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Arte Povera
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Introductory essay

In the late 1960s a number of Italian artists working primarily in Turin and Rome, as well as Genoa, Milan and Bologna, began to show their work together. Resolutely avoiding a signature style and encouraging incoherence as a positive value, these artists produced work spanning sculpture, photography, installation and performance, which they showed alongside that of other international artists involved in parallel tendencies such as Land Art, antiform, postminimalism and Conceptual Art. This work became known as Arte Povera, which, literally translated, means 'poor art', but does not refer solely to a poorness of materials. Arte Povera's impact on artists across Western Europe and America was both immediate and profound, and its influence is still felt around the world.
The artists who were to become most closely associated with this movement — Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kouneilis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini and Gilberto Zorio — were concerned with that point at which art and life, nature and culture, intersect. They attempted to create a subjective understanding of matter and space allowing for an experience of the 'primary" energy present in all aspects of life as lived directly and not mediated through representation, ideology or codified languages. This energy was intended, on the one hand, to correspond to the basic physical forces of nature [such as gravity or electricity] and, on the other hand, to refer to the fundamental elements of human nature [such as vitality, memory and emotion]. Other artists sometimes associated with Arte Povera, whose work was also engaged with these concerns, were Mario Ceroli, Claudio Cintoli, Piero Gilardi, Paolo Icaro, Eliseo Vlattiacci, Aldo Mondino, Hidetoshi Nagasawa, Luca Patella and Gianni Piacentino. The term 'Arte Povera' was coined in September 1967 by the young Genoese critic Germano Celant. In his first catalogue essay for the exhibition, 'Arte povera — Im spazio', he wrote: 'What has happened [...] the commonplace has entered the sphere of art. The insignificant has begun to exist – indeed it has imposed itself. Physical presence and behaviour have become art [...] Cinema, theatre and the visual arts assert their authority as anti-presence [...] They

eliminate from their inquiry all which may seem mimetic reflection and representation or linguistic custom in order to attain a new kind of art, which, to borrow a term from the theatre of Grotowsky, one may call "poor".' Celant initially conceived Arte Povera as an art that rejected consumer society and that saw the artist not as a 'producer' but as an individual dedicated to 'the free self-projection of human activity'. He envisaged 'a poor art concerned with contingency, events, a historicism, the present [...] an anthropological outlook, "real" man [Marx] and the hope [now a certainty] of discarding all visually univocal and coherent discourse [...]" So pluralistic are its manifestations and manifold its concerns that even today, more than thirty years after the initial surge of creativity, it is difficult to define Arte Povera. Its richness lies in this very variety; at once conceptual and sensual, literal and metaphoric, poetic and down-to-earth, it is close both to the natural processes of the present and at the same time aware of the past through memory. Radically transforming the language of contemporary art, Arte Povera has changed Western art-historical premises whilst pursuing broader definitions of cultural practice. The acceptance of contradiction and complexity, tied to a sense of the importance of openness, fluidity and subjectivity, positions the practice of Arte Povera beyond Modernism, and sustains our continuing fascination with it. Arte Povera did not see art and life as oppositional. As art critic Tommaso Trini, who became involved with the movement in the 1960s, has put it, 'The relationship between "natural-artificial" is a technological theme. Anthropology prefers to examine the relationship between nature and culture [...] they present identical structures. The products of culture are not to be distinguished, essentially, from natural products.' The Arte Povera artists linked nature and culture through the juxtaposition of mundane manufactured materials [neon tubes, glass, cloth] with organic natural materials or elements [vegetables, live animals, earth, fire, water]. These provided a new alphabet for a non-mediated language of real experience — neither visually nor verbally representational, neither figurative nor abstract. Although many Arte Povera artists began as painters, they moved beyond paint-on-canvas both because it prioritized a certain type of representation and because it focused on vision as a primary vehicle for knowledge. However, they did not reject traditional techniques this 'battle against tradition' had already been waged by the previous generation of artists, which included Piero Manzoni and Yves Klein. When traditional painting is referred to or used in Arte Povera, whether directly, as in the work

of Mario Merz, or alluded to metonymically by Anselmo or Paolini, it is done in order to expand painting by combining it with the possibilities of process-oriented work. Modern culture has been defined by vision, and the eye has become an emblem of power and a symbol of a central, 'vertical' gaze onto the relationship between the self and the world. Arte Povera, on the other hand, explores different perceptual and sensual dimensions, positing a 'horizontal' notion of knowledge. When Jannis Kounellis uses coffee, for example, or Mario Merz employs beeswax and fresh fruit, they focus on the sense of smell. Similarly, the sensation of touch is often evoked, either by the conjunction of materials with highly varied textures— such as the dirt, metal and water in Pino Pascali's works, the porous sponge and heavy metal in Giovanni Anselmo's Respiro [Breath], 1969, Luciano Fabro's use of marble, glass and silk in his Piedi [Feet], 1968-71, and the salt-filled bowls of Marisa Merz — or by creating a sensation of coolness, as in Pier Paolo Calzolari's ice-forming structures. The non-conventional, contingent and contextual meanings inherent in language are used by Arte Povera artists alongside their explorations of the senses. In Arte Povera, words are handwritten, heightening their subjective nature and their physical and emotional connotations. In Boetti's text-works he wrote with his left hand, exploiting the associations of left-handedness with non-rational, imaginary, mental processes. The handwritten texts of Emilio Prini and Mario Merz often have the quality of drawings. The relationship between art and truth in language is also central to Zorio's work. In Scrittura bruciata [Burnt writing], 1968-69, Zorio wrote a text on paper with invisible ink and dropped the paper on a hot sheet of copper, causing the words to be momentarily visible before burning. Since 1969 he has made a series of alchemical machines, Per purificare le parole [To purify the words], long, pipe-shaped alcohol containers through which the viewer is meant to speak. After passing through this 'purification', what remains of language is the tone, timbre and rhythm of the voice freed from 'content', the intentionality of conscious discourse and the representational nature of verbal language. New models of critical practice emerged in response to Arte Povera. The critic as connoisseur was rejected in favour of chronicler and commentator. The clearest example of this changing attitude can be found in critic Carla Lonzi's work. In line with Marshall McLuhan's theories about civilization's passage from the mechanical, emblematized by printing and the purely visual, to the aural and participatory, as induced by the new electronic media, Lonzi turned from structured critical essays to taped

interviews with artists. These were published complete with inflections, suspensions, interjections and other non-denotative elements of language. What interested the Arte Povera artists was the way in which it is possible to maximize the experience of beauty with a minimum of linguistic transformation and cultural imposition. Boetti's Cemento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione [Trials of harmony and invention], 1969, is made with the 'poorest' of media and methods: tracing in pencil the lines on a sheet of graph paper. Similarly, in Lo spazio [The space], 1967, Giulio Paolini heightened the viewer's experience of the space simply by placing eight white letters of lacquered wood around the walls of the room. While generally creating indoor works, Arte Povera artists also made site-specific pieces for outdoor or unconventional locations. Freely using different forms and techniques, they explored the possibilities of installation art, bridging sculpture and live art, photography and film or video, the permanent and the ephemeral. The scale is often determined by the dimensions of the human body, its physical presence and behaviour. Mario Merz's dome-shaped Igloos, for example, are the size of small huts. Fabro's cloth cube, in-cubo [In the cube], 1966, is proportioned to accommodate one person at a time. Penone's individual interactions with the outdoors in Alpi marittime [Maritime alps],1968, involved gestures such as encircling the trunk of a young tree with his hand. Never monumental, the scale of these works recalls the humanistic approach of Leonardo da Vinci, whose famous image of the human figure illustrates the concept of a harmony of proportion as determined by the body. The attempt to make art without the mediation of a coded both universal and individual." language of representation reflected an ideal of 'authenticity' commonly held in the 1960s by that generation of rebels' who challenged what they perceived to be an oppressive economic and cultural system based on consumerism and tradition, devised to control rather than liberate.

The protests of May exploration of the relationship between art and life, began 1968 throughout the Western world represented the culmination of this position in a broadly social and political context. Just as institutions, education, the family, conventional religion and sexuality came under attack generally, so were traditional aesthetic norms about materials, technique, scale form and concept disrupted by the new generation of artists. Rejecting bourgeois values and post-industrial capitalism, as well as the rigours of traditional Marxism, they anarchically embraced the powers ofthe imagination. In an attempt to decrease intellectual control over experience [deculturare — to de-civilize —

was a key neologism of the time] the Arte Povera artists pared the art object down to elementary, unadorned, 'poor' propositions and gestures. Because of its anti-intellectual stance, and despite the fact that it had achieved radical
breakthroughs in the language of art and its display, Arte Povera questioned avant-garde assumptions and objectives. For the principle of 'innovation ' was considered to be productivist and little more than a mimicry of capitalist strategies, not a critique.
In 1970 the Swiss curator Jean-Christophe Ammann offered a definition of Arte Povera that is particularly relevant: 'Arte Povera designates a kind ofart which, in contrast to the technologized world around it, seeks to achieve a poetic statement with the simplest ofmeans. This return to simple materials, repealing laws and processes deriving from the power of the imagination, is an examination of the artist 's own conduct in an industrialized society [I A way of "dropping out" which is by no means a denial ofsociety, but which instead asserts a moral claim: the subjectified sensibility in its objectified authenticity reflects a natural recollection of environmental phenomena, both universal and individual.

Precursors

The questioning of Western aesthetic categories and norms, and the broadening ofwhat can be defined as art, through the exploration of the relationship between art and life, began long before Arte Povera. Important precedents can be found throughout the history of twentieth-century art. Reference to everyday materials, for example, can be traced back to Dada artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters, to Surrealism and to the later new-Dada assemblages Of Robert Rauschenberg, to Nouveau Réalisme, Claes Oldenburg and other Pop Artists. Also relevant is the development of performance art, from Dada and the Futurists through Pop Art happenings, Fluxus events and John Cage's performances. Arte Povera's concern with art as an environment to be experienced, rather than as an autonomous object, was pre-empted by Constructivist and Bauhaus experiments and by Lucio Fontana's Spatialism. And art created outside the neutral exhibition space, in the urban or natural environment, has its roots in Situationist experiments, in the Japanese Gutai group's outdoor exhibitions and in the work of the Land Artists. It is also important to recognize the legacy of action painting, from Jackson Pollock to the European CoBrA artists; both share a concern for 'art as process', in which

the artist's gesture becomes both the subject and the object of the artwork, creating an equilibrium between spontaneity and design.

Among all these precedents, perhaps one of the most important was Futurism, of which the young Arte Povera artists were particularly aware. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Futurists — the poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and artists Umberto Boccioni and Giacomo Balla, among others — aimed to create a new art for the modern world, based on simultaneity, dynamism and speed, seeking to place Italian art at the forefront of the avant-garde. Balla's canvases used imagery that recalled the translation of movement in the chronophotographic experiments of Anton Giulio Bragaglia, and his Complessi plastici [Plastic complexes],1913, are assemblages of various materials: cotton, metal wire, liquids of various colours. The Futurists' use of diverse media and concern with time-based processes is echoed in such works as Pistoletto's ever-changing Quadri specchianti [Mirror paintings], or the vital dynamism of Kounellis' use of fire. Other more recent experiments in contemporary art also had an impact on the birth of Arte Povera. For instance, the importance of social awareness on the part of the artist and of the power of imagination as an instrument for social change can be traced back to the activities of the Alba Laboratory, which was seminal to the development of what later came to be called International Situationism. The experimental laboratory in the town of Alba near Turin was founded in 1955 by Pinot Gallizio and Piero Simondo and the CoBrA artist Asgerforn. Gallizio's significance in the formation of Arte Povera's identification of art with life is evident from Mario Merz's comment: When I saw him in Alba he never had the painter's frock on or the paintbrush in his hands [...] The man was stronger than the painter. He showed how the idea behind painting was more important than painting[...] What was important for him was the practice of life [...]" However, it is not only in European art that Arte Povera's roots can be found. The Japanese Gutai group also provided an important precedent to Arte Povera’s use of natural materials and emphasis on action and process in art-making. Formed in 1954 around the figure of artist Jiro Yoshihara, the Gutai group moved away from pictorial abstraction towards a synthesis of matter and subject, developing an extreme form of action painting, Often combined with performance, using heterogeneous materials. Following the first Gutai exhibition in Europe, organized by the young critic and gallerist Luciano Pistoi in 1959, and a second show in 1961 , this work was familiar to the older Arte Povera artists such as Mario Merz and Pistoletto. Most of

the younger artists, who only began to work in the early to mid 1960s, had no direct contact with Gutai. For them, other influences were far more significant. In post-war Milan, the work of Lucio Fontana determined a shift of concern away from the autonomous art object towards an exploration of art as a total environment. His research into 'Spatialism', together with his charismatic presence in Milan, were determinant in encouraging the rise of Arte Povera in Italy. In 1949, by piercing the canvas itself, Fontana opened up the pictorial surface of modernist abstract painting to real space and light, creating an optimistic sense of continuity between nature and culture, light, space and thought. Like the Arte Povera artists after him, Fontana was fascinated by the baroque concept of a matter that dilates in space and time and the symbiotic relationship between nature and culture. His legacy can be seen, for example, in Fabro's notion of 'Habitat', in Anselmo's visualization of our relationship with the infinite and in Paolini's interest in the absence of the art object and focus on the presence of the viewer in the exhibition space.

