

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