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Uno specchio d'Italia.

Luciano Fabro's *Italies*

A large wooden silhouette of the Italian peninsula hangs upside-down by a rope, with Sicily and Sardinia mounted on the verso [fig. 1]. Adhered to the front of the form is a modern road map, which marks the route of the *Autostrada del Sole* (Highway of the Sun): the highway that vertically traverses the peninsula, linking together many of Italy's major cities, from Milan in the North, down through Florence and Rome, terminating near Naples in the South. This *Autostrada* was completed in 1964, and, as the first major road in Italy that did not follow an ancient Roman route, it immediately became a symbol of the nation's post-war economic and social progress. This particular map is part of a sculpture titled *Italia* (1968), by the Milanese Arte Povera artist Luciano Fabro (1936-2007). In October 1968, Fabro's *Italia* hung in a medieval arsenal in Amalfi as part of the exhibition *Arte povera + azione povere*. At that time, the *Autostrada del Sole* was still new, a utopian image emblematic of modernized Italy, condensing the nation's many hopes and successes into one shining civic project.

By deploying the iconographic reference to the *Autostrada* in his *Italia*, Fabro departed somewhat from the conceptual and phenomenological character of his previous work. Earlier sculptures like *Ruota* (Wheel, 1964) and *Buco* (Hole, 1963) are evidence of his interest in spatial relationships and sensations, and like most works that were pulled into the Arte Povera orbit, they avoided direct political commentary and generally resist topical interpretation. This first *Italia* marked a shift in Fabro's practice, as he repeatedly returned to the iconic form throughout the rest of his career. Variations on the peninsular form quickly became a powerful vehicle for a veiled social commentary in the politically turbulent years to come. Redolent of his own aesthetic, however, as well as the phenomenological and existential tone of Arte povera, Fabro's *Italia* sculptures are indirect and open-ended in their approach to socio-political issues. Juxtaposing a familiar form with common materials, they ask viewers to choose from among the many possible meanings that arise from these material and imagistic combinations. Over the subsequent four decades, Fabro used the material variation of his *Italia* sculptures to address the nation's self-image amidst the constantly changing social, economic, and political climate. Viewing the materials he employed against a backdrop of contemporary events reflects the shifting images of Italy in the late 20th century. Italy had unique challenges in the post-war period, and since Fabro's *Italia* sculptures use the map as their form, it is important to consider some of the multiple meanings the concept of "Italy" may have held for its citizens at

mid-century.¹ Italy had been a unified nation for less than a century in 1946, and among the many complex issues the new post-war republic faced was the difficulty Italians seemed to have accepting their fellow countrymen as equals. Divisions between Northern and Southern Italians – temporarily repressed during the Fascist period – reemerged in the slow smoldering of the war.²

By 1950, economic aid from the United States under the aegis of the Marshall plan catapulted Northern Italy into a second industrial revolution, known as the “Italian Miracle”. The automaker FIAT (Fabbrica Italiana Automobili di Torino), in the Piedmontese city of Turin, became one of the brightest symbols of the post-war economic boom, and the personal automobile came to exemplify modern autonomy and social status. Indeed, by the mid 60s, almost a quarter of Italy’s total investment was tied to FIAT’s material needs.³ Much of the labor in factories like FIAT, Pirelli, and Olivetti was not indigenous to the North, however, and was performed instead by émigrés from Southern Italy. Thousands came north looking for work and an escape from the agricultural poverty and corruption that plagued much of the south in the early post-war years. In Turin, for example, the population almost doubled in the city center between 1951 and 1967, and it increased nearly eighty percent in the neighboring suburbs, most of the influx coming from southern regions like Apulia, Campania, and Calabria.⁴

In the South itself, the already dismal economic conditions were compounded by corruption and mismanaged funds. Aid money earmarked for the South, in an effort to economically unify the country, was often diverted back to the North by means of shell companies and ghost factories. Some scholars argue that major northern industrial firms preferred to keep the South illiterate and poor because it kept their factories well supplied with cheap labor.⁵ Less a miracle than an exploitative labor market, old divisions between northern and southern Italy reemerged in these early post-war years.

