

# From Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972

## An Introduction

### Using the Arte Povera Group Leaders' Kit

We warmly welcome you and your group to Tate Modern and the exhibition *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972*. Included in this kit for group leaders is:

- this introductory sheet, which includes curriculum links and a post-visit activity
- six thematic key-work cards including suggestions for discussion in the gallery, along with colour images
- *Material Evidence*, a photocopyable 'sample book' for students to use in the exhibition
- an exhibition guide.

The kit gives helpful information on the exhibition and can be used alongside the *Tate Modern Teachers' Kit*, which outlines our strategies for working in the gallery and gives ideas on structuring and facilitating a group visit. It is available from the Tate shop for £12.99.

### Introduction to the Exhibition

In 1967 the Italian critic Germano Celant coined the phrase *Arte Povera*. He used it to describe the work of a group of young Italian artists who, since the mid-1960s, had been working in radically new ways, breaking with the past and entering a challenging dialogue with trends in Europe and the US. Less a distinctive style than a conceptual approach, *Arte Povera* denotes a type of art made without formal restraints, and often conceived in opposition to the commercialisation of art.

It is often wrongly believed that *Arte Povera*, meaning, literally, 'poor art' is an art of cheap or humble materials. In fact, the group made use of an enormous range of media. These did include raw and organic materials such as coal and wool, and even living creatures, vegetables and live energy sources, but manufactured and richly seductive media such as silk or glass were also employed. This diversity reflected a highly experimental, open approach to processes and techniques.

The sensuality of many of the materials chosen by the artists is explicitly used to appeal to our sense of smell or hearing as well as sight (see key-work cards 1 and 3). Often, the viewer is engaged through the experience of the gallery space itself – a strong tendency in art practice in the 1960s.

The musician John Cage once said, 'Art comes from a kind of experimental condition in which one experiments with living'. This phrase informed many of the ideas behind *Arte Povera*. Artists linked with the group were predominantly concerned with the connection point between art and life. They constantly explored how our experiences of everyday life can be interpreted and extended through art (see key-work card 3). A key idea informing many of their works was an emphasis on investigating the links between the natural organic world and humanity (see key-work card 4). This was often carried out through works looking at the elemental forces of nature. Rather than using realism as a means to communicate connections with life, works were often infused with a sense of poetry and symbolism.

The *Arte Povera* artists also aimed to dissolve the boundaries between the exhibition space and the world outside, often making works in the landscape, or bringing elements from the landscape into the gallery (see key-work card 3). A famous example was Jannis Kounellis's installation of 1969, in which he exhibited twelve horses in a gallery in Rome.

*Arte Povera* was not a rigid, exclusive movement, and it would have been antithetical to its ideas to produce a specific manifesto or set of formal beliefs. In part, the group developed its ideas in reaction to the influence of American consumerism and the values of Pop art, which had been widely represented at the Venice Biennale in 1964 (including work by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Claes Oldenburg). In the late 1950s to the early 1960s, Italy had experienced an economic boom, but as this faded into a new recession, the promises of commodity capitalism began to falter. Artists were in turn affected by this shift, moving away from the slick, commercial languages that typified American art at this time. The philosophical, political and cultural context is discussed in key-work card 5.

Although this was a period of radical change in many areas of society, it is important to note that some traditional prejudices still held. It is a disappointing fact, for example, that the only woman artist directly associated with this movement, Marisa Merz, was omitted from many exhibitions, and from much of the accompanying documentation, despite her solo show in 1967. Her engagement with materials and audiences, however, have been crucial to much current practice (see key-work cards 1 and 6). *Arte Povera* in general has influenced many subsequent women artists, including Mona Hatoum, Lucia Nogueira, Jana Sterbak and Jo Stockham. It is also interesting to remind ourselves that the use by artists thirty-five years ago of mattresses, tents, body casts and food has influenced much contemporary British art practice (which at times prides itself on originality and shock rather than acknowledging the legacy of art school lectures on *Arte Povera*!).

