

Press release
Inaugural exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Milan

Georg Baselitz & Lucio Fontana

L'aurora viene

20 September—9 December 2025
Opening Saturday 20 September 2025, 2—5pm

Thaddaeus Ropac Milan
Piazza Belgioioso, 2, 20121 Milan

**The gallery's second exhibition will pair the pioneering feminist artists
VALIE EXPORT and Ketty La Rocca for the first time**



Georg Baselitz, *Aurora viene*, 2015 (detail)
Oil on canvas
98 × 88 cm (38.58 × 34.65 in)



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale*, 1957
Pastel and collage on canvas with holes
125 × 100 cm (49.21 × 39.37 in)

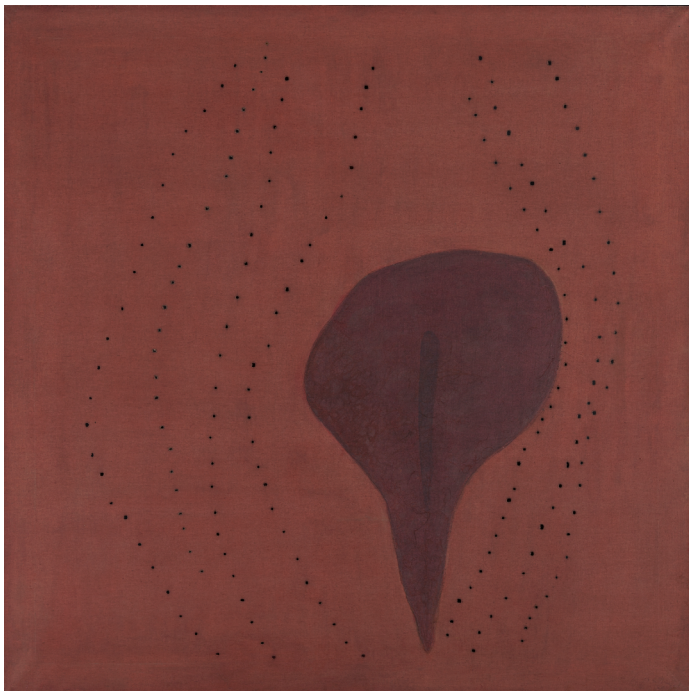
Thaddaeus Ropac Milan will open on 20 September 2025 with an exhibition of works by Georg Baselitz and Lucio Fontana, retracing Baselitz's longstanding and ongoing engagement with the work of the Argentine-Italian master. Entitled *L'aurora viene*, the Milan gallery's inaugural exhibition pairs the two artists in dialogue in a two-person presentation for the first time, and encompasses paintings and sculptures by Baselitz spanning the past decade, as well as works by Fontana from the 1930s to the 1960s, including the loan of a nucleus of works from the Fondazione Lucio Fontana.

Though the two artists never met, Fontana has played an important role in the work of Baselitz. Baselitz has a studio in Italy, and Fontana lived and worked for most of his life in Milan, where the first exhibition of his works was held in 1931.

The exhibited works by Baselitz include a new monumental bronze sculpture and recent paintings with empty, unlit centres or suspended figures who seem to surge forth from dark grounds, echoing Fontana's exploration of what lies beyond the canvas.

Demonstrating the development and evolution of this exploration in Fontana's work, the works on view include 'Baroque' sculptures dating from as early as 1937 up to the 1950s, as well as a selection of *Concetti spaziali* (Spatial Concepts), including iconic *Attese* (Expectations) works from the 1960s and key examples from the *Gessi* (Impastos, 1954–58) and *Inchiostri* (Inks, 1956–59) series, as well as an exceptionally rare *Fine di Dio* (End of God) from 1963–64. The gallery's new Milan space, in the historic Palazzo Belgioioso, designed by Giuseppe Piermarini in 1772, becomes the site for an 'intellectual confrontation' between the two artists' works, which unfolds across ideas of space, language, objecthood and the body, and, fundamentally, a search for origination, both of artistic form and of the universe. 'Interpretation is of no use to any artist', Baselitz explains. 'Now, at my age, it's more of an intellectual confrontation, without any dependence.'

The presentation of works by Lucio Fontana alongside paintings by Georg Baselitz sets up a dialogue that is both coherent and surprising. Allowing for an in-depth exploration of the ideas artmaking is founded on, it showcases a shared imagination and sensibility, expressed through different means. The project demonstrates how alive and relevant Fontana's work remains today. The works by Baselitz exhibited in Milan – some of which even reference Fontana in their titles – have been extraordinary allies in this regard. Our loan of a core group of works, carefully selected from our collection and including pieces from lesser-known and yet intensely meaningful cycles, is a valuable opportunity



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale, Forma*, 1957
Aniline and collage on canvas with holes
150 × 150 cm (59.06 × 59.06 in)



Georg Baselitz, *Rosa riposa*, 2019
Oil on canvas
304 × 350 cm (119.69 × 137.8 in)

that resonates with the commitments behind, and builds on, our multifaceted programme.

