

Giovanni Anselmo

Invisible

December 19, 2024 – February 15, 2025

VISIBILE

Sant'Andrea
de Scaphis

Giovanni Anselmo

Invisible

Hands held in pockets, under tables, behind closed doors. There is no end to how many times you have to open and reopen your eyes to see what is actually there. Of course, it begins when we are old enough to read those books without pictures. Sitting in the warm bed, thus begins the separation of our images from the images of others. *To “lift the stone” into the vertical field of visibility that normally belongs to the canvas is to travel through those millenia, as Anselmo put it, back to the time “before the transformation of the earth’s crust buried many aspects of life and drew them away from the light.”*¹ In lawn chairs overlooking the lake. Once in a hundred years they said, pulling out sandwiches from coolers. A glance downward; swatting at an insect; following a sound with your eyes to the other end of the park; any distraction and you would miss it. But it was mostly the husbands missing it or willing to miss it that is. A news article or a text popping onto the screen. While the wives held vigil for the sun. As usual the two extremes held their posts; sometimes a social position imposed becomes a social position defended. In either case the results would be damning. *Really, a work comes about in a pretty simple manner. It comes about because you have an intuition and you discover something that was already there, potentially, but it was latent, and you pull it out. You insert yourself in the flow of life, you recognize some aspects of reality, and you notice that you can transform them into a work.*² In an article in the *Times* a group of Spanish nuns claim the door handles were turning on their own. They had never seen so many weeds in the garden—they grew rapidly in the dark. At night, first it was laughter and then it was cries. In the interviews Sister Belén insisted they were doing the right thing, that they had to follow instinct over order. Cacao was at a premium due to the tariffs and further risks couldn’t be inherited. Not everyone agreed. Some insisted on staying, senses perked to all and any forces. *This energy is not a symbol, but a real energy situation that always —day and night— surrounds us. We are constantly in this situation of energy and we ourselves are energy. In my work there is the will to go against fiction, against illusion.*³ Lining up the bottles one two three on the shelf. The pharmacist looks at the patient, I know my chickens. Handing over a small vial with long instructions surely no one will read. This is part of the ceremony; the literature obfuscates the lesson. *Every day we enter into relation with visible and invisible images and for this reason these concepts really have an indefinite weight, because, for example, through a religious lens, God comes to mind. In such a sense, we are finite, small beings that endure for a few years and then disappear. But God always exists and is infinite and invisible.*⁴ It felt like a romantic gesture, used those words, said John to John or Jane to Jane or Jane to John or John to Jane. Guiding the other to the tombstone where they would rest. Eventually. But the weight of the rock, the longevity it announced. *Life occupies all the available space... Without exploding, its extreme exuberance pours out in a movement always bordering on explosion.*⁵ Jackpots sing as the buses pull in from New York and Boston. It’s another Thursday at the casino. Best friends claim

machines in a long row, pass hours ordering diet cokes first and vodka tonics second. All on the house. Someone’s adult grandson came on the bus this time, wanted to do some bonding. The slights of hand at the card tables mesmerize him in his drunken stupor. He rushes back to his grandmother, now sitting beside her best friend, looks at them dumfounded. But I never saw it coming, he says. *My way of making art corresponds to a “presentation” and not a “representation” of the real.*⁶ Trying to explain wordplay to a burning candle. Language flickers in shadows and then goes out. Rubbing crayon to paper over the image of the word to remember that it is made of something. Really, it takes so little to be made of something. *For us the term “povera” or “poor” is fine and that’s it, because it is the equivalent to “rich” while the term “art” means “rich you and poor me.”*⁷ In the story there is a little girl who needs eyeglasses. All of her other problems are unapproachable before this first issue is solved. Because that is the stuff of life, the order of things. Her father works all the livelong day to solve this first problem in the story. All the livelong day. *His objects live within the moment in which they are composed and assembled and have no existence as immutable objects. To re-exist, they have to be re-composed, which means that their existence depends upon our interventions and behavior. Rather than autonomous products, they are unstable, and alive in relationship with our own lives.*⁸ There was an argument in the lecture hall. The professor took up a piece of chalk and scratched out something resembling an equation. It was meant to settle something, to convey justice. Then the professor turned to the group and muttered something about Nils Bohr’s greatest flaw: never having noted that it is man’s finitude that determines every possibility of measure.

—Allison Grimaldi Donahue

¹Krauss, Rosalind E. “Giovanni Anselmo: Matter and Monochrome. Originally published as “Giovanni Anselmo: Marshall Plan Monochrome,” in *Giovanni Anselmo*. Galleria d’Arte Moderna Bologna, 2007. Republished in *October*, no. 124, Spring 2008. here in Perpetual Inventory. MIT Press, 2010. p. 190.

