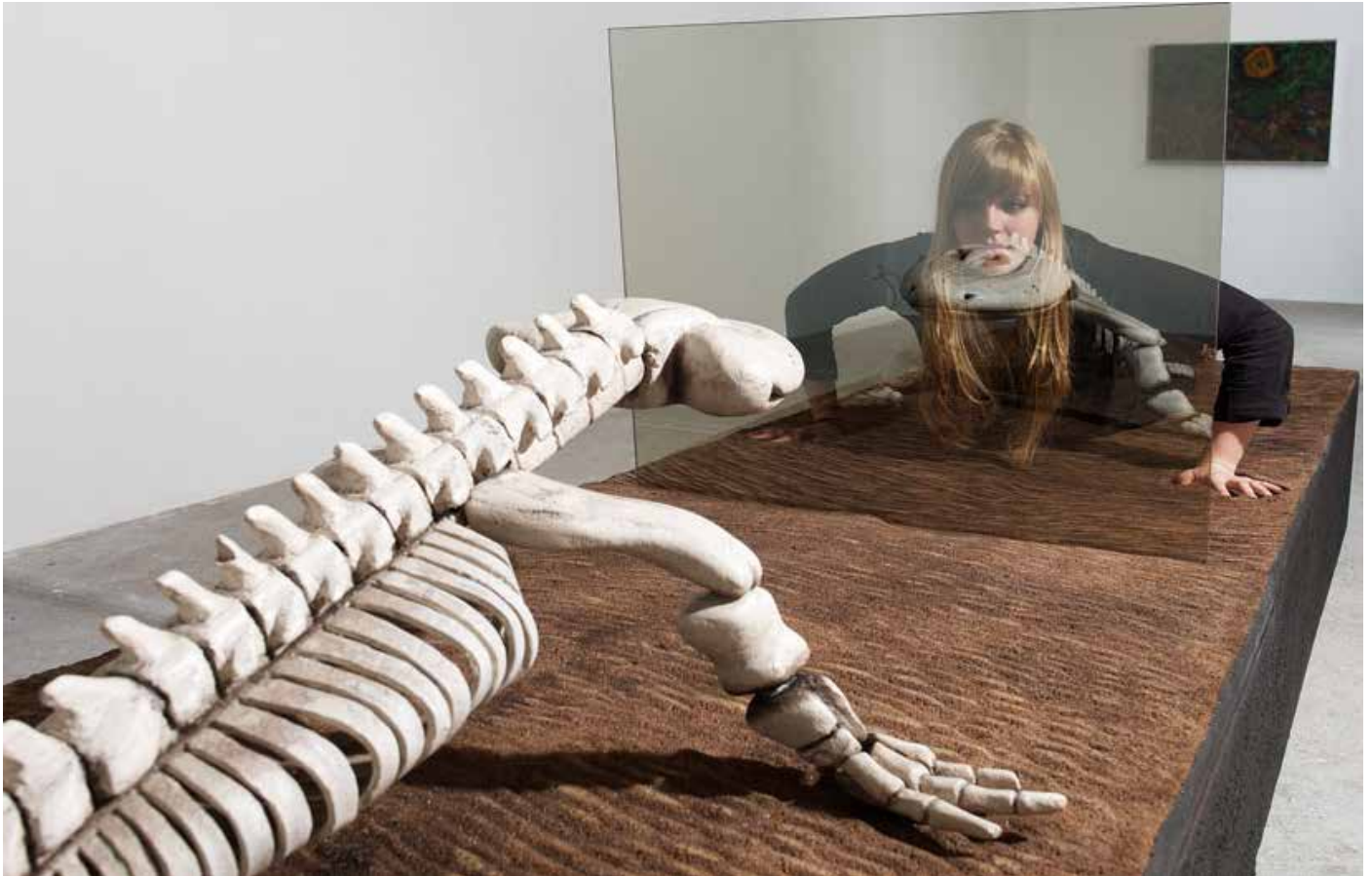
CCCOD - Centre de Création Contemporaine Olivier Debré, *Leçon de Choses*, Tours, France, 2010





Aigues Tortes, 2007
polyurethane foam
mousse polyurethanique
70 x 420 cm (27.56 x 165.35 in.)
unique artwork
GILA19014





Tiktaalik, interactive installation, 2010, Collezione Fondazione Gilardi



D.M.G. Free, 2014

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

200 x 60 cm (78.74 x 23.62 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19018



View of Work shop O.G.M. FREE, Milano, Italy, 2014



Tronco spiaggiato, 2016

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

180 x 180 cm (70.87 x 70.87 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19011



Installation view of *Visibile-Invisibile*, Enzesfeld-Lindabrunn, Austria, 2008



Greto di montagna, 1967

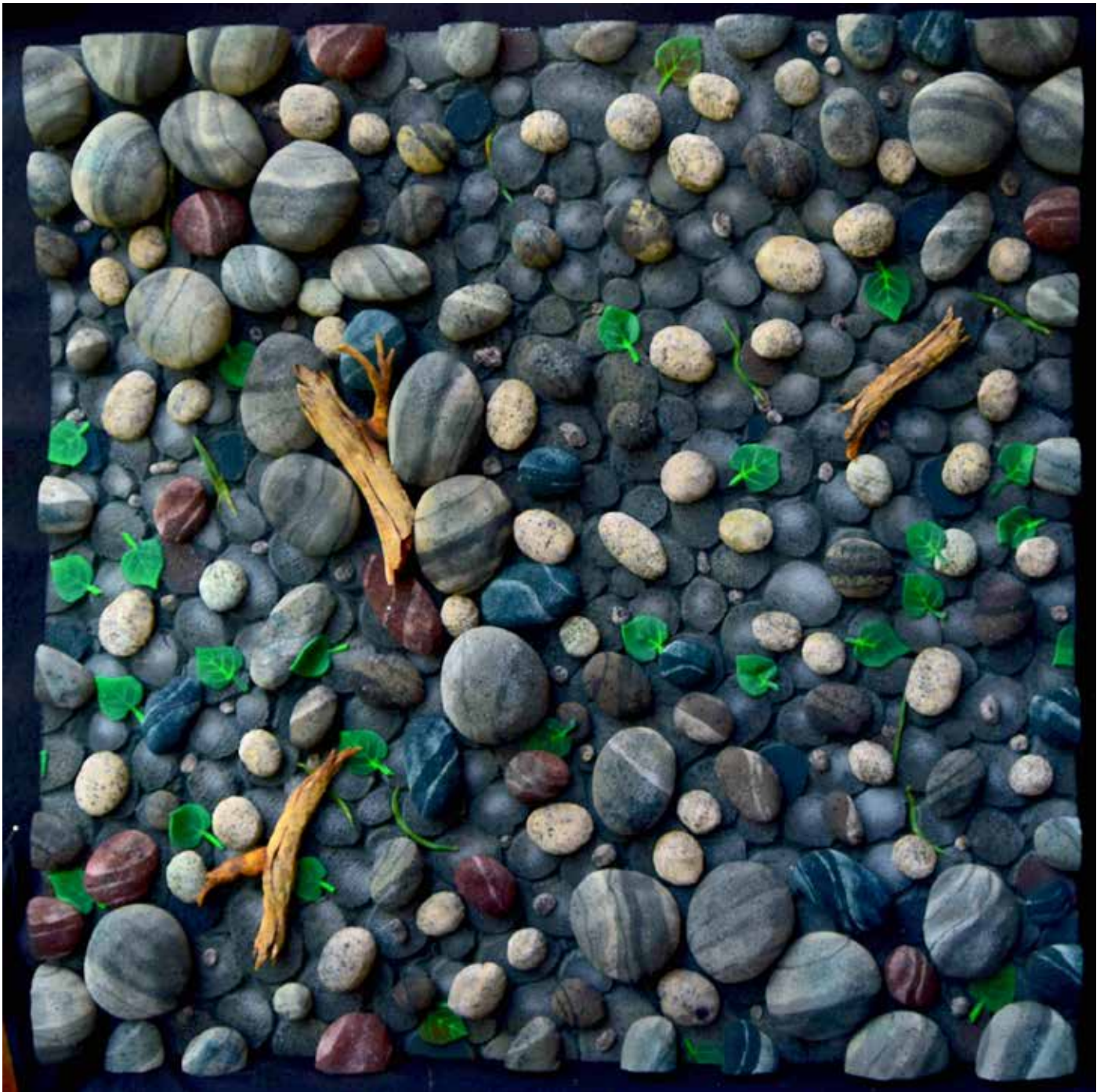
polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

50 x 50 cm (19.69 x 19.69 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19007



Greto di torrente, 1967

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

150 x 150 x 18 cm (59.06 x 59.06 x 7.09 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19008



Tronco sedile, 1966

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

60 x 10 cm (23.62 x 3.94 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19012



Mais sull'aia, 1967

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

70 x 70 cm (27.56 x 27.56 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19010



Zuccaia, 1966

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

50 x 65 cm (19.69 x 25.59 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19013



Le Donne di Siano, 1980

serigraphy

sérigraphie

70 x 50 cm (27.56 x 19.69 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19019



NO ALLA REPRESSIONE, 1969

serigraphy

sérigraphie

70 x 50 cm (27.56 x 19.69 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19017



Kossiga-Dracula, 1991
polyurethane foam
mousse polyurethanique
80 x 50 cm (31.5 x 19.69 in.)
unique artwork
GILA19016



RENZI BIFRONTE, 2014

polyurethane foam

mousse polyuréthanique

60 x 50 cm (23.62 x 19.69 in.)

unique artwork

GILA19025



Biennale de Lyon, installation view of *Inverosimile* (1990), Lyon, France, 2003



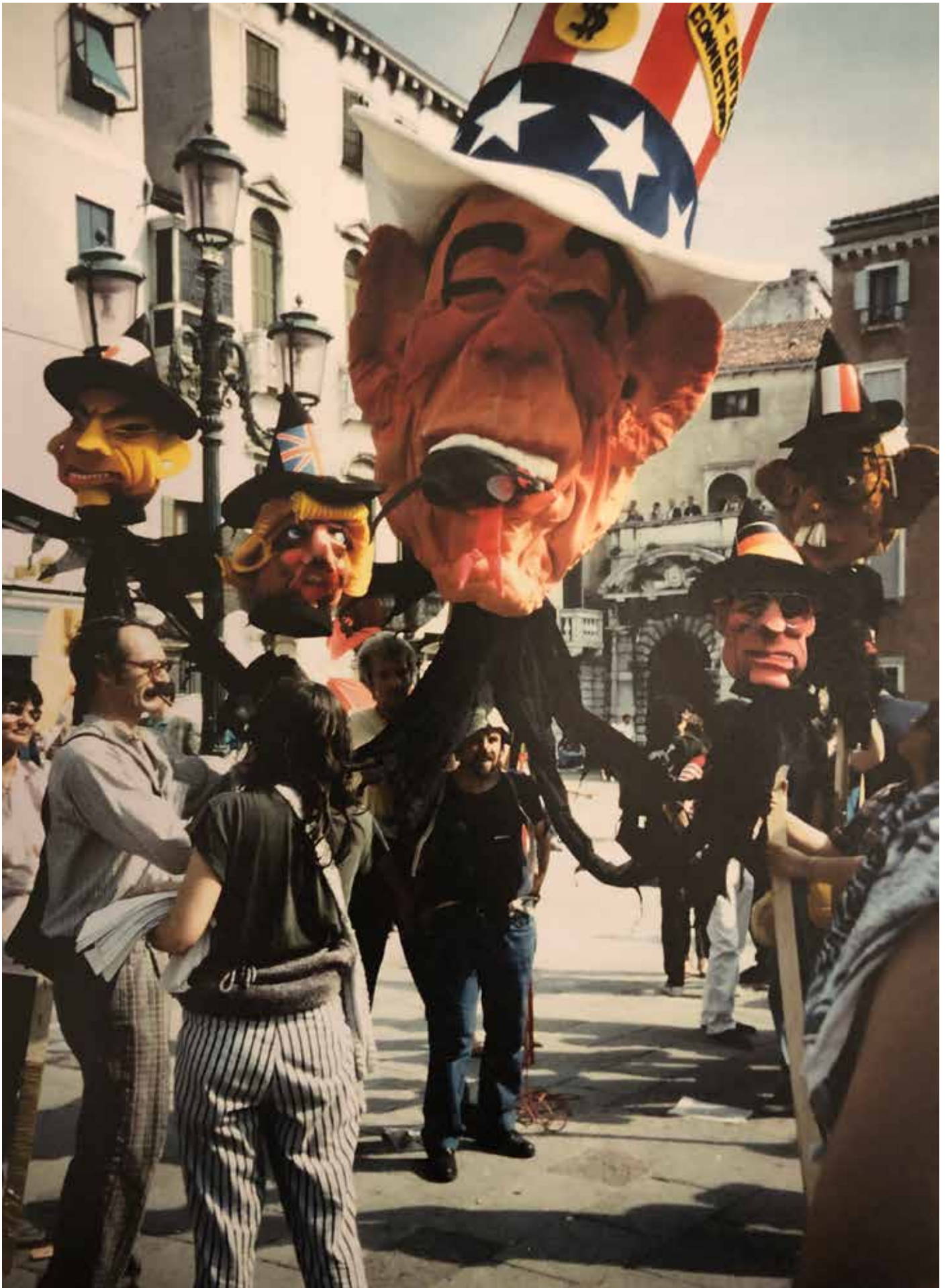
45th Biennale de Venice, Italy, 1993



Galleria Sperone, view of *Inverosimile* installation, New York, USA, 1991



Musée des Arts Décoratifs, view of *Banano danzante*, *arbre électronique*, Paris, France, 1989



Demonstration of the «Teatro politico di strada» against the G8 Summit in Venice, Italy, 1988



Ninfee, Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie de La Vilette, Paris, France, 1988



Performance during a demonstration against nuclear power, Caorso, Italy, 1987

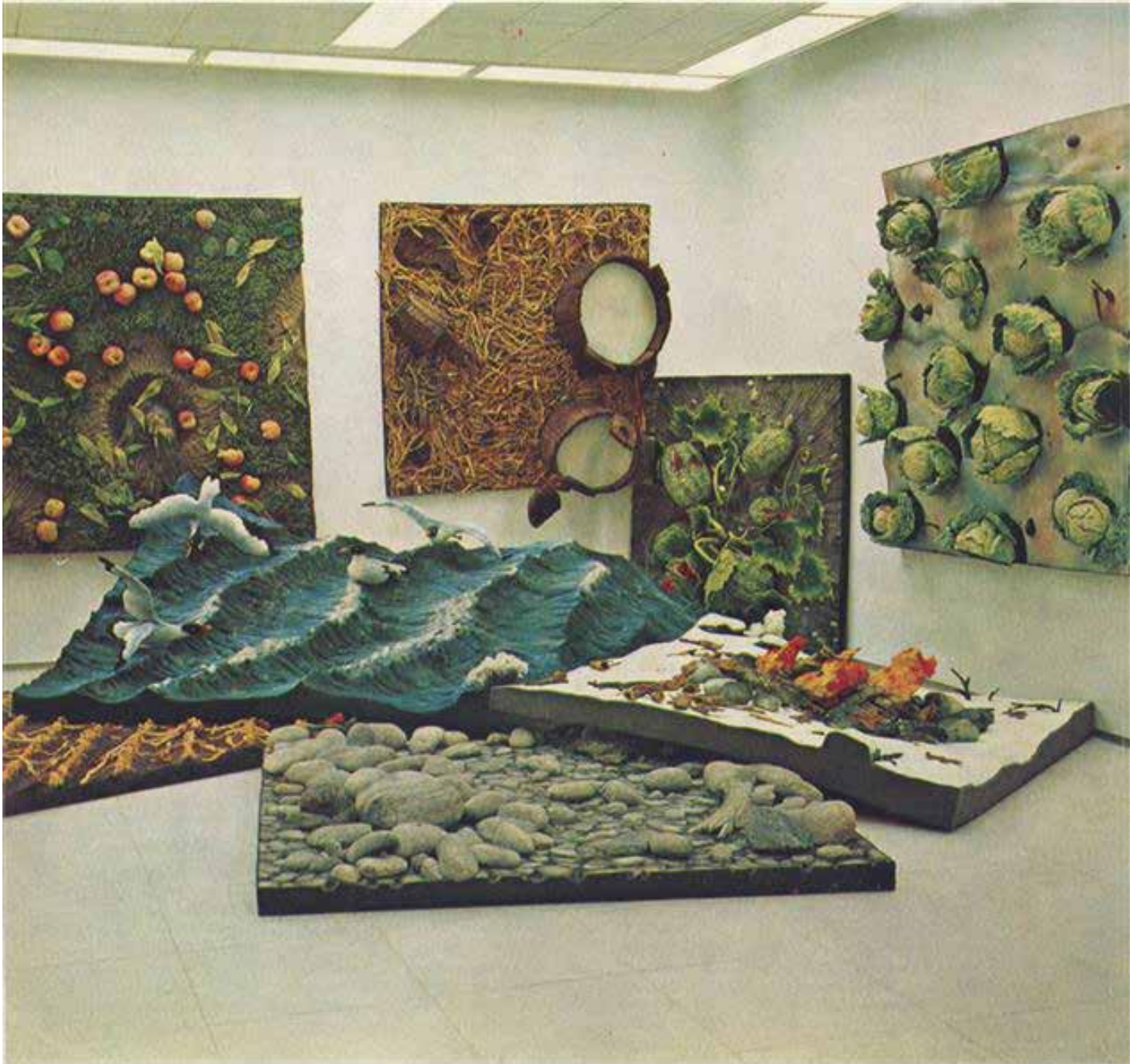
PIERO GILARDI

BIOGRAPHY EXHIBITIONS / ARTWORKS PUBLICATIONS PRESS

MICHEL REIN PARIS/BRUSSELS



Galleria EVA Menzio, view of *HE HAL* installation, Turin, Italy, 1987



Galerie Michael Sonnabend, Paris, France, 1967

PIERO GILARDI

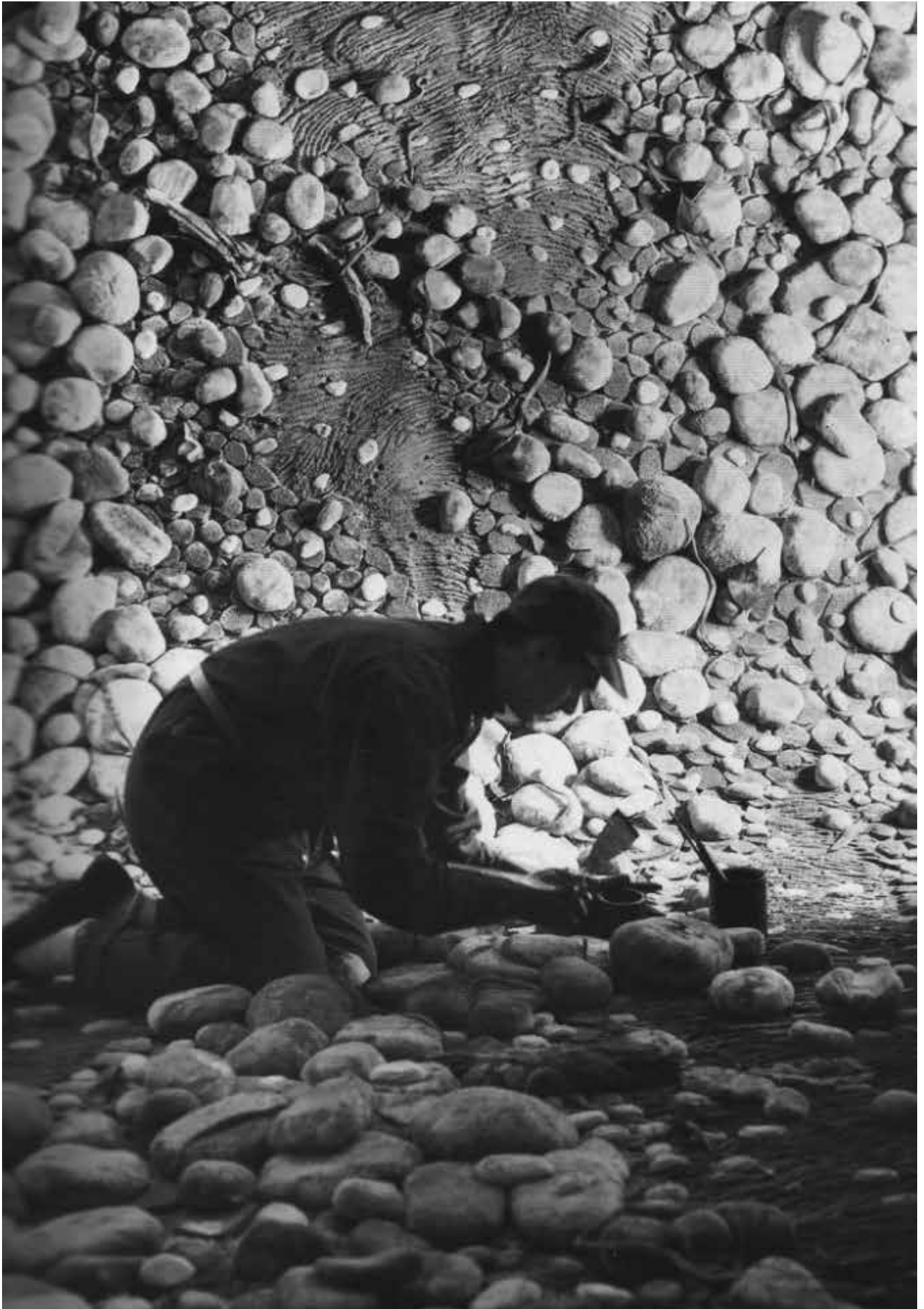
MERCOLEDI 25 GENN. 1967 ALLE ORE 18 NEL PIPER DI
TORINO S'INAUGURA LA MOSTRA DEI TAPPETI NATURA
DI PIERO GILARDI (P.G.C. DELLA GALLERIA SPERONE)
L'INVITO E' PERSONALE

