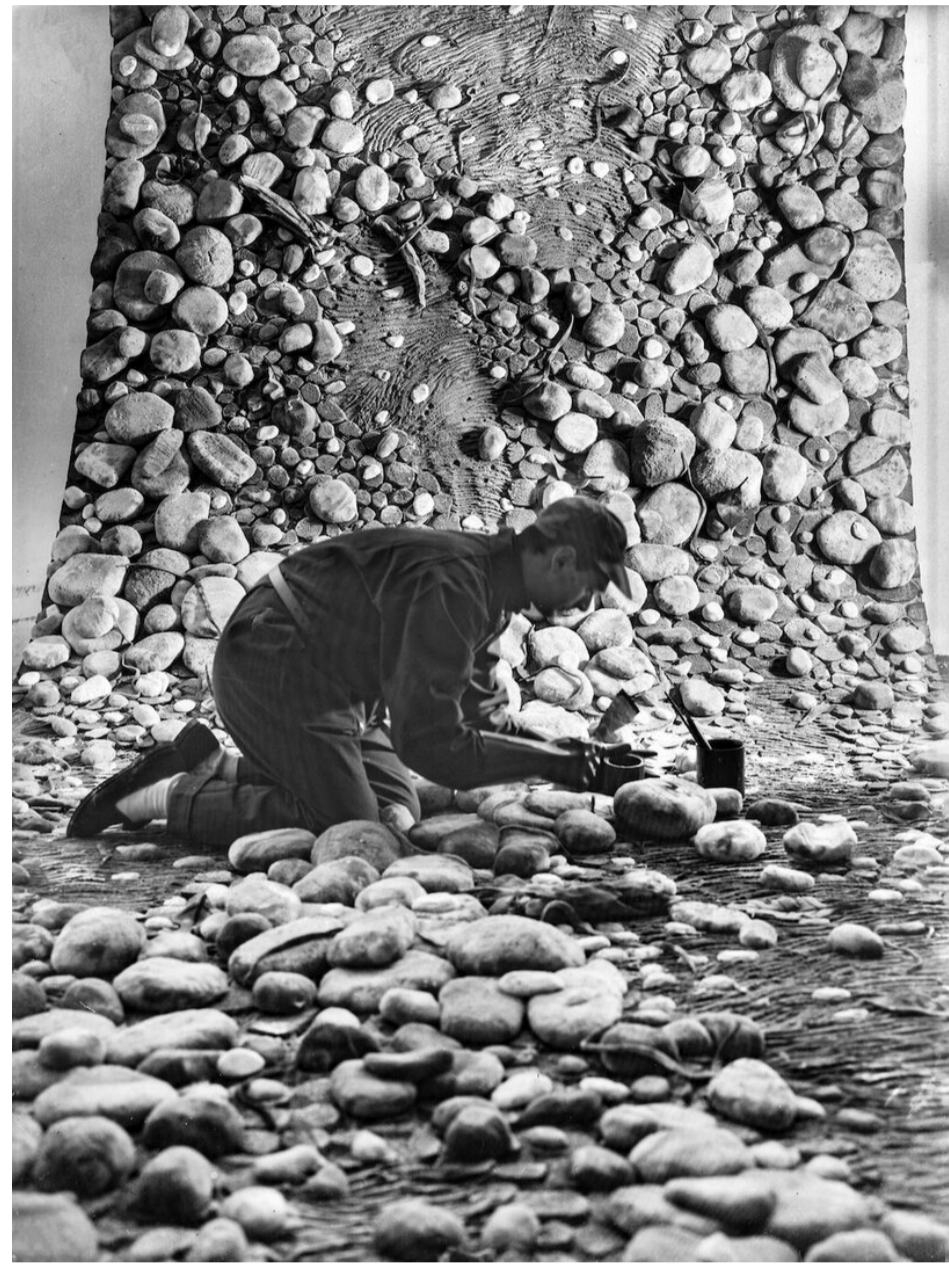


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March 07, 2023 at 1:45pm

**PIERO GILARDI (1942-2023)**

Italian artist Piero Gilardi, whose “*Tappeti-Natura*,” or “Nature-Carpets,” brought the wilderness into the gallery, died March 5 in Turin at the age of eighty. His death was confirmed by his gallery, Michel Rein. Gilardi in the 1960s set himself apart from his compatriots in the Arte Povera movement with his floor-bound works made of polyurethane blended with vinyl resin and rubber latex. Various evoking environments such as a forest floor scattered with fallen logs, a rocky seashore, or a verdant field and laid flat on the floor, these sculptures invited visitors to relax upon them and thus become a part of the depicted scene. “The effect is an artificial nature in which surprises and the mysteries of true nature stimulate the brain but flex elementally underfoot,” he said in 1966. Writing in the pages of *Artforum* in 2022, Elizabeth Gilardi noted that the playfulness of these sculptures, which yoke nature to the future, “belies the conceptual work and technical skill that went into making them, as well as the complexity of the



postwar moment in which the Italian artist’s project first emerged.”

Gilardi was born in Turin on August 3, 1942, to a Swiss family. While studying at the local Liceo Artistico, he encountered Michalangelo Pistoletto, ten years his senior, whom he would later credit as a profound influence. Gilardi became a major figure in the Arte Povera movement, of which Pistoletto was a leading proponent, and whose members placed “poor” materials in the service of work that pushed back against postwar conventions. In 1963, Gilardi staged his first solo show, “Machines for the Future,” featuring a group of interactive contraptions that invited and responded to viewer interaction. Two years later, he exhibited the first “*Tappeti-Natura*,” which he would go on to show in Amsterdam, Brussels, Cologne, Hamburg, New York, and Paris. During this time, he created other, complementary works of a similar nature, including a dress made of polyurethane birch logs and another made of rocks of the same material.