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# Timeline

## 1962

Milan: Construction of the Underground begins

April, Italy: Censorship of theatre and opera is abolished, although retained for TV, cinema and variety shows

July, Algeria: End of French colonial rule

October, Cuba: Cuban missile crisis

## 1963

April, Vatican City: Pope John Paul 23rd publishes 'Peace on Earth', supporting workers' and women's rights, and freedom of speech

April, Italy: General elections. Success of the Left

June, Vietnam: Buddhist monk Quang-Duc sets fire to himself as an act of protest. Images are transmitted around the world

October, Rome: Violent clashes between police and demonstrators during strikes by construction workers

October, North-East Italy: 2,000 people die after Vajont dam collapses

## 1964

Italy: End of the 'Italian miracle' economic boom

June - October, Venice: Strong US contingent at the *Biennale* causes debate in the Italian art world. Robert Rauschenberg wins Jury's Grand Prize

August, Vietnam: First US airstrikes against North Vietnam

## 1965

February, USA: Assassination of Malcolm X

August, USA: 35 deaths and 3000 arrests after civil rights demonstrations in Los Angeles

October, Cuba: Che Guevara leaves the Cuban Government to lead guerrilla war in Bolivia

December, Italy: High unemployment, especially in the mechanical engineering sector

December, Italy: Demonstrations against Vietnam War throughout the country

## 1966

February, Italy: Mass strike by 500,000 construction workers

April, Rome: Student Paolo Rossi killed in clashes with Fascists in La Sapienza University

May, Rome: Artist Richard Serra provokes outrage with exhibition of live and stuffed animals

July, Turin: Large-scale demonstrations against the Vietnam War end in a massive sit-in and numerous arrests

August, China: Chairman Mao launches the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

November, Italy: Flash floods hit many regions including Florence, where 70 people are killed and 12,000 left homeless

## 1967

Italy: The Fiat 124 is declared 'car of the year' in Italy

Turin: Around 60,000 southern workers arrive in city during the year, creating housing crisis

January, Italy: 'La Sapienza' University in Rome occupied by students demanding a democratic system of representation. Students in other Italian universities follow suit

April, Rome: Large-scale demonstration against US bombing in Vietnam

September, Genoa: *Arte Povera - Im spazio*, organised by Germano Celant. The first exhibition to use the phrase 'Arte Povera'

December, Rome: Lyndon B. Johnson welcomed by the Government and the Pope. The city erupts with indignation

## 1968

January, Sicily: Earthquakes leave over 200 people dead and 50,000 homeless

January, USA: *Young Italians* exhibition at Institute of Contemporary Arts, Boston includes Kounellis, Pascali and Pistoletto

April, USA: Martin Luther King assassinated

May, France: Beginning of student revolt

June, USA: Robert Kennedy is assassinated

June - September, Venice: *Biennale* besieged by student demonstrations, followed by clashes with police.

## 1969

Italy: Germano Celant's book *Arte Povera* is published

January, Rome: Kounellis installs 12 live horses at Galleria L'Attico

February, Italy: General strikes called by workers' unions

February, Rome: Exhibition by Mario Merz includes a car driven by the artist from Turin to Rome

February, Rome: Violent demonstrations against Richard Nixon's visit

March, Switzerland: *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, international group exhibition includes Arte Povera artists

October, USA: 15 million people demonstrate against the Vietnam War

November, Rome: Bill on divorce approved by the Chamber of Deputies

December, Italy: Bombs explode in Milan and Rome. Locations include a bank in Piazza Fontana, Milan, where 16 are killed and 90 wounded

## 1970

May, Cambodia: Violent U.S. military intervention

August, USA: Demonstrations for Women's Liberation movement

September, Rome: Visit by Richard Nixon sparks protests throughout the city

October, Rome: Divorce Law is approved by Italian Senate

December, Military coups in Somalia, Cambodia and Sudan

## 1971

March, Rome: The Corte Costituzionale legalises the advertising of contraceptives

Vietnam: Withdrawal of US troops

May, Germany: *Arte Povera: 13 Italian Artists* held in Munich. Last exhibition for over a decade to use the term 'Arte Povera'

## 1972

March, Milan: Body of left-wing activist Giacomo Feltrinelli is discovered in disguise, carrying fake documents. The Left claim that he was murdered, the Right that he died accidentally while planting a bomb

May, Milan: Police captain Luigi Calabresi, accused of the death of the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli, is shot and killed outside his home

# Following up: creative links for the classroom

The thoughtful, witty and inventive practices of Arte Povera artists can provide much inspiration for classroom projects across a range of subjects. Here are some of our ideas (based on the QCA schemes of work) for you to develop and adapt. Although the art curriculum requires you to show students the work of artists, there are also rich opportunities to work across the curriculum, for which some ideas are briefly mentioned. If you think this exhibition would be of interest to colleagues working in other subjects, please tell them about it!

