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Homage

John R. Lane

There was very little knowledge in the United States of the achievements of Luciano Fabro as little as five years ago; an amazing situation considering the important position this artist has long enjoyed in Europe. It was the powerful conviction and informed insistence of Rudi Fuchs that ensured a major presence for Fabro in the 1985 Carnegie International Exhibition in Pittsburgh, bringing his work to the attention of a large American audience and putting it in the context of the most discussed European contemporary art (it had been seen, in a rather diffuse setting, at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984).

How strange, difficult, and insubstantial this conceptual work appeared when Fuchs first introduced us to it, particularly at that enthusiastic moment when Americans' appreciation of new European art was decidedly tilted toward expressionist painting. I remember not being alone in my serious scepticism, no doubt because American eyes that were used to Minimalism and then to New Expressionism were simply not accustomed a few years ago to looking at sculpture that had layer upon layer of meaning derived from and built on centuries of European and Classical art, history, philosophy, religion, and mythology. Nor were we used to the extraordinary elegance of mind and lightness of touch that are so characteristic of Fabro and his sculpture. Now these qualities seem so essentially part of much of the best American as well as European art of the past ten years. For me, it was the challenge of trying to understand Fabro's accomplishments that helped put into place the exceptional contributions of American artists like Robert Ryman, Bruce Nauman and Cy Twombly, each of whom shares the command of historical and contemporary issues, the strength of concept, and the grace of execution that inform this Italian's work and who, in fact, were appreciated in Europe considerably in advance of their popular acceptance in the United States.