

For more information

If you have any questions or want to find out more about the exhibition, please ask our friendly Gallery Assistants. They're here to help!

We also have free Spot Tours of the exhibitions every day, Tue – Fri. Please ask for times at Reception.



Logo by Anthea Hamilton

Piero Gilardi

Collaborative Effects

Introduction

Collaborative Effects tracks Piero Gilardi's experimental approach to collaboration inside and outside the art world over a 22-year-period from 1963 to 1985. The exhibition presents his early sculptures as well as his work as a creative facilitator with various political movements. It brings these two strands up to date with two recent sculptures, together with props and video documentation relating to anti-austerity and environmental campaigns in Italy. Collaborative Effects is the first time Gilardi's work outside of the art world has been included within an exhibition.

Piero Gilardi was an influential figure in the development of Arte Povera, or "poor art". The term was first used by the critic Germano Celant to describe a radical and diverse group of artists concentrated in Turin, Italy, in the late 1960s. As well as Gilardi, the group included Mario Merz, Alighiero Boetti and Michelangelo Pistoletto. Although it is difficult to generalise, Arte Povera was characterised by materials and processes that are both raw and direct, favouring industrial and organic materials – even live animals. Their work is poetic, enigmatic and philosophical. In contrast Gilardi's own work in this period was a synthetic, vividly coloured representation of nature,

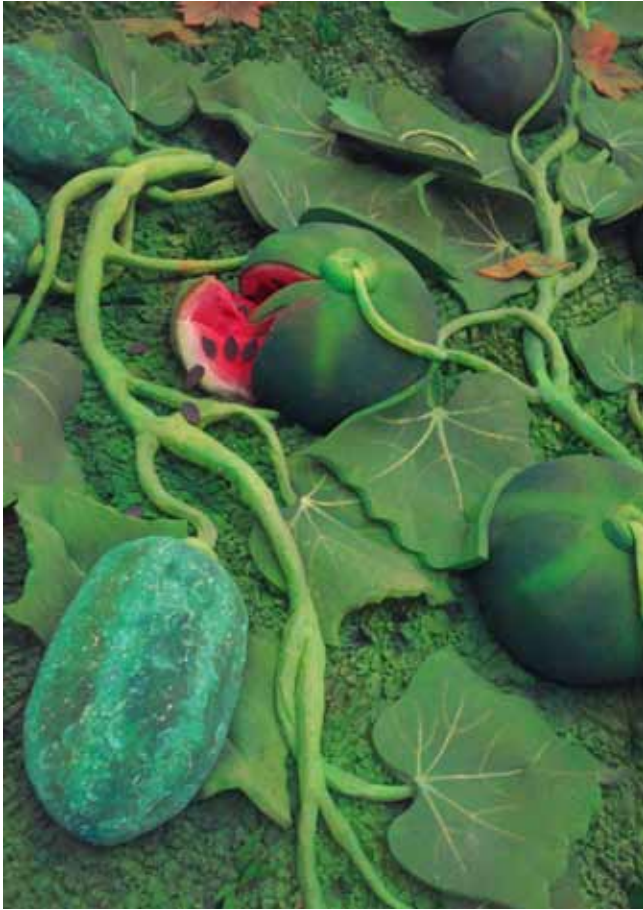


Piero Gilardi, Stone Dress performance, 2012. Photo Peter Cox courtesy of Vanabbemuseum

carved and painted by hand. From the outset his work was designed to be handled, worn and used by people. This was part of a larger ethos of merging art with life in an attempt to transform society. In this sense Gilardi is a precursor to the theory of Relational Aesthetics of the 1990s, and the socially engaged art of the 2000s.

Piero Gilardi still lives and works in Turin – where he has organised an exhibition of his recent work to coincide with this exhibition. His influence has also been felt internationally through his theoretical writing, and through his linking together of international artists and their varied practices in the late 1960s.





