SIMON LEE

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

The Brooklyn Rail
'Guest Critic Sharon Hecker: Why Luciano Fabro Today?'
September 2018

WHY LU -CI- ANO FAB -RO

Why should Luciano Fabro, a postwar Italian artist deeply attached to his national roots, be of interest to American audiences in 2018? Although he was associated with Arte Povera, Fabro described himself as "the heretic of the Arte Povera church." This self-declared outsider position allowed him to develop a broad, open and collective sense of culture that extends beyond a single nation or time period.

I met Fabro, his wife Carla and his daughter Silvia thirty years ago while I was employed at the Christian Stein Gallery in Milan. I eventually went to work for him to help prepare for his first U.S. retrospective at the San Francisco MoMA. Fascinated by the recordings on answering machines, Fabro gave a talk in San Francisco titled "I Would Like to Leave a Message." He read his words in Italian and I simultaneously translated them into English line by line. At one point, I accidentally read ahead of him by one line. Never missing a beat, Fabro stopped, looked up at the audience, and exclaimed: "Now THAT is what I call 'avant-garde!'"

Since then, I have written numerous critical essays on Fabro to help him become better known to English-speaking audiences. Having translated his theoretical writings, I began looking for a U.S. publisher. Art historian Jack Flam put me in contact with Phong Bui, who responded that, before Fabro's writings and art could be appreciated in the U.S., he believed a re-tilling of the soil would be needed. To this end, he invited me to be the guest critic for this issue of the *Brooklyn Rail* on Fabro.

Phong's idea was to generate fresh interest for those who knew Fabro's art and introduce him to young American audiences who may not know his name. Many of the renowned artists, critics, and curators whom I invited to write here about Fabro have known him, worked with him, or had a special connection to him. In addition to old friends, I invited a number of people who did not know Fabro personally, but who collect his work, have curated shows, have written about him recently, or are in the process of organizing exhibitions on him.

Why, then, should we take a new look at Fabro? In my opinion, it is because of what he can tell us about the possibilities of sculpture.

Sculpture, for Fabro, was something that could be sensed, felt, touched, and tasted by the viewer. Before Félix González-Torres was piling up his candy installations, Fabro distributed sweets wrapped in messages, as part of an installation titled *Computers di Luciano Fabro, Caramelle di Nadezda Mandelstam* (Luciano Fabro's Computers, Nadezhda Mandelstam's Candies, 1990). The candies evoked a bitter memory, reported in Nadezhda's memoirs, of the sweets that Stalin's police cynically offered her while searching her apartment before sending her husband, the poet Osip Mandelstam, off to his death in a Siberian gulag.

For Fabro, sculpture was related to craft and to craftiness. He made his needle-and-thread *Penelope* (1972) out of leftover material from his enormous *Piedi* (Feet, 1968-71), which were adorned with silk stockings sewn by his seamstress mother. Like the resourceful and cunning Penelope, whose creative weaving and unweaving staved off her suitors as she waited for her husband Odysseus to return, Fabro zigzagged his needle and thread up and down the wall. By leaving a dangling strand, he invited the viewer to take up the thread and continue his open-ended process of making.

Contemporary art's engagement with the viewer's mind and body was an important concern for Fabro. His works could be all-enveloping, such as *In cubo* (1966), a cube made to be inhabited by one person, or the numerous *Habitats*, which could be collectively inhabited; or they could be very small, humorously enticing the viewer to come closer to investigate. In *Tu* (You, 1978), he dangled a wire thread from the ceiling almost to the ground with a tiny egg made of red sealing wax at its end. This required the viewer to crouch down to discover an erotic image stamped onto the egg; in order to see the work, the viewer had to reproduce the kneeling sexual posture of the figures on the seal.

Many of Fabro's works evoke an interest in the visceral quality of the sculptural surface. In making his supine headless figure known by its shortened title *Lo Spirato*

('The Expired One, 1968-73), he chose a butter-colored marble, characterized by irregular streaks. Sensuously warm and translucent, it approximated pale human skin and pulsating veins, a suggestive—and very contemporary—evocation of the 'skin' of sculpture.

Fabro strove to create an ongoing dialogue between art and nature as a regenerative force. At a time when we are concerned with the human destruction of nature, his botanically themed works such as *Felce* (Fern, 1968), *Edera* (Ivy, 1969), *Foglia* (Leaf, 1982) and *Nido* (Nest, 1994) gain resonance. Images of nature played an important role in his philosophy of art. He wrote, "when the senses are renewed in art, art also renews nature."

Fabro's openness to nature suffused his worldview. Once, we had a discussion about the question of roots. As an American of Hungarian, Russian, and Lithuanian ancestry, who grew up in Israel but was living in Italy, I could not understand his fierce attachment to his Italian land. Why all those maps of Italy he continued to make and remake? I said to him: "My roots are everywhere and nowhere." He flashed a smile and responded: "That is because you are like ivy, the plant that does not need soil because it has its roots in the air."

Finally, for Fabro, art was something to be experienced and shared rather than owned. Fifty years before Blockchain offered novel platforms for buying communal 'shares' in an artwork, Fabro was humorously issuing 'collective shares' for one of his sculptures, stating that their value would rise for everyone as the sculpture gained market value. He wrote: "when that which has economic value passes from one owner to the next, one of them loses … when that which has cultural value passes from one person to the other it … is enriched." For Fabro, "culture ... can give forever and [is] never exhausted."

Portrait of Sharon Hecker, pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

TO-DAY

Sharon Hecker would like to acknowledge the artist's daughter, Silvia Fabro, and the Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro, who work tirelessly to promote and preserve Luciano Fabro's legacy.

SHARON HECKER is an art historian and curator. She lives in Milan and Los Angeles. Her most recent books are, with Marin R. Sullivan, *Postwar Italian Art History Today: Untying 'the Knot'* (2018) and *A Moment's Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture* (2017). She has authored numerous critical essays on Luciano Fabro and has translated his writings into English, notably for his retrospective at San Francisco MoMA (1992).

BY SHARON HECKER

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In Conversation ::::::: Luciano Fabro with Martin Schwander

MARTIN SCHWANDER: Your artworks are so different from each other and, because of their complex internal structure, are hard to characterize.

