PERCORSI RECENTI/RECENT PATHS

Una Città per I´Arte/A City for Art

**Milan, Palazzo Reale**

**from 17 June to 17 September 1997**

**PIERO MANZONI**

**Palazzo Reale, Sala delle Cariatidi, entrance from the staircase in Piazzetta Reale**

At the Sala delle Cariatidi (Room of the Caryatids) of Palazzo Reale, the Council of Milan - Culture and Entertainment Dept.,in cooperation with the Mudima and the Antonio Mazzotta Foundations, presents to the public a wide retrospective of Piero Manzoni with about 110 works and around a hundred documents: from the pictorial canvases of the early Fifties to the last conceptual works with 'merde d'artista/artist's shits' of 1961. The exhibition documents the entire artistic career of Piero Manzoni, from the first early phase of the pictorial canvases (Veduta di Savona/View of Savona), to the oil compositions made between the end of 1955 and the beginning of 1956, where anthropomorphic figures are represented, where the matter of figures becomes more and more slick and remote, to the works made by tar on canvas, up to the first *achromes/achromatic pieces* of 1957, white canvases creased horizontally. However these protruding creases soon disappear, too.

As Manzoni says: "it is not a matter of painting blue on blue or white on white: quite the contrary, the matter for me is to give a surface which is completely white (actually totally colourless, neutral) outside any pictorial phenomenon, any foreign intervention to the value of the surface, (...) a white surface which is just a white surface".

On display there are the *achromes/achromatic pieces* on canvas imbued with kaolin, made of cotton wool and Styrofoam, with cotton buds and sowed canvas squares, there are those treated with cobalt chloride and those with glass wool, hay, plastic, fur and stones, and the "pacchetti/packages" made of paper, twine and sealing wax. In addition there are the *Corpi d'aria/Bodies of air*(inflatable sculptures), which can be reduced and extended, displayed for the first time in 1959; with these sculptures, beyond the casing and the base, it was possible to purchase also the very breath of the artist to be preserved in its specific container. Also especially for the exhibition they made the *Scultura nello Spazio/Sculpture in Space*, from a project by Piero Manzoni of 1960, which consists of a white sphere of about 2m in diameter suspended in the air. The visitor can also admire the *Linee/Lines* of various lengths, closed in sealed boxes, their invention dating back to1959. Space is meant as a mind image: Manzoni inverts the imaginative process that goes from the *eye*to the *mind*, in this case it is, in fact, the brain that suggests the image to the eye.

Also on display there are *Impronte/Prints*of fingers on paper from 1960 and some *Ricevute d'autenticità/Receipts of authenticity*, in other words papers issued by Manzoni to those people who let him sign their bodies, thus becoming "living sculptures". With these last works the visitors are called to be new supporting actors of the artistic creation and to take an active role cooperating in it. The signed people and the objects placed above the "magical bases" prove that anything can become a work of art, because the only form of art is us and our lives. In the room of PalazzoReale, where there are on display the receipts of authenticity collected in a black cheque holder, the visitors will find a magical pedestal, which transforms objects and people into art works.

In 1960, laying down his own finger print on boiled eggs, Manzoni consecrated them to art, eggs which the audience ingested during the exhibition and the whole thing lasted all in all 70 minutes. In the idea of the artist they had to be swallowed and penetrate inside the visitor, creating a real event in-between provocation and magic. Some *Uova/Eggs* are still today on display for the public.

The artistic career of Piero Manzoni ends in the exhibition with the cans *Merda d'artista/Artist's shit* of 1961, sold at the same price per gram of gold. The action is, in this case, all oriented to the assertion of life in its biological components - substance, measurability, quantification -. This way the artist gives an economical value to the bodily products, proving that any idea comes from the body and more and more identifying art with himself.

As a homage to Piero Manzoni a copy of the "Base del Mondo/Base of the world" will be on display, an iron parallelepipedon made by Manzoni in 1961 for the park of Herning in Denmark, which displays the upside down writing "Socle du Monde...", that can then be read upside down.

The exhibition is enriched by 100 documents consisting of letters and critical texts originally typescript by the artist and amended by hand.

The aim of this exhibition is to testify the undiminished skill of invention of Manzoni, expressed in the writings of the artist himself: "we therefore intend art as a discovery (*inventio*) in a continuous historical change of authentic and unmarked areas. Our world is an alphabet of first images. The painting is our idea of freedom; it is in this space that we tend towards the discovery, to the invention of images; unmarked images justified only by themselves, the validity of which is determined only by the amount of zest for life they contain".

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