

LUCIANO FABRO INHABITING SPACE

«The modern concept of art can be traced back to Bacon*, who understands art as an extension, like a limb, thus reaching out to all things and becoming part of their existence. Modern and contemporary art consists of entering into things, a process that also unfolds through a sense of wonder, curiosity, and the new.»

Luciano Fabro

LUCIANO FABRO

ABITARE LO SPAZIO. INHABITING SPACE

curated by

Fiammetta Griccioli, Roberta Tenconi

and Vicente Todolí with the collaboration of

Silvia Fabro (Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro)

Pirelli HangarBicocca

08.10.2026 – 21.02.2027

Public Program

12 November: 7 PM, lecture in the show

with art historian Margit Rowell

3 December: 7 PM, conversation in the show

with artists Liliana Moro and Gianni Caravaggio

14 January: 7 PM, lecture in the show

with curator Andrea Viliani

February: performance in the exhibition space

Museum Mediation

Museum mediators are present in the exhibition spaces to answer questions from the public, provide information and contextual elements that can deepen the fruition of the artworks.

Catalog

Published in fall 2026, the volume dedicated to the exhibition is available at the Pirelli HangarBicocca bookshop and online.

***Cover quotation:** Luciano Fabro, *Lezione prima. L'arte naturale*, February 1, 1999, published in *Lezioni 1996–2002*. Milan: Accademia di Brera, Libri Scheiwiller, 2022, p. 147. Fabro quotes Francis Bacon (1561–1626), the English philosopher widely regarded as one of the key figures of the modern scientific method.



Luciano Fabro installing *Iconografie*, 1975–80, “Luciano Fabro. Letture Parallele IV,” PAC Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea, Milan, 1980
Courtesy Archivio Fotografico A. Guidetti e G. Ricci
Photo Giovanni Ricci

The Artist

A leading figure of post-war Italian art, Luciano Fabro (Turin, 1936–Milan, 2007) based his research on a constant reflection on the language of sculpture and the relationship between the artwork and its surrounding space. His production cannot be easily categorized—each work or cycle is the result of a theoretical issue that, once addressed, raises new questions. As the critic Rudi Fuchs noted, Fabro’s *oeuvre* can be interpreted as a garden, where a variety of elements—plants, flowers, hedges—coexist without merging, each maintaining its own identity while remaining part of a whole.

Throughout his career, Fabro ceaselessly questioned the meaning of art, moving freely across different mediums, from drawing and environmental intervention to sculpture and writing. His artistic production was accompanied by extensive theoretical activity, which he considered an integral part of his practice. Teaching played a central role: «I believe that



Luciano Fabro reflected in *Tondo e rettangolo*, 1964,
in his studio, Milan, 1965
Courtesy Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro
Photo Giovanni Edoardo Nogaro

anyone who does something knows how to convey it to others,» he maintained. He held classes first at the Accademia di Carrara (1979–83) and then at the Accademia di Brera in Milan (1983–2002), and was also involved in the Casa degli Artisti—an “art research institute” in Milan that he co-founded in 1978 with art critic Jole De Sanna (1947–2004) and artist Hidetoshi Nagasawa (1940–2018). These were moments for intergenerational dialogue and exchange, adopting a maieutic teaching method that relied on active engagement to stimulate young artists to develop their own potential.

Fabro was born in Turin but grew up in Friuli, where he commenced his education. In the late 1950s he moved to Milan, connecting with leading figures of the contemporary art world. He absorbed theoretical principles from their poetics and reinterpreted them in an original way. He adopted Lucio Fontana’s (1899–1968) conception of

space as an intrinsic dimension of the artwork, capable of immersing the viewer in a total perceptual experience, and Piero Manzoni’s (1933–1963) focus on the conceptual and imaginative aspects.

A keen observer of his own time, an avid reader of philosophy and literature, and a connoisseur of art history, Fabro combined an interest in experimentation typical of much contemporary practice with an in-depth study of tradition: forms of Greco-Roman classical art, Humanism and the Renaissance, 17th-century scientific thought, and Baroque compositional approaches. On these foundations, he built a deeply personal language, full of references and layers of meaning. In his research, materials become a fundamental means of expressive freedom, articulated using an original visual vocabulary: from the most common and basic to the most precious or ephemeral, from bronze to glass, paper to silk, and pure gold to marble.

From the very outset, in the early 1960s, Fabro focused his research on the relationship between the artwork and space. The works featured in his first solo exhibition at the Galleria Vismara in Milan in 1965 function as instruments of perception in which the viewer plays an active role. These pieces made with glass and reflective surfaces, like *Buco* (1963), allow the spaces in front of and behind them to interpenetrate, establishing a dialogue between the environment, its reflected image, and the viewer. The following year Fabro created *In cubo* (1966), consisting of white fabric stretched over a lightweight structure that he built based on the specific measurements of his own body.

In the years that followed, Fabro continued his exploration, expressing it in an artistic practice employing vastly different techniques and materials. Between 1967 and 1968 he focused his efforts on the *Tautologie*, a group of works created during a brief and intense phase in his career. The term—meaning the repetition of a previously expressed concept in different words—clearly conveys the principle of this group of works, according to which the artwork «is what it is, says what it says,» demonstrating its creation process while representing nothing but itself. In *Pavimento (tautologia)* (1967), for example, the artist used sheets of newspaper to cover a section of the floor he had previously cleaned and polished. As Fabro explained: «The surface must be kept clean, polished, and constantly covered with newspaper. Regular maintenance is necessary to ensure the required conditions are preserved. After all, every experience regarding this piece is restricted

to its maintenance.» The work was presented that same year at the first Arte Povera exhibition, featuring artists brought together by critic Germano Celant (1940–2020) in a series of shows. However, Fabro's position within the group was unique: while sharing the drive to restore art to the simple, direct experience of materials, his research was distinguished by his constant engagement with art history and tradition. His practice shifts between seemingly opposite poles—weight and lightness, balance and instability, opacity and transparency (concerns that have historically been addressed within the discipline of sculpture)—redefining the medium as a language that is manifested in the relationship between objects, the space they occupy, and people who experience them.