LUCIANO FABRO: In contemporary art, the dominant tendency is that the artist gives a clear and firm idea of his work. The reason for this process of reduction is probably due to the fact that people today do not have time to reflect on works of art and their complexity. My work contains a multiplicity of points of view that are complex to present in their different aspects and which may seem contradictory from the outside.

SCHWANDER: Does art serve man in his search for identity?

FABRO: Art does not seek, it creates identity. Identity and creation are the same thing. They close the circle. Each new work also broadens our knowledge of nature. Art defines the limit. What lies beyond that limit remains excluded.

SCHWANDER: In the writings you have published you are entering ever more deeply into the metaphysical characteristics of the works.

FABRO: Art has metaphysical qualities. Many times a thing changes very little physically when it becomes a work of art. What can change, however, are its metaphysical qualities. When I take a piece of marble, I can change, more or less, its outward appearance. As soon as this stone is treated as a work of art, it takes possession of something that it did not have before. This was understood very early on. To make the menhir prehistoric man took a stone that was not different from the others, but he isolated it and at the same time gave it a metaphysical dimension, which even today we remain impressed by as spectators.

In order to give the metaphysical aspect to a work of art it is necessary that there is no apparent effort, everything must appear as a miracle. This is the garment of creation.

SCHWANDER: There are only a few works of art that manage to have these metaphysical dimensions.

FABRO: Just as only very little fruit tastes good. Quality is a very selective thing in nature and is subject to strong oscillations. There are times when quality [in art] reaches its full development. It's like in nature: there are times when storms prevent the ripening process and other periods when the fruit becomes perfectly ripe.

Without a doubt [today] we are living in very difficult times. This becomes particularly clear with the fact that everything that is done for art must be justified. We must always justify the right of art to exist on social, philosophical, aesthetic, and moral levels.

It is particularly difficult for society to understand that art still has metaphysical roots. Already in my earliest texts I talk about this problem. I am thinking in particular of a text from 1964.[1] In that text I already say that I am a "humanist".

The word "humanism" cannot, however, be considered without the word "identity." When identity is established there is a fixed point upon which things depend. In religious times, God was the central point. In modern art this point is perhaps man. He is, in all cases, responsible for everything that happens around him because he has the ability to come into contact with everything. It's like in geometry: as soon as I have determined a fixed point, I can determine another point and connect the two points. The crisis of our times comes, among other things, from the fact that man does not try to identify the center, but instead always remains on the periphery. We must learn to talk about art again. In my lessons at the Brera Academy I am trying to start up a discussion on principles.[2] We need to reacquire confidence in things that go beyond immediate experience.

SCHWANDER: Underlying this premise, is there a reason to have hope for art?

FABRO: We must have hope on principle. Every work of art we create brings with it an extra moment of identity and thus enlarges the basis for what we call culture.

SCHWANDER: Is there, in your work, a point of mediation between political and social reality on the one hand, and the metaphysical approach that you add to the work of art on the other hand?

FABRO: The work of art, from the moment when it emerges from the hands, becomes open to different possibilities when it comes into contact with something that determines its extension. However, none of my works were created for a certain circumstance or from a reaction to a certain event, due to the fact that I am rather skeptical about all political solutions.

SCHWANDER: In the last few years you connect yourself, through the titles of the works, to ancient myths. Do these myths represent a living power for you?

FABRO: Yes, of course. We are in a situation in which we have to create anew the myths upon which art and all spiritual things can develop. We are in a direct relationship with myths because they are the basis of our culture. Myths are not part of history, they are life that is cleansed from all the casual incidents of everyday life.

My works take shape from a complex series of thoughts. Suddenly I have a clear vision before my eyes, it appears to me like a revelation. Everything is so clear to me that usually not even a detail needs to be changed. Only in a second phase do I become "mechanical" and I look for technical solutions.

SCHWANDER: Do you sometimes have doubts about the accuracy of these "inner visions"?

FABRO: No, never. Already in the invitation to my first show I tried to define my relationship with the materials. Each material has its own particular experience, its own history. When I look at a stone, I come to know something about the mountain from which this little stone has been detached, and also about the earth. Then, at the moment when this stone has been worked, it brings with it the history of the sculpture inside it and I come to know something about the person who worked on that stone.

In my work, one cannot speak of a choice of materials, because as soon as a work appears before the inner eye, its shape, its dimensions, and its materials are already given.

The materials on their own do not interest me at all.

SCHWANDER: Another known feature of your works is the explicit reference to the works of artists [of the past].

FABRO: In my works there is never a question of quotations. It is to take those points of reference that make the continuation of the journey possible.

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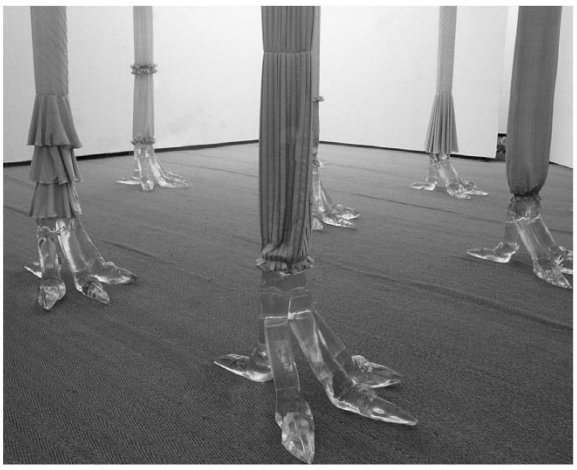
Luciano Fabro:



Installation view, Biennale Venezia, 1972 (*Vetro di Murano e shantung di seta pura*, *Piedi*, 1968 – 1972 + Penelope, 1972). Photo: Luciano Fabro. © Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro.

SCHWANDER: Do you mean by this that there are some ideas in art that survive over time without changing?

FABRO: Not ideas. They are *a priori*, and an artist can reactivate them if they have the ability and the sensitivity to do so.

