

**Inside Other Spaces.
Environments by
Women Artists 1956–1976**
Essay

*Conversation between Andrea Lissoni and Marina Pugliese,
Co-Curators of "Inside Other Spaces. Environments by Women Artists 1956–1976"
at Haus der Kunst München*

Andrea Lissoni Do you recall when we began the research that would have led to *Inside Other Spaces*?

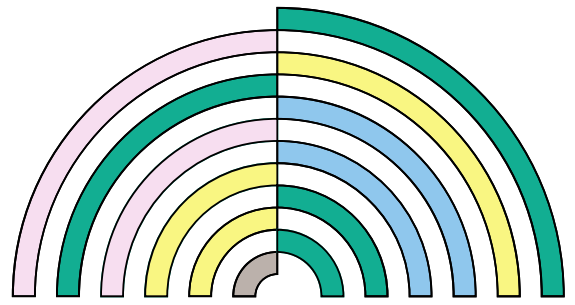
Marina Pugliese In 2020 you wanted to assess the possibility of a group show on the history of the environments and you reached out as I did the first survey of Lucio Fontana environments at HangarBicocca in Milan in 2017 and I was researching at the Getty on an exhibition project on environments in the form of corridors and labyrinths. We started the first survey with a timeline in mind, 1949-1976 and when met we distributed on a big table all possible sources and environments. We would deepen and deepen – all this ended up in the Visual Timeline section of the catalogue - and drafted a first list of well-known and not enough-seen works.

AL We knew that it was a mostly untold story, so we focused on conventional sources – magazines, publications – major events, and main institutions whilst we started trying to organise, making categories, or typologies.

The first main problem emerged: the American lineage – brilliantly generated by the visionary Allan Kaprow in his work and his texts. And then so like many other lineages, it starts looking like a Western history, associated with the Californian Light and Space movement (artists like James Turrell, Robert Irwin, Larry Bell, John McCracken, Doug Wheeler,...) and in Europe with the artist group ZERO, yet ...

MP Something unexpected happened: we noticed a lineage we didn't consider, environments made by women artists. There were not only many remarkable works, but also game-changing, due to their unique use of materials, their size, the high and diverse engagement with the audiences. I think in particular of two environments, *La Menesunda* (*Mayhem*, 1965), by Marta Minujín and Rubén Santantonín, and *Hon – en katedral* (*SHE – a cathedral*, 1966), by Niki de Saint Phalle, in collaboration with Jean Tinguely and Per Olof Ultvedt. We decided to ask ourselves if it was worth continuing in this direction, deepening the research, in view of an exhibition only featuring women artists.

AL Indeed, we were unsure. Would it have made sense to open an exhibition of only women artists in 2023 at Haus der Kunst? Would that have been perceived as incoherent, or belatedly tokenising? We reached out to colleagues and specialists, in particular to Maristella Casciato, senior curator of architectural collections at the Getty Research Institute and Francesco Guzzetti, senior Lecturer of modern and contemporary art at the University of Florence who, already in the first closed-doors



workshop highly encouraged us to move forward. We came up with a title, that highlights the question of different spaces. We shall emphasise spaces, shouldn't we?

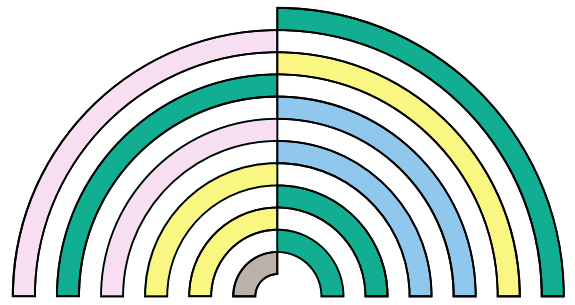
MP Yes, Space is the key. In fact, the room is a matrix with environments, which are immersive artworks created by the artist to modify the given space. In the case of women, there's an idea of ephemerality and nomadism ... As if building shelters is vital more than building walls. Every environment in the show could be seen as transparent, complex yet open, visible, and perceivable from the outside as well as from the inside. We nevertheless worked for three years on the exhibition, why do you think it took so long?

AL We wanted to research in depth. We involved the conservator Barbara Ferriani, who is an expert in material sources and forensically worked on researching the environments of Laura Grisi, Lea Lublin, Nanda Vigo and Tania Mouraud (three of them reconstructed for the first time since their appearance), and set a working team composed by ourselves, Hanna Kriegleder, the Head of Exhibition organisation and production at Haus der Kunst, Anne Pfautsch (preceded by Monika Senz), curatorial fellow and for each artist we tried to reach out to scholars who already conducted research in the past, therefore we extended the collaboration to colleagues all over the world, from Brazil and Argentina to Japan and Lithuania.