By the mid-1960s, the waning of Italy’s post-war economic boom exacerbated these problems, bringing social unrest at universities and labor rumblings on factory floors. The dearth of jobs during this period stirred resentment among northerners who argued that the influx of laborers from the South contributed to the weak job market. When the economy soured, the émigrés who had been part of the northern population explosion were both rootless and jobless. Those still working were becoming aware of the exploitation being exacted on them, and began to organize for better wages and terms. At the same time, many Italian students, like those in Strasbourg in 1966 and Paris in 1968, were becoming disillusioned by the triumph of capitalist gain over traditionally communal ideals and the slim prospects of employment in Italy’s continued slumping economy. In Milan, for example, demonstrations began at the Catholic University (*Cattolica*), and spread to the State (*Statale*),

and would continue to erupt throughout the city over the next decade as students, there and throughout Italy, soon found common ground with the laboring classes.⁶

The economic downturn of the later 1960s also caused many to question industrialization – the very dream that the *Autostrada del Sole* seemed to signify – and made some nostalgic for the idea of a pre-industrial Italy. For the artists of the Arte Povera generation, like Fabro, who came of age in the midst of the post-war boom and bust, the contradictions found in materials presented rich possibilities. Industrial materials like lead, Perspex, and neon reflected the radical changes in Italy's economy and culture. Alternately, traditional and natural materials like gold leaf, silk, glass, wood, and marble pointed to Italy's celebrated artisanal heritage. In his *Italia* sculptures, Fabro used lead, gold, copper, glass, and aluminum, materials with multiple, and even oppositional associations. Thus his sculptures are neither fully nostalgic, nor particularly hopeful about industrialization. Rather, they are layered with cultural meanings that allowed Fabro to look forward and backward in the same work, drawing equally from the Renaissance and the twentieth-century. It is from this position, straddling the gap between Carrara marble and Pirelli tires, that Fabro's sculptures in various materials will reveal the transitional nature of Italy in the late 1960s and beyond.

In the spring of 1968, Fabro was invited to participate in the *Nuovo paesaggio* (New Landscape) section of the *Triennale di Milano*. That May, coincident with the student movements sweeping across Europe, protests besieged the *Triennale*, resulting in the exhibition's cancellation [fig. 2]. In light of this, as well as the subsequent protest at the *Biennale di Venezia* the following month, and later the *Biennale di Venezia* in early June, Fabro and the important feminist critic Carla Lonzi authored a text arguing for the limited role of the artist in times of direct political struggles: "For the artist, there is no alternative identification in our society or in another hypothetical society, because his nature is to not identify with the social structure".⁷ Here, Fabro and Lonzi (as well as Giulio Paolini, who co-signed the text) argue that the artist does participate in political struggles that seek to break specific institutional circuits, because he or she is always already working in the interstices or margins of institutional and social structures like the factory, the university, or the museum. They suggest that the possible effective outcomes of the overt politicization of art are neutralized by the fact that the artist is accepted as being counter to such circuits. However much they may have sympathized with the politics of the student and labor movements, Fabro and Lonzi seemed to believe that the protests at the *Triennale* and *Biennale* were misguided in their attempts to draw art and artists into the economic and social struggles of 1968.

