

**SPERONE WESTWATER**  
257 Bowery New York 10002  
T +1 212 999 7337 F +1 212 999 7338  
www.speronewestwater.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**“Against Nature”: Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni**

14 September – 28 October 2000

Sperone Westwater is pleased to announce a group exhibition featuring paintings by the three post-war Italian artists – **Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana** and **Piero Manzoni**. This exhibition includes work made in the 1950’s and 60’s -- a time of ephemeral artist groups, manifestos and experimentation. “Against Nature” makes reference to the artists’ irreverent use of materials and pictorial techniques, and treatment of the picture as an object. Amidst rapid industrialization, post-war Italy experienced great cultural renewal, with a new alertness to science and technology. Searching for truth in new places, these artists explored materials that came from urban and industrial refuse. Through these new materials – polyester, cotton fibers, cut canvas, burlap, glue, neon, glass etc.-- the canvas became a theatrical place where a new pictorial space could emerge. Destructive and constructive in impulse, Fontana and Manzoni created elegant and graceful forms out of radical and iconoclastic gestures. The center of their activity was Milan, the urban and cultural hub of Italy. In Rome, Burri practiced a more rustic or earthy but no less powerful form of abstraction. These works provoke a self-consciousness in the viewer, as he/she senses a new relationship with the painting as object.

**Alberto Burri** (1915-1995) expanded the expressive possibility of raw and synthetic materials like burlap grain sacks and burnt plastic and glue, creating rich surfaces that evoke organic cycles of nature. The aggressive collage of textures and scar-like lines spoke of war and its atrocities towards culture and art. Many critics have connected the burlap material with the aid that the Allies sent to Italy after the War, which arrived in sacks bearing the Stars and Stripes, stamped with the words ITALY and U.S.A. These original forms were deeply communicative records of construction and deconstruction, both violent and sublime. “Against Nature” will include two seminal “Sacchi” works from 1953 and 1955; a “Ferro” painting made of iron from 1959; and one of his “Cretto” paintings from 1976 of glue, baked in a pizza oven, which yielded a purposeful and exaggerated “craqueleur”.

*(More)*

**Lucio Fontana** (1899-1968), an Argentine by birth, lived most of his professional life in Milan, where he enjoyed numerous exhibitions and enormous success. This exhibition includes examples from his “Oli” series (1960), from his “Pietre” series (1952) with affixed Murano glass fragments, a painting made of copper from his “Metali” series, as well as several “Tagli”, or slashed canvas works. *“The famous hole and cut were not just gashes punched through a canvas, but a way of making the viewer look beyond the physical fact of the painting, to what Fontana called ‘a free space’.”* (Whitfield, S., Hayward Gallery, 2000) Fontana used his art as a vehicle for moving through matter and extensions of pictorial space, incorporated in his theory of “Spazialismo”. It is a powerful polarity - such infinite space existing within the microcosm of the cut hole.

**Piero Manzoni** (1933-1963) despite a tragically short career, substantiated the idea that a painting had great value only in the fact that it existed. Denying the canvas any external meaning or association, he claimed, *“Why not liberate the limitless sense of total space, of pure, absolute light? There is only this to express: being and living.”* This concept was investigated in his notorious “Achromes” – “colorless”, white surfaces made from gathered or folded canvas, which was manipulated with a variety of plaster. These works were signs, or “imprints of humanity” devoid of all color or figurative implications. The exhibition includes three cut canvas collages, a folded canvas, and a cobalt chloride “Achrome”, (which glows in the dark) -- signatures of Manzoni’s cool rationality.

This will be the first exhibition in America to group the work of these three pivotal post-War avant-garde figures together, artists who changed the course of Italian contemporary art with influence well beyond their national borders. Their radical artistic personae continue to fascinate today's younger practitioners – be they painters, sculptors or conceptually based artists.

This is the third historical exhibition Sperone Westwater has assembled on Italian Painting of the fifties and sixties, following our “Gold: Gothic Masters and Lucio Fontana”, 23 January – 13 February 1999 and last January’s “Lucio Fontana”. Catalogues were published for both of these exhibitions.

For further information or photographs, please contact Sperone Westwater at 212-431-3685