Starting in 1968, he embarked on a new corpus, all sharing the subtitle *Piedi*. In them, he reshaped fundamental elements of traditional sculpture: the plinth, the column, and human anatomy. Employing a range of techniques, from marble carving to bronze casting and glassmaking, he paired these materials with silk to create “calzoni,” columns resembling trousers that establish a sense of continuity and redefine the spatial characteristics of the environment. These unsettling forms were poorly received by contemporary critics, at the time more focused on Conceptual Art, which prioritized the idea over the physical object.

In the *Italie* group, begun in 1968, the silhouette of the peninsula is replicated in numerous variations. Sometimes accompanied by ironic titles, these pieces take on political or symbolic meanings; notable examples include *L'Italia di cartoccio*, *Italia all'asta*, *Italia segata*, *Cosa Nostra*, and *Italia del dolore*. In 1975 he conceived *Coreografia*, an autonomous space in the Christian Stein gallery in Turin, using long rolls of white paper to present nine *Italie*. The idea of creating a defined area in which the works and viewers can “be comfortable” was the starting point from which Fabro developed the concept of *habitat*, a term he used from the mid-1970s onwards as the title for some of his spatial installations. These autonomous structures, built primarily from lightweight materials, are created for occasions such as the Tokyo Biennale (1970), the Venice Biennale (1972), the PAC Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan (1980), the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam (1981–82), or the Neue Galerie-Sammlung Ludwig in Aachen (1983).

Throughout his career, Fabro explored materials in each of their sensory qualities—form, color, and the way they react to light and shadow—engaging all the senses. This sensitivity is expressed by



Vetro di Murano e Shantung di seta pura, 1968–71, installation view, “Opera o comportamento,” 36th Venice Biennale, 1972
Courtesy Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro
Photo Luciano Fabro

the term “haptic” (from the Greek *apto*, meaning to touch, adhere, unite, bind together), which provided the title for an exhibition and a text written in 1976 with De Sanna and Nagasawa. The viewer's experience is paramount; the artwork engages sight, touch, and all the other senses, directly stimulating thought.

During the 1990s and 2000s, Fabro's production was featured in major solo exhibitions at international institutions, including the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona (1990); the Kunstmuseum Lucerne (1991); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1992); the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1996); and the Tate Gallery in London (1997). He also received several public commissions. These include *Giardino all'italiana* (1994) for Picassoplatz in Basel, where he created a self-contained space in which a map of the southern hemisphere sky, rendered in marble with points of light, is pierced by nature (in the form of trees) that interrupts its continuity; and his final work *La colonna* (2007), dedicated to the Italian immigrants who were hired in the coal mines, situated in the town hall square in Genk, Belgium.

The Exhibition

“Abitare lo spazio. Inhabiting Space” is the first retrospective devoted to Luciano Fabro by an Italian institution since his death in 2007. It features around 50 artworks created over a period of four decades, from the 1960s to the early 2000s, placing particular emphasis on one of the fundamental aspects of his artistic practice: the relationship between the piece, space, and perception. The path does not follow a chronological order but is structured around groups of works that highlight the ways in which Fabro addressed these themes over time.

At the heart of the exhibition is the reconstruction of the *Habitat* that the artist created for his retrospective at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam in 1981. Installed in the Navate, it effectively constitutes an “exhibition within the exhibition”: a self-standing architectural intervention designed to house a group of works and bring them into dialogue with each other. The concept of *habitat*, an environment in which the art pieces, architecture, and the human presence all contribute to create a whole, is described by Fabro both as a place «that must embody all our possible activities—imaginative, rational and emotional—but which, by doing so, stimulates us» and as a “refuge” in which to shelter and feel at ease. Conceived as a space constructed according to a carefully studied geometry of perspectives and proportions, this *Habitat* guides paths and viewpoints. It was envisaged by the artist as a sort of “ideal city” in which visitors have the opportunity to create their own route.

Around this core, the exhibition presents Fabro's production from different periods, starting with one of his best-known sculptures, *lo rappresento l'ingombro dell'oggetto nella vanità dell'ideologia. Lo spirato* (1968–73), and ending in the Cubo with *È la vita è la storia è la morale* (1995)—presented at the 1997 Venice Biennale—that brings together what Fabro defines as «the celestial space, the space of the history of life, and the space of human measure.»

The exhibition is the result of research conducted in private and public archives and collections, and of a close collaboration with the Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro, which preserves and studies the artist's work under the direction of Silvia Fabro. Thanks to this synergy, it was possible to create faithful reconstructions of several of his *Habitats*.

1. *lo rappresento l'ingombro dell'oggetto nella vanità dell'ideologia. Lo spirato*, 1968–73

The exhibition begins with one of Fabro's most significant works. Carved from milky white marble with prominent veining, the sculpture depicts the trace of a human figure lying supine covered by a sheet. The sign of the body's presence becomes less and less distinct because, while the feet are visible, the bed sheet gradually flattens until reaching the pillow, which retains only the indentation left by the weight of the head that had been resting on it. The sculpture draws on iconography from the Italian tradition, such as Andrea Mantegna's (1431–1506) *Dead Christ* and Giuseppe Sanmartino's (1720–1793) *Veiled Christ*, but subverts its meaning: it does not depict a body, but rather its absence. The subject becomes the bed sheet in its transition, as the artist wrote, «between fullness and emptiness without interruption,» simultaneously revealing the memory of a presence and its absence.