The young Arte Povera artists in Rome, on the other hand, grew up under the shadow of artist Alberto Burri. In the late 1940s and early 1950s his exploration of materials and their transformation through such processes as chemical reaction in his Muffe [Moulds], or burning in his Combustioni [Com-bustions], pointed to a concern with organic growth. This aesthetic prefigures Arte Povera experiments with materials in relation to primary energy, such as Zorio's works based on chemical reactions, like Rosa-blu-rosa [Pink-blue-pink], 1967, a work which changes colour according to the humidity in the air. In 1952, Burri started making his Sacchi[SacksJ, using torn and sutured burlap sacking, and by the mid 1950s he was burning materials such as paper, wood and, later, plastic. These works inspired artists such as Pascali to move towards the free use of materials as linguistic signs. Though far from displaying the sense of weight and rigour to be found in the shaped canvases that Burri had been making since his first Cobbo [Hunchback], in 1950, Pascali's three-dimensional canvases on wooden structures, such as Labbra rosse[Red lips) or Colosseo (Coliseum], both 1964, are indebted to these experiments. Kounellis' early paintings with signs and lettering resonate with the memory ofthe printed letters on Burri's Sacchi [Sacks], and his heaps of coal recall the older artist's black combusted wood. But while Burri made his paintings out of peces of burlap bags, Kounellis presents sacks in terms of materials, Kounellis presents fire itself, emphasizing the very process of

combustion. Some of Kounellis' works. such as Senza titolo [Margherita difuocol [Untitled (Daisy offre), 1967, use fire and propane gas torches to ignite the pistil Of a steel flower; others feature the actual sources of potential energy, such as coal. These two artists not only share an affinity with similar materials, but also a sense of compositional rigour, and their works, which express the artistic act as a moral one, resonate with the tragic memory of recent European history. Other Italian artists of the 1950s and early 1960s significant to the birth of Arte Povera included the sculptor Ettore Colla, whose use of found metal broadened the possibilities of sculptural media and the abstract painter Carla Accardi. Accardi exhibited regularly in the 1960s and was familiar to younger artists. Her Tende (Tents) — made of transparent plastic covered in bright, pictorial signs — may well have influenced the many Arte Povera works that, like Fabro's In-cubo (ln the cube). 1966, Mario Merz's Igloos or Zorio's Tenda [Tent] of 1967. exhibit a sense of domesticity and a utopian idea of habitat.

Perhaps Accardi's appeal to younger artists lay in her joyful, colourful approach, which was in such marked contrast to the Existentialist pessimism of most Informel painters of this period. By the late 1950s, seeking a form closer to real life, artists throughout Europe were rejecting the painterly abstraction and the heroic nature of Informel or Abstract Expressionism. The first contemporary book written about the Italian art scene of the period was Rapporto 60— Le arti oggi in Italia [Report 60— The arts today in Italy], by art historian Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco. Published in 1966, it traces this shift away from post-war Abstract Expressionism, identifying two main lines of emerging work: ricerche visuali [visual research], which comprised optical and kinetic art; and figurazione nuovissima [new figuration), which included Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme and other forms of iconic representation. It was in the second area that he placed the pre-Arte Povera work of Pistoletto, Kounellis and Pascali, highlighting their renewed attention to the real — a quality shared, albeit in very different terms, with Pop Art's depiction of the everyday.

It is interesting to note that in Paris and New York in the 1960s, some of the artists who would later be grouped around Arte Povera were showing at Sonnabend, a gallery particularly affiliated with early Pop Art. The birth of Pop certainly contributed to the return of interest in real, daily life. Banality was elevated by Andy Warhol to the level of high art, and the artist realized that anything from the urban landscape could be appropriated as material. Arte Povera, however, did not share Pop Art's focus on

anonymous mass culture and images culled from movies, magazines or advertising. Rather, it was concerned with difference and subjective specificity. Art critic Filiberto Menna, active in the Italian contemporary art scene throughout the 1960s, commented on this in 1968: 'Artists like Pascali and Ceroli, Pistoletto and Mondino, Kounellis and Marotta [... I have grasped and accepted the direct opening out towards the real proposed by Rauschenberg and Johns, Lichtenstein and Oldenburg. But it is not their aim to pursue the same path already taken; they want instead to open new directions and experiences — without rejecting the city, the technical and artificial, they are turning elsewhere, towards nature, the artisanal and organic [Pop was seen by Arte Povera as too pristine and product-based, creating autonomous objects that conflicted with the process-oriented, open nature of Arte Povera. As Kounellis pointed out: Something we need to reach today is unity between life and our art practice. The story of Pop Art and of r many other movements takes this unity away. Like all industrial and technological things, it puts you in a detached position, between yourself and the thing you are making. More important was the influence of new Dada, the Zero group artists, Nouveau Réalisme (including Klein], and the Azimuth group [Manzoni, Enrico Castellani in Milan in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Manzoni's exploration of human nature, and his enquiry into the elements that define an artwork, led him to explore the limits Of the body, nature, art and the world itself. Such statements as Uova con impronta [Eggs withfingerprint], 1960, a work that the audience could consume; Sculture viventi (Living sculptures], 1961, a group of people signed by the artist; and Merda d'amsta [Artist's shit], 1961, a series Ofcans apparently containing his faeces, evidence an approach to subjectivity and the unfolding of the work in time and space that was later developed by Arte Povera.

The French sculptor, painter and performance artist Yves Klein was familiar to Italian audiences, particularly following his 1957 exhibition ofblue monochromes at the Apollinaire gallery in Milan. Opening up the boundaries of art through his research into the absolute, he shifted his attention away from static painting towards the process ofmaterial and spiritual transformation implied by the artistic act. His ideas for a utopian architecture, Architecture de l'air, which would integrate the subject perfectly into the environment, anticipate some ofArte Povera's ecological concerns. The way he moved fluidly between painting, sculpture and performance, and developed a concept of the Void as a realm of freedom and creativity, had a strong impact on Arte Povera's focus on

experimentation, process, subjectivity and use of materials to stimulate different types of sensory perception. Pistoletto says that Klein's Leap into the Void, 1960, is important as a precursor to his Mirror paintings;' but while Klein attempted to reach a new dimension in which the material and immaterial coincide, Pistoletto felt it could be reached through the transformation of the flat painting into a space where subject and object coincide in the world both within and beyond the mirror.

Cultural Context

During the 1950s and early -1960s, Italy went through a period of rapid industrialization and economic growth that became known as the Miracolo italiano [the Italian miracle]. Advanced technology and serial production were rapidly introduced, creating a new Italian society where consumerism was to be accessible to all, symbolized in 1957 by the universally afford-able FIAT 500 automobile. A new faith in the possibility of harnessing art, industry and science towards a bettering of the human condition was widespread. By the mid 1960s, however, economic recession had set in, and the 'miracle' was over. The mood shifted from optimism to scepticism and a sense of precariousness. These were the years of the May1968 student and workers' uprisings throughout Europe and America; anti-Vietnam war demonstrations; a growth of interest in Eastern philosophy; a new sexual liberation; and a pacifist, hippie counter-culture.

The cult of drugs as the pathway to artificially and idealistically heightened sensibility and perception, spearheaded by the Beat Generation in the1950s and later celebrated by Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert in their book The Psychedelic Experience [published in Italian in 1964], may have given rise to some of Arte Povera's process-oriented works based on the chemical and atmospheric transformation of materials.

A general questioning of progress as a social 'good', as well as a questioning of the certainties that had existed since the Enlightenment, brought about the emergence of more relativistic cultural positions. The philosophies of Kant, Hegel and even Marx were criticized as overly deterministic, and the traditional psychoanalysis of Freud and early twentieth-century structuralist linguistics were being further developed along semiological and post-structuralist models. European eighteenth- and nineteenth-century utopian ideas of a world where self-realization is harmonized with democracy were

revealed as having evolved into structures of oppression, both within Western society and its colonialist successors. It was around these issues that new perspectives emerged in cultural fields as varied the as visual arts, music, film, theatre, literature, philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis, sociology, art history and art criticism, architecture and popular culture. New intellectuals were ascendant: psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan; semiologist Roland Barthes; anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss; philosophers Louis Althusser, Gaston Bachelard and Jean Francois Lyotard; cultural critics Norman a Brown and Marshall McLuhan; and linguistic theoretician Noam Chomsky.
Critical social theory, as developed by the Frankfurt School during the -193os,194os and 195os in the works of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm, was especially influential on the radical thinking of the New Left in the 19605. Linking psychoanalysis and Marxism, Adorno analysed the contradictions of individual behaviour in 'bourgeois' society. In his Dialectic of Enlightenment,1947, written with Horkheimer, Adorno reveals the relationship between reason and power, and explains the development of totalitarian political systems such as Fascism. Marxism and psychoanalysis also underline Marcuse's theories, which unmask and critique the exploitative, repressive instincts to be found in the work-and-savings ethic of capitalist society. Although the Arte Povera artists never explicitly used critical social theory in their works, it is none the less important to underline the prevalence of tile issues discussed by the New Left at the time of Arte Povera's emergence. The notion, quite different from that of modernist aesthetic principles. Of a diffused and decentred subjectivity that creatively flows from the maker's 'attitude' to materialize in form is crucial, as is the importance of pleasure and the utopian vision of freedom in an 'aesthetic society',- an idea that has strong links with the writings of Marcuse.

According to Adorno, ever since Hegel, modern aesthetics has been characterized by a denial of 'natural beauty' in favour of 'artistic beauty', which is reached only by the autonomous subject, by the 'spirit'. Rejecting the idealistic, self-referential view of art, Arte Povera reached back through materialism and empiricism towards an idea of'natural beauty', a 'deter. mined indeterminacy'. The strong, controlling and rational subject breaks down in favour of a 'multi-dimensional' self, willing to follow the natural or chance direction of the mate According to Adorno, ever since Hegel modern aesthetics has been

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Structuralism and semiology were also important cultural developments for intellectuals in the early 1960s. According to structuralists, signs are significant only as part of a system of relations, not as autonomous elements. Semiology studied cultural phenomena — fashion, advertising, film, television, music, ideologies, communities — in terms of language and structure, revealing them all as systems of communication
and as signs. It is this broad conception of language, along side innovations in art history such as Duchamp's ready-mades, that formed a cultural background enabling artists to use anything as a significant sign in itself, with no need for intellectual translation into verbal or visual representational language. The moment they fall under our gaze, elements from daily life [whether apparently 'cultural' or 'natural'] are already part of discourse: they belong to the symbolic order and cannot be 'real'. In attempting to appropriate reality as sign, Arte Povera therefore undertakes a paradox, which it plays out in practical terms: things and processes are simultaneously elements of reality and of language. To paraphrase McLuhan, whose writings were particularly relevant to the Pop and 'semiological' generation prior to Arte Povera, if the medium, and not the content, is the message, and the message of Arte Povera was the 'self experiencing the world', then the experience of the self- rather than any new techno-logical medium - had to be the medium. It was Umberto Eco, Professor of Semiotics at the University of Bologna, who founded semiological studies in Italy. His first book, Opera aperta [The Open Work], 1962, dealing with the interpretation of avant-garde art, was widely rials themselves. Consequently, soft media and changing forms, such as the cloth in Fabro's Tre modi di mettere le lenzuola [Three ways of arranging sheets],1968, or Marisa Merz's Senza titolo [CoperteJ (Untitled

