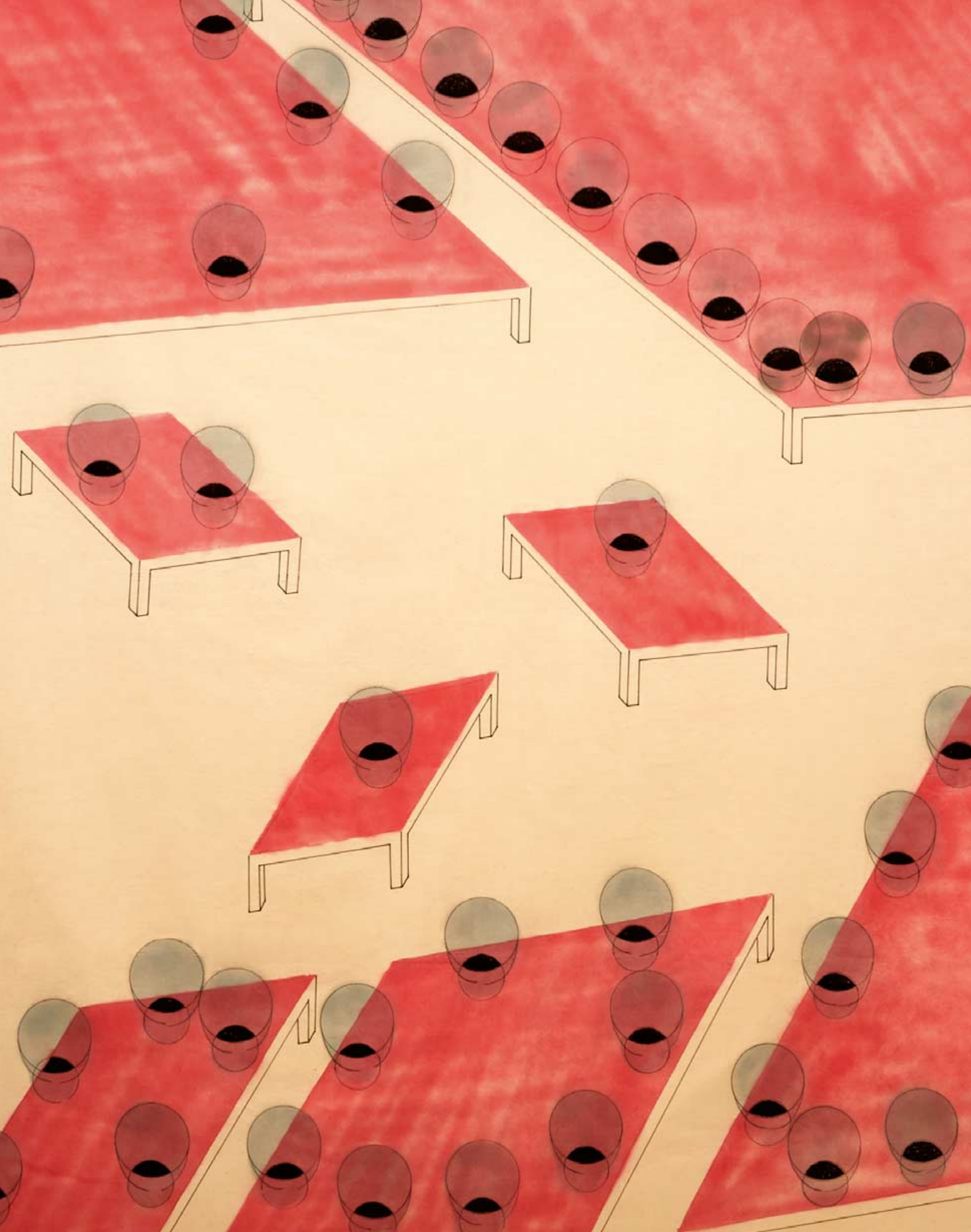
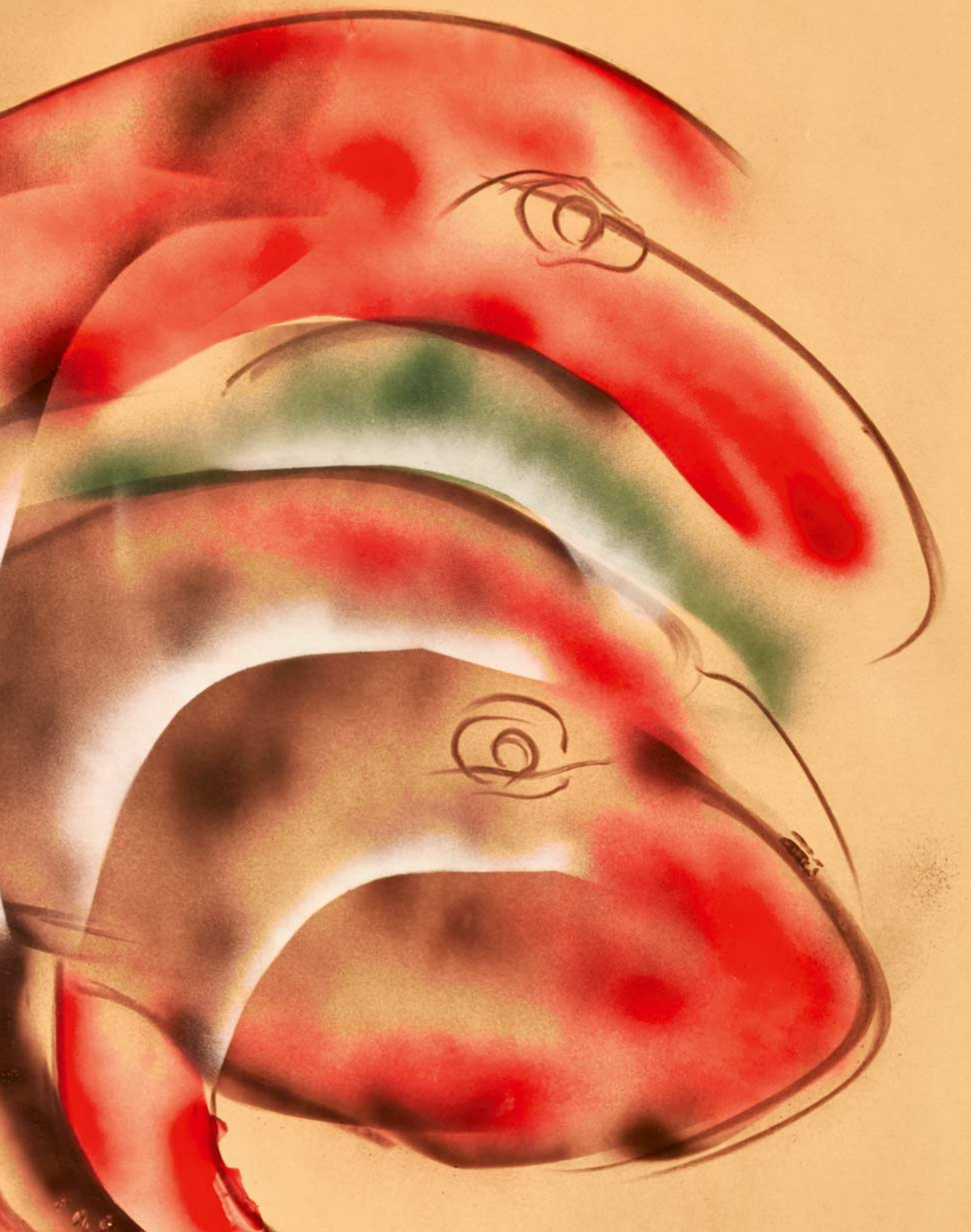




MARIO MERZ TIME IS MUTE

MUSEO NACIONAL CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFIA

In the mid-1960s, against the backdrop of global political upheaval, a movement emerged in Italy that made a strong impact on the international art scene of the time: arte povera. Not unlike other trends that emerged after World War II, arte povera advocated the intertwining of art and life, programmatically adopting an aesthetic that placed great importance on ethical and social-political issues and on critical analysis of the existential conditions of the contemporary subject.

Mario Merz, who began his career in the 1950s, was one of the leading figures of arte povera, which got its name and official identity from Italian art critic and historian Germano Celant. Merz's works, like those of other artists associated with the movement, are highly critical of consumer society and of the, in his view, predatory impulse of a postindustrial capitalism that distances human beings from nature and from an awareness of the collective whole, pushing them into an alienated life from which, as Robert Lumley tells us, "dream and poetry" have been banished.

Merz expressed this critique through the creation of a conceptually complex and metaphorically dense poetic and iconographic imaginary that centers on the use of recycled materials (of both organic and industrial origin) and also incorporates archaic and anachronistic references. In constructing this imaginary, Merz sought both to invoke a kind of mythical time and space—as a way of drawing attention to the necessity of restoring an understanding of the world not determined by the trappings of civilization—and to make us confront the sense and deeper meaning of fundamental human experiences such as building and dwelling.

One of the key artistic motifs in shaping this imaginary is the igloo, a structure Merz began to use in the second half of the 1960s. As Juhani Pallasmaa explains, Merz's igloos refer simultaneously to the beginnings of human culture and to its end, to the vestiges of an extinct, premodern civilization and to a dystopian future. Written on the dome of one of his earliest, *Igloo di Giap* (Giap's Igloo, 1968), are the words "Se il nemico si concentra perde terreno; se si disperde perde forza" (If the enemy masses his forces, he loses ground; if he scatters, he loses strength), attributed to the North Vietnamese General

Võ Nguyên Giáp. This quotation full of political and philosophical connotations is written in neon lights, a material Merz repeatedly returned to in his works.

Along with language, which always plays a fundamental role in Merz's works, another key element is the Fibonacci series, an infinite sequence of integers in which each number is the sum of the previous two. In Merz's case, this numerical progression—which was discovered in the thirteenth century and has since been used to describe a pattern of growth that often appears in the natural world—is used not as a hidden principle of proportion but as a key visual motif. References to this mathematical-poetic formulation in Merz's work are numerous and diverse; they include, for example, the paintings and installations he created with tables arranged or portrayed in the form of a spiral, a figure full of symbolism that always fascinated him.

Contrary to many earlier interpretations, Merz's interest in this and other elements with mythical undertones or associated with a somewhat archaic imaginary (such as igloos and the ancestral animals he drew in the 1980s and 1990s) had a strong political component. He used them not merely for rhetorical purposes or as nostalgic re-creations but to convey his profound rejection of consumerist tendencies in contemporary society. This aspect of his art is emphasized in *Time Is Mute*, the retrospective organized by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in collaboration with Fondazione Merz. The exhibition and this accompanying catalog, which includes a selection of previously unpublished poems by Merz, allow us to rediscover the multifaceted body of work he created, showing both his contextual importance—Merz is a key artist for understanding European art of the second half of the twentieth century—and the critical relevance and poetic potential his work still has today.

José Guirao Cabrera
Minister of Culture and Sports

In the 1980s and 1990s, Mario Merz was one of the most highly regarded figures in the international art scene, frequently hailed as one of the most important living artists of his generation. During those years, numerous studies and research projects focused on his work, which featured in a steady stream of solo exhibitions. Spain was no exception to this trend, and several museums (including the Museo Reina Sofía) acquired his works and/or organized shows that, as a rule, generated a lot of media interest and attracted large and enthusiastic audiences. A perhaps anecdotal detail that is nonetheless representative of the central role he came to play at the time is the fact that he was often described as the "Mediterranean Joseph Beuys." In reality, Merz was born in Milan, and his entire career was based in Turin—that is, in the industrialized north of Italy, a setting that has little or nothing to do with what is normally associated with the Mediterranean.

These days, however, Merz is no longer such a strong presence on the international arts agenda, and projects relating to his work are rarely organized. What accounts for this change? One reason is surely the logic of planned obsolescence, from which the art world is by no means exempt. This logic tends to turn everything, including artists and the works they generate, into products with a limited useful life; that is, into consumer objects subject to the voracious appetite of a market that demands constant novelty.

A second, more specific reason for the art institution's recent lack of interest in Merz is the profound dehistoricization of his work in the 1980s and 1990s. This process turned his most emblematic artistic/poetic motifs—from igloos to spiral tables and research into the Fibonacci numbers—into purely rhetorical elements that ended up functioning almost like a brand.

Merz was also considered a kind of idealized embodiment of the nomadic artist. This romantic notion deprives his work of a more situated political dimension and substitutes instead a saccharine reading of his critique of modernity, which was—although we failed to perceive it at the time—perfectly attuned to the new symbolic order promoted by neoliberal globalization. The recent proliferation of names and projects using a return to nomadism as a mere aesthetic strategy,

devoid of content, has unsurprisingly ended up in a cartoonish idealization of the nomadic artist.

In contrast to this depoliticized, decontextualized reading, the exhibition *Time Is Mute* seeks to reposition Merz within the specific historical context in which his work emerged and developed: that of the industrialized city/region of Turin in the 1960s and 1970s, the period in which the defining features of his artistic practice took shape. This was the moment of the switch from a Fordist to a post-Fordist society, in a place where the shift was particularly traumatic. (Turin was home to the Lingotto car factory, which Le Corbusier considered the paradigmatic factory space designed for assembly-line production.) It was also a period of expansion of consumer culture, which Merz—like the situationists, to whom he was close—considered one of the main instruments of domination and alienation in advanced capitalist societies. Accordingly, he was always highly critical of artistic movements such as pop art and minimalism, because he believed that through their fetishistic and unsituated defense of the aesthetic experience they were reproducing and helping to reinforce the logic of consumerism. Against the backdrop of the breakdown of Fordism, Merz generated an artistic research and creation practice that sprang from a conscious and visceral rejection of the world of consumption, firmly rooted in the territory and the historical moment from which he spoke, and with an indisputable iconographic and discursive singularity.

During the second half of the 1960s—coinciding with the emergence and popularization of the arte povera movement, of which he was a key figure—Merz laid the foundations of his artistic vocabulary. The most distinctive element of this was the igloo, a structure he began working with at that time and continued to use until the end of his career. To paraphrase Juhani Pallasmaa, through the creation of these igloos (drawing on both natural and artificial materials), Merz sought to probe the deep, unconscious territory of human construction, doing so based on the premise that dwellings are what give our world its basic experiential and emotional structure.

Almost in parallel to his incorporation of the igloo, Merz began working with the Fibonacci numbers, an infinite numerical progression discovered by the Italian mathematician Leonardo de Pisa in the thirteenth century, in which each number is the sum of the two preceding ones (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, …). The singularity of this sequence is the fact that it describes a pattern of exponential growth that often appears in nature; for instance, in sunflowers, seashells, tree branching, and the arrangement of leaves on a stem. Beyond its abstract beauty and its potential practical applications, what fascinated Merz about the sequence was the possibility of explaining and representing highly complex biological, physical, and even political and sociopolitical phenomena through a premodern mathematical formula that, as Robert Lumley points out in

the text he has written for this catalog, also represents “the organic connection between numbers and the natural order.”

Archaism and the use of anachronistic elements and references play an important role in Merz’s work, operating as core elements in his radical questioning of modernity and the paradigms that underpin it. The neon lights—already-obsolete objects of industrial origin—that form part of many of his installations are an example of this, as are the drawings of animals like crocodiles and rhinoceroses that evoke prehistoric times. In using these ancestral figures or references to a proto-industrial, premodern era, Merz was in part seeking to explore the possibility of (re)connecting to the long time of history that technological reasoning and voracious consumerism seems to want to bring to an end. His impulse was not so unlike what other authors—such as the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini—were defending and pursuing at the time.

In this sense, the metaphoric invocation of the “prehistoric wind from the frozen mountains”—an evocative image that Merz often turned to when he talked about his works—should not be seen as a melancholic appeal to an idealized past but as a call for the need to bring (back) to the center our relationship with nature; that is, the emotional, not purely instrumental, connection with our environment.

Merz’s practice has an unmistakable political dimension and purpose. Although he was aware that critical content and discourses are quickly absorbed by the art world, he always chose to leave space for mystery in his works. Perhaps his strategy of merging the political and the poetic can most clearly be seen in some of the works Merz made with neon lights, such as *Sciopero generale azione politica relativa proclamata relativamente all’arte* (General strike political action relative proclaimed relatively to art, 1970) and the seminal *Che fare?* (What is to be done?), a small sculptural work that directly references Vladimir Lenin’s text outlining his strategic proposals for revolutionary parties. After creating the work in 1968, Merz then used it in numerous installations.

In organizing the present exhibition, we wish to contribute to reversing the dehistoricized interpretation of Merz’s work. Our desire is based on the conviction that as long as his work is allowed to maintain its radically situated nature—that is, if we do not ignore the incisive critique of industrial, consumerist modernity that underlies Merz’s quest for the mythical—it has the power to continue to speak to us.

Manuel Borja-Villel
Director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Marisa Merz and Mario Merz with the first IGLOO DI GIAP
[Giap's Igloo], Galleria Mara Coccia, Rome, 1968

THE EXISTENTIAL POETICS OF MARIO MERZ: IMAGES OF CONSTRUCTION, DWELLING, AND BEING

Juhani Pallasmaa

After the human and moral disaster of World War II, European artists were disillusioned and aspired to engage in a true social reality instead of aestheticization, abstraction, idealization, and illusions. Aesthetic intentions and beauty were replaced by existential concerns, and the ideas of existential philosophy resonated widely.[1] The new realist and existentialist position took varying forms and atmospheres in literature, cinema, visual arts, and architecture. In the visual arts of Italy after the mid-1960s, the arte povera movement, which included artists in several Italian cities (Milan, Rome, Genoa, Venice, Naples, and Bologna) represented a socially, culturally, and politically motivated movement away from elitist values and aesthetics. The neorealist Italian cinema had engaged with social reality, class structures, poverty, mental alienation, and desperation a decade earlier.

Mario Merz, painter, sculptor, performance and installation artist, was a central arte povera figure along with Giovanni Anselmo, Enrico Castellani, Luciano Fabro, Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Marisa Merz, Mario Merz's wife and the only female member of the movement. The group used unconventional materials and techniques and was a countermovement to the emerging industrial and technological sophistication, intellectualization, abstraction, and aestheticization of American art. An influential promoter of the arte povera movement was the Italian art curator and critic Germano Celant, who also gave the movement its name in 1967.

Mario Merz's work is particularly engaged in architectural images and of place, dwelling, and construction. The most characteristic and recognizable of Merz's artistic works are his countless variations of the archaic hut and domed igloo structure. These constructions evoke a multitude of references to and recollections of the primitive huts of earliest human history, as well as temporary habitations and utopian projects in the postindustrial world. Early human dwellings have interested numerous scholars and artists, but the primordial human dwelling continues to remain an enigma. In the first century BCE, the Roman Marcus Vitruvius Pollio—the first theorist and historian of architecture—saw the origin of architecture in the domestication of fire and its centering impact.[2] "Therefore it was the discovery of fire that originally gave rise to the coming together of men, to the deliberate assembly and to social

1. For the existentialist philosophical movement, see William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1962).

2. Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1960).

Marc-Antoine Laugier, The personification of architecture and the primitive hut. *Essai sur l'architecture*, Paris, 1753

Eugene Viollet-le-Duc, "The First Building." *Histoire de l'habitation humaine*, Paris, 1875

The wood-framed leather dome of the Rendile tribe in Kenya

intercourse . . . they began in that first assembly to construct shelters. Some made them of green boughs, others dug caves on mountain sides, and some, in imitation of the nests of swallows and the way they built, made places of refuge out of mud and twigs."[3] Marc-Antoine Laugier's influential drawing of a primitive hut in 1755 and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc's drawing *The First Building* (1875) provide visual images of humanity's first dwelling, although based more on fantasy than on reliable archaeological or anthropological research. The German architect, historian, and art critic Gottfried Semper further argued that the first human constructions were based on the craft of weaving branches, twigs, and plant fibers together rather than on the tectonic principles that later characterized architecture.

Merz's constructions remind us of the beginning of architecture and of the history of vernacular constructions, which continue to be built and used in various parts of the world; for example, the wood-framed leather domes of the nomadic Rendile people in Kenya. Transported on the backs of camels as the tribe continues its endless journey through the desert, the domes are reerected every evening by the women of the tribe. Most of Merz's constructions are associated with igloos of the Inuit and Yupik peoples, however. The authentic igloo has a curved and stepped entrance corridor buried under the snow cover to prevent wind and drafts from entering the dwelling chamber proper, but we are usually aware of only the visible semispherical dome. Merz's igloos are built not of snow but of waste and found materials from the industrial world, frequently glass, the material of modernity. The feeling and narrative of used materials was seminal for him, and even his paintings suggest materiality rather than mere color.

A few years before Merz's first variations of the igloo theme, Bernard Rudofsky's 1964 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, entitled *Architecture without Architects*, brought the neglected indigenous and vernacular traditions of the world to the attention of the architectural profession.[4] Certain vernacular architectures had already exerted remarkable influence on modern architecture, especially the Mediterranean building traditions, which inspired Le Corbusier in his pioneering search for a modern architectural language.[5] Japanese traditional architecture began to inspire Western modernist architecture during the 1930s, almost a full century after *japonisme* first influenced the Western fine arts tradition, notably the impressionists.[6] In the mid-1950s, the anthropologically inspired Dutch structuralist movement, as seen particularly in the writings and work of Aldo van Eyck, imported the influence of the "primitive," especially the mythological world and building tradition of the Dogon in the Bandiagara Canyon south of the Sahara and connected architecture with structuralism in anthropology. The role of African and Polynesian art on the emergence of modern art, especially through the early years of cubism, is also part of the multifaceted story of the primitive in the modern.

3. Ibid., 38.

4. Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964).

5. During his trip around the Mediterranean in 1911–1912, Le Corbusier measured and sketched countless examples of traditional constructions. On the influence of the vernacular on modern architecture, see Michelangelo Sabatini, *Pride in Modesty: Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

6. Bruno Taut's *Das japanische Haus und sein Leben* and *Nippon mit europäischen Augen gesehen* were influential among modern architects in the Western world. The influence of Japanese aesthetics on mid-nineteenth-century Europe began with the movement called *japonisme*.

Merz's constructions are not formal or visual imitations of any of the vernacular traditions. He instead explored the deep unconscious ground of human construction, its mental motivations and messages rather than its shapes. Merz usually used a metal frame to provide structure, covering it with glass sheets, metal, clay, mud, stone plates, branches, plant fibers, rags, and so on—in short, recycled materials. This covering layer is metaphorical and partial rather than suggestive of a practical function. He also conceived all-glass domes without a separate structural frame. The materials appear as found, recycled, and frequently broken remains of some previous human construction or other use. Used and worn materials were characteristic of the arte povera artists in general, whose art aimed at a sense of time and duration and an anti-aesthetic that underlined existential meanings and associations. Merz's igloo structures also make one think of the even more archaic structures found in the biological world; for example, animal constructions, such as bird nests and the capture nets of spiders and caddis fly larvae—structures that are amazingly sophisticated both in their functional performance and structural features.[7] The larva of *Climacia areolaris* (a type of lacewing fly), for instance, constructs a dome of silk produced by its anal spinnerets as the outer layer of its cocoon. A butterfly species is known to build a dome of its own poisonous larval hair held together by silk—the larval case then rests in a silk hammock in this protected space.[8] Thus, the origins of dome construction are rooted in the biological historicity of earthly life. Consequently, it has a deep echo in human perception, memory, and imagination. Animal constructions are frequently astonishingly complex and refined functional and technical structures. These refinements become understandable when considered in light of the animals' evolutionary history. Spiders, for instance, developed their capture nets over a span of 300 million years, while the oldest human constructions (by *Homo heidelbergensis*) are estimated to be around 400,000 years old.[9] The primordial and the refined are surprisingly fused.

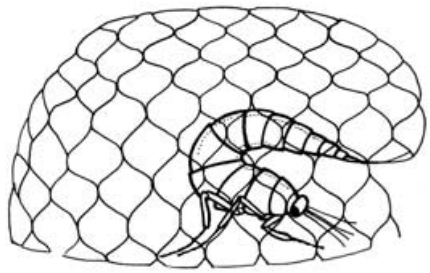
This cultural and biological historicity is reflected in Merz's constructions. Their suggestive force arises from their layered associations and dualities. They are anachronistic and futuristic, ancient and novel, primitive and advanced. The temporary habitations and nomadism associated with the current massive refugee migrations in several parts of the world give the artist's imagery a new actuality, resonance, and meaning.

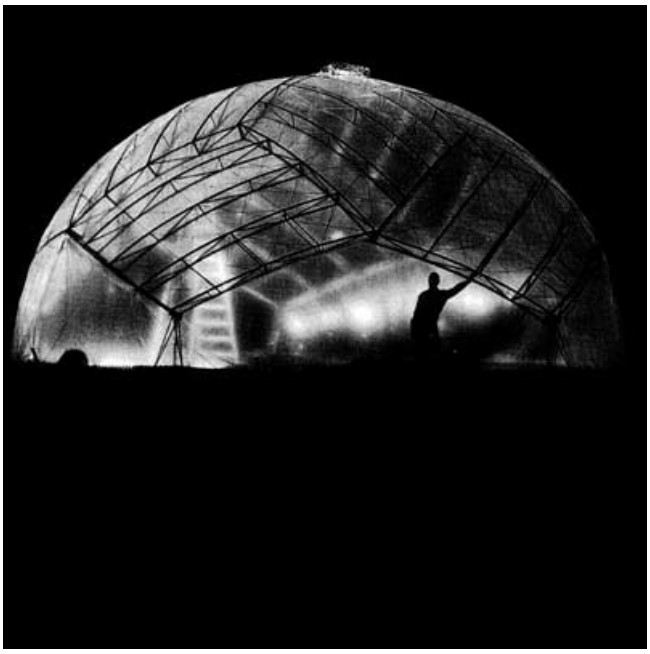
Along with the structural vault, the dome in its symmetrical completeness and perfection is the most archetypal and memorable of architectural structures, as evidenced by the authority of the Pantheon in Rome and the dome of Filippo Brunelleschi's Florence Cathedral, which, when completed, was the largest structural span in the world. The artist-clockmaker-architect even invented the complex machinery that lifted the construction stones to the dizzying heights of his dome. But domes are also among the most refined constructions of our scientific, technological, and industrial age, the modern dome structure being

7. See *Animal Architecture*, ed. Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1995).

8. Ibid., 9.

9. Harry Francis Mallgrave, *From Object to Experience: The New Culture of Architectural Design* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 136.



