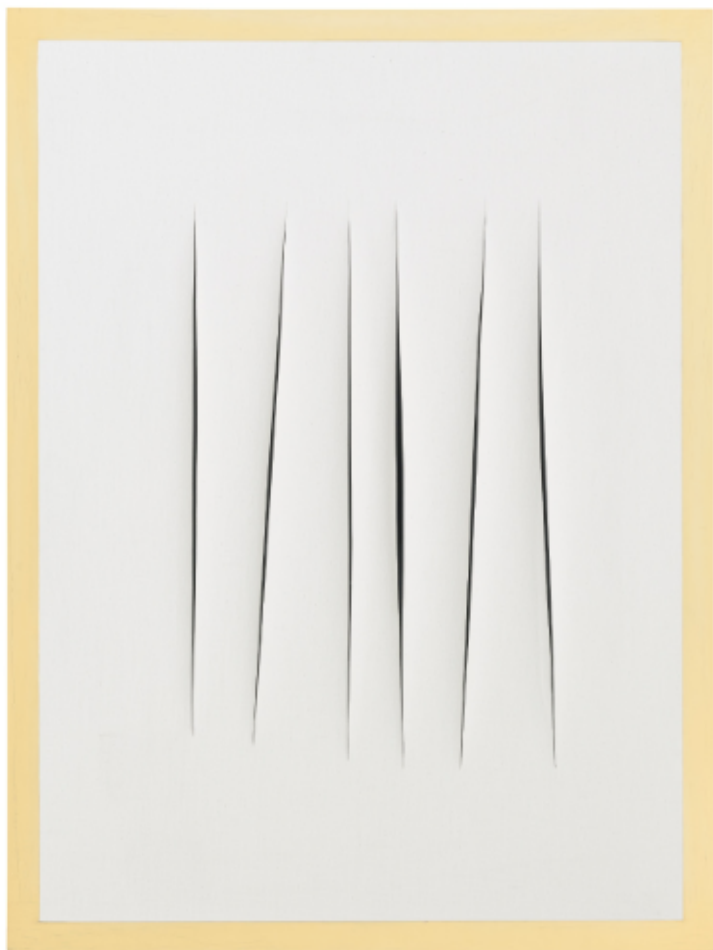


Sotheby's

Contemporary Art Evening Auction

London | 26 giu 2013, 07:00 PM | L13022



LOTTO 19

PROPERTY FROM A PRESTIGIOUS EUROPEAN COLLECTION

LUCIO FONTANA

1899 - 1968

CONCETTO SPAZIALE, ATTESE

signed, titled and inscribed Mario Bardini è tornato dalla Russia on the reverse
waterpaint on canvas, in artist's frame

130 by 97cm.

51 1/4 by 38 1/4 in.

Executed in 1965.

STIMA €3,300,000-4,500,000 GBP

PROVENANCE

Private Collection (acquired directly from the artist circa 1965-67)

Sale: Sotheby's, London, Contemporary Art, Part I, 26 June 1997, Lot 8

Acquired directly from the above by the present owner

EXHIBITED

Rome, Galleria Editalia, Qui arte contemporanea, dieci anni, 1976-77, n.p., illustrated

LETTERATURA

Enrico Crispolti, Lucio Fontana Catalogue Raisonné, Vol. II, Brussels 1974, p. 161, no. 65 T 38, illustrated, and no. 65 T 125, illustrated

Enrico Crispolti, Lucio Fontana, Catalogo Ragionato di Sculture, Dipinti e Ambientazioni, Vol. II, Milan 1986, p. 564, no. 65 T 38, illustrated, and p. 582, no. 65 T 125, illustrated

Enrico Crispolti, Catalogo Ragionato di Sculture, Dipinti e Ambientazioni, Vol. II, Milan 2006, p. 767, no. 65 T 125, illustrated

NOTA DEL CATALOGO

Elegant, columnar and utterly pristine, the six slender cuts of Lucio Fontana's monumental *Concetto Spaziale* together evince a timeless expression of the Spatialist project through which the artist so radically advanced the course of art history. A progression of assured incisions across a pure white canvas, its brightness amplified through contrast with the plunging black recesses, this work is a perfect expression of Fontana's search for "the Infinite, the inconceivable chaos, the end of figuration, nothingness" (the artist cited in: Exhibition Catalogue, London, Hayward Gallery, Lucio Fontana, 1999-2000, p. 198). Executed in 1965 at the height of Fontana's truly ground-breaking conceptual dialogue, the present work masterfully balances spontaneity and control to dramatically breach the centuries-old paradigm of painting on canvas. The imposing scale of this painting, rarely preserved within the original artist's frame, confronts the viewer with a spectacular interplay between pure white tableau and the six vertical black slashes that pierce through the monochrome expanse. At the command of Fontana's deft Stanley blade, the perfected illusionism of the Old Masters and challenge to tradition of Abstract Expressionism are sacrilegiously ruptured. Attuned to a contemporary moment in which the ambition of cosmological exploration invigorated philosophy and an intellectual revaluation of space and time, Fontana's dramatic rupture of the known and accepted parameters for representation delivers a thrilling visual metaphor: with his radical gesture Fontana choreographed a revolutionary dance with the unknowable dimensions of the void.

