

PIERO GILARDI. FROM NATURE TO ART / DALLA NATURA ALL'ARTE

by / di Valérie Da Costa

Pebbles from a torrent bed, peaches on the ground after a storm in an orchard, seagulls flying over the sea, burnt vegetation after a forest fire, undergrowth covered in snow, a field of watermelons, maize or pumpkins, these are some of the themes of Piero Gilardi's *Tappeti-natura* [Nature Carpets].

From the mid-1960s to the present day, Gilardi has been making *Nature Carpets* (halfway between painting and sculpture) a sign whereby his work can be recognized, an object of reflection to talk about an intimate and familiar nature that echoes in each one of us, both collectively and personally.

Well before certain ecological issues, which nowadays are at the core of our current world, Gilardi has been concerned with representing nature not in the form of landscapes, but rather as fragments, not through a panoramic vision, but by adopting a horizontal gaze closer to things, in order to show us a nature (at times domesticated, at others not) caught in its smallest details, and attract our attention to things we would not otherwise look at.

As a protagonist in the first Arte Povera exhibitions in the late 1960s, Gilardi preferred talking about nature by using not elementary materials (water, earth, fire...), but an industrial and





contemporary material, polyurethane foam, which he cut up, arranged, glued and painted to reveal a nature pushed beyond reality with its bright, dazzling and joyful colours.

With Piero Gilardi nature is something experienced and lived. You sit on tree-trunks (*Aigues Tortes*, 2007) to listen to their noises, you wear nature like a piece of clothing to transform (*Vestito-Natura Anguria*; *Vestito-Natura Sassi*; *Vestito Natura Betulle*, 1967; *OGM Free*, 2014) [*Nature Watermelon Dress*; *Nature Stone Dress*; *Nature Birch Dress* 1967; *OGM Free*, 2014].

His *Igloo* (1964), which was first shown in Paris, is a historical piece which should be read with a desire to return to a form of primitive life, far from the challenges of the consumer society of that time, an issue he shared in particular with his friend Pino Pascali (1935-1968).

This political awareness, which lies at the heart of Piero Gilardi's work, is expressed not only in his drawings, posters and masks of politicians made every year for the May Day parade in Turin, but also in this profound reflection of awareness of nature, which has occupied the artist for more than fifty years.

all images: Piero Gilardi, *Dalla Natura all'Arte*, installation views, Michel Rein, Paris, 2020. Photo Florian Kleinfenn. Courtesy of the artist and Michel Rein, Paris/Brussels