

Press Release

Fabio Mauri. Amore Mio

Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse
30 September – 22 December 2023



Organised with Olivier Renaud-Clément in collaboration with Studio Fabio Mauri, 'Fabio Mauri. Amore Mio' is the first solo presentation in Switzerland on the seminal Italian artist (1926 – 2009) and sheds light on a period in his work during which he explored artistic strategies pertinent to pop art. The exhibition includes paintings, sculptures and works on paper spanning the late 1950s to the mid 1970s, as well as the installation 'Amore Mio' (1970), on view for the first time in over 50 years.

'Fabio Mauri. Amore Mio' is a testament to the artist's early engagement with themes that would come to define pop art, before the movement became widespread in Europe after US artist Robert Rauschenberg won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1964. The 1964 Biennale marked a pivotal shift: artistic circles in Europe, particularly Italy, saw the arrival of American pop art as a sign of US expansionism, at a time where artists like Tano Festa, Fabio Mauri, Mimmo Rotella and Mario Schifano were already experimenting with similar ideas.

Some of Mauri's earliest works in the exhibition include drawings and collages in the vein of neo-dada and proto-pop that incorporate cartoon elements and comic strips distributed by the artist's father, Umberto Mauri, who was among the first to import American comics to Italy. The artist deployed fragments of Lil Abner, Popeye, Flash Gordon and Mad Magazine, as well as comic strips syndicated in Italy. 'Jiggs and Maggie' became 'Arcibaldo e Petronilla' and a cutting illustrating its two main characters at the cinema can be seen in 'Arcibaldo I' (1960). Extending the scene with expressive mark-making in 'Arcibaldo II' (1960), a box drawn in black ink resembles the cinema screen, a symbol of our multimedia-dominated society repeatedly used by Mauri. 'Arcibaldo III' (1960) sees Mauri collage the words 'The End' as a play on the classic cinematic trope.

In 1957, Mauri began working on his seminal and radical 'Schermi' (Screens) that refer to television and cinema—which was introduced to Italy on a wide scale in 1954. Made with blank canvas or white paper, some also citing the iconic words 'The End' or 'Fine,' these objects underscore Mauri's interest in the power of the New Media of his time and the mechanisms of communication and mediatic manipulation. In a radical gesture, Mauri voids his monochromatic screens of any content, narration and ideology, emphasizing that 'the canvas

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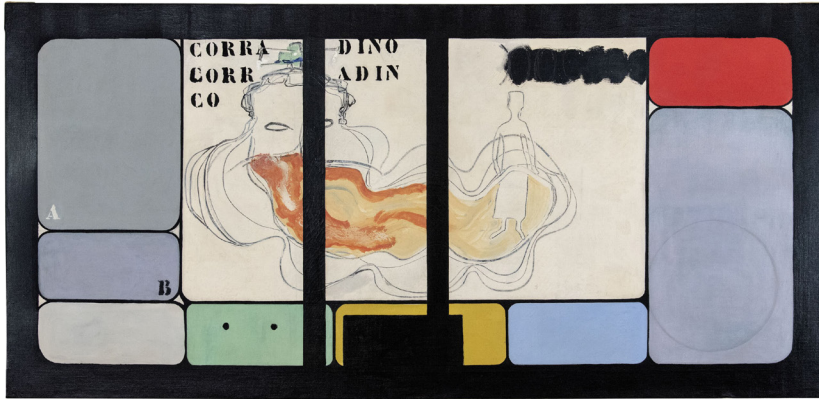
is no longer. It is exchanged with a distinctively 'active' breeding ground for culture and the fermentation of ideas.' Whilst these works often comprise pure white screens that extend out from the frame, other examples of Schermi appropriated images of celebrities like singer Frank Sinatra or symbols referring to the actress Marilyn Monroe or took the form of drawings on paper, characterized by their flatness or abstract patterns.

Elevating the comic strip to an art form, 'L'isola (The Island)' (1960 – 1966) acts as a maquette for the scenography of Mauri's theatre play 'L'Isola,' written in 1960. The unparalleled set design plays with the flatness of comics, depicting a graphic world composed of contrasting planes stylized with black contouring lines, all framed by a dark edge evocative of television screens. 'L'Isola' is an early prime example of Mauri's engagement with the performative arts and his unrelenting exploration of the real.



