

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION

PIERO MANZONI

CURATOR

Germano Celant

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Massimo Melotti

CATALOGUE

Electa

TEXTS BY

Ida Gianelli
Germano Celant
Jean-Pierre Criqui
Jens Henrik Sandberg
Francisco Calvo Serraller
Nancy Spector

OPENING

Thursday February 6th, 1992
7,0 pm
(press preview from 11,0 am)

EXHIBITION DATES

February 7th - May 3rd, 1992

MUSEUM HOURS

10,0 am - 7,0 pm
closed on Mondays

LOCATION

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

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition, organized by Germano Celant and set up in collaboration with the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Kunstmuseum of Herning and the Fundación "La Caixa" of Madrid, is the most important retrospective exhibition ever of this artist who died prematurely 29 years ago. Of the over 120 works, from public and private collections, about half are also presented for the first time in Italy. The exhibition is accompanied by wide-ranging historical documentation, including books, catalogues and films of the time. Among the works exhibited, as well as all the variations of "Achromes", are "Socle du Monde, homage to Galileo", the "Linee", including the one 7200 metres long, the ~~lines~~ of "Merda d'artista" and the "Fiati".

THE ARTIST

Piero Manzoni was born in Soncino (Cremona, Italy) on July 13th, 1933 and he died in Milan on February 6th, 1963. His work was initially influenced by artists such as Burri, Kline, Fautrier and, later, after 1958, by Neodadaism. He created the "Achromes", the lines, the alphabets. In the "Achromes", attention is not directed to the material or the monochromatic colour, but to a primary space, the 'zero degrees' of the picture. From 1961 he began, at the same time as other artists, such as Beuys, Rauschenberg, Klein, his search for an artistic and aesthetic vision of the body. Thus faeces, breath and even the persons themselves became works of art, "signed" by the artist. In the same year he created the first "magic base": any person or object placed on it is to be considered a work of art, for as long as it stays on the base. In Herning, Denmark, Manzoni created the "Socle du Monde", a rectangular iron box (82 x 100 x 100 cm) which, being upside-down, becomes the base which supports the world, a work of art.

The artist, who was appreciated during his life by the critics and known to the wider public only for his "provocations", is today considered one of the most important exponents of the art of this century.

THE CURATOR

Germano Celant (Genoa, 1940), theoretician of the "Arte Povera" movement, is curator for contemporary art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and organizer of international exhibitions, among them: "Ambiente Arte", Venice Biennial (1976); "Futurismo & Futurismi" and "Arte italiana: presenze 1900-1945" with Pontus Hulten, Venice, Palazzo Grassi (1986 and 1989); "Italian Art in the XX Century" with Norman Rosenthal, London, Royal Academy of Arts (1989); "Memoria del futuro" with Ida Gianelli, Madrid, Centro Reina Sofia (1990). Among his most important publications are: "Arte Povera" (1969), "Arte dall'Italia" (1988), "Inespressionismo" (1988), "Artmakers" (1989), "L'inferno dell'arte italiana" (1990).

PIERO MANZONI

Biography

(from the text by Germano Celant)

Piero Manzoni was born in Soncino (Cremona) on July 13th, 1933. He died in Milan on February 6th, 1963.

1956

After a traditional-type figurative phase, which produced landscapes of the places he lived in or stayed at, and went from 1951 to 1955, Manzoni did a series of oil paintings, at the end of 1955 and the beginning of 1956, in which only anthropomorphic images are present.

His first works were exhibited in August of that year at the "Fourth Market Fair" at the Sforzesco Castle in Soncino.

After the exhibition in Soncino, Manzoni participated in the San Fedele Prize in Milan, where he deepened his acquaintance with Ettore Sordini, and together with Sordini, Camillo Corvi-Morra and Giuseppe Zecca, wrote a manifesto, published in Milan on December 9th, entitled "Per la Scoperta di una Zona di Immagini". "Per la Scoperta di una Zona di Immagini" is also the title of one of Manzoni's books, entirely different from the manifesto.

1957

On January 2nd, at the Galleria Apollinaire, Yves Klein's first exhibition in Italy was inaugurated. Manzoni visited the exhibition and, though only formally, met the artist in person. During the same month, while he continued work on the pictures of humanoids and on tar works, he wrote "L'arte non è vera creazione...", which was published and signed, in May, with Sordini and Angelo Verga. Again with Sordini and Verga, at the Galleria Pater, he participated in a collective exhibition presented by Lucio Fontana, and with them, in June, joined the Gruppo Nucleare, thus becoming part of the movement's second generation.

