

Mario Merz



Mario Merz (1925-2003) was born in Milan. During World War II he abandoned pursuit of a degree in medicine to join the anti-fascist movement “Giustizia e Libertà” (Justice and Freedom). In 1945 he was arrested while leafletting and spent a year in Turin’s prison where he executed numerous experimental drawings, made without ever removing the pencil point from the paper. He had his first solo exhibition in 1954, at the Galleria La Bussola in Turin. Beginning in the mid-1960s his desire to work with the idea of the transmission of energy from the organic to the inorganic led him to create works where neon pierces objects of everyday use, such as an umbrella, a glass, a bone or his own raincoat. In 1967, critic Germano Celant coined the term “Arte Povera” and included

Merz among the proponents of the new language. Merz’s first solo museum show in the United States was at the Walker Art Center in 1972, followed by a retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in 1989, and a survey at MoCA, Los Angeles, also in 1989. Major exhibitions of the artist’s work include Museum Folkwang, Essen (1979), Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (1979), Whitechapel, London (1980), Kunsthalle, Basel (1975, 1981), Palazzo dei Congressi, San Marino (1983), Kunsthhaus, Zurich (1985), Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art (1990), and the Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice (2015). Merz’s numerous honors included the Laurea honoris causa (2001) and the Praemium Imperiale (2003). His work can be found in numerous public and private collections worldwide including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Art Institute of Chicago; ARTIST ROOMS, National Galleries of Scotland and Tate; La Caixa Contemporary Art Collection; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Herbert Foundation, Ghent; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.

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Mario Merz
Selected Press

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Sam, Sherman. "Critics' Pick: Museum of Cycladic Art." *artforum.com* (*Artforum*), December 2015.

ARTFORUM

"Numbers are prehistoric," a small, thoughtful first survey of Mario Merz in Greece—curated by Paolo Colombo, presented by NEON—begins with *Lumaca*, 1970, a video by Gerry Schum of Merz drawing a spiral emanating from a snail, expanding the line of its shell into real space/time. This piece, installed on a table with bundles of branches behind it, forms part of the installation *Foresta con video sul sentiero*, (Forest with video on a path), 1995. Together they illustrate the notion of the progressive Fibonacci sequence (a mathematical theory that resembles many growth patterns in nature), an idea that underpins much of Merz's aesthetic philosophy.



Mario Merz, *Pittore in Africa* (Painter in Africa), 1983, neon, 193 x 6".

Imprisoned in 1945 for anti-Fascist activity, Merz began to draw. This exhibition manages to tease out the political aspect of Merz's thinking through a scholarly display of works on paper that usually combine both writing and drawing. One wall is emblazoned with a series of statements, beginning with "1 Freedom to read in prison" and counting in 12 statements through the Fibonacci sequence to "144 Freedom not to believe a generalization."

Merz's neons are more direct in terms of the politics of protest; a sharp contrast from the more poetic qualities of his other works. For example, *Sciopero Generale* (General Strike), 1970, is a line of white and red neon that states "General strike relative political action proclaimed relatively to art," with the words "relative" and "relative to art" in red—thus highlighting a sense of urgency. And his response to discovering the lack of African artists exhibiting in the Venice Biennale was to create the eponymous neon, *Pittore in Africa* (Painter in Africa), 1983, an emphatic gesture of solidarity with the unknown artists on that continent.

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Shaw, Anny. "First museum exhibition in Greece for Italian Arte Povera artist Mario Merz."
theartnewspaper.com (The Art Newspaper), 26 October 2015.



THE ART NEWSPAPER



Mario Merz, installation view, Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens (2015) © Natalia Tsoukala

The Italian Arte Povera artist Mario Merz's first ever exhibition in a Greek museum opened on 22 October in Athens. The show has been organised by Neon, a non-profit organisation founded by the Greek collector Dimitris Daskalopoulos, and the Fondazione Merz, which is preparing to publish the artist's first catalogue raisonné, dedicated solely to Merz's igloo sculptures, next autumn.

One igloo work, *Igloo con albero* (1969-2002), is also included in the exhibition. Merz first started creating the domed structures in 1968 as a way of expressing his pre-occupation with the fundamental needs of existence—shelter, food and man's relationship to nature. The circular shape of the igloo also relates to Merz's long-held fascination with mathematical sequences, particularly the Fibonacci spiral, an exponential series of numbers that underlies the growth patterns of natural life.

"Mario Merz made nature, numbers and politics co-exist, he is one of the most insightful social critics of the public realm," says Elina Kountouri, the director of Neon. "His work resonates with the turbulent situation in Greece over the past five years, where the whole value system has been re-examined. Merz could never have predicted how instructive his work would be in today's polarised Europe."

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A large section of the show is dedicated to Merz's writings, which are treated for the first time as fully part of his artistic output. Neon writings, paintings and drawings are also included in "Mario Merz: Numbers are prehistoric," which is open at the Museum of Cycladic Art until 31 January 2016.

Tasini, Laura. "Searching for Magic: An Unconventional Itinerary at the Venice Biennale and Collateral Events." *Sculpture*, December 2015, pp. 14-15.



Searching For Magic: An Unconventional Itinerary at the Venice Biennale and Collateral Events

by Laura Tansini

We begin at Mario Merz's exhibition "Città irreale" ("Unreal City") at the Galleria dell'Accademia di Venezia. Made with primary materials (wax, wood, iron, and cloth), Merz's works communicate dynamism, infinity, and energy, transmitting a cosmological connection to the universe. Because of these properties, his works need to breathe and should be shown in a wide-open space, which the Accademia galleries could not provide. On the other hand, the works selected by curator Bartolomeo Pietromarchi are so strong and meaningful that they speak for themselves.

"Città irreale" opened with seminal works of the 1960s and

'70s representing the strong ethical and political tensions in Merz's idea of a shared society balanced between nature and culture. Ranging from everyday objects to habitats based on the igloo—which Merz called "an ideal organic shape suitable to resist the force of reality itself"—these works explore relationships with architecture and the city in a cosmological perspective.

The first room featured three works from the '60s (not easily seen). In *Città Irreale* (1968), Merz quotes a verse from T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land." The artist constantly used written words. Here, the neon writing underlines his thoughts about

urban dimensions: "All our cities are unreal and suspended in the void." It sounds cryptic, but Merz is Merz and cannot be "translated" or explained. *Impermeable* (*Raincoat*, 1966), one of his first multimedia works, was installed nearby.

A small room contained *Verso lo Zenith* (*Toward Zenith*, 1985), its magically ascending double spiral rising from a base of wax and wood. The spiral movement generates an upward and downward flow (negative and positive) that throws us into infinity. Merz developed his ideas about the principles governing space in different ways, asking, among other things: Is space curved or

Mario Merz, *74 gradini riappaiono in una crescita di geometria concentrica*, 1992. Stone and iron, view of installation at the Accademia.

straight? I was bewitched and found it difficult to leave this work.

The main gallery contained the large-scale *Spirale di cera* (*Wax Spiral*, 1970–81), which began life as an installation for the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, designed by Mies van der Rohe. This work means to reach beyond the confines of surrounding space. It strikes a balance between implosion and explosion, creating a space "in motion" that contrasts with rigid and static architecture, as well as the order and limits of a museum. Instead, Merz introduces proliferation and primordial forces, the governing principles of growth in nature.

All of the 14 exhibited works deserved pause and deep reflection, helping us to penetrate into Merz's cosmological world. The show ended in the courtyard of the Accademia with a large installation of eight igloos: *74 gradini riappaiono in una crescita di geometria concentrica* (74 steps reappear growing in concentric geometry, 1992). The 74 steps, which have lost their "aim," become the temporary bases of eight igloos outlined by bars of iron bent into arches. These are nomadic structures that seem to generate themselves from the stones. An architecture that is an environment, not only space but also place, this installation is the *real unreal city*, a metaphysical and surreal place where nature and culture find synthesis and balance.

Holman, Martin. "Mario Merz." *Art Monthly*, November 2014, p. 24.

| Reviews | Exhibitions |

Mario Merz

Pace Gallery London 26 September to 8 November

'The space grows like a bunch of grapes,' wrote Mario Merz in 1974, referring to the installation he was making with tables in a London pub for his second exhibition at Jack Wendler's gallery. The number seated at each table increased in stages not in a linear fashion, one by one, but in accordance with the Fibonacci series devised by a medieval monk to reflect rapid and controllable patterns of proliferation in certain living entities. Since each figure in the sequence is the sum of the two preceding it, totals grow with ferocious speed ad infinitum. Merz had adopted the sequence not only as a reminder that man is one unit in the mass of society at large but also as a metaphor for the ultimate power and abundance of nature. Numbers, Merz wrote in 1971, 'pour space into a larger space which is infinite space'.

There are at least two sensations that one expects from a show surveying the career of Merz. The first is a strong feeling for the relationship of humans with things in the world, and the other is the nearly tangible rhythm, as in respiration, of concentration and expansion that is simultaneously organic and conceptual. This fusion of nature and thought characterises Merz's most arresting work.

In this exhibition, the first comprehensive selection in London of the artist's principal themes since 1993, *Double Spiral*, 1985, provides an elegant, compressed expression of a stream of possible meanings that impinge powerfully on the surrounding space. The two vertical spirals in iron make apparent the incessant flow of energy upon which Merz based his philosophy of art and life. The spiral represents the progressive movement of nature that pulses forward and back to its own centre. Its twinned forms echo the double-helix molecular DNA structure that places all living organisms in a single biological series.

'Thought expresses itself in spirals,' Germano Celant has quoted Merz as remarking and, from his earliest wartime drawings, the artist used a propulsive, sometimes continuous line in his work on canvas and paper of looping or spiralling contours. This gesture seems to flush out the meaning of images as they grow through a process of accretion. Layers of thin and thick marks, sometimes sprayed and often painted in reflective media, bring vibrancy to the surface, as in *Pyramid*, 1997-2000, one of several large-scale paintings in this show tacked, as Merz preferred, directly to the gallery walls. Rolling strokes in ink and varnish outline a crude igloo-like shape that arches round finer, curving gestures in coloured pastels which graphically weave the central tower motif against a metallic ground that in turn luminesces in the ambient light with a dull sheen.

The igloo entered Merz's vocabulary in 1968 and is the sculptural

form with which he is most associated. The main gallery of this exhibition is dominated by *Movements of the Earth and the Moon on an Axis*, made on a monumental scale in 2003, the year Merz died. This archetypal shape has burgeoned into three hemispheres, the largest of which is clad in glass panes buttressed at floor level by slabs of clay still in their supplier's wrapping. Inside, a smaller igloo is pierced diagonally by tall wands of neon as if to liberate the energy contained within the object. That smaller circumference has expanded into the adjacent structures, the second of which is largely enclosed by irregularly shaped sheets of marble clamped to the metal framework. The visitor orbits the perimeter and glimpses through gaps another deviated power source: the transformer's power cable that snakes into a hole in the floor.

The igloo freed Merz, originally a painter, from the archaic conventions of two-dimensional planes to orchestrate an independent space. More artefact than artwork, it was unencumbered by art history; a token of primitive technology, it was equally a powerful emblem of physical growth and mental development. Meanings proliferate as Merz, trusting the subconscious, supplanted narrative with an enigmatic indeterminacy that is a constant throughout his mature production. His cyclical thought patterns were calculated to evade rationalisation.

The archetypes of igloo, table and number system mostly emerged in the period from 1968 to 1972 when Merz contributed to the first, classic shows of Arte Povera. Indeed, in 1969, Celant chose the igloo for the cover of the Italian edition of his seminal book about the movement (although Walter de Maria was preferred for the English and German versions). These typologies aligned the present moment with a collective mythic heritage or, as Merz expressed it in 1967, 'this is how one can enter into the rhythm of how things were yesterday and how things are today, something which, however, from the fact of being, is already tomorrow'. It is precisely because Merz's poetic allusion to primordial origins was permeated with a critical but unaggressive confrontation with modern preoccupations with waste and consumption that his work remains astonishingly contemporary.

This exhibition dutifully gathers instances of archetypes to emphasise their significance, although not always with the best examples. There are tables, but a painted sequence on canvas; an iguana, but in acrylic, ink and pencil; and even a raincoat, but a collage that is no match for the iconic neon-crossed garment from 1967. Upstairs, in *A Work, a Measure of Land that gives a Very Earthly Portrait*, 1987, brittle bundles of vine branches are packed like a coiled volute within a cordon of inert concrete kerb stones. Moderated by square flat tablets of mutable wax, the combination articulates rather meekly the volatile dualities of texture, culture and time, of permanence and decay, that powered notions of transformation in more resonant assemblages.

For Merz, words embodied the boldest transitions, between the physical object and the immaterial idea, so text is this otherwise stimulating show's most regrettable omission. Language had potential substance for Merz, who incorporated meditative phrases, typically in his cursive handwriting linked in neon (a token of himself), into structures from 1968 onwards to explore relationships between reading, writing and mental distortion, and between perceptions drawn from sight and thought. The dynamic progression implicit in Merz's use of script is, however, implied in *Line*, 1991, a large canvas suspended from a steel framework. Onto the support Merz drew in outline curving seed forms and stitched numerals in clear neon tubing that glow with a bluish light as totals accelerate in an ascending Fibonacci sequence. 'People know,' Merz said in 1971, 'that... numbers can go into infinity while objects are finite. Numbers are the vitality of the world.' ■

MARTIN HOLMAN is a writer based in London and Florence.

Mario Merz
*Movements of the
Earth and the Moon on
an Axis* 2003



“Mario Merz.” *Elephant*, Autumn 2014, p. 26.

PACE GALLERY
LONDON

MARIO MERZ
28 SEPT-8 NOV

‘Space is curved, the earth is curved, everything on earth is curved.’

One often thinks of men of that generation, who lived through WWII as young adults, as having a different, harder fiber, a more robust presence and, not being, like us, or like our fathers even, victims of the vast distracting forces of mass media, a less scattered energy—not to mention the wrist-twisting handshakes. Mario Merz (1925-2003, and who was imprisoned during WWII) would belong in that category—or at least his work would, which bears certain of the hallmarks of the Arte Povera movement (both in terms of materials and aesthetics), but also transcends it. Each piece still glows with the creative energy of the periods and movements it embraced (in the seventies in particular) but also with the iconicity and staying power of a major individual voice, both wrist-and-soul twisting.

This is one of the treats of this autumn in London: an opportunity to enjoy the work of the groundbreaking Italian artist Mario Merz. Note that, rather disconcertingly, this is the artist’s first show in the capital since 1993.

www.pacegallery.com

Right
Movements of the Earth and the Moon on an Axis, 2003
Mario Merz
Triple igloo
Metal, tubes, glass, stone, neon, clamps, clay. View 1.



© MARIO MERZ BY SIAE COURTESY FONDAZIONE MERZ

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Dama, Francesco. "Beyond the Igloo: Mario Merz in London." *hyperallergic.com* (*Hyperallergic*), 30 October 2014.

HYPERALLERGIC



Mario Merz, "Spostamenti della Terra e della Luna su un asse" ("Movements of the Earth and the moon on a axis") (2003), metal tubes, glass, stone, neon, clamps, clay, 1000 cm x 600 cm x 300 cm (all photos © Mario Merz by SIAE, Courtesy Fondazione Merz unless otherwise indicated)

Among the few Italian contemporary art movements that made a mark on the international scene in 20th century, Arte Povera is probably the most interesting. The term (literally "poor art") was coined by art critic and curator Germano Celant in 1967 to define the poetics of the movement, which focused on the exploration of a wide range of common materials rather than employing the traditional bronze and marble. Wood, paper, wool, rags, twigs, soil, and sand are just some of the unconventional materials used by Arte Povera artists. As the Italian "economic miracle" of the 1950s was fading and the turmoils of the year 1968 were in the air, the movement gathered a dense group of artists that wanted to challenge the commercial system by putting an emphasis on the process of making art.

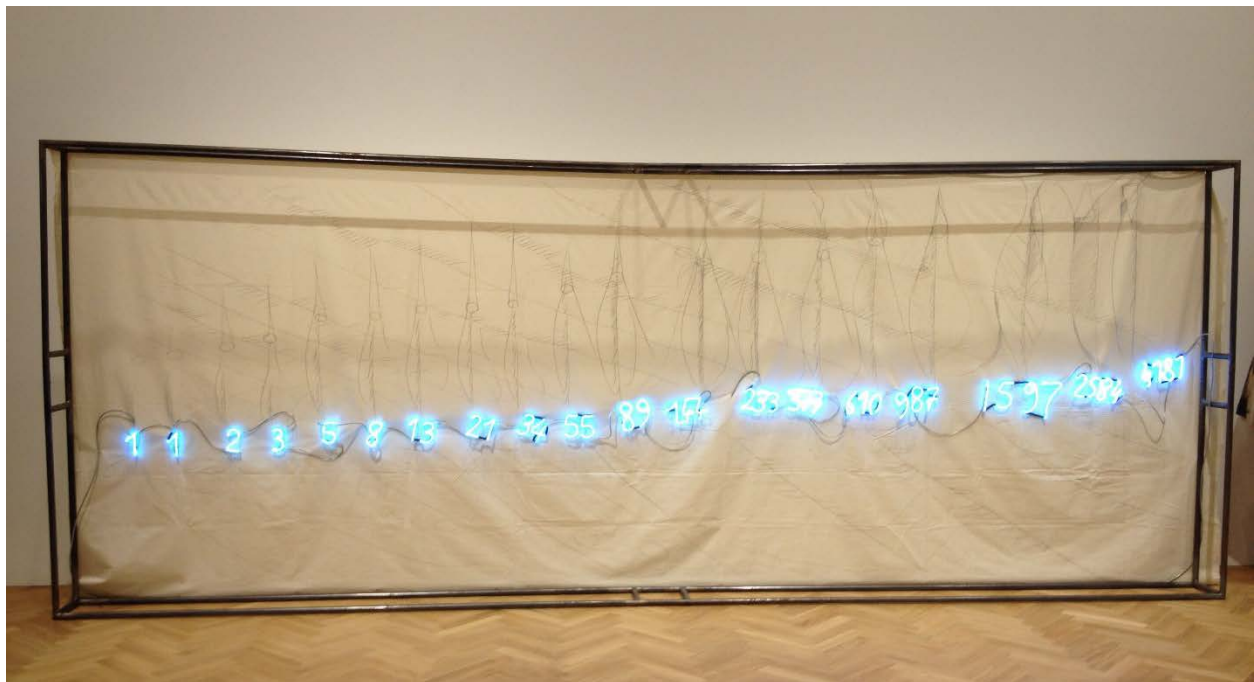
It comes as no surprise that most of those artists were included in the landmark exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, curated by Harald Szeemann at Kunsthalle Bern (Switzerland), in 1969. The aim of that exhibition perfectly suited Arte Povera's intent. Szeemann wanted to elevate the artistic process over its final product, changing the space of the museum into a sort of artist's studio. Among the incredible group of artists featured in the show — including Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Bruce Nauman — there was Arte Povera affiliate Mario Merz.

Pace London, in collaboration with the Fondazione Merz in Turin, has recently inaugurated a significant exhibition of the Italian artist's works from the 1960s to 2003, the year he died. The show has the great merit of displaying iconic works next to lesser-known pieces.

Merz's passion for simple and natural materials is exemplified in the exhibition's centerpiece, "Spostamenti della Terra e della Luna su un Asse" ("Movements of the Earth and the Moon on an Axis") (2003), a three-dome installation and the last of its kind the artist made before his death. Merz began constructing such igloo structures, probably his most renowned works, in the late '60s using a variety of materials. "Spostamenti..." features plates of stone and glass covering two intersecting dome structures that represent the relationship between the Earth and the Moon. The installation features all of the hallmarks of Merz's work. The free-standing structure's plates of glass and stone rest on structures of metal rods and are kept together using clamps and blocks of clay that create tensions and connections between the materials.

The practice of changing materials' properties by placing them in contact with other forces and energies was Merz's central interest. As he once put it:

I work from the emotions I get from the archetypal structure that cancels the material. Then, once I have procured the object I try to take possession of its structure with my hands, arranging it in various positions till I feel it is in unison with me physically...



Mario Merz, "Linea" ("Line") (1991), metal frame, charcoal on canvas, neon, 520 x 200 cm (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

One of his preferred materials for achieving this effect, neon tubes, are another characteristic Merz medium. They are well represented throughout the exhibition.

"Linea" ("Line"), from 1991, depicts in blue neon the first 19 numbers in the Fibonacci sequence — in which each term is determined by the sum of the two previous values. Resonating with universal growth patterns and the form of the spiral, the Fibonacci sequence has become one of Merz's trademark motifs. In

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1971, he made a towering neon version of the sequence at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and subsequently recreated it on top of several Italian landmarks.



Mario Merz, "Doppia spirale (Double spiral)" (1985) iron, 230 cm x 125 cm diameter

The exhibition also includes a series of works on paper and sculptures made of iron that depict spirals and organic forms. They are essential to gaining a fuller appreciation of the artist's practice and help to explain why, half a century later, Arte Povera is perhaps more popular than it's ever been.

There is a whole group of young artists in Italy who, captivated by the Art Povera's emphasis on process, still look to it for inspiration. This exhibition helps make clear why the movement remains fresh to this day, and showcases Merz as one its most enduring figures.

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Cullinan, Nicholas. "Preview: Mario Merz: What is to be done?" *Artforum*, May 2011, p. 152.

LEEDS, UK

"MARIO MERZ: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?"

HENRY MOORE INSTITUTE · July 28–
October 30 · Curated by Lisa Le Feuvre

One of the most politically committed artists associated with Arte Povera, Mario Merz engaged issues of process and proliferation that seem more current than ever, making this focused survey especially timely. The question raised by Merz's numerous versions of the neon sculpture *Che fare?* (What Is to Be Done?), first made around 1968, chimed with the Leninist problematic adopted by Italian students in that tumultuous year. This exhibition promises to move past such polemics to examine instead the radical potentiality inherent in the array of materials Merz employed, with special consideration given to the everyday objects and consumer goods he penetrated with neon. Eschewing Marxist praxis as a lens in favor of artistic practice, the HMI's Le Feuvre has selected key works by Merz from the 1960s and '70s and bracketed them with filmic portraits of the artist by Gerry Schum and Tacita Dean.

—*Nicholas Cullinan*

Artner, Alan G. "Merz's 'humble' art is simply profound." *Chicago Tribune*, 27 March 2008, section 5, p. 3.

ART REVIEW

Merz's 'humble' art is simply profound

By Alan G. Artner
TRIBUNE CRITIC

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Mario Merz's "igloos" — sculptures meant to evoke dwellings of early humans as well as arcs of electrical energy. These pieces by the Milanese sculptor and painter came to stand for Arte Povera, the movement of the '60s and '70s devoted to creating from humble materials. Such art ranked among the most important from Italy in the 20th Century.

Merz was the oldest of the nine artists who worked in diverse styles, exhibiting together under the banner of Arte Povera. And at his death at 78 in 2003, he was called the grand old man of contemporary art in Italy. But unlike his colleague Jannis Kounellis, Merz was not exhibited in great depth in our city, a fact that now gives his small solo exhibition at the Arts Club of Chicago something of the character of an introduction.

Merz began as a painter in the 1950s, and the exhibition shows that, 30 years later, it was to painting he returned, creating images of animals as rough and bold as those found in prehistoric caves. But the painted works here are clearly part of his repertory after the mid-1960s, as eight are components of what looks to be a temporary nomadic dwelling and two more refer to a numerical progression found in



The untitled neon piece from 1971 (rear) gives one of Merz's earliest and clearest statements of the Fibonacci sequence, an ancient numerical formula found in nature.

nature that became a significant basis for his work.

Several of the sculptures on view use wax, which to Merz suggested both the product of a natural process and a material long used artistically in casting. He liked such conjunctions but didn't just leave them at that. In "Lingotto," the purest of the sculptures on show, a thick slab of beeswax is meant to evoke both a bar of gold and the famous yellow Fiat factory in Tur-

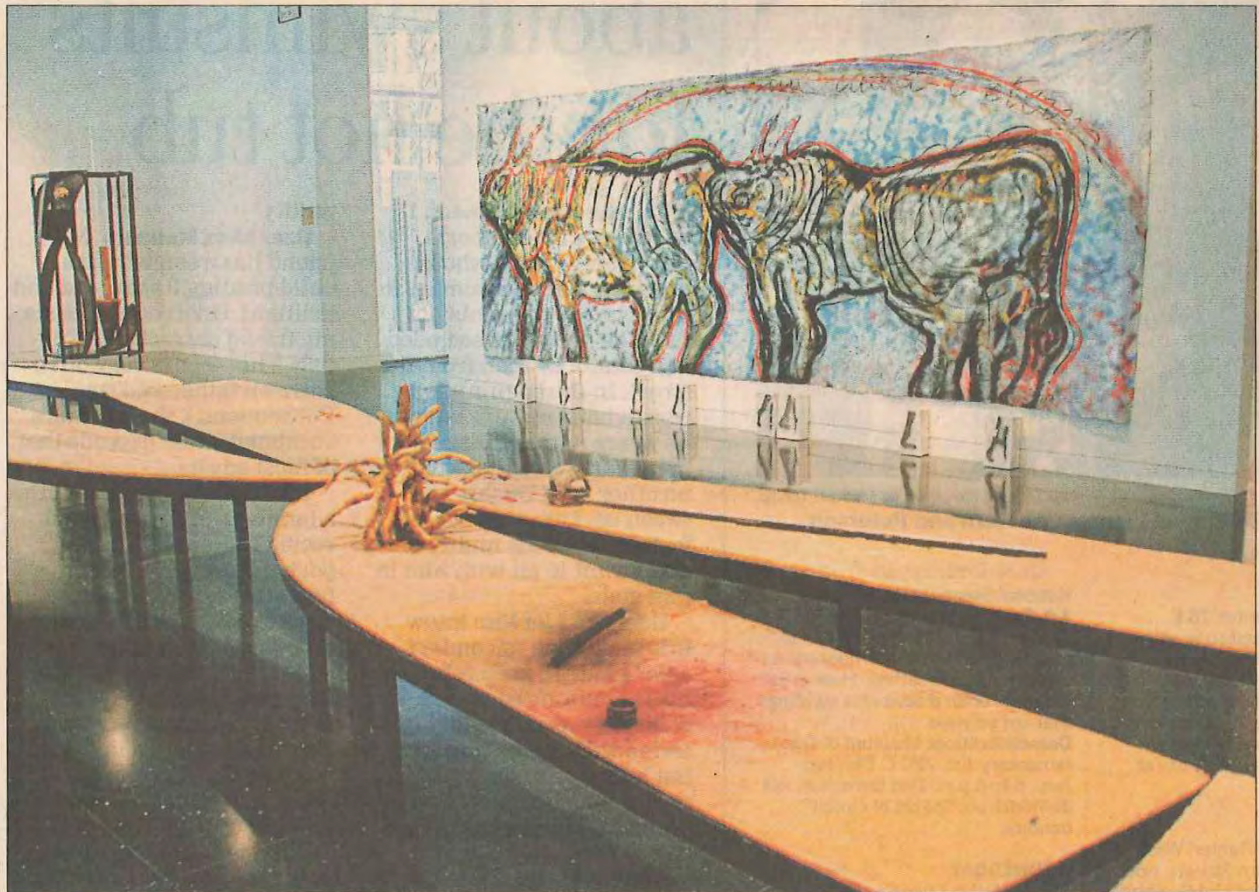
in, Italy, at which his father worked. In "Four tables in the shape of magnolia leaves," the large wax-covered pieces are intended to be mundane objects put into a "high" artistic environment as well as works based on an organic form that developed according to the numerical progression Merz observed.