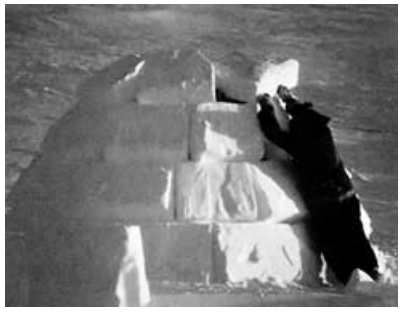


The larva of *Climacia areolaris* (Neuroptera) constructs a geometric dome of silk produced by its anal spinnerets as the outer layer of its cocoon

R. Buckminster Fuller, a small size geodesic dome

R. Buckminster Fuller, The Manhattan Dome, project

Drop City, Southern Colorado



An Eskimo igloo

exemplified by Pier Luigi Nervi's imposing concrete examples, such as the Palazzetto dello Sport in Rome (1957). Merz's artistic domes simultaneously evoke dual, polar associations: primordial and futuristic images of hope and disaster, beginning and end, past and future. While they make us remember humankind's earliest constructions, they also suggest the high-tech geodesic domes of R. Buckminster Fuller, which he initially designed to house the US Army's radar installations. The patent for his geodesic dome was granted in 1954 and might have been an inspiration for Merz. Fuller's geodesic domes achieve a maximally efficient ratio of weight to volume of enclosed space. Dome structures were also used in some of the later utopian ecological research projects, such as the Eden Project (2000) in England, a botanical garden exploring the feasibility of sustainable living; and the Biosphere 2 (1991) research project in Oracle, Arizona, a closed ecological system intended to simulate human life in outer space. The centrality of human survival in these projects also ties them to the survival theme in Merz's installations.

The glass dome also appears in the futuristic drawing Francois Dallegret created to illustrate Reyner Banham's 1965 article "A Home Is Not a House." Given Merz's interest in the glass dome, he might well have been aware of this image of naked figures inside a transparent dome, surrounded by high-tech machinery for heating, air-conditioning, and communication.[10] Banham's article prophesies that, in the near future, advanced mechanical technology will replace the traditional notions of house, home, and architecture. Merz's igloos suggest temporary shelters built from the arbitrary remains of our technological culture, perhaps after an unavoidable ecological catastrophe. His huts and domes, with their rich and even conflicting connotations, have no practical purpose, their mental and psychological impact based on poetic imagery. They suggest both an innocent paradisiacal life and a failed utopia. His structures refer simultaneously to the archaic beginnings of human culture and its end through an apocalyptic event. Their undefinable and enigmatic post-disaster atmosphere recalls Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) and Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* (1982), but they also project the innocent poverty and hope of Vittorio De Sica's neorealist *Miracle in Milan* (1951). The counterculture community Drop City (southern Colorado, 1965–1970s), as well as similar intentional communities it inspired in the late 1960s and 1970s, was based on Fuller's Dymaxion principles, with structures built from the metal plates and windshields of used cars and other waste materials of the society of abundance, suggesting the fusion of utopia and dystopia. Well-known in the 1960s thanks to news reports and television coverage, Drop City and its constructions were likely also known to Merz when he was working on his early domes.

In addition to numerous museum installations, the artist also produced works for specific sites at archaeological digs, juxtaposing his temporary structures with the authority of the historical site and its authentic objects. These works

10. Reyner Banham, "A Home Is Not a House," *Art in America*, April 1965, 109–18.

are intriguing collages of time and origin, evoking a vague archaeological dimension and suggesting a reading of his artworks as found objects without a distinct origin or history. Other arte povera artists also used historical contrasts in their works. Paolini exhibited plaster casts of Roman busts with the splinters of broken objects on the floor, Pistoletto juxtaposed a cast of a sculpture of Venus with a huge pile of rags, and Anselmo balanced a suspended block of black stone against a pile of lettuce.

In some of Merz's installations the artist used three domes nested inside one another, thus projecting an air of ultimate concealment, privacy, secrecy, and silence. These structures fuse the images of the container and the contained: the shelter itself is being sheltered. Instead of the spherical dome, a few of Merz's "primitive huts" have a conical or traditional hut shape and are built of reeds or other plant materials. These structures resemble the imagery of vernacular African and Polynesian dwellings, and they seem to be devoid of the suggestion of catastrophe. They, too, suggest the metaphysical task of the dwelling, beyond its functioning as practical human shelter. The dwelling is not only a physical shelter but projects an order into the surrounding world.

Merz was obsessed with images and concepts of survival and dwelling. In some of his works he deploys images of dwelling beyond the shelter itself. The table, for instance, can stand for the entire dwelling. With its multiple utilitarian purposes and its centering and gathering impact on family life, the table is an archetypal architectural image. Due to its role as the "stage" of gatherings and meals, both everyday family routines and festive or ritualistic feasts, the table conveys moving and intimate meanings and feelings. In our imagination we add guests around and objects to an empty table, as its very emptiness suggests both its use and user in the same way that a chair is always an invitation for a sitter. As a consequence of its facilitating and mediating role, the table also suggests a narrative. A long table is seen as the scene of the Last Supper thanks to the countless paintings of the biblical theme throughout art history.

In his 1973 show at the John Weber Gallery in New York, Merz combined another favorite theme of his, the Fibonacci number series, with a sequence of modular tables. He also began to use figures of animals, such as deer, in his installations to evoke feelings of innocence, homelessness, solitude, and threat. His choice of motorcycles in some of his installations conveyed the meaning of a contemporary journey without a fixed domicile or home. His use of stacks of old newspapers similarly suggested the randomness and anonymity of today's information and the temporality, valuelessness, and perishability of news. Hardly anything is more useless than old news. At the same time, stacks of newspapers suggest the passing of time.

Merz's installations evoke the most basic human need and act: to dwell. Dwelling calls not only for physical shelter but for an articulation and definition of the dweller's place in the world; human situations are necessarily always

placed. The dwelling determines the dweller's place and domicile, and, consequently, the dwelling radiates a basic structure for the dweller's entire world. The Rendile erect their community in a circular configuration, with a wider space left open toward the direction of the sunrise. The door openings of the huts are all oriented toward the rising sun, and the chief's hut is located in the ring of dwellings exactly opposite the rising sun. Thus, the tribe transports the image of their world on their endless nomadic journey, reconstructing the scheme of that world every evening.

The dwelling and the home center our world and give it its basic experiential and emotive structure. The dwelling is as much a mental act as it is a physical structure. In his essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Martin Heidegger suggests that modern human beings have lost their ability to dwell.[11] In fact, the modern human being who has rejected god no longer dwells but has become a nomad and wanderers again on an aimless, endless journey. The haphazard materials of Merz's works suggest the life of an early *bricoleur*. *Homo faber*, instead of being a craftsperson-maker, has turned into a hunter-gatherer. Merz's constructions thus suggest the Heideggerian loss of the capacity to dwell in the middle of abundance. Dwelling has instead become nostalgic yearning. Merz's artworks point simultaneously backward and forward in time and along the evolutionary course.

Yet another image in Merz's constructions is the suggestion of an emerging, still feeble and threatened life. The archaeological fact that the first human constructions were graves, not dwellings, is not generally known or accepted by architects, probably because we have wanted to associate architecture with the image of life rather than death. "Mid the uneasy wanderings of paleolithic man, the dead were the first to have permanent dwellings: a cavern, a mound marked by a cairn, a collective barrow. These were landmarks to which the living probably returned at intervals, to communicate with or placate the ancestral spirits," Lewis Mumford, the historian of human settlements, writes in *The City in History*.[12] In *The Dominion of the Dead* the American literary scholar Robert Pogue Harrison points out the mental meaning of burial: "I would say that humans bury not simply to achieve closure and affect a separation from the dead, but also and above all to humanize the ground on which they build their worlds and found their histories."[13] Merz's domed structures are symbolic dwellings for the dead, as well as shelters for the living. They are simultaneously tools of memory and imagination. The essential meaning of his huts is to declare and represent the existence of human beings, both dead and alive, by means of our existential need to dwell, both physically and mentally. The Latin word *humanitas* derives from *humando*, "burying." Harrison concludes, "to be human means above all to bury."[14] The inhabitants of Merz's dwellings also know how to bury.

Early human beings buried their dead long before they built any shelters for themselves, which means that architecture was born of the mental reality of an

11. Martin Heidegger, *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 319–39.

12. Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 7.

13. Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xi.

14. Ibid.

imaginary world rather than the practicalities of earthly life. A layer of mythical, mental, and symbolic meaning has been part of architecture since its emergence. Merz's constructions project this metaphoric content and could just as well be funerary sites and memorials as dwellings. They evoke questions and suggest answers at the same time. They are engaged in the processes of giving symbolic and experiential meanings to human construction and declaring the human presence.

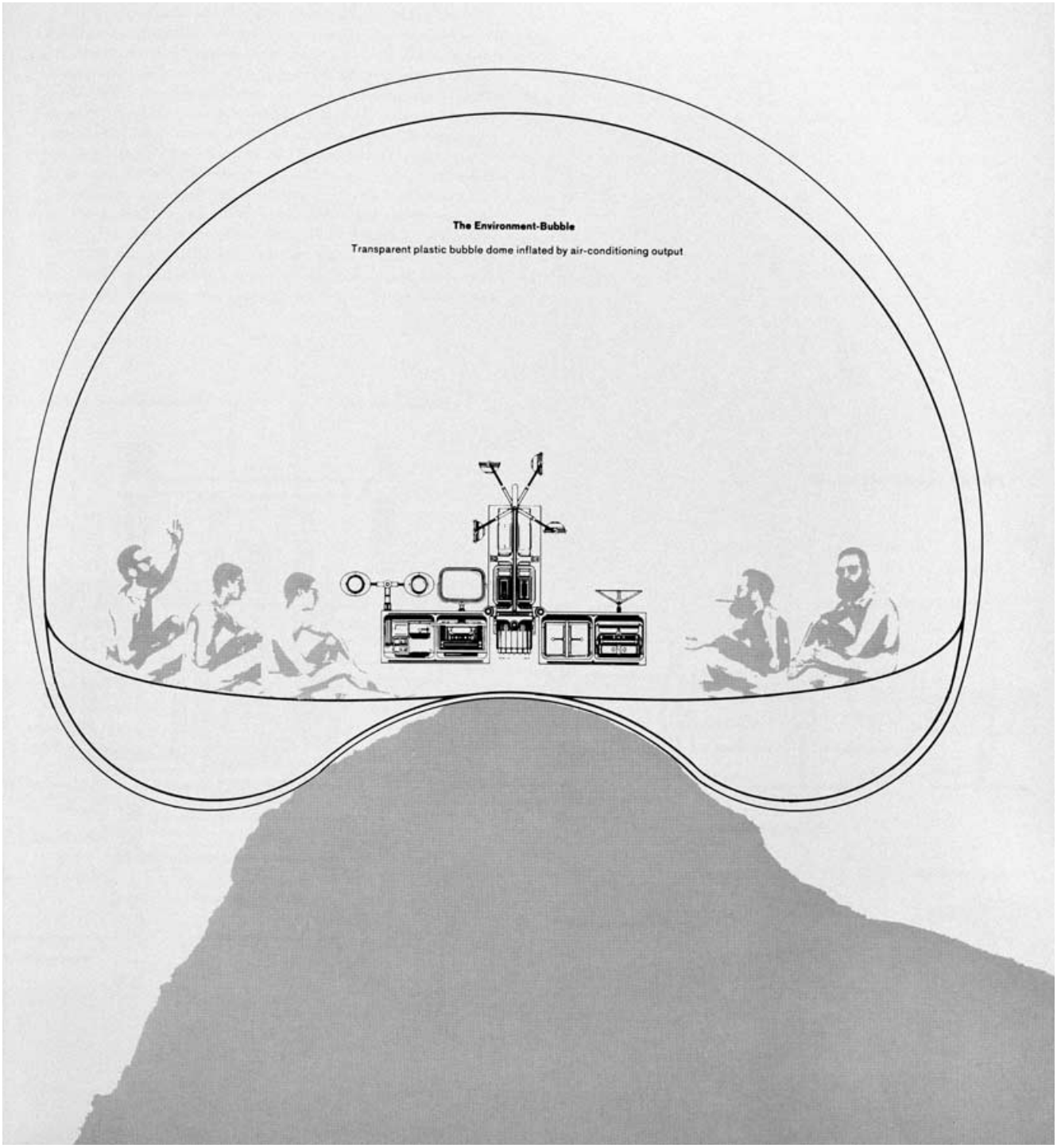
At the beginning of his career in the mid-1960s, Merz made art pieces in which neon lights pierced ordinary objects, such as a bottle, an umbrella, a stack of newspapers, and the artist's own raincoat. He also began to use words and numbers executed in neon lights as motifs juxtaposed with objects. For an early igloo entitled *Igloo di Giap* (Giap's Igloo, 1968), dedicated to North Vietnamese General Võ Nguyên Giáp, Merz placed the general's motto—"If the enemy masses his forces, he loses ground; if he scatters, he loses strength"—in neon lettering on the igloo.

The neon light—immaterial, clinical, timeless, cool—is a contrast to the beaten and worn materiality and suggests "nowness" in the middle of the layered time of Merz's other elements and materials. His manner of using found materials is clearly related to his earliest art works, made while imprisoned during WWII for his participation in the Giustizia e Libertà anti-fascist movement. During his imprisonment he began to draw on any material he could find.

The igloo of the Inuit and Yupik peoples is built of the purest of substances, white snow, whereas Merz's domes are frequently covered with found materials, wastes, that suggest a previous use and the passing of time. The blue neon lights create a nonmaterial, ethereal, technological, futuristic, and anonymous atmosphere as a contrast to the found materials that suggest wear and lived life. The choice of neon light instead of other light sources is deliberate. A warm candle or incandescent light would create a feeling of invitation, domesticity, and intimacy. "A lamp is waiting in the window and through it, the house, too, is waiting. The lamp is the symbol of prolonged waiting," observes Gaston Bachelard, the philosopher of science and poetic imagery.[15] Merz's lights serve the opposite purposes of anonymity, alienation, distancing, and abstraction. Neon lights have also been used by other arte povera artists, such as Kounellis, as well as by several American minimalist and conceptual artists, such as Dan Flavin and Bruce Nauman.

Merz included the Fibonacci series in various works and situations, from wall pieces to igloos, as well as in huge installations on existing tall architectural structures, such as factory chimneys. Normally, when artists and architects use a proportional system, such as the golden ratio, the Fibonacci series, or Pythagorean harmonic proportions, the mathematical device is a concealed, "invisible" proportioning principle, rather than an explicit motif or subject matter. In Merz's works the mathematical sequence is always a central visual

15. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 34.



Francois Dallegret, “The Environmental Bubble,” illustration for Rayner Banham’s article “The Home Is Not a House,” *Art in America*, April 1965

and associative motif. In his performances and installation after 1969, Merz frequently used the beginning of the Fibonacci series: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5 ,8, 13, 21, 34, . . . Invented in the twelfth century by the mathematician and monk Leonardo Fibonacci, the series (in which each digit is the sum of the two previous digits) is an approximation of the golden ratio—also called the golden section (*sectio aurea*) and divine proportion (*divina proportione*)—which was known to Pythagoras in the fourth century BCE and was rediscovered in the Renaissance era by Leonardo da Vinci's friend Luca Pacioli (Leonardo illustrated his *Divina proportione*). The golden ratio is a continuous proportion approximating the numerical value 1.6180339887… . Greek architects such as Phidias, the sculptor-architect of the Acropolis in Athens, are assumed to have used the golden ratio. Le Corbusier, the most influential of modern architects, used both the golden ratio and the Fibonacci series in his system of harmonized measures, which he entitled *Modulor* (1954). Merz's reference to the mathematical ideas of the Renaissance, the beginnings of modern culture, is significant, as this was a period when architecture aspired to be recognized not just as mere craft but as one of the disciplines in the quadrivium, because of its association with mathematics. The mathematical suggestion was expected to elevate the primitive craft of construction into the realm of art. Numerous scholars have shown how the Fibonacci series describes dynamic patterns of growth in physical and biological phenomena. The golden ratio has also been regarded as the mathematical foundation of beauty. In works by Merz, the Fibonacci series evokes abstract scientific thought in counterpoint to the material, embodied, existential, and poetic language of art. Mathematics and physics are both motivated by beauty. "Beauty is a conspicuous element in the abstract completeness aimed at in the higher mathematics; it is the goal of physics as it seeks to construe the order of the universe; it ought at least to be the inspiration of all study of life," John Oman, philosopher and theologian, wrote in 1931.[16] The physicist Paul Dirac argued three decades later that those physics theories that project beauty are probably also the correct ones.[17] Mathematician and theoretical physicist Herman Weyl made an even more outspoken confession: "In my work I have always tried to combine truth with beauty; when I have been obliged to choose one of the two, I have always chosen beauty."[18] In the arte povera artworks of Merz, the mathematical image of the Fibonacci series evokes the realm of science and abstract thought, and it also represents the abstract, mathematical, and inarguable core of beauty.

In some of his works, Merz juxtaposed the Fibonacci series with photographs, such as a factory workers' lunch room or a restaurant with varying numbers of clients. Merz used the Fibonacci series in his igloo constructions as well as his wall pieces and huge vertical installations, including in his 1971 Guggenheim Museum exhibition; the Turin Landmark (1984); the vertical spiral assembled from sticks at the Weber Gallery in New York (1990); and the vertical column piece at the Centre for International Light Art in Unna, Germany. His tallest installation is on the 100-meter-tall chimney of the Turku Power Station in

16. John Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural*, quoted in H.E. Huntley, *The Divine Proportion: A Study in Mathematical Beauty* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p. xiii.

17. Paul Dirac, "The Evolution of the Physicist's Picture of Nature," *Scientific American* 208, no. 5 (May 1963): 45–53.

18. "In meiner Arbeit habe ich immer versucht, das Wahre mit dem Schönen zu vereinen; wenn ich mich über das Eine oder das Andere entscheiden musste, habe ich stets das Schöne gewählt." The quotation appears above the bust of Weyl located in the Hermann Weyl Zimmer at ETH Zurich.

Finland (1994), in which the Fibonacci numbers go all the way to fifty-five. His vertical installations are related to his admiration for the skyscrapers in New York (Merz's father was an architect), but his towering vertical structures and the Fibonacci series each repeat an insistently rising movement—the first in the suggestive visual language of art, the latter in the immaterial and absolute language of mathematics. The number system suggests another level of reality, that of pure ideas, reason, certainty, and beauty.

Countless artists have painted architectural scenes—from Giotto and the painters of the Siena School of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, who gave buildings the character of human beings; to Claude Monet's paintings of Rouen Cathedral, which turn stone into light; to Giorgio de Chirico's uninhabited buildings, with their haunted shadows and echoes. Others have used real buildings, or their parts, in the production of artistic works (e.g., Gordon Matta-Clark and Rachel Whiteread) or even made architectural projects as works of art (e.g., Per Kirkeby). In Merz's art, dwellings are not visual motifs, as his material constructions invoke the existential and mental ground of dwelling and construction. His works are engaged in the human need and instinct to dwell and the compulsion to build. His structures are not shelters for the body, as they project a dimension of mystery, nostalgia and meaning onto human existence itself. As Rainer Maria Rilke writes, "Now it is time that gods emerge / From things by which we dwell."[19]

19. Rainer Maria Rilke as quoted in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 320.

THE POETICS OF THE POLITICAL

Thomas Lawson

AROUND ’68 (WE BARELY REMEMBER ON THIS UNENDING SUNDAY) WE MADE AN IGLOO WITH EARTH ON TOP THAT LOOMED UP AND, ENGRAVED, OR MORE PRECISELY, INSTEAD OF ENGRAVED, WHICH SO LIKE A GRAVESTONE, ILLUMINATED! THE POLITICAL INVECTIVE VICTORIOUS FOR THE VIET PEOPLE—IF THE ENEMY CONCENTRATES, HE LOSES GROUND, IF HE DISPERSES, HE LOSES FORCE— WE CONTEMPLATED THIS DYNAMIC IRREVERSIBLE IDEA, AND WE TURNED IT ON (IN NEON!) SO THAT ON OUR LONG SUNDAY WE SHOULD NOT FORGET IT.[1]

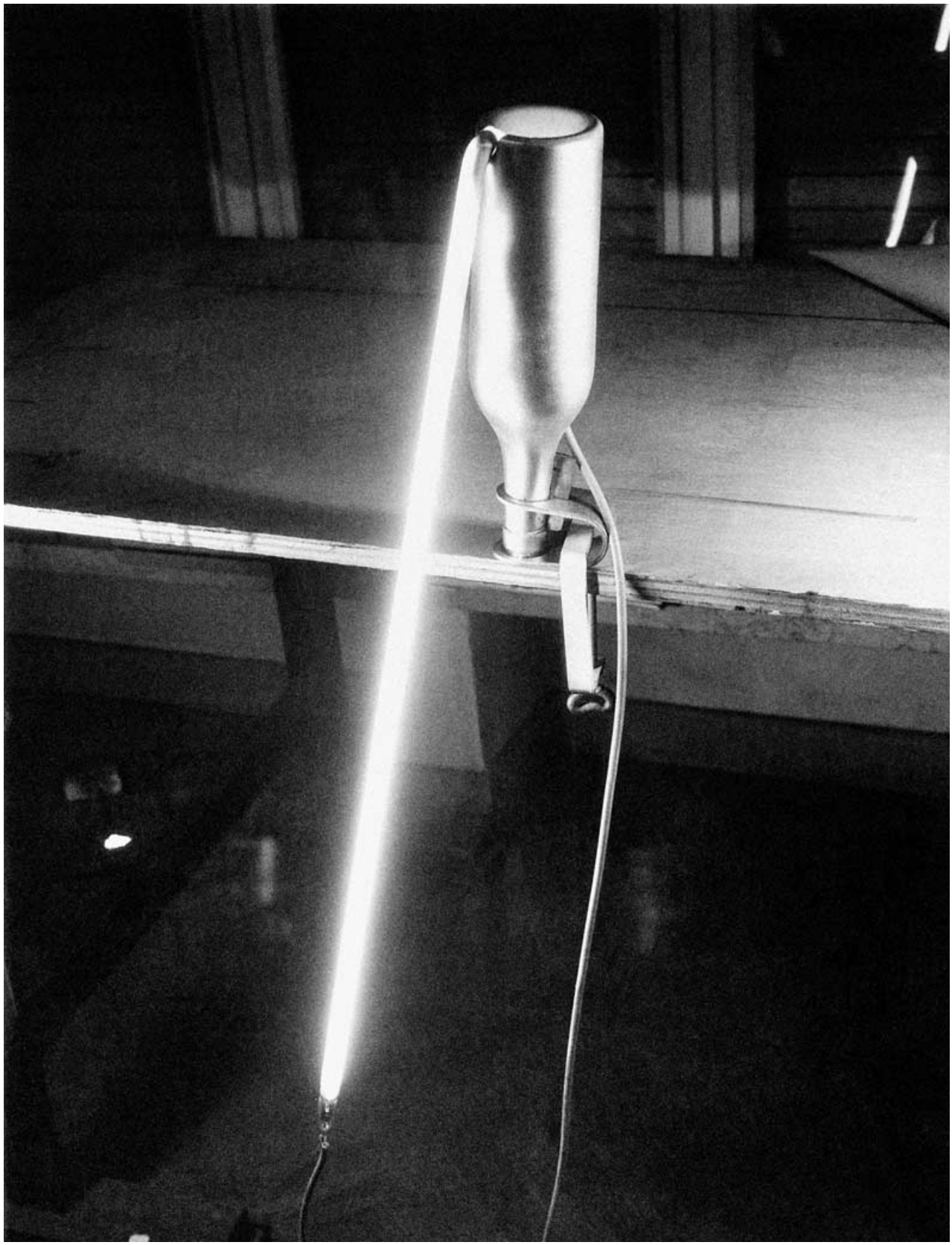
So often when art and politics are discussed in the same breath the effect being sought is instrumental. An image sears the conscience, a slogan trips the heart. Art considered this way can be powerful, but it is always limited by its moment. Forever after it requires a footnote, an explanation. Of course, some artists take their political responsibilities as a license to seek a more poetic engagement with the imagination, using their art in a more oblique way to address social issues. A case can be made that this is what Robert Rauschenberg was getting at when he talked about wanting to operate in “the gap between art and life.”[2] Mario Merz worked from a similar disposition, but it took him some time to know how to give the idea form.

In 1966, when Merz clamped an upside down bottle to a table in his studio in Turin and placed a neon tube against it, he decisively moved away from the provincial view of art he had been struggling with for at least a decade. During that time he was concerned with the question of art as framed by the problems of painting—the quality of mark-making and how to read meaning there; the issue of representation and how to decide if a painting should record the look of the world or the appearance of the artist’s psyche; the overarching problem of the artwork’s relationship to the modern world and to political meaning. Although we know little of Merz’s long apprenticeship in art, we do know he was familiar with Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio’s “industrial painting” of the mid-1950s, and from that can surmise he knew of Lucio Fontana’s *concetto spaziale* works, including the neon installations, as well as the radical collage practice of the *nouveau réalistes* in nearby Nice. We also know that he met his wife, Marisa Merz, in 1957, and that they made a life together as artists.