PIPER

e' la fine del mondo



Performance posters at the PIPER CLUB Turin, Italy, 1967



Gilardi at work, Galleria Sperone, 1966



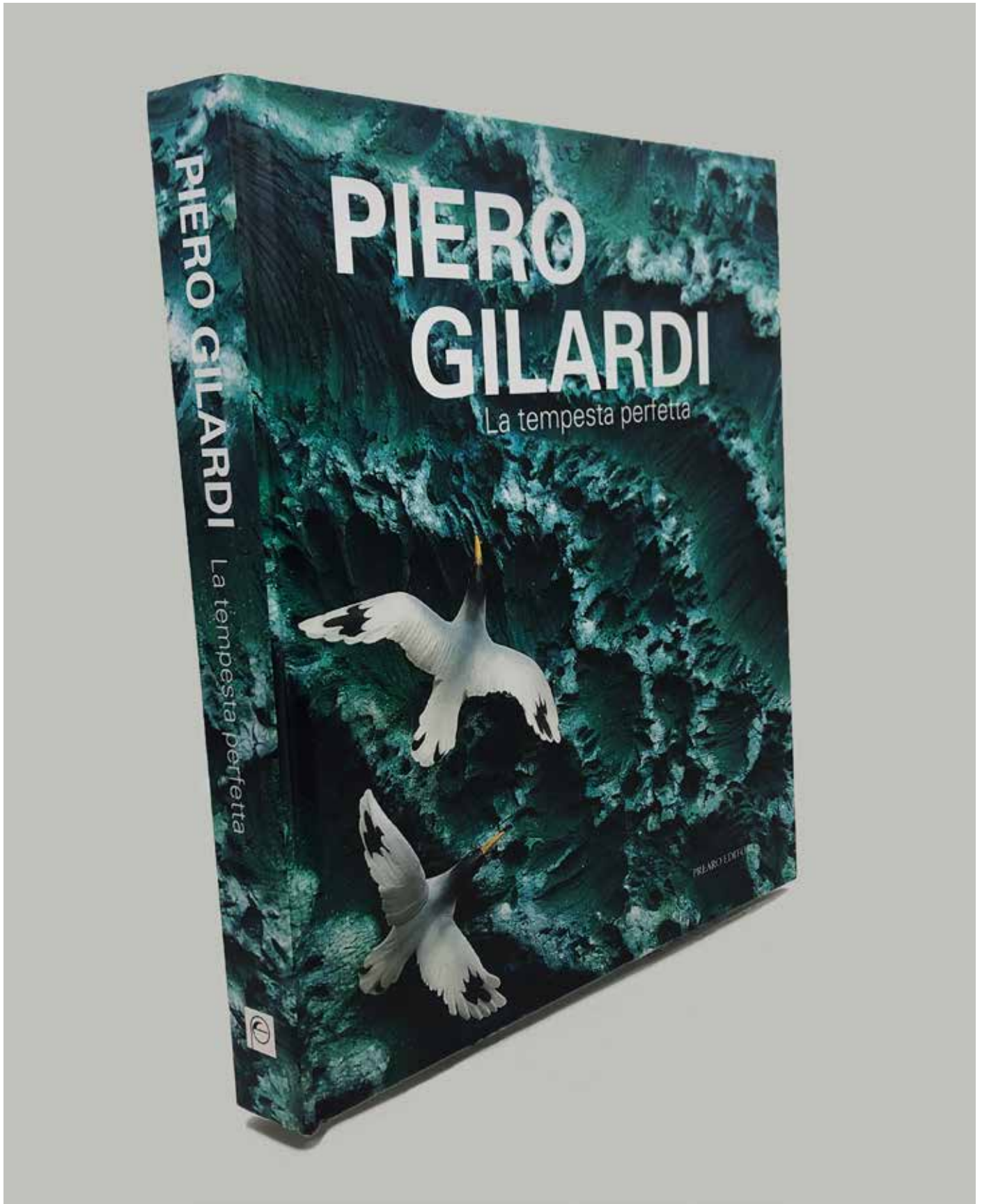
Ettore Sottsass Junior with Piero Gilardi

PIERO GILARDI

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MICHEL REIN PARIS/BRUSSELS

PUBLICATIONS



Piero Gilardi. La tempesta perfetta, 2018

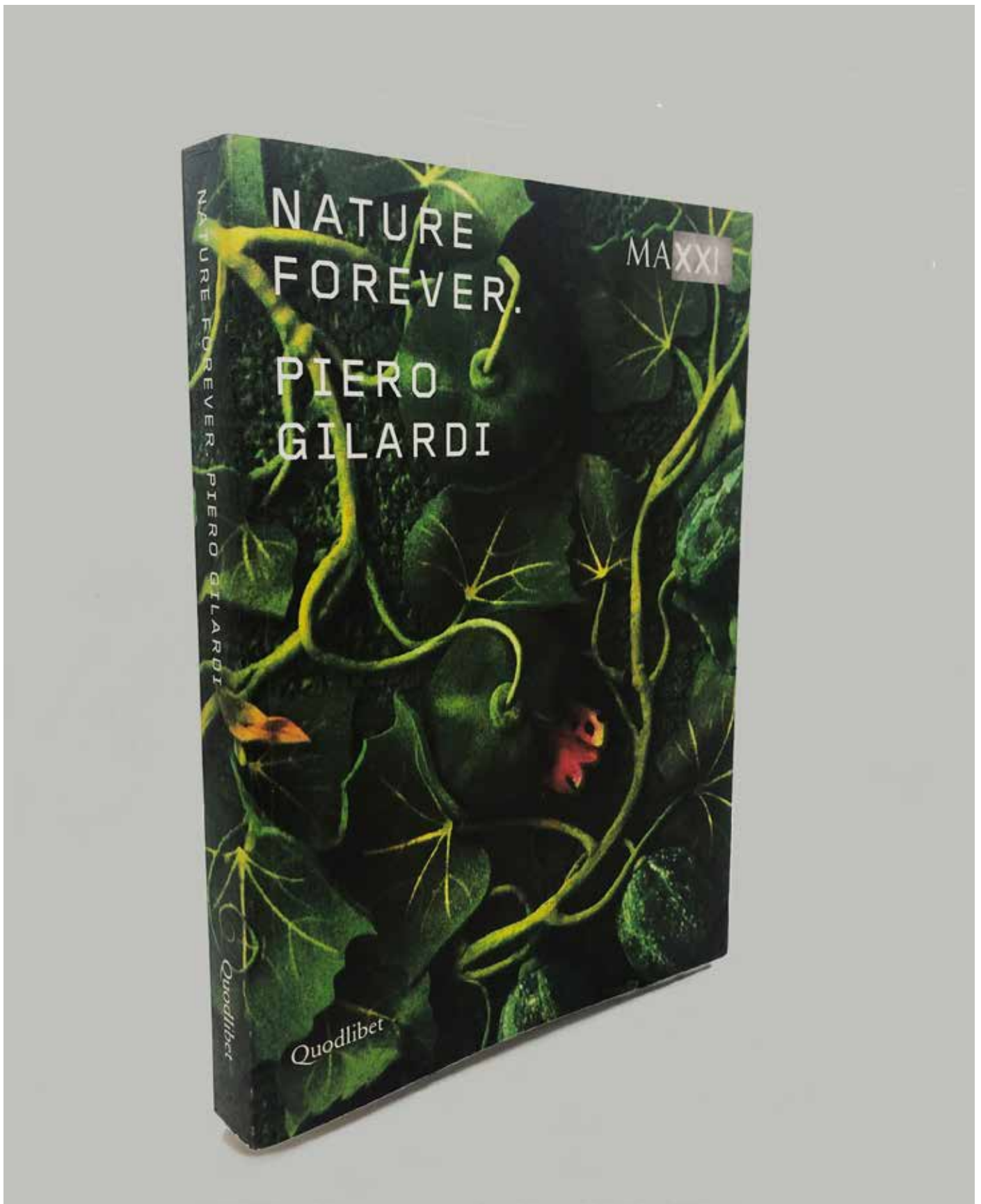
Texts by Piero Gilardi

ed. Prearo

208 pages

Italian

ISBN : 9788873481355



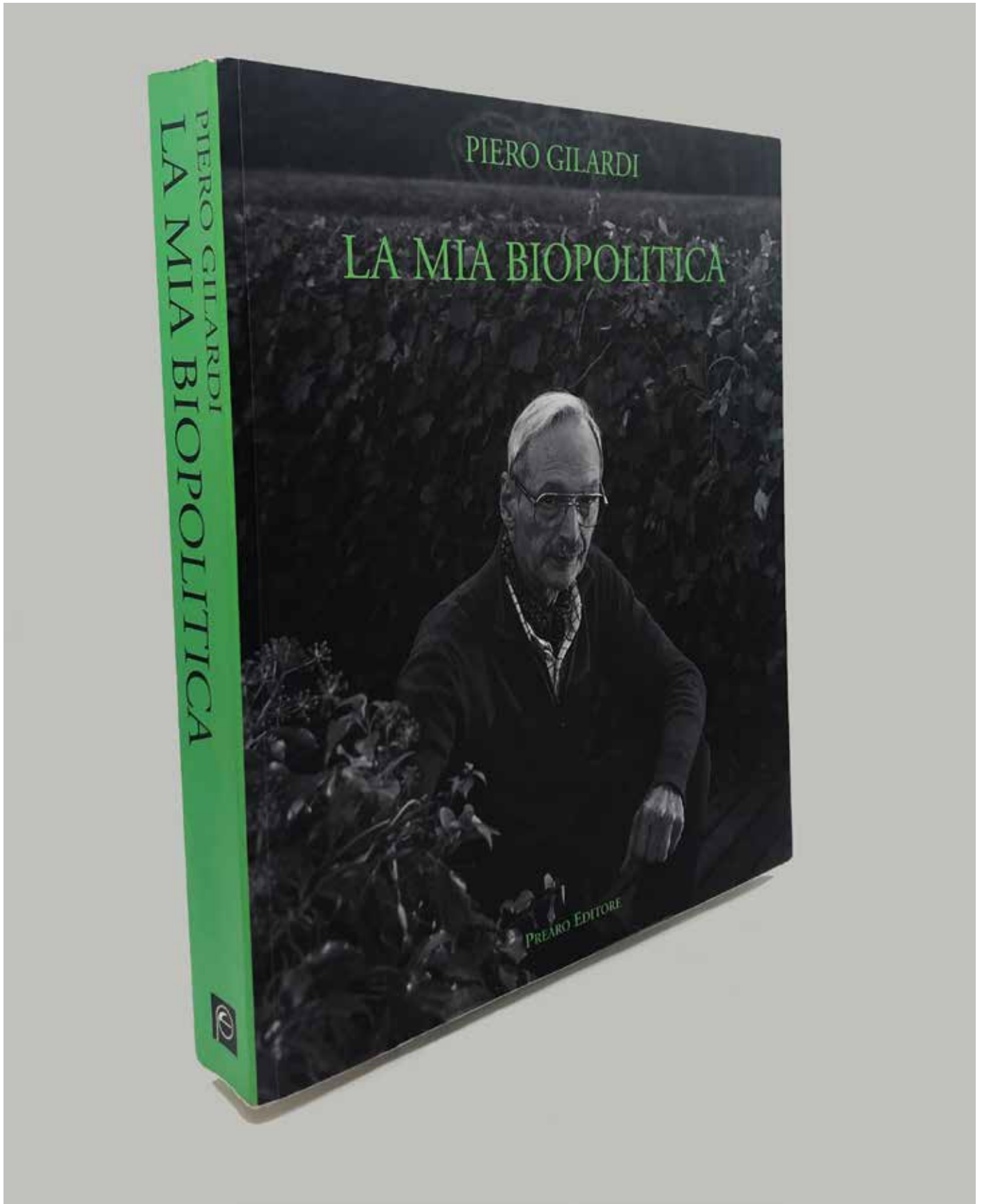
Piero Gilardi. Nature forever, 2017

Texts by Hou Hanru, Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, Valérie Da Costa, Marco Scotini & Piero Gilardi
ed. Quodlibet

224 pages

Italian/English

ISBN : 9788822900753



Piero Gilardi. La mia biopolitica, 2016

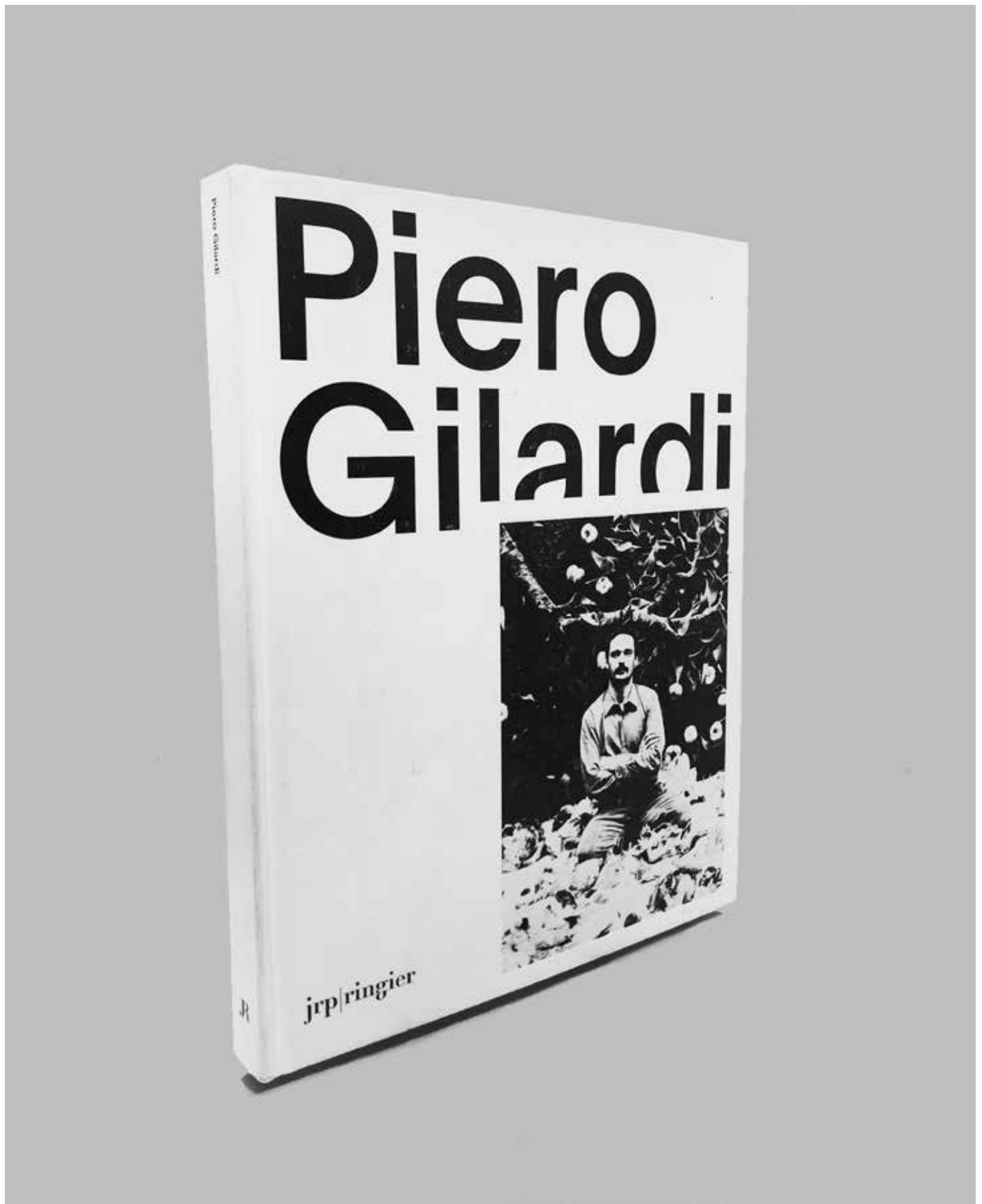
Texts by Piero Gilardi

ed. Prearo

344 pages

Italian

ISBN : 978-8873481102



Piero Gilardi, 2012

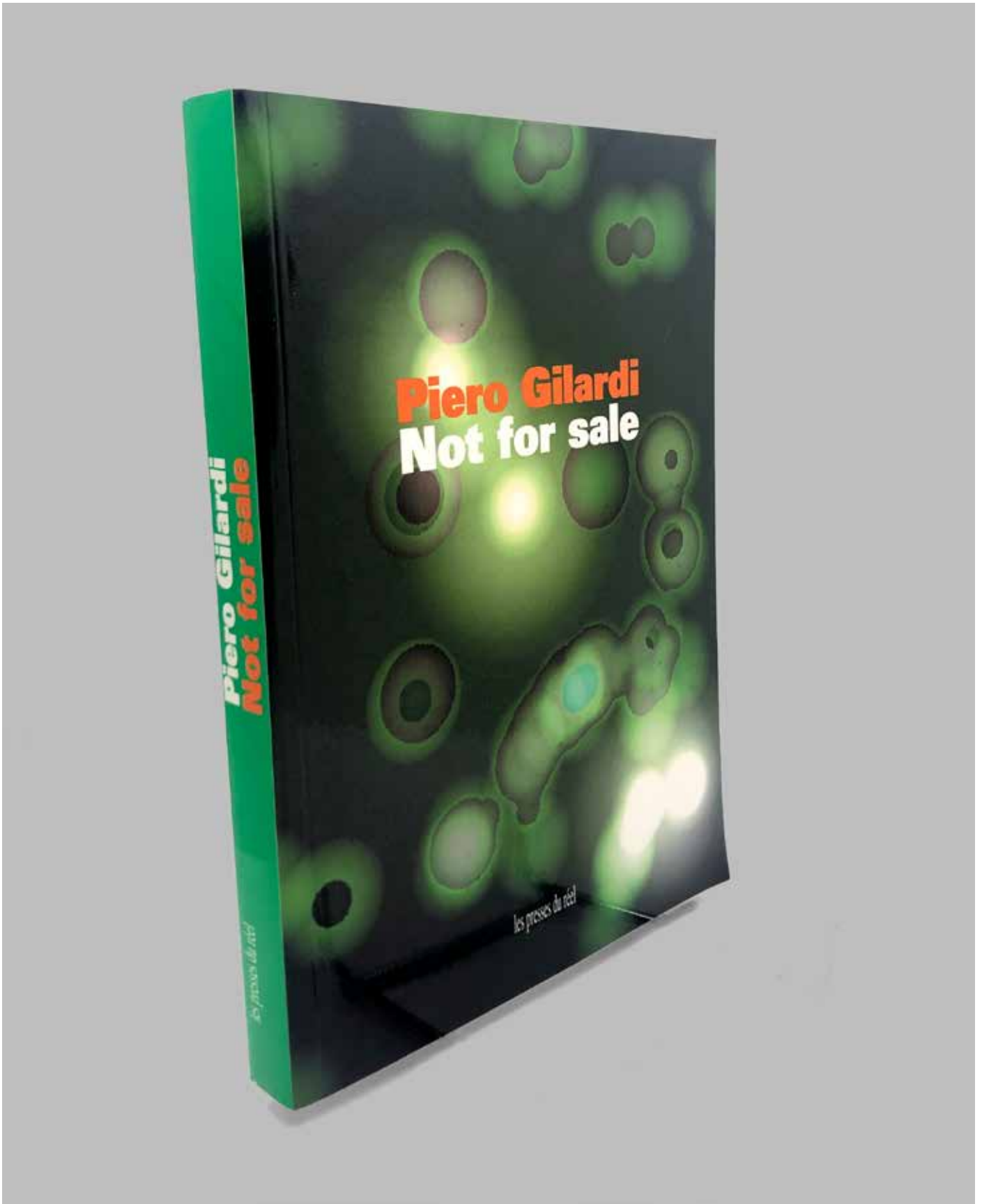
Texts by Andrea Bellini & Charles Eschei

JRP|Editions

192 pages

Italian/English/French

ISBN : 978-3-03764-242-9



Piero Gilardi - Not for sale, 2003

Texts by Piero Gilardi

ed. les presses du réel

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French

ISBN : 978-2-84066-079

PIERO GILARDI

BIOGRAPHY EXHIBITIONS / ARTWORKS PUBLICATIONS PRESS

MICHEL REIN PARIS/BRUSSELS

PRESS

DENTRO L'OPERA: INCONTRO CON PIERO GILARDI



Piero Gilardi è nato nel 1942 a Torino, dove vive e lavora. Nel 1963 ha allestito la sua prima mostra personale *Macchine per il futuro*, e solo due anni più tardi realizza le prime opere in poliuretano espanso, i *Tappeti-natura* che ha poi esposto a Parigi, Bruxelles, Colonia, Amburgo, Amsterdam e New York. **A partire dal 1968 interrompe la produzione di opere per partecipare all'elaborazione delle nuove tendenze artistiche della fine degli anni '60: *Arte Povera*, *Land Art*, *Antiform Art*. Ha collaborato alla realizzazione delle due prime rassegne internazionali delle nuove tendenze allo Stedelijk Museum di Amsterdam e alla Kunsthalle di Berna e nel 1969 comincia una lunga esperienza transculturale diretta all'analisi teorica e alla pratica della congiunzione "Arte Vita".**

Nel 1981 riprende l'attività nel mondo artistico, esponendo in gallerie delle installazioni accompagnate da workshops creativi con il pubblico. A partire dal 1985 inizia una ricerca artistica con le nuove tecnologie attraverso l'elaborazione del Progetto IXIANA che, presentato al Parc de la Villette di Parigi, prefigura un parco tecnologico nel quale il grande pubblico poteva sperimentare in senso artistico le tecnologie digitali. Nel corso degli anni '90 ha sviluppato una serie di installazioni interattive multimediali con una intensa attività internazionale. Insieme a Claude Faure e Piotr Kowalski, ha costituito l'associazione internazionale Ars Technica ed in qualità di responsabile della sezione italiana, promuove a Torino le mostre internazionali *Arslab. Metodi ed Emozioni* (1992), *Arslab. I Sensi del Virtuale* (1995), *Arslab. I labirinti del corpo in gioco* (1999).



Ha pubblicato due libri di riflessione teorica sulle sue varie ricerche: *Dall'arte alla vita, dalla vita all'arte* (La Salamandra, Milano 1981) e *Not for Sale* (Mazzotta, Milano 2000 e Les Presses du réel, Dijon 2003). Ha promosso il progetto del PAV – Parco Arte Vivente, che si è aperto a Torino nel 2008, nel quale si compendiano tutte le sue esperienze relative alla dialettica Natura/Cultura.

Project Marta – Monitoring Art Archive lo ha incontrato per *Collezione da Tiffany* al fine di approfondire le conoscenze tecniche e materiali, in particolare, di *Tronco-Sedile*, una scultura del 1997 misurante 280 cm (lunghezza) x 65 cm di diametro, realizzata intagliando e lavorando il poliuretano (PUR), successivamente dipinto. La scultura raffigura un tronco d'albero ed è stata pensata dall'artista per essere utilizzata come seduta, ed infatti la sua proprietaria ci ha contattato per una manutenzione straordinaria – della quale si sono occupate la nostra consulente tecnica Fabiola Rocco e la collega Melissa David, restauratrici specializzate nell'ambito del contemporaneo – per ricevere indicazioni per mantenerla al meglio nel tempo, pur continuando a farne l'utilizzo previsto da Gilardi.

Benedetta Bodo di Albaretto: La sua ricerca in ambito artistico inizia intorno agli anni '60 e si concentra soprattutto sulla riproduzione di scorci e frammenti di paesaggi ed elementi naturali, un esercizio tecnico che punta ad ottenere un effetto molto realistico ed a porre l'attenzione su uno stile di vita che, col passare del tempo, diventa sempre più artificiale. Le opere in questione sono conosciute come *Tappeti-natura*, sono realizzate in poliuretano espanso dipinto e sono state esposte in tutto il mondo. Vuole raccontarmi più nel dettaglio il suo percorso artistico?