Conceived at a time when conceptual art was promoting the dematerialization of the artwork, the sculpture plays a dual role, asserting an imaginative dimension while reaffirming the fundamental importance of the creative act and the materials. Carved by stonemasons from a plaster model (now at CSAC – The Study Center and Communication of the University of Parma), it was exhibited for the first time in 1973 as part of the “Contemporanea” exhibition, in the car park of Villa Borghese in Rome; from 1980 onwards, with the exception of very few other occasions, it was kept by Fabro in his Milan studio.

2. *La Dialettica*, 1985

The word “dialectic” denotes the art of debate, or the tension produced by the exchange of different viewpoints. Fabro formally translates this into a figurative composition: a block of marble with the features of a face—an eye and the negative imprint of a mouth—sculpted on a monumental scale on one side. «I sought to make the expression of both the eye and the mouth correspond to the expression of the gods in the art of various civilizations, while always remaining true to the respective classical periods.» Two cables branch out from a hole that runs through the upper

part of the sculpture, rising to the ceiling while supporting a spiderweb of brass chains that unfolds lightly in space. Although this does not belong to the classical iconography of the liberal art of Dialectics, it is an effective metaphor for representing dialectical thought from a modern perspective: a dynamic network of relationships, oppositions, and references. The title also pays homage to *Dialectic (or Industry)*, painted by Paolo Veronese (1528–1588) between 1575 and 1577 on the ceiling of the Sala del Collegio in the Doge's Palace in Venice, in which a female figure is depicted holding a spiderweb in her hands. Other brass chains also pass through the same hole in the marble, emerging to form the so-called “earrings.”

At Pirelli HangarBicocca, the work is reconstructed for the first time in the configuration Fabro conceived for the industrial architecture of the Grande Halle de La Villette, which hosted the 1985 Paris Biennale. *La Dialettica* is now part of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in the version the artist created a few months later for the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh; here, the cobweb is positioned behind the marble, between two wooden slats, one inserted in the hole and the other left free so that its weight keeps it taut.

3. *Allestimento teatrale*, 1967–75

With *Allestimento teatrale* Fabro alternates «between two artistic disciplines: tactile and visual art and visual and sound theater.» Visitors are invited to step inside a cube covered in mirrors both inside and out, or they can sit on the chairs placed outside. The layout of the installation deliberately creates a subtle reversal of roles, in which the viewer becomes the subject of the work: those who enter it are shielded from outside eyes, while seeing their image multiplied infinitely; those sitting outside see themselves, along with the others present, reflected on the walls, thus becoming part of the scene. Designed in 1967 for the Teatro Stabile in Turin—hence the title—it was not, however, built for that occasion, but was instead presented for the first time at the Bagno Borbonico gallery in Pescara in 1975. There, the installation was brought to life by an actor, who read excerpts from Gustave Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1874) inside the cube. In subsequent presentations, Fabro reinvented the mise-en-scène, reading his texts written for the occasion by himself, or entrust-



Luciano Fabro with *In cubo*, 1966, in the exhibition “Lo spazio dell’immagine,” Palazzo Trinci, Foligno, 1967
Photo Tonino Romagnoli

ing actors with both the reading and the selection of texts, or leaving visitors free to enter the installation individually.

Only one visitor at a time can enter the work. It is accessed via a door that can be opened by sliding one of the sides of the cube. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, an actor reads texts written by the artist on Saturdays and Sundays from 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM.

4. *In cubo*, 1966

With *In cubo* the artist invites us to perform a simple gesture: lift the lightweight structure of the work and step inside. Indeed, the piece can be experienced only from the inside, while the outside is merely an outer structure. The five sides covered by white canvas create an intimate space; sounds from outside are muffled, while light filters through the fabric and the only open side—on the floor—maintains a connection with the surrounding space. Exhibited in 1967 at the Galleria Notizie

in Turin, it was designed by Fabro using his own body as a unit of measurement. His height and arm span determined the dimensions of the original piece, based on a relationship between the human figure and geometry that recalls Leonardo da Vinci's (1452–1519) *Vitruvian Man* (c. 1490), but which it actually contradicts, given that the ratio between arm span and height varies from person to person. Consequently, Fabro's personal cube is not really a cube.

As the artist wrote, «The novelty lay precisely in having to enter from “underneath,” lift the structure, and go inside: it's not something you usually do. Whenever people talked about stepping out of the painting and occupying the environment, I would ask, “what is the measure of the environment, of the room?” The ideal measure of the room is that of man. We must begin to consider space as a sense in its own right, taking our other senses (hearing, touch, and sight) as a starting point.»

The exhibition features five exhibition copies of *In cubo*: one made to Fabro's measurements, one for his friend and art critic Carla Lonzi, and, for the first time, three scale variations. Fabro stated that *In cubo* is a work that must be made to measure for the intended user, as only then will they have the pleasant sensation of being inside their own personal space. As it is not possible to offer each visitor this opportunity, the exhibition comprises five versions allowing them to find the one closest to their own proportions.

5. *Habitat* (di Rotterdam), 1981

Fabro's largest *Habitat* was conceived in 1981 for his retrospective at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. It occupies a large open area of approximately 1,100 square meters, in which more than 20 works created over a period of 20 years are displayed. «I built the space as if the museum walls didn't exist,» the artist explained; the whole room became an autonomous environment, a temporary architectural structure housing the pieces along a multi-directional path. The floorplan is divided between two areas. In the first, Fabro created five specular asymmetric corridors by inserting four free-standing walls, covered with a corrugated roof and clad in white paper, whose layers fold like an accordion across their breadth.

The position of these elements is based on a rigorous design process in which the artist applies the principles of perspective and the golden ratio. The diameter of a first circle corre-

sponds to the width of the exhibition space; this gives rise to a geometry of intersecting circles, which determines the position of both the artworks and the walls within the installation, thereby guiding the construction of the *Habitat* itself. The four walls are located along points where the perspective lines of the space intersect the project's circles. The sections of circle visible on the floor of the exhibition space document the design process.