BOTTIGLIA [Bottle]
1966–1967
Bottle, spray paint, neon, clamp
Approx. 90 x 50 x 20 cm
Private collection

1. Mario Merz, “An Infinitely Long Sunday Has Lasted Approximately from 1966 and Now It Is 1976,” in Beatrice Merz, ed., *MARIO MERZ: I Want to Write a Book Right Now* (Florence: hopefulmonster, 1989), 53-55 and in this publication, 100-102.

2. “Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made (I try to act in the gap between the two).” “Robert Rauschenberg,” in *Sixteen Americans*, exh. cat., ed. Dorothy C. Miller (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 58.



In 1967 Marisa Merz made a short film, in dark black-and-white, full of shadows. The film is silent, but one can easily imagine the foreboding soundtrack of a horror film. In what appears to be a kitchen—in the foreground is a table with a jug, a bowl, a pan, a bottle of oil—a woman opens a can of peas and counts them in a dish. Behind her a strange tubular form, glinting metallically, hangs menacingly. The absurd banality of the action—who counts peas, and why?—is thrown into relief by the science-fiction-y horror of the domestic monster lurking behind the oblivious woman.

We know from this, and a few contemporaneous photographs, that Marissa Merz claimed the kitchen, their shared domestic space, as her studio. It was where she constructed and installed her *Living Sculpture*, huge snaking forms made from strips of industrial foil, wound and stapled. It was where she knit small squares of copper wire, counting the hours with women's work gone awry, a kind of physical drawing in real space, with real material. At the same time, in his studio, Mario Merz took various everyday objects speak of life outside the home, a man's life perhaps—a raincoat, an umbrella—painted them, and pierced them with neon tubes. Considering these two bodies of work, we can imagine a kitchen-table dialogue on the politics of everyday life revolving around questions of home, work, housing, care.

In 1968 Mario Merz made a hemispherical shape from some metal tubing, then covered it with chicken wire and caked adobe. Although it has no obvious entry, the simple shape connotes a kind of shelter, a space big enough for one person to ride out the storm. As a form it resonates; it could be a child's play space, or part of a base camp erected by some intrepid explorer in an inhospitable land, or a futuristic version of a nomadic people's home. Cast across it, like a net of light, a skein of neon spells out a gnomic piece of advice from one of the leaders of Vietnam's guerilla war against the United States. The dialogue of everyday politics collides with the politics of state and war.

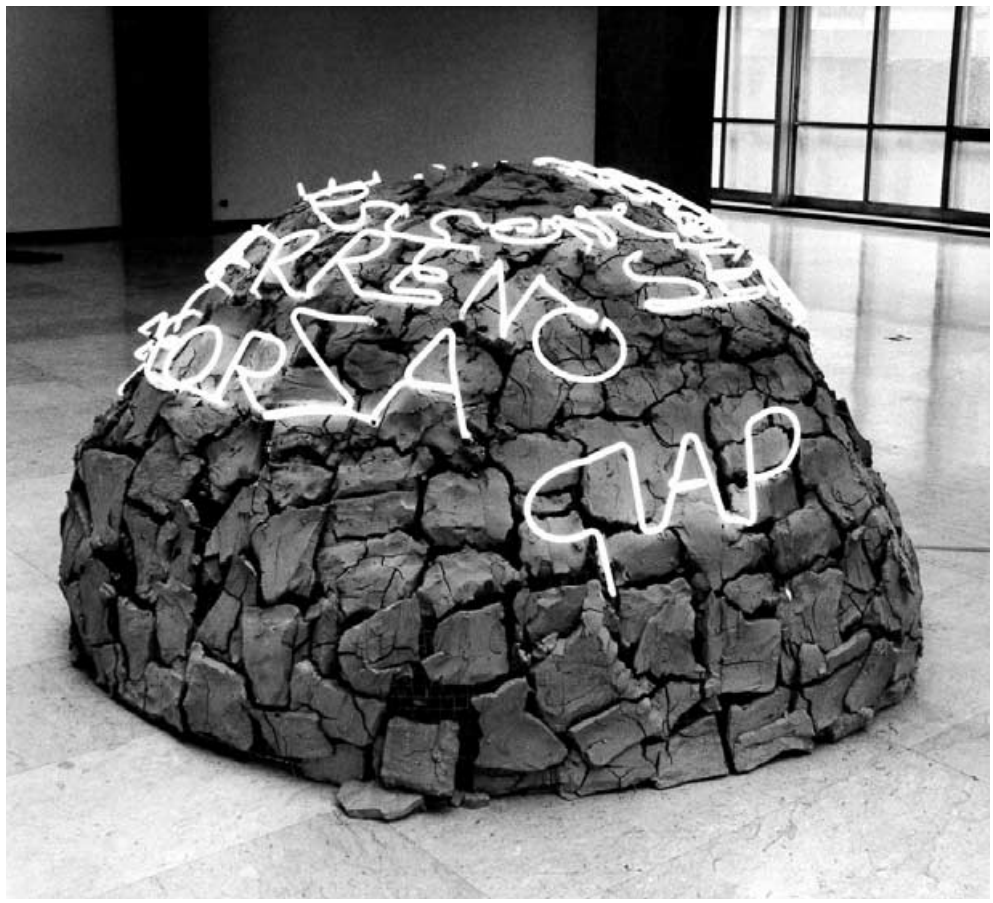
IT'S LATE IN THE AFTERNOON ON AN EXTREMELY LONG SUNDAY. WE HAVE NEVER WORKED! FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS ALL WE'VE DONE IS THINK AND PASS AN EXTREMELY LONG SUNDAY BETWEEN TWO IMMENSE, GRAY WEEKS OF WORK THAT LOOM UP BEFORE AND PERHAPS AFTER US.[3]

We know that Merz operated with a political sensibility, and every biographical note opens with the tale of his imprisonment for anti-fascist activities during the final years of Benito Mussolini's rule. As a medical student at the Università degli Studi di Torino he had joined the anti-Fascist group Giustizia e Libertà and was arrested in 1945. He was young but already clearly on the side of progress and justice. While in jail he began to draw, obsessively. Although this probably started as a coping mechanism to survive confinement, the activity opened his mind to a more meditative perception in which the

3. Merz, "An Infinitely Long Sunday."

Marisa Merz, video still from *La Conta* [Counting], 1967
Film, 16 mm (black-and-white, no sound), transferred to video, 2:44 min. Merz Collection, Turin

IGLOO DI GIAP - SE IL NEMICO SI CONCENTRA PERDE TERRENO SE SI DISPERDE PERDE FORZA
[Giap's Igloo — If the enemy masses his forces, he loses ground; if he scatters, he loses strength]
1968
Metal structure, clay soil, neon
100 x 200 cm
Merz Collection, Turin
(Installation view, Galleria d'arte moderna, Turin, 1971)



observation of nature is mapped through a repetitive mark making. On gaining his freedom, he began making art, going out into the fields to draw grass, working in a compulsive manner, working for hours, never allowing his pencil to leave the page. This is remarkable but hardly predicts the poetics of Merz's mature work. How did he move from process to image without losing the intensity of the mark?

Politics in Italy following the defeat of the fascist dictatorship in 1945 was by turn pragmatic, violently disruptive, and wildly poetic. The postwar accommodation between the Italian Communist Party and the Christian Democrats ushered in a period of economic growth and social conformity, a decidedly prosaic decade or two. Internal pressures and global events conspired to bring this to an explosive end with massive strikes hitting Fiat and other major manufacturers in northern Italy in 1969. The internal problems were the predictable result of greed, with income disparity reaching unsustainable levels, corruption felt to be ubiquitous, and established unions despised for being too much in cahoots with the bosses. Globally there was the rising disgust at US war in Vietnam and a generational demand for greater personal and erotic freedom.

Much of this had manifested the year before in large protests against the Vietnam War in London, the student protests in Bonn, and the student uprising and general strike that paralyzed France. Further afield, Poland and Czechoslovakia had seen doomed attempts to loosen the grip of Soviet Communism, while in the United States the Chicago Police Department apparently went berserk trying to stop antiwar demonstrators at the Democratic Party Convention. It was a time of street riots, strikes, and repressive pushback from entrenched authorities—but also of expansive experimentation in popular music and burgeoning attempts to reconsider how life is lived, from utopian communes far from city streets to gritty urban squats.

In 1968 the Rolling Stones used acoustic guitars, a sitar, and a toy drum set to frame the ambivalent lyrics of "Street Fighting Man," while later that same year The Beatles upended a fairly straightforward rock and roll song called "Revolution" into an eight-minute sound collage of terrifying intensity, both bands compelled by the political moment to step beyond the usual limits of entertainment. I mention this to underscore the depth of political feeling at that moment, when even pop stars were as likely to be engaged as activists. And also to point to a connection between technical experimentation and political expression. This essay attempts to locate Merz's aesthetic strategies within an understanding of these poetics of political change by laying out a concatenation of influence, moving out from the narrow view of a few radical artists in northern Italy in the 1950s, to broader cultural theories developing across Europe, and finally to the harsher world of political action, the connective tissue being a generational rejection of established convention, of how things are done, along

with a heightened sense of the importance of reconnecting to the momentous reality of the everyday.

WHEN I SAW [Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio] IN ALBA HE NEVER HAD THE PAINTER'S FROCK ON OR THE PAINTBRUSH IN HIS HANDS. . . . THE MAN WAS STRONGER THAN THE PAINTER. HE SHOWED HOW THE IDEA BEHIND PAINTING WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PAINTING. . . . WHAT WAS IMPORTANT FOR HIM WAS THE PRACTICE OF LIFE.[4]

The Second World War brought massive destruction to European cities, and for at least a decade following the end of the war, ruined buildings and destroyed streets were part of the everyday environment. If this was the havoc and despair wrought by conventional weapons, it was easy to imagine how much worse things would be if the atom bomb were to be deployed in a future war. As a result, for many young people in the early 1950s the overarching political concern was the threat of nuclear annihilation. Artists sought new ways to capture this, most favoring the expressive handling of materials to depict ruined bodies in a scarred landscape. But while the majority continued to work within the conventional structures of painting and sculpture, some began questioning the continued relevance of these forms. In 1951 two young artists in Milan, Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo, wrote a manifesto for art in the nuclear age in which they criticized the ways in which painters commodified their work by endlessly repeating gesture and image. Here perhaps is the first articulation of an argument that would upend the processes of art-making in Italy in the 1960s.

This kind of radical thinking received a boost a few years later when the Danish artist Asger Jorn began visiting Albisola on the Ligurian coast, just south of Turin. Jorn was a discussant, always seeking companions and contexts to consider the wider relationship of art to politics. During the German occupation of Copenhagen he had collaborated with a group of artists and architects to produce a journal that considered various kinds of indigenous art, surrealism, jazz music, and children's art—topics designed to provoke the Nazi censors. In the immediate postwar years he began working with architects, expanding the reach of his work from easel to wall panel, and then, more importantly, joined with a group of like-minded artists from other cities then reemerging from Nazi oppression to form CoBrA (named for Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam). The driving idea behind the group's work was a desire to upend the given truisms of Western thought, the "world of decors and hollow facades" that had fed and encouraged fascist thought. In general the CoBrA artists pursued expressive forms, looking to the work of untrained artists, especially children and the mentally ill, as a way to open up their own processes to more democratic ways of thinking. Above all, they were polemicists, taking positions against the centrality of Paris. To them the classicizing posturing coming from the École des Beaux-Arts tradition was

4. Merz interviewed by Mirella Bandini. See Mirella Bandini, "Mario Merz e Michelangelo Pistoletto; il significato di Gallizio per la nuova generazione," in *Pinot Gallizzio e il Laboratorio Sperimentale d'Alba*, exh. cat. (Turin: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 1974), 27, reprinted in *Arte Povera*, ed. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (London: Phaidon, 1999), 21.

stultifying, the intense rationality driving geometric abstraction dangerous, and the strictures of politically ordered realism dictatorial.

Jorn moved to Albisola for his health, to find cleaner air. But he did not slow down. He quickly began experimenting with ceramics, which had a centuries-old tradition there, and he began connecting with like-minded artists in the area. Baj became a frequent visitor, and, more important, Jorn met his contemporary, Pinot Gallizio. Pinot Gallizio was a polymath, a chemist who was also a scholar of Neolithic culture, and a leftist thinker who was pragmatic enough to be elected councilman in his native Alba, a town roughly halfway between Albisola and Turin. Their friendship was forged in discussion of the technical arcana of glazes and resins, as well as political analysis of the ills of Western society and potential cures.

In 1953 Jorn learned that the Swiss architect Max Bill was working to reenergize the idea of the Bauhaus and establish a new school in Ulm. In his enthusiasm to engage, Jorn put aside the fact that Bill was a constructivist and wrote to suggest collaboration. Bill dismissed the idea, saying the new school would be devoted to the practical arts of architecture and design, that there would be no space for the expressive experimentation promoted by CoBrA artists. In response Jorn declared the establishment of the Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste, basically a summer program centered on experimental ceramics, first in Albisola and then in Alba. During one of these gatherings the idea was first formulated that art should be both useless and anti-economical, that artists should somehow subvert the normalizing role of technology to fend off the enervating boredom of consumer culture.

The culminating event of all this frenetic activity was I Congresso Mondiale degli Artisti Liberi (First World Congress of Free Artists), which took place in the Alba town hall in 1956. Local artists from Turin and Milan were joined by artists from across Europe, along with a delegation of political theorists from Paris, led by Guy Debord, to argue about the possibilities for a free art in an industrial society. Jorn spoke passionately about the dangers of a new kind of academicism in art schools, elevating skills over emotion, as being parallel to the deadening effect of industrial production on artisanal making. Picking up on this, Pinot Gallizio bore down on the relationship between artist and machine, making the case for a kind of absurdism that would both honor and put into question the value of work for work's sake. This in turn was amplified by Debord's lacerating denunciation of the alienation effect caused by the consumerist version of capitalism underpinned by industrialization. The outcome of all this was the establishment, the following summer, of the Situationist International to work collectively toward a liberation of everyday life from the oppressive alienation of modernity.

Central to situationist theory as it developed in these years was Debord's concept of the spectacle, the argument that under advanced capitalism all social relations are understood and mediated through objects. That is, direct lived experience was now devalued in favor of a trade in secondhand experiences and commodities designed to fulfill created desires. To counteract this, the situationists believed in creating what they called "situations," actions designed to reawaken authentic feeling. In that spirit Pinot Gallizio built his painting machine, programmed to produce by the meter but susceptible to an uncontrollable contamination of material, creating an "industrial painting" that was both standardized and relentlessly idiosyncratic.

ON SUNDAY CULTURE DIVESTS ITSELF OF THE CULTURES OF LABOR AND APPEARS SOLEMNLY IMMERSED IN THE MUD OF ITS INERTIA...WHAT IS THAT? MUD, NATURALLY ON SUNDAY. ON WEEKDAYS THE MUD BECOMES AN OBJECT. CONSUMERISM HAS ITS DUTY TO DO.[5]

By the mid-1950s the Italian economy was growing at an impressive pace, second only to Germany in Europe. The year 1957 saw the introduction of the Fiat 500, a small car for working families, designed to be stylish and affordable. A sign of financial success, it was also the very type of constructed spectacle the situationists described. The same year six of the most economically robust European states banded together to establish a Common Market, signing a treaty in Rome to work toward economic and political union. Industrial capital was taking the first steps toward loosening trade barriers and creating a global economy. Unions worked hand in glove with factory owners to ensure peace on the production line. Distracted and amused, decently housed and fed, people enjoyed the sweet life, and Federico Fellini showed us the spiritual trap of following manufactured dreams in *La dolce vita*. Visual art seemed stuck, unable to respond, but there was word of a new kind of theater developing in the east, a type of performance that privileged image and place over language.

During these years the Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowski began developing his revolutionary approach to performance work, declaring that the theater could not, and should not, compete with the overwhelming technical spectacle of the movies. Instead, it should acknowledge limited means and work from the strength of being a "poor" artform that required only a space, some actors, and an audience. "Theater must admit its limits. If it cannot be richer than film, then let it be poorer. If it cannot be as lavish as television, then let it be ascetic. If it cannot create an attraction on a technical level, then let it give up all artificial technique. All that is then left is a 'holy' actor in a poor theatre."[6] Grotowski shared Jorn's skepticism about the value of learning the traditional skills associated with representing reality. For Grotowski the actor must embody the role, reach a place where there is no

5. Ibid.

6. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (1968; New York: Routledge, 2002).

distance between self and other. Further, he wanted to create a theatrical experience that would challenge the spectator to confront the chasm between performance and reception and thus to participate in completing the work of the actors and director.

The productions he staged in the early and mid-1960s in Poland were radical reinterpretations of classical texts in which image and action superseded language in an attempt to confront a reluctant public with political reality. In *Akropolis* Grotowski took a well-known, early twentieth-century play set in the cathedral in Kraków and recreated it in Auschwitz, while the horror and pain were still present. During the play the actors, who claim to be the walking dead, memories of past lives, build the concentration camp around the living spectators. In Grotowski's presentation of the Elizabethan play *Dr. Faustus*, the audience was seated as guests at Faust's last supper, while the action unfolded on the table in front of them. Word of these explosive performances spread quickly throughout Europe, and Grotowski himself published some theoretical writings that were subsequently collected and published, first in Denmark, under the title *Towards a Poor Theater*.

THE GREAT TIME OF A SUNDAY BETWEEN GREY WEEKS OF NEVER ENDING WORK. A TIME BETWEEN THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO SEE.[7]

In Italy the ruling political party throughout this period was the Christian Democrats, but they always had to seek partners to stay in power. In the spring of 1960 they formed a new government with the support of a neofascist party, and opposition began to form around the idea that repressive social customs and cultural assumptions were holding people back. After a series of protests and riots in Turin and Genoa, as well as in Reggio Emilia and Sicily, the Christian Democrats realized they could not continue to govern from the right, and in 1963 they began a series of governing partnerships with leftwing parties that persisted for a decade. But despite expectations, these left-of-center governments proved disappointing, providing little real change, and also offering ideological support to the US government as it pursued its war in Vietnam. In response, a militant activism took hold of the imagination of young leftists, developing in concert with sympathetic thinkers and artists across the West.

So while Grotowski was rethinking the power relationship between actor and audience, a significant number of leftist intellectuals in Turin were beginning to rethink the relationship between labor and capital, spurred by the growing disillusionment among Fiat workers with their union, which they sensed had sold them out. The classic position of the Left was to offer working-class skill and labor in return for better wages and conditions—an incremental improvement in daily life, but nothing fundamental changes. Writers such as

7. Merz, "An Infinitely Long Sunday."

Toni Negri began to posit that, while this state of affairs demonstrates that capital reacts to labor demands, it does so by fostering technological development and political change to keep the working class at a disadvantage. Better to redesign the relationship and begin making claims for a better life rather than a higher wage. Negri called this *Operaismo*, a Marxist theory of everyday life. In turn, this movement based in and around the factories of northern Italy morphed into Autonomia, a decentralized movement for radical change that operated throughout Italy in the 1970s.

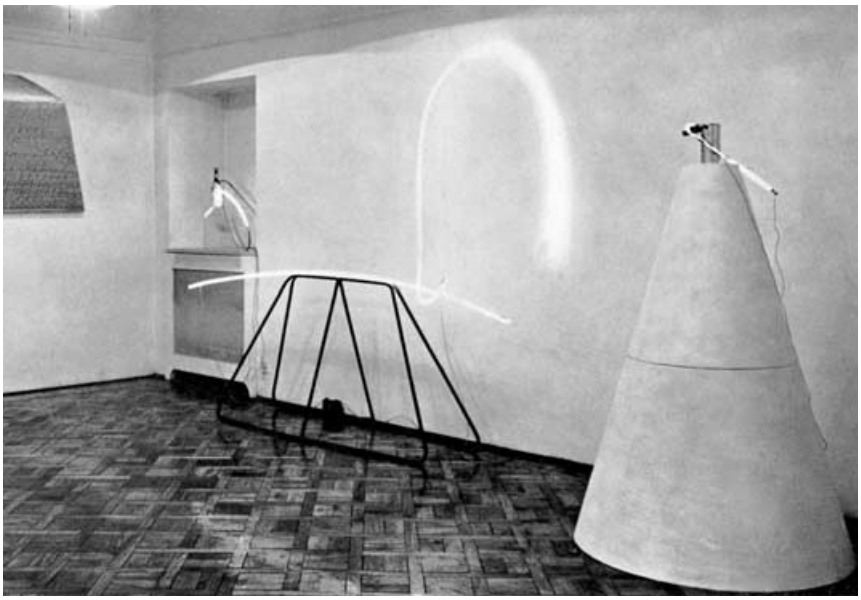
What has happened . . . the commonplace has entered the sphere of art. The insignificant has begun to exist—indeed it has imposed itself. Physical presence and behavior have become art. . . . Cinema, theatre and the visual arts assert their authority as anti-pretense. . . . They eliminate from their inquiry all which may seem mimetic reflection and representation or linguistic custom in order to attain a new kind of art, which, to borrow a term from the theatre of Grotowski, one may call "poor." [8]

During this turbulent period the home of Mario and Marisa Merz became a meeting place for artists such as Giovanni Anselmo, Piero Gilardi, and Gilberto Zorio, as well as dealers and critics such as Gian Enzo Sperone and Tommaso Trini. In this environment, the living artwork created by Marisa, they discussed how to make relevant art and how to present it to a public without becoming ensnared in the flattening space of commerce. What they wanted was to find an exhibition space where the real and the imaginary, found objects and handmade creations, would be joined in a theatrical suspension of judgment. To effect this, Gilardi and Michelangelo Pistoletto, along with Sperone and the collector Marcello Levi, established the Deposito d'arte presente, an informal meeting place and gallery, in a large open space in a disused factory. For two years this became the energized site of meetings, discussions, performances, concerts, and exhibitions. An aesthetic of nonhierarchical interaction developed, encouraged by the open layout of the large space, and this in turn encouraged the artists to experiment more radically with materials and processes, with Merz investigating the possibilities of wicker, metal, glass, and neon—elements of commercial and industrial production—as well as objects of daily use.

Merz had his first show at Sperone's Turin gallery in January 1968, presenting a selection of these works made of woven wicker, carved and painted wood, welded iron bars, all crossed and canceled by neon. The light gave the objects an uncanny quality, but within the conventional gallery space they maintained the self-contained appearance of the well-crafted object. They still looked like art objects. Group shows such as *RA3 Arte Povera + Azione Povere*, curated by Germano Celant in the Arsenali at Amalfi, were where the physical manifestation of the idea of an open-ended art concerned with

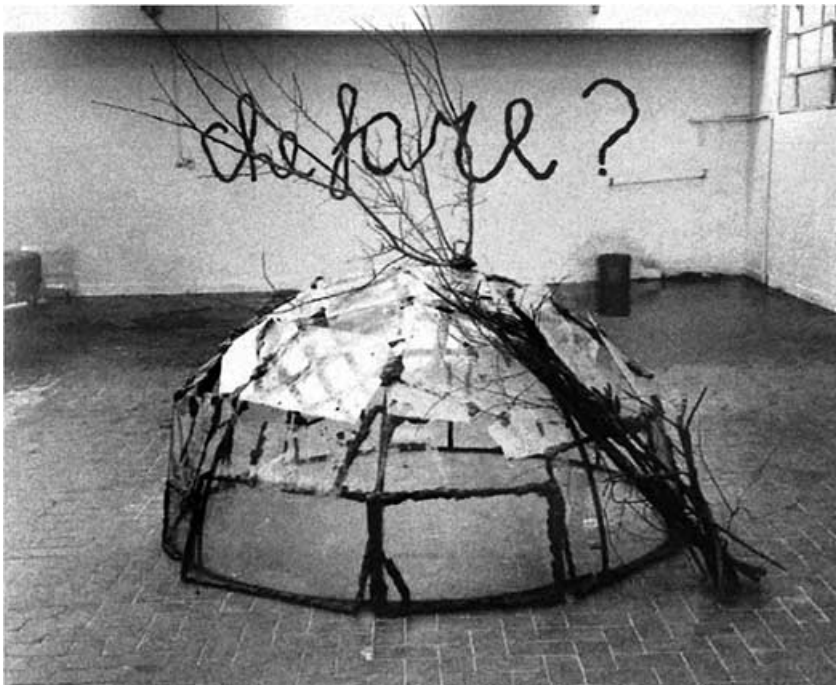
8. Germano Celant, *Arte Povera—Im Spazio* (Genoa: Masnata/Trentalance, 1967).

Deposito d'Arte Presente,
Turin, 1967–1969



Deposito d'Arte Presente,
Turin, 1967–1969

Mario Merz, Galleria Sperone,
Turin, 1968



Che fare?
Galleria L'Attico, Rome
February 1969

the contingency of lived experience, of the daily experience of incoherence, came into view.

In 1969, at Galleria L'Attico in Rome, Merz found his voice. Like the Deposito space, this was a contemporary ruin, a utilitarian space—in this case an old parking garage—rendered obsolete. Here Merz presented a series of propositions, rather than an exhibit of well-made objects, under the collective title *Che fare?* (What is to be done? 1968), quoting Vladimir Lenin's pamphlet on the role of the intellectual in the revolution. Against the back wall sat a disabled car (a Fiat, of course), traversed by neon light. Scattered around the rest of the space lay various suggestions of shelter—an igloo form, shapes reminiscent of skylights or greenhouses, bundled sticks and straw. Lenin's question was roughly written on the wall, like a desperate graffiti, and next to it a water tap ran, pouring into an oil barrel. The overpowering effect was of homelessness, abandonment—a poetics of dispossession.