SCHWANDER: The discourse on many levels that you have with tradition contradicts most of the positions of avant-garde artists who have taken their legitimacy and energy from the verbal rejection of tradition. At the same time, your work has always been related to Arte Povera, one of the last classical avant-garde movements.

FABRO: Even if I have opposing ideas or thoughts, I feel closer to the avant-garde because they have the same mentality that I have. The reactionaries, on the other hand, fight against every vital situation.

SCHWANDER: What was the meaning of Arte Povera in the development of your work?

FABRO: I was with the group that "founded" Arte Povera.[3] Germano Celant was looking for young artists with works that were different from the usual works of those times. In Rome, he found Pino Pascali and Jannis Kounellis, in Turin, Giulio Paolini and Alighiero Boetti, in Genoa, Emilio Prini, and in Milan he found me. On the other hand, when Arte Povera became something of public interest in '68 with the exhibition in Amalfi, my work was removed from that context.[4]

SCHWANDER: Did the alienation between the representatives of the avant-garde and you reach its greatest point with the presentation of a group of *Feet* made of Murano glass at the Venice Biennale in 1972?

FABRO: I had already started working on the *Feet* in '68. The first exhibition with the *Feet* made of marble and metal is from 1971 at the Borgogna Gallery in Milan. In 1972 there was the presentation in Venice, in which I exhibited only the Murano glass *Feet*. I had no shame anymore [*Laughs*]. The *Feet* just made people shake their heads... Some friends who, up until that point, were begging me to do exhibitions with them did not want anything to do with me anymore. I explained this in a short text.[5] At the same time, however, I made new friends.

SCHWANDER: Undoubtedly, it was clear to you that the *Feet* would be perceived as an aesthetic provocation.

FABRO: No, I do not like provocative gestures in art at all. I am of the opinion that provocation limits the visual field. Usually I try to do some kind, nice gestures that, however, are not always understood [*Laughs*]. Another reason I was able to save my innocence in that situation was that I always had someone around me who had faith in my work. I never had the feeling of being alone.

Excerpt from: Martin Schwander, "Luciano Fabro, Kunst schafft Identität", in *Luciano Fabro*, edited by Martin Schwander, Kunstmuseum Lucerne (Basel: Wiese Verlag, 1991), pp. 193-206.

1. Luciano Fabro, *Atti del comune di Milano*, in Luciano Fabro, *Attaccapanni* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), pp. 11-16. English traslation in *Luciano Fabro* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1992), pp. 25-27. Translation by Sharon Hecker.
2. Luciano Fabro, *Arte torna arte. Lezioni e conferenze 1981-1997* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999).
3. *Arte Povera - Im-Spazio*, ed. Germano Celant, Galleria la Bertesca, Genoa, September 27 to October 20, 1967.
4. *Arte povera più azioni povere*, ed. Germano Celant, Arsenali dell'Antica Repubblica, Amalfi October 4 – 6, 1968.
5. Luciano Fabro, "Questi piedi non sono un'idea," in *Flash Art*, n. 24, Milan, May 1971. p. 5. English translation in Luciano Fabro, "These Feet are not one idea," in Carolyn Christov - Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon, 1999), p. 245 and in Luciano Fabro, "These feet are not an idea, but all of your ideas," in *Zero to infinity: arte povera 1962 - 1972*, ed. Richard Flood and Frances Morris (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center and London: Tate Modern, 2001), p. 214.

MARTIN SCHWANDER is an art historian and curator. He is a curator at large for the Beyeler Foundation where he curated an exhibition on the work of Georg Baselitz in 2018. In 1991 he curated an exhibition on Luciano Fabro's work at the Kunsthalle of Lucerne, where he was director from 1989 – 1997.

Art Creates Identity

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LAWRENCE WEINER

I HAVE PARTICIPATED IN MANY EXHIBITIONS WITH LUCIANO AND I AM ALWAYS EXCITED BY THE FACT THAT HE COULD TURN TINSEL INTO SUBSTANCE

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH LUCIANO WENT ON FOR MANY YEARS BUT I THINK THE HEIGHT OF IT FOR BOTH OF US WAS HELPING TO HOST YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE FALL OF THE WALL

WE WERE ABLE TO SEGUE YOUNG PEOPLE INTO A SYSTEM THEY HAD BEEN CLOSED OFF FROM

LUCIANO'S SKILL AS A TEACHER AND MY ENTHUSIASM SEEMED TO MESH VERY WELL

LAWRENCE WEINER
NEW YORK CITY 2018

LAWRENCE WEINER is an artist.

ROBERT MORRIS

I probably had some common interests with Fabro, although I did not include him in the show I organized at Castelli Warehouse which included Anselmo and Zorio. Even some of my recent work using linen and carbon fiber cast over mannequins and then stripped off, leaving the figure as void, resonates with his prone marble figures. And I like his note of equivalence between same material/different formal manifestation in some of his sculptures. Ah, those heady days of non-art materials when process set the ball rolling and we had air to breathe. Now the market has eaten us all. From this distance the gestures we once made against it seem futile and even puerile. Money is the only value in America. Is Europe any different? The edge of didacticism in some of Fabro's work annoys. Not fair, but a Johns Flag weighs tons compared to a leather Italy. Still, Mussolini hanging upside down . . . . There was once a kind of diffuse griminess to '60s American hands on art that had an affinity with some Art Povera.

ROBERT MORRIS is an artist.

PAOLO CANEVARI

It was an upside-down Italy, hanging like a hanged man, like a rag hung out to dry and abandoned; it was my country; taken and turned upside down . . . I was a young artist and I asked myself who that visionary was. What artist could express such a profound group of concepts and meanings in such a simple, elegant, and absolute way, that profoundly Italian culture made up of genius and contradictions? With that first image by Luciano Fabro, I encountered what would be a surrogate father, a constant presence in my path of creative thinking as a man and an artist. It was the 1980s and I was taking my first steps as a student at the Art Academy in the forest of the contemporary. It was a period populated by obscene people, ugly painting, and aggressively ambitious critics who would transform the perception of art in the years to come, and who would announce the victory of globalized materialism that was waiting for us in the twenty-first century. That artist left in me something that never abandoned me; a feeling of intimacy and, at the same time, the feeling of an unbridgeable distance, something I frequently sensed when going into those sacred places that we call museums. In that upside-down Italy I felt the incumbent stature of an artist but also the smile, ironic and confident, that a master has when seeing his young pupil. I met Fabro personally many years later. Thanks to another great artist of Arte Povera, Jannis Kounellis, I became part of the historical Christian Stein Gallery. In 2004, while mounting an exhibition of mine in the gallery, I saw Fabro enter, look at me, and smile. It was in that way that we introduced ourselves to each other.