Suspended between the perspectival order of a Renaissance piazza and the dynamism of a Baroque square, the *Habitat* continues into a second space.

At Pirelli HangarBicocca the *Habitat* (di Rotterdam) is reconstructed for the first time using the materials preserved in the Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro, the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, and the Stadsarchief of the City of Rotterdam. In Milan, the *Habitat* has been recreated maintaining the proportions and layout of the original spaces, as well as its geometric and formal structure. The selection and arrangement of the works mirrors that of Rotterdam, with a few exceptions where it was necessary to replace certain pieces—both to ensure public access in accordance with current museum standards and due to availability and conservation requirements—thus respecting Fabro's approach, which allowed for modifications to individual elements within his *habitats*. In Milan, unlike in the original plan which mainly included glass works, the second area is occupied by three marble works (nos. 29., 30., 31.) which exemplify the artist's interest in cosmological themes.

Available for consultation is a facsimile of the *Vademecum*, the text written by Fabro himself that accompanied the Rotterdam exhibition and contained descriptions of the works on display there.

CORRIDOR 1

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| 6. <i>Italia feticcio</i>, 1981 | 11. <i>L'Italia del caso</i>, 1968–71 |
| 7. <i>L'Italia di cartoccio</i>, 1970 | 12. <i>Italia da guerra</i>, 1981 |
| 8. <i>De Italia</i>, 1970 | 13. <i>Cosa Nostra</i>, 1971–81 |
| 9. <i>Latin Lover</i>, 1972 | 14. <i>L'Italia d'oro</i>, 1971 |
| 10. <i>Italia del dolore</i>, 1975 | |

The *Italie* group, which the artist reworked throughout his career, takes its cue from an instantly recognizable shape: the boot-like outline of the Italian peninsula. Fabro explores the relationship between this image and its possible meanings, changing its material, dimensions, and orientation each time. Texture, just like colors and shapes, transforms our perception of this icon and multiplies the different ways it can be interpreted. Italy is thus expressed in a multitude of versions, each offering a different interpretation and



Habitat (di Rotterdam), 1981, installation view, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 1981. Courtesy Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro. Photo Laura Vecere

exploration, ranging from irony to an analysis of the concept of national identity, through to references to contemporary historical and political events. In the *Vademecum* text accompanying the 1981 exhibition in Rotterdam Fabro states: «Italy is an image for whoever recognizes it, for whoever feels in some way bound to it, and in part it has to do with the symbol that represents its moral reduction: the reduction of form to a graphic of ideas. But for me form remains the transmigration of the material. Form is like a pause inside the transformation. To be more precise I have always accompanied this ideological and symbolic negation with titles more cheerful than conceptual.»

CORRIDOR 2

15. *Iconografie*, 1975–80

Iconografie consists of a table, covered with a white tablecloth, on which glass basins rest containing water and shards of glass—the residue from the glass firings for the *Vetro di Murano e Shantung di seta pura* (1968–71), from the group of works *Piedi* presented at the 36th Venice Biennale in 1972. On each fragment, Fabro engraved the name of «people for whom violence against the body represented the violence of stupidity inflicted on ideas»: Archimedes, Crazy Horse, John the Baptist, Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis, Socrates; the artist also added an empty one to allude to a potentially infinite list.

The title both evokes and subverts the concept of iconography, namely the set of images and visual attributes by which a subject is represented. Indeed, the opposite is true here: the distinctive features disappear and the horror of their stories is conveyed through an absence of images. All that remains are their names, engraved on the shards of glass contained in the bowls, which evoke the biblical story of Salome, who had asked for and received from her stepfather the head of John the Baptist in a basin.

«In this work, you do not know what is water and what is glass,» Fabro wrote. The transparency causes the two elements to merge, while contributing to obliterating any potential figure, so that of each martyr, only the engraved name remains.

CORRIDOR 3

16. *Piede senile IV*, 2000

17. *Piede senile III*, 2000

18. *Piede senile II*, 2000

19. *Ombelico di Venere*

(*Piede Senile I*), 2000

20. *Piede di vetro tra i suoi stampi*, 1973

Beginning in 1968, Fabro created the *Piedi*, a group of works that arose from a simple yet radical idea: to isolate a part of the body considered secondary in classical statuary and make it the primary subject, in order to rethink the very way sculpture is conceived. The first examples resemble the legs of fantastical, mighty creatures, monumental forms that seem to support tall columns—“calzoni,” trousers—made of silk. In truth, they do not support anything, alluding to architectural tradition without serving any actual function.

For each *Piede*, the chosen material is crafted using the finest artisanal techniques: «I chose the noblest quality of each one [...]: polished marble, cleaned bronze, tinted glass, silk worked with dressmaker's finesse.» *Piede di vetro tra i suoi stampi* also preserves the memory of the tools with which it was made: the glass foot is presented alongside the cast-iron molds used to produce its component parts, in a pairing that Fabro compares to a shell and its pearl.

CORRIDOR 4

21. *I Gioielli: Cristo, Buddha, Zarathustra*, 1981

In these works, belonging to a group of artworks called *Gioielli*, the artist draws on a principle akin to the Baroque aesthetic, in which the clarity of the configuration is interwoven with effects of movement, light, and shadow that transform how it is perceived. Arranged one after the other in the corridor, the three create a perspectival sequence of sacred images. The Greek cross references Zarathustra, the rectangle with a solid suspended in its center is associated with Buddha, the metal lattice with thread-like elements evokes Christ. Regarding these three pieces, Fabro wrote: «I have found nothing better than these latest works to express the triangle formed by Light-Matter-Space. I called them *Gioielli* because I think they have the substance of jewelry, and perhaps also because, like jewelry, space is nothing but light, skin, flesh, eros.»