Just a few months later, in the autumn, Fabro participated in *Arte Povera + Azione Povere*, in Amalfi.⁸ The three-day exhibition included objects, performances, and a critics' conference. It was organized by the collector Marcello Rumma and the curator-critic Germano Celant, the latter of whom had recently proposed the term *Arte Povera* to describe trends in contemporary Italian art. His November 1967 essay "Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerilla War" identified a certain rebellious artistic attitude towards stylistic conformity, the market, and traditions. A year later, however, in the essay that accompanied the Amalfi exhibition, the fourth "Arte Povera" show that Celant had organized in the span of a year, he refined his initial idea of the *Arte povera* artist as "guerrilla warrior". Instead, he suggested here that the socio-political value of this art was *indirect*. On the heels of the occupied *Biennale* and *Triennale*, Celant echoed Fabro and Lonzi, arguing that *Arte Povera* was not topically addressed to political events like the Spring demonstrations; rather it had "the aim of eliminating the sectorial and classicist division that undermine the revolutionary and propulsive charge".⁹ Instead of literally taking to the streets, the objects and interventions made by these artists aimed primarily to undermine structural and conceptual roadblocks in their viewers.

Of course, given that the show was mounted in the midst of intense political turmoil throughout Europe, many objects do exhibit some engagement with contemporary events and ideas, but only tangentially, or in contradictory ways. Mario Merz, for example, presented *Sit In* (1968), a bed of beeswax on which the eponymous neon phrase rests. Although it seems to be a literal reference to the increasingly popular non-violent form of political demonstration, any directness is obfuscated by the banal form of the work, and its inclusion opposite another work by Merz: a wicker cone under which the artist cooked a pot of beans (*Cono*). In another example, artist Paolo Icaro repaired the corner of a crumbling building, perhaps positioning himself as a blue collar worker, but also a conservator of historical stonework. Such indeterminacy reigned among the works exhibited in Amalfi.

This novel exhibition provided a platform for the first of Fabro's *Italia* sculptures, the one featuring the *Autostrada del Sole*. Exhibited a few miles south of the road's terminus, this 1968 sculpture seemed to obliquely address the civil project with some skepticism, as Fabro's map is turned on its head. In fact, it is hung by the foot, a gesture that may refer to the fate of Mussolini and his henchmen at Milan's Piazzale Loreto in 1945. In 1968, Italy was in many ways again involved in a civil war, and Fabro's overturned Italy drew a tenuous thread to connect the partisan resistance to the Fascist regime during WWII and the social turmoil of 1968. Still, in Fabro's sculpture the gesture was submitted with lightness and humor. It was not a poster with a slogan from

the walls of the *Statale*, but neither was it simply an exercise in defining phenomenological space. The exhibition of *Italia* in October 1968 initiated a series that allowed Fabro to root the open-ended poetics of his earlier spatially-oriented work within the contemporary moment. By using representational and evocative materials like the map in paradoxical or oblique ways, he required viewers to come to their own conclusions about the political commentary, if any, or meaning contained in the work. In order to perceive “Italy” in these sculptures, viewers had to regard themselves and consider their own experiences of the nation.

Six months later, in early 1969, the political situation in the nation had intensified such that Fabro’s ironically critical *Italia* sculpture became incendiary. In April, a photograph of the first *Italia* sculpture was used on a poster advertising Fabro’s solo show at the Galleria Neubourg in Milan, but was considered so inflammatory in the intensifying political climate of that year, that the poster was censored and taken down from the walls of the city [fig. 1].¹⁰ 1969 would be a difficult year in Italy, marked, as it was, by massive, violent workers strikes in Milan and Turin that disrupted the already faltering economy. Later that year, on 12 December 1969, a neo-Fascist bombing at the Piazza Fontana in Milan killed 17 and injured more than 100. It was the first concrete sign of the domestic terrorism that would plague Italy for more than ten years. Was the image of Italy hung upside-down too direct a reference to the top-heavy economy in the Spring of 1969? By then, was it becoming clear that the economic miracle could neither mend the divisions between North and South, nor between the extremes of the political spectrum in Italy? Was Fabro’s *Italia* read as a critique of the Southern laborers flooding the North? How had the image of the nation changed between 1968 and 1969?