Also, we involved Giovanni Rubino who collaborated with us on the timeline and the bibliography. The checklist took its first shape, and we began asking for some loans and studying replicas. We intensified our research on the environments by Judy Chicago, Tania Mouraud, and Marta Minujín, with whom eventually we worked in collaboration. We also asked for loans we couldn't unfortunately obtain such as Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Room (Phalli's Field)*, 1965, and Carla Accardi, *Triplice Tenda*, 1969-71. We knew that the accessibility to the work was crucial to us, and of course, this brought to choices in the case of original artworks or historic replicas. Here comes also the first clarification, defining the differences between a reconstruction, a replica, and a loan.

MP A reconstruction is basically the remake of an environment staged for the first time after the artist's death. In case of an artwork rebuilt by the artist or under her close guidance, it is indicated as a "replica." In the end thanks to the extensive research carried out, *Inside Other Spaces* presents two environments never reconstructed before: Nanda Vigo, *Ambiente cronotopico* (1967) and Aleksandra Kasuba, *Spectral Passage* (1975).

Three reconstructed with relevant changes in dialogue with the artist or their estate: Lygia Clark, *A casa é o corpo. Penetração, ovulção, germinação, expulsão* (1968); Laura Grisi, *Vento di Sud-Est (Wind Speed 40 Knots)* (1968); Lea Lublin, *Penetración/Expulsión (del Fluvio Subtunal)* (1970). And three replicas produced in collaboration with the artists themselves, two of which updating the original environments on the basis of their requests: Marta Minujín, *¡Revuélquese y viva!* (1964); Judy Chicago, *Feather Room* (1966–2023); and Tania Mouraud, *We used to know* (1970–2023). Additionally, four



environments are loans: Tsuruko Yamazaki, *Red (Shape of Mosquito Net)* (1956); Lucio Fontana and Nanda Vigo, *Ambiente Spaziale: "Utopie", nella XIII Triennale di Milano* (1964); Maria Nordman, *FILMROOM EXHALE 1967–PRESENT* (1967–Present); and Faith Wilding, *Crocheted Environment (Womb Room)* (1972). But how would you define an environment?

AL An environment, is an immersive artwork isolated from the surrounding space. Following the definition that Allan Kaprow gave in *Environment, Assemblage & Happenings*, New York, 1966: "... Environments must be walked into [...] In any event, a fuller involvement with actual space is important [...] expanding the work, until it fills an entire space or evolves one, thus becoming an environment. [...]".

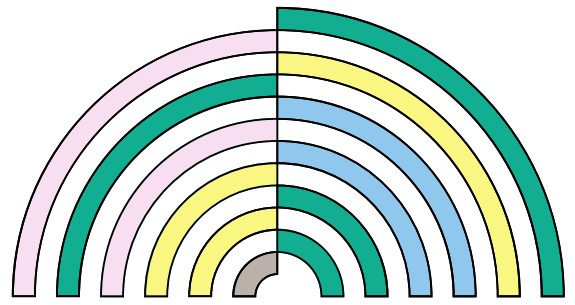
MP We always wanted this exhibition to be an experience. An experience of a different kind. We had ongoing conversations with Hanna Kriegleder – who worked on the exhibition design with her team – that we extended eventually to Learning and Engagement and Visitors Service teams to get to the point of generating a unique experience: notably, we wished visitors' memories not being jeopardised by taking in and out shoes nor queueing in front of the artworks for the sake of a holistic and harmonic journey.

Hence, the idea of a soft floor across galleries was developed alongside an antechamber with benches and a hanging system with bags to contain visitors' shoes. In the first room, the audience encounters also the "score": what it is, and why did you want the public reading it at the beginning of *Inside Other Spaces*?

AL As well as a traditional introduction text, I wrote a short text that I intend as a tuning fork, an instrument that prepares the visitor for the mood we wanted to set. We would like the visitors to move differently, to think with their bodies, to take their time, not to follow the walls and reading, rather to move freely and experience. To become cats, that's the end of the text.

MP Why do you call it score?

AL I see it as a written representation of a loose musical composition, which is the exhibition. All parts are presented and arranged one below the other, the visitor is free to interpret recalling it. It might be also the secret music for a film, whose character are all 12 environments. Then comes the display, we wished to combine all works as a composition. We had spatial constraints – the galleries of the East galleries at Haus der Kunst and their peculiar very high ceilings and doors – we were keen to generate a unique interconnected experience featuring artworks visually in dialogue across galleries, but also not to blend substantial differences: we promised ourselves to respect individualities and always had in mind that this was a proposal rather than uniform group show.



We humbly had some foundational models in mind, such as *This is Tomorrow*, Whitechapel Gallery, 1956, London, *Dylaby* in Amsterdam, 1962, *Luz Sonido, Movimeinto* in Bogota, 1969), all exhibitions that transformed the display of the individual works into an actual overarching environment.