## Art and Design

*Material Memories* (links to key-work cards 1 and 3)

Collect samples of sacks (try coffee shops, green grocers, pet shops, markets). What qualities do these sacks have? For example:

- Where have they travelled from?
- Are they grubby? Do they have traces of what was contained in them (e.g. earth from potatoes, straw, coffee beans)?
- Do they smell good or bad?

Explore and list the different sensations of touch, sight and smell in relation to the sacks. What might be favourite characteristics of the sack (e.g. the memory of a sack race from childhood, the rough smell of the hessian)? Record these comments on a flipchart/in sketchbooks.

Cut some hessian into postcard-size rectangles and using PVA glue, stick onto thick white/cream card. If necessary add a flat weight while they dry, using a plastic sheet to stop everything sticking to the table.

When the cards are dry, each member of the group should choose one characteristic of the sack that has interested them and should write this on the back of the sacking postcard. They can then choose someone to send the card to, address it and ask the recipient of the postcard for their response. Post and await reply ...

(This type of playful, interactive mail art, which operates outside the gallery context, is a typical Arte Povera strategy.)

*Materials* (key-work cards 1, 3 and 4)

- Which materials are natural and which are man-made?
- What do students first notice about the materials? Create a word bank of describing words.
- Make a classroom display of a range of different materials with sensory word cards to describe how they feel, what they smell like etc.

Extension activity: Create playful artworks that explore the relationship between nature and our everyday environments. Experiment with a range of natural materials and every day objects. For example, wallpaper made from cabbage leaves, or lampshades stitched from orange peel. Ask students to use their sketchbooks to keep a record of the different processes involved in making these pieces, and note the sensory differences made to them over time as they decay (their smell, what they look like or feel to the touch).

*What is Sculpture?* (key-work card 1)

How do these works relate to students' ideas of sculpture? Discuss the different ways the artists have used materials. Choose a part of the human body, record it in sketchbooks and make three dimensional models of it experimenting with different materials e.g. clay, papier mâché, wire. Discuss how each material affects the process of making.

Extension activity: Develop the activity above by changing the model in some significant way, for example formally (scale, surface texture) or conceptually (e.g. abstracting it).

*Journeys* (key-work cards 2 and 5)

Do your students make certain journeys regularly? Have they ever made any particularly significant journeys in their lives? If so, what were the landmarks or events that marked the journeys?

On tracing paper, ask students to represent these journeys visually, making up symbols to denote landmarks or events. Layer the pieces of tracing paper to make a collective art work.

Extension activity: Using a map of the locality, pinpoint the names of roads that refer to aspects of the natural world (e.g. colours, seasons, materials). Highlight these and redraw the map with these streets remaining. Students could develop this idea in several ways; by choosing different categories of interest (e.g. road names of famous people), or by drawing the new map digitally, or making the final version out of a material related to the chosen category.

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*Life Events* (key-work card 2, Gilardi's *State of Mind Costume* 1964)

What state of mind do students attribute to the wearer of this piece? What visual evidence supports their ideas?

Students could make quick annotated sketches of the piece, highlighting what they consider to be its key features.

Use this as the basis for designing costumes to describe another state of mind, thinking in particular about the qualities and associations we make with particular materials.

Extension activity: make the costumes and wear them – a piece of performance art!

*Shared View* (key-work card 5, Mario Merz's *Giap's Igloo* 1968)

What qualities do students associate with domestic living spaces? Are any of those expressed in this piece? Name different types of dwelling structures. What factors affect the type of homes we live in?

Extension activity: Choose one of these qualities and create a group space that aims to exude this quality (e.g. calmness, a retreat from the hurly burly of the outside world). Think of objects to be included in the space that will promote this. Students could extend this to smells, sounds and textures...

Students could also make a contextual display for their pieces. This activity encourages students to think about the broader context for art work and provides opportunities for making plural interpretations of the pieces. The display might include words associated with the Arte Povera works that inspired them, images of important social and political events taking place in the 1960s and in the present day, a selection of objects related to the artworks, or links to artists whose work shares similar concerns. The experience of making any art work will be strengthened by asking students to discuss the making process with peers, how their work relates to pieces in the exhibition and how they will develop ideas in future work.

