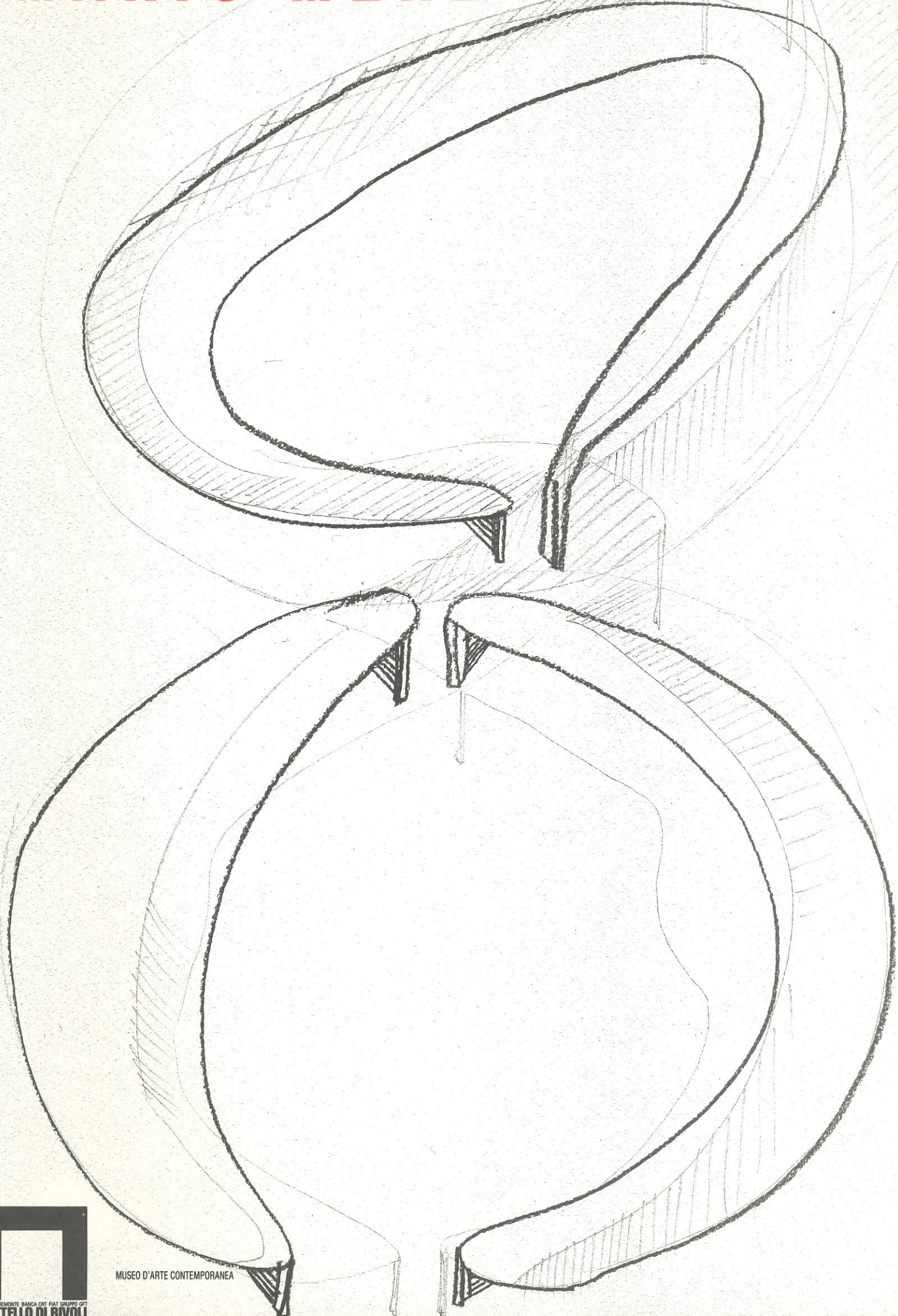


# MARIO MERZ

TERRA ELEVATA  
O LA STORIA DEL DISEGNO



MUSEO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA

PRESS RELEASE

**EXHIBITION**

**MARIO MERZ**  
**TERRA ELEVATA O LA STORIA DEL DISEGNO**  
**(RAISED GROUND OR THE HISTORY OF DRAWING)**

**CURATORS**

Rudi H. Fuchs  
Johannes Gachnang  
Cristina Mundici

**PRESS OFFICE**

Massimo Melotti

**INAUGURATION**

Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May 1990  
7 pm  
(from 10 am for the press)

