

Luciano Fabro

(Turin, 1936 — Milan, 2007)

Fabro, one of the members of the Arte Povera group, formulated his early works by examining the relationship between object, body, and space. The forms are basic and geometric, what one might describe as minimalist, but the attitude behind them stems from an idea and from the vitality of movement. They exist within a system that seems conceived to unfold at a meeting point between Leonardo's *Scheme on the Proportions of the Human Body* and Palladian architecture.

In 1969 he began a long series of works developed around the geographic outline of Italy, and he turned this shape into his personal blank page: "I need to know how my hands function on something that remains static. The form of Italy is static, immobile, and I measure my hands' mobility against its stillness. Italy is like a sketch album, an aide mémoire that I have continued to do over the years: if I'm working on something new, I sketch it out on one of these Italies."

Speculum Italiae (Italy's Mirror), 1971, begins with a shape in mirrored glass, tightly wrapped in thin strips of lead, like a mummified body. In *Italia all'asta (Italy on Auction)*, 1994, two Italy shapes, one placed upside-down, are positioned face-to-face and then nailed to a pole; the surface of the shapes has a pattern in relief that is typical of manhole covers. The Italy that is right side up might be raised up on the pole like a proud insignia of our country, but the other one, upside down, instead seems to hang from a gallows, held prisoner by a pin, like a giant insect, captured or fallen dead. Italy is for sale, as it was once sold by itinerant vendors in markets, like merchandise exhibited on a stick. But it is also put up for sale like an auction lot, in a spirit that is half-sarcastic, half contrite.

In *Attaccapanni (di Napoli) (Clothes-stand – of Naples)*, 1976-77, instead of the absence of color in the iron and lead and the geometries of the design there is now an expansive range of colors. Fabro wrote: "Light is the subject of *Attaccapanni (Clothes-stand)*. Light and shadow as two qualities of color; I'm not playing with the difference between color and less color but, as in the old tradition, with the idea of colored light and shadow. There is red and green, which are different qualities of light." And again: "These are the colors of sunset. First you have this pink-blue light that appears, then the light becomes fire before it turns green and then blue when it begins to go dark, when everything is a movement of violet, and then finally it is night. One of the questions I was immediately asked was: why this color, why a sunset? [...] The colors of sunset do not serve to imitate, but to eat the sunset through its colors. Draftsmanship in art is a conscious, knowing act, whereas color is akin to an act of cannibalism." (EV)