One of the clearest and earliest examples of his work with the progression is an untitled wall piece from 1971 that presents the sequence — each number being the sum of its two preceding numbers — in neon. Here, again, is a grand conjunction: an ancient formula, which can be extended to infinity, spelled out in a modern material. Elsewhere, he alludes to the sequence (named after the 13th Century mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci) through leaves and spirals, a pine cone and seashell.

Unlike in the art of many of his contemporaries, neither personal connections nor formal considerations overshadow the work's concern with the universal. Simple in form and rooted in the everyday, this is nonetheless an art that achieves conceptual largeness, a goal rarely aimed for or attained in work of today.

"Mario Merz" continues at the Arts Club of Chicago, 201 E. Ontario St., through April 11. Call 312-787-3997.

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Detail from Mario Merz's 1985 "Four tables in the shape of magnolia leaves" (front) that covers steel tables with beeswax and includes other materials such as dry pigment. "Bison" (back) is a 1982 painting that returns to the animals Merz treated early in his career, giving them the bold roughness of images from cave paintings.

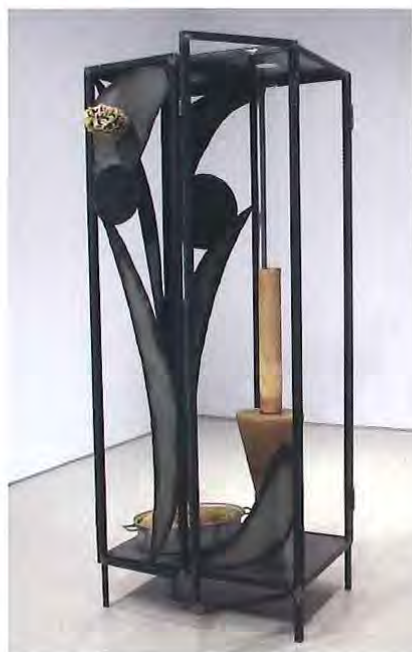
“Mario Merz: The Magnolia Table.” *Art and Living*, Fall 2007, p. 116.

Mario Merz: The Magnolia Table
Sperone Westwater, New York, New York

When artist Mario Merz passed away in 2003, he left behind his own unique brand of sculpture and an expansive breadth of work. A small fraction of his oeuvre can now be seen on display at New York's Sperone Westwater, which is exhibiting a swath of vintage sculpture and neon produced by the artist in the 70s and 80s.

Merz was indoctrinated by his father, an inventor and engineer, with an innate fascination for science and mathematics. After completing two years in medical school, he refocused his efforts toward creating his own style that incorporated these disciplines with mysticism and found materials. By 1968, Merz had become a leader in the Arte Povera group, an association of Italian artists collectively bound by a shared anti-elitist aesthetic and a regard for the incorporation of accessible materials—specifically, organic and inorganic debris.

Exemplifying the artist's talent for incorporating such materials is *Pianissimo (Very Softly)*, a glass and steel cabinet made in 1984 that elegantly cages a convergence of beeswax and pinecone. The sculpture was a prominent fixture in the artist's major retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1989. ■



Mario Merz, *Pianissimo (Very Softly)*, 1984. Beeswax, pine cone, plexiglas, steel and aluminum. © 2007 Michael Short. Image courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York

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Lewis, David. "Critic's Picks: Mario Merz." *artforum.com* (*Artforum*), 29 November 2007.

ARTFORUM



Tavola a spirale (Spiral Table), 1982, aluminum, glass, fruit, vegetables, branches, and beeswax, 18' diameter.

The work of Mario Merz is rarely exhibited in America, and rarer still in any depth. His current reputation—like that of *arte povera* generally—is founded mostly on reproductions and myths, and like any sculptor, especially one with such a nuanced and lyric sense of materials, Merz loses almost everything in visual translation. This exhibition happily remedies the situation: It covers nearly two decades of his career and includes works in a variety of media, including large-scale constructions like *Tavola a spirale (Spiral Table)*, 1982, laden with fruit and vegetables; an untitled oil painting incorporating snail shells and leaves; and a neon piece enumerating the beginning of the Fibonacci sequence. What emerges throughout is visual poetry of a refined and very European type. Merz uses found and often organic materials—beeswax, cauliflower, conch shells—as a traditional painter might, creating relationships of texture and color and

tone (the grainy red and purple pigment against the beeswax surface of *Quattro tavole in forma di foglie di magnolia [Four Tables in the Shape of Magnolia Leaves]*, 1985, for example). Most impressive, though, is the depth and coherence of this artist's sensibility. Individual works or moments that might initially appear hackneyed or mannered—as in the leaflike sculpted forms in *Pianissimo (Very slowly, very quietly)*, 1984—instead seem natural when considered as aspects of Merz's utopian-anthropological aspirations: They speak to the fact that in his hands art is neither a style game nor an arena for virtuoso display, but rather an assertion (however tentative) of a kind of wisdom, at once cosmic and everyday.

Povoledo, Elisabetta. "Poet of 'Arte Povera.'" *ARTnews*, January 2004, p. 60.

Poet of 'Arte Povera'

MILAN—Mario Merz, whose works made with humble materials helped define Italy's *arte povera*, or "poor art" movement, died at age 78.

Merz gained international notoriety as one of the founders of *arte povera*. Under the direction of curator and critic Germano Celant and along with fellow Italian artists including Michelangelo Pistoletto and Alighiero e Boetti, Merz worked with everyday materials, such as glass, umbrellas, tree branches, old newspapers, and, later, neon, to create structures that resembled a primordial, natural world infused with energy.

Widely regarded as Italy's most important contribution to avant-garde art of the 1960s, *arte povera*, whose name reflected the movement's antielitist and anticonsumerist philosophy, thrived between 1967 and 1972, the year that Merz had a solo exhibition at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. "*Arte povera* is important because it is linked to life. . . . It is necessary to use anything whatsoever from life in art, not to reject things because one thinks that life and art are mutually exclusive," Merz said.



Mario Merz championed the use of simple materials and archetypal forms such as igloos, which became his signature motif.

Born in Milan, Merz established his creative base in Turin. He was imprisoned in 1945 because of his participation in the antifascist Resistance movement, and began his career as an artist the day after

he was released. "I started to draw because I told myself: Art has to become the new message," he said in an interview included in the catalogue for his 1989 retrospective at New York's Guggenheim Museum.

Unlike other *arte povera* artists, Merz continued to paint even after he began using objects to make art. But he was best known for his obsession with the spiral form and its mathematical and spiritual implications, which culminated in his first igloo-shaped structure in 1968. Igloos became a signature motif and, according to Merz, represented the structural energy of nature. He repeated the form over decades, creating igloos of materials including stone, wood, and canvas.

Merz was regarded as a preeminent personality on the Italian art scene. The Turin daily *La Stampa* described Merz as a "modern-day Leonardo" and cited Harald Szeemann's consecration of Merz as "the modern version of beauty." Art critic Achille Bonito Oliva eulogized him in the Rome daily *La Repubblica* as an artist of "moral strength and constructive impulses."

He is survived by his wife, Marisa, who is also an artist, and his daughter, Beatrice.

—Elisabetta Povoledo

PHOTO BY PAOLO WISSAT SARTOR, 1988/COURTESY SPERONE WESTWATER, NEW YORK

Celant, Germano. "Sphere of Influence." *Artforum*, January 2004, pp. 25-26.

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

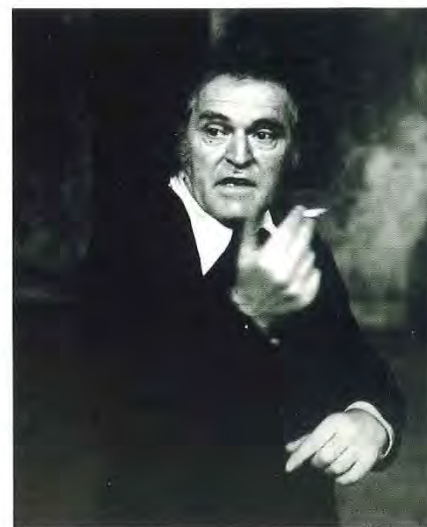
GERMANO CELANT ON MARIO MERZ

PASSAGES

IF I CLOSE MY EYES, I can still envision my first encounter with Mario Merz in 1966 at his studio in Turin, which marked the beginning of my long friendship and collaboration with him as a fellow nomad and adventurer, a journey unbroken until his death on November 9, 2003. In the series of rooms where he worked, the artist's triangular structures projected out from the walls and floors. Made of fabric and woven bamboo, they brought to mind the shaped canvases being produced at the time by Frank Stella and others and were splashed with red paint (as well as scorched with burn holes), evoking the history of an artist, born in 1925, who had come to maturity amid the climate of action painting and Abstract Expressionism. As a scholar of contemporary art, I had already experienced Pop art firsthand at the Venice Biennale, had known Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jim Dine, and was a reader of the Minimalism-influenced *Artforum*. Thus I was not immediately struck by Merz's work, except by the presence of one new visual element, fluorescent tubing—not the mass-produced version used by Dan Flavin, but the free-form type seen in advertising signs. Merz's neon lights, which hung from the projecting structures or traversed them, seeming to

pierce and tear them open, produced a perceptual surprise: They destroyed the object. At the same time, the paintings' aggressive swells became enhanced by the lights' lightninglike brightness. The luminous energy introduced an aspect of fragility and impalpability and not only created a crisis for the primary object (sometimes bottles as well as various fabric items) but also altered the way colors and forms were read. The glass and canvas became less anonymous and more alive, and therefore organic. The encounter between discordant entities added up to an intentionally vertiginous, if not chaotic, whole.

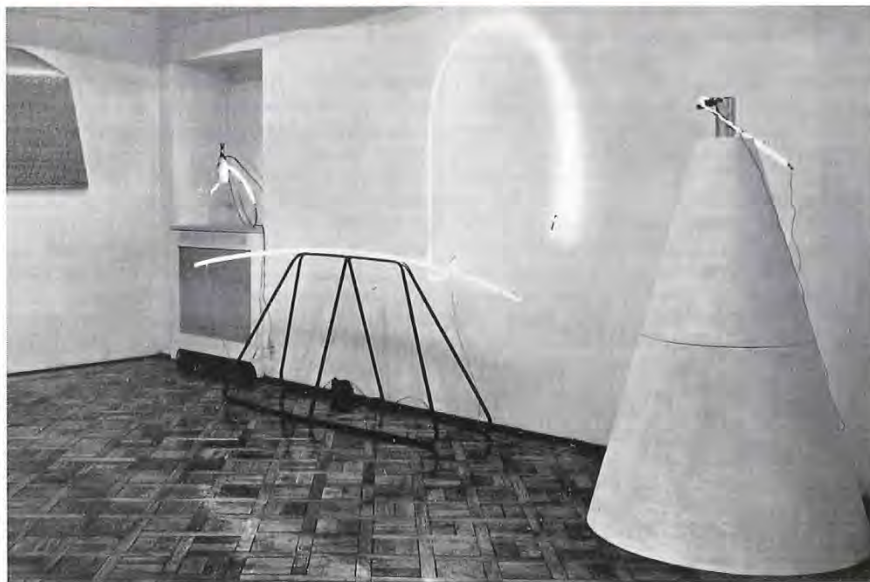
In this interweaving of elements and materials, Merz created an autonomous "habitat." In 1966, this kind of production was decidedly disruptive to the day's more prominent, monolithic theory of art, the absolutism of Minimalism's pure concepts and surfaces. But Merz's stance, which questioned the linguistic and territorial limits of artistic research, was shared by an entire generation of artists whose work ranged from *arte povera* to Body art, from Land art to Conceptual art, and whose number included Joseph Beuys, Jannis Kounellis, Bruce Nauman, and Joseph Kosuth. Merz's artistic practice at that time, in fact, coincided with the concerns of society



INSTILLED WITH A UTOPIAN SPIRIT, MERZ ATTEMPTED IN HIS WORK TO ABOLISH ALL DEGREES OF STRATIFICATION AND FELT URGENTLY IMPELLED TO BATTLE FOR THE EQUIVALENCE OF THINGS.

at large, where critiques of social order in its most advanced industrial manifestations were giving birth to models of procedural extremism, both political and cultural, based principally on marginalized values. Indeed, the rebellion of that young generation was about an ethical vindication of social relationships, and this challenge was manifested both in Europe and in America, with an invitation to shake off the weight of the past. Artists, who no longer had any intention of relinquishing control to others—critics, dealers, collectors, or museums—similarly rejected the traditional hierarchy of techniques and materials. Instilled with a utopian spirit, Merz, who was in fact jailed for his antifascist views, attempted in his work to abolish all degrees of stratification and felt urgently impelled to break free of those strictures and battle for the equivalence of things.

Some of Merz's most important developments took place within this alternative magma. In 1968, after three previous shows of more traditional painting, he had his first exhibition of this new work of neon and shaped objects at Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone in Turin. Accompanied by my brief theoretical text, the show was a significant step in his complex artistic journey. The exhibition was a fireworks of pieces: The fluorescent tubes passed through bottles, glasses, and cones, as if they were an eruption of wine and lava; they supported soft forms, like a cushion; they marked the red-silver surfaces of an umbrella and a raincoat; they transformed into lances with colored tips. The luminosity



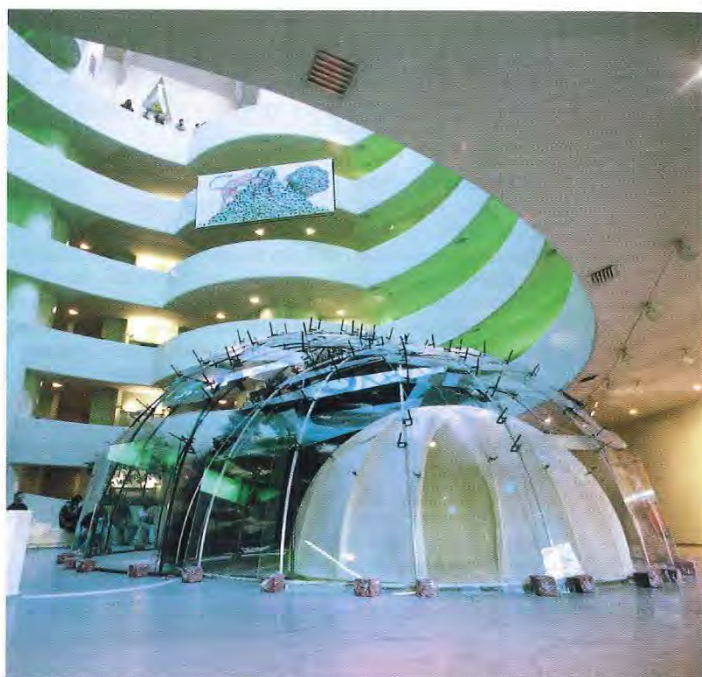
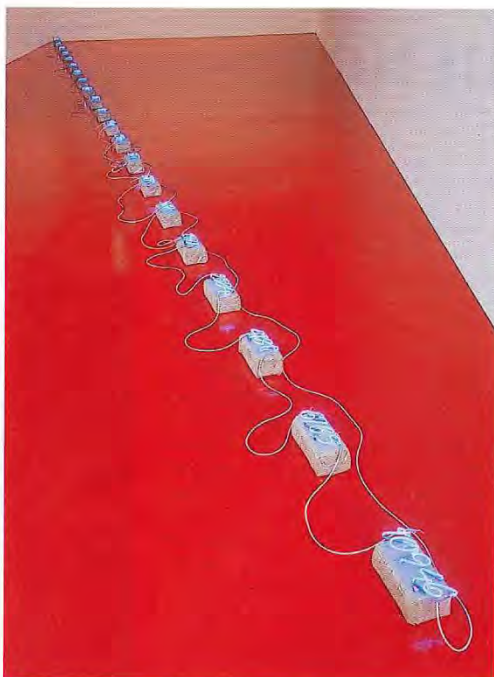
Top: Mario Merz, ca. 1960s. Bottom: View of "Mario Merz," Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin, 1968. Photo: Paolo Bressano.

caused everything to boil visually, without any coherence save its deliberate incoherence. With this intentionally uncontrolled process, Merz aspired to present multiple artistic identities, so that a solo exhibition would be perceived as a group show.

Merz further complicated his universe of objects by mixing writing in fluorescent light with wax, as in *Sitin*, 1968, and then with structure, as in one of his first igloo pieces, *Mai alzato pietra su pietra* (Never Has Stone Been Raised upon Stone), 1968. The former consists of a spaghetti pot that contains the title, a definition of peaceful social rebellion, written out in neon; the latter is a construction that recalls Eskimo or Native American igloos but which, instead of ice or clay, is made of white fabric bricks, a transformation from the rigid to the soft, from the purely volumetric to the organic.

The igloo, a form that would preoccupy Merz throughout his life, is one of his singular contributions to the language of art. As he told me in an interview in 1971, "I made the igloo for . . . overlapping reasons. First in order to discard the jutting plane or the wall plane and create a space independent of the process of hanging things on the wall or nailing them to the wall and putting them on a table. Hence, the idea of the igloo as the idea of absolute and self-contained space: it is not modeled; it is a hemisphere placed on the ground. I wanted the hemisphere to be nongeometrical, so the hemispherical shape created by a metallic structure was covered with sacks or shapeless pieces of material such as soil, clay or glass." Indeed, his structures are not fixed but in a state of continuous change and precariousness. As such, many of his works no longer exist or, once taken apart, are difficult to remake, particularly without his guidance. This ephemerality perhaps threatens the permanence of his place in art history, which favors rigid and petrified objects.

Likewise, Merz's artistic perspective was that of a nomad, someone inclined to adapt with the greatest flexibility to any and every context. This Situationist-influenced desire to incorporate materials found at the different sites of his shows and to improvise in the space offered him characterized his entire artistic voyage. In 1969, when he arrived in Rome in his Simca for an exhibition at the Attico gallery, located in a former garage, he covered the space in stucco and also used the car—pierced with neon—in the show. The fluidity of his practice was apparent in his writings, politics, and poetics as well



and received a literal reference at the gallery when he placed the phrase "*Che fare?*" (What's to be done?) above a tap, which he turned on to let the water run.

His adaptive nature was evident also when he arrived at the Guggenheim in 1989 for his first museum retrospective, and he and I, as the show's curator, began to discuss the difficulty of installing his large paintings and sculptures along the ramp designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. He allowed me to fold the canvases so they could be adjusted to such architectural obstacles as platforms or diagonal walls. The result was a sequence of paintings that followed the corners and curves of the Guggenheim without opposing or being compressed by its limitations, which is what generally happens to artworks exhibited in the legendary rotunda. His unconventional attitude toward the space was also displayed in the magical presence on the building's exterior of a stuffed crocodile and inside, as if driving on the spiral ramp's wall over the void, of a motorcycle, its handlebars replaced by buffalo horns. Both pieces were followed by a series of neon numbers from the Fibonacci sequence, which Merz incorporated in works throughout his career.

But more than anything, I remember the construction of the triple igloo, *Città irreale* (Unreal City), 1989, in the rotunda: three large overlapping metal domes that supported heterogeneous materials like rubber, large sheets of broken glass, plaster, bundles of sticks, metal hinges, wax, enormous stones, and neon words. This precarious and ephemeral edifice, in its fragility and potential danger, fully represented

Merz's ideas with its combination of intensity and aggression, of articulations both heavy and light, of security and insecurity. As a Merz dome took shape inside Wright's dome, the organic architecture of the American master coexisted with the wild, dynamic architecture of the European one.

In scores and scores of installations over the years, Merz was always nurtured by dialogue with his wife, Marisa, a significant artist in her own right (her work is made of subtle weavings of graphite and copper wire). The two were united by a constant exchange of gestures and glances, signals and smiles. Merz continually availed himself of these and of her works themselves, to give energy and sweetness to his igloos and tables, which, thanks to Marisa's contributions, were covered in fabric rolls, delicate clay, soft Arab bread, piles of fruit and vegetables, yellow wax violins, and heaps of straw. His art was always about dialogue, and it thrived as well on chance encounters. Roaming through city streets led him to leave traces of both autobiographical and public visions. Merz was an artist who used the act of construction in a manner antithetical to the traditional model; architecture implies planning, but Merz built largely by improvisation. He created works meant to be experienced and consumed but which must not remain. He believed in the natural breath of people, places, and things; he loved what life bestows. I am sure that he will also love what is bestowed in death. If I close my eyes . . . □

Germano Celant is a contributing editor of *Artforum*. (See Contributors.)
Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

Left: Mario Merz, *Everything Flows*, 1985, numbers from the Fibonacci sequence in neon on clay bricks on linoleum, dimensions variable. Right: Mario Merz, *Città irreale* (Unreal City), 1989. Installation view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Attilio Maranzano.

Smith, Roberta. "Mario Merz, 78, an Italian Installation Artist." *The New York Times*, 13 November 2003, p. B9.



Photographs by Associated Press

As a member of the Arte Povera movement, Mario Merz, left, celebrated the beauties of simple, rustic materials and organic shapes, which often involved spirals. Above, his 2003 igloo installation in Turin, Italy.

Mario Merz, 78, an Italian Installation Artist

By ROBERTA SMITH

Mario Merz, an Italian artist whose installations exemplified the Arte Povera movement and its use of humble, often organic materials, died on Sunday at his home in Milan. He was 78.

He died in his sleep, and no cause of death was announced.

Mr. Merz belonged to a generation of artists who emerged following World War II and in different ways opened traditional painting and sculpture to a range of new mediums and forms. Born in 1925 in Milan, he was close in age to artists like Joseph Beuys, Robert Rauschenberg, Donald Judd, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Lee Bontecou, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Yayoi Kusama and Andy Warhol.

Most started working in oil on canvas and were drawn to the use of non-art materials or already existing objects or images in the pursuit of art that was more real, worldly and egalitarian. The Italian arm of this tendency, christened Arte Povera by the young Italian critic Germano Celant in 1967, included Mr. Pistoletto, Jannis Kounellis, Alighiero Boetti, Gilberto Zorio and a handful of other artists who exhibited together regularly during the late 1960's and early 70's and to this day maintain a coherence more usual to 19th-century and early-20th-century art movements.

The artists' common ground included minimal forms combined with conceptual irreverence and a sense of rustic chic regarding materials and objects that was complemented by the centuries-old Italian buildings in which their work was often exhibited and photographed.

Mr. Merz's installations — permeated with ideas of growth and fecundity and spreading across floors, walls and ceilings — had an exuberance that could be alternately carnivalesque or spare, pastoral and populist. He became identified with great spiraling cornucopia-like glass tables stacked with fruits and vegetables, and makeshift clamped-together igloos made of mud, bundled twigs, loaves of bread or irregular pieces of glass, wax or slate.

In a 1967 interview Mr. Merz spoke

of the importance of organic meaning and said, "These are forms that stretch into space and therefore they are to be understood as a process of development."

Many of his installations were accented with words or numbers in neon. The numbers counted off the Fibonacci progression, the mathematical formula for growth patterns found in many forms of life, including leaves, snail shells, pine cones and reptile skins. (Both before and after he discovered the Fibonacci series, a frequent motif included liz-

*Using Arte Povera's
humble materials for a
vision of fecundity
and abundance.*

ards large and small, stuffed and painted.)

It was not by chance that the Fibonacci progression was also the basis for the spiral, or that the igloo is a spiral in three dimensions. The igloo, as a form of habitation, was consistent with another preferred form, the table, with its connotations of eating and conviviality. In 1972 he illustrated the Fibonacci progression with a series of photographs of a factory workers' lunchroom and a restaurant progressively crowded with diners. His 1973 show at the John Weber Gallery in New York expressed the Fibonacci in a series of low modular tables.

Mr. Merz was a burly, energetic man whose flowing hair and jagged profile gave him an operatic demeanor. He began drawing as a teenager, most seriously during the final months of World War II, when he was imprisoned for distributing anti-Fascist pamphlets in Milan. Upon his release, he spent several months in Paris, working as a truck driver in Les Halles and pursuing political activities. But he also visited the Louvre and learned about wider currents in the art world.

He spent the next dozen years making art indebted to the French Informel painters, working with increasingly thick layers of paint in which he incised a spiral motif. From there he gradually moved to shaped canvases and then to wall pieces, the most original of which, from the mid-1960's, involved neon and jutting forms woven to his specifications by basketmakers. He made his first igloo in 1968, decorating it with a saying by Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap of North Vietnam: "If the enemy masses his forces, he loses ground. If he scatters, he loses force."

Mr. Merz's art was ubiquitous in international exhibitions and figured prominently in historic surveys of Arte Povera, most recently one organized by the Tate Modern in London and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2001. He was the subject of numerous retrospectives, including one at the Guggenheim in 1989, and his work is included in museum collections around the world.

