New York Rediscovers Lucio Fontana

Chiara Basso (January 24, 2019)



“They think it’s easy to make a cut or a hole. But it’s not true,” Fontana (1899–1968) said once. “You have no idea how much stuff I throw away.” The Argentinian-Italian artist famous for his “holes” (buchi) first and from 1958 for his “cuts” (tagli) is in the spotlight in New York thanks to two major events, a retrospective at the MET Breuer and an exhibition at the Italian Cultural Institute.

The exhibition "Lucio Fontana: On the Threshold [2]," at the MET Breuer and the MET Museum [3] on Fifth Avenue through April 14, is the first retrospective in the U.S. in 40 years, while "Spatial Explorations - Lucio Fontana and the Avant-garde in Milan in the 50's and 60's [4]," at the Italian Cultural Institute [5] in Park Avenue through March 6. showcases four works painted by Fontana in Milan after World War II along with other avant-garde masterpieces by artists who were part of the so-called "Spatialism," an Italian movement started by Fontana in 1947 with the idea that art should embrace science and technology, as he stated in his Manifiesto Spaziale (spatialist manifesto).

All paintings from "Spatial Explorations," curated by Francesco Tedeschi, belong to the Intesa Sanpaolo art collection [6] that also borrowed two of Fontana's works to the Met Museum for its retrospective: Spatial Concept, The Moon in Venice (Concetto Spaziale, La Luna a Venezia, 1961) and Spatial Concept, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese, 1967).

The exhibit's inauguration on January 23 was attended by a large public as well as the Italian Ambassador in the US Armando Varricchio, Consulate General of Italy in New York Francesco Genuardi, Giorgio Van Straten, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute and Michele Coppola, Head Officer of the Art, Culture and Historical Heritage Department at Intesa Sanpaolo.

For ambassador Varricchio "this exhibition of works by Fontana and other important Italian artists of the twentieth century in New York confirms the extraordinary vitality of cultural relations between Italy and the United States. The works exhibited at the MET and at the Italian cultural Institute represent at best the strong Italian yearning for discovery, experimentation, and the call to explore the unknown and to go beyond borders. In the arts, Italy is synonymous with excellence, avant-garde and the ability to project ancient traditions and culture into the future."

For a broader understanding of this artist though, it is worth visiting "Lucio Fontana: On the Threshold," at the MET. This retrospective explores Fontana's beginnings as a sculptor and his pioneering work with environments, contextualizing the radical nature of the Cuts within the artist's practice. It showcases about 100 objects, including sculptures, ceramics, paintings, drawings, and environments made between 1931 and 1968. It is organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in collaboration with Fondazione Lucio Fontana.

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