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Mario Merz
Igloos

Pirelli HangarBicocca

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Pirelli HangarBicocca

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Exhibition view, Kunsthau Zürich, Zürich, 1985
Courtesy Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2011.M.30). Photo: Balthasar Burkhard

Mario Merz

Igloos

25 October 2018 – 24 February 2019

Curated by Vicente Todolí

In collaboration with Fondazione Merz

Pirelli HangarBicocca



Mario Merz

Mario Merz (Milan, 1925–2003) began his artistic career in the 1940s, at the end of the Second World War. Grown up in Turin, he started studying medicine, but left university to join the Giustizia e Libertà anti-fascist movement in 1945. His political activities earned him a year in prison, where he met the critic Luciano Pistoï (1927–95), who would become a key figure in his early career as an artist. During his reclusion, Merz occupied himself by drawing; his famous spirals, made without ever lifting the pencil off the paper, date from this period.

After his release from prison, he taught himself to draw and subsequently to paint, immersing himself in nature, which became the main subject of his works. In 1954 La Bussola gallery in Turin presented his first solo exhibition, that included a series of paintings featuring Merz's personal style. In close parallels with Informalism and Abstract Impressionism, these works were yet characterized by the elaboration of natural forms, such as leaves and chestnuts. During the same period, Merz met Marisa, an artist herself who became his life partner. At the beginning of the 1960s, he produced in his studio a series of works in which he experimented with what he later defined as "jutting structures": volumetric pieces composed of canvas from which cubic or pyramidal elements emerged, and which were often perforated by neon tubes. Pushing the boundaries between painting and sculpture, these works

Mario Merz during the installation of the exhibition "De Sculptura", Messepalast, Vienna, 1986
 © J. Paul Getty Trust. Courtesy Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2011.M.30).
 Photo: Harald Szeemann

were part of the experimentation also conducted by other artists during the same period to explore the environment and breach two-dimensionality, with the aim of merging different means of expression.

Mario Merz continued his study of three-dimensionality by passing neon tubes through everyday items such as an umbrella, a bottle, or his own raincoat, with the intention of dematerializing the object with the energy of the light that transforms its essence. During the 1960s, he met art historian and critic Germano Celant, who curated in 1968 at Galleria Sperone in Turin the first exhibition in which Merz displayed experimental pieces that broke away from the two-dimensionality of the wall. During the same period, Celant coined the term “Arte Povera” and included Merz in the group of artists that he would present under this name in numerous exhibitions, all sharing the aim to break down the boundaries between nature and culture, and art and life, in the attempt to achieve a subjective understanding of matter and space. At that time, Merz and other artists associated with the Arte Povera group—such as Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Piero Gilardi, Pino Pascali, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Gilberto Zorio—displayed their work in seminal international group exhibitions, including “Op Losse Schroeven” at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, curated by Wim Beeren, and “When Attitudes Become Form”, curated by Harald Szeemann at the Kunsthalle in Bern, both in 1969.

Merz realized his first igloo at the Galleria Arco d’Alibert in Rome in 1968, with the intention of occupying and relating to an autonomous, independent space. Subsequently entitled

Igloo di Giap, the work consists of a hemispherical steel structure covered with metal mesh to which numerous blocks of clay wrapped in plastic bags are attached. A phrase formed by neon tubing spirals set around the outer surface of the structure, from top to bottom, forces the viewer to walk around the artwork in order to read it in its entirety: *Se il nemico si concentra perde terreno se si disperde perde forza Giap* (“If the enemy masses his forces he loses ground if he scatters he loses strength Giap”). From this time onwards, and for the rest of his career, Merz would flank his production of paintings, sculptures and installations with the development of the form of the igloo, intersecting this exploration with all the elements that characterize his poetics, from tables to spirals, the Fibonacci sequence, and the use of the written word.

The Exhibition

The exhibition "Igloos" highlights and outlines the multiple paths that gave rise to a crucial body of works in Merz's oeuvre: the igloos. They represent a form that the artist incessantly probed for almost forty years, reconfiguring it with different materials and elements each time, in an in-depth exploration of the processes of transformation of humankind and nature. A metaphor of the place and space inhabited by humans, the igloo is often composed by a metal frame covered in fragments of the most diverse materials, such as clay, glass, stone, jute, and metal.

Produced in collaboration with Fondazione Merz, the solo show presents over 30 igloos of various sizes and materials, arranged in chronological order (1968–2003) in the Navate space of Pirelli HangarBicocca. The exhibition starts and ends with two igloos displayed separately in the space, due to their unique characteristics: *La goccia d'acqua* (1987), the largest igloo ever made for a museum setting, and *Senza titolo (doppio igloo di Porto)* (1998), characterized by a stag on the top.

This group of works illustrates some of the key features of Merz's practice, including the use of natural and industrial materials, the poetic and evocative presence of the written word, and the dialogue with the surrounding space and its architecture.

