

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale*, 1954. Terre cuite peinte, 30 x 40 cm

LUCIO FONTANA

April 24 - June 27, 2026

Opening Friday, April 24th from 5 to 7 pm

Galerie Karsten Greve is pleased to present an exhibition dedicated to the ceramics of Lucio Fontana (1899–1968), bringing together a selection of works created between the 1930s and the 1960s. The exhibition highlights an essential yet often lesser-known aspect of the artist's practice: his work with terracotta, a founding medium that runs throughout his career and gradually nourishes his Spatialist research. Fontana's attraction to ceramics finds its roots in his personal history as he grew up in his father's workshop, a sculptor of funerary monuments, where he became familiar with working with clay from an early age.

The exhibition opens with *Torso Italico* (1938), a monumental work inspired by antique statuary and imperial Rome. While drawing on traditional codes, the figure radically fragments them. This truncated body, deprived of arms, emerges as a presence that is both massive and vulnerable, where classical monumentality is diverted into a more unstable form. Modeled in a single piece, it demonstrates remarkable technical mastery, with firing constraints contributing fully to the intensity of the work. In the context of late 1930s Italy, the figure resonates with the historical imaginaries of its time while maintaining an ambiguous dimension, a silent critique of autocratic ideologies.

At the same time, Fontana explores a very different, lighter vein. His stays in Albisola, where he collaborated with the poet and ceramist Tullio Mazzotti, foster a rich and inventive production situated at the crossroads of sculpture and craftsmanship. Exotic animals, fruits, shells form a poetic universe dominated by luminous colors and organic shapes. Some pieces appear almost animated, such as the playful *Cocodrillo* (1936–37); surfaces ripple and unfold, colors vibrate.

From the 1940s onward, the tone shifts. The experience of war profoundly affects Fontana's sensibility, and his works begin to reflect the political upheavals of the time. Belligerent figures and scenes of combat gradually emerge. Rather than representing violence directly, Fontana often transforms these confrontations into choreographed compositions in which bodies intersect in a theatrical movement. In *Battaglia* (1947), the figures seem to intertwine, indistinct and almost electric.

Themes of crucifixion and deposition provide Fontana with a field of expression for great gestural intensity, between tradition and experimentation. Shaped with vigor, the figures of Christ elongate and twist under the pressure of the artist's gesture. The material seems to vibrate, as if the suffering of the Passion and spiritual energy were directly transmitted into the clay.

The exhibition highlights the artist's gradual evolution toward a more radical conception of surface which becomes a boundary to be crossed, and of space as a form to be revealed. With his *Concetti spaziali*, small perforations punctuate the surface of the material. These simple yet decisive openings transform the sculpture: the surface ceases to be a limit and becomes a passage into space. This principle lies at the core of the research Fontana developed within the Spatialist

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movement, whose foundations he established in his *Manifesto Blanco*, published in 1946. "We want the painting to leave its frame and the sculpture to leave its glass case," he wrote.

Fascinated by scientific progress and the emerging imaginaries associated with cosmic exploration, Fontana developed a vision in which sculpture resonates with an expanded space. In the late 1950s, with his *Natura* series, large terracottas with incised or hollowed forms, he engages directly with contemporary developments, drawing inspiration from the first images of lunar craters. These works reflect a keen awareness of his time: Fontana does not represent the cosmos, but captures its impact on how we conceive space and form.

Lucio Fontana was born in 1899 in Rosario, Argentina. He first trained in academic craftsmanship with his father, a specialist in funerary sculpture, and later with his teacher, the Symbolist Adolfo Wildt, at the Accademia di Brera. From 1930 onward, ceramics became his medium of choice, remaining central to his practice until 1960. He explored its infinite possibilities, at the Sèvres Manufactory, in 1937, and in the workshop of his friend, the Futurist ceramist Tullio Mazzotti in Albisola. In 1946, he published the famous *Manifesto Blanco*, the foundation of Spatialism. Although widely recognized in Italy, it was not until 1948, at the Venice Biennale, that Fontana achieved international acclaim. He then exhibited in New York, Osaka, Copenhagen, Buenos Aires, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and participated to the *Documenta 2* and *4* in Kassel (1959 and 1968). After his death in 1968, numerous posthumous exhibitions were dedicated to his work, including at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1987, the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna in 1996, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2006, and the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome in 2008. In 2025, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice devoted a major exhibition to his ceramic practice. Galerie Karsten Greve has exhibited Lucio Fontana's work since 1973.