

Lucio Fontana

Recto-verso

1 December 2022 – 23 April 2023

Born in 1899, Lucio Fontana developed one of the most radical bodies of work of the second half of the 20th century. Having signed many manifestos, as early as 1947, he opened a new path based on his very personal conception of space. Beginning in 1949, Fontana gave all his works the general title of *Concetto spaziale* [Spatial Concept]. The holes (*Buchi*), in 1949, and the slashes (*Tagli*), in 1958, remain his hallmark and their success contributed to erasing all trace of the first Fontana: a skilful sculptor who, in the 1920s and occasionally later, proved capable of satisfying official commissions. The Centre Pompidou collection can only testify to this academic vein through the dialogue Fontana maintained at the time with his Italian and South American companions from his training years. Fontana was born in Argentina, which he left for Italy, but to which he returned for two long, decisive periods. The exhibition also presents drawings, including a 1940 self-portrait, which introduce us to architectural interventions and other environments to explore, created by the artist as early as 1948.

The master's works are side by side with those of Giacomo Balla, the Futurist precursor, those of his early friends, those of his great contemporaries and those of younger artists who stimulated him, like Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni, not forgetting those who later crossed the path of Fontana, the mentor and collector. The exhibition thus presents the early works, the central body of his work, as well as the later output.



Ayuntamiento
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AGENCIA PÚBLICA PARA LA GESTIÓN DE
LA CASA NATAL DE PABLO RUIZ PICASSO
Y OTROS EQUIPAMIENTOS MUSEÍSTICOS
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“I don’t want to make a picture, I want to open up space, to create a new dimension for art, to link it to the cosmos as it extends to infinity, beyond the flat surface of the image.”

Lucio Fontana was born in Argentina and sent by his parents to study in Italy. He enlisted in the Italian army during the First World War, reached the rank of officer and was wounded on the front. In 1921, he returned to Argentina and dedicated himself to sculpture, first in his father’s funerary workshop. He went on to oversee several public commissions in a personal capacity, then returned to Italy to complete his training at the Brera Academy under Adolfo Wildt. His academic creations bear the stamp of the master’s neoclassicism and he “shone” for some time among the official art élite. *Uomo nero* (1930), since destroyed, marks a post-Cubist turning point in his work which led him to geometric abstraction. He participated in the first exhibition of abstract sculpture in Italy at the Il Milione gallery in Milan in 1935.



Sculptura spaziale [Spatial Sculpture] (47 SC 1), 1947
Bronze, 56,5 × 50,5 × 24,5 cm
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Christian Bahier
and Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP

In 1940, Fontana returned to Argentina to help his father in the competition for the commission for the national flag monument of Rosario, his birthplace – which they did not win. He taught in several art schools in Rosario and Buenos Aires. He was stimulated by his contact with students and, in 1946, participated in writing the *White Manifesto*, although he did not appear among the signatories. This was a utopian project to surpass painting, which was to acquire a “new dimension as idea and volume”. Beginning in 1949, Fontana gave all his works the general title of *Concetto spaziale* [Spatial Concept] and he assigned descriptive sub-titles to the different series to come.

Buchi [Holes: canvas and punched paper]:
from 1949 to the end

Pietre [Stones: glass inclusions]: 1951-1958

Barocchi [Baroques]: 1954-1957

Gessi [Impastos: pastels on canvas]:
1954-1958

Inchiostri [Inks: aniline dyes]: 1956-1959

Olii [Oils]: 1957 to the end

Carte [Papers]: 1957-1960

Tagli [Slashes]: 1958 to the end

Quanta: 1959-1960 (*Tagli*'s polyptychs
presented in an archipelago)

Nature: 1959-1960

Metalli [Metal Sheets]: 1961-1968

Fine di Dio [The End of God]: 1963-1964

Teatrini [Little Theatres]: 1964-1966

Ellissi [Ellipses]: 1967

After the Second World War, Fontana returned to Italy in 1947 and continued the experiments with ceramics he had begun in Albissola in 1935. He co-signed the *Spatialist Manifesto* with young intellectuals, which asserted the necessity of questioning the achievements of the past. The text was followed a year later by a second and a third in 1950, *Proposal for Regulations*. The Spatialist movement, of which he was a figurehead, took space and light as its point of departure in order to design works in relation to the surrounding world and the conquest of space.

“We intend to liberate art from matter, to liberate the sense of the eternal from the preoccupation with the immortal. And we do not care if a gesture lives for an instant or a thousand years, for we are truly convinced that, once accomplished, it is eternal.”

Spatialist Manifesto, 1947

In 1949, at the Naviglio gallery in Milan, Fontana created the installation *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera* [Spatial Environment in Black Light] into which the public entered. He used the interaction of space with plays of light to disorientate the spectators. The seeds of this revolutionary environment can be found in his many drawings, in which he conducts extensive research into his concept of space.

He began to incorporate perforations in his works on paper, then on canvas. For Fontana, the hole is outside the dimensions of the picture, it is “free space”, i.e., infinity. He was won over by a clear and irrevocable gesture that opened up original perspectives for art, previously divided between two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional sculpture.

Interested in new materials, Fontana designed works for neon.

His *Tagli*, monochrome pictures which he then slashed, met with international success in 1958. These gashed canvases would become icons of modern art.

“When I sit down before one of my *tagli* [...], I feel like a man who has been liberated from the slavery of matter, a man who belongs to the grandeur of the present and the future.”



Concetto spaziale. Attese [Spatial Concept. Waiting] (T 104), 1958
Vinyl paint on canvas, incisions, 125 × 100,5 cm
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Audrey Laurans/Dist. RMN-GP

This led to exhibitions all over the world. He continued to work with bronze and ceramic spheres (*Nature*, 1959-1960), then with oval monochromes in the *Fine di Dio* (1963-1964) series and with the mise en scène of the *Teatrini* (1964-1966), which incorporate a stylized figuration of vegetal origin. Fontana died in 1968, shortly after leaving his Milan studio to settle near Varese.

“While making *Nature* I was thinking of these unknown worlds, of the Moon with these holes, the terrible disquieting silence and the astronauts who discover this new world.”

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Guided tours

The mediation team offers you
guided tours to discover the
works from the exhibition,
in an active and sensitive way

Individual tours
Visit in Spanish included in the
price of the ticket. Inscription on
the same day at the reception.
25 people maximum.
Wednesday at 6 pm

Groups
In Spanish, English and French,
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(tours, workshops, events...)
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Information

Opening hours
9.30 am to 8.00 pm, every day
Ticket offices close at 7.30 pm
The museum is closed on
Tuesdays (except holidays and
days before holidays), 1 January
and 25 December

Prices
Temporary exhibitions: €4,
concessions: €2.50
Semi-permanent exhibitions: €7,
concessions: €4
Semi-permanent and temporary
exhibitions: €9,
concessions: €5.50

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