Acqua scivola, 1969

Installation view, GNAM – Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, 2017. Courtesy Fondazione Merz, Turin.
Photo: © Silvio Scafoletti



The exhibition takes the form of a unique landscape that draws a comparison between these works to reveal the distinguishing characteristics of each in order to grasp their complexity.

The exhibition's narrative takes its starting point in Merz's early explorations of the igloo to bring out the uniqueness of this imagery and its many facets. It keeps as reference the seminal solo show curated by Harald Szeemann (1933–2005) in 1985 at the Kunsthau in Zürich, which included all the types of igloos made by the artist up until that time, arranged to form a "village", a "town", an "unreal city" in the vast venue. On that occasion, the artist created a dynamic landscape in which the works dialogued with each other according to «a musical canon, a pictorial canon, but also a physiological canon.»

In Merz's oeuvre, the igloo has multiple meanings that change and evolve from one work to the next. While on the one hand it has the function of delimiting a space or a territory—or defining the boundary between inside and outside space—on the other it is a symbol or a metaphor of the human condition and its way of inhabiting the contemporary world. Inside, opposite elements and concepts—light/heavy, bright/dark—coexist to give life to new entities. The igloo is a concise image, whose hemispherical form incorporates the elements of the natural and urban worlds, including light, water, earth, wood, and stones, to transform them into a poetic vision. In each separate instance, the elements and materials used vary according to the site and the context, and are recombined in the subsequent presentation of the same work, thus continuing to change.

In the artist's mind, the igloo combines the contemporary with the archaic, forming an unbroken circle where time is suspended. Defined by Merz using a variety of terms, including hut, dome, tent, womb, cranium, and earth, the igloo embodies a primordial form of architecture that dialogues with the complexity of the social and industrial context of the second half of the 20th century.

The exhibition in Milan pursues the goal defined by Szeemann and Merz, also featuring the igloos conceived in the decades following the 1985 show for fundamental anthological and retrospective exhibitions at international museums and institutions.

1 Igloo di Giap, 1968 [1985 partial reconstruction]

The work is a variation on the first igloo that the artist conceived in 1968 for the group exhibition at Galleria Arco d'Alibert in Rome. In that setting, Merz covered the hemispherical steel structure with blocks of clay wrapped in plastic bags and placed a white neon phrase on top of it, which said: *Se il nemico si concentra perde terreno se si disperde perde forza Giap* ("If the enemy masses his forces he loses ground if he scatters he loses strength Giap"), quoting the Vietcong general Võ Nguyên Giáp (1911–2013), the commander-in-chief of the Vietnam People's Army, and symbol during those years of the struggle against Western imperialism.

The text, in the artist's handwriting, spirals around the hemispherical surface of the work, giving it an existential, almost meditative significance. As Merz explained, «I didn't make



Igloo di Giap, 1968

Installation view, GAM – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, 1970. Photo: Paolo Mussat Sartor

Igloo di Giap in 1968 because I thought that Giap represented a political solution, but because he had a sort of Buddhist perception of war and military life.»

The creation of works of this type introduced important innovations in Merz's practice: the conquest of three-dimensionality through a close relationship with the surrounding architectural space, the use of socio-political mottoes that show the

influence of the cultural climate of the period, and the unstable combination of radically different materials, such as clay and neon, to transform them via a process of abstraction.

The *Igloo di Giap* on display at Pirelli HangarBicocca is the variation of the work made in 1970 for the "Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art" exhibition held at GAM in Turin, for which Merz applied the clay directly to the metal structure, revealing its textural qualities.

2 *Objet cache-toi*, 1968

In 1968, Merz also made *Objet cache-toi*, with which he continued his exploration of the essence and form of the igloo, experimenting with new materials and combinations of meanings. The title cites the neon phrase in capital letters that illuminates the dome of the igloo, formed by a metal structure hung with white fabric buns placed next to each other like bricks.

The expression in French is derived from a slogan against consumerism that appeared on the walls of the Sorbonne University in Paris during the student protests of 1968. Once again, Merz focused on the political and social context, which was undergoing great changes at the time, from which he drew symbols that he recombined in his works.

In *Objet cache-toi*, he underscores the tension that is created between the materiality of the object itself and the phrase that encircles it, urging its dematerialization: «In French *cache-toi objet*, or alternatively *objet cache-toi*, provocatively means "go

away object, hide." [...] *Objet cache-toi* thus means that the object, as such in its triviality, should disappear when confronted with a more concise form. In my opinion, I have made an entirely concise form with my igloo, hence writing the phrase *objet cache-toi* was inevitable.»

3 *Acqua scivola*, 1969

Originally conceived for Merz's solo exhibition at Galleria l'Attico in Rome—a gallery that acted as a beacon for the most experimental art scene of the period—the artist subsequently replicated this work in many variations, always using the materials found *in situ*.

