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Fabio Mauri

Retrospective in solid light

Re_PUBBLICA MADRE (ground floor), mezzanine, Columns gallery (first floor), third floor and roof-terrace

November 26, 2016 – March 6, 2017

Press preview: November 24, 12 noon

Opening: November 25, 7 p.m.

Curated by Laura Cherubini, Andrea Viliani

The MADRE museum is pleased to present the exhibition *Retrospective in solid light* devoted to **Fabio Mauri** (Rome, 1926-2009), a masterful exponent of the neo-avant-gardes of the second half of the Twentieth Century, whose artistic practice, focused on the exhibition of the **mechanisms of ideology**, the exploration of **propaganda languages**, the analysis of **collective imagination** and the **structures of media narratives**, starting with film, makes him one of the most seminal Italian contemporary artists.

His **works and actions**, comprising painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, and performance, **explored the European history of the “Short Century” in its conflicts and contradictions**, and had their intellectual and emotional core in his inquiry into the specifically European subject of ideology, and the intrinsic relationship between history and ethics, as in the tension and recomposition of the personal and collective sphere. Distancing himself from an original affinity with contemporary experiments in Pop Art, Mauri pursued a radical independence, even from the dominant scenarios of Italian contemporary art history, to define his unique and personal research, in the attempt to **represent thought, unravel the mechanisms of perception** (revealing the manipulative strategies or induction mechanisms peculiar to the “society of the spectacle”), **bringing out the potential paths of memory and**, at the same time, **its systematic repression or remodeling**.

Organized in close collaboration with the Fabio Mauri Studio, the exhibition at MADRE museum is the most complete ever devoted to the artist in the last two decades and presents **more than a hundred works, actions and documents**, in a layout that transforms the whole museum into a critical experience and a multiple structure, where the work is compared with its project, the thought becomes physical and the museum's white cube merges with the theatrical stage and the black box of the cinema. As a research

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and exhibition platform, **the exhibition incorporates and conveys the concept of “solid light,”** which appears in some of the titles of the artist's works. Referring to the Futurist *Lampadine con i raggi solidificati* (“Bulbs with solidified rays”), Mauri gave physical form to the beam connecting the projector with the movie screen, so expressing the idea that all the components of the existence are real, hence also thought, imagination and ideology. This reflection, later entrusted to his *Schermi* (“Screens”), *Proiezioni* (“Projections”), and performative actions, became a **metaphor of the relationships between mind and world, reality and memory, history and stories.** Transforming in this way the museum itself into the projector, on the occasion of this exhibition, as well as the concept of a retrospective into an architectural projection that envelops the viewers, making them an active part, subject/object of this narrative, inflected in the works, actions and documents.

The exhibition layout starts on the **ground floor** of the museum, in the **Re_PUBBLICA MADRE gallery** turned into a veritable *Theatrum Unicum Artium* (“unique theater of the arts”), presenting works, installations and documentation (where photography also acquires the significance and pictorial-sculptural authority of an essential trace). The exhibition reconstructs the **performative and theatrical matrix** of the artist's practice, with a selection of Mauri's most important actions. These actions will be again periodically presented as long as the exhibition runs (*Ideologia e Natura*, 1973; *Europa bombardata*, 1978; *L'Espressionista*, 1982; *Senza titolo*, 1992) or presented through few essential “scenic” components or related works (*Ebrea*, 1973; *Dramophone*, 1976; *Picnic o Il buon soldato*, 1998; *Fermata d'autobus*, 1995) or, in the **three galleries on the mezzanine floor**, through documentary materials (*Che cosa è il fascismo*, 1971; *Gran Serata Futurista 1909- 1930*, 1980; *Che cosa è la filosofia. Heidegger e la questione tedesca. Concerto da tavolo*, 1989). Also, materials from Mauri's first play are presented on a small stage (sketches, maquettes and stage photographs), the monologue in two parts and two scenes titled *L'isola* (1960), first presented in 1964, at the *Festival dei Due Mondi* in Spoleto (performers Tomas Milian and Barbara Steele) and then reenacted in 1966 at Teatro Stabile in Rome (performers Alberto Bonucci and Rosemary Dexter). In relation to these actions, they are also presented, as on a stage where the viewer can freely advance, some basic works as *Manipolazione di cultura* (1971-1973, **completed in 1976**), the artist's books *Ho Pensato tutto* (1972) and *Linguaggio è guerra* (1975), introduced by *Sala del Gran Consiglio (Oscuramento)* (1975) and *Il Muro Occidentale o del Pianto* (1993), culminating, with an eye to the public, in the two chairs of *Teatrum Unicum Artium* (2007), which contains the phrase “the end”: a theater where History critically stages a “theater to restore verisimilitude to existence, which is improbable.”

There follows a second complementary section on the **third floor**, which articulates **groups of works that deconstruct the languages of media narratives, starting by the film one, restoring and interpreting them.** Transforming the third floor into a true architectural loop, the itinerary proceeds chronologically and by groups of works, till the returning to its starting point. Here the display comprises works that, from the second half of the 1950s, the artist began to explore, in an initial tangency with the Pop Art aesthetic, the dimension of the mass media (*The End*, 1957-1958; *Braccio di Ferro*, 1960; *Cassetto*, 1960; *The Nursery News*, 1960), in dialogue with one of the later “screens”, *Schermo Leo Castelli* (1974), devoted to the figure of Leo Castelli, the historic gallerist of North American Pop Art. In 1964 Mauri eventually abandoned the analysis of collective imagery embodied in mass consumer goods and icons, to focus on a theme that definitively characterized the path of his research: the ideology and the functioning modes of consciousness, associating the personal sphere and the collective one, and finding its moments of synthesis in the concept of “screen” and “projection.” Together with a series of other works and materials related