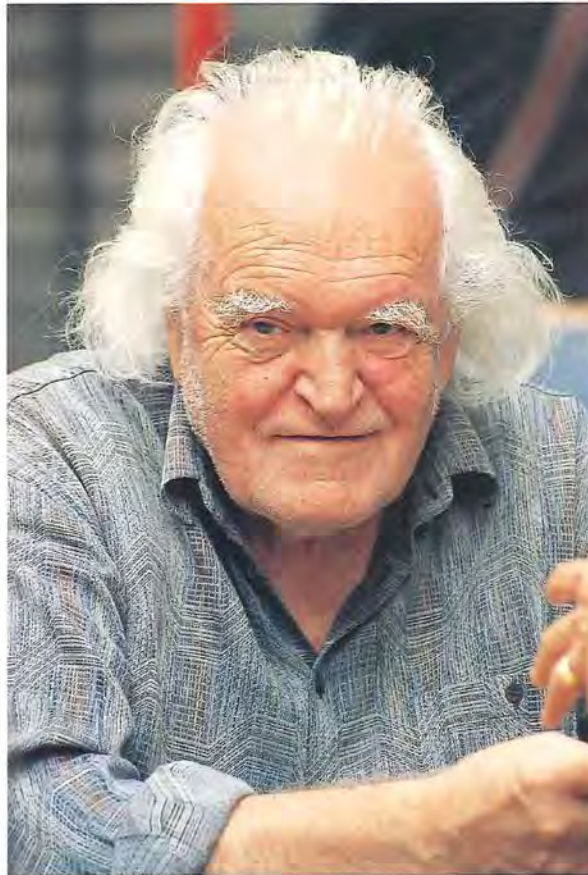
He is survived by his wife of nearly 50 years, Marisa Merz, who is also an artist; his daughter, Beatrice Merz of Milan; and two grandsons.

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“Mario Merz.” In *Praemium Imperiale 2003*. Tokyo: The Japan Art Association, 2003, pp. 14-19.

彫刻部門
Sculpture

マリオ・メルツ Mario Merz



1925年1月1日 イタリア・ミラノ生まれ
Born January 1, 1925
Italy

マリオ・メルツは「アルテ・ポーヴェラ」(貧しい芸術という意味のイタリア語)を代表する作家である。「アルテ・ポーヴェラ」は1960年代から注目を集め始めた。権力に奉仕する作家が大理石やブロンズといった伝統的な素材を利用していたのに対して、「アルテ・ポーヴェラ」の作家は反エリート主義を掲げ、身の回りのありふれた素材を使って自らの理念を表現しようとした。

「木の切れ端とか古新聞を芸術の中に置くと、その素材の疲労が払拭され、豊かさの状態に戻されるわけです」とメルツは語る。

メルツの作品は、素材・形態とも多種多様だが、ガラスや古新聞、ネオン管を組み合わせたインスタレーション、建築構造物の原型ともいえるイグルー(原義はエスキモーの半円球の氷の家)、そして、ネオン管による「フィボナッチ級数」の表示が中心である。

フィボナッチ級数とは、 $1 \cdot 1 \cdot 2 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 8 \cdots$ というように、先行する2つの数字の和が次の数字となり、無限に展開する数列。カタツムリの殻の螺旋構造など多くの自然現象の基をなすとされ、13世紀のイタリアの数学者レオナルド・フィボナッチがウサギの出生率に関する数学的解法として発見した。

広島原爆ドームを連想させる巨大な石のイグルー、城壁や塔の屋根などに配したネオンの数列など、その作品は意表を突く場所にあり、見る者に意識の変革を迫る。

「古代ローマ皇帝シーザーの墓があった遺跡に、螺旋状のネオン管の作品を設置したのは、シーザーの過去の栄光の記憶を呼び覚ます力を持つかのように思えたからです」

第二次世界大戦中、メルツは反ファシズム運動に参加して投獄された。ある日、監獄が爆撃で破壊され、外に出てみると、あたり一面は瓦礫の山。「人生を一から作り直す必要に迫られた」と回顧する。メルツの作品に「廃墟」と「再生」のイメージが漂うのは、この体験に由来する。

過去3回の日本訪問では、神社の「朱の柱」に強い関心を持ったという。

One of Italy's leading contemporary artists, Mario Merz is largely self-taught. He was born in Milan in 1925 and attended medical school in Turin. During the Second World War, he was arrested for handing out anti-fascist leaflets, and it was in prison that he started to paint. Merz has devoted himself to painting ever since.

Merz's first one-man exhibition was held in 1954 at the Galleria La Bussola in Turin. He worked in the then-dominant style of *art informel*. Analyzing certain natural phenomena such as the leaves of plants, he aimed to expose their essential structure using the sequence of numbers known as Fibonacci numbers. In the mid-sixties, his experimentation led him to reject paint on canvas, and he explored non-traditional methods such as the use of ready-made objects, piercing the canvas with neon tubing and using objects such as bottles, umbrellas and raincoats. In 1967, he embarked on an association with several artists, which became a loosely defined movement known as *arte povera*. This movement denoted a complete openness towards materials and processes, and it was marked by an anti-elitist aesthetic. Artists here incorporated humble materials drawn from everyday life and the organic world as a protest against the dehumanizing aspects of industrialization and consumer capitalism.

In 1968, Merz adopted one of his signature motifs, the igloo, as an architectonic primitive prototype. It was made of a metal skeleton covered with fragments of clay, wax, mud, glass, burlap or bundles of branches. Political or literary phrases in neon tubing were often also incorporated into it. By the time of his first solo exhibition in the United States, at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in 1972, he had also added stacked newspapers, archetypal animals and motorcycles to his iconography. Merz often incorporates materials indigenous to the specific environment of his exhibitions and adjusts the scale of the work to the particular site.

A retrospective exhibition of Merz's work was organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1989. His works were also included in a recent exhibition, *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972*, organized in 2002 by the Walker Art Center and the Tate Modern. This was also held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.



トリノの自作前で
Turin, 2003



Attilio Maranzano, Roma

1



2

1. グッゲンハイム美術館での個展
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1989

2. アフリカの画家 300×458cm
Pittore in Africa, 1980-85



Clovis Franca-Kris Knack, São Paulo

1



Salvatore Licita, Milano

2

1. エスタド美術館での個展
Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo,
2003

2. 二重螺旋
Doppio Spirale, 1990



1

1. マラルメ 55×720×80cm
A Mallarmé, 2003

2. 数字の飛行(トリノ)
Il volo dei numeri, Turin, 2000

3. イグルーと噴水(トリノ)
Igloo Fontana, Turin, 2002



2



3



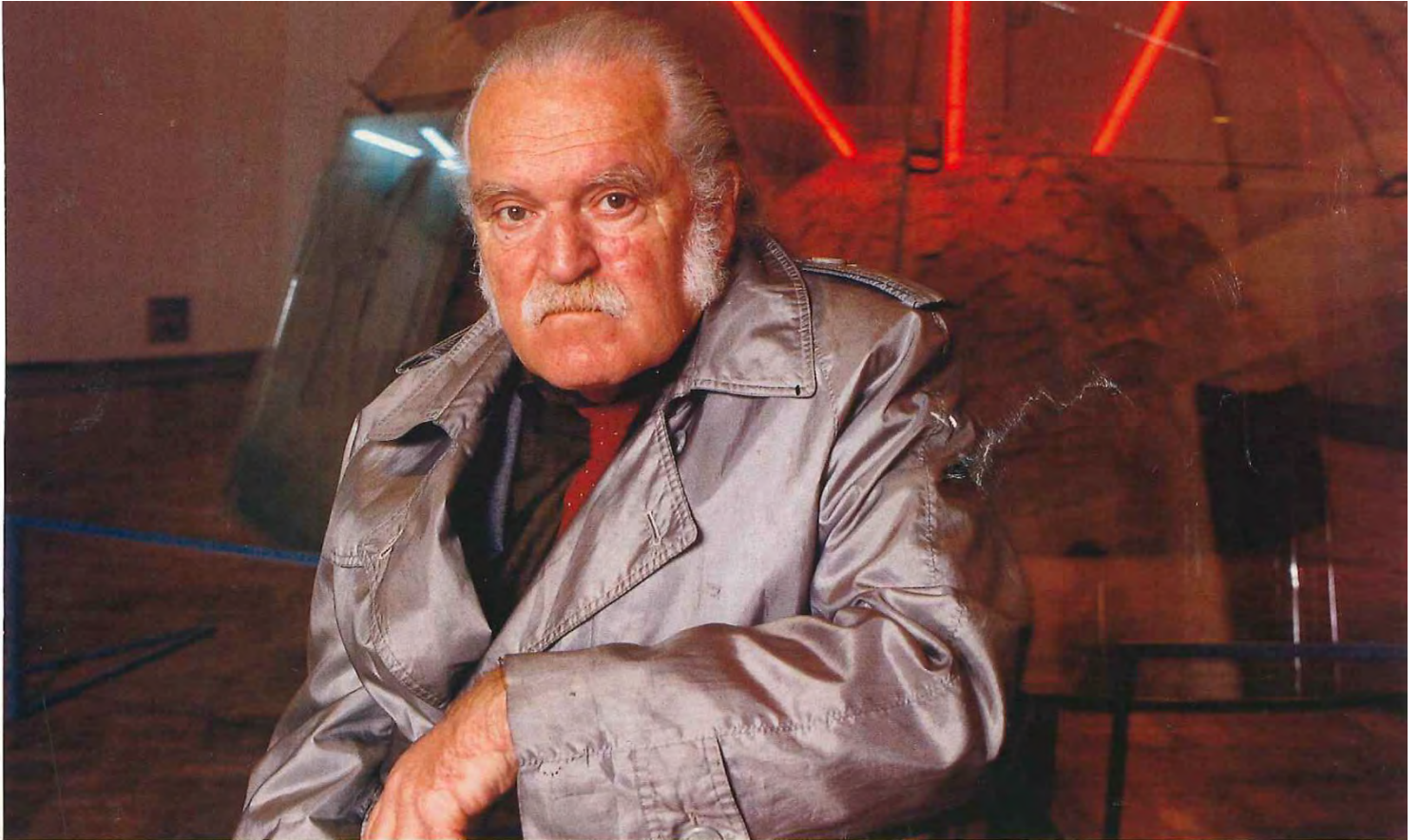
シーザー広場のマーク(ローマ)
Un segno nel Foro di Cesare, Rome, 2003

1925 イタリア・ミラノに生まれる
トリノ大学で2年間、医学を学ぶ
1945 第二次世界大戦中、反ファシズムグループに参加し、
投獄される。獄中で絵画を描き始める
1954 トリノのブッソラ画廊で初個展
1960- 「アルテ・ボーヴェラ」を代表する作家として活躍
1966 蛍光管と日用品を組み合わせた作品を制作
1968 イグルー作品を制作
1970 フィボナッチ級数が作品に登場する
1972 アメリカでの初個展をミネアポリスで開催
1975 スイスのバーゼル美術館で個展
1988 ロンドンのアンソニー・ドフェイ・ギャラリーで個展
名古屋ICAで個展
1989 ニューヨークのグッゲンハイム美術館で大回顧展
1998 「イタリア美術1945-95」展に出品、日本巡回
2002 「ゼロから無限へ アルテ・ボーヴェラ1962-72」展に出
品、欧米各地を巡回

Born in Milan, Italy
Studied at medical school in Turin
Arrested for anti-fascist activity; started painting in prison
First one-man exhibition at the Galleria La Bussola in Turin
Described as one of the main figures of *arte povera*
Worked with everyday objects and neon tubes
First interpretation of space with the igloo
Worked with Fibonacci numbers
Exhibition in Minneapolis, U.S.A.
Exhibition at the Basel Museum, Switzerland
Exhibition at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London
Exhibition at the ICA Nagoya, Japan
Exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, New York
Exhibition *Italian Art 1945-95*, Japan
Joint exhibition *Arte Povera 1962-72* in Europe and U.S.A.

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“Mario Merz.” *Art Das Kunstmagazine*, no. 4, April 1999, p. 19.



Seit Mitte der sechziger Jahre gilt **MARIO MERZ**, 74, als ein Hauptvertreter der Arte Povera. Sein Interesse gilt elementaren Gesetzmäßigkeiten des Lebens. Die Wachstumszahlenreihe des Mathematikers Leonardo Fibonacci (um 1170 bis nach 1240) und die Spirale tauchen deshalb immer wieder in seinen Werken auf: als Symbole aus Metall, Reisig oder Neonröhren. Der Iglu verkörpert für Merz die Gleichwertigkeit von Innen- und Außenraum

Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn. "Mario Merz." *Flash Art*, January/February 1991, p. 144.

TURIN

MARIO MERZ
CASTELLO DI RIVOLI
CENTRO PER L'ARTE
CONTEMPORANEA LUIGI PECCI

Italian Arte Povera artist Mario Merz exhibiting simultaneously in two different museums, one in the North, near Turin, the other in Tuscany, near Florence, chose to link the two shows together dialectically. On the one hand, "Terra elevata o la storia del disegno," at the Castello di Rivoli, seemed an understated transformation of the old castle which today hosts one of Italy's major contemporary art museums. "Lo spazio è curvo o diritto," on the other hand, held in the modern architecture of industrial Prato, was a perfect example of Merz's strongest and most energetic work, full of stones and sticks and igloos and broken glass and piles and piles of newspapers brought together in the mind as if they were different stations on an exponential spiral of creation.

The two shows related in counterpoint, challenging the history of one place as well as the non-history of the other, to paradoxically redeem them both. In Rivoli, the artist brought together a great number of his "Tables" made of stone, iron, and glass since 1973. Although the tables were bare, it was as if the fruit, leaves, and garlands of flowers already to be found in the frescoes of the 18th century castle walls could poetically and miraculously come to life and reappear on the tables, dressed for a banquet. In Prato, on the contrary, where the museum space is frankly not too suggestive on its own, the artist decided to take hold of the entire building and grounds, and redesign the architecture completely. The result was an outstanding use of energy, emitted principally by a circling line of sticks in fascies that spiraled out from the center of the courtyard through the perimeter walls of the museum and the different rooms of the exhibition area.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev



MARIO MERZ, SPACE IS CURVED OR STRAIGHT, 1990.
DETAIL OF THE INSTALLATION AT THE LUIGI PECCI
MUSEUM, PRATO.

Pasini, Francesca. "Mario Merz." *Artforum*, December 1990, pp. 151-152.

ASCONA

MARIO MERZ

MUSEO COMUNALE
D'ARTE MODERNA

Some months ago I accompanied Mario Merz to see an exhibition of the work of Savoldo, a 16th-century painter of the Scuola Veneta. Upon our return, while we were discussing the paintings, Merz spoke to me about the "mysterious simplification" of contemporary art: "We don't know why we have ended up with this simplification, but we do know that it isn't tied to the story of society. It is a mystery. The paintings of Dürer, of Titian are rich in narrative content and this is one reason they are well received."

In Merz's works, this mysterious simplification doesn't lie in the telling, but in the way he makes it possible for one to perceive a form's growth in space. It is a space that contains history, but that is not separate from the everyday flow of life; Merz indicates a form in order to interfere with society, not to describe it.

The exhibition can be understood as the third stage of a broader discourse initiated by Merz last summer, with his installations in the Castello di Rivoli, *Terra elevata o la storia del disegno* (Raised earth or the history of drawing), and at the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato, entitled *Lo spazio è curvo o diritto* (Space is curved or straight). In all three locations Merz filled the entire museum, and, indeed, set up a space that accommodates the growth of the form. In this way, as Harald Szeemann writes in the catalogue, he has made visible "the courage to once again cast light on the unfinished, the shadow, the other face of reason and logos."

The spiral and the bundles of sticks constitute the common thread that connects these three examples of Merz's work. In Rivoli he elaborated a single theme, the table, which often assumes the form of the spiral and just as often supports bundles of sticks on its surface. In Prato, an imposing spiral of bundled sticks rose up from the exterior courtyard of the museum to the up-

per floors, where it expanded into all the rooms, thereby suggesting an organism originating within the earth. In the Prato catalogue, Merz writes: "The spiral is slow and full of humors like a fruit, expressing the rising of matter over itself. . . the cochlea expresses the primordial form, the comma is the breath that says we must breathe to write, we must breathe to draw." The puff of breath, the growth of the material, the articulation of the design, and the attention to the place and the architecture—these are fundamental to the installation in Ascona.

The ancient building is organized around an interior covered courtyard, surrounded by three tiers of granite balconies on each of three sides. This is where Merz's construction originates. On the ground floor, and then on the balconies above, bundles of sticks were packed together. The atrium reveals the pulsing heart of the installation. A tall cone of wicker rises like an ancient medieval tower, while to the left, a crocodile climbs the wall, leaving behind a shining trail of neon Fibonacci numbers (from 1 to 987).

One enters the floors from an interior stairway. At the end of the first flight one is welcomed by a drawing of a light spiral with a shell resting in the middle. The many small rooms that open off the balconies contain numerous drawings from the artist's collection dating from 1979–83. Bundles of sticks piled up against the walls of the entry areas opposite the atrium assume the function of imaginary buttresses. Their airy compactness gives a sort of fluidity to the building's structure. On the first and second floors, the entry areas also contain two igloos that mimic the cellular form of the building. Made of slabs of granite from an old house in a nearby village, they tell us something about the relationship between

nature and nature—between that which takes on life through Merz's own hand and that which lives on site. The 202 bundles of sticks were also gathered on the site, in the beech woods of Mount Tanaro overlooking Ascona.

They are signs of empathy between the place of art and that of life, between the public space where Merz exhibits his art and the private space where he conceives it. But here, in Ascona, the emphasis on the site also has another utopian resonance. In fact, Monte Verità lies a few kilometers from the museum, and, at the beginning of the century, this was the hill where the spokesmen of the great utopias of the *novecento* lived, loved, thought, and built. Theosophers, anarchists, vegetarians, poets, and artists all came here. Baron von Haydt, the last owner of the Monte, left the hill to the canton of Ticino, with the request that it be kept open for art. Szeemann, who organized a large show on this theme in 1978, states that the magnetic hill of Verità remains a utopia, re-opening its paths to today's artists.

—Francesca Pasini

Translated from the Italian by Marguerite Shore.



Mario Merz, *Untitled*, 1990,
mixed media. Installation view.

Blanchard, Paul. "Mario Merz." *Tema Celeste*, January-March 1990, p. 62.

NORTH - SOUTH - EAST - WEST



Mario Merz, *Accelerazione = sogno, numeri di Fibonacci al neon e motocicletta fantasma*, 1972, bike, neon.



Mario Merz, partial view of the exhibition at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Mario Merz

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is the only building that Frank Lloyd Wright was commissioned to do in New York, and the sixteen years that elapsed between its conception (in 1943) and its completion (in 1959, after the death of both the architect and his patron) speak all too eloquently of the difficulties that plagued its construction. As is known, Wright's ambitious and controversial design is based on the spiral, which links it

not only to natural "architecture" such as that of the snail or the vine, but also to rudimentary forms of human shelter, such as the Italian *trulli*, medieval rural dwellings formed of flat-pitched spiral courses of stone, or prehistoric huts, to which Mario Merz's igloos also make reference.

In fact there is an extraordinary syntony between Merz's exhibition and Wright's museum which reveals not only a common interest in certain elementary shapes, the expressive power of which is used to

advantage by both men, but also a shared notion of time. In no other museum as in the Guggenheim is one so aware of the temporal dimension of physical space: the spiral ramp of the main exhibition hall compels the visitor to complete a linear course (from top to bottom, or vice versa) and a cyclical one (around an invisible central axis); and the time taken can be visualized by looking out across the open central well to the position occupied a second, a minute, an hour ago, or to that to be occupied a second, a minute, or an hour hence. In a word Wright's museum is a diachronous space: as such it has less in common with traditional architecture than it has with sculpture. And Merz knows this.

Perhaps it is because the artist has a consciousness which the architect does not have. Merz tells us: "The architect has to reckon with a relative temporality linked to his economy... In the artist temporality is dilated to the maximum... it is expanded to the widest possible magic values. The artist therefore has to take this into account, otherwise he is not an artist, nor even an architect, because the limited and coerced temporality of the architects is deliberately so... For the artist, the more temporality is dilated the more the walls will break apart and be overrun, and the more artistic value his design will have."

Here, as in all Merz's installations, the privileged status of the work derives from this peculiar relation with time. If the form disappears, its root is eternal, the artist claims. Even if form in itself may be attenuated or disappear altogether, we carry within ourselves its original, eternal seed, which reappears continually in our way of being and of acting. This fundamental communality of forms produces some interesting effects, not the least of which is the mutual contamination between the temporality of the artist and that of the architect. Occupied by Merz's work, Wright's museum is not a static place, it is a place of passage — in the obvious sense of a spiral corridor, but also in the more subtle sense of the passage of time from primitive structures to personal ones. The works, though stationary in space, have no fixed position in time; they are reversible in past time as in future time. And this reversibility of space and time is the conscious product of the artist's position as a fugitive on earth.

Merz's Guggenheim therefore is not a practical place, a *place for*, it is a theoretical place, a *place in itself*, an *abstract place*. It is a metaphor for imagination, that "harbor of chimaerical and real art" that is inside of us.

Paul Blanchard

At the Guggenheim Museum, New York

Mahoney, Robert. "Mario Merz: The Cannibalism of Arte Povera." *Flash Art*, January/February 1990, p. 123.

S P O T L I G H T



SEED IN THE WIND (SEME NEL VENTO), 1953.
OIL ON MASONITE, 86 x 104 CM.

MARIO MERZ

THE CANNIBALISM OF ARTE POVERA.

A mellowing of what Germano Celant calls Mario Merz's "organic love relationship with (Frank Lloyd) Wright's organic architecture" kept Merz's retrospective at the Guggenheim together. The museum is a difficult building, Merz sensibly acknowledged this, with interesting impact. The sloping ramps came to symbolize premises sliding away from the arte povera orthodoxy. The show is a rollercoaster ride of pluses and minuses that all add up to one: Merz. *Do we walk around houses or do houses walk around us?* questioned its own stability as it looked up worryingly to the Guggenheim skylight spiral. This final resting place of painting's wandering signifiers, a nomad place taken refuge in long ago, was superseded by the architecture. Only these heavier armored ones – secured with slate, or twigs – stayed put. Some igloos looked depressed, other flighty or opportunistic. A thought that these were uneven accommodations of installations done better

elsewhere evened out the show however.

In the beginning, arte povera overvalued its ambiguity and the transformative potential of "poor" material, due to its reading of popular culture as a "monolithic culture that excluded ambiguity and confusion." Where is that monolith now? Did it ever exist? The rhetorical premises are coming undone. This also causes the materials to wander, signifiers are marginalized, the void looms larger than even Merz imagined. Much depends on what you are partial to: taxidermy, newspaper, twigs, and tables laden with fruit interested me. Merz's vegetable arrays on glass tail-ends of signifier breakthrough seemed the most on edge. Glass, neon, Fibonacci numbers (the rhetorical

melody): all seemed less relevant. *Hamper* and *Raincoat* were original again. But a motorcycle spinning down the Guggenheim drain seemed like a public relations stunt. In general, however, it did look like Merz thought through the space and over his career. His own early on-canvas painting was reduced by off-kilter hanging next to an ingredient like vegetables and newspaper stacks. Fifties Pollockisms were cornered and represented as self-alienation set outside the igloos. These signs of a first cannibalism in arte povera were quite intriguing.

Robert Mahoney

At the Guggenheim Museum, New York.



LIZARD (LUCERTOLA), 1979.
OIL AND CHARCOAL ON CLOTH WITH NEON TUBE,
281 x 242 CM.



UNREAL CITY, NINETEEN HUNDRED EIGHTY-NINE, 1989.
METAL TUBES, GLASS MIRROR, TWIGS, RUBBER AND CLAY.

Vetrocq, Marcia E. "Mario Merz." *Arts Magazine*, January 1990, p. 84.

Mario Merz

On one of the works in his autumn exhibition at the Guggenheim, an informal drawing with a collaged leaf, the artist Mario Merz had scrawled, "*i numeri sono solo un'espressione di crescita*" ("numbers are only an expression of growth"). The inscription concisely states the primary assertion that underlies Merz's art: that the numerical logic which urges and governs all forms of organic proliferation, from the reticulation of reptilian skin to the forking of a leaf's veins, likewise should inspire the course of artistic creation. This numerical logic is expressed by the Fibonacci sequence, which advances by continually summing up the last two numbers of the progression (1-1-2-3-5-8-13...). It is precisely this model of recuperation and growth that was convincingly demonstrated by the 80-odd pieces from 1952 to the present that comprised Merz's first full-scale American exhibition. The Fibonacci progression, in neon, charcoal, or paint, snaked across individual works and out onto the very façade of the museum. Since Merz's is an art of recombinant elements deployed with semantic agility, the show was not so much a chronological retrospective as a moment of consolidation, a "summing up."

The impression of generation through continuity (rather than avant-garde "progress" through annulment of the past) is not merely a function of Merz's recurring motifs. More to the point are his fresh elaborations of earlier ideas, a recycling of components, and his tracking of homologous and rhyming forms through both natural and man-made structures. The spiral of a snail glued to a canvas is reasserted as the form of a segmented table. Tree branches bound into fagots enclose an igloo, form a wall for displaying plastic aprons, or suggest a platform for an earlier painting. A lance-point is like a pinecone, an igloo like a cupola, a table like a leaf. A slim shaft of neon poking through a canvas might line up with a lizard's spine, but it is also an illuminated response to the dark



Mario Merz, *Unreal City*, Nineteen Hundred Eighty-Nine, 1989, Metal, tubes, glass, mirror, twigs, rubber, and clay, 16'4 1/8" x 32'8". Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

vacancy of Lucio Fontana's *bucchi*. Piercing a raincoat like a Zeusian thunderbolt, the neon becomes a visual refutation of the garment's Italian name, *impermeabile* (literally, "impermeable"). Spelling out words and phrases as if they were incantations, neon tubes vibrate with the pulse of venous systems.

Through the exhibition *The Knot* (1985), and major shows of Jannis Kounellis (1986) and Michelangelo Pistoletto (1988), the American audience has come to recognize the anti-elitism and improvisational methods of Italy's *Arte povera*. Yet if Merz is paradigmatic of the movement with his "poor" and impermanent materials, and his preoccupation with food, dwellings, and the meeting of nature and technology, he also stands apart by virtue of age and temperament. Born in 1925, Merz is the oldest of the group, the only one to have experienced the war as an adult (like Alberto Burri, Merz began making art while imprisoned), and the only one to have been a painter in the 1950s. The adolescent outrageousness and theatrical challenge hurled at high art, which characterized much of *Arte povera*, are alien to Merz's tolerance of all possible materials and forms as he investigates the common energy and rationality sustaining natural and human production.

