

# LUCIO FONTANA SCULPTOR

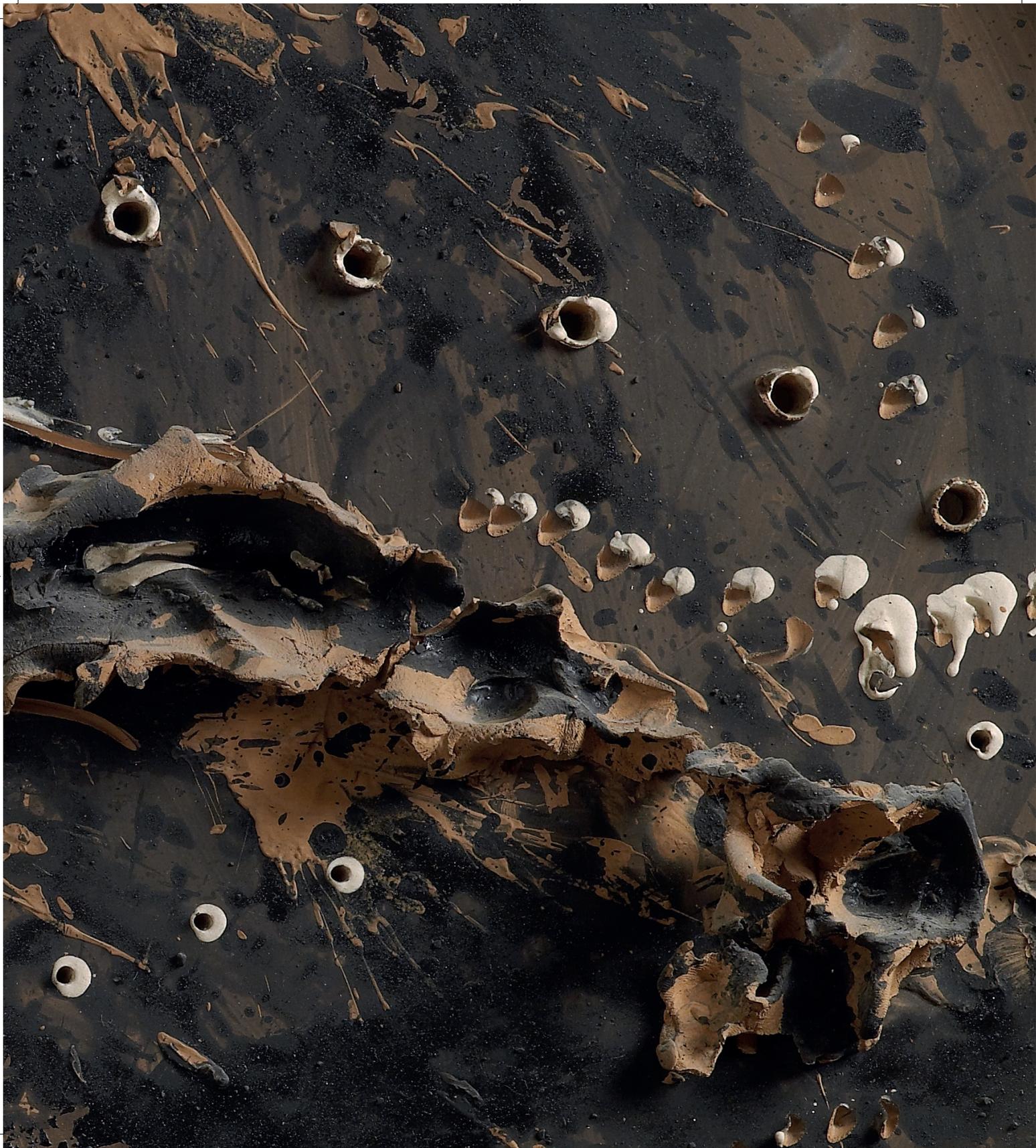
## FROM THE EARTH TO THE COSMO

M&L FINE ART, LONDON, 7 MARCH-12 MAY 2017

**M&L FINE ART**

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*Lucio Fontana Sculptor.*

*From the Earth to the Cosmo*

M&L Fine art, London, 7 march-12 may 2017

*Front cover:*

*Concetto spaziale [Il pane], 1951, detail [sc. 9]*

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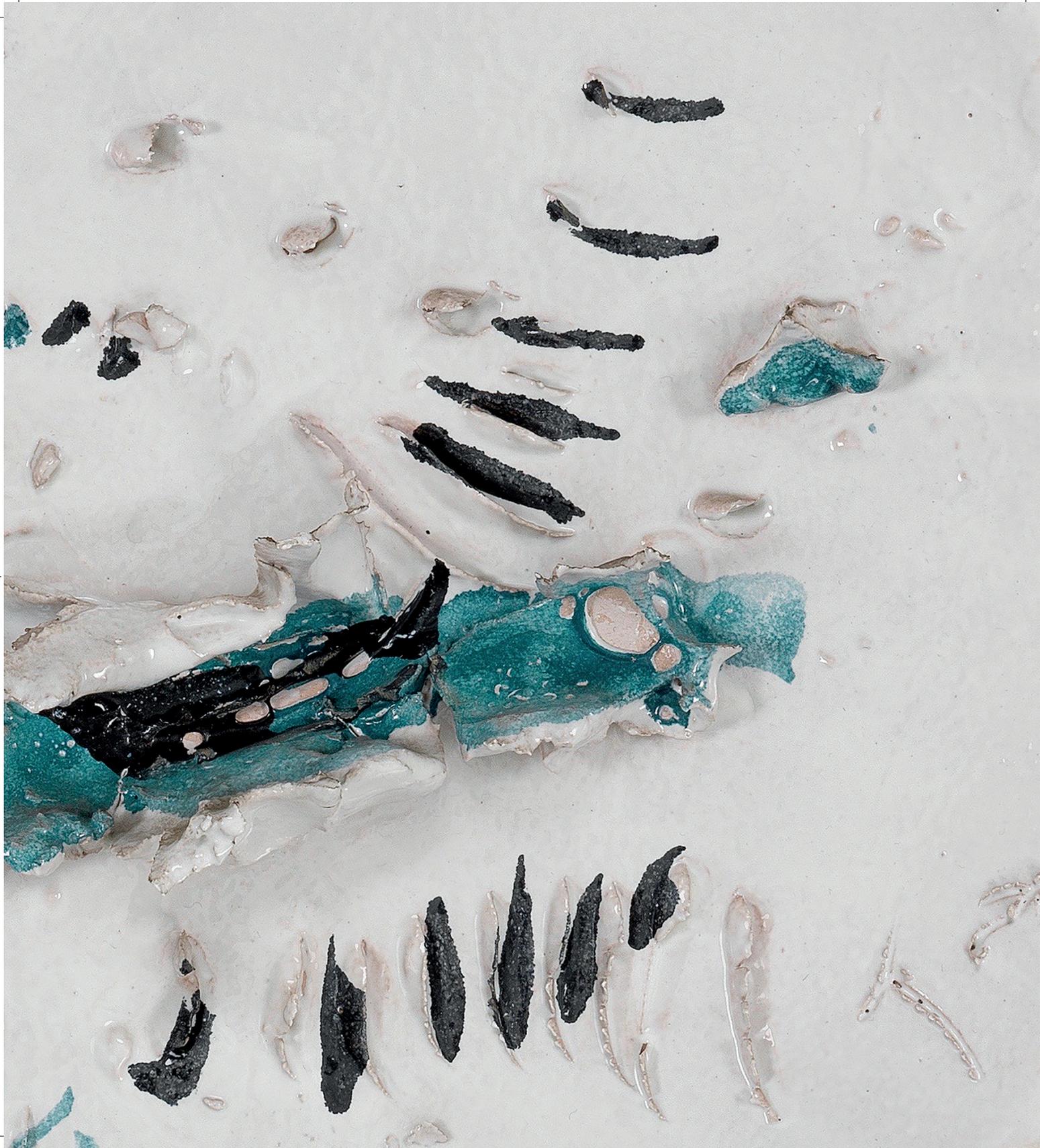
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## CONTENTS

- 9 | About some sculptures by Lucio Fontana  
*Paolo Campiglio*
- 13 | “My” Fontana  
*Luciano Tellaroli*
- 16 | Speaking of Lucio Fontana's multiples  
*Fausta Squatriti*







## ABOUT SOME SCULPTURES BY LUCIO FONTANA

*Paolo Campiglio*

Sculpture was part of Lucio Fontana's genetic makeup. It came from a family tradition of decorators and artisans who had preceded him in the second half of the nineteenth century, but above all it came from his father Luigi, who had emigrated from Italy to Argentina and with whom the artist had a contradictory love/hate relationship. It was his father, a sculptor and astute entrepreneur in Rosario on the cusp of the two centuries, who taught his son the rudiments of this art: modelling, sculpting marble, and the importance of the architectural context. It was his father who showed him how to render expressions of feeling in the human figure, and the importance of the incidence of light. But his father was also the first figure to be challenged and «killed» by the young Lucio who was in search of his own path, one far from the doldrums of nineteenth century professional routine: he was gifted with an extraordinary manual ability and was a virtuoso in moulding figures.

Fontana arrived in Milan in 1927 with the aim of studying at the Brera Academy, and while there he became fascinated by the extreme sculptural condensation of the marble works by his teacher Adolfo Wildt, by the luminous tension of his surfaces, and by the clarity of his gilded sculptures.

The attraction of Wildt's art was its refined transfiguration of the forms from figuration to abstraction, as well as by its material: through an expert use of the chisel, Wildt transformed the material into sinuous, apparently weightless motifs. This was a heroic and heretical virtuosity by this master of Symbolism: Lucio thought he was marvellous.

But slowly he left this preciousity behind and, having graduated in 1930, he began to create the basis of his own art. Now he was fascinated by the coloured plasticity of Archipenko and Zadkine, two artists he had already studied while in Rosario, and they inspired his first experiments with sculpture. But in Milan in the early 1930s his antediluvian primitivism, overflowing with expressionist tensions, caused a scandal.

With a lack of commissions, and with the state of contemporary art collecting in the Italy of that period, the fascist regime guaranteed collaborations with painters, sculptors, and architects through professional associations (unions) for public events, the commissioning of monuments, and the installation of art exhibitions: the Milan Triennial was a workshop of ideas and projects, somewhere where the young exponents of the modern movement and rationalism – architects including Terragni, Ligeri, Figini, and Pillini, and the BBPR group – could meet such young artists as the thirty-year-old Fontana, Fausto Melotti, and others.

Their ideal was a European and supranational art, the art that was being created in Paris at the time; and so Fontana took part in the Parisian Abstraction Création movement in 1935, with the idea that sculpture must

break away from plastic forms and free itself from volumes, replacing them with minimal, abstract, and weightless volumes. His solo show of abstract works at the Galleria del Milione in February 1935 was a complete failure at the time. But the artist was not discouraged; he made the most of an experience that he considered important from a theoretical and polemical point of view: it was a revolt against a backward-looking context, a provocation, an inquiry into space.

