



LE GALLERIE
DEGLI UFFIZI

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DANTEDI: PIAZZA SIGNORIA GIVES RISE TO A TREE FROM PARADISE BY GIUSEPPE PENONE

About 22 metres high, the installation, curated by the Uffizi in co-promotion with the Municipality, will be the largest sculpture ever hosted in a public space in the historical city centre of Florence.

The work is a foresight to the exhibition 'Alberi In-versi' (Inverse Trees), dedicated to Dante Alighieri and held in the Uffizi Gallery from 1 June to 12 September.

The museum director Eike Schmidt:

A monumental fir tree rises up to over 22 metres in Piazza della Signoria, in the heart of Florence, stretching its metal branches towards the sky: the installation, created by the artist Giuseppe Penone, is the largest ever placed in a public space in the centre of Florence. It was unveiled today, for the "Tuesday" of a very special year, the 700th anniversary of the death of the Author of the Divine Comedy.

In fact, the colossal sculpture "Abete" can be considered as a metaphor for Heaven: "the tree that lives from the top / and bears fruit eternally and never loses leaf" (vv. 29-30, Canto XVIII, Paradise, Divine Comedy), as Cacciaguida degli Elisei declares describing to the incredulous Dante the place where he stands.

For Penone, the tree is the image of his youth spent in the woods of the Maritime Alps. It has therefore been a frequent presence in more than 50 years of research. Through its growth in concentric circles, the tree reveals its essential form, which is strictly necessary for its own existence and development: it is deeply rooted in the earth but has branches reaching up to the sky.

Among trees, the artist prefers conifers, because of their twist-resistant trunk and regular stage-shaped branches: in other words, a perfect synthesis of the very definition of a tree. For the above reasons, the work chosen by Penone to be placed in Piazza della Signoria is a monumental fir.

The trunk and branches are made of cast stainless steel, encircled by a lattice. This confers an ascending sense to the installation: the 18 elements that compose it have been moulded in bronze, using a process of castings from bamboo stumps.

"Abete" reflects Giuseppe Penone's interest - and indeed all of ours - in the green elements of art, especially in the urban space. According to the artist, this is where the continuity between culture and nature, between history and the present, takes place, even in a place as highly distinctive as Piazza Signoria in Florence. The installation, curated by the Uffizi in co-promotion with the Municipality and in collaboration with the Arte Continua association, is an anticipation of 'Alberi In-Versi', an exhibition dedicated to Penone that the Galleries will host from 1 June to 12 September this year, as part of the celebrations of Dante's death in 2021. The title itself alludes to Dante's theme of the "tree that lives from the top". So, this borderland between the corporal and the conceptual world, between matter and idea, will be the subject of a series of drawings by the artist that will be on display in the Galleries for the occasion.

Meanwhile, attending Abete's ribbon-cutting ceremony today in Piazza Signoria were, among others, the museum's director Eike Schmidt, the President of the Region of Tuscany Eugenio Giani and the Mayor of Florence Dario Nardella.

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The director of the Uffizi Galleries, Eike Schmidt, says: "Contemporary art in Piazza della Signoria has been the subject of heated debate ever since Michelangelo's David and Baccio Bandinelli's Hercules and Cacus: this has always been a demonstration of the vivacious nature of the Florentines, who in this period will be able to reflect (and, why not, criticise) on the many meanings of Penone's installation. The fact remains, however, that this "Dantean tree", which in the artist's view refers to Alighieri's verses, combines an abstract idea of nature - not by chance made of metal - with the stony concreteness of the centre of Florence".

The artist Giuseppe Penone: "Abete" in Piazza della Signoria indicates the development of thought, which is similar to the spiral growth of the plant".

The President of the Region of Tuscany, Eugenio Giani, said: "On the day dedicated to the Supreme Poet, seven hundred years after his death, it is essential to highlight the great contemporaneity of Alighieri, which is still intact today, through the work of one of the Italian artists, Giuseppe Penone, who can be considered a great master of contemporary art. And to do so in Piazza della Signoria, a place so full of symbols and values since the time of Dante himself, only makes this exhibition even more important and valuable".

The mayor of Florence Dario Nardella: "The tree by its very nature turns its gaze towards the sky, towards those stars Dante longed for, towards salvation. What greater symbol then, in this dramatic year, of hope for a renaissance and a new start after the pandemic? Florence is celebrating its poet and its New Year with this symbol in its main square, which for some years now has been the scene of contemporary public art. As a sign of a new start, beginning with culture, art and nature. This work, and the 700th anniversary events in general, will not only be a unique opportunity to celebrate the Supreme Poet but also a form of reconciliation between the city and a citizen who was first so neglected and then so regretted, as well as a way of tackling his extraordinary and still relevant legacy. An inheritance that passes through the museum of Italian language in Santa Maria Novella, the cenotaph in Santa Croce, the readings of the tercets performed all over the world, the plaques and sculptures that commemorate the Poet and the Comedy, and the myriad events that we are preparing to organise in the name of a figure who has become a universal symbol".

The Councillor for Culture of the Municipality of Florence, Tommaso Sacchi, states: "Trees, a theme dear to Penone's work, are also among the fundamental symbols in the Divine Comedy, from the initial forest to the overturned tree in Paradise. Having a towering fir tree in our main piazza that induces us to raise our eyes to a renewed horizon is our choice to celebrate Dante with contemporary art and public art in general, of which Florence has been an active experimenter for some years now. The impressive thing about Dante is his universality: we have all encountered, in various forms, the Divine Comedy and other works, and his is a fabulous and spiritual journey that is highly topical. In the year of post-Covid rebirth, linking Dante to a natural symbol can be a way of rethinking a new relationship between man and nature, but also between man and art, poetry and culture, all cardinal values and beacons of light that guide us on the road to recovery".

Valdo Spini, member of the board of directors of the Uffizi Galleries: "Dante, by writing the Commedia in Italian, became the father of the country. Today, in the pandemic, we need a unified approach: "Con miglior corso e con migliore stella, (Paradiso, I, 40)".

The president of the Arte Continua association, Mario Cristiani, said: "It is an honour to collaborate with Giuseppe Penone's exhibition Alberi In-Versi which, on Dante's day, with 'Abete' unites heaven and earth, the Uffizi and Piazza Signoria, great poetry and contemporary art".

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON GIUSEPPE PENONE

Giuseppe Penone was born in Garessio, near Cuneo, in 1947; he lives and works in Turin. In 1968 he began exhibiting and became part of the Arte Povera group of artists. In his sculptures and installations, the process of creation is an integral part of the work: it is the actions performed by the artist in a dialectical relationship with natural actions that give form to matter, differently each time, revealing its fantastic aspects. In 2007 he represented Italy at the 52nd Venice Biennale; in 2013 he exhibited in the gardens of the Palace of Versailles and in 2014 in the Boboli Gardens (Florence) and Madison Square Park (New York); He has had solo exhibitions at the Whitechapel Gallery in London and the Kunstmuseum in Winterthur (2013), the Musée de Grenoble (2014), the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas and the Musée Cantonal des Beaux Arts in Lausanne (2015), the MART in Rovereto and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (2016), the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome (2017) and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in Wakefield (2019).

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