— Silvia Ardemagni,

President of the Fondazione Lucio Fontana

Baselitz's recent portraits of spectral figures in pallid colours, hanging upside-down in the pictorial space, were inspired by a dream in which he saw his own skin 'torn down the middle, split in two'. Over the course of the last decade, he has returned almost compulsively to the motif. His light, sometimes effervescent treatment of paint suggests the ageing body, while its composition – emerging onto the monochrome ground as if from behind – recalls Fontana's ploughing of the depths of the canvas in search of a new artistic dimension. 'I wanted an apparition', Baselitz says, 'something that appears out of the depth'. As critic Steven Henry Madoff wrote: 'There is a hiss in these late paintings, whose provenance is in what Achille Bonito Oliva once called "a splintered, pyrotechnic space," which presents a formal spatiality that is also psychological'.

In the evolution of Baselitz's new spatiality, as Fabrizio Gazzarri wrote, 'a progressive liberation is taking place that jettisons all oppressive and excessive matter [...]. In this removal of matter, gravity loses direction; the compositional structures break down, taking on a new order that obeys other laws, other potential (cosmic?) dimensions.' There is a tangible parallel here with the new laws and dimensions that Fontana, before him, had established in his manifestos spanning the late 1940s and early 1950s, in which he formulated his theories of

Spatialism. Fontana believed that in order to make a ‘new art’ in keeping with its time – ‘an art for the Space Age’, as he put it – he needed to open the canvas to the infinite cosmos beyond it. In the resulting *Concetti spaziali*, he achieved this by puncturing or cutting: from the *Attese* works, with their characteristic *tagli*, or slashes, that plunge deep into the canvas, to the *Gessi*, made using pastel, and *Inchiostri*, so named for the artist’s use of ink, which are united by the constellations of *buchi* (holes) that perforate canvases rendered in muted tones.

The dark centres of the earliest Baselitz works on view – a series commenced in 2015 in a period of intense reflection on the work of Fontana – reference the latter’s *tagli*. A work from this series, *Aurora viene* (*Aurora comes*, 2015), gives its cosmic title, evoking an infinite dimension beyond the canvas, to the exhibition. These depictions of legs, which conclude at the extremities of the canvas in clunky shoes, draw the eye to its empty centre: ‘like a dark opening’, as art historian Carla Schulz-Hoffmann described. From there, Baselitz wrote: ‘It should flow out, spread out, expand towards the edges’. This central abyss, which represents a break with both Baselitz’s previous compositions and with art-historical norms, is the fruit of his reflection on Fontana. As Baselitz explained: ‘He cuts a slit in the middle of his canvas and plunges the viewer’s gaze into darkness. [...] The artist has something very specific in mind, which lies outside the painting. This slit has a meaning, just like in Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde*. The slit is like a view of the sky, of eternity.’



Lucio Fontana, *La Fine di Dio*, 1963-64
Oil, gashes, holes, and graffiti on canvas
178 × 123 cm (70 × 48.43 in)



Georg Baselitz, *Cowboy*, 2024
Bronze
403 × 118 × 116 cm (158.66 × 46.46 × 45.67 in)

Also on view is a remarkable example of Fontana’s rare *Fine di Dio* (*End of God*) works. Widely considered the apex of his practice, the artist made only 38 *Fine di Dio* works in a brief period between 1963 and 1964. Its ovular form represents both origin and absolute; as Fontana put it, ‘infinity, the inconceivable, the end of figuration, the beginning of nothingness’.

Exhibited in the principal gallery room of Thaddaeus Ropac Milan, the *Fine di Dio* in arresting pink enters into conversation with Baselitz’s 2019 *Rosa Riposa*, with its unfurling nude figures rendered in a similarly sensuous palette. In the *tagli* and the organic shapes found in Fontana’s works from the 1950s, too, a suggestion of form and matter, bearing both their philosophical and physical meanings, emerges when confronted with the disarming corporeal intimacy of Baselitz’s bodies laid bare.