I saw him again on other occasions—I lived between New York and Rome and the contacts with other Italian artists were infrequent and formal; but I was particularly grateful to Fabro for transmitting to me a vision of the artist's role in a contemporary society through a book-collection of his lessons as professor at the Brera Art Academy of Milan and his conferences in museums and institutions.

That role did not stop at *making art,* but broadened the responsibilities of teaching, as a moral and ethical way of thinking, a social need that Fabro had sensed and understood, and that he had posed to himself as a problem. My being an artist today and a professor at the Art Academy of Rome owes much to his idea of transformation and the help that an artist can, and must, give to the younger ones.

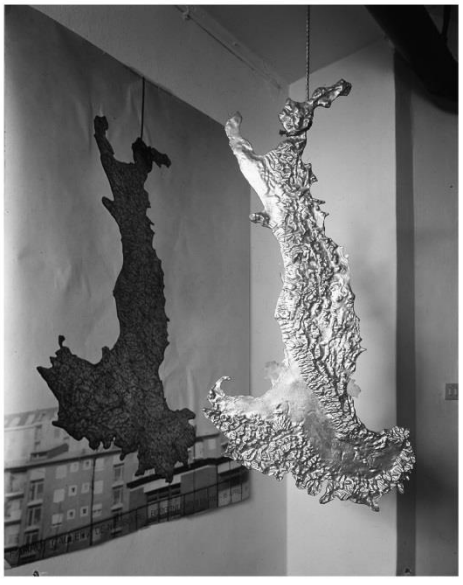
Fabro's thinking was fundamental for my generation, artists like me, Liliana Moro, Stefano Arienti, and Bruna Esposito were able to grow in the generous intellectual legacy of Arte Povera, far from contemporary conformism and from the way in which society induces one to think in restrictive terms without true visions and perspectives.

Through the eyes of my students I see how teaching—which does not accept institutional didactic systems: the propaganda, the devious message of advertising and all that lies beneath an idea of profit and exploitation—can create an intimacy in the work, and a value for it that can also be gleaned in its physical dimension, not imposing or overwhelming, but possible and comprehensible. The trace that art can leave can be profound and can be followed and used as an indication for others.

I think that Fabro taught us how art is knowledge and, without knowledge, art cannot exist.

Translated by Sharon Hecker

PAOLO CANEVARI is an Italian artist.



Luciano Fabro, *L'Italia d'oro*, 1971 + *L'Italia*, 1968. Gallery De Nieubourg, Milan. Photo: G. Baghetti. © Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro

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LUCIANO FABRO: TIMELY AND DEFIANT
BY MARGIT ROWELL

My first encounter with Luciano Fabro's art left me fascinated and perplexed. Who was this artist who, in the 1970s and 1980s, in a landscape virtually dominated by the language of Minimalism, dared to make an art that so boldly eluded comparisons with his peer group, or classification of any kind? Starting in the late 1960s, Fabro's vocabulary was overtly referential to his Mediterranean culture, evoking, among other motifs, the boot of the Italian peninsula (the *Italie*), a reclining tomb figure (*Lo Spirato*), classical columns with no supporting function (and sometimes translated into silk: the *Piedi*). He unselfconsciously quoted eternal myths by invoking Prometheus, Venus, or Sisyphus. His materials were anachronistic (silks, bronze, gilt, Murano glass, Carrara marble), whereas the fabrication was entrusted to expert artisans (sewing, carving, casting). The resulting works are beautiful, elegant, and metaphorical. Paradoxically, the term that keeps coming back to me is that of "baroque."

This perception is not totally arbitrary. After discovering Fabro's sculptures in the mid-1980s, I then met him in person at his retrospective exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris in 1986. This event, however, rather than clarifying my ideas about the artist and his art, mystified me even more. Everything enchanted and escaped me. In the summer of 1989, I visited his exhibition at the Castello di Rivoli and, during those long summer nights, he initiated me to the baroque splendors of Turin (in particular, to the architect Guarini), to which he was a passionate guide. Perhaps this planted a seed in my perception, but no matter what, the analogies are there.

We worked together on several occasions, and in a sense, he was an incredible mentor; however, for me, the usual approach to an artist's oeuvre (analysis-synthesis) continued to get me nowhere. Upon his untimely death in 2007, I felt that a critical monograph was necessary—for myself, and others. Even more difficult than I expected—there were so many questions left unanswered—this endeavor took me the better part of eight years.

Fabro recognized that his work was difficult, in particular, for an Anglo-Saxon or "northern" (as he liked to put it) audience, unsteeped in (or forgetful of) the Humanist tradition he chose as his source. His determination to resist the trends of the international avant-gardes demanded that his viewers shed their acquired habits of seeing in order to come to terms with his art. Fabro's avowed guiding principle was to express complexity, clothed in what he considered simple or obvious forms. This objective came again from his Italian background: the Franciscan idea of *povera*, signifying a natural simplicity that embodies deeper truths. And yet paradoxically, for me, the baroque is never far away, in an elegance and seduction that deliberately mask other preoccupations.

On the surface, Fabro's art appears in total contradiction with the artistic mores of the period, and for these reasons, his relation to the paradigm of modernism is difficult to grasp. However, the lushness and metaphoric content of his work obscures a range of underlying issues that were shared by many late-twentieth-century North American sculptors. His main plastic concerns—the visitor's direct experience of real as opposed to illusionistic space, the haptic or tactile quality of perception, the sculpting potentials of light and color, the enormous importance of materials, the dialectics of instability and gravity, and the use of repetition or serial sequences, for instance—were in fact absolutely of their time.

