



fiera internazionale d'arte
moderna e contemporanea

international exhibition of
modern and contemporary art

2/4.02.2024
Bologna

Opus Novum #6

Luisa Lambri, *L'Esprit Nouveau*
Curated by Simone Menegoi

In collaboration with Thomas Dane Gallery

Padiglione de L'Esprit Nouveau, Bologna
1° February - 3 March 2024

Annually since 2019, Arte Fiera has commissioned a celebrated Italian artist to create a new work to be presented alongside the fair. This programme, *Opus Novum*, has previously commissioned works from Flavio Favelli (2019), Eva Marisaldi (2020), Stefano Arienti (2021), Liliana Moro (2022), and Alberto Garutti (2023).

In 2024 the recipient of the commission is Luisa Lambri (b. Como, 1969), an internationally acclaimed Italian artist working with photography, known mainly for her abstract images of modernist artworks and architecture. Lambri does not, however, photograph buildings any more than Giorgio Morandi (b. Bologna, 1890, d. Bologna, 1964) painted cups and bottles. She investigates the relationship between space and light through the filter of the photographic process. Like Morandi, who manipulated the objects he painted – assembling them, covering them with paint – to shape them into his vision, Lambri also profoundly alters the subjects of her photographs in digital post-production. What we see in her images is not what she saw through her lens, but rather a re-elaboration that isolates, simplifies, and summarises the original, according to an aesthetic sensibility influenced by 20th-century radical abstraction.

For Arte Fiera, Lambri focuses on two buildings symbolising Bolognese architecture in the '70s: the Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Riola di Vergato (BO), Alvar Aalto's only permanent work in Italy, completed in 1978, and the Padiglione de l'Esprit Nouveau, the exact replica of a temporary pavilion designed by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret in the 1920s, constructed in 1977 at the entrance to the Fair District. Lambri presents a series of entirely new images made in Aalto's church, alongside older images from her archive, inspired by the setting of the Padiglione de l'Esprit Nouveau, which will all be shown here for the first time.

Lambri has chosen the exhibition title (*l'Esprit Nouveau*) not only as an homage to the location of the show, but also after the homonymous journal founded by Le Corbusier, Amedée Ozenfant, and Paul Dermée in 1920. The original pavilion, designed by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret for the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, was conceived as a manifesto of the aesthetic advocated by the journal. In this



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exhibition Lambri emphasises the affinity between her way of using photography and that of the journal's authors who frequently used manipulated or photomontages of architecture rather than orthodox documentation.

In this new body of work Lambri concentrates on two elements of the Church of Santa Maria Assunta: the base of the concrete bell tower and the window of the baptistry. These two subjects, presented in a series of subtle variations, are the only aspects of the building Lambri reveals; avoiding offering an overall and immediately recognisable image of the church as a whole. This is not an unusual choice for the artist: when photographing the work of architects she admires, she systematically avoids iconic views and prefers close-ups taken from a distance that ranges from about 20-30 centimetres to a maximum of 2-3 metres. Her photographs are the result of an intimate, physical relationship with architecture. Lambri's sensitivity to space also extends beyond her work and into the precise relationship between works and the environment in which they are displayed. This process is highly refined and strictly site-specific and results in the architecture of the museum or gallery becoming part of the work itself, suggesting the number of images, their placement, and the method by which they are presented.

In the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, which has unique characteristics (including technical limitations: works cannot be hung on many of the walls), some of the photographs are displayed on individual plinth bases painted white.

The selection of photographs from Lambri's archive was influenced by the pavilion's style, lines, and proportions. It includes images of buildings by Robert Mallet-Stevens, an architect close to Le Corbusier, and by Gerrit Rietveld, Peter Zumthor, and Alberto Campo Baeza.

The exhibition includes fourteen works in all, made between 2000, with Untitled (Therme, #01), and 2023, with the photographs of Santa Maria Assunta. They offer a significant panorama of Lambri's work. Taken as a whole, they reveal the artist's constant attention to the features of buildings which open to the outside and to light: windows, portholes, and skylights. Ultimately light, in all of its forms – weak or intense, sharp or dispersed, at noon or at twilight – is the driving influence behind all of Lambri's work, and architecture the space in which she manipulates it.

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