

IKON

Exhibition Guide

Giovanni Anselmo

Where the stars are coming
one span closer
in the panorama towards *oltremare*
with the hand pointing to it,
while colour lifts the stone,
the stone lifts the canvas,
earth and stone find their bearings,
the greys become lighter,
the paths guide,
the light focuses,
one enters the work,
the lettuce is always fresh,
the sea sponge breathes,
the aura of painting appears,
the invisible shows itself ...

1 February – 28 March 2005

First & Second Floor Galleries

“I, the world, things, life – we are all situations of energy. The point is not to fix the situations, but to keep them open and alive – like life processes. Because... to work with energy requires total freedom in choosing materials.” Giovanni Anselmo

This is the first solo exhibition in the UK by the major Italian artist Giovanni Anselmo. It comprises a variety of work, using a range of media, created over the last forty years. Although the artist works predominantly with sculptural forms, suspended from the gallery walls and arranged on the floor, the show also includes drawings, photography and slide projections, as well as a new piece of artwork commissioned by Ikon.

Anselmo was born in Turin, Italy in 1934. Through the 1960s he worked as a graphic designer, producing art in his spare time. From the late 1960s – 1970s he became

involved in *Arte Povera*, an Italian avant-garde art movement. Literally translated as 'poor art', it encouraged the creation of artwork in radical new ways and provided an identity for a number of young Italian artists based in Turin, Milan, Genoa and Rome. The main emphasis for these artists was experimenting with the properties of ordinary objects and materials. Despite the international critical success, most of the artists involved in *Arte Povera* struggled to find buyers for their work. Anselmo was no exception, although the benefits of this meant that his most influential work was created without compromise.

In 1965 Anselmo witnessed the sun rise on Stromboli, a volcanic island in Italy. This was a defining moment which marked the beginning of his life as 'an artist'. Stromboli itself is a meeting place of the elements – fire, air, earth and water. It is one of the most active volcanoes on earth, therefore inherently unstable. Anselmo was suddenly aware of being a part of the natural forces of the world. "What could not be seen, whether it was gravity or magnetic fields, determined what could be seen. Anselmo's art set out to make this invisible visible." (Robert Lumley, *Arte Povera: Movements in Modern Art*)

Anselmo utilises everyday materials including earth, stone, leather and perspex. They are often brought together in unusual combinations, gaining dramatic power by combining ephemeral, or temporary elements, with the strength of machine quarried stone slabs. His interests centre on concepts such as time, gravity and light. By exploring the quality of nature and the elements, he exploits natural forces and the potential energy of materials.

One of Anselmo's best known works, *Senza Titolo, (Eating Structure)* 1968, involves the crushing of a lettuce between a large standing block of granite and a smaller stone, which is held together by a wire. If the lettuce is allowed to dry out it will shrink, causing the wire to lose tension and the stone to fall. Therefore, the structure must be continually 'fed' with fresh lettuce so that the wire remains tight.

The artist's new work, *Where the stars are coming one span closer..., or Here and There*, 2004, is an interactive piece which has been commissioned by Ikon. A number of granite blocks are scattered throughout the galleries and the audience is encouraged to stand on them. In doing so, they become grounded as part of the work and yet at the same time, they are literally closer to the stars. As a result, Anselmo puts the viewer in two places at once, a common theme throughout his work. This is again demonstrated in his early photograph, *Entrare nell'opera (Into the Work)*, 1971, which shows the artist running into the landscape, snapped using the camera's time-delay mechanism. The artist is both 'here' behind the camera and taking the shot, and 'there', appearing in the image.