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The Italian Cultural Institute in New York

presents

LUCIANO FABRO
Drawing as Space

curated by Ilaria Bernardi and Silvia Fabro

April 15 – May 15, 2024

The Italian Cultural Institute in New York, in collaboration with Paula Cooper Gallery, presents an exhibition of works on paper by the artist Luciano Fabro (Turin, 1936 – Milan, 2007).

Among the most important artists from the postwar period, Fabro is known for his in-depth and innovative research into sculpture and space, as well as for his intense theoretical thinking and commitment as a teacher. Less is known about his parallel activity on paper, which he carried out from the early 1960s to his death in 2007. Indeed, only three exhibitions of Fabro's work on paper have taken place – in 2013 at the Kunst Museum in Winterthur and the GAMEC - Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Bergamo, and then in 2014 at the CIAC - Centro Italiano Arte Contemporanea in Foligno. Both exhibitions were accompanied by catalogs (available in English) that invited the first critical reflections on this subject.

The exhibition at the Italian Cultural Institute in New York, curated by Ilaria Bernardi and Silvia Fabro, aims to delve deeper into the artist's production on paper, presenting a group of works that exemplify the two principal ways Fabro understood drawing: on the one hand, as a "study," that is to say, closely linked to his sculptures and installations; on the other, as a "work in itself" specifically conceived for the paper support.

Although their genealogy differs, the "studies" and the "works in themselves" selected for this exhibition have a common denominator: a reflection on space, whether physical, anthropological, or natural, and on the relationship between inner and outer reality.

On display in the first room are "studies." These include two *Untitled*, 1962 (a preliminary research on perception, later developed in the works presented in Fabro's first solo show in 1965), as well as the study for *Concetto spaziale, descrizione*, 1967, and a study for *Allestimento teatrale* (conceived for the Teatro Stabile in Turin in 1967 and made in 1975).

In addition to these studies related to the conceptual and physical dimensions of the space outside us, on view are also the studies for *Giudizio di Paride* (1979-80) and *IO (l'uovo)* (1978). A small mark

made on a sticky note might recall spermatozoa or a primary sign, referring to the artist's desire to "prolong one's body in all the things of the world" through anthropic and personal dimensions.

The two works belonging to the series of the *Macchie di Rorschach* (1976) are also related to the anthropological dimension. They simulate the ink blots that were used in the 1920s to conduct the so-called Rorschach Test for the purpose of analyzing an individual's personality. An integral part of *Macchie di Rorschach* are the texts written by the artist, titled *Apologhi*, associated with each work of this series.

The text, which is typewritten and autographed, is fundamental to the artist's research, as Fabro considered text on par with his painted or drawn interventions. The *Macchie di Rorschach* are one example, while Fabro's "descriptive" titles, meant to supplement the vision of the work, suggest an idea, an image, or the meaning itself to the viewer (as with many of the works exhibited in the second room).

Works conceived as "works in themselves," mostly suggesting natural space, can be viewed in the second room. Eight elements, similar to those used by the artist to construct the room-sized installation *Habitat delle erbe* (1980, in the collection of the Musée Départemental d'Art Contemporain de Rochechouart), allow the viewer to imagine the four walls of that *Habitat*. Landscapes and skies unfold rhythmically, transforming the room into an outdoor, natural environment, in which space becomes a complex scheme of vital reactions.

The same concept is underscored by *Tubo da mettere tra i fiori* (1963), a site-specific installation made with a telescopic steel tube "hidden" within a large group of green plants.

Other works on paper expand the reflection on nature, referring to some of its elements (*Paesaggio rettangolo*, 1999; *Il viaggio del sole*, 1993; *Disegno di cielo, dal vero*, 1992; *Tramonto*, 1995) as well as to specific temporal dimensions (*Segno di partenza*, 1992; *È proprio ora di seminare*, 1994 and *In principio*, 2007).

The exhibition ends with two major works. In the first, *Far di un cielo un senso* (1997), Fabro uses a typewritten poem (another example of his use of text as part of the work) to evoke specific elements of physical, anthropological, and natural space, and to refer to different works made over the course of his activity. In the second, *Disegno malato* (1995), Fabro refers to the very concept of drawing, representing it as an ovoid sign that acts as an open container of space and relations, lovingly "curated" by the artist via the apposition of a blindfold fashioned from a folded piece of kitchen paper.

To coincide with *Luciano Fabro: Drawing as Space*, Paula Cooper Gallery will include an example from the artist's celebrated *Piedi* series in a forthcoming group exhibition of sculpture at 521 W 21st Street. The earliest *Piedi* date to the late 1960s and early 1970s, and comprise enormous claws in glass or metal emerging from silk trouser legs that descend from the ceiling. *Piede Senile II* (2000) is an abstracted bronze 'foot' with an elegant pleated texture made from fabric dipped in wax. The columnic form of the *Piedi* and their use of sumptuous materials evoke both classical Italian architecture and a sense of the Baroque. For further information, please contact Paula Cooper Gallery.