Pietro Gilardi: «I *Tappeti-natura* ho incominciato a farli nel 1965, in un periodo conosciuto come post Pop Art. Gli anni Sessanta sono stati molto fecondi in termini di progettualità nuove, penso al 1966 con la *Minimal Art*, poi evoluta nella *Land Art*, due movimenti che nascono in un contesto di passaggio tra Pop Art e Arte concettuale. In questo periodo si va oltre la dimensione classica del quadro e della scultura per entrare nella dimensione installativa, entrando nello spazio e nel vissuto delle persone. Il *Tappeto-natura* è pensato per essere vissuto dai suoi proprietari. Il tappeto accoglie il nostro corpo, ci cammini sopra ma volendo potresti accoccolartici, no? Il *Tronco-sedile* è un'evoluzione dello spazio del vissuto domestico. Siamo di nuovo fuori dalla dimensione dell'estetica canonica. Da un lato è un oggetto, dall'altro contiene un'immagine evocativa di una problematica che è l'abuso dell'industrialismo nei confronti dell'ambiente. Come sono nati? Una mattina durante una passeggiata sul Sengone, non lontano da Torino, ho avuto una sensazione di ribrezzo alla vista di tutti i rifiuti sul greto del fiume, ed ho voluto ricostruire quello scorcio ripulito dalle tracce inquinanti umane. Basta fiumi inquinati, volevo vedere un greto di fiume così com'è in natura».



*Una vista di Naure Forever al MAXXI di Roma (2017) con i celebri Tappeti-natura di
Piero Gilardi*

B.B.: Potrebbe raccontarmi le sue preferenze in termini di materiali utilizzati nelle sue opere? Mi riferisco non solo alle tipologie di poliuretano ma anche ad esempio alla materia pittorica solitamente realizzata con una miscela a base di lattice di gomma (“Mescola Gilardi”), pensato per proteggere il poliuretano dal degrado indotto dalla luce, ed agli adesivi che utilizza per assemblare gli elementi che compongono le sue opere.

P.G.: «Quando ho pensato a quest'idea di natura ho avuto ben chiaro di voler rifuggire la dimensione classica della rappresentazione, volevo dare uno stimolo fruibile attraverso il proprio corpo, ed ho pensato a come fosse possibile fare una cosa del genere. Ho pensato a cosa accoglie il nostro corpo: sedie, poltrone, letti...sono arrivato così alla gommapiuma. Questa è un prodotto organico, composta al 60% a base di caucciù, una linfa che raggiunge la forma a noi conosciuta tramite processo di vulcanizzazione, però era molto cara ed anche molto deteriorabile. La mescola Gilardi contiene una percentuale di lattice di gomma, mescolato ad un catalizzatore a base di zolfo che serve per la vulcanizzazione, ed un'altra decina di elementi tra cui l'ossido di zinco che filtra i raggi UV. Il poliuretano è gommapiuma sintetica, dopo la guerra dall'utilizzo militare siamo passati all'utilizzo civile. Utilizzo il Plextol B500 come lattice sintetico, la Mescola Gilardi è una miscela di più componenti».

B.B.: **Nel caso della scultura *Tronco-sedile* vi è una struttura di sostegno interna all'opera, ma non è possibile appurare come sia stata realizzata visionandola esteriormente. Potrebbe descrivermela?**

P.G.: «Nel caso della scultura *Tronco-sedile* vi è una struttura di sostegno interna all'opera, una centina iniziale di compensato spesso, a seguire altre tre centine tagliate nel compensato. Poi ho applicato un foglio di masonite che segue la curva delle centine, e sulla struttura ho avvolto una lastra da 8-10 cm di poliuretano, fissandola con Bostik 99, appositamente per la gommapiuma. [...] Sulla forma così sbazzata intervengo con una lama - rasoio da conciatore - per ritagliare una forma o realizzare le fenditure del legno, oppure con le forbici quando devo ottenere delle sfrangiature, strappando i materiali, oppure la levigatrice orbitale quando devo lisciare le superfici. I lavori più grossi possono richiedere anche una settimana di lavoro».



Pietro Gilardi, Tronco-Sedile, 1997. 280 cm (lunghezza) x 65 cm di diametro

B.B.: **Conservazione e manutenzione preventive: esistono delle misure per la conservazione in generale delle sue opere che raccomanda di adottare ai suoi collezionisti/galleristi? Penso ad esempio all'accortezza di non esporre le opere vicino a fonti di calore o in ambienti troppo umidi.**

P.G.: «Per approfondire l'aspetto cognitivo sui materiali mi sono servito di tante collaborazioni. Alla fine degli anni Sessanta ho lavorato con la ditta Gufram, che produceva oggetti in poliuretano espanso verniciati con lattice di gomma. La formula di quest'ultima miscela l'avevo concessa io, ma loro hanno messo in campo ingegneri e una tecnologia sviluppata per migliorare la composizione, studiando quali componenti aggiungere alla miscela e soprattutto utilizzando un forno – una cabina che lavora a 60° – per rafforzare la vulcanizzazione del lattice, rendendo gli oggetti più resistenti. Sono stato assistito dai tecnici della Gufram e della EOC per quanto riguarda i materiali, mi sono confrontato con loro sulla possibilità di aggiungere l'ossido di zinco per proteggere dagli UV, oppure sulla tipologia di teche che è possibile utilizzare per le mie opere, nello specifico penso al plexiglass anti UV».

B.B.: **Alcuni artisti hanno integrato nella loro opera il concetto di temporalità, di effimero, così l'idea alla base del progetto prende forma anche attraverso l'utilizzo di elementi che ne causeranno – consapevolmente – il degrado e, in alcuni casi, anche la scomparsa. Lei è favorevole alla testimonianza del passaggio del tempo sull'opera?**

P.G.: «Ti faccio un esempio. Il Museo di Gallarate ha una mia opera, uno scoglio sonoro, con all'interno un meccanismo abbastanza complesso, che suona quando le persone lo ribaltano, il rumore di un masso che cade in mare. Ovviamente questa manipolazione ha portato a un deterioramento consistente, ed ora il Museo mi ha chiesto di realizzare una exhibition copy per salvaguardare il pezzo originale. Non è qualcosa con cui sono d'accordo, volevo fosse un'opera da utilizzare, effimera, destinata a perdersi. Però mi sono adattato e ho agito per favorire la durata dell'opera. Bob Morris nel 1967 ha realizzato un'opera alla cui base era posto un registratore, dentro una scatola di legno. Dal suo interno si sentiva il rumore di falegnameria prodotto dall'artista per costruire la scatola. Allo stesso modo le testimonianze dei processi di realizzazione delle opere possono essere sostitutivi delle stesse. Da qui la mia conservazione di disegni e progetti, fotografie e video».



B.B.: Il pubblico può avvicinarsi alle sue opere, può toccarle – e in caso deve essere dotato di dispositivi come guanti, ad esempio – oppure ci sono casi in cui bisogna far mantenere una certa distanza? Nel caso di Tronco-sedile è appunto pensato perché ci si possa sedere.

P.G.: «Per molte opere è prevista la manipolazione e l'interazione, però da parte del pubblico spesso c'è ineducazione, quasi una sorta di violenza. Per questo, per quanto riguarda i Tappeti natura, mi è capitato spesso che si decidesse di permettere di toccare una sola delle opere all'interno di una mostra, le altre invece si mettono sotto teca, in modo da poter controllare quell'unica e avere sott'occhio la situazione».

B.B.: Rilascia informazioni a collezionisti, galleristi, allestitori in merito all'installazione dei suoi lavori? Ad esempio l'inclinazione o tipologia delle luci, una distanza specifica dalle altre opere, una collocazione a centro sala?

P.G.: «Quando consegno una delle mie opere fornisco la documentazione necessaria, un dossier con le schede dei materiali perché possa essere esposta in sicurezza, soprattutto quelle molto tecnologiche, per cui addirittura consegno con un hard disk con il programma necessario a farla funzionare. In questi casi consiglio comunque di cambiare il computer ogni 4 anni, per non correre il rischio di non avere più pc compatibile con l'hard disk. Per un'opera tecnologica devi tenere conto che bisogna aggiornarla, perché dopo al massimo 15 anni non trovi più i pezzi di ricambio. Io fornisco il ricambio per ogni pezzo, ma è da mettere in conto un cambio di interfaccia. Nel dossier c'è la descrizione dell'apparato tecnico, la lista degli elementi necessari per il trasporto, le istruzioni per l'uso, relazioni di precedenti restauri, riferimenti di tecnici ci fossero problemi informatici, schemi di montaggio delle opere. Così sono tranquillo quando consegno i miei lavori».

JULIET

Piero Gilardi
 Juliet - Art Magazine
 27 November, 2019
 by Roberto Vidali

Piero Gilardi: siamo natura

by ROBERTO VIDALI • 27 NOVEMBRE 2019 • INTERVISTE

Non si può parlare del lavoro di Piero Gilardi senza partire dai suoi “tappeti-natura”, lavori dal forte accento cromatico e nei quali venivano declinate le infinite possibilità di un mondo artificiale nel segno del poliuretano espanso. In seguito la modalità della tecnologia interattiva si affiancherà all’uso di questo materiale palesemente antitradizionale (il passo dalla scultura scavata nella pietra a quella sagomata da un materiale di sintesi è senz’altro epocale e corrisponde a quella sperimentazione inesauribile di sempre nuove ricerche espressive, propria degli anni Settanta) senza per questo scendere a patti con un processo di smaterializzazione. In tal modo l’oggetto estetico, nel lavoro di Piero, non ha mai perso di pregnanza, anzi ha sempre acquistato forza, permettendo al corpo plastico di far scaturire tutte le sue energie interiori; pensiamo al *Banano danzante* (esposto alla Galleria Toselli, a Milano, nel 1989, e ancora composto da sole parti meccanico/elettroniche), fino ad arrivare a *Inverosimile* (proposto nel 1990 a Volpaia e nel 1991 da Sperone-Westwater, a New York), vigna interattiva e profumata, corredata da effetti sono/visivi. La definizione di *tappeto-natura* viene usata dall’autore, per la prima volta, nel 1966, in una scheda di presentazione per la mostra da Sperone, a Torino, che così scriveva: “Spero di poter riunire, un giorno, tutti i tappeti che sto realizzando, in un luogo largo e piano, racchiuso da una cupola informe e opalescente: in quell’ambiente rarefatto l’immagine di ogni tappeto comincerà a dilatarsi e deformarsi secondo un ritmo organico incomprensibile ma accettabile... L’effetto è di una natura artificiale in cui le sorprese e i misteri della natura vera stimolano il cervello ma si flettono elementarmente sotto i piedi”.



Piero Gilardi, *Igloo*, 1967, cm 200 x 200 x 130. Ph François Fernandez, collezione Fondazione Gilardi



Piero Gilardi, *Orto di surresno*, 1967, poliuretano espanso, cm 150 x 150 x 1,8, ph courtesy Galleria Michel Rein, Parigi

Vivi ancora questa speranza?

Ettore Sottsass diceva che i *tappeti-natura* erano un esorcismo contro la morte della natura causata dallo sfrenato sviluppo industrialista del dopoguerra. L'ossimoro di queste opere è che sono realizzate con un materiale industriale – il poliuretano espanso – che per me fu necessario per offrire al nostro corpo e al nostro tatto quella sensazione della natura immersiva. In sostanza i *tappeti-natura* sono delle opere interattive che accolgono il corpo. In seguito ho realizzato installazioni interattive utilizzando le tecnologie digitali, come ad esempio la vigna interattiva *Inverosimile*. Ho ancora la speranza che le tecnoscienze, usate nel modo appropriato, ci possono aiutare a salvare l'umanità dall'ecocidio incipiente.

Come vorresti, invece, definire la tua collocazione nell'attuale panorama artistico internazionale?

Mi sento parte delle arti ecologiche. Come sottolinea Paul Ardenne, le arti ambientaliste ci offrono oggi una galassia di pratiche artistiche differenti: da quelle di denuncia critica a quelle che delineano socialmente pratiche e stili di vita ecosostenibili.

Ritengo di poterti definire il motore primo del PAV di Torino. Mi puoi fare una breve nota di come e perché è stato fondato e di quali obiettivi oggi si pone?

Il PAV (Parco Arte Vivente, centro d'arte contemporanea Torino) è stato costruito e ora viene gestito da un gruppo di operatori culturali molto impegnati. Anche se mi consideri il "motorino" dell'equipe, va reso merito a chi come Enrico Bonanate, Orietta Brombin, Valentina Bonomonte e Giuliana Ponti si sono prodigati fin dall'inizio a far funzionare il PAV come *museo pubblico all'aperto*.

È indubbia la tua grande passione per l'impegno civile: direi che è una costante che ha accompagnato tutto il tuo lavoro di sperimentazione. Oggi, come coniughi tutto ciò all'interno del tuo lavoro artistico?

Oggi, l'obiettivo del PAV è quello di sviluppare una coscienza ecologica allargata cogliendo tutta l'energia per il cambiamento che il movimento *Friday for the future* esprimerà. Oggi, la mia biopolitica consiste nel collaborare a tutti i movimenti della cittadinanza attiva, come il *Comitato Acqua pubblica* ed *Extinction Rebellion* per rendere più incisiva la comunicazione degli obiettivi politici come la salvaguardia dell'ambiente e la democrazia di base.



MUSEO MAXXI, ROMA – FINO AL 15 OTTOBRE 2017. LA SEDE CAPITOLINA RIPERCORRE LA CARRIERA DELL'ARTISTA TORINESE PIERO GILARDI, METTENDO IN EVIDENZA I NODI TEMATICI DELLA SUA POETICA. DALLA NATURA ALLA SCIENZA, PASSANDO ATTRAVERSO LA TECNOLOGIA.

Una vasta mostra retrospettiva di **Piero Gilardi** (Torino, 1942) si è aperta al Museo Maxxi di Roma a cura di Hou Hanrou, Bartolomeo Pietromarchi e Marco Scotini. La mostra allinea diverse componenti del lavoro di Gilardi, iniziando dai primi Anni Sessanta, quando le intuizioni concettuali sulle funzioni dell'arte si mischiano alla fascinazione del mondo della scienza, della fantascienza e della comunicazione. Una fascinazione che porta a interrogarsi sulle evoluzioni future della comunicazione e che si collegherà poi all'intervento sui new media. La *Macchina per discorrere*, sorta di Radio Futurista che s'illumina quando si parla, diventa una previsione sulle tematiche dell'interattività che, dai computerizzati Anni Ottanta, invaderanno il rapporto arte-scienza-società.

Ma sono le opere “pop-iperrealiste”, che usano materiali plastici morbidi e maneggevoli, a rappresentare nuove problematiche contemporanee. Come i *Vestiti Natura*: erba, sassi, fiori e rami indossati da modelle in gallerie d’arte nella vivace Torino degli Anni Sessanta, dove le forme espressive (unificate poi da Germano Celant nell’Arte Povera) stavano sorpassando le città di punta come Milano e Roma con soluzioni originali e aperture imprevedute. E più tardi i *Tappeti Natura*, che diventeranno una delle immagini iconiche delle tematiche società-natura inaugurate in quegli anni dalle controculture e dalla Land Art.

I lavori di Gilardi portano un elemento diverso, il fantastico e il fiabesco, come nel *Barone Rampante* di Italo Calvino, dove il protagonista vive sugli alberi in mezzo alla natura per critica verso la società.



Piero Gilardi, *Mare*, 1967. Collezione Fondazione Gilardi. Photo Leo Gilardi

LA SVOLTA DEGLI ANNI '60

La leggerezza e il fantastico sono quindi i mezzi con cui affrontare tematiche impegnative. Atteggiamento che muterà in parte con il mutare degli Anni Sessanta in Italia e nel passaggio alle realtà delle lotte politiche che esplodono intorno al '68. La partecipazione politica, già evidente nel lavoro precedente, diventa prioritaria dal '69. Sono anni di scelte radicali e Gilardi sceglie di abbandonare i percorsi prettamente artistici e di portare la creatività nelle lotte politiche.

I modelli sono quelli nati in anni in cui tutto era rimesso in discussione: Stato, lavoro, scuola e sanità mentale attraverso l'antipsichiatria. Il lavoro con i collettivi di animazione culturale conduce alla partecipazione ai collettivi politici che rappresentano la base sociale dei movimenti. Molte immagini ricordano l'entusiasmo e la creatività di quegli anni, dove le maschere e le marionette di Gilardi traducono la realtà in termini visivi immediati, colti e popolari insieme, come le figure di **Depero**.

Negli Anni Ottanta è l'arte digitale a muovere il suo operato, che vede le nuove tecnologie come un ampliamento del binomio arte-comunicazione. Il "Meraviglioso Tecnologico" permette il reificarsi d'ipotesi quali l'interattività, vista come sviluppo della partecipazione del pubblico ai processi creativi, istanza basilare del lavoro neodata degli Anni Cinquanta e Sessanta confluito nelle pratiche concettuali e nell'arte digitale.

LA STORIA DEL PAV

Dall'arte "abitabile" all'arte "sensoriale", così i sassi e le piante delle nature mimate e plastificate negli Anni Sessanta diventano cinetici, creano piccole o grandi narrazioni con finalità di gioco e politica ambientale. Come in *Alice in Wonderland*, alberi e fiori parlano, animazioni e musiche ribadiscono il passaggio dai problemi gravi dell'ambiente all'ottimismo di una natura e una società che ridiventano integre e felici.

La creazione del PAV – Parco Arte Vivente nella periferia di Torino diventa la sintesi di molte linee di ricerca del lavoro di Gilardi: la cultura come animazione culturale, la tecnologia come medium modello, la logica di una didattica estetica che agisce dalla periferia. Il risultato è una struttura di grande interesse, nata con un'architettura biologica su un'ex discarica bonificata. Alternativa alle funzioni museali (centro di ricerca e non museo), la struttura propone mostre legate all'arte, alla scienza e all'ambiente. Su questi temi sorgono attività didattiche, workshop e la partecipazione di artisti che producono in loco le loro opere, come il gigantesco trifoglio-labirinto abitabile di **Gonzalez-Foerster**. Oppure come il Fiore macchiato di rosso che il "bioartista" **Eduardo Kac** ha modificato geneticamente inserendovi il proprio DNA come fosse il proprio sangue.

Una mostra che porta a Roma un artista non abbastanza visto in città e, attraverso il suo lavoro, una rilettura importante e significativa dell'arte italiana dagli Anni Sessanta a oggi.

Dialoghi di Estetica. Parola a Piero Gilardi

NEGLI ANNI SESSANTA PIERO GILARDI HA IMPOSTATO LA SUA RICERCA INCENTRANDOLA SUGLI SVILUPPI DELLE SCIENZE POSTNEWTONIANE E LA RELAZIONE FRA ARTE E NATURA. IN SEGUITO SI È CONCENTRATO SULLE PRATICHE RELAZIONALI E PARTECIPATIVE E L'ESPLORAZIONE DELLE POTENZIALITÀ PROVENIENTI DALLE SPERIMENTAZIONI BIO-TECNOLOGICHE. ALLA LUCE DI QUESTI TRATTI SALIENTI DELLA SUA POETICA, QUESTO DIALOGO VERTE SUL RAPPORTO TRA NATURA E ARTIFICIO, IL SUPERAMENTO DEL TRADIZIONALE MODELLO RAPPRESENTAZIONALE E LA POSSIBILITÀ DI RIPENSARE ALL'ARTE IN UNA PROSPETTIVA ANTROPOLOGICA.



Piero Gilardi nell'Ecoagora, 2015 – PAV, Torino - photo Valentina Bonomonte

In che modo ha influito sulla tua ricerca artistica la riflessione sul rapporto tra natura e artificio?

Negli Anni Sessanta arte e natura costituivano una coppia oppositiva. Il lavoro di allora era principalmente di carattere empirico. Si procedeva cercando di mettere insieme il mondo artificiale, quello delle macchine, con quello naturale. Lo sforzo era perciò rivolto a trovare una possibile conciliazione. Si cercava di condensare questi due mondi.

Di questa potenziale ibridazione mi è sempre interessato soprattutto l'aspetto antropologico: il tentativo di superare l'antinomia tra natura e artificio, riconoscendo l'evoluzione dell'uomo. Come ci insegnano anche le più recenti ricerche scientifiche, l'uomo nel corso della sua evoluzione si ibrida continuamente con ciò che è differente. Questa ibridazione ha perciò contribuito alla stessa evoluzione dell'uomo. Se ci pensiamo, per millenni questo ha voluto dire attuare uno scambio.

Ci fai un esempio?

Il canto degli umani trova molti dei suoi riferimenti nell'osservazione del canto degli uccelli. Lo stesso gesto estetico sembra in qualche modo rifarsi ai comportamenti proto-estetici degli animali.

Per mezzo secolo ho seguito gli sviluppi di questa coppia oppositiva che rimandano anche al rapporto tra arte e cultura. Considerata l'evoluzione della tecnoscienza e il suo integrarsi alla vita, penso che oggi il divario tra i due poli oppositivi si sia ridotto. Forse possiamo dire che la distanza tra natura e artificio sia stata ormai superata. Negli Anni Sessanta, il mio lavoro prendeva avvio proprio dalla ricerca di una possibile soluzione. Oggi mi sembra che quest'ultima sia stata trovata.

Questo approccio è anche all'origine del tuo abbandono del modello classico della rappresentazione – penso in particolare ai tuoi *tappeti-natura* – per procedere in direzione di un'arte incentrata sulla relazionalità. In un certo senso, anche la *Macchina per discorrere* che hai realizzato nel 1963 mostrava già questa direzione del tuo lavoro.

Anche i tappeti-natura erano già un'offerta relazionale, poiché sono pensati per essere soffici giacigli che si offrono al corpo. Proprio questo aspetto rivela anche l'altra dinamica parallela del mio lavoro: compiere un superamento della natura iconica dell'arte per portarla su un registro relazionale.

In questo caso, all'origine delle mie ricerche vi è anche una riflessione sui sensi e la mente, ossia sulla antinomia tra mente e corpo che tuttavia non possono essere scissi. Sono inestricabili. La stessa vita relazionale è basata su questa inscindibilità. Rispetto a questo potenziale superamento (dalla produzione iconica a quella relazionale), sono però convinto che il ciclo si sia quasi compiuto.

Quasi?

Sì, perché vedo nell'arte i residui di una produzione ancora basata su una logica iconica. Si fanno ancora monumenti e l'icona ha tutt'oggi una forza sorprendente soprattutto in ambito mediatico. A ben vedere, le icone sono ancora surrettiziamente valide.

Però l'evoluzione novecentesca dell'arte si deve sia alla produzione di immagini sia alla trasmissione delle idee. Il concettualismo si aggiunge alle tradizionali forme d'arte visiva e plastica, che privilegiano tutt'oggi la produzione iconica. Che cosa ne pensi?

Indubbiamente gli aspetti cognitivi e di elaborazione concettuale sono stati importanti per me e per tutta la nostra generazione. Il lavoro sui concetti e le categorie è stato decisivo. In quegli anni, quello che ci appariva chiaro era proprio che il gesto estetico era la conseguenza di una diversa visione del mondo.

Certo, il mio lavoro, così come quello di altri artisti attivi negli stessi anni, può essere riconosciuto innanzitutto come concettuale. C'è un periodo in particolare della mia ricerca che lo conferma: quello sull'arte microemotiva, che per me corrisponde a un momento di profondo travaglio concettuale.