(Blankets)], also 1968, are a negotiation between the impulse to make art and the rejection of rigid idealistic aesthetics and a purely 'artistic' beauty. ' Structuralism and semiology were also important cultural developments for intellectuals in the early 196os. According to structuralists, signs are significant only as part of a system of relations, not as autonomous elements. Semiology studied cultural phenomena - fashion, advertising, film, television, music, ideologies, communities - in terms of language and structure, revealing them all as systems of communication and as signs. It is this broad conception of language, along-side innovations in art history such as Duchamp's ready-mades, that formed a cultural background enabling artists to use anything as a significant sign in itself, with no need for read. Through his studies of James Joyce, John Cage, serial music, Informel painting, kinetic art, television, the Nouveau Roman and the films of Jean Luc Godard and Michelangelo Antonioni, Eco interpreted the contemporary artwork as an open system where the experience of the work is flexible and constantly renewable. Stemming from post-structuralism was the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, who studied systems of thought 'genealogically' as expressions of systems of power in what he called an 'archaeology of knowledge'. Influenced by Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche, Foucault reveals the relativity of moral and 'epistemic' systems, therefore helping to dismantle the certainties of Modernism. In Les mots et les choses [The Order of Things], 1966, published in Italian in 1967, Foucault studied systems of knowledge from the Renaissance to the birth of the human sciences [psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.] in the eighteenth century, revealing how their scientific 'objectivity' is invalid. 'Man' as a central subject and object of knowledge, it is claimed, is disappearing. Foucault's relativistic positions can be related to the weakening of a central sense of self in the 'horizontal' dimension of Arte Povera, as well as to its embracing of complexity, difference and uncertainty. Arte Povera works are often complex and multi-layered, widely different from one another even when made by the same artist, and avoid the homogenizing, design-oriented, recognizable artist's 'style' of late Modernism. Among Foucault's major works was Histoire de la folic Page classique [Madness and Civilization: History of Insanity in the Age of Reason], 1961 [published in Italian in 1963], This key work, which deals with the practices of exclusion and reclusion as means of domination, and criticizes psychiatric principles, was a major influence on the development of anti-psychiatry in the late 1960s. In Italy in 1968 Franco Basaglia, a psychiatrist at the hospital of Gorizia, began

to develop his psichiatria democratic° [democratic psychiatry], a practice based on the idea that the psychiatric hospital must no longer be a constrictive place that removes illness from society, but must become an open community where the boundary between inside and outside is an osmotic membrane. Among his many experiments was the organization of happening-like events where the hospitalized community would interact with the people of the city, of which artists were aware. The anti-psychiatry of Basaglia in Italy, Ronald D. Laing and David Cooper in Britain, and Thomas Szasz in the US contributes to an understanding of the anti-rationalist strain in Arte Povera and the relationship between inside and outside prevalent in many of the works. Just as the anti-psychiatrists broke down the boundaries of the hospital, so the Arte Povera artists dismantled the boundaries of the exhibition space and the isolation of the art community. The artist Piero Gilardi, closely affiliated to Arte Povera, though not included in the exhibitions under that title curated by Germano Celant, was for some years directly involved in a renewal of psychiatric therapy through working creatively with the hospitalized in Turin. In Senza titolo [12 cavalli][Untitled(-12 horses)],1969, Kounellis brought the outdoor world into the gallery space by exhibiting twelve live horses. Pistoletto's experimental street theatre group, Lo Zoo [The Zoo], begun in 1968, created occasions allowing for dynamic relationships between artists and audience. Boetti's interest in diminishing control of the rational self over creative practice and a breaking down of the boundaries between author and audience was developed through collective acts of creation, such as having his tapestries embroidered by Afghani craftspeople. Particularly important to the development of Arte Povera were experiments in the relationship between art and life and between art and authenticity in contemporary theatre, Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', Judith Malina and Julian Beck's 'The Living Theatre', and Jerzy Grotowsky's 'Poor Theatre' returned theatrical performance to its origins as cathartic ritual and collective representation. Arte Povera treated the exhibition space like a stage where fact and fiction are joined in a 'theatrical' suspension of judgement. One of the most important figures of post-war experimental theatre, Jerzy Grotowsky, settled in 1970 in central Italy, where many of his early performances were held in the 196os. It was he who first introduced the use of the word 'poor' [i.e., 'poor theatre'] into cultural discourse of the 196os. In his theatre the classics are re-addressed and become mythic narratives. Grotowsky's method pares down all forms of theatrical

mediation, placing the emphasis on the actor as the primary element. As he put it in 1965: 'Theatre must admit its limits. I fit cannot be richer than film, then let it be poorer. I fit cannot be as lavish as television, then let it be ascetic. If it cannot create an attraction on a technical level, then let it give up all artificial technique. All that is then left is a "holy" actor in a poor theatre.' The term 'Arte Povera' initially referred not to the use of 'poor' materials, nor to a sociological critique of consumer society, but to the concept of 'impoverishing' each person's experience of the world; this implies gradually freeing one's consciousness from layers of ideological and theoretical preconceptions as well as from the norms and rules of the language of representation and fiction. It was these preconceptions that were perceived as obstacles between the self and a meaningful, essential experience of the world. As the modernist ideal of an ordered and autonomous work of art viewed by a detached spectator broke down, a new form of subjectivity drawing on the notion of phenomenology, far from the transcendental subjectivity of nineteenth-century philosophical metaphysics, was posited. The founder of phenomenological thought, Edmund Husserl, has claimed that knowledge is gained by 'putting the world in parentheses' and suspending disbelief. Consciousness is therefore freed from preconceptions and knowledge of the deep essence of things and of oneself is acquired. However, it is French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose book Phenomenology of Perception, 1945 (published in Italian in 19651, who allows a closer parallel with some of the principles underlying Arte Povera. For Merleau-Ponty, the relationship between consciousness and the world is equivalent to the relationship between nature and the body. Rather than emphasizing their distinction, he interprets them as structures of behaviour, and focuses on perception as the moment where the self and the world connect. The Italian art scene in the 196os was also influenced by the early twentieth-century American pragmatist john Dewey. Rejecting abstract, rationalist forms of thinking, Dewey posited a creative, open form of knowledge based on the importance of the initial, spontaneous, empirical experience of the world. Nature, for Dewey, is not composed of substances but rather events and processes. Luciano Fabro once wrote a paper on Dewey; art historian Maurizio Calvesi expounded on his thoughts at length in his essay for the 'Teatro delle Mostre' catalogue, 1968 — an important show of Arte Povera artists —and, in his book Arte Povera 1969, Germano Celant para-phrased Dewey: 'Among living things he [the artist] discovers himself too, his body, his memory, his movements, everything that

lives directly and thus begins again to experience the meaning oflife and nature, a meaning that implies, according to Dewey, the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible, the sentimental and the sensuous.' These notions are reflected in Arte Povera's time-based works and its use offluid, living materials to capture the flow of natural energy in matter. Pistoletto's mirror works open painting to a sequence of reflected images in order to explore time. Penone's Alpi marittime [Maritime clips], 1968, verifies the effects of an individual's gestures in nature. The works of Zorio are demonstrations of elementary physical laws such as pressure, evaporation or the transformation of matter through heat and humidity. In his Tenda [Tent],1967, for instance, saltwater, poured onto a canvas cloth, simultaneously drips and evaporates. In his early works 011966-67, Anselmo suspended energy through the creation of tension in works such as Senza titolo [Untitled], 1967, in which he created a curved sheet of Perspex by bending it and connecting two of its edges together with an iron fastening. Energy manifested by proliferation and biological growth is the theme of Mario Merz's spirals and Igloos, and in his Bottiglia e neon [Bottle and neon], 1966-67, a bottle is trans-fixed, and therefore energized, by the flow of electricity in a neon tube. Since 1967, Kounellis' installations have some-times involved live birds and animals — living, untamed sources of natural energy. Architecture and design were also undergoing great changes at the time, and Italian 'radical architecture' of the 196os and 1970s, such as the Florentine group Superstudio and the Milan-based Archizoom, or the work of Ettore Sottsass and others, ran parallel to Arte Povera." Frank Lloyd Wright's visionary 'ecosystemic' model of possible interpenetration between nature and building recalls the fluidity of Arte Povera and the idea of a nomadic, temporary home. His The Living City, published in 1958, came out in Italian in 1966, a seminal year in the development of Arte Povera. Invented in 1951, Richard Buckminster Fuller's Geodesic Dome, a cheap, light-weight, easy-to-build structure of chain-linked triangles that resembles the cells of living organisms, provided a deeply original, utopian and socially-oriented model of architecture and environmental design that combined advanced technology with a close observation of complex, organic structures in nature. One such dome was built in Milan for the 1954 Triennale exhibition of applied arts, and closely recalls Mario Merz's use of the igloo shape and application of mathematical principles anticipated by Accardi's Tenda (Tent], 1965, and developed in Calzolari's concept of a Casa ideale [Ideal home], 1969, or Luciano Fabro's Habitat works. The notion

of a nomadic home is also present in the little-documented work of Emilio Prini, notably his project Camping [Amsterdam], 1969, a complex outdoor event and subsequent display inside the gallery comprising photographs of people who had sat outside the museum in front of tents raised over holes in the sand. Paradoxically, these architects combined an anarchic, revolutionary outlook on society with a sense of community, history and myth. Similarly, Arte Povera artists were concerned with issues of freedom but not with 'newness' or an avant-garde idea of progress and evolution in art. In this respect their vision coincides with that of the filmmaker, poet, essayist and novelist Pier Paolo Pasolini. His critique of official Marxism as well as the combination of realism and symbolism in his works refers to a mythic, pre-modern, rural world as well as to the culture of border zones where contemporary urban and traditional agrarian realities interact. This can be related to the issues and imagery of Arte Povera, from Pascali's Attrezzi agricoli [Farm tools], 1968, to Zorio's archaic, alchemical laboratories and 'machines'. References to a pre-industrial, agrarian civilization, and a harmonious, Arcadian world of craft-based economy recur in Arte Povera, an art that developed in a country laden with the contradictions of a perhaps too rapid post-war industrialization. Arte Povera references art history— particularly Mediterranean art history — by simultaneously paying
Pascali did not make mounds of dirt; he filled his Canali di irrigazione [Irrigation channels] with earth and water in order to recall an ancient agricultural activity while at the same time constructing this work as a contemporary fiction. Similarly, Kounellis' wool, coal, fire and stones recall archaic Greece; Fabro's sense of space stems from a profound respect for Renaissance architecture, while his employment of cloth, glass and gold-leaf often recalls the Baroque; and Boetti's chromatic richness and use of pattern is in constant dialogue with the history and continued practice of decorative and applied arts throughout the world. Arte Povera was also at variance with contemporary tendencies, particularly Conceptual Art and Minimalism, in its complete and deliberate heterogeneity and apparent lack of rigour. Its principles had more in common with Robert Smithson's critique of rational techniques and his concern with the primordial condition of materials.' There are also affinities between Arte Povera and the radical work of the homage to and distancing itself from Italy's strong, almost overbearing, artistic heritage. This recurs most notably in the work of Kounellis, Paolini and Pistoletto, who have incorporated ancient Roman or Greek sculptures and fragments, or Renaissance paintings into their work. It is

this free and constant dialogue with a past culture that distinguishes Arte Povera from other movements from the second part of the 196os such as Conceptual Art, Land Art, postminimalism and antiform, and from slightly later movements such as body and performance art. Arte Povera artists shared the optimistic, sometimes utopian outlook ofthe May1968 movements with many inter-national artists of the time, as well as an interest in authenticity and phenomenological reduction, in energy and process, and in the discovery of 'horizontal', non-hierarchical art practices. However, they often used metaphor and poetic and symbolic connotations that seemingly contradicted the ideal of a reduction and identification of art with reality.

Brazilian sculptor/performance artists Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark,' the Americans Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, Barry Flanagan, Walter De Maria, Richard Serra and Robert Morris as well as with some works by Hans Haacke such as Condensation Cube, 1963-65, and Joseph Beuys' works using felt and fat as conveyors and symbols of energy Unlike most Land Art, however, Arte Povera was never monumental or thematic. While Land Art explored the relationship between the practice of art and the control of territory, or the landscape, the Arte Povera artists only occasionally dealt with this theme, and their outdoor interventions, which pre-date most Land Art, were on a human scale. These included Fabro's Tubo do mettere tra I fiori [Tube to place amongflowers1,1963; Penone's Alpi marittime [Maritime a/ps]1968; and Mario Merz's Untitled,1969 — a wedge made by pouring wax in the cavity between two branches of a tree.

Genealogy

Arte Povera was an art of 'public' subjectivity, particularly as nourished by human interaction within the cultural context and within the environment. It is therefore important to recognize the development of networks between those individuals who made up the loose affiliation called Arte Povera, as well as the genealogy of spaces in which they met and showed together. In an age when the art market was not as influential as it is today — an age of'open anarchic resistance to closed and predetermined systems of thought and behaviour — the history of exhibitions, both in public and private spaces, traces a genealogy of ideas born and shared. Not merely a chronicle of power." Although Arte Povera was not identified as a tendency until 1967, with the show 'Arte povera — Im spazio at La Bertesca gallery, Genoa, in truth its roots are to be found in a series of

exhibitions of many of its key artists, which were written about extensively by critic Carla Lonzi. Germano Celant, curator of 'Arte povera — Im spazio' was the first to give the term 'Arte Povera' to this type of work. The show was divided into two sections. Works by Boetti, Fabro, Kounellis, Paolini, Pascali and Prini were included in 'Arte povera', while those by Bignardi, Ceroli, Tacchi, Mambor and Icaro were grouped in 'Im spazio'. As well as writing the catalogue essay, that same year he also published an emphatic article entitled 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War' in the newly founded Flash Art magazine. Though each of the artists had produced their work autonomously, and no group manifestos were drawn up, by bringing them together in this exhibition Celant created a framework for understanding Arte Povera as a movement. Arte Povera developed across a number of Italian cities and through a wide array of work, each of which had its own particular history and dialogue with the international art world. Particularly important centres were Rome and Turin — with off-shoots in Genoa and Milan.

