



Consolato Generale d'Italia  
Johannesburg

Press release | Rome, 16 October 2023

The Consulate General of Italy in Johannesburg

*presents*

## **ARTE POVERA 1967-1971**

curated by **Ilaria Bernardi**

**Johannesburg, Wits Art Museum**

**31 October – 9 December 2023**

### **First exhibition on Arte Povera on the African continent kicks off to celebrate 56 years since its definition**

On 27 September 1967 in Genoa, at Galleria La Bertesca, Germano Celant presented the exhibition *Arte povera Im-spazio*; on that occasion he coined the definition of Arte Povera to indicate, he wrote in the catalog, the linguistic process of some Italian artists that “consists in removing, eliminating, reducing to minimum terms, impoverishing signs, in order to reduce them to their archetypes.”

The exhibition *Arte Povera 1967-1971*, curated by Ilaria Bernardi at the Wits Art Museum in Johannesburg and promoted by the Consulate General of Italy in Johannesburg, intends to celebrate 56 years since that first exhibition in 1967. *Arte Povera 1967-1971* is **the first Arte Povera exhibition on the African Continent and the first Arte Povera exhibition after its theorizer, Germano Celant, passed away in 2020**; thus, its crucial historical meaning.

Working closely with both the artists, or their archives, and important collectors and museums who were available to lend their works, the exhibition includes historical works by the 13 artists who, following insertions and removals after 1967, are now viewed as being the recognized exponents of Arte Povera: **Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, Gilberto Zorio.**

Rather than proposing a general retrospective on the research of the 13 artists, curator Ilaria Bernardi adopted a **more analytical and philological concept**, restoring the liveliness and the dialogue existing among those artists between the second half of the 1960s and the very early 1970s. In fact, will be exhibited at the Wits Art Museum works emblematic of the research of each of the artists, dated between 1967 - the year the term Arte Povera was coined by Celant - and 1971 - the year he announced that the Arte Povera label should disappear in order to let each artist assume his or her singularity. By setting this specific time limit, **the exhibition is delving into the first phase of Arte Povera, at the same time aiming to grasp the common denominators that led Celant to create that definition for his research.** Hence, the addition of a few works made immediately before year 1967.

**Most of the works in the exhibition were presented in historic Arte Povera group shows and in solo exhibitions of the respective artists, between 1967 and 1971.** Among the works on display there are: *Direzione* (1967) by Giovanni Anselmo; *Senza titolo (porte)* (1966) by Alighiero Boetti; *Piombo rosa* (1968-2018) by Pier Paolo Calzolari; *Pavimento (Tautologia)* (1967) by Luciano Fabro; *Senza titolo* (1968) by Jannis Kounellis; *Sit-in* (1968) by Mario Merz; *Scarpette* (1968) by Marisa Merz; *Averroè* (1967) by Giulio Paolini; *Scoglio* (1966) by Pino Pascali; *Svolgere la propria pelle* (1970-1971) by Giuseppe Penone; *Orchestra di stracci - Quartetto* (1968) by Michelangelo Pistoletto; *Identico alieno* (1967-1968) by Emilio Prini; *Letto* (1966) by Gilberto Zorio.

An area with an illustrated chronology of the group exhibitions held between 1967 and 1971, which are to be considered pivotal to the history of Arte Povera, accompanied by display cases with related catalogs, is part of the exhibition too. The exhibition ends with the video-documentary *Arte Povera*, edited by Beatrice Merz and Sergio Ariotti (Hopefulmonster, Turin, 2011).

***Arte Povera 1967-1971 is part of the larger exhibition project Arte Povera and South African Art: In Conversation***, promoted by the Wits Art Museum and by the Consulate General of Italy in Johannesburg including, on the same dates, another exhibition titled *Innovations in South African Art, 1980s-2020s*, curated by South African curator Theminkosi Goniwe, dedicated to South African artists who, for some aspects of their activity, are or claim being akin to Arte Povera: Lucas Seage, Jane Alexander, David Thubu Koloane, Kagiso Pat Mautloa, Moshekwa Langa, Usha Seejarim, Bongiwé Dhlomo-Mautloa, Willem Boshoff, Kemang Wa Lehulere, Thokozani Mthiyane, Kay Hassan.

**A bilingual (Italian/English) and "double" illustrated book/catalogue, *Arte Povera and South African Art: In Conversation*, will be published by SilvanaEditoriale**, to be browsed in two verses, both with institutional introductions by the Ambassador of Italy in Pretoria, Paolo Cuculi, and the Consul General of Italy in Johannesburg, Emanuela Curnis. The first verse of the volume will be devoted to Arte Povera exhibition curated by Ilaria Bernardi, including her extensive essay, insights into the works of the 13 artists as well as a chronology of the most important Arte Povera exhibitions from 1967 until today. The second verse will be devoted to the exhibition curated by Theminkosi Goniwe, include his essay as well as insights into the works of the South African artists.

---

**Contact for press**

Studio ESSECI  
di Sergio Campagnolo s.a.s  
Ufficio Stampa, Pubbliche Relazioni e Progetti di Comunicazione

Address: Via San Mattia, 16 – 35121 Padova (PD)

Email: [segreteria@studioesseci.net](mailto:segreteria@studioesseci.net)

Phone: +39 049.66.34.99

**Press kit:**

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qZDpiCenCOkDX8jOv4foVOsjbI\\_UgAIR?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qZDpiCenCOkDX8jOv4foVOsjbI_UgAIR?usp=sharing)

---

**Wits Art Museum**

Wits Art Museum is a leading university art museum, in Johannesburg, dedicated to African art. Its collection includes more than 13,000 works of African art and grew out of a small departmental teaching collection started in the early 1950s by two professors, Heather Martienssen and John Fassler, both from the Department of Architecture at Wits. In the late 1960s, Norman Herber donated substantial funds to acquire works, allowing the historical and contemporary collections to grow substantially. In 1978, the first works of classical African art were donated by Vittorio Meneghelli, and the following year the Standard Bank African Art Collection was started and John Schlesinger donated a large collection of more than 100 works. Other major additions to the collections include the Wits Museum of Ethnology Collection (2001), the Neil Goedhals Archive (1993), the Robert Hodgins Print Archive (2007), the Sekoto Collection (2010), and the Walter Battiss (2017) and Judith Mason (2017) archives. Currently, the museum also includes the Jack Ginsberg Centre for Book Arts, which houses more than 3,000 artist's books, 400 of which are South African, as well as a unique archive of 3,000 objects on the history and genre development of book art, and an extensive library of monographs on South African art.