It may have come as no surprise that a Merz exhibition was the first offering by the

Guggenheim's new Curator of Contemporary Art, Germano Celant, for he has been *Arte povera*'s steadfast champion since it coalesced in the late 1960s. Yet it would be a mistake to undervalue this rare sympathy between artist and curator and the opportunity it afforded to capitalize on what would otherwise be the ultimate curatorial nightmare, the Dantean descent down Frank Lloyd Wright's spiral ramp. Merz's pieces multiplied across space and time, while the well below the museum's great skylight congenially housed his large interpenetrating igloos of metal, rubber, and glass. (Vaulting through space and time in more concrete terms, Merz provided a companion installation in the still-raw industrial spaces of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art some 150 miles away.) Not since the Joseph Beuys exhibition of 1979 had the Guggenheim been so mastered by an artist, yet Merz is no Beuysian shaman. There is an absence of rhetoric and portentousness about Merz's enterprise, an essential modesty, a confidence in nature that is free of romanticism and self-importance. Nonetheless, with his works overrunning the façade, floor, walls, and ramps, the artist fully absorbed the Guggenheim into his own process of growth and ordering, and made of that museum (*pace Schwitters*) the definitive *Merzbau*. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, September 28–November 26)

Marcia E. Vetrocq

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Smith, Roberta. "Mario Merz Works Complement the Guggenheim." *The New York Times*, 29 September 1989, p. C25.

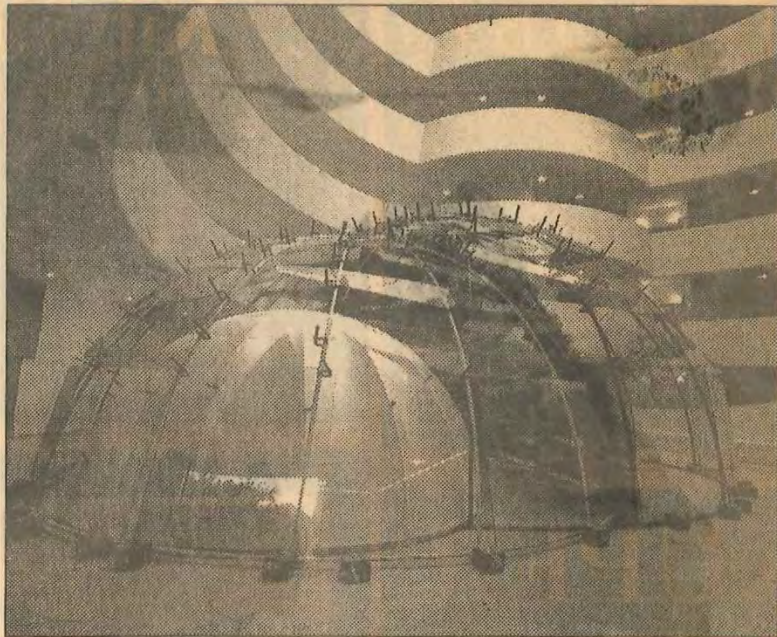
Mario Merz Works Complement the Guggenheim

By ROBERTA SMITH

It isn't often that a museum building seems tailor-made for an artist's work. Still less often is the structure in question as eccentric as Frank Lloyd Wright's implicitly organic Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, with its spiraling ramp measured off in shallow bays, its great open well and its ribbed and rounded glass roof. Nonetheless, just such a fusion has been achieved between the Guggenheim's architecture and the work of Mario Merz, the grand old man of contemporary Italian art.

This retrospective has been organized by Germano Celant, a well-known Italian critic who is one of the Guggenheim's new curators of contemporary art. It is an irresistibly beautiful show that, in keeping with Mr. Merz's sensibility, is alternately carnival-like and contemplative, manic and serene. And it offers America its first in-depth look at an artist who, like Joseph Beuys, emerged in Europe in the aftermath of World War II, rose to prominence in the early 1970's Arte Povera movement and went on to inspire the Neo-Expressionists of the 80's.

Mr. Merz's work lacks Beuys's tragic depth and his distinctive finesse as both a sculptor and draftsman. There are moments in this show when Mr. Merz can seem like nothing more than a deft arranger of terrific-looking things — in a piece alternating large bundles of twigs and red aprons, for example. But for the most part he is master of a vivid, salt-of-the-earth installation art that revels in the decorative and poetic possibilities of natural materials.



David Heald

"Città Irreale" by Mario Merz at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

The presentation that Mr. Merz and Mr. Celant have orchestrated is a nonchronological mixture of old and new, past and present. It intermingles the artist's early Expressionist paintings of the 1950's and his more Minimal (and Povera) 60's sculpture, often made of wire mesh, neon tubing and wax. These in turn are mixed with his more ambitious, physically elaborate recent sculptures and his noticeably less successful recent paintings, which mostly provide the show with colorful backdrops. As a result, the persistent viewer will comprehend slowly, but organically, the underlying unity of Mr. Merz's art, while the show itself starts the Guggenheim's spiral spinning and, at least once, sets it on its ear.

Mr. Merz's art counts among its most indispensable staples the ribbed and rounded form of the igloo, and thus igloos made of everything from slabs of slate, wax and plate glass to loaves of bread and small bags of sand regularly punctuate the flow of art here. They culminate in "Città Irreale" ("Unreal City"), a glorious, giant four-in-one igloo that dominates the museum's rotundalike ground floor.

Mr. Merz's is also an art dedicated to the pursuit of the spiral in all its manifestations and philosophical implications. In addition to the spiral shapes — the igloos, cones and glass-topped spiral tables — that appear throughout his work, his paintings and sculptures are often dotted with, or trailed by, mysterious neon numbers. They are particularly visible in the wake of two of the exhibition's most flamboyant works: a giant lizard that seems to climb the museum's exterior and a bright red motorcycle with steer's horns for handles that, cantilevered out into space, seemingly turns the building's interior coil on its side and into a Great Adventure ride.

The implicit show-stopping drama of these particular pieces aside, the neon numbers give the show a wonderfully animated visual buzz. More importantly, they count off the Fibonacci series, a natural mathematic progression found in the growth patterns of leaves, snail shells, pine cones, sundry fruits and vegetables and the skins of reptiles. Of course, all of these items put in frequent appearances in Mr. Merz's art. The spiral glass tables are piled high with fruits and vegetables, sometimes in arrangements that count out the Fibonacci. Both the leaves and the impressively repellent lizards — sometimes large, sometimes small, sometimes painted, sometimes stuffed — are present virtually from his earliest paintings, years before he happened upon the Fibonacci.

Despite, a certain visual noisiness, this show brings the viewer to the center of the artist's pastoral, almost

A dedication to the pursuit of the spiral.

simple vision. It elucidates his concerns with the tensions between the organic and the man-made, and between the basic human needs for food and shelter and the sustenance that only art can provide. In particular, the igloos, like the frequent use of the bundled twigs and of drooping raincoats or jackets, seem intended to conjure up the dignity of building, farming and manual labor. But the entire exhibition is a kind of homage to keeping close to the earth and to nature, in both art and life.

This show is the first substantial sign that Thomas Krens, the Guggenheim's new director, and his newly appointed international team of curators may be able to revive the museum's sagging reputation, at least where contemporary art is concerned. It certainly offers proof positive that one road to such a revitalization is to invite artists to make active use of the museum's architecture, turning what has often been seen as a detriment into an advantage. It is doubtful that any other contemporary artist could so infiltrate and illuminate the forms and meanings of the Guggenheim's spiral, but that shouldn't keep anyone else from trying.

"Mario Merz," which has been financed in part by Gruppo GFT and the Rivetti Art Foundation, will remain at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1017 Fifth Avenue, at 88th Street, through Nov. 26.

Baker, Kenneth. "Mario Merz: Museum of Contemporary Art." *Artforum*, Summer 1989, pp. 150-151.

LOS ANGELES

MARIO MERZ

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

In Mario Merz's show here, the art looked like it had been brought to the laboratory for examination under controlled conditions. The setting was so clean, so sanitized of all sense of signifying context, that it left Merz's work looking theatrical and self-important. *Arte povera's* arbitrariness reads as material poetics only in situations that exhale some—any—air of cultural history. But MOCA, once you're inside it, seems as rootless as a space station, and Merz's work only heightened that impression.

What this commissioned installation revealed was the tacit psychological program of the building's interior design: to encourage the most literal reading of everything seen in it. Since there is no literal meaning to Merz's work, since it depends on a play of associative response

to materials, structures, and atmospheres, the pieces looked philosophically beached. What a difference it might have made to place Merz's work in the more textured spaces of the Temporary Contemporary, where even Christian Boltanski's delicate installation showed recently to full, transporting effect.

At two points in his three-room ensemble, Merz got control of the situation. One was in the first room, where he set up an igloo of glass and steel that seemed larger than the room itself, especially when you took a long view of the piece from across the museum foyer. Merz has said that he uses the igloo as an immemorial symbol of the human capacity to make nature habitable. An open hemisphere of steel tubing, the igloo's curved ribs bristled with C-clamps, on which rested—unfastened—large polygonal sections of plate glass. Squares of glass leaned against the structure at ground level, held in place by slabs of slate. Inside was a smaller igloo whose sides were swathed in beeswax. Pieces of slate were added here too, along with neon figures that recite the Fibonacci numbers which Merz uses to symbolize natural growth and the connectedness of human generations.

The most effective aspect of the piece was not its enigma, or the anxiety about earthquakes it must have aroused in every geography-conscious visitor. What was most striking was the way reflections in the tilting sheets of glass chopped up and reassembled the pyramidal skylight overhead (itself as much a signature of Arata Isozaki's museum designs as the igloo is of Merz's art).

The second room was convincing only by virtue of its inscrutability. A sequence of open polyhedral steel forms was assembled on the floor, with sheets of glass sandwiched upright between them. In plan, the steel forms made back-to-back right triangles: the shape of a Greek tem-

ple pediment, like those of the Parthenon. On the sloping wall of the pyramidal lightwell above, Merz hung a small stuffed alligator. Below it, like a spoon, stretched the Fibonacci numbers in blue neon.

The third room held two more igloos, one of glass and slate and one covered with bundles of twigs gathered from L.A. canyons. These were fitted into an ensemble of tables draped in sheet lead or topped with glass, slate slabs leaning on their sides. The whole situation had the feeling of a colossal banquet interrupted by some human catastrophe. Along the opposite wall, Merz hung giant muslin sheets painted with strange fanlike figures that seemed to refer to slices of citrus, to the California hills, and to the igloos. A set of crude chairs and tables stretched in front of this backdrop, marked by red neon Fibonacci numbers. The whole ensemble had a defeated air, as if Merz realized halfway through that his art could not master the situation, but that by then it was too late.

—Kenneth Baker



Mario Merz, installation view, 1989.

Grüterich, Marlis. "Paths for Here and Now in Impenetrable Places: Mario Merz's Travel Pictures 1987."
Parkett, no. 15, 1988, pp. 48-57.

Mario Merz

Paths for Here and Now in Impenetrable Places

*Mario Merz's Travel Pictures
1987*

MARLIS GRÜTERICH

The titles of a new and an old work by Mario Merz – their contradiction and their appeal – shall lead me through the memory of the images seen at his exhibitions this year.

In November in Paris Mario Merz repeated his motto: "Art is the ability to rescue oneself."¹⁾

Any journey is worth Mario Merz's small and large exhibition images. They are situated along the itinerary of his fantasy biography. This year took me to Chagny in Burgundy, to Venice, Düsseldorf, Bordeaux and Paris. A persistent travel motive for a restless prophet like Mario Merz lies in his need for a daily dosis of phenomenal out-looks between knowing and intuitive life-orientation and especially his surprisingly productive application of artistic devices to the meta-

morphoses of new daily routines into imagery. Mario Merz's iconography rests on the individual and global perceptibility of their pictorial forms. They recur, like obsessions from which one seeks release, until one feels at ease with these repeatable acts of liberation.

The economic culture of reproduction avoids the pitfalls of personal time-spaces of perception in which images are constructed rather than imitated. When Pop became inescapable in the United States, Mario Merz in Italy had the good fortune of being involved with the human phenomenon of construction for the purpose of one-sided acceleration in engineering and for the purpose of cyclical regeneration in agriculture. Mario Merz's father designed engines for Fiat in the Baroque city of Turin, which looks out on the hills and snow-capped mountains of Piemonte.

Mario Merz's combination: the formalization of the biological and technological constitution of his biography. Socially binding models had outlived their

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usefulness for Modern Art. The poetic scientist was free to exercise the artistic right to introspection far away from the academies.

"The poet has a strong feeling for the natural phenomenon. He doesn't describe it. He has to express it in a different mode. That is why I have given up the artistic variations of logic."

(Mario Merz)

Mario Merz found the accelerated fantasy figure, which makes contact in every respect with nature and culture, which can become a concentrated and eccentrically concrete epos. Labyrinthine spirals of visible and invisible cosmic structures constitute in every age and everywhere the organic pictorial scaffolding for the fusion between the phenomena of nature and their derivatives in human industry.

"The world keeps revolving because there is electricity."

The spiral structure in Mario Merz's igloo constructions maps out a practical and symbolic image of the conviction that equivalents of analogies between proximate and remote global relations can be translated into formal practice. Since this phenomenon has no continuity in itself, he exercises optimal action with respect to natural and human givens. As long as Mario Merz lives, art-igloos will sprout out of the earth around him. In a scattered age, he takes the liberty of focusing on synthesis in forming and staging his mental iconography. The Modern Age has freed itself from the bonds of antiquated imagery through formal and informal abstraction. Mario Merz's dialectical application of this fact to the physiognomy of the things of life overcomes the icon-less isolation from reality – without painting people.

If you stay at home, there is not enough terrain for the construction of poetic designs for an art that wants to foster culture and therefore does not isolate itself ineffectively.

"The concept is a situation and a response to a situation."

(Mario Merz)

About the images at Mario Merz's exhibitions this year, I recall how on particularly long days the eyes were opened up by acts of enjoying oneself, making friends and remembering. Then the times of day do more than merely register events. Color and shade do

more than merely add picturesque light to the things of the world. Prometheus Mario Merz advances substantial arguments against phantasmas and their resistance to thought. For Mario Merz, configurations that also give him images of his motivations are indications that igloo-painting and things had better keep going.

CHAGNY IN BURGUNDY, JANUARY

"I have only used form – history never." (Mario Merz)

He can afford to say that because it is already a story when you turn an exhibition and a landscape into a lingering reflection.

From the TGV-station in the middle of the stretch between Paris and Lyon, an icy canal followed the winding road through the wintery transparency of the rhythmically hilly landscape. Parasitic mistletoe high up in the wan old trees and cropped, juicy, reddish brown grapevines gave me signs of life between lost villages. What business did I have in the faceless, mini-industrial city of Chagny? If laughing Pietro Sparta's gallery hadn't been next to the Mairie . . . If the door of an inner courtyard with workshops had not opened onto the thing incarnate?

Jumping in vineyards.

Like a Christmas goose with herbs, the floor of the workshop was stuffed with bundles of grapevines. The bizarre natural carpet was warm to the eyes – the crystal flowers on the windowpanes icy like one's feet.

"Such an object has a highly interesting physiognomy. Such an object can be used. It is superfluous to go there as an artist and recreate the object emblematically."

(Mario Merz)

Bent by winegrowers in opposition to their natural growth, the vines formed a formal as well as informal ground plan of smaller and bigger, organic as well as geometrically constructed arches out of beeswax. Half visible, half visionary spiral-springs, the impulsive coproduction in a rustic winter camp and a Japanese bridge of drainpipes climbing under the ceiling and a "walkway" of underbrush on top noticeably heightened the curve of the earth on the inside. After van Gogh's im- and expressive Europeanization of Hiroshige's highway-mountainridge-bridges, traversing the bays, column after column, between Tokyo and



MARIO MERZ, *LA GOCCIA D'ACQUA* (DER WASSERTROPFEN / *THE DROP OF WATER*), 1987,

METALLSTRUKTUR, GLAS, NEON / *METAL STRUCTURE, GLASS, NEON*, $\phi 1000 \times 500 \text{ cm} / \phi 33' \times 16'5''$,

DREIECKIGE METALLSTRUKTUR, BRUNNEN / *TRIANGULAR METAL STRUCTURE, FOUNTAIN*, $80 \times 2640 \times 445 \text{ cm} / 32'' \times 86' \frac{1}{2}'' \times 14'7''$.

INSTALLATION: CAPC MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE BORDEAUX, 1987.

(Photo: Frédéric Delpech)

Kyoto, we now have an international, romantic "earthlife-landscape" (C.G. Carus) (play on the words Erdbeben = earthquake and Erdleben) but not a pars pro toto section. Real blue neon numbers in the underbrush symbolize paths of energy out of the plain to new shoreline foundations – with and without contractor. On the picture plain of supratemporal interpretations, they were powered by the electrical transformation of cyclical fantasy.

Hiroshige's bridge-fireworks and bridge-rain can also be discovered in the astral mimesis of the scenic

self-portrait. Enthusiastic about the cogency of chance analogies, the artist recognizes the importance of the forms that occur to him and their ideas, without idealistic or materialistic predominance or semantic difficulties.

"It's because I haven't given up painting. That is, I haven't given up poetry. I see painting as a literary phenomenon... One phenomenon is expressed through the voice, another through the sign... Mathematics also has a poetic side. Poetic systems are not opposed to scientific systems. Even Einstein tried to see things the way a ratio-

nalist of his time never could have seen them. His scientific method was more complex. So at a certain point the phenomenon of linguistic difference comes into play. Language changes inasmuch as the instrument changes. If you change the instrument, you change the language."

(Mario Merz)

With Goethe: "We think, place after place we are on the inside."²⁾ And also on location with Merz.

Like the master builders of monasteries in Romanesque Burgundy, nothing extraneous occurred to Mario Merz. The barrel-vault proliferation in Chagny became the greenhouse for the minimalist and mythologist or the "complexity of perception, which is actually the basic form of the senses." (A. Kluge) Verbally-poetically, Alexander Kluge's cinematic and Mario Merz's static imagery are no different from the talking silence of nature:

"Nature, by the way, sets up complexes of this kind quite naturally. Except that they are unnarrated."³⁾ It is in the choice of complexes that the artist and the cinematographer differ from each other.

VENICE, APRIL

Places and their times tell of local and supra-regional life, when Mario Merz blends the forms and phenomena of nature with the derivatives of civilization, e.g. Veneto with Venice.

At the vaporetto stop San Tomà, the Palazzo Grassi blends into the elaborately restored facades on the Grand Canal. The rich Serenissima clung, up to her downfall, to urbanely differentiated similarity in her environment of waterstreets, alley ways, squares, palazzi and gardens. Beautiful people encountered their own significance in period costume on their own walls, ultimately neither overly Christian nor overly antique, like the Palazzo Grassi, now a museum of modern art.

The biennial city dusted off a monument. Arcimboldo's mannered metamorphosis was extended into the 20th century as the basic phenomenon of the conceptualization of art. The "Arcimboldo effect" is invoked to turn the fourth dimension into an instructive function of pictorial thinking – in Duchamp's erotic mechanisms as well as in cubo-futuristic or surreal utopias of style, the artist saw himself as the hub of the subjective

collective of his artistic devices, ironization of context, stylistic distortion, multi-forms and multi-perspectives.

However, in Arcimboldo's world portraits, everything is where it should be. And Mario Merz's *natura morta* also looked as if he had thought about the advantageous self-confidence of the Baroque patron. Like Rudolph II, who had himself painted in Prague by Arcimboldo, the rulers of Venice had themselves staged in the center of their world theater by Titian, Tintoretto and Tiepolo, with the saints, the gods, the four parts of the contemporary world, the four elements and the cycle of the four seasons all relegated to the background. Mario Merz arrives at a different set of representative numbers. The subjective democrat digitalizes his pictorial program of poetry and science himself: the formal transformation of the world's contents. We are not held in a center. There are too many of them. Nothing was more appropriate than homage (*homme/man* – *age/time* + *age*) to the age of man that has changed since Arcimboldo, even in Venice's tourism. But it has to occur to you. A festival architecture in the monumental entrance hall transposed the mimesis of the numerical proportions of the golden mean from the scale of observation to the world of analogy in size and totality. The invoking magic of Fibonacci's arabic calculation to infinity with finite nature allows us to see the whole, its parts simultaneously accelerated, through the rapid procession of persistently small symbols repeating themselves through the zero: here and now.

In the darkness of the gondola stand, "undulations" in the blue numbers canal of a lighted glass depot. Gradually discernible in the central photosphere of the stairwell, a giant "floating" crocodile, pieced together out of the wedge-shaped perspectives of his all-round movement – this, in turn, additively pieced together into a body of fist-sized balls of newspaper that looked as if they had been sprayed with muddy water. It proceeded to crawl "on land" as an ovoidal swordfish stone on the spiral scaffold-cum-thicket. Then I lost my way. In the semi-darkness of the bare branches from *terra ferma*, red, yellow, green squashes, zucchini, etc. slithered onto the spiral, labyrinth of a table on the chimney-cone of pale willow shoots, which provided the pictorial rotation of light and air between inner and

outer architecture in the Palazzo center. In the same breath, he left that transmission of the image to the imagination. Of fragile human dimensions, Mario Merz's breathing body of the mid-sixties had grown into architectural lungs. Surrounded by classical rows of columns, it gave an anatomy lesson on architecture in which one can breathe, an architecture that passes the optical and physical movements of perception along to the circulation-cosmos of civilization.

An allegory cited from Arcimboldo's alchemy of portraiture signalized the metamorphosis of poetry in the glance of an eye. The white Turk's-cap lily "grew" out of natural imagery, irrigated by the reservoir in a twin bottle blown especially in Murano. If the images of our multi-medial vernacular (the top-repro-simulation of the year in Venice: "Your life is your film"/in our jeans) are ever to be firsthand again, an incomparably more plausible imagination will have to govern the self-perception of manifest mental forms.

"If there is eternity, then that means: it is so comprehensive that you can go from there back to the minimum. I can go back to the tiniest crumb, because I have extended ad infinitum the element of infinity that already existed in the consciousness of (Russian and American) Minimalists."

(Mario Merz)

DÜSSELDORF, FEBRUARY

While Mario Merz was still working in Venice in February, his exhibition at Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf fortunately left him enough energy and concentration to give a lecture to my students at the School of Art in Cologne about his status quo. In *n u c e*: "Content must unexpectedly prove to be important."⁴⁾

A purely informal or purely constructive artistic approach does not offer the imagination extreme working methods anymore and therefore, no unexpected affective or intellectual insights either.

What is to be done?⁵⁾

Let the mental and material vehicles of the image become the medium "picture." The content of the ensuing fusion satisfies the invested need for vision and knowledge.

OUT OF LEAD conveyed a substantial materiality without any spurious stylistic commitment. In Fischer's warehouse-gallery, in the large second-floor

space with windows along both sides and a row of supporting columns down the middle, there stood a northern continent-body of large wax and lead leaves. The lead-ice-ocean-mass dominated but protected the wax warmth like an animal's armor. Reminiscent of Beuys' PAIN ROOM (shown by Fischer in 1983/84 in the small gallery behind the Kunsthalle, currently housing an exhibition of sculptures by the virtuoso Picasso) but without the strenuous claustrophobic side-effects, survival qualities emanated from the dully reflected rays of light on the lead coat. The small, leaden cubic fortress on the igloo's zenith was a compliment to the non-absolutizing Bauhaus module of the world commune:

"I had to give the picture a security that it no longer had."

(Mario Merz)

Useful is not a rigid mental system but a constructive mental attitude available on call.

The lunar atmosphere was cool and soft.

BORDEAUX, MAY

The baggage of the pictorial generator is light and heavy. OUT OF LEAD was already standing in Bordeaux in May, a unit like a software memory, in the upper vaulted gallery of a warehouse-museum in the former port. Older annual pictures were also lined up here: 1981 architecture founded and dissolved by time / *Architettura sfondata dal tempo*, *architettura fondata dal tempo*. 1983 Centuries hoarded to pull up a mass of algae and pearls. 1983/85 *La casa del giardiniere* / The gardener's house, *Archi - tettura* = origin - roof?

Even when it is empty, the endless square meters of the enterprising art Entrepôt Lainé, run by Jean-Louis Froment, is typical of this Atlantic harbor that amassed riches through trade in slaves, wood and wine. There is one thing here that has not been given price since the days of the city counselors, Montaigne and Montesquieu: a generous morality that allows a certain leeway within the "spirit of the law"⁶⁾ to keep things from grinding to a halt.

The open spaces beyond the city convey a feeling for the quality of life under the oceanic skies of Aquitania. The taxi driver and the waiter say so - and not only their droll, lilting dialect. Opening receptions at the



MARIO MERZ, *ARCHITETTURA FONDATA DAL TEMPO, ARCHITETTURA SFONDATA DAL TEMPO*
(ARCHITEKTUR GEGRÜNDET UND AUFGELÖST VON DER ZEIT / ARCHITECTURE FOUNDED AND DISSOLVED BY TIME),
METALLSTRUKTUR, GLAS / METAL STRUCTURE, GLASS, ϕ 600 x 300 cm / ϕ 20' x 10',
RECHTECKIGE METALLSTRUKTUR, BEMALTE LEINWAND, NEON / RECTANGULAR METAL STRUCTURE, PAINTED CANVAS, NEON,
260 x 476 cm / 8'5" x 15'7".
INSTALLATION: CAPC MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE BORDEAUX, 1987.

(Photo: Frédéric Despech)

gallery and at the feudal Mairie make a great to-do for the sake of transience that is forever.

Mario Merz made an economic art miracle come true: the architectural drawing that works in space without definitive boundaries. Barely inside the house, one saw the RIVER THAT CROPS UP in a barrel vault some thirty meters long. Iron arches, like lines pencilled by Mario Merz's impulsive choreography, jumped over the newspaper river (a ribbon of bundled newspapers) of neon blue Fibonacci numbers jumping from finitude to infinity. In 1974, red tunnels of lines sketched the tension of these little power numbers over the fingers of one hand.⁷⁾ Here one saw at a glance how moving sums of thought can be pitted against thick walls by the news of yesterday – more impressively, I suspect, than the spring break-up in the smoothly modernized Capodi Monte castle of the Bourbons, turned into a museum high above the bay of Naples.