He spent the summer at Albisola, where he used to stay in summer during his youth, and in those years a centre of interesting cultural and figurative activity led by the Gruppo Cobra, Fontana, Wilfredo Lam, Garelli, Emilio Scanavino, Cardazzo, Tullio d'Albisola, Pescetto and many others; and it was at Albisola that, with Biasi, Colucci, Sordini and Verga, he wrote the "Manifesto di Albisola Marina".

On his return to Milan he signed the "Manifesto contro lo Stile" with the entire Gruppo Nucleare Internazionale; this bore the signatures of Armand, Enrico Baj, Bemporad, Gianni Bertini, Jacques Calonne, Stanley Champmans, Colucci, Sergio Dangelo, Enrico De Miceli, Reinhout D'Haese, Wout Hoeber, Hundertwasser, Klein, Theodore Koeng, Nand, Joseph Noiret, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Gio Pomodoro, Pierre Restany, Saura, Sordini, Serge Vandercam and Verga. In October he exhibited with Baj, Bertini, Bemporad, Dangelo, Klein, A. Pomodoro, G. Pomodoro, Rossello, Sordini, Verga, Asger Jorn, Vandercam, in the exhibition "Arte Nucleare", at the San Fedele gallery.

He created a series of materic works, in rough plaster, scratched and marked, or in canvas cut into irregular rectangles, which, that autumn, he began calling "Achromes", to underline his interest not so much in the material (which is reminiscent of Burri), nor the monochromatic colour (Klein and Fontana), so much as the idea of a space with absolutely no images (whether pure colour, marks or material), a primary space, which is identified with the 'zero degrees' of the picture.

1958

The continual exchange of contacts with the nuclear group, and in particular with Baj, materialized in January in the form of a three-man exhibition "Baj, Fontana and Manzoni" at the Galleria Bergamo. The exhibition was transferred to Bologna, at the Circolo di Cultura, thanks to the interest and organization of Renato Barilli.

Meanwhile, Manzoni finally abandoned nuclear painting of the humanoids and the tar works, though he still exhibited with the Gruppo Nucleare, and his work on the "Achromes" was becoming

increasingly explicit, first in plaster and then in canvas covered with kaolin. That April he had a personal exhibition at the Galleria Pater, showing only works created with those materials.

In May, with Baj and Fontana, he participated in a polemic exhibition at the Galleria Montenapoleone, which included works by Francis Picabia, Antonio Sant'Elia, Fontana, Baj and Manzoni. At the same time, following in the tracks of the dada and futurist consciousness of the banal object and the elementary and phonetic image, he created a series of "Tavole di Accertamento" (assessment tables), among them some "Alfabeti", in positive and negative, and two maps.

With Baj and Dangelo, he wrote the third issue of the nuclear journal "Il Gesto", which included writings by Nanni Balestrini, Gillo Dorfles, Jaquer and Edoardo Sanguineti.

The "Achromes" were exhibited in Rotterdam, at the Rotterdamische Kunstkring gallery, in September.

1959

This was the year which marked his definitive separation from the Gruppo Nucleare, and the deepening of his operative and theoretical relationship with Enrico Castellani and Vincenzo Agnetti, who, in those years in Milan, were the purist pole of visual-concrete research. On February 16th, he participated in an exhibition with Bonalumi and Castellani, at the Galleria Prisma. In April he created the first "Linee", and during that spring he developed the plan of marking living persons and giving them authenticity cards (the beginnings of his creations of living sculptures, 1961) these being plans which were accompanied by the idea of encasing persons, living or dead, in rectangular blocks of plastic. On a trip to Aja, during his personal exhibition at the De Posthoorn gallery, he met Henk Peeters, who put him in touch with the Zero Group. Still in that April, he exhibited at the Galleria Appia Antica, Rome, with Castellani and Agostino Bonalumi. The exhibition was presented by Leo Paolazzi, who, with Sanguineti, Balestrini, Renato Barilli and others went on to form the new Italian literary avant-gard.

During this period he published a large-format book, which he donated to Emilio Villa. It was entitled PMP (Piero Manzoni Pirla, d.e. Piero Manzoni, the fool).

On his return to Milan, he created 45 "Corpi d'aria" (air bodies), pneumatic sculptures, a product to be manufactured in series and sold for L. It. 3,000, in a wooden box containing a balloon and a tripod.

On August 18th, at the Galleria Pozzetto Chiuso, he exhibited a "Linea lunga" and other shorter lines. The line of 19,93 metres was exhibited all around the walls of the gallery.

