

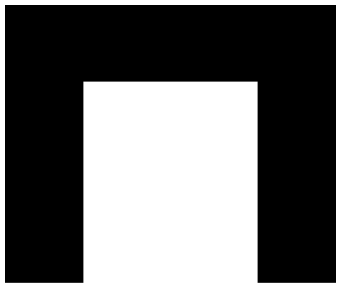
CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

MUSEO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA

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Exhibition	<i>Gianni Colombo</i>
Curators	Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Castello di Rivoli Marco Scotini, Archivio Gianni Colombo
Catalogue	Skira Milan, edited by Marcella Beccaria
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Entrance	€ 6.50 full price, € 4.50 reduced price
Location	Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Piazza Mafalda di Savoia – 10098 Rivoli (Turin)
Education services and public programs	Education Department tel. +39/011.9565213 – fax +39/011.9565232 e-mail: educa@castellodirivoli.org
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The exhibition was made possible with the contribution of Fondazione CRT



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PRESS RELEASE

Gianni Colombo

Curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli-Turin and Marco Scotini, Archivio Gianni Colombo, Milan

Dates: September 16, 2009 – January 10, 2010

Press preview: Monday, September 14, 2009 – 11.30 a.m.

The Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea is organizing and producing a major survey exhibition of works by Italian artist Gianni Colombo (Milan, 1937 – Melzo, 1993). This exhibition, curated by Castello di Rivoli Interim Director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Marco Scotini, curator of Archivio Gianni Colombo, includes almost one hundred works ranging from his radical participatory environments of light and movement, for which he became most well-known during the 1960s, to a broad selection of drawings, moving “wall structures”, sculpture, multiples and installations.

Gianni Colombo was one of the leading figures in the field of international kinetic art that developed over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. Interested in the Surrealism of Max Ernst and in the poetic world of Paul Klee, he attended the Accademia di Belle Arti in Brera. His artistic research was soon characterized by experiments with materials and their perception, from ceramics to graphics, from works with an emphasis on material consistency to the creation of multiples and, above all, of ‘environments’ accessible to viewers. In the 1950s, during a period of intense economic recovery and within Milanese art circles characterized by a lively international debate, he was drawn to developments by the “nuclearists” and to the Spatialism of Lucio Fontana.

If Fontana was the artist who defined the space of the work as the work of art itself, Colombo investigated art as *participatory* space, thus anticipating many current interests.

In 1959 he founded Gruppo T along with Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani and Gabriele Devecchi, later joined by Grazia Varisco. The group proposed that art abolish all static boundaries between painting, sculpture and architecture, through the attention to time and through the creation of mobile and participatory spaces. Colombo delved into themes that were shared by other members of the group, creating veritable kinetic objects that were meant to establish a direct relationship with the viewer, who was invited to manually activate the works’ constituent mechanisms. His interest in architectural space and its primary constructive elements led the artist to experiment with new perceptual structures, resulting in his first environment, *Strutturazione cinevisuale abitabile* (*Habitable Kine-Visual Structuralization*, 1964), reconstructed on the occasion of this exhibition. Also included are other important historical environments: *After-Structures* (1966) and *Zoom Squares* (*Quadrati*

deformati) (*Zoom Squares – Distorted Squares*, 1970), characterized by movements of light, and the wellknown *Spazio elastico* (*Elastic Space*) – for which Colombo received First Prize at the 1968 Venice Biennale. In the *Elastic Space*, the movement of the fluorescent elastic strings illuminated by Black light creates surprising effects that lead to the public's spatial disorientation.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Colombo created more complex practicable spaces without the earlier works' electronic element. This was the genesis for the *Bariestesie* (*Baresthesias*, 1974-75) and *Topoestesie* (*Topoesthesias*, 1975-77) elementary structures characterized by the use of manipulated and distorted inclined planes, arches, stairs, columns, planks and cylinders, where the visitor's passage is an essential component of the work.

A strong interest in industrially-derived techniques and materials which Colombo shared with his brother, designer Joe Colombo – goes hand in hand with attention to perceptual and specifically tactile dynamics. The works he created call for the active involvement of the viewer, invited to manipulate them in accordance with procedures that are not only tactile and optical, but also encourage a sensory relationship and experience that is almost nocturnal – suspended between ordinary existence and dream.

The retrospective at Castello di Rivoli includes a wide-ranging selection of works that retrace the artist's entire career. The exhibition in the Manica Lunga begins with Colombo's early *gouaches* and ceramics and with some of his hanging mobile works: slender geometric structures in metal that define space as something fluid and changing. The subsequent, darkened environment contains works that surprise and involve the visitor through effects of light. In *0↔220 Volt* (1977-91) the intermittent lighting sources convey a continuous transformation, while in the *Cromostrutture* (*Chromostructures*, 1961-70) an analogous task is entrusted to mutations in color. Colombo's interest in the user-work relationship can already be seen in his ceramic sculptures, some of which are composed of manipulable elements; but this interest becomes more evident in mature works, including the *Rilievi intermutabili* (*Intermutable Reliefs*, 1959), composed of rubber surfaces that change when underlying spheres or cylinders are pushed; *In-Out* (1959-63) and the *Superfici in variazione* (*Surfaces in Variation*, 1959) – all works where the formal appearance is modified as a result of the user's manipulation. Works that move also include the *Strutturazioni pulsanti* (*Pulsating Structuralizations*, 1959) which are 'paintings' formed by small standard pieces of polystyrene foam core where a pulsating electromechanical animation creates a disorientation.

