

Incontri Internazionali d'Arte

Many will already be familiar with the beginnings of this association. In the late-1960s Graziella Lonardi Buontempo, a lady in her forties of rare beauty, left Naples and her husband, whose surname she would continue to use for the rest of her life. She started a new life in Rome, living with Francesco Aldobrandini in a building opposite the Aracoeli, collecting art, travelling, socialising at the highest level with aristocrats, the wealthy bourgeoisie and intellectuals. In June 1970 she made a trip to Montepulciano and attended the exhibition “Amore mio”, the brilliant debut of Achille Bonito Oliva, then in his thirties. Deeply impressed by what she had seen, within a few months the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome hosted the show “Vitalità del negativo nell’arte italiana 1960/70”, again curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, with the overall design by the architect Piero Sartogo. It was a rigorous, highly selective retrospective of 1960s Italian art and art criticism. As well as covering up the state of disrepair in which the Palazzo delle Esposizioni languished in those years, the layout concept of the show transferred the critical notion of an art feeding on the negative – and redeeming it – into a very visual experience.

The Palazzo delle Esposizioni show marked the beginning of the Incontri Internazionali d’Arte association, which was formalised officially in a deed dated July 19th, 1971. According to the founding document, the aims of the association were “to spread and increase awareness of contemporary art in all its forms”. Right up until Graziella Lonardi Buontempo’s death in 2010, after a lifetime spent as the association’s secretary-general and soul, this is exactly what the association pursued. Its activities continued uninterruptedly and with a volcanic energy that embraced many sectors, particularly the visual arts, but also film and literature. Its avant-garde approach was everywhere, from the new works it promoted to works it encouraged to reappraise, even down to the model it adopted for its own organisation. Albeit chaotic and penalised by insufficient funds, the association was supremely successful at putting into

practice its main concept: the conviction that even the most radical work of art must, in the magical moment of its presentation, reach the broadest possible audience, immediately entering into the public domain.

In the catalogue for the “Vitalità del negativo” show, Palma Bucarelli – who in those years was both the Soprintendente all’Arte Contemporanea and the director of the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna – underlined that this was the first time the education ministry (at the time there was still no culture ministry) had lent its patronage to a show that was more “explorative than representative”. Bucarelli interpreted this decision as a long overdue recognition of the formative role of museums, and a newly acquired awareness that the problem of art was inextricable from the problem of culture and the education of the masses.

Incontri succeeded on many occasions in introducing the new to museums or other places capable of housing a large public. The most astounding of all remains “Contemporanea” (1973-1974), Achille Bonito Oliva’s master-stroke, which transformed the entire city into a show. Roughly 350 artists took part, with twelve curators each in charge of a different section: Bonito Oliva for art, Paolo Bertetto for film, Giuseppe Bartolucci for the theatre, Alessandro Mendini for architecture and design, Daniela Palazzoli for photography, Fabio Sargentini for music and dance, Yvon Lambert and Michel Claura for books and independent record releases, Mario Diacono for visual and concrete poetry, Bruno Corà, Lietta Gervasio and Paolo Medori for alternative information, plus an area called “Aperta” devoted to debuting artists. The aim of the project was to convey the anthropological complexity of contemporary society: the entire Villa Borghese underground parking lot, freshly built to designs by Luigi Moretti, was made available to the event by the contractor firm and transformed into a vast laboratory. Almost all of the artists involved came to Rome for the exhibition, many mounting their own pieces themselves and others actually completing them on site. Christo wrapped a 200-metre stretch of the city’s Aurelian walls. Over the three months that the event lasted, a total of 40 shows were staged, 80 films screened, there were debates and conferences. Great care was taken to include learning, which paid off considerably in the high number of school groups that visited. Graziella Buontempo frequently remembered, with satisfaction, that “Contemporanea” was the first event of its kind in Italy where she had seen entire families among the visitors, complete with toddlers in their prams.