Throughout the 1930s, in the climate of fascist Italy, the artist happily accepted public competitions and collaborations with the architects he was most in sympathy with; and in this context too he was able to use to advantage his sculptural ideas, even though in the regime's figurative and symbolically representative atmosphere. This was the case of the *Cavalli che seguono la Vittoria* (1936), seen in this show, and the small model for the large-scale (2.5 metre high) *Cavalli*, created from reinforced and completely white plaster and which constituted, together with the statue Italia (later renamed *Vittoria*), the dynamic energy and the centre of attraction of the Salone della Vittoria at the 1936 VI Triennial. This was the most representative and symbolic heart of the exhibition, an extremely fascinating environment designed by Edoardo Persico, an architect and art critic. And yet Fontana's sculptural group, with its incredible proportions, and both figurative yet abstract, was not easily assimilated into the rhetoric of the regime. The white sculptures were ghostly apparitions in a space illuminated by strong lighting where shadows disappeared. The horses were transformed into pure plastic forms that, rearing up, searched for space.

Even with his official commissions his art had anti-monumental connotations, ones alternative to the rhetoric of commissioned art. For Fontana, figuration and abstraction were not contradictory: distant from political engagement and the intransigence typical of avant-garde movements, he managed to express an abstract sensation in his figuration, an evanescent plastic concept, while with his non-figurative sculpture he pushed art into a territory of pure relationships and spatial connections. This was a solution he was to take up again after the war, one he himself recognised as the first steps towards «Spatial Concepts».

His «Spatial Concepts», in other words his pierced canvases, were begun in 1949: these works represented a gesture, a concise formula, that expressed the values of the civilization of the atomic and space age. This was not sculpture and it was not painting: the pierced canvas was an expression that reaffirmed the presence of a fourth dimension, space-time, to be found even in our everyday life. Fontana believed in a new civilisation that would supersede material and blood, and would be reborn in a utopian, futuristic, and ideal dimension. But he never really abandoned materials, and so his sculptural approach to ceramics continued to produce new developments. In 1950, at the same time as his first pierced canvases, ones in which the «holes» also had a sculptural value and were often perforated from the back of the canvas, he began to evolve ceramics that he himself was to refer to as his «bread», due to the singular thickness of the doughy material pierced by holes.

These were monochrome works created in only three examples and conceived at different times; of them the terracotta *Concetto spaziale* (1951), on show here, is a rare example: the minimal gestures and the repetition of the formula of the “holes” extend over the whole surface to brutally mortify the material. But in fact this is only an apparent mortification: the violence of the gesture hides, instead, the opening of that new dimension, of an ideal «elsewhere», difficultly deducible because it is masked by appearances.

Throughout the whole of the 1950s his creativity developed through the seduction of materials, a fascination with anti-materials, polychromy, and an absolute monochrome; there were also sculptures finely modelled in clay (plates and bas-reliefs) in which the extreme virtuosity of *homo faber* was allowed full expression (often in relationship to architecture) and a renunciation of material in the Spatial Concepts on canvas. In this continuous oscillation, such works as *Concetto spaziale* (1951), a painted terracotta with holes, represent a fascinating mediation: the holes, oriented in diagonal trajectories, are «illuminated» by drops of colour in order to underline the contrast between light and shade, apparition and mystery, that was typical of his works on canvas. However, the terracotta block has a tactile weight and consistence.

The series of Spatial Concepts on terracotta blocks made between 1951 and 1957, are related to drawings conceived as original illustrations for the poems in the book *Il Prato del Silenzio* by Lina Angioletti (Schwarz, 1956), now seen here for the first time. The «temi del giorno e della notte», the poems of time, were interpreted by Fontana with spatial and allusive images, in black and white, in order to reaffirm the “existential” alternation of light and shade. The marks on the sheets of paper, scattered in trajectories of criss-crossed or radial dots, are in harmony with the hermetic verses of the poems.

The terracotta models for the facade of the church of the Assunta, on the Celle hills of Liguria (1956-1958), commissioned by the architect Luigi Magnani, represent a period of sacred sculpture analogous to the figurative motifs on the ceramic plates, though on an architectural scale, and they are linked to the numerous studies for bas-reliefs for the fifth door of Milan cathedral: the fully rounded figures come alive as a result of the contrast between the dynamic and magmatic material of the sculpture and the surface of the facade.

At the end of 1958, the long and difficult affair of the fifth door of the cathedral finished unhappily for the artist: after much hesitation and sacrifices by the artist, the commission was undertaken by Luciano Minguzzo. According to the recollections of the artist, which were noted down after a conversation with him in the 1960s, it was his very anger at this defeat, following a fierce telephone call explaining the decision of the cathedral competition, that unleashed the violence of his «cuts»: it was the loss of this important commission as a “sculptor” that led him to destroy with a scalpel, in the excitement of his anger, all the canvases that he had in his studio at the time. This purifying gesture led to a new period of fertile creativity. The peremptory «cutting» of his canvas was not a destructive act but something that opened up a new horizon: first of all as a series of cuts, and then

as his central motif, the protagonist of a monochrome ground. His spatial concepts became «attesa»: awaiting or expectation. Awaiting as contemporary humanity's condition which awaits and expects the future; a waiting for the artist's creative act that suddenly manifested itself after his contemplation of the monochrome canvas, a waiting for humanity in space, attracted by the infinite cosmos.

This was the crucial passage between 1959 and 1968, the final decade of the artist's life, a passage that led to that "philosophy of nothing" typical of a Fontana who, by then, had distanced himself from the tough battle for acceptance as an artist, and who as a man had reached a moral and ethical stability, an interior sagacity, a philosophical maturity. In the final series of works titled «ellissi», 1967, the «cut» was by planned and then realised mechanically on lacquered wood or enamelled, polished metal, finished in the artisanal workshops of Sergio Tosi. The oblong and ovoid forms, reminiscent of Einstein's curved universe, were studied in such a way as to become variable elements in space. Either hung on the wall or placed on special pedestals structured in such a way as to freely modify their inclination or orientation, these last sculptures, an example of which is the *Pillola* exhibited here, were coloured elements alluding to industrial civilisation, to a society in continuous change: the cuts became an emblematic style, almost a sign of the artist's action, one with ever-new meanings.

In an interview with Carla Lonzi in 1967, Fontana humbly reaffirmed that these recent sculptures were similar to Einstein's curvature of the universe:

[...] a few days ago an atomic scientist saw these ovals and asked if I were a scholar of mathematics or of Einstein because, he said, they have the form of Einstein's mathematical structuring; the universe is compressed and long, almost like a cigar. But instead it's just a coincidence, isn't it? It is a form that I have studied for a year: it is the most simple and modest that can there can be. Anyway, it has the usual holes, the space that has always been my ideal: the forms change, I use lacquered wood, lacquered metal sheets, materials that are also common now. Not that I want to discover anything; quite the contrary. I continue in this way... these ovals, [...] they add nothing, they are a variation [of the idea of the "cuts"] that is almost a pastime, not a discovery..

## “MY” FONTANA

*Luciano Tellaroli*

Thanks to my passion for Giorgio Marinelli, at the end the seventies I read *L'ironia teologica di Fontana*, which he had just written. Through his captivating and omnipervasive style, he introduced me to the incredible story of the contest for the V door of the Duomo di Milano, to which Fontana dedicated seven years with great enthusiasm. So, I began studying the papers in the archives of the Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, reconstructing the story: participants, acts of the selecting committee, complaints, recommendations to the artists, letters and decisions that initially resulted in an ex-aequo between Fontana, Minguzzi and Manfrini, then a further restriction to the first two took place and finally, in 1958, Fontana backed down and the contract was given to Minguzzi; his door was to be inaugurated on the 6th of January 1965!

I wanted to create an exhibition about the great “missed” opportunity for Milan and name it *The façade of sacredness*; it would have included, in addition to the models for the contest, the three Vie Crucis as well as other “sacred” works by Fontana, among which the two models for the Assunta di Celle shown here... The exhibition was supposed to be transferred from Milan to Rosario, to the Museo Municipal de Castagnino, substituting the story about the door of the Duomo with a local one: Fontana’s participation in the contest for the Museo Nacional a la bandera. In this case too, although he was commended, Fontana lost the contest.

Following are some excerpts from the letters sent by Fontana to his pupil and friend Pablo Edelstein, which help understand the pathos with which the artist experienced the contest for the Duomo di Milano.

4/12/1950

[...] In the following months I will be very busy with the sketch for the door of the Duomo di Milano, which I have to deliver by April, and the spatial decoration for the Triennale di Milano.

25/4/1952

[...] The decision about the door of the Duomo will be taken over the next few days. Minguzzi only presented half of a door, which could be either positive or negative for him as it is impossible to carry out such an important job in such a short time. Manfrini made three panels and a large publication for every commissioner and I presented one panel and two character studies made of modelling clay. I heard they might award the prize but not the contract – if that is the case they can go to hell [...]

17/10/1952

[...] The doors of the Duomo, I would have won by vote, but special interests intervened so now it's a draw between Minguzzi and me.

21/5/1958

I will no longer be doing the door of the Duomo, as the commissioners have been coming to my studio to control my work for more than two years... my door would have lost all its personality and I don't want to submit to them or give up something that makes my door recognisable, so I told them to go to hell; now I'm very relaxed and able to carry out my daily work serenely [...]

Although it was appreciated, at the last moment my project for the exhibition also ended up in the same way....

Another vivid memory is reading an article by Marta Isnenghi in the section *Passion stories* in the "Corriere della Sera" newspaper in 2002; following are some excerpts from the article:

[...] Every morning the girl travels from Lodi to Milan and pattering she reaches the lab in Ausonio Street... She works as a "junior" in one of the most elegant hat boutiques of the city. A young sculptor works in the atelier opposite to the shop. His name is ...Lucio. He comes from Argentina where he was born in Rosario de Santa Fè in 1899, and his parents have Italian origins... He has a gaze of fire that contrasts with his indolent stride and a Clark Gable smile. Teresita stealthily observes him while she inserts the "stiffener" in the felts in order to make them stay in shape... the bold Lucio never stops looking at her while he shapes his passionate pieces of terracotta, very different from the algid sculptures of Adolfo Wildt, his teacher at Brera. Passion doesn't need words: so, one night, after closing the atelier and the boutique, they leave together as young silent lovers in a city full of lights.

«That night, I missed the last train for Lodi», Teresita was later to reveal. So, the love story between one of the most important artists of the 20th century and the shy hat designer began... After the years in Albissola, where he experiments with clay, in 1940 Fontana boards a ship to Argentina leaving Teresina alone. During the war, Teresina waits for him with nostalgia and trepidation. Until, in 1947, he returns... They get married in 1952 at the church del Redentore, in Stradivari Street.

Then Fontana opens a studio in Monforte Street 23, in the courtyard of Palazzo Cicogna, ex-posed towards the garden permeated by the summer scent of vanilla produced by the Clerodendrum. This is where he cuts long white canvases and creates his first famous "slash-es". Teresita now owns a boutique in Piccinni Street, but she seems intimidated and almost detached from her husband's activities...

I read the article many times because it resembled a screenplay for a movie! I thought about shooting a short film that would bring the article to life... the small «stiffener» in the hats, the looks, the missed train, the ship that leaves and returns (archive images here, obviously), the wedding, the studio in Monforte Street... Two friends, who are actors, and I, started shooting the first scene... but soon we realised that in order to do a good job we needed licenses, autho-risations, costumes, scenography... well, the budget was just too high... giving up for the second time.