In the actual Milan exhibition, Fabro used the highway map again for a second sculpture, titled *Road Map Italy* [fig. 3]. Upright this time, Fabro mounted the map on a sheet of lead that curled around the edges to the front, holding the Italian peninsula in a cold embrace. Sicily and Sardinia, also mounted on lead, were attached to the front of the map. In this second *Italia* sculpture, Fabro responded to growing tensions by using materials in a conceptually abstract manner. Lead became an important medium for Fabro’s exploration of Italy’s economy and culture. It symbolized the re-emergence of age-old corruption and lethargy that slowed the economic and social progress of the post-war boom. The material of bullets, lead would soon resonate with the violence of the decade. While he could not have known it at the time, the next decade would retroactively come to be known as the *anni di piombo*, or “years of lead”.¹¹ For Fabro, and the rest of the world, lead would become one of the most salient material symbols of the Italian 1970s.

From a tactical point of view, lead may also have presented itself as a fitting

allegory for Italy, because it contains some of the same contradictory association with past and future that the Latin peninsula does. For Fabro, this single material could be linked to a constellation of associations in the viewer: lead is a metal used in modern industry, however it is also a material traditionally associated with alchemy, the ancient, elusive, art of turning worthless materials into gold. An alchemical transfiguration is exactly what industrialization brought to post-war Italy: in the 1950's, base metals had been formed into everything from Fiat automobiles to Olivetti typewriters, creating the largest economic boom in its history. Metaphorically, the "Italian Miracle" had turned lead into gold. Since lead can simultaneously refer to industry and alchemy – to the promise of the economic miracle and to the reversal of fortune that deflated its Faustian promises – it embodied a deep memory of the pagan past and a view to a modern industrial future that allowed Fabro to bridge between the contradictions of the shifting cultural situation.

Fabro's *L'Italia di cartoccio* (Package Italy, 1970), [fig. 4] continued the artist's exploration of the complex potential of lead as a physical material and as an allegorical tactic. Fabro's *L'Italia di Cartoccio* (Package Italy, 1970, Fig. 4) continued the artist's exploration of the complex potential of lead as a physical material and as an allegorical tactic. Here Fabro covered a plywood silhouette of the Italian peninsula in a heavy swath of lead. The familiar boot shape is completely cloaked by the metal, calling immediately to mind a fish poached in a crumpled sheet of foil (*al cartoccio*). The resemblance to this lowly home-cooking method might be one layer of reference, but the wrapping can more figuratively be read as referring to the exportation of Italian goods and images during the economic miracle, to the packaging of "Italianicity". The 1950s and 60s were banner years for Italian design, exported through the glossy pages of *Domus* or *Casabella*, while filmmakers like Fellini and Rossellini packaged "*la dolce vita*" for consumption by an international audience. However, the image of Italy presented to the outside world, in the pages of design magazines like *Domus* or in bids for international tourism, did not reflect what many Italians themselves experienced in those turbulent years. In Fabro's sculpture, ripples of lead look soft and luxurious – they make a visually pleasant form – yet they hide the lowly, plywood reality within. For instance, the laborers who made FIAT cars and Sottsass furniture could most often not afford the items that they produced. By the late 60s and early 70s, Italy was a country full of such contradictions.

Fabro's *Speculum Italiae* (Mirror Italies) and *It-alia*, both of 1971, provide Italy with a picture of itself, through the present states of these sculpture attest to the difficulty of that endeavor [fig. 5; fig. 6]. These sculptures are made of pieces of mirrored crystal glass bound with lead. Fabro explained that he arrived at these partial outlines while trying, unsuccessfully, to cut a complete

silhouette: “I was left with three outlines in various states of mutilation [...]. With each of these three pieces of glass I made a *pâté de sculpture*. Three assemblages in which the parts in the various versions of Italy might coexist but were blunted and by that time reduced to a state of mere reference [...]”.¹²