The titanic enterprise cost Graziella Buontempo the end of her relationship with Francesco Aldobrandini, who had been one of the main financial backers of Incontri, in an articulate and mixed system of financing that combined public and private funding.

There is not enough space here to mention all the initiatives that were organised in museums or other institutions, so we have limited ourselves to those in which Incontri was most actively involved.

“Roma interrotta” at Trajan’s Market in 1977, from an idea by Piero Sartogo with designs by twelve architects for expanding Rome, starting from the Eighteenth-Century map of the city by Gian Battista Nolli.

“Identité Italienne. L’Art en Italie depuis 1959”, a major show at the Centre Pompidou curated by Germano Celant in 1981.

A cycle of monographic shows at the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples, all of which were curated by Bruno Corà from 1987 to 1991, with site-specific works conceived for the Sala dei Camuccini by Mario Merz, Daniel Buren, Carlo Alfano, Giulio Paolini, Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Eliseo Mattiacci, Sigmar Polke.

“Arte domani. Punti di vista”, a review coordinated by Pieranna Cavalchini which ran from 1990 to 1997, started with the idea of ensuring visibility to a new generation of young artists and critics, and to favour international exchanges. The various editions were curated, among others, by Cecilia Casorati, Cornelia Lauf, Aldo Iori, Agnes Kohlmeyer, Sylvie Parent, Melissa Harris.

“Immagini Italiane”, a show devoted to Italian photography organised in collaboration with the journal “Aperture” at the Guggenheim Collection in Venice, 1993. The project also included the opening of La Casa della Fotografia in Villa Pignatelli in Naples.

A new take on the Italian art scene, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva and entitled “Minimalia”, was presented in 1997 and 1998 at the Fondazione Querini Dubois in Venice, the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome and at PS1 in New York.

The association’s activities in the film sector were coordinated largely by the critic Adriano Aprà along with Patrizia Pistagnesi, with reviews of Italian cinema at the New York Museum of Modern Art and at the Centre Pompidou.

The Premio Malaparte non-Italian literature prize was launched in Capri in 1983 and is still running.

Each of these events was accompanied by a beautifully bound catalogue. Incontri also published a number of other titles, such as the writings of Sol LeWitt edited by Adachiara Zevi.

The logistical hub for this vast body of work was a space overlooking the Seventeenth-Century courtyard of Palazzo Taverna, in Via di Monte Giordano, with its gushing fountain – in those days overgrown with ferns and venus hair – that soon became the association’s characteristic image. The same room witnessed the creation of Achille Bonito Oliva’s Centro d’Informazione Alternativa, which inaugurated in November 1971 under the coordination of Bruno Corà. As indicated in its printed programme, the Centro was tasked with actively providing information and documentation. Its documentation duties consisted of chronicling cultural and political

events by gathering texts, catalogues, magazines, etc. The active information entailed directly presenting works, actions, conversations and other material.

The programme made no mention of what some have termed 'apparitions' – the 'exhibitions' that ran at Palazzo Taverna for over a decade. Their most likely inspiration was the "Teatro delle Mostre" by Plinio De Martiis (La Tartaruga, 1968) with which Achille Bonito Oliva had collaborated. At the Centro, the events – be they works on show, actions, installations, screenings or debates – always lasted just the space of one evening. At times they would be part of a broader programme and spread out over one or more weeks, with a rapid turnover of different apparitions in quick succession.

It is safe to say that in those years Palazzo Taverna hosted just about all the artists and critics – Italian and international – being credited by a network of publications and exhibitions mostly in Europe as belonging to the last avant-garde current of the Twentieth Century. There were also a number of lesser-known episodes, organised thanks to their promoters' capillary knowledge of the local scene.

