

## Piero Gilardi

(Turin, 1942)

Artist, political militant and tireless theorist, Piero Gilardi undertook his artistic career at the start of the 1960s, first with his pioneering *Macchine per il futuro* and then, from 1965, with his *Tappeti natura* displaying the influence of Pop Art. Exploiting the colourful artificiality of expanded polyurethane, these bas-reliefs reproduce impressions of nature in no more than a few square centimetres: soft, welcoming and playful, they reject the wall and the display stand in order to conquer the space of everyday life and finally interact with the body of the audience, habitually kept at a distance from the work of art. Despite pressure from his gallery, in 1967 Gilardi considered his experience with the *Tappeti* to have come to a conclusion, preferring to devote himself to the production of a number of simpler objects using waste materials. Over this period, he travelled assiduously between Europe and the United States, setting up productive relationships with young artists and curators, driven by the idea of fostering the construction of a network of new process approaches, which in an article at the time he brings together under the definition of 'micro-emotional art'. While he was one of the driving forces behind the Deposito d'arte in Turin and gathered information useful for the planning of the major exhibitions in Amsterdam and Berne in 1969, he came to the decision to abandon the creation of object works in order to break away from a system which he deemed to have become too closely intertwined with the market.

Although for various years this choice was to keep him off the exhibition circuit, Gilardi would continue to place his expressive capacity at the service of people, convinced of the need to "enter real life while acting in an artistic manner." His militancy initially led him to collaborate with spontaneous political formations and counter-cultural youth groups, for which he produced posters and banners of criticism and propaganda. He then focused on the network of psychiatric hospitals in his city, where he set up art-therapy workshops and carried out experiences of collective creation in the outlying areas of the world, such as Native American reserves and African villages. Around the same time, he began to organise his first political street actions on the occasion of the trade union Mayday marches. Documented in the video in the collection *May Days in Turin 1981–2013*, these urban performances view the encounter between protest actions and aesthetic practices thanks to the appearance of masks and costumes worn by participants in response to the most pressing political and economic issues of the day. In the mid-1980s, with the progressive introduction of new technologies, Gilardi believed it fitting to take control of such means of power from a grassroots level and return to the production of objects. This gave rise to his computerised interactive installations and later on the 'Parco Arte Vivente', which opened in Turin in 2008, bringing together his interests in politics, ecology and biotechnologies.

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