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PRESS RELEASE
GAGOSIAN GALLERY
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GALLERY HOURS:  Tue–Sat: 10:00am–6:00pm

LUCIO FONTANA: Ambienti Spaziali

Thursday, May 3–Saturday, June 30, 2012
Opening reception: Thursday, May 3rd, from 6:00 to 8:00pm

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to announce a major and unprecedented survey of the work of Lucio Fontana. Six of his groundbreaking environments, known as Ambienti Spaziali, have been faithfully reconstructed, providing a completely new perspective for the rich and varied retrospective of more than one hundred major works that surrounds them. Curated by Germano Celant, assisted by Gagosian director Valentina Castellani in close collaboration with the Fondazione Lucio Fontana in Milan, the exhibition includes many works that have rarely been seen and reunites important series from public and private collections.

Fontana's fascination for the advancements of science and technology during the twentieth century led him to approach art as a series of investigations into a wide variety of mediums and methods. As a sculptor, he experimented with stone, metals, ceramics, and neon; as a painter he attempted to transcend the confines of the two-dimensional plane. In a series of manifestos, beginning with the Manifesto blanco (White Manifesto) of 1946, Fontana announced his goals for a "spatialist" art, one that could engage technology to achieve an expression of the fourth dimension in a radical new aesthetic idiom that melded the categories of architecture, sculpture, and painting.

A sculptor trained in classical techniques, Fontana was initially known for grand and innovative sculptures produced for trade fairs and exhibitions promoting the ideology of Fascism in Italy. But these early examples already contained a rationalist abstract language that pointed to an awareness of the most daring rationalist architectonic experiments of Edoardo Persico and Giuseppe Terragni.

(Continue to page 2)
Upon his return to Milan from Argentina in 1947, Fontana found his studio and works completely destroyed in the Allied bombings of Milan. Due to this abrupt tabula rasa, he considered himself to belong rather to the post-war generation of Italian artists: thus the story of his career is, effectively, the story of his last twenty years. In Buenos Aires, with his students at the newly founded Academia of Altamira, Fontana conceived of an art that could reflect the excitement of contemporaneous discoveries in science and physics and thus continue evolving its very means. Inspired by, but surpassing, the language of Futurism, they advocated doing away with the traditional supports of painting and sculpture. With the act of cutting a thinly painted monochromatic canvas with a sharp knife, Fontana exploded the definition—or at least the conventional space—of art. This act challenged the entire history of Western easel painting and led him to the understanding that painting was no longer about illusion contained within the dimensions of a canvas but, rather, a dynamic concept that blended form, color, architectural space, gesture, and light. Thus the concept of spazialismo was born.

From this moment on, Fontana entitled his works Concetti spaziali (Spatial Concepts), among which a progression of categories unfolds, predicated on the fertile dichotomy between the hole and cut. His assaults on the canvas were not merely physical; they were ways of making the viewer look beyond the fact of the painting into what he called “free space.” Around the same time, he created his first environmental work, Ambienti spaziali a luce nero (Spatial Environment in Black Light), which consisted of a small black room in which several large, fossil-like forms made from papier maché hovered overhead, their fluorescent painted surfaces picked out by black light. As the exhibition demonstrates, it is significant that this first environment was made in 1949, the same year that Fontana introduced the Buchi (Holes), in which he punctured the surface of the canvas in order to access the physical space—and with it the metaphysical dimension—behind the picture. With the Pietre (Stones) series that followed, he fused sculpture with painting by encrusting the surface of the canvas with heavy impasto and fragments of colored glass.

Fontana’s second environment Luce spaziale (1951) is an elaborate, looping neon sculpture originally designed for the ceiling of the Triennale di Milano. It has been reconstructed in its entirety for this exhibition. With these first two Ambienti spaziali, he already broke with the tradition of Dadaist and Constructivist environments and anticipated advanced research with fluorescent light. In 1958, he began making Attese (Waiting), monochrome surfaces that he sliced open with a single gesture or inscribed with multiple cuts at irregular intervals across the canvas, exposing backgrounds that had been artfully darkened with black gauze to create a mysterious sense of illusion and depth. In subsequent Ambienti made between 1961 and 1967, the same aspiration towards purity and the absolute that led him to slash the canvas gives rise to empty rooms where light is the sole element used to suggest and generate space, thus anticipating the revolutionary Space and Light research of the 1970s.
In the momentous egg-shaped canvases that comprise the series *La fine di dio (End of God)* of 1963–64—several key examples of which have been brought together for the exhibition—all of Fontana's concerns seem to coalesce in perfect resolution. These extraordinary works, with their punctured, blasted, gouged, and lacerated surfaces, were his literal response to the anticipation of man's first flight into outer space. With their surfaces literally torn open by hand, they present a vision very different from his earlier optimism of a new spatial era driven by new scientific knowledge; *La fine di dio* suggests the physical and psychic harshness of the reality of man confronting the moon for the first time at close range, at once hero and martyr of the extraterrestrial age that he had first imagined, then made.

*Trinità (Trinity)* (1966), on loan from Fondazione Giorgio Marconi, consists of three large white canvases punctuated by lines of holes. In this exhibition, it is presented for the first time in the way that Fontana conceived it, embraced in a theatrical setting made from ultramarine plastic sheets vaguely resembling wings. This idea of a theatrical, eccentrically shaped space is echoed in a varied series of *Teatrini* (1965–66) with their characteristic black frames that create a void around the canvas. The exhibition culminates in the *Ambienti Spaziali* that Fontana created in 1968 for "Documenta 4", a complex labyrinth of glaring luminosity in which the viewer loses all sense of direction and time and ends against a wall cut by a single slash.

This exciting and complex exhibition has been expertly designed with the collaboration of architect Annabelle Selldorf.

**Lucio Fontana** (1899–1968) was born in Rosario de Santa Fé, Argentina and raised in Milan. He moved back to Argentina in 1922 where he worked as a sculptor in his father's studio for several years. In 1926, he participated in the first exhibition of Nexus, a group of young local Argentinian artists. Returning to Milan in 1928, Fontana enrolled at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera. His first solo show was held at Galleria Il Milione in Milan in 1931. In 1935 he traveled to Paris and joined the Abstraction-Création group. The same year, he developed his skills in ceramics in Albisola, Italy and Sevres, France. In 1939, he joined Corrente, a Milan-based group of expressionist artists, while intensifying his collaborations with architects. In 1940, he moved back to Buenos Aires, where he founded the Academia de Altamira with some of his students in 1946, from which the Manifesto Blanco group emerged. He returned to Milan in 1947 and, together with a group of writers and philosophers, signed the Primo Manifesto dello Spazialismo. His first major international retrospective was held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1977. Subsequent museum exhibitions include Musée national d'art moderne de la ville de Paris and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1987 (traveled to La Fundación 'la Caixa' Barcelona; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Whitechapel Art Gallery, London in 1988); Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 1996 (traveled to Museum Moderner Kunst Stifung Ludwig, Vienna, 1997); Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan (1999); "Lucio Fontana. Entre Materia y Espacio," La Fundación 'la Caixa' and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (1998); Hayward Gallery, London (1999); and "Lucio Fontana: Venice/New York" Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2006–07).

For further information please contact the gallery at newyork@gagosian.com or at +.212.741.1111.