The socialising, collective spirit which pervaded the activities of Incontri was reflected in its predilection for group shows and the plurality of the contributions featured in its catalogues. This extended also to the programme of initiatives scheduled at Palazzo Taverna, two of which were exemplary in this sense. The first was "Critica in atto" (March 6th-30th, 1972) during which, day after day, there were lectures by Giulio Carlo Argan, Alberto Boatto, Luciano Caramel, Mario Diacono, Germano Celant, Renato Barilli, Italo Tomassoni, Maurizio Fagiolo, Giuseppe Gatt, Vittorio Rubiu, Filiberto Menna, Maurizio Calvesi, Daniela Palazzoli, Marisa Volpi, Paolo Fossati, Tommaso Trini, Catherine Millet, Jean-Marc Poinot, François Pluchart, Michel Calura, Klaus Honneff and Achille Bonito Oliva himself, who had promoted the event. The second was "Roma. Mappa 72" (November 20th-December 18th, 1972) which ran a series of exhibitions – some truly memorable – by Ferruccio De Filippi, Cesare Tacchi (the consecration of the ground), Franco Gozzano, Sandro Chia, Eliseo Mattiacci, Luigi Ontani, Anna Valeriani, Patrizio Mangogna, Cloti Ricciardi (a meeting of the feminist collective which men were forbidden to attend), Domenico Centaro, Laura Grisi, Sergio Lombardo, Gianfranco Notargiacomo, Alighiero Giuseppetti, Collettivo Fiore-Varrone-Gramaglia, Claudio Cintoli, Mimmo Germanà, Jannis Kounellis, Giancarlo Croce, Renato Mambor, Luca Patella, Vettor Pisani, Maurizio Beneduti, Gino De Dominicis (cocktail to celebrate the twilight of the Second Law of Thermodynamics).

In 1972 Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys were both hosted at Incontri meetings, for two long debates. From the photographs taken by Massimo Piersanti it is clear that there was always a

packed audience at the Palazzo Taverna gatherings, fired up by the assiduous appearances of Renato Guttuso, Alberto Moravia – who served as the association’s president for many years –, Giulio Carlo Argan and many others.

Throughout the 1980s and well into the ‘90s, the influence of Bruno Corà on the activities organised by Incontri Internazionali d’Arte grew steadily, conditioning its choices with a different way of working and an entirely new attitude. Greater prominence was given to individual artists, and a number of study projects and discussions were launched with research institutes such as the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche. Those were the years of the admirable shows held at Capodimonte, as well as others in which Incontri supported the presence of Italian artists abroad.

The activities at Palazzo Taverna entered a new phase of greater impetus towards the end of the 1990s, when Graziella Leonardi Buontempo decided to invest in a reordering of the library and archives, which opened to the public in 2001. With the cycle entitled “Cielo”, anyone in the reading room or the meeting room could look up at the ceiling and appreciate a remarkable artistic feat: the *Cieli* works were commissioned from, among others, Giulio Paolini, Enzo Cucchi, Andrea Aquilanti, Donatella Spaziani. For the benefit of the younger generations, in 2003 Incontri Internazionali signed a deal lasting 50 years with the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. At the time they were the only Italian organisation to have an atelier in this prestigious no-profit space, created by the French state with the goal of internationalising all art forms.
(DL)

Fabro

Concetto spaziale d'après
Watteau, 1967-71

Corona di piombo, 1968-71

L'Italia d'oro

Alluminio e seta naturale,
1971

Incontri Internazionali d'Arte
November 29th 1971

The inclusion of Luciano Fabro at the 'show-event' organised by Incontri Internazionali d'Arte on November 29th 1971 was the third in the cycle of evenings entitled "Informazioni sulla presenza italiana".

The Incontri association was still in its early days, having inaugurated its activities in November the previous year with the show "Vitalità del negativo nell'arte italiana 1960/70" at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva. The success of this event was in all probability behind Bonito Oliva's appointment to the post of national commissar of the Italian section at the "Septième Biennale de Paris", for which he requested the organisational assistance of Incontri Internazionali d'Arte. When the Paris Biennale closed, Bonito Oliva conceived the review "Informazioni sulla presenza italiana" for Incontri in Rome, where he included many of the works that had been presented in Paris.