MP Art history and new narratives are the backbones of the exhibition. As the whole history of the environments, the necessity of highlighting the fundamental contribution given by women artists, we were always convinced that the ending date would have been 1976. It's the year of the exhibition "Ambiente/Arte" curated by Italian critic and curator Germano Celant at the XXXVII Venice Biennale. The exhibition featured environments (Ambiente is the Italian word for Environment) and their precedents, and was divided into two sections – the forerunners (Jackson Pollock, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Allan Kaprow, Piero Manzoni, and Louise Nevelson – and the contemporaries (among whom Vito Acconci, Michael Asher, Joseph Beuys, Daniel Buren, Dan Graham, Robert Irwin, Jannis Kounellis, Sol LeWitt, Mario Merz, Bruce Nauman, Maria Nordman, Blinky Palermo, and Doug Wheeler). It shall be noted that indeed there were three women artists in the exhibition – Louise Nevelson, Carla Accardi, and Maria Nordman – however, it is clear that the exhibition was Western-centric.

Nevertheless, it was crucial, not only because it was the first and perhaps the only group show on the history of the environments, but also because since the mid-1970s the word environment faded until it disappeared, taken over by the new word installation, that imposes itself since. It shall be noted that nowadays, every environment can be considered as an installation – albeit the word didn't exist until the late 1970s – whilst not every installation is an environment. We decided to render the new narrative that *Inside Other Spaces* proposes in the room dedicated to the *Timelines* gallery.

AL It's a room that through six projections aims to give as much context as possible to both the history of the environments and the research we conducted. We present a slideshow consisting of a visual timeline that features a selection of the environments exhibited around the world between 1956 and 1976, a second one showcasing the research we made to reconstruct or replicate the environments on display, a time-lapse of the installation of the exhibition and the 3D animations that guided our ideas of the display, the exhibition's video, with interviews to ourselves and the artists and, last but not least, the original films of *La Menesunda* (*Mayhem*, 1965), by Marta Minujín and Rubén Santantonín, and *Hon – en katedral* (*SHE – a cathedral*, 1966), by Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Per Olof Ultvedt, showing respectively the opening and the construction of both ground-breaking environments.

This room is a sort of visual catalogue, containing the research, the archival information, and the making of and behind the scenes of *Inside Other Spaces*. There are many and more specialistic details that are shared in the catalogue which we look forward to receiving in December. The wall texts are as accurate as possible, however, among the many stories that deserve to be told one is striking, the relationships between

Lucio Fontana and Gutai, the triangle Italy-Japan-Latin-America in the 1950s, which all are the background for having presented two artworks by Nanda Vigo in the exhibition.

MP We begin the exhibition with an environment made in 1956 by Tsuruko Yamazaki, as the contribution of the Japanese group Gutai to the history of environments and performances comes very early and is crucial. The group founded by Jiro Yoshihara had a magazine, titled Gutai and used it as a vehicle to spread their research but also to invite other artists as Fontana, who had the cover with a work, as contributors. In Europe, Fontana was regarded by the ZERO group and the Gruppo T as a harbinger for his environmental research, and the Gutai were supported by the French art critic Michel Tapié who organised exhibitions for them. Nanda Vigo was part of that scene, as an artist and as she organised the first Nul exhibition in Milan, in the very studio of Lucio Fontana. On the other hand, the Argentinian scene was extraordinarily rich, original, and powerful, it nurtured a diverse and prolific panorama of fundamental artists. Within this landscape, Marta Minujín and Lea Lublin are extremely important artists, whose major relevance internationally and in art history is yet to be acknowledged.

We could continue for hours, but we do prefer to leave the rest of the talking to the wall texts in the exhibition and to the catalogue. I nevertheless have one more question: why do you think environments are so important nowadays? You always insisted that a historical exhibition was fundamental.

AL This has to do with the Haus der Kunst vision. My approach is based on strong continuity throughout the years across projects and exhibitions: we look at the present anticipating the future, and having the past in mind. Younger artists are more and more conceiving immersive works, using or not high-end technologies, they seem to anticipate spaces where borders between real and virtual space are blending, giving shape to multiverses. This is why we decided to present WangShui solo exhibition *Window of Tolerance* alongside *Inside Other Spaces*, in continuity with the 2022 sequence Fujiko Nakaya, Dumb Type, and Carsten Nicolai: not only all exhibitions are connected across galleries but also throughout time, as part of a holistic program in which everything echoes at resonates. There is a red thread that bridges Heidi Bucher, Fujiko Nakaya, Joan Jonas, Dumb Type, Carsten Nicolai, WangShui, and the live exhibitions *Echoes*, and *Inside Other Spaces*, bridge them all providing a historical background. In this sense, *Inside Other Spaces*, brings ideally together all strands: whilst looking back to the environments, we highlight what is missing from historic narratives as well as questioning canons and traditions to bring to the fore those voices historically set aside. On the other hand, we are keen on tackling contemporary visionary practices and fundamental social preoccupations.

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