Fabro's "spatial concepts," a central thematic initially inspired by Lucio Fontana, propose experiences to the visitor that show affinities with the work of Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra. These artists explored comparable ideas beginning in the 1960s, with a view to stimulating the mind and body's response to unprecedented physical situations. It should be said that the Americans' and the Europeans' knowledge of each other's work was relatively superficial, gleaned from international exhibitions, mostly in Europe. So it was not a question of cross-fertilization as much as one of artists on two continents addressing certain ideas that were in the air.

Finally, whereas the specific contexts and contingencies on each side of the Atlantic clearly contributed to shaping these artists' world views, as well as their sensibilities and ultimately their plastic expressions (one relatively abstract, and the other infinitely baroque), it should nonetheless be said that a political and cultural critique of the state of the world was common to both. Their filters were definitely different, but it was the same post-war, consumer-oriented world that they sought to dispute and defy.

MARGIT ROWELL is an art historian based in Paris. Her monograph on Luciano Fabro is scheduled to appear in early 2019 (ed. JPRingier, Zurich).

Luciano Fabro, *Io rappresento l'ingombro dell'oggetto nella vanità dell'ideologia. Lo Spirato*, 1968 – 1973. Photo: Andrea Toniutti. © Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro.

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LUCIANO FABRO: IN VIRTUE OF REFRENCES* BY FRANCES MORRIS

One evening in 1989, after dinner at a restaurant in Milan, I was taken by Luciano Fabro to his studio. The artist had been a curious and entertaining dinner companion. A short drive from the restaurant brought us to a quiet street lined with the kind of anonymous and self-effacing façades that are typical of Milan. Fabro's studio was reached through a main entrance on the street and across a small inner courtyard surrounded by high white walls. Access to the inner sanctum of an artist one admires can give a privileged view of their working methods, in close proximity to tools and models: it can be an occasion for revelations and understanding. On this evening I was disappointed as we entered a pair of small rooms distinguished, at first sight, by an invasive harsh light and a sense of vacancy.

In one corner, however, lay a slab of lusciously veined, pale grey marble. The contours of finely carved drapery revealed the form of a male figure resembling a recumbent tomb effigy. The figure had no head: at the junction of the drapery and pillow the human form subsided, leaving nothing of substance beyond the body other than the imprint of a head on the marble pillow. Not content with leaving the impression of this strange act of disappearance to take root in the viewer's imagination, Fabro had inscribed the work on opposite sides of the base: *Io rappresento l'ingombro dell'oggetto nella vanità dell'ideologia* (I represent the encumbrance of the object in the vanity of ideology, 1968 – 1973).[1] These lines seem to warn us against a direct transaction between image and idea, they create a block in the flow of references to sources, both living and dead, whether from classical art history, contemporary news pictures or from biblical scenes of death and resurrection. They call us to pause on the verge of iconographic analysis, for there is an encumbrance or obstruction, there is no solution. The obstruction is the material, obdurate and imposing; matter through which the artist has drawn attention to the opposite, non-matter, and thus, by implication, presence and absence. So the work briefly also titled *Lo Spirato* (*The Expired One*) (1974) is not so much an image of death as an image of the transformation of the body into something else; of the body into spirit, of matter into void, and of past into present.

[...]

Fabro, likewise, is an intellectual who trusts in culture. . . .[The facts of the history of his time] have threatened his basic humanism, but Fabro continues to assert a space for art:

> 'We were in nature, we felt safe there. And suddenly everything in nature became dangerous. Today it is difficult to say where nature begins or ends . . . ; we have holes in the atmosphere . . . We talk about Chernobyl, but these holes have been developing for much longer, and who knows, Chernobyl is nothing compared to what is happening in biology, Aids . . . that is so immense that everything begins to float. Now art is perhaps like a tiny dust particle which remains suspended and on which nature can be recreated. That can become the new meaning of nature.'[2]

My last visit to Fabro's studio, six years after the first, was made in order to see a small maquette of *La Luna* (The Moon), his first thoughts on this project for the Tate Gallery [exhibited in *Luciano Fabro*, curated by Frances Morris, Tate Gallery, London, 1997]. Aside from this maquette, little had changed in the studio: *Lo Spirato* was still in the corner, still a brooding and disquieting presence. This time I was taken to another working space on the other side of town, the space where Fabro stores and packs his work. The warehouse is approached through the studio of [his daughter Silvia], a picture restorer, and the accretion of crates and packages and odd materials in Fabro's room was thus framed through visions of landscapes and narratives of oil colour, brushwork and craft in the classical manner. These offered fitting reminders of the heritage that Fabro's career has acknowledged and of his belief that art is not so much about creating new things as about recreating: "The problem, to progress in art, does not arise; what matters is to preserve it."[3] Fabro's "references," whether to historical and mythological figures or to geological and geometrical structures, demonstrate a way in which identity and understanding can be passed on; and he describes the work of art as the "suitcase" of identity, one which "like all suitcases, contains patrimonies which date from long ago."[4]

Luciano Fabro, *La Luna*, 1995. Photo: Luciano Fabro. © Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro.

1. This is the title inscribed underneath the sculpture together with the names of the artist and the craftsmen who executed the piece. The title *Dal pieno al vuoto, senza soluzione di continuità* (From fullness to emptiness without interruption), appeared Luciano Fabro, *Attaccapanni* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978) as the caption underneath the photographic work *Studi per Lo Spirato*. In later sources, this title erroneously appeared as the original title sculpted underneath the sculpture. See Sharon Hecker, "I represent the encumbrance of the object in the vanity of ideology." *Lo Spirato* ('The Expired One) in *Luciano Fabro*, ed. Silvia Fabro, Galleria Christian Stein, Milan, 2017.
2. Luciano Fabro, interview with Jan Braet in Jan Braet and Luciano Fabro, "After the rain, a flower opens," exh. cat. Open-Air Museum of Sculpture, Middelheim 1994, pp. 37.
3. Ibid., p. 61.
4. Ibid., p. 62.

* From Frances Morris, "Luciano Fabro: In Virtue of References," in *Luciano Fabro,* Tate Gallery, 1997, pp. 8, 23 and 28.