Founded in 1959 by André Malraux, for its 1971 edition the Paris Biennale underwent an overhaul of its regulations following the 1968 student uprisings. The commissioner-general for

the event was Georges Boudaille and, as well as the artists, all the commissioners were required to be under 35 years of age. Where in previous editions entries were divided into nationalities, in view of the new art forms that were developing the new Biennale classified its entries into sections: *Travaux d'équipe*, *Art conceptuel* and *Interventions*. The exhibition space had also been moved from the Musée de la Ville in Paris to a freshly-built hangar at the Parc Floral, in the forest of Vincennes.

In the project he submitted to the cultural section of the Italian foreign office, Bonito Oliva motivated his choice of artists according to an idea of art unfettered from the constraints of society, in which mankind's anthropological complexity was retrieved through behaviour, action and imagination. The brief accompanying note also contained – a must in those days – a condemnation of the artwork as a “simple or complex object (...) financially gratifying (...) elusive of the dramatic times man is living in today”. As well as the official catalogue of the Biennale, *Incontri Internazionali d'Arte* published another which concentrated on the Italian artists present. The text by Bonito Oliva it contained argued in favour of an “anarchical (...) individual ideology”, with objects reinterpreted as “traces left by the artist's imagination, presenting the cordial unfamiliarity of the objects of Borges and the joyfulness of a decentralised placing”.

“Informazioni sulla presenza italiana” was the inaugural event of the *Incontri Internazionali d'Arte* space in Palazzo Taverna. The title echoed that of the famous show “Information”, held the previous year at the MoMa in New York and reflected the general interest in documentation typical of those years. Intrinsic to many conceptual works, the documentative or factual identity of art was championed by critics who opposed what was perceived to be the “authoritarian” practice of interpretation – the motivation largely behind the *Incontri*'s decision to become a *Centro d'Informazione Alternativa* (centre for alternative information) soon after. Curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, the review was coordinated by Bruno Corà, who had collaborated with *Incontri* since its beginning, along the lines of the “teatro delle mostre” (exhibition-theatre) held in 1968 by Plinio De Martiis at La Tartaruga gallery in Rome. Every day of the week except Sundays, from 6 pm, for over four weeks, an individual artist or group of artists would be featured. A few months later, in March 1972, the catalogue of the review was published, made up only of images, all photographs taken by Massimo Piersanti. Edited by Achille Bonito Oliva, this volume was the first in a series known as the *Quaderni del Centro d'Informazione Alternativa*.

Fabro had just turned thirty-five when he was included in the *Incontri Internazionali d'Arte* event. His family was originally from the Friuli region of north-east Italy, but he was born in

Turin and was living in Milan at the time. Already one of the most prominent Arte Povera artists, he had earned considerable acclaim – even at an international level – and had a long curriculum of shows to his name. If one were to summarise his work very briefly, one could say that it stemmed from a desire to overturn the established automatic mechanisms of thought and perception. In Rome, Fabro had already exhibited several times at the Galleria La Salita, emblematic pieces such as *Mezzo specchiato e mezzo trasparente* in 1965, which consisted of a sheet of glass – half see-through and half reflecting – suspended over an easel, which by permitting a simultaneous view of what was in front and what was behind was intended as an annihilation of the hierarchies governing the definition of space.

Achille Bonito Oliva had already included Fabro in both the shows he had curated, “Amore mio” (Montepulciano 1970) and “Vitalità del negativo”. The artist responded to Bonito Oliva’s Incontri invitation with an action similar to the one he had staged in Montepulciano, where the entire town had resounded with the recording “consideratemi irresponsabile di quanto succede” (do not consider me responsible for what is happening). For Incontri he presented a nucleus of four works, largely created using traditional sculpture materials and with a precise iconographical reference. It would appear that Fabro wanted to present a form of ‘compendium’ of his recent works, as a way of conveying the new path his work was taking. With this selection, he showed that he had distanced himself from Conceptualism, or at least from the Conceptualism which believed it could ignore the matter, colours and flavours of the world. Fabro clearly wished to come to terms with the image, and with the matter without which the image is not rendered. He continued to believe that the work of an artist was inextricably connected to the definition of space: “no work exists unless it is placed in the right space” (Luciano Fabro in the monography devoted to him by Jole De Sanna, Ravenna 1983).