However, if you're reading this it means that the third attempt was successful and the story of Fontana's extraordinary artistic adventure has taken shape, in the sculptures exhibited here in which the different «cycles» of his work are shown. Cycles that began in different years (... holes, baroques, plasters, natures, slashes...) and that were never closed: the simultaneity of his expressive registers accompanied his entire creative path.

Lightness, perspicacity and essentiality mark his works, in which conceptual *gravity* and vi-brations merge, even in the infinitesimal nuances.



16 FAUSTA SQUATRITI

## SPEAKING OF LUCIO FONTANA'S MULTIPLES

*Fausta Squatriti*

Lucio Fontana expressed his interest in the future of humanity and its role in the universe through provocative and visionary art; he knew that after the Second World War scientific progress would produce ethical and moral changes, a sort of mutation, and he waited for it without fear of losing his roots in the past or in the present.

The spatial era would confirm his intuitions expressed in the symbolic restarting from zero, from white, announced in the *Manifiesto Blanco*, which was drafted with enthusiasm by a group of Fontana's students under his influence, in Buenos Aires (1946), and later extended and divulged in subsequent manifestos when the artist returned to Italy.

Ten years later, in 1957, man left Earth for the first time; therefore, space was no longer inviolable. That «going beyond», staged by Fontana, becomes reality through the language of art, whose prophetic and unprejudiced breadth and great complexity use relatively simple means: oil colours, canvas wall painting, glass, decorative glitter and hand shaped ceramic. Fontana uses neon tubes, sheets of copper to lacerate and Wood's lights only when necessary.

After completely exploring gesture, during the last years of his life he directs every emotion to the power of the project. The aura lives where some interpreted the works made by extraneous hands as a sort of reduction. On the contrary, a new chapter began; the artist felt the necessity to join the industrial civilisation, of which, during those years, the bitter results were unpredictable, while people impatiently waited for the civil society, its underdeveloped laws and outdated morals to adapt.

Daniel Spoerri was one of the first to conceive the possibility of producing artworks in series; in 1959, he created the "Edition MAT". In 1964, in our twenties, although probably not well prepared, Sergio Tosi and I became editors of numbered and multiple books, contributing to the birth of a genre that wasn't that of sculpture or of the industrial object itself. The consumer society accepts the fact that artworks lose their uniqueness when built with the use of partially innovative industrial techniques applied in an artisanal way. In the scale of values of consumption, Art is one of the goods.

In the same year, I asked Lucio to create a project for an edition; therefore, the folder *Quattro Oggetti di Lucio Fontana e Due Poesie di Salvatore Quasimodo* was born, containing screen prints on card with punched holes between sheets of aluminium. Later, we created the catalogue and manifesto for the exhibition in Paris at Alexandre Iolas' gallery, using similar but more industrial procedures.

In 1967, Fontana commissioned us to create a sculpture entirely produced with means other than the artist's hands, which is known as a *Concetto spaziale*, a big polished copper egg, cut and lacquered with industrial paint, which for some time has been part of the collection of the Banca Intesa Sanpaolo and still conserves its original lacquer.

The sculpture was finished at the last minute and I transported it from Milan to Rome with my Cinquecento Giardinetta, to exhibit it for the first time at the Galleria Marlborough in Gregoriana Street 5, while on the roof of the car I carried another sculpture in lacquered foil that the artist named *Farfalla*, I don't remember its colour. We left early in the morning and arrived in time for the opening. The exhibition also presented ellipses in lacquered wood created by a very skilful carpenter and industrial lacquerer.

The great red sculpture was so beautiful that we started thinking about creating a smaller edition of it. Fontana named it *Pillola*, in tribute to the contraceptive pill that, although prohibited in Italy, during those years had changed the practice of conception allowing women to experiment a sexual freedom that was unimaginable before it.

Thirty-six pieces of *Pillola* were produced, plus some artist's proofs that presented chromatic variations: black, white, red, shocking pink, yellow, turquoise and purple. Each piece comes with a card in Fabriano paper with printed colophon and Fontana's original signature written with a green pen. Together with the artist, we decided to use this method in order to certificate the authenticity of the edition, considering that the lacquer might be ruined accidentally and therefore need redoing completely, because industrial materials are not restorable in the same way as manual ones.

A few years ago, I saw a piece that looked very similar to the original edition but it presented a line of holes instead of the slash; I wasn't aware of this piece as it wasn't produced by me.

In 1968, Lucio invited Sergio and I to spend New Year together with him and Teresita; we had chilled champagne and a slice of Panettone in the penumbra of a hospital room.

The great artist died on September the 7th of that year, lovingly remembered by anyone who had the honour of being his friend.

# CATALOGUE

## 1. I cavalli che seguono la vittoria

1936

Bronze, unique example

52 x 60 x 25 cm

From 1935 to 1936 a group of architects and artists led by Edoardo Persico, together with Giancarlo Palanti, Marcello Nizzoli, and Lucio Fontana, won a competition for decorating the reception hall of the VI Milan Triennial which was inaugurated in May 1936. The hall was the high point of the official exhibition's symbolism and had been conceived by Persico in a noble manner: he adopted the continuous rhythm of tall wings that suggested, in an abstract manner, the idea of an ancient colonnade. The room, completely white and isolated from the rest of the building, was artificially lit and emanated a ghostly pallor. Inside the rational space designed by Persico, Fontana had devised a notable sculptural group in plaster placed on a high dais, a group consisting of an advancing allegorical figure in the foreground, representing Italy, followed by an ancient symbol of energy and dynamism: two rearing horses. But the end of the campaign for the occupation of Ethiopia in the months before the exhibition meant that the authorities had imposed that the work's title be changed to Vittoria, and forced the artist to append a phrase by Mussolini at the base of the group. A series of photomontages by Nizzi at the entrance, with portraits of Roman emperors, imbued the setting with the official character required by the commissioners, but undertaken with the use of a modern technique.

This model for the horses, in polished bronze, and which was presented to the commission by Fontana as an example of his work, indicate the artist's original intention to adopt an abstract colour (either black or white) on a figurative base that is highly dynamic and which underlines its uncertain abstract or figurative identity. The ancient theme of rearing horses as a symbol of energy and dynamism, which had been re-evaluated by the Futurists, had been personally interpreted by Fontana as the emblem of a mass in movement articulated in space from his first sculptures in the 1930s. In the future a rearing horse, the so-called «el caballo loco», was to remain one of the artist's favourite subjects in ceramics, a symbol of irrational energy, the emblem of a pure manifestation of strength in movement, almost a reminiscence of his past as a «gaucho» in the Argentinean pampas.

*Paolo Campiglio*

*Provenance:* Private Collection, Milan.

*Exhibitions:* Milan, Museo del Permanente, *Lucio Fontana e Milano*, 11 October-17 November 1996, pp. 54-152, n. 8 (erroneously indicated as glazed plaster); Milan, Triennale di Milano, *Centenario di Lucio Fontana. Cinque mostre a Milano. Lucio Fontana, la Triennale, la Luce*, 23 April-30 June 1999, pp. 170-354, n. II,14; Leeds-Rovereto, Henry Moore Institute-Mart, *Dead Language Sculpture. Sculpture from fascist Italy-Scultura Lingua Morta: Scultura nell'Italia fascista*, 31 May-14 December 2003, p. 98, n. 5; *Lucio Fontana, Works from 1936 to 1965* (London Amedeo Porro Fine Arts, London, Ben Brown Fine Arts), p. 33 (ill.)

*Bibliografy:* P. Campiglio, *Lucio Fontana. La scuola architettonica degli anni Trenta*, Nuoro 1995, pp. 83-84, n. 46; E. Crispolti, *Fontana*, Milan 1999, pp. 114-115, n. 44; E. Crispolti, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato di sculture, dipinti, ambientazioni*, Milan 2006, vol. II, p. 935, n. 36 A 5; P. Campiglio, *Lucio Fontana. Works from 1936 to 1965*, Cinisello Balsamo 2015, p. 32.



## 2. Battaglia

1947

Polychrome ceramic, glazed blue, pink and gold

15 x 28.5 x 22 cm

Signed and dated «L. F. 47» on the back. Signed «Fontana» at the bottom

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n. 3761/1

*Provenance:* Private Collection, Milan (gift from the artist, 1960).



### 3. Madonna Assunta e San Michele Arcangelo

Celle Ligure, façade of the parish church of the Assunta in Piani

After the Mostra del Centenario (Exhibition for the Centenary), held in Milan in 1999, the two preparatory terracotta models, for the façade of the parish church of the Assunta in Piani di Celle Ligure, are exhibited for the first time.

At the same time, a new photographic campaign was created, making it possible to compare the models with the final work, still *in situ*, which is a large high-relief made of red slip cast refractory terracotta, painted with earth pigments and glazed.

The possibility of comparing the models with the final work makes it possible to follow the different phases of the project.

In the first model – the smaller and probably older one – the figures are defined by a line that deeply incises the surface of the terracotta; the mantle of the Virgin emerges from the table, as well as the small legs of the angel pushing Mary towards the sky. Michael strikes the dragon with his spear. In Jewish tradition, the snake or dragon symbolised the power of evil. The incised mark that defines the spear isn't as strong as the outlines of the figures; instead it resembles the commissures between the bricks of the façade.

In the second model, a greater spatial opening is evident, as if Fontana was taking into account the wide surface of the façade. The distance between figures is greater, giving a far-reaching and greater compositional unity to the work, perhaps at the expense



of the dramatic intensity. The mantle of the Virgin extends under the left arm, recalling the spread out black mantle of the extraordinary *Arlecchino* (1948). The figure of the *Archangel*, which calls to mind *Il Fiocinatore* (1934) and the *San Giorgio con l'asta* (1935), provides the model with more dynamism due to the different impetus of the legs and the greater torsion of the chest.

Once again, incised lines that reproduce the bricks of the church's façade characterise the background, but the very nervous and almost obsessive vertical lines assume a gestural value that formally anticipates the famous "slashes" that shortly after (October 1958), with different and autonomous conceptuality and aesthetics, inaugurate one of Fontana's greatest "cycles", placing him among the top artists of the 20th century.

As you can see in the images taken from the photo-shoot that Nicolò Gialain did especially for the exhibition, in the façade's high-relief, the compositional structure changes due to the placement of the dragon-snake in a lower position and its alignment with the diagonal of the stick, made of bronze, which



### 3.b Madonna Assunta e San Michele Arcangelo (study), 1958

1958

Terracotta with figures in relief

41 x 61 cm

*Exhibition: Centenario di Lucio Fontana, in Centenario di Lucio Fontana. Cinque mostre a Milano. Lucio Fontana, la Triennale, la luce, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Triennale, 23 April-30 June 1999), Milan 1999.*

*Bibliography: E. Crispolti, Fontana. Catalogo Generale, Milan 1986, vol. II, p. 738 (ill.); E. Crispolti, Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato di sculture, dipinti, ambientazioni, vol. II, Milan 2006, p. 969, n. 58 A 4; E. Crispolti, Centenario di Lucio Fontana, in Centenario di Lucio Fontana. Cinque mostre a Milano. Lucio Fontana, la Triennale, la luce, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Triennale, 23 April-30 June 1999), Milan 1999, p. 245, n. III, 73 (ill.).*



substitutes the spear in the models. Three angels with a single winged head are added on the sides accompanying the *Assunzione*; the mantle, that was almost an aura in the models, is reduced to the upper part – as in the magnificent figure of the *Pala della Vergine Assunta* (1955), now in the Museo Diocesano in Milan. The arms and the reduced mantle suggest a curvilinear shape that gives movement to the setting, whereas the Virgin's feet seem to rest on a half moon. It is quite likely that this iconography was inspired by the famous passage from *Apocalisse* di Giovanni: "...a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet..." in the "vision of a woman and the dragon", from which the work takes inspiration. Finally, the tail of the monster changes shape, closing upwards in order to harmonise and contrast the line of the mantle and of the arms. The use of the very ancient engobing and glazing techniques enrich the material used, contributing to the refined sacredness of the work.