Fontana’s and Baselitz’s pursuits have in common a sense that apparent destruction can bring renewal. Whispers of this can be found in the earliest Fontana works on view in the exhibition: sculptures which attest to his work before the concretisation of his theory of Spatialism. Here, the artist was already oscillating between abstraction and figuration, and between referentiality and experimentation: each work a daring act of ‘persiflage’, as Baselitz described. Then came the conclusive gesture

of the puncture. For Baselitz, when he first encountered Fontana's work in Berlin in the early 1960s, as artists were talking about the end of painting, 'the black in the cut left open a glimmer of hope'; 'hope that, in the middle, there might be something after all.' Baselitz began painting his compositions upside-down in 1969. This novel format was his route to revolutionising a medium that was then regarded as irredeemably conventional. He describes being fascinated by the content in Fontana's work because it 'is inconceivable without form', while Baselitz's inversion, present across the works on view in the exhibition, serves to empty ostensibly figurative form of its content. As Flavia Frigeri wrote in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, it is in their 'making the object of painting prevail over the painted subject' that the two artists meet.

Baselitz often approaches giving his works titles as an opportunity for wordplay, sometimes denoting a reference or idea, and sometimes representing a snippet of everyday conversation. Fontana is named, by pun or play on words, in several of the titles of works on view. Fontana himself often inscribed enigmatic phrases on the versos of his works, like a diary of thoughts ranging from the philosophical to the mundane: 'a domestic and

poetic counterpoint to the gesture that silently cuts the canvas', as Luca Massimo Barbero wrote in his essay in the exhibition catalogue, which Baselitz transforms 'into titles, into a further sound'. Baselitz is an autodidact in Fontana's language, entering into an encrypted linguistic play that, in Frigeri's words, 'shroud[s] this imaginary friendship in a veil of humour and mystery'.

Baselitz and Fontana seem to interact and converse at several levels across the exhibition, but Barbero posits that the two artists, ultimately, are bound not by 'a formal proximity nor an affinity of language, but a shared tension. In other words, the idea that art does not represent but announces, that it does not describe but evokes, that it is first and foremost an act of opening up towards the origin.' Brought together, they enter into a dialogue that activates the latent sense of the union of the cosmic and the bodily that lies just under the surface in both artists' works, centred around the infinite dark matter they both explore. The slash was the *aurora* of Baselitz's engagement with Fontana: a starting point for a dialogue that runs much deeper. As Barbero added: 'It is there, in that slit, that Baselitz was able to see art become the threshold between sound and vision, between flesh and space and, finally, between gesture and *beginning*': a birth of form that is 'not given but originates'.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue featuring essays by Flavia Frigeri, Curatorial and Collections Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London, and Luca Massimo Barbero, Artistic Advisor of the Fondazione Lucio Fontana and leading Fontana scholar.



Lucio Fontana, *Guerriero*, 1953
Glazed ceramic
105 × 66 × 50 cm (41.34 × 25.98 × 19.69 in)



Portrait of Georg Baselitz. Photo: Martin Muller

Georg Baselitz

Georg Baselitz (b. 1938) has had a profound influence on international art, shaping a new identity for German art in the second half of the 20th century. Early in his career, his work was included in documenta 5 (1972) and 7 (1982). The 1980s was a seminal decade for the artist, opening with one sculpture to represent Germany at the 1980 Venice Biennale alongside Anselm Kiefer, which marked his first foray into the medium. In the years that followed, he participated in a series of influential exhibitions: *A New Spirit in Painting* (1981) and *German Art in the Twentieth Century* (1985) at the Royal Academy of Arts, London; and *Zeitgeist* (1982) at the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin.

Italy has played an important role in Baselitz's work. Until 1987, he had a studio in Castiglion Fiorentino, near Arezzo, and today, he has a studio in Imperia. He became the first living artist to have an exhibition at the Gallerie dell'Accademia in 2019 with his exhibition *Baselitz – Academy*, focusing on his reflections on his own artistic evolution and his engagement with academic traditions. Alongside Baselitz's connection to the work of Fontana, he shared a strong creative relationship and a mutual admiration with Emilio Vedova tracing back to the 1960s, which endured until Vedova's death, and at the Venice Biennale in 2007, the artists' works were exhibited together. Baselitz's *Avignon* series was presented at the 2015 Venice Biennale.

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, presented his first comprehensive retrospective in the United States in 1995, which toured to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; and Nationalgalerie, Berlin. Further significant retrospectives were organised by the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, in 1996 and 2011, and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 2007. Other notable solo exhibitions have been held at Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2006); Albertina, Vienna (2007); and Städel Museum, Frankfurt (2016; travelled to Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome; and Guggenheim Bilbao). To mark the artist's 80th birthday in 2018, comprehensive solo exhibitions were held at the Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; and Musée Unterlinden, Colmar, France. In 2019, his election to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in France was followed by his largest retrospective to date at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in 2021.

Works by Baselitz can be found in numerous public collections around the world, notably The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and Nationalgalerie, Berlin, among others.



