



REGIONE PIEMONTE BANCA CRT FIAT GRUPPO GFT
CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION

GIUSEPPE PENONE

ORGANIZERS

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CATALOGUE

Fabbri Editori

INAUGURATION

Thursday 14 November 1991
7.0 pm
(press meeting 6.0 pm)

DURATION

15 November 1991 - 9 February 1992

OPENING HOURS

10.0 am - 7.0 pm. Closed on Mondays

VENUE

Castello di Rivoli
Museo d'Arte Contemporanea
Piazza del Castello
10098 Rivoli TO



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GIUSEPPE PENONE
AT THE CASTELLO DI RIVOLI MUSEO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA

The exhibition at the Castello di Rivoli is the first broad retrospective dedicated to Penone by an Italian museum, and it looks at the various phases of his activity, starting with his first works in 1968 ("Alpi Marittime"). The exhibition includes "Rovesciare i propri occhi"; the important cycle of the "Alberi" (trees), here exhibited in great numbers; the "Gesti vegetali" cycle; the "Soffi"; the works on the stratification of the earth; the "Unghie", as well as the most recent works yet exhibited in Italy, such as the "Suture" (1987-1991).

With the various aspects of his work, Penone lets us reflect on the origins of artistic language in its organic link with natural processes. Penone's materials are not "poor", in the sense that they do not refuse to belong to the tradition on principle (he often uses bronze casting). Rather they are "primary", because they relate back to nature as to the origin of all languages. The resulting confrontation between the artistic and the non-artistic casts doubt on the conventions on which that distinction is based.



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GIUSEPPE PENONE

Born in 1947 at Garessio (Cuneo Province), Giuseppe Penone lives and works in Turin. His first exhibitions were in 1968, and right from the beginning he gained the reputation of being one of the most original of the artists who reacted to the cult of the "Pop"-derived image. Many artists, in Europe and in the United States, at the end of the sixties and during the seventies, reacted against traditional materials and frames of reference in art. They adopted widely varying materials, derived from Nature or from Industry, belonging to every day reality, rather than using "art" materials. They looked for new relations between matter and form.

Penone's actions were aimed at direct contact with Nature, and tended towards the visualization and modification of the growth processes of natural elements, in particular those of trees.

In his case, in all his work, it can be said that Nature itself becomes the producer of form: his "Alberi" (trees), begun in 1969, are trees which he defines as having had their bark removed: the work of the artist lies in bringing out the pre-existing image of the tree by making a series cuts in beams of wood. Within the life cycle of Nature, this represents the need to redefine artistic language radically, and, by extension, to redefine culture itself.

Nature, for Penone, is not a force to be dominated, as happens in the huge installations of American "Land Art", but a group of phenomena and transformation processes which the artist analyses as they evolve, to desume the rules which can be reduced to language, to form. Penone's works are shaped by his hands, thus they are "man sized", but they often involve the natural elements, in such a way that the work is produced through the growth of these, and to some extent it escapes the artist's



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control ("Patate", 1977, "Zucche", 1978-79; or of the plants in "Gesti vegetali", during the eighties). The artist's body, his "naturalness", is involved as much as the other phenomena. The body is the limit which separates the subject from the outside ("Rovesciare i propri occhi", 1970), and at the same time it is the primary medium of all relations with it ("Svolgere la propria pelle", 1970; the body-print is projected onto the exhibition rooms). In any case, the body and Nature are seen as biological entities studied in their reciprocal relations of contact and intermingling, and the different modalities of the relationship (the pressure, the print of one body on another) are seen as moments which originate culture, and in particular the practice of sculpture.

Many of Penone's works originate from the direct contact between body and matter: in "Soffi" (blows), 1978, the terracotta sculpture, like a vase, bears the print of the artist's body and mouth. The intention is to make visible the form which the action of blowing takes against one's own body. The same principle governs the "Soffi di foglie" (blowing leaves), 1987, in which the hollow holds the print of the artist and of the air which comes out of his mouth. In other cases it is parts of the body which, isolated, enlarged, are presented in their function of link between the man and what surrounds him ("Unghie" (nails), 1987), or the typical actions of a man in his attempt to interpret Nature, are taken as the theme; the antropomorphism of the "Patate" and the "Zucche" (gourds), or the mimetic, explicit quality of the perfect copy of a river stone in "Essere fiume" (being the river) of 1981.