## Cross curricular links for primary schools

*Science* (SC3) Materials and their Properties (1a, 2)

Using works featured in key-work cards 3 and 4, explore the use of materials by artists. How could they be grouped? What kind of changes occur to them naturally over time? How else could these materials be changed?

*Maths* Ma2: Numbers and the number system (2b)

Using Mario Merz's *Giap's Igloo* (key-work card 5) as a starting point, ask children to describe some mathematical sequences. Make floor installations using pebbles that visually demonstrate these sequences.

*English* En1 Speaking and Listening (1b,c,d,e, 2a,b,c,d,e,8c,d, 9a)  
The describing game

In pairs, children select one work and look at it for two minutes. They describe it to the rest of the group, who have to guess which work each pair has chosen. You could also ask children to remember the key describing words, note them down and use these as the basis for creative writing.

For further art and literacy ideas, visit the *I See What You Mean* website at [www.accessart.org](http://www.accessart.org).

In addition a range of sketchbook and language activities are available in the *Tate Modern Teachers' Kit*.

We would be delighted to hear about any of your projects inspired by work from *Zero to Infinity*; please send details to Helen Charman, Schools Programmes, Tate Modern, Bankside, London SE1 9TG.

This kit was written by Liz Ellis with contributions from the Tate Modern education team.

# 1 Sensory materials

## Discussion points

- How are materials used in each of the works?
- What do you notice about the materials?
- Are the artists appealing to senses other than sight with these works?
- Do you have favourite materials (eg that you like to wear, touch, smell)?

## Luciano Fabro

*Foot* 1968–71

**Marble and Silk. Variable height x 100 x 80 cm**

‘Certain materials are right together because of their colour and form ... I chose the noblest quality of each one, the most refined technology ... polished marble, cleaned bronze, molten glass, silk worked with dressmaker’s finesse and colours to match this context.’ Luciano Fabro

This work is one of a group of giant piedi (feet) made using marble, metal, glass and silk. Fabro later produced yet more, using an even wider variety of materials. He juxtaposes these huge feet with a sensual pillar of silk, stretching up to the ceiling. This negates any idea that Arte Povera was only about poor materials. Craftsmanship, as well as rich materials, is celebrated in a monumental but also humorous way. We can enjoy the pleasure and skill in the handling of the materials and the wonderful scale of these enormous timeless feet. In this work Fabro shows his concern with the contrast between the manmade and nature by bringing together both organic and inorganic materials.

(illustrated)

## Marisa Merz

*Bea* 1968

**Nylon threads. Variable dimensions**

‘There has never been any division between my life and my work.’ Marisa Merz

Marisa Merz has knitted the letters of her daughter’s name in nylon thread. It reminds us of handmade socks or clothes from the past. She has also made shoes from copper and nylon wire. Merz would often display these sculptures in outdoor environments, on the beach or in the countryside. At times she displayed her sculptures at home or in clubs (see key-work card 6), constantly making connections between public spaces and more private environments. She continues to make work that explores sensations of touch, using wax and clay.

*Given that Marisa Merz is the only female artist in this exhibition, do you notice anything that makes her work stand apart from the other art on display?*

*Think about Marisa Merz’s statement above. How do you think the materials, technique and meanings of this work relate to her domestic life?*

## Pier Paolo Calzolari

*With no Other Smells but Mine, with no Other Noises but Mine* 1969–70

**Mattress, neon tubing, freezing structure 19 x 193 x 76 cm**

Throughout the ages, artists have been fascinated by beds and mattresses, with their associations of sleep, love and death. Here, Calzolari uses a generator to create ice on the freezer bars around the mattress. The title of the piece is spelt out in neon. Calzolari often uses materials that change (eg water that can be frozen, banana leaves that will decay), which represent the notions of transformation and time passing. His materials also refer to boundaries such as liquid and solid, heavy and light. His choice of mattress and the scale of the lettering relates to his own body size.

*Which materials in this work are subject to states of change? Note down the transformation they might make from the state they are in now.*

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## 2 The 1960s Italian and European context

### Discussion points

- Artists at this time began to use ideas of performance and installation in their work – as opposed to wall-based painting – influenced by music and street demonstrations. How do these works demonstrate this?
- Many of the artists in the exhibition show maps of Europe or specifically of Italy. Why might this be?
- If you were to make work about Britain in 2001, what methods would you use? Would you include sound or text, or have an interactive element?
- Discuss how the US influences us today (eg through the many branches of McDonalds, Starbucks etc, or disagreement over pollution levels).

