

The Origin of the Stone

Exhibition: 10.10.2023 – 08.12.2023



PETR ŠTEMBERA

Kameny, 1979

exhibiting copy, 6,5x20 cm, 15x20 cm

Two sizeable yet rather unremarkable stones were at the center of an artistic action that took place on the northern outskirts of Prague: the stones were wrapped in netting, hoisted onto the artist's shoulder, and carried along a path through a nondescript green landscape. The neutral and elemental character of the action, in which the mineral fragments of the Earth's crust were simply removed from their current position and transported on the artist's back to another outdoor location, is confirmed by the documentation: six photographs that somberly depict the stages of the action, supplemented by a city map on which the route is marked. "Transposition of Stones" focused on the phenomenological apprehension of the natural landscape through astute bodily experience. Eschewing any hidden human-centered social interpretation, as was typical for much of Petr Štembera's work, the action foregrounds direct physical encounters with the natural matter of the world. In this case the artist, who at the time used to describe his practice as ecological, was simply carrying rocks, feeling their weight on his back as he moved through the landscape. Privileging neither his body nor the stones, he merely acknowledged their coexistence; nevertheless, he was actively removing them from their original site. M.&R.F.

Petr Štembera is among the key Czech performance artists of the 1970s. He was one of the leading figures of the Prague body art circle and from 1970 mediated contact with important performance art representatives both in the West and in Eastern Bloc countries. In the early 1970s, Štembera's interest in extreme physical and psychological experiences led to extreme body art pieces that he began to document in the manner customary in American body art: a black-and-white photography with a short description – a report on when and where it happened. Štembera's first performances took place in nature and