Genoa

Although Germano Celant began as an art critic in Genoa, which was also the city in which the first 'Arte Povera' group show was held, the importance of Genoa's cultural network has not been adequately considered until now. It was in this ancient but very contemporary Ligurian port in Northern Italy that Eugenio Battisti taught and edited the review Marcatré, whose consultants included architect Paolo Portoghesi, semiologist Umberto Eco and poet Edoardo Sanguineti. It was also here that Dudi Fagioni and Francesco Masnata opened La Bertesca gallery. In December 1967 a second important show was curated by Celant at the University in Genoa. Called 'Collage 1', it featured Boetti, Anselmo, Ceroli, Fabro, Cilardi, Mambor, Paolini. Pascali, Piacentino, Pistoletto, Prini, Simonetti and Zorio. Genoa was also the birthplace of Paolini and the home of Prini. Germano Celant had been a student at the University of Genoa, studying under Battisti, one of Italy's foremost art historians and the author of L 'antirinascimento The Anti-Renaissance], 1962, a survey of lesser-known aspects of fifteenth. and sixteenth-century art, including 'rustic-style' decoration and the influence ofalchemy in the visual arts. In a series ofseminars that began in 1963, Battisti also became known for providing students with direct access to contemporary artists, inviting practitioners to visit the university and to comment on the works they brought with them. Many works were donated, which

formed the collection ofthe Museo Sperimentale d' Arte Contemporanea, today housed in the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna [Civic Museum of Turin]. Through Battisti's seminars Celant met Eco, Pasolini and art historians Maurizio Calvesi and Giulio Carlo Argan. He began to write for Marcatré and for the architectural journal Casabella. This gave the young critic a chance to travel extensively, to meet gallerists and to become conversant with current art and ideas: the relation between critical theory, revolutionary practice and artistic production, and communication in advanced technological societies, cybernetics and semiology. These issues were being debated not only by intellectuals like Eco, but also by the members of the Gruppo '63, among whom were such notable figures as poets Nanni Balestrini and Edoardo Sanguineti, and art critics Renato Barilli and Cillo Dorfles. The varied artworks produced in Italy during the mid 1960s, based on the utopian ideal ofa fusion between art and science towards a perceptive restructuring of the human environment, were referred to under the umbrella term 'Arte programmata' ['programmed' or Gestalt-based art). Artists such as Gianni Colombo, who built spaces of projected light, and Cetulio Alviani, who constructed elaborate installations of moving parts and reflecting steel, were the major exponents of this approach, which occupied much of Celant's early critical output. By 1966, however, when he wrote a catalogue essay for Pistoletto's exhibition at La Bertesca, Celant had already begun to move towards the radical and critical position ofwhat he came to name 'Arte Povera'. Celant's two seminal texts of 1967, 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War' and the catalogue essay for 'Arte povera — In spazio', range widely, reflecting on the films of Warhol and Godard, the writings of Sartre and Beckett, and the theatre of Stanislawsky and especially of Crotowsky. Celant identified in the work of his contemporaries a revolutionary quality in the value applied to what appears to be insignificant, in the critique of representation implied by 'impoverishing signs to their archetypes' and in a paradigmatic use of all elements of life as a new alphabet for the arts. Analysing these works in the broader context of protest against American imperialism as manifested by the Vietnam war, he saw this work as anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois acts of resistance, expressions of social and cultural unrest. In his essay for the show 'Arte Povera' held at the De' Foscherari gallery in Bologna in 1968, he added a reference to 'The Living Theatre', as well as to anarchist thought in general. In 1969 he wrote a fourth essay about the exhibition 'Arte povera + Azioni povere', held in Amalfi in October 1968; this text signalled an increased

interest in performance art, in free and subversive action as art, in collective performance and the dematerialization of the artwork, all of which were consistent with developments occurring in the international arena. Celant's book Arte Povera, published in 1969 in English, Italian and German, marks the year in which the movement achieved international acclaim and significance. In it, he criticized the 'objectivity' of Op, Pop and Minimalist Art as effectively separate from life, and stressed the importance of materials that were vital and alive: 'Animals, vegetables and minerals have cropped up in the art world. The artist is attracted by their physical, chemical and biological possibilities. He is renewing his acquaintance with the process of change in nature, not only as a living being, but as a producer of magical, wonderful things, too. The artist-alchemist organizes living things in magical ways. In addition to Celant, another key figure in the Genoese art world is the artist Emilio Prini. In 1967, still in his early twenties, he created works based on the complex relationship between the ‘standard' [the uniform, modular, serial, dehumanized product of capitalist post-industrial production] and the 'different' [the mistake, the individual, the subjective, the corporeal), as well as between language (the documentation of an artwork through photography, text, etc.) and experience [authentic, phenomenological, psychological and physical perception). Prini's exhibitions are both installations and events in which the viewer becomes aware of space and time and the relationship between aesthetic experience and the biological life of the body. They are also stage sets where theatre occurs, and, paradoxically, by the transformation of the exhibition into a place of 'poor' theatre, real life is allowed to enter as a contemporary epiphany. For instance, in 'Arte Povera• in 1967, Prini exhibited his first Perimetro, titled Perimetro d'aria [Perimeter of air], 1967, in which five neon lights, one in each corner of the room and one in the centre, were activated according to a relay system accompanied by sound. The work allowed the viewer physically to apprehend him- or herself in relation to the edges of the room. Emblematic of these concerns with life and its own consumption is Prini's use of the camera and its mechanisms. A 1968 work-in-progress involved the continual use of a camera until it was destroyed by its own function. Two thousand shots were to be taken every year for ten years, the time it was predicted that the camera would reach the end of its 'life span'. A similar project was L 'USA usa [a play on words, literally 'the USA uses'], 1969, in which a tape machine continuously recorded the sound of its own mechanism until this repetitive usage caused it to break. In Celant’s book each artist was

asked to design a given number of pages. Prmi's pages compile text — both type-set and handwritten — photographs. maps and descriptions of partially realized or hypothetical projects. These cryptic. complex images are preceded by a picture of the artist himself wearing a clown's nose. Typeset over the picture, so that only part is legible, is a nursery rhyme. Prini reflects on the relationship between sign and context and how these become synchronically and diachronically part of a system of meaning. That is why in his 1996 exhibition in Strasbourg, for instance, he compiled new and older works together into together into an installation of objects that appeared to have been temporarily placed in the space, including 'poorly' made plywood structures referring to urban sites he had experienced in Rome or Genoa.These elements—a step, a curved a powerful manufacturing centre, and manyartists responded to this by making work as a form of anarchic, non-functional wall, a sloping road. a piece of the socle of a building — are almost topographical surveys ofreal spaces. In a nearby room, he presented giant enlargements of black and white photographs of work from his first solo exhibition at La Bertesca, 1968, which were titled Pesi spinte azioni [oggetti a scomparsa totale — oggetti a scomparsa parzialeJ [Weights pushes actions (objects that totally disappear— objects that partially disappear)]. In that 1968 show Prini had exhibited several Other works including Fermacarte [Paperweights), 1968, which were large photographs of himself performing azioni tipo [typical actions] such as jumping, walking upstairs or striding about, and were displayed in a spread on the floor. Each photograph was accompanied by a bundle of lead pieces, the total weight of which corresponded to his own body weight. His Ipotesid'azione [Hypothetical actions), 1967—68, are what you might call objects that totally disappear. 'I went on a trip with Renato I walked along a road uphill ... I developed a void of 4 m and 50 cm by removing a branch from a tree ... I read Alice in Wonderland... I built a house ...' Either concretized in language as a written list on paper, or given physical weight as lettering impressed on 5•mm sheets of lead through the weight of the artist's arm, these acts of freedom are no longer merely abstract or unreal; they are suspended in a territory between the symbolic and the real, language and experience. The actions, Prini seems to suggest, are experienced — or freed from the need to be acted out at all — just by their evocation and their translation into inscriptions in lead. This idea of subtraction, central to his work, has led him to remove traces of his work from the world

by leaving the pages of catalogues blank, and to make reference to a ‘void' upon which all authentic presence rests.

Rome

An important part of Arte Povera’s early history took place in
Italy's principle cities, Rome and Turin. In the 1950s Turin was plywood structures referring to urban sites he had experienced in Rome or Genoa. By contrast, Rome was the city of spectacle, home of RAI Television, broadcasting from 1955, and the film production complex Cinecittå, which housed the studios of Fellini and Antonioni, amongst others. Even in the early 1950s, Rome was one Ofthe major contemporary art centres. The art world would meet and discuss current events at the Café Rosati in Piazza del Popolo. Galleries such as L'ObeIisco, artist-run spaces like the Fondazione Origine, and critics and historians including Emilio Villa and Cesare Brandi [and later Cesare Viraldil helped make it a key cultural centre, well integrated into the international art scene. Early in the 1950s Rauschenberg, for instance, came to Rome to exhibit, Cy Twombly was resident, and artists from Rome like Afro and Burri were showing in New York galleries and international museums on a regular basis. Critics Michel Tapié and Pierre Restany, and future dealers Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend, also visited Rome on occasion in the 1950s. Roman artist Mimmo Rotella, known for his décollages made of layers of torn posters, became part of the French Nouveau Réalisme movement around 1960, and artist and writer Fabio Mauri had gained notoriety with his Schermi [Screens) — monochrome, shaped canvases. And there were other centres for the emerging avant-garde, such as Plinio De Martiis' La Tartaruga and Gian Tommaso Liverani's La Salita.o Romewas the great cauldron of night-life and festivity, peopled by avant-garde artists, actors, filmmakers and members of the Roman aristocracy, so dramatically portrayed by Frederico Fellini in La dolce vita in 1959. And the party lasted well into the mid 1960s. In the early 1960s, the artists of the so-called Scuola di Piazza del Popolo (Mario Schifano, Salvatore Scarpitta, Tano Festa, Ciosetta Fioroni, Sergio Lombardo, Renato Mambor, Cesare Tacchi and Franco Angelil were developing an Italian parallel to Pop Art bringing in images from the media with playful irony and with a semiologist's attention to signs in the contemporary urban landscape. It is from within this context that the early work of Roman Arte Povera emerged. Younger artists living and working in Rome, among whom

were Pascali and Kounellis [as well as Mario Ceroli, Eliseo Mattiacci and Luca Patella, who would all later be loosely affiliated with the movement) developed an approach to art production early on that combined natural and artificial elements in installations that were partly inspired by set design, joined fictive landscape with real space, and came out of the semiological approach ofthe earlier generation. American art was also seen sporadically in Rome. Richard Serra's first solo show at La Salita, 'Live Animal Habitats', 1965—66, was significant in that it showed what possibilities there might be for including live animals in art. In the mid 1960s, Pino Pascali was the emergent star of the Roman art world. In 1965, in his first solo exhibition [held at La Tartarugal, he showed colourfully painted shaped and protruding canvases such as Colosseo [Coliseum], 1964, and Labbra rosse [Red lips), 1964. With these joyful, bulging works, Pascali married an enquiry into the possible extension of painting beyond the flat surface of Modernism With a light-hearted, Pop appropriation of set design. In October 1966 a new series ofwhat the artist called 'fake sculptures' — pure white, shaped canvas structures —were shown in Fabio Sargentini's L'Attico, which by the late 1960s had become the most important gallery in Rome for showing Arte Povera. Several of the Arte Povera artists, including Pascali and Kounellis, while starting their careers with La Tartaruga, moved to L'Attico by the mid 1960s. While La Tartaruga was aligned with the Scuola di Piazza del Popolo figurative/ Pop generation, Sargentini's interest in theatre and process-oriented art meant that L'Attico was closer to the concepts that informed Arte Povera. In June 1967 Sargentini organized a group exhibition at L'Attico titled 'Fuoco, Immagine, Acqua, Terra' [Fire, image, water, earth], which was the first exhibition to focus on the relationship between the natural and the artificial, and to present a coherent selection of works made from natural elements. The programme continued with Pistoletto in February 1968, Pascali in March, Patella in April and Mattiacci in May, followed in 1969 by Merz's first solo show in Rome, in which he exhibited, among other things, the car he had driven from Turin. L'Attico later showed artists such as Beuys and Dibbets, organized events outside the gallery including Smithson's Asphalt Rundown in 1969, and subsequently staged experimental dance and music events by Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer." Essential to Pascali's method was his way ofcreating his works very quickly, giving his materials immediate form without theoretical justification. In the few years before his death in 1968 he produced a large number ofhighly varied works. This capacity to change radically the

style and appearance Ofhis works from one exhibition to the next reflected Arte Povera's advocation of both heterogeneity and difference. In his series of sculptures, Armi [Weaponry) [made in 1965 when the war in Vietnam had escalated and the first pacifist demonstrations had begun in the US], he used old cans and metal parts to simulate weapons; for Bachi di setola [Brushworms —the title is a play on words: seta means silk, but setola is a bristle brush), 1968, he arranged coloured plastic brushes in long, worm-like shapes; and in El ponte [The bridge], 1968, he employed steel-wool scouring pads to produce ‘primitive' architectural forms. He also made photographic representaions ofhimself'wearing’ or 'using' his works, and films with artist Luca Patella for which he 'planted' loaves of bread in the sand. Fascinated by materials and the possibilities of their transformation, like a child creating his own toys, Pascali found that everything had an equal amount of potential. These widely varying materials ranged from the unnatural and urban, such as fake fur, to natural media like hay, dirt or water. In 32 m' di mare circa [Approximately 32 m' Ofseal, 1967, he combined the two by using water that had been dyed blue. Pascali was trying to set up a 'make believe' situation — to create representational works. He rejected the avant-garde principle of anti-fiction, but this did not mean a return to a traditional. 'adult' form of representation based on scientific, religious or ideological and philosophical notions. Rather, he created a 'poor' form ofrepresentation in order to transform childish play into legitimate 'high' art. Compared to Pascali, Jannis Kounellis is more reserved and meditative. His early life was spent in Greece where he witnessed not only the Second World War but ten years of civil war. He came to Rome in 1956, enrolled at the Art Academy and was exhibiting at La Tartaruga by 1960. It was in that year that he showed his ‘sign' and 'alphabet' paintings, made both on paper and canvas, which referred to an elementary perception of reality and communication in urban culture. The large black letters, arrows or arithmetical symbols, often stencilled to decrease the evidence of the ‘artist's touch', hover mysteriously over a white or newspaper background. Neither abstract nor representational, they signal the artist's awareness that the debate between abstract and figurative art was no longer relevant in a post-industrial landscape where signs are perceived as ‘real' and shape consciousness. In 1966—67, Kounellis made a major shift away from the flat surface of the sign paintings by including organic and inorganic materials in his works, which, by the end of 1967, had become installations. In March 1967, he showed paintings at L 'Attico that