²Anselmo in an interview with Walter Guadagnini published in *Giovanni Anselmo*, gallery text, Galleria Civica di Modena 1989. in *Giovanni Anselmo. Oltre l’orizzonte* at MAXXI Roma Poligrafia, Barcelona. 2024. p. 224. curated by Gloria Moure. trans. Allison Grimaldi Donahue.

³Anselmo in an interview with Patrick Bougelet and Denis-Laurent Bouyer published in “Sans Titre”, n.29, dicembre 1994- febbraio 1995, pp. 1-2. in *Giovanni Anselmo. Oltre l’orizzonte* at MAXXI Roma Poligrafia, Barcelona. 2024. p. 225. curated by Gloria Moure. trans. Allison Grimaldi Donahue.

⁴Anselmo in an interview with Xosé Antón Castro Fernández published in “Lápiz. Rivista Internacional de Arte”, n. 113, giugno 1995, pp. 28-39. in *Giovanni Anselmo. Oltre l’orizzonte* at MAXXI Roma Poligrafia, Barcelona. 2024. pp. 228-9. curated by Gloria Moure. trans. Allison Grimaldi Donahue.

⁵Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share*, as cited in Daniel Soutif, “The Act of Power or Suspended Time.” in *Arte Povera*. C. Christov-Bakargiev. 1985. p. 235. cited here in Krauss, Rosalind E. “Giovanni Anselmo: Matter and Monochrome. Originally published as “Giovanni Anselmo: Marshall Plan Monochrome,” in *Giovanni Anselmo*. Galleria d’Arte Moderna Bologna, 2007. Republished in *October*, no. 124, Spring 2008. here in Perpetual Inventory. MIT Press, 2010. pp. 187-8.

⁶Anselmo in conversation with Andrea Viliani in *Giovanni Anselmo* curated by Gianfranco Maraniello and Andrea Viliani Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Bologna 26 May- 27 August 2006. In *in conversation with Andrea Viliani*. p.226. trans. Allison Grimaldi Donahue.

⁷Martin, Henry. “Letter to Marcello Rumma.” dated 5 December 1968. trans. Allison Grimaldi Donahue in *Henry Martin: An Active Ear*. ed. Emanuele Guidi. Spector Books, 2024. 292.

⁸Germano Celant, “Arte Povera: Notes on a Guerrilla War,” published in *Flash Art* n°5, 1967. here in <https://flash--art.com/article/germano-celant-arte-povera-notes-on-a-guerrilla-war/#> translated by Henry Martin. Accessed December 2024.



Invisibile, 2009

Granite
25 5/8 x 47 1/4 x 25 5/8 inches
(65 x 120 x 65 cm)
NG7087



“I wanted to create an invisible work. However, if I want to verify the invisible, I can only do it through the agency of the visible. If I want to materialize the invisible, this becomes immediately visible. The invisible is the visible one cannot see.”