The work is the first igloo made of glass and its transparent effects allow it to establish a direct relationship with the outside space, further developing the concept of the igloo. In Rome, a branch rested against the dome, while in the version of *Acqua Scivola* that the artist presented the same year at "When Attitudes Become Form" group exhibition at the Kunsthalle in Bern, the branch/tree grew inside the igloo, connecting the inside and the outside. The use of glass creates new relationships with the surrounding elements, reflecting the light and the space. The broken panes of glass in particular, temporarily held together with glue, convey a constructional ideal based on a concept of stable precariousness. Merz's habit of making numerous versions of the same work is intrinsic to his artistic production, and he conceives his works in close relationship with the exhibition venue, like something that adapts to a specific time and place. The artist

thus puts each work in a position to renew its meaning, generating new possibilities for interpretation: «In my house, which is the igloo, broken glass represents the height of what provisional can be.»

4 *Igloo di Marisa*, 1972

The exhibition narrative continues with igloos made by Merz for important international exhibitions. They include *Igloo di Marisa*, created in 1972 for documenta 5 in Kassel. Merz covered it with foam-filled bundles of white fabric, over which he piled seven plexiglass boxes arranged in a spiral from top to bottom. The boxes contain neon numbers, from 8 to 144, forming a Fibonacci sequence (a mathematical sequence in which each number is generated by the sum of the two that precede it). Introduced by Leonardo Pisano (ca. 1175–1235), known as Fibonacci, and derived from several laws of nature, the sequence is conceived as a system capable of representing the growth processes of the organic world. The use of this mathematical system in Merz's work reflects his interest in the constant transformation of the physical universe, characterized by proliferation.

Merz introduced the Fibonacci sequence to his artistic practice in the early 1970s. He initially applied it in relation to the architecture of the exhibition venues, creating a dialogue with the specific features of each setting, and subsequently incorporated it in his igloos. Emblematic of this *modus operandi* is the series made respectively for the spiral architecture of the Guggenheim Museum in New York in



1971 and for his first institutional exhibition, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 1972, where the artist arranged the neon numbers along the stairs, next to the lifts and along the ceiling.

5 *Is space bent or straight?, 1973*

Like *Acqua Scivola*, this work is also made from glass, which became a recurrent constructional feature of Merz's igloos. The artist used broken panes of glass, attaching them to the steel structure with glue and clamps—the latters, tools used by metalworkers and craftsmen—introducing a reference to the worlds of industry and work.

Inside the igloo is a typewriter used by Merz and Emilio Prini (1943–2016) for a performance during which the two men sat inside the igloo reading, writing and speaking, effectively making it a place for living and relating to others. The space of the work thus becomes a room in which everyday activities are performed and through which the artist redefines the boundaries between inside and outside, and between art and life.

The title introduces a further level of meaning and refers to some of the artist's thoughts on space and architectural principles of construction, highlighting the way in which the flat surface of the rectangular pieces of glass follows the igloo's curved form.

Igloo di Marisa, 1972

Installation view, documenta 5, Kassel, 1972. Courtesy Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2011.M.30)



Is space bent or straight?, 1973

Mario Merz in the exhibition space, Berlin Kunstmesse, Berlin, 1973.

Photo: Angelika Platen

6 *Auf dem Tisch, der hineinstösst in das Herz des Iglu*, 1974

During the 1970s, Merz expanded his vocabulary with the theme of the table, a domestic and architectonic element symbolizing conviviality, which also became part of the igloo-house. A glass dome, *Auf dem Tisch, der hineinstösst in das Herz des Iglu* ("On the table that penetrates the heart of the igloo") is pierced by a long triangular table that intersects it asymmetrically. In this work the artist contrasts the horizontal top of the table with the bowed lines of the hemisphere, probing the relationship between linear and curved spaces. On the one hand, the pointed tip of the

table breaks into the volume of the igloo; on the other, it projects it towards the outside space. As in many other works, this penetration of elements marks the return of the concept of traversing, or rather the way in which an object, such as a table, a spear, or even a neon tube, is inserted in another element, upsetting its balance and introducing tensions and energies that give rise to new meanings.

7 *Senza titolo*, 1978

This work features one of the most important symbols of Merz's poetics: the spear. Like the neon tubing, the spear is a metaphor for speed and vital energy, and is often used by the artist to penetrate elements or works and to alter their balance. At the same time, it evokes an archaic age for it is the archetype of the combat weapon and hunting implement. In this case the spear is created with a cone of wax from which a rough wood pole branch emerges. Stick in the wooden floor at the entrance to the igloo, it relates to the Fibonacci sequence arranged on the metal mesh.

8 *Evidenza di 987*, 1978 [2018 partial reconstruction]

This large igloo demarcates and delineates the space by means of the curved steel lines that form its sixteen segments. Several panes of broken glass cover its surface, attached by clamps with red grips—the same color as the car door incorporated in the structure of igloo.