Piero Gilardi, Macchina per discorrere, 1963 – C.C.C. TOURS – photo François Fernandenez

Questa parte del tuo lavoro rivela anche un forte legame con la tua riflessione sulla comunità e le relazioni umane, lasciando supporre che tu abbia compiuto un passaggio dal concettualismo alla relazionalità.

L'elaborazione concettuale per me è avvenuta a partire da una riflessione sul gioco esistenziale sia dell'individuo sia della comunità umana. Questo ha avuto anche un risvolto politico: trovare una nuova connessione tra l'individuo e la comunità, ovvero poter situare le due entità in un nuovo modo. Penso allora all'arte politica come incentrata su questa possibilità: garantire all'individuo un potenziale di libertà e, allo stesso tempo, mirare a ottenere quella sinergia che si crea nella comunanza e nella condivisione sociale. Credo che il nodo del gioco esistenziale sia questo.

Il lavoro concettuale per me ha avuto a che fare prima di tutto con la possibilità di garantire lo scambio mirando ad accogliere la differenza individuale all'interno del cerchio della comunanza. Possiamo intendere tutto questo nei termini di un discorso di apertura dei cerchi: una comunità accoglie la diversità dei suoi componenti individuali nella stessa misura in cui è aperta al dialogo con altri cerchi esterni, ossia con altre comunità. Si tratta dunque di un problema esistenziale che considero, prima di tutto, proprio nei termini di un approccio antropologico.

Forse è proprio in virtù di una riflessione antropologica – ossia di ricerche incentrate sulle relazioni e gli scambi comunitari, l'accoglienza delle diversità – che l'arte, anziché essere sfiorita, è rinata proprio grazie alle ricerche condotte a partire dagli Anni Sessanta. Ti sembra una prospettiva condivisibile?

Sì. Ci sono stati diversi preannunci, spesso di carattere utopico, fatti in ambito artistico in questa direzione. Penso, per esempio, all'annuncio della scultura sociale fatto da Beuys. Un concetto sul quale sono tornato più volte anch'io. L'arte è di tutti. Non dimentichiamo infatti che lo scambio dell'arte, dunque della produzione simbolica, è fondamentale tanto per l'evoluzione delle società quanto per quella degli individui. La stessa costruzione della soggettività è legata alla produzione simbolica e alla condivisione dell'arte a livello comunitario. L'arte è, in fondo, un bene comune. Ma, messa in questi termini, la questione diventa ancora più complessa. Perché, se possiamo dire che l'arte non sia degli artisti o di chi la acquista – supponendo che essa abbia funzioni progettuali, simboliche, terapeutiche ecc. – allo stesso tempo, dovremmo anche esser maggiormente capaci di riconoscerla come potenziale veicolo del cambiamento, come portatrice di nuove speranze.



Piero Gilardi, Akwesasne – Canada – photo Piero Gilardi, 1983

Questa concezione dell'arte si traduce direttamente negli sviluppi successivi delle tue ricerche, penso in particolare all'attivismo sociale e agli interventi di riattivazione creativa che hai attuato in diversi contesti urbani. Quale potrebbe essere un aspetto saliente che ha contrassegnato queste tue attività?

Per me ha voluto dire concentrarmi soprattutto sul mondo pulsionale. Per otto anni ho fatto l'arte-terapeuta. Avevo aperto quattro atelier in cui svolgevo attività insieme a pazienti psichiatrici con patologie diverse. Queste attività mi hanno reso più consapevole del fatto che nell'espressione artistica c'è sempre un'energia libidica. Proprio negli Anni Sessanta si discuteva di due diversi orientamenti teorici della psicoanalisi. Per Freud la produzione di rappresentazioni è espressione censurata delle pulsioni, mentre secondo la concezione junghiana la rappresentazione è piuttosto il costruito progettuale della pulsione. Questa seconda visione credo che permetta di comprendere meglio il compimento della liberazione dell'estetica da qualsiasi valenza normativa.

Spiegaci meglio quest'ultimo concetto.

Oggi in arte non c'è più un canone. E questo permette anche di capire meglio l'attuale eclettismo diffuso nell'arte. Prima di tutto, però, dev'esserci un medium. Sia esso il linguaggio, una macchia di colore, un gesto... È necessario un medium perché vi sia produzione simbolica.

Quello che intendo è che gli Anni Sessanta hanno contribuito a depotenziare la valenza normativa del medium. Ti faccio un esempio che potrebbe essere più calzante. Proprio in quegli anni ho lavorato molto realizzando diverse animazioni artistiche, sia in Italia sia all'estero: sono stato in Africa, in Nicaragua... Queste esperienze mi hanno permesso di individuare una sorta di procedura che si ripeteva con frequenza, ossia le diverse fasi che componevano l'attività creativa, che prevedeva il coinvolgimento dei partecipanti in quella che, in fondo, era un'opera d'arte totale. L'attività prendeva avvio con un gioco liberatorio al quale seguiva un momento rituale con caratteristiche estetiche – ad esempio, il coordinamento coreutico dei partecipanti o lo svolgimento di un'attività teatrale. Alla fine, questo rito tornava di nuovo al gioco. Questa liberazione di cui ti dicevo non può prescindere dal medium, e la penso proprio nei termini di questo momento liberatorio successivo alla fase del rituale. Un momento di elaborazione della rappresentazione che viene abbandonata in modi diversi per tornare alla libertà creativa.



Piero Gilardi, Connected Es – Galleria Civica di Modena, 1999

Quali potrebbero essere allora le conseguenze di questo superamento della rappresentazione in arte?

Questa trasformazione dell'arte rientra in un grosso movimento di trasformazione antropologica che può contribuire alla costituzione di una nuova mente. In questo modo, l'arte offre risorse creative e possibilità relazionali che potrebbero aiutarci ad affrontare le complessità del mondo contemporaneo.

La mostra che è stata recentemente inaugurata al PAV, in cui vengono esposti lavori di tre collettivi di artisti agro-ecologici, è una dimostrazione di questa possibilità: il lavoro in campagna lascia emergere la componente creativa. Si tratta allora di poter intravedere nelle continue trasformazioni dell'arte le offerte di diverse possibilità di salvezza.

La nuova funzione sociale dell'arte potrebbe allora trarre origine da un incremento della portata simbolica nelle pratiche creative e, parallelamente, da una riduzione di quella rappresentazionale?

Nell'interazione simbolica tra gli individui vi sono diversi aspetti da considerare: lo scambio delle pulsioni, l'empatia della speranza, la condivisione di un progetto. Credo che siano fattori che rientrano anche nella produzione artistica e che sono decisivi anche per la sua continua trasformazione.

Questo mi fa anche pensare a tutte le teorizzazioni sulla morte dell'arte. Le ho sempre considerate come metafore per l'elaborazione del lutto per la morte dell'arte umanistica. Ossia, di quella basata sulla rappresentazione e sull'antropocentrismo. Ma queste teorie rivelano l'esigenza, in parte consapevole, di dare un senso non a un lutto ma a una trasformazione. Attraverso diverse esperienze transculturali, l'arte si è trasformata. Le diverse forme di possibile ibridazione sono all'origine di tutto questo. Credo che attraverso di esse l'arte sia fuoriuscita dalla sua torre d'avorio per entrare nel vivo dello svolgimento dell'antropologia culturale.

Davide Dal Sasso

Piero Gilardi

Zerodeux

June 2010

by Benedicte Ramade

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PIERO GILARDI

BIOMAN: TOI AUSSI, REVELE LE PHOSPHORE QUI EST EN TOI! par Bénédicte Ramade



• Piero Gilardi
Phosphor, 2009. Courtesy galerie Semiose. Photo P.-A. Marassé

Potite leçon de chimie avant de commencer toute incursion dans le monde du Turinois Piero Gilardi : le phosphore (blanc-jaune, rouge et violet-noir), est indispensable aux organismes vivants. Lorsqu'il prend la forme de phosphate, il entre dans la composition de l'ADN et sert de véhicule à l'énergie. Ainsi, plantes et animaux, donc nous aussi les humains, partageons ce composant, entretenons un lien entre espèces. Un tel préambule en forme de vulgarisation scientifique était nécessaire afin de mieux s'abandonner aux charmes évidents de la bien-nommée *Phosphor* (2008).

Le dispositif merveilleux et enfantin occupe une bonne partie de la galerie Sémiose. Un arbre mort digne des contes de fées et de sorcières, noir, noueux, entièrement synthétique et démontable, invite à pénétrer dans son tronc sombre et forcément suspect. Spectateur-cobaye, la dialectique est connue depuis une bonne quarantaine d'années, un rôle dont on s'est rapidement méfié puis lassé. D'où une certaine réticence envers un éventuel « cirque » voire une prise à partie humiliante à laquelle nous acculerait l'arbre.

Sauf qu'ici, on se frotte à un des spécialistes du genre interrelationnel, Gilardi, l'homme des *tapis-nature* (1964) et de l'art « micro-émotif » et « habitable » (1967) avec des œuvres qui tutoient d'emblée.

Quid de l'expérience? Téléportation? Irradiation? Douche d'ondes? Déclenchement musical comme dans l'installation qui le consacra à la biennale de Lyon en 2003? À l'intérieur de la coque de mousse, le corps déclenche un scintillement peu compréhensible. Car c'est au spectateur qui se trouvera à l'extérieur, de l'autre côté d'une vitre, de profiter du spectacle et de lui donner un sens: la matérialisation du phosphore dans le corps du sujet. Car le phosphore blanc est luminescent dans l'obscurité lorsqu'il est exposé à l'air. Reste à savoir si le dosage est bénin ou témoigne d'un quelconque empoisonnement. Soit par ingestion de mort-aux-rats (dont le principe actif est le phosphore blanc) ou relatif à la pollution des environnements aquatiques particulièrement soumis à un surdosage de phosphates (responsable de l'eutrophication ou l'étouffement des eaux par prolifération

d'algues). Gilardi ne tranche pas. Il laisse l'œuvre creuser insidieusement son chemin dans des esprits toujours plus sensibilisés aux faits écologiques. Et puis ce que démontre avant tout *Phosphor*, c'est que nous partageons un patrimoine commun avec les plantes, une familiarité qui rend obsolète l'ambivalence entre nature et culture et entérine une révision complète des schémas d'expansion de la civilisation.

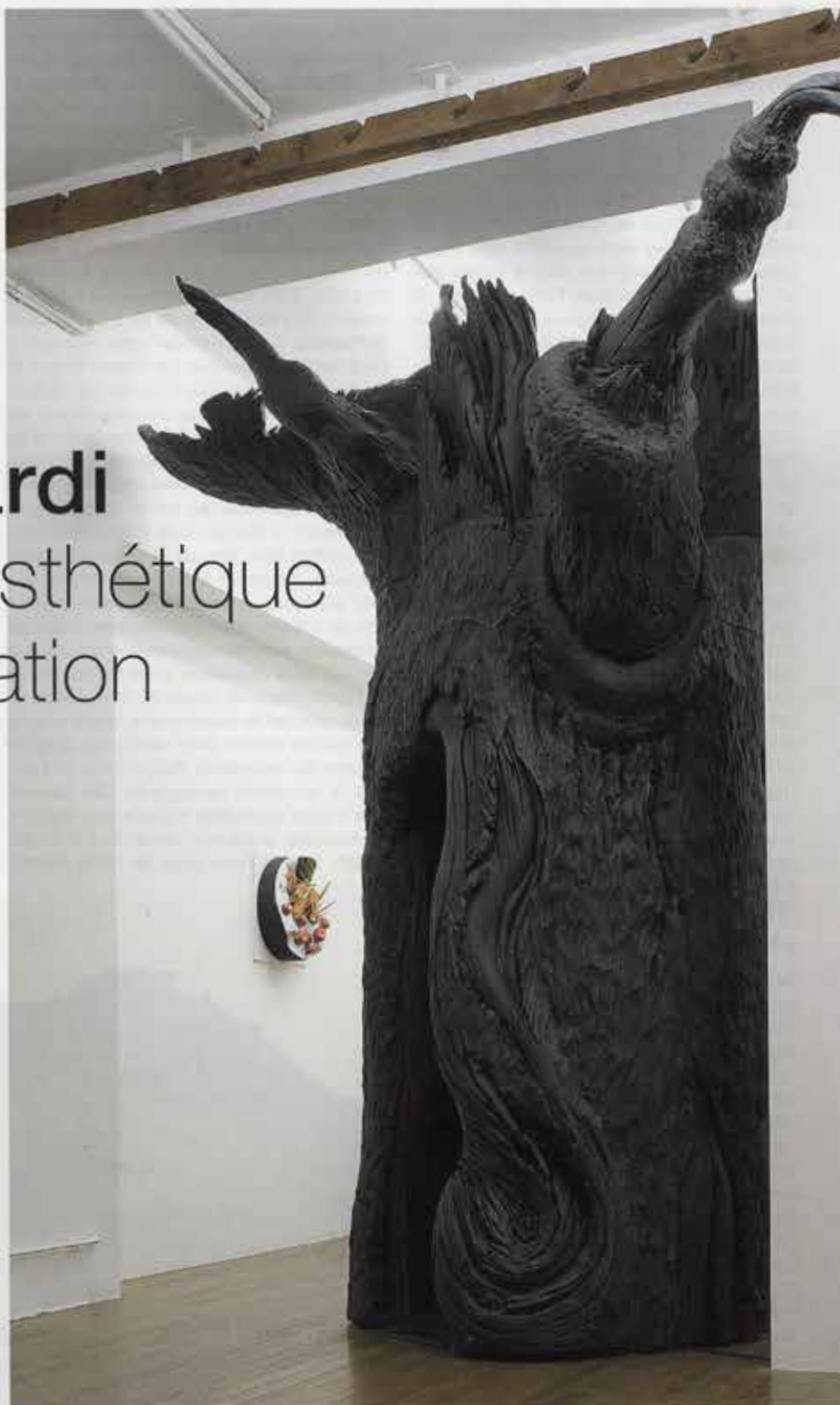
Piero Gilardi, *Phosphor*, à la galerie Sémiose, du 9 octobre au 5 décembre 2009. Exposition photographique à Venise au CCSD de la Biennale 2010.

Piero Gilardi

pour une esthétique de l'abnégation

Erik Verhagen

La réflexion sur l'écologie ne date pas d'aujourd'hui. L'Italien Piero Gilardi s'y est attelé dès les années 1960. Le Centre de création contemporaine (CCC) de Tours lui organise une rétrospective du 26 juin au 7 novembre, tandis que l'artiste participe également à l'exposition *D'après nature* (26 juin - 31 octobre) au domaine départemental du château d'Avignon.



« Phosphor », 2008. Mousse de polyuréthane et dispositif électronique. Diam : 260 x 360 cm, (Coil Fnac, Paris ; Ph. P.A. Marassé ; Toutes les photos, court. galerie Sémiose, Paris) Polyurethane foam and electronic device

■ Influent, l'artiste turinois Piero Gilardi le fut à bien des égards. « Conseiller » de Wim Beeren, le commissaire de l'exposition *Op losse schroeven* au Stedelijk Museum d'Amsterdam en 1969 (1), il guida au même moment Harald Szeemann lors de la préparation de la (tout aussi) mythique manifestation *Quand les attitudes deviennent forme* (Kunsthalle Berne, 1969). Quant à son œuvre à proprement parler, dont les activités de conseiller ne sauraient toutefois être dissociées, elle fut présentée, dès le milieu des années 1960, chez Gian Enzo Sperone et Ileana Sonnabend, prestigieux marchands qui surent accompagner l'artiste à une période où sa démarche était intimement liée à la pré-histoire de l'arte povera. Comment expliquer dès lors que l'importance de Gilardi soit aujourd'hui minimisée ? Que son œuvre ne fasse pas l'objet d'une attention plus soutenue ? Sans doute a-t-il pâti de l'amnésie généralisée qui affecte avec une constance déconcertante les milieux de l'art contemporain. Et payé le prix d'un destin « hors normes ». Car l'artiste n'a effectivement, en matière de « plan de carrière », pas opté pour les « bons » choix, préférant rester fidèle à ses engagements initiaux, jugeant par ailleurs utile, contrairement à certains de ses confrères, de tirer les conséquences d'un processus inéluctable où l'art finit par se dissoudre dans la vie. *Dall'arte alla vita, dalla vita all'arte* est le titre d'un ouvrage consacré à Gilardi, publié au début des années 1980. Beau et juste résumé d'une trajectoire singulière qui poussa l'artiste, au firmament, à abandonner quasiment toute pratique en 1969 avant de la reprendre une dizaine d'années plus tard.

« Microémotif »

Retour en arrière : en 1965, Gilardi crée ses premiers tapis-nature (*tappeti natura*) en mousse de polyuréthane. « Praticables », ces œuvres tridimensionnelles, d'aspect hyper-réaliste, conçues pour être placées au sol dans un cadre domestique amorcent l'impératif cher à l'artiste d'investir la « vie » par le biais de la création. Réfractaires à une récupération et « auratisation » institutionnelles, ces objets censés se confondre avec d'autres éléments du quotidien induisent de facto l'idée d'une dématérialisation, que la critique Lucy Lippard théoriserait par la suite. Interactifs et « habitables », ses travaux trouveront enfin légitimement leur place au sein de l'exposition *Arte Abitabile*, montée par Sperone en 1966, à laquelle participèrent, entre autres, Mario Merz et Michelangelo Pistoletto. « Je cherchais, précise Gilardi, à faire évoluer mon œuvre d'une dimension autoréflexive à un environnement "relationnel" (2) ». Pour satisfaire cet objectif, il produit, sciemment à la chaîne, un grand nombre de tapis afin de nourrir jusqu'à l'écoeurement une logique

« tayloriste ». Mais la lassitude ne tarde pas à se manifester. En 1967, l'artiste décide progressivement de se désolidariser d'un milieu de l'art de plus en plus aliénant, tout en cherchant à établir de nouvelles bases auxquelles il tente, en vain, de rallier ses pairs. En 1968, il décline le concept d'« énergie primaire et d'art microémotif », ces termes devant être compris comme des alternatives aux « structures primaires » inhérentes à un art minimal jugé sévèrement par l'artiste, même si, reconnaît-il aujourd'hui (3), l'« épilogue » minimaliste était sans doute « nécessaire » dans la mesure où il marquait la fin et, à ses yeux, la déchéance du récit moderniste. Réceptif à l'anti-forme développée par Robert Morris et au principe entropique défendu par Robert Smithson, Gilardi tente simultanément de trouver un moyen de contrecarrer le diktat de l'objet au profit d'une « dispersion » de l'énergie, cette dernière coïncidant notamment avec les possibilités offertes par le dialogue et la discussion. « Gilardi, note Szeemann dans son journal tenu lors de la préparation des *Attitudes*, concevait le tout comme une réunion d'artistes, à partir de laquelle l'exposition se créerait tout naturellement : pas de transports, pas de marchands d'art, mais le résultat de la discussion entre les artistes et de l'auto-critique du musée (4) ». Or, Gilardi se sentit trahi par le commissaire, allant jusqu'à dire que ce dernier avait vendu son âme au mécène de l'exposition, Philip Morris, et à son allié, le marchand new-yorkais Leo Castelli. Une même désillusion marqua ses rapports conflictuels, suite aux rencontres d'Amalfi (1968), avec le futur pape de l'arte povera,

Germano Celant, que l'artiste qualifia d'opportuniste et d'inféodé aux effets de mode. Gilardi est de toute évidence un créateur emblématique de la fin des années 1960 et l'un des rares à avoir su assumer jusqu'au bout les implications propres au processus de dématérialisation de l'objet d'art. Car force est de constater qu'il fut esseulé dans sa volonté de revendiquer pleinement, outrepassant les frontières menant à l'anonymat et l'abnégation, l'idée d'une « sculpture sociale » dialogique. Voyant, à tort ou à raison, en Beuys, à qui ce terme renvoie irrémédiablement, un « poseur », Gilardi fut de ceux qui ne se laissèrent pas ensorceler par le chaman de Düsseldorf. « En ce qui me concerne, écrit-il dans une nécrologie incisive, *Joseph Beuys était depuis longtemps à des siècles lumière de moi : c'était une distance physique, artistique et idéologique [...]. Lorsqu'en 1967, j'étais allé le voir à Düsseldorf, je l'avais rencontré dans l'atmosphère ouatée de sa maison. Il m'avait reçu avec son sourire en coin, un peu moqueur, et il me regardait avec ses yeux transparents et enjôleurs, qui trahissaient un "narcissisme" désarmé (5)*. » Selon Gilardi, la plupart de ses confrères, à commencer par Beuys, n'avait pas su s'extraire des milieux académiques ou institutionnels, ni couper les ponts avec un marché avide de protocoles, fétichismes et autres traces – à l'image des certificats d'un Ian Wilson – transactionnelles. Critiquer l'institution ou le marché de l'« intérieur » lui semble, à la fin des années 1960, incompatible avec la dynamique émancipatrice enclenchée. Y être sans y être ou ne pas y être tout en y étant, à l'instar de



« Sottobosco », 1967. Mousse de polyuréthane. 90 x 130 x 20 cm. (Ph. P.A. Marassé). "Forest Floor." Polyurethane



« Igloo », 1964. Mousse de polyuréthane et matériaux synthétiques. 200 x 200 x 120 cm. (Ph. P.A. Marassé). Polyurethane foam and synthetic materials

la stratégie développée par un Daniel Buren, notamment à Berne, où Gilardi n'« exposera » finalement pas, s'avère pour l'artiste synonyme d'un fourvoiement. Aussi décide-t-il, en toute logique, de se distancier et de tourner le dos à un monde de l'art dont les chamboulements n'ont jamais su atteindre le cœur du « système » (6).

Exception faite de rares incursions dans le design, pourtant à même de favoriser une optique « relationnelle », Gilardi ne « produit » quasiment rien dans les années 1970. Mais n'en demeure pas moins actif. « Je voulais, note-t-il, ouvrir la voie à une nouvelle créativité pouvant bouleverser l'individu et la vie. Mais la vie, la société, son langage et ses structures refusaient la créativité. Alors je me suis engagé aux côtés de tous ceux qui voulaient changer la société. [...] Au début, il n'y avait guère de temps pour l'art. La lutte contre l'establishment monopolisait toutes nos énergies. À cette époque, la créativité s'exprimait par le comportement : la lutte, la discussion, l'égalité. Le plus important était de reprendre en main son propre destin pour essayer de changer la vie partout et concrètement. Les affiches, les vignettes et les bandes dessinées que je réalisais à ce moment-là communiqueaient ces besoins humains [...] J'ai travaillé dans des ateliers psychiatriques. [...] Plus tard, j'ai participé aux activités d'un collectif culturel et politique ; avec mes camarades, je suis allé dans les quartiers, les

Piero Gilardi For an Aesthetic of Abnegation

Artistic interest in ecology is nothing new. The Italian artist Piero Gilardi first grappled with the subject in the 1960s, along with broad social issues. This summer and fall a retrospective of his work can be seen at the Centre de Création Contemporaine (CCC) in Tours (June 26 to November 7, 2010), and Gilardi will also feature in the exhibition *D'après nature* (June 26–October 31, 2010) put on at the Domaine Départemental du Château d'Avignon.

