

WATeR

WATER

The last section of the exhibit is devoted to the liquid state. Liquids exhibit some characteristics of solids and others of gases. The particles are close to each other, held by cohesive forces that prevent their dispersion, but the molecules are able to move within the mass. This generally results in an increase in the volume of the liquid compared to the solid, with a relative decrease in density. At the same temperature and pressure, the solid normally has a density about 10% higher than the corresponding liquid. Water, the most common liquid on Earth, of which our body is also made up for the most part, does not obey this rule. Water is a chemical compound formed by two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. In nature, it is one of the main constituents of ecosystems and is the basis of all known forms of life. Humanity has recognized its importance since ancient times, identifying it as one of the main constituent elements of the universe and endowing it with fundamental meanings, bound to the values of purity, wisdom and rebirth.

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- Yves Klein, *La Vague*, IKB 160 B, 1957

The last work by Yves Klein (Nice, 1928 – Paris, 1962) in the exhibition is probably the most iconic, as it is coated in the famous blue color patented by the artist, called upon here to evoke materiality and immateriality, stasis and movement at the same time. Alternative conditions typical of water and the sea, in perpetual transformation, able to enchant the eye and impossible to penetrate; a metaphor of the deep, of human restlessness and the desire to overcome limits. The wave recalled in the title is evoked through the movement of the plaster support.

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- Roger Hiorns, *World-disclosure*, 2015

“With this work I tried to create an organism, something that acquires life through a chemical accident. An accident that perhaps reflects the randomness of the universe.” As Roger Hiorns (Birmingham, 1975) explains, the work instinctively refers to the idea of an underwater wreck, which the presence of the flashlight makes us associate with the emergence from the darkness of an unknown past. The chemical accident, caused by the artist, consists in immersing a car engine in a solution of copper sulfate mixed with water and brought to a high temperature. The contact between substances and materials triggers the crystallization process. The work is therefore the opening to the world of matter, with all its unpredictable transformations.

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- Roni Horn, *Hot Water Suite (3)*, 1991–1993

For more than forty years, Roni Horn (New York, 1955) has been investigating the complex relationship between man and nature with particular attention to the transformative and energetic dimension of water. Driven by an ecological sensitivity, her works are attentive and awe-struck observations of the natural forces at work in comparison with the results of human activity, as recounted in the series of photographs entitled this series of photograph, in which views of primary energy sources, such as the Icelandic geysers, alternate with photographs of infrastructures built to convey and exploit those same natural waters and vapors.

- Yves Tanguy, *En lieu oblique*, 1941

Giorgio De Chirico’s work also inspired the surrealist painter Yves Tanguy (Paris, 1900 – Woodbury, 1955), the creator of alienating landscapes inhabited by biomorphic entities. On deserted moors – sorts of mental landscapes suggested by the gray and foggy coasts of Brittany – colored structures stand out, suspended between the different states of matter, between the liquid and the solid. The affinity that the artist felt with the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch, linked to the sect of the Rosicrucians – artists imbued with a deep symbolism – was matched by the link with the alchemical representations of the Surrealists.

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- Roman Signer, *Der letzte Schnee*, 2004–2021

Gifted with a spirit midway between the enchanted and the sarcastic, typical of his work – aimed most of the time at capturing the wonder and at the same time the paradoxical component of many human actions in the presence of the forces of nature and their inevitable manifestation – Roman Signer (Appenzell, 1938) collected snow from his garden on a winter afternoon and placed it in a freezer, with the irrational – and rather impractical – intention of preserving it forever. In relation to the ecological crisis that humanity is going through, Signer’s work is endowed with unexpected meaning, which entails a series of questions. What is the meaning of our actions? Where is our doggedness in perpetrating a fixed image of the world leading us? What are we trying to preserve and what are we really losing?

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- William Anastasi, *Sink*, 1963/2001–2021

Water is the most common agent of spontaneous chemical reactions in nature. In this work by William Anastasi (Philadelphia, 1933), a flat sheet of steel is wetted daily, so that over time, the metal surface becomes covered in rust. The viewer can clearly see the regularity with which Sink’s appearance changes, without the artist being able to intervene to control the phenomenon. Rust is the spontaneous reaction by which worked iron seeks to return to its natural state. The fascination with the chemical process is thus combined with a reflection on time and memory.

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- Olafur Eliasson, *Glacial landscape no. 11*, 2017

Reflection on major environmental issues is the inevitable outcome of the broader and more general consideration of the transformative processes of matter put forward by artists over recent years. The question of the melting of the glaciers, the main reason for the most dramatic upheavals of which scientists are predicting the imminent arrival, has been and continues to be the focus of numerous elaborations. Among the best-known activists engaged on this front, Olafur Eliasson (Copenhagen, 1967) was perhaps the one who most succeeded in capturing public attention when, in 2014, he took twelve large blocks of ice from the Greenland ice sheet and placed them in a square in Copenhagen. Developing this idea, in 2016, he then used smaller fragments of the ice cap to make watercolors, with the intention of continuing to denounce the problem of global warming using a more traditional visual language.

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- Robert Smithson, *Petrified Coral and Mirrors*, 1971

The viscous aspect of some liquids and the processes of the transformation of matter always attracted Robert Smithson (Passaic, 1938 – Amarillo, 1973), the creator of a series of “earthworks” linked to territories marked by human exploitation, guided by an ecological thought ante litteram. *Glue Pour* bears witness to the action carried out by the artist in Vancouver in 1969, when he poured 226 kg of industrial material from the top of a slope of debris. *Petrified Coral and Mirrors*, on the other hand, is part of the Non Sites series. The coral narrates the passage, represented by the fossil element, from organic matter to inert matter, thus opening up a reflection on the reality of things and on time.