The automobile is a recurrent feature of the artist's work. In 1969, Merz presented his own car pierced by a neon tube in his solo exhibition at Galleria l'Attico in Rome, at that time hosted in a garage. The car was a powerful symbol in the social imaginary of that period, an icon of development of the industrial universe; for Turin in particular, where the artist lived and worked, it was a means of profound transformation of the urban environment and society.

The car door appears as a sort of fossil, a remnant from another temporal era: «Here there is the contrast between random forms—the broken pieces of glass—and a non-random form—the car door. However, the position of the door is random because it's as though it has been hurled into space by an unforeseen event, such as an earthquake or an accident. A car door hurled into space, into the void, without a reason.»

9 *If the hoar frost grip thy tent Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent, 1978*

Language and the written word represent another crucial aspect in Merz's poetics. *If the hoar frost grip thy tent Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent* is emblematic of the artist's interest in poetry and literature, and particularly of his deep knowledge of the work of Ezra Pound (1885–1972). The phrase is taken from *The Pisan Cantos*, written by the American poet while he was imprisoned in a camp near Pisa in 1945. The quotation "If the hoar frost grip thy tent / Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent" is written in the artist's handwriting, in blue neon around the entire circumference of the igloo, which



If the hoar frost grip thy tent Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent, 1978
Installation view, Bernier Gallery, Athens, 1978

is covered with a metal mesh that allows the internal space to be glimpsed. Merz pays tribute to the poet by embodying the phrase in a script that recalls the transient and precarious nature of the human condition.

10 *Luoghi senza strada, 1979*

Completely closed to the outside space, this igloo is covered with tar, a material usually used for the construction of roads due to its agglomerative properties. The notion of the contemporary



city is reinforced by a neon phrase on one side of the work which declares: *Luoghi senza strada* ("Places without streets").

Made for an important solo exhibition at the Museum Folkwang in Essen, this work highlights the artist's ceaseless exploration of the modulation of materials and their combinations to probe the relationships between the individual and society. In this case, the work does not relate to the surrounding space but is conceived as a self-supporting structure in a self-referential context.

11 *Architettura fondata dal tempo, architettura sfondata dal tempo, 1981*

"Time-based architecture, time-debased architecture": the title of this igloo evokes the theme of architecture, which plays a central role in Merz's reflections on space. As the artist explains: «The history of architecture is the history of humankind through time; on the one hand, a history of construction and assertion of our dominion over nature (from the heart to the city), on the other, a history of destruction and ruin (the edges of the broken panes of spray-painted glass conjure up precarious traces of vanished backgrounds, worn-away images).»

A complex installation, the artwork comprises three different elements: an imposing igloo, measuring six meters across, made of broken panes of glass painted red, blue, yellow and black, and intersected by a large white canvas depicting a prehistoric animal and connected to a tubular metal structure. Next to it is another circular metal structure containing a pile of bundles of twigs, which together recall the shape of a nest.

Merz never completely abandoned painting, and it re-emerged in his work during the 1980s, when he returned to depicting animals and natural subjects on large canvases.

In this interpenetration of igloo and canvas, the artist merges two of the main recurrent questions of his artistic career: the attempt to represent reality through both figurative painting and the very objects that compose it.

12 *Tenda di Gheddafi, 1981*

During the same year, Merz made *Tenda di Gheddafi* for the seminal group exhibition "Identité Italienne. L'art en Italie depuis 1959," curated by Germano Celant at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. It is the only igloo completely covered with canvas, where installation and painting blend, creating a three-dimensional painting.

«I wanted it to be a tent and to remain a hemisphere, but to evoke the model of a legendary tent, and so I painted it. I covered it with cones, with the tip facing downwards, with a figure that is somewhere between a spatial object and a cutting object, between the tree and the soul of the tree, its spirit.» These words reveal the return of the symbol of the cone-spear, which is depicted on every segment of the hemisphere in shades of red, white and blue, represented both as a single element and in the form of intersecting cones.

Pages 22-23: *Architettura fondata dal tempo, architettura sfondata dal tempo, 1981*

Installation view, Galleria Tucci Russo, Turin, 1981. Photo: Enzo Ricci



Tenda di Gheddafi, 1981

Mario Merz in the exhibition space, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1981.

Photo: © Nanda Lanfranco

13 *Igloo del Palacio de las Alhajas, 1982*

Made for the “Correspondencias: 5 Arquitectos, 5 Escultores” exhibition curated by the artist Juan Muñoz (1953–2001), who was for a short period Merz’s assistant, this igloo was displayed at the Palacio de las Alhajas in Madrid, whose architecture is characterized by an imposing glass ceiling. During the 1980s Merz made increasingly articulated igloos, incorporating different variables in his works and giving complexity to

the perfect equilibrium of the hemispherical form. On this occasion he made a structure covered with glass and several stones, enclosed in a similar one, thus creating one of the first double igloos. Horizontally and vertically piled bundles of twigs are placed in the cavity between the domes to emphasize the boundary between the two transparent structures. The artist thus establishes a dialogue with the architectural setting in which he presents the work, in this case choosing a material like glass, which creates a play of reflected light accentuated by the glass ceiling of the Palacio de las Alhajas.