CORRIDOR 5

22. *Tubo da mettere tra i fiori*, 1963

Regarding *Tubo da mettere tra i fiori*, Fabro wrote: «This work, one of my very first, was created for a small garden in Milan, but was never installed. Since I had neither an apartment nor a studio big enough, I would take it to visit those friends who had lots of house plants or a garden. It reminds me of many of my attitudes back then and also today—perhaps also a certain way of constructing and placing things so as to make them transparent,

23. *Struttura ortogonale assoggetta ai quattro vertici a tensione*, 1964

as well as a fondness for softening both material and line, and also an indirect idea of nature and color.» *Struttura ortogonale assoggetta ai quattro vertici a tensione* belongs to this same line of inquiry, addressing it from the perspective of the material's properties. By cutting away parts of a rectangular metal grid and deforming it by pulling at its extremities, Fabro meant «to see the sense that a material acquires when it passes from one shape to another. To achieve this sense, both shapes need to be present, with the new one remaining unresolved by the memory of the preceding one,» thereby bringing together the gesture and the shape it creates in a single image.

OUTSIDE THE CORRIDORS

24. *Mezzo specchiato Mezzo trasparente*, 1965/2007

25. *Tutto trasparente*, 1965/2007 27. *Buco*, 1963/2005 28. *Buco*, 1963/2005

Other early productions by Fabro, linked by their use of sheets of glass, mirror, and metal, are displayed at the end of the space marked by the paper corridors. These particular versions were revisited by the artist in the 2000s for a planned exhibition at the Madre – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina in Naples (2007).

Positioned at eye level, their reflective surfaces incorporate the surrounding environment and, at the same time, the presence of the viewer, triggering interaction between the artwork's setting and the visitor. Regarding *Buco*, Fabro wrote: «It is the first expression concerning the interpenetration of two opposite spaces: the one in front of the mirror and the one behind.» The work is a tribute to the *Spatial Concepts* created by Lucio Fontana from 1949 onwards, in which he pierced the surface of the canvas with holes, thereby opening it up to a further dimension. Fabro, however, potentially reverses this process: the reflective surface of the slab mirrors the viewer's image and the environment in front of it, while the transparent and irregular sections fragment the view and allow what lies beyond the slab to emerge. The artist continued, «[in] *Mezzo specchiato Mezzo trasparente*, I bring the viewer face to face with themselves: the reflected space can be seen beyond, far behind, while the transparent space comes

to the fore. *Tutto trasparente* is the most certain stage of the process, and the last. Since nothing happens on the glass, everything that is there—anything that might interact with it—passes through it.»

26. *Io*, 1977

Positioned at the center of the *Habitat*'s floor plan, in proximity of the point where the circles that delineate the space converge, *Io* is a self-portrait of the artist in the fetal position. Cast in bronze in the shape of a hollow egg, the work's smooth, gilded interior features the imprints of Fabro's hands in relief as he embraced himself, while an engraved drawing on the outside reveals the subject depicted. «I had the inspiration to embrace myself, as if I were someone else, embracing myself in the optimal position, the fetal position. One of the laws of chance had been revealed to me: each person, tall or short, fat or thin, embraces their own egg.» The circumference of *Io* corresponds to the width of Fabro's arms wrapped around his body, just as the weight of the sculpture (70 kilograms) matches that of the artist when he realized it. If, as Germano Celant suggested, all of Fabro's *habitats* can be regarded as "eggs"—shells or environments built to contain and create connections between the works—it becomes clear why this piece was so central to the conception of the *Habitat* (di Rotterdam) in 1981.

29. *La Luna*, 1997

30. *Eclissi di cielo*, 2006

With this group of sculptures, Fabro delves deeper into his exploration of the cosmic order. *La Luna* and *Il Sole*, conceived for his solo exhibition in London in 1997, at the Duveen Galleries at the Tate (now Tate Britain), establish a connection with ideas about the origin of the universe. *La Luna*, carved from dark marble, rises like a column, its volume gradually diminishing, in keeping with the sequence of the lunar phases.

Its vertical mass is counterbalanced by *Il Sole*, set horizontally on the floor. The seven white marble discs, arranged at intervals to allow the light to filter through, are fluted on the outside like a Doric column. At the center is a series of star-shaped

31. *Il Sole*, 1997



Luciano Fabro with *Eclissi di cielo*, 2006, at a marble workshop, Carrara, 2006. Courtesy Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro

openings with an increasing number of points, creating a visual sense of rotational movement.

Between the two pieces is *Eclissi di cielo*, one of Fabro's most recent works, exhibited for the first time at Pirelli HangarBicocca. A monumental sphere of green onyx, traversed by luminous veins, is trapped between two black marble elements—on whose surface the artist has dotted a star map in pure gold—as if drawn to them by an attractive force. The composition evokes an eclipse, that rare astronomical alignment in which one celestial body obscures the light of another. Brought together in this space, the three sculptures reveal the opposite faces of the sky and the moment when light and darkness overlap.

At Pirelli HangarBicocca, the three works are on display in the second space of *Habitat* (di Rotterdam).

32. **Sala Pentagonale**, 1970
including:
33. **Il pupo**, 1968
34. **Davanti, dietro, destra, sinistra**, 1968
35. **L'Italia**, 1968
36. **Speculum Italiae**, 1971
37. **Avanti, dietro, destra, sinistra (cielo)**, 1967–68