FRANCES MORRIS is Director of the Tate Modern Art Gallery, London.

The Brooklyn Rail
'Guest Critic Sharon Hecker: Why Luciano Fabro Today?'
September 2018

EVERY ORDER IS CONTEMPORANEOUS OF EVERY OTHER ORDER BY MAMI KATAOKA

Every day, we experience the impossibility of capturing the world by a single standard. In the present age when politics, economics, religion and culture create such diverse values, it seems that the world is increasingly uncertain. However, there was never a time when the future was certain and the attempts to govern the world under a single value are coming to an end. It can be said that the ability to continue to be conscious of the multiple possibilities that exist and overlap is an important task for the future of this planet.

At the 21st Biennale of Sydney, where I served as Artistic Director, I used the term "Superposition" from quantum theory as a metaphor for the multilayered and interdependent values as well as the uncertainty of the modern world. Here the non-hierarchical, variable and complementary nature of things is projected through the ancient Chinese natural philosophy, Wu Xing, which expounds on the conflicting and symbiotic relationships of the Five Phases of the universe. The connection between Wu Xing and quantum theory relates to the Danish physicist Niels Henrik David Bohr (1885 – 1962), who contributed to the development of quantum theory and who emphasized the complementary nature between quantum theory and eastern thought.

In this context, of the seventy invited artists, it was quite natural to exhibit Luciano Fabro's *Every Order is Contemporaneous of Every Other Order: Four Ways of Examining the Façade of the SS. Redentore in Venice* (1972 – 73). In this work, Fabro proposes several possibilities for the façade design of a church in Venice. The fact that it was created around the same time as when the Biennale of Sydney was founded in 1973 is also significant. The founder of the Biennale of Sydney, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis was born in Italy in 1915 and after experiencing defeat of WWII, he traveled to Australia looking for new ground. Having seen the festivities and the magnetism of the Venice Biennale, he hoped that Australia, where the physical distance from the rest of the world is still a big concern today, will strengthen its connection to Asia and the Pacific. By bringing together Belgiorno-Nettis's thinking of Venice and of Fabro—who at the same time was suggesting possibilities using a church in Venice—I was hoping that it made it possible to expand people's consciousness as far back as the establishment of the Biennale itself.

The exhibition space chosen for Fabro's work was the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which has been a partner of the Biennale of Sydney since 1976. Built at the end of the 19th century, the façade of the museum is supported by six Ionic columns to reflect the thought at the time, which was to hope for the museum's role to be "a temple to art and civilizing values." On the other hand, the SS. Redentore church—the basis of Fabro's work—was designed by Andrea Palladio in the 16th century and it also has columns that bring to mind the Parthenon. Fabro studied the façade in varying proportions and put together a portfolio consisting of fifty-one silkscreened prints. In the preface, he proposed different possibilities for the façade in ways that are parallel to what Dante wrote in *Convivio* (1304 – 07) as the four interpretations of artworks: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical. It is said that the façade of the church which is a masterpiece by Palladio is determined by strict mathematical proportions and that the overall height is five-fourths of the width and the width of the central section is six-fifths of the height. In contrast to this, Fabro proposes novel possibilities to things such as the height of the columns and the pediment. To adorn the façade, he suggests statues of Adam and Eve by Van Eyke to be arranged on the lower left and right sides at a distance from one another, Canova's Venus in the middle niche on the left, a man holding a plow on the right side and a statue of Christ by El Greco on the very top right and a female statue drawn by Michelangelo on the top left. In the center is the ancient Greek fabulist and poet Aesop drawn by Velasquez.

As expressed by Fabro "An abuse of the philological method in this interpretation of the façade of the Church of the Redentore" and that "No genuine love of order is possible without the denial of that order," by replacing sculptures with figures by prominent painters and sculptors in the history of art, Fabro's work denies orders and hierarchies in the understanding of history and religion. By placing Aesop—the fabulist whose very existence is unclear—at the very top of the façade, Fabro poetically suggests a change to the social hierarchy and reminds us of the political climate of the late 1960s to the 1970s.

Although reference to history and art history in this way is frequently seen in Fabro's practices, in terms of its spatial consideration and intervention of architectural space, this work can bring to mind *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1988) which he exhibited at the 9th Biennale of Sydney in 1988. It is a 180cm x 45cm x 9.5cm marble board placed at the slope of the stairs of the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the marble's proximity to the size of a human body is a nod to the Duchampian intervention of architectural space. Also, the attempt at drawing on the relationships between the columns, the adorning sculptures and the overall proportions by using the SS. Rendetore church as a subject, is deeply involved with his continuous questioning of the definition of *sculpture*. This is particularly noticeable in the relationships between the ambiguity of the functions, the gravitational forces and the equilibrium within the space of such things as columns, sculptures and pedestals that were given to each part in his *Piede* (*Foot*) series which was produced from 1968 – 71.

Every Order is Contemporaneous of Every Other Order: Four Ways of Examining the Facade of the SS. Redentore in Venice is perhaps an unusual piece among Fabro's oeuvre but it occupies a highly important position as a starting point in considering the essence of Fabro's works and from there, in becoming aware of the challenges presented to us in contemporary society.

Translated by Aiko Masubuchi

MAMI KATAOKA is Chief Curator at Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. She also served as Artistic Director of the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2016–2018), Joint Artistic Director of the 9th Gwangju Biennale (2012) in South Korea, and International Curator at the Hayward Gallery in London (2007–2009).

Luciano Fabro, *Every Order is Contemporaneous of Every Other Order: Four Ways of Examining the Façade of the SS. Redentore in Venice*, 1972. Screenprint on paper, 255 x 945 cm. Installation view, the 21st Biennale of Sydney, 2018, Art Gallery of New South Wales. Photo: silversalt photography. Courtesy the Estate of Luciano Fabro. Private collection, Milan.

