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Roy Adzak - Negative Objects, 1963-1973

Artissima 2025

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Lucio Fontana and Roy Adzak, circa 1962



MoMA, New York, 1967 (on the right, Roy Adzak, *Five Split Bottles: White on White*, 1965)



Cover artwork by Roy Adzak for the Rolling Stones, *Emotional Rescue*, 1980

This presentation of works by the English artist Roy Adzak is the first in Italy since his participation in the 1978 Venice Biennale (*Dalla natura all'arte, dall'arte alla natura*) and his solo exhibitions at Galleria Pater in Milan in 1961 and 1963.

Celebrated during his lifetime, Adzak's work became difficult to access after his death at the age of sixty. Having settled in Paris in 1962, his studio, inventory, and archives were sealed following his passing; it took several decades before his estate was finally resolved—only in 2021—allowing for a fascinating rediscovery and the organization of new exhibitions (including a museum retrospective currently in preparation at a French museum for 2026–2027). Focusing on the years 1963–1973, this selection covers the period during which Adzak was represented by the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, alongside artists such as Yves Klein, Arman, and Lucio Fontana, and was supported by critics including Otto Hahn, Alain Jouffroy, and Pierre Restany. During this time, his works entered many major international collections, both private (among them those of Philip Johnson and Burton Tremaine) and institutional (MoMA in New York or the Tate Gallery in London).

Adzak's first negative casts of female bodies date from 1956, four years before Yves Klein's *Anthropometries*. These became the starting point for an oeuvre developed over some thirty years—utterly unique, coherent yet diverse—structured around a fundamental notion: the trace, the imprint. Adzak's fascination with this concept dates back to his youth, during archaeological excavations in the Hindu Kush, where he nearly lost his life (he subsequently changed his birth name, Wright, for that of the family who saved him). It was thus only natural that Adzak featured prominently in the landmark exhibition *L'Empreinte* at the Centre Pompidou in 1997 (curated by Georges Didi-Huberman and Didier Semin).

By playing on the visual ambiguity between positive and negative, through bold use of color and light and an inventive approach to casting, Adzak's imprints blur the boundaries between painting and sculpture. They strip the object—whether industrial or natural, bodily or vegetal—down to its essential form, freed from anecdote, archetypal and quasi-abstract. "What might have been merely a process expands, setting new traps," wrote the critic François Pluchart in 1966. Adzak's explorations of the object, the body, and finally the cycle of life—transcending the duality of presence and absence—now appear remarkably ahead of their time. As Pluchart continued, "Adzak situates the imprint of a body, an object, or a mark of life within the perpetual silence of objectivity."

Echoing the contemporary concerns of the Situationists, the Surrealism specialist José Pierre summarized in 1965 the core of this work—whose implications are as aesthetic as they are political or metaphysical: "By presenting us with the hollow negative of familiar objects, does not Adzak, in the long run, persuade us that, surrounded by a world of phantoms—phantoms of objects—we ourselves are nothing but vain simulacra?" For his part, Adzak invited viewers to see his work as "a continuous, punctuated commentary on the passage of time and on our concern with the space we occupy during and after the course of our lives."

Stéphane Corréard & Hervé Loevenbruck

Roy Adzak

Untitled (Fruits)

1963

Oil and plaster on wood and canvas

146 x 123 x 8 cm



Roy Adzak

Untitled (X-Ray series)

1963

Spray on paper

65 x 50 cm



Roy Adzak

Negative Objects (11 Bottles)

1965

Oil and plaster on wood and canvas

74 x 93 x 4,5 cm



Roy Adzak

Untitled (Three Antique Busts)

1973

Oil and plaster on wood

102 x 102 x 13,5 cm