LA GOCCIA D'ACQUA / THE DROP OF WATER

In the storehouse, covering the entire cross section and almost the entire ground plan, the glass igloo at eighteen years of age achieved the apotheosis of its presentiments. At a distance from the dark arcades it rose to a cathedral interior, buttressed by one of the columns in the hall and supporting walkers for the first time. From the dizzying heights of the gallery windows, beams of sunlight projected roaming igloos of light through the arched windows onto the glass vaulting. Colliding with Mario Merz's architectonic cubism, they broke on the representational levels of the glass roof, on the floor and on the horizon of the rotation-table of the world's house. In perfect keeping with the site, a gigantic, wedge of a table, an iron slab on legs, advanced out of the darkness of the arcades into the light of the igloo and pierced the glass wall opposite with its tip, where the cycle of things in the igloo world vented itself in a gush of water. To keep the water from ebbing, it was collected in a barrel and invisibly pumped back into its hose.

Mario Merz would never think of dramatically drafting the real thing, the earth spewing water and fire, like Leonardo da Vinci. Today the eschatological spectacle can be so wonderfully terrifying only in the movies. We don't even notice it anymore. That is why Mario Merz does not design irrigation systems as

organs of the landscape, like Leonardo. He constructs the cosmic image that needs rescuing. Mario Merz's drops of water fall on hot stones, persevering and immodest.

"Philosophers argue for and against society. They are too rigid. I'm a very formal person. And I'm even more formal than other people who call themselves formal because I use parallel forms... If you instigate conflicts, nothing works anymore. That leads to incorrect decisions. There are so many conflicts that cancel each other out. But a lot of things are revealed by parallel appearances."

(Mario Merz)

The fourth dimension is multi-dimensional – round and not square. The igloo, the instrument of Mario Merz's biographical imagery, acquires its cultural usefulness through contact with reality, depending on its painterly constructive constitution. The igloo house of the world is the communicatively life-sized head, the visibly vibrating physis in the accelerated imagination. The head in its cranium is as distant as the near and far world. The igloo can stand there and yet act, can isolate itself and be a resonance chamber for the rest of the world – like the head. So it's not all that strange.

PARIS, NOVEMBER

For the Festival d'Automne, the flow of forms was regenerated on the way to church and art in Le Veaus Hospital "La Salpêtrière."⁸⁾ It rained the length of the cobbled carriageway from the triumphal arch entrance dedicated to the child, Ludwig XIV, to the church of Saint Louis in the center of the compound. The parade of ghosts: Charcot's psychiatry,⁹⁾ Picasso's blue dramas in the women's jail, ten years' private company for Artaud's nerves, drugs and delusions. My first impression and my lingering memory of Mario Merz's body-architecture within the mighty architecture for the saints of the French kings: it breathed as if Mario Merz were speaking out of the igloo cloud to tempt us with a culture that keeps erasing the night monument from its imagination. Everything revolved around the predominant crossing. A small cupola under the toweringly high cupola.

Yes, but the eternal recurrence looked different. Behind the railing on the floor, dramatic illumination in a glass-depot wedge that bore down on the igloo in a

rotating diagonal. Eccentrically placed but rarely even, and transparently covered with rectangular stone slabs from an old roof (and a fragment of a Classicist relief): *DO THE HOUSES REVOLVE AROUND US OR DO WE REVOLVE AROUND THEM?* (1977/85)¹⁰ From the main altar, a secular revelation shone on the silvery, wire-mesh screen: *EVEN IF THE FORM DISAPPEARS – ITS ROOTS ARE ETERNAL*. In the left side of the transept, a body-in-body formation, mystified in the back-light. Erotically, it runs through all the non-objects there have been so far, *PLACES WITH NO WAY OUT, LIGHT-DARK* in the grapevine and glass igloo. The picture generator sent neon flashes through the glass dome of igloo-proliferation (h 14', Ø 26') in the blind, black body of its innards. Only a few steps away from the nimbus of Monte Verità's cyclical events, the whole thing withdrew into holy dimness. The blue neon exhortation *OBJECT, CACHE TOI!*, larger than any since 1968, was written on the fagot shack-igloo.

And on spoke Zarathustra/Merz about *IMPENETRABLE PLACES*; one turned around and faced another chapel. Why impenetrable? Actually, an elegant way out of a psychic blockade. A glittering wire-mesh space lab on a flying carpet out of grapevine fagots, there where the arcade to the pulpit was piled up with fagots higher than eye level. In the sacrosanct chill of the church, there came the warmth of fusion after all, in which leaning, white marble slabs became emotional walls of houses and the numbers were able to light the way into the house through the underbrush. In the chapel opposite, *A PATH FOR HERE AND NOW / SENTIERO PER QUI* opened up although at first the barricaded ruin didn't seem to have one nor did it look like a project for a house, *PROGETTO DOMESTICO*, as the commissioned triennial of 1986 was called. It isn't that easy to con Mario Merz into a euphoria of design. Not with craftsmanship nor with industrial skill but with empathy for his materials, Mario Merz carved a canal some eight meters long out of narrow, porous sandstone slabs (concrete cladding) with bizarre banks. Running under the igloo fortress, it houses the stream of numbers of the miraculous transformation of newspapers into everything autonomous that one wants and needs for constructive, physiognomic habitation. At the opening, I saw a sad Madonna in the spotlights above the igloo as if on a barricade of tattered dogma.

Towards the opposite shore of the crossing, there swelled the elementary, mimetic realm of organicity without an indication of narrative action. Devoid of ideology by instinct. The Venetian crocodile with the modern flexibility of ancient forms swam to the time(s)-energy-flow of the dancing stories on the banks. A dark path forked into a light one on the way to fantasy recycling with nature and industry. "A day is long for Mister Blum." (Mario Merz).

Harald Szeemann staged the homage to Mario Merz's annual yield with the artist in such a way that the mythical-scientific pictorial instruments for the perception of being would, through fascination, be able to demonstrate their applicability to various cultural contexts – individual and objective.

Due to his aversion to precocious mental births, Mario Merz embeds his aesthetic observations in discernible phenomenal life. Personal culture cannot simply invent other newnesses. A great loner befriends his picture-journeys: "I am interested in the fact that the ocean swells and doesn't stay flat."

(Mario Merz)

(Translation: Catherine Schelbert)

NOTES

¹⁾ All of Mario Merz's statements are quoted from a conversation with him before the opening of his exhibition in Paris.

²⁾ See Ernst Cassirer, *FREIHEIT UND FORM*, Darmstadt, 1967, 4th ed., p. 181.

³⁾ A. Kluge, "Die schärfste Ideologie: dass die Realität sich auf ihren realistischen Charakter beruft", in: A. KLUGE, Thomas Böhm-Christl (ed), Frankfurt a. M., 1983, p. 297.

⁴⁾ Published in: *LA PLANÈTE MERZ*, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Libération No. hors série, Paris, Harald Szeemann (ed).

⁵⁾ Lenin raised this question in a speech on the chances of Soviet Communism in 1912. Probably aware of this, Mario Merz repeated the question in the form of a neon sign on wax in a cooking pot for fish.

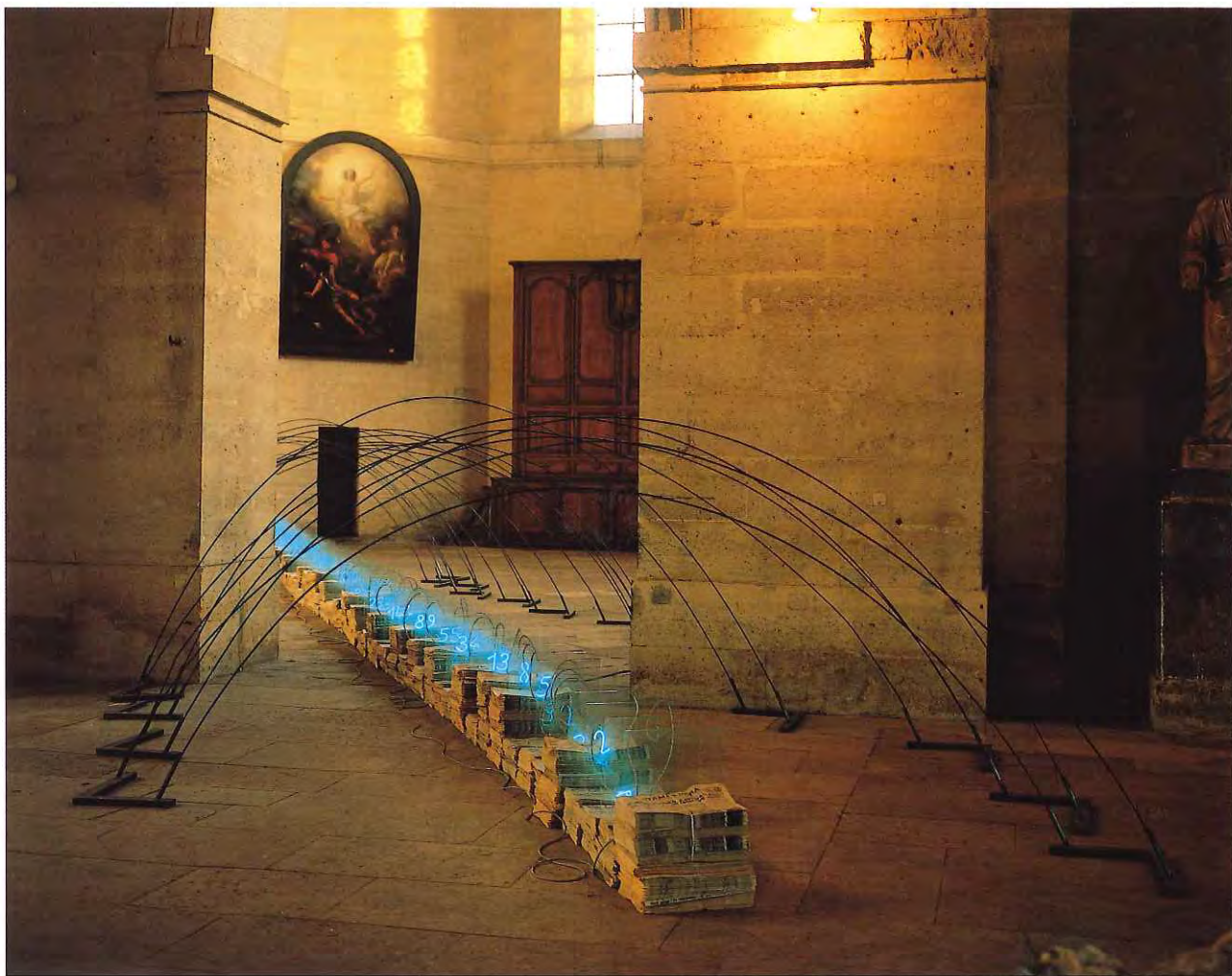
⁶⁾ Charles de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, "On the Spirit of the Law," 1748, first published anonymously.

⁷⁾ In: MARIO MERZ, catalog, Kunsthalle Basel, 1975, Marlis Gräterich and Carlo Huber (eds): *Una somma reale e una somma di gesti delle cinque dita realmente / A true sum is truly the sum of the five fingers*.

⁸⁾ Art exhibitions are shown in the church of the Salpêtrière, a psychiatric clinic, with buildings dating back to the 17th century.

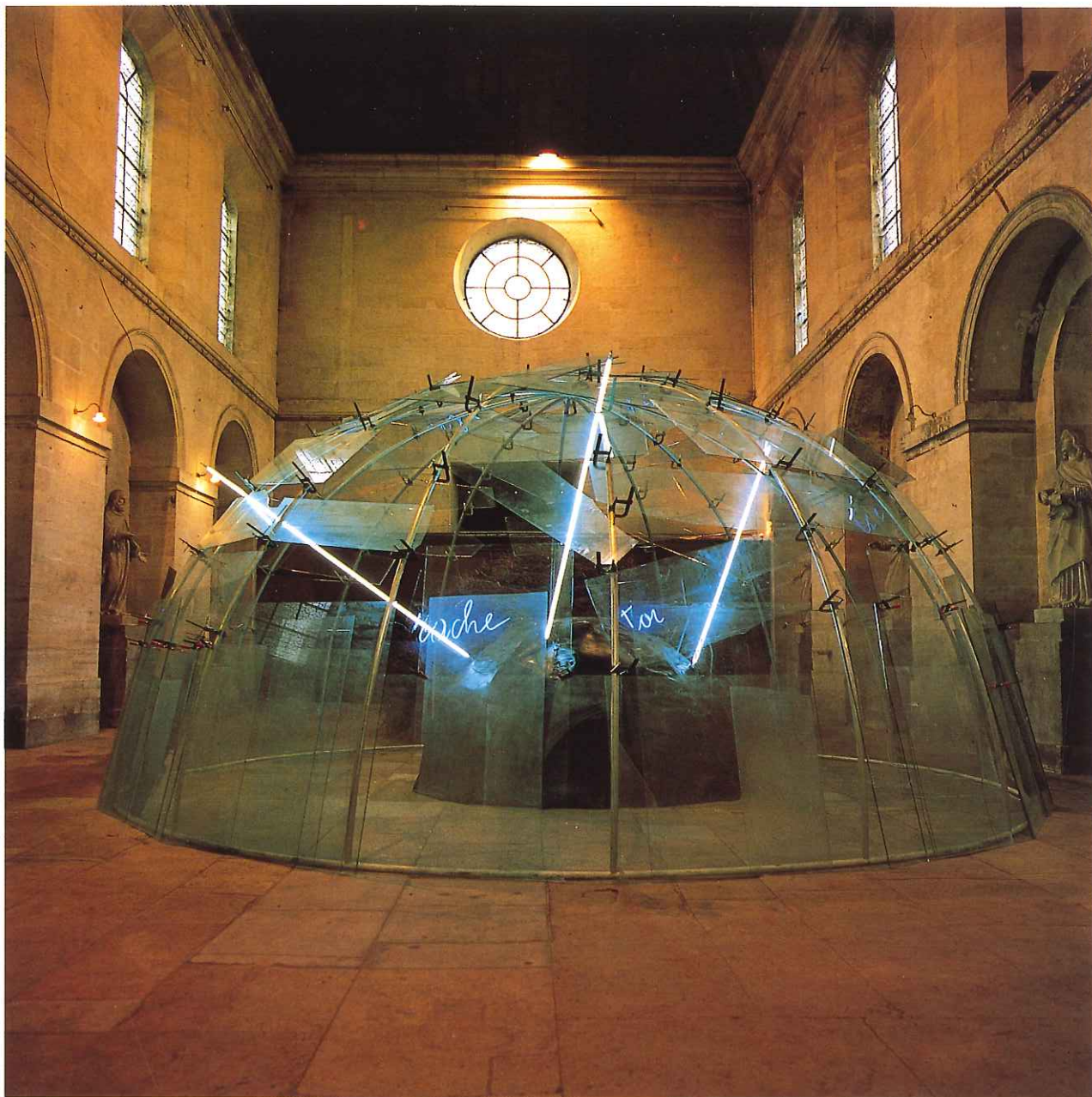
⁹⁾ Jean Martin Charcot (1825–93), influential neurologist, founded a neurological clinic in the Salpêtrière in 1862. His research in hysteria and hypnosis interested Sigmund Freud, who studied with Charcot in 1885.

¹⁰⁾ Girano le case intorno a noi o giriamo noi intorno alle case? The title of Mario Merz's DAAD exhibition, Berlin, 1974, was occasioned by the fact that the exhibition space was too small. The low, triangular table coming out of the glass igloo made its first appearance here in order to enlarge the room. See the poster and cover drawing at the Kaiser-Friedrich-Wilhelm-Museum, Krefeld.



MARIO MERZ, *IL FIUME APPARE* (FLUSS, DER AUFTAUCHT / RIVER, THAT CROPS UP), 1986,
EISEN, GLAS, ZEITUNGEN, NEON / IRON, GLASS, NEWSPAPER, 240 x 400 x 2500 cm / 8' x 13' x 82'.
INSTALLATION: CHAPELLE DE LA SALPÊTRIÈRE PARIS, 1987.

(Photo: Salvatore Licitra)



MARIO MERZ, 8 5 3, 1985, TRIPLE IGLOO,
DREI METALLSTRUKTUREN, GLAS, REISIGBÜNDEL, TEER, NEON /
THREE METAL STRUCTURES, GLASS, FAGOTS, TAR, NEON;
IM ZENTRUM DES GROSSEN IGLU / IN THE CENTER OF THE BIG IGLOO: OBJET CACHE-TOI, 1968.
INSTALLATION: CHAPELLE DE LA SALPÊTRIÈRE PARIS, 1987.
(Photo: Salvatore Licitra)

Silverthorne, Jeanne. "Mario Merz's Future of an Illusion." *Parkett*, no. 15, 1988, pp. 58-63, 68-69.

Mario Merz

MARIO MERZ'S FUTURE OF AN ILLUSION

JEANNE SILVERTHORNE

The work of Mario Merz leaves the impression of a compulsive urge toward transcendence. On the one hand, he is himself a kind of Second Coming, considerably less glorious than was anticipated, bringing confirmation of another postponement in the offing, a third and fourth and fifth Coming. He exalts, on the one hands, the habit of craning forward, knowing the impossibility of arrival. On the other hand, he is the last Futurist left standing in the wake of a future that has exhausted itself in an orgy of big bangs. This expresses itself in a visual vocabulary bequeathed to him by the Futurists – vectors, spirals, and directional lines pull our eyes and minds toward some point of convergence at which time and space will be superseded. The ritualistic qualities and functions of his installations conflate this movement with that of a religious epiphany. And Merz's relationship to Futurism is like his relationship to religion. Both await the Millennium, but Merz takes up both at a post-Millennial point.

Many are the indications of Merz's Transcendentalism. The physical, although indispensable, is, in the end, merely material. Forms come and go; only the root remains,¹⁾ says Merz the Platonist, illustrating with an empty raincoat pierced by

neon (the constant energy and vanished corpse of UNTITLED, 1971), with neon numbers rocketing up a spire into the heavens (UNTITLED, 1984), with sea gull footprints chiselled up a wall and out through a window (at San Benedetto del Tronto, 1969). Flight to the freedom of disembodiment – the motorcycle accelerates centrifugally, defying gravity on the wall (ACCELERATION-DREAM, FIBONACCI NUMBERS IN NEON AND FANTASY MOTORCYCLE, 1972). Like acceleration, an attempt to cross some barrier of inertia, sound or light, the transparency of the igloos and the translucence of the velum constructions allow vision and light to pass through. In Merz's paintings the use of gold leaf, aluminium paint and shiny enamels, and the "atmospheric halo" of the neon, "dissolves" their "physicality (...)" creating a spectral quality that is enhanced by (...) the spray paints with their vaporous appearance."²⁾ And what is it that will appear when Merz's paintings disappear?

The artist characterizes his landscape images as a reprise of nineteenth-century landscape painting. (It is certainly an unintentional irony that neon enacts one of the most trenchant criticisms of nineteenth-century Romanticism, being literally a "circumambient gas.") The painters Merz emulates were Transcendentalists, taking nature as a conduit for a higher being.

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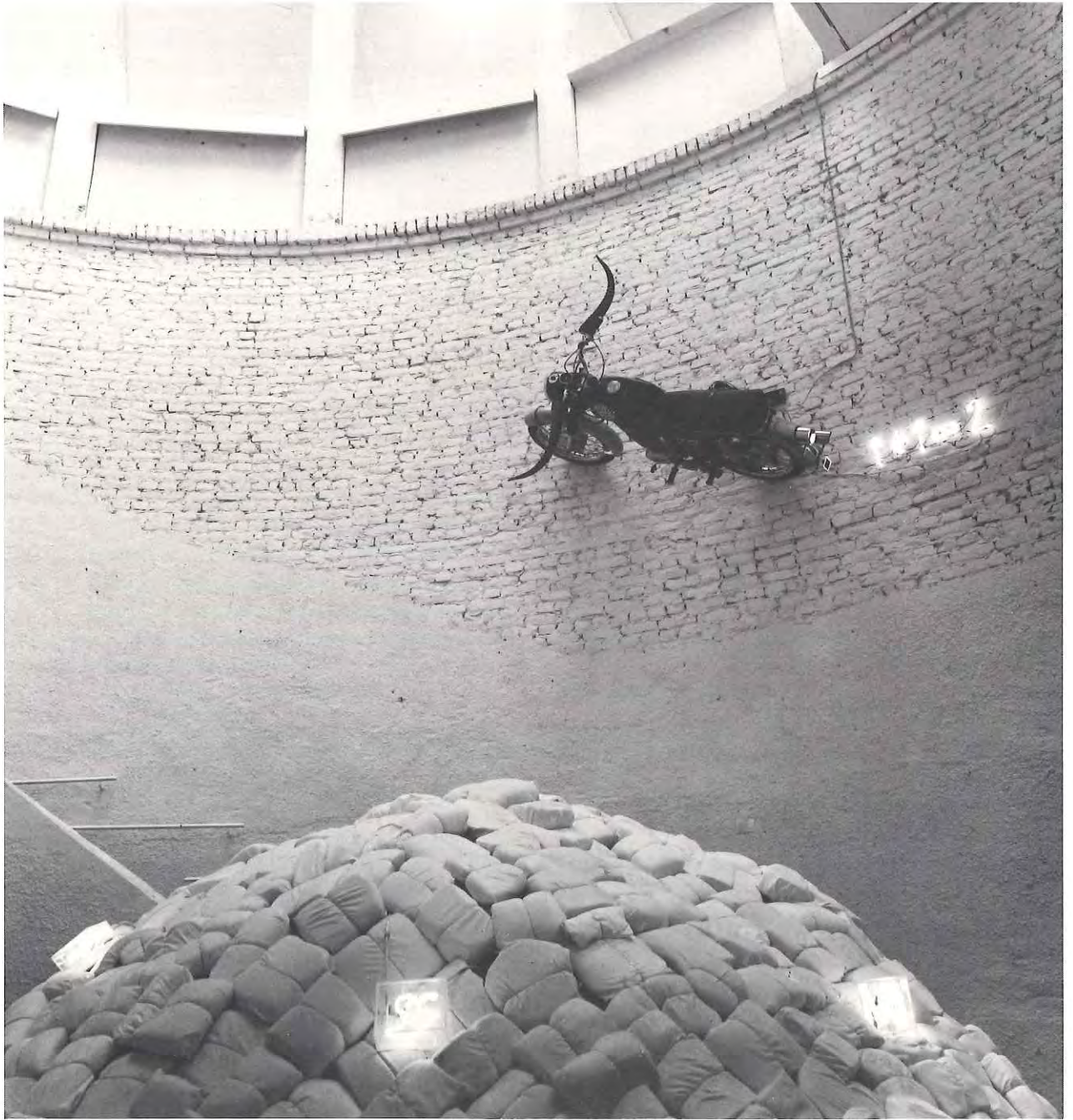
A secular search for transcendental freedom obsessed the Italian Futurists, and Merz has much in common with them. The visual congruences are unmistakable. According to the Futurist writer Ardengo Soffici, the essentials of pure painting were the arabesque and the chiaroscuro. Merz emphasizes both. Neon wands are “lines of force” (as early as 1966, in Structures with Neon Passing Through). Vectors, the “passionate” and beautifully willful “acute angles” of the Futurists, recur in painting after painting. Indeed, as Luciana Rogozinsky has described, an entire installation can be ripped by a three-point perspective.³⁾ In a 1983 Bologna grouping, the vanishing point and the viewer’s eye came to rest in a corner (another vector) containing one dark and one light canvas.

Beyond the visual connections, Merz and the Futurists desire the same freedoms – for one, a freedom from rationality. The spiral, for example, “permits . . . Malevich’s square to acquire the same expressive power as the vision of a mentally ill,” according to Merz, taking the supremely controlled vision of Malevich and making it illogical (insane).⁴⁾ Liberation for Merz, as a member of Arte Povera, would come out of a Marcusean philosophy: political and sexual repression is overcome through the intensely personal, where one touches the perpetual movement of energy in the cosmos.⁵⁾ In addition, when Merz places fruits and vegetables on spiralling tables that resemble conveyor belts, as if they were headed to fruition, he is close to achieving another Futurist freedom: the finite released hurtling into the infinite. Merz speaks constantly of space as something oppressive, which he battles to penetrate. An igloo can be too large, too swollen for a given space, in Merz’s own description, like an overgrown “elephant.”⁶⁾ Rogozinsky describes works so “squeezed together” that “they appeared to want to force themselves on each other and reproduce.” The Futurists, for their part, in embracing Bergsonian simultaneity, claimed to sense molecular motion and vibrating waves within an object; this absolute motion was joined with relative motion, the interaction of this never-still object with its never-still environment. The result was the birth of a new entity – the object-milieu.

With Merz, leaning as a construction method is a trope for the interdependence of all things. Works are psychologically as well as physically enmeshed. The struggle for freeing consummation in the object-milieu, then, need not be simply between an object and space. Neon, in addition to being Merz’s “Goddess of Speed,”⁷⁾ was on at least one occasion an allusion to a minor shooting pain in his knee. This is akin to Russolo’s bringing street noises into the theater with his “noiseintoners”; it is further proof of Merz’s tendency to mix all contexts.

In the process of blending figure and ground, unit and matrix, the Futurists believed genres would distill; progress would result in their harmonious fusion. Merz, however, shows a more banal future, one in which genres have collapsed rather than united. His works are the *ad hoc* combinations of a scarcity economy. Merz’s use of indigenous materials, such as eucalyptus branches from the bush when he was in Australia, is part of a scavenging aesthetic which creates “a utopia dreamed up from the unwanted substance of the world” (Rogozinsky). A bundle of hay and a Simca automobile cooperate out of mutual interest, genres in league together out of necessity. “People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones” – it’s as though Merz’s glass igloo has survived the thrown stone, possibly a real one such as that in STONE MOVED FROM CONTINENT TO CONTINENT (1983–84). The global nature of the shattering event is suggested by the title. Fragmented structures rise tentatively out of ruins. Their provisional nature – stacked and leaning rather than secured with nuts and bolts, leaning now out of weakness as well as camaraderie – shows them holding themselves in readiness for the next catastrophe. Merzian animals look irradiated. Bronze and oil can barely be remembered. The institutions the Futurists wanted to destroy – the museum, the library – are effaced in Merz’s scenario.