During the course of 1969 millions of Italian workers went on strike for better living conditions, mostly in the industrialized north, but eventually even in the underdeveloped southern regions. The biggest of these industrial actions was at the Fiat Mirafiori plant in Turin, where the intellectuals associated with the Autonomia movement joined forces with the workers and with students. Meetings were held at the University of Turin to discuss demands and tactics. Police repression was severe. Revolution was in the air. On July 3 a one-day national strike was called, under the rallying cry "Che cosa vogliamo? Tutto!" (What do we want? Everything!).[9]

FIRST CAME CHAOS, THEN LABOR, THEN THE CHAOS OF LABOR, THEN THE UNDRESSING OF THE CHAOS OF LABOR. WE ARE MARXIST ALMOST ALL OF US BY THE TURN OF MIND THAT SAYS: MARX SAW THIS ELEMENTARY PROCESS: THE UNDRESSING OF THE CHAOS OF LABOR ... WE HAVE WITNESSED ALL THIS ON SUNDAY—CULTURE FOR THOSE WHO WORK IS A SUNDAY THING.[10]

During these months of riot, Merz discovered the writings of the twelfth-century Pisan mathematician Fibonacci and in them found the calming influence of numbers. Fibonacci had discovered an elegant description of growth and progress, an underlying order beneath the chaos of life. Here was an almost mystical diagram that then became the generating dynamic of Merz's work. In an echo of his wife's earlier film enacting the absurd regularity of daily life, he said, "I hate the rationality of life. I love the rationality of numbers, though, because numbers are a fantastic invention: if you open up a shell of peas and you count them, there are fantastic numbers, always different. . . . To count numbers is a way to get close to the irrationality of life."[11]

9. William Keach, "What Do We Want? Everything!" *ISR International Socialist Review*, no. 67 (September 2009), https://isreview.org/issue/67/what-do-we-want-everything (accessed March 25, 2019).

10. Merz, "An Infinitely Long Sunday."

11. *Arte Povera*, ed. Christov-Bakargiev, 34; also available on the Tate Modern website, https://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/6630 (accessed March 25, 2019).

MARIO MERZ: TABLES AND HOUSES, TIME AND SPACE

Robert Lumley

"DATES? WHY DATES? DATES AREN'T IMPORTANT AT ALL, ONLY EVENTS MATTER. AND WHY HISTORICIZE? HERE IN TURIN WE'VE NOTHING TO HISTORICIZE, WE'VE JUST GOT TO DO THINGS."[1]

Mario Merz is speaking with the art historian Mirella Bandini as part of a series of interviews with Turin artists for the review *Notiziario arte contemporanea*.

The year is 1972, and there is a growing awareness of the new generation of artists in the city—including, among those interviewed, Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Piero Gilardi, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Giuseppe Penone, Gianni Piacentino, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Gilberto Zorio. Bandini recognizes that she is witness to an extraordinary creative wave, to art history in the making. But Mario Merz is impatient with questions that presuppose the importance of historical reconstruction and contextualization. "We'd have done the same things wherever we'd lived," he says. "Arte povera is a matter for God, not me or whoever."[2] We've removed all the dates from our work, he claims, and we've got rid of the names. Mario, his wife Marisa, and their twelve-year-old daughter Beatrice are all of the same opinion, all signatories of the same "manifesto." In fact, when the interview with Marisa Merz was first published, it did not include Bandini or her questions. It consisted, instead, of a conversation between Marisa and Beatrice on the topic of whether they should eat boiled potato and mayonnaise or panettone.[3] The Merz family had effectively declared its independence from the discourse of art history in the name of other ways of thinking.

For Mario Merz, philosophy is not exclusive to philosophers—nor, indeed, to adults—and is part and parcel of everyday life. Likewise, being an artist is not a job or a career but a way of living, of inhabiting the world. At the same time, art has a special significance in human society. Harald Szeemann identified this outlook in Merz, placing him among "that latest generation of solitary, wandering visionary artists who create from chaos by considering 'interior necessity' to be the fundamental criterion. These artists also use their art to conceive a new diverse creative society that is closely associated with Nature and with technique that is archaic and forward-looking at the same time."[4] The focus on the romantic figure of the artist needs to be counterbalanced with an eye to Merz's preoccupation with the spaces of home and of human sociability,

1. Mirella Bandini, ed., *1972, Arte povera a Torino: Interviste* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi, 2002), 47 (my translation). In Italian, the last part of the quotation reads, "abbiamo semplicemente da fare ancora qualcosa." The Italian *fare*, a key word in Mario Merz's vocabulary, can be translated as both "to do" and "to make."

2. Ibid., 48 (my translation).

3. Ibid., 5. The unpublished interview with Marisa Merz, which consists of a statement read out by the artist, is also included in this volume (ibid., 55). For the relationship of artwork and domestic space in the case of Marisa Merz, see Teresa Kittler, "Outgrowing the Kitchen: Marisa Merz's *Untitled* (Living Sculpture)," in *Marisa Merz: The Sky Is a Great Space*, ed. Connie Butler (Munich: Prestel, 2017), 229–45.

4. Harald Szeemann in *Mario Merz*, ed. Danilo Eccher (Turin: hopefulmonster, 1995), 128.

UNA SOMMA REALE È UNA SOMMA DI GENTE - SPADA REALE
[A real sum is a sum of people — Spada Reale]
1972
11 black-and-white photographs, neon
Variable dimensions
Merz Collection, Turin

together with his investment in daily life and familial relations. An examination of the place of the table and the house, broadly conceived, opens the way to a grounded inquiry into the wider questions of time and space that his art and writings address. "Table" also entails the kitchen table where the panettone is eaten and the mayonnaise prepared.

Tables

Tables enter Mario Merz's vocabulary almost as an afterthought. They are necessary but invisible supports to works such as *Bottiglia* (Bottle, 1966) and *Doppia bottiglia di Murano con neon* (Double Murano bottle with neon, 1967). When Merz staged a series of actions in 1972, held in a restaurant in the center of Turin, a workers' canteen in Naples, and a pub in London, his attention was on the number of people who could be counted around the tables of the rooms. *Una somma reale è una somma di gente* (A real sum is a sum of people, 1972) consists of a sequence of single images.[5] Handwritten numbers in neon accompany each image. First, an empty restaurant with tables laid, then a man at one small table, then a woman at another, then a man and a woman at another, three people at a table, then five at another. The series continues until fifty-five people are seated. Merz was experimenting with the Fibonacci number series in which each number is the sum of the preceding two numbers, hence 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55.[6] But he was not interested in performance, in realism, or in sociological documentation, and the physical presence of people distracted from his purpose. Tables, on the other hand, tables *without* people, seemed to offer greater freedom and scope in terms of a calculation of space (with people in mind). He was not interested in "found tables" of the kind used by Jannis Kounellis or, indeed, by Marisa Merz at L'Attico in Rome in 1969.[7] Nor was Mario Merz concerned with the designer tables for which Italian industry was famous. For Merz, the material object was subordinate to his thinking using the Fibonacci series. As he told Sarah Tisdall, "the big jump came when I actually made tables. It was a change from a description of what already existed to the actual realization of an environment."[8] But Merz had no hand in the actual making of the tables for the exhibition at the John Weber Gallery in New York in 1973. They were made by a carpenter, in accordance with Merz's drawings. Consisting of plywood, taking up enormous space, and so low that people were obliged to sit cross-legged on the ground, the work defied ideas of usefulness or art market value.[9] It was conceptual—a visualization of processes of exponential growth and proliferation that pushed the space of the building to its limits. The work's title—*it is as possible to have a space with tables for 88 people as it is to have a space with tables for no one*—in the form of a sentence that has no capital letter to mark the beginning and no full stop to mark an end, embodies a linguistic analog to the process envisaged.

5. An artist's book was published with the sequence of photographs at the Spada restaurant in Turin. Mario Merz, *Fibonacci 1202: Una somma reale è una somma di gente* (Turin: Sperone Editore, 1972). See also Giorgio Maffei, *Libri e documenti: Arte povera 1966–1980* (Mantua: Edizioni Corraini, 2007), 105.

6. Asked what was the Fibonacci series, Merz replied, "a proliferation of numbers. Numbers reproduce themselves like men, bees, or rabbits. If they did not reproduce, they would cease to exist. The series is life." Mario Merz, interviewed by Tommaso Trini in *Data*, September 1971, 21 (my translation).

7, Marisa Merz's work *Tavoli* was exhibited at L'Attico in 1969.

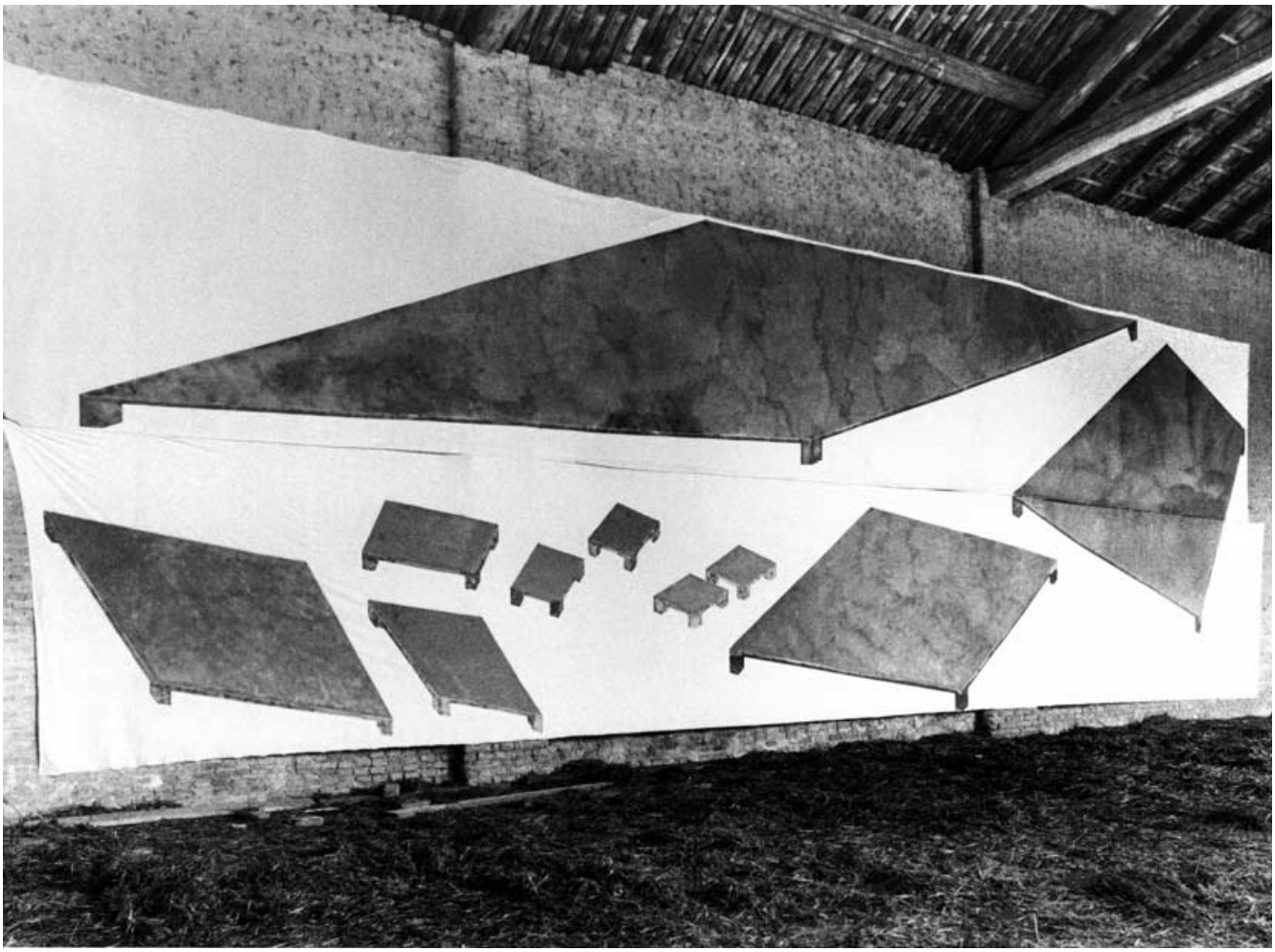
8. Caroline Tisdall, "Mario Merz: An Interview," *Studio International*, January 1, 1976.

9. There was, in the first years of arte povera, a common repudiation of the art market and its constraints. The experiment of the Deposito d'Arte Presente, the artists' space where Merz's igloos were first exhibited, was seen by some as an attempt to free artists from the shackles of American dealers. See Robert Lumley, "Arte Povera in Turin: The Intriguing Case of the Deposito d'Arte Presente," in *Marcello Levi: Portrait of a Collector*, ed. Maria Centonze, Robert Lumley, and Francesco Manacorda (Turin: hopefulmonster, 2005), 89–107.

BOTTIGLIA E BICCHIERI
TRAPASSATI
[Bottle and glasses perforated]
1966–1967
Bottle, glasses, neon
106 x 70 x 35 cm
Private collection

Marisa Merz
Coperte
[Blankets]
1968
Roll of wool, rubber, nylon
Variable dimensions
Merz Collection, Turin
(Installation view, Galleria L'Attico, Rome, 1970)

TAVOLE CON LE ZAMPE
DIVENTANO TAVOLI
[Boards with legs become tables]
1974
Mixed media on canvas
520 x 1530 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo
(Installation view, Cascina Ova, Tortona, 1974)



LA NATURA È L'ARTE DEL NUMERO
[Nature is the art of the number]
1976
Metal structure, glass, crystal, stone, plaster, fruit, vegetables, sticks, newspaper, neon
Variable dimensions
(Installation view, Museo Diego Aragona Pignatelli, Naples, 1976)

In the various versions of the work titled *Tavole con le zampe diventano tavoli* (Boards with legs become tables, 1974), Merz represented the same table type in paint, sometimes using a two-color system to designate horizontal and vertical in the preperspectival manner of Italian primitives up to Giotto. The move is a prelude to Merz's return to painting but painting that, just as the table-objects occupied whole floors, now takes over whole walls—of a large medieval barn in Tuscany, of an outside wall in Berlin, of the massive nineteenth-century industrial interior of the Roundhouse in London. With the fresco and mural as antecedents, Merz brings together architecture and painting without concern for genre or period. He relishes the polysemy of words in Italian. *Tavola* and *tavolo* refer at once to the tangible and everyday material—the plank or board of wood (*tavola*) and the many forms of table (*tavolo*)—and to the intangible and immaterial tables of numbers and elements, such as the periodic table.[10] Merz looks for ways to explore systems of numbers in the material world and vice versa. Binaries and divisions such as those between matter and spirit or art and life are rendered meaningless.

The rectilinear table gives way in Merz's work to curved forms, notably the spiral. In keeping with his philosophy, it is not a linear development but part of a series of returns and reappropriations, going back to his first paintings, characteristic of his oeuvre as a whole. He told Jean-Christophe Ammann that he felt closer to Jackson Pollock and to the spiraling movement of whirling dervishes than to Renaissance conceptions of perspective.[11] In 1970 Merz conceived a work for the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, Germany, where the previous year he had been a guest at the museum's exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*. He recalled, "I found myself in front of Mies van der Rohe's wonderful building. I didn't want to put an object inside it but to make an object that was completely inserted into this house and that was nonetheless the total contrary of this house."[12] So he conceived of a spiral that would move from a central point in the house and break through and then expand beyond the walls according to the Fibonacci progression. The spiral table, however, does not appear in Merz's oeuvre until the second half of the 1970s, with exhibitions in Pescara and Essen. Made of metal tubing and with glass tops, the structures have a modernist reference. However, this was offset by the placement of a rich abundance of fruit and vegetables, which offered themselves to the spectator.[13] Here we are far from the pared down, reduced work of the arte povera phase. It is now easy in descriptions and analyses to reach for a wealth of symbols, whether from the European tradition of painting, with its classical and Christian iconography, or from the vernacular of popular culture. Rudi Fuchs writes, "I like the idea that the tables are also drawings, drawn with a sharp precise line and floating space like flat banners. They are light. . . . But when the table is covered with other materials, they become opulent with color and ravishing texture and even smell. The table is then like a horizontal painting."[14] Szeemann, on the other hand, draws attention to growth and labor: "the laws of growth generate the spiral tables, this object of daily use in a society that is

10. For the range of meanings and use in Italian of *tavola* and *tavolo*, as well as reference to regional variations, see the website of the Istituto Treccani, http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/. According to the Treccani dictionary, *una tavolata* refers to a "gathering of people around the same table to drink and eat, often with the idea that they make up a numerous and happy company" (my translation).

11. Jean-Christophe Ammann and Suzanne Pagé, "Intervista a Mario Merz," in *Mario Merz*, exh. cat. (Paris: ARC; Basel: Kunsthalle, 1981).

12. The work was not realized. See Mario Merz, interview by Germano Celant, March 1971, in *Mario Merz*, exh. cat., ed. Germano Celant (Milan: Mazzotta, 1983), 67 (my translation).

13. According to Françoise Ducros, Marisa Merz arranged the fruit and vegetables on the tables at the exhibition *Isola della frutta* (Island of fruit) in Pescara in 1976, a sign of the continuous collaboration between the two artists. Françoise Ducros, *Mario Merz* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 83.

14. Rudi Fuchs, "Allegorie," in *Mario Merz*, ed. Eccher, 126.

used to working when seated, after a time when for the peasant the land, the fields, had been the great table without legs."[15]

In the interviews that accompanied each major exhibition, Merz reiterated and elaborated ideas and possible interpretations that related to the table. He referred to the many frames of reference that had built up like so many layers: "the table is witness to the stasis of daily life . . . an inanimate object can acquire life through the presence of the organic, wine, honey or fruit . . . the table takes on cosmic forms that take apart the rigidity of the object . . . the table is also an altar on which a miracle takes place . . . the apple of Eve when put on the table, as in a Cézanne painting, assumes everyday significance."[16] The materials of which the table is made also undergo variation. In *Quattro tavole in forma di foglie di magnolia* (Four tables in the shape of magnolia leaves, 1985) the leaves of the table are made of modeled beeswax and welded steel and are simultaneously leaves of a tree.[17] This process of accumulation and filling space goes together with work that combines structures previously developed independently: tables combine with igloos and with a range of materials (bundles of newspapers, stacked brushwood) to create what Merz thought of as "landscapes." Françoise Ducros writes of the evolution of the "metaphorization" of the table from an architectonic to a landscape form.[18] Yet Merz, in interviews over a lifetime, invariably begins his reflections on the table, as on other themes, by going back to first principles and asking what preexisted, what existed in Nature before it was taken over by human beings, what underpinned the subsequent making of things. The table, he tells Daniele Eccher, is "una sopraelevazione del terreno" (a raised piece of land).[19] He starts his conversation with Germano Celant at the time of the Guggenheim exhibition of 1989 by suggesting that rocks, for him, stand for the first architecture. This observation could as easily be applied to tables—tables always function in Merz's work in relationship to the surrounding space and to the process of "becoming" rather than to fixity.

Houses

As a young boy, Merz used to play under the worktable of his father, who was an engineer responsible for the construction of lifts and winding gear for use in the mountains. The significance of this relationship between father and son remains unexplored, but Merz made his feelings toward architecture very clear: "my birth was violated by architecture. That's almost a fact of my ancestral psychoanalysis," he tells Celant; "I have always wondered why human beings invented the whole thing known as architecture."[20] Merz remembers that as a child he identified instead with the grass that struggled to grow between a mass of rocks. Architecture in Merz's vocabulary acquires a distinct set of associations: it stands for fixity, the inorganic, Cartesian rationalism, Renaissance perspective, and capitalist organization of space and time.

15. Harald Szeemann, "Mario Merz," in *Mario Merz*, ed. Eccher, 142.

16. Danilo Eccher, "Conversazione con Mario Merz," in *Mario Merz* (Turin: hopefulmonster, 2003), 20.

17. For a richly insightful account of this work and of Merz's encounter with the situationists, see Emily Braun, "Mario Merz: Ethnographer of the Everyday," in *Mario Merz: The Magnolia Table*, ed. Gian Enzo Sperone (New York: Sperone Westwater, 2007), n.p.

18. Ducros, *Mario Merz*, 134.

19. Eccher, "Conversazione con Mario Merz," 20.

20. Germano Celant, "Interview with Mario Merz, Guggenheim Museum, New York, February 1989," in *Mario Merz* (Milan: Electa, 1989), 228.

It is not a neutral and historical term but a polemical one. In part, it took on these associations in the specific conditions of a Turin that from the 1950s to the 1980s was the Italian equivalent of Detroit, Italy's Motown. Here theories that the factory was the mental as well as physical model for the future capitalist organization of society—so-called *operaismo*—were formulated and quickly gained traction.[21] But Merz's thinking also shared in what Anna Detheridge identifies as "the impatience towards the abstract and rationalist spaces of modernity that brought many Italian artists to explore the 'spatial concept,' above all in perceptual and cognitive terms." Modernity in former totalitarian nations, such as Italy, lacked connection to ideas of liberation from old hierarchies, so that it was "frozen between the old and the new."[22] For Merz, "Architecture" in this sense represented the system against which he defined his own projects—not this or that government or political order but the system that organized (or attempted to organize and control) space and time down to the last centimeter and the last second.

The Situationist International and the figure of Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio had a powerful influence on Merz, who came to share in their critique of Le Corbusier's conception of the habitation as a "machine for living in." For them, this approach toward the house amounted to an extension of the factory, making it a "factory for eating and sleeping" from which dream and poetry were banished. Likewise, they rejected the rule of "right angles" and "cadaverous rigidity" in the construction of buildings and the planning of cities.[23] Asger Jorn, the CoBrA artist, helped to set up the Laboratorio Sperimentale (Experimental Laboratory) in Alba with the purpose of contesting Max Bill's project of reviving the Bauhaus in Ulm, a project that in Jorn's eyes turned design into the slave of industry. Another participant, the architect Constant, took inspiration from the Gypsy encampment at Alba, searching for ways to incorporate mobility, common ownership, collective invention, and continuous change into his proposals for urban forms.[24] But the key link for Merz was the larger-than-life Pinot Gallizio, whom he admired as a man of ideas who was not an intellectual, someone with an immense capacity for putting thought into action. The melting pot of ideas at Alba came to life through Pinot Gallizio's activities: he threw himself into painting in his fifties when he had already been a partisan fighter, a pharmacist and herbalist, an amateur archaeologist, and a town councilor who was friend to the Gypsies.[25] The artists and thinkers of Alba provided an alternative vision that rejected the dominant ideas of progress and modernization, and they used art to imagine a world based on human equality, freedom, and creativity.

How exactly Merz happened upon the igloo form is not clear. We know he discussed the idea with fellow artists in Turin. The Merz kitchen hosted many late-night discussions. An exhibition entitled *Arte abitabile* (Habitable art) at the Galleria Sperone in Turin in June 1966 brought together work that asked the simplest and most radical questions of what a house was.[26] Emblematic

21. For a reading of Merz in relation to *operaist* theory, see Elizabeth Mangini, "Solitary/Solidary: Mario Merz's Autonomous Artist," *Art Journal* 75, no. 3 (2016): 11–31. For an analysis of *operaist* theory in relation to architecture and the urban, see Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 13–21. For a longer history of *operaismo*, see Andrea Righi, *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini and Negri* (London: Palgrave, 2011).

22. Anna Detheridge, *Scultori della speranza: L'arte nel contesto della globalizzazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), 36 (my translation).

23. For situationism and the critique of Le Corbusier (the Corbusier who was author of the Plan Voisin of 1925 that replaced central Paris with tower blocks within a Cartesian grid), see Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 4–10.

24. Ibid., 106–55.

25. According to Pistoletto, the whole experience of the Laboratorio Sperimentale at Alba could only have existed because of Pinot Gallizio, "a man of extraordinary openness, spontaneity, and freedom." Pistoletto recalled the "strange affinity" between Merz and Pinot Gallizio in "Mario Merz e Michelangelo Pistoletto," in Mirella Bandini, *Pinot Gallizio e il Laboratorio Sperimentale di Alba del Movimento Internazionale per una Bauhaus Immaginista* (Turin: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 1974), 27–29. For a new perspective on Pinot Gallizio and collective art practice, see Jacopo Galimberti, *Individuals against Individualism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 16–69.