The exhibition ends with an extensive selection of architectural models which demonstrate the artist's interest in the design and conceptual phase of his work, although always intended with a sense of play and levity.

Special thanks to the Archivio Gianni Colombo, Milan for their collaboration.

The exhibition was made possible thanks to the support of Fondazione CRT

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Gianni Colombo – a biography

Gianni Colombo was born in Milan on January 1, 1937 to a family of entrepreneurs. He had two brothers, one of whom, Cesare, known in the art world as Joe, became a designer. Colombo attended the Accademia di Belle Arti in Brera (Milan), where he studied painting with Achille Funi and Pompeo Borra. Between 1955 and 1961 he regularly exhibited ceramic works at the *Concorso Nazionale di Faenza* and the *Mostra Nazionale di Gubbio*.

His artistic research was soon characterized by experimentation with different materials and media.

During the 1950s - a period of fervid economic revival, when the art world was marked by lively European debate and by experimentation with new practices in visual culture - Colombo was active in creative circles in Milan. He was close to the Nuclearist group and especially Lucio Fontana and at Spatialism.

In 1959, Colombo founded *Gruppo T* with Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani and Gabriele Devecchi, who were soon joined by Grazia Varisco. The group proposed kinetic, programmed and optical art, where the intervention of the viewer was decisive. The goal was to abolish every static boundary between painting, sculpture and architecture through the creation of interactive spaces. In 1959, Colombo exhibited multi-media works and monochrome reliefs made from felt at the Azimut gallery in Milan, which in those years was a reference point for the most experimental artistic tendencies. Beginning in 1960, *Gruppo T* organized a series of group and solo exhibitions entitled *Miriorama* (which means a thousand images), numbered progressively to emphasize the continuity of a shared and common program. During this period, Colombo explored certain themes common to the other members of the group, such as the idea of an "open" work and viewer interaction.

Colombo's first solo exhibition was *Miriorama 4*. The artist presented his early kinetic works: the *Superfici in variazione* (*Surfaces in Variation*), the *Rilievi intermutabili* (*Intermutable Reliefs*) and *Strutturazioni pulsanti* (*Pulsating Structuralizations*), surfaces with rhythmic movements and electro-mechanical animation. Colombo's goal was to establish a direct relationship with the viewer, who was invited to activate the works' constituent kinetic mechanisms.

In 1962 the members of *Gruppo T* participated as individuals in *Arte programmata. Arte cinetica. Opere moltiplicate. Opera aperta*, an exhibition organized by Bruno Munari and Giorgio Soavi, with a text by Umberto Eco, which was held in the Olivetti shops in Italy and abroad; in the same period, he was also among the founders of the international movement *Nouvelle Tendance*. Exhibitions included *Nove tendencije 2* in Zagreb in 1963 and *Nouvelle tendance. Propositions visuelles du mouvement international* in Paris in 1964.

In 1964 Gianni Colombo and his brother Joe received the Gold Medal for Design at the XIII Milan Triennale, for their *Acrilica* lamp; Gianni also created installations for exhibitions, including *Eurodomus 1* in Genoa. In the 1960s his research was characterized by the need to create practicable and transversable environments and to propose a new field of perception, capable of stimulating the viewer on a psychical-physical level. His first habitable environment, entitled *Strutturazione cinevisuale abitabile* (*Habitable Kine-Visual Structuralization*) was exhibited at the Louvre's Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1964. Colombo created *Strutturazione cinevisuale ambientale* (*Environmental Kine-Visual Structuralization*) the following year for the third *Nova tendencija* exhibition in Zagreb (1965).

Using plays of light, structures in rapid motion and images produced by rhythmic flashes, he experimented with the mechanisms of perception and the possibility of activating residual images (*after-images*) in the retina of the observer. This was the genesis of *After-Structures* (which began in 1964), the *Roto-Optic* works (1964) and the *After-Points* (1965). In 1966 he also created an

environment called the *After-Structures*, within which revolving images of light were projected, punctuated by the action of intermittent flashes.

In 1965 Colombo participated in *Nul* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and in the exhibition *Licht und Bewegung / Kinetische Kunst* at the Kunsthalle in Berne.

After taking part in the exhibition *Lo spazio dell'immagine* in 1967 in Foligno, he participated in *Trigon 67* in Graz, where he showed *Spazio elastico (Elastic Space)* for the first time. In this environment he created a volumetric, mobile grid with elastic strings activated by motors and made phosphorescent by the presence of Black Light. Perhaps the most well known of his environments, this work provokes a perception of the space that varies from person to person. In 1967 Colombo was also invited to the São Paulo Biennale. The following year he participated in the XXXIV Venice Biennale, where he won the prize for painting. Another important international engagement was *documenta 4* in Kassel in 1968.