■ The Turinese artist Piero Gilardi has exerted an influence in a number of ways. While acting as “adviser” to Wim Beeren, curator of the exhibition *Op losse schroeven* at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1969,⁽¹⁾ he was also guiding Harald Szeemann in his preparation of the (equally) mythic *When Attitudes Become Form* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969). As for his own art (although of course his work as adviser cannot be separated from this), it was shown as of the mid-60s by Gian Enzo Sperone and Ileana Sonnabend, two prestigious dealers who were able to support the artist at a time when his work was intimately bound up with the prehistory of Arte Povera. How, then, are we to explain the fact that Gilardi's importance is so underrated today, and that his work does

not receive more sustained attention? For sure, he has suffered from the general amnesia that afflicts the world of contemporary art with disheartening regularity. He has also paid the price for his maverick life. For, if we are talking “career plans,” Gilardi definitely made some “bad calls,” preferring to uphold his early commitments and, unlike some of his colleagues, choosing to draw the obvious conclusions regarding an ineluctable process whereby, it was thought, art would become one with life. *Dall'arte alla vita, dalla vita all'arte* (*From Art to Life, from Life to Art*) is indeed the title of a book about him published in the 1980s. It makes for a fine and fair summing-up of a singular life in which, having shot to the top, he more or less gave up making art in 1969, only to resume his activity a decade or so later.

engagement

écoles et les usines pour catalyser la créativité collective des gens qui luttent (7). » Indépendamment de ces activités, Gilardi voyage et monte des projets en Afrique, au Nicaragua et dans des réserves d'Indiens en Amérique du Nord, puis amorce, en 1981, sans véritablement la justifier, une réinsertion dans le monde de l'art. D'une part, en (re)produisant des tapis-nature qui traduisent son goût pour les simulacres tout en s'investissant, à partir du milieu des années 1980, dans les nouvelles technologies. Convaincu que ces dernières sont susceptibles de parfaire un dessein relationnel, l'artiste conçoit en conséquence des dispositifs interactifs explorant un potentiel virtuel. Cette double polarité simulacre/virtualité circonscrit jusqu'à ce jour sa création, certaines de ses œuvres pouvant associer ces deux vecteurs.

Jardin en mouvement

Si Gilardi a repris avec beaucoup d'enthousiasme le chemin de l'atelier, renoué le dialogue avec d'autres artistes, il n'a pas pour autant abandonné le travail de terrain auquel il se consacra prioritairement dans les années 1970. Parallèlement aux workshops qu'il organise régulièrement, l'artiste s'investit depuis plusieurs années dans l'aventure du *parco arte vivente*, lequel peut être considéré comme son *opus magnum*. Synthèse de ses interrogations et préoccupations, cet opus témoigne à la fois de ses élans utopistes et de son désir d'œuvrer dans une perspective sociale et collective. Work in progress, le *parco arte vivente* est un « jardin en mouvement », selon la formule de Gilles Clément, avec lequel Gilardi a collaboré. Basé sur un ancien terrain industriel de Turin laissé à l'abandon et reflétant l'intérêt de l'artiste pour le paysagisme, les biotechnologies et l'écologie, il est, aux dires de son concepteur, un laboratoire favorisant la mise en place de rencontres en tous genres. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster ou Michel Biazzy sont notamment intervenus. Mais la liste des participants ne saurait bien entendu se résumer à des acteurs de l'art contemporain, cette scène demeurant aujourd'hui comme hier bien trop étriquée pour l'« interlocuteur » turinois. ■

(1) Se reporter à Christian Rattemeyer, « Op losse schroeven: Tentative Connections » dans *In & out of Amsterdam. Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976*, catalogue de l'exposition du MoMa, New York, 2009.

(2) Piero Gilardi, entretien avec Stefania Delaidotti dans *Piero Gilardi Interdipendenze*, Silvana Editoriale, Milan, 2006, p. 106.

(3) Piero Gilardi, entretien avec l'auteur le 25 janvier 2010.

(4) Harald Szeemann, « Journal et carnets de voyage touchant aux préparatifs et aux retombés de l'exposition "When Attitudes become form" », *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, n°73, 2000, p. 11.

(5) Piero Gilardi, « Beuys peut vivre » (1986), in Piero Gilardi, *Not for sale*, Dijon, Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 59.

(6) Comme le note à juste titre Anne Dagbert dans un essai consacré aux *Attitudes*: « Ainsi, pour beaucoup, malgré l'enthousiasme sans précédent soulevé par un espoir de libération des contraintes sociales (parallèle avec l'idéologie de mai 1968) et malgré le succès énorme de l'exposition, cette dernière demeure paradigmatique d'une utopie qui s'est éteinte dans sa confrontation au réel. » (Anne Dagbert, « Quand les attitudes deviennent forme. Vers un nouveau mode de perception », *artpress*, n°121, janvier 1988, p. 39).

(7) Piero Gilardi, « Depuis 16 ans... », in Piero Gilardi, *Dall'arte alla vita dalla vita all'arte*, Paris, Prints etc., 1982.

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En haut / top: « Vestito Natura Betulle ». 1967. Vêtement de performance (document d'archive). Performance clothes
Ci-dessus / above: Parco Arte Vivente - Centro d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin. © Parco Arte Vivente

In 1965 Gilardi created his first *Nature Carpets* (*tappeti natura*) in polyurethane foam. These useable, hyperrealist works designed to be placed on domestic floors show the artist beginning to look for ways of bringing his art into everyday life. Refusing recuperation and "auratization" by the institution, these objects supposed to fit in with other quotidian elements pointed, *de facto*, towards the idea of dematerialization later theorized by critic Lucy Lippard. Interactive and "habitable," his works were finally granted their proper place at the exhibition *Arte Abitabile* put on by Sperone in 1966, with, among others, Mario Merz and Michelangelo Pistoletto. "What I was trying to do," Gilardi would later recall, "was to move my work away from a self-reflexive dimension and towards a 'relational' type of environment." (2) To achieve this goal, he deliberately mass-produced his carpets in order to feed a "Taylorist" logic, almost ad nauseam. But it was not long before he wearied of this. In 1967 the artist decided to gradually move away from an art world that he found increasingly alienating, while at the same time trying to lay down new foundations and persuade his peers to join him (which they did not). In 1968 he articulated the concept of "primary energy and micro-emotive art," which he put forward as alternatives to the "primary structures" inherent in Minimalist Art. Gilardi took a dim view of Minimalism at the time, although today he concedes that the Minimalist

"epilogue" was probably necessary, in order to mark the final phase, as he saw it, in the failure of the Modernist narrative.⁽³⁾ Gilardi was receptive to the idea of anti-form developed by Robert Morris and to the entropy principle advocated by Robert Smithson, while simultaneously looking for a way of countering the supremacy of the object in favor of a "dispersion" of energy, coinciding with the possibilities offered by dialogue and discussion. "Gilardi," notes Szeemann in the journal he kept when preparing *Attitudes*, "conceived of the event as a gathering of artists, out of which the exhibition would be created by a natural process: no transport, no art dealers, but the result of discussions between the artists and the museum's own self-critique."⁽⁴⁾ In the end, however, Gilardi felt that Szeemann betrayed him, and even claimed that he had sold his soul to the exhibition's sponsor, Philip Morris and their ally, the New York dealer Leo Castelli. A similar sense of disillusionment colored his conflictual relations with Germano Celant, the future pope of Arte Povera, after their conversations during the exhibition at Amalfi in 1968. Gilardi saw him as an opportunist and slave of fashion. Gilardi is quite clearly one of the emblematic artists of the late 1960s and one of the few who really acted on the implications of the dematerialization of the artwork. The fact is that he was indeed isolated in his efforts to really assert the idea of "social sculpture," a process that meant crossing the frontier to anonymity and abnegation. Rightly or wrongly seeing Beuys as a "poseur" (the association was irremediable), Gilardi was among those who resisted the spells worked by the shaman of Düsseldorf. "As far as I am concerned," he wrote in an incisive obituary, "Joseph Beuys was light years away from me: the distance was physical, artistic and ideological [...] When I went to see him in Düsseldorf in 1967, I met him in the cozy atmosphere of his house. He greeted me with a slightly mocking kind of half smile, and looked at me with transparent, coaxing eyes that betrayed a helpless 'narcissism'."⁽⁵⁾ According to Gilardi, the majority of his peers, and Beuys foremost among them, had failed to break free of academic or institutional circles and to cut themselves off from a market hungry for protocols, fetishism and transactional traces, such as the certificates provided by Ian Wilson. At the end of the 1960s, he considered critique of the institution or the market "from within" as incompatible with the emancipatory dynamics that had been unleashed. Being part of the game without playing, or playing without being part of

the game, as in the kind of strategy developed by someone like Daniel Buren—particularly at Bern, where in the end Gilardi did not "exhibit"—struck him as synonymous with artistic errancy. He therefore made the perfectly logical decision to move away and turn his back on an art world whose upheavals could never touch the heart of the "system."⁽⁶⁾

Struggle, discussion, equality

Apart from a few ventures into a design, a field that was perhaps more conducive to a "relational" aesthetics, Gilardi "produced" almost nothing in the 1970s. He was, however, quite active. "I wanted to open up the path to a new creativity that could change the individual, and change life. But life, society, its language and structure, rejected creativity. So I joined forces with all those who wanted to change society. [...] At first, there was hardly any time for art any more. The fight against the establishment was taking all our energy. In those days, creativity was expressed through behavior: struggle, discussion, equality. The key thing was take back control of our own lives in order to try to change life everywhere, and in real ways. The posters, sketches and cartoons that I made in those days communicated these human needs [...] I worked in psychiatric workshops. [...] Later, I took part in the activities of a cultural and political collective. My comrades and I would go round the neighborhoods, to the schools and factories, trying to catalyze the collective creativity of the people who were struggling."⁽⁷⁾ Independently of these activities, Gilardi also traveled and set up projects in Africa, in Nicaragua, and on the Indian reservations of North America. Then, in 1981, without really offering any kind of explanation, he started to move back into the art world. He began (re)reproducing his nature carpets, reflecting his taste for simulacra, and also, as of the mid-1980s, moving into new technologies. Believing that these tools could enable him to put his relational ideas into practice, Gilardi devised interactive installations exploiting the potential of virtuality. Since then, virtuality and simulacra have constituted the twin poles of his art, and have sometimes been combined in specific works.⁽⁷⁾

But if Gilardi's return to the studio and dialogue with other artists has been enthusiastic, he has not forsaken the kind of work in the field that was his priority in the 1970s. He continues to organize workshops on a regular basis, and for several years now has been involved in the creation of a *parco arte vivente*, which could fairly be considered his magnum opus.

Synthesizing his questions and concerns, this work reflects both his utopian impulses and his desire to work towards social and collective ends. The *parco arte vivente* is a work in progress, or, in the words of Gilles Clément, an occasional collaborator, a "moving garden." Located on a derelict industrial site in Turin, the project reflects Gilardi's interest in landscape, biotechnologies and ecology and is, as he himself puts it, a laboratory designed to promote all kinds of encounters and collaborations. French artists Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Michel Blazy are among those who have contributed to its activities, but of course the list of participants reaches well beyond the ranks of contemporary art, a field that continues to be too restrictive for this "interlocutor" from Turin. ■

Translation, C. Penwarden

(1) See Christian Rattermeyer, "Op losse schroeven: Tentative Connections," *In & out of Amsterdam. Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976*, exhibition catalogue, MoMA, New York, 2009.

(2) Piero Gilardi, interview with Stefania Delaidotti in *Piero Gilardi Interdipendenze*, Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2006, p. 106.

(3) Piero Gilardi, interview with the author, January 25, 2010.

(4) Harald Szeemann, "Journal et carnets de voyage touchant aux préparatifs et aux retombés de l'exposition 'When Attitudes become Form,'" *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, no. 73, 2000, p. 11.

(5) Piero Gilardi, "Beuys peut vivre" (1986), in P. Gilardi, *Not for sale*, Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 59.

(6) As Anne Dagbert rightly notes in an essay on *Attitudes*, "for many, in spite of the unprecedented enthusiasm aroused by the hope of liberation from social restrictions (parallel with the ideology of May 1968), and in spite of the huge success of the exhibition, it remains paradigmatic of the utopias that collapsed in their confrontation with the real." (Anne Dagbert, "Quand les attitudes deviennent forme. Vers un nouveau mode de perception," *artpress* 121, January 1988, p. 39).

(7) Piero Gilardi, "Depuis 16 ans....," *Piero Gilardi, Dall'arte alla vita dalla vita all'arte*, Paris: Prints etc., 1982.

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PIERO GILARDI

Né en/ born 1942 à/ in Turin

Vit et travaille à/ lives and works in Turin

Expositions personnelles récentes/recent shows:

2001 Galerie Cristiani-Pron, Paris

2003 Biasutti & Biasutti Gallery, Turin

2004 Poggi Gallery, Ravenna

2005 Biasutti & Biasutti Gallery, Turin

2006 City Gallery, Modène

2009 Galerie Sémiose, Paris

2010 CCC, Tours (26 juin - 7 novembre) ; Domaine départemental du château d'Avignon (26 juin - 31 oct.)

Piero Gilardi

Zérodeux

2010

By Antoine Marchand

Piero Gilardi au CCC de Tours

—
par Antoine Marchand



Près de cinquante ans de carrière. Cinquante ans de lutte, de choix, sans compromissions. Cinquante ans dictés par une seule et même volonté : réunir l'art et la vie. Si cette antienne paraît aujourd'hui galvaudée, elle n'a pourtant jamais été aussi juste que pour qualifier la production de Piero Gilardi : « Au fond, dans mes expériences, on retrouve constamment deux idées – toujours les mêmes – entrelacées et pourtant complémentaires : élargir la créativité et l'entremêler avec les problèmes de la vie ! ». L'exposition *Leçon de choses*, qui se tient actuellement au CCC de Tours, est l'occasion de jeter un regard rétrospectif, non pas sur la carrière, mais bien sur la vie de cet artiste italien. Impossible de séparer l'une de l'autre. Sans vouloir jouer les anciens combattants, il est essentiel de revenir aux origines de son travail pour en comprendre la richesse. Piero Gilardi commence à exposer en 1963 et produit ses premiers tapis-nature dès 1965, fragments de paysage réalisés en mousse de polyuréthane. Il est rapidement repéré par plusieurs critiques influents, au premier rang desquels Germano Celant, qui l'expose aux côtés de Merz, Boetti, Pistoletto ou Zorio et regroupe leurs pratiques sous le terme *d'arte povera*.

Néanmoins, malgré le succès grandissant, Piero Gilardi prend assez rapidement ses distances avec le monde de l'art, cherchant notamment à fuir la logique marchande des galeries. À l'inverse de certains de ses contemporains, il estime que critiquer le système de l'intérieur est impossible et préfère donc s'en démarquer. Débute alors une longue période, de 1969 à la fin des années 1970, durant laquelle il s'investit dans la vie de la Cité, arrête de produire des oeuvres pour le monde de l'art et travaille dans l'espace social. À une époque où la contestation étudiante et ouvrière est forte, il s'implique tout naturellement dans les mouvements activistes et de contre-culture : « [...] il y avait chez moi l'intention de faire sortir l'art des schémas conventionnels et de le faire vivre au sein de l'expérience du quotidien, avec une fonction et un

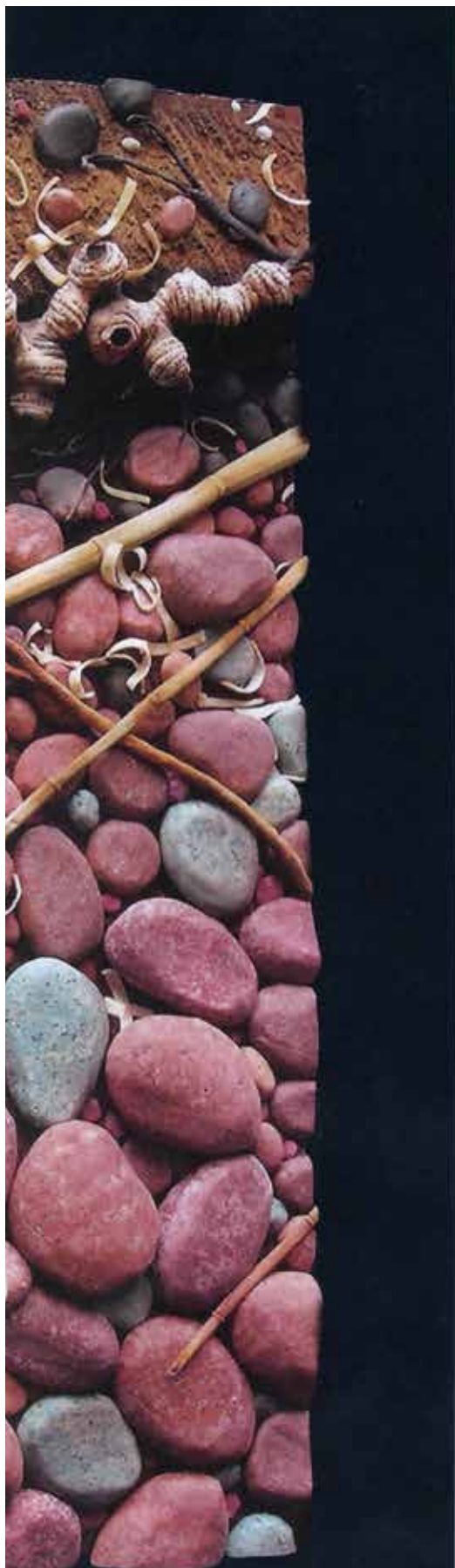
mécanisme interne de type ludique 2 ». Piero Gilardi y développe notamment une réflexion autour de la notion anthropologique de « créativité collective », de l'oeuvre d'art plurale. Ce n'est qu'au début des années 1980, quelque peu désabusé par la répression des mouvements contestataires et la domination croissante du système capitaliste, qu'il revient dans la sphère de l'art, toutefois animé des mêmes intentions qu'à ses débuts.

L'exposition du CCC balaie l'ensemble de sa production protéiforme et permet de faire le lien entre ces différentes périodes. Outre les incontournables tapis-nature, ceux des années 1960 comme les plus récents, on retrouve ses premières sculptures, comme cet igloo de 1964 – rappelons que le premier igloo de Mario Merz date de 1968 – mais également des créations plus récentes, telles que *Phosphor* (2008), déjà présentée à la galerie Semiose l'année dernière, ou *Tiktaalik*, installation interactive spécialement produite pour l'occasion. Démonstration par l'absurde de la théorie de l'évolution, cette oeuvre nous place, dans une position assez ridicule et inconfortable, face à l'un de nos plus vieux ancêtres, chaînon essentiel du passage de la vie aquatique à la vie terrestre. Toute l'exposition navigue ainsi dans cet entre-deux, entre fantaisie et interrogations plus profondes. Elle permet surtout de constater que l'oeuvre de Piero Gilardi traverse de nombreux courants de l'histoire de l'art récent, du Pop art (à une époque, les tapis-nature étaient produits en rouleaux, avant d'être découpés et vendus au mètre) à la performance (on retrouve dans *Leçon de choses* des objets ayant été utilisés lors d'actions et manifestations des années 1970) en passant par l'esthétique relationnelle (trente ans avant qu'elle soit théorisée) ou l'art multimédia avec *Connected ES* (1998), installation censée amener ses participants « [...] à un état de conscience qu'on pourrait définir comme hallucination collective lucide 3 ».

Piero Gilardi est aujourd'hui totalement investi dans son projet de Parco Arte Vivente (PAV), un parc installé à Turin, dont on peut découvrir la maquette à Tours. « Jardin en mouvement 4 » et laboratoire permanent, cette *Gesamtkunstwerk*, au sens gilardien du terme, permet à l'artiste de faire le lien entre les expériences utopiques des années 1960 et 1970, l'aménagement urbain tel qu'il s'impose aujourd'hui dans les villes modernes et des préoccupations plus personnelles – l'écologie, l'inscription de l'art dans la Cité, le travail avec le vivant et cette volonté jamais désavouée d'oeuvrer dans une perspective fédératrice et communautaire.

Art in America

Piero Gilardi
Art in America
June/July 2010
By David Ebony



PIERO ORGANIC TECHNOLOGY GILARDI

A pioneer of Italy's Arte Povera movement who left the art world in the early 1970s, Piero Gilardi is in the midst of a revitalized career, with new works and a "living art" park in Turin.

BY DAVID EBONY

ONE OF THE MOST IDEALISTIC—and elusive—figures associated with the early Arte Povera movement, Turin-based artist Piero Gilardi was widely recognized in the early 1960s for his experiments with unorthodox materials and sculptural forms that radically diverged from the avant-garde mainstream. His much-acclaimed and often controversial "Tappeti-natura" (Nature-carpets)—floor installations and wall reliefs made of meticulously molded and painted polyurethane foam that take the form of rocks, plants and a wide variety of nature studies—brought him substantial critical and commercial success through the '60s. He grew disillusioned with the art world, however, and, by the early 1970s, ceased making art, abruptly exiting the scene.

Gilardi (b. 1942) spent the next 10 years traveling in Italy and abroad, writing theoretical analyses of society and culture, the focus of his thinking during this period of civil upheaval. A number of these essays appeared in *Flash Art*, *Arts* and other art publications. He organized street theater, actions and protests in factories, and participated in various community outreach programs and political initiatives, particularly during extended stays in Nicaragua and Kenya, as well as in the U.S., on the Akwesasne Reservation of the Mohawk Nation in northern New York State, along the Canadian border.

Just as suddenly as he had disappeared, Gilardi reentered the art world in

1983, to begin a new series of works and also to prepare for retrospective exhibitions held the following year at Galleria Toselli, Milan, and the Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara. He worked on a fresh series of Nature-carpets, although his main focus was on new-media works, including virtual reality pieces, interactive installations and what would now be called relational art projects that encompass political activism and community-based endeavors, all centered on the precarious bonds between nature

Piero Gilardi: *Beach Fire*, 2007, polyurethane foam, 59 by 59 by 9¾ inches. All photos, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Biasutti & Biasutti, Turin.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW

Early works by the artist in "Che fare? Arte Povera: The Historical Years," at the Kunstmuseum Lichtenstein in Vaduz (May 5-Sept. 9). "The Lesson of the Things," a Piero Gilardi survey, opens at the Centre de Creation Contemporain (C.C.C.), Tours, France (June 26-Nov. 1).

THE ARTIST MAINTAINS THAT THE CONCEPT FOR THE NATURE-CARPETS WAS TO MERGE TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE— NOT TO SET THEM IN OPPOSITION.



Above, "Nature-carpets" in Gilardi's 1967 exhibition at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris. Photo courtesy the artist.