**PERIOD**

May, 16 - September, 23 1990

**OPENING HOURS**

10 am - 7 pm. Closed on Monday.

**VENUE**

Castello di Rivoli  
Museo d'arte contemporanea  
Piazza del Castello  
10098 Rivoli TO



REGIONE PIEMONTE BANCA CRT PAT GRUPPO IRI  
**CASTELLO DI RIVOLI**  
MUSEO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA



**CENTRO PER L'ARTE  
CONTEMPORANEA**  
LUIGI PECCI  
PRATO

**MARIO MERZ, Terra elevata o la storia del disegno**  
(Raised ground or the history of drawing)  
Castello di Rivoli - Museo d'Arte Contemporanea  
May, 16 - September, 23 1990

**MARIO MERZ, Lo spazio è curvo o diritto**  
(Space is curved or straight)  
Prato, Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci  
May, 26 - September, 17 1990

Today, an exhibition dedicated to Mario Merz might appear to be either overly ambitious or a challenge. The motivation of the Castello di Rivoli - Museo d'Arte Contemporanea and the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci of Prato contain no traces of this. These two museums have, by their various paths, reached the same conclusion, to dedicate an exhibition to Mario Merz. This decision demonstrates their intention to elevate Italian art through the works of one of its most important artists. Two different exhibitions in terms of their content - Rivoli exhibition is thematic, the Prato one concerns the artist's last ten years' work - each of which, though, finds its exact place in the analysis which the Artistic Directors of the two museums have made of Mario Merz's artistic history. The two exhibitions, almost concurrent, also take on particular meaning because they are the tangible proof of the spirit of collaboration which exists between the two active institutions which, unfortunately alone, represent Italy today on the world contemporary art scene.

Marco Rivetti  
President

Massimo Bellandi  
President

With the exhibition "Terra elevata o la storia del disegno" (Raised ground or the history of drawing) by Mario Merz, the Castello di Rivoli - Museum of Contemporary Art, continues the series of exhibition hinging on two main axes of cultural planning.

The first of these, in fact, has been pursued through the investigation of twentieth century masters, whose works have been presented and exhibited with an original critical slant; the rooms of the castle have played an important role as the setting for these exhibitions. In this series there have been exhibitions like "Lucio Fontana. La cultura dell'occhio" in 1988, and Alberto Giacometti in 1989.

The second axis begins from "Ouverture", the Castello di Rivoli's inaugural exhibition in 1984, and has connected a series of exhibitions stressing the tendencies or the whole work of an artist, but which, in each case, confronted the contemporary artist with the spaces inside the castle through a close collaboration to reach a new global work of art, made up of single works, some of which were expressly produced for the exhibition.

From Anselmo, Kirkeby, Long, De Maria, O. Gehry, Abramovic, Lüpertz and Paolini to Kounellis, Byars, Fabro and Rainer, to name a few, aiming not merely at a retrospective operation, but at constituting an original artistic "unicum" in the eighteenth century rooms of the castle.

"Tables are important in life!" (Mario Merz, 1974).