26. Robert Lumley, "Habitable Art: In and around Piero Gilardi," n.d., https://cms.nottinghamcontemporary.org/site/assets/files/1918/habitable_art-1.pdf (accessed April 4, 2019).

was Zorio's *Tenda* (Tent, 1966), the antithesis of the kind of house celebrated in the pages of *Domus* and *Casabella* magazines. In Teresa Kittler's words, "*Arte Abitabile* wholeheartedly sought to reject the kind of domestic setting that had by now become synonymous with Italian design and had been celebrated in the interior design exhibition held just a year earlier, in the spring of 1965, at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence: *La Casa Abitata* (The Inhabited House). . . . However, the very title and rhetoric surrounding the show pointed to an enduring interest in the idea of home."[27] Writing ten years later, Merz saw 1966 as the beginning of an "INFINITELY LONG SUNDAY," which still continued—that is, time without work and given over to socializing and talking, a moment closely associated with arte povera. During this Sunday, Merz writes, "we made an igloo with mud illuminated with a political message." Within the space of a few months Merz made two "discoveries" that would transform his art: the igloo form and the Fibonacci series.[28]

The igloo "with a political message" is *Igloo di Giap* (Giap's Igloo), named after the North Vietnamese general. In one version the igloo is covered with mud; in another the dome-shaped structure is clad with small plastic bags filled with earth. Both carry a quotation from Võ Nguyên Giáp in neon letters that wind around its form. Viewers have to circle the igloo twice to read them: "Se il nemico si concentra perde terreno se si disperde perde forza" (If the enemy masses his forces, he loses ground; if he scatters, he loses strength). Commenting on this work a year later, Merz emphasized the biological and philosophical implications of Giáp's phrase and pointed to its significance in guerrilla warfare against the American army: "I was fascinated," he said, "by its sensual structure. The idea is round. Look at how the idea of the General neutralizes itself. If you follow the phrase, you come back to the beginning: it circles around and then comes to rest. There is no clarity, no logic, no progress to it. It is a contained dynamic force. . . . The dome has no support, it is concave as well as convex, just like the military tactic of General Giap."[29]

Merz's observations are rich in ideas that feed into his cosmology or vision of the world. There is the critique of a rationalist modernism encapsulated in the negation of "clarity," "logic," and "progress" to which he counterposes enigma, paradox, and circularity. A linear model of time as progress and of space as divided by straight lines is subverted. "The igloo is a primitive form, but it is real. Today they make horrible houses, but the igloo is the opposite of the machine for living in. It is a temporary shelter."[30] It embodied "living space" (*spazio vitale*) as opposed to economic space. For Merz, the igloo was simultaneously habitation and idea: "the igloo is the ideal organic form. It is at the same time the world and the little house. What interested me in the igloo was the fact it existed in the head already before it was made." He goes on, "It is a springboard for the imagination as well as an elementary form. . . . I torture the elementary image of the igloo I carry inside me. I think the igloo has two sides—a concrete one and a mental one."[31]

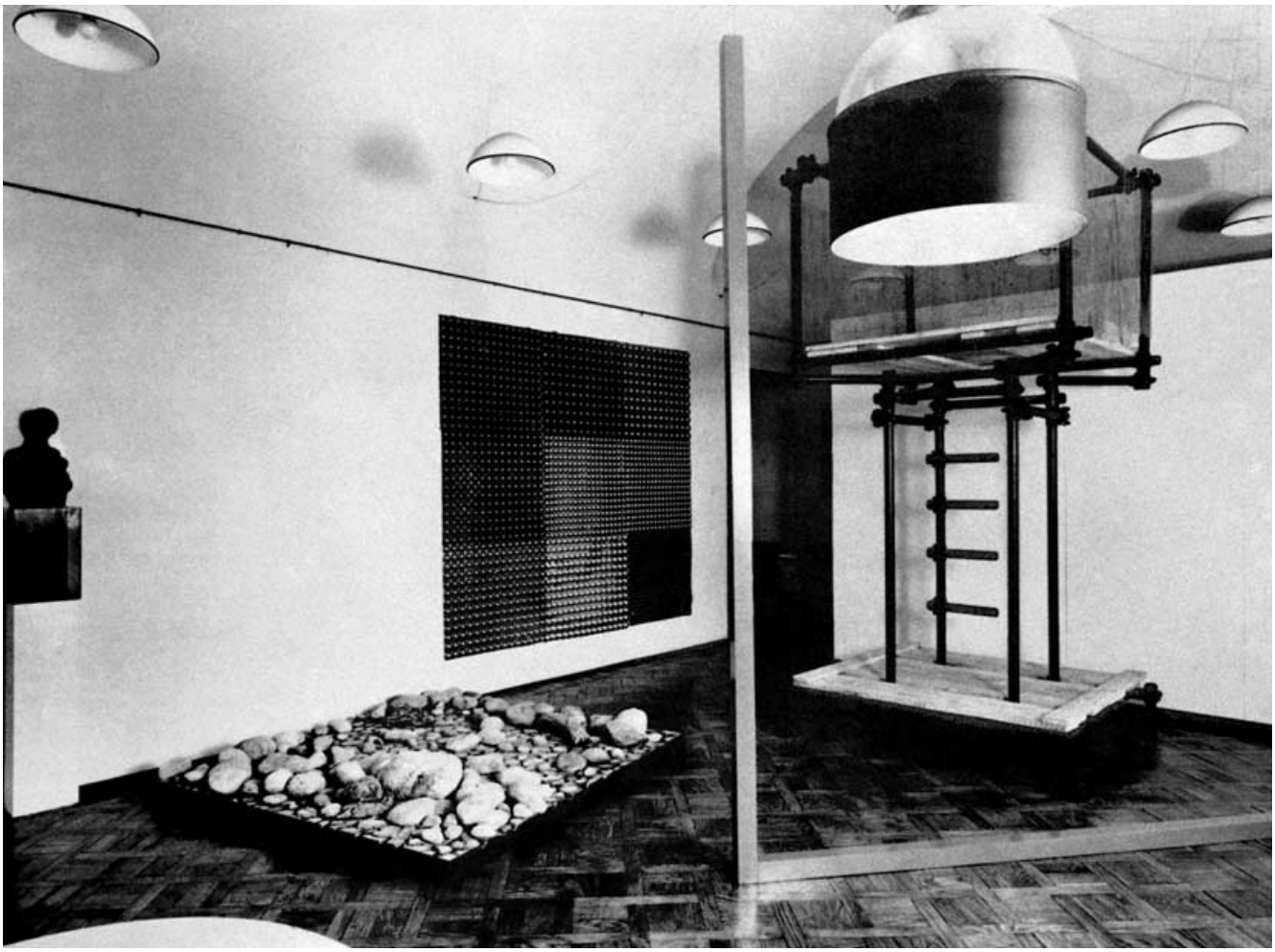
27. Teresa Kittler, "Living Art and the Art of Living: Remaking Home in Italy in the 1960s" (PhD thesis, University College London, May 2014), 26–27, http://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/publication/966361/1 (accessed February 19, 2019).

28. Mario Merz, "UNA DOMENICA LUNGHISSIMA DURA APPROSSIMAMENTE DAL 1966 E ORA SIAMO AL 1976," in *Voglio fare subito un libro* (Turin: hopefulmonster, 2005), 94

29. Corinna Criticos, "Reading Arte Povera," in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972*, ed. Richard Flood and Frances Morris (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001), 77.

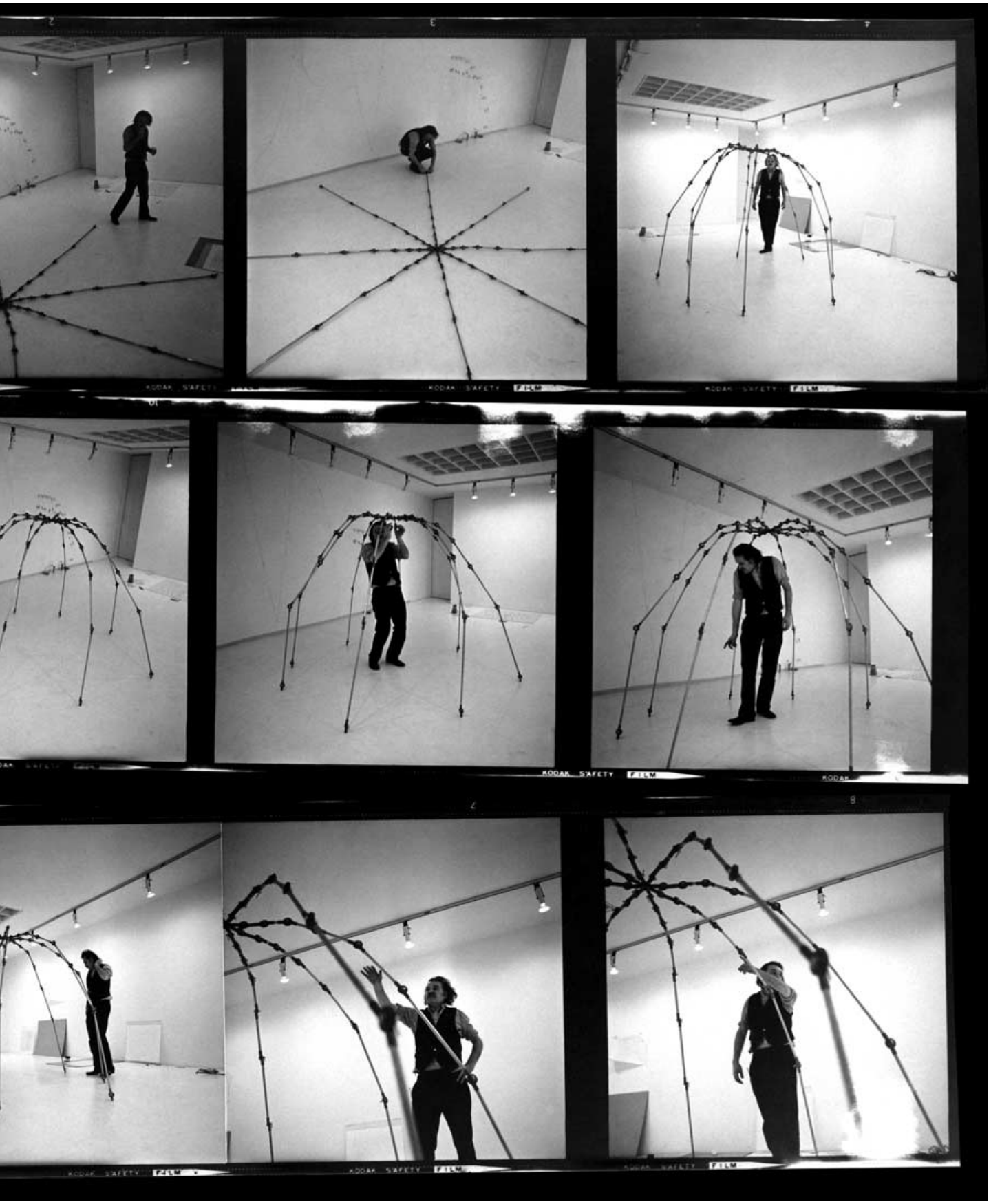
30. Bandini, *1972, Arte Povera a Torino*, 51 (my translation).

31. Interview with Ammann and Pagé, 148–50 (my translation).



Arte abitabile, Biasutti & Biasutti, Turin, 1966
(photo courtesy Archivio Gilardi, Turin)

Mario Merz with IGLOO FIBONACCI
Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1970


KODAK SAFETY FILM

In the years that followed, Merz continually "tortured" the "elementary image" in his mind to produce endless variations on the form. Ducros describes the experience of walking through the "encampment" or "village" of sixteen igloos assembled in Zurich as part of the retrospective organized by Szeemann in 1985, noting that the differences in height, diameter, and covering provoked changes in perception in the viewer moving between textures, signs, transparency, opacity, light, and fractures of line and volume.[32] The first igloos stand self-contained. This is the case with *Igloo Fibonacci* (1970). The structure, which assumes the shape of a pine cone, is made of articulated brass tubing divided into eight sections constituting eight legs, each built up following the sequence 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8. With no covering, it is neither closed nor enclosing but is open to the surrounding space. By contrast, *Igloo* (*Tenda di Ghedaffi*) (Igloo [Qaddafi's tent], 1981) is covered with swathes of unprimed canvas made of burlap sewn into sections on which Merz has rapidly painted in bright colors a series of inverted lances, a form recurrent in his work. It was the only igloo to be conceived entirely pictorially. The igloos made two decades later variously intersect with one another, contain one another, and combine with tables and other forms. Merz used opaque materials such as clay, stone, wax, fabric, metals, and brushwood; for transparent material, he mostly used glass. Natural materials combine with the man-made. There is no aesthetic of authenticity or purity at work. On the contrary, Merz brings together materials that seem not to belong together and uses neon tubes to pierce structures with a light and energy associated with the street and urban environment. He loves the irregular, the uneven, and the heterogeneous. He leaves the dust on the surface of the glass and enjoys the menace and unpredictability of the broken shard. He inserts objects into the igloo—an upside-down bottle, the frame of a car door, the head of a deer, a branch, pine cones. At first glance, the materials and objects used might appear random and ill-assorted, but they form the equivalent of what Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev calls Merz's "personal alphabet."[33] Take the bottle—think Giorgio Morandi, think Merz's neon pieces of the mid-1960s, think the wine bottle he loved to empty with friends. The bottle recurs across the oeuvre. "The upturned bottle," Merz said, "is architecture. It is not a matter of what it contains but the thing in itself, an extremely interesting form."[34]

The igloo is a "springboard for the imagination" for Merz. The igloo provides shelter; it contains a dark intimate interior, a womb. The igloo can also be transparent and open to the surrounding space or combine transparency and opacity. Ducros writes of the importance of the void or empty space in Merz's work from the earliest canvas works that jut from the wall to the bottles and wicker objects, such as *Cono* (Cone, 1967), and, lastly, the igloos.[35] The void has a sculptural quality but needs also to be understood in a philosophical and existential sense. "We constantly have nothingness in front of us as a great void we need to fill up," Merz told Hans Ulrich Obrist. Yet we must contemplate and endure that void (and endure boredom) if we are to go beyond continuous

32. Ducros, *Mario Merz*, 136. The Zurich exhibition of 1985 was revisited at the Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan in *Igloos*, curated by Vincente Todolí in collaboration with the Fondazione Merz, 25 October 2018–24 February 2019.

33. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "'Thou Wilt Give Thanks When Night Is Spent': On Words in the Art of Mario Merz," in *Mario Merz*, ed. Pier Giovanni Castagnoli, Ida Gianelli, and Beatrice Merz (Turin: hopefulmonster, 2005), 163.

34. Celant, ed., *Mario Merz*, 185 (my translation).

35. Ducros, *Mario Merz*, 130.

and meaningless activity.[36] It is no surprise to find Martin Heidegger among the philosophers read and admired by Merz. It was Heidegger who, in a celebrated discourse, spoke of the void as the core of the common household jug: "although the jug is a recognizable something in its physicality, it is the void of the jug—the nothingness at its core—that makes the thing useful."[37] Science, for Heidegger, could make no sense of emptiness, which it had always to fill with some other content. Calculation and quantification could not adequately describe the spaces that in human experience partook of "earth, sky, divinities and mortals." Habitation should not be separated from the act of building. Around the table and in the home, human beings continuously "built the house." When Merz created his igloos in situ, he was reenacting the primordial activity of building the house, an activity he saw as visionary rather than mechanical.

Time and Space

Merz's second great "discovery" on that "infinitely long Sunday"—the Fibonacci series—is intimately connected to thinking about empty space. One day he was in a garden looking at the gaps between the branches of a tree. The more he looked, the more the thought came to him: "it is to impossible to measure them in meters and centimeters; it is absolutely beyond calculation."[38] The numbers of the Fibonacci series, however, seemed to Merz to escape from the constraints of an abstract Cartesian mathematics in which the world was reduced to lines and grids. It represented the organic connection between numbers and the natural order based on reproduction and proliferation. The structure that connected the two numbers—the "coupling"—is always the same, and yet the numbers are continuously changing. "Always the same, always changing," observed Barbara Reise, who declared that Merz's practice had undergone a "leap"—a leap just like that of the numbers that accelerated from 1 to 55 when consecutive numbers went from 1 to 10.

For Merz, the Fibonacci series was no mere device. Nor did it attract him as someone interested in mathematics. The simplicity and easy-to-grasp character of the system appealed to him. But more significant, it connected with his evolving philosophy of life in which the human and the natural world were part of a continuum. The curved line and the spiral—shapes that had long fascinated Merz—could be described mathematically in terms of the Fibonacci series. Organic analogies could be found in the shape of shells, pine cones, and animal horns, and it is not by chance that these recur in his work. Such forms have attracted artists since the Renaissance due to the 5/8 ratio of the golden section. For Merz, however, the processes of growth and proliferation of the Fibonacci sequence broke out of the Renaissance conventions of symmetry and perspective—conventions that, Merz said, assumed a closed structure and a fixed point of view. The envisaged expansion and energy

36. Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews, Volume 1* (Milan: Charta, 2003), 604.

37. Adam Sharr, *Heidegger for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2007), 28.

38. Merz, interview by Celant, 59 (my translation).

FIBONACCI SANTA GIULIA,
installation view, Merz home
1968
Neon
Variable dimensions
Merz Collection, Turin

FIBONACCI SEQUENCE 1–55
1994
Neon
Variable dimensions
(Permanent installation,
The European Sculpture City,
Turku, Finland)

FIBONACCI SEQUENCE 1–144
2002
Neon
Variable dimensions
(Installation view, Fondazione
Merz, Turin, 2005)

corresponded more to the Einsteinian notion of space and time, growth that is asymmetrical and unlimited.

Merz claimed for himself an extraordinary freedom in making work unconstrained by categories of genre, medium, or form—work with even greater mobility and potential ubiquity than that enjoyed by the igloo.

For Merz, visualization was a process of observing and finding, not inventing, a process of inclusion, not exclusion. Lisa Le Feuvre writes that he was committed to "presenting" rather than "representing" and to utilizing sculpture to "undo structures of perception." It was sufficient to place the numbers in neon on what already existed, whether objects, buildings, vegetables, or trees. The act of placing or leaning—*appoggiare* in Italian—meant bringing attention to something while maintaining the separate and removable quality of the artwork.[39]

Placed on the side of the kitchen above the sink in the Merz home, the Fibonacci numbers are a playful accompaniment to everyday life, a conceptual interruption of workaday routine. Placed on the facade of the converted Antiche Prigioni in Pescara, the neon animates the building and its reflection in the water of the canal. Placed on the spiral ramp of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Fibonacci numbers are like butterflies that impart lightness and make the interior of the building float. In each instance, Merz creates a dialogue with existing space with the most minimal of interventions. We are asked to experience anew what is already there. Previously unnoticed roof beams, steps seen as simply a means to get from A to B, a famous building condemned to invisibility by postcard reproductions—all these structures and places are brought into vision.

The Fibonacci series in Merz's oeuvre appears to relate principally to space, the intervals between the numbers a form of measurement. The smaller numbers cluster together, the larger numbers are further and further apart, until they exist only in our imagination. However, the Fibonacci numbers can equally be seen to relate to time. Just as the "economic" space of the factory is countered by the "living" space of the igloo, so mechanical clock time is countered by the organic time of natural growth and expansion. To counteract what he sees as "the emptiness of today's technological man," Merz seeks to reawaken human consciousness of its dark recesses, to bring back the "Vento preistorico dalle montagne gelate" (Prehistoric wind from the frozen mountains), to use a title that recurs several times after 1977.[40] He asks us to consider the ancestral feelings induced by living in the shadow of prehistoric animals. Compare, he says, the hold on the imagination of a great animal from our distant past with that provoked by an airplane: "the night of humanity," Merz said, "is animal." In an extraordinarily bold move, Merz reintroduces animals to contemporary art in the shape of the iguana and the crocodile, animals that when stuffed were previously housed in the natural history

39. Lisa Le Feuvre, "Protagonist Materials," in *Mario Merz: What Is to Be Done?*, exh. cat., ed. Katarina Pierre (Umea: Bildmuseet, 2012), 11–38.

40. "The frozen mountains are a poetic expression for glaciation. My work is constantly tied to time, to the sense of time that sometimes conflicts with the realism of today and is closer to a metaphysics of time." Interview with Ammann and Pagé, 159 (my translation).

CHE FARE?
[What is to be done?]
1968
(Installation view, Galleria Sperone, Turin, 1968)
Aluminium, wax, neon
15 x 45 x 18 cm
Musée Départemental des Vosges, Epinal

museum. With Fibonacci numbers in neon trailing behind them, they climb the outside of museums, traverse ceilings, and leave the earth heading skyward.

Time is reconceived with respect to Nature. Detheridge writes, "Many artists in these years such as Mario Merz and Jannis Kounellis still had a relationship to the physical world that could be called organic—its laws exercised a huge fascination on them. The secret rhythms of Nature that ruled exponential growth and the reproduction of plants and animals, its entropic mechanisms, the precarious equilibrium of forces in tension, the presence of latency and potential—all these held great appeal for them."[41] When Merz returned to painting, he offset its claims to permanence or longevity by introducing fruit and vegetables into his three-dimensional work. The short lifecycle and the need to be replaced suggested analogies with human life and rituals. On other occasions, time in Merz's work appears as the deep time of geology or evolution, sometimes making the very idea of measurement itself problematic. In this, he shared in the research of fellow artists, such as Anselmo, whose *Trecento milioni di anni* (Three hundred million years, 1969) perfectly embodied this changed perception. A lump of anthracite coal is bound by wire holding in place a lamp and a piece of sheet metal that prevents light from dispersing. Ammann notes, "the fossil coal is an organic product formed over millions of years far from light and oxygen. The lamp (together with oxygen) will give back, over time, the light that will allow the anthracite to return to its original state. . . . Anselmo is demonstrating a space of time that is no longer re-traceable, showing us the limits of our imagination and thought."[42] Merz's art is perhaps more metaphorical and less metonymic than Anselmo's, but the two artists share a common questioning of the modernist vision in which time is subordinated to human ambitions of control and direction. Along with others, such as Robert Smithson in the United States, they conceived of human activity within a physical environment where it was subject to much greater natural forces.

Merz was distinctive, too, in that his reflections, whether expressed in titles, in his writings, or in interviews, displayed a wide cultural frame of reference. He read voraciously, and allusions appear in his work to poets and philosophers as well as to army generals and political theorists. He loved to play with words and their possible multiple meanings, eschewing the unilateral and the manifest for the enigmatic and complex. An ideal conjunction was between utter simplicity and complex possibility, as in *Che fare?* (What is to be done?), a title that is simultaneously an everyday question and a (Leninist) call to arms, words that talk of the present and the future, of thought and action. As *Igloo di Giap* reveals, time and space can be concentrated or expanded depending on what approach is adopted. For Merz, there is no privileged point of view or position. We are in continuous movement. We ask ourselves, *Le case girano intorno a noi, o noi giriamo intorno alle case?* (Do we go around houses, or do houses go around us? 1977). Time is elastic; time is cyclical, made up

41. Detheridge, *Scultori della speranza*, 116 (my translation).

42. Jean-Christophe Ammann, "Giovanni Anselmo," in *Giovanni Anselmo*, ed. Beatrice Merz (Turin: hopefulmonster, 1989), 35 (my translation).