The exhibition caused a great sensation, so much so that the line was defaced, and this was reported in the "Giorno" of Milan. In September, he had an exhibition at the Galleria Kasper in Lausanne, with Bonalumi and Castellani. The same month, on his return to Milan, with Agnetti and Castellani, he draughted the plan for a journal to counter "Il Gesto" of the Gruppo Nucleare, and it appeared under the name of "Azimuth". Meanwhile his contacts with artists and gallery-owners continued, as well as with the most representative letterati of those years, in particular with Edoardo Sanguineti.

In November, with Castellani, he began work to set up a gallery. The opening was on December 4th, the gallery was named "Azimut" and the opening exhibition was by Manzoni, who exhibited 12 "Linee".

1960

The gallery Azimut's last year of activity.

On January 4th an exhibition entitled "La nuova concezione artistica" was inaugurated; exhibitors were Kilian Breier, Castellani, Oskar Holweck, Klein, Heinz Mack, Manzoni and Almir Mavi-gnier.

Udo Kultermann, who had written for "Azimuth", organized an exhibition entitled "Monochrome Malerei" for the Städtisches Museum in Leverkusen. This was an international panorama of artists who worked using a single colour; among the Italians invited, besides Fontana, Castellani, Francesco Lo Savio and others, there was Manzoni.

The artist, who had now created fresh air bodies, presented them in Milan at the Galleria Azimut.

During the same period he made his first "Scultura nello spazio", a sphere supported by a circular jet of air.

He began his journeys to Denmark, to Copenhagen and Herning. In June he opened an exhibition of 9 "Linee", at the Kopcke gallery in Copenhagen. He met Aage Damgaard, an industrialist, who invited him to live in a huge studio, set up for guest artists. During his stay at Herning, Manzoni created his longest line, 7200 metres.

On his return to Milan after his stay in Denmark, Manzoni presented the exhibition "Consumazione dell'arte dinamica del pubblico divorare l'arte" (Public consumption of dynamic art devouring art), at the Galleria Azimut. The exhibition consisted of a table on which Manzoni boiled some eggs and, after having marked each one with his thumb-print in ink, he distributed them to the public to eat.

On October 8th, he organized a collective exhibition at the Galleria Trastevere in Rome.

During the winter, at the request of the Yugoslav artist Josif Vanista, he prepared three projects entitled "Tavole di accertamento" (assessment tables).

His "Philosophy of infinite space monochrome" was published in 1961 by the Japanese journal "Geljutsu-Schinco", and he also signed the "Manifesto contro niente", for the Esposizione Internazionale del Niente, the manifesto being signed also by Carl Laszlo, Onorio, Fencart, Bazon, Brock, Herbert Schuldt, Castellani, Mack and Piene.

1961

In January, Manzoni made his first magic base. Whoever or whatever was on the base was considered to be a work of art for as long as it stayed there.

In January and February he exhibited, for his friends, the first "Achromes", made with cotton wool and wool fibres.

Manzoni and Castellani went to Rome in April to exhibit together at the Galleria La Tartaruga. This exhibition presented "Achromes

e sculpture viventi", living persons signed by Manzoni himself. In May the artist boxed and produced 90 boxes of "Merda d'artista" (shit by the artist). The shit was sold by weight by the gram at the price fixed for gold.

In July, on the occasion of a collective exhibition with Castellani, Dadamaino, Bonalumi and others, Manzoni presented a tray containing signed eggs, at the Sala del Circolo degli Artisti, and invited visitors to "take communion with art"; the eggs were eaten within about half an hour. On August 12th, the tins of "Merda d'artista" were exhibited for the first time in public, at Albisola, in the exhibition "Artisti in villeggiatura da Pescetto". Invited to the XI Premio Lissone, Manzoni exhibited the 1140 metres line.

After spending the summer at Albisola, Manzoni went back to Denmark, where, in Copenhagen, he inaugurated another exhibition at the Koepcke gallery, on October 18th, advertised by the slogan "Merda d'artista - un lavoro d'arte vivente" (shit by the artist - a work of living art), where he presented "Uova" (eggs), "Merda d'artista" and "Sculture Viventi" (living sculptures).

During his stay at Herning, he created two great works, the "Base del Mondo" and the "Vetrina Fosforescente".

On his return to Milan, Manzoni quickly produced a completely new series of achromes, created with different materials.

The winter of 1961 was rich in work and plans, among them the plan to paint Milan Cathedral pink and the "Afonìa Milano" for heart and wind instruments.

1962

In the months of February and March, Manzoni was in Brussels and Rotterdam, where he contacted the Smith gallery and the Nul Group. On February 17th, at the Galleria Aujourd'hui in Brussels, he exhibited with Castellani, and on March 9th he was at the Stedelijk Museum for the exhibition of the Nul Group, where he was present owing to Sonnenberg's and Peeters' interest.