It was due to the positive insistence of his friend Enzo Rossi and Angelo Saraceno, Managing Director of the Banca Popolare di Milano and financier of the contest for the V door of the Duomo di Milano, that Fontana accepted the job he had previously refused in June 1956 for health reasons (Letter sent by Fontana to Rossi, 05/06/1956; *Lucio Fontana. Lettere 1919-1968*, Milan 1999).

Enzo Magnani, the architect who designed the church, was the first to express the desire to involve the "spatialist" artist, this way modifying the compositional scheme of the façade that was originally outlined by Rossi, who was given the task of the internal Via Crucis instead, trying to create a compositional "convergence" and a partly achieved spatial continuum. In addition to the floor, produced by Mario Rossello, works by Emanuele Luzzati and Enrica Valenzano decorate the Parish.

Luciano Tellaroli



### 3.a Madonna Assunta e San Michele Arcangelo (study)

1958

Terracotta with figures in relief

55 x 75 cm

Signed at the bottom right: «l. fontana»

*Bibliography:* E. Crispolti, *Catalogue raisonné des peintures, sculptures et environnements spatiaux*, Brussels 1974, vol. II, pp. 214-215; E. Crispolti, *Fontana. Catalogo Generale*, Milan 1986, vol. II, p. 735 (ill.); E. Crispolti, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato di sculture, dipinti, ambientazioni*, vol. II, Milan 2006, p. 969, n. 58 A 2; E. Crispolti, *Centenario di Lucio Fontana*, in *Centenario di Lucio Fontana. Cinque mostre a Milano. Lucio Fontana, la Triennale, la Luce*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Triennale, 23 April-30 June 1999), Milan 1999, p. 245, n. III, 72 (ill.).

#### **4. La Fenice**

1949

Glazed polychrome ceramic

Diameter 47 cm

Signed, dated and titled on the back: «l. fontana fenice 49»

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n. 163/1



## 5. Testina

1950-1955

Polychrome ceramic

12 x 17 cm

Signed on the back: «L.F.»

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n.598/148

*Provenance:* Studio d'Arte Contemporanea Dabbeni, Lugano; Private Collection, Sweden; Private Collection, London



## 6-7. Guerrieri a cavallo (Battaglia)

1950

Glazed polychrome ceramic

Diameter 90 cm each

Each signed and dated on the back: «l. Fontana / 50 / albissola»

Works archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, no. 3960/1, 3960/2

An important show of ceramics by Lucio Fontana opened at the Galleria del Milione, Milan, on 13 May 1950 and presented all the artist's recent output: plates, vases, and sacred sculptures, with gilding, acid and brilliant colours, and with accentuated contrasts or dimmer and tenuous ones. In the 20 May edition of the "Corriere della Sera" newspaper, the critic Leonardo Borgese, usually extremely cautious in his judgments, defined the ceramics as sculptures "halfway between Impressionism and the Rococo". In fact, the artist had intentionally played with eighteenth century tradition by adopting the classical "Savona plate" with moulded decorations; in some old warehouses in Albisola he had found unused plates which he transformed with relief sculptural elements of battles and knights. For this occasion he exhibited very large plates, some a metre in diameter, together with some new plates which he defined as "spatial".

In the article titled *Spaziale* in the "Milano Sera" newspaper of 13 May 1950, an anonymous contributor said:

Lucio Fontana, the most extreme of Italian sculptors, the creator of *Arte Spaziale* and the initiator of a new generation of ceramicists, today opens a solo show at the Galleria del Milione of ceramics made in Albisola, where he lives for most of the year. They were kiln-fired with the help of the artisans of the place. On exhibition are small and large plates, some enormous, with battles: scenes that are candid and others that are... spatial. Strong dishes for gourmets, in other words.

In March of the same year, the artist was convinced that he could create a new *Ambiente spaziale* work for the *XXV Venice Biennale* in 1950, to which he had been invited, but the commission preferred his sculptures, in particular three ceramics. To these Fontana added *Concetto spaziale*, 1949-50 (49-50 B 5), a pierced yellow canvas which was here exhibited to an international public for the first time, though sadly it went unnoticed by the critics; it was a work that represented for the artist his most advanced and pure art. He also presented two large plates with battle scenes, each almost a metre in diameter, and a *Cristo* that had perhaps already been exhibited in Milan.

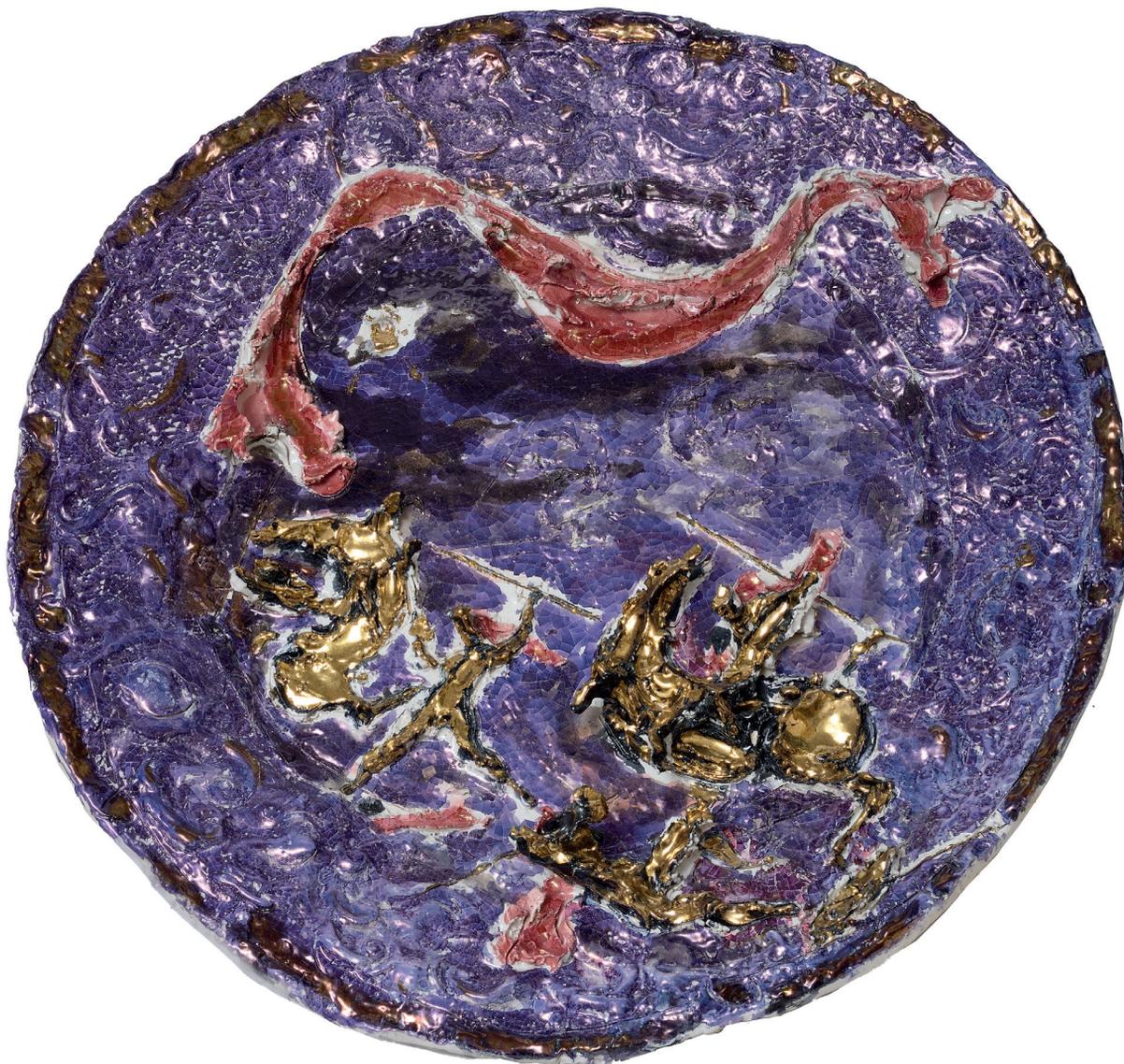
These are two plates which, having been bought by the original owner from the Biennale in 1950, have now been identified. Fontana was overjoyed by the sale and, on 20 October that year, he told his friend Edelstein, «I too have been lucky at Venice and have sold all my ceramics». This is also supported by an article in the architect Luigi Moretti's magazine "Spazio", in which the sales price of the *Cristo* was quoted as L.150,000 and the *Piatto con Battaglia* as L.100,000 (*Borsa italiana dell'arte moderna*, in "Spazio", n. 4, January/February 1951, p. 117).

For this pair of plates, which had originated as a diptych, Fontana worked on some old and very large plates using a ribbon-like motif in the upper part. This detail is very similar to the red strip that runs along the ceramic frieze of the *Battaglia* conceived in 1948 for the Cinema Arlechino, but it is also reminiscent of other abstract elements to be found in the *Ambiente Spaziale a luce nera* made for the Galleria del Naviglio in 1949. Even the violet-blue colour is reminiscent of the dominating tone of this environmental piece. In both pieces, the lower part shows a theme the artist often favoured for the figuration of his ceramic works: the *Battaglia* with dynamic and gilded, luminous and bright figures. For Fontana, this subject represented humanity's eternal battle, one that here is set in a fantastic and galactic scenario, one that is completely surreal.

*Paolo Campiglio*

*Exhibitions: XXV Biennale di Venezia* (Venezia, Palazzo Centrale, Padiglione Italia, 8 giugno-15 ottobre 1950), Venice 1950; *Arts & Food, Rituali dal 1851* (Milano, Triennale, 1 maggio-31 ottobre 2015), Milan 2015.

*Bibliography: XXV Biennale di Venezia*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Palazzo Centrale, Padiglione Italia, 8 June-15 October 1950), Venice 1950, n. 16; *Arts & Food, Rituali dal 1851*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Triennale, 1 May-31 October 2015), Milan 2015, p. 466, n. 532 (illustrated in colour (rotated 45° anticlockwise)).



## 6. Guerrieri a cavallo (Battaglia)

34 CATALOGUE



**7. Guerrieri a cavallo (Battaglia)**

## **8. La corrida**

1950-1953

Glazed polychrome ceramic

Diameter 50 cm

Signed top left: «l. Fontana»

Authentication on the photo of the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan



## 9. Concetto spaziale [Il pane]

1951

Holes and scratches on terracotta

28 x 35 cm

Signed and dated at the bottom left: «l. fontana 51»

In 1950 Fontana created a *Concetto spaziale* that consisted of a thick block of white ceramic pitted by a constellation of holes, a kind of emanation of his concurrent researches into «holes» on canvas. The block, which has always been part of the artist's collection (today's Fondazione Fontana in Milan) was jokingly called by Fontana «bread» due to its characteristic form which was similar to that of thick bread dough (in particular, the typical flatbread of Liguria) but invaded by a series of perforations surrounded by a continuous line that delimited the space of the action and gestures. The work maintains the energy of a violated material, the physical solidity of which has been nullified and yet is apparently rising as though leavened: in this way the block expresses an affirmation of the material, its vitality which is at the same time negated by the gesture of piercing.