Restaged here for the first time since its presentation at the 10th Tokyo Biennale in 1970 titled “Between Man and Matter,” **Sala Pentagonale** marks a crucial turning point in Fabro’s *oeuvre*. It is, in fact, the first temporary space specifically designed and built by the artist to house his works, thus foreshadowing the use of the term *habitat*. The room, which is made up of five walls using a system recalling Japanese screens, has no ceiling and is accessible to visitors via one side. It is an intimate space, where the pieces are all visible at once. Hanging overhead, **L'Italia**, the first of the *Italie* group, is a sort of manifesto: this iron silhouette, suspended upside down and covered with a road map of the peninsula—with the islands attached to the back—overturns conventional perspectives, including views on Italian identity, transforming the image of the country into an unstable figure. **Speculum Italiae**, the shape of the peninsula in mirrored crystal, is set on the floor, bound by lead strips that allow only part of the reflective surface to show through. Beside it, lying on a mat, is **Il pupo**. It is made of a fan wrapped in ancient swaddling clothes, on which Fabro has his signature embroidered. As it vibrates, it evokes the sound of breathing. On the back wall, **Avanti, dietro, destra, sinistra (cielo)**, a section of a star map—with symbols modified by the artist—is traced in white paint on three black metal plates, virtually extending the space towards the cosmos and foreshadowing the artist’s interest in cosmological themes, which he developed in subsequent years. On the remaining walls, four typewritten business cards, **Davanti, dietro, destra, sinistra**, indicate the directions within the space, transforming the room into a navigational system, in which the points of reference constantly shift in relation to the viewer, highlighting their relativity and limitations.

The *Sala Pentagonale* has been reconstructed for the first time using the materials preserved in the Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro, the archives of photographer Shigeo Anzai, and those of Keio University, Tokyo. The dimensions of the room were inferred from the artist’s sketch published in the Tokyo Biennale cat-

alog and verified by comparing them with historical photographic records. At Pirelli HangarBicocca, it was possible to reunite all the pieces originally exhibited in Tokyo, with the exception of *Italia di piombo: Nazione italiana*, which was unavailable for loan. It was replaced with *Speculum Italiae*, a work of the same dimensions and made from the same material.

Access to the *Sala Pentagonale* is limited to two people at a time. Visitors have the opportunity to hold *Il pupo* wearing the gloves provided by the cultural mediators.

38. **Concetto spaziale (tautologia)**, 1967

For the group exhibition “Trigon ’67. Ambiente/Environment” at the Künstlerhaus in Graz, Fabro designed a room comprising two equally sized spaces. However, only the first is accessible, as the passage to the second is blocked by a painting placed beyond the threshold, of which only a portion of the back is visible. **Concetto spaziale (tautologia)** establishes a distinction between what can be experienced directly and what must be reconstructed mentally. «You just have to believe it. On this side or that, no imagination is required,» Fabro wrote about the work. The title combines two references: on the one hand, the artist borrows the term *Concetto spaziale*, coined by Fontana to describe his spatial experiments; on the other, *Tautologia* links the piece to the group of works of the same name in which Fabro explores the conditions that determine the appearance and recognition of a thing «which is defined not by itself but by the knowledge we have of it, by the relationship between ourselves and the thing.»

Concetto spaziale (tautologia)—previously reconstructed only for the exhibition at Madre – Museo d’Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina in Naples in 2007—is recreated at Pirelli HangarBicocca in accordance with the artist’s floor plans held in the Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro.

39. *Prometeo*, 1984

«Prometheus embodies a downfall,» Fabro wrote, referring to the mythological figure who stole fire from the gods to give it to mankind. «Prometheus is the earth, our capacity for reason; geometry is nothing more than a rationalization of the earth.»

Eight small columns, obtained from marble core samples, are attached to eight small white and red surveying poles, which cross eight leveling rods—used in construction—horizontally. They thus form a triangle and a pentagon inscribed within an ideal circle.

The work was created in 1984, two years before the Chernobyl disaster, and was first exhibited in 1986, after the accident. «I created it two years ago,» the artist said, «it already had a name—*Prometheus*—but I did not feel ready to exhibit it; it was a conundrum that was lodged in my mind, but after this incident, it was as if it became clearer to me. [...] *Prometheus* ignited the issue, and with him it ends. Today, the myth is over. Everything it stood for—its sequences of reasons and emotions—loses its language, its meaning, its space.»

40. *Nord, Sud, Est, Ovest giocano a Shanghai*, 1989–94

Shanghai is the Italian name for the game of pick-up sticks, where each piece rests on the others and a single move can transform the entire structure. In *Nord, Sud, Est, Ovest giocano a Shanghai* Fabro transferred this unstable equilibrium to an environmental scale. The artwork consists of a colored metal structure suspended from the ceiling, on which small colored aluminum rods are arranged randomly to form a grid that protrudes from the frame supporting it. Slender metal elements hang below the structure, suspended by wires, reaching down to the floor. With their varying heights, which evoke the stature of different people, they resemble presences with which to engage. Fabro referred to them as *Nudi*, like those realized in various kinds of marble from 1987 onwards. «The image lies somewhere between the free-form and the geometric and is reminiscent of the game of Shanghai,» he explained. However, in his choice of colors, he evoked the tones of the works of Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), a leading figure of Neoplasticism, the movement which, in the early 20th century, reduced painting to basic colors.

41. *Habitat (di Aachen)*, 1983

including:

42. *Foglia*, 1981

This *Habitat* is a standalone architecture, a clearly defined geometric volume, yet its walls allow the outside light to penetrate through the gaps between its various components. The ceiling is suspended above the underlying framework by a system of intersecting iron rods. As in the *Habitat* (di Rotterdam), the whole structure is covered with paper that forms a checkered pattern with a textured surface. Fabro created the work in 1983 for his solo exhibition at the Neue Galerie–Sammlung Ludwig in Aachen, displaying it in a Baroque hall. He designed it to house five pieces from the *Gioielli* group, in an intimate space set apart from the sumptuous décor of the surrounding area. As Jole De Sanna remarked, the space is characterized by three features: the absence of contact between the walls and ceiling, the entry of light and air, and the use of paper as a means of communication between the exterior and the interior. The following year, Fabro suspended *Foglia*—an open-form sculpture simultaneously recalling a leaf, a flower, and a shell—from the center of the ceiling of *Habitat* (di Aachen) at “Overture,” the 1984 inaugural exhibition of the new Castello di Rivoli Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino.