The table is the dominating theme of the exhibition, which includes works by the artist in the form of tables; from the seventieth onwards, in fact, together with his better-known igloos, Mario Merz has been producing works which recall the form of the table. Thus, by exhibiting his tables, we are able not only to create a special lens through which to look at the artist's work, but also to reconstruct his development, the paths he has taken, the elements and motives, such as the use of the spiral as a proliferation towards the infinite, the neon as a luminous force (dynamic rather than chromatic energy), the ordinal numbers in a Fibonacci sequence to define a space which is biologically infinite, the use of wax as a material which gives shape to a place more imagined than given, the rotting of fruit as an element of temporal dynamism. The exhibition will be situated on the second floor of the castle, and will occupy all fifteen rooms: the rooms of the Savoy residence will be exclusively arrayed with works in the shape of tables and with canvases of tables. The ideal setting for objects which are of great physicalness, through they are alogical and afunctional: "pieces of raised ground" on which a world may 'act' and, at the same time, the appearance of sign/design.

The idea of the table came to me first while we were sitting, all together, in a restaurant. There was a photographer taking photographs first of one person, then two, three, five, eight, etc. up to fifty-five. I found all of this very interesting. First the empty restaurant, then one person at a table, then another person at a table, and so on. It was a structure corresponding to a Fibonacci numerical sequence. This gave me the idea of working with tables. So I made a table for one person, then a table for another, one for three and one for five; it was a sort of play between geometry and mathematics. The table is a quadrangle; at a small table - 50 x 50 cm. (a bar table) - you can seat one, two or three people. Since there is no 4 in the Fibonacci series, the table has to be enlarged when you have to seat five people, and so on... What interested me was the physical side of the table, since the table is fundamentally linked to man. The table is a piece of the ground which is effectively an area "lifted, raised". It is interesting that starting from a square table I reached a table which does not exist in architecture. Some architects have been very interested in this table, since it is a table at which you can sit, on the inside or on the outside, where someone is always sitting further in or further out than the subject. It is also a sort of physical and organic figure which is no longer a quadrangle."

J.C. Ammann - S. Pagé, Interview with Mario Merz,  
in the catalogue "Mario Merz", ARC, Parigi-Kunsthalle,  
Basilea, May 1981.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

Mario Merz was born in Milan on January 1, 1925. His mother was a music teacher and his father an engineer and inventor. After the family had moved to Turin, Merz attended the Scientific Lyceum and then, for two years, the Faculty of Medicine. But, alongside his scientific education, Merz cultivated an interest in literature and poetry, which had first emerged before the Second World War, and which developed alongside his artistic activity, appearing in his works in the form of graphics. During the war Merz fought as a partisan in the organization "Giustizia e libertà" until he was imprisoned in 1942. After his release he went to Paris, where he turned his hand to various jobs, and where his political activity continued; he became interested in the work of Dubuffet, Fautrier and Pollock, as well as reading J. P. Sartre.

At the end of the war he came back to Italy, and his cultural interests brought him into close contact with the work of Cesare Pavese, Karl Marx, John Steinbeck, Eugenio Montale, Leonardo da Vinci and, in particular, Ezra Pound.

During this period he became friendly with Mattia Moreni, Ennio Morlotti and Luigi Spazzapan, and in 1949 some of his drawings were published by the critic Luciano Pistoì in "L'Unità".

After this transitional phase, Merz began to use oil paint on canvas, deriving images from the world of nature and using enamel paints, applied with a compressor, looking for an alternative to the influence of the Italian and French non-representational art.

His first personal show was in 1954 at the Galleria La Bussola in Turin, which was organized by the critic Luigi Carluccio. During this period Merz became friendly with Emilio Vedova and Pinot Gallizio, and towards the end of the 1950s he met his future wife, Marisa, a fellow-artist. During a stay in Switzerland he produced a series of works which were then exhibited in April 1962 at the Galleria Notizie, Associazione Arti Figurative, in Turin, with a text by Carla Lonzi. In 1964 he took part in the



Quadriennial National Exhibition of Art, at the Società Promotrice delle Belle Arti, in Turin, exhibiting a work created during a stay in the country near Pisa, and which introduced the form of the spiral. But it was also the beginning of an awareness of a new relationship between a work of art and space. In fact, between 1964 and 1965 he began to make "jutting structures", in which neon crossed over various objects: a glass, a bulb, a bottle, a rain-coat or an umbrella. The interpenetration of matter and light tends to transform the object as though it were permeated by energy. The "Gruppi di senso", as Celant defines them, were to be exhibited in 1968 at the Galleria Sperone in Turin.