### Piero Gilardi

*State of Mind Costume* 1964

Manipulated clothes 160 x 40 cm approx.

'If life, society and its actual institutions are not open to the freedom of art, then we need to change them.' Piero Gilardi

Gilardi worked in the 1960s to establish networks between artists across Europe who shared common ideas. He had great reservations about the role of commercial galleries in selecting work for exhibitions, and about the commodification of art. This led him to stop making his own artworks in the 1970s. Instead, he worked with psychiatric patients in Italy, returning to his own work with the creation of interactive computer-based work from the 1980s onwards. *State of Mind Costume* was part of a series of clothes designed to be worn in order to communicate various states of mind. This costume is for the adventurer!

(illustrated)

### Emilio Prini

*Five Spots of Light on Europe* 1967–8

Collage on map 95 x 110 cm

This map highlights key cities in the European art world. It is unaltered from its original form, apart from the cities which are highlighted. This expresses Prini's key idea of questioning the nature of the art object. He has said that he makes works by altering them as little as possible, the ideas behind the work being more important than its physical manifestation. (This closely links his work to the wider movement of Conceptual art and follows on from the readymades of Marcel Duchamp, dating back to 1917). Prini is interested in the nature of the art world and the mechanisms by which it is run. In other map works he has marked both real and imagined art projects.

*Can you identify the cities Prini has highlighted? What kind of places are they (you could research this). Are they wealthy or poor?*

### Luciano Fabro

*Road Map Italy* 1969

Road map, lead sheet and wood 142 x 73 cm

This was one of a series that Fabro made using the map of Italy in different materials, ranging from fur to a range of metals. Working in series (see also *Foot*, key-work card 1), allows Fabro to explore ideas of form, materials and scale.

Here, the lead is so thin and malleable as it curves around the form of the country, that it is almost like soft fabric. The shape of Italy is immediately recognisable, but the lead surround creates a strange juxtaposition of actual object and sign (the map). It forms a heavy boundary around the country, perhaps making a statement about Fabro's opinion on the country's political situation, and reducing the country to its banal boot-like shape.

*What is the particular significance of Fabro's choice of lead as a material? (Italy at this time was developing an increased infrastructure of motorways, coupled with a widespread increase in car ownership).*

*In this work, what kind of statement do you think he is making about Italy?*

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# 3 Art and the everyday

## Discussion points

- What is immediately recognisable in these works?
- What is made different by the choice of scale or materials?
- Do we expect to see these materials displayed in an art gallery?

## Michelangelo Pistoletto

*Ball of Newspapers (Globe) 1966–68*

Press newspapers and iron rods. Diameter 180 cm

'As far as I am concerned... all forms, materials, ideas and means are available and to be used.' Michelangelo Pistoletto

The globe is made from newspapers collected over a two-year period, therefore referring to the passing of time and to historical events. Pistoletto rolled this work through the streets of Turin before displaying it in the gallery setting. The moving sphere and its passage through the streets symbolises the constantly changing events and aspects of life, as reported in the newspapers that are squashed together inside it.

Pistoletto's concerns with material processes as well as with wider political and world issues are similar to some of the works of Boetti (see key-work card 6).

(illustrated)

## Pino Pascali

*A Cubic Metre of Earth 1967*

Earth on wooden structure 100 x 100 x 100 cm

Delighting in a wide range of materials that included steel-wool scouring pads, bread and hay, Pascali here displays the cubic square of Italian earth in all its glory, deliberately playing with ideas of abstract form and childish games with mud. He ignored the boundaries between art practices and everyday life, and aimed to transform the notion of play into high art.

*Discuss what Pascali might be saying about the nature of Italian soil. Do you think he is being serious or funny?*

*Think about earth as a material for making art. What other, more traditional, types of art are made from materials that are found in the ground?*

## Jannis Kounellis

*Untitled 1969*

Seven burlap sacks with beans, corn, coffee, lentils, peas and rice. Variable dimensions

These sacks contain everyday provisions and fuel, referring to our basic need for food and warmth. Kounellis was also interested in exhibiting work that could not be easily bought as a commodity, in the way that prints, paintings or photographs can. More interested in works that exist as spaces or remain as memories, he placed objects within installations and environments in order to encourage our experience of these sites, sometimes using materials that referred to the place in which the work was shown. At the same time, his work is informed by an awareness of the politics of world trade (including stocks of coffee and coal and their shifts in value).