In 1968, for the exhibition *Tendencije 4* in Zagreb, he created *Zoom Squares*, an environment also shown at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels the following year. This environment is characterized by the projection of luminous squares subject to mutable dimensions onto walls, on the basis of a timed and programmed set of instructions. That same year he also participated in the exhibition *Campo urbano* in Como, where, collaborating with other artists including Gabriele De Vecchi and Davide Boriani, he created an artificial thunderstorm.

During the 1970s, Colombo created new practicable environments that call into question traditional notions of space, body equilibrium and movement. In 1970, he took part in the exhibitions *Amore mio* and *Vitalità del Negativo nell'arte italiana 1960/70*, both curated by Achille Bonito Oliva. The same year, working with the conceptual artist Vincenzo Agnetti, he exhibited the environment *Campo praticabile (Practicable Field)* at Studio Marconi in Milan. Also in collaboration with Agnetti, he created the videotape *Vobulazione e bioeloquenza neg (Wobulation and Bieloquence Neg)*, at the Museo Civico in Bologna in 1970, on the occasion of the exhibition *Comportamenti, progetti, mediazioni*, curated by Tommaso Trini and Renato Barilli. In 1971 Colombo held an important solo exhibition at the Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum in Graz, followed in 1972 by another solo exhibition curated by Giulio Carlo Argan at the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, Colombo directed his research towards the creation of environments characterized by the use of inclined planes, arches, columns and manipulated and distorted architectural elements, where the condition of the visitor's transit is an essential component to the work. This resulted in the *Bariesthesie (Baresthesias, 1974-1975)* and *Topoesthesie (Topoesthesias, 1977)*. The goal of such environments is to modify the viewer's perceptions of place and space, showing the inertia of their otherwise normal use. The environment *Bariesthesia* was first exhibited at Studio Marconi in Milan in 1975 and presented again on various occasions, including the show *Didattica* in Modigliana (1975). That same year, on the occasion of his solo exhibition at the Städtisches Museum in Leverkusen, Colombo installed the project *0«-»220 Volt*, based on contrast of intermittent luminosities.

1976 was an intense year for Colombo, with the artist's participation in the group show *Europa / America. L'astrazione determinata* (Bologna, Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna), Biennale exhibitions in Venice and Sydney (where he presented *Spazio elastico*), and with solo shows at the Kunsthalle in Baden-Baden and in Kiel.

In 1978, the city of Como entrusted Colombo with the design of a public monument dedicated to the theme of the Resistance during World War II. It was inaugurated in 1983. In 1979, working with Emilio Tadini and Gianfranco Pardi, he created *Borgotondo*, a playground in Mirandola (Reggio Emilia). Important recognition of his work as an artist and designer came in the form of his appointment to the position of professor of "Spatial Organization" at the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti in Milan (NABA), where he would also serve as Director beginning in 1985.

In 1981 Colombo won the *Kunst am Bau* competition in Berlin for the creation of a monumental structure in the city (the project was never realized). That same year he developed the environmental work *Luce/ombra (Light/Shade)*, exhibited at Studio Grossetti in Milan, and he also created sets for Adry Boon's film *Plus Echo*, shot in Holland.

In the early 1980s, Colombo began working on *Architetture cacogoniometriche (Cacogoniometric Architectures)*, which he exhibited in solo and group shows in Italy and abroad. In these environments Colombo investigated the structural characteristics of the exhibition space and its primary architectural elements, removed of all decorative value. For the group exhibition *Pier + Ocean. Construction in the Art of the Seventies* at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1980, he altered the architecture of the space, inserting among his own works a frame from the film *A Week (1920)*, where Buster Keaton contemplates the distorted structure of a prefabricated house of his own creation.

In 1984, Colombo created the environment *Architettura cacogoniometrica-Colonne (Cacogoniometric Architecture-Columns)*, exhibited both in a solo exhibition at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan and at the Venice Biennale. Two years later, he returned to set design, for Hans Wolfgang Zender's work *Stephen Climax*, at the Opertheater in Frankfurt. The 1980s were thus characterized by large environmental installations, some of which were outdoor pieces, including the aforementioned permanent installation *Monumento alla Resistenza europea (Monument to the European Resistance, 1983)*, the environmental installation *Architettura cacogoniometrica alpina a Bruno Taut (Alpine Cacogoniometric Architecture to Bruno Taut)*, in 1988, Furkapass, Switzerland and, that same year, *Architettura cacogoniometrica (Cacogoniometric Architecture)* in Morterone (Lecco). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Colombo developed new environments that focused on the concept of "curved space". His final environmental artwork, *Spazio diagonometrico (Diagonometric Space)*, was created in 1992. Exhibited at the Galerie Hoffmann in Friedberg, it consists of large cones of photographic paper activated by electric motors. In the autumn of 1992, he created *Opus Incertum (Uncertain Work)*, his last artwork before his sudden heart failure.

On February 3, 1993 Gianni Colombo died in hospital in Melzo (Milan).