

Pier Paolo Calzolari

(Bologna, 1943)

In keeping with a line of research he has elaborated since the emergence of Arte Povera, Pier Paolo Calzolari sets in motion processes of transformation that are capable of sublimating the physicality of material. Moss, honey, tobacco, salt, ice, wax, felt, lead, light, and sound, but also people and animals are used as elements for the construction of an “ideal house,” a real and symbolic place where the artist’s creativity unfolds. Offering access to this house, in *Scalea (mi rfea pra)* (*Monumental Staircase – mi rfea pra*), 1968, Calzolari develops a work starting in the form of three steps. An image of the ascent toward consciousness, they remain close to everyday reality through the words “mi rfea pra,” fragments that relate to a nursery rhyme in dialect. As in other works of the same period, the artist utilizes a refrigerator motor to obtain a veil of icy brine over the entire surface. The essence of whiteness, brine, as a material that coincides with its color, represents a yearning for the absolute. According to a poetics of opposites, this tension is immediately brought back to the linear passage of time by the presence of a burning candle.

In the 1980s, Calzolari returned to painting with renewed vigor, which was present earlier in his works of the 1970s. This medium is intended as a place through which the artist carries out a dialogue that involves present experience and the memory of history, both placed at an equal plane. In *La luna (The Moon)*, 1980, the contour of the celestial body, painted against a blue background, evokes a condition of timeless poetic research, while the presence of a coffee pot resting on a small terracotta table manifests the urgency of life and its daily necessities. Life and art are also the protagonists of *15:00 (Natura morta) (15:00 – Still Life)*, 2006. The shapes of some books made of lead are defined against the surface of a large square covered in icy brine. Resting on a shelf, the books refer to a continuous desire for knowledge. The contrast between the white of the ice and the gray of the lead delineates a seductive image, the beauty of which captures the eye with a mechanism that evokes the pictorial tradition of *vanitas*, where an emphasis on the sensual allure of everyday objects was utilized as a warning of the inexorably transient nature of human life. (MB)