

Press Release, March 2025

GIUSEPPE PENONE *THOUGHTS IN THE ROOTS*

- Serpentine presents the most comprehensive institutional exhibition of Giuseppe Penone's practice in London, featuring sculptures and works from 1969 to today.
- The exhibition will extend beyond the gallery into the Royal Parks.

At Serpentine South

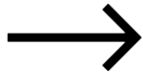
3 April – 7 September 2025

Press view: Wednesday 2 April 2025, 9am–12pm

Please RSVP to: press@serpentinegalleries.org



Images: Giuseppe Penone, *Albero folgorato* (Thunderstruck Tree), 2012, installation view Versailles 2013, Photo © Archivio Penone. Giuseppe Penone, *Idee di pietra – Ciliegio* (Ideas of Stone - Cherry Tree), 2011, installation view Versailles 2013, Photo © Archivio Penone



Serpentine is delighted to present *Thoughts in the Roots*, the most comprehensive institutional exhibition of Giuseppe Penone presented in London. On view from 3 April to 7 September 2025, the exhibition will be staged at Serpentine South and extend beyond the gallery to feature sculptures in the Royal Parks.

Expanding on the significance of trees as a recurring motif throughout Penone's work and enabling the artist to "perceive the space of Serpentine as a continuum with the nature of the park that surrounds it", three outdoor monumental bronze cast sculptures are presented on the plinth and close to the South gallery.

Albero folgorato (Thunderstruck Tree, 2012) is on view alongside two works from the *Idee di pietra* (Ideas of Stone) series. Based on a hundred-year-old willow that grew in Belgium, the sculpture depicts a willow tree struck by lightning with its wounds decorated with gold, while *Idee di pietra* (Ideas of Stone) explores the juxtaposition of human and organic materials with the balance of unworked natural stones in and around the bronze cast trees.

Penone cast the tree in bronze and lined its pulp with gold leaf, capturing the invisible force of nature that sculpts its splintered shape and complex internal structure.

Idee di pietra – Ciliegio (Ideas of Stone – Cherry Tree) and *Idee di pietra – 1891 kg di luce* (Ideas of Stone – 1891 kg of Light) are part of a series in which the artist explores the relationship between river stones and the human thought process. Large river stones of varying shapes and sizes are placed on the forks of the bronze tree branches.

Thoughts in the Roots showcases the artist's continued interest in the relationship between humans and the natural world, featuring works that range from 1969 to today.

A leading figure in the Arte Povera movement, born in Italy in the 1960s, that celebrates the simplicity of natural materials and artistic techniques, Giuseppe Penone experiments with a wide range of materials including wood, iron, wax, bronze, terracotta, marble and plaster, bringing their individual physical qualities to the fore.

Since its launch in the 1970s, Serpentine has maintained a long-standing commitment to bringing art out of the traditional gallery context and into the surrounding landscape, offering an opportunity for artists to engage with the immediate environment of Kensington Gardens.

Giuseppe Penone says: "To breathe the perfume of the leaves that cover the walls of the environment, to inhale the fragrance of the resin extracted from the trees and poured into an empty tree trunk, these are actions that allow us to perceive the space of Serpentine as a continuum with the nature of the park that surrounds it."



“All of my work is a trial to express my adherence and belonging to nature, and it is with this thought that I have chosen the works for the exhibition. The two paths that I have created, inside the gallery and outside of it, in the park, become two integrated gardens.”

Bettina Korek, CEO, Serpentine, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine, say: “We are honoured to present Giuseppe Penone’s exhibition at Serpentine South. *Thoughts in the Roots* will celebrate his impressive five-decade practice and uncover the visual, tactile, and olfactory dimensions of the materials he explores. Revealing the fragile and poetic relationships between humans and nature, the exhibition will exemplify Penone’s experimental research and feature new works presented in the UK for the first time and extends into The Royal Parks. Following his participation in the Garden Marathon – our knowledge festive - at Serpentine in 2011 and his contribution to *140 Artists’ Ideas for Planet Earth*, we’re thrilled that this leading figure of the Arte Povera movement, has accepted our invitation to bring the Park into the gallery and vice versa. Responding to the Spring and Summer seasons, Penone’s delicate landscape will nurture Serpentine’s mission of building new connections between artists and audiences.”

The exhibition will embody the key principles of Penone’s work, namely the synergies between artistic and natural process, and the poetic relationship between humans and nature.

Since the 1970s, Penone has visualised breath as sculpture through different materials. Highlights will include *Respirare l’ombra* (To Breathe the Shadow), a sensory installation made of laurel leaves that envelops the walls of the gallery. The artist compares the process of breathing to that of lost wax castings, in which metal flows into the mould and air is expelled from reeds, similar to lungs respiring. Reminding us of the fleeting nature of organic elements, the artwork is conceived as an immersive experience celebrating respiration and dissipating over time as the leaves lose their scent and colour.

Exploring the rapport between nature and body, Penone also uses organic materials to record his own breath. In *Soffio di foglie* (Breath of Leaves), the artist stacks boxwood leaves and lies down on the pile, breathing air into them. The imprint of his body and respiration is cast on the leaves, recording traces of his bodily presence.

The exhibition opens with *A occhi chiusi* (With Eyes Closed), a work showcasing the artist’s combined interest in exploring the relationship between sight and the act of closing one’s eyes. His first exploration started in 1970 with *Rovesciare i propri occhi* (Reversing One’s Eyes), a black and white photograph that captured Penone looking directly at the viewer while wearing reflective contact lenses that rendered him blind. With the absence of vision, he creates a space for imagination within the mind. The numerous acacia thorns on canvas echo a synthesis of our senses in connection with nature too.