The projected image became a central motif that defined Mauri's oeuvre, saying: 'From the start, I saw the world as a large, only partially decipherable projection [...] We see portions of the world, those that our culture allows us to distinguish and see [...] The screen is what we project objects and bodies onto, as well as invisible feelings and thoughts.' The installation 'Amore Mio' (1970) plays on this idea, requiring viewers to navigate the dark environment by swiveling a fixed light to reveal the surrounding works. Consisting of 18 silkscreened canvas elements that form the immersive and interactive space, this work has remained unseen since its first showcase in 1970 during the legendary exhibition of the same name presented by Achille Bonito Oliva at Palazzo Ricci in Montepulciano, Italy. Further silkscreens include works entitled 'Gangster' (1974), portraits of the notorious figure Al Capone that testify to Mauri's engagement with the international pop art movement.

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Also on view is Mauri's installation 'Intellettuale. Il Vangelo secondo Matteo di/su Pier Paolo Pasolini' (1975). Originally conceived with the participation of Pier Paolo Pasolini as a living screen for his film 'The Gospel According to St. Matthew,' the film is now projected upon his shirt. Depicting a beam of light as a three-dimensional solid, 'Cinema a luce solida (Cinema of solid light)' (1968) suggests that images projected onto a screen are often constructed—particularly in pointed and political ways—and that their ideas have weight. Exploring the idea of the screen as a filter through which we perceive reality, Mauri said, 'the screen had become a sort of witness to history, an opaque mirror, but one that captured the projections of the world and contained them.' Mauri proposes through his works a questioning of the 'real' by commenting on the proliferation of screens in modern society—an observation that holds even more relevance today.

'Fabio Mauri. Amore Mio' will open on 30 September with a walkthrough of the exhibition from 5pm led by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Director of Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea.

The exhibition precedes the online catalogue raisonné of Mauri's work to be published at the end of the year, as well as a solo presentation of works on paper at Castello di Rivoli, Italy, opening December 2023. Mauri's iconic installation 'Luna' (1968) will also be part of a major group exhibition 'Immersion. The Origins: 1949-1969' at Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts Lausanne from 27 October 2023.

About the Artist

Fabio Mauri (1926 – 2009) was born in Rome, Italy; his early youth was marked by the events of war and Fascism—traumas and horrors that would profoundly impact and influence the artist's life and work. Raised among writers and painters, it was natural that Mauri would befriend intellectuals in both artistic and cultural circles of Italy's new avant-garde, among them: philosopher and semiotician Umberto Eco, film director and aficionado Pier Paolo Pasolini (the artist's close childhood friend), visual artist Jannis Kounellis, art historian Maurizio Calvesi, the writer Edoardo Sanguineti and art critic and curator Achille Bonito Oliva.

First emerging in the late-fifties, Fabio Mauri developed the ideas for his work in the context of television and cinema, which from 1954 became a part of everyday cultural life. Throughout the 1960s Mauri proved his deep understanding of modern media by reworking the conventional space of easel painting into the conceptual space of the screen, a surface upon which reality and fiction turn into consumable images. Connecting themes and ideas of the past to the present, his work injects within itself a notion of ethical or social responsibility that causes the spectator to critically examine his experience of 'the real'. Mauri's artistic career remains as varied and diverse as the activities in which he engaged. An artist, playwright, publisher, critic and professor for over 20 years, Fabio Mauri's wide-ranging oeuvre cannot be easily defined.

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Fabio Mauri inside the installation 'Amore Mio',
Montepulciano, Italy, 1970
Photo: Elisabetta Catalano

Fabio Mauri
Arcibaldo III
1960
India ink and collage on paper
12.4 x 11.7 cm / 4 7/8 x 4 5/8 in

Fabio Mauri
Schermo The End (Screen the End)
1959
Pencil on paper (vellum) and tempera on wood
56.5 x 56.5 x 4.4 cm / 22 1/4 x 22 1/4 x 1 3/4 in
Photo: Jon Etter

Fabio Mauri
Sinatra
1964
Print on shaped wood on canvas stretched on
wooden frame
186 x 100 x 6 cm / 73 1/4 x 39 3/8 x 2 3/8 in

Fabio Mauri
L'isola (The Island)
1960 - 1966
Canvas, tempera and acetate on wood
59 x 78 cm / 23 1/4 x 30 3/4 in

Fabio Mauri
Gangster
1974
Silkscreen on paper
65 x 50 cm / 25 5/8 x 19 5/8 in

Fabio Mauri
Cronaca di Corradino (Chronicle of Corradino)
1965
Tempera and acrylic paint on canvas
100 x 210 cm / 39 3/8 x 82 5/8 in

Fabio Mauri
Cinema a luce solida (Cinema of solid light)
1968
Methacrylate sculpture, electric light
Overall: 170 x 74.5 x 68 cm / 66 7/8 x 29 3/8 x 26
3/4 in