The Brooklyn Rail
'Guest Critic Sharon Hecker: Why Luciano Fabro Today?'
September 2018

TECHNIQUE AS ALIBI
BY JESSICA MORGAN

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given my position at Dia, an institution so closely connected to a minimal tradition, I had started to look at Fabro's work, and specifically at his work from the early 1960s, in relation to a reduced language of form. Yet even a cursory look into Fabro's production makes apparent that the connection to American minimalism is next to non-existent, and that it is rather the material selection and fabrication of work that structures his thinking. Fabro's early investigations into space, the viewer's relationship to vision, and the environment of the installation form a discrete body of work—which includes *Impronta* (1964), *Mezzo specchiato e mezzo trasparente* (1965), *Tutto trasparente* (1965), or *Ruota* (1964), and *Croce* (1965). The trajectory of these works rather abruptly comes to an end in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Fabro's investigation of materiality takes a perhaps surprising turn with the start of *Piedi* and *Italie* series. In these series he is not only unafraid to be referential, metaphorical, and even humorous, but the presence of iconic or representational forms seems to exuberantly fly in the face of so much contemporaneous work.

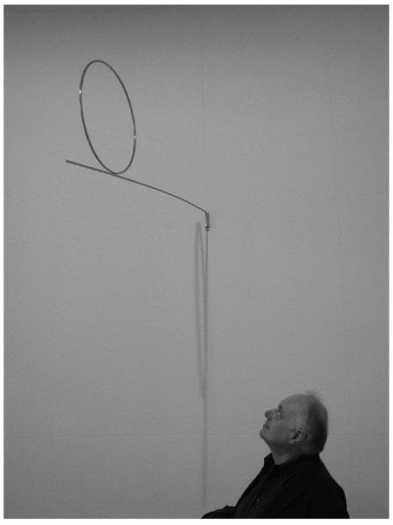
Fabro's move from a pared down formal object—the materialism of which is, literally, rendered open and transparent—toward a subjective iconography is mirrored in his writing. His occupation in the 1970s with educational and social narratives, still avowedly materialist, introduces an expansive, inclusive perspective. He wrote in *Attaccapanni* (1978):

> I have always had an authentic distrust of ideas; for this reason, from the beginning, I made sure that my work does not coincide with the ideas that it represents. Technique, I found, can be useful as a good alibi to postpone the result of the excitement of the idea, so that [the idea] seems cold and impersonal to me. In this, I am helped by the fact that I am not a master of any particular technique. So, when I'm realizing a work from myself, I have to learn everything down to the most elementary things, always focused on how to do rather than on what to do, and when I must ask others to do something that I cannot to do for myself, my sole concern is that the work be so simple and legible that another person can do it well.
>
> (*Atti del Comune di Milano*, 15 marzo 1964, in Luciano Fabro, *Attaccapanni* (Turin: Einaudi,1978), pp. 11–16.)

Fabro's need to be open and transparent finds itself in the communication of processes, rather than in final works. The working method leads to understanding so that, even when the appearance of the work is highly metaphorical, or its iconography rendered opaque, his audience can follow him. Simplicity of form becomes—across a time of development and while finding a considered vocabulary, simplicity of communication—a far from simple achievement.

In this way, and indeed in many others, Fabro differs from the occupation by many of his Arte Povera contemporaries, whose symbolism circumnavigated an often hermetic (neo)classical canon. Fabro can reference a Neapolitan sunset, classical antiquity, and animal or human forms, but his work with craftspeople in glass, marble, bronze, and fabric brings us back to a process of thinking through making, and a marriage of the modern and antique that remains as surprising and compelling today as at its moment of production.

JESSICA MORGAN is Nathalie de Gunzburg Director of the Dia Art Foundation in New York.



Luciano Fabro, *Ruota*, 1964. Photo: Daniel Soutif © Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro.

RE: MOVING PICTURES
BY NEIL POWELL

In writing this short piece about Luciano Fabro, I seek to posit a fresh and possibly perverse approach to re-viewing the received wisdom and conditions for understanding the artist's oeuvre.

Over more years than I care to remember, I have found myself becoming accustomed (and oddly sensitized) to editorial convention that presents a body of learned text interspersed with, or juxtaposed against, exemplar images of key artworks intended to enable the readership to identify how ideas might look in practice. Without wishing to offend other commentators, the potential folly and condescension of this text-image-text approach only really came into sharp focus when I was trying to conjure something anew about Fabro that wasn't desperately over-descriptive. I also didn't wish to repeat that which had already been written around such iconic motifs as *L'Italia d'oro* (1968) or *Contatto. Tautologia* (1967 – 2001). Whilst such works, like many others by Fabro, are delightfully photogenic, I have, with some logic I hope, determined not to decorate my arguments and observations with pictures. Sadly for you then, dear reader, within the confines of these musings I offer no visual respite or pictorial distraction from a navigation of how one might experience or read Fabro's significant allegorical constructs.

In keeping with the notion that this writing is freed from the pictorial, my central argument supports a position that focuses on the search for meaning derived from re-learning to read the objects of the work rather than on perceptions gained from a history of appearances, in print or otherwise. I would suggest that such conditions for re-reading require us to recognize our individual current circumstances and see with a fresh eye the capacity of Fabro's works to act as resonant markers and material wayfinders in a world of the fugitive, the tautologous, and the abstract.

The temptation for commentators when addressing discrete bodies of work is to manage their accrued associations using the tools of historicity—that is, to repeat and re-deploy context as a way of neatly (authentically) fixing their individual or collective meanings in time—often attaching significant events as if they were portals for insight. Someone once said to me that Jackson Pollock was the ideal vehicle for art history: a receptacle to be successively filled and emptied of meaning by commentators *ad nauseam*[1]. So my sincere plea here is not to repeat what we've thought previously about Fabro—let's take time with the works in person wherever possible—and think again.

In the early '80s I remember being mesmerized upon seeing a version of *L'Italia d'oro* for the first time. For me as an art student it was a mind-boggling encounter, I had no idea how to take it. His characterization of Italy, hung inverted like some ironical heretical carcass, gilded and sacrificed, seemed to me at the time to be the epitome of a disrupted nationalism—an indictment of the body geo-politic. At the time, maybe I was as right as I could be. Some thirty-odd years later though, I increasingly find the certainty of hindsight and much improved knowledge of history to be a series of traps; traps tempting one to extend readings and arguments on Fabro and *Arte Povera* in particular, based on the prevailing conditions of a post-unification, post-war Italy in the 1960s. With *L'Italia d'oro*, one is literally tempted to cite such unsavoury examples as the *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades) who sought to separate Italy from NATO by extortion, or to refer to the patchwork of post-Matilden[2] Italian history. The fact is that Italy has been, and still is, a work in progress and a tangle—the more I have learned of Italy, the more historicity has failed me as a device for affixing Fabro's work.