Furthermore, works by Fabro is part of the most important museum collection in the United States, such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The New Orleans Museum of Art, Hessel/CCS Bard in Annandaleon Hudson (NY), The Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and other major private collections. In particular, an important collection of his works is permanently shown at Magazzino Italian Art, in Cold Spring (NY): this collection also includes one of the exemplars of the *Struttura ortogonale assoggettata ai quattro vertici a tensione* (1964), whose models are on display at the Italian Cultural Institute. For further information, please contact Magazzino Italian Art.

“This exhibition of Fabro’s works on paper marks a turning point in the promotion of the study and valorization of drawing by Italian artists who were active in the 1960s. Only by embracing the difficult task of exploring and scientifically reconstructing their activity on paper can we discover previously unknown aspects of their thinking that are of essential importance to a reading of their complete oeuvre.” (Ilaria Bernardi, exhibition curator).

“Working on Fabro’s drawings entails entering a territory of art and research and an intimate world of friendships and close relationships. The artist rarely chose to show his drawings in public, yet on many occasions he gave them away as gifts to people close to him. For many, Fabro’s numerous works on paper are a recent discovery, thanks to the first exhibitions organized roughly ten years ago. The purpose of these exhibitions was to initiate a reflection on this area of research and reveal the close connection between his work on paper and his better-known career as a sculptor. And yet each new opportunity to study Fabro’s vast output more closely fills me with an emotion that is hard to explain, except that I am moved by the pleasure of rediscovering in it that playful, lightweight, and ironic side of his personality, translated with visual, sensory, and emotional delicacy.” (Silvia Fabro, exhibition curator).

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<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1FqOiSXHu5Fw6MIQb7XuW4PeIosH3Rs8R?usp=sharing>

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Luciano Fabro was born in Turin in 1936. At the age of six, in 1942, he and his mother moved to live with his grandparents in the province of Udine. In 1959 he settled in Milan, and participated actively in the city's vital artistic climate. He soon came into contact with the artists Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Dadamaino, Enrico Castellani and the critic Carla Lonzi, with whom he had an intense intellectual understanding until 1970, the year that Lonzi decided to abandon the art world and devote herself to feminism.

For his first solo exhibition in Milan at the Galleria Vismara, from May 12 to 26, 1965, he showed *Buco, Impronta, Raccordo anulare, Ruota, Struttura ortogonale assoggettata ai quattro vertici a tensione, Tondo e rettangolo* (the latter was acquired by Lucio Fontana).

In 1967 Germano Celant included the work *Pavimento, Tautologia* (1967) in the "Arte povera" section of the exhibition *Arte Povera - Im Spazio* held at the Galleria La Bertesca in Genova from September 27 to October 20, 1967. Fabro thus became one of the first six artists chosen by Celant. Their work was shown together, revealing their shared inspiration, an approach that Fabro saw as echoing the Franciscan concept of simplicity and "poverty" filled with meaning.

Fabro participated in all the exhibitions of the Arte Povera artists, as well as Celant's historical reassertion and re-reading of this group of artists from the 1980s.

In 1979, with the artist Hidetoshi Nagasawa and the critic Jole de Sanna, he founded the Casa degli Artisti in Milan (it eventually closed in 2007): a place for discussion, research, and exchange between artists from different generations.

From 1983 to 2002 he taught at the Accademia di Brera (his lectures were recently published in two volumes edited by Silvia Fabro, in 2022 and 2023, by the publisher Libri Scheiwiller, Milan).

In addition to showing his work at the Venice Biennale (1972, 1975, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1986, 1993, 1997) and at Documenta Kassel (1972, 1982, 1992), Fabro's work has been shown in many major retrospectives: PAC - Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan (1980), Museum Folkwang, Essen, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam (1981), Neue Galerie - Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen (1983), The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, Le Nouveau Musée, Villeurbanne (1987), Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1988), Museo d'Arte contemporanea del Castello di Rivoli (1989), Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona (1990), Kunstmuseum Luzern (1991), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1992), Openluchtmuseum voor Beeldhouwkunst Middelheim, Antwerp, Palazzo Fabroni, Pistoia (1994), Centre G. Pompidou in Paris (1996), Tate Gallery in London, Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro (1997), Musée Bourdelle, Paris (2004), MADRE: Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina a Napoli (2007), and Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid (2015).

From the 1980s onwards Fabro produced public works for Switzerland, Korea, Japan, Holland, Belgium, Norway, and Italy.

His works are held in the collections of major museums, including the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Tate Modern in London, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, The New Orleans Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and other major private and public collections.

He wrote profusely on the theory of art, and these writings have been collected in several publications and translated into numerous languages.