In the end, Fabro recognized that the desire to create an *Italy* of crystal glass, as well as the inability to do so, pointed to the fragility of the concept of the Italian nation in the 1970s. It literally shattered during production. The pieces that the artist was left with appeared meaningful in light of the fragile social conditions, and he turned again to lead to bind the shards together. A glance into these *Mirror Italies* – bandaged with strips of lead – indicates the inability to see Italy clearly as a unified nation at the time. Similarly, in *It-alia*, the Northern and Southern parts of the map remain separated, segregated, by lead supports. When displayed, each of these two works lie on the floor, as heavy and ineffectual as broken legs. Fabro’s continued use of lead to bind and support these pieces points to contemporary attempts to salvage the image of a unified nation: the lead both holds the works together and weighs them down.

In that same year, Fabro addressed the alchemical equation from the other side: gold. In *L’Italia d’Oro* (Golden Italy, 1971) the peninsular form was again hung by the heel [fig. 7]. Instead of lead, this Italy is cast in gilded bronze. Here again Fabro created a counterpoint among layers of reference: while the upside-down form may again refer to the failure of Fascism, the material carries a more complex significance. Gold is both the elusive dream of the medieval alchemist and the signature of *quattrocento* masters. Fabro himself has hinted at the paradoxical nature of this work: “gold is an excellent cover-up for any form, [however] a hanging form is never very authoritative”.¹³ He intimated that this most precious metal is only a thin veneer. As he did in *L’Italia di cartoccio*, Fabro again used the materials allegorically: the gold veneer exposes industrial progress as a myth, a false science, that disguises the social problems under the surface.

In the early 1970s, the *Italy* sculptures were clearly an important vehicle for Fabro’s interest in the changing economic and social conditions of the nation. By 1975, bombings on trains, riots in the streets, assassinations and kidnappings, carried out by groups on the far-left and far-right such as the *Brigate Rosse*, *Lotta Continua*, *Prima Linea*, *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* or *Terza Posizione*, were regular features of Italian news.

That turbulent year, Fabro had a one person show at the Galleria Christian Stein in Turin, titled *Choreography*, for which he chose to show only *Italy* sculptures. He created a long hallway inside the gallery hung with the various map sculptures. Organized chronologically, the exhibition provided a kind of

snapshot of developments, or indeed regressions, in Italy from 1968 to 1975. One new work in the 1975 exhibition makes for especially fruitful comparison to the first *Italy* sculpture of 1968. In *L'Italia del dolore* (Italy of Pain, 1975), Fabro again used the highway map of modern Italy [fig. 8]. No longer simply inverted or divided, this road map is in tatters. It hangs loosely from an Alpine armature, as if connected to the rest of Europe by the most rudimentary sutures.

Fabro continued to make Italy sculptures in various materials throughout the 1970s and 1980s. *L'Italia di guerra* (Italy of War, 1981), is particularly interesting as it comes at the end of the violent decade that began with the “Hot Autumn” of 1969. Made of steel mesh, the lower or Southern part of the map is turned upward and attached by wire to the upper or Northern part. The form creates a sort of Moïbus strip – an infinite loop that disfigures the map with endless war. *L'Italia feticchio* (Fetish Italy, 1981) has a lighter tone. Made of copper tubing and copper ribbon, it is a twisted coil that approximates the silhouette of the Italian nation. A Baroque flourish, it was originally made to be hung from an 18th-century dome. Here again Fabro creates a counterpoint between industrial materials and a specifically Italian artistic heritage. “Fetish Italy” could be said to problematize nostalgia for the past instead of focusing on the future. For a country that survives mainly on tourism, it would not be difficult to lose sight of a modern future among the ancient ruins. Fabro has written about the Italy sculptures: “The Italy is like an album of sketches, a memo, I continue to make it over the years: if I study something new, I sketch it in an Italy”.¹⁴