The factors unifying an Italian heritage might be more usefully characterized by a history of suffering, poverty, migration, and the church and state in more or less subcutaneous, perpetual conflict. Oddly, I would say that this level of vague understanding would suffice in feeling confident about the origins of *Arte Povera*[3] and Fabro in particular.

So as a reassurance to those who encounter Fabro's work—should you need one—a knowledge of the devilish detail is not the key to understanding or enjoyment, but an open mind and a degree of diligence unhindered by a cell phone probably is.

Should you think I have softened and lapsed into a romantic advocacy of the timelessness of art, let me reassure you I have not. What I am proposing is that Fabro's work has an enduring timeliness; that is, being possessed of a rare capacity to be relevant outside the moments and circumstances of its production.

PROFESSOR NEIL POWELL (Manchester, England 1961) is an academic, writer, and artist. In 2016 – 17 he worked on The British Art Show 8.

The Brooklyn Rail
'Guest Critic Sharon Hecker: Why Luciano Fabro Today?'
September 2018

FABRO: WHY NOW
BY NANCY OLNICK

While studying the artists of the Arte Povera movement, I was immediately enchanted with the work of Luciano Fabro. His work took sculpture to an entirely new dimension, transforming and revamping the medium in contemporary art. Upon first seeing *Efeso II* (*Ephesus II*, 1986), I was overwhelmed by the weightiness of the roughhewn white Carrara marble, hanging high in the air in beautiful defiance. Imposing steel cables hold the marble in place, balancing it in the air, dematerializing the weight of the object and magically giving it a sense of lightness.

Fabro's *Marmo colaticcio e seta naturale (Piede)* (Colaticcio marble and natural silk (Foot), 1968 – 1970) offers a glimpse into some primordial past; a surreal sculptural form that resembles the claws of birds and the paws or hooves of strange animals and mythological creatures. Fabro focuses his attention on the element upon which the weight of traditional, classical sculpture ultimately falls, and which offers it stability: the foot or the pedestal of a sculpture.

Fabro's work often referenced mythology as a way to reveal psychological, cultural, or societal truths. This is one of the reasons why we chose works such as *Eos* and *Efeso II* for our collection at Magazzino. *Eos (L'Aurora)* consists of two cylindrical marble columns: one ivory colored and the other black. Eos, the goddess of dawn, is a female being who generates herself each day and drives her chariot across the vast horizon both morning and night. Caught having sexual relations with Aphrodite's lover Ares, Eos is condemned to have an insatiable sexual desire. Fabro's wit, sense of humor, and playfulness is often seen in his work.

All of Fabro's work on view at Magazzino generates deep responses from our visitors. We feel that the archetypes defined in myth give the viewer the ability to relate to the characters and the situations that recur in human culture. In my opinion this is why Fabro's work will always have a timeless sensibility and is contemporary. One visitor wrote a beautiful letter to us stating,

> Upon seeing and feeling the weight of *Efeso,* I felt somewhat unhinged from my moorings. That this beautiful environment could be created and given honor to and celebrate the minds of artists, their art being held, as if loved, in a space of such magnificent scale, deeply moved me.

One cannot comment on Fabro's influence without mentioning the irony he gave to many titles of his work. For example, two other works we chose to exhibit at Magazzino engage with the geographical form of Fabro's *Italies*, *It-alia* (1971) and *Italia all'asta* (1994). *It-alia* consists of two separate parts of mirrored plates of glass cut in two, along the line that separates the north and south of the Italian peninsula. The two pieces are attached to sheets of lead and are displayed on the ground, at the point where the wall meets the floor, highlighting the economic division that separates the two parts of the same country.

Italia all'asta (Italy on a pole/Italy on sale at auction) consists of two maps of Italy, one right side up and the other upside down. Italy's shape becomes an enigmatic object that opens up a host of interpretations. Like a commodified object, Italy was, according to Fabro, sold off in a political auction. The artist is playing on the dual meaning of the word "asta" in Italian: *asta*, the pole upon which the maps of Italy are displayed, is also the word for auction. We particularly loved these works because they invited reflections on the very notion of national identity in the context of internationalism that characterize the times in which they were created and the time in which we live. Indeed, we sense that today's contemporary artists still grapple with the same problems inherent in all societies.

Magazzino Italian Art's mission is to create further recognition of Post-war and Contemporary Italian art in the United States through its exhibitions and programs. It houses an extensive library of books and archival materials available for scholars and students or anyone conducting research in this field. We search for the work of Italian artists that can resonate in any society.

The work of Luciano Fabro was able to initiate a dialogue with the great artistic tradition and with the pillars of Italian identity. Our enduring interest in Fabro's work arises from our firm belief that it illustrates the beauty of man's capacity to create, and, in doing so, also celebrates the mystery of our shared humanity. It is thanks to his genius, courage, and exquisite sensitivity that contemporary artists are compelled to study, explore, and be inspired.

NANCY OLNICK is Co-Founder of Magazzino Italian Art in Cold Spring, NY

Luciano Fabro, *Marmo Colaticcio e seta naturale*, 1968 – 1970. Photo: Silvia Fabro. © Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro.

Re: Moving Pictures Endnotes

1. In conversation with Professor Michael Corris, Oxford 1998.
2. Matilde di Canossa of Tuscany (1046 – 1115) was at least partly responsible for the model of City States and dominated the Italian peninsula up until the unification of Italy in the 19th Century. Whilst known as Matilde of Tuscany, her power base was located in the strategically important Apennine area of Emilia-Romagna.
3. As a point of fact the term *Arte Povera* in Italy is most commonly used to refer to second hand furniture to denote something like 'Shabby Chic' or old fashioned. See Subito.it or other online Italian marketplaces for further information.