

Kamel Mennour is pleased to present our second solo showing of the work of Gina Pane. Pane is a seminal figure in the history of body art and more generally in that of the arts scene in France during the 1970s and 80s.

Throughout her career, Gina Pane moved between painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, and ‘action1’ with equal facility, whether in the heart of nature, as she did the 1960s, or before an audience in the 1970s. Photography made an appearance within the context of her ‘*constats d’actions*’, produced in close collaboration with Françoise Masson. With Masson, who photographed all the actions, Pane rigorously planned the images that were to result, using a series of preparatory drawings that would be fundamental in the elaboration of the works. Pane used a variety of materials throughout her career (earth, wood, glass, marble, copper, steel, brass, lead, felt, etc.), each selected for its intrinsic qualities and its symbolic significance, but she also used readymade objects as well as objects created by herself, to say nothing of her own body, which she set up as her principal material and the instrument of a new language: that of body art.

The exhibition bears witness to the wealth of Gina Pane’s vocabulary with three major, utterly singular works, produced about a decade apart from one another respectively: *Souvenir enroulé d’un matin bleu* (1968), *Action de Chasse. C’est la nuit chérie...* (1979- 1981), and *La Prière des pauvres et le corps des saints* (1989). The latter give some indication of the conceptual coherence of her work, at the crossroads between the poetic and the sacred, the intimate and the extimate, the heavens and the earth.

Exhibited for the first time in Turin in 1969, *Souvenir enroulé d’un matin bleu* takes the form of a wooden cylinder covered in blue felt and fixed to a metal structure on which the words *ricordo avvolto di un mattino blu* have been engraved in the artist’s native language. The delicate colour of the felt, the evocative power of these few words, the sweetness and sobriety emanating from the whole combination give the work an exceptionally strong poetic resonance, accentuating the intimate and doubtless agreeable event that is being remembered. Gina Pane would reveal in a late interview that this recurrent use of felt in her productions—notably in the ‘Partitions’ of the 1980s, and in particular in the Saints’ robes—is tied to a childhood memory: ‘It’s the first material I came into contact with, when I was a child, cutting discs for the pianos to be repaired<sup>2</sup> ... but this blue is also the blue of the sky above the Piedmont mountains of my childhood.’

This aspiration towards the celestial, present in all her work, is a part of the privileged relationship Gina Pane developed with the elements, with beautiful, savage nature that she envisioned as a ‘poetic force, a place of memory and energies’. This attraction to the mysterious forces that

surround and inhabit us can be seen in the monumental mural, *Action de Chasse. C'est la nuit chérie*.... The work embodies a decisive turning point for the artist who, after producing thirty odd actions in public, had decided not to do any more. When she was invited to show in the US in 1979, Gina Pane chose to send instructions (notably in the form of texts and drawings), which two performers would interpret two years later at Franklin Furnace in New York, then in Lyons in France. The large mural presented here is the work's third realisation or the 'Partition of the Action', which the artist exhibited in 1981 at the Galleria Multimedia d'Arte Contemporanea in Brescia. *Action de Chasse. C'est la nuit chérie*... brings together the immoderate dimensions of a large, 24 panel colour drawings (black, white, blue, red, orange) in charcoal, pastel, and gouache, with the action object: a tiny little wooden house painted green. In order to bring the viewer closer to the darkness, by way of introduction Gina Pane adds a succinct dialogue between a man and a woman, which one images to be murmured: '.... Deep is the night. Terrifying things happen. A woman asks a man: what is all that? He answers: It's the night sweetheart...'. The polyptych represents this night: an intense night, one that, far from offering a peaceful refuge, is full of perils, risks born of obscurity... One can see sketched within it different 'hunting' and combat scenes. Stylised masculine figures wrestle with the figures of animals, enemy brothers clash in ferocious jousting matches, crossing knives as well as arrows. Three angels watch over all this, and the little house nearby on the wall is there as if to offer a zone of comfort in the midst of such an unleashing of the passions. Dark night, troubling night, tormented night—but also fantasised, magnetic, amorous night, made of embraces and reconciliations... Gina Pane takes care to keep a refuge from the torment of the outside world.

In the second room of the gallery (rue du Pont de Lodi), *La Prière des pauvres et le corps des saints* is the artist's last work. This solemn sculptural 'Partitions' is made up of three groups of three horizontal glass cases dedicated to three saints the artist had paid homage to before: Saint Sebastian, Saint Francis, and Saint Laurence. The central cases allow one to see the bodies of the saints brushing up against the surface of their brass sarcophagi. The cases on the left exhibit memories of their attributes or the instruments of their martyrdom: the forged iron bow bristling with arrowheads for Saint Sebastian, the rusted iron Tau cross for Saint Francis, the charcoal-blackened wood to evoke the gridiron of Saint Laurence. The right-hand cases show the saints' robes in symbolic colours: red felt for Saint Sebastian to reflect his body pierced by an arrow, brown felt for Saint Francis to recall his vow of austerity and poverty, sky blue felt for Saint Laurence to signify his bodily asceticism and the element of the air. Words from the 'prayer of the poor'—an invocation for simple needs—are engraved in the brass and the glass of the cases, such as to recall that it was for others, and to bring salt, honey, and fire, that these saints gave their lives. A synthetic work exhibited posthumously in 1990 at the CAC Passages in Troyes, *La Prière des pauvres et le corps*

*des saints* deploys a complete repertory of materials cherished by the artist, and affirms the sacred dimension present in the ‘Partitions’ of the 1980s. Through the Lives of the Saints, Gina Pane places the wounds of today’s world in a mise en abyme that nonetheless includes an opening onto another world, an escape heavenwards. ‘All my work belongs to the trajectory: Earth-Sky’, wrote the artist.

Gina Pane, whose first wish was to shake minds awake from the anaesthetising torpor of the media, managed to create a myth and to leave us a vibrant, sincere, radical, and poetic work, in search of an eternal communion with the public.

‘It is to YOU that I am speaking because you are this “unity” in my work: THE OTHER.’

Gina Pane, *Lettre à un(e) inconnu(e)*, 1974

1. Gina Pane preferred the term ‘action’—more capable of transcribing the idea of process at the very heart of her practice—to that of ‘performance’, which she believed to be too demonstrative.
2. Gina Pane’s father was a piano maker. Felt is used between some of the metal parts and the wood, and for the hammers and dampers.

Born in 1939 in Biarritz to an Austrian mother and an Italian father, Gina Pane left Italy in 1961 to study at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris. She attended Edmée Larnaudie’s Atelier d’Art Sacré and lived for the rest of her life in Paris. At the same time as pursuing her artistic practice, Gina Pane taught painting at the École supérieure des beaux-arts du Mans from 1975 to 1990. In 1978, she created and led a performance workshop at the Centre Georges Pompidou. She died in March 1990 in Paris after a long illness.

Her work, celebrated by historians, critics, and artists, and represented in important private and public collections, has now been rediscovered by a wider public. A number of her works are currently on show at the Centre Pompidou-Metz as a part of the exhibition, ‘*Sublime. Les tremblements du monde*’ (until 5 September 2016), and an important retrospective of her work is on show at the MUSAC – Musée d’art contemporain de Castille-León in Spain (‘Gina Pane Revisited’, until 24 April 2016).

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*