

and maybe that was part of the point.

Such unusual material transformations are at the root of Gelatin's practice. In 2005, for example, they hung a frozen sculpture made from human urine from the second story of a building in Moscow, where it clung like a thickened icicle in winter. In 1999, they designed a "human elevator," with a group of people lifting a person up instead of a machine. "Vorm—Fellows—Attitude" continued in this vein, if not with total success. Despite the promise, I, for one, was not satisfied. For me, the show created a friction: while I instinctively liked the work for its YBA-style humor and mediagenic quality, I also found it intellectually too light, too late, maybe a little too art-scene cool. In the end, perhaps that was more off-putting than the gross-out subject matter—any formal interest or appreciation was awkwardly and comically stopped in its tracks.

—ROBERT PREECE

WEST BRETTON, WAKEFIELD, UK

Giuseppe Penone

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

"A Tree in the Wood," a beguiling exhibition spanning five decades, makes clear Giuseppe Penone's lifelong obsession with the symbiotic relationship between trees and humans. His bronze casts, barely distinguishable from their genuine arboreal cousins, emphasize the human resemblance with vertical forms, arm-like branches, and skin-like bark—most

evident in a series of anthropomorphic, flayed sculptures that recline and crawl along YSP's esplanade. Yet Penone is at his best when the connections are less explicit. His tree sculptures cradling egg-like boulders strike a seemingly effortless equilibrium, stretching majestically skyward while highlighting human smallness.

Penone grew up in the northwest region of Piedmont, where the forests provided early inspiration. He has fixedly pursued his preoccupation with nature since his early Arte Povera days, reveling in the physicality of marble, bronze, wood, and clay. Inviting a similarly contemplative approach, this sensory exhibition, which remains on view through April 28, 2019, encompasses sculpture, graphic works on canvas, and formative photographs.

Few venues could show Penone's work to better advantage; YSP's Underground Gallery and surrounding parkland appear to merge seamlessly, thanks to a glass partition between the two. Inside, *Matrice (Matrix)* (2015)—two halves of a 100-foot-long pine trunk placed crown to crown—extends through all three rooms, forming the backbone of the exhibition. This noble specimen—felled and hollowed out, its knots and contours laid bare—is shocking to behold.

On the surrounding walls, tactile works continue Penone's exploration of the relationship between the human

body and nature. The "Corpo di pietra" ("Body of stone") series consists of white Carrara marble slabs carved to reveal the delicate tracery of veins. One work in the series, *Rami (Branches)* (2016), is stuck with twigs, recalling the arrow-pierced flesh of Saint Sebastian from medieval and Renaissance paintings. In *A occhi chiusi* (2009), thousands of acacia thorns on white marble crystallize into an unnerving image of two closed eyelids, perhaps encouraging the viewer to rely on senses other than sight. Smell, for instance, is integral to *Respirare l'ombra (To Breathe the Shade)* (2008), a floor-to-ceiling, wall-hung grid of aromatic laurel leaves enclosed in wire mesh panels. A branch clinging to the mesh bears a rough clay face in reference to the Greek myth of Daphne, who escaped Apollo's advances by transforming into a laurel tree.

All paths here lead back to trees. Punning the exhibition title, *Nel Legno (In the Wood)* (2008) presents a beam whittled away to reveal a sapling at its core, like a material memory of its youth. The passage of time is also the subject of *Trattenere 6, 8, 12 anni di crescita (Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quel punto) (To Retain 6, 8, 12 years of growth (It Will Continue to Grow Except at This Point))* (2004–16). Three somewhat macabre bronze casts featuring Penone's disembodied hand and forearm clenched around a sapling demonstrate how the trunk has grown around



the foreign body six, eight, and 12 years later, underscoring the inexorable march of nature.

The same idea is echoed outside, on a hill above the gallery, where a cast of a lightning-struck tree, partially covered in gold leaf, gleams in the sunlight as if immortalizing the original electric bolt. One of the pleasures of this show is discovering Penone's works within YSP's rolling 500-acre grounds. *Idee di pietra—Olmo* (2008), a bronze elm with a river boulder nestled in its branches, stands in a clearing, casting a primeval aura over the surrounding copse as if it were an ancestral being. Such poetic encounters abound in Penone's work, offering a welcome counterpoise to the digital overload of contemporary life. ■■■

—ELIZABETH FULLERTON

FROM OPPOSITE:

GELATIN

Two installation views of "Vorm—Fellows—Attitude," 2018.

GIUSEPPE PENONE

Luce e ombra,

2014.

Bronze, gold, and granite, 1260 x 380 x 380 cm.