On the basis of that experience in 1951 he made a second example which we are presenting here: *Concetto spaziale [Il pane]*, 1951, which is very similar to the original but has a more aggressive approach to the holes. The piece's rarity is due to the fact that the material is not painted white, but was left raw with the typical colour of fired, unglazed clay, nor was it painted after firing. The idea is of a material that, in its humbleness and simplicity, leads the artist's action back to the most minimal terms. Actually, Fontana's aim was to negate the process of art-ceramics in the various stages of firing majolica, by bringing the process back to the first act on an inert material. This inert material is revived by the gestures, by a plurality of perforations. The intensity of these holes, undertaken with frequent and repeated violent gestures within a fairly small space, has brought about a kind of texture, one with a sculptural value, that seems to anticipate the later works, with more regular and vibrant motifs, by Heinz Mack and Otto Piene. These characteristics, ones that led to an annulment of the material's traditional artistic value and to the expression of gestural repetition, were only understood many years later by the young artists of Azimuth and of the Gruppo Zero who had closely followed the artist's work and considered him to be a precursor. A third (and last) example of this type, dating from 1952 and today conserved in the Jorn museum in Silkenborg, was in fact reproduced by Piero Manzoni and Enrico Castellani in the first issue of the magazine *Azimuth* (September 1959) to illustrate an article by Guido Ballo devoted to Fontana and titled *Oltre la pittura, oltre la scultura*. This was a testimony to the fact that his radical approach contradicted sculpture (ceramics in particular) even though not making use of canvas, the characteristic material of painting, and aimed at expressing, with the work's ambiguous presence, an eternal contradiction: the impasse of contemporary humanity, divided as it is between an attraction to material in all its forms, a metaphor for humanity's material and earthly dimension, and an attraction to the time-space infinity of the cosmos.

*Paolo Campiglio*

*Bibliografia:* M. Tapié, *Devenir de Fontana*, Turin 1961, p. 77 (ill.); J.E. Cirlot, *Lucio Fontana*, Barcelona 1966, pp. 6-7 (ill.); E. Crispolti, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato di sculture, dipinti, ambientazioni*, Milan 2006, vol. I, p. 303, n. 51 SC 7.



## 10. Concetto spaziale

1954

Holes and scratches on terracotta, unfired painting

25 × 32 cm

Signed and dated at the bottom right: «l. fontana 54»

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n. 1185/1

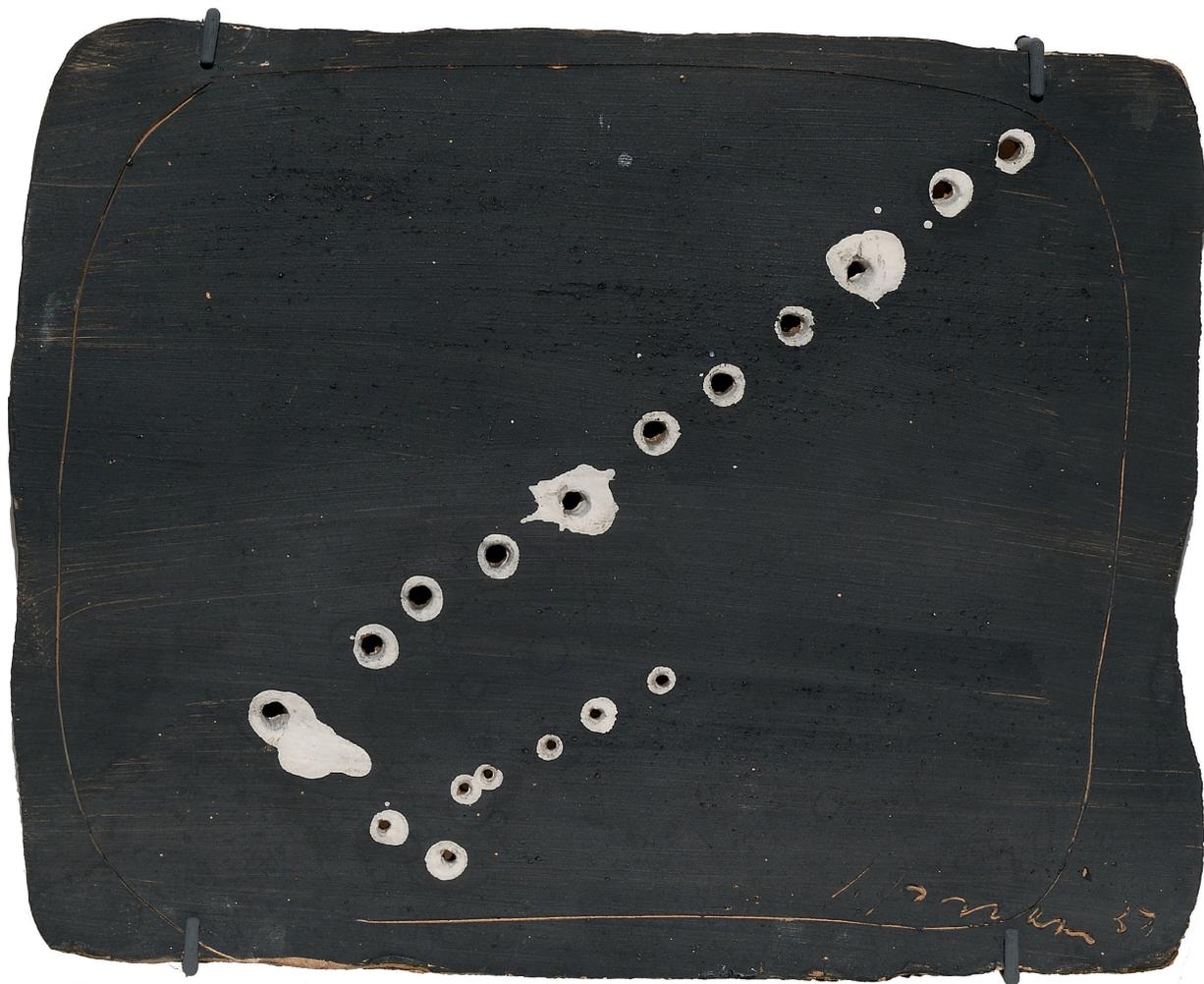
This terracotta, made in Albisola where Fontana produced his majolica pieces in collaboration with the manufacturers in the area, translates the canvas *Concetto spaziale* works into clay. The series of “spatial sculptures” in the form of small terracotta blocks, marked by drops of unfired paint applied to the holes, dates from the early 1950s. In the summer of 1954, however, Fontana continued with this typology with works of a similar format with various colours, mostly on a black background, and characterised by lines of holes highlighted by paint poured onto them. He exhibited a group of these works for the first time in Milan that summer in the show *Incontro Internazionale dei ceramisti di Albisola*, part of the X Triennial (1954). The show was curated by Fontana, at the time commissioner for invitations, and in it were exhibited the works produced during an event held in Albisola that summer, one that was crucial for the relationship between the Nucleare group and the CoBrA groups. Fontana and Baj, together with Karel Appel, Corneille, Matta Echaurren and Emilio Scanavino, exhibited ceramics.

The artist countered the figurative expressionism of the plates/sculptures and the vase/sculptures with a ceramic work inspired by spatial calm and meditation, with luminous, sidereal trajectories against the black of the cosmos. In particular, *Concetto spaziale* 1954 seems to be a translation of the “stone” works, the series of works characterised by fragments of coloured glass glued to the canvas that become a luminous element in a dialogue with the rhythms of the perforations: in the opaque-black coloured block, characterised by two rectilinear sequences of diagonal holes, the light is expressed in a minimal manner with simple marks of colour. In this example, the parallel series of perforations, one with a greater and the other with a less intense diameter with smaller holes, are traced out in a monochrome space outlined with the usual continuous lines and scratches: these are highlighted by superimposed drips of paint to create the spatial illusion of a dialogue between brighter and duller elements, between active elements and an ideally flat background. Here there is a minimal black/white double-colouring, but other examples from the same series show drops of different tonalities, limited to the holes, and able to oppose the expressive emptiness of the perforations. With such an expedient, one based on simplicity and play, Fontana seems to express a calm and extended spatial imagination, almost like a starry sky or a cosmic apparition, something that was to find a fuller expression in the successive series of plaster works and ink works.

*Paolo Campiglio*

*Provenance:* Galleria Blu, Milan; Private Collection, Cles; Private Collection, Milan.

*Bibliography:* “Le Arti”, n. 7/8, July-August 1972, n. 8 (reproduced on the inside back cover); E. Crispolti, *Lucio Fontana, Catalogo ragionato di sculture, dipinti e ambientazioni*, vol. 1, Milan 2006, n. 54 SC 9, p. 307.



## 11. Concetto spaziale

1955

Holes, incisions, and graphite on unfired terracotta

40 x 29 cm

Signed and dated at the bottom: «l. fontana 50»

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n.1186/6

*Provenance:* Galleria Pater, Milan.



## 12a. Illustration for *Il prato del silenzio*

1956

Black and white ink on paper

34 x 24,5 cm

Signed at the bottom right: «fontan»

*Provenance:* Milan, Lina Angioletti.

*Exhibitions:* *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979; *Lucio Fontana*, exhibition catalogue (Zagreb, Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, 14-30 January 1983), Zagreb 1983.

*Bibliography:* L. Angioletti, *Il prato del silenzio*, Milan 1956, n. 1 (ill.); *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979, cat. p. 1 (ill.); *Lucio Fontana*, exhibition catalogue (Zagreb, Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, 14-30 January 1983), Zagreb 1983, cat. n. 211 (ill.); L.M. Barbero, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato delle opere su carta*, Milan 2013, vol. III, p. 1120, n. 56 DVA 1

## 12b. Illustration for *Il prato del silenzio*

1956

Black and white ink on paper

34 x 24,5 cm

Signed at the bottom right: «fontan»

*Provenance:* Milan, Lina Angioletti.

*Exhibitions:* *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979.

*Bibliography:* L. Angioletti, *Il prato del silenzio*, Milan 1956, n. 12 (ill.); *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979, cat. p. 6 (ill.); L.M. Barbero, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato delle opere su carta*, Milano 2013, vol. III, p. 1120, n. 56 DVA 12.

## 12c. Illustration for *Il prato del silenzio*

1956

Black and white ink on paper

34 x 24,5 cm

Signed at the bottom right: «fontan»

*Provenance:* Milan, Lina Angioletti.

*Exhibitions:* *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979.

*Bibliography:* L. Angioletti, *Il prato del silenzio*, Milan 1956, n. 12 (ill.); *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979, cat. p. 4 (ill); L.M. Barbero, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato delle opere su carta*, Milan 2013, vol. III, p. 1120, n. 56 DVA 13.