In 2004, 37 years after creating his first Italy sculpture for the 1968 exhibition in Amalfi, Fabro returned to the South, and to the *Italy* series. In Naples, just a few miles from Amalfi, Fabro installed *Italia all'asta* in the Piazza Plebiscito [fig. 9]. It is not the first version of *Italia all'asta*, there are others that date back to the mid 1990's located in San Gimignano, Turin, and held in private collections, but the one in Naples is the largest of the *Italy* sculptures, measuring 50 feet (15 meters) in height. Constructed of aluminum, two silhouettes are mounted on a large pole at the center of the square. One silhouette has the North end up, the other the South end, and they are arranged so that the tops and bottoms of each surface connect to form the traditional sign for infinity. The North and South are locked in an encounter, at once an endless struggle and an infinite embrace. For some viewers, this *Italia* might signify the interconnectedness of the opposite poles of modern Italy.

A closer look at *Italia all'asta* reveals more layers of significance. The title of this work does not only refer to the literal location of the piece *all'asta* or “on a pole,” but also has a second meaning: colloquially, in Italian, *all'asta* means “for sale” or “at auction”. This second meaning refers to inscriptions on the

aluminum maps. One side bears personal names and places evocative of milestones in the history of the nation: Savoia, Nizza, Campoformido. On the other, one finds the names of corporations that have taken private control over fundamental and once public Italian resources, such as energy and telecommunications. Is Fabro creating an equivalence between socio-political historical moments like military campaigns and the advertising efforts of industrial corporations? Perhaps the work raises questions as to which names are fit to define the nation?

The material Fabro chose, aluminum, provides equally complex and paradoxical readings. Aluminum was the celebrated national metal of Italian Fascist ideology. In the 1930s, it was seen as embodying speed and lightness, but also strength and solidity. While for many Italians today this memory, and certainly the association with Fascism, may have faded, for the early post-war generation, allusions to aluminum's anti-corrosive quality may still have spoken to Italy's dreams of lasting glory in the modern age. Jeffrey Schnapp, Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University, writes about the superimposition of industrial and Fascist goals in the pre-war years. He cites two magazines of the 1930's devoted to light metals, in which one author rallied Italians to: "acknowledge that a new and decisively important protagonist has emerged in the nation's economic life: ALUMINUM. An Italian metal, the abundance of which makes us the envy of the world".¹⁵ Historically, then, aluminum was at the center of the Fascist campaign for autarchy, or self-reliance.¹⁶ This self-reliance, however, came at the cost of encouraging monopolies on natural resources by Italian firms like Montecatini, which was Italy's largest aluminum producer through the 1930s and 40s, until their price controls made the material virtually unusable. Bringing this analogy forward to Fabro's aluminum sculpture – marked as it is with the monopolistic effects of contemporary privatization and globalization – the aluminum work shines new light on the faded memories of the devastating effect this had on the Italian economy in an earlier era. In a sense, *Italia all'asta* might be read as a call to be vigilant over the ways in which essential infrastructures have been taken out of civic control. In a country where the Prime Minister, until recently, owned the bulk of Italian media, the symbolism is strong.¹⁷

Just as Fabro's earlier *Italy* sculptures used lead and other evocative materials to approach the transitional moment of the late 60s and early 70s, *Italia all'asta* showed Fabro to still be engaged with an approach that is emblematic of the contributions of Arte Povera in general. Still powerful today, this approach celebrates indirectness and encourages contradictory meanings that must be sorted out by each viewer. This very public iteration of the *Italy* series is exemplary of Fabro's layered approach to materials. Reaching back to recall the past and reflecting forward into the future, Fabro's *Italy* series was a

multivalent and viable vehicle for social commentary from a sometimes paradoxical, but uniquely Italian perspective. It is simultaneously about the division between North and South, and their inescapable connection. Made of aluminum, it recalls the misguided nationalist goals of Fascism, and by its inscriptions, refer to the dominating aims of global capitalism today. On the most basic level, however, the shiny aluminum of *Italia all'asta* succeeds in finally providing a mirror, in which Italians can see themselves reflected in the image of their nation.