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THE WORKS EXHIBITED

The exhibition dedicated to Giuseppe Penone consists of a retrospective of about fifty works, which occupy the entire second floor of the museum. The works have not been exhibited in chronological order, rather the artist has preferred to create a dialogue with the castle's rooms and other spaces. Thus the sequence listed indicates the presence of the various works, but not the order in which they will be found.

Among other works, "Alpi Marittime" of 1968 (six black and white photographs) are included, as is "Trattenere diciassette anni di crescita" (hold in seventeen years' growth) 1968-1985 (trunk of ash-tree).

The cycle of the "Alberi" (trees) is amply illustrated by over twenty works, varying from three to twelve metres in length.

A section of the exhibition is dedicated to the "Unghie" (Finger nails) with "Unghia e pietre litografiche" 1988 (glass and lithographic stone), "Unghia e tronchi d'albero" 1987 (glass, wood), "Unghia" 1988 (glass, laurel leaves, canvas), "Unghia" 1988 (glass, wax). The work "Unghiate" (Scratches) 1991, of stone and plaster, will fill an entire exhibition room.

Other works in the exhibition are: "Cinque paesaggi" (Five landscapes) 1985-1991 (bronze, five elements, terracotta pots, earth, vegetation), "Sedimentazione nera" (Black sediment) 1991 (stone, glass, earth).

Four works (in cast iron, glass, earth, elements) are part of the cycle "Contour Lines" of 1989.

"Suture" 1987-1991 is the title of a large steel, plexiglas and earth installation (345 x 400 x 370 cm.). The retrospective exhibition is completed by "Palpebre" (Eye lids) 1989-1990/1991 (coal on cloth, plaster casts), "Patate" 1977 (five bronze elements and potatoes), "Vaso" 1971 (excavated vase, bronze, four elements), the terracottas of "Soffio" (Blow) 1978, "Essere fiume" (Being the river) 1981 (stones, two elements), "Rovesciare i propri occhi" (Overturn your eyes) 1970 (black and white photographs) and "Svolgere la propria pelle" (Unfold your skin) 1970 (painted glass, ten elements).



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THE CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION "GIUSEPPE PENONE", WITH TEXTS BY

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**INTERVIEW WITH GIUSEPPE PENONE
AT CASTELLO DI RIVOLI MUSEO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA**

Q. Your whole production has the print of the meeting with natural world in its numerous forms and evolutions, as if the man-artist were steadily facing it.

A. I don't believe there is a conflictual relation between man and nature and they cannot be considered as separate entities. The concept of division and difference of man compared to nature comes from western civilization religious doctrines, while for the other religions, he is inside nature, is part of it. Sure, it does not appear today: so many are the superstructures imposed by our society. In my opinion there is no contrast in the relation with nature, but not even moralism. The tree becoming sculpture is a living element in evolution changing in times different from ours. It is a rigid structure compared to our rhythm of time, that in its existence thythmes becomes fluent.

We are inclined to consider everything according to our rhythms and our actual valuation of the reality has already changed compared to yesterday. It is sufficient to change time concept to discover other shapes in other materials, other reality definitions, other values that we don't have now. It is also possible to find again the shape of the tree, by stripping its growth circles.

Q. Exhibiting at Castello di Rivoli, the artist must face with unusual spaces showing the print of times and history.



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A. My works are not thought and they are not created for a specific space and, therefore, it has not been a problem to place them in the rooms of Castello di Rivoli. The decoration of the rooms, the space full of memory can make the work itself appear as a decoration element and this is a risk. But, on the other hand, they are stimulating spaces and give the opportunity to create real events, a unicity not allowed by a normal exhibition space.

