

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Mario Merz

Early Works

515 West 24th Street

November 10 – December 17, 2016

Opening November 9, 5:30 – 7:30pm

Gladstone Gallery, in collaboration with Fondazione Merz, is pleased to present an exhibition of historic early works by Mario Merz. A leading member of Italy's Arte Povera movement of the 1960s and 70s, Merz created paintings, sculptures, and installations with an aim to oppose a monolithic culture and to celebrate perplexity. This goal manifested itself in the artist's deviation from the mass-media iconography popularized by Pop Art, the mythic emotionalism of Abstract Expressionism, and the machismo detachment of Minimalism. Instead, Merz and his Arte Povera contemporaries – such as Alighiero e Boetti, Luciano Fabro, and Jannis Kounellis, among others – employed simple, everyday materials and perceptive references to nature in order to ground their art in a relatable existential ambiguity.

The three seminal works on view in this exhibition exemplify this stratagem. *Giap Igloo – If the Enemy Masses His Forces, He Loses Ground: If He Scatters, He Loses Strength* (1968) represents a body of work that became an enduring motif throughout Merz's career, since he began making igloo sculptures in 1967. Using the exterior world to create an interior space, igloos encapsulate Merz's drive to utilize social tradition as a means for individual reflection. At once a freestanding structure, this hemisphere is rendered meaningless without an inhabitant to provide utilitarian import. The instillation of subjective weight onto the objective form of the igloo is underscored by the neon words circumscribing the dome. A quotation from General Vo Nguyen Giap of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front describing the double-bind of combat strategy, the glowing letters provide a visual tension to the cracking clay exterior, while highlighting the artist's fascination with social mores – in this case, military and political custom.

Further showcasing Merz's interest in exploring a collective conscience through prosaic media is his boxlike sculpture, *Sitin* (1968). The title of the work invokes the physical act of using one's body to occupy space – a fact emphasized by the position of the sculpture on the gallery's floor – and also points to the global escalation of political protests in 1968, of which the sit-in was an often-used technique. Through this gesture, Merz emphasizes the social significance of sitting as individual stance and collective action.

The large-scale installation, *La bottiglia di Leyda (Leyden Jar)*, provides a visual culmination of Merz's Arte Povera endeavors: physical space is redefined as both deeply personal and simultaneously universal through the use of common materials. With wire mesh covering every wall of the gallery, Merz invites viewers into a communal environment that proudly incorporates the natural world, all while neon lights spell out the Fibonacci sequence. A remarkable numeric sequence that seems to exist throughout nature (from pinecones to snail shells), the Fibonacci numbers in this work stress a belief that, even though the world around us is sometimes inexplicable and chaotic, there is an order uniting us all.

Mario Merz was born in 1925 and died in 2003 in Milan, Italy. He was awarded the Praemium Imperiale, Tokyo; the Oskar Kokoschka Prize, Vienna; and the Arnold Bode Prize, Kassel. Merz was the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at institutions around the world, including Fundação de Serralves, Porto; Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisberg; Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona; and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. His work is included in many prominent public collections, including Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Art Institute of Chicago, among many others. The Fondazione Merz in Turin, Italy, regularly displays both the works of its namesake and sponsors exhibitions by living artists.

Jim Hodges
530 West 21st Street, New York
Opening November 10, 2016

Kasper Bosmans
12 Rue du Grand Cerf, Brussels
Opening November 18, 6 – 8pm

For further information, please contact Allison Rodman: (212) 206-9300 or arodman@gladstonegallery.com
New York gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm
Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday – Friday, 10am – 6pm and Saturday, 12pm – 6pm