On June 9th he was in Bern, at the Schindler Gallery, where the "Gruppo Zero" was exhibiting. The catalogue of the exhibition reproduced works by Pol Bury, Castellani, Dufrene, Fontana,

Klein, Mack, Manzoni, Peeters, Piene, Schoohnoven, Uecker, with a presentation by Doelman. From Bern he went to Amsterdam, where on August 4th he exhibited with Castellani and Schoohnoven at the Delta Gallery. He published "Piero Manzoni, the life and works", a volume of 100 white pages with only the cover printed. In November, there was a collective exhibition at the Galleria del Cenobio and he wrote "Alcune realizzazioni, alcuni esperimenti, alcuni progetti" (Some creations, some experiments, some plans).

1963

His last exhibition was in January, at the Smith Gallery in Brussels.
He died in his studio on February 6th.

ALCUNE REALIZZAZIONI, ALCUNI ESPERIMENTI, ALCUNI PROGETTI
(Some creations, some experiments, some plans)

Piero Manzoni, Milan 1962

My first "Achromes" go back to '57; in the canvas soaked in kaolin and glue. In 1959 the raster of the "Achromes" consisted of machine sewing. In '60 I made some in cotton wool, in expanded polystyrene, I experimented with phosphorescence, and others soaked in cobald chloride, which changes colour as the weather changes. In '61 I continued with still others, in straw and plastic and with a series of squares, always white, in cotton wool balls and then fluffy, like clouds, in natural or artificial fibre. I also made a sculpture in rabbit skin. In 1959 I prepared a series of 45 "Corpi d'aria" (air bodies), pneumatic sculptures, maximum diameter 80 cm (height with the base, 120 cm); the purchaser, should he desire, may purchase not only the shell and the base (in a special small container), but also my breath, to be kept in the same container.

During the same period, I planned a group of air bodies for a park (always spherical), diameter about 2m 50; through a device to compress the air, they pulsate with a very slow breathing rhythm, not synchronized (experimental examples, with small shell, in 1959). Based on the same principle, I have also proposed a pneumatic-pulsating ceiling and wall, for a type of architecture. Again for a park, I had thought of a small grove of pneumatic cylinders, elongated like stalks, which would vibrate in the wind. (In the same project, other very tall steel stalks would whistle in the wind). For the open air, I worked out an independently moving sculpture ('59-'60). This mechanical animal will be independent, because it will get its nourishment from nature (solar energy); it will stop at night, and curl up; during the day it will move, make noises, emit rays, bring out antennae, to find energy and to avoid obstacles: it will also be possible to make it self-reproducing.

In 1960 I realized an old project: the first sculpture in space. A sphere supported by a jet of air. Based on the same principle,

I worked on some "Bodies of absolute light", spheroids which, supported by a suitably-directed jet of air, spun vertiginously creating a virtual volume.

At the beginning of '59 I made my first lines, shorter ones first, then increasingly longer ones (19, 11m, 33m, 63m, 1000m, etc.); the longest I have yet been able to make is 7200m (Herning, Denmark 1960). All these lines are sealed in boxes. I would also like to draw a white line right along the Greenwich meridian!

In 1960, during two manifestations (Copenhagen and Milan) I consecrated some hard-boiled eggs to art: the public was able to make direct contact with this work by swallowing an entire exhibition in 70 minutes. Since '60 I have been selling my thumb-prints, right and left.

In 1959 I had thought of exhibiting live persons (other, dead ones I wanted to shut up and conserve in transparent plastic blocks): in '61 I began signing people, for exhibition. I give these works of art an authenticity card.

In January, '61, I made the first "magic base": whoever, or whatever object, was on it, as long as it stayed there, was a work of art. I made a second one in Copenhagen. On the third, made of iron and very large, placed in a park in Herning (Denmark, 1961) rests the Earth: it is the "Base del Mondo".

In the month of May, 1961, I produced and boxed 90 tins of "Merda d'artista" (shit by the artist) (30g each), natural conservation (made in Italy). In a previous project I wanted to produce vials of "blood of the artist".

From '56 to '61 I prepared a series of "assessment tables" of which 8 have been published by lithography, collected in folders (maps, alphabets, finger-prints...).

For music, in 1961, I composed two "Aphonies": the "Herning Afo-
nia" (orchestra and public), the "Afo-
nia Milano" (heart and wind instruments). At present (1962) I am working on an electronically-controlled labyrinth, which will perhaps serve for psychological tests and brain-washing.

Edizioni Scheiwiller, Milan, 1967