This period had been particularly favourable for contemporary art in Turin, so much that the city became an international pole of attraction, thanks to the work of gallery-owners, critics, and some artists who opposed excessively consumeristic or industrializing tendencies, and who formed a movement which Germano Celant called "Arte Povera"; as well as Merz there were Giulio Paolini, Gilberto Zorio, Jannis Kounellis, Luciano Fabro, Giuseppe Penone, Alighiero Boetti, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Giovanni Anselmo.

In the Arte Povera exhibitions Merz showed works which he had created from natural elements (earth, stone, leaves, wood, wax, iron, glass) and in 1967 he began to work on his first igloos, which were, for Merz, a metaphorical, archetypal form; "Igloo, compact and natural form, its surface as the largest surface in the smallest space... It is the ideal organic form... world and small home at one and the same time... an architecture which begins on the inside and expands outwards" (1979). After this, the artist began to arrange his installations following the Fibonacci mathematical progression (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8...), an expression of the concept of proliferation in a space-time structure.

"The Fibonacci numbers undergo accelerated expansion, it is from them that I got the idea that there were new faculties with which to represent all the examples which you find in the world of material in expansion, seen as live, vital lives, living matter which is in rapid and uncontrollable expansion. Thus the numbers are coupled to reality: neither the numbers nor the reality dominate, since in the idea of this representational art, two things

must be independent even if they are superimposed".

"The Fibonacci numbers do not come exclusively from mathematics, but rather are useful measures of time and space: this means that they are protected from the physicalness of reality and they protect the complication of reality with simplicity... the numbers are inside nature... my aim is to make natural art with numbers" (1979).

In 1971, at the Guggenheim, the artist placed neon numbers at proportionally increasing intervals, following the spiral form of the building's architecture, and the installation along the side of the Mole Antonelliana which he set up in Turin in 1984 followed a similar conception. At the beginning of the 1970s, Merz began to elaborate another fundamental structure: the table, an element linked to man, a moment of behaviour and sociability. "Then one day I was thinking: what is a table? The table is perhaps the work-place which we identify most, because everything, including the computer, is a table. The table in reality is a carrier of work-energy, thus the table does not mean making something aesthetic, but an absolute social process.

First of all I made a series of tables as sculpture; a series of tables which, following the Fibonacci numbers, had this progression... You could identify tables treated like this from outside, from the table for 55 people to that for one person, and meanwhile, in their totality they created a dimension of raising the ground: they created a plain above another plain. When I had got that far, that is, to the realization that the table is simply a raising of the ground (...), then I thought that tables in reality had this sort of dimension.

Owing to this very raising of the ground, they are capable of becoming a spiral, organised mathematically by the numbers themselves. These Fibonacci numbers are in themselves a spiral, which, in a certain sense, is forced to put the small numbers at the centre and the large numbers round the edge, and this is fundamentally a social process. Having reached the spiral, I thought of directly making a spiral table, which doesn't exist. And in this sense it is a sculpture. And it is here that art enters by the skin of its teeth into a process which is not directly aesthetic but which is a cognitive process" (Accademia

Albertina di Belle Arti, Turin, course on the History of Art, Prof. Mirella Bandini, January 1977).

In 1972 he held his first personal show in the United States, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the following year he exhibited "It is possible to have a space with tables for 88 people as it is possible to have a space for no one" at the John Weber Gallery in New York. In 1974 he created triangular tables which intersected with igloos and, after this, glass tables in the form of a spiral which hold fruit, vegetables and branches.