combined live birds in cages with large, rose-shaped, cloth cut-outs pinned to canvas. Some critics at the time saw these works as representing a new kind of surrealist assemblage, but Kounellis was more interested in anarchic freedom from linguistic norms and conventional materials. In the alienating context of mass production and consumption, where signs had become reified into billboards, neon. television and film, the revolutionary and ethical role of the artist was to recover authenticity through memory, and transform things themselves into a new art alphabet. Kounellis was affected by what he saw as the tragedy of European history and the laceration of Enlightenment ideals in the twentieth century. He developed a cathartic art where the audience could become part of his 'landscapes'. The space of the gallery and the exhibition site in general were transformed into a stage where real life and fiction could join in a suspension of disbelief. In his first installation in November 1967 at L 'Attico, Kounellis created a balance of inorganic and organic elements in an oneiric landscape. It may have seemed, at first glance, more like a group show than a solo one. He planted simple plants, such as cacti, in geometric, minimal-looking bins of earth [that summer Pascali had also begun to use earth); nearby a metal structure was overflowing with raw cotton, while on the wall an iron slab supported a perch on which sat a live parrot. In an adjacent room goldfish swam in an aquarium. But despite these three-dimensional works, Kounellis is not a sculptor; he thinks like a painter. An admirer of Henri Matisse and Eugene Delacroix, Kounellis has attempted to create pictorial compositions while breaking out of the frontal, synchronic, modernist surface into an art that develops in real time and space, where spectators are 'actors' in the scene. He did not portray the wall, but used it as a found element; he did not paint scenes of labour, he manipulated materials evocative of modern industrialism, such as iron and coal. He did not try to depict figuratively the hardship of the rural life he had left behind in Greece, but represented it symbolically with stones and raw wool. Anything could enter into the 'painting' on condition that it was bridled into a balanced, classical composition. Poetic, and laden with references to history and myth, Kounellis' later works have spanned installation and performance, and are often site-specific. In 1969, at Lucio Amelio's gallery, Modern Art Agency in Naples, for example, he showed ground coffee on shelves, recalling the transport of goods in the Mediterranean port. When Sargentini closed his apartment/gallery in Piazza di Spagna and opened a new space for L'Attico in an old garage in Via Beccaria in 1969, for the opening exhibition Kounellis 'parked' not

cars but twelve live horses in the space. By doing so he radically recentred the horse — long the subject of traditional art in equestrian Statuary and battle paintings — into avant-garde practice, channelling its energy in the gallery space. In the ancient Mercati di Traiano, in Rome, in 1997, he placed thirteen wardrobes an two doors, all sealed in lead, along a scaffolding ledge, which partially obstructed the entryways to the central hall. Both inside the architecture and exposed to the outdoors, the wardrobes decentred reality, seeming to harbour secret memories of past lives.

Turin

The other key city for the development of Arte Povera was Turin. This was the city in which Mario Merz and Pistoletto had been exhibiting since the late 1950s, and in the 1960s they were joined by Anselmo, Boetti, Cilardi, Marisa Merz, Paolini, Penone and Zorio. After the ravages of World War I l, Turin became the industrial and economic centre of the country's reconstruction. The FIAT automobile factory was based there, and in the nearby town of Ivrea other manufacturing industries such as Olivetti, developed. This rise in prosperity and increased opportunities for employment attracted working-class immigrants from southern Italy, and social conflicts soon followed, along with the rapid growth of sprawling industrial suburbs. At the same time, thanks to Turin's proximity to the rest of Europe, especially Paris, it became the breeding ground for the development of new international cultural relations following thie isolation of the Fascist period.
New private galleries burgeoned, of particular significance because of the near absence of public contemporary art institutions in Italy, partly a result of the importance given to the country's age-old historical heritage. In many cases private galleries were founded by art critics and curators, frustrated by the failure of public exhibitions to reflect their interests. In 1947, for example, the art critic Luigi Carluccio opened La Bussola, including in its programme art from outside Italy, such as work of the French avant-garde, in a move towards reintegrating Turin into the broader international art world. During the 1950s Francis Bacon was among those international artists who exhibited in Turin. French critic Michel Tapié also visited and met the city's leading cultural figures —among them the young art critic Luciano Pistoi, who later opened the Notizie gallery. It was in this context that Mario Merz held his first solo show in 1954, in which he exhibited thickly painted works depicting leaves, animals and other elements from the natural world. Merz grew up

in Turin and studied science and medicine at University. During the Second World War he was arrested for anti-Fascist activities and spent a year in prison at the Carceri Nuove, where he began creating drawings made without lifting pencil from paper. After his release he continued making these 'continuous drawings' as a way to depict landscape. This vision oforganic, flowing creation is still visible in Merz's handwritten neon numbers and words, the electricity moving from one sign to the other in a continuous flow of energy. Although Celant used the metaphor of 'guerrilla warfare' to describe the work of the Arte Povera artists, they themselves rarely referred directly to political action in their works or writings. An important exception, however, lies in Merz's use of short verbal slogans such as Sitin [Sit in], 1968. This phrase, fashioned from neon tubing, was placed in a fish-skillet filled with wax, which softened slightly when warmed by the mild heat of the neon. These works are a metaphor for non-violent political action: though passively sitting in a pot, the neon has its gradual effect. In 1968, referring to Lenin's 1912 speech and pamphlet about the role of the intellectual in the revolutionary process, Merz set the words Che fare? [What's to be done?] in a pot of wax. The same words also appeared in mud stucco on the wall of L'Attico in Rome in 1969 as part of Merz's one-person exhibition, placed next to a constantly running water faucet recalling Rome's numerous fountains. Lenin's words expose the eternal dilemma surrounding human action, even when faced with a water faucet: let it run, or turn it off? This question was especially relevant in the late and early 1970s when, following the events of May 1968, Italian workers were demonstrating, and highly charged — even terrorist — political groups were being born. Merz's first Igloo work, Igloo di Giap [Giap igloo], 1968, also makes use of the slogan. Emblazoned in neon on its dome is the famous guerrilla warfare statement of Vietcong General, Vo Nguyen Ciap: 'Se il nemico si concentra perde terreno se si disperde perde forza' [If the enemy concentrates, he loses ground. If he scatters, he loses force]. Merz's intent was to create ever-changing works that are highly material and physical and yet always ephemeral and conceptual. His Igloos refer to the shape ofthe terrestrial globe, to the celestial cupola and to the simplest of architectures — the hut. They are built of metal tubing, glass, sandbags. newspapers and materials indigenous to the location. They are rebuilt at each exhibition; the materials change according to the site. As in nature, they germinate and grow — sometimes into double and triple igloos — and are bound to the earth. Merz developed this idea of growth from 1970 onwards, using an

exponential number series in which each digit is the sum of the preceding two: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc. This mathematical sequence (evident, for example, in the spiral of a snail's shell) was identified as a central principle of nature by the early thirteenth-century mathematician Leonardo da Pisa, nicknamed Fibonacci, who based his observations on the sexual reproductive pattern of rabbits. In 1971 Merz placed a sequence of hand-written, neon Fibonacci numbers along the supvEf spiral stairway of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, in homage to Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architectural principles. In his drawings, his installations with tables of 1972—73, and even in his few videos, Merz has often used the spiral shape as a visual correlative of Fibonacci's sequence." As Merz himselfhas stated: 'I hate the rationality of life. I love the rationality of numbers, though, because numbers are a fantastic invention: if you open up a shell of peas and you count them, there are fantastic numbers, always different ... To count numbers is a way to get close to the irrationality of life. Merz met his future wife Marisa in the 1950s. She was also an artist, working in an artist's studio in Turin. It was at their Turin home that dealers and critics, including Cian Enzo Sperone and Tommaso Trini, and artists such as Cilardi, Zorio and Anselmo, met frequently in the mid 1960s. Marisa Merz's approach to the engagement of art and life, the importance of subjectivity and intuitive visionary practice, her exploration of a horizontal dimension, as well as her deep attention to the authenticity of human relations, have had a great impact on all the Arte Povera artists who have been close to her, especially Mario Merz. Pointing to the continuity between public and private, Marisa Merz made the home into an environment for her art. Rather than submitting the interior sensibility to the imposed rules of external society, she expressed it through internal space. Her soft, swirling, variegated aluminium coils, which she exhibited in 1967 at Sperone, hung from the ceiling of her house in 1965—66, a paradigm ofthis new subjective and free-flowing sensibility. They created a dense, entangled, forest. like space, far from the reductive geometry of contemporary Minimalism. Her use of changeable forms, and of ceiling rather than wall, signalled a shift away from classical modernism towards a less frontal and authoritarian notion of art. In 1967 she also hung Altalena per Bea [Swingfor Beal in her home, an object that was both a sculpture and a real swing for her daughter Beatrice, elevating play and pleasure to the realms of art. In 1968 Marisa Merz began knitting nylon or copper threads in her home/studio, not showing her work publicly again until her 1970 solo exhibition at L'Attico. She created simple squares

and rectangles, or shapes that fit her body, recalling old-fashioned knitwear. She installed these delicate works along walls or on horizontal bases or even in outdoor locatios compositions. They do not hang as vertical 'artworks', meant to be viewed frontally, but appear to grasp the wall like spider's webs in an organic gesture of embrace. Similar to her pencil drawings of 1996—97 — often almost abstract portraits made of an infinite number of overlapping continuous lines — they draw the viewer's gaze into their complex mesh of threads. Throughout her work, Marisa Merz has explored the possibility of visionary insight and ritual through the daily experiences of life. Her Coperte, rolled and tied blankets. Were placed in various positions and locations: on the shoulders of Mario during his show at L'Attico in 1969, in her own show there in 1970, on the bottom shelf of a wax-covered table, or on the wet sand ofthe beach ofOstia near Rome. She has also used wax and salt, materials that 'breathe' and react to the climate. Since the 1980s, she has been making a number of small, tactile clay and wax heads that plastically express the interior sensation of vision. They recall sculptures made by the blind, communicating proprioceptive sensations rather than solely visual ones. Although her work was exhibited publicly at Sperone in 1967, and reviewed by Trini, surprisingly Celant did not refer to her in his 1967 essays on Arte Povera. Nor was she included in the group shows under that heading in 1967 and 1968; in the 1980s, however, her work was re-assessed and recognized as integral to the movement. Michelangelo Pistoletto was also a key figure, not only in Turin but elsewhere, bridging the early 1960s generation of Manzoni and Klein with Arte Povera, as well as helping to forge links between Turin, Rome and the international art world. Interested in exploring the relationship between the figure and matter, Pistoletto wanted to find a way of combining the materico [texturall paintings produced by artists Ofthe movimento nucleare [literally, 'nuclear movement', including artists such as Enrico Ban, with the recovery of subjectivity through the artist's own iconic presence in the work. This led to a process of constructively dismantling traditional figuration by means of his continuously changing, time-based Quadri specchianti (Mirrorpaintings), begun in 1961. These contrasted the movement of reality, reflected onto shiny steel, with a fixed image — flat figures or objects glued onto the mirror surface — in order, literally, to depict infinite difference and diversity. In 1963 Pistoletto exhibited his first Mirror paintings at the Galatea gallery in Turin. They were bought by Ileana Sonnabend whose Parisian gallery he had visited recently, and who exhibited his works the following year. The importance

of Pistoletto's travels to the development of Arte Povera's network of intellectuals, critics and artists around the world cannot be over-emphasized. It was also Pistoletto who suggested in 1960 that the young gallery assistant at Galatea, Gian Enzo Sperone, become director of II Punto, which Sperone ran for a couple of years before opening his own space in Via Cesare Battisti in 1964. This went on to become the most important early gallery for Arte Povera artists, and through his relations with Sonnabend [later proprietor of the renowned gallery in New York) and Dusseldorf gallerist Konrad Fischer, Sperone created a platform for the internationalization of Arte Povera. The 1964 Venice Biennale was dominated by a new and powerful force in art. The triumph of American Pop Art shocked the Italian art world, provoking a desire to re-assert an autonomous European identity. In response to Pop's detached simulation of the objects and icons of consumer society, a whole range of process- and experience-oriented art forms emerged that were aesthetically and even politically opposed to it. Already in touch with the artists Gilardi and Piacentino, Pistoletto at this time began to meet with other artists, such as Anselmo, Boetti, Mario and Marisa Merz, Penone and Zorio, who shared his concerns. Examples Ofa new sensibility can be found in the group show 'Arte abitabile' (Live-in art] at Sperone, Turin, in 1966, where works by Gilardi, Gianni Piacentino and Pistoletto, including his important series Oggetti in Meno [Minus objects), 1965—66, created a 'domestic' landscape of new sculptural forms that recalled elements from the home. Rather than adding ever more objects to a consumerist society based on the process of production and consumption, as Pistoletto claimed the Pop Artists were doing, he wanted to create complex situations reflecting different psychological and phenomenological experiences. He did so by constructing and contrasting a series of diversified structures that resembled furniture. These 'objects', such as Struttura per parlare in piedi [Structure to lean against while standing and talking), Lampada a Mercurio [Mercury lamp] and Letto (Bed], were first before 'Arte abitabile'. in order to break down the distinctions between public gallery space and private living space. This was intended to determine a change of focus; metaphorically to subtract objects from the landscape of perception and consequently focus on the different relationship Of each individual viewer with the objects.