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## 4 Humanity and the natural world

### Discussion points

- What type of natural objects are referred to here?
- What materials have been used to make the work?
- Why might these have been used in combination?
- What is the mood of the works?

### Giovanni Anselmo

*Untitled* 1968 (also known as *Eating Structure*)

Granite, copper wire and lettuce 70 x 23 x 37 cm

'I, the world, things, life – we are all situations of energy. The point is not to fix situations, but to keep them open and alive – like life processes.' Giovanni Anselmo

This work explores the basic principles of gravity and tension through the use of natural materials. As long as the lettuce is fresh, with a firm leaf structure, the sculpture is kept in balance, but once the lettuce wilts the tension is lost and the granite slips. This leads to energetic maintenance by gallery staff and a good relationship with our local green grocer! Forces in nature, such as energy, tension and gravity, formed a key theme explored by many artists associated with Arte Povera.

*Discuss the different types of natural forces you think are inherent in this work.*

(illustrated)

### Piero Gilardi

*Nature Carpet* 1966

Polystyrene 20 x 100 x 70 cm

'My attitude at the time was one of anxiety toward the loss of nature; at the same time, however, I trusted in technology, which I represented in my use of an artificial material: polyurethane.' Piero Gilardi

Gilardi made a range of what he saw as ideal environments, based on photographs of a vegetable garden, for example, or the floor of a cave and, in this case, a river bed. The photographs were printed onto a large roll of polyurethane. He then cut pieces from the roll for display and sale. Eventually, disillusioned with the way in which his artworks became products, he stopped making them. In the 1980s he returned to these works, making them part of an interactive installation and allowing people to walk on them.

*How do you think Nature Carpet relates to consumer items made today? Can you think of saleable items that may have been inspired by Gilardi's work?*

### Giuseppe Penone

*Tree* 1970

Wood 348.5 x 19 x 9 cm

'I've been trying to obtain from a beam, originally 11 metres long, 22 centimetres wide and 10 centimetres thick, the form of the tree that's fossilised inside it.'

Giuseppe Penone

Beginning with a fabricated plank of wood, Penone successively stripped away layers of the surface corresponding to the natural growth rings of the wood. The result is that the plank has been partially transformed back to the tree from which it was made. Penone carved the wood away until the number of rings left matched his age. He made the 'branches' according to the position of knots in the plank of wood. Penone has made about forty similar works, some of which have unfolded as performances carried out by the artist in the gallery space. He also often exhibits several works together, to form a forest. Penone is intrigued by the relationship between how long it takes a tree to grow and the time he spends carving it back to its original form (about a month). His process has led him to see the imaginative potential of every 'door, table, window or board', each of which has the image of a tree lurking inside it.

*A key idea in Arte Povera is to bypass the traditional role of the artist as someone whose way of working is separate from everyday activities. Do you think Penone succeeds in this?*

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# 5 Artists' political and cultural frameworks

## Discussion points

- What type of political events were in the news in the 1960s (eg the Vietnam war, the 1968 Paris demonstrations, the rise of civil rights movements)
- What do you feel about the use of text in the work? Do you feel you need more/less to gain access to the ideas informing this kind of work?
- Can you think of artists making work informed by contemporary political/cultural events? (eg the rise of disability activism and the role of the arts in this, see Disability Arts in London magazine).

## Mario Merz

*Giap's Igloo – If the Enemy Masses his Forces he Loses Ground, If he Scatters he Loses Strength* 1968

**Metal, wire mesh, neon tubing, dirt in bags, batteries, accumulators 120 x diameter 200 cm**

'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 count them, there are fantastic numbers, always different... To count numbers is a way to get close to the irrationality to life.' Mario Merz

The title of this work, which is spelt out in neon letters around the surface of the igloo, is a quotation from the North Vietnamese general Giap, who defeated the French in 1954. Using earth, Merz refers to nomadic peoples and their shelters, and connects the natural world with our daily lives. The igloo shape was used by Merz repeatedly, usually in conjunction with the Fibonacci series of numbers, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55 etc) named after the Italian scientist's findings of this numerical configuration in the natural world. Influenced by the work of his wife, Marisa Merz, he frequently remade the igloo series according to the site of display.