### **12d1-3. Illustration for *Il prato del silenzio***

1956

d1) Black and white ink on paper

10 x 25 cm

Signed at the bottom right: «L. F.»

*Provenance:* Milano, Lina Angioletti.

*Exhibitions:* *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979

*Bibliography:* L. Angioletti, *Il prato del silenzio*, Milan 1956, n. 11 (ill); L.M. Barbero, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato delle opere su carta*, Milan 2013, vol. III, p. 1120, n. 56 DVA 11.

d2) China nera su carta;

16 x 24,5 cm

Firmato in basso a destra: «fon»

*Provenance:* Milano, Lina Angioletti.

*Exhibitions:* *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979

*Bibliography:* L. Angioletti, *Il prato del silenzio*, Milan 1956, n. 9 (ill); L.M. Barbero, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato delle opere su carta*, Milan 2013, vol. III, p. 1120, n. 56 DVA 9.

d3) China nera e tempera bianca su carta

12,5 x 25 cm

Firmato in basso a destra: «L. F.»

*Provenance:* Milano, Lina Angioletti.

*Exhibitions:* *Lucio Fontana. Concetti spaziali 1949-1968*, exhibition catalogue (Pordenone, Galleria Sagittaria, May-June 1979), Pordenone 1979

*Bibliography:* L. Angioletti, *Il prato del silenzio*, Milan 1956, n. 2 (ill); L.M. Barbero, *Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato delle opere su carta*, Milan 2013, vol. III, p. 1120, n. 56 DVA 2.

The series of drawings conceived by Fontana for illustrating the poetry of Lina Angioletti was initiated by a singular meeting of the poet and the artist, one abetted by the editor and gallery dealer Arturo Schwarz. The hermetic and evocative verses by Angioletti were interpreted with spatial images consisting of nuclear elements and sharp forms shot across by trajectories of drawn holes.

The illustrations, however, are extremely important because they are linked to the series of *Concetti spaziali* on blocks of terracotta conceived between 1951 and 1957. In particular they anticipate a series of plates made in 1957 which were exhibited in a solo show by Fontana at the Galleria del Cavallino in Venice (and then at the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan) from September to November 1957.

The «temi del giorno e della notte», the poems of time, were interpreted by Fontana with spatial and allusive images, in black and white in order to reaffirm the «existential» alternation of light and shade. The marks on the sheets of paper, scattered in trajectories of criss-crossed or radial dots, harmonise with the hermetic verses of the poems. With regard to this, the artist Fausta Squatriti, daughter of Lina Angioletti, has said,:

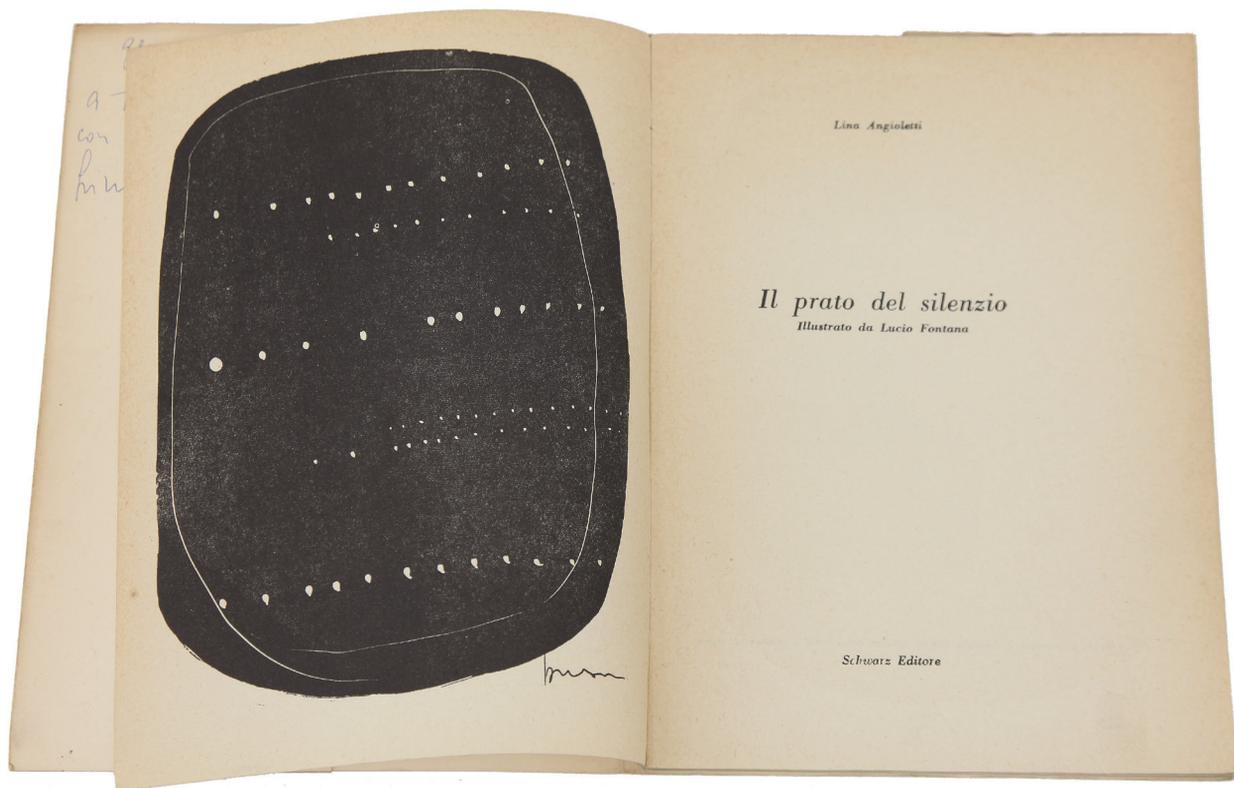
[...]

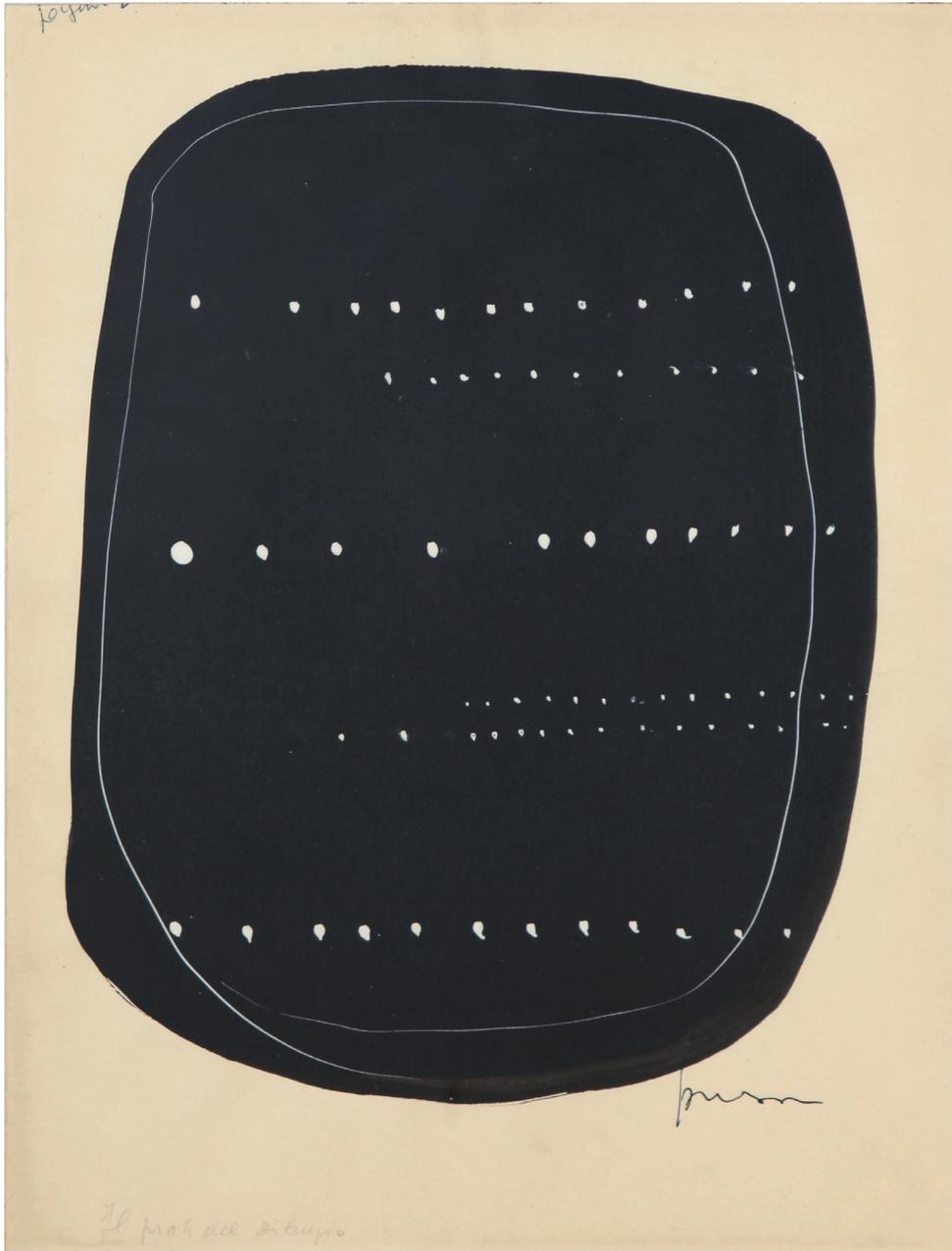
I met Fontana with my mother, Lina Angioletti, who had come into contact with the Milanese art world thanks to Arturo Schwarz, the bookseller and editor in Milan. In 1956, for the series “Dialoghi col Poeta” there was published the collection of her verses *Il prato del silenzio*, illustrated with many drawings by Fontana. He had drawn them in ink: my mother read the poems out loud, and Lucio drew, as speedy as he was precise, his attention completely captured by them. I, as a fifteen-year-old girl, observed the scene, moved by the beauty of that harmony between words and images that evolved in a way that was as natural as it was surprising.

Generous as he was, Lucio gave the drawings to my mother who kept them for her whole life on the walls of her home. Sixty years later *Il prato del silenzio* has left this private area to be admired by a wider public.

