

ARTFORUM

Luciano Fabro Museo Madre

By Ida Panicelli (March 2008)

At the time of his sudden death in June 2007, Fabro had already written specific notes and instructions about the installation and catalogue texts for this exhibition, entitled "Didáctica Magna Minima Moralia." He had decided, with curator Rudi Fuchs, to limit the selection to his earliest works, created between 1963 and 1968; that is, before the birth of arte povera, of which Fabro was one of the acknowledged leaders.

From the beginning, his work was distinguished by a proliferation of eclectic materials, careful attention to technical production, and consideration of the properties of different surfaces, forms, and materials, the positions and relationship between objects and space, and the way in which these "behave" with each other. Fabro's lucid and playful *modus operandi*, which distances his work from the rigors of minimalist sculpture, places it, rather, within the path opened up by the mocking presence of Piero Manzoni in Italian art of the early '60s.

The interplay among tension, flexion, and gravity characterizes works such as *Raccordo Anulare* (Ring Road), 1963, *Ruota* (Wheel), 1964, and *Croce* (Cross), 1965. Everything is inexorably out of alignment: The thin brass or stainless-steel bars bend imperceptibly because of their own weight, and the orthogonal lines, made elastic, negate the geometric fixity of the walls, subverting the spatial order and disorienting the viewer. *Asta* (Pole), 1965, is a steel tube that comes down from the ceiling, one degree out of perpendicular alignment with the floor. If the perpendicular line is what our eye is accustomed to assuming as a rule of architectural space, Fabro upsets this certainty, disturbing the order with a barely perceptible movement; he reminds us that it is precisely dynamic mutation that is the essential element of human reality and the most consistent paradox in our existence. But impossible as it is to maintain fixed points of perceptual reference, it is equally impossible to remain serious. Despite their apparent severity, these works give the same frisson as the solution to a Zen koan: An unexpected shift of meaning checks one's presuppositions, resulting in a liberating laugh.

The works that are about the notion of mirroring, such as *Buco* (Hole), 1963-65, and *Mezzo specchiato mezzo trasparente* (Halfreflective, Half-transparent), 1965, create, instead, a short circuit between reflection and direct vision, between reverberation and concealment. Made up of sheets of glass and mirror mounted on a metal support, they generate an uncertainty between art as direct experience of the world and art as imitation of nature. As in the works of Michelangelo Pistoletto and Giulio Paolini, the fragmentation of optical perspectives allows for their meeting point in the involvement-both sensory and mental-of the viewer. Only by embracing the unpredictability and complexity of experience can the viewer move beyond the

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limitations of static vision to resolve not only the dichotomy between reflection and transparency but also that more enigmatic and existential one between mimesis and reality.

Avoiding any stylistic consistency whatsoever, Fabro preferred consistency of thought and a morality of art as a code of being and acting. He left us this exhibition of first works as a concise and conclusive summation of the original motivations of his artmaking and a confirmation of their continued significance, condensing his intentions into these eloquent words, featured in the accompanying catalogue: "I will begin with giving back to every Work the space that it had / I will begin with transforming every viewer into an exponent of the work itself/I will begin again!"

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