to the meanings and dynamics of projection, the exhibition presents his main sculptural and installational works (*Cinema a luce solida*, 1968; *Pila a luce solida*, 1968; *Colonne di luce*, 1968), which investigate the identification dynamics between the viewer and the film narration, by making them concrete and tangible. There follows a selection of the *Schermi* series, in their various forms, including: *Schermo-Disegno* (1957); *Schermo* (1958); *Una tasca di cinema* (1958); *Cinema* (1958- 1965); *Schermo carta rotto* (1958-1989); *Schermo* (1958- 1959); *Schermo in legni bianchi* (1959); *Schermo in legno nero* (1959); *Drive in House* (1960); *Cosa è uno schermo o Schermo ovali* (1962); *La tasca del generale* (1962); *Schermo Sport* (1962); *Schermo con pubblico* (1963); *Marilyn* (1964); *Sinatra* (1964); *Schermo* (1970); *Schermo II generazione* (1973). Proceeding until one of the first “doormats,” among the last of the artist’s series: *L’ospite armeno* (2001), a true screen-threshold, walkable and passable by the viewer. An adjoining room presents the installation *Luna* (1968), which, like the “doormats” or *Il televisore che piange* (1972) and *Ricostruzione della memoria a percezione spenta* (1988), seems to literally take us first “on” the screen and then “beyond” the screen, “inside” it, into a mental environment which gives a three-dimensional consistency to our imaginary. The central gallery exhibits the 36-screen work *Warum ein Gedanke einen Raum verpestet? / Perché un pensiero intossica una stanza* (1972), where the screen coincides with the extension of the architecture that houses it, together with a 35mm film projector, where a white canvas is inserted instead of film (*Pittura*, 1986-1996), a cinematic mechanism that introduces within itself the surface of the projection screen too. The exhibition path culminates in a selection of works where the perspective is reversed (being viewed from the screen as the projection surface to the projector as the source or point from which the projection emanates), starting from the 16mm projections of the 1970s onto bodies and objects of the series *Senza* and *Senza Ideologia*, to *Intellettuale* (installation taken by the performance produced with Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1975, where the director became the “screen” of his own film, *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*) and his following work *Fabio Mauri e Pier Paolo Pasolini alle prove di Che cosa è il fascismo 1971* (2005). The series ends with the most recent projections on digital media and environmental installation – including *I casi del mondo e la signora Matisse* (1988-2005); *Cernobyl* (1990); *Murato vivo* (2005); *Cineart* and *Rebibbia 1* (2006); *Piccolo Cinema* (2007); *Sfera* (2009) –, where the architecture is progressively incorporated into the projection, evoking a floating dimension (*Interno/Esterno*, 1990), a hypothetical architecture become cinematic, **where the space-time of architecture is fused together with the one of cinema, and our imaginary acquires awareness**. No longer spectators, but an integrating and judging subject/object of the narrative we attended to, which has progressively revealed the tangible reality (in “solid light”) of that extraordinary fiction that is – like all ideology or historical narrative, or like the human mind – the cinema, and art itself. The exhibition ends outside the museum, on the **roof-terrace**, with the presentation of the work *La resa* (2002): a white flag hoisted on a pole, definition of the state of impotence of judgement, in front of the complexity of the world, but also the very last attempt or act of communication.

The final section of the exhibition presented in the **Columns gallery (first floor)** is devoted to the complete **oeuvre of Mauri’s architectural models**, which reconstruct his **principal exhibitions, presented together for the first time in a solo show**. By its partition into interdependent areas – which articulate the dimension of the interconnected museum’s “white cube”, the cinematographic “black box” and the theatrical “stage” (even extending, with some works and projections, outside the museum/theater/projector) – the exhibition presents itself as both a *mise-en-scène* and a methodological and critical instrument: an inquiry into the indelible relationship between forms of thought and world, namely the identification of our thoughts, both individual and collective, as a “world in solid light.”

gardes of the second half of the Twentieth Century. His first solo exhibition in 1955 at Galleria Aureliana in Rome, was presented by Pier Paolo Pasolini, with whom Mauri had founded the review "Il Setaccio" in 1942. They again collaborated in the 1970s, at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Bologna. In 1957 Mauri realized his first *Schermi*, initially monochromatic works that already embodied his interest for collective dynamics of imagination entrusted to cinematic fiction, object-forms explored during the following years. In 1964, he definitively abandoned some initial similarities with the contemporary Pop Art researches, identifying into the experience of war, first repressed and then faced with implacable lucidity, and so into ideology, as a characterizing element of European culture, the thematic and conceptual axis of all his subsequent research, giving rise in the early 1970s to his actions and *Proiezioni*. In 1968 he was among the co-founders of the review "Quindici" and in 1976 the review "La Città di Riga." For twenty years he taught Aesthetics of experimentation at Accademia di Belle Arti in L'Aquila. In 1994 Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome presented his first retrospective, followed by those at Kunsthalle in Klagenfurt (1997), Studio National des Arts Contemporains in Le Fresnoy-Lille (2003), Palazzo Reale in Milan (2012), and Fundación PROA in Buenos Aires (2014). Among numerous group exhibitions, Mauri's work was presented at various editions of the *Venice Biennale* (1954, 1974, 1978, 1993, 2003, 2013, 2015) and, in 2012, at *dOCUMENTA (13)* in Kassel.

Contemporaneously to the exhibition at MADRE museum, from October 7th, 2016, to January 15th, 2017, the GAMeC - Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Bergamo hosts a different retrospective devoted to the artist, which, together with the exhibition in Naples and complementing it, presents a comprehensive profile of this research.

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