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- Andy Warhol, *Piss Painting*, 1978

The work is part of the *Oxidation Paintings* series, produced by urinating on canvases covered in metal-based paint or plaster priming. In the case of the work in the exhibition, uric acid in contact with the surface of acrylic and plaster generates greenish-yellow stains with indefinite contours. Between 1976 and 1979, along similar lines, Warhol (Pittsburgh, 1928 – New York, 1987) created his *Cum Paintings*, in which the chemical reaction is entrusted to ejaculation fluid. Both series bring his research in the field of the non-figurative and the abstract for the first time, while retaining the ironic and deconstructive nature of his works (in this case, the most self-referential vein of Abstractionism post-World War II).

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- Pamela Rosenkranz, *Anemine (Verdurous Debris)*, 2018

In the paintings in the *Anemine* series, Pamela Rosenkranz (Altdorf, 1979) used chlorocruorin, a green substance that binds oxygen in the blood of certain annelids in the Amazon rainforest. The pigment was spread onto aluminum sheets, with the intention of opening up a reflection on the fragile balance of the ecosystem, playing on the short-circuit of meaning between the name of the geographical area concerned and Amazon the online giant. The artist’s works question the anthropocentric perspective from which we usually tend to look at the world and its relationships.

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- 11-corridor. Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger, *Accelerated Spirits*, 2021

Gerda Steiner and Jörg Lenzlinger (Ettiswil, 1967; Uster, 1964) pursue “an aesthetic of nature,” basing their experiments on sound scientific knowledge. For the past twenty years, the duo has focused on urea: an ancient nitrogen-based fertilizer used in intensive agriculture, the production of which requires the consumption of large quantities of fossil fuel. The work, created specifically for the exhibition, consists of bowls with colored fertilizer solutions, forced to crystallize progressively during the period of the exhibition. Never quite the same, the work evokes the dimension of the chemistry laboratory, playing once again on the contrast between the natural and the artificial.

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- Mika Rottenberg, *Spaghetti Blockchain*, 2019

The title of the work combines spaghetti with “Blockchain”: a computer network-based technology that allows transactions to be managed and tracked. Apparently, the two worlds do not seem to have anything in common, like the free associations of objects and words elaborated by the Surrealists. Mika Rottenberg (Buenos Aires, 1976) associates images and sounds, according to a practice typical of the world of advertising, only that here the music is the fascinating diphonic or harmonic chant perfected in the Soviet republic of Tuva, associated with images of hands with enameled nails that incessantly manipulate and transform matter. Seemingly solid matter turns out to be rubbery entities on the verge of collapse. Solids melt, liquids turn into gases and everything contributes to the manifestation of a cosmic dance.

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- Jorge Peris, *Laboratoire Simondon à la GAMeC*, 2012–2021

This tree of ropes and crystals is the result of a progressive process of evaporation and capillarity from which a hybrid form, midway between the organic and the fossil, emerges. The title of the work quotes Gilbert Simondon, the philosopher of the “mentalité technique”: a scholar of the psycho-sociological and historical-cultural development of technical objects who, avoiding the abstractness of deductive thinking, pitched various disciplinary fields against one another to highlight the absolute uniqueness of individual events. The work by Jorge Peris (Alzira, 1969) takes on a different form each time it is installed. The skeleton of salt crystals that solidifies along the ropes in fact produces concretions of different structures and stability, depending on the dynamic relationship created between the balance of salinity levels in the liquid used, controlled by the artist, and the humidity levels in the environment.

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- 2,5. Erika Verzutti, *Water*, 2015; *Iceland, 2020; Alps, 2020*

The works of Verzutti (São Paulo, 1971) establish a parallelism between the compositional logic of the three works and the principle of balance between the elements in geological systems, to which the titles refer. The relationship between the full and empty volumes of the bronze is emphasized through the use of oil paint. The color blue refers to the element of water, and its insertion in the grooves of the sculpture recalls rivers, lakes and pools, according to the natural relationship between earth and water in nature.

- Namsal Siedlecki, *Viandanti*, 2021

The two copper sculptures were made from the fusion of a batch of coins thrown by tourists into Rome’s Trevi Fountain, and their title and form cite a pair of wooden votive offerings dating back to the first century BC, housed at the Bargoin Museum in Clermont-Ferrand. They are immersed in a galvanic basin, connected to each other by an electric circuit that keeps a process active of the unidirectional exchange of matter: one figure will continue to grow stronger by subtracting ions from the other, which will progressively wear out. The two fetish-figures by Namsal Siedlecki (Greenfield, 1986) allude to the continuous regeneration of matter as a paradigm of the relationships of the social body.

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- Pier Paolo Calzolari, *Senza titolo – Gesti*, 1969

There are many works by Pier Paolo Calzolari (Bologna, 1943) that allude to the boundary between the immaterial and the material, opening a reflection on a world in which metamorphosis is an essential condition for the very existence of matter. Frequent is the use of frost, whose white color refers to the stage of the alchemical process that allows the substance to rise. The work on display is part of a series with neons and icicles made in 1968–1969. In this case, a lead base exploits the cooling action of a motor that converts air into frost. Connected to the base, a red neon marks the passage of time and the alchemy of the passage from one state to another.