

# Peggy Guggenheim COLLECTION

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## Press Release

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LUCIO FONTANA. VENICE/NEW YORK

TWO RARE SERIES OF WORKS BY FONTANA REUNITED FOR THE FIRST TIME AT THE PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

LUCIO FONTANA. VENICE / NEW YORK will be on view at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, June 4–September 24, 2006. Under the auspices of the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan, the exhibition presents Fontana's VENICE paintings and his NEW YORK series of metals of the early 1960s, that are presented together for the first time. The exhibition is conceived and curated by Luca Massimo Barbero. From 10 October 2006 to 21 January 2007, the exhibition will be on show at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Over the course of a few months in 1961 Lucio Fontana worked on a group of canvases which constitute an episode of exceptional aesthetic clarity: the VENICE series. After years of titling his works *Spatial Concept*, *Waiting*, this was the first time Fontana dedicated his work to a place and gave his paintings lyrical titles, such as *Venice Was All in Gold* or *Night of Love in Venice*. This series was shown the same year in the exhibition *Arte e Contemplazione* at Palazzo Grassi, Venice. Each canvas measures 1.5 meters square and is remarkable for its thickly layered paint, often punctured or cut, with glass inserts. Fontana worked the surfaces with swirling gestures that allude to the baroque whorls of Venetian churches, to the linear patterns formed by moonlight on water, to the preciosity of the mosaics of San Marco, or in general to the Byzantine splendors of Venice. And so these paintings are a synthesis of different faces of the city, of Byzantine gold and white Istrian stone, of the transparency of glass or the darkness of night. Their Baroque richness was greeted in 1961 with enthusiasm by a surprised public.

In the same year, 1961, Michel Tapié organized an exhibition of the VENICE series at the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York. It was Fontana's first solo exhibition in the United States, signaling him at once as a new 'master' of the international avant-garde. Fontana was, in turn, fascinated by the New York, and while the VENICE series was showing at the Martha Jackson Gallery he was enthusiastically sketching the city which, in a curious geographic and aesthetic conceit, came to form the basis for unforgettable metal works that he produced upon his return: the NEW YORK series. This consisted of large sheets of shiny and scratched copper, pierced and gouged, cut through by dramatic vertical gestures that simulate the force of New York construction and the metal and glass of the buildings. They are works of powerful impact, seductive in their tormented surfaces, rich in metallic reverberations that tell of the electric tension of New York City.

The exhibition at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection (which includes other, more 'typical' works by Fontana) will open with two important reference points in Fontana's *oeuvre*: *Spatial Concept. Holes* (1949) and the first "cuts" (1958-59). The first part of the exhibition focuses on the years 1959-61 and includes works known as the "oils", in which thick paint is densely applied all over the canvas, creating its own material field. Fontana's concern at the time was to overcome an optical and cool notion of color to create works that synthesized all his experimentation. The oils made possible vivid gestural marks deep in the paint field, whether sweeping lines or piercings resembling openings. The voluptuous physicality of his medium, in white or soft pink, resembles the sensuality of flesh. In 1961 Fontana began making oil paintings with a silvery or golden paste into which he inserted fragments of colored glass to form small constellations. With its startling and naturalistic name, the VENICE series attracted instant attention, even shock: "the master of Art Informel has created a cycle of paintings dedicated to the city of Venice and its Baroque image playing with paradox and anti-avantgarde

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provocation". Fontana completed nineteen works in the series, some of which were lost from view following the 1961 exhibitions in Venice and New York; others, due to the delicacy of the materials, suffered damage. They have never been reunited until now.

LUCIO FONTANA. VENICE / NEW YORK offers a unique opportunity to see works of the VENICE series such as *Sky in Venice* next to *Sun in St Mark's Square*, *Spatial Concept*, *Venice Lagoon*. Among the works of the NEW YORK series is the grandiose metal triptych *Spatial Concept, New York 10*, three meters wide, as well as smaller metals exhibited here for the first time. The exhibition will be augmented by newly discovered archival material, drawings, and photographs, and will present a fresh and original view of this celebrated master of post-war art. The VENICE series represents Fontana's romantic love for the Baroque and for the ancient architecture of Venice, while in the NEW YORK series he is enthralled by the contemporary.

The dispersal of the Venice series and many of the New York works into museums and private collections, in Europe, the United States and Japan, necessitated two years of work during which curator Luca Massimo Barbero established the location of every painting exhibited in 1961, in order to provide the public with the most comprehensive presentation of Fontana's work in that seminal moment. More than forty years on, it will once more be possible to see together the works shown in Venice and at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, alongside the metal works realized in the same year as the artist's homage to the American metropolis.

LUCIO FONTANA. VENICE / NEW YORK is sponsored by Banca Aletti, Private & Investment Bank of the Banco Popolare di Verona e Novara Group. The exhibition is also supported by the Murray & Isabella Rayburn Foundation through the generosity of Maurice Kanbar. Additional support is provided by the Italian Institute of Foreign Trade (ICE), the Regione del Veneto, and Alitalia. The official shipper is Tratto.

The exhibition catalogue publishes essays by leading scholars of Fontana's *oeuvre*: Enrico Crispolti and Paolo Campiglio, as well as curator Luca Massimo Barbero.

The exhibition programs of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection are made possible by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection Advisory Board and:

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# 186 June, 2006

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Hours: 10.00-18.00; Closed Tuesday

Entrance: euro 10; euro 8 seniors over 65 years; euro 5 students; free 0-12 years

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