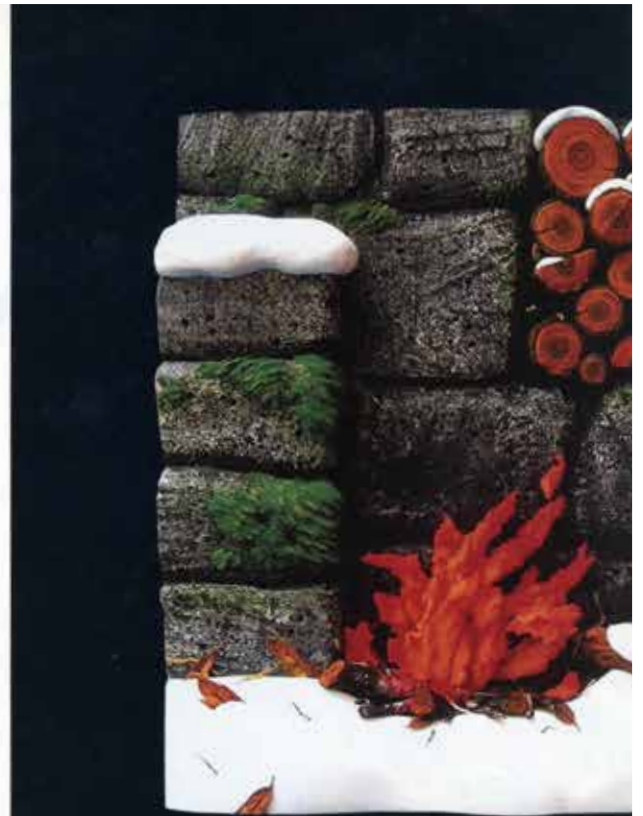
Near right, Gilberto Zorio lying on *Stones-bed*, polyurethane foam, 78 3/4 by 39 1/4 by 11 3/4 inches; in Gilardi's Turin studio, 1967. Photo courtesy the artist.

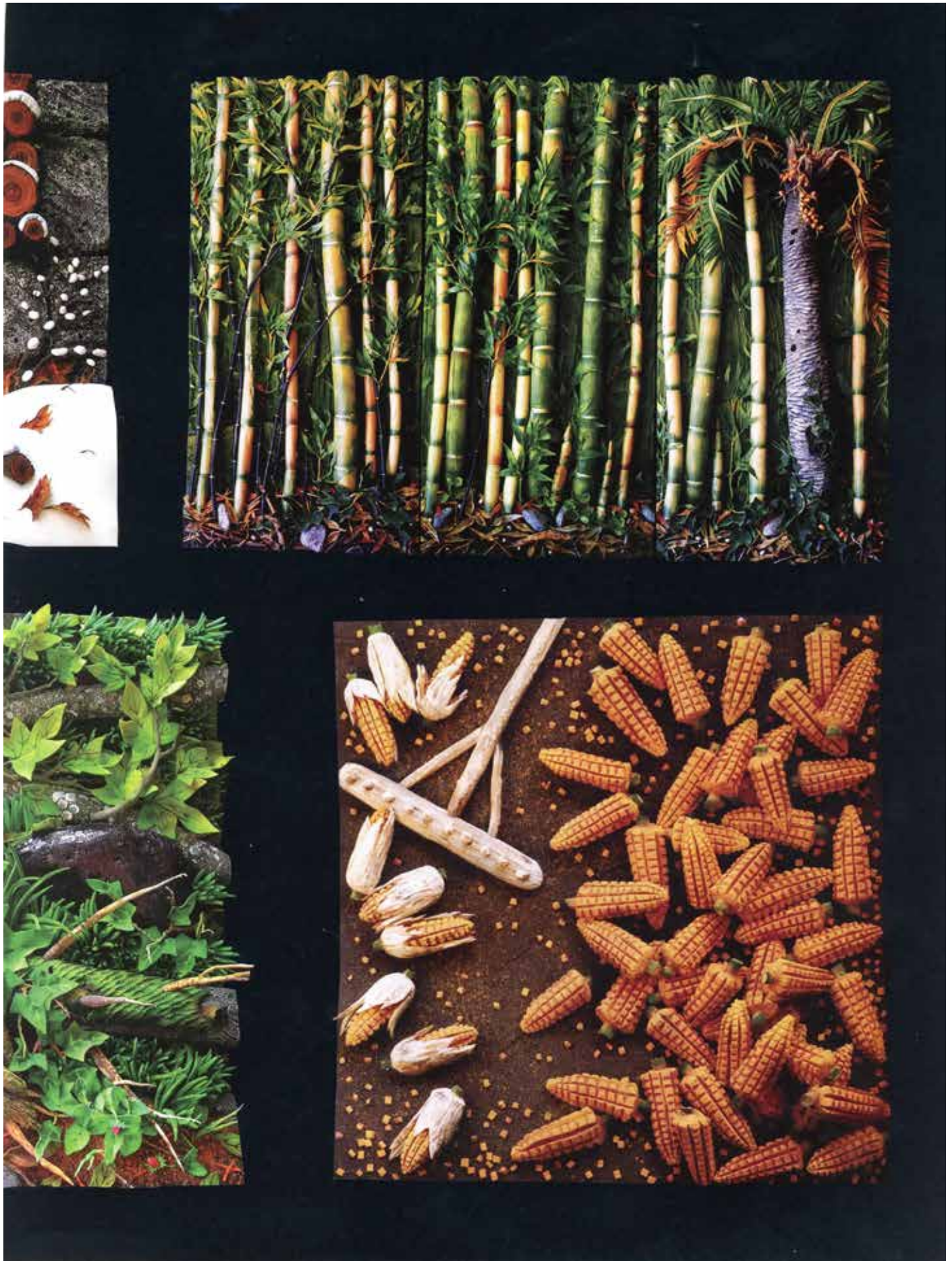


Far right, four "Nature-carpets," all polyurethane foam. Clockwise from top left: *Fire Mountain*, 2008, 39 1/4 by 39 1/4 by 9 1/4 inches; *Bamboo Forest*, 2004, 70 1/4 by 106 1/4 by 11 3/4 inches; *Corn*, 1966, 59 by 55 by 11 3/4 inches; and *Undergrowth*, 1967, 35 1/2 by 52 by 9 1/4 inches. *Undergrowth* courtesy Galerie Semiose, Paris.

and society. Critics and public alike have found new relevance in his environmentalist themes. As his interests have shifted toward Bio-art, or what he terms "living art," Gilardi has settled into his new roles as a "rediscovered" doyen of Arte Povera and a mentor for younger artists. Since the mid-1980s, he has had numerous gallery shows throughout Italy and abroad (including a 1991 exhibition at New York's Sperone Westwater), featuring interactive installations and performances as well as the Nature-carpets. Earlier this year, the Nature-carpets were on view at Galleria Russo venues in Rome and Milan [Mar. 9-Apr. 9]. A Gilardi career survey, "The Lesson of the Things," opens this summer at the Centre de Création Contemporain (C.C.C.), Tours, France. His early works are included in "Che fare? Arte Povera: The Historical Years," now at the Kunstmuseum Lichtenstein in Vaduz.

For the past eight years, Gilardi has been preoccupied by Parco Arte Vivente (Park of Living Art), or PAV, his most ambitious endeavor to date. In late 2008, Gilardi unveiled the work in progress, and last year a series of educational programs







Above, *Igloo*, 1964 (foreground); *Mere con Gabbiano*, 1967 (left wall); *Anguire*, 1967 (back wall); and *Nature Dress of Birches*, 1967 (right).

Right, view of the installation "Stream in the Snow," 2006, polyurethane foam and Plexiglas casés, 10 parts, each 39 1/4 inches in diameter.

Far right, *Tronco Sonoro*, 2000, interactive sound installation, polyurethane foam and audio equipment.

Opposite top, Gilardi's friends in his studio with *Mountain*, 1967, polyurethane foam, approx. 10 by 26 by 10 feet overall. Photo courtesy the artist.



were launched. A collaborative effort that he conceived and designed (he currently serves as its artistic director), PAV is a monumental undertaking situated on an approximately 6-acre green space in the heart of the Lingotto section of Turin. Surrounded by high-rise housing and industrial buildings, PAV encompasses a new museum and study center with laboratories, workshops and spaces for temporary and permanent exhibitions, including "Bioma," a permanent, multi-gallery, new-media installation by Gilardi. The grounds are reserved for sprawling earth art and ecologically engaged outdoor installations by an international group of invited artists, with a special focus on young and emerging talent. This season, PAV hosts a variety of exhibitions, outdoor installations and performances [details available on the park's website, www.parcoartevivente.it].

GILARDI'S CAREER HAS had a unique trajectory. In his early 20s, he garnered substantial critical attention as a participant, with Michelangelo Pistoletto and Gianni Piacentino, in the exhibition "Arte Abitabile" (Live-in Art), held in 1966 at Sperone Gallery, Turin.¹ With its emphasis on reductive forms and mundane materials, the show was perceived by many Italian observers as marking a clear break with the pervasive consumerist iconography of Pop art, which then dominated the international scene. The exhibition featured a large rectangular Nature-carpet that resembles a dry rocky riverbed. After experimenting with polyurethane foam to produce a sculpture in the form of an igloo (1964), Gilardi, with the help of assistants, adapted the material for the Nature-carpets. The works have an interactive element, as the artist invited viewers to walk across or lie down on the soft pieces in an attempt to evoke the experience of being in nature.

Gilardi's work in the Sperone exhibition was lauded by influential critics such as Maurizio Calvesi, Tommaso Trini and, most significantly, Germano Celant, who recognized Gilardi's kinship with a new movement in Italian art he dubbed Arte Povera (Poor Art) in 1967. Included in major Arte Povera exhibitions with Alighiero Boetti, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Jannis Kounellis, Gilberto Zorio, Giovanni Anselmo and Pistoletto, Gilardi's sculptures were attuned to the movement's radical efforts to merge art and life in a wide variety of mediums and materials, and in live performances.

Much was written at the time about Gilardi's ironic choice of high-tech industrial materials to evoke organic forms and natural environments. This ambiguous nature/artifice dichotomy still lends the works a certain degree of tension and contributes to their provocative allure. The artist maintains, however, that his concept was to merge technology and nature—not to set them in opposition—and to suggest a homeostasis whereby industrial processes and materials could actually help in focusing society on the nascent environmentalist movement.² Also misunderstood is the work's relationship to hyperrealist sculpture, whose Pop art roots are far removed from Gilardi's thematic concerns.

Surprising some of his peers, the Nature-carpets (at times delivered to the galleries in huge rolls and sold to collectors by the yard) had broad commercial appeal. Life-size and lifelike sculptural renderings of bucolic scenes, such as a leafy garden of ripe tomatoes, a cornfield at harvest time, tangled

GILARDI CONTINUED TO ORGANIZE EXHIBITIONS, BUT BY 1969 HIS DIFFERENCES HAD GROWN WITH EUROPE'S CURATORIAL ELITE.



strands of seaweed undulating above a sandy ocean floor, a bamboo forest, a cabbage patch and a verdant field of melons proved irresistible to collectors. In the two years following "Arte Abitabile," Gilardi presented Nature-carpets in over a dozen solo shows in Italy and abroad, including major exhibitions in Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Cologne and New York.

One of the more peripatetic Italian artists of the time, Gilardi traveled extensively throughout Europe to gather information about experimental art and artists, and to help organize shows of their works in Italy. He is widely credited with introducing Italian viewers to the work of, among others, Richard Long, Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, Jan Dibbets and, perhaps most notably, Joseph Beuys, whom he met in Düsseldorf. Gilardi advocated artists' autonomy within the art system and resisted the commercialization of the Arte Povera movement. Feeling increasing pressure from dealers to produce more of the ever-in-demand Nature-carpets, he tried to expand the scope of his work. Gilardi created a costume resembling tree branches and a series of folksy bricolage pieces, such as a wheelbarrow and sandals made of found materials, as well as polyurethane foam sculptures of logs and tree stumps that serve as seats and benches, all in keeping with the initially self-effacing tone of Arte Povera. After one of his principal dealers, Ileana Sonnabend, rejected these pieces for a 1968 solo show in Paris, demanding instead another series of Nature-carpets, Gilardi decided to call it quits. He continued to organize exhibitions, but by 1969 his differences had grown with Europe's new curatorial elite, including Celant and Harald Szeemann, who, he felt, were allowing commercial interests to infiltrate too far into the exhibition process. Gilardi withdrew his support and assistance for a number of exhibitions when corporate sponsors like Philip Morris were allowed to dictate details of museum shows, and collectors and dealers, such as Leo Castelli, to buy out entire gallery exhibitions prior to public openings.³ He felt that the revolutionary spirit and idealistic purpose of Arte Povera were



THE PAV GROUNDS ARE RESERVED FOR EARTH ART AND ECOLOGICALLY ENGAGED OUTDOOR INSTALLATIONS BY AN INTERNATIONAL GROUP OF INVITED ARTISTS.

fast being diffused and diluted. So began Gilardi's long self-imposed exile from Italy and the art world.

GILARDI DREW ON his "real world" experiences of the previous 10 years when he re-launched his art career in the early 1980s. He favored collaborative art projects aimed toward stimulating community involvement. Working with scientists and engineers, he developed elaborate installations incorporating virtual reality, interactive video and other electronic devices to stress the importance of technological research in raising environmental awareness. He has also revisited the Nature-carpets, and continues to produce increasingly elaborate and fanciful compositions in that series. The recent pieces are typically shown as wall reliefs of varying sizes encased in Plexiglas boxes. "Ruscello nella neve" (Stream in the Snow), a 2006 installation, features 10 circular Nature-carpets, some hung on the wall, others placed on the floor. Counter to the artist's initial aims, the works no longer have an interactive element, since one cannot walk or lie on them. Presented as rarefied art objects, they continue to be the works for which the artist is best known. Gilardi bluntly admits to feeding the marketplace with the Nature-carpets by fulfilling collectors' demands. Although to some degree compromising his youthful ideals, he directs the proceeds from the Nature-carpets toward his less marketable but more challenging new-media pieces, Bio-art experiments and other endeavors.

He also continues to be engaged to a certain extent with writing (particularly for PAV's growing series of publications), performing and street theater. He presents a new theater piece in Turin each May Day and sometimes on other special occasions. Last year's May 1 presentation, for example, addressed the worldwide banking crisis. Several performers on bicycles weaving through the May Day rally wore artist-designed animal costumes. According to Gilardi, the savvy Turin audience grasped the point that the costumes in the form of crocodiles, wolves and snakes referred to local banks and multinational financial institutions.



Above, view of Parco Arte Vivente (PAV), showing (left) Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's earthwork *Trêfle*, 2006, and (right) the Bioma building.

Left, view of Lara Almarcegui's earthwork *Scavo*, 2009, 15 feet deep and 250 square feet overall. Courtesy PAV, Turin.

AFTER THE GRITTY AMBIENCE OF THE WORKS OUTSIDE, THE INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE THAT GILARDI OFFERS IN "BIOMA" SEEMS OTHERWORLDLY.



removed layers of soil to investigate the various strata, and to analyze the natural and social history they reveal. In the process, she uncovered in successive layers of earth the ruined foundations of an early 20th-century factory, a 19th-century brick fountain, a medieval well, fragments of an ancient Roman wall and evidence of a Neolithic settlement. Finally, Almarcegui reached a level of "natural terrain" some 15 feet below the surface that is uncontaminated by human-made debris. As suggested in press material, visitors are to make their way down gradually into the pit to view the earth's Ice Age stratum as part of a metaphoric exploration of memory and the unconscious.

Echoing these earthworks, the largest structure at PAV, the Bioma building, is surrounded by berms, making it appear to be a subterranean structure. Designed by Gilardi with architect Gianluca Cosmacini and interior designer Massimo Venegoni, the 9,500-square-foot facility features a 17-foot-high entrance hall off the main parking lot. The earthen berms are planted with grass and other vegetation so that, from a distance and certain angles, the structure completely melds with the landscape. Earthworks are planned for the structure's grassy rooftop, and a large central courtyard is to be used for performances during the spring and summer.

Tall windows on two sides fill most of the interior with natural light. But one area of the building contains Gilardi's "Bioma" (in the artist's translation, "hybrid"), which is installed in an interconnected series of six small darkened galleries. Visitors part heavy black curtains to move from one intimate chamber to the next, each containing a large video screen built into one wall and, in the center of the room, a cluster of miscellaneous objects and electronic equipment. After the gritty ambience of the works outside, the interactive experience Gilardi offers here seems otherworldly. A sign above the entrance to "Bioma" invites visitors to "Please Touch." At times, "Bioma" recalls the zany museum of curiosities assembled by the eccentric science professor Martial Canterel, the protagonist of Raymond Roussel's 1914 novel *Locus Solus*. Each of five segments of Gilardi's multifaceted installation, developed in collaboration with software designer Riccardo Colella, is devoted to one of the senses: *Vegetal Mutation* (sight), *Odor Essences* (smell), *Nature Reliefs* (touch), *Mutable Sounds* (hearing) and *Waterplay* (taste); a sixth display, *Invisible Energies*, imaginatively addresses the workings of the brain and extrasensory perception.

In *Vegetal Mutation*, the visitor finds a tiny video camera mounted on a pole set before a tall, leafy plant. Nearby is a touch-sensitive computer screen attached rather incongruously to a large terra-cotta pot—designed by the artist—which resembles an ancient artifact. Placing a finger on a leaf image on the screen, the viewer activates another video projected on one wall in which the struc-

This spread, three multimedia installations from Gilardi's "Bioma" series, 2008.

Left, *Odor Essences*; right, *Vegetal Mutation*. Both courtesy PAV.

Below, *Nature Reliefs*. Photo David Ebony.





ture and contours of the leaf are transposed into a mesmerizing, psychedelic-colored series of morphing fractal images. According to the artist, the images represent a detailed analysis of the plant's cellular structure.

A group of organic objects in *Nature Reliefs*—a sponge, a cactus, a conch shell—is placed in shallow pans of water set on a table. Touching the items triggers electrodes that send signals to a computer, which in turn gauges the pressure and heat of the touch, and transposes it into a colorful and frantically morphing series of abstract video images projected on a large screen.

Perhaps the most haunting installation of all is *Mutable Sounds*. Feeling their way into a completely dark room with only tiny pinlights in the floor as a guide, visitors arrive at a small circular enclosure with shelves of objects all around. One can grasp faintly

illuminated items such as branches or piles of small stones. Thanks to some unseen electronic rigging of phonic sensors, rubbing the stones together, for instance, causes the room to fill with loud amplifications and reverberating mutations of the subtle sounds the action would normally emit. Also surprising are the bunches of sticks embedded in one area of the floor that, when stepped on, instigate an echoing clatter. Of all the installations, this one seems to engage the body fully in the way the artist intends.

In the most ambitious works of his nearly 45-year career, "Bioma" and PAV, the artist offers a unique experience of nature within the context of art. Remaining steadfast to the idealism of his youth as well as the innovative spirit of Arte Povera, but with the addition of electronic-age implements, Gilardi succeeds in merging art and life. □

1 See *Arte Povera* by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, New York and London, Phaidon, 1999, p. 49, for more information on this key exhibition. **2** This and other Gilardi comments are from the author's conversations with the artist in Turin, Nov. 7, 2009. **3** See *Piero Gilardi: Interdipendenze/Interdependence*, Angela Vettesse, ed., Milan, Silvana Editoriale, 2006, p. 28.

Piero Gilardi

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by Stéphane Corréard & Timothee Chaillou

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ENTRETIEN / PIERO GILARDI — L'EXPRESSION ARTISTIQUE COMME FORME DE VIE

NÉ EN 1942 À TURIN, PIERO GILARDI A PARTICIPÉ AUX DÉBUTS DE L'ARTE POVERA. MAIS SON ŒUVRE AUX RÉSONANCES PROFONDEMENT SOCIALES ET POLITIQUES A LARGEMENT DÉBORDÉ DE CE CADRE PUREMENT ESTHÉTIQUE, DESCENDANT DANS LA RUE, SE CONFRONTANT À DE LOINTAINES CULTURES TRIBALES OU SE HEURTANT AU TROPISME CAPITALISTE DE LA TECHNOLOGIE. SES RECHERCHES ONT TROUVÉ UN ÉCHO PARTICULIER EN FRANCE : SOUTENU PAR PIERRE RESTANY, GILARDI EST RÉAPPARU DANS LES ANNÉES 80 À LA GALERIE LARA VINCY PUIS, 15 ANS PLUS TARD, AU CONSORTIUM DE DIJON ET À LA BIENNALE DE LYON. CET AUTOMNE, C'EST À LA GALERIE SEMIOSE QUE PIERO GILARDI EXPOSE SES FAMEUX «TAPIS-NATURES».

Stéphane Corréard : Comment est né le premier tapis nature ?

Piero Gilardi : Le premier était un tapis de cailloux, comme un tapis de salle de bains ! Tout a commencé en me promenant près d'une rivière à Turin, j'y ai vu des galets envahis par des déchets, des plastiques. Alors, je me suis dit qu'il fallait que je prépare un petit morceau de rivière, avec ses galets, propre et confortable !

S.C. : La préoccupation écologique était donc première.

P.G. : Oui, mais tous les écologistes m'ont dit que j'employais des matières plastiques polluantes !

S.C. : C'est ironique d'utiliser du pétrole pour refaire de la nature...

P.G. : Oui, et je reconnais aussi cette ironie dans certains travaux d'artistes écologistes. Souvent les pépinières ont un fonctionnement très compliqué, qui demande un travail énorme pour générer la vie des plantes cultivées. Alors que de manière spontanée, il y a dans les friches urbaines une croissance gigantesque des plantes. S'occuper du végétal avec notre culture urbaine demande un effort absurde.

S.C. : Il y a une certaine violence dans les bords coupés très nets des tapis nature, comme si ces morceaux avaient été prélevés de manière abrupte.

P.G. : C'est un écho de la production industrielle. Dans les années soixante, la culture industrielle, celle de Taylor, était prédominante, nous en étions pétris. Par exemple Pinot-Gallizio proposait sa peinture au métal, comme un tissu industriel, cela m'a intéressé.

S.C. : À cette époque, à la fin des années 60, vous aviez une carrière prometteuse : vous étiez représenté par Spone et Sonnabend, vous aviez participé à la création de l'Arte Povera... Or à ce moment précis, vous stoppez net votre production artistique. Plus étonnant encore, lorsque vous recommencez à produire des objets d'art, en 1984, vous recommencez à faire des tapis nature, vous reprenez comme si vous n'aviez jamais arrêté.

P.G. : En effet, j'ai eu une interruption de 12 ans dans ma production artistique. Pendant ce laps de temps, j'ai travaillé sur le plan de la créativité collective. Cette forme de création est une stimulation venant de l'artiste qui est ensuite dirigée et distribuée vers chaque individu pour créer ensuite ensemble, sans que le signe, le logo de l'artiste soit imprimé ou apposé sur cette œuvre. Cette œuvre d'art plurielle, comme le dit James Hillman, est différente d'une somme de série d'œuvres individuelles, les significations en sont bien différentes.