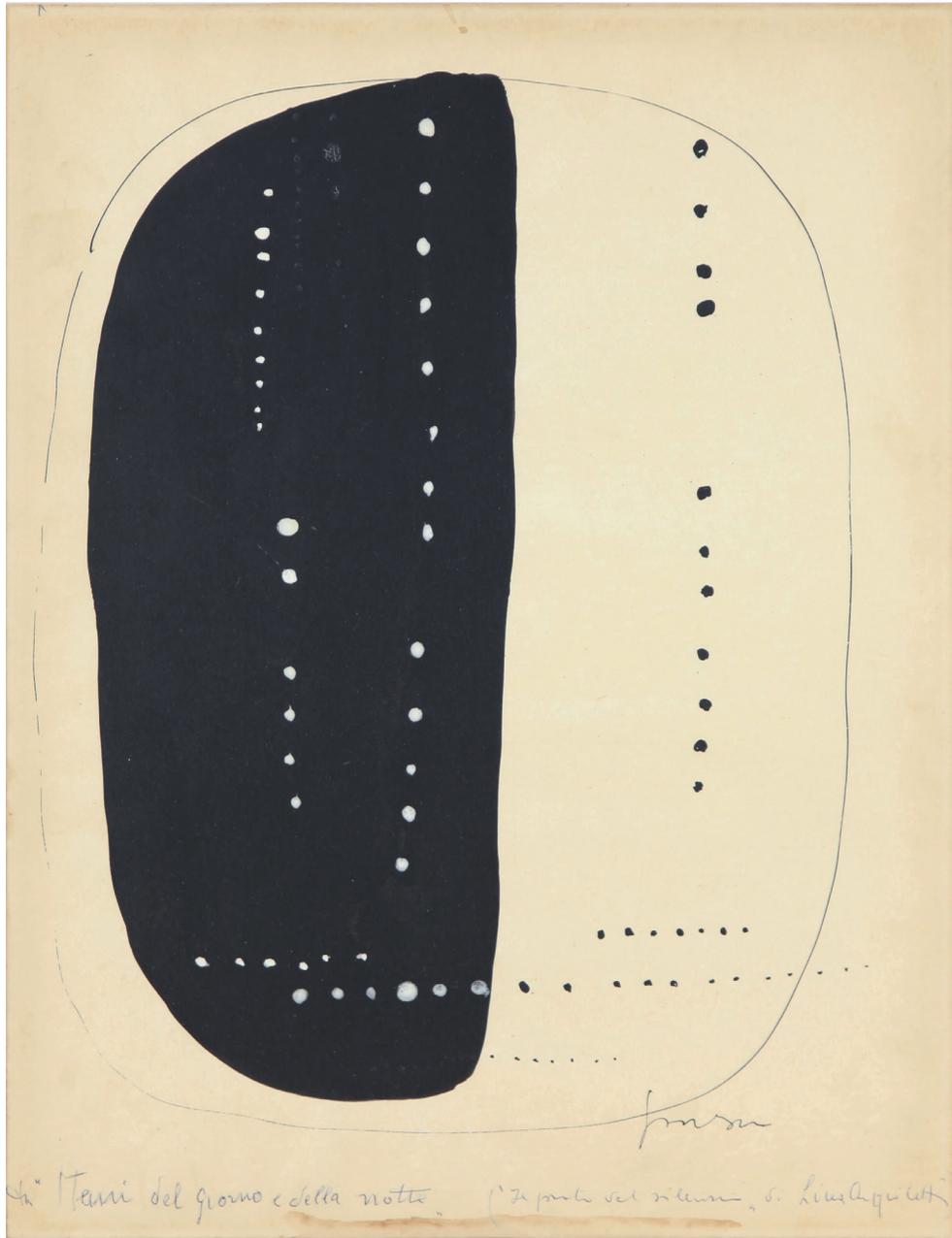
[...]

*Paolo Campiglio*

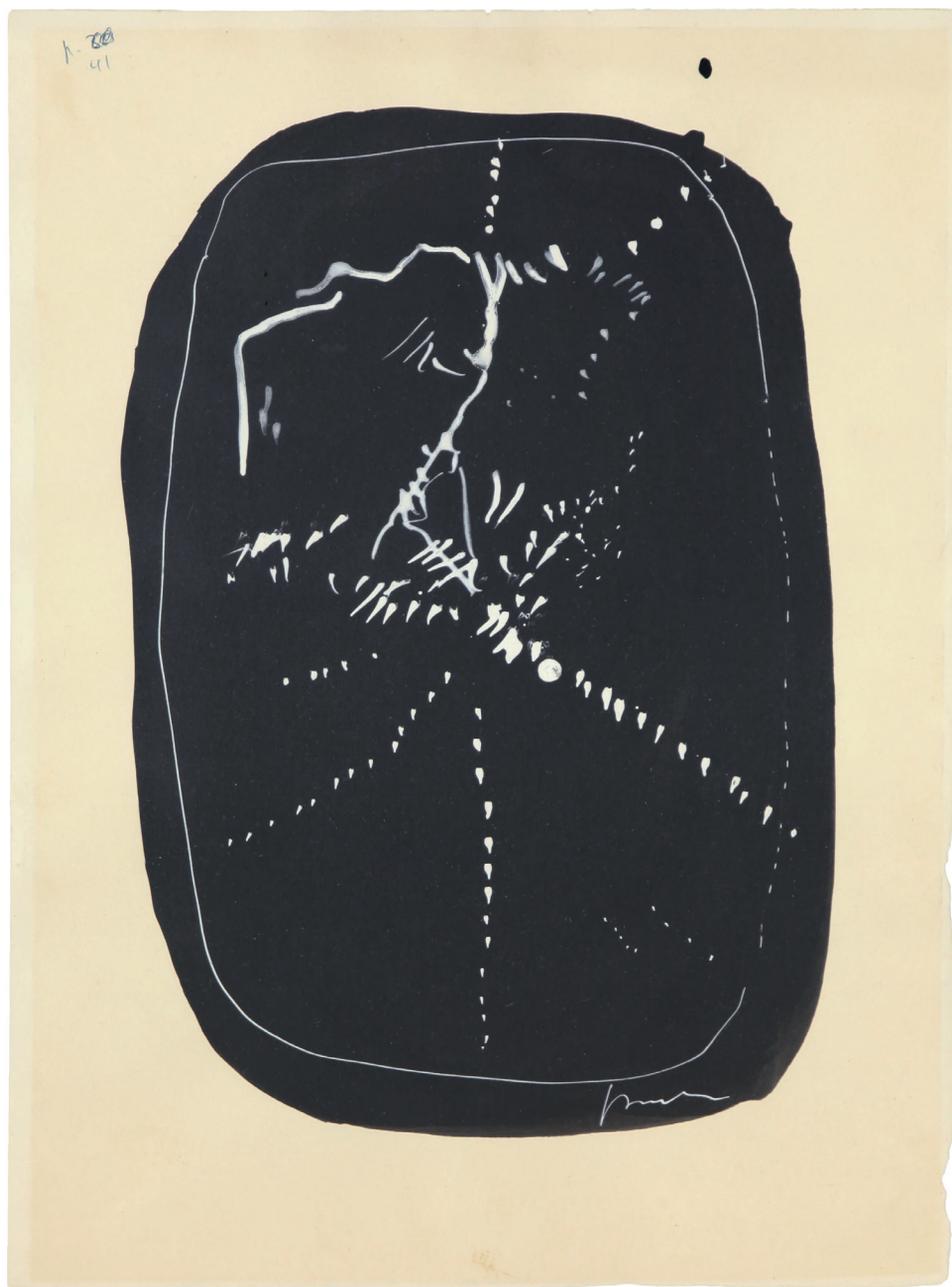




**12a. Illustration for *Il prato del silenzio***



12b. Illustration for *Il prato del silenzio*



12c. Illustration for *Il prato del silenzio*



12d1-3. Illustration for *Il prato del silenzio*



### 13. Concetto spaziale

52 CATALOGUE



#### 14. Concetto spaziale

### 13. Concetto spaziale

1956

Painted terracotta

Diameter 50 cm

Signed and dated at the bottom right: «Fontana 56»

### 14. Concetto spaziale

1956

Terracotta painted black and white

Diameter 50 cm

Signed and dated at the bottom right: «Fontana 56»

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n.1185/14

[...] In presenting my Spatial Concepts, it is obvious that I do not want to make modern painting or sculpture; luckily I feel myself free from this form of contemporary art hysteria, the logical consequence of an art that cannot find a way to develop... And by piercing the canvas, these innocent holes guarantee the first spatial sign of an art for the Space Age.

With this statement, published by Giampiero Giani in his book *Spazialismo, origini e sviluppi di una tendenza* (Edizioni della Conchiglia, 1956), Fontana reaffirmed his own commitment to an increasingly anti-pictorial and anti-sculptural direction, one that was by now a conceptual direction. In May-June 1956 the Galleria del Naviglio, in fact, hosted a large show that summed up the ten years of Fontana's Spatialism and highlighted the artist's fundamental role in contemporary avant-garde art.

In the summer of 1956 and in 1957 the artist continued his activity as a ceramicist and almost completely abandoned the figurative motifs present in the ceramics of the early 1950s. Instead he concentrated on his spatial ideas, which were pushed almost to the limits due to the expressionist nature of his marks and incisions. The ideas expressed on his plates and vases were the same ones that he had dealt with in his works on canvas: motifs generated by the layout of fragments of glass or clumps of material, with the difference that here the ceramic surface is strongly incised and scratched. In the couple of plates titled *Concetto spaziale* (1956), made from painted and unglazed terracotta that alludes to the humbleness of earth - one white with black forms and marks and the other black with lacerations and holes surrounded by white - there is a clear allusion to an organic central form, a clot of material grooved transversally

### 15. Concetto spaziale (natura morta)

1957

Black and blue polychrome ceramic

Diameter 32 cm

Signed at the bottom right: «l. fontana»

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n. 3577/4

### 16. Concetto spaziale (natura morta)

1957

Polychrome ceramic in black, pink, and blue

Diameter 32 cm

Signed and dated at the bottom right: «l. fontana 57»

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n. 3577/3

and part of a galaxy of incised marks. This is an elongated form reminiscent of the Milky Way and, at the same time, one that expresses the angry gestures of the artist on a defenceless material and shatters its calm state. These gestures, anticipating the actions that in 1959 he was to apply to the “nature” series – spherical terracotta forms enlivened by the artist’s cuts and holes -, allude to the primitive approach of human beings in face of creation: the first drawing by humans, the original creative and linguistic expression, was a mark traced out on the sand or cut into the earth. Contemporary artists, according to Fontana’s theory, must therefore reject any cultural overtones linked to the concept of representation, of a *mise-en-scène*.

In this pair of *Concetto spaziale* plates (1957) majolica is employed with all its polish, reflections, and bright colours. Here the explosion from a central nucleus of a form in space is more evident, even though the reference to still-life in the title alludes to the concept of “form” and “nature” that in this year the artist was also developing in the works on canvas known as “i gessi”, plaster works. The other side of Spatialism was, in fact, a meditation on the nucleus as an organic element, one linked to the natural world and not just to cosmic imagination. However, in these plates there has come about a synthesis of cosmic and natural elements, as though the cellular implications of the terrestrial organic world were a mirror of the one - at the time only imagined - present in cosmic space. And finally, in these plates there is an early formulation of the idea of the “cuts” that were also to be found in the contemporary spatial ceilings, made from graphite, and realised in collaboration with architects: a solution that, on canvas too, he was to fulfil more completely at the end of 1958 with a genuine “opening” onto another dimension.

*Paolo Campiglio*



**15. Concetto spaziale (natura morta)**

56 CATALOGUE



**16. Concetto spaziale (natura morta)**

## 17. Concetto spaziale. Natura

1959-1968

Bronze

5 x 10 x 10 cm each

Signature and copy number incised on the back: «L. F. / 66/90»

*Bibliography:* H. Ruhé-C. Rigo, *Lucio Fontana, Graphics, multiples and more...*, Trento 2006, p. 14, n. B-3/B-4.



## 18. Concetto spaziale

Terracotta, painted black

39 x 29 cm

Signed at the bottom right: «i. fontana»

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n.1185/5



## **19. Concetto spaziale**

1960-1965

Cuts and scratches on terracotta, black

21 x 45 x 21 cm

Signed

Work archived by the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, n.1015/8.

*Provenance:* Private Collection, Genoa.