Reconstructed by the artist on various occasions and in different versions, the work is on display at Pirelli HangarBicocca in its 1984 configuration, with *Foglia* inside it.

43. *L’Infinito*, 1989

Two rings formed by an intertwined steel cable trace the symbol of infinity on the floor. Along their length, they are overlain by four irregular blocks of Carrara marble, hollowed out and polished inside. Where the cable crosses over itself at the center, four further marble elements converge to form a blade. Created in 1989, *L’Infinito* combines the weight of the stone with the continuity of the line in an image that appears both firmly anchored to the ground and suspended. Fabro described these as “ghost forms” because they retain their traces while having lost their substance. «If you stare at this work long enough, you will see it as if suspended above the floor.»

44. **Borromini**, 2001

including:

45. ***Il giorno mi pesa sulla notte IV (per Carla)***, 1994–2000

The title pays tribute to Francesco Borromini (1599–1667), one of the leading architects of the Italian Baroque, to whom Fabro refers for his ability to conceive architecture as a dynamic structure and a field of opposing forces. Presented just once, at Art Unlimited in Basel in 2001, **Borromini** consists of two panels of dark blue fustian laid across the floor, which intersect in the center and rise up on all four sides, supported by four mobile scaffolds. This ephemeral installation can also be considered part of the basic concept of *habitat*; in fact, Fabro designed the temporary structure to house one of his works. At the point where the lengths of cloth meet, he placed ***Il giorno mi pesa sulla notte IV (per Carla)***, a sculpture dedicated to his wife which—like the other artworks with the same title—consists of a block of pink marble, left rough on the sides but finely carved with grooves along the outer edge, resting on a pair of black marble cylinders. All the elements are dotted with small circles of pure gold that represent a map of stars.

Borromini is reinstalled for the first time at Pirelli HangarBicocca, using original materials preserved in the Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro and incorporating the original elements.

46. **Guarino Guarini**, 2000

including:

47. ***La lune s'allume sur l'onde qui ronde abat-jour***, 1998

As with *Borromini*, Fabro paid tribute in the title of this work to one of the most important figures of 17th-century Turin Baroque: the architect Guarino Guarini (1624–1683), renowned for his daring geometric designs and vaulted structures. The installation, presented just once at Art Unlimited in Basel in 2000, consists of a large circular tent made of blue fustian inside which the artist set ***La lune s'allume sur l'onde qui ronde abat-jour***. This sculpture consists of three elements, resting on top of each other: a turned travertine base, an irregularly shaped block of marble and a dark marble crescent moon. The work is lit by two lamps, powered by an electric cable that

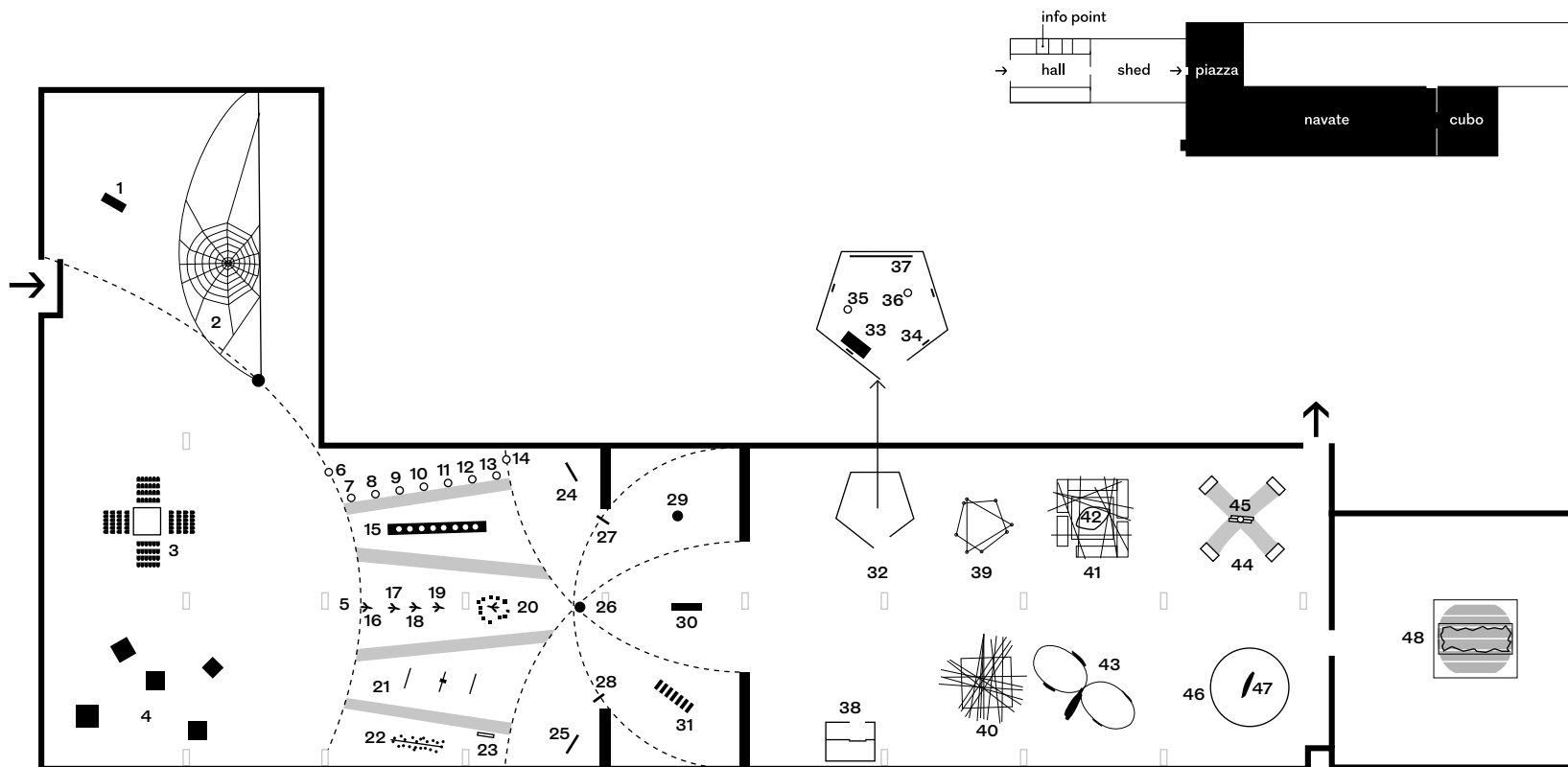
wraps around it. The title is a poetic French phrase—literally “the moon illuminates the wave that circles the lamp”—introducing the three compositional and formal elements of the piece: the moon, the lamp, and the wave that connects them.