Toutes les idées, les activités des années 60 étaient très vivantes et nous étions enthousiastes. Autour de nous, il y avait des mouvements étudiants et ouvriers. Après cela, dans les années 70, il y eut un déclin et surtout une réponse du système. Le système capitaliste italien a peu à peu restructuré la production en semi-automatisation, affaiblissant progressivement la classe ouvrière. Puis sont apparues les Brigades Rouges. Il y eut des répressions qui, peu à peu, ont bloqué tous ces mouvements. Au début des années 80, j'ai compris qu'il fallait que je revienne pour continuer à lutter à l'intérieur de mon milieu tout en faisant des animations politiques (je collabore aux mouvements *no-global* d'aujourd'hui). Ma décision de revenir

m'a permis de devenir animateur professionnel de la ville de Turin. J'ai alors travaillé dans un centre culturel polyvalent. D'une certaine façon le parc d'art vivant que j'ai créé et auquel je me consacre beaucoup, c'est un peu aussi une réponse à cette crise. Quand j'ai recommencé à intervenir dans le milieu de l'art, j'ai produit des installations avec de la technologie interactive. Ce travail est né à la suite d'un événement tragique qui a eu lieu à Turin : l'usine Fiat a licencié 22 000 ouvriers pour les remplacer par des robots. J'ai eu envie d'employer les technologies comme alternative à cet usage capitaliste des machines.

Timothee Chaillou : Vous êtes alors parti au Kenya, à Managua, dans une réserve indienne.

P.G. : Oui, j'ai travaillé dans les années 70 avec de jeunes artistes de la contre-culture et j'ai eu envie d'expérimenter cette méthode de la créativité collective dans des cultures tribales. Je ne cherchais pas une culture vierge, puisque toute culture est hybride, mais en tout cas ces cultures maintenaient une certaine sacralité dans leurs rapports sociaux, dans leurs rites et dans la dimension symbolique de l'expression artistique.

T.C. : Quand vous aviez arrêté votre production plastique, est-ce par refus de créer de la marchandise ?

P.G. : Oui tout à fait. J'ai commencé par travailler sur les idées, les relations. J'ai essayé de faire ce que l'on pourrait appeler des œuvres de pré-Arte Povera. Certains disent que ces travaux étaient conceptuels, pour moi c'étaient des travaux effectifs mettant en relation les artistes, de façon à ce qu'ils aient une confrontation entre les expériences et les idées nouvelles d'autres artistes pour développer un esprit d'auto-organisation, en se rendant autonomes du marché de l'art tout en pouvant se référer aux institutions publiques. C'est une proposition que j'ai présentée à Harald Szeeman, pour la Kunsthalle de Bern. J'avais constitué un dossier, en proposant une quarantaine d'artistes susceptibles d'auto-organiser une exposition. Tout était basé sur la mise en relation, sur la relation même. Faire un art en tant que construction de réseau était une vraie nouveauté. Mais la limite de cette expérience fut le corporatisme. La nouveauté de notre expression avait besoin de se relier aux nouveautés des mouvements politiques : il n'y a pas de révolution en art s'il n'y a pas de révolution au sein de la société. C'est alors que j'ai souhaité travailler dans le champ social, par exemple dans un hôpital psychiatrique.

T.C. : L'exposition que vous évoquez a-t-elle inspiré à Harald Szeeman «Quand les attitudes deviennent formes» ?

P.G. : Oui, c'est en effet une exposition fondée sur mon dossier. C'était une perspective nouvelle car il y avait, en 1958, de grands mouvements politiques qui ont changé la culture. Il y avait des maîtres à penser, comme Henri Lefebvre en France ou Marcuse aux États-Unis. Pour Marcuse, un acte politique était un acte artistique. L'art doit entrer dans la vie pour sortir de la dimension privilégiée et protégée de l'esthétique. La vie s'organise par des actions partagées. C'est à ce niveau-là que les artistes deviennent des coopérateurs. C'était un moment «magmatique».

S.C. : Comment aviez-vous rencontré ces artistes ?

«L'ART DOIT ENTRER DANS LA VIE POUR SORTIR DE LA DIMENSION PRIVILÉGIÉE ET PROTÉGÉE DE L'ESTHÉTIQUE. LA VIE S'ORGANISE PAR DES ACTIONS PARTAGÉES. [...]

DANS L'ÉCOLOGIE, IL Y A DES MAÎTRES À PENSER COMME GILLES DELEUZE, FELIX GUATTARI OU GREGORY BATESON QUI PENSENT QUE L'ÉCOLOGIE EST AUTANT ENVIRONNEMENTALE QUE SOCIALE. POUR EUX L'ÉCOLOGIE EST UN ENSEMBLE, FONDANT UNE VISION SYSTÉMIQUE DE LA VIE AVEC UNE INTERDÉPENDANCE ENTRE TOUS SES PHÉNOMÈNES. C'EST UN CROISEMENT DE LIENS GÉNÉRATEURS D'EXPÉRIENCES ARTISTIQUES. DANS CETTE DIMENSION HORIZONTALE, TOUS LES PHÉNOMÈNES SONT LIÉS, EN CONSIDÉRANT QUE LA PART DU HASARD RESTE IMPORTANTE : C'EST UN BRUIT ÉVOLUTIF. ET À PARTIR DE LÀ ON VA EXPÉRIMENTER DE NOUVEAUX MODES CRÉATIFS D'EXISTENCE.»

P.G. : Cela a débuté à New York grâce à des liens amicaux. Certains des artistes présentaient leurs travaux dans une exposition de Lucy Lippard, «Eccentric abstraction» (1966). C'était une exposition à contre-courant de la forte domination du minimalisme de Donald Judd ou Robert Morris. Suite à cette exposition, j'ai voulu rencontrer les artistes participants, Bruce Nauman, Frank Viner ou Eva Hesse. J'ai démarré avec ce petit groupe New Yorkais. Leur idée était, d'une certaine façon, de casser la géométrie de l'art minimal et de retrouver un signe individuel. Un signe individuel qui n'était plus celui de l'art abstrait, fondant une nouvelle subjectivité.

S.C. : En quoi ce projet est-il connecté à l'Arte Povera ? Votre travail est-il proche de ce qu'est devenu l'Arte Povera, ou en est-il le contraire ?

P.G. : La vraie tête pensante de l'Arte Povera était Michelangelo Pistoletto. Il était très dur et radical d'un point de vue conceptuel, tandis que Mario Merz, Gilberto Zorio et les autres artistes étaient un peu naïfs. Je me suis bien sûr nourri des discussions entre mon groupe de Turin et les artistes du reste du monde. J'ai souhaité recueillir ce que faisaient d'autres artistes pour leur rapport.

J'étais contre le label «Arte Povera». Si l'art entre dans la vie, alors il n'y a plus d'identité nationale, plus d'identité de groupe culturel. Le nouvel art né en Occident par cette vague révolutionnaire de 68 est quelque chose qui ne peut pas avoir une connotation précise, cela doit rester fluide et libre. J'étais donc contre tout label. Les artistes qui ont participé à «Quand les attitudes deviennent formes» ont eu une confrontation très riche. Germano Celant a ensuite voulu construire le groupe de l'Arte Povera en le transformant en une espèce d'avant-garde militaire de l'art pauvre. Il y a eu un découpage, une segmentation de ce mouvement général, alors que c'était une expression nouvelle et libre présente dans tout l'Occident. Mais le label Arte Povera a atteint son but : le succès commercial...

S.C. : Germano Celant a fait de l'art italien un produit d'export adapté au marché américain...

P.G. : Pas tous, une minorité à continué à travailler dans la vie sociale. Pistoletto a consti-

tué un groupe théâtral populaire, le Zoo, qui est parti en tournée pendant 2 ans. D'autres ont commencé à avoir du succès, et ont abandonné cette intention de porter l'art dans la vie, en s'enfermant dans leurs ateliers. C'est devenu de l'Arte Povera académique. Au départ nous avions une vision holistique de l'art, de la vie, de la société. Le changement se voulait total. Nous voulions nous concentrer sur la nouveauté sémantique de l'Arte Povera, l'énergie pure, la matière pure en la mettant en scène.

S.C. : Une alternative qui s'est esquissée à l'époque était le design, ce qui est aussi une possibilité de faire rentrer l'art dans la vie.

P.G. : J'ai adhéré au design italien et au mouvement anti-design. En effet, le design permet d'apporter l'art dans la vie tout en ayant un parcours commercial. Entre les années 60 et 70, le phénomène du design était vraiment radical et conceptuel, à l'image du groupe *Archizoom*. La créativité est un besoin radical pour chacun de nous. Le sujet n'est pas porteur d'une identité forte, mais d'une identité changeante et métamorphique. Ces idées émergentes, de la fin des années 60, étaient celle d'un début d'esprit post moderne.

T.C. : Vint ensuite la Trans-Avant-Garde qui fut une opération marketing pilotée par Achille Bonito Oliva lancée sur la scène internationale pour que, dit-on notamment, la mafia puisse blanchir de l'argent. Vous avez dit, «qu'il s'agit de citationnistes ou d'artistes appartenant à la Trans-Avant-Garde, on sent chez eux quelque chose de faux, comme une mystique de l'art, simulée et exhibée...» C'est justement ce qu'on appelle la mort de l'art qu'on célèbre au cœur même de l'art... «L'art, tel qu'on l'entend dans notre culture occidentale et spécifiquement bourgeoise, est mort et flotte telle une épave sur la mer de la crise des idéologies et des philosophies.»

P.G. : Je n'aime pas ce mouvement, mais j'ai cherché à le comprendre. Les artistes peuvent avoir des histoires personnelles douteuses, reprochables — on peut par exemple reprocher à Martin Heidegger d'avoir eu des rapports avec l'organisation nazie — mais dans l'expression artistique il y a toujours un noyau de vérité qui échappe à l'artiste, même s'il devient opportuniste ou de droite ! La vérité de la Trans-Avant-Garde était la célébration des funérailles de l'art.



Mais de quel art ? Là est le problème. La Trans-Avant-Garde a simulé la dernière expression de la modernité : c'est l'élaboration du deuil pour la fin de l'art moderne, donc de la dernière phase de l'humanisme. Ce n'est pas anti-humaniste ou post-humain. Ils étaient au coucher du soleil de la modernité. La culture de l'humanisme met l'homme au centre de l'univers, c'est une vision anthropo-centrée de la vie à tous les niveaux. La pensée post-humaine c'est la pensée de l'hybridation. C'est une pensée qui quitte cette conception de l'homme comme étant au centre, et la mesure, de toutes choses. Nous sommes hybridés avec les animaux, hybridés avec les machines. L'identité humaine est fondée sur la conjugaison et l'hybridation avec les autres formes de vies, avec le non-humain.

S.C. : Vous avez mené des projets avec la science, les technologies et l'interactivité. Le spectateur se retrouve alors comme noyé dans des environnements...

P.G. : Oui, parce que la technologie n'est pas simplement un outil, c'est une forme de vie. Aujourd'hui les machines sont capables de se connecter entre elles, bien au-delà du projet de l'homme. Elles sont des formes vivantes. En tant qu'être humain, il est impossible que nous soyons seulement autoréférentiels.

T.C. : Les expositions d'art multimédia, de nouvelles technologies, sont en général étroitement affiliées aux techniques des médiums représentés sans en dépasser les enjeux. Elles ne remettent que peu en cause les modalités de production et d'expression de ces éléments et de leurs idéologies. Souvent, les techniques restent simplement les sujets des œuvres. Vous avez dit, concernant l'art des années 60, que la tentative de rélier l'art à la vie et au développement de la société a échoué - parce qu'elle a dû se borner à jouer passivement avec les images de la technologie et de l'industrialisme. Les artistes auraient une trop grande confiance dans les technologies qu'ils utilisent, en oubliant toutes formes critiques de celles-ci, en évacuant la part transformatrice de l'art ?

P.G. : Oui tout à fait. Je n'ai jamais été un technicien de la technologie. Le but de l'association *Ars Technica*, que j'ai fondée avec Claude Faure et Piotr Kowalski, est de créer une communauté d'artistes et de scientifiques discutant ensemble les définitions et les conceptions de la techno-science. L'installation « Inraisemblable » (1990) est comme une fête populaire, Saturnale, c'est comme un jour de vie émo-

tive, comme un psychodrame réalisé avec des moyens technologiques. Dans les années 70 nous pensions que les technologies étaient rentrées de manière perverse dans la vie de tout le monde. Nous avions besoin d'interagir avec cette intrusion grandissante et abusive de la technologie. Les thèmes du corps, de la communication physiologique m'intéressent et je n'ai qu'un critère lorsque j'utilise la technologie : créer des situations plurielles, pour ne pas isoler le spectateur.

T.C. : Pouvez-vous nous parler du Parc de l'Art Vivant ?

Piero Gilardi : Le projet du Parc de l'Art Vivant a débuté en 2002. Avant sa naissance concrète, j'ai présenté ce projet au Consortium de Dijon et au MAMCO de Genève. Ce parc a une forme, celle d'un centre d'art et d'un parc. C'est en soi un organisme vivant, car la vie, la pratique et les relations sont comme un organisme vivant. Parmi les artistes invités on compte Michel Blazy, Emmanuel Louisgrand, Gilles Clément, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster... Ils produisent des œuvres qui s'élaborent en fonctions des cycles naturels. Michel Blazy a récupéré des sapins de Noël morts qu'il a replantés pour qu'ils servent de tuteurs à des plants de tomates : les fruits deviennent des boules de Noël. Les tomates sont ensuite partagées avec le voisinage, puis les graines sont remises en terre pour que de nouveaux plants poussent l'année suivante.

Il y a là des correspondances avec ma pratique personnelle. En 1968, j'ai cherché à créer des coopératives à Turin, à ouvrir un espace alternatif autogéré par les artistes. Actuellement, je suis arrivé à créer un système qui est sensible aux relations d'interdépendances avec l'environnement social. Dans l'écologie, il y a des maîtres à penser comme Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari ou Gregory Bateson qui pensent que l'écologie est autant environnementale que sociale. Pour eux l'écologie est un ensemble, fondant une vision systémique de la vie avec une interdépendance entre tous ses phénomènes. C'est un croisement de liens générateurs d'expériences artistiques. Dans cette dimension horizontale, tous les phénomènes sont liés, en considérant que la part du hasard reste importante : c'est un bruit évolutif. Et à partir de là on va expérimenter de nouveaux modes créatifs d'existence.

T.C. : Il est étonnant que Nicolas Bourriaud ne se réfère pas à vos recherches et travaux. Certains artistes des années 90 parlaient d'un objet pour en faire

une « entreprise relationnelle » : la marchandise était un point d'appui pour une articulation d'échanges - sans que cela soit nécessairement une complaisance envers le système d'échange capitaliste. Vous dites, en 1986, qu'en général, tout le monde est assez conscient du fait que l'art intervient de plus en plus dans les rapports de la vie à tous les niveaux et si les avant-gardes de ce siècle ont préfiguré péni- dement ce processus, il me semble aujourd'hui que les temps sont mûrs pour que l'on pratique consciencieusement des séquences de cette nouvelle dimension relationnelle. La communication socialisée est chez vous très libératoire, parfois pédagogique, nécessairement engagée politiquement, dépassant le système des actes marchands.

P.G. : J'ai commencé à travailler dans une dimension relationnelle à partir des années 60. En parallèle de l'exposition de Berne, il y eut un festival d'art vivant à Amalfi dans le sud de l'Italie. Nous avions organisé une véritable expérience communautaire de transformation sociale. L'expérience relationnelle se faisait déjà à ce moment-là, tandis que la « créativité collective » ne fut étudiée que dans les années 80 par James Hillman. Concernant mes rapports avec Nicolas Bourriaud, ils sont maintenant terminés. Ce que je pourrais lui reprocher, c'est qu'il impose des limites lorsqu'il parle de « formes de vie » simplement en tant que nouvelle esthétique, il reste dans la théorisation. Si ce sont des « formes de vie » elles doivent se connecter avec tous les processus de la vie sociale et biologique.

T.C. : L'esthétique relationnelle ne se détermine pas nécessairement par la présence active de l'artiste dans la production de sa proposition, tandis que votre implication physique est déterminante dans le processus d'élaboration de vos productions liées à un art relationnel.

P.G. : Oui, tout à fait. Je peux imaginer que pour Nicolas Bourriaud le but est d'accompagner la naissance d'une nouvelle forme d'esthétique, tandis que je recherche un changement de la vie à travers l'art. Alors de ce point de vue, l'expression artistique a une caractéristique anthropologique. On peut récupérer chez les animaux des attitudes artistiques - tels les oiseaux jardiniers. Dans cette vision d'un art qui change nos modes de vie, quel serait le résultat final ? Ce serait un processus d'auto-création, un processus de création qui devient naturel pour tout le monde, l'expression artistique comme l'une des modalités normales de

vie pour tous. L'esthétique est un rite confié des spécialistes, tandis que de l'autre côté, il y a l'expression artistique comme forme de vie. On peut se confronter, s'enrichir en échangeant des altérités. Le geste artistique est celui qui permet de préfigurer cette hybridation avec l'altérité de l'autre, dans une dimension où tout le monde devient créatif. Cette utopie finale est bien différente de la théorisation de Nicol. Bourriaud.

S.C. : Un italien ne peut pas dire cela sans penser à l'artiste, designer et pédagogue Bruno Munari ?

P.G. : En effet, j'ai eu la chance de connaître Bruno Munari, qui était un vrai animateur, il vraiment travaillé dans ce sens, pour faciliter la naissance de la créativité de chacun. Ce peut sembler rhétorique et démagogique, mais il est cependant possible de conserver cet idéal, cette conception de l'art comme une attitude profonde changeant nos façons de vivre.

S.C. : Quelle place prennent les tapis nature dans cette pensée ?

P.G. : Dans les tapis nature, vous pouvez voir geste. Ce n'est ni une sculpture, ni un tableau. A quoi nous invite un tapis, avec sa souplesse sa mobilité ? S'allonger dessus, par exemple. C'est un rapport psycho-physique minimal avec un objet de la vie quotidienne. Un tapis devient métaphore d'une dimension esthétique mentale, tout en ayant un accès à la vie quotidienne, pour que l'imaginaire et les sensations physiques soient mélangés ensemble dans une situation de *statement*.

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR TIMOTHÉE CHAILLOU & STÉPHANE CORNEARD

PIERO GILARDI - NOT FOR SALE, A LA RECHERCHE DE L'ART RELATIONNEL 1982-2000, LES PRESSÉS DU NEÛL.

ILLUSTRATION :
PIERO GILARDI, GRETTO AUTONNALL, 2008, MOUSSE DE POLYURETHANE, 70 x 70 x 20 CM. © PHOTO P. A. MARASSE / COURTESY DEMOSSE SALZBURG.

AGENDA :
PIERO GILARDI, GALERIE DEMOSSE, JOYEUX 5 DÉCEMBRE 2009.

CULTURE

Piero Gilardi

Par Emmanuelle Lequeux · Publié le 31 octobre 2009 à 13h08 - Mis à jour le 31 octobre 2009 à 13h08

Longtemps confiné à ses années 1970, l'Arte Povera italien a de nouveau le vent en poupe, comme le montrent de nombreuses expositions à travers le monde. La galerie Sémiose en offre une nouvelle démonstration, paradoxale : si Piero Gilardi a participé au mouvement dès ses prémices, il s'en est vite lassé. Ecologiste dans l'âme, collectiviste de l'art, Gilardi a préféré consacrer ses années 1970 à des actions militantes. Agé de près de 70 ans, le voilà qui revient en force. On retrouve ici ce qui a fait le succès de Piero Gilardi, ses "tapis-nature" qui composent végétaux, champignons et fleurs en des parterres de mousse à la frontière du design. La galerie en présente un exemplaire historique, daté de 1964, mais aussi de nombreux récents : des micro-paysages où le kitsch bataille avec la mélancolie, où l'artifice ultime d'une mousse née du pétrole revient aux origines, à la terre. Un arbre mort, sculpté dans la mousse lui aussi, se transforme en refuge technologique : dès qu'un visiteur entre en son cœur, des loupiotes vertes dessinent sa silhouette, symboles du phosphore qui est le seul élément partagé par tous les êtres vivants, selon l'artiste. Une manière ironique de rappeler que tout combat, même celui de l'écologie, a besoin de ses poètes autant que de ses tragédiens.

Piero Gilardi
Sperone Westwater
1991
by Dan Cameron

BACK TO THE GARDEN

Every movement, no matter how ephemeral, has its archetypal insiders and outsiders. For instance, despite his vital role in the early development of *Arte Povera*, Piero Gilardi would probably have to be considered the most elusive figure of that handful of artists to whom this term historically refers – a renegade in a group of self-proclaimed outcasts and misfits. On the other hand, by the curious process of reversal which often happens in such questions of historical interpretation, one might also choose – especially from a 1991, *post-art-crash* perspective – to see Gilardi's career as quintessentially *Arte Povera*, next to which the work of many of his colleagues looks suspiciously well-behaved, even conventional. Certainly Gilardi's decision, in 1967, to turn his back on the art world after a triumphant and well-orchestrated international gallery debut, has an odd, purist ring to it, as if his personal experience had already taught him that the only acceptable way to practice art as a vocation was to openly renounce it as a profession.

Even if such a point of view is not immediately shared by the reader/viewer, it is hard to argue with the premise that the period Gilardi spent outside of the art world – 1967 to 1980, give or take a year – made an important contribution to the discussion of the period concerning the '*de-definition*' of the work of art. From such a position, however, we might also remind ourselves that the nature of Gilardi's activity during these years practically ensured that it took place invisible to the eyes of those who are designated the watch-dogs of art's enshrinement as Art. Like other famous art-world drop-outs before him – from Hugo Ball to Allan Kaprow – Gilardi's self-imposed exile created a sense of estrangement among his colleagues, who by the '70s were already busily engaged in writing the history of *Arte-Povera* – a history from which Gilardi would be largely excluded.

'*And why not?*' one might ask. If part of Gilardi's statement in turning his back on the art world was that he did not want to participate in the making of myth, that he didn't believe in the glorification of the artist's *persona*, then by all rights he shouldn't be entitled to a piece of the pie. But of course there are other ways of looking at this predicament. To begin with, despite the young Gilardi's prodigious development as a sculptor prior to 1967, it is his contribution as writer and theoretician during those years which has most ensured that his name has not been consigned to absolute erasure in the interim period. In noting this, it should go without saying that, just as we cannot permit ourselves to separate Gilardi the sculptor from the social activist and educator, so too must Gilardi the writer be understood as part of the total entity that is transformed, with time, into the image of a life lived to the fullest, with one's priorities and one's senses both fully aroused. And it is in

his writings that Gilardi has best articulated the position of the artist as first and foremost an integrated man – not as one who has fetishized production to the point where the object takes over even in the act of its own denial, nor as a heretic, whose only interest in systems of belief is to deny them their efficacy.

In fact, it is probably Gilardi's expanded capacity for belief in art, as well as his impulse towards a state of perpetual integration between forms of expression, which seems to most emanate from his current *'trompe l'œil'* installation, titled *Inverosimile*. The direct connection here to the artist's mid-'60s *nature carpets* is almost startling: once again Gilardi is going to great lengths to simulate nature, but in the process he has also ensured that we can follow every trace of the so-called deception. In so doing, Gilardi seems to happily underscore the futile aspect of art, the dedication of so much energy and care into the creation of things whose primary function in the world is that one contemplates the circumstances of their existence. But he is also critiquing – in the most generous sense of the word – the modern tendency to treat nature as a refuge, a passive, unchanging given that will always be there when we want it. In Gilardi's version, by contrast, nature is itself as much an illusion as art, a seemingly gratuitous excess of sensations that can be tolerated only after a near-total editing process has taken place, so that nature's effect on the civilized person who has momentarily strayed into its embrace still consists largely of that which he or she viewer wishes to see.