– Giovanni Anselmo

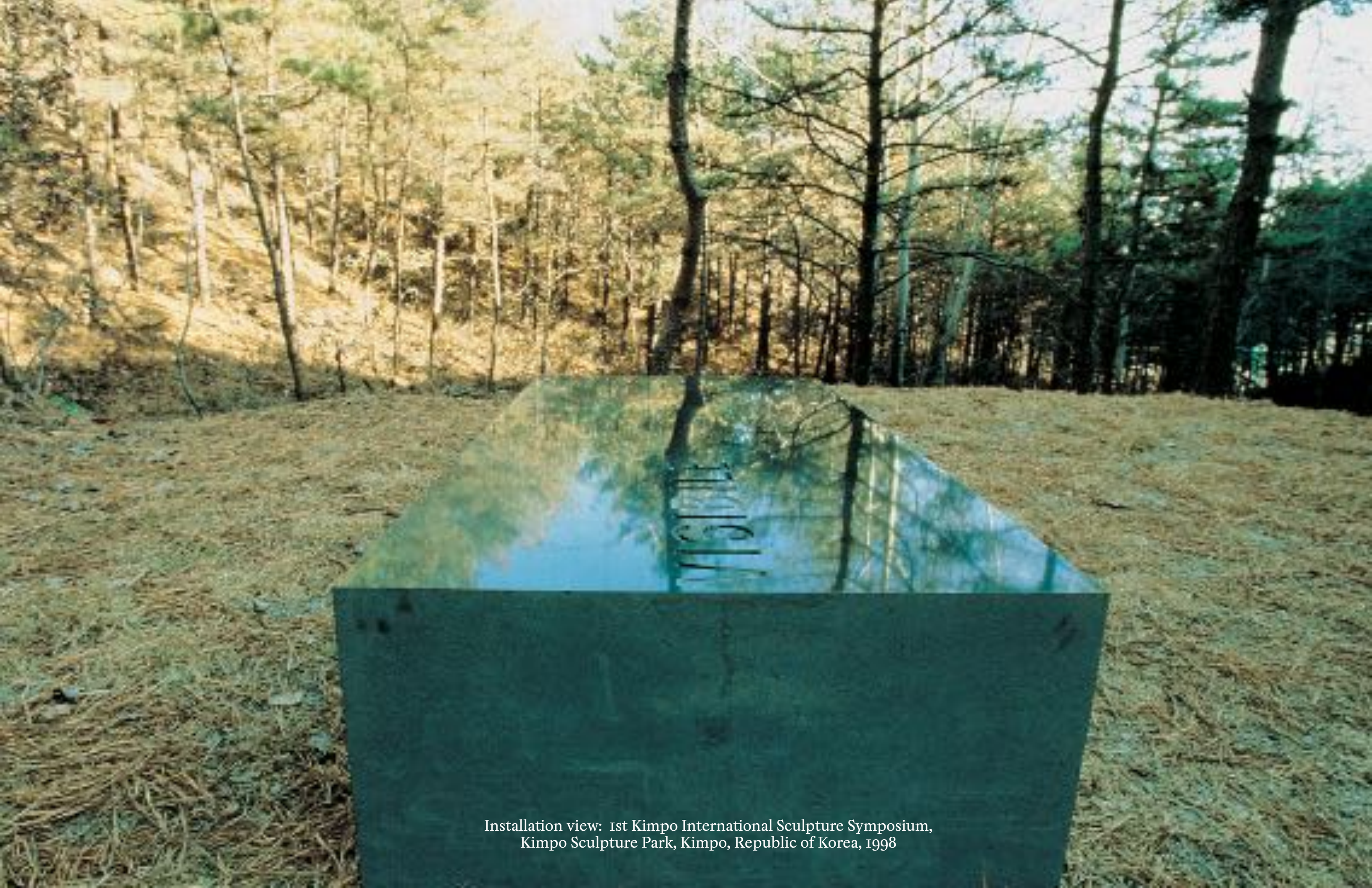
Installation view: *Giovanni Anselmo: Invisible*
Sant'Andrea de Scaphis, Rome, December 19 2024 – February 15, 2025



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Installation view: 1st Kimpo International Sculpture Symposium,
Kimpo Sculpture Park, Kimpo, Republic of Korea, 1998

“And with regard to the written word, one also notes the continual oscillation between the rarefaction of the symbolic and recurring presence of certain words and the declarative and explicative excess of some of his captions. Sometimes the word in question describes a moment, a situation, and does so with a startling truthfulness which brings us back to the ‘sublime’ theme of the infinite [...]”

– Francesco Moschini

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“As interpretation and identification tools, Anselmo’s works do not invent or add something new to the world; rather they make visible that invisible or infinite (that ‘whole’) of which all things and we ourselves are visible details.”

– Maddalena Disch

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Giovanni Anselmo is a seminal figure of the Arte Povera movement, a radical artistic practice that emerged in Italy during the late 1960s. The term “Arte Povera,” meaning “poor art,” reflects the movement’s use of humble, everyday materials to challenge the commercialism of art and explore fundamental human experiences, physical processes, and the passage of time.

Anselmo’s practice is deeply rooted in exploring elemental forces, natural phenomena, and conceptual paradoxes, often using materials like stone, wood, metal, and even language as a medium. His works engage with tensions between opposites: permanence and ephemerality, weight and lightness, the physical and the immaterial. Stone is a recurring material in Anselmo’s oeuvre, symbolizing weight, permanence, and the natural world. Moreover, his interest in gravity is evident in his many works where stones are precariously balanced, evoking a sense of suspended energy.

Anselmo is known for incorporating language as a conceptual tool in his art, treating it not merely as a vehicle of communication but as an active, sculptural presence. For Anselmo, language exists at the intersection of the conceptual and the physical, embodying a tension between the immaterial idea and its material manifestation. His works frequently invite viewers to contemplate the relationship between what words signify and how they exist within the world as tangible artifacts. Through his ingenious use of language and stone, he invites us to confront the fundamental forces that shape our existence, grounding the conceptual in the material and the infinite in the immediate.

Sant'Andrea
de Scaphis