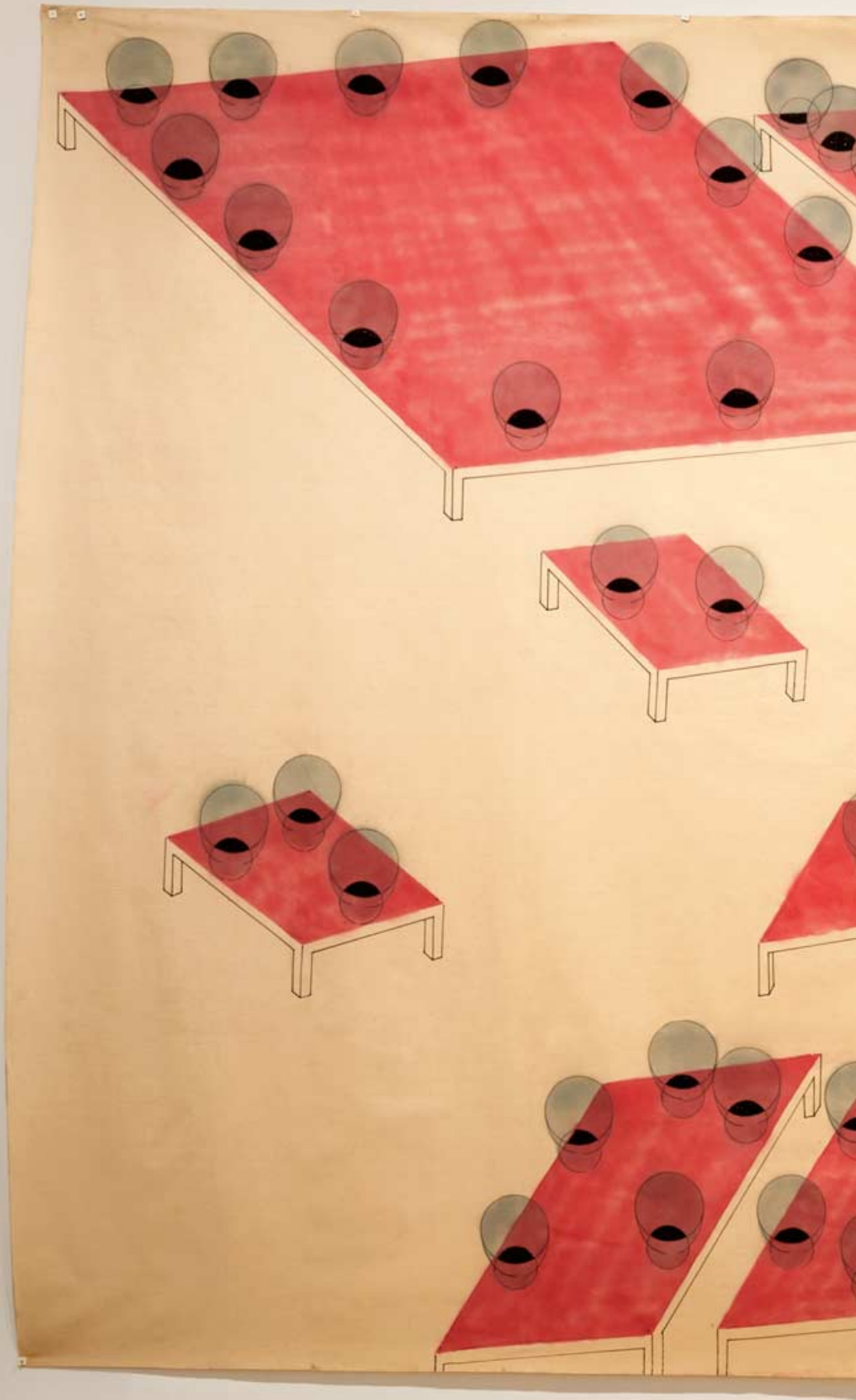
of returns and repetition. Language is not an add-on or a secondary element in Merz's oeuvre; it is constitutive and part of the whole just as in the sentence that can be read only by going around the circular form of the igloo. Christov-Bakargiev suggests Merz was indebted to the imagist poetry of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and that for him words are "thing-like and as three-dimensional as things themselves." Moreover, they provide "a passage or portal into his *oeuvre*." "In his artworks," she writes, "Merz repeated a small number of words and phrases, like a personal alphabet, in a form of aesthetic repetition and echo. With language, as with things, he returned over and again to the same point, creating a suspended place in the mind of his audience where the end was always the beginning and distinctions between past, present and future were no more."[43]

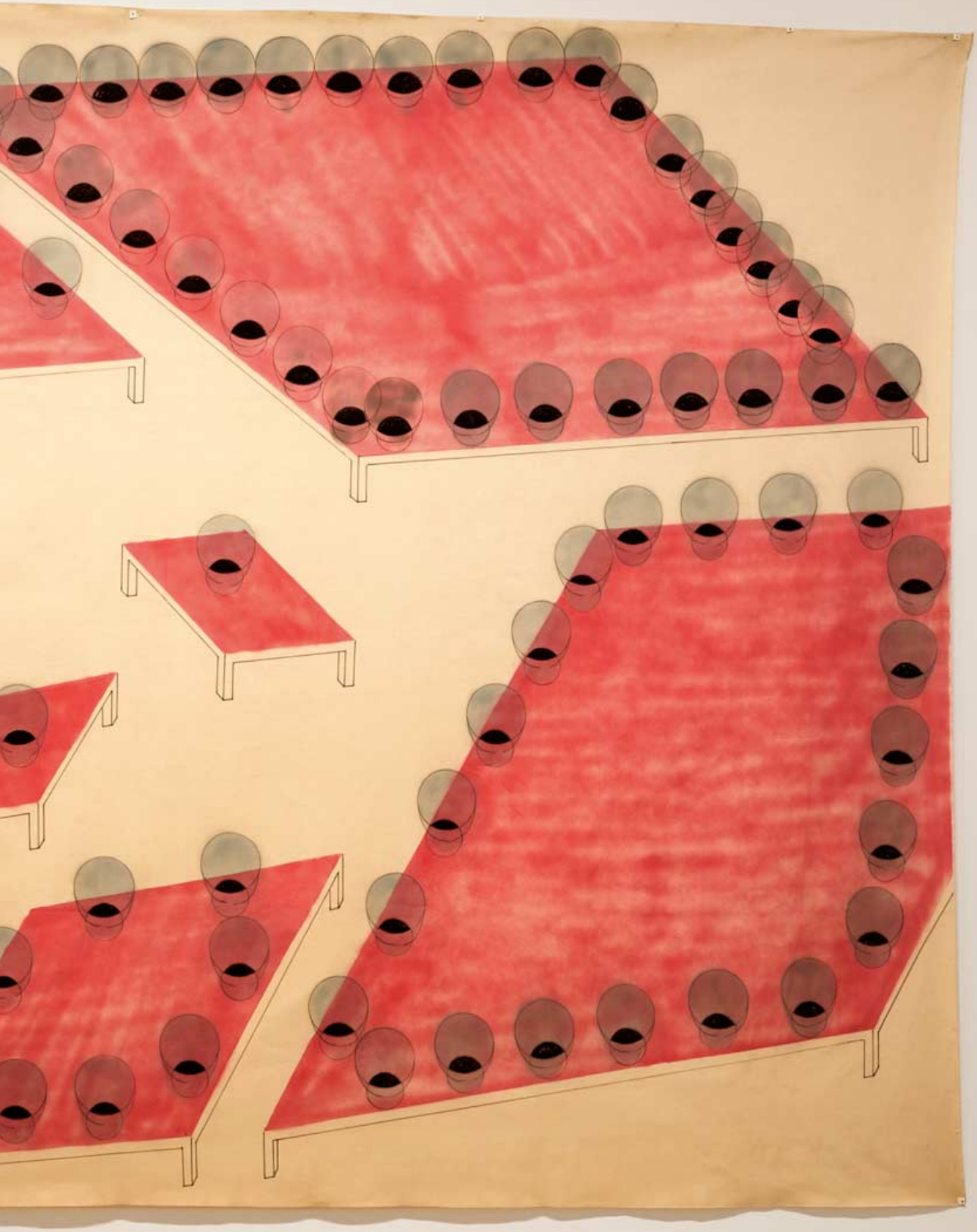
Christov-Bakargiev's reference to the "audience" rather than to "spectators" or "viewers" stems from a discussion of written language and therefore might seem surprising. But it usefully raises the question of how we are positioned, and position ourselves, in the presence of the work, and how we might respond by listening as well as looking, feeling as well as thinking.[44] When Merz told Bandini that he, Marisa, and Beatrice were throwing out dates and names from the art, he was clearing the ground for a response or engagement that was direct and immediate, as opposed to a response mediated by, and dependent on, information on historical background. This was not a denial of the past but a rejection of "historicization." Those faced with the art are to be free in how they react as sentient beings who can smell the melted wax, feel the cold light of the neon, hear the blast of the prehistorical winds, and see through shards of broken glass. For Merz, they are responding to a situation of energy. Increasingly the "landscape" is what matters and what brings together individual works. Spectators, in turn, are free to wander and to lose themselves in a reality that departs from the apparent certainties of contemporary life into a world that may be variously confusing, unnerving, and exhilarating.

43. Christov-Bakargiev, "'Thou Wilt Give Thanks When Night Is Spent,'" 148–65.

44. Can we think of Merz's work as "noisy" or "full of sound"? In his entry for *Art Povera: Conceptual, Actual or Impossible Art?* ed. Germano Celant (Worthing, UK: Littlehampton Book Services, 1969), 37, Merz suggests equivalence between glass and the violin: "the broken glass is the violinists." My thanks to Laurence Lumley pointing out the aural dimensions of Merz's work.

MARIO MERZ
TIME IS MUTE



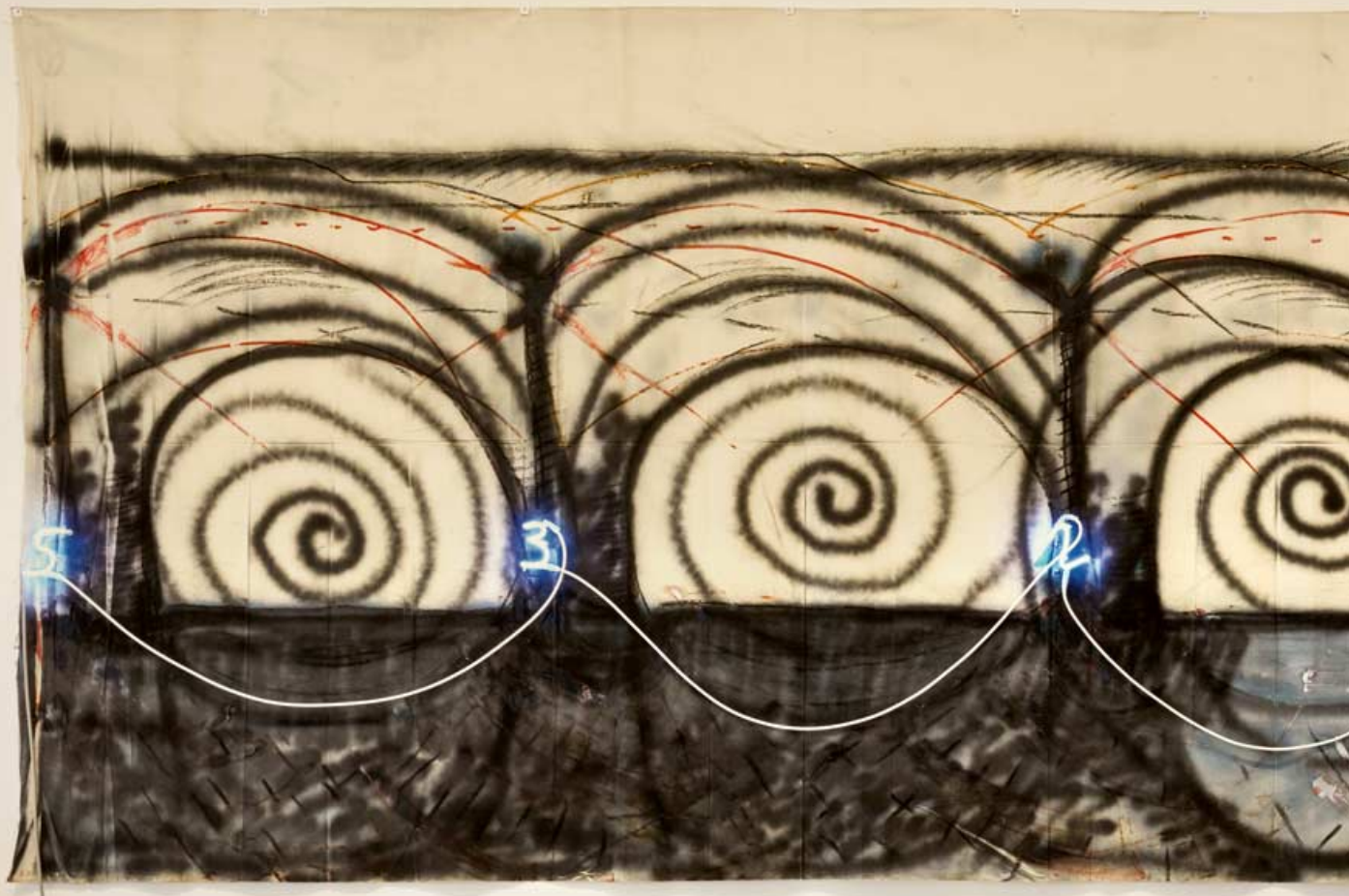


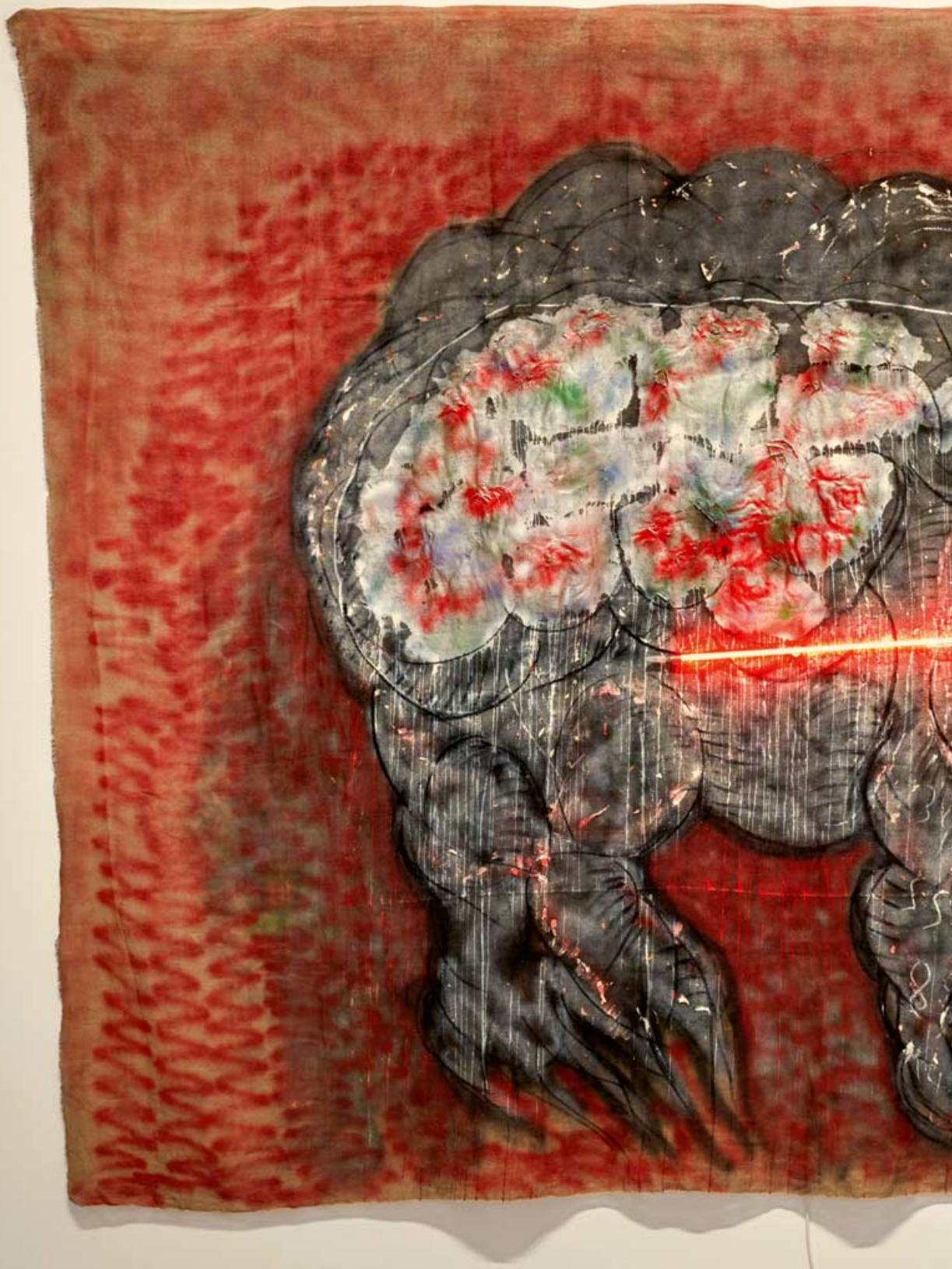

attraverso

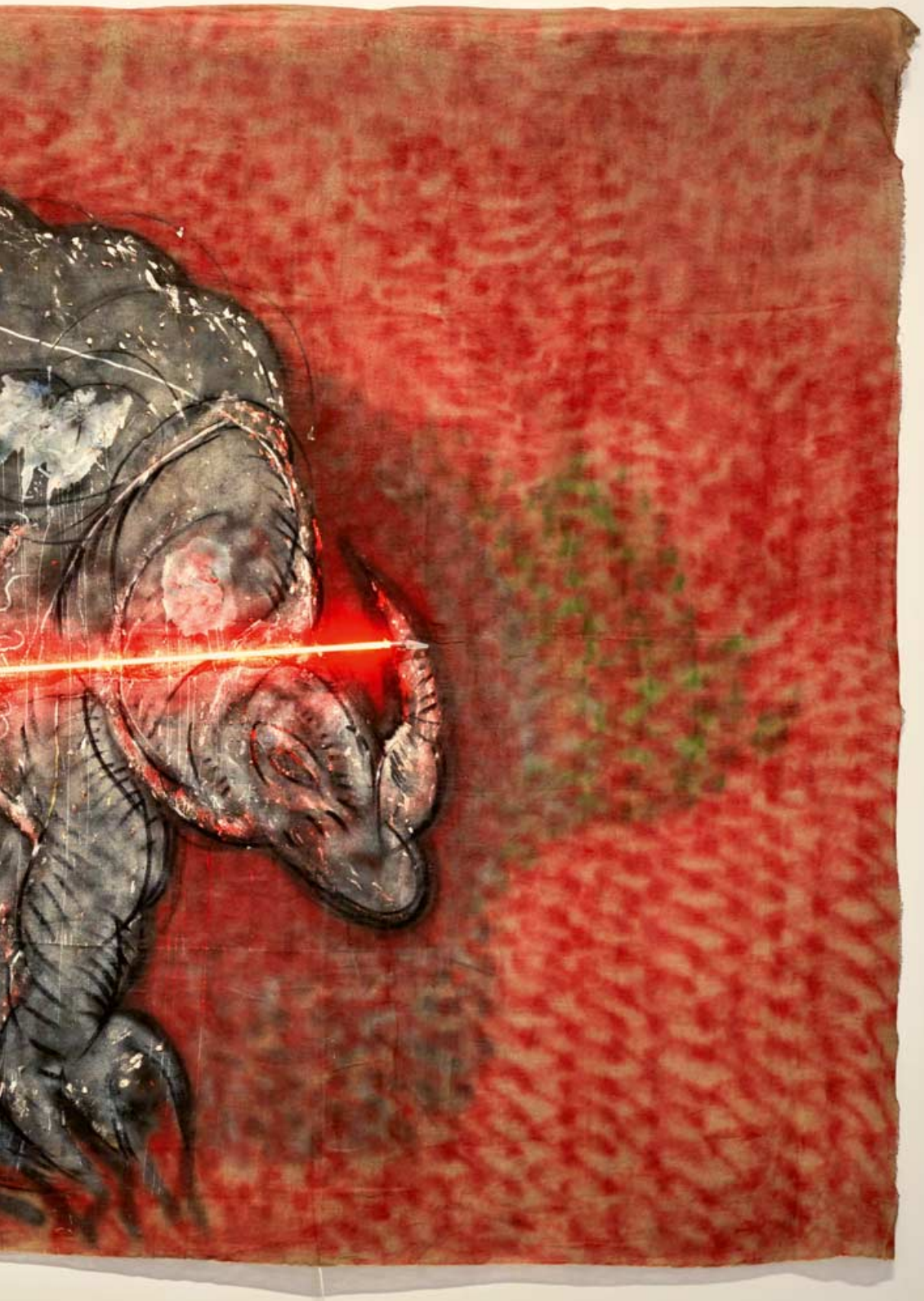

FORZA NO


SCIOPERO GENERALE
AZIONE POLITICA


RELATIVA PROCLAMATA
RELATIVAMENTE ALL'ARTE



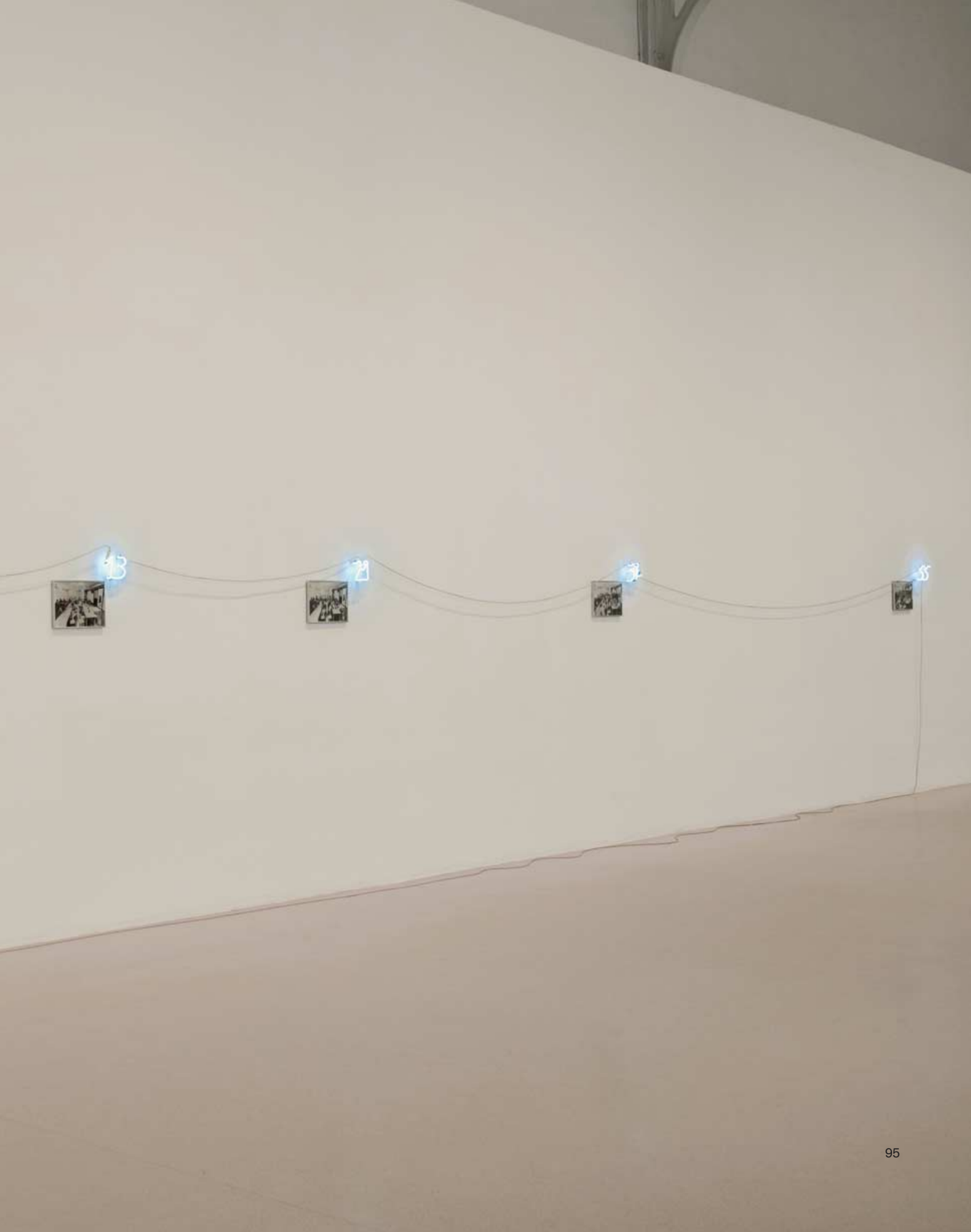





pittore in Africa


déclaration
des droits
de l'homme


1
1
2
3
5
8



MARIO MERZ
TEXTS ANTHOLOGY

Published in: Beatrice Merz, ed., *MARIO MERZ: I Want to Write a Book Right Now* (Florence: hopefulmonster, 1989)

Unpublished texts
(All texts undated)

GENERAL STRIKE
RELATIVE POLITICAL ACTION PROCLAIMED
RELATIVE TO ART

GENERAL STRIKE
CONTRIBUTION TO THE ANTIFORMALIST SOCIAL STRUGGLE
TEXT OF PROCLAMATION IN ART

GENERAL STRIKE
CONTRIBUTION TO THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE
WITH TEXT OF PROCLAMATION IN ART

1	Freedom to read in a prison
1	Freedom to paint
2	Freedom to leave
3	Freedom to give something to someone
5	Freedom to enter arbitrarily in a political conversation
8	Freedom to suffer a declaration of hostility
13	Freedom to bear the weight of patience
21	Freedom to have three contrasting ideas
34	Freedom to receive an indictment without deserving one
55	Freedom not to believe oneself a prisoner of the economy
89	Freedom not to be a moralizer in adverse conditions
144	Freedom not to believe a generalization

BIOGRAPHY AS SUSTENANCE (space and freedom
in natural progression).

AN EXTREMELY LONG HARD SUNDAY APPROXIMATELY FROM 1966 AND NOW WE ARE IN 1976

It's late in the afternoon on an extremely long Sunday. We have never worked! For almost ten years all we've done is think and pass an extremely long Sunday between two immense, gray weeks of work that loom up before and perhaps after us. Before '66, we think, we all worked more or less, and afterward? Later on, it seems, we'll have to work. (According to the roles of life in our century).

We feel (how one feels on Sunday!) like we're not working. The consciousness of this makes us become a little devilish, while we are so human on this extremely long Sunday.

During our extremely long years of Sunday there appear to our memory, slow but solemn, in its inertia, there can appear and it is with insufficiency and with slight vexation that there appear to our slow but solemn memory the faces and words of those who saw us work. The critics, the dealers, and in the second row those who pay something, the collectors—appear and disappear to our slow but slightly vexed gestures of annoyance. We were not working, whereas they when they appear (rarely) we think they think we are working for culture, and hence for us for them and for that which culture slowly shows itself to be. Instead we were undressing culture to see how it is made. And this is our long Sunday, we are undressing culture to see how it is made. But this undressing is infinitely long and that keeps us in this extremely long Sunday, just to undress culture to see how it is made. But this undressing is endless! ... And it is thus really ridiculous, even if so really (let us say it) necessary.

Around '68 (we barely remember on this unending Sunday) we made an igloo with earth on top that loomed up and, engraved, or more precisely, instead of engraved, which so like a gravestone, illuminated! The political invective victorious for the Viet people—if the enemy concentrates, he loses ground, if he disperses, he loses force—we contemplated this dynamic irreversible idea, and we turned it on (in neon!) so that on our long Sunday we should not forget it. They won.

We have discovered that culture undresses and shows us the war of liberation of an intelligent general who says—If the enemy concentrates, he loses ground, if he disperses, he loses force—but that it is the people who say why it is, the people that dip their dirty fingers in the rice paddies and in the space given them to live, immense space! A country! One calls it "their" country.

Back in '68 the phrase illuminated because irreversible was lighted. What a long Sunday. At dawn war was already in the air and later we knew why, and how!

For us it is Sunday. We have had the pleasure of selling this product to our collector friend.

We are here to undress culture and culture every now and then gives us its topical themes through wars, and the care that numbers are really alive and fast, how many kilometers we have crossed in this terrible Sunday without work! Why us, we have never worked and we know it—we have always and only continued to exist to denounce that we could not work very well in this eternal delight of war and of general labor. The accumulation of newspapers! and of numbers!

We took a few little trips abroad smoking a few butts that here were slanderous and there not exactly (but almost there too for people who work). We naturally brought along our communist ideas, but there really wasn't anybody who gave a hoot there, because a lot of people there already don't work a work day. And that demonstrates that our Sunday is extremely long in space, too. We have our Sunday hands, extremely long, abandoned, our spatio-temporal drowsiness also over N. Y., etc., etc.

Now the antipathy is generalized. Many artists tremble throwing their colors into the painting, but not us, we don't think so, but culture appears to us in light and undressed or dressed in light like the archangels to Dante. Therefore we can construct works where culture appears. to disappear again. This is our desperation.