14 *Hoarded centuries to pull up a mass of algae and pearls, 1983*

Already in its title, this work recalls Ezra Pound, whose oeuvre as Merz himself declared, «has a powerful poetic influence on my work; many of my thoughts are still derived from his thought.» Internally, the double igloo is composed of a metal mesh “painted” with a layer of sulfur, while the exterior is covered with panes of glass secured by clamps. In this work Merz focuses on the concept of time and his circular vision of temporality. Indeed, Pound’s phrase evokes a stratified time and elements (algae and pearls) that belong to history before the appearance of humankind. The use of sulfur conjures up an archaic dimension, as it is a mineral present in the deepest layers of the earth, but it is also extracted and processed by humans for various purposes.

15 *Chiaro oscuro / oscuro chiaro*, 1983

Merz used this double oxymoron ("Light dark / dark light") to symbolize the opposition of light, and thus openness—an igloo made of glass secured by clamps and resting on blocks of clay—and dark—a larger one completely covered with bundles of twigs. On the opposite sides of the two igloos—as if the day and the night were intersecting—illuminated by neon writing are the words *chiaro* and *oscuro* respectively further unveiling this dichotomy, also recalled in the artist's words: «The igloo is created by contrasts: light/dark, inside/outside, light and heavy material. They are the contradictions that humanity experiences on Earth and in life.»

16 *La casa del giardiniere*, 1983–84 + 1985

This work exemplifies the transformative approach that Merz implements in his works. Indeed, the igloo is modified on occasion of different exhibitions until taking on its current form. While the main structure—the hemisphere constituted by a canvas painted in shades of red, white and grey—endures over time, the last segment of the igloo is gradually modified: initially covered in clay, subsequently removed to be replaced by the neon phrase *vento preistorico dalle montagne gelate* ("prehistoric wind from the icy mountains"), then also replaced by slabs of beeswax that incorporate two pinecones and a metal element.

17 *Senza titolo*, 1984

Three igloos merge like Chinese boxes that appear infinitely multiplied by the reflections of the panes of glass. This work leads the eye from the inside to the outside space. The proliferation of the hemispheres is picked up by the neon Fibonacci numbers placed in two opposite points on each igloo, commencing with the number one on the internal igloo and reaching number eight on the external one. In contrast to the glass, blocks of clay are placed at the base of the structure to create a dividing line.

18 *Noi giriamo intorno alle case o le case girano intorno a noi?*, 1977 [1985 reconstruction]

This work is unique in its use of a lamp that projects a beam of light, which is propagated through the long row of broken glass panes. The light becomes dimmer inside the igloo, which is made from stones held together by clamps. The work embodies a crucial question for Merz in relation to the experience of the architectural space and physically enacts the perception of distance: «There were also dusty panes of glass, found at a glazier's, which I framed with glue. The glue made them into a very heavy type of material as opposed to the concept of glass, which is light and transparent. The light positioned behind this stack of glass panes softened them and at the same time became very distant.»



Noi giriamo intorno alle case o le case girano intorno a noi?, 1977
[1985 reconstruction]
Installation view, Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière, Paris, 1987.
Photo: © Salvatore Licitra

19 Senza titolo, 1985

Made for his solo exhibition in Zürich in 1985, *Senza titolo* is composed of two igloos intersected by a long row of stacks of newspapers and interspersed with panes of glass, on which neon Fibonacci numbers are arranged. Both glass fragments and numbers are also positioned on the outer structure of the igloo and generate multiple references between the hemispherical forms and the longitudinal row, thus creating the illusion of continuously expanding trajec-

tories. The artist explained the choice of this media: «I use stacks of newspapers not because they form cubes, but because they are a reproduction of a series of words and thoughts, a series of the same newspaper.»

20 Sentiero per qui, 1986

In this work, Merz once again uses newspapers as a medium, here employed to express the idea of the transmission of information. Realized for the 17th Milan Triennale, *Sentiero per qui* is composed of an igloo made from metal, stones, and glass intersected by a long “path” of newspapers made from piled copies of the *Corriere della Sera*. The newspapers become a further manifestation of the concept of progression, reinforced here by a Fibonacci sequence, from 1 to 233, that runs along the entire row. This proliferation is expressed through a material associated with industrial society to create «an authentic modern landscape.»

21 La goccia d'acqua, 1987

This work is part of the series of igloos which the artist has conceived since the early 1980s and presented inside very distinctive architectural settings—in this case the CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, a former warehouse for colonial goods.