## 20. Pillola\*

1960-1965

Polished and lacquered copper

36 x 22 x 40 cm

Edition of 36 copies in various colours

*Bibliography:* H. Ruhé-C. Rigo, *Lucio Fontana, Graphics, multiples and more....*, Trento 2006, n. M-5, p. 155.

\* *Per informazioni sulla genesi di questa scultura si veda, in questo stesso catalogo, il saggio di F. Squatriti a pp. 17-18*







## LUCIO FONTANA

### Brief biography

#### 1899

Lucio Fontana was born on 19 February in Rosario di Santa Fe, Argentina.

#### 1906-1916

He came to Italy and was registered by his father, first at the Torquato Tasso school in Varese, and then at the Ballerini school, Seregno. Finally he settled in Milan in Via Palestina 10. He then enrolled at the Carlo Cattaneo technical institute and at the Brera manufacturers school, part of the Brera Academy, in Milan. In 1915 he was admitted to the architectural faculty of the Castello Sforzesco school for industrial design.

#### 1917-1921

He interrupted his studies and enlisted as a volunteer in the First World War, even though he was an Argentinean citizen. He was in the front line on the Carso plateau for two years. He was discharged because he had been wounded in the head. At the end of the war he was awarded a silver medal for gallantry, and he returned to Milan where he continued his studies and obtained his diploma as a building inspector. For a short time he was in Turin at the school for cadets.

#### 1922-1927

Together with his family he returned to Rosario di Santa Fe in Argentina where he worked in his father's sculpture workshop. He opened his own studio and became interested in the work of Archipenko, Maillol, and Zadkine. Halfway through 1927 he returned once more to Milan. He enrolled at the Brera Academy and followed the courses of Adolfo Wildt.

#### 1928-1930

##### Training at the Brera Academy

He got to know Fausto Melotti. He gained his diploma in sculpture from the academy. He took part in the XVII Venice Biennale. He established fundamental relationships with the young avant-garde architects Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Giuseppe Terragni, and Piero Lingeri, the latter a fellow student of Fontana's cousin Bruno. At the end of 1930 he created a ground-breaking sculpture: *Uomo nero*.

#### 1931-1939

##### Coloured sculpture, abstraction, ceramics

In February 1931 he held his first solo show at the Galleria del Milione, Milan, organised by Edoardo Persico, where he exhibited *Uomo nero* together with a series of terracotta and coloured plaster sculptures. He made

numerous small cement blocks scratched with abstract and surreal motifs. He made his first contacts with the architect Luciano Baldessari and the BBPR group. In 1934 he came into contact with Carlo Belli, a theoretician of Italian abstraction, and socialised with the abstract artists who were grouped around the Galleria del Milione (Licini, Melotti, Reggiani, Soldati, Veronesi, Radice, Rho, Munari).

In January 1935 his second solo show opened at the Galleria del Milione where he exhibited abstract sculptures in cement and iron: this was the first show of abstract sculpture in Italy. In March, together with Ghiringhelli, Licini, Melotti, Reggiani, Soldati, Veronesi, Bogliardi, De Amicis, and D'Errico, he signed the *Manifesto della Prima mostra collettiva di Arte Astratta italiana*, an exhibition held in Turin in the studio of Felice Casorati and Enrico Paulucci. He joined the French *Abstraction-Création* movement. In 1936 he began to work with ceramics in Albisola, in the factory of Giuseppe Mazzotti, and so began a production of coloured majolica and stoneware sculptures. In July 1937 he moved to Paris for a few months, visited the Universal Exposition, and met Juan Miró, Tristan Tzara, and Constantin Brancusi. He worked with stoneware in the Sèvres factory.

## 1940-1947

### The Argentinean period: figurative sculpture

In the spring he left for Argentina. As a result of Italy's entry into the war, he did not return but settled in Rosario di Santa Fe. He took part in the official Argentinean Salón, where he presented himself as a sculptor, until his return to Italy in 1947.

From 1942 he taught at the Manuel Belgrano academy of fine art in Buenos Aires. He worked as a ceramicist in the Cattaneo factory. He frequented Margherita Sarfatti who had fled to Argentina due to the racial laws in Italy. In 1946 he moved to Buenos Aires where, together with Jorge Romero Brest and Jorge Larco, he founded the "Altamira, Escuela libre de artes plásticas" private academy, a school opposed to officialdom and that was also an important centre for cultural promotion, frequented by the young artists of the Madí and of the Asociación Arte Concreto e Invención. In 1946 he edited the *Manifiesto Blanco*, signed by numerous young pupils from the Altamira school and the academy. The name of Fontana was not to be found among the signatures.

## 1947-1957

### Spatialism: spatial concepts

In March he returned to Milan. He found his old studio had been destroyed during the bombardments, with the consequent loss of many works (including Uomo nero). He returned to making ceramics in Albisola. In December he wrote the first Spatialism Manifesto. He made his first spatial sculptures.

In March 1948 he wrote the *Secondo manifesto dello spazialismo*. In March-April he took part in Rome in the show *Arte Astratta in Italia* at the Galleria di Roma. He participated in the XXIV Venice Biennale where he exhibited his first spatial sculptures.

On 5 February 1949 the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan inaugurated his environmental work *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera*. He began to work together with the Arredamento Borsani firm in Milan. With his ceramic sculptures

he participated in the show *Twentieth-Century Italian Art* at MoMA, New York, which bought a *Crocefisso*. He began his series of «concetti spaziali» with «buchi».

In 1950 he took part in the *XXV Venice Biennale* as a ceramicist; here he had wanted to present a *Ambiente spaziale* work, but his request was rejected. In 1951, together with the architects Luciano Baldessari and Marcello Grisotti, he made for the IX Milan Triennial a large-scale, neon *Concetto spaziale*, a long, tangled tube suspended above the reception hall of the Palazzo dell'Arte, and an obliquely lit ceiling in the vestibule. During the I Congresso Nazionale delle Porporzioni (27-19 September), part of the IX Triennial, he read out the *Manifesto tecnico dello Spazialismo*. He began the series of *Pietre, Stones*, spatial concepts on canvas with holes and fragments of coloured glass. In 1952 he was awarded joint second prize, with Luciano Minguzzi, for the competition for the fifth door of Milan cathedral, which had been announced in 1950. On the occasion of the show *Arte Spaziale*, held in May at the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan, he presented for the first time his spatial concepts with holes, which he showed again in his solo exhibition in the same gallery in May. On 9 February he married Teresita Rasini. On 17 May he wrote the *Manifesto del movimento spaziale per la televisione* specifically for his participation in an experimental transmission for the Rai broadcasting company.

In 1954 an *Incontro internazionale della ceramica* in Albisola where Fontana, one of its promoters, was able to work together with young Italian Spatialism artists and to meet the exponents of the CoBrA group. He participated in the *XXVII Venice Biennale* with an anthological show of twenty works. He began his series of *Gessi*, plaster works, spatial concepts characterised by holes and the use of coloured pastels. He began his *Barocchi* series, spatial concepts with holes and with the use of non-painterly materials. He continued his collaboration with architects for numerous examples of “a synthesis of the arts”.

In 1957 he took part in *Between Space and Earth. Trends in Modern Italian Art*, at the Malborough Gallery, London. In Paris he met Yves Klein with whom he began a close friendship. He concluded his *Barocchi* series which he considered too close to the Informale movement. He began his series of ink works, spatial concepts characterised by canvases coloured only with aniline and ink.

## 1958-1968

### The cuts

In 1958 he had a room to himself at the *XXIX Venice Biennale* where he presented his *VII Manifesto dello Spazialismo*. He took part in the show *Painting in Post-War Italy (1945-1957)* in New York, curated by Lionello Venturi at the Casa Italiana, Columbia University. He came into contact with the Gutasi group of Osaka. At the end of the year he began his series of *Tagli*, spatial concepts characterized by one or more cuts on monochrome canvas, works which represented his abandonment of Informale aesthetics.

In February 1959 he presented his *Tagli, cuts*, for the first time at the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan, and then showed them again at the Galerie Stadler in Paris. An anthological show was presented at the Galleria L'Attico in Rome. He also took part in *II. Documenta* in Kassel and in the V São Paulo Biennale in Brazil. He continued to work on his series, including the shaped canvases that he titled *Quanta*. During the summer in Albisola he made some terracotta sculptures, *Nature*: large spheres that seem like cells marked by cuts or gashes.

In 1960, for the show *Dalla natura all'arte* held at Palazzo Grassi, Venice, he exhibited the *Nature* works and installed *Esaltazione di una forma*, an environmental work made from fabrics and artificial lights. His participation in *Monochrome Malerei* in Leverkusen underlined his rejection of Informale art. He concluded his *Nature* series. He began his *Olii* series, spatial concepts with an abundant use of oil paint and polyvinyl glue, and just one perforation. In 1961 he exhibited his *Nature* works at the Galleria Pagani in Milan and at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris. He worked on the large series of *Olii* (those titled *Venezie*) dedicated to Venice; he exhibited them in the *Arte e contemplazione* show in Venice and the at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York. During his journey to New York he began to think of works inspired the city, which he was to make the following year: these were to be the *Metalli* series: lacerations and gashes on sheets of copper and mirroring metal.

In January 1962 the Städtisches Museum in Leverkusen held an important anthological show of his work, organized by Udo Kultuermann. He presented the *Metalli* works for the first time at the Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan. He took part in *Nul* in Amsterdam.

In 1963 he began to work on a new series, *La fine di Dio*, spatial concepts on large oval canvases that are reminiscent of the idea of eggs and birth, and which he exhibited at the Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan. A first large, in-depth retrospective show, curated by Enrico Crispolti, opened in June at Castello Spagnolo in L'Aquila. He presented his *La fine di Dio* in Paris in February at the Galerie Iris Clert. He signed a contract with the Marlborough Gallery, which had venues in London, New York, as well as in Rome where he was to hold an important solo show. He took part in the XXXII Venice Biennale and in the XIII Milan Triennial for which he created some mosaic panels for both the walls and the floor (the "liston") and, together with Nanda Vigo, an environmental work *Utopie*. For *Integratie 64* in Duerne, Belgium, he designed a monumental luminous sculpture titled *Concetto spaziale. Il tempo e lo spazio*. He concluded his series *La fine di Dio*. He began the new *Teatrini* series. These consisted of lacquered wooden frames, which were moulded with brightly coloured organic motifs, and of a pierced monochrome canvas.

In 1966 there was an important retrospective show at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, for which he also made a *Spatial Environment*. He organised his solo room at the XXXIII Venice Biennale as an environmental work, in collaboration with the architect Carlo Scarpa, and for which he was awarded the Biennale's Gran Premio: in an oval room he presented seven cuts, each one hidden by an altar-like structure.

There was an important solo show at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1967, where he made a series of environmental pieces. He began a new series, *Ellissi*, in lacquered wood, and showed some painted metal "missile" sculptures on stems, amongst which *Pillola*. These new works were shown for the first time at the Galleria Marlborough in Rome.

In 1968 he left Milan and settled in Comabbio, in his family's old home. An important solo show opened in January at the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hanover. He began to plan some *Ambienti spaziali* for the XXXIV Venice Biennale and for *4. Documenta* in Kassel. He died of a heart attack on 7 September in the Santa Maria clinic of the Circolo hospital, Varese.



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