Keen to increase communication between people, the arts and other disciplines, Pistoletto went on to create a variety of time-based works and theatre events. In his sculptures, performances, installations, photographs and videos, which he sees as 'families' and

'generations' of works, he has used 'high' materials such as marble, 'poor' ones including foam rubber or rags, and 'inert' substances like gesso plaster wit 'live' elements such as burning candles in order to create a subjective 'theatre' of space and time. Following his essay ‘Le ultime parole famose' [Famous last words] of 1967, in which he questioned individual authorship, he opened up his studio to poets, filmmakers and intellectuals, which in turn led to Lo Zoo [1968—71], a collective action- and theatre-group founded by Pistoletto and friends. The symbolic and only partially choreographed open performances Of LO zoo combined music and theatre, and took place in streets, galleries and theatres in Italy and throughout Europe. Another important actor in the establishment Of an artists' network was Piero Gilardi, who created some Arte Povera works, including Carriola [Wheelbarrow], 1967. In 1965 he began making his better-known polyurethane Tappeti natura [Nature rugs], which hyperrealistically simulated nature, such as leaves and fruit, on a field of grass, and which were exhibited internationally in the 1960s. At the end of 1966, the Piper night-club opened in Turin and soon gained a reputation for its short presentations ofartists' works. Asked by the organizers to create a piece for the club, Gilardi hung some of these Nature rugs on a long aluminium screen. Representing a sea, a desert, corn cobs, stones and pumpkins, they were illuminated by lights and superimposed with projected images. On the last evening, a giant polyurethane mushroom was polyurethane 'party' , throwing bits of it at each other and dancing the Shake. The event was not meant to be provocative or aggressive towards the audience [as early Dada or Futurist happenings were), but rather to create a context for a collective experience based on the release of regressive and irrational impulses. Presenting art in a music venue was an example of Arte Povera's attempt to break art world boundaries by making incursions into various other territories of contemporary urban life. Another time, Marisa Merz's aluminium coils were hung from the ceiling of the Piper, and in 1967 Pistoletto orchestrated Lafme di Pistoletto [The end of Pistolettol, in which actors moved around the space with mirrors, each donning a mask bearing a photograph of the artist, symbolizing art-making that involved others in a flow of unstable reflections and diffused subjectivity.

After 1968, Arte Povera and Italian art became international. Many artists in Europe and America began to employ unconventional and 'live' materials. In 1967—68 Gilardi's travels in Europe and articles printed in Flash Art were fundamental to the communication

between, like-minded artists elsewhere. In Germany Gilardi met Beuys, and he brought back news of Beuys' work to Italy; in Holland he met Dibbets and Van Elk; and in Britain he met Barry Flanagan and Richard Long. Many of these artists were to show alongside Italians in Amalfi as early as 1968 in the exhibition 'Arte povera + Azioni povere'. As a consequence of the new international network, several shows featuring Arte Povera artists were organized abroad including 'Prospect '68' at the Kunsthalle in Dusseldorf, curated by Konrad Fischer and Hans Strelow, and '9 at Leo Castelli' in New York in 1968. By promoting the idea of international group exhibitions of new artists with young curators such as Harald Szeemann and Wim Beeren, Gilardi was influential in determining two paradigmatic international exhibitions in Europe: 'Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form' [Bern, London, Krefeld, 1961 and 'Op losse schroeven: situaties en cryptostructuren' [Amsterdam, 1961. Gilardi criticized the mediation of private galleries in favour of artists' self-presentation and self-organization, and was concerned that the interests of gallerists such as Sonnabend, Sperone and Fischer were influencing the selection of artists in public exhibitions in which Gilardi was involved. For instance, Paolini and Fabro, who were represented by Pistoi's Notizie gallery rather than by Sperone, were not invited to participate in either exhibition. As a consequence ofhis political convictions and of his critique of the commercialization of art, Gilardi stopped producing physical art objects for over a decade during the 1970s. Then in the 1980s he returned to his art practice with the creation of interactive, computer-oriented environments. Perhaps it was through Pistoi and Lonzi's connections with Rome-based artists, such as Accardi, and galleries, such as La Salita, that some of the artists working with Notizie in Turin and L'Ariete in Milan exhibited in Rome in the 1960s. Giulio Paolini, for instance, who lives and works in Turin, held his first solo show in Rome in 1964, long before Arte Povera was even in the making. For his exhibition at La Salita he placed plywood panels around the space, suggesting that the installation was still underway. He also held solo shows in Turin in 1965 and Milan in 1966. These exhibitions were often accompanied by Lonzi's critical essays. She interpreted Paolini's reductive attitude not as cold, analytical conceptualism, but rather as a window onto rich, possible experiences: 'What can over hastily be interpreted as negation in Giulio Paolini's work is, in reality, an affirmation ofthe possible — not in ideological terms, but as a concrete experience, as personal amenability and an openness so boundless as to make any compromise futile […]

There are too many paintings that are born already rigid because of a desire to be integrated [...] and there are paintings [such as those of Paolini) on the other hand that radiate, through a precise use of subtlety and verification, a willingness to live elastically in the flux of existence. In the late 1960s, the distinction between Arte Povera and Conceptual Art was not as marked as it is today. Both Arte Povera and Conceptualism attempt a reduction of art to its elementary structures, and Paolini's experiments in this area brought his work closer to the latter than any other Arte Povera artist. His work is almost always the result of a tautological inquiry into the nature of art. Duepiudue [Twop/ustwo], 1965, for example, consists of a blank panel, in the centre of which is a photograph of itself. It is possible, however, to make some distinctions. Many Conceptual Artists focused analytically on the concept of the artwork as subject, attempting to reach a ‘zero degree' of art as an aesthetic act; to move away, as a political gesture, from the commercialization of art, from the obligation of the physical presence of the work; and to critique the notion of authorship. Consequently, the Conceptualists employed varied 'non-materials' — language, gestures, tape-recorded messages and photography. Paolini, on the other hand, while using similar media, focused on the actual process of vision and interpretation of the artwork in real space and time. His exhibitions are presentations of systems of related signs that point to the nature and experience of art itself. Because of this concentration on the experience of the real, he eschews the painted canvas or the sculpture. Believing that the work of art lies in the audience's experience Of it, he concentrates on the traces and documentation of artworks, creating a stage-set for an exhibition, adorned with props that point to art but are not art. The absence of the 'artwork' paradoxically allows the experience of 'art' to occur. This attention to the real, contingent, phenomenological process and experience of vision pared down to a 'poor', basic degree justifies Paolini's inclusion as an Arte Povera artist. In his first work, Disegno geometrico [Geometric drawing), 1960, he divided the rectangular space of the canvas by drawing two sets of crossed lines. The traditional preparatory act of measuring one's space prior to actually making a drawing thus became the subject and object of the work. He went on to consider the materials of art-making themselves by exhibiting the back of a canvas or placing a can of white paint in a stretcher. In Vedo [la decifrazione del mio campo visivo] [l see (The decipheringofmy visualfield)), 1969, he defined the area of his visual field by marking it in pencil with dots on the wall. When he questions art, Paolini

does not interrogate its nature in an abstract, universal and metaphysical manner, but always in terms of its concrete existence. Therefore, just as for Foucault there can only be an 'archaeology of knowledge' , so Paolini's inquiry is embedded in the history of artworks, their presentation and communication. While Fabro, Kounellis, Paolini, Pascali, Pistoletto and Mario Merz had shown prior to 1967, 1967—68 were key years for the broadening ofthe Arte Povera group in Turin through debates, exhibitions, new galleries and publications. Alongside Sperone and Luciano Pistoi's Notizie, the new Christian stein gallery had opened in late 1966 with a show of works by Aldo Mondino, a Turin-based artist known for his works made with sugar and chocolate, and someti mes affili Zorio. Anselmo, Penone and Boetti, slightly younger than the Other artists, began showing their work, either in solo shows or in seminal group exhibitions. From the Autumn of 1967, the Deposito d'arte presente [initiated by Pistoletto and Sperone, as well as by the collector Marcello Levi who helped fund it. organized by Cilardi and presided over by Luigi Carlucciol became an informal meeting and exhibition place for Arte Povera and other artists in Turin. Located in an old factory in Corso Casale, it opened to the public in early 1968 for discussions, exhibitions, theatrical events and concerts. In a country where very few public institutions showed young artists' work, and at a time when a critique of the commercialization of art rendered private galleries inappropriate. an open, large public space such as array of organic and inorganic materials. from lettuce, water and electricity, to granite, iron and plastic, and even invisible materials such as the force of gravity. He has also employed a variety often techniques and forms including artist's books, drawing, photography and slide projection. Yet despite this diversity, everything in his oeuvre is essential, elementary. His method of creating art is precise, almost mathematical, methodologically related to philosophical propositions or to experiments in physics. In August 1965. while walking on the volcano of Mount Stromboli at dawn, Anselmo became aware that his body was casting no visible shadow because of its position in relation to the low sun. An 'invisible' shadow, however, projected against the sky behind him, could be imagined. This minor event had an enormous impact on the artist. The revelation that he was only a tiny detail in a vast continuum of universal energy was to inform many of his works referring to gravity and magnetic fields, such as Direzione [Direction], 1967—68. a compass inserted into a large, roughly triangular block of granite, this, where the works of different artists could interact, was of great significance. However, after about two years

the artists' works were temporarily removed to make space for an exhibition and meeting with writer and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini. Some of the artists, such as Pistoletto, objected to what they felt was an excess of attention paid to Pasolini. Many works were not subsequently reinstalled, and this signalled the eventual decline of the Deposito as an artist-run space. An important exhibition was held in December 1967, coordinated across three Turin galleries: II Punto, Christian Stein and Sperone. The exhibition, entitled 'Con temp l'azione' [a play on words, which could be read both as 'Contemplation' and 'With time, action'] was curated by Daniela Palazzoli. It was here that Mario Merz exhibited one of his first objects with neon, and the show also included works by Anselmo, Alviani, Boetti, Fabro, Mondino, Nespolo, Piacenttno, Pistoletto, Scheggi, Simonetti and Zorio. Giovanni Anselmo was born in a small town outside Turin and has since alternated periods in the Piedmont city with summers in his island home of Stromboli. He has used a wide oriented northwards. It also lies at the base of his vision of a decentred subjectivity and is expressed in many works on the relationship between finite and infinite, microcosm and macrocosm. The word particolare [detail) recurs in his titles and is often projected onto walls in the gallery space or sometimes into the middle of a room on a point that only becomes visible when the body of the viewer crosses its field. From 1967—69 Anselmo expanded these ideas by exploring the phenomenology of energy, creating actual situations of tension, as in Torsione [Torsion), 1968, where fustian is twisted as tightly as possible, secured with an iron rod and then fixed to the wall. Similarly, in Senza titolo [Untitled], 1968— also called Struttura che mangia [Eating structure) — a head of lettuce is lodged between a block of granite and a small stone, held together by a wire. If the lettuce is allowed to dry out, the wire will loosen and the smaller stone will fall. In his desire to translate real experience into art without the mediation of symbolic representation, Anselmo inverts the conventions of traditional representation. In his landscape works, for example, he enters concretely into the landscape itself. For Verkürzter Himmel [Shortened sky), shown in Munster in 1987, he placed a steel slab vertically in the ground, thus ‘shortening' the sky by that distance." In Entrare nell'opera [To enter the work], 1971 — a delayed-release photograph showing the artist running in a field — the author of the landscape work becomes its subject. A similar reversal occurs in II paesaggio con mano che 10 indica mentre a nord I grigi si alleggeriscono [The landscape with hand that points to it while to the north the greys become lighter], 1982, in which a drawing of a hand on

the gallery wall points to real stones below, standing alongside them the viewer becomes part of the landscape. These constant references to the conventions and traditions of representation in painting distinguish Anselmo's research from practices that attempt to cancel out traditional art in favour of life. For Anselmo, just as the awareness of infinity occurs only through the particular and finite, so the knowledge and understanding of the real can occur only through the reflected 'text' of the work of art in a 'poor' theatre of representation. A similar channelling of primary energy into art lies at the heart of Gilberto Zorio's practice. While Anselmo's art is about revealing the laws of nature as they invisibly determine a universe in which humans are but a detail, Zorio's work is keyed towards the release of energy in the transformation of materials. By analogy, he explores the energy and effects of revolutionary human action. Violence [and destruction] is not a negative notion for Zorio. Like an erupting volcano that radically modifies the landscape, it is the expression of a surge of intention transformed into creative action. Energy, when it is consumed, is not lost, according to Zorio, but simply transferred from one element to another. This process of transformation by heat and chemicals is Often utilized in his works, which have spanned sculpture, installation, text and performance, and his exhibitions also reflect this sense of energetic 'eruption'. Displayed neither frontally nor traditionally, the works are juxtaposed according to difference, dynamically relating floor, ceiling, walls and corners. The eradication of layers in order to reach the original, archaic nature of materials is a recurrent theme for Zorio, ... I my work with the lights on the floor sprang from the idea of returning light to its real function, which is not that of lighting a table or a room but as a source of heat, of energy I ...] as being slightly in competition with the sun."'