Following pages: Mario Merz during the installation of *La goccia d'acqua*, CAPC musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux, 1987. Photo: Frédéric Delpech



La goccia d'acqua is the largest igloo that Merz ever made for an indoor space. Measuring 10 meters across, the hemispherical metal structure is entirely covered with panes of glass of various sizes dotted with neon numbers. The work is made even more imposing by a 26-meter-long triangular table that runs right through the igloo and whose end is fitted with a tap, from which water rhythmically drips into a bucket.

The work also highlights Merz's constant interest in science and the laws of physics: «In physics, the phenomenon of the drop of water is explained using the notion of "surface tension". This tension is the force of cohesion that holds together a drop of water or a drop of mercury. It is not possible to understand my igloos without this concept of surface tension, which distinguishes inside from outside. This phenomenon is so important for me that I have entitled the biggest igloo that I have built so far *La goccia d'acqua*. In the igloo, internal space and external space are equivalent.»

22 *La pianta della vite nella sfera occidentale, 1991*
[2018 reconstruction]

Natural materials are predominant in this work too. The bundles of vines resting against the metal structure and arranged at different angles, seem to support themselves. A funnel—generally used to transfer liquids, such as wine—is placed among the bundles, evoking the idea of transferral or passage between inside and outside.

23 *Senza titolo, 1991*

Stone is another recurrent natural element of the igloos realized during the 1990s. In this case, Merz creates the work by arranging slabs of stone vertically and horizontally, producing a form that recalls the concept of house and shelter by employing a material that is traditionally used for houses.

24 *74 gradini riappaiono in una crescita di geometria concentrica, 1992*

Merz has conceived igloos as structures for both indoor and outdoor spaces, for installation in urban and natural settings. *74 gradini riappaiono in una crescita di geometria concentrica* is presented in Pirelli HangarBicocca outdoor area, and is constituted by eight structures formed by blocks of stones that are connected to each other by metal rods, creating a landscape of igloos. Merz described the relationship between landscape and sculpture as «the only possibility of moving away from traditional sculpture. For me, the landscape is a huge sculpture and this is why I believe it is necessary to use it in some way in my work.»

25 *Senza titolo, 1994*

In this work the artist has arranged squared slabs of white marble one on top of the other, leaving only a few areas empty and conveying a sense of instability. The elements are connected by a Fibonacci sequence that runs vertically over the dome, evoking the concept of the terrestrial coordinates of longitude.

26 *Luoghi senza strada*, 1994

Merz revives the poetic expression *Luoghi senza strada* ("Places without streets"), writing it in blue neon on the igloo covered with black slabs of slate and granite. Consequently, visitors have to walk around the work to read the writing, making a mental action physical.

27 *Le case girano intorno a noi o noi giriamo intorno alle case?*, 1994

This metal and glass igloo precariously rests on rectangular stone slabs arranged in a circle on the floor. Red neon words are placed on each of the slabs, forming the writing *Le case girano intorno a noi o noi giriamo intorno alle case?* ("Do we go around houses, or do houses go around us?"), a recurrent question in the artist's poetic. Inside is a second igloo made from different types of stones laying on the floor or supported by clamps in the upper part of the structure.

28 *Zeus Lanze*, 1995

In this work, the concept of the spear is fully embodied by the red neon tube that pierces the precarious structure of the igloo, made from a few panes of glass and painted stones. The tension is emphasized by the title of the work, which recalls Zeus' lightning bolt, intensifying the concept of energy.

29 *Senza titolo (Foglie d'oro)*, 1997

Made from a layer of wax, fragments of gold leaf and dry leaves that adhere to a thin nylon fabric stretched over the metal structure, the igloo *Senza titolo (Foglie d'oro)* creates a dialogue with the light surrounding it, which it simultaneously absorbs and reflects. This igloo stands out from the rest of Merz's artistic production in its use of precious and delicate materials.

30 *Senza titolo (doppio igloo di Porto)*, 1998

Animals are a recurrent theme of Merz's poetics and also feature in the vocabulary of the igloos. Their symbolism evokes an archaic and primitive dimension. In the case of *Senza titolo (doppio igloo di Porto)*, made for his solo exhibition at the Fundação de Serralves in Oporto in 1999, the artist created the piece for the museum park. The work directly refers to the natural environment through both the use of bundles of twigs arranged vertically on the internal igloo, and the imposing presence of a stuffed stag on the top of the second structure, on whose side a neon Fibonacci number—10946—intensifies the expressive power of the installation.

31 *Spostamenti della terra e della luna su un asse, 2003*

This work was made for a solo exhibition at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil, in 2003. For this context Merz combines for the first time a double glass igloo with a stone igloo. The triple igloo conceived by the artist is composed respectively of two concentric structures covered with fragments of glass secured by clamps and a third hemispherical construction to which stones from Brazil are attached. The double glass igloo is also characterized by three neon tubes that start from the center of the hemisphere piercing the surface outwards.