The following year he exhibited in a European museum for the first time, at the Kunsthalle in Basle, and in the same year at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. Towards the end of the 1970s Merz began to place more importance on the pictorial component, with the representation of vegetable or exotic forms or wild animals like tigers, the crocodile combined with bundles of sticks, marked with neons or placed alongside igloos. In 1981 he made the "Pittore in Africa" (shown at Rivoli during the "Ouverture" exhibition) and he continued to produce installations in which he combined tables, igloos, painting, fruit, vegetables, newspaper and animals.

In 1983 he was awarded the Oskar Kokoscka prize by the City of Vienna, in addition to the DAAD awarded by Berlin in 1974 and the Arnold Bode by Kassel in 1981.

In 1987, when he was invited to create an installation at the Salpêtrière in Paris, Merz created a monumental glass igloo with the Fibonacci sequence which extends, under metal arches aligned on the floor; it is situated in the Saint-Louis chapel.

Among his most recent exhibitions are those held in 1988 at the Luisiana Museum of Modern Art at Humlebaeck, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Nagoya, and in 1989 at the MOCA in Los Angeles, at the North Adams for the inauguration of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, culminating with his great success at the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York last autumn.

The basic framework of the catalogue which accompanies the exhibition consists of a large series of drawings revolving around the theme of the "table", especially drawn by Mario Merz.

These are flanked by texts by Rudi Fuchs and Johannes Gachnang, as well as one written by Beatrice Merz in the form of a conversation with the artist. As the Castello di Rivoli has done for previous exhibitions, a complete set of photographs illustrating the works installed in the rooms of the museum is included in the catalogue.

WORKS ON EXHIBITION

Tables:

It is possible to have a space with tables for 88 people as it is possible to have a space with tables for no one, 1973/1990.

Auf dem Tisch, der hineinstösst in das Herz des Iglu, 1974/1990.

Tavolo a spirale, 1976/1990.

Spirale con bottiglia, 1979.  
Jean Bernier, Athens.

Senza titolo, 1980.  
Galleria Salvatore Ala, Milan.

Lezione di anatomia, 1980.  
Bonnenfantemuseum, Maastricht.

Tincta purpura tegit fuco roseo conchyli, 1980/1990.

Tavola a spirale, 1982.  
Sperone Westwater, New York.

Senza titolo, 1984/1987.  
Galerie P. Sparta-Petit, Chagny.

Senza titolo, 1986.  
Museum Van Hedendaagse Kunst, Gand.

Tavola, 1987.  
Galerie Annemarie Verna, Zurich.

La goccia d'acqua, 1987.  
Collection of the artist.  
Courtesy CAPC/Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux.

Tavolo dei libri, 1989.  
Beatrice Merz, Turin.



Canvas and drawings:

Per i tavoli, 1974.

Angelo Baldassarre, Bari.

Senza titolo, 1974.

Collection of the artist.

Senza titolo, 1974.

Private collection, Zurich.

Disegni, 1974.

Private collection.

In addition new works expressly made for the exhibition will be shown.

CAPTIONS

- 1 Mario Merz at the Castello di Rivoli, on the occasion of his exhibition "Terra elevata o la storia del disegno" ("Raised ground or the history of drawing"), May, 16 - September, 23 1990.  
Photo by P. Pellion.
- 2 Mario Merz, Quattro Tavole In Forma di Foglie di Magnolia, 1985.  
Sperone Westwater, New York.
- 3 Mario Merz, Tavolo a Spirale, 1982.  
Sperone Westwater, New York.
- 4 Mario Merz, Igloo (La Tenda di Gheddafi), 1981. Collection Castello di Rivoli.
- 5 Mario Merz, Pittore in Africa, 1981. Installation at the Castello di Rivoli during the inaugural exhibition "Ouverture", 1984.
- 6 Mario Merz, Pittore in Africa, 1981. Detail.
- 7 Mario Merz, Auf dem Tisch, der hineinstösst in das Herz des Iglu, 1974.  
Installation on the occasion of the exhibition "Haus am Lützowplatz", Berlino, March 1974.
- 8 Mario Merz, Per i tavoli, 1974. Collection Angelo Baldassarre, Bari.