Guarino Guarini is reinstalled for the first time at Pirelli HangarBicocca, using original materials preserved in the Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro and incorporating the original elements. Unlike the Basel presentation, the sculpture *La lune s'allume sur l'onde qui ronde abat-jour* on display in Milan is a second version from 1998, since the first exhibited in 2000 was not available for loan.

48. ***È la vita è la storia è la morale***, 1995

È la vita è la storia è la morale, which was presented, among other venues, at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997, is installed at the center of the Cubo. It is a large suspended structure measuring six by six meters, arranged on three levels that correspond to the concepts mentioned in the title, envisioned by the artist as interdependent.

At the bottom, “life” is represented by a white cotton cloth with an irregular outline, stretched across the frame using a sea-green silk thread, evoking the zigzagging pattern of the thread used in *Penelope* in Venice in 1972. This is a diagram taken from an illustration in the novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) by Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), which, for Fabro, embodies the concept of life: a non-linear journey, marked by constant interruptions and detours. The same drawing appeared in 1978 on the cover of his book *Attaccapanni* and in the work *C'est la vie* (1986), which the artist dedicated to a little girl at the “Chambres d'amis” exhibition in Ghent. In the middle level, spread out like washing on lines, lies the negative of the sheet of “life,” whereas “history” offers only a retrospective trace of what has already been experienced. The upper part, “morality,” consists of acetate prints depicting a star map, supported by a frame within which a thread is once again arranged in a zigzag pattern. The image conjures up the famous phrase by the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804): «the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.»



Selected Exhibitions

Many international institutions have hosted solo exhibitions by Luciano Fabro, including Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2014); Kunstmuseum Winterthur, GAMeC – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo (2013); Madre – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples (2007); Musée Bourdelle, Paris (2004); Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro; Le Nouveau Musée, Villeurbanne; Tate Gallery, London (1997); Centre Pompidou, Paris (1996); Portikus, Frankfurt am Main (1995); Palazzo Fabroni, Pistoia (1994); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1992); Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne (1991); Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (1990); Capodimonte National Museum, Naples; Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin (1989); Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1988); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (1987); Pinacoteca Comunale, Loggetta Lombardesca, Ravenna; Neue Galerie – Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen (1983); Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Museum Folkwang, Essen (1981); PAC Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan (1980). The artist has taken part in numerous biennials and group shows, such as the Sydney Biennale (2018, 1988); Quadriennale d'Arte, Rome (2008, 2005, 1986, 1973); Venice Biennale (1997, 1993, 1986, 1984, 1980, 1978, 1975, 1972); São Paulo Biennial (1996, 1975); documenta, Kassel (1992, 1982, 1972); Paris Biennale (1985, 1971); Tokyo Biennale (1970). The artist has received numerous prestigious awards, including the Accademico d'Onore, Florence (2004); the Coutts Contemporary Art Award, Zurich (1994); the Antonio Feltrinelli Prize, Rome (1993); the Sikkens Prize, Rotterdam (1987); and the Aachen Art Prize (1981).

This publication accompanies the exhibition "Abitare lo spazio. Inhabiting Space" by Luciano Fabro

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Special thanks to Silvia Fabro (Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro)

Acknowledgments

Anthony Allen, Gianfranco Benedetti, Massimo Berardini, Adriano Berengo, Adriano Borrelli, Giovanna Busacca, Gianni Caravaggio, Stefano Chiodi, Nicole Colombo, Paula Cooper, Bruno Corà, Andrea Crapanzano, Martino De Vincenti, Dario Del Prete, Roberto Di Pasquale, Edoardo Durante, Marcella Ferrari, Brenno Franceschi, Rudi Fuchs, Francesco Fusi, Massimiliano Goitom, Catherine Grenier, Hong Sang Hee, Sharon Hecker, Arianna Lecci, Liliana Moro, Frances Morris, Edi Perego, Roberto Pini, Patrizia Pisani, Maria Grazia Quarta, Iolanda Ratti, Emma Rinaldi, Margit Rowell, Martin Schwander, Manuele Solimeo, Francesco Stocchi, Andrea Toniutti, Andrea Viliari, Pietro Vitali

The activation of the work *Allestimento teatrale* (1967–75) is realized in collaboration with the Associazione Z.I.A. Zona Indipendente Artistica. Actors: Eleonora Paris, Camilla Violante Scheller, Irene Serini

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Graphic Design
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Editing and translation
Malerba Editorial & Partners, Milan

For all images, if not otherwise stated:
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Printed:
September 2026

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Situated in a former industrial building, once a locomotive manufacturing facility, Pirelli HangarBicocca occupies 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest single-level exhibition spaces in Europe. This vast area comprises the Shed and Navate spaces, which are used for temporary exhibitions, and the permanent display of Anselm Kiefer's *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*. This monumental installation with seven reinforced concrete towers has become one of the most iconic works in Milan. The building also houses a number of services for the public: a spacious entrance with reception area, facilities for educational activities, space for conferences and meetings, Bookshop and bistro with a charming outdoor area.

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