A *Numeri di Fibonacci, 2002*

The exhibition also includes a Fibonacci sequence of neon numbers strewn in height along the 100 meters of the bridge crane of the Navate exhibition space, giving rhythm and unity to the exhibition space.

Main Exhibitions

Many renowned institutions in Italy and abroad have presented solo exhibitions of the work of Mario Merz (Milan, 1925–2003), including: Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2011); Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin, GAM–Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin and Fondazione Merz, Turin (2005); Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo (2003); Fundação de Serralves, Oporto (1999); Galleria Civica d'Arte Contemporanea, Trento (1995); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1994); Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (1993); Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato (1990); Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin (1990); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1989); MoCA Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1989); ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts), Nagoya (1988); Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière, Paris (1987); CAPC musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (1987); Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster (1985); Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich (1985); Palazzo dei Congressi e delle Esposizioni, San Marino (1983); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1983); ARC Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (1981); Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (1981); Whitechapel Gallery, London (1980); Museum Folkwang, Essen (1979); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (1979); ICA Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1975); Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (1975); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1972). His work has also been displayed at numerous editions of Venice Biennale (1997, 1986, 1980, 1978, 1976, 1972), and documenta, Kassel (1992, 1982, 1977, 1972).

This publication accompanies the exhibition “Iglu” by Mario Merz

Lenders

Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino - Deposito a lungo termine Fondazione Marco Rivetti; Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino; Colección Fundación ARCO / IFEMA - Depósito CA2M; Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Collezione Merz; Galerie Tschudi, Zuz / Switzerland; Galleria Giorgio Persano; Herbert Foundation, Ghent; Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; “la Caixa” Collection. Contemporary Art; Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano - Deposito Art Collection EFG Private Banking; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma; Mart - Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Rovereto; Sammlung Fischer; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie; TATE And all those who prefer to remain anonymous

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List of the exhibited works

1 **Igluo di Giap, 1968**

[1985 partial reconstruction]
[Giap's igloo]
metal structure, clay, neon
Ø 200 cm
Collezione Merz

2 **Objet cache-toi, 1968**

[Hide, object]
metal structure, fabric, neon
Ø 200 cm
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg

3 **Acqua scivola, 1969**

[Glide, water]
metal structure, branch, glass, glue
Ø 200 cm
Collezione Merz

4 **Igluo di Marisa, 1972**

[Marisa's igloo]
metal structure, fabric, neon,
plexiglas
Ø 300 cm
Private collection

5 **Is space bent or straight?, 1973**

metal structure, clamps, glass, glue,
typewriter
Ø 200 cm
Collezione Merz

6 **Auf dem Tisch, der hineinstösst in das Herz des Iglu, 1974**

[On the table that penetrates the heart of the igloo]
igloo: metal structure, clamps,
glass, glue
Ø 400 cm
table: metal structure, wood
45 x 1240 x 350 cm
overall dimensions: ca. 200 x 1450
x 400 cm
Collezione Merz

7 **Senza titolo, 1978**

[Untitled]
wooden base, metal structure,
metal mesh, wax, neon,
cone of wax, branch
wooden base: 6 x Ø 320 cm
igloo: Ø 300 cm
cone of wax and branch: h 131 cm
Private collection

8 **Evidenza di 987, 1978**

[2018 partial reconstruction]
[Evidence of 987]
igloo: metal structure, clamps,
glass, car door
Ø 600 cm
canvas: mixed media on canvas,
branches
210 x 1730 cm
Collezione Merz

9 **If the hoar frost grip thy tent Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent, 1978**

metal structure, metal mesh, neon
Ø 400 cm
Herbert Foundation, Ghent

10 **Luoghi senza strada, 1979**

[Places without streets]
metal structure, tar sheath, neon
Ø 300 cm
Collection Van Abbemuseum,
Eindhoven

11 **Architettura fondata dal tempo, architettura sfondata dal tempo, 1981**

[Time-based architecture, time-debased architecture]
igloo: metal structure, clamps,
painted glass, stones
Ø 600 cm
canvas: metal structure, mixed
media on canvas, neon
265 x 480 x 20 cm
nest: metal structure, mixed media
on glass, twigs
100 x Ø 320 cm
Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte
Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino.
Deposito a lungo termine Fondazione
Marco Rivetti

12 **Tenda di Gheddafi, 1981**

[Qaddafi's tent]
metal structure, mixed media on jute,
spring clamps
Ø 500 cm
Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte
Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino

13 **Igluo del Palacio de las Alhajas, 1982**

[Igloo of the Palacio de las Alhajas]
metal structure, clamps, glass,
stones, twigs, quartz stone, sand
internal igloo: Ø 400 cm
external igloo: Ø 600 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte
Reina Sofía, Madrid

14 **Hoarded centuries to pull up a mass of algae and pearls, 1983**

metal structure, clamps, glass,
metal mesh, sulfur, neon
internal igloo: Ø 200 cm
external igloo: Ø 400 cm
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Düsseldorf. Acquired in 2004,
formerly Collection Ackermans

