

The Bloomberg Commission: Giuseppe Penone: Spazio di Luce (Space of Light)

For the latest annual Bloomberg Commission Italian artist **Giuseppe Penone** (b. 1947) has created an ambitious bronze sculpture which invites us to rethink the relationships of sight and touch, outdoors and indoors, nature and the city.

Over the past 45 years, Giuseppe Penone's work has probed industrialised society's understanding of nature. Rather than seeing them as distinct or opposed, Penone insists that the spheres of culture and nature are inseparably intertwined.

In his early twenties, Penone became associated with a loose grouping of innovative artists who rapidly rose to international prominence under the name of *Arte Povera*. Inspired by the radical politics of the late 1960s and frustrated by the limitations of art as taught by the academies, these artists embraced diverse sculptural practices and materials for their work to have a wider social impact.

Revaluating notions of time and progress played an important role in this. For his earliest works, Penone attached the steel cast of his hand to a young sapling for it slowly to be absorbed by the growing tree. He also traced the outline of his body with wire onto a tree and simulated one more year's tree growth by applying a thin layer of wax. It is from the latter 'action' that *Spazio di Luce* takes its cue.

At first glance the sculpture looks like the cast of a tree, but it actually solidifies a thick layer of wax covering a large larch found on the Franco-Italian border. The outside of the tree, its bark, consequently is on the gold-covered inside while the cast's exterior bears the memory of human touch in the form of the artist and the foundry workers' finger prints. In the earlier *Essere Fiume (To Be River)* (2000) a sculpture made by Penone perfectly mimics a rock shaped by river water, thereby creating an analogy between the forces of nature and the actions of the sculptor.

Find out more:

A fully illustrated book including an extensive interview with the artist and an essay by Douglas Fogle is on sale in the Bookshop from mid-October 2012.

Buy a beautiful limited edition work of art by Giuseppe Penone at the Information Desk.

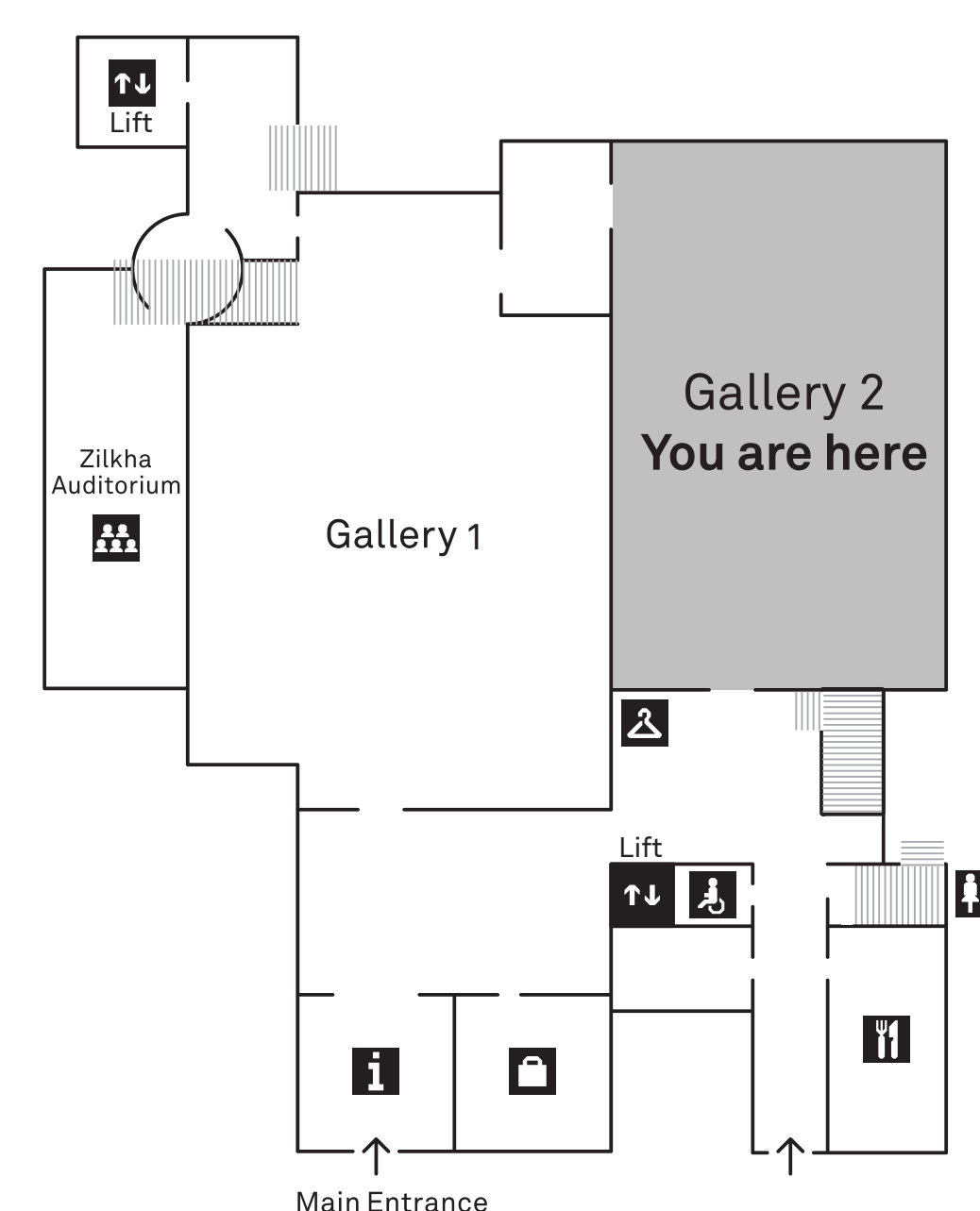
Visit whitechapelgallery.org to see a behind-the-scenes film of Giuseppe Penone in his studio and to find out more about a programme of talks and events inspired by nature, the city and The Bloomberg Commission: Giuseppe Penone.

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Over one year this series of changing displays offers different vantage points to understanding how *Spazio di Luce* connects with Penone's work of the past 50 years.

Trees have been a focal point for Penone throughout his career. Many of his earliest so-called 'actions', performances that survive only as photographs, took place in the forests near Turin or his home town of Garessio in Italy. To bring the outdoors into the gallery was an important strategy for many of the artists associated with the legendary group of *Arte Povera*.

In 1969, Penone covered a young tree with a thin layer of wax to simulate an additional year's growth. With the artist's finger prints replacing the texture of the tree's bark, *Gli anni dell'albero piú uno* (*The years of the tree plus one*) (1969) is emblematic of Penone's investigation of the relationship between our bodies and the eco systems we inhabit.

The following year, Penone began work on his ongoing series of *Alberi* or *Trees* for which he stripped industrially cut beams back to reveal the shape of the younger tree within. Photographs and objects on view here document Penone's earliest works with trees including his first *Albero* as well as a collective action of carving a 12 metre-long tree carried out in Munich, Germany, in 1970.

From the very beginning, Penone has reflected on his work by writing poetic aphorisms. Two of these have been selected here to express the artist's thoughts on the actions of carving and covering trees.

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