All the pieces Fabro presented in Paris were later presented also at Incontri Internazionali d’Arte. The works featured in the French and Italian catalogues of the Biennale are the ones Fabro had initially intended to present. The pieces he in fact presented are documented in the photographs taken at the Parc Floral venue and those by Piersanti at Palazzo Taverna, in which it is possible to see that the artist was present in Rome for his exhibition.

The work *Concetto spaziale d’après Watteau* consisted of a camping tent with a veranda space, with a painting blocking the entrance to the inner chamber. On the invitation for the Incontri review, the work was listed with two dates: 1967-1971. The 1967 date referred to the year of *Concetto spaziale (tautologia)*, another work by Fabro in which the title was an explicit reference to Lucio Fontana. It had been included in the “Trigon” of Graz in 1967 and was made up of two perfectly identical rooms placed next to one another, separated by a doorway which

was blocked by a canvas – larger than the door itself and with the rear in view. The second room was inaccessible and could only be appreciated by reading the text that accompanied the work.

A painting also blocked the access In *Concetto spaziale d'après Watteau*, although this time it was positioned in such a way that the front surface was visible, facing inwards and intended as a subversion of accepted notions of interior and exterior. According to the Incontri documents, the tent that was used in the Paris Biennale was never delivered back in Rome – in those years it was not uncommon for objects featured in shows to be damaged or lost during the dismounting process, simply because they were not understood to be part of an exhibit. From the Palazzo Taverna photographs, it would appear that the tent was a different one, not the Moretti Flavia brand used for the Paris show and which is mentioned in the correspondence regarding missing works. It could conceivably have been another tent loaned for the purpose by a friend in Rome... but this is beside the point.

Fabro had presented this piece for the first time in Munich, at the “Kunstzone” review in September 1971, for which he used the same tent as in Paris – in all likelihood his own camping tent. It in fact receives a mention in one of his texts: “At Munich I presented *Concetto spaziale d'après Watteau*. In Bavaria they do things on a grand scale and with few changes they converted the marquees used for the beer festival into an art fair. I patched up my little tent, Flavia, as best I could and – having obtained a Watteau (attributed), which had a freshness and was the right size on loan I pitched the tent and placed the painting in the opening between the inner chamber and the veranda.” (*Attaccapanni*, Turin 1978).

For Munich, Fabro was lent a country scene attributed to Jean-Antoine Watteau, one of the finest Eighteenth-Century French painters and whose name has since been associated with this piece. Bruno Corà remembers that for the Rome event in 1971 the picture was loaned by antique dealer Cesare Canessa. Different paintings have been each time the piece has been presented over the years. At the Palais des Beaux Arts of Brussels in 1986, each of the two openings in a double-chamber tent were hung with photographic images of the building designed by the famous Belgian architect Victor Horta. At the Centre Pompidou in 1996 Fabro’s piece was renamed *Concetto spaziale d'après Lorrain*, after the painter Claude Lorrain whose painting was used. For this event, the old Flavia tent was replaced with the one featured here today.

For the current version of *Concetto spaziale d'après Watteau* 1971-2019 at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni we have used a Nineteenth Century painting of an outdoor scene. We have chosen

a work that both fits over the opening of the tent and which works with the artist's original idea of reversing the back and front of the painting.

It has not been possible to trace the whereabouts of *Corona di piombo* del 1969-1971, which was sent up for auction at Christie's New York in 2011, so in its place we have included the first of two lead crowns by Fabro, entitled *Corona di alloro. Facsimile* and dated 1969.

L'Italia d'oro and *Alluminio e seta naturale (Piede)*, which on the Incontri invitation were listed simply as *Alluminio e seta naturale*, are the same works that were shown in Paris and Rome in 1971.