Piero Gilardi, Nature Carpet, (detail) 1967. Courtesy of the artist

Gallery 2

The exhibition begins with Gilardi's early sculpture – interactive objects based on natural motifs, including his celebrated Nature Carpets, which are highly colourful and realistic slices of nature made from carved and painted foam. Gilardi encouraged people to use them – to lie on them, picnic on them, and carpet their homes with them. He was even interested in making them available as mass-produced objects sold by the metre. They were an instant success and were shown at leading avant-garde galleries around the world, as well as at experimental design fairs in Italy. He explained “I created the nature carpets in 1965, thinking of them as examples of the interior decor of the cybernetic “individual living cell.” Inspired by the softness of Pop artist Claes Oldenburg's sculptures of products and foodstuffs he aimed to make objects that appeared welcoming to the human body in order to close the divide between art and spectator, body and mind.

Around the same time Gilardi created “clothes” (1964-1967) again using polyurethane as a material. They fell into two categories - *vestitu stati d'animo* (mood suits) and *vistiti natura* (nature dresses). He staged performances using the dresses at his home, or at the Piper Club in Turin – a bar and informal arts venue. One of these performances can be seen at Nottingham Contemporary on Saturday afternoons during the exhibition.



Piero Gilardi with the interactive Jigsaw Puzzle at Vanabbemuseum.
Photo Peter Cox. Courtesy of Vanabbemuseum

Although these sculptures are now too delicate to be generally engaged with, Gilardi has made a new piece especially for this exhibition - a life-sized jigsaw puzzle of a flower bed that children and adults are invited to play with.

The cabinets in this room present examples of Gilardi's activities as a critic and catalyst within Arte Povera circles. The artists would meet at his studio and at Michelangelo Pistoletto's to exchange ideas. For Gilardi, action was as important as object, the exhibition space could be a site of artistic production, and group exhibitions should be collectively determined by the artists themselves. He travelled widely at this time. He was a conduit between artists associated with these different ideas across continents. His networks and ideas were crucial to the development of two famous exhibitions from 1969 that encapsulate this moment in art – *When Attitudes Become Form* at Kunsthalle Berne and *Op Losse Schroeven* at Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam – which presented Arte Povera with the wider context of art after Minimalism in Western Europe and North America – movements like Land Art, Conceptual Art and “Anti-Form” sculpture.



Piero Gilardi, May Day Demonstrations, Turin 1977. Courtesy of the artist

Gallery 1

Gilardi was the most politically engaged artist of the Arte Povera group. In the late 60s, at a time of great political turmoil in Italy, he left the art world altogether and became a creative facilitator of street theatre for a range of radical causes. These came to include workers' revolution, the anti-psychiatry movement, radical youth groups and the rights of indigenous people around the world. This work involved making sculptural props and choreographing actions and demonstrations – practices he continues until this day. Often beginning with satirical cartoons, Gilardi's agit-prop sculptures are executed in the same medium as earlier sculptures – carved and painted foam. Recent examples are included in the middle of the gallery.



Piero Gilardi, performance during the Turin CGIL strike, 2011. Courtesy of the artist

Gilardi describes his work as an activist artist as an instinctive continuation of his longstanding interest in the “social right to art”. Gilardi’s “creative political militancy”, as he called it, was partly inspired by the work of German artist Joseph Beuys who developed the idea of “social sculpture” – potentially every human activity could become socially transformative art. Beuys was an influence for John Newling too.





Piero Gilardi, Igloo, 1964. Courtesy of the artist

During the 1980s Gilardi became involved in the relationship between emerging information technologies (especially virtual reality) and living systems. He called this work Bio Art. His recent installation *Albatross* (2011) was a response to the devastating Tsunami and nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan. The albatross is a longstanding metaphor for the fatal consequences of destructive human behaviour. The work gives the viewer literally a “bird’s eye view” of the disaster.

Much of Gilardi’s current work focuses on Parco Arte Vivante, a visionary art centre he founded in Turin. It is dedicated to art that addresses ecological issues and is located in a working class district next to the former iconic Fiat factory, the crucible of Italy’s “long ‘68” of the 1960s and 70s. A model and film of PAV is included in this gallery. Gilardi is also presenting an exhibition of *Recent Works* (2008 – 2012) in PAV to coincide with this exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary.

Collaborative Effects is curated by Andrea Bellini and Diana Franssen. It is a Nottingham Contemporary partnership with Castello di Rivoli in Turin and Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. A major publication, produced by the three institutions and JP Ringier is on sale in the shop. It documents the exhibition and the wider context of Gilardi’s fascinating creative and political trajectory.



CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

vanabbemuseum