
eARTH

The second section of the exhibition is dedicated to the solid state. As opposed to gases, the characteristics of solids are their incompressibility and the fact they have a definite shape. In the solid state, attractive forces between particles prevail over the effect of thermal agitation, so that their freedom of movement is substantially suppressed, and only sensitive oscillations around the equilibrium position remain possible. The weaker the attractive forces are, the lower the temperature needed to transform a solid. The solid state is associated with the earth element, and through it, with all the three kingdoms of nature: mineral, vegetable and animal. Considered by many traditions as the most sacred and divine of the elements, as a symbol of primordial matter, earth has always been both mother and stepmother: it is the planet on which we live and, more strictly speaking, the compact part of the earth's surface that emerges from its waters.

1. Man Ray, *Élevage de poussière*, 1920–1970 ca.

In this famous shot from 1920, at the request of his friend Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray (Philadelphia, 1890 – Paris, 1976, one of the greatest exponents of Surrealism) photographed the work *The Large Glass*, considered by many the highest and most complex expression of symbolic and alchemical thought of the great French master. The subject of the shot is not so much the work itself as the dust deposited on its surface over the course of a year, enhanced in its material consistency by the prolonged exposure of the film to light for over two hours. In French, the word *elevage* refers both to “elevating” and “raising,” to ennobling and bringing up. Thus, the author intended to emphasize the invisible presence of generative processes.

2. Yves Klein, *Monogold sans titre*, MG 003, 1960

Through this second work by Yves Klein (Nice, 1928 – Paris, 1962) we come face to face with his research on the monochromatic triad, which embraces blue, pink, and gold: the three colors of the burning flame. Gold, the purest metal, key to alchemical transformation, becomes an expression of the immaterial dimension – a purely ideal dimension which art alone may embrace – when removed from the logic of profit. Klein then sells “zones of immaterial pictorial sensitivity” by exchanging them for gold bars. Whoever bought them had to burn the certificate, while the artist threw half of the ingots obtained into the Seine, allocating the other half to the production of the monochrome painting. Everything is a cycle. Nothing is lost and everything is transformed, even ideas.

3. Max Ernst, *La Forêt*, 1927–1928

Max Ernst (Brühl, 1891 – Paris, 1976) was considered by André Breton, founder of the Surrealist movement, an artist-cum-chemist by virtue of the way the theme of the metamorphosis of matter – intertwined with the idea of the “Great Work” of alchemical transmutation – was embodied in his work. This is the case of *La Forêt (The Forest)*, where the entangled branches of the Rhineland woods, through the techniques of frottage and grattage, are transformed into a composition of stones or metals: a symbol of continuous change. Also endowed with meaning are the bird – the artist's alter ego, alchemical symbol of sublimation – and the eclipse, metaphor for the alchemical wedding between the Sun King and the Moon Queen, as well as a symbol of the union between male and female which paves the way to creation.

4. Joana Escoval, *Living Metals II*, 2019

Two volcanic rocks connected by a copper wire: a work representative of the refined poetics of Joana Escoval (Lisbon, 1982), oriented to connecting the principles of “nature” and “culture” within a single systemic vision. Working on what is visible to the human eye but also on the forces and transformative processes that continuously take place in the depths of the Earth, the artist draws on the energetic dimension of matter, evoked by the presence of the metal-conductor: a symbol of the breath of the world and its cyclical nature.

5. Pinot Gallizio, *L'uomo incombinato or L'uomo incombinato dell'antimondo*, 1957

A chemist with a university background, Pinot Gallizio (Alba, 1902–1964) was also a botanist and, in his own way, an archaeologist. The earth, with its compounds and stratifications, always captured his attention. At the age of fifty, the artist created a genuine chemistry laboratory in his own home and began to apply his various passions to painting. The choice of multiple materials – as shown by this large work containing mica, iron, pigments and PVA glue – expresses the contamination between images of the visible world and theories of modern physics related to the concept of “anti-world”: a reality where “antiparticles” and particles are to be found in a state of continuous exchange. The same pigment dusting is to be found on the ceiling of the *Caverna dell'antimateria* (1959), perhaps the most famous project in Gallizio's artistic career.

6. Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise*, 1941–1961

A great expert of alchemical secrets, Marcel Duchamp (Blainville-Crevon, 1887 – Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1968) places inside a portable box all the most representative works of his Dada-Surrealist production, which together with *Air de Paris* and other iconic works also includes his famous *Large Glass*. A mysterious work, charged with complex esoteric symbolism that places the celestial female representation alongside the earthly male one, the *Large Glass* contains numerous alchemical symbols that allude to the theme of the transformation of matter, to which the use of glass itself – as transformed matter and the basis for the pictorial composition – also refers.

eARTH

1. Edith Dekyndt, *Ne touche à rien – réplique*, 1997–2015
3. Edith Dekyndt, *Berlin Spring Pieces*, 2015

The experiments of Edith Dekyndt (Ypres, 1960), which indifferently cross sculpture, painting, and video, originate from the dialectic between material and immaterial reality. Her work also extends to ethical issues, reflecting on the speculative practices of material exploitation, in favor of a rediscovery of the natural links with the various material worlds. *The Berlin Spring Pieces* series shows the reactions of materials such as wine, casein, blood, or resin in contact with linen or velvet canvases. Processes such as absorption, fusion, loss, drying and decomposition take shape in fascinating compositions that challenge the visitor's perceptive sensitivity. In *Ne touche à rien*, dried drops of various beverages are photographed and recorded on empty and projected slide frames. In this enlargement, the solidified liquid embodies an imaginary scientific world of cells, planets, crystals, and more.

2. Renata Boero, *Cromogramma*, 1971

With an artistic training and a long experience in the field of restoration, Renata Boero (Genoa, 1936) reflects on the constitutive principles of matter and on the natural times of transformation. She is especially interested in material processes, as shown by the canvas exhibited here, folded and immersed in liquid pigments derived from the boiling and extraction of natural substances, which cause various forms of alteration of the support. The attention to chemistry is highlighted by the grid with which the canvas is organized, recalling the traditional classificatory tables of observation of physical and chemical phenomena.

4. Karla Black, *Nature Equals Meaning Minus Choice*, 2011

Nature equals meaning minus choice. The title of the work by Karla Black (Alexandria, 1972), helps us interpret the meaning of this work, which consists of a mountain of sawdust made by cutting different types of wood. Seemingly solid, the mountain is actually a fragile system, subject to weathering and the passing of time. As a material, the shredded wood could be transformed into various objects: the core of a skirting board or the casing of a pencil. Karla Black's sculptures thus invite us to grasp the fascination of the material complexity of the objects we surround ourselves with, playing on the contrast between what appears and what exists in essence.

5. Dove Bradshaw, *Contingency (Pinecones and Driftwoods)*, 2014

The work of Dove Bradshaw (New York, 1949) was exposed to a snowstorm after being treated with a variety of environmentally reactive materials, such as silver, liver of sulfur, and common paint. The contingency alluded to in the title is thus derived from the intertwining of the artist's conscious choice of materials and the unpredictability of nature. At the center of the work lies his interest in the chemical processes of action and reaction and the reflection on the concept of “indetermination,” seen as a response to a modernity in constant need of reassurance.

6. Gary Kuehn, *Melt Piece*, 1964

After having worked as a construction worker at a young age, in the 1960s Gary Kuehn (Plainfield, 1939) came up with his *Melt Pieces* series, often associated with the sphere of so-called Post-Minimalism, while also close to the experiences of Process Art. These works highlight the formal contradiction between their geometric and organic parts, joining the solid aspect to the liquid and staging the transformative potential of matter. The plywood parallelepiped, from the cracks of which a shapeless mass of mortar emerges, counters the sense of ever-unstable matter with the theoretical and ideal principles of *Minimalism*.

7. Davide Balula, *Buried Painting (Champagne)*, 2012–2014

The paintings of Davide Balula (Annecy, 1978) emerge from the burying of the canvas for a longer or shorter length of time. A generative hibernation period that hides them from the gaze but opens them up to an endless scope for transformative variables, dictated by the process of corrosion to which they are subjected. The soil of the place chosen each time – in this case that near the cellars of the Maison de Champagne Pommery – leaves a trace of itself on the canvas. The soil transforms the canvas, triggering different reactions each time. In the perfect form of the circle, order and chaos unite within a single vision.

- 8-corridor. Ana Mendieta, *Volcán (Ana Mendieta Filmworks No.71)*, 1979

Contact with Mother Earth is the basis of the work of Ana Mendieta (La Habana, 1948 – New York, 1985). When she was still a young girl, she was expatriated from Cuba via the “Peter Pan” project – set up by the United States for anti-Communist purposes to expatriate minors after the Castro revolution – and she said that she felt “torn from her mother's womb.” Recovering ancient ritual practices and using the body as a medium, the artist dialogues with the four natural elements, transferring the idea of matter continuously transformed by the energies it contains to the ritual dimension. In the video, the artist first imprints her own silhouette on the shore of a lake and then triggers combustion inside the crater created at the center of the figure.