Fabro has stated that he had wanted to "take into consideration some of the themes that have remained at the crossroads of our culture: eroticism, nationalism, religious symbols, the sensory/ritualistic sphere" – in all of these the image was dictated by significance. He believed he was capable of elaborating such issues and... "to avoid generating a hybrid, I used a catalyser - seduction".

Fabro's version of the crown, historically a royal or religious symbol (although he had in mind the wreaths normally placed to honour the fallen in battle), is a multitude of leaves each cut out of lead individually and arranged either side by side or overlapping, to form a circle and kept together with a metal wire. A fragile assemblage which Fabro placed laying down on the floor – unlike the commemoration wreaths which the powerful normally leave standing against a monument – to ensure extra stability for elements cut out of such a heavy metal.

Italy itself was honoured by Fabro's 'new conscience' procedure, an image that could be substantiated with a material and rearranged in space. "I agree with anyone who holds Italy's shape dear", he declared – not without a degree of provocation aimed at those who would consider such a statement to be nationalist. From the first of his *Italie*, completed in 1969 by cutting the shape of Italy out of a map and attaching it to a metal base, Fabro made a number of other versions in different materials and differently arranged in space. Many of these were conceived to be hung vertically, because "a hanging shape is always less authoritarian". The version on show here, with Sicily and Sardinia screwed onto the back, is in gilded bronze, "because gold is always an excellent maquillage for any shape".

Like the golden *L'Italia*, *Alluminio e seta naturale (Piede)* is also part of a series of works in which Fabro used similar shapes in different images. Perhaps more than in the other works, for this series Fabro tested the sculpture, reinventing it at the same time. In this piece, he took "the

pivot of dynamism in the human body” and rendered it “plastic” with matter. In a cheeky break with accepted form for conceptual artists, he then perfected the work with artistic techniques, craftsmanship, in his selection of “the noblest quality materials, the most sophisticated of appropriate techniques, with polished marble, shined bronze, coloured glass, finely-cut silks ...”.

The novelty of this work was noticed by Saverio Vertone, who first presented the *Piedi* series in March 1971 at the Galleria Borgognona in Milan – “maybe Fabro has seen the end of the clear-cut identification between work and concept, and has decided to look for something midway between the mental or psychological departure point and the objectual arrival point – in the density of matter and technique, in the non-measurable chance of their point of contact”. Fabro expressed this attitude well in his characteristically caustic and happily provocative manner:

“I have nothing to say, but I have to keep you at a distance. I don’t want any moaners around my works. Would you like me to be more transparent? I’ve seen all too well how transparency leaves your eyes gazing lazily at nothing.

(...)

I will be detailed! I will explain to you word for word my bad moods, my bad conscience in blaming you. Please understand, to me you are so happy-go-lucky, so imprecise, so pedestrian and instrumental. Instead you are the most radical! Wherever you are there are no borders, just the beyond!

(...)

Two or three years ago, when I began presenting the *Lenzuola* and *Italia* works, I didn’t do what I normally do and offered no justification for the novelty of my work. I wanted instead to test how people would autonomously react when confronted with images that were the opposite to what they would normally expect to find among conventional images. The result of that merry little test was truly embarrassing,

Anyone who has touched these feet will have experienced what the hands feel. Anyone who has seen these feet will have noticed that it is possible to listen to stone. But those who are deaf never thought of touching them or looking at them with sentiment.

To anyone who asks me to write about my work, I can only answer from my point of view. I am no town crier (I want to underline that), I do what suits me with imagination (I want to underline that).

I made them like no other. Phidias and Praxiteles, Donatello and Buonarroti, Bernini and Canova are my witnesses. I have not used them as examples but I have found them exemplary” (*Questi piedi non sono un’idea*, “Flash Art”, May 1971). (DL)

The reconstruction of the Luciano Fabro show at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni was made possible thanks to the expertise of his daughter Silvia Fabro.

The Incontri Internazionali d'Arte documentation we have consulted is in the archives of the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo.