

Giuseppe Penone

(Garessio, Cuneo, 1947)

From the time he began walking in the woods of Garessio, Penone has investigated the relationship between man and nature, between growth and creation. He identifies in this dialectic an encounter between two different temporal dimensions: the cycles of seasonal growth of the plant universe and the irregular, concentrated time of human work that modifies, shapes, or even interrupts the flow of life of that universe.

The first works that establish a relationship between natural forms and the artist's body, dating from 1968, are experiments with tree trunks, marked in their growth by a bronze cast of his hand, where the cast becomes interwoven in the wood, surrounded by a cubic form of metal mesh, and will rise with the tree's growth.

The following year the artist created *Albero di 5 metri (5 Meter Tree)*. Like other works in this series, it stems from Penone's ability to see the form of the original tree, trapping it in the wood of planks, beams, and furniture. The "peeling off of the bark" is a process of restoring the form, restoring it to life. The artist tells how, while following the knots in a beam, one can read the layout of the tree's branches toward the sky, and understand how many plants were around it and the scent of the woods from which it was cut.

The artist reconstructs the natural history of the plant, tracing backwards its slow formation: "However," Penone writes, "while this process took me about one month and the person who sees the finished work will spend a moment of visual perception, in reality the process was originally very long. For I consider my work in a certain sense to be like a film sequence, shot in reverse and greatly accelerated. [. . .] What intrigues me most and what I sense as a constant in my poetics is the real time relationship of growth and the personal time of "peeling away the bark."

The digging toward the tree's past seasons corresponds harmoniously to the works involved with the expansion of the form outward, as in *Propagazione (Propagation)*, 1997. Working around a central core, the artist's fingerprints create curved lines that continue in space like waves in the water. However, the fingerprint, which also is natural and individual, like a tree trunk, has a creative will, a demiurgic attitude that shapes nature. In other works such as *Pelle di foglie (Skin of Leaves)*, 2003, the encounter between man and nature becomes a metamorphosis of human and plant bodies, as in a distant memory of classical art, which was able to convey the spell cast over Daphne's body. (EV)