Time is multidimensional. The simple temporal divisions of the Futurists are dissolved. With eyes filled with nuclear-age tristesse, the contemporary viewer looks on Merz’s futurama as a post-apoca-



MARIO MERZ, *ACCELERATION-DREAM, FIBONACCI NUMBERS IN NEON AND FANTASY MOTORCYCLE* /
BESCHLEUNIGUNGSTRAUM, FIBONACCIZAHLEN IN NEON UND MOTORRADPHANTASIE, 1972.

INSTALLATION: DOCUMENTA 5 KASSEL, 1972.

(Photo: Paolo Mussat Sartor)

MARIO MERZ, INSTALLATION VIEW AT GALERIA L'ATTICO, ROME, 1969.

(Photo: Claudio Abate)



MARIO MERZ, *CHE FARE? (WAS TUN?) /*

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?) 1968,

PFANNE, WACHS, NEON / *PAN, WAX, NEON*. (Photo: Paolo Mussal Sartor)



lyptic reconstruction that is, paradoxically, prehistorically primitive. The speed of force lines, spirals and vectors transports us – shades of H. G. Wells' time machine – into an Einsteinian relativity, a soup of tenses. *IL FIUME APPARE* (1986) consists of newspapers topped by Fibonacci numbers arranged in a long line which is bridged periodically by iron arches. This is the march of events through a cross-current of eternal return – time and tide. Even this is more orderly than the relativistic implications of *DOUBLE IGLOO* (1979). An outer glass igloo "skin" is topped by a hat, as if that hemisphere were a head, while an inner igloo composed of clay shards makes an imbrication suggestive of the tumuli of the brain, and echoes the scales of a stuffed alligator placed on the ceiling. This environment reminds us that we possess a primitive section in our brains, one might say a lizard brain, coexisting with more advanced sections.

Merz's concern with the dignity of labor, the communality of workers, and his conflicting adherence to a modified Nietzscheanism of the self recapitulate an uncertain social evolution. The Futurists abhorred the masses except as they cohered into a symbolic *uebermensch*, "the disciple of the Engine," as Emilio Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote, whose "glory rests in his personal qualities."⁸ Futurism's populism seemed always to turn elitist. The artist could be done away with some day when exquisite perception became commonplace. One of Soffici's principles was that there "will come about such a state of perfect commu-

nion between the creator and the contemplator that one word . . . one sign will reveal everything." But these signs will be "an hermetic cryptography intelligible only to the initiated."⁹ Merz has made art out of employees in a company cafeteria; his neon phrases are graffiti from the May '68 demonstrations, the title of a book by Lenin, and a slogan attributed to North Vietnamese General Giap. Germano Celant interprets Merz's nomadism as a way of "keeping alive the fusion between property and work."¹⁰ Nevertheless, "collectivism," claims Merz, "... has a meaning in life; in art . . . the big problem is to overcome it," through, one surmises, a discovery and assertion of self.¹¹

This contradiction comes together in the religious aspect of Merz's endeavor. A kind of early Christian communality links up with Merz as Messiah. Food-sharing rituals inform many of his presentations. Christian iconography permeates the painting *THE MORNING STAR* (1983–84), its domesticated animal burdened with overtones of innocence and potential sacrifice. In fact, there is at the same time a prelapsarian quality in Merz's animal archetypes and a post-Edenic one. In his own view, the creatures are Gothic demon-angel changelings.¹² Neon-pierced objects also suggest transformation. Transubstantiation and the Nativity are foregrounded when the object is a bottle of wine or a bale of hay. Recently, in Naples, the pieces of *ONDA D'URTO* (1987) were deployed to form an area resembling a nave. Finally, in Paris, Merz was given a chapel, Salpêtrière, in which to put together an environment (1987) which was somewhat homesick for Catholicism.

Onto these sacred stages steps Merz the proselytizer. He is as prolific verbally as he is sculpturally. His proclamations address the issues of how to live and how to make art. He practices a species of laying-on-of-hands, taking possession of an object by arranging it in his hands until its structure manifests itself. This is the modern-day holy man-philosopher, an oceanic, Whitmanesque figure. In truth, Merz's work, so repetitive, is a performance, not an artifact, a series of recreations of a handful of symbolic actions. Along with Beuys, he has been called a shaman, a magician, and an alchemist.



MARIO MERZ, *DOUBLE IGLOO; ALLIGATOR WITH FIBONACCI NUMBERS TO 377*.
 INSTALLATION: SPERONE WESTWATER FISCHER GALLERY NEW YORK, 1979.

Still, the issue of nostalgia remains controversial. Merz's dramaturgy is completely in keeping with Walter Benjamin's contention that art that ignores mechanical reproduction is, willy nilly, religious in aspiration. Merz credits only nature or the life force with reproductive power and gives it unlimited credit. Merz wishes to reestablish Wagnerian myth; he assuages the fear of the demise of the symbolic in the modern era.¹³ Perhaps he combines Charles Baudelaire's sense that "we are all celebrating some funeral" with William Butler Yeats' vision of the birth of a new age. Yeats had his spiral, the "widening gyre"; he too saw "things fall apart," felt that "surely some revelation is at hand." However, Merz's Second Coming is no rough beast. His narrative thrust remains utopian and it is this more than anything that constitutes his risk. In history, utopias have always failed.

NOTES

- 1) "When the form disappears, the root is eternal" was a phrase Merz wrote above a painting in an installation at Flow Ace Gallery in California, 1982.
- 2) Susan Krane, catalogue for show of Merz's work at Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y., Jan. 18–March 18, 1984, p. 10, 18.
- 3) Review in ARTFORUM, April 1983, p. 83.
- 4) Mario Merz, «Une petite maison mythique et cosmique», LIBÉRATION, Fall 1987, pp. 4–6.
- 5) Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, «Arte Povera, 1967–87», FLASH ART, Nov.–Dec. 1987, pp. 52–69.
- 6) Patrick Javault, «Entretien de Mario Merz», LA REVUE, Oct. 1987, pp. 6–7.
- 7) Marinetti's term.
- 8) This is from Marinetti's May 1910 attack on the Professors, as quoted in Rosa Trillo Clough, FUTURISM, THE STORY OF A MODERN ART MOVEMENT: A NEW APPRAISAL (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1961), p. 33.
- 9) A. Soffici, PRIMI PRINCIPI DI UNA ESTETICA FUTURISTA (Firenze: Valecchi, 1920), as quoted by Clough, p. 57.
- 10) «Mario Merz: The Artist as Nomad», ARTFORUM, Dec. 1979, pp. 52–58.
- 11) Interview with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, in «Arte Povera.»
- 12) «Une petite maison», p. 5.
- 13) Rogozinsky



MARIO MERZ,
TERRA GRIGIA, TERRA CHIUSA
 (GRAUE ERDE, VERSCHLOSSENE ERDE /
 GREY EARTH, CLOSED EARTH), 1979,
 HOLZ, TON, FLASCHE MIT NEON /
 WOOD, CLAY, BOTTLE WITH NEON.
 (Photo: Dorothee Fischer)



MARIO MERZ,
IRRITABILE - IRRITATO
 (REIZBAR - GEREIZT /
 IRRITABLE - IRRITATED), 1979,
 KOHLE, ACRYL, NEON AUF LEINWAND,
 TONOBJEKT / CHARCOAL, ACRYLIC,
 NEON ON CANVAS, CLAY OBJECT,
 233 x 270 cm / 7'7" x 8'10".
 INSTALLATION: GALERIE ANNEMARIE
 VERNER ZÜRICH, 1979.
 (Photo: Doris Quarella)

MARIO MERZ,
TISCH, FRÜCHTE UND GEMÜSE /
TABLE, FRUIT AND VEGETABLES, 1982,
ø 550 cm / ø 18'.

INSTALLATION: SPERONE WESTWATER
GALLERY NEW YORK, 1982.

(Photo: Zindman/Fremont)



MARIO MERZ, VIER TISCHE IN FORM
EINER MAGNOLIE / FOUR TABLES
IN SHAPE OF A MAGNOLIA, 1985,
BIENENWACHS UND MISCHTECHNIK
AUF STAHLTISCHEN /
BEESWAX AND MIXED MEDIA ON
WELDED STEEL TABLES,
0,7 x 20 x 1,5 m / 29" x 65' 3" x 60".
BÂTEAU IVRE, 1983,
ACRYL UND KOHLE AUF LEINWAND /
ACRYLIC AND CHARCOAL ON CANVAS,
2,6 x 23,5 m / 8' 8" x 77' 4".
INSTALLATION: LEO CASTELLI IN
COOPERATION WITH SPERONE
WESTWATER GALLERIES, NEW YORK, 1985.

(Photo: Dorothy Zeidman)



Zacharopoulos, Denys. "The Present of a Work." *Parkett*, no. 15, 1988, pp. 95-97.

Mario Merz

MARIO MERZ, TEMPEL, VON DEN ABGRÜNDEn ENTFÜHRT / TEMPLE, RAPED BY THE ABYSSES, 1981,
BEMALTE LEINWAND, NEON, METALLSTRUKTUR / PAINTED CANVAS, NEON, METAL STRUCTURE,
380 x 700 x 65 cm / 12'6" x 23' x 2'2". INSTALLATION: HALLEN FÜR NEUE KUNST SCHAFFHAUSEN.

(Photo: Paolo Alussat Sartor)



The Present of a Work

DENYS ZACHAROPOULOS

Mario Merz's work draws its roots from Empedocles and from Rabelais, from Leonardo and Bruegel, from Voltaire and Nietzsche, from Leopardi and Pound, from Monteverdi and Wagner, from Bernini and Sant'Elia, from Chirico and Boccioni, from Giordano Bruno and Cuvier, from Géricault and Fautrier, etc... It is altogether overspill, trend, movement and dynamics. It ceaselessly moves ahead of its own limits. It impetuously precedes all iconographical organisation, all symbolical arrangement, in order to generate sense at the actual point of its poetic strangeness, of its political familiarity. Each bit of evidence is a new hypothesis for improbable events, and each improbable-

ity is a bias through which sense shifts into the present. What might seem confused at a standstill, turns, once it starts to move, into a fusion of distinctions: numbers, poetics, critical thought, and ireny, as opposed to all destiny, all signification, all confirmation, all history.¹⁾ The present of a numerical configuration is the infinite number containing its reality beyond chance and necessity.

The proliferation of figures uncovered by the monk Leonardo da Pisa (ca. 1180-1240), later known as Fibonacci, has been ruling Mario Merz's work since 1970, driving in its wake politics, poetics and art as a sole complex entity of the work, just as biology, mathematics and physics are but one manifold reality of proliferation.²⁾ This co-naturality of things strips the

DENYS ZACHAROPOULOS in an art critic. He lives in Paris.

work of referential functions: proliferation, being sui-referential, ceaselessly generates itself. This co-naturality of things turns space into a complex movement where memory, animals and numbers never freeze in a rigid triangular structure, but merge with the sense of life itself, announcing at every moment its impending virtuality. Hence Man, work and event constitute the blatant actuality of space the present of life and its inescapable impact. In fact, this defines the horizon of Merz's oeuvre. There Man is given by his grasp of the basically impossible, but inescapably present gap between a view and a horizon, between a work and an event. The point is not to divide Man or to stress his duality, but to unite him without unifying him with the world. This, in fact, is the principle behind Fibonacci's series: 1.1.2. (3.5...): the number is identical to itself but is also that which precedes and follows it, so that it is always equal to the others. This is also the sense of the spiral: no sooner does it herald the possibility of a closure, than a circle will irreversibly open itself to the exteriority of a world seen and seized as being space and sense.

Within this double grasp, the igloo is a given of both work and event, of both place and sense of things, of both Man and the world. Moving beyond all dialectics, all divisions and all attempts at unification, the work criss-crosses what is open and what is closed, what is full and what is empty, etc... Amongst constructions, dwellings and architectural forms, igloos are unique for they need no decoration, no composition, no levelling out of various parts within the hierarchy of a whole. The igloo is form, function and work at the same time. This is why the work is an event while it is also a work. Neither painting nor sculpture, Mario Merz's work becomes real at the moment of its comprehension: it is there, it is present, and thereby gives form beyond the triangularity of space and times. Fibonacci's proliferation is alien to dialectical suppression. It does not stop at 1. 2. 3. but coils up and unfurls. It may fold and unfold,³⁾ but it never folds back upon itself, because it folds and unfolds within one time and one space that could hardly be dissociated from a place – be it a mental place where the work would materialize, where the work would materialize, where it could be grasped and manifest. Moreover, this mental place is never “simply” but always “complexly” mental. It is constantly identi-

cal to a physical place, to a sense that knows reality and acknowledges it as such, because it was born with it, because it naturally belongs with it. Thus, numbers are also nature, language is poetry, Man is work, and knowledge is event. This happens prior to things, prior to forms, prior to sense. There is no more apt designation of this “priority” than the Greek word “meta,” which allows us to speak of meta-techne (in analogy to meta-physics). Yet nowadays, any discussion on terminology will have less to do with Aristotle's *aporiae* than with those of Molière's *Monsieur Jourdain*. But let us not burden ourselves with pedantic discussion and naive opinions. It only remains to be said that, prior to a work and prior to things, an event finds its locus within the idea of the work itself, within its project and sense, within an idea of the present.⁴⁾

Art is the order of the present. Its innumerable hypotheses, its unaccountable virtualities have to do with obviousness as well as with improbability. They are actually given, but only with a dimension that appropriates both the time of sensory experience and that of history. Hence, things can be present to the world while they are present to themselves. Such a dimension is that of a work which removes art from the vanity of objects, from the finite status of shapes, to bring it back to the irreducible dynamics of existence. The work is the great form through which the present presents itself and takes hold of absence apart from the mode of standstills or of images. Absence, being prior to things, is then merely a threatening version of the a priori of space⁵⁾ – the unthought that sweeps the void away.

Work and event are given with the same intensity as the times, within the discontinuous configuration of a space that contains breaks without appropriating their contours, of a space where interiority is at the same time inconceivable and impossible. There are never just three times (past, present, and future): they do and they do not exist at one and the same time, they are never there, because there, they will always be time. The work's articulations are one, sole impossibility that acts as if it were possible and simultaneously negates its own possibility, through the present that grasps and actualizes it without knowing it. It does not suppress it or go beyond it, but positively ignores it. The work never stops, just as life only stops when it ceases to be, unless form is held back, just as power holds back deci-

sions. Meanwhile, the articulations of these forms and decisions are but a teeming abundance, a ramification where only the present itinerary, the current evolution can ensure their positive undecidedness: that of a form which never ceases to be a work, i. e. a time and place of work. Such a thing can only exist through a double (or multiple) transformation of itself and of its conditions of possibility. Hence, the thing is present inasmuch as it is a work – i. e. beyond all dialectics of presence and absence, without the slightest recourse to an effect of presence (such as emphasizing presence by means of an apostrophe or any other rhetorical figure).⁶⁾ This is form⁷⁾ in the present; it is the present of form – grasped within time and within the idea of time which is actualized as the space of an idea and as the materiality of an event envisaged as a force and field at the same time.⁸⁾

It seems obvious that critical – let alone theoretical – language can hardly grasp living matter. Since the word “dog” does not bite as Henry James says, Mario Merz’s work is, in its text, nothing but deep rooted indecision between the anticipation of a principle which hardly marks out a starting point for proliferation – 1.1.2.(3.5.), and the suspension of this principle by virtue of the question it raises about the sense of the number two (2): the question of separation and identity implicit in all discussions on representation since Plato. In the face of such dialectics, inherent to all research on meaning, to all configurations of text, “I shudder at the eternal silence of those infinite spaces.”⁹⁾ No sooner has the spiral been sketched within language, than it turns immediately into a loop which closes the circle. Both Hegel and Proust strive to bring us back to reason, to memory, to Time regained or to the spirit. Meanwhile, Mario Merz’s work moves on, implacable, towards the empire of the world: an actuality that defies all realism and all reality with its positive inconceivability. Whether animals or plants, whether minerals or matter, whether human or actual, all are the work’s present.¹⁰⁾ And it is their present that the work gives. This is actually what escapes all and any text, because it is, specifically, the work’s force and field, its imperviousness to reduction and its unspeakability – the unthought that sweeps away both the void and the sense which carries thought.

(Translation from the French: François Boué)



MARIO MERZ, VENTO PREISTORICO DALLE MONTAGNE GELATE
(PRÄHISTORISCHER WIND VON VEREISTEN BERGEN /
PREHISTORIC WIND FROM ICY MOUNTAINS), 1977,
BEMALTE LEINWAND / PAINTED CANVAS, 147 x 240 cm / 57½ x 94½",
UND 13 REISIGBÜNDEL / AND 13 FAGOTS. (Photo: Thomas Cugini)

NOTES

- 1) See Karl Löwith, *MEANING IN HISTORY*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London 1949. *passim*.
- 2) Fibonacci's series "do not cultivate contradiction but absorb as much as they can, the contradiction whereby numbers are repeated, five after five, because they are vegetal, biologically natural, for they have a sort of preceding mother and father to make the son to come." Leonardo da Pisa, *Liber Abaci*, 1202, quoted in the 1228 edition by Germano Celant in Mario Merz, Mazzotta, Milan 1983, p. 60.
- 3) Gilles Deleuze, *FOUCAULT*, Minuit, Paris 1986, pp. 115–130 and the chapter "Sur la mort de l'homme et le surhomme." *id.* pp. 131–141.
- 4) "The past does not produce the present because it dies at the precise moment when the present is born, because the latter moves away from it to live on, thereby showing its absolute independence. If, then, the present is to be determined, it can only be by way of what the present never is and of what can never become the past within an instant. Otherwise, it is absolutely free. This time outside of time, some call it eternity, others the future (...). But the future is only one instance of eternity, because if it were a moment within duration, it would then go one day through a state of the present. Eternity and future have a common core in relation to the present: they are both an idea of the present. And, in fact, if the present is to be determined, it can only be by way of the idea of the present, provided however, that it will not be understood as the present idea of the present." Brice Parain, *Recherches sur la nature et fonctions du langage*, Gallimard, Paris 1942, Coll. Idées, pp. 236–237 (Underlined by D. Z.).
- 5) Kant, *CRITIQUE DE LA RAISON PURE*, P. U. F., Paris 1944, pp. 56–57. See also D. Zacharopoulos, *De Kant à Monet. REPRÉSENTATION DE L'ESPACE, ESPACE DE REPRÉSENTATION. POINT AVEUGLE*, in *Artistes 15*, Paris spring 1982.
- 6) *DU SUBLIME*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1965, pp. 26–31.
- 7) On the concept of form, see H. Fautillon, *VIE DES FERMES*, P. U. F., Paris 1943, *passim*.
- 8) On the relation between force and field in Mario Merz's work, see "Notre Solitaire Oblique Solidaire," *ART STUDIO 3*, Paris, Jan. 1987, pp. 93–94, as well as Gilles Deleuze's text (see footnote 3 above) p. 137, concerning Foucault's work.
- 9) Blaise Pascal, *PENSÉES*, 201 (Lafuma), 206 (Brunswick).
- 10) "Animals, plants and minerals are entrenched in the world of art." Opening sentence of Germano Celant's *ARTE POVERA*, Mazzotta, Milan 1969, p. 225.

Felix, Zdenek. "The Power of Imagination." Translated by Stephen Reader. In *Mario Merz*. Exhibition catalogue. Essen: Museum Folkwang Essen; Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1982, pp. 6-8.

The Power of Imagination

„Imagination is something that exists. If you can picture the imagination as a real magnetism, with real magnetic waves, then you will find yourself beginning to believe in its power. One has to invent one's own invention. If art will invent itself for itself, then it can react even to the turbulence of the history of man – not for being distracted, but by the power of imagination. Art is discernible rather by the imagination in it than by its distraction". Mario Merz, 1981

Both within the art scene of his country and far beyond, the Italian Mario Merz occupies an especial, distinct position. The large one-man exhibitions mounted in Essen, London, Eindhoven, Basle and Paris from 1979 to 1981 offered renewed emphatic proof of the astonishing vitality and impressiveness of Merz's work. The increasing importance of this oeuvre, spanning more than three decades, springs not only from the quality of a long series of works which would be enough to secure the Italian's artistic standing by themselves; but is fed to an equal extent by an expanding thought process concomitant with the work. This vital „thought system" is tangible in the artist's work and attitudes, colours his writings and utterances, provokes opinion and invites confrontation with man's situation in the modern world. Because of the claim of penetrating the world „outside art" and of setting up a utopian model for human actions and activities, Mario Merz is frequently related to Joseph Beuys, who also asserts his „widened concept of art" and seeks to apply this concept to all human activity. In many respects the two artists' paths do converge, in fact, but, though companions in generation and a line of thought, they are separated by different cultural and mental origins. Common to Merz and Beuys is the conviction that art is closely bound up with man, his world and his history and that it must make its position in relation to these things clear before it can be justified as „meaning-full" art.

Mario Merz is known as the builder of igloos, the constructor of movable nomad dwellings which have to be re-erected at each new site. The igloo is familiar as the archetypal house shape found not only among aboriginal peoples in North America, Africa or Oceania, but also in Europe, for example in Merz's native country, right up to the present. The domed houses of stone in Apulia, called *trulli*, or the Etrurian shepherds' round wooden huts as they can still be observed in isolated cases today, represent the remnants of a method of construction discovered as long ago as the Ice Age by the first human beings. Now Mario Merz's igloos have little connection, or at least, not primarily, with the fundamentals of architecture, but an essential one with our physical and mental environment. By turning back to an original architectural form, Merz demonstrates that man can develop in a positive sense only if he revitalises his relationship to his own tradition and to natural evolution, so to draw from it his impulses for the present and the future.

In another sense, Merz's igloo is an organic unity, mutable, extendable and capable of development. The igloo could be thought of as a token of continuing evolution and expansion

in the biological, mental, social and individual sphere. It is like a cell which burgeons wildly as a constantly developing and changing plant. „The plant grows, its growth space passes into infinite space, its growth period passes into infinite time", says Mario Merz, meaning with this beautiful metaphorical image the dimension of time of the world, the unceasing and manifold motion of nature as a component of cosmic motion. Each of Merz's igloos is part of this motion, too, for it changes and consists of different materials associated with the growth period of the earth, such as metal, glass, clay, stones or asphalt. – And just as nature needs and uses time to create new organic forms of life and pass them on in time, so the igloo, like every building, embodies the time in the course of which it was built. The individual time of work passes into the infinite time of the material's natural history, and vice-versa. Thus individual experience can also be absorbed into and handed on by collective, mythical memory.

In the course of years, Mario Merz has built a series of other dynamic structures like the igloo, which, thanks to the principle of growth, proliferation, burgeoning extravagance as all found in nature, multiply and develop. This underlies the objects pierced by neon lances and thereby charged with light and energy, the tables arranged in spirals and covered with glass, stones, wax or fruit, and it is the means by which the well-known Fibonacci progression of figures, increasing by each preceding pair as 1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55 89 144 etc., and corresponding to various biological processes in nature, has found entry into Mario Merz's repertoire. The wealth of metaphor and the adaptability of this repertoire enable the artist to tackle the questions and portents he senses as urgent again and again and to express them in images replete with untapped imagination and sensuousness.

As Merz's form of expression derives from content, it follows that the choice of the means of expression is determined by the contents. This also applies to the more recent, painterly work. To the surprise of many art enthusiasts, 1981 saw Merz presenting large-scale pictures in Paris and Basle with figurative representations of animals, people, tables and landscapes. The large igloo erected at the *Identité italienne* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris also bore the trace of his increased urge to paint, in a coat of brightly painted linen. The innovative choice in favour of painting was basically influenced by the artist's interest in a new, more „life-like" formulation of problems he has been engaged in for a long time. At the same time this choice witnesses to the youthful originality of an artist loth to fall prey to routine under any circumstance and who is always searching for contemporary modes of expression. The present choice of „painting" as such a means is for Merz nothing other than the continuation of his previous artistic and philosophical path. For the contrast between the „poor" materials dominant in the works of the sixties and early seventies and the colour of the figurative pictures of about 1980 perplexes only if we limit our comparison of the works to appearances and ignore the common message.

With as great a command as he built his igloos and spiral tables Merz presents his concerns as a painter today. One finds to one's astonishment that the new pictures by Merz are outstanding painterly achievements, reminiscent in their brushwork, colour and liveliness of van Gogh or Delacroix. In a roundabout way Mario Merz is returning to his „painterly period” of the fifties, that stage in his artistic development which is all too little known or regarded and which is only becoming apparent in its intellectual content today. The majority of these early pictures have been disseminated in private collections in Italy and the artist has kept only a few in his Turin flat. An exhibition, much due as it now is, would doubtless show the surprising freshness and the significance of this work.

But even in the seventies, painting played an important role in Merz's work as the medium of sensuous tokens of man and nature. Figurative representations of the period are increasingly a part of the works and installations, such as the large images of spirally turning tables (*A board with legs becomes a table*, 1974) or several variations of the piece, *Tree in Proliferation*, 1975–76, have shown. The point here was the association of the expansive development of the Fibonacci series as a symbol of mathematical progression with such processes in society (tables) or nature (tree). Another aim was to set the images in motion, to imbue them with a dimension of time. In the work of the late seventies one can observe the emergence of „reality” in the shape of representational images, for example in the „Houses in the Jungle”, reminiscent of Chinese bamboo houses, with representations of tigers and leopards.

In Merz's more recent images his power of imagination is even more impressively developed. In the winter of 1981 and early in 1982, he exhibited a series of large-scale, complex works at Tucci Russo's and Christian Stein's in Turin, and at Sperone Westwater Fischer in New York, comprising an astonishing store of subjects and content. The artist had succeeded in the most felicitous way in finding a synthesis bet-

ween his earlier repertoire and the new subjects of animals, trees, landscapes and people. As a symbol of this fusion there appeared at the Tucci Russo Gallery, emerging from the neon light, an igloo of colourfully painted splinters of glass, into which had been placed as into an energy condenser an image stretched on a metal construction and representing an imaginary diluvial prehistoric animal. The characteristic geometrical form of the igloo combined with the „real” vision of the animal, to demonstrate the unity of development of the cosmos and nature. Another sign of the continuity and simultaneously of the conceptual broadening in Merz's art was left by the large piece entitled *The prehistoric wind from glacial mountains / Temple snatched from the abysses* which was exhibited at Stein's in Turin. In this extraordinarily rich image, Merz places a little Greek temple into a mighty, rugged coastal landscape flooded by neon light. An electric lightbulb, set into a metal barrel compressed and dented by the breakers, shines as a mysterious lamp at the foot of the picture like a signal at the edge of the precipice. Here, Merz has designed an effective metaphor: the two poles of western civilisation, mythical tradition and techno-economic progress, are juxtaposed ominously with the primeval force of nature.

