



LUCIO FONTANA

The third dimension

We want the painting to escape from its frame and the sculpture from its bell jar

Spatialism - Milan, 18th March 1948

Lucio Fontana (1899, Rosario de Santa Fè) a versatile artist that can be described as a curious traveller, an inexhaustible explorer, an unscrupulous conqueror and a superb experimenter. Certainly his, an adventure beyond the traditional limits, a route searching for innovation through new spaces, new dimensions, in a dilated time projected in the future, maybe not even be human. It is in the flamboyant after-war climate that Fontana achieves his “spatial” idea and he fiercely inserts himself in the fertile humus of the Italian avant-garde scene, longing to abandon a lifetime of circumstances confined and constrained in an encoded immobility.

The Spatialism Movement (also called Spatial Movement, Spatial Art or Spatialism) was born in 1946 with the “*Manifesto Blanco*” (white manifesto) and finds the support of different artists, among which the petitioners of the various posters undersigned in the years such as Mario Deluigi, Roberto Crippa, Cesare Peverelli, Gianni Dova, Beniamino Joppolo, Gian Carozzi, Vinicio Vianello, Milena Milani, Virgilio Guidi, Enrico Donati and others.

His ceaseless theoretical activity together with his manual ability, established the solid basis to operate a revolution in the conception of the work of art, supplying the elements to overcome the margin between painting and sculpture, by means of an action that has transformed the two-dimensional of the canvas, and through a spatial idea of the work of art beyond the border of the work itself, involving both the surrounding environment, releasing the materials in a space-matter dimension. The concept of space remains the key issue of his research, a space delimited, generated, influenced, rhythmical by shape and by motion, but always alive, indefinite, futuristic, maybe even visionary.

The exhibition presents 34 works on display, with the aim of providing a testimony, as complete as possible of the *Spatial Concept* declination proposed by Fontana in the different, expressive forms and through the particular techniques achieved.

When, therefore in his artistic career the figurative gives in to change, he fulfils in his works in the beginning of the 1950s, small holes called i “*Buchi*” - that combined with small pieces of embedded stones, create complex nebulae of light, shade and colour: attempts, the *Spatial Concepts*, of going further than the canvas, to perforate matter and override the boundaries of painting. A test on canvas, where the canvas is considered not just as an ordinary support, but is considered as matter (equal to iron, marble, ceramics) that has to be worked, transformed, moulded until its definitive overcoming.

However, the real innovation that breaks up all connections with the past and marks the unmistakable identification with his art, occurs in February 1959, when he displays his first samples of the long series of cuts called “*tagli*” that pierced the canvas and exposed the space behind it. This way, the painting is transformed into a monochrome surface crossed by a breccia, by one or more vertical cuts (*spatial concept Attesa* or *Attese*, in case of more cuts) that indicate escape routes towards elsewhere, towards a “third dimension”.

The two fundamental elements of Fontana’s research are concentrated on these works: on one side the concept of space expressed by the motion, but at the same time the moment before taking action, when the idea is already in the Artist’s mind and he waits to realise it.

Fontana’s passion for ceramics arises in the 1930s when he uses terracotta for his plastic works even though the turning point occurs in 1935 when he meets Tullio Mazzotti, called d’Albisola. It is with him that a thirty year collaboration begins as a modeller at the Mazzotti factory in Albisola

Marina, producing works in a futurist style, and afterwards applying the theory of Spatialism to ceramics like in the *Sfere* work (1957) and in the *Spatial Concept* (1957) where cuts (*tagli*) and holes (*buchi*) are applied to geometric shapes in terracotta.

Thanks to the collaboration with the main Italian architects of that time, Fontana had the chance to carry out some experiments, that led him in 1949 to create one of his most innovative and radical works: *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera*. It was presented on occasion of the exhibition held at the Naviglio Gallery in Milan, and consisted in having created a dark environment illuminated only by six lamps of Wood, whereas in the middle of the room a temporary installation consisting of a giant amoeba-like shape suspended in the void in a darkened room, lit up by florescent lights that changed colour from yellow to purple, to red to blue. In this way Fontana wanted to exceed the traditional concept of the three languages of art, therefore uniting painting, sculpture and architecture in one, only space perceivable by the visitor. Since then up until 1968, the year of his death (in fact the exhibition intends to pay tribute to him fifty years later), Fontana continued to accomplish *Spatial Environments / Ambienti Spaziali* for Galleries and Museums.

Even in the *Teatrini* series - space remains the protagonist, delimited by a frame that defines the painting within which different representations of cosmic landscapes seen by possible astronauts go on scene.

The environment and setting up of the exhibition, with explicit reference to that claimed in the *Manifesto tecnico dello Spazialismo* in 1951, where it declared that the 4° ideal dimension of architecture is art, and that reinforced concrete (seen as the “way”) revolutions the styles and the statics of modern architecture, proposes an urban ambience characterised by some constructive elements precisely of postwar architecture.

It is the flooring, that simulates an assemblage of stone cubes, and accompanies the visitor in ambiances characterised by partitions reproducing concrete breeze blocks alternated with others rust coloured with clear reference to corroded corten surfaces.

The exhibition’s itinerary is also influenced by vertical elements that on one side invite the visitor to reflect on the title of the exhibition, representing a sort of passage to the “third dimension”, whereas on the other they vaguely provoke and recall the *Spatial Ambience*, presented in Document 4 in Kessel in 1968, where a white space labyrinth led to a cut (*taglio*).

Other than a multimedia installation, that simulates the execution of cuts on canvas, some photographs taken by another grand artist – the photographer Ugo Mulas complete the display. A regular customer at the Giamaica bar in Milan, a meeting place in the 1950s for all artists.