

**GIUSEPPE PENONE**

***NELLE MANI (IN THE HANDS)***

***Works from 1968 to 2008***

**Opening: Saturday 28 November 2009: from 11.30 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

**Until 28 March 2010**

**From Wednesday to Sunday: 10.30 a.m. - 1 p.m. / 3 - 7 p.m.**

**PRESS RELEASE**

*Nelle mani - Works from 1968 to 2008* is an exhibition that aims to provide scope for investigation; Giuseppe Penone could perhaps not have planned it except in a place in which his work is already well-known. In the Studio per l'Arte Contemporanea Tucci Russo, which has hosted numerous other exhibitions by him, the artist has on this occasion brought together a group of works with the desire of rendering intelligible the processes that generated them.

The exhibition layout is not only spectacular, thanks to the presence of large sculptures and drawings, but also analytical through the decision to set works of different periods alongside each other on the basis of the processes of production; some of these have not been presented to the public for a long time.

It is increasingly clear – and this exhibition aims to confirm the point – that in Penone's work the technical execution, effected using non-traditional practices but perfected by the artist himself, is closely linked to the mental processes at the origin of his work.

This exhibition therefore is founded on an invitation not to evaluate the work on the basis of long-established notions, if these are not founded on immediately verifiable data (such as when we associate a bronze sculpture to the act of modelling), but to adopt new interpretative categories.

The hand, which forms the common denominator of all the works on show, as the exhibition's title itself suggests, is a central theme in Penone's oeuvre for the cognitive value the artist attributes to the voluntary or involuntary act of touching. Since the early 1970s, this had led him to create new ways of giving form to matter, amplifying signs, furrows, cavities or reliefs obtained from prints using different techniques.

**Exhibition layout**

The first room will present some works from the *Geometria nelle mani (Geometry in the hands)* series (2005) in bronze and stainless steel, together with an equal number of works entitled *Pelle di grafite (Graphite skin)*, canvases which show the amplified prints of different parts of the hand.

The second room will display works – each self-encompassing and autonomous – in each of which it will be possible to verify a different stage in the mental and material elaboration leading to the definition of the *Geometries in the hands*. Starting with *Cocci (Potsherds)*, a work dating from 1982, which Penone made by adapting the hands around fragments of a vase and placing them in the primeval gesture of cupped hands to hold water, and then pouring in plaster. In this way, he obtained a cast in which the liquid material of the plaster, bound itself to the potsherds as it solidified.

In some later works, he replaced the potsherds with the small geometric shapes small children play with. *Geometria nelle mani*, the photograph of 2004, fixes the initial moment in their realization. In the negative image, the darkest shadows, those in the empty space between the two hands, have become white and seem like sources of light, resembling also the plaster the artist would later pour into the cavity.

The *Acciai (Steels)* are the casts of the *Cocci*; their inside walls provide a positive cast of the hand's volume, while the original geometry is drawn by a portion of emptiness.

In the light of these works that preceded and led to the development also of other works in different directions, the large bronzes of *Geometria nelle mani* appear the amplification of a primordial gesture, the result of a process during which a liquid has solidified, as often occurs in Penone's work, for whom the liquid state is the condition that puts the various forms of the existing world on the same level. "The elements are fluid", the artist has declared. "Even stone is fluid (...) it is merely a problem of time. Our life duration enables us to give values of 'hardness' and 'softness' to certain things, while time cancels these out". In these same sculptures, moreover, geometry constitutes a dialectic element, of a different nature to the mass of bronze to which it is associated and from which it stands out thanks also to a different work process, constituting forms realized using mirror-polished stainless steel panels.

The third room will have another large bronze work on display, *Proiezione (Projection)* of 2000, in which a fingerprint is developed through space in accordance with optical laws and materialised in a bronze cast segmented into three portions and supported by a latticework of branches that hold it the eye-level of the observer.

Opposite this work, the visitor will find *Propagazione (Propagation)*, a drawing on the wall in which the artist continues and amplifies the lines originating from the fingerprint, and the 288 sheets of *Svolgere la propria pelle su 41580 mm<sup>2</sup> – punta del dito anulare della mano destra (Unrolling one's skin over 41580 mm<sup>2</sup> – tip of the right-hand ring finger)* of 1971, in which the photograph of the ring finger of the right hand, pressed against a pane of glass, is repeated on different sheets in which it progressively occupies every different position possible.

Various works to do with the act of touching, implying the mental action of gaining experience through contact, are gathered in the last of the exhibition rooms, many of which from the cycles entitled *Svolgere la propria pelle (Unrolling one's skin)*.

All are preceded chronologically by the photographs of the *Rovesciare i propri occhi (Overturning one's eyes)* project of 1970 in which the face of the artist appears, wearing a pair of mirrored glasses. It was this work, with which Penone inhibited the sense of sight in himself, without depriving of that same sense those viewing the work (to whom was reserved a visually complex work), that anticipated his interest in touch and all the works he dedicated to this.

Among the other works on show are *Libro trappola (Trap book)* and *Senza titolo (Untitled)*, both of 1972, which could originally be touched and, upon contact, stained the skin with colour (the special powder used in police investigations), and *Svolgere la propria pelle – pietra (Unrolling one's skin – stone)* of 1971. This comprises a stone from a river that the artist has touched and then dipped in acid (the same process as used in engravings). The acid has marked it, except with the grease transmitted by the contact has prevented it biting. In the sequence of photographs completing the work, one can see the artist's hand throwing the stone into a river and the water running over it, filling the furrows left by the acid.