He began as an assistant to Gilardi in 1966, and in early pieces, such as Sedia (Chair], 1966, Zorio borrowed the coloured polyurethane of the older artist's rugs, but radically disrupted their representational aspect. He also 'toughened' them by incorporating elementary construction materials, such as the metal scaffolding in the cloth and salt water Tenda [Tent), 1967. This was shown at Zorio's first solo show at Sperone in 1967 along with Rosa-blu-rosa [Pink-blue-pink], 1967, another process-oriented work comprising a long asbestos lumber semi-cylinder filled with a gesso plaster and a cobalt chloride mixture that changes colour according to the humidity in the air. Senza titlolo [Untitled], 1967, was a column obtained by pouring layer after layer of thick impasto through a tube.

Once dry, it maintained its poured, magma-like shape, reflecting the effects of gravity and pressure. The notion of fluid and elastic shapes is characteristic of the antimodernist, anti-rationalist approach of the 1960s, also evident in Smithson's Clue Pour and Asphalt Rundown [both 1969]. Two other works of 1967 at Sperone dealt with the theme of weight: one was a cylinder that squeezed air from a rubber inner tube; the other was a piece of cement that crumbled slowly under its own weight. In recent years, Zorio has built complex machines involving movement and sound that develop three-dimensionally in space. These are strange, anti-productive and ludic works that recall the history of esoteric machines in twentieth-century art, from Marcel Duchamp's Large Class to Jean Tinguely's constructions of the 1950s. They also refer to a mythic world of pre-modern science and artefacts — alchemy, ether, acids, cruets, leather, canoes, javelins — creating landscapes of fiction. Giuseppe Penone exhibited his first works at the Deposito d'arte presente in 1968 and held his first solo show in Turin at Sperone in 1969. One of the few Arte Povera artists to create important early works in an outdoor context, he was not concerned, like many Land Artists ofthe late 1960s, with developing monumental modifications to the landscape. He began working in the hills around his hometown of Caressio, south of Turin. The relationship with the farming community of his origins determined the concepts at the basis of his work and shaped his ecological and anthropological concerns. His first works were a series of actions entitled Alpi marittime that took place in the woods. In Alpi marittime: ho intrecciato tre alberi IMaritime alps: I have woven three trees], 1968, he intertwined three shrubs. modifying the direction of their growth. For Penone, knowledge is never gained by reasoning, but is achieved through disposing oneself to a state of philosophical openness [and horizontality] in order to comprehend reality empirically. The subject must gain contact with the world through the relation of his own body to natural processes such as the growth of trees and plants, focusing on human gestures like touching, shaping or moulding. Seeing skin as the osmotic, ever-changing membrane that carries the marks of creation, Penone has often used techniques concentrating on surfaces. including imprinting, carving and casting. Against the grain of traditional Modernism that relegated craft and manual labour to 'low' art, Penone rejects the role of the artist as a figure detached from everyday activities and acts as a master carpenter, a farmer, focusing on elementary and minimal gestures: 'A good path is one that loses itselfin the undergrowth, one where the bushes close immediately behind the

wanderer without saying whether he is the first one to leave a trace on it or the last one ever to tread it ... To find the path, to follow it, to examine it, and to clear away the tangled undergrowth: that is sculpture. Just as the artist is created and shaped within the natural realm, so his action doubles creation in nature. In 1970, in Munich, for the work Albero (Tree), Penone carefully carved layers of wood from around the knots in industrially shaped building logs. Once this process was finished, the log appeared to be a raw trunk of a younger tree, with stubs where its branches once were. This action inverts the normal sequence from natural shape to a manmade, 'functional' form. His first Albero, made when he was twenty-two years old. was carved down to the size of a tree of the same age. This process of reversal can also be seen in his Rovesciare i propri occhi [To reverse one's eyes), 1970, a work that exists today in the form of a photograph Of the artist wearing mirrored contact lenses: rather than receiving perceptions from the outside, the eye becomes a medium for re-projection. Alighiero Boetti's art was amongst the most varied of Arte Povera. His materials ranged from cement, wood and cloth to electric light, numbers, letters, dates, paper, words, maps and magazine covers. His techniques varied from constructing, drawing, colouring and sewing to counting, photocopying, mailing, printing, photographing and sending telegrams. He made individual works, collective projects, three-dimensional objects, installations, postcards, books, posters and a video. These were rarely site-specific for, while he was interested in different cultural contexts and in broadening Western perspectives on art with non-Eurocentric traditions and practices, he was not concerned with critiquing the exhibition space. He saw his artworks, whether made in his studio or in far-off places, as things received from, and to be disseminated to. many parts of the world, like so many messages in bottles. Boetti was fascinated by the way humans order and classify for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, and create conventional and arbitrary codes to communicate with each other. But he also saw that experience in time, and through memory, transformed conventional codes into processes of change, into myriad stories and histories. He could ally himself to the ideas of Arte Povera as long as they were not specifically about materials but about ‘energy' and the relationship between art and life through phenomenological and conceptual approaches. In his first show at the Christian Stein gallery in Turin in 1967, Boetti showed several three-dimensional structures in different 'poor' materials, recalling building and design. These included a first version of his piles of objects, Catasta [Pile), 1966, and works

that explored time and the notion of 'mental' energy. Lampada annuale [Annual lamp), 1966, was a lightbulb in a box, designed to turn itself on randomly for eleven seconds each year. Referring to waiting and expectation, this work both provides a visual image of the transformative powers of energy. and reminds us of the innumerabl unscheduled events that occur without our awareness. In the playful Ping Pong, 1966, two square, red light-boxes are alternately illuminated, each one revealing part of the work's title: 'Ping' or 'Pong'. Boetti's early works are often the visual result Of very simple tasks such as filling a container with different materials: Un metro cubo [One cubic metre], 1967; or making a pile of similar objects such as paper pastry-cases: Colonne [Columns), 1968. Both minimal and conceptual in his propositions, he intended to create the richest of worlds with the poorest of means. His work set aside an elevated modernist notion that saw formal and intellectual research as signs of quality, in favour of embracing the 'low' dimension of craft and design. By the 1960s, modernist abstraction had been appropriated by industrial, standardized design. With Zigzag, 1966, Boetti did the opposite and took the idea of the deck chair into the world of high art. However, these elementary manifestations of normal, daily and repetitive action also function as forms of imaginative liberation from the alienation of repetitive labour: they recall children's games or non-functional actions that are performed during a conversation, such as doodling, whilst still embracing the traditional and popular notion of beauty as expressed through the decorative arts. After 1968, feeling that many of the Turin artists had become excessively fascinated by materials and were producing works based more on this fascination for poor' materials than 'poor' propositions, which had originally defined Arte Povera, Boetti rejected the label 'Arte Povera'. Shortly afterwards he moved from Turin to the baroque and colourful city of Rome. Here, rather than in the industrial northern city of Turin, he felt closer to his own personal heterogenic aesthetic and to the broader Mediterranean culture with which he was becoming increasingly involved. During this time he made Niente da vedere, niente da nascondere [Nothing to see, nothing to hide), 1969 — a large glass window in an iron gridded frame, which constituted, in its reduction ofmaterials, a zero-degree proposition — and the graph-pa per piece Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione [named after a violin concerto by Antonio Vivaldi). Made by tracing over the printed lines of the paper in pencil, it was a simple statement in comparison with the material-laden work being made at the time by many other Turin-based artists. Aware of

the limitations of Western Modernism and ethnocentrism, with its focus on authorship and historical progress, Boetti attempted to 'impoverish' the authority of the ‘author' and all egocentric self-expression in order to be in a receptive position, channelling different kinds of experience into art practice, creating a relational and communicative subjectivity. While his first works were essentially made by himself with the help of craftsmen and technicians, around 1971 he began to consider working collectively. He envisaged a role for himself as an inventor of games and tasks that others would accomplish, therefore bringing into the work the unexpected richness and variety of different individual experiences. The relationship between the task designed and the myriad ways in which it could be accomplished, in Mettere al mondo il mondo (To give birth to the world), 1972 — in which he invited participants to fill sheets of paper with ball-point pen between order and disorder. Boetti often used the theme of maps. His 1967—69 work in progress, Dodiciforme dal giugno '67 [TwelveformsfromJune '671, 1969, was made ofthe juxtaposed maps of warring territories. From 1971 onwards he designed a number of embroidered maps of the world entitled Mappa (Map] in which the flag design of each nation is sewn into the appropriate area. Each new map followed the changes in political borders around the world. Here a conventional cultural code overlaps with a graphically simplified mental abstraction-cum-decoration, alluding to the constant negotiation, throughout history, of chance and necessity, and the unstable fluctuations of human communities as they develop through predictable and unpredictable events.

Boetti's conception of time is horizontal rather than vertical — that is, not from a historical standpoint but from a ‘geographical' one, measuring it as it unfolds through space and culture. This idea also lies at the basis of his mail art projects: letters that were sent. returned, repackaged and sent again in a process of migration that carried layers of experience. Boetti was one of the only Arte Povera artists to create works about the Arte Povera artists themselves, translating their network into visual patterns. In 1967 he designed a poster in an edition of 800. He called the work Manifesto, playing with the double meaning of the term, which also signifies ‘poster'. Rather than writing a typically avant-garde ‘manifesto’ of intentions, undersigned by artists. he made a work out of the artists' names themselves. He listed sixteen artists, accompanying each name with a combination of graphic symbols. The meaning of the symbols could not be deciphered without the key to the code. which he deposited with a Notary Public, only to be revealed

after his death. but which remains sealed according to the wishes of his heirs. He makes reference to his artist friends again in Città di Torino (City of Turin). 1968, by asking them to sign their names on the site Of things, to determine their essences not for inert contemplation, but for their useful secondary properties ... TO induce causes from the effects that are felt. To sharpen the tools of the spirit and extend through them new tools, the power of the hand, to prolong one's body in all the things of the world. This ‘empirical' notion of geometry, which is never merely abstract nor rational but is individually perceived and ‘mapped out' in concrete and effective contexts, recurs in Fabro's work. Another example is Habitat, 1966, realized in Rome in 1982. where he experienced the space of the room by 'measuring' it in gold-leafed wooden rods. Fixed to the wall in a grid pattern, it brought the two-dimensional measuring technique that a copyist might employ, drawing a grid on paper, into the three-dimensional, real space of a room. In works such as these, material presence is reduced to a minimum, and what is at stake is the possibility of combining intellectual analysis with perceptual awareness. Thus the scale of the work is connected to that Of the human body. In. cubo [In the cube), 1966. shown in 1967 in Turin, is a white, cloth cube open at the bottom, which the viewer is meant to lift and crawl under. This simple gesture, asking the viewer to abandon his/her easy autonomy in order to engage as a participant with the work, points to Fabro's belief in the need to become ethically responsible for one's acts as well as to respect and value others and their acts. Once inside this primitive architecture — very different from the complex optical environments of Arte Programmata in the mid 1960s — participants experience a heightened sensation not only of the delimited space itself but also of their relationship to the outside space through the light that filters in, the view of the floor and the sounds from outside their homes on a map Of the city that provides a visual, horizontal mesh of relationships.

Milan and Bologna

The art of Luciano Fabro rests on an empirical view of knowledge and experience. Aware that Fontana was a leading artistic figure in Milan, and interested in his notion of space, Fabro moved there in 1959, the year that Manzoni and Enrico Castellani founded the

radical magazine and exhibition space Azimuth. Fabro's first notable works were made in 1963 and shown in his solo show at Vismara gallery in Milan in 1965. When he met critic Carla Lonzi, with whom he would share a long and important dialogue. In 1963 he wrote a seminal manifesto, signing it 'Era Francesco Bacone' (It was Francis Bacon), after the English sixteenth-century empirical philosopher. He calls for: 'A new logic of detail that con offer the means for the development of the human spirit in the world. To discover the order of a similar simplicity of imagery and form was utilized by Fabro from 1968 in his many Italie, made in the shape of the outline of ltaly. In his first Italia rovesciata [Overturned Italy], the form was hung upside-down. The boot-like shape of the country is immediately recognizable; it is abstract, yet real. Inverted, it is saved from potential inertia: the mental time necessary to read the shape creates a small gap between sign and referent, amplifying the moment of recognition. Its banal shape prevents one's attention from being pulled into intellectual interpretation away from the actual experience of how certain materials — glass, metal, fur, etc. — react to being transformed by craft. Like other Arte Povera artists, Fabro freely moves between using simple, cheap materials to rare or traditionally 'high art' ones, an act pointing to the validity of craft and craftsmanship as 'high' art and legitimizing popular tradition and manual labour. These works illustrate Fabro's questioning of analytical Conceptualism, which he felt created a disjunction between the intellect and phenomenological experience of the real. His Piedi (Feet), 1968—71 — large sculptures of imaginary feet in marble, glass or metal, topped by long cylinders made of cloth such as shantung silk — are shown as a series of juxtaposed pieces where the materials themselves determine the artist's technique. The flowing, adaptable and sensual nature of cloth recurs in Fabro’s work. From 1966—70 he made clothes that were shaped directly to the body of their wearers; Tre modi di mettere le lenzuola [Three ways ofarranging sheets), 1968, comprised three pairs ofdouble sheets, and II Pupo [The baby], 1968, was a small electrical aspirator wrapped in artists art diapers. Among Fabro's major works is Lo Spirato. 10 rappresento I'ingombro dell'oggetto nella vanitå dell'ideologia. Dal pieno al vuoto senza soluzione di continuitå [The deceased. I represent the encumbrance of the object in the vanity of ideology. From full to empty without interruption of continuity, 1968—73. Here, the uselessness of ideological constructs, the importance of touch and craftsmanship, are again the subject of the work. Taking a photograph of himself lying under sheets, Fabro removed the image of the head through photomontage,

