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GIANNI COLOMBO

A Space Odyssey

Curated by Marco Scotini

Opening: Thursday, May 11, 2023; 6pm - 9pm

May 12 – July 17, 2023

From Tuesday to Saturday, 11am – 6pm (until June 3, 2023)

From Monday to Friday, 11am – 6pm (from June 6 to July 17, 2023)

Fondazione Marconi and Gió Marconi are pleased to announce *Gianni Colombo. A Space Odyssey*, an important retrospective dedicated to the Milanese artist on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of his death. The exhibition, curated by Marco Scotini, focuses on the particular spatial dramaturgy that characterises Colombo's work, starting from a comparison with 1968 Stanley Kubrick's spectacular sci-fi movie.

Considered one of the greatest international exponents of kinetic and environmental art, Gianni Colombo made the link between space and body the catalyst for all his three-dimensional investigations. Using flashes of light, moving objects, immersive environments and isolated architectural elements, the artist created disturbing spatial devices capable of disorienting acquired perceptual forms and deconstructing ordinary behavioural codes.

In perfect union with Lygia Clark, throughout the 1960s Colombo challenged rigidity with the mise-en-scene of elasticity. However, during the 1970s he put gravity at the centre of his personal challenges. It is not by chance that the three large installations conceived for Studio Marconi during this period – *Campo praticabile* (1970), *Bariestesia* (1975) and *Topoestesia* (1977) – mark a fundamental stage in his journey in this direction, confronting gravity as an equally inevitable and invisible factor to be overcome. Electronic bands on TV screens, baresthetic perception (a condition of equilibrium) and the progressive replacement of cubic space with curved space determine his work in his period.

It is in fact with the curved platform of *Campo praticabile* [Practicable field], that Colombo created a walkable environment on the floor of the gallery in collaboration with Vincenzo Agnetti. As Agnetti later wrote: *Given a base: the floor, a platform or something else, identifiable at the threshold of sensitivity, we already have a field consisting of two hemispheres: the upper one as a positive virtual field tending towards redundancy, and the lower one as a predicted unpredictable negative field.*

Also in 1970, an extraordinary photo by Ugo Mulas portrayed one of the three corridors of *Topoestesia* (presented at the *Vitalità del Negativo* exhibition) as a centrifugal space. All four perimeter walls converge towards the back wall, creating the visual effect of a torsion, thus excluding the identification of any reference axis. Gianni Colombo is at the centre of the image: his feet rest on one side wall, his torso on the other in front, and his hands are compressed on the surface. If the image were rotated 45 degrees, the side wall would immediately transform into the floor. The impression is therefore of a photograph taken in a spacecraft with the astronauts' bodies orbiting in an anti-gravitational space.

Moreover the Apollo 11 moon landing took place in July 1969 and *Topoestesia (Planned Itinerary)* was shown just a year later, while Stanley Kubrick's sensational sci-fi film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* is from 1968. The purpose of the exhibition is to focus on the artist's challenges to gravity and on his idea of inclined surfaces: an aspect which was shared by many contemporary dance choreographers of the time, from Yvonne Rainer to Simone Forti. From the earliest ceramic works *Costellazioni Intermutabili* [Interchangeable Constellations] from the 1960s to the suspended, moving metal structures *Spazi Curvi* [Curved Spaces] from the 1990s, and interspersed between these, the reconstruction of several fundamental environments (*Bariestesia*, 1973 and *Topoestesia*, 1977), through which a part of Studio Marconi's history is reconstructed. In essence, *Gianni Colombo. A Space Odyssey* offers a journey inside a strange space machine in the company of an exceptional crew (Vincenzo Agnetti, Ugo Mulas, Joe Colombo, Livio and Piero Castiglioni and Maria Mulas). A journey in the *embodied knowledge* (Donna Haraway), that effectively questions the certainty of our Cartesian coordinates.

The association of Colombo's space to the one set in Kubrick's movie arises from Annette Michelson's evocative text and, in both cases, it stems from the use of a perceptual disorientation in order to make our

bodies re-establish a state of balance as an open process, thus responding to a sensory disruption with a physical readjustment carried out by experience. *A situated knowledge* far from any abstraction.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Gianni Colombo was born in Milan in 1937. After studying at the Brera Academy under the guidance of Achille Funi, in the latter half of the 1950s he created his first kinetic and programmed artworks.

He began exhibiting at Galleria Azimut in 1959, and in October of that year he founded Gruppo T with Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani and Gabriele De Vecchi. Grazia Varisco joined the following year. The group's aim was to investigate the temporal dimension as an essential factor of an artwork and its reception, and to undertake research into light and perceptual phenomena.

In January 1960 Colombo exhibited with Gruppo T at Galleria Pater in Milan; in 1961 at the *Nove Tendencije* show at Zagreb museum; and in 1962 at the *Arte programmata* exhibition in Milan, organised by Bruno Munari and Umberto Eco.

In 1963 he took part in the 4th San Marino Art Biennale, and the following year presented his first habitable environment, *Strutturazione cinevisuale abitabile* [Habitable Cine-Visual Structure] at the *Nouvelle Tendence* exhibition at the Louvre.

In 1965, after appearing in the Zagreb group's third show, he took part in *The Responsive Eye* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and his theoretical essay *Sulle ricerche plastiche cinevisuali* was published in the catalogue.

In 1965 he exhibited in the *Nul '65* show at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and consolidated his relationship with Zero, the artist group based in Düsseldorf.

In 1967 he presented his *Spazio elastico* [Elastic Space] environment at the *Trigon* exhibition in Graz, and together with Gabriele De Vecchi designed *Ambiente a strutturazione virtuale* [Virtual Structured Environment] for the exhibition *Lo spazio dell'immagine* held in Foligno, Umbria, in July.

In 1968 he exhibited with Gruppo T in Grenoble but the group separated shortly afterwards. However, Colombo's work had already been well received for some time, and that same year he won the first prize for painting at the 34th Venice Biennale.

In 1970 he and Vincenzo Agnetti created the *Campo praticabile* [Practicable Field] environment, which was shown at Studio Marconi.

By the late 1960s his research had also turned to video. In 1971 he presented *Total Furnishing Unit* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York as part of the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*.

In 1975 he held a solo show at Studio Marconi, for which he created the *Bariestesìa* environment.

He received several public commissions, including a monument to the Resistance for the municipality of Como.

In 1980 he took up the chair in Structuring Space at Milan's Nuova Accademia, and in 1985 became the school's director. In 1983 he held an important solo exhibition at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Contemporanea in Suzzara, Lombardy. The following year he was invited to present his work at the Contemporary Art Pavilion in Milan and at the 39th Venice Biennale, where he was given a solo room. In 1986 he created the sets for *Stephen Climax* by M. Zender at the Frankfurt Opera House. Meantime he continued work on the series *Architetture cacogoniometriche – Archi* [Cacogoniometric architectures – Arches], environmental works which he presented in 1992 at the Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden.

Gianni Colombo died suddenly in Melzo on 3 February 1993.

In 2010 an important exhibition was dedicated to him at Castello di Rivoli, curated by Carolin Christov-Bakargiev and Marco Scotini.

The most recent major group shows featuring his work were the *Thinking Machines* exhibition at the MoMA, New York (2018); *Vertigo. Op Art and a History of Deception 1520-1970* at the Kunstmuseum, Stuttgart and at the Mumoc in Vienna; and *Le diable au corps. Quand l'Op Art électrise le cinéma*, at Mamac in Nice (2019).

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