It appears to us to disappear again and we have just enough time (quickly) to have a work made or to make it ourselves. (On our Sunday!) it appears before us and then disappears. And does it leave traces? We think so, it leaves tremendous traces, like an angel of fire, it burns.

But on Sunday! What burning can there be on Sunday, if not a mishap!

The angel that works burns the products on workdays, not on Sunday. Sundays are for mishaps like wars and the accumulation of ludicrous products.

How unpleasant for we poor people who take upon ourselves such a long Sunday.

Our overwork is gratified in symbols.

While we are dipping our hands in an unique and comprehensive venture, undressing a culture is an action made of excesses and of sedimentations, thus to the sight and touch, of chaos! To the real touch something exceeds, something does not appear. But that is mud! Which exceeds and cedes here on Sunday: how can we build.

We have worked with the products of other men. Therefore, we have worked with different cultures. Because we have continued to live on Sunday.

Because, they say, cultures are, we say cultures exceed and disappear therefore are not eternal, if not in memory or in the energy of the meanings of before or of after it doesn't matter. A neon is a neon before and after the meaning. During the meaning. And therefore on Sunday.

On Sunday culture divests itself of the cultures of labor and appears solemnly immersed in the mud of its inertia.

And we undress it (attempt), anyway it returns into the mud real chaos of debris of so many values—culture of weekday labor—Is that clear?

First came chaos, then labor, then the chaos of labor, then the undressing of the chaos of labor.

We are Marxist almost all of us by the turn of mind that says: Marx saw this elementary process: the undressing of the chaos of labor.

This is not a symbolic undressing.

We have witnessed all this on Sunday—culture for those who work is a Sunday thing.

We have witnessed all this. Symbols are just mud.

Try with the shell of sea or land, it seems symbolic to the culture of the non-existent (to history!) but it is not a symbol of the mud. It is mud.

Therefore with us symbols can rest assured for their reality and identity, symbols are always of mud or return quickly to the mud even when they raise their crest. We know that a house is mud in addition to being weekday culture, our Sunday continues to assuage cultures in their sad but true identity with the earth. That is, what art has always tried to do and done (on Sunday) for those who seek in the symbol a hook that can drag them out of that.

What is that? Mud, naturally on Sunday. On weekdays the mud becomes an object. Consumerism has its duty to do.

WHAT TO DO?

ALONE AT LAST

or just obviously romanticism

TWO AT LAST
THREE AT LAST
FIVE AT LAST
EIGHT AT LAST
THIRTEEN AT LAST
TWENTY-ONE AT LAST
THIRTY-FOUR AT LAST
FIFTY-FIVE AT LAST

That which I dare to learn from day to day is that there is nothing wrong with that since the spiral is slow and full of humors like a fruit, and the drama we see in the spiral is only the idea that the form of the spiral may be a malignant concept or at any rate that the spiral may be a form expressing anxiety: the spiral probably expresses merely the rising of matter over itself, then the spiral shell loses its strength when organic matter slows and ceases its casting poetry is full of exclamation points or question marks, poetry is an introduction,
the love of strength is in scattering,
numbers always rise from unity,
a day rises on itself,
the cochlea expresses the primordial form,
the comma is the breath, the comma says we must breathe to write,
we must breathe to draw.

THE COCHLEA IN THE SCENE OF THE NIGHT OF THE WORLD CONTINUES ITS RITUAL HOME

The animals are here and the terrible odor of their bodies
the fur, is not representable
grass is furry and animals are furry, and only the fleeting and distant Orient has represented animal and vegetable fur with sufficient liking. As Western man today fears the fur to see how far away the abstraction of oil paint and of molten bronze is from the obscene will to exist, which rises from the smoking fur of the horse and from the slow movement of the mild muscles of the shark
Western man has chosen to dodge the problem of coexistence with his own animals by creating art as the totemic symbol of his enmity toward them.
If is pointless to repeat this totem forever, as oil paint and molten bronze;
the primitive enmity has disappeared to leave the field to man's amusement in creating abstract forms without animal fur.
But how much fur there is, still, on the animals of Lascaux!
Only Leonardo after maniacal coloquii and nightmares with the nature of animals, Leonardo made drawings to bring to the light of animals.

THE GROWTH OF WATER TAKES PLACE FAR AWAY
HIGH UP
THE WATER IS POURED
IN SILENCE WITH NUMBERS
ON THE BOTTOM
WHENCE BEGINS THE MUSIC
THAT GROWS WITH THE SPEED OF THE WATER 1 1 2 3 5 8
13
21
34
55
89
144
233
377
610

THE GROWTH OF WATER TAKES PLACE
FAR AWAY HIGH UP
THEN FALLS TOWARD THE BOTTOM
SCREAMING CARRYING WITH IT
SILENCE 1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34
55
89
144
233
377
610
987
1597
2584
4181
6765
10946

the open scientific hand
the closed symbolic hand
two fingers opened to symbolize a letter
two fingers in a symbolic circle
the hand extended unsatisfied
the double hand: the two hands (prayer or touch)
the closed hand sleeps
the closed hand is stronger
two fingers open are the fingers of the goat
two fingers in a circle in the limpid water
the hand extended like an oar in the water
swimming
the open hand the leaf
the cabbage hand
the hand in a fist clenched in symbol
the fingers closed tight
the 10 fingers spread wide
two index fingers extended
the ten fingers like ten hands
two fingers like three fruits
the closed hand a switch that switches off
the electricity of the open hand
two fingers amid the symbol
two fingers symbolizing a letter
two fingers symbolizing a letter
two hands symbolizing to indicate
two index fingers toward
the hand with one and four (Gothic)
the Gothic hand (closed tight and spread wide)
the hand = structure of elements
the hand with a prevailing structure
the hand with two prevailing structures
the hand with three prevailing structures
the hand with four prevailing structures
the hand with five prevailing structures
two similar fingers
a primary finger
two fingers in an ambiguous position
the hand as clenched fist (rock)
the hand as contacts
the hand as contacts closed and curved
the hand as open contacts, stable and continuous
the hand as unstable contacts
the fingers in opposition 1 and 4
the fingers in opposition 1 and 4 in contact
the closed hand
the open hand with three and closed hand with two (prevalently open)
the closed hand with one and open with 4
the two hands in electrically ordered spaces
the fingers electrically joined
the closed hand (in swift symbol)
the hand in symbolic action
the closed hand in symbol

the snail
spins its spiral on the light hinges of the numbers
1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55
GOLDEN SPIRAL!
the foot jumps and compresses its bones in the space of itself
compresses its perfect pine-seeds of bone in the form of the numbers
1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55
the naked pine-seeds or uncovered bones of the pine-cone shine in the sun!
1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55

THE DOG IS IN MOTION TOWARD OTHER DOGS
THE NUMBER IS IN MOTION TOWARD OTHER NUMBERS
THE DOG. ONE DOG. TWO DOGS.. THREE DOGS... FIVE DOGS.....
EIGHT DOGS..... THIRTEEN DOGS..... TWENTY-ONE DOGS.....
THIRTY-FOUR DOGS..... FIFTY-FIVE
DOGS..... THE REPRODUCING DOG
1.1.2..3...5.....8.....13.....21.....34.....
55..... THE REPRODUCING NUMBER
ANIMALS ARE REPRODUCTIVE NUMBERS
NUMBERS ARE REPRODUCTIVE ANIMALS

I do not accept the layering of supports, the place is a place. From an empty place to consciousness of being in full places. It is the consciousness by virtue of which almost everyone prefers the bars where everyone goes. For the workers of Naples the cafeteria is an automatic everyday place.
The pieces are pieces of a piece of public psychology presented in accordance with the phraseology of art. Mathematical thought is the sum derived from metaphysical or aesthetic or purely normal canons and brought to the choral representation of a movement that is reality. And even psychologically non-formal. The bar accepts being an automatic meeting place.

A series of people in a restaurant is more elementary than a series of numbers (the series is elementary but people assembled for a common function is more elementary).

Numbers at the restaurant
people at the restaurant
numbers as people at the restaurant
a person plus another person make two people
two people plus one person that comes in make three people
a real sum is a sum of people.

Fibonacci-Naples
artistic choice that does not describe free time
but (collective) real time.

FIBONACCI'S NUMBERS AND ART

Fibonacci's numbers are in accelerated expansion, it is from them that I drew the idea that it was possible to represent with new faculties all the examples that one comes upon in the world of matter in expansion understood also as living vital lives: living in rapid and controllable expansion.
The numbers therefore are coupled with reality: neither the numbers nor reality are dominant in that in the idea of this representative art two things must be independent even if they are superimposed.
A fabulous example of independence and of superimposition is given by the study made by Fibonacci himself of the birth of rabbits in accordance with Fibonacci's numbers, or Fibonacci's numbers superimposed, as in an imaginary and real screen, on the growth of rabbits.
Numbers are a relative extension of the body through the five fingers.
Relative because they rule out psychological but not physiological extension.
The wall is loaded (bricks, stones, cement, historical anxieties, psychological anxieties), the numbers unload it as music unloads the chemical density of the atmosphere. Music also has mathematical or numerical equivalences.
Time is a tap-root plunged into the earth (the date of birth)
time develops in an objective and relatively free reality as a tree develops from the tap-root in the atmosphere. Time also is an anxiety that develops in one direction only, but it can logically be traced in reverse with the sign—just as numbers can be traced in reverse with the sign.
The passage of light through certain holes and only through those holes is numerological.
Ancient architecture is not fortuitous, because it is not just a covering of space.
What numerology lacks is narrative, but narrative is simply reality. Reality is nondeformable.

everything (trees animals stones houses clouds) is referable to architecture.
is architecture
is referable to architecture, is architecture,
the quantity or complexity of the supports that are “naturally” simplified by themselves, as water evaporates, or with the aid of values, like the distances between phenomena.
That which does not naturally refer to architecture is psychology, that is, religion, that is, the fear of death and the fear of humanoid relations, relations between humans, that is, by architecture I mean all that is value, calculable, not just descriptive, calculable in many layers. The form of a cloud is architecture. The substance, that of which a cloud is made, is architecture, water makes architecture.
The psychological assault of the fear of the cloud bearing storm water is not part of the architecture.
Architecture is a sum (by sum I mean the analytical detachment made deliberately) of values. Between the clouds and the flat earth exists a value, between the moving cloud and the steadfast mountain exists a value, between the wind and the tree exists a value, complex but analyzable.
What is not analyzable is the fear of the wind in the branches of the tree when the wind is transformed into storm, that is, increases its personal value, in comparison to the stationary value of the tree itself.
From this observation we deduce that values in disagreement, the tension between stationary values and increasing values provoke psychology, that is, fear.
The disagreement between animal gestures referable to quotas of animal architecture and gestures referable but in reality derived from the incidence of fear creates social systems, that is, what the historians indicate as the ‘’history” of humankind.

The art object is contradictory because, in the stability of the sum of analyzable values, it is the bearer of one relative but unsurpassable expression of fear with regard to stability itself. Itself an object, it is the bearer of fear with regard to that of which it itself is made, that is, it is fearful of its own values of manufacture.
Poetry is the regulation of fears, as religion is the lake in which one throws natural fears, the fear full lake where “natural” fears mixing with one another become transcendental, become the transcendental lake of total fear, the indiscriminate fear of death.
Architecture is the sum of lay values that man has gathered, notwithstanding, or hastily but coherently, immediately before and immediately after, his religious fears. Among the lay values, the values of art and of science, fear expands or contracts, like a cosmic lake, dominating or dominated depending on the civilizations or personal rhythms.

here is an example of one or more passages between “entropy and purpose”

“boards with legs become tables”

boards are products of the geometric spirit, values are geometric, sizes are sizes already in the wood of the trees.
The passage from boards to “boards with legs” brings the values to increasing complexity.
Man introduces legs knees and feet, “the human paws.” The boards introduce into the earlier values the new anthropomorphic values of man: values relating to the everyday nature of life:
“boards with legs become tables.”
The complexity of the new values, human legs in anthropomorphic relation to the legs of the tables, cause a momentary withdrawal from the geometric entropy of the boards made of wood. A momentary withdrawal because of an innovation. Because entropy is the law of the stopping of time. The innovation or successive time dissolves geometric entropy, introducing the anthropomorph of the legs, as long as the entropy repeats itself in the next stop.
The values of the tables are analyzable, once they have been stopped, irreversible. They can be counted from one with a proliferating sum, adding one and repeating entropically, that is, geometrically, the axis of the initial sum up to a number in which the tables can hold themselves spatially
without dissolving in space
geometry becomes architecture.
The analyses of the new architectural object, the values of the boards which with their legs have become tables, can be reduced to the geometric numbers 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34 and 55. These numbers by geometric leaps, on the same terrain as descriptive geometry represent, can represent a parabolic curve or the beginning of the spiral of the numbers themselves the spiral being only an exposition of numbers.
The sum of the quadrangular tables can “become” as in a play of different representations of the same numbers, instead of a sum a series of expanding curves, that is a spiral.
Quadrangular architecture is transformed into spiral architecture, joining the series of tables in a single, unitary table that is still entropic, in that the spiral is a geometric figure that develops on a plane, from a descriptive support, this plane or plain acts as in a geometric representation of the expansion of the values. The plain that supports the plane of the spiral table is an architectural subject as abstract as the plane of the spiral itself. But its abstraction differs from the architecture of the spiral. Because in the entropic series its abstraction is strengthened by the presence of the products of the board, the fruits of the earth tentacular products of the plain still abstractly alive in geometry.

The plain already has two lives in cosmic architecture.
One, geometric or descriptive or numerable or planetary in a fixed or entropic position and one, mother of earth products germinated in a position around the sun, but in a position animated by the sun itself, taking as the sun a relative but vital reference point.
At the moment two architectures, the first of which lies in the drawer of fixed values, and the second is germinating other values, in turn decipherable, physically present.
The numbers shift in the accounting of the germinations.
The products of the earth are countable, and shifted in the entropy of the numbers of the architecture of the spiral, they themselves become numbers and, with the numbers, presence, and not absence.
Presence is the new law of entropy.
The fear of the natural product is removed from architecture,
the natural product becomes architecture making itself number, incarnating itself, number takes on proportion.
The fear of the natural product is momentarily removed
the proportion of the number of products is the adversary that momentarily shifts the ancestral fear back toward the product of the earth.

Is geometry a derivative of entropic forms
or is it an entropic source of descriptive formalities?
is entropy nature or descriptive art?
is number entropical?
does transformation become entropy?

numbers are
convergent
analyzers
of reality of divergent aspect
any object is architecture of divergent aspect
an analytically governable form is cosmic architecture
even if the form can be deciphered as anthropological
it converges to organize itself in symbols, the final product is a point;
the point of the beginning and of the end.

Number is the primigenial revelation of the logic of the machine, but also of existence. Number was born as a distinction among equal beings. The proliferation of beings is the primigenial cataloguing consciousness of reality. The leaves of the chestnut tree have common characteristics because they are countable, summable (in proliferation). The awareness of this is the action of “awareness”! The leaves of the chestnut belong to a living in proliferation. The peasants know the proliferation of beings because they live on it. And by the logic of their existence, they must count.

In 1967 I used Giap’s thought to make an art of observation. I thought that his thought observes realities the “enemy” can be represented by means of a number of men in a space, if men group together they leave space free for other forces, if they disperse they lose all force of impact.
Giap’s observation also is numerical.

Concentrate and abandon terrain
disperse and lose strength
breath has two nostrils
the hand has five fingers.

Igloo, synthetic and natural form, its surface
like the largest surface in the smallest space.

Life can be lived with different intentions.
The control exercised by walls must be replaced with qualities that can declare themselves from the inside outward.
Walls control the inside beginning on the outside and working inward (divisions).
Without walls the inside has vital faculties of expansion toward the outside.
2) Ahead in time.
But what is the vital mechanism that makes it possible in the new house to expand the house from the inside outward?
This mechanism can be glimpsed in a mechanism of tables in expansion.
Tables = elements raised off the ground.
Tables are intellectual and practical space raised off the ground.
Tables, a mechanism of intellectual and practical expansion in the future tear down the dividing walls and lead practically, that is, artistically-architecturally.
The house has a development coherent with the future.
Abolishing walls and expanding oneself through a system of unitary and spiral self-control.
Numbers are self-control in a spiral series of tables.
The tables increase with the power of the number, and in turn control the excessive power of the number with the awareness, of being in the everyday.
The space of tables-raising off the ground is a relative space (60 cm per side the first table, the last 540 x 480 cm).

from unity to a sum of unities, all at once,
That is, a number that goes from the smallest to the largest
following the expansion of space.
not linear but organic expansion. The meaning of this is evidently hidden, but natural.

We architects and artists reject the construction of tables in lines (that is in series), and we

reject the idea that there can be a preestablished number of people in any room, we

construct a table for one person, as an extreme case. Because tables belong to the everyday

reality of life, they must be for a full space and an empty space together.
we could
If there were just one person it would be possible to assign him a table.

For an increasing number of people it is necessary to construct increasing tables, tables that

grow as a cluster grows. Because the number of people
the space contain the tables.
is increasing organically, it is necessary also that the number of tables increase organically.

That is, it is possible to think that the tables increase over themselves, like people in reality

increase over themselves. That is, it is possible to think that the tables represent the
have a space for one person
expansive force of space. It is possible to construct a table altogether similar to the

preceding table for one more person.

It is possible to construct a table altogether similar to the preceding ones for two people. It
have a space
is possible to construct a table altogether similar to the preceding ones for three people. It is
have a space
not possible to construct a table similar to the preceding ones for five people.

The new table must grow in order to contain around its sides an organically
it is possible to have a space
greater number of people. The new table for eight people must grow to contain
it is possible to have a
around its sides eight people, a new table must grow to
space it is possible
contain around its sides thirteen people. A new table must
to have a space
grow to contain around its sides thirty-four people… how is it possible to have a

space for no-one or for eighty-eight people?

Genesis

primordial space was not economically saturated

abstract space is not economically saturated

the space in which we live is economically saturated

Utopia

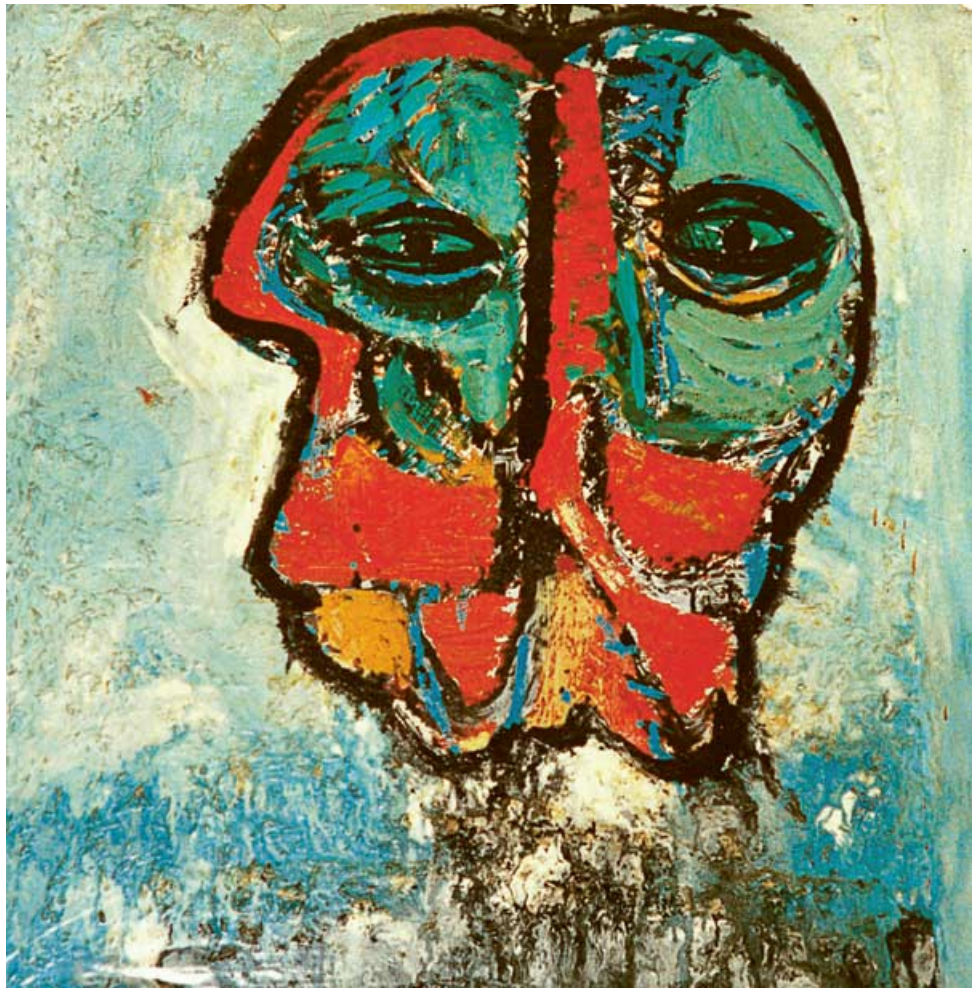
to save the space in which we live from economic saturation
to discuss the space and the quality of the space of the future
for asociality as consciousness
and sociality as structure
and for sociality as consciousness
and asociality as structure

DO YOU GO AROUND THE HOUSES OR DO THE HOUSES GO AROUND YOU?
A TREE OCCUPIES MAINLY TIME
TWO TREES OCCUPY THE SAME TIME BUT A GREATER SPACE
THE FOREST OCCUPIES THE SAME TIME BUT A GREATER SPACE
THE SCENT OF THE PINES IS A DRIFT OF TIME
SPACE IS TIME THAT CAN BE EATEN
THE TIME OF THE FALL OF A PINE-CONE IS PROPORTIONAL TO THE
LARGENESS IN TIME IT TOOK TO GROW
A HOUSE IS PRACTICABLE BETWEEN SPACE AND TIME
WHILE REPRODUCING ANIMALS ARE INDEPENDENT OF ANIMALS
OF OTHER SPECIES
REPRODUCING NUMBERS ARE INDEPENDENT OF NUMBERS OF OTHER CLASSES
NUMBERS DRAW STRENGTH OF REPRODUCTION (PROLIFERATION)
FROM DISTINCT BUT CONNECTED UNITS LIKE THE ANIMALS OF PROLIFERATION
TO FOLLOW THE PROCESS OF PROLIFERATION LEADS TO AN ANTIPARODISTIC VIEW
OF LIFE
TO BECOME BIG (TO GROW) IS ANTIPARODISTIC
A HOUSE IS A GROWN PRODUCT
TO MAKE A HOUSE IS TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE PROPORTION OF GROWTH
THE UNKNOWN AND THE UNCOMMUNICABLE ARE INSIDE THE HOUSE
A HOUSE IS A PROPORTION BETWEEN MAN AND A WASTE OF NATURE
IS A WHOLE A MOVEMENT OF DETACHED PIECES OR DOES IT REPRESENT A TOTALITY?
ARE HOUSES A SUM OF SPACES OR A LIVING PROLIFERATION?
IS REALITY MADE OF DETACHED PIECES OR IS IT COMPLETE?
DO YOU GO AROUND THE HOUSES OR DO THE HOUSES GO AROUND YOU?

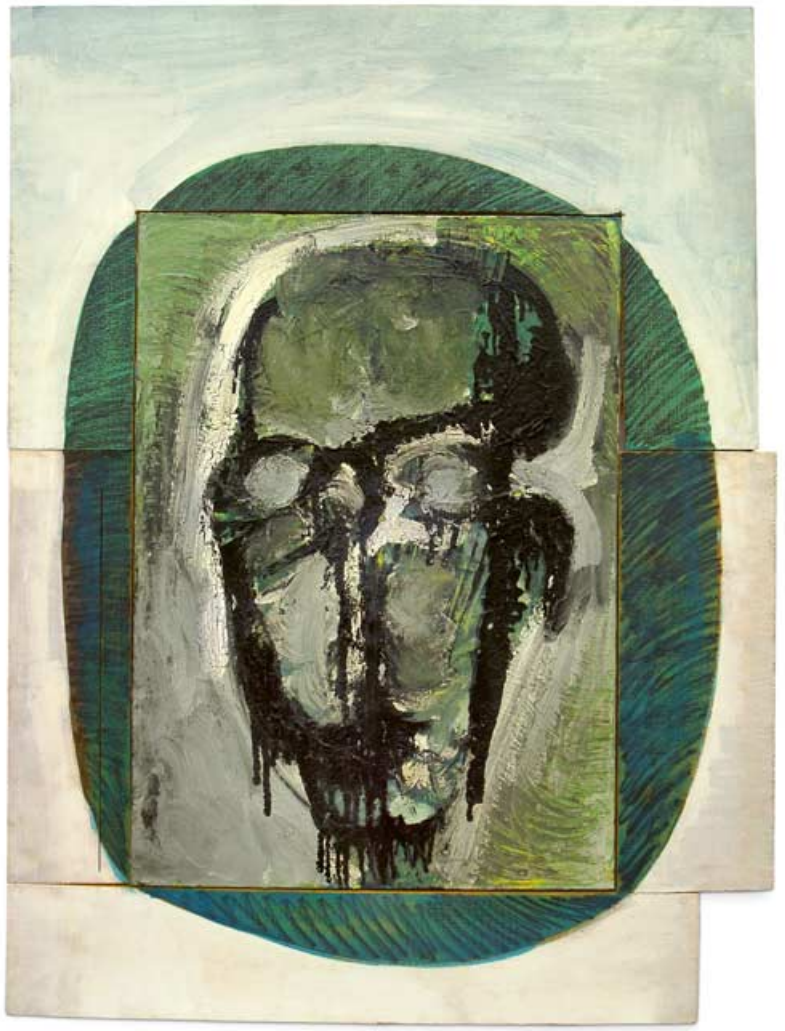
Look for the first house
Look for the semispherical house
Look for the perfect model of the idea of house
Look, it is there, among the dead branches dragged from the woodland
a perfect idea, impossible to do, an idea born
    in the midst of the “impossibility” to do anything
    that is not perfectly related to making money
    or the tradition of one-way knowledge.
Look “outside” of money-making
Look “outside” the tradition of one-way knowledge
    for the first house, or the last house, the first that is aware that
    the house must be built “outside” of making money and “outside” of
    the tradition of one-way knowledge, the first house launched in the
    semispherical, semi-real, semi-Western, semi-conscious. semi-gloss,
    semi-electrical movement.
Look for the abandoned house in the field odorous of the sea
    only science without witnesses
    in life covered with false testimony
The house with the fingers in the rock of the sea
Look with the pink fingers in the water for the cochlea in the
    continuous meal of the seaweeds
that move endlessly on the floor of your house,
    the endless meal—motion of the seaweeds.

