

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# ARTFORUM

### “Manzoni: A Retrospective”

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555 West 24<sup>th</sup> Street

January 24–March 21



Piero Manzoni, *Base magica—Scultura vivente* (Magic Base—Living Sculpture), 1961, wood, 23 5/8 x 31 7/8 x 31 5/16".

The Piero Manzoni retrospective at this gallery surpasses a “definitive” designation in such emphatic fashion that the casual qualifications for “museum-quality” exhibitions in commercial spaces must now be rewritten. If a dealer can uproot and resite the inverted plinth *Socle du monde* (Base of the World), 1961, from its spiritual and specific home in Denmark, as well as forage successfully for sixteen of the ninety extant cans of the infamous “*Merda d’artista*” (Artist’s Shit), 1961, then his is a team endowed with limitless power. Curator Germano Celant hits every period of the Italian provocateur’s seven-year career in depth and buoys each turn with complementary works from both kindred

and chance contemporaries. A blank 1951 Rauschenberg *White Painting* is valuable family, a blunt baseline against which degrees of presence and absence can be measured, very helpfully, through the dozens of differently tuned monochromatic Manzoni works on display, from those in sagging weighted canvas to fluffy fur, rubbery tofulike sliced segments, or racks of gesso-sealed bread rolls.

Though the show conforms to survey-style austerity in various conventional ways—a time line and perhaps needlessly thorough exhibition history follow the work from room to room—the gallery makes the most of its freedom from institutional rubric. There is no introductory text. No media are listed and no hints offered of what the work has ever meant. This nakedly uninformative approach allows unanswered questions the integrity they deserve, revering the mysticism, weightlessness, and folly running through the artist's oeuvre. Manzoni died, at twenty-nine, in 1963. Through this experiment, the man and his work are given as precious a gift as any retrospective can offer: life.

— William Pym