Postscript

Not long before the artists' sudden passing in June of 2007, I visited his studio in Milan, where we discussed a fairly recent Italy sculpture that hung from the ceiling in his studio [fig. 10]. This Italy, a version of which is titled *L'Italia ipocrita* (Hypocritical Italy, 1996), was made of folded maps of the nation. The artist explained that this Italy was in fact a working pinwheel, which he considered a reference to the rotating door of Italian politics, and his countrymen's frequently changing political allegiances. As with all of the Italy sculptures, Fabro's ironic and gentle humor was borne out in his tactical approach to materials and gestures.

PLATES

- 1 Luciano Fabro, *Italia*, 1968. Wood and highway map.
- 2 The occupied *Triennale di Milano*, may 1968. Photo b/w, Archivio Triennale, Milan.
- 3 Luciano Fabro, *Italia Carta Stradale* [Road Map Italy], 1969. Wood, highway map, lead, scale 1:700,000. Private collection, Turin. Artwork © Luciano Fabro, photo © Giorgio Colombo.
- 4 Luciano Fabro, *L'Italia di Cartoccio* [Package Italy], 1970. Highway map, plywood and lead, 50 x 120 x 60 cm. Collection of Christian Stein. Loan to the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina, Napoli. Artwork © Luciano Fabro, courtesy Christian Stein Gallery, Milan.
- 5 Luciano Fabro, *Speculum Italiae* [Italy's Mirror], 1971. Mirrored crystal glass and lead, 3 elements: 73 x 114 x 11 cm (Peninsula); 15 x 21 x 1 cm (Sardinia); 21,5 x 11,5 x 1 cm (Sicily). Collection Margherita Stein, Property Fondazione CRT Progetto Arte Moderna e Contemporanea. Permanent loan to the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin and the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin.
- 6 Luciano Fabro, *It-alia*, 1971. Mirrored crystal glass and lead.
- 7 Luciano Fabro, *L'Italia d'oro* [Golden Italy], 1972. Gilded bronze.
- 8 Luciano Fabro, *Italia del dolore* [Italy of Pain], 1975. Road map of Italy, De ruta cloth, iron and string, 150 x 80 cm. Archivio Fabro, Milan. Artwork © Luciano Fabro, courtesy Christian Stein Gallery, Milan.
- 9 Luciano Fabro, *Italia all'asta* [Italy for Sale/Italy on a Pole], 2004. Aluminum. Artwork © Luciano Fabro.
- 10 Luciano Fabro, *L'Italia ipocrita* [Hypocritical Italy], 1996. Maps and wire, private collection, Milan. Artwork © Luciano Fabro, photo by the author.



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8 Luciano Fabro, *Italia del dolore* [Italy of Pain], 1975. Road map of Italy, De ruta cloth, iron and string, 150 x 80 cm. Archivio Fabro, Milan. Artwork ©Luciano Fabro, courtesy Christian Stein Gallery, Milan.



9 Luciano Fabro, *Italia all'asta* [Italy for Sale/Italy on a Pole], 2004. Aluminum. Artwork ©Luciano Fabro.



10 Luciano Fabro, *L'Italia ipocrita* [Hypocritical Italy], 1996. Maps and wire, private collection, Milan. Artwork ©Luciano Fabro, photo by the author.