The vegetal world is a central subject in Penone’s work, citing the tree as the ‘primal and most simple idea of vitality, of culture, of sculpture’. He created his first *Alberi* (Trees) in



1969, by removing the wood along the outer growth rings of mature timber layer-by-layer. Knots were left in place as they emerged into branches, revealing how the tree would have appeared before it was felled.

The exhibition features *Alberi libro* (Book Trees), a sculpture consisting of twelve carved saplings placed side by side. 'Every word for tree collects days of rain, sun mist, contains seasons, memories of places, of times experienced, that have a different meaning from person to person. They are words that fill the woods with their presence, invade the landscape, force us to an interpretation of motion, active, and push us for their correct interpretation in the forest's care.'

Gesti vegetali (Vegetal Gestures) is a series of sculptures that encapsulates the gestures of plants and the movement of the body. Penone created the first drawings of *Gesti vegetali* in the 1980s, outlining the movement of the human body. He molded the work in clay before casting it in bronze, a material which the artist began utilising after realising the oxidation resembled the same colour as the bark of trees. Each sculpture is placed in a plant pot and positioned outside the gallery windows, in dialogue with the trees in Kensington Gardens.

Designed by Atelier Dyakova, an artist book will be published to accompany the exhibition. Featuring drawings and new writings from Penone alongside the contributions from Federico Campagna, Ludovico Einaudi, Precious Okoyomon and Elif Shafak. The publication will also feature an extended interview between Penone and Hans Ulrich Obrist discussing the artist's inspiration and practice.

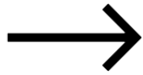
Penone has a longstanding relationship with Serpentine. He previously worked with Ecologies at Serpentine, which encompasses myriad convenings, networks, infrastructural and long-term research projects which hold ecology and the environment at their core. The artist was a participant in the 2011 Garden Marathon at Serpentine. This two-day event was an exploration of the concept of the garden. He is also featured in the book *140 Artists' Ideas for Planet Earth*, published by Serpentine and Penguin.

Thoughts in the Roots is curated by Claude Adjil, Curator at Large and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artist Director with Alexa Chow, Assistant Exhibitions Curator.

Notes to Editors

With a career spanning over five decades, Giuseppe Penone's (b. 1947 lives and works in Turin, Italy) expansive oeuvre encompasses sculptures, drawings, painting, installations, and photography. Born in Garessio, a village near Cuneo, Italy, he is influenced by the forested region of Northern Italy.

He has been featured in solo exhibitions worldwide including at the Fondazione Ferrero, Alba (2024); at the Galleria Borghese, Rome (2023); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2004, 2022); Philadelphia Museum of Art (2022); Villa Medici, Rome (2021); Palais d'Iéna – CESE, Paris,



(2019); Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (2018); Chateau La Coste, Le Puy-Sainte-Réparate (2017); Palazzo della Civiltà, Rome (2017); Louvre Abu Dhabi (2017); MART, Rovereto (2016); Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (2016); Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2015); Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (2015); the Beirut Art Center (2014); the Musée de Grenoble (2014); the Château de Versailles (2013); Kunstmuseum Winterthur (2013); Madison Square Park, New York (2013) and Whitechapel Gallery, London (2013). Giuseppe Penone has exhibited at Documenta V (1972), VII (1982), VIII (1987) and XIII (2012) and at the Venice Biennale in 1978, 1980, 1986, 1995 and 2007.

Limited Edition

The exhibition will be accompanied by a special limited edition. This will be a limited edition print and will be released on the week of the opening of the exhibition.

For more information on the available editions, please contact editions@serpentinegalleries.org.

About Serpentine

Building new connections between artists and audiences, Serpentine presents pioneering contemporary art exhibitions and cultural events with a legacy that stretches back over half a century, from a wide range of emerging practitioners to the most internationally recognised artists, writers, scientists, thinkers, and cultural thought leaders of our time.

Situated in London's Kensington Gardens, across two sites, Serpentine North and Serpentine South, Serpentine features a year-round, free programme of exhibitions, architectural showcases, education, live events and technological activations, in the park and beyond the gallery walls.

The Serpentine Pavilion is a yearly pioneering commission, which began in 2000 with Dame Zaha Hadid. It features the first UK structures by some of the biggest names in international architecture.

Public art has emerged as a central strand of Serpentine's programme. Major presentations include a collection of Eduardo Paolozzi's sculptures (1987), Anish Kapoor's *Turning the World Upside Down* (2010), Lee Ufan's *Relatum – Stage* (2018-19), Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *London Mastaba* in the Serpentine Lake (2018), *I LOVE YOU EARTH* by Yoko Ono (2021), Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's *In remembrance of the coming alien (Alienor)* (2022), Atta Kwami's *DzidzJ kple amenuveve* (Joy and Grace) (2021-22), Gerhard Richter's *STRIP-TOWER* (2023), Yayoi Kusama's *Pumpkin* (2024) and Esther Mahlangu's mural *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (2024).



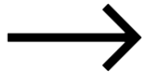
Proud to maintain free access for all visitors, Serpentine also reaches an exceptionally broad audience and maintains a profound connection with its local community.

For more information, please contact:

Nicolas Smirnoff, Head of Communications, NicolasS@serpentinegalleries.org; +44 (0) 757 0291 018

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