Portrait of Lucio Fontana. Photo: Lothar Wolleh

Lucio Fontana

Lucio Fontana (Rosario di Santa Fé, Argentina, 1899 – Comabbio, Italy, 1968) is one of the most influential artists of the 20th century on the international scene, driven by an inexhaustible creative impulse that guided his relentless experimentation with different methods and means of expression. Born in Argentina to Italian parents, Fontana began his career as a sculptor working in his father's studio and studying under Adolfo Wildt at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan. He lived and worked between Milan and Argentina, where he worked on several major public and private commissions, through which he garnered considerable recognition. During the 1930s he distinguished himself as a central figure on the Italian abstract art scene, and his notable abstract sculptures were shown at Galleria Il Milione in Milan. He went on to join the group *Abstraction – Création* alongside other Italian artists. During this time, he commenced his lifelong engagement with ceramic, the fruit of his profound working relationship with Tullio d'Albisola, Futurist poet and ceramicist. This period also saw several pivotal collaborations with leading Italian architects, including Figini and Pollini, BBPR and Luciano Baldessari, among others.

In the 1940s, Fontana returned to Argentina and founded Altamira Escuela Libre de Artes Plásticas in Buenos Aires, an anti-academic art school at which he taught sculpture and where, in 1946, he conceived *Manifiesto Blanco*, in which he developed the theories that would nourish his subsequent artistic production. In 1947, Fontana returned to Milan, where he became a key figure in a group of artists united by an interest in the ideas presented in his *Manifiesto*.

The work and the dialogues of the years that followed would ultimately give rise to the Spatialism movement, which would be expanded upon through further manifestos. Fontana continued his personal research and, in 1949, perforated his first canvases in works he titled *Concetto spaziale (Spatial Concept)*. A decade later, in a continuation of his artistic innovation in search of a new dimension beyond the canvas, he performed, for the first time, the revolutionary and now-iconic gesture of the 'slash'.

The year 1949 also marked the creation of one of Fontana's most radical works, *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera (Spatial Environment in Black Light)*, presented at the Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, which rendered the lived, ephemeral experience of man in space. As well as the significant *Holes, Slashes* and *Sculptures*, during the 1950s and 60s Fontana conceived several further series of works: *Stones, Baroques, Impastos, Inks, Papers, Oils, Quanta, Natures, Metals, End of God, Little Theatres, Ellipses* and other *Spatial Environments*, which he continued to develop until the end of his life. Fontana has been and continues to be the subject of important solo exhibitions at major institutions in Italy and internationally, and his works can be found in the collections of prestigious museums around the world, including Tate, London; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Museum of Modern Art, New York.

About Thaddaeus Ropac gallery

Representing over 60 artists, as well as a number of renowned artist estates, Thaddaeus Ropac gallery supports and showcases the careers and continues to build on the legacies of some of the most influential artists of our time with a wide-ranging programme of over 40 exhibitions curated at its extensive and historic gallery spaces each year. Thaddaeus Ropac also represents a number of renowned artist estates and continues to build on their legacy, as well as providing curatorial expertise, acting as consultant to major museums and public institutions and advising private and corporate collections. Active in both the primary and secondary markets, the gallery also represents its artists at all major international art fairs.

Thaddaeus Ropac Milan spans across 400 square metres of the historic Palazzo Belgioioso. Our seventh location joins Thaddaeus Ropac's galleries in London at Ely House, a five-floor listed mansion in Mayfair that was formerly the Bishop of Ely's London residence; in Paris both in the Marais and an extensive early 20th-century ironworks factory in Pantin, which was redeveloped to accommodate the display of large-scale artworks; in Salzburg at the Villa Kast, a 19th-century townhouse in the Mirabell Gardens in

the historic centre and Salzburg Halle, a converted industrial space close to the city centre; and in Seoul, in the heart of the thriving cultural district of Hannam-dong, occupying the ground and first floors of an outstanding architectural landmark: the Fort Hill building.

Thaddaeus Ropac gallery has a longstanding commitment to Italy and its art scene. The Milan gallery provides an ideal locus for our wider activities across Italy, including the support for our artists in their inclusion in and exhibitions coinciding with the Venice Biennale. Most recently this has included critically acclaimed exhibitions of Alex Katz at Fondazione Giorgio Cini (2024); Martha Jungwirth (2024), Adrian Ghenie (2019) and Joseph Beuys (2022) at Galleria di Palazzo Cini; and Daniel Richter at the Ateneo Veneto (2022). Major exhibitions in Venice have also recently included Georg Baselitz's career survey at Gallerie dell'Accademia (2019) and Anselm Kiefer's monumental installation at the Palazzo Ducale (2022). To commemorate the 100th birthday of Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), Milan's Museo del Novecento presented an exhibition of groundbreaking works by the American artist in 2025.

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