Merz thinks in images and creates images. He places store in not producing „paintings” to depict something, but „images” filled with imagination. Imagination should/can inspire our thoughts, stimulate thought and liberate sensual perception. So his new pictures are concrete impulses to fill our awareness with phantasy, but which also warn us of the misuse of phantasy. These images are intended to make us aware that recollection of the collective memory of myths and natural evolution, long thought atrophied, is not only possible but vital, and that „the emptiness of today's technical man has to be set against a non-emptiness reaching very far back.” The art of Mario Merz contributes to this balance in that it shows us a real path for our active imaginations.

(Translated by Stephen Reader)

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Celant, Germano. "Mario Merz: The Artist as Nomad." *Artforum*, December 1979, cover, pp. 52-28.





MARIO MERZ: THE ARTIST AS NOMAD

He who practices art is a vagabond, a nomadic survivor who will never find a home among people who have become settled.

—Adorno and Horkheimer

Germano Celant

Mario Merz's "igloo" of broken glass is an uncertain and unsheltering space. Its fluid irregularity upsets its tranquility as a secure object by transforming it into something referential, raising questions of what is reconcilable and definitive in art. The structural and the referential come together; the openings and the transparency of the glass allow osmotic exchanges to filter between the two contexts. Recalling the huts and domes of primitive builders, the igloo establishes a rapport between internal and external space. It represents the border zone between full and empty; a field of complementary tensions where forces of meeting and collision are engaged.

A shelter and a cathedral of survival, from the politics of art as much as from the winds, such buildings are also the image of the nomad or vagabond, who does not believe in the secure object, but in the dynamic contradiction of life itself. For nomads, the vagabond's existence means drifting from one

context to another, adapting to local foods and customs; their lifestyle never crystallizes into anything definitive or stable. Nor are their buildings permanent: they consist of an accumulation of elements necessary for survival, often serving as much to identify the inhabitant as to protect him from the weather. Merz is known as a builder of "igloos" (as he calls them, although he is most generally interested in the domical shape and nomadic implications of such structures). Hence he is similar to a nomad who chooses the location of his campsites in order to draw upon the territory for economic resources and cultural stimuli.

One needs to build in a manner antithetical to current models; to build according to processes of growth and seclusion, both following and overcoming one's will, in a natural rhythm, day and night. Different materials are chosen each time, determined by chance, place and proximity of other elements, and dictated by the vegetation. The earth's surface must be a body with which these elements can relate intimately. Nothing should be preordained, that is, capitalized. To build is the necessity—hour by hour and day by day—to weld the will onto that which is scattered in life.¹

With such an attitude, building becomes the interpretation and humanization of a territory no longer perceived as a place to pass through or park, but a field



Mario Merz, *Mai alzato pietra su pietra*, 1968, mixed media.

where interactions between economic activity and natural and artistic construction can take place. Merz's concept of "territory" embraces all contexts, including the artistic, from museums and galleries to magazines and books. The igloo's construction can thus respond to social conditions while remaining open to symbolic and cosmic interpretations. Its existence, like that of art, is bound to history or science as much as to myth and legend. It is impossible to establish its reality and its absolute existence, because its dimension is mythical and flows in time. Thus its re-creation preserves the enigma of a life that is active and never exhausted.

Merz's materials are as adaptable as the nomad's. Thus the clamps and arches can sustain plates of glass or matting, hold skins and clumps of branches, accommodate large slabs of stone and car doors. Everything is reduced to enigma and to nomadic energy. Signs—bound in stucco or traced with thread and skin—create images formed of various materials; poor, but alive and immediate. This continuous transformation perpetuates a culture that is unorganized, hence variable; while Merz's structure of casual, ephemeral materials harmonizes with his ideas of art, which have evolved according to contingency, surmounting obstacles as they arise. Merz's process thus eliminates systems in favor of an encounter that produces a communicative "vertigo."

Merz's interest in this vertigo began around 1966, when he first produced "objects passed through by neon." The neon is experienced as an energetic flux or spear of light that passes through the object, thus destroying the idea of the solidity of the object. Punctured by the neon, the object becomes annulled as an icon but it is redefined as material; the neon abandons its own physicality and becomes light. Works such as the bottle or the umbrella, penetrated by the neon, confound our perception of form and materials, since we can no longer consider the two elements as autonomous, but as assimilated with each other.

The idea is to create from illogical juxtapositions of objects a transformation which reflects the fluctuating sense of balance between the nomad and the territory in which he operates. This problem of things that pass through or lean on each other, not actually penetrating each other, but existing contiguously, has been an issue in all of Merz's work since 1968. The effervescence of materials, resulting from the encounter of two energies, carries over into a work he made in 1968 titled *Objét cache toi*, a hemispherical cabin made of earth whose title derives directly from graffiti written in Paris during the May revolution. Like Merz's work *Che fare?* (from the title of Lenin's book), the significance of *Objét cache toi* is political and existential, because it reveals the urgency of using the object as an ideological tool. It is Merz's first igloo.

I made the igloo for three interwoven reasons: to abandon the idea of the plane as a vertical or horizontal, hence the idea of creating a surface independent of conventional surfaces. My idea of the igloo is a space absolute in itself: it is a hemisphere leaning on the earth. My interest is that the hemisphere is not geometric; it is almost always created from a metal structure, covered with nets of casual materials like clay, earth, wax, and broken plates of glass.

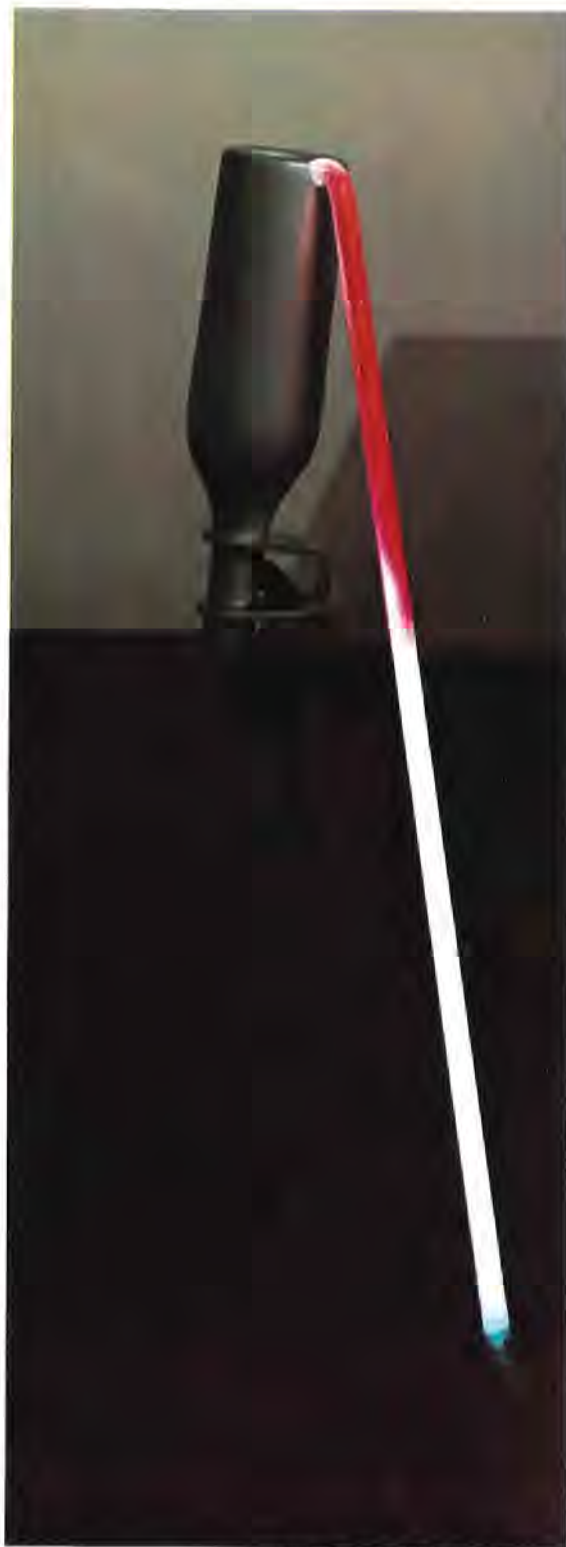
The metal network, in its flexibility and transparency, gives, however, the sense of a pressure from within, a sort of traction toward the outside. The igloo is thus a point of escape, a place of defense and of rest: "Its essence is its existence both as a sculpture and as a habitable structure."

The natural difficulties—as much as the artistic—are overcome by lightness and flexibility. Similar to the Navajo wigwam or the Mongol yurt the igloo is a cultural entity furnishing life-support, relating to the whole of society, artistic or not. The area which is covered and at the same time open is charged with functions and relations suggesting a linkage between social, artistic and spatial elements. Its capacity is huge, and the interrelation between the various factors determines what the igloo refers to—one can understand this if one reflects on the interior activities of the socio-cultural structure in which it acts, almost always the context of art. The igloo is both the umbrella and the field which, in spite of environmental limitations, shelters Merz and urges him to construct something deliberately impermanent. For him it is the act of building, not the finished structure, that is meaningful. Building is a journey through the territory he works in, so his process is determined by the conditions he finds, his materials—whether man-made or natural—depend upon what is locally available. His objects represent a fusion of memory and present experience, the organic and the theoretical. All this finds historical confirmation in the mathematical system of Fibonacci.

Merz began his works using the Fibonacci series in 1970, when he felt the need of a biologically possible system, mathematical and organic at the same time. This system, devised by the medieval mathematician Leonardo da Pisa, author of *Liber Abaci* (1202) and handed down in the 1228 edition under the name of Fibonacci, is, according to Merz, "biologically thinkable. It corresponds with the proliferation of natural and corporeal elements. For example, we have one nose, two eyes, five fingers, precisely according to the series 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, easily recognizable. Thus I have made a series of works based upon the Fibonacci series (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233)."

The first work using the Fibonacci progression grew out of his neon-filled objects of 1966-67; then in 1970 he made a sequence of slabs of glass covered with neon numbers. Here the physical nature of the 1966-67 works was translated into a mental system, where the idea, taken from Fibonacci, predominates over the material. Because the idea is adaptable to any operation whatever, it is possible to apply it to every type of reality—private, social, spatial, objective, organic and biological. Thus since 1970 he has incorporated the Fibonacci series in his work in various forms—the igloo, the page of a book, the crocodile, the pine cone, a room, clumps of newspapers, tables.

Coming to grips with the concept of the igloo is essential for survival outside a technical-bourgeois society. The nomadic nature of the igloo indicates a "writing in the space" that defines its place and its people: "I claim that the igloo is inhabitable and that thus it is easy to arrive at the idea that the igloo has a close rapport with people. From my experience I have seen that people love it, because they understand



Mano Merz, *Bottle and Neon*, 1966, mixed media



Mario Merz, *Object Passed Through by Neon*, 1967, mixed media.

immediately its real and cosmological vocation."

The artist's construction corresponds to the territory of art, of which the total image is often assimilated with that of society, therefore always reflecting the image of the environment and of its inhabitants. The structure of society and that of the igloo develop and change concurrently; what happens to one often depends upon the other, in the sense that the igloo cannot be understood except as a place that mediates between human rapports and as a center of political and cultural radiation. Here we find advanced and primitive typologies, "decorative" details typical of a particular social or cultural group. One has recourse to the "ruins," the broken and malleable evidence of glass or stones. On this ground, Merz wants to measure the breakdown of the ordering function of art, understood in itself, outside of every context. The poverty of materials reveals a theoretical stance, as it sustains the image of the negative and the rejected, as opposed to the positive and utopian image of a rigid and monolithic, if not minimal, art. The poverty of language stays in the world of pessimism and disenchantment. Its survival perhaps depends upon its ability to recognize its powerlessness against the mystical, from the minimal to the conceptual, which tries to express and dominate all by means of opulent and logical forms. It upsets the mechanistic basis of a reductive and minimal position. In fact, conceptual research symbolizes the entire concept of "modern" art, and idealistic art, taken to its furthest extreme. Conceptual research establishes an order by which its progress is systematized. Merz's proliferations of objects cannot be predestined; they are based on contingent and casual observation.

In Merz's work considerable importance is attached to the spiral, which develops structurally from the center. As Merz has said, "From the center one is heard by all." The person in the center speaks



Mario Merz, *Che Fare?*, 1968, mixed media.

for the group. The igloo lies within the spiral because it is open to the questioners; it is both public and private. Merz sits within the igloo: "If I am in the igloo as an actor, I am in possession of myself: if I am not in the igloo, I have no audience; I never leave the igloo alone and I don't go away; I enter the igloo not as an actor but as an artist who desires the igloo:

I bring into the igloo my own conformity
I bring into the igloo my lack of musical awareness
I bring into the igloo elementary forms of life
I bring into the igloo other people
I bring myself into the igloo, thus in the igloo I am both a private and public person."

The igloo contains within it both the cosmic and the personal; for this reason it is always concentric. One might also think of it as an overturned hole, a sacred place that symbolizes the emptiness/fullness of the earth. An absolute sphere of the material and the immaterial, it is the axis of encounter for all circles, of individuals and groups. Sometimes, as at the Art Institute of Chicago ("European Art of the Seventies," 1977) an igloo is constructed for a particular exhibition; the igloo is the myth of "something together with nothing," triggering the phenomenon of reminiscence, a link with the past that because of its energy (in the artistic sense) continues to be identified with the present.

I use a more subtle and hidden art, the art of observation. Observation without restraint and without giving in to the passiveness of mere observation. In Japan there exists the art of observing stones combined with the art of putting these stones in sand gardens. Or the art of observing plants, as related to the sculptural presentation of the *ikebana*.

The observer is the new model for the intellectual or the artist, who can no longer be a prophet who speaks through oracles, but the scientist who observes the world to discover that its antitheses are not necessarily as he would wish. He does not want to find a quick or absolute solution, but to understand the perplexity inherent in any solution.

In 1967 I used a thought from Giap to create an art of observation. Giap observed that the "enemy" can be represented by a number of men in a place; if the men join together they leave the space free for other forces, but if they break apart they lose their impact. When I used Giap's idea to make an art of observation I thought it was more observing of reality than saying, "Long live the people of Vietnam; out with the French and American invaders!" Giap's idea corresponds to a reality that can be explained with physical and persuasive laws.

There is born the concept of a critical solution which is by nature continually subject to adaptations and revisions. This solution does not exclude partitioning and restructuring and recombination; in fact, it nourishes them. A logical form is not reconcilable with this proposition; the igloo in its formation continually resolves itself on the plane of experience and observation.

In discussing the art of observation, one must consider realism, which is rooted in the art of Caravaggio. His art proposes the simultaneous moral and political commitments of the artist, as well as his polemical and critical character as set against formalist and classical art. Merz, as a good observer of the "real," believes only in the history of the given, what-

ever it might be, so much so that in some works, on the walls or on the floor, he includes the internal process, from life to death, of the real and of the natural. In none of his materials—the igloo, newspapers, spiral tables, fresh fruit and vegetables—does one find abstraction or rules, only the experience of nature and sculpture. Like a body, the sculpture is not an object or a given substance, but a continuous organic development. It manifests itself as a system of energy that renounces every boundary and every intimacy. Each element consumes the next; combined they extend in a continuous chain.

In Merz's installation in the Museo Pignatelli in Naples, from 1976, a spiral-shaped table coils around an igloo, bundles of sticks, stones and vegetables, to go beyond all space and all time. Its formation also engulfs information (newspapers), thus following a natural process of proliferation, of an image capable of wavering between present and past. By referring to and including elements from his work since 1967, and also by the presence of fruit and vegetables, which decompose and must be replaced, he tries to connect the interpretations of past facts with present ones, in fact reduces them to zero and to the most infinite.

Fibonacci, besides being a mathematician, was a wandering cleric, therefore a nomad. The progres-

sion of elements, as well as the progression of numbers, is part of the observer's voyage.

I thought of superimposing the art of observation on the art of numbers. Numbers not as numbers, but as objects. Just as words or colors or photographs can relate to each other, so the numbers are related in a series. The art of numbers is superimposed on an art of observation. The art of observation is so subtle and uncommunicative, so profound and hidden, that it needs the art of numbers to reveal it. The Fibonacci numbers are in a diverging series that accelerates; it is from this that I have treated the idea that it was possible to represent, with new means, all the examples one meets of materials in an intense expansion, as if alive—live materials, then, that are in rapid and controllable expansion.

The Fibonacci numbers, like Giap's phrase and the reference to the "truth" of Caravaggio, are linked to "realism." Their osmosis affirms the historical existence of an experience that believes in reality as a given. For Caravaggio, Merz, Giap and Fibonacci, verisimilitude does not exist; all is real, therefore without distinctions or hierarchies of value.

"What is to be done?" A dramatic question, because it defines the nonexistence of solutions. To be content with an answer would mean reentering the affirmative, efficient and productive process of an art that takes shelter behind myths and capitalism. Ending contradictions and resolving ideas results in sta-



Mario Merz, *Fibonacci Unit*, 1970, metal and stone, 58 1/4" high.



Ojibwa wigwam, Wisconsin.



Mario Merz, *Double Igloo, Alligator with Fibonacci Numbers to 377*, 1979, installation at Sperone Westwater Fischer, New York.



Mario Merz, *Untitled*, installation at Museo Pignatelli, Naples.

ble property, the death of nomadism. The nomad exists only by keeping alive the fusion between property and work: the nomad comprehends, because he takes his experience along with him. Even if confined, he continues to function in his own way. Without presuming to combat civilization by himself, he works in order to keep alive a symbolic good: art. Even in a situation forbidden any liberty, the nomad sees in the individual and the ephemeral a political and cultural strategy, the coexistence of the public and self-expression: "In 1942 I was in prison in Italy for a year as a persecuted political criminal. I could think at length without being manipulated by the idea of a career. The thought occurs to everyone: to defend oneself from the cataclysm of the irrational while keeping the problem open: is the rational the invention of irrational reality? Is art a solitary solution? Is art a public solution? Does art truly succeed in compromising two such diverse modes of action?"

This request can be satisfied only by a willingness to lose oneself in the lives of others. The act of grouping together is a response to a personal condition; however, art can not overcome its solitary character unless it mirrors the group, which accepts a *collective art*. The tables, which he has made since 1972, represent research in dialogue and in common culture: the exchange of words and of food. As the igloo represents Merz's idea of territory and materials, the table comes to stand for the social interaction of the local community. Thus the table, through the rites of reunion and eating, transcends the boundaries between people and objects. Merz is no longer in the center, but seated next to the others. Everyone in the ceremony has a sense of rapport with the others, a defined place in the entire space. A group or an individual can draw back into a private zone or can reunite with the others under the roof of branches or



Mario Merz, *Tables*, 1971, installation at John Weber Gallery, New York.

panes of broken glass. In this moment, the nomad, in the center of a system of relations, becomes sedentary. He begins to occupy precise confines, placing himself near the other nomads and living with them, organizing the space according to the presence of the others. In this way tables are formed for one person, for two, for three, for five, for eight, for 13, for 21, for 34, for 55, for 89. As they proliferate they arrange themselves in spirals, in relation to the increase in people.

Man is "grafted" to life, knowing only the physical and mortal weight of the cycle. No one is free of the cycle; it is both generative and mortal. Everyone, no matter how uninformed or insensitive, is aware of the cycle's regeneration and mortality. Theoretical ignorance of the cycle's abstract laws does not preclude knowledge of the cycle's fundamental laws and thus the adherence to its development.

Merz explains the cycle's function not only in relation to things, but to people as well. His tables represent a stage in the development from the individual to the collective, serving to group people together. In a sequence of photographs in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Merz shows various accumulations of people at tables—proliferations created by gathering for dinner or lunch, in a pub or at a restaurant. Here not only the space fluctuates, but the gestures, words, food, smiles, and bodily movements. An encounter at a table represents the gathering of different entities. Just as numbers or vegetables can unite, so can people. In a group of people the individual develops as a social being. At the table, existence is collective, based on the equal division of space, food and wine, as of labor.

Merz initiated another "proliferation" in a factory cafeteria. The tables are host to every worker in the

factory; they are not concerned with including or excluding; they signify the end of cultural elitism and the construction of a transcendent and separate reality. Thus Merz satisfies his need to act on a level which is no longer elitist but of the masses, according to the anarchic principle of self-organization. More than the igloo, the tables operate on the level of common language and action. They are complementary; their development can lead to a total integration of their needs from negative to positive. One calls such an object a house. Merz's *Fibonacci House* is still only in the planning stage, but it is a certainty:

To build a house is to abandon the disproportionate idealism of thought, to accept the proportions of reality. Reality contains all in itself, the will to survive, the consciousness of negation, the consciousness of the positive and of the unknown which comes along with it as a product of contemporary life. To build is to know the ratio between man and the materials man wastes. It is to use the energy of the sun. Building is first of all a watchful recognition of daily life. It defends art from hedonistic material. In building it is often necessary to change materials. The house becomes large. To make the house is to take into consideration the proportions of growth inherent in biological life. The Fibonacci House is constructed freely according to a numerical series of the same name.

The *Fibonacci House* transcends the igloo's broken panes not only to collect around its table people and their food, but also to wall them in. When the construction is finished, change and exchange will be complete. The journey will be over. Thus the nomad will finally have a resting place. ■

Germano Celant is an Italian art critic. This article is a translation from the original Italian.

1. All quotations are taken either from the artist's unedited writings or conversations with the author.



Mario Merz, *Tables*, 1974, installation at D.A.D., Berlin.

MARIO MERZ

Biography

1925 Born in Milan, Italy
2003 Died in Turin, Italy

One Person Exhibitions:

1954 Galleria la Bussola, Turin
1962 Galleria Notizie, Turin
1968 Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin
1969 Ilena Sonnabend, Paris
Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin
Galleria L'attico, Rome
1970 Konrad Fischer, Dusseldorf
Sonnabend Gallery, New York
Galleria Francoise Lambert, Milan
1971 Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin
Sonnabend Gallery, New York
John Weber Gallery, New York
1972 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
Jack Wendler Gallery, London
1974 Haus am Lützowplatz, Berlin
Galeria Area, Florence
Jack Wendler Gallery, London
Cassino Ova, Tortona
1975 Kunsthalle Basel, Basel
Kunstmuseum Lucerne, Lucerne
Galeria Area - Lo Grigat, Munich
Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt
1976 Galleria Pieroni, Pescara
Villa Pignatelli, Naples
Gian Enzo Sperone, Rome
Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin
Galleria Tucci Tusso, Turin
Galleria Annemarie Verna, Zurich
Galleria Forma, Genoa
Konrad Fischer, Dusseldorf
1977 Galleria Ala, Milan
Galeria Annemaria Vrena, Zurich
1978 Galerie Jean et Karen Bernier, Athens
Lucio Amelio, Naples
Galleria dell'Oca, Rome
Galleria Tucci Russo, Turin
1979 Museum Folkwang, Essen
Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Sperone Westwater Fischer, New York
Gallerie Anne Marie Verna, Zurich
Galleria Toseli, Milan
OOLP, Libreria Internazionale, Turin
Galleria Giuliana De Crescenzo, Rome
Galerie Durand Dessert, Paris
1980 Whitechapel Art Gallery, London

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- Albert Baronian, Brussels
Ink, Zurich
Sperone Westwater Fischer, New York
Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin
Salvatore Ala, Milan
Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Max Hetzler, Cologne
Galerie Christian Stein, Turin
1981 Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf
"I-80 Series: Mario Merz," Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha
Konrad Fischer, Zurich
l'Arc, Paris; Kunsthalle Basel, Basel
Franco Toselli Gallery, Florence
Galleria Tucci Russo, Turin
Studio W Kwietnu, Warsaw
Ville de Paris, Paris
Lucio Amelio, Naples
1982 Sperone Westwater Fischer, New York
"Facets VIII," Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Mario Diacono, Rose
Galerie Munro, Hamburg
Galerie Marilena Bonomo, Bari
Salvatore Ala, Milan
Musuem Folkwang, Essen
Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart
Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna
1983 Kestner Gessellschaft, Hannover
Anthony d'Offay, London
Flow Ace Gallery, Venice, California
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Galleria Pieroni, Rome
Neuberger Museum, Purchase, New York
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Nachst St. Stephen, Vienna
1983-84 Palazzo Congressi ed Esposizioni, Republic of San Marino
Galerie Buchmann, Basel
1984 Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf
The Albright - Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo
Hallwalls, Buffalo
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Galleria Sparta, Chagny
Christian Stein, Turin
Musee Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi
Kunstverein St. Gallen in Katherinen, St. Gallen
Sperone Westwater, New York
1985 Nachst St. Stephen, Vienna
Christian Stein, Turin
Kunsthau Zürich, Zurich
Liliane et Michel Durand Dessert, Paris
Galerie Munro, Hamburg
Sperone Westwater and Leo Castelli, New York
"La casa gira intorno all'albero o l'albero gira intorno alla casa," Musee d'Art et d'Industrie,
Geneva
1985 Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster
Pietro Sparto, Pascale Petit, Chagny