*The work engages with ideas about homes and the environments with which we are surrounded. Would it be possible to use this work as a home? What sort of outdoor environment do you picture it in?*

(illustrated)

## Guilio Paolini

*Apotheosis of Homer* 1970–71

**Music stands, photographs and paper. Variable dimensions**

'Each spectator can feel himself reflected in each of the actors, and thus in each of the historical characters and this completes the scene. This, however, has no narrative intention whatsoever: there is no link between the characters, save their shared symbolic function.' Guilio Paolini

*Apotheosis of Homer* uses photographs of actors playing famous historical figures to explore ideas of perception and representation. These concepts – central to the experience of art itself – are fundamental to Paolini's practice. 'Apotheosis' means the highest point in the development of a person or movement, while 'Homer' refers to the ancient Greek poet, whose work was used as a model and source for subsequent poets. Drawing on historical references from various periods, the different elements, including the thirty-two music stands, and the artist's own voice on the soundtrack, are props that are not art objects in themselves, but which, when combined together, allow the experience of art to be felt by the viewer, who completes the work. Of all the Arte Povera artists, Paolini's work was the closest to the concerns of Conceptual art.

## Jannis Kounellis

*Untitled (Freedom or Death, Long live Marat, Long Live Robespierre)* 1969

**Iron plate, chalk and candle 100 x 70 x 22 cm**

'The work of a painter is to free something without imposing it, because if you impose it you've liberated the thing, but not a person.' Jannis Kounellis

Influenced by the French painter, David (1748–1825), and his painting *The Death of Marat* (1793), Kounellis refers to the hero of the French Revolution, Jean-Paul Marat. Kounellis made this work at a time of repeated social upheaval in Paris during the late 1960s, linking the subject matter of the French Revolution to his contemporary experience. The use of the chalk, easily rubbed away, and the guttering candle, evoke the vulnerability of Marat's revolutionary ambitions, as well as his early death.

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# 6. The artist and audience

## Discussion points

- How have artists used methods of display to enable us to experience the artworks?
- What would it feel like to see this work in the street or in a club? How does the gallery make us experience the work differently?
- How can you make an artwork that allows the viewer a response?

## Giuseppe Penone

*To Turn One's Eyes Inside Out* 1970

Black and white photograph on canvas 37.3 x 26.7 cm

'Mirrored lenses, when placed over my eyes, indicate the point that separates me from that which surrounds me. They are like a skin, a border element, the interruption of a channel of information that uses light as its medium.'

Giuseppe Penone

Penone wears mirrored contact lenses, making himself blind and reflecting the external world. The photograph documents a performance in Turin, when Penone was photographed at intervals by a colleague, who recorded the changes in the urban landscape as it was reflected in his eyes. The work turns the tables on the way in which an artist usually receives visual information. He cannot see the images, but by means of the mirrored lenses, projects them back into the world, along with the reflection of the viewer.

Born in a rural part of Italy, Penone often used the natural landscape in his work, recording his actions in photographs (see key-work card 4). As part of the exhibition *Documenta 5* in 1972, he painted photographic emulsion ('Liquid Light') on windows before pressing his body against the surface. When the emulsion was developed, the traces and impression of his skin were recorded on the glass.

(illustrated)

## Alighiero Boetti

*Map* 1971–2

Embroidered fabric 147 x 228 cm

'For me, the embroidered Map couldn't be more beautiful. I did nothing for this work, chose nothing myself, in the sense that the world is shaped as it is, I did not draw it; the flags are what they are, I did not design them. In short I created absolutely nothing. When a fundamental idea, the concept, emerges, there is no need to decide on anything else.'

Alighiero Boetti

This work was embroidered for Boetti by craftspeople in Afghanistan. The work is part of a series of embroidered Maps made between 1969 and 1993, recording political shifts (eg the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Soviet Union) as well as the human relationships that literally thread and connect us to each other. The national flags show the fiercely contested national identities that separate and unite us. Boetti was keen to blur distinctions between art and life, and false distinctions between art and craft.

*Who would you consider to be the artist of this work?*

## Marisa Merz

*Untitled (Living Sculpture)* 1966

Aluminium. Variable dimensions

This work, made from aluminium, was displayed in various ways at Marisa Merz's home, in galleries and at the Piper Club in Turin, which showcased art, music, installation and performance work as well as being a bar/café for the arts community. The work was intended to be free-flowing and organic, far removed from the box-like works of the American Minimalists. The aim was to create an environment that could be changed by the audience and could also alter according to the needs and demands of the site.

MODERN

TATE