The “*Tappeti-Natura*” gained so much acclaim that Gilardi was met with resistance on the part of one of his exhibiting galleries when he attempted to turn away from them. Rather than continue working a vein he felt he had mined deeply enough, he stepped back from the commercial art world and became an activist and organizer, aligning himself with various student and worker groups. As a form of protest, he famously created a rubber effigy of Fiat owner Gianni Agnelli; his activist efforts took him to Nicaragua, Africa, and the US, where he worked on behalf of Native American causes. Interested in the art movements then sprouting, including Land art and antiform art, he traveled widely to discover more about them, and helped organize the first two international exhibitions of contemporary work of the time at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and at the Bern Kunsthalle.

Gilardi returned to making physical work in 1981 and began exhibiting again, this time presenting creative public workshops as well. His 1985 *IXIANA* project, presented at the Parc de la Villette in Paris, took the form of a technological park where the public could engage artistically with digital technologies. Technology increasingly played a role in his oeuvre, as embodied by the multimedia interactive installations he created beginning in the 1990s. Gilardi also wrote prolifically for this time, contributing regularly to *Flash Art* and *Juliet* and publishing two books in Italian, 1981’s *Dall’arte alla vita, dalla vita all’arte* (From art to life, from life to art), and 2000’s *Not for Sale*. In 2008, he inaugurated the public art space Parco Arte Vivente (Living Art Park) in Turin, meant to exhibit earthworks that take nature as a theme.

Though he became more widely acknowledged later in his career, Gilardi did not reap the fruits that some of his better-known Arte Povera comrades did. In 2017, he was the subject of a major retrospective at Rome’s MAXXI titled “Nature Forever”; his first solo debut in the US, at Cold Spring, New York’s Magazzino Italian Art, closed this past January. The artist remained hopeful about the future of his favorite topic to the end, despite the increasing peril in which it found itself. Asked in 2019 by *Juliet*’s Roberto Vidali to coin a slogan for the future, Gilardi’s response was brief and pointed. “The planet burns,” he affirmed. “Let’s save it all together.”

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