The artistic theory behind the creation of the tagli (cuts), and before them the buchi (holes), was professed in Fontana's first manifesto, the *Manifesto Blanco*, published in 1946. Here Fontana proposed the birth of a new Spatialist art which sought to articulate the fourth dimension. In this quest, Fontana proposed the artist as the source of creative energy, anticipating future events and engaging with technological advancement. According to Fontana, the artist's work should aspire to enlighten ordinary people to the possibilities offered by their environment and society. Ceaselessly engaged with the scientific and technical evolutions achieved throughout the Twentieth Century, he incorporated these ideas into his art with a dynamic exploration of method, material and medium.

Since puncturing his first canvas in 1949, Fontana had been singularly committed to the Spatialist mission to explore the conceptual depths beyond the limits of the two-dimensional picture plane. A few years following the punctures and piercings of the buchi, Fontana sharpened his gesture: the elaboration of the hole finds its definitive expression in the elegantly vigorous tagli which would dominate Fontana's oeuvre thereafter. This is as much a conceptual leap as it is a visual one: with the space created by the slash standing for the idea of space without physical boundaries, the flat picture plane was undermined forever. In his last ever interview Fontana gave consummate expression to this revolutionary aesthetic venture: "I make a hole in a canvas in order to leave behind the old pictorial formulae, the painting and the traditional view of art and I escape, symbolically, but also materially, from the prison of the flat

surface' (the artist cited in: Exhibition Catalogue, Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum; London, Whitechapel Art Gallery, Lucio Fontana, 1988, p. 34). By the mid-1960s the development and perfection of the *Concetto Spaziale*, *Attese* powerfully admonished this categorical restriction and dissected the very concept of painting itself.

In 1966, following the year *Concetto Spaziale*, *Attese* was executed and just two years before his untimely death, Fontana was awarded first prize at the XXXIII Venice Biennale for his pavilion, a temple dedicated to his spatial art exclusively inhabited by the most pure and essential artistic expression of Fontana's career - the monumental white tagli. Indeed, it is this iconic format that has earned the artist international and art-historical renown. In navigating a glimpse of the abyss, an insinuation telescoped most definitively in the opus of pristine white canvases to which the present work belongs, Fontana shatters prescribed spatial divisions. These works allude to the cosmic and foreground the concept that our presence in space is not bound to our conscribed environs but that there is something else beyond our ability to perceive, and that we might conceive of it through the power of art.

Passing through the very substance and ground of the two-dimensional, Fontana at once unites the hermetic parameters of easel painting with the three dimensionality of sculpture. In tune with cosmological advancement these works pioneer a dialogue with space and time - a discourse most prominently evoked by the artist's stunning opus of blindingly white neon installations. Indeed there is a formal and conceptual parity between the present work and this experimental tenet of Fontana's practice. The sequence of intensely sharp fissures here echoes the piercing beams of light criss-crossing at ungraspable speed in Fontana's 1961 *Fonti de energia*. Attempting to emphasize progress and advancement, Fontana sought to create enigmatic circumstances for the manifestation of pure space and pure energy before his viewers. In harnessing the colour white - a chromatic signifier for pure light, energy and technological advancement - and incising the serene perfection of the canvas' surface, profound innovation radiates from *Concetto Spaziale*, *Attese* with unsurpassed clarity. Each slit is of almost equal length, the harmony deliberately upset by Fontana's angling of the cuts, and the squeezing constriction of the intervals in between. With nervous energy and dynamic force, space pulses through the openings; the blinding whiteness of the ground dramatically sets off the abyssal black the open incisions while the sharpness of the cut violates the pure unadulterated canvas field. As if recoiling from an assault, the edges of each slit curl inwards creating rhythmic recessions that lead our eye into the darkly imagined space beyond.

Created four years after Yuri Gagarin was launched into space and four years before Neil Armstrong would first set foot on the moon (an event Fontana would sadly not live to see), the present *Concetto Spaziale* is imbued with the artist's unbridled enthusiasm for the incommensurability of space as endless and infinite, yet brimming with the promise of uncharted and boundless adventure. For Fontana, scientific advancement demanded parallel innovations in art, which he felt should extend into our surroundings. As outlined by the artist: "The discovery of the Cosmos is that of a new dimension, it is the Infinite: thus I pierce this canvas, which is the basis of all arts and I have created an infinite dimension, an x which for me is the basis for all Contemporary Art" (the artist cited in: Exhibition Catalogue, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Lucio Fontana, Venice/ New York, 2006, p. 19). Representing the mature realisation of this conceptual conceit, *Concetto Spaziale*, *Attese* utterly defines Fontana's pioneering innovation and revolutionary desire to further the very boundaries of our phenomenological perception.



Fig. 1

Lucio Fontana Photograph by Shunk-Kender © Roy Lichtenstein Foundation



Fig. 2

Installation view of Lucio Fontana's *Fonti di energia*, soffitto di neon per 'Italia '61, Torino, 1961 © Lucio Fontana/SIAE/DACS, London 2013



Fig. 3

6th Milan Triennale, 1936 The Salone della Vittoria of the Palazzo dell'arte, designed by Giancarlo Palanti and Edoardo Persico with Vittoria and Cavalli che seguono la Vittoria by Lucio Fontana © Lucio Fontana/SIAE/DACS, London 2013