



Exhibition

Giuseppe Penone. *Sap and thought*

BnF | François-Mitterrand | Galerie 2
12th october 2021 - 23rd january 2022

The Bibliothèque nationale de France is hosting the Italian artist Giuseppe Penone, a key figure in contemporary art, for his first major exhibition in Paris since 2013.

Penone, whose work is a vital, poetic examination of humankind's links with nature, has created *Pensieri e linfa (Sap and Thought)* specially for the occasion, a spectacular installation based on the imprint of a tree trunk, on either side of which the artist has added a text in his own hand. Facing this emblematic work, previously unseen monumental pieces are on display alongside drawings, photographs, bibliophiles' books and artists' books, as well as an outstanding series of 18 prints recently created by Penone, who has gifted them to the Library. The free rein given here to one of our era's major artists is an invitation for visitors to immerse themselves in his unique body of work and reflect on his writings and notions of traces, time and memory, all in perfect resonance with the BnF's heritage collections and missions.

Penone, a major figure on the international art scene

Born in 1947 in Gressio, a little rural municipality in the Italian Piedmont, Giuseppe Penone studied sculpture at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Turin. At the age of 21, he carried out a series of interventions on a young tree's process of growth. This inaugural work was noticed by the critic Germano Celant, who associated the young artist with the Arte Povera movement, which advocated a form of art freed from traditional practices and materials, seeing the creative process as more important than the finished object.

Penone became interested in the possibilities of bronze very early on in his career, as well as in bodily imprints as memory and matrices of his works. His practice, with its underlying idea of interdependence between nature and culture, combines formal explorations or natural materials (wood, bronze, marble, stone, acacia thorns, etc.) and fragments or imprints of bodies.

Enjoying a worldwide reputation, winner of the highly prestigious Praemium Imperiale, the artist represented Italy at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and was the subject of a retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2004, followed by an exhibition of his monumental sculptures at the Château de Versailles in 2013.

Memory and writing at the heart of a unique body of work

Giuseppe Penone's work has always examined the relationship between nature and culture, but his thoughts on writing, traces and memory are less well-known. It is no surprise, therefore, that the BnF has invited the artist to present his body of work from this angle, so echoing the Library's collections and missions and the François-Mitterrand site's symbolism and architectural characteristics.

Created especially for the exhibition that bears its name, *Pensieri e linfa (Sap and Thought)* is its centrepiece : a spectacular installation formed by frottage, rubbing a 30-metre-long acacia tree trunk on a length of fine linen canvas with a manuscript text by the artist running either side of the trunk's imprint in regular sequences, like the pages of an open book.

Penone's text has been translated into French by Jean-Christophe Bailly, the author of numerous writings on art as well as stories, poetry and plays. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to hear extracts from the translation, read by Jean-Christophe Bailly himself.

Branching out from the *Sap and Thought* installation, the itinerary reveals a network of filiations between chronologically distanced works, with the evolution of forms and proposals highlighting the themes recurring in them. There are a number of works on exhibition for the first time, including the twelve monumental *Alberi libro* (12 Book Trees sculpted in the form of open books) and the arresting series of four large finger paintings *Leaves of grass*, inspired by the first edition of Walt Whitman's poetry collection. "Historical" works such as the frottage of a tree trunk *Verde del Bosco (Forest Green)* from 1986, sculptures, including *Pensieri di foglie (Thoughts of Leaves)* and *A Occhi chiusi (With Eyes Closed)*, and a group of graphic items (drawings, photographs, prints and artistes' books), mostly from the BnF's collections, bring fresh light to bear on the close ties that Giuseppe Penone has forged with writing and the imagery of books.

The Giuseppe Penone exhibition forms part of a valorisation and mediation policy initiated by the BnF almost 40 years ago in order to present the works of great contemporary artists whose creations it conserves (prints and artist's books for the most part). Previous exhibitions in the same vein include: "Georg Baselitz, sculptures et gravures monumentales" (1985) ; "Louise Bourgeois, estampes" (1995) ; "Tàpies ou la poétique de la matière" (2001) ; "Aurélie Nemours. Estampes" (2001) ; "Geneviève Asse, la pointe de l'œil" (2002) ; "Soulages, l'œuvre imprimé" (2003) ; "Les Impressions de Pierre Alechinsky" (2005) ; "Zao Wou-Ki, estampes et livres illustrés" (2008) ; "Richard Prince, American Prayer" (2011) ; "La chambre de sublimation. Dessins de Matthew Barney" (2013) ; "Anselm Kiefer. L'alchimie du livre" (2015) and "Miquel Barceló. Sol y sombre" (2016).

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BnF | François-Mitterrand
Quai François Mauriac, Paris XIII^e

Tuesday to Saturday 10 a.m. > 7 p.m.
Sundays 1 p.m. > 7 p.m.
Closed on Mondays and public holidays

Admission 9 euros, reduced rate 7 euros – reservation recommended on bnf.tickeasy.com and via the FNAC network

Free admission for Reading/Culture and Research Pass holders – reservation recommended on bnf.tickeasy.com

The health pass is needed to access the exhibition

Curatorship

Marie Minssieux-Chamonard, Curator at the Rare Books Reserve, BnF

Cécile Pocheau-Lesteven, Curator at the Department of Prints and Photography, BnF

Publication

Giuseppe Penone. *Sève et pensée* (exhibition catalogue)

112 pages, 39 euros, BnF Éditions

Giuseppe Penone. *Sève et pensée* (text of the work created for the exhibition, translated by Jean-Christophe Bailly)

64 pages, 15 euros, BnF Éditions

In partnership with ARTE, Télérama, La Croix, Beaux-Arts Magazine and France Culture

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