- ¹ For an excellent and entertaining source on the social developments of the post-war period, especially the relationship between the conditions of the period immediately following WWII and the turmoil of the 1960s-70s, see Tobias Jones, *The Dark Heart of Italy* (New York: North Point Press, 2003), 43. For more scholarly history available in English, a standard account of Italy's post-war period is Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- ² Fascism, stifling as it was, gave the nation a unifying discourse, a conceptual map of what "Italy" meant. However, it did so with an iron fist, paving over cultural differences by force, and trying to centralize both the government and the Italian culture, artistically and linguistically. The Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini even prohibited mention of the "Southern Problem", preferring to ignore and repress dissent and difference. Ironically, this presented something of a roadmap for postwar reunification. See Ginsborg, *A history of Contemporary Italy*, 9-71.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 215.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.
- ⁵ Dennis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 434.
- ⁶ See Robert Lumley for an excellent history of the protest movements in Italy and the rise of *Autonomia*. Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (New York: Verso, 1990).
- ⁷ Luciano Fabro and Carla Lonzi, "Documento sull'occupazione della XV Triennale di Milano" (1968), in Jole de Sanna, *Luciano Fabro: Biografia, Eidografia* (Paisan di Prato: Campanotto, 1996), 48. Originally printed in: Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto* (Bari: De Donato, 1969), 230-2.
- ⁸ The artist-participants were divided into three groups. *Arte povera* included: Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Luciano Fabro, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Gianni Piacentino, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Gilberto Zorio.
- The "azione povere" section included Anna Maria Boetti, Jan Dibbets, Paolo Icaro, Pietro Lista, Richard Long, Gino Marotta, Plinio Martelli, Emilio Prini, and Ger Van Elk. Finally, Pistoletto's theater group Zoo made up the third section called "azioni di gruppo." The critics present included Vittorio Boarini, Piero Bonfiglioli, Achille Bonito Oliva, Germano Celant, Gillo Dorfles, Piero Gilardi, Henry Martin, Filiberto Menna, Daniella Palazzoli, Angelo Trimarco, and Tommaso Trini.
- ⁹ Germano Celant, "Azione Povera", in *Arte Povera = Art Povera*, trans. Paul Blanchard (Milan: Electa, 1985), 88-89. Originally published in: *Arte povera più azioni povere*. A cura di Germano Celant (Amalfi, Arsenale, 1968). Cat. (Salerno: Rumma Editore, 1969). Page citations refer to the English edition.
- ¹⁰ Luciano Fabro, interview with the author, 21 May 2006, written notes. Fabro indicated that while he meant the work in a "critico-ironic" way when it was first made, it took on a life of its own given the intense politics of 1968-69, and was taken as an emblem of the student and worker movements that were strong in that part of the country. It was somewhat unexpected that the poster would cause so much uproar. The poster was later reproduced in the catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art's 1970 *Information* exhibition. See *Information*. Curated by Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970). Cat. (New York, 1970), 181.
- ¹¹ The term "anni di piombo" first shows up in Italian dictionary in 1983. The most likely first use comes from Margarethe Von Trotta film of 1981: *Die Bleierne Zeit*, (The Years of Lead). The English title of the same film is *Marianne and Julianne*.
- ¹² Luciano Fabro, "Lecture parallele", in *Luciano Fabro* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1992). Cat. (San Francisco, 1992) 113. Originally published in: *Luciano Fabro* (Milan: Galleria Borgogna, 1972). Cat. (Milan, 1972).
- ¹³ Luciano Fabro, "Vademecum", in *Luciano Fabro*. Curated by Margit Rowell (Barcelona:

Fundació Joan Miró, 1990). Cat. (Barcelona, 1990), 80.

¹⁴ Luciano Fabro, in *Luciano Fabro* (San Francisco), 109.

¹⁵ Anonymous author of: “Metalli leggeri e loro applicazioni”, *Adunata*, July-August 1931, 73-74; quoted in Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “The Romance of Caffeine and Aluminum”, *Critical Inquiry* 28, No. 1, (Autumn 2001): 256.

¹⁶ For more information on aluminum as part of the Fascists’ autarchic goals, see *ibid.*, 244-269.

¹⁷ Indeed, many have compared Berlusconi with Mussolini in terms of his controls over the media. Berlusconi’s television monopoly, used to promote his agendas and wary of criticizing the boss, is seen as the equivalent of Mussolini’s balcony from which he gave rallying speeches to his supporters. For more on this and contemporary Italy see Jones, *The Dark Heart of Italy*.