UNTITLED
1952
Mixed media on canvas
129.5 x 90 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

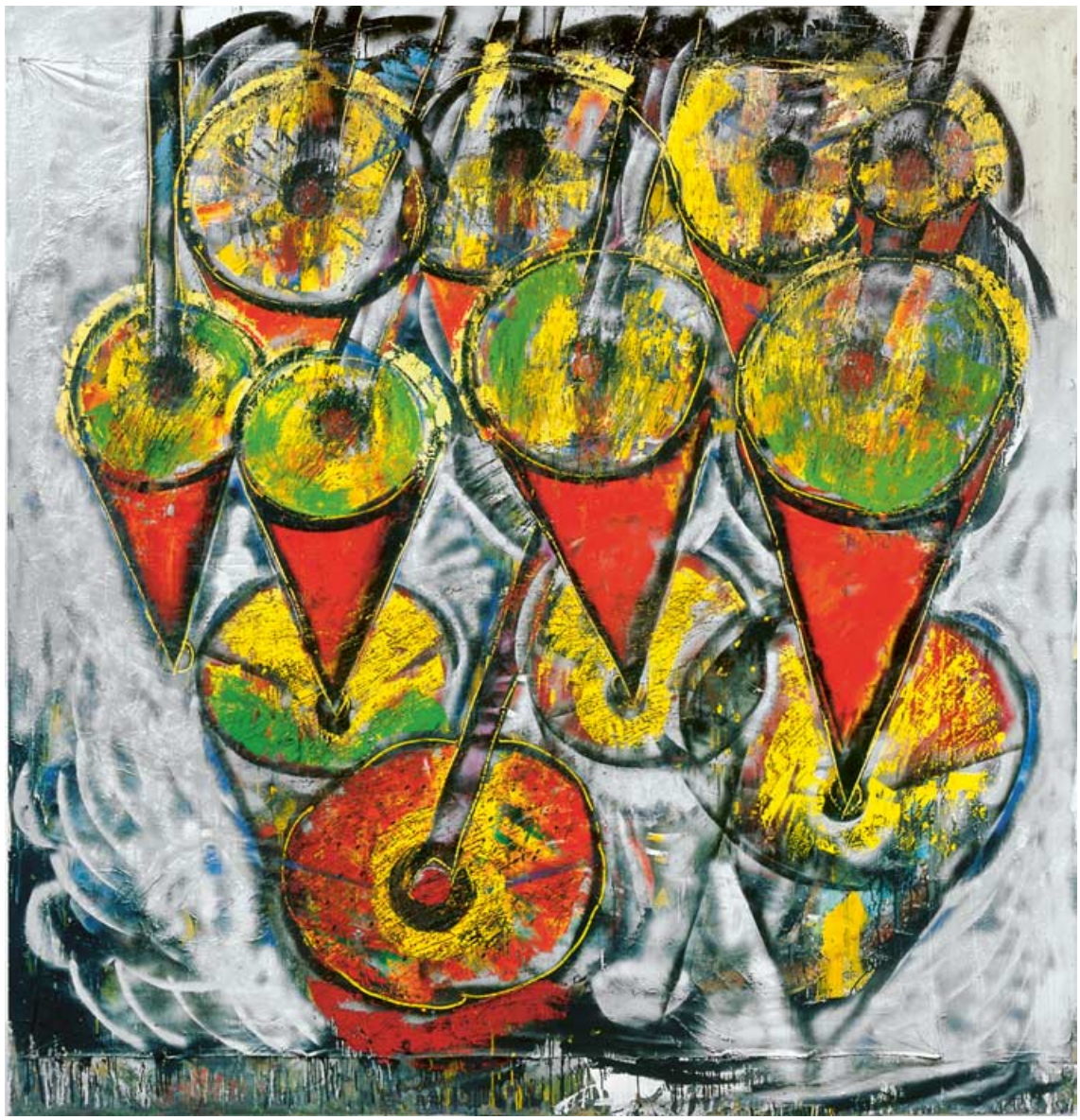
CONTADINO
[Peasant]
1954
Mixed media on canvas
110 x 130 cm
Private collection, Turin



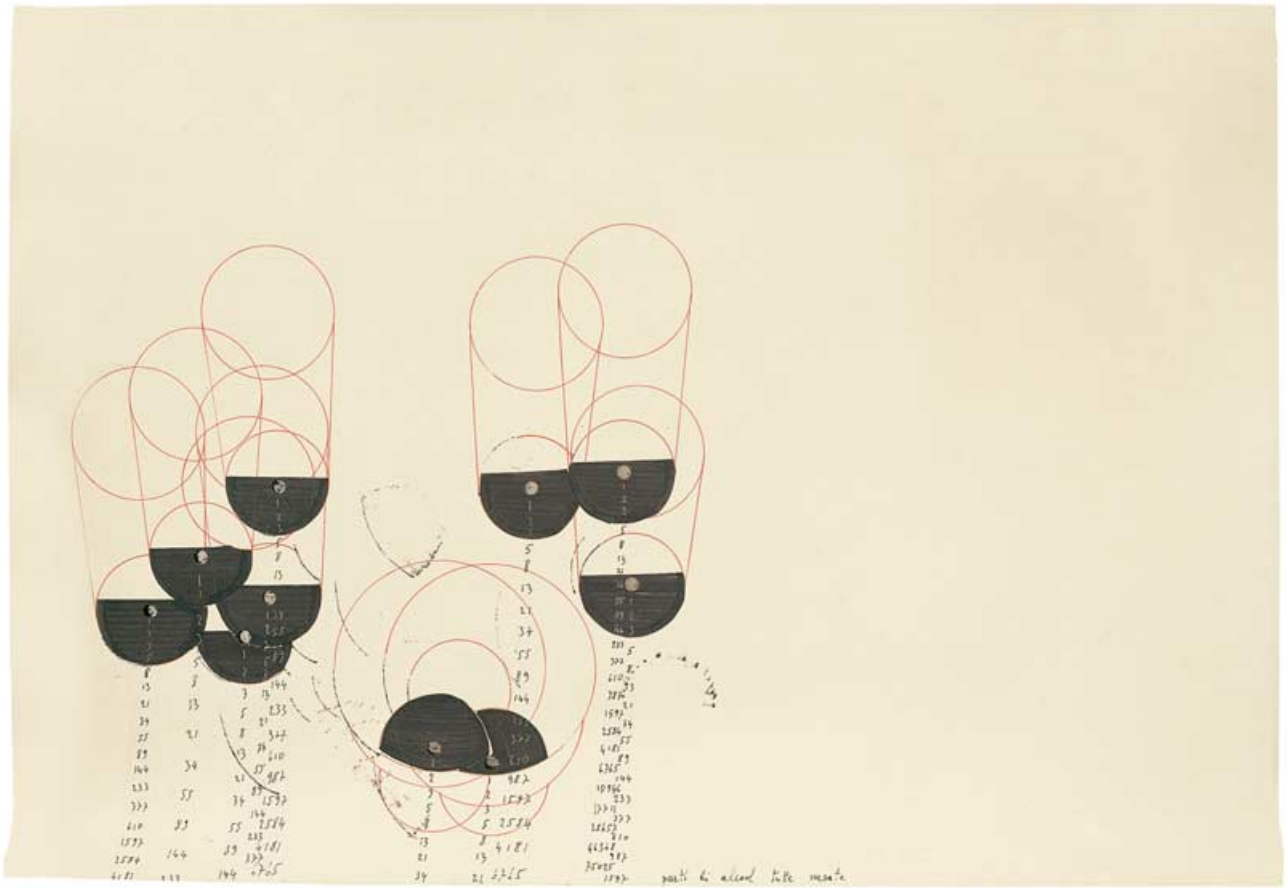
FACCIA ROSSA E VERDE
[Red and green face]
1955
Mixed media on wood
122 x 118 cm
Merz Collection, Turin



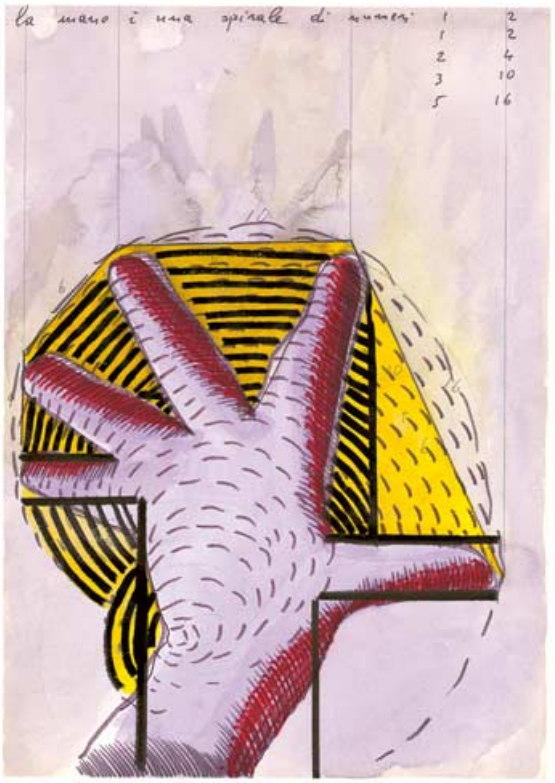
UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on wood and canvas
153 x 114 cm
Merz Collection, Turin



UNTITLED
1984
Mixed media on panel
278 x 265.5 cm
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

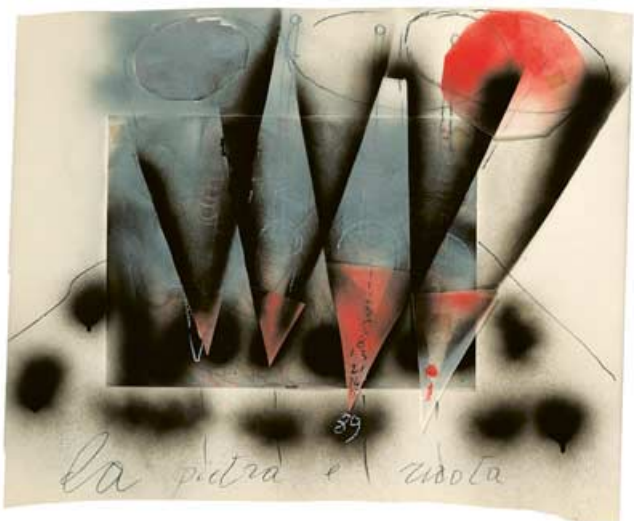


PARTI DI ALCOOL TUTTE VERSATE
[Pieces of alcohol all poured]
1970
Felt-tip pen and ink on paper
70 x 100 cm
Private collection



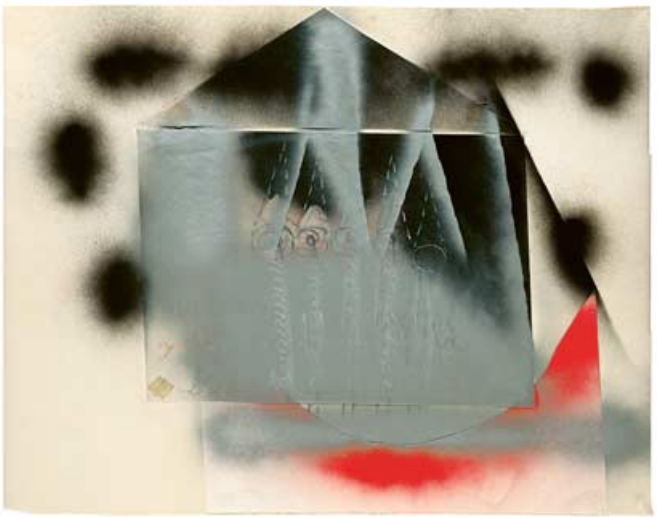
UNTITLED
1973
Felt-tip pen and india ink on paper
33.5 x 23.8 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

SPIRALE DEI TAVOLI - DA UNA TAVOLA PER 1 PERSONA
ALLA TAVOLA PER 55 PERSONE
[Spiral of tables—From a table for 1 person to a table for 55 people]
1974
Enamel, pencil, india ink on paper
70 x 70 cm
Private collection, Germany



UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

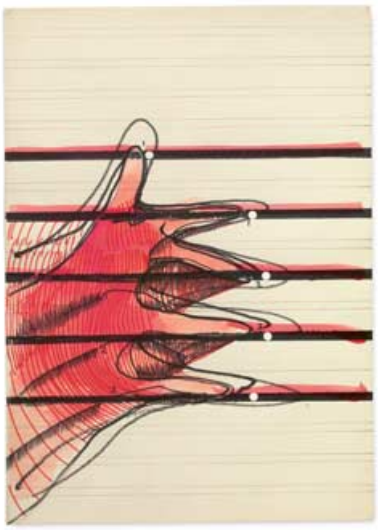


UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin



UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Alessandra e Paolo Barillari Collection

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

water gives and receives memories
water sets the course of the cardinal directions
becomes the cardinal directions
water is a memory and infinite memories
in this case memories directions memorials
south north east west:
they are only 4

a sculpture

to start out on a long period of immobility
is a way of feeling that i don't recommend
cherish the period reserved for yourself
parallel with the forms of action
words are the quantity
one word holds it all together

expansion of foliage
while the drop lasts

you do it on purpose to tell me
the dissolution is no use

the dissolving object does not cast a shadow

i wait twenty minutes for the drop to disappear

the drop leaves its mark before falling

see
in a long snapshot
the drop has taken shape

we are sheltered

the quantity of drops
is a single, solitary, and unique thought

solitary too
is the dissolution in flight

as a covering
welcome the foliage
because it has a tree-like shape

warmth compresses the foliage's form
cold revives in quality in quality

what is one to do to avoid having too many things to do
which are of no use?

the forms space of the notations of the drops
and of their horizontal notations

domain of horizontality

round stick from a branch
from an enormous quantity of leaves
like a finger from a branch
primitive and future

decide

how much does a drop cost?

parsimonious
about to dissolve
useful
so near
and comprehensible
in its form

has a slow velocity in sliding

to fall in automatic velocity

it takes little to remain suspended

in itself, to let itself go

will there be a drop tomorrow too?

for now it falls again
and resumes its shape

the complex of society

no answer
laugh
answer

The bizarre is in the tangle of things seen in the organic world.

In the organic world it is difficult to find the rules of art.

The red mask of maturation.

A generation of antiorganics grows on the organic surface of the earth.

In the organic world it is difficult to find the rules of geometry.

To find the rules that are revealed and do not remain hidden.

To insert directly in the work organisms belonging to the organic kingdom like the branches of plants.

A powerful monster has emerged, continuous motion or at least the idea that we can form of continuous motion.

Continuous motion with mechanical objects, such as electricity.

I have always thought that electricity is an organic product revealed in formulae of mechanical force.

A generation of antiorganics that easily use all that can be a mechanical facility in the countryside grows visibly on the organic surface of the earth, but the fascination of the unknown appeals to the same persons who want at bottom to ignore it.

Absurdly, geology interests those who have never been touched by anything interesting, while in art, or in thought, the things become continuously complicated in which something interesting can easily lurk, like a worm growing in the soil. The only authentic but absolutely necessary condition for survival beyond all the tedium of nothingness is precisely this worm that is formed without knowing how.

the condition to rid yourself of the certainty
on which is based the temptation to consider
determined
the mastery of your own being as a poet or painter
the condition was that of not being occupied with demonstrating
the prevalence
of the mode of being the velocity of it all
of your own legs
the velocity of the word the velocity of the
following ones
to make means not to be prepared
to develop pressure to develop
not method
but always and only knowledge of velocity
to pray and hope to be still in the world of the planets
it is of little use to be to show
memory is the knowledge
is the conjugation of the project
because project
is negation or only space
try to believe that the planet
does not make it we will see some interesting things
that is the condition of excluding painting
for me it has never existed

so there is no need of certainty
grass is a sign of the planet not a sign of painting

knowledge
the precision to name
to make
make
painter in africa
to make in relation to not making
to be born is common to all
not to make is the thing that reinvigorates
to name
to produce seems to drive but to drive is the velocity of the
lion this is why i made the lion
to produce paper the paintings are fast

the brain is the parenthesis between velocity and slowness

to make make and to make the painting not before
painter in africa does not mean knowledge of africa
architecture and knowledge of being on earth on the planet
not to ask when you were born to ask when you were able
to make the first painting without obsession
put on the music and continue
make sure that the painting is music
paper not on sale
black paper means color black which means
knowledge of the night
go on further
go on further

the tower is our tower but also the fact that it is so social, so social, more social than a heap
of stones because in the tower the stones are arranged to form a tower
the world is full of rebuses
we are full of the orient
in our divergences
divisions determinations
honest disenchantments, departures
and in general, travels of travelers even if uncertain
of the roots they are the neighbor desire for existence
desires in general
the element
is the magma divided into elements
remains physical, one, tap water too

river water is the music that flows

To draw the consequences from what cannot stand still

The work is bearable as long as it is not finished, the image is in formation.

It is not seen before
it is not seen afterwards
it is seen while it is formed
What is seen at the end is already a marvelous object
The inner eye
sees afar
down and satellite

Mathematical gazes cross
shiny leaves cross

As in human history, there are swords everywhere and
they all look the same

The table is divided into five parts
has an acute angle and therefore a penetrating point
and a tail that fans out.
and the table in reality is in perspective with two opposite corners,
but their angles are not the same, as in most
agricultural fields

To design with indistinct aims
To communicate with distant leaves

Every stone seems to want to be both insignificant and significant at the same time

A hand can turn in the air
A stone can turn in the air

The wrinkles of the leaves are geometry

The leaves are schematic too but the mass of foliage is numerically staggering

A house of stone that spins around on its axis reveals the quantity of stones
suspended that are piled one on top of another

Beneath it the river appears as an organic mirage

A heap of branches arranged vertically reveals the countryside the road the sky and
the force of number
A thought fragment makes a complete circuit of the world of fragments until it
returns as an awaited fragment just as the first moon of august is awaited every
year. The thought fragment has disappeared in the meantime

Numerical abstraction seems to have
a distant and cheerful source like
a light by night
Pythagoras is certainly more cheerful than Isaiah
But Isaiah is more cheerful than doctor Freud
But Freud opens
Isaiah closes and Pythagoras
sails provocatively above
the submarines

repetition exalts in the light
and is extinguished

8 meters of wall for Marisa
8 times Marisa high

no it's not a social story
things are fine this way

smooth (and) wrinkled
opaque (and) transparent
slender (and) mighty
always and by itself

if you make a bottle
you will make it double
immediately after triple, and later yet
more fragmented
until the cluster predominates

reeds with bright telephone
stones with sky blue radar and corners
and with dark shadow

luminous quadrants
reeds with telephone

time up for the word
the word has run out
does not create proverbs
does not create prayers
does not create itself
in view of
it only makes the sound
of the hen
in the farmyard
it is a gurgling
and the eyes
precede it
the gullet
is its end
and not the mind

the destructive action of the wind
is an action in infinite and finite directions:
thus
the direction of the roof
the direction of the tree
at the peak
the direction of the cylinder of the tree
superarmored
the direction of infinity
100 and 200
and three hundred blades of grass
that run in one direction
the direction
of the shadow
of the column
which is at an acute angle
to the direction
of its wind
the direction
of the shadow
of the gentleman with the tunic
of mister Piero della Francesca
the direction of the water
rippled by wind
and direction
the direction of the smoke
that races across the street
with the firemen

who drive and work
the direction
of the dust of the fields
and from the fields it arrives
and runs in direction
direction
is a drift passing
naturally and unnaturally
at the same time all the lagoons
of rice
the eye directs

LIST OF WORKS

UNTITLED
1952
Mixed media on canvas
129.5 x 90 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

CONTADINO
[Peasant]
1954
Mixed media on canvas
110 x 130 cm
Private collection, Turin

FACCIA ROSSA E VERDE
[Red and green face]
1955
Mixed media on wood
122 x 118 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

IMPERMEABILE
[Raincoat]
1963–1978
Raincoat, wood, neon
222 x 135 x 28 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands
P. 65

SALAMINO
[Small salami]
1966–1967
Wool blanket, neon
120 x 15 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin
P. 68

CITTÀ IRREALE
[Unreal city]
1968
Metal structure, metal net, beeswax, neon, transformer
110 x 62 x 10 cm
Private collection / Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz
P. 69

CHE FARE?
[What is to be done]
1968–1973
Aluminum, beeswax, neon
12.5 x 66.8 x 19.1 cm
ARTIST ROOMS
Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Acquired jointly through the d'Offay Donation with assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art Fund 2008

CONO
[Cone]
ca. 1967
Willow
221 x 129.5 x 129.5 cm
Tate. Purchased 1983
P. 82

IGLOO DI GIAP
[Giap's Igloo]
1968
Metal structure, plastic bags of clay soil, neon, batteries, accumulators
120 x 200 cm
Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle Centre Pompidou, Paris
P. 73

IGLOO (TENDA DI GHEDDAFI)
[Igloo (Qaddafi's tent)]
1968–1981
Metal structure, mixed media on jute
240 x 500 cm
Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin
P. 72

SCIOPERO GENERALE AZIONE POLITICA RELATIVA PROCLAMATA RELATIVAMENTE ALL'ARTE
[General strike political action relative proclaimed relatively to art]
1970
Neon, plexiglass
10 x 535 x 10 cm
Merz Collection, Turin
Pp. 76-77

IGLOO FIBONACCI
1970
Brass pipes, steel hinge, 8 marble slabs with adhesive tape and white numbers
180 x 260 cm
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
P. 87

PARTI DI ALCOOL TUTTE VERSATE
[Pieces of alcohol all poured]
1970
Felt-tip pen and ink on paper
70 x 100 cm
Private collection

FIBONACCI NAPOLI (FABBRICA A SAN GIOVANNI A TEDUCCIO)
[Fibonacci Napoli (Factory in San Giovanni a Teduccio)]
1971
Black-and-white photograph, neon, transformer
Variable dimensions, 10 photographs of 20 x 30 cm each
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Pp. 94-96

UNTITLED
1973
Felt-tip pen and india ink on paper
33.5 x 23.8 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

PER I TAVOLI
[For the tables]
1974
Mixed media on canvas
280 x 370 cm
Angelo Baldassarre Collection, Bari
Pp. 66-67

LE GAMBE
[The legs]
1978
Metal, black chalk, acrylic paint, neon, transformer on canvas, heather branches
250 x 280 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Pp. 70-71

UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
1978
Enamel, charcoal, pencil, ink on paper
40 x 50 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

PICCOLO CAIMANO
[Little caiman]
1979
Stuffed caiman, neon
Variable dimensions, caiman 56 cm
Private collection
Pp. 74-75

RINOCERONTE
[Rhinoceros]
1979
Mixed media on canvas, neon
291 x 435 cm
Private collection, Madrid
Colección particular, Madrid
Pp. 80-81

NOI GIRIAMO INTORNO ALLE CASE O LE CASE GIRANO INTORNO A NOI?
[Do we go around houses, or do houses go around us?]
1982
Charcoal and spray paint on vellum sheets on bamboo and clay poles
434 x 333 x 351 cm
Sperone Westwater, New York
P. 86

UNTITLED
1982
Mixed media on canvas, neon
180 x 540 cm
Giorgio Persano, Turin
Pp. 78-79

PITTORE IN AFRICA
[Painter in Africa]
1983
Metal pipes, metal net, neon
300 x 260 x 37 cm
Anne & Wolfgang Titze Collection
P. 90

UNTITLED
1984
Mixed media on panel
278 x 265.5 cm
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

LA GOCCIA D'ACQUA
[The drop of water]
1987
Metal structure, glass, neon, bucket, rubber tube, water
80 x 2640 x 445 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie
Pp. 88-89

DÉCLARATION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET DU CITOYEN
[Declaration of human and citizen rights]
1989
Metal structure, mixed media on canvas, newspapers, neon
287 x 287 x 190 cm
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf
Acquired in 2004, formerly Collection Ackermans
P. 91

TAVOLO A SPIRALE
[Spiral table]
1989
Metal structure, glass, Marisa Merz's wax violins
75 x 900 cm
Merz Collection, Turin
Pp. 92-93

CASA SULLA FORESTA
[House in the woods]
1989
Metal structure, metal net, rubber, beeswax, neon, bundled branches
102 x 260 x 120 cm
Merz Collection, Turin
P. 83

UNTITLED
1998
Collage on Folex
7 panels, 150 x 340 cm each
Merz Collection, Turin
Pp. 84-85

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on wood and canvas
153 x 114 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Colección Merz, Turín

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
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Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Merz Collection, Turin

UNTITLED
Undated
Mixed media on paper
67.5 x 47.5 cm
Alessandra e Paolo Barillari Collection

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pittore in Africa

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