Q. Can we imagine a visit to the exhibition even if it is still in preparation?

A. It is possible, summarily, to stop on some works. First of all, it is better to specify that the way is not chronologic, but many works have been placed considering the relation with space and its features, in forced way. In the big room opening the exhibition I wanted to place the work "Alberi" (Trees), work started in 1969 and that I continue still now. It is an idea of forest; to discover more deeply and clearly the "idea" of forest present in timber. It is a verification of this image. And, it is here that, for the first time, I probably managed to reveal a part of the wood closed in timber. In the following room there is "Palpebre" (Eyelids), about twenty drawings on two opposite walls. They are the repetition of the surface of eyelid skin; it is as if to see with closed eyes. This closing becomes a body definition, to which I started working between 1969-70. In the same room other works of the Seventies: "Lenti a contatto" (Contact lenses) and "Lavori sulla punta delle dita" (Works on the tip of fingers), photographic plates reproducing the tips of fingers crushed against the glass; even in this case a work ended now but coming from an old meditation. We have then some photographs of the actions performed in 1968 and the tree trunks modified in these actions and then also "Sedimentazione nera" (Black sedimentation).

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Going on, we find "Contour Lines". "Contour Lines" is filling up with cast iron the blank left by workmen steps in a factory in Yorkshire in the nineteenth century. In this way I bring again a stair to its original level, then I turn it upside-down in order to make the hollow become the footprint relief. Even this work remains in the sphere of my relation with nature because the set of people who walked on the stair has created an erosion typical of natural phenomena, as for example in rivers.

In the following room there is "Patate" (Potatoes): a heap of potatoes among which there are five casts in bronze. They have an anthropomorphic shape obtained by forcing their growth in shapes and negatives. The bronzes indicate the anthropomorphism existing also in the other potatoes, products of nature, that complete the work: it is an intervention on a non-controllable growth, hidden under foot sole, conditioned only by this moulding in negative.

Going on, we find "Suture" (Sutures), the big installation that I introduce to Italian public for the first time. They are suture lines of a skull, in steel and, in it, inside plexiglas, we find a earth sedimentation.

Then there are "Soffi" (Blows) in clay and with leaves: similar works focused on body and breath print on different elements.

This is a theme becoming larger in the following room with different connotations and results. Here we have "Unghie" (Nails), enlarged nails in glass, combined with different materials, for example leaves, acting as flesh, or tree trunks or also lithographic stones.

We reach now the last room where I placed "Gesti vegetali" (Vegetal gestures). I wanted this position in order to be able to read the installation as complementary to "Alberi" (Trees) in the first room. In these last ones the creative moment is on wood, firm and fossil material, while I, the man, am active. In "Gesti vegetali" (Vegetal gestures) there is fossilized gesture in bronze and the growing active vegetal inside it: here the vegetal finds an original shape and runs along the gesture fixed by man.

PENONE

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26 Octobre 1991 - 19 Janvier 1992

C'est la première fois que Giuseppe Penone, un des artistes majeurs de l'art contemporain, présentera un ensemble de près de 500 oeuvres s'échelonnant sur plus de 20 années d'activité.

Pour caractériser cet ensemble, le terme de "dessin" ne rendrait compte que d'une façon très approximative des procédés, si divers et si inventifs, que Penone emploie, et cela sur des supports, divers eux aussi, tels que papier, tissu, ardoise, etc.

C'est pourtant autour de la notion de dessin que l'ensemble de ces oeuvres peut être regroupé : un certain nombre d'entre elles montrent la genèse et la formalisation progressive de thèmes que Penone va ensuite traduire dans d'autres matériaux. D'autres oeuvres se présentent comme autant d'expérimentations où Penone explore le vaste registre des traces, des empreintes, des frottages. D'autres encore constitueront de vastes "installations" spécialement conçues pour notre exposition. La main de l'artiste apparaît ainsi comme le point de départ d'un monde infini de formes, d'un espace en expansion.

D'une façon particulièrement éloquente, cet ensemble éclaire la démarche singulière d'un artiste dont l'oeuvre doit toujours être située dans son rapport à la nature. L'homme n'est pas placé au centre de l'univers mais occupe sa place parmi tous les autres organismes vivants.

Pour Penone, l'oeuvre d'art n'est pas à proprement parler le but de son activité : elle se trouve prolongée autour d'elle et en amont d'elle par l'outil qui l'a générée et tout ce avec quoi elle entre en contact. La pensée de Penone se révèle ainsi d'une profondeur que nous sommes loin d'avoir épuisée, mais que cette exposition permettra en tous cas de mieux apprécier.