

HOMAGE TO PINO PASCALI
curated by
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6-9 PM

Torre Astura, Nettuno (RM), 22 July 1965.

Gian Tomaso Liverani's gallery *La salita* (Rome) organized the *Mostra a soggetto. Corradino di Svevia 1252-68*, a group show commemorating the young Swabian ruler Conradin of Swabia, grandson of Frederick II and the last member of the Hohenstaufen dynasty who was betrayed in the fortress of Astura, imprisoned and consigned to the forces of Charles I of Anjou.

On the occasion of the prize-giving and the opening of the exhibition – which featured works by Mario Ceroli, Tano Festa, Ettore Innocente, Sergio Lombardo, Renato Mambor, Fabio Mauri, Aldo Mondino, Pino Pascali, Mario Schifano, Cesare Tacchi and Antonio Titone – Pino Pascali was to stage a performative action lasting several hours in the crypt of the fortress, alongside a sculpture-monument conceived for the exhibition. The work *Requiescat in pace Corradinus* is composed of a wooden funerary stele covered with felted fabric and canvas painted in enamels. On the lower part of the monument appears the script: "JOSEPH PASCALI FECIT ANNO".

In what was an unexpected happening – among the first ever to take place in Italy – the young Apulian artist performed an action of an immersive nature with great theatrical potency. Placing himself alongside the sculpture, he wore a costume that evoked the forms of the mitre and cope, officiating like a medieval priest and emulating the dressing of Hugo Ball on the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, in 1916, when, clothed as bishop-totem, he ecclesiastically declaimed a nonsense poem.

In similar clothes, Pascali staged a funerary ritual commemorating Conradin, diffusing incense in an enclosed space for two hours, unsettling the spectators with the stultifying power of the vapours produced by a mixture of herbs and impeding their vision with the use of smoke pots. Several of those present recall having carried Pascali out of the crypt in a lifeless state. In his performance, the artist also made recourse to a further mask, completely covering his face: a headdress which he had already used on several previous occasions, in particular when posing for the photographer Claudio Abate, with a large mechanical phallus suspended at his waist, in the act of inseminating the machine/aeroplane *Araba fenice* (1964, later destroyed). Anything but fortuitous or casual, this choice seems to connote a consolidated approach, that of "performing sculpture". The olive drab mask facilitated a full immersion in the performative gesture; if we take into account that the balaclava undoubtedly came from the military world – similar models appeared as part of army uniforms in mountainous areas – but was widely used in the context of sexual fetishism and erotic play, the desecrating irony of Pascali's dual gesture even more convincing, capable of bringing together Eros and Thanatos in a single medium, that of the mask-cum-device used for rituals of both fertility and death. The action at Torre Astura, defined as a "happening-scenography", reveals the artist's understanding of sculpture as a scenographic medium, an artefact suitable for the realisation of a ritual within a theatricalised space. Although on several occasions Pascali had made recourse to costumes (for example, military uniforms or as a "wildman") in order to activate or animate his sculptures for the still or movie camera, the action at Nettuno was the only one performed in a public context.

Pascali displayed his great attachment to that theatrical experimentation that had encouraged him, from when he was a child, to frequent the Scenography studios at the Fine Arts Academy in Rome. A passion that he shared above all with his friend Anna Papparatti (partner of the gallerist Fabio Sargentini) with whom, in the weeks preceding the performance, Pascali had met and got to know the actors of the Living Theatre, established in the Rocca Sinibalda castle in the province of Rieti. His viewing the *Mysteries* show in the Parioli quarter, in the autumn of 1964, had been a revelation of great impact: the purgatorial acts, the moments of initiation to paradise, the scene of the Indian raga, the actors lighting incense that swamped and almost suffocated the spectators, the attempt to capture the public in a synaesthetic sensorial trap and the finale once again in hell with the body of the actor falling on the other bodies, accumulating a mountain of cadavers, are indissoluble images along the path Pino Pascali was following and which reappeared over the following days and years, starting with the unforgettable installation-performance *Requiescat*.

The Open Box and the Fondazione Pino Pascali are evoking this work over the course of two evenings in correspondence with the anniversaries of the death and the birth of Pino Pascali (Bari, 19 October 1935 – Rome, 11 September 1968).

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