leaving only its indentation on the pillow. He later instructed marble carvers to create a sculpture of this, partly recalling highly crafted Medieval and Renaissance tombs in churches, affirming the possibility of creating richly physical and material 'classical' sculpture in an age when dematerialization had become the rule. While most artists coalesced around the two major cities of Turin and Rome in the 1960s, even when living in Milan (like Fabro or Genoa (like Prinil, Bologna artist Pier Paolo Calzolari developed his early work independently. He exhibited alongside other Arte Povera artists only after the second 'Arte Povera' group show at Dei Foscherari gallery in Bologna in 1968. His work had shared many ofthe movement's underlying principles previously. In the early 1960s he began working in Bologna, but for much of his early life he had lived in Venice, and that city's atmospheric quality of light filtering through the humidity, its urban landscape suspended between sky and water, and its many memories of Byzantine cultures lie at the roots of his art. Interested in the sublime and the experience of epiphany, Calzolari bridges the verbal, the visual and the sensual. He creates complex, often time-based symbolic and allegorical performances (which he has called 'Acts of Passion') involving himself, animals, other performers and the audience itself. In late 1967 he presented Ilfdtro e benvenuto all'angelo (Thef/lter and welcome to the angel) in Bologna. Upon entering, viewers were asked to remove their shoes, put on red socks, and then follow a narrow corridor with a soft rubber floor, illuminated by ultra-violet light, to emerge in a wide, well-lit space full of live white doves. Calzolari wanted to broaden the dimension of painting, which he felt was merely descriptive, into highly allegorical and emotional installations. The dazzling white of the doves contrasting with the red socks on an intensely green base of artificial grass created a visionary suspension between reality and dream. In 1969, his first show in Turin was at Sperone and included works made of lead and mercury, such as Come Lago del cuore [Asa lake ofthe heart), 1968, and II mio letto cosi come deve essere [My bed as it should be], 1968, made with a mosscovered brass rod the width of this wrist, brass letters and banana leaves. It also included electrical ice-forming structures such as Un flauto dolce per farmi suonare [A sweet flute to make me play]. 1968. Calzolari began making ice works around 1967. He showed one of the first of these at the Deposito d'arte presente in Turin in 1968. In his Senza titolo (Malinal [Untitled (Malina)l, 1968, in Bologna, he juxtaposed an albino dog with large melting blocks of pink ice. Calzolari's choice of materials points to states of boundary: between organic and

inorganic, liquid and solid, heavy and light, as well as between different degrees of malleability. Many of his works are located around a fragile and metaphysical suspension where the material becomes spiritual and the immaterial becomes physical — words, for example, becoming concrete, ‘spelled out' in bronze, brass, neon tubing and ice. Alchemical transformation is alluded to by a symbolic use of items such as stairs and ladders, while the suspended dimension between dream and reality is reached through the horizontality of many of his works and the use of mattresses and benches. While his first actions from 1967—70 exploited a few contrasting and interactive elements, such as melting ice or smoke. from 1970—75 they focused on the figure of the artist engaged in daily activities (reading. walking, etc.), and after 1975 expanded into more complex philosophical and esoteric events.

Internationalization

Throughout the twentieth century, revolutionary theory has been internationalist in perspective, fundamentally opposed to the legacies oflate nineteenth-century nationalisms. By the end of the 1960s a new form of internationalism had developed. founded on the idea that advanced contemporary art was universal and not rooted in any specific local context. In 1968 Italian artists were shown in Dusseldorfin the exhibition 'Prospect '68' , and artists such as Richard Long and Jan Dibbets exhibited in Italy in the first international group exhibition of this generation of the 1960s, 'Arte povera + Azioni povere' in Amalfi. The following year, Celant's book Arte Povera was published in Italian, German and English, and the internationalization of Arte Povera, alongside postminimalism, Land Art, antiform and Conceptual Art, was complete. That same year, important group shows abroad included the Italian Arte Povera artists, such as 'Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form' [Bern, London, Krefeld]. and 'Op losse schroeven: situaties en cryptostructuren’ at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. In May 1970 the inclusion of works by Arte Povera artists at The Museum of Modern Art, New York and in 'Between Mind and Matter: Tokyo Biennale '70' demonstrated the far reaching effects of the movement. Arte Povera had been influenced by the Gutai group of the 1950s, then it was later to have an impact on the installations and materials used by the younger Japanese artists of the Monoha. Also in May. 'Processi di pensiero visualizzati: Junge Italienische Avantgarde', the first group show outside Italy of exclusively Arte Povera

artists, was held at the Kunstmuseum, Lucerne. In 1970, Celant curated 'conceptual art arte povera land art' in Turin, and in 1971, the group show 'Arte Povera' was held at the Kunstverein in Munich with works also by Gino De Dominicis, Vettor Pisani and Salvo. Except for the inclusion of Arte Povera artists in Documenta 5, 1972, however, group exhibitions of their work decreased rapidly after 1971, when attention in the international art world shifted to more dematerialized art based on social critical theory. While earlier Arte Povera work of 1968—69 were sometimes actions or performance-based, "many poveristi had shifted away from this type of art, which they perceived as too univocal to reflect the layered complexity and simultaneity of contemporary experience at once physical and immaterial. At this time, for example, Pistoletto began a consciously polemical project called Collezione — a collection of Arte Povera artworks assembled to demonstrate the continuity of the art object after its first presentation. At this time, Leftist political activism had turned to terrorism in Italy, and this provoked further scepticism among the Arte Povera artists about the direct social and political effects of artistic practice. Furthermore, the artists felt that their identification as a group did not adequately represent their individual developments and research. Therefore a number of important one-person public exhibitions were held throughout Europe and America. In 1972 Merz showed at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and in Europe, Ammann began to curate a series of solo shows in Lucerne [Anselmo, 1973; Boetti, 1974; Zorio, 19761. Around 1969—70 Italian artists such as Maurizio Mochetti, Salvo, Gino De Dominicis and Vettor Pisani began exhibiting art that sometimes displayed a marked criticism of Arte Povera. These were works that rebelled against the simplicity of' poor' materials and questioned the principle that art should or could be ‘authentic'. By the early 1970s, the Arte Povera artists themselves had made a shift away from the simplified notion of Arte Povera as an art of' poor' and even 'ugly' media. In 1971, for example, Boetti began to make highly coloured, decorative works based on universal aesthetic notions of beauty, and Fabro showed his Piedi (Feet) in marble, silk and other luxurious materials. Artists such as Emilio lsgro and Vincenzo Agnetti created more conceptual and analytical works, while Fabio Mauri went on to become Italy's foremost performance artist creating such works as Ebrea Uewessl, 1971. In contrast to the artists, however, Celant followed the new critical trend of the towards a more politically radical and de-materialized artistic and revolutionary practice, publishing a new text in the magazine Domus in 1971 in which he argued that the

art of the 1960s had failed to achieve a revolution in the cultural system. An analysis of the current situation including Arte Povera, Conceptual Art, street and guerrilla theatre, documentary fllm-making, a-critical criticism, imaginary architecture, political spontaneity and all those counter-cultural attitudes which seek to resolve labour in life or action — shows that one episode (artistic, political, architectural, theatrical, cinematographic, philosophical, critical, etc.] has followed another, while the use has remained the same and every attempt to destroy or annul or dissolve the myth of culture [I has failed]. The social and aesthetic revolution intimated by Arte Povera had remained within the bounds Of art and had not, he felt, subverted the system of production, distribution and use of art that remained inexorably separate from life.

Legacy

In the mid 1980s, there was a move among leading international curators to reassess the importance of Arte Povera and the art of the 1960s." Celant curated the exhibition 'Identité italienne: l'art en Italie depuis 1959' for the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1981 , which included Arte Povera, and this was followed by other shows specifically about Arte Povera in the early 1980s in Bordeaux, Los Angeles, Cologne, Madrid and New York. Major international exhibitions of the late 1980s such as 'Sonsbeek '86' and 'Skulptur Projekte in Münster•, 1987, also featured Arte Povera artists. While these exhibitions brought Arte Povera back into circulation, the commercialization and institutionalization of museums during the 1980s had the somewhat detrimental effect of causing a shift of focus away from the more ephemeral, anarchic, performative and process-oriented dimensions of the movement, thereby exacerbating the simplistic view of the movement as an art of' poor' materials. In some of these shows, such as Rudi Fuchs' exhibition 'Ouverture', opening the Castello di Rivoli near Turin in 1984, Arte Povera was presented alongside neo-Expressionism and the Transavantgarde, with which it shared the aim of enhancing the subjective dimension in art. However, while the 1980s neoExpressionist notion Of subjectivity was ‘private' and foreclosed, based on an idea Of the artist as witness of historical drama [as in the work of Enzo Cucchi or Anselmo Kiefer], the Arte Povera artists saw it as open and 'public'. flexible and optimistic, relating to ideas Of community. While it seemed during the late 1970s and early 1980s that the Transavantgarde had diverted the legacy of Arte Povera and other practices of the 1960s,

such as Land Art, antiform and Conceptual Art, many artists continued a dialectical dialogue with the art of the 1960s. Even while neo-Expressionists and Arte Povera artists were exhibiting together in group shows in the mid 1980s, the growth of interest in Arte Povera and the avant-garde of the 1960s also represented a shift away from dominant trends in painting and sculpture. These new artists, rejecting the ideal of self-expression of much art made in the early 1980s, were eager to re-address the practice of installation. The legacy of Arte Povera can be found in work such as Tony Cragg's early pieces made by juxtaposing found pieces of coloured plastic, recalling Arte Povera's use of worn, culturally significant materials. Wolfgang Laib's works ofpollen and wax are indebted to Mario Merz•s employment of sensual, natural materials. However, Laib's wax houses and other structures are autonomous, whereas most of Merz's work has been context- or site-specific." Along with Oldenburg and Kaprow, Arte Povera had led the way in creating installations in which viewers were at once inside the work and outside of it, bridging the history of environmental art with that of-autonomous sculpture. Albeit with different intentions and formal results, and without sharing Arte Povera's belief in authenticity, much European installation art and architectural sculpture of the 1980s [Marco Bagnoli, Fortuyn/O'Brien, Reinhard Mucha, Juan Munoz; Remo Salvadori, Thomas Schütte, Ettore Spalletti. Franz West, Rachel Whiteread and Jan Vercruysse among others] recalls and reacts to — in its allusion to architecture, furniture and structures built on the scale of the human body as well as in its poetic and metaphoric nature — works such as Pistoletto's Oggetti in meno (Minus objects), Mario Merz's Igloos and tables, Kounellis' use of metal bins, shelves and construction materials, and Fabro's Habitats. It was Arte Povera 's affirmation of the vital importance of subjectivity in the process of experiencing the world that ushered in an art that, if not directly anthropomorphic, was clearly about the body and its experience; but because the focus was on real life and not on artificial representation, the work had to be decentred from figurative or representational bodily reference. The result was that it often referred to the places we make for our bodies. There is an affinity here with some more recent sculpture. But while Arte Povera created 'places' for the body to be experienced as a presence, artists such as Rachel Whiteread, with her casts of inner spaces, create physical manifestations of absence. In the interest in Arte Povera continues, both because it sees art as communication and process, and because it critiques the purely visual in favour of a practice based on the simultaneity of perception,

pleasure and a layering of cultural and contextual references. The freedom to use heterogeneous materials, such as food or live animals, has been widely taken up, as has Arte Povera's free, anti-production aesthetic that turned to cultures of the past as much as to the future, that conjoined 'high' and 'low', painting and decoration, 'self' and 'other', 'Western' and 'non-Western'. Arte Povera's attention to process and to the historical and cultural significance of signs, attitudes and objects used can be found today in the practice of artists as diverse as Mario Airö, Cai Guo Qiang, Maurizio Cattelan, Mark Dion, Jimmie Durham, Olafur Eliasson, Bruna Esposito, Anya Gallaccio, David Hammons, Mona Hatoum, Eva Marisaldi, Gabriel Orozco, Pepon Osorio and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Since there were neither manifestos nor definitive lists of Arte Povera artists, it may be legitimate to ask whether it ever really existed, or whether the work of the poveristi should be evaluated within a broader perspective of postminimalist, conceptual and antiform tendencies, alongside work by Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, Lawrence Weiner, Richard Long, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson and others. Undoubtedly, this generation shared certain principles: that a work of art should be an 'attitude' become form through disparate materials; that art is related to a quest for truth and authenticity and may be realized in any material, medium and location; that art should engage with certain broad social concerns stemming from anti-authoritarian and anti-consumer society positions based on the individual. However, the more one considers the diverse works of Arte Povera, the more one becomes aware of its specific characteristics: a reference to domesticity, community and habitat; a human scale; a layering of diverse cultural references; a rejection Of coherent style, unitary authorship, the distinctions between literal and metaphoric, natural and artificial, through the transformation of the installation into a 'poor theatre' where culture and nature coincide.