As we step into Gilardi's portable ecosphere, the empirical reality of what we are experiencing cannot really be called into the question. What is transformed over time, however, is the sense of certainty that man's greatest affectations and nature's deepest mysteries are really so far away from one another. Perhaps this experience brings us a step closer to understanding why we long to glimpse in works of art some evidence that our inner lives are as multi-faceted, as endlessly compelling, as the natural order in which they claim their deepest roots. Without some affirmation of such underlying connections between nature and ourselves, we seem to forget that our existence is anything more or less than that which we have produced along the way. Perhaps because nature herself does so much more than simply create or destroy, our role as initiates in Gilardi's simulated garden must also involve establishing contact with that part of ourselves which most feels itself to be in a harmonious relationship to nature. After all, Gilardi seems to be saying, tending to the world we live in and making ourselves happy as well are just two ways of approaching the very same problem – a point we would never have doubted had we not ourselves been banished from the garden those many millenia ago.

Dan Cameron

REVIEWS

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Piero Gilardi, *Banano danzante*
(Dancing banana), 1989, mixed media,
ca. 137 x 117 x 117.

MILAN

PIERO GILARDI

GALLERIA TOSELLI;
STUDIO MARCONI

Piero Gilardi's recent exhibitions constituted an abbreviated retrospective. At Toselli, Gilardi displayed sculptural works from 1964 to the present and at Studio Marconi, he installed costumes and props from his 1983 performance work, called "Stop Pollution." Gilardi has been working in the *arte povera* vein for more than 25 years. But the seductive softness of his materials (painted polyurethane foam and plastic), coupled with his dependence on a true-to-life representation of the naturalistic, invites direct participation in the work. This accessibility distinguishes Gilardi's production from most *arte povera* work. Gilardi abandons the traditionally estheticized distance between viewer and artwork to enter the realm of the interactive and the social. That which is then estheticized is the work's capacity to initiate and maintain its active relationship to the viewer, while functioning within the contrast between the artificial and the real.

On display at Toselli was *Banano danzante* (Dancing banana, 1989), a life-sized, brightly colored banana tree made of polyurethane foam. The Disneyesque, hyperreal tree dances to the changing beat of a music that might best be described as a mixture of a James Bond film soundtrack and Caribbean Afro-funk. Flashing lights accompany the music and the gestures of the long fanlike leaves, and occasionally the tree's stalk of bananas seems to sing, as the peels of each of the bananas open and close like mouths. Gilardi's entire circuslike production stands in the center of a rectangular base which,

through its relationship to Modernist structures, reminds us that what we have been drawn into is indeed a sculpture. At a certain point the music stops and a strong female voice presents itself as the voice of the tree. "If you want to play together," she announces, "place your hand between my flowers." Through his use of voluptuous forms, provocative music, and an alluring female invitation to play, Gilardi employs a kind of seduction that is both intriguing and humorous.

Gilardi's "Tappeti-natura" ("Nature rugs," 1989), soft polyurethane objects intended to be used as sculptural rugs upon which one can sit, were here presented as wall pieces. One such work, *Tronco Bruciato* (Burnt tree-trunk), depicts a three-dimensional, life-sized charred tree-trunk lying on rich, dark soil and covered with vibrant green ferns, ivy, and occasional bright red sprouts. The massive, almost carbonized tree, set amidst the fragile leaves and flowers, recalls the cycle of life and death, as the tree returns to the soil from which new life grows. In the older *Totem domestico* (Domestic totem, 1964), three polyurethane foam and plastic tree trunks form a tripod structure from which a foam boulder is suspended by a thick rope; the latter appears about to give way. The comic suspense and vivacity of the work calls to mind animated cartoons.

For his installation at Studio Marconi, Gilardi scattered pine needles on the gallery floor. In an accompanying text, he described the original performance of "Stop Pollution," which was written for and performed by members of the Mohawk tribe of Native Americans. The work reads as a blunt allegory of nature triumphing over pollution. The remnants of the piece here—pine needles, tree trunks, branches—evoked a sylvan setting disrupted by human industry.

The artist's production is grounded in

a rigorous commitment to the accessibility of his works, an accessibility which moves against Modernist currents of difference and distance. Gilardi produces work that manifests a belief in the fascination of creation and in the power of art to bring people together.

—Anthony Iannacci

Piero Gilardi
 Cat. Musée des Arts Décoratifs
 1989
 by Pierre Restany

IXIANA SELON PIERRE RESTANY

La condition post-moderne nous décrit un futur imminent sous les couleurs les plus angoissantes du progrès. Les nouvelles technologies et les mutations bio-génétiques conséquentes nous font peur et nous semblent se présenter comme des phénomènes de rupture lacérateurs et traumatisants. Le folklore mécaniste de la première et de la seconde révolution industrielle cherche à arrêter le cours de l'histoire ou tout au moins à le ralentir. Il en résulte un maniérisme fin de siècle, dernier avatar de l'aventure de l'objet au XXe siècle.

Piero Gilardi, connu d'après les années 60 par sa nature artificielle en polyuréthane, témoigne d'une vision extrêmement lucide de cette situation et il nous présente une proposition optimiste susceptible d'amorcer avec autant d'humanité que d'humour la solution du rapport entre l'intelligence humaine et artificielle.

Pour lutter contre la lente hémorragie de notre identité culturelle, Piero Gilardi nous propose une nouvelle œuvre d'art qui est à la fois une structure plastique formelle, un parcours psycho-sensoriel et un dispositif de connaissances.

Ce projet, qui prend la forme d'une "poupée bionique" de 40 m de long sur 14,50 m de haut se nomme IXIANA. Elle est la cousine de Biba, la première version du projet culturel de Piero Gilardi. IXIANA évoque l'"IXA", petit crustacé des mers chaudes muni de pattes cylindriques courtes et fines et aussi l'"IXALE" une grenouille indienne rousse, marbrée de brun. IXIANA évoque aussi la légende d'IXION, le héros malheureux thésalien, roi des Lapites, fameux rivaux des Centaures.

IXIANA se situe donc au point de rencontre étymologique entre la biologie des tropiques et la mythologie de l'Olympe. C'est tout un programme pour cet être à la fois petit et grand, de sexe féminin, qui pense, agit et vit, utilisant la plénitude de sa conscience sensorielle dans un

Post-modern conditions describe the imminent future with the most anguishing colours of progress. New technology and associated bio-genetic changes scare us and appear to present lacerating and traumatic breaking points. The mechanistic folklore of the first and second Industrial Revolution tried to stop the course of History - or at least to slow it down. This turned into a fin-de-siècle mannerism, the ultimate bulwark of object adventure into the 20th Century.

Piero Gilardi, known for his polyurethane artificial nature since the 60s is the witness of the extremely lucid view of this situation and presents us an optimistic proposition full of humanity and humour : a potential solution of the relationship between human and artificial intelligence.

Piero Gilardi proposes a new work of art against the slow haemorrhage of our cultural identity. It is a formal plastic structure, a psycho-sensorial itinerary and a way for knowing. All at one time.

The project - a 40 meter long and 14.5 meter high doll - is named IXIANA. She is the first cousin of BIBA, Gilardi's first idea.

IXIANA evokes IXA. A small hot water crustacean with short and fine cylindrical claws. Also IXALE. A red brown-lined Indian frog. IXIANA also evokes the legend of IXION. The unlucky Thessalian hero, king of the Lapites - the famous rival of the Centaurs.

So IXIANA is the etymological point of encounter between the biology of the tropics and the Olympian Mythology. A whole program to be - at once small and great - a female who thinks, acts and lives in the fullness of sensorial consciousness in a futurist and science fiction environment. The harmonic peace-making between nature and culture. And this is why IXIANA is sweet and laid on the earth.

The body with all its bio-genetic accessories that feel the ground is comfortably on its belly. Its expression evokes both

contexte à la fois futuriste et futurible, celui de la pacification harmonique du rapport nature et culture. Voilà pourquoi IXIANA est douce et détendue.

Son corps, muni de tous les accessoires bio-génétiques qui lui permettent de franchir le seuil de la perception normale, est confortablement allongé sur le ventre. Son expression gestuelle évoque à la fois la tendresse de l'enfance et la sagesse de l'adulte. Sa main droite repose sur une sphère de couleur bleue métallisée au symbolisme évident, tandis que sa main gauche, légèrement ouverte et dressée, marque la position de l'ouverture et du contact.

La chair d'IXIANA est de couleur rose fuschia phosphorescente et elle est munie de tous les accessoires bio-génétiques fondamentaux. Auriculaires, relais articulés, fenêtres sensorielles qui lui permettent de fonctionner en elle-même et vis à vis des autres.

Car IXIANA renferme dans les replis de sa chair de bébé toute une série d'espaces de la communication et de la perception qui constitue un modèle de connaissances psychosensorielles ouvertes à tous les usages humains, hommes, femmes, enfants, d'un âge compris entre 5 et 65 ans.

Le public se promène ainsi dans le corps et la tête d'IXIANA et y effectue différents transferts sensoriels, tactiles, sonores, visuels, olfactifs. Ces transferts trouvent leur conclusion et leur assimilation à travers le soft-ware du programme IXIANA, un véritable cerveau virtuel qui permet à l'utilisateur de s'identifier à son propre portrait robot individualisé et hautement personnalisé à la suite des transferts sensoriels.

Il est facile de concevoir tous les usages socio-culturels auxquels une telle structure est susceptible de se prêter. La recherche didactique se mêle aisément au divertissement, au spectacle et à la rééducation physique et mentale.

IXIANA nous propose un véritable bain d'humanité, une recharge affective et mentale à l'orée de l'an 2000. Et comme nous devons affronter toutes les inconnues de la post-modernité du troisième millénaire, IXIANA entend voyager, se déplacer dans le monde entier. Elle entend être le lieu de toutes les fêtes, de tous les spectacles, de toutes les expérimentations psychologiques et socio-culturelles de

the tenderness of infancy and the knowledge of elder age. The right hand lays on a metal blue ball of obvious symbolism. The open left marks openness and contact.

IXIANA's skin is phosphorescent pink with all basic biogenetic accessories, such as ears, articulations and whatever else allows it to work with other beings.

IXIANA's body contains a whole series of communications and perceptions. A model of psycho-sensorial knowledge open to all users - whether male or female - from 5 to 65 years of age.

The public moves both in IXIANA's body and head. With different sensory, tactile, hearing, visual and olfactory transfers. They are concluded and assimilated through the IXIANA program software - a real and proper brain that allows the viewers to identify with it.

It is easy to conceive all the socio-cultural uses this structure can lend itself to. Teaching research adds itself to amusement as well as to mental and psychological education.

IXIANA proposes a real and proper "bath" into humanity, and an affective and mental recharge at the eve of the year 2000. Just as all of us have to face the unknowns of the 3rd millennium post-modernity, so IXIANA travels throughout the world. IXIANA is the place for all feasts, spectacles, psychological and socio-cultural experiments of changing mankind.

IXIANA is the companion, witness and guardian angel of this changing man. Its motivations are rational and not transcendental - more and more human.

This dimension of humanity inside new technology is the great moral teaching we must draw from IXIANA. The new laboratory for our brain, the permanent fuel for our dreams.

IXIANA, a modest gift of technology and tenderness, is a sign of humanity and continued renovation. It will help us to better live the difficult moment of the end of a century and millennium.

Best wishes to IXIANA. Best wishes to all of us. This is what it means.

Pierre Restany

l'homme en pleine mutation.

Cet homme en pleine mutation, IXIANA entend l'accompagner, en être le stimulant, le témoin, l'ange gardien. Un ange gardien dont les motivations demeurent rationnelles et non transcendantes : humaines, toujours plus humaines.

Cette dimension d'humanité au sein de la nouvelle technologie est la grande leçon de morale que nous devons tirer du modèle d'IXIANA, le nouveau laboratoire de notre cerveau, l'usine permanente de nos rêves éveillés.

IXIANA, modeste bijou de technique et de tendresse est la marque d'un humanisme en perpétuel renouveau. Elle nous aidera à vivre mieux le moment difficile de la fin d'un siècle et d'un millénaire.

Souhaiter bonne chance à IXIANA, c'est nous souhaiter une chance encore meilleure à nous-mêmes.

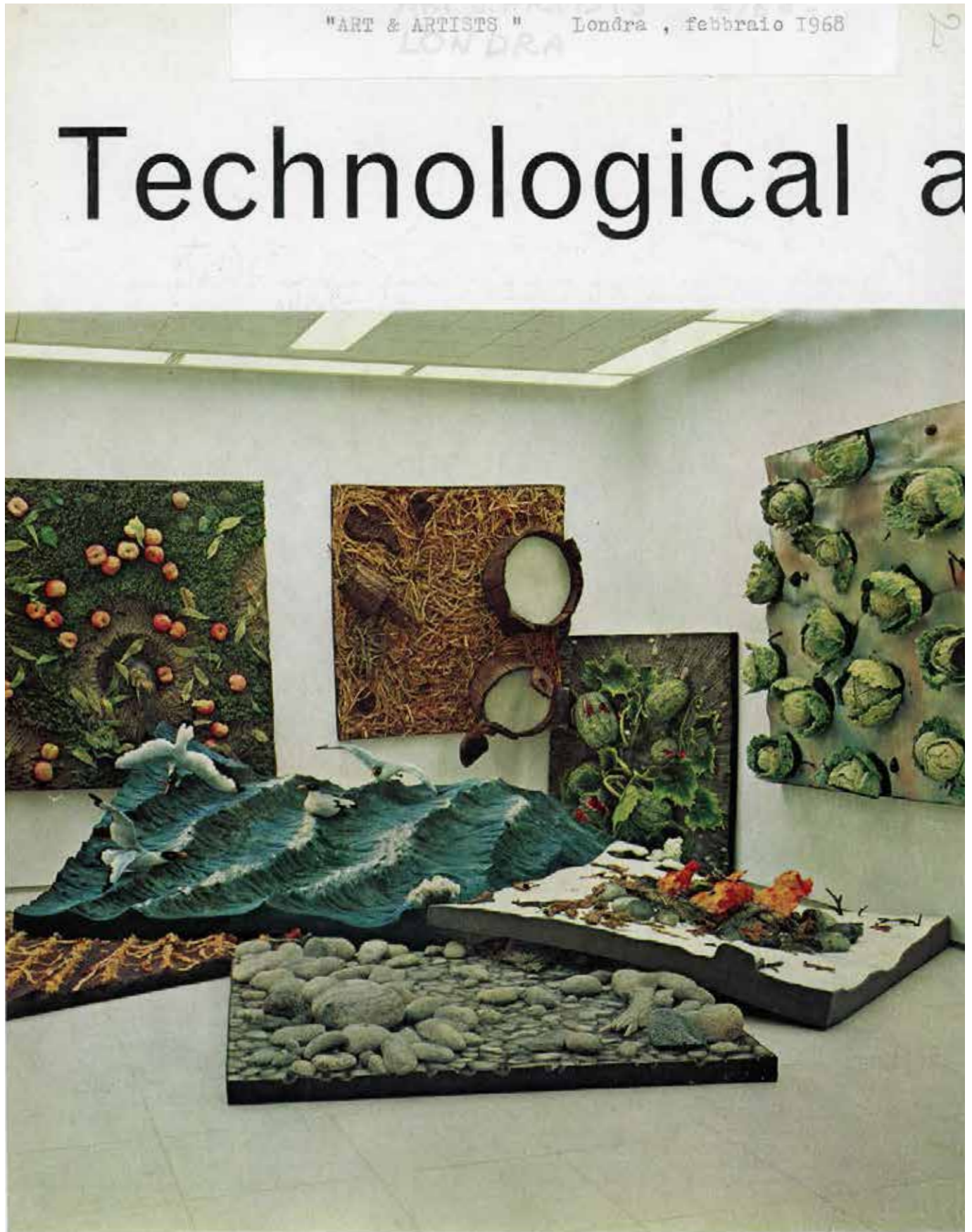
Pierre Restany

PIERO GILARDI

BIOGRAPHY EXHIBITIONS / ARTWORKS PUBLICATIONS PRESS

MICHEL REIN PARIS/BRUSSELS

Piero Gilardi
Technological Arcadia su Art & Artist
February 1968
by Henry Martin



cadia

HENRY MARTIN

PHOTOGRAPHS OF PIERO Gilardi's work have appeared on several occasions in magazines dedicated to architecture and interior decoration, and on every one of these occasions he has subsequently received letters from department stores and wholesalers wanting information – not having realised that these are works of art – about manufacturer's specifications, norms for gross purchases, sizes of possible shipments, the range of subject matters, and the dimensions in which each might be made available. When people have not been warned beforehand, these objects very easily appear to have been made not for contemplation but for some other kind of use. And the name which Gilardi has given them – he calls them 'nature-carpet' – was created, it would seem, to facilitate such a misunderstanding; it surely does nothing to discourage it. The possibility of this misunderstanding is, in fact, one of the things that these works are about; it is a part of the way in which they function. This name that they bear is but one small part of a whole structure of ambiguities.

The ways in which we ordinarily use a thing are determined by a perception of the category to which it belongs. This is one of the things that Richard Wollheim means when he tells us that all seeing is 'seeing-as'. His statement might well be modified to read that all understanding is 'understanding-as', a principle of which every good industrial designer is highly aware. The difference between good design and bad design is a matter of the quality of the information that an object transmits, about precisely how it is to be understood. A well designed object usually contains whole networks of indications about the character of its proper use. But this is not so with Gilardi; indications about what we should do with his nature-carpet are something that he very carefully avoids. In the sense that no part of his work creates a context that defines it, it is quite entirely abstract. In a catalogue note that Gilardi wrote for his last show at the Galleria Sperone in Milan, he advised the viewers to do with

his work whatever they might happen to desire. 'Cut them into squares, put them onto stands of polished marble, and display them under glass! Have your tailor turn them into cocktail frocks! Take them into the country for ant-free picnics! We can do what we want with these objects since we don't know what they are in the first place. They are not paintings since they are perfectly at home when lying on the floor; they are not sculptures since they are equally at home when hanging flat against a wall. And then again, they are made of synthetic foam rubber, a material that has hardly any associations with fine art at all.

The *fact* that Gilardi uses this material is of course secondary to the *way* in which he uses it. Chamberlain too employs foam rubber, and there is no question about his works being sculptures. Among the many artists who now use materials that have no art history, Gilardi is perhaps unique in that he does so without any of the rhetoric of transformation. Gilardi would give the impression of wanting to make a statement *with* materials and not *about* materials. He seems to work with foam rubber in the way that Rembrandt worked with paint. As far as meets the eye, his awareness of his medium is technical rather than metaphorical. Foam rubber belongs to window dressers, to decorators of model-train layouts, and to Cinecittà. Gilardi does nothing to take it away from them. He makes a product with foam rubber that is not at all alien to our notions of what a product in foam rubber ought to be. He simply presents us with this foam rubber world and asks us if we like it. Buyers for department stores naturally say 'yes'.

As we have gone busily about the task of reassessing the world, extending consciousness and preparing the way for a technological fulfilment of the Book of Revelations, Nature has become the great forgotten subject. Romanticism possessed itself of Nature so thoroughly that the baby seemed almost to have become the bathwater.

Nature now belongs to the people who are worried about 'highway beautification' – expensive and profitable projects for lining Route 66 with petunias and weeping-willow trees. When Frank Lloyd Wright began to talk about the possibility of linking business centres to rural living areas in which every house would nestle privately within its own little acre, both the 'good' guys and the 'bad' guys began to call him senile. Progress, no matter who is defining it, has all become a matter of asphalt and steel, stress-resistant plastics and electronic communication. In an attempt to avoid a reactionary involvement with Nature, we have come to prefer no involvement at all. We allow it to be destroyed, both within our cities and within our minds, by the very instruments that we have chosen for our own salvation. The cure is uncannily similar to the illness.

But surely McLuhan should have learned from Jung that the entire history of the race is preserved within the minds of all the individuals who make it up. And Claude Levi-Strauss deftly demonstrates that concepts which cease to be active in a language may still continue to manifest themselves through the changes that their very passage from the language may effect upon the language's structure. The task then is not to change but to re-form consciousness, not to give up the typographic past but rather to incorporate it into the electronic future. Electronic man, if he is to be successful, will carry typographic man around inside him. If electronic man is alienated from typographic man, he will be alienated from himself.

Precisely where Gilardi stands in relationship to all of this is something that his work will not allow us to say. Has he rehabilitated Nature for the rehabilitated man, or is he showing us Nature unredeemed for mankind unredeemed? Is he showing us man's relationship to Nature as it is, or as it will be, as it should be or as it shouldn't be? Is his work naturalism or romance, lyricism or satire? Since it cannot be all

PIERO GILARDI

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Feu de Forêt 1966 *Foam rubber* 80" × 120"

of these things, perhaps it is none of them. Gilardi has not chosen to solve our problems for us, but simply to show us where some of them are. Part of the power of his work comes from the way in which its meaning and its valence seem continuously to shift – from the way in which it so delicately hangs between the hallucinatory and the real.

The sheer size of Gilardi's work is also important. Since he has always worked on natural scale and without any principles of formal or spatial composition within the individual pieces, there is no logical limit to the proportions that they can assume. Every piece implies the possibility of whole meadows of foam rubber grass dotted with tons of autumn-ripe foam rubber apples; whole mountainsides of foam rubber snow laced with foam rubber snowballs; endless miles of dry stony foam rubber stream-bed flecked with fallen foam rubber leaves. The new pieces, which measure up to five or six metres long, are limited only by the exigencies of the rooms in which they are displayed. Gilardi seems to be saying that our ideas about Nature can be as big as, if not bigger than, we want them to be. The size of the works becomes the emblem of the enormity of his problem's implications.

To exhibit these pieces, Gilardi has struck up the device of coiling them up on large stands made of plexiglass and tubular aluminium. The tail ends of the pieces hang off the stands and sprawl across the floor like yardage unwound from a bolt of cloth. These stands do more, though, than simply facilitate the exhibition of works of a particular dimension; in their own way, they give the works still another dimension. When the nature-carpets are wound upon their stands, more or less rolled up as occasion demands, they have become as large as the imagination will allow. We cannot see where they finish, and if we like we can assume that they do not finish at all. Moreover, the stands, cold and efficient looking, like the trappings of hardware stores, seem to be the last link in a chain of endless factory production, factory production on the scale of the paint company that advertises its desire and its capability to cover the world. Gilardi has discovered that the non-ironic use of a medium can, in itself, be one of the finest of ironies. □

An exhibition of Gilardi's work was recently held at the Galleria Sperone, Milan, and at the Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris. Photographs courtesy of the latter.



Pommes Tombées avec Echelle 1966 Foam rubber 80" × 136"



Bord de la Mer 1966 Foam rubber 80" × 120"