15 **Chiaro oscuro / oscuro chiaro, 1983**

[Light dark / dark light]
metal structure, clamps, glass,
twigs, neon, clay, concrete
light igloo: Ø 400 cm
dark igloo: Ø 600 cm
overall dimensions: ca. 300 x 900
x 600 cm
Rovereto, Mart - Museo di arte
moderna e contemporanea di Trento
e Rovereto

16 **La casa del giardinere, 1983-84+1985**

[The gardener's house]
metal structure, mixed media on
canvas, wax, pines, snail, metal
object
Ø 400 cm
Galleria Giorgio Persano

17 **Senza titolo, 1984**

[Untitled]
metal structure, clamps, glass,
neon, clay
internal igloo: Ø 200 cm
central igloo: Ø 400 cm
external igloo: Ø 600 cm
MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti
del XXI secolo, Roma

18 *Noi giriamo intorno alle case o le case girano intorno a noi?*, 1977
[1985 reconstruction]
[Do we go around houses, or do houses go around us?]
igloo: metal structure, clamps, stones
Ø 500 cm
triangular structure: metal structure, glass, glue, lightbox
61 x 600 x 102 cm (without glass)
overall dimensions: ca. 255 x 1050 x 500 cm
TATE: acquired in 1990

19 *Senza titolo*, 1985
[Untitled]
metal structure, rubber, glass, newspapers, neon
internal igloo: Ø 400 cm
external igloo: Ø 600 cm
Collezione Merz

20 *Sentiero per qui*, 1986
[Path to here]
metal structure, clamps, stones, glass, newspapers, neon
igloo: Ø 400 cm
overall dimensions: ca. 250 x 1400 x 400 cm
"la Caixa" Collection. Contemporary Art

21 *La goccia d'acqua*, 1987
[The drop of water]
igloo: metal structure, clamps, glass, neon
Ø 1000 cm
table: metal structure, iron, bucket, hydraulic pump, tap, water
80 x 2600 x 440 cm
overall dimensions: ca. 500 x 2600 x 1000 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie

22 *La pianta della vite nella sfera occidentale*, 1991
[2018 reconstruction]
[The vine in the Western sphere]
metal structure, twigs, cone of wax, funnel
Ø 300 cm
Collezione Merz

23 *Senza titolo*, 1991
[Untitled]
metal structure, clamps, stones
Ø 300 cm
Collezione Merz

24 *74 gradini riappaiono in una crescita di geometria concentrica*, 1992
[74 steps re-appear in a growth of concentric geometry]
metal rods, stones
8 igloos: Ø ca. 420 cm each
overall dimensions variable
Courtesy Galerie Tschudi, Zuzo / Switzerland

25 *Senza titolo*, 1994
[Untitled]
metal structure, clamps, marble, neon
Ø 300 cm
Colección Fundación ARCO / IFEMA.
Depósito CA2M

26 *Luoghi senza strada*, 1994
[Places without streets]
metal structure, clamps, slate, neon
Ø 400 cm
Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano. Deposito Art Collection EFG Private Banking

27 *Le case girano intorno a noi o noi giriamo intorno alle case?*, 1994
[Do we go around houses, or do houses go around us?]
metal structure, clamps, glass, stones, slate, neon
internal igloo: Ø 300 cm
external igloo: Ø 600 cm
overall dimensions: ca. 300 x 900 cm
Collezione Merz

28 *Zeus Lanze*, 1995
[Zeus' spear]
metal structure, clamps, glass, mixed media on stones, neon
Ø 300 cm
Sammlung Fischer

29 *Senza titolo (Foglie d'oro)*, 1997
[Untitled (gold leaves)]
metal structure, nylon mesh, wax, gold leaf, leaves
Ø 300 cm
Collezione Merz

30 *Senza titolo (doppio igloo di Porto)*, 1998
[Untitled (double igloo of Oporto)]
metal structure, clamps, twigs, taxidermied animal, neon
internal igloo: Ø 300 cm
external igloo: Ø 800 cm
overall dimensions: 620 x Ø 800
Collezione Merz

31 *Spostamenti della terra e della luna su un asse*, 2003
[Shifts of the earth and the moon around an axis]
metal structure, clamps, stones, glass, neon, clay
stone igloo: Ø 500 cm
internal igloo: Ø 300 cm
external igloo: Ø 600 cm
overall dimensions: 250 x 1000 x 600 cm
Collezione Merz

A *Numeri di Fibonacci*, 2002
[Fibonacci's numbers]
neon (1 – 144 series)
Collezione Merz



Senza titolo (doppio igloo di Porto), 1998
 Installation view, Fundação de Serralves, Oporto, 1999.
 Courtesy Fondazione Merz, Turin. Photo: Rita Burmester

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and discovery covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and facilitators are on hand to help the general public connect with the art. Since 2013, Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: **Shed**, **Navate**, and **Cubo**.

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