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- 1986 Antonio Tucci Russo, Turin
1987 Musee d'Art Contemporain, Entrepot Laine, Bordeaux, 8 May – September
Toselli, Milan
Chapelle de la Salpetriere, Paris, 15 November – 31 December
Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf
Kunstverein, Munich
Musee d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, 6 September – 10 October
1988 Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, 5 February – 5 March
Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh, April
"Installations," Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek C., Denmark, 28 May – 3 June
1989 "Mario Merz," Le Nouveau Musee, Villeurbanne, France, 9 June – 10 September
"Mario Merz: Declaration Des Droits De L'Homme et Du Citoen," Paris, July
"Mario Merz: A Retrospective," Guggenheim Museum, New York, 29 September – 26 November
(catalogue)
1990 "Mario Merz: Tavola," Annemaria Verna Galerie, Zurich, September – October
"Mario Merz," Il Centro per l'arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato, 26 May – 17 September
Castello Di Rivoli, Turin, 16 May – 23 September
Fiorella Urbinati Gallery, Los Angeles
Espai Poble Nou, Barcelona, June – November
Museo Comunale D'Arte Moderna, Ascona
"Mario Merz," Espai Poble Nou, Barcelona, 27 June – November
1990-91 SteinGladstone, New York, December 1990 – January 1991
1991 Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf, Germany, 7 May – 4 June
Jean Bernier, Athens, Greece, 24 October – 21 December
1992 "Mario Merz - Master Works," Sperone Westwater, New York, 11 January – 22 February
"Mario Merz, 74 Gradini Riappaiono in una Crescita di Geometria Concentrica," Galerie Tschudi,
Glarus, Germany, 28 July – 31 October
1993 Anthony d'Offay, London
1994 Barbara Gladstone, New York, 26 March – 16 April
1994-95 "Mario Merz," Vera Van Laer Gallery, Antwerpen, Belgium, December 1994 – January 1995
1995 "Mario Merz: New Installation," Vera Van Laer Gallery, Antwerpen, Belgium, 21 September – 30
November
1999 "A Casa Fibonacci," Mario Merz," Fundação Serralves, Porto, Portugal, 6 February – 28 March
"Mario Merz," galleria Christain Stein, Milan
2004 "In Memoriam: Mario Merz," Kewenig Galerie, Cologne, July – September
2006 "Mario Merz: 8-5-3," Gagosian Gallery, London, England, 9 February – 18 March
2007 "Mario Merz," Buchmann Galerie, Berlin, 27 April – 26 May
"Mario Merz: The Magnolia Table," Sperone Westwater, New York, 2 November – 22 December
(catalogue)
2008 "Mario Merz," The Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 7 February – 11 April (catalogue)
"Mario Merz," Sprovieri Progetti, London, England, 13 June – 2 August
"Mario Merz," Gladstone Gallery, New York, 18 September – October
2010 "Mario Merz. Pageantry of painting. Corteo della pittura," Fondazione Merz, Torino, Italy, 12
May – 26 September
2010-11 "Mario Merz: Che Cos'è una Casa?" Fondazione Merz, Turin, Italy, 4 December 2010 – 6 March
2011 2011
2011 "Mario Merz: What Is to Be Done?," Henry Moore Insitute, Leeds, 27 July – 30 October
2012 "What Is to Be," Girogio Persano, Turin, Italy, 20 June – 30 September
"Mario Merz: Major Works from the 1980s," Sperone Westwater, New York, NY, 1 November –
22 December
2014 "Mario Merz," Pace London, 26 September – 8 November
2015 "Mario Merz: Città Irreale, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, 8 May – 20 September
2015-16 "Mario Merz: Numbers are Prehistoric," Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens, 22 October 2015 – 31
January 2016
2016 "Marisa and Mario Merz," MACRO – Museum of Contemporary Art Rome, Rome, 18 February –

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12 June (catalogue)

"Mario Merz," Skulpturenhalle, Thomas Schütte Stiftung, Neuss, Germany, 10 April – 14 August

"Mario Merz: Works from the 1980s," Sperone Westwater, New York, 30 April – June

Group Exhibitions:

- 1967 "Contemplazione," Gallerie Sperone, Gallerie Stein
Gallerie Il Punto, Turin
- 1967-69 "Despositio d'Arte Presente," Turin, December 1967 – June 1969
- 1968 "Contemplazione," Galleria De Fosherari, Lugano
"Arte Povera + azioni povera," Arsenaux de l'Ancienne Republique, Amalfi, October
"Il Percorso," Galleria d'Arco d'Alibert, Rome
"Prospect '68," Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, September
Galerie Del Deposito, Turin
"Arte Povera," Centro Arte Viva, Trieste
"When attitudes become form," Institute of Contemporary Art, London, August
"Op Losse Schroeven - situaties en cryptostructuren," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, March
"Verborgene Structuren," Museum Folkwang, Essen, May
"Disegni e progetti," Galleria Sperone, Turin
"Arte Povera," Galleria La Bertesca, Genoa
Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin
- 1970 "3 Biennale della giovane pittura," Museo Civico, Bologna, January
"Tokyo Biennial," Tokyo
"Amore Mio," Palazzo Ricci, Montepulciano
"Processi di pensiero visualizzati," Kunstmuseum, Lucerne
"Arte Povera-Land Art-Conceptual Art," Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Turin
- 1970-71 "Vitalità del negativo," Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome
- 1971 "Second Nuremberg Biennial," Kunsthalle, Nürnberg
"Arte Povera," Kunstverein Munich, Munich
"Arte de Sistemas," Museo di Arte Moderno do al Ciudad de Buenos Aires
"Projects: Pier 18," Museum of Modern Art, New York
"Guggenheim International exhibition," The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
"Prospect '71/Projection," Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf
"Sonsbiik '71," Arnheim
- 1972 "De Europa," John Weber Gallery, New York, April
"Documenta 5," Musée Fridericianum, Kassel, June
- 1973/74 "Contemporanea," Parcheggio di Villa Borghese, Rome, November
- 1974 "Projekt '74 - Aspect Internationaler Kunst am Anfang der 70er Jahre," Wallraf-Richartz
Museum, Cologne, 5 July – 10 September
"Kunst bleibt Kunst," Kunsthalle, Cologne, July
- 1975 "Spiralen und Progressionen," Kunstmuseum, Lucerne
- 1976 "Ambiente/Arte," Biennale de Venezia, XXXVII, Venice, July
"Prospect Retrospect," Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, October
- 1977 "Arte in Italia 1960-1977," Galerie Civique d'Art Modern, Turin, May
"Documenta 6," Kassel, June
- 1977-79 "Europe in the Seventies, Aspects of Recent Art," The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, October
1977; The Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC; The San Francisco Museum of Modern
Art, San Francisco, June 1978; The Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, December
1978
- 1978 "Marisa Merz: Nicola de Maria, Mario Merz," Franco Toselli, Milan
"Dalla natura all'arte, Dall'arte alla natura," Venice Biennale
- 1979 Sperone Westwater Fischer, New York
Konrad Fischer, New York

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- Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
"Kunst der 70er Jahre," Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich
"Boetti/Icaro/Merz/Paolini/ZaZa," Hal Bromm, New York
1980 Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin
"Forum Design," Linz, Austria
"Fabro, Kounellis, Merz, Paolini, Materialien zu einer Austerllung, Kunsthalle, Bern
Salvatore Ala, Milan
"Pier and Ocean," Hayward Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum Kroller-Muller, Otterloo
"L'isola della frutta," Ink, Zurich
"Kunst seit 1960," Kunstverein Sammlung Crex, Karlsruhe
"Kunst na68...in Europa," Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, July
"Europe 80," Lyon
"Rosc '80," Gusiness Hop Store, Dublin
"L'arte degli anni settanta," Biennial of Venice, June – September
"Le Stanze," Castello Colana, Genazzano
1981 "A New Spirit in Painting," Royal Academy of Arts, London, January
Sperone Westwater Fischer, New York
"Identite italienne: Art en Italie depuis 1959," Musee d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou,
Paris, June
"Acireale," Palazzo di Citta, Rome
"Kounellis, Merz, Nauman, Serra," Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld
"Westkunst," Rheinhalen der Kölner Messe, Cologne, May
"No Title," The Collection of Sol Lewitt," Wesleyan University, Middletown; Wadsworth
Atheneum, Hartford
"Linee della Ricerca Artistica in Italia 1960-1980," Palais des Exposition Rome, February
"No Title: The Collection of Sol Le Witt," Wesleyan University Art Gallery and The Davidson
Art Center Gallery at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, 21 October – 20 December
1982 "New Work on Paper 2: Borofsy, Clemente, Merz, Penck, Penone," The Museum of Modern Art,
New York
"Italian Art Now: An American Perspective 1982," Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New
York, April
"Avanguardia - Transavanguardia," Muro Aureliano, Rome, April
Giuliana de Crescenzo, Rome
Christian Stein, Turin
"Zeitgeist," Internationale Kunstaustellung, Berlin, October
"Beast: Animal Imagery in Recent Painting," The Institute for Art and Urban Resources PS1, New
York
"Correspondencias: 5 Arquitectos, 5 Escultores," Palacios de las Alhajas, Madrid
Durand - Dessert, Paris
"Merz, Pisani, Spalletti," Museum Folkwang, Essen
"Vergangenheit-Gegenwart-Zukunft," Württembergerischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart
"Documenta 7," Kassel, June
"68-80 Attitudes/Concepts/Images," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, April
"Arte Italiana 1960-1982," Hayward Gallery, London, October
1983 "Expresiver Pathos," Galerie Hummel, Vienna
"Documenta 7," Kassel
Massimo Minini, Milan
"Antiform et Arte Povera Sculptures 1966-69," Centre d'arts PlastiquesContemporains des
Entrepots Laine, Bordeaux
"Postminimalism," The Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut
"New Italian Art," The New Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cleveland
"Opere su Carta," Centro d'Arte Contemporanea, Gibellina
"Artists from Sperone Westwater Fischer," SVC Fine Arts Gallery, University of South Florida,
Tampa
"Concetto-Imago: Generationswechsel in Italien," Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn

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- Christian Stein, Turin
"Il Cielo," Centro d'Arte Contemporanea, Siracusa, Italy
"Recent European Painting," The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Galerie Munro, Hamburg
"New Art," The Tate Gallery, London, September
"Una storia d'arte a Torino 1965-1983," Kölischer Kunstverein, Cologne, October
"Ars 83 Helsinki," Ateneum, Helsinki
1984 Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf
"Arte Porvera," Karsten Greve, Cologne
"Tutti Frutti," Galerie Maier-Hahn, Düsseldorf
"Italien C 1968/Das Soziale und das Pathos," Karsten Greve, Cologne
"Terraes Motus," Villa Campolieto, Naples
"Il Modo Italiano," University of California, Irvine; Newport Harbor Museum; University of Southern California, February
Tucci Russo, Turin
Centro d'Arte Contemporanea, Siracusa
Christian Stein, Turin
Sperone Westwater, New York
"Contemporary Italian Masters," Cultural Center of the Chicago Public Library, Chicago
"Content: A Contemporary Focus, 1974-1984," Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC
"I disegno in dialogo con la terra," Albert Baronian, Brussels
1984-85 "Arte Povera," La Mole Antonelliana, Turin; Palacio de Cristal and Palacio, Velazquez, Madrid
"Galeria Artra, Milan
"Ouverture," Castello di Rivoli, Turin
"The European Iceberg," Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, February
XIII Biennale de Paris, Grand Halle du Parc de la Villette, Paris
"The Sculpture as Draughtsman," Visual Arts Museum, New York
Galerie Munro, Hamburg
Franco Toselli
Musée St. Pierre, Marseilles
Sperone Westwater, New York
Annemarie Verna, Zurich
Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld
"Promenades," Parc Lullin Genthod, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva
"Dialog," Gulbenikian Foundation, Lisbon
Fondation Cartier, Jouy en-Jouas-Paris
"7000 Eichen," Kunsthalle Tübingen, Tübingen
"The Knot Arte Povera at P.S. 1," P.S.1 Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York, 6 October 1984 – 15 December 1985
"Transformations in Sculpture," The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Kunsthaus Zurich, Zurich
"De l'Arte Povera," Palacio Velazquez, Palacio de Cristal, Parque del Retiro, Madrid, January
1986 Anthony d'Offay, London
Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf
Barbara Gladstone, New York
Sol Lewitt - Mario Merz, Galleria Pieroni
Eugene Binder Gallery, Dallas
"Spuren, Skulpturen und Monumente ihrer präzisen Reise," Kunsthaus, Zurich
"De Sculptura," Wiener Fest Wochen, U-Halle des Messepalastes, Vienne
Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt
Rhona Hoffman, Chicago
"Chambres d'amis," Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Gand, June

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- “Qu’est-ce que la sculpture moderne?,” Musee national d’Art moderne,
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, July
“Hommage a Beuys,” Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich
“Sonsbeek ‘86,” Arnhem, The Netherlands
Galeria Comicos, Lisbon
“Falls the Shadow,” The Hayward Gallery, London
“Insieme,” Ippolito Simonis, Turin
Marilena Bonomo, Bari
“Fra Usikkerhet til Samlet Kraft,” Kunstneres Hus, Oslo
Quadriennale di Roma, Rome
“Sein und Sehnsucht,” Galerie Tanit, Munich
“Mater Dulcissima,” Chiesa dei
“Philadelphia Collects Art Since 1940,” Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
Galerie Roger Pailhus, Marseille
“Steirischer Herbst,” Stadtmuseum, Graz
- 1986-87 “The Spiritual in Art,” Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, Los Angeles, The Museum of
Contemporary Art, Chicago; Haags Gemeente Museum; The Hague
- 1987 “About Sculpture,” Anthony d’Offay, London
Barbara Gladstone, New York
“Light,” Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico
Christian Stein, Turin
“Lightworks, 1965-1986,” Rhona Hoffman, Chicago
“Ritrattare,” Eva Menzio, Turin
Galleria Pieroni, Roma
“Drawing,” Anthony d’Offay Gallery, London, 1 – 29 May
Galerie Buchmann, Basel, May
“Turin 1965-1987; Arte Povera, L’Art Pauvre dans les collections publiques francaises,” Musee
d’Art et d’Histoire, Chambéry; 13 June – 30 August; Musee de l’Hospice Comtesse, Lille
“Skulptur Projekte in Münster,” Landesmuseum, Münster, 14 June – 4 October
“Sol Lewitt/Mario Merz,” Musee Saint Pierre Contemporain, Lyon, 9 October – 23 November
“Italie hors d’Italie,” Musee des Beaux-Arts, Nimes, July
- 1988 Sperone Westwater, New York, 6 – 27 September
Barbara Gladstone, New York, 12 March – 2 April
“Contemporary Print Acquisitions 1986-1988,” Tatyana Grosman Gallery, Museum of Modern
Art, New York, May – June
“Positionen heutiger Kunst - Position of Present-Day Art,” Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 24 June – 18
September
“Europa Oggi - Europe Now,” Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Prato, 25 June – 2 October
- 1988-89 “L’Observatoire,” Faideh Cadot Gallery, New York, November 30, 1988 – January 14, 1989
(catalogue)
- 1989 “Italian Art in the Twentieth Century,” Royal Academy of Arts, London, 14 January – 4 April
“Collections du Fonds Regional d’Art Contemporain Nord Pas-de-Calais,” Santa Scolastica, Bari,
15 March – 26 April
“Group Exhibition,” Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York, Summer
“Verso l’Arte Povera,” Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea, Milan, January; Espace Lyonnais d’Art
Contemporain, Lyon, June
- 1990 “Mario Merz,” La Nouveau Musee, Villeurbanne, 9 June – 10 September
“Mario Merz: Terre Elevata O La Storia Del Disegno,” Castello Di Rivoli, Turin, 16 May – 23
September (catalogue)
“Lo Zingaro Blu,” Galleria Pieroni, Roma, June – July
“Die Endlichkeit Der Freiheit Berlin 1990,” Brigitte Hammer, Berlin, 1 September – 7 October
“High Season I: A Multiple Print Show,” Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna
“Neons,” Sprengel Museum, Hanover, September – October
“Poiesis,” Graeme Murray Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland, 11 August – 30 September
- 1991 “20th Century Collage,” Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, California, 12 January – 16

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February

- “Arte Povera,” Studio Oggetto, Milan, Italy, 10 January – 20 February
- “Luciano Fabro, Dan Flavin, Jannis Kounellis, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Mario Merz, Bruce Nauman,” Steingladstone, New York in conjunction with Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2 February – 2 March
- “Inaugural Exhibition,” Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, opened June
- “Artisti dell’Arte Povera,” Galerie Karin Schorm, Vienna, Austria, September – October
- “Group Exhibition,” Galerie Pietro Sparta, Chagny, France, opened 22 October
- “Artisti Dell’Arte Povera,” Galerie Schorm, Vienna, 3 October – 14 December
- “Nature creation du Peintre,” Musee Cantonal Des Beau-Arts, Lausanne, 6 April – 26 May (catalogue)
- 1992 “Documenta IX,” Kassel, Germany
- “15th Anniversary Exhibition,” Rhona Hoffman Gallery,” Chicago, 8 May – 13 June
- “Charlton, Flavin, Long, Merz, Ruckreim, Zorio,” Sala Gaspar, Barcelona
- “Terrae Motus alla Reggia di Caserta,” Fondazione Amelio, Naples, November (catalogue)
- “Arte Povera,” Kodama Gallery, Osaka, Japan, 19 October – 12 December
- 1993 “Out of Sight Out of Mind,” Lisson Gallery, London, 15 February – 3 April; Sammlung Goetz, Munich
- “La collection Mme Christian Stein,” Centre Regional d’Art Contemporain Midi-Pyrenees, Labège-Innopole, France, 19 January – 28 March
- “Gravity & Grace, The Changing Condition of Sculpture 1965-1975,” Hayward Gallery, London, 21 January – 14 March
- “A la decouverte...de collections romandes I,” FAE Musee d’art contemporain, Pully/Lausanne, Switzerland, 19 February – 27 June (catalogue)
- “Drawing the Line Against AIDS,” Curated by John Cheim, Diego Cortez, Carmen Gimenez, and Klaus Kertess, Biennale di Venezia and AmFar International, Venice, 8-13 June (catalogue)
- “Utopia - Arte Italiana 1950-1993,” Salzburger Festspiele, Salzburg; in cooperation with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg, 24 July – 31 August (catalogue)
- “De Verzameling, The Collection,” Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, opened 5 September
- “Schwerpunkt Skultur” (Center of Gravity), Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld, September – October
- 1994 “Some kind of fact some kind of fiction,” Sperone Westwater, New York, 8 January – 12 February
- 1995 “The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-1968,” Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 6 October – 22 January (catalogue)
- “Sculpture,” Anthony d’Offay Gallery, London, 7 December – 26 January (catalogue)
- “Terrae Motus Terrae Motus,” Palazzo reale, Caserta, Italy, December (catalogue)
- “Itinere camino e caminantes,” Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Portugal, January – February
- Sperone Westwater, New York, September – October
- Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, 16 September – 8 October
- John Weber Gallery, 16 September – 14 October
- 1995-96 “L’Escultura. Creacions Paral-Leles Metafores del Real,” Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, 30 November 1995 – 18 February 1996 (catalogue)
- 1996 “Portrait of the Artist,” Anthony d’Offay Gallery, London, April – June
- 1997 “Arte Italiana, Ultimi Quarant’anni: Materiali Anomali,” Galleria d’Arte Moderna di Bologna, Italy, 28 February – 4 May
- “La Biennale di Venezia. XLVII Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte,” Venice, Italy, 15 June – 9 November (catalogue)
- “Anselmo, Boetti, Laib, Merz, Nauman, Paolini, Pistoletto, Vital, Zorio,” Sperone Westwater, New York, 13 September – 18 October
- “Ausgestellt—Vorgestellt III. Mario Merz für Peter Wüthrich,” Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl, Germany (catalogue)
- 1997-98 “Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life,” The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 25 May – 26

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- August 1997; Hayward Gallery, London, 9 October – 4 January 1998 (catalogue)
 “Arte Italiana, 1945–1995: il visibile e l’invisibile,” Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, Nagoya, 14 November 1997 – 15 January 1998; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, 1 February – 22 March 1998; Yonago City Museum of Art, Tottori, 23 April – 26 May 1998; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, 15 June – 26 July 1998
 Christian Stein, Milan, December – January
- 1997–00 “Arte Povera: Arbeiten und Dokumente aus der Sammlung Goetz, 1958 bis heute,” Neue Museum Weserburg Bremen, June – September 1997; Kunsthalle Nürnberg, October – December 1997; Kölnischer Kunstverein, 13 February – 26 April 1998; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Palais Lichtenstein, Vienna, 19 June – 30 August 1998; Konsthalle Göteborg, Sweden, September – October 1998; Sammlung Goetz, Munich, 26 July – 18 December 1999 and 24 January – 20 May 2000 (catalogue)
- 1998–99 “50 espèce d’espaces,” MAC, galeries contemporaines des musées de Marseille, 28 November 1998 – 30 May 1999
- 1999 “Group Exhibition,” Sperone Westwater, New York, 18 June – 30 July
 “Opening Exhibition,” MASS MoCA, Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA
 “Island of Sculptures,” Xacobeo, Pontevedra, Spain, July
- 1999-00 “The collection of the ‘Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain’,” Palazzo delle papesse, centro Arte Contemporanea, 1999 – 2000
- 2000 “Different strokes; selections from the permanent collection,” University Gallery, Fine Arts Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 29 January – 17 March
 “Arte Povera Torinese; Boetti, Merz, Paolini, Penone, Pistoletto, Zorio” Galerie Nathalie Pariente, Paris, 15 April – 20 May
 “In Process, Photographs from the 60s and 70s,” Curt Marcus Gallery, New York, 20 October – 25 November
- 2000-01 “Many Colored Objects Placed Side by Side to Form a Row of Many Colored Objects,” Collection of Annick and Anton Herbert, Casino Luxembourg, Forum d’Art Contemporain, 29 October 2000 – 21 January 2001
 “Arte Povera in collection,” Castello di Rivoli Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino, 6 December 2000 – 25 March 2001
 “Art Light,” Galerie Ernst Beyeler, Basel, 25 November 2000 – March 2001
 “Luci in Galleria. Da Warhol al 2000. Gian Enzo Sperone: 35 Anni di Mostre fra Europa e America/ Lights in the Gallery: From Warhol to 2000, Gian Enzo Sperone: 35 Years Between Europe and America,” Palazzo Cavour, Turin, Italy, 6 October 2000 – 14 February 2001 (catalogue)
- 2001 “Multipli 1967 – 2001,” Esso Gallery, New York, 16 January – 3 March
 “Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera,” Tate Modern, 31 May – 19 August (brochure)
 “Art Unlimited,” Art 32 Basel, 13 – 18 June (catalogue)
 “Arte Povera: Selections from the Sonnabend Collection,” Curated by Claire Gilman, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York, 3 October – 8 December (catalogue)
- 2003 “Sculpture,” Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, 14 February – 15 March
- 2003-04 “Thinking about Sculpture,” The Rachofsky House, Dallas, Texas, 2003 – 2004
- 2005 “Drawings from the Modern, 1945-1975,” The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 30 March – 29 August
- 2005-06 “Art and its Materials,” Galleria Cardi & Co., Milan, Italy, 24 November 2005 – 21 January 2006
- 2006 “Public Space / Two Audiences, works from the Herbert Collection,” Museu d’Art Contemporani De Barcelona, Barcelona, 7 February – 1 May
 “Kounellis, Long, Merz, Turrell,” Galleria Cardi & Co., Milan, Italy, 2 March – 7 April
 “Mario Merz – Wolfgang Laib,” Accademia Tedesca Rome, 21 September – 27 October
- 2006-07 “Inaugural Exhibition: Wrestle,” Curated by Tom Eccles and Trevor Smith, CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 12 November 2006 – 27 May 2007
- 2007 “Fast Forward: Contemporary Collections for the Dallas Museum of Art,” Dallas Museum of Art, 11 February – 20 May (catalogue)

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- 2007-08 "Vent'Anni con Gli Amici: 1987-2007." Galleria in Arco, Torino, 10 November 2007 – 12 January 2008 (catalogue)
- 2008 "Red Sky," Luhring Augustine, New York, 21 January – 16 February
"Selections from the Collection of Helga and Walther Lauffs," David Zwirner and Zwirner & Wirth New York, May; Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, Switzerland, 1 June – 26 July
"Minimal and Conceptual Art in Europe: The Helga and Walther Lauffs Collection," David Zwirner and Zwirner & Wirth, New York, 5 November – 23 December
- 2008-09 "Italics: Italian Art between Tradition and Revolution 1968-2008," Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 27 September 2008 – 22 March 2009; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 18 July – 25 October 2009 (catalogue)
"life on mars: 55th Carnegie International," Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, 5 May 2008 – 11 January 2009
- 2009 "15 Years of Collecting – Against the Grain," Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg, Germany, 15 May – 13 September (brochure)
- 2009-10 "Orientamento," Galleria Cardi, Milan, Italy, 1 December 2009 – 27 February 2010
- 2010-11 "Basico: Moto Perpetuo," 35th Anniversary: October 1975 – October 2010, Tucci Russo Studio per l'Arte Contemporanea, Torre Pellice (Torino), Italy, 10 October 2010 – 27 February 2011
- 2011 "Group Show." Galleria Christian Stein, Milan, Italy, 24 February – 30 April
- 2011-12 "Arte Povera Più Azioni Povere 1968," curated by Germano Celant and Eduardo Cicelyn, Museo d'Arte contemporanea DonnaREGina (MADRE), 11 November 2011 – 20 February 2012
- 2011-13 "Sympathy for the Devil," Vanhaerents Art Collection, Brussels, Belgium, 30 April 2011 – 30 November 2013
- 2012 "Matters of Fact" Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 18 March – 27 May
"Collezione Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati," Lugano Arte e Cultura, Lugano, 23 June – 5 August
"Arte Povera," Galleria Cardi Pietrasanta, Lucca, Italy, April – May
- 2013 "Che Fare?," Galerie Lelong, New York, NY, 22 February – 30 March
"When Attitudes Become Form," Fondazione Prada, Venice, 1 June – 3 November
"Arte Povera," Albert Baronian, Brussels, 7 September – 9 November
- 2014 "On The Road," Pazo de Xelmirez/Park and Church of San Domingos de Bonaval, Santiago de Compostela, June – November
- 2015 "Accelerazione," Herbert Foundation, Ghent, 26 April – 15 November
- 2016 "Ballet Mecanique," Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York, 16 January – 20 February
"Drawing Dialogues: Selections from the Sol LeWitt Collection," The Drawing Center, New York, 15 April – 12 June (catalogue)

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Selected Collections:

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York
Art Gallery of Ontario
Art Institute of Chicago
ARTIST ROOMS, National Galleries of Scotland and Tate
Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht
La Caixa Contemporary Art Collection, Spain
Castello di Rivoli Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Turin
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
Dallas Museum of Art
Herbert Foundation, Ghent
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands
Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid
Museum Brandhorst, Munich
Museum Folkwang, Essen
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Museum Wiesbaden, Germany
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent
Tate, London
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN