

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

Press release

AZIMUT/H. Continuity and Newness
Curator: Luca Massimo Barbero
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Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice
#AzimuthVenice

One can't rise off the ground by running or jumping: one needs wings.
Piero Manzoni

The exhibition *AZIMUT/H. Continuity and Newness* is a tribute to the post World War II neo-avantgarde in Italy, currently of widespread interest to critics, curators and the general public, and in particular to Azimut/h, the gallery and the review founded in 1959 in Milan by **Enrico Castellani** (b. 1930) and **Piero Manzoni** (1933 – 1963). The exhibition reveals Azimut/h's central position in the panorama of Italian and international art of those years: like a creative earthquake it was one of the great catalysts of Italian and European visual and conceptual culture of the time and an intellectual bridge between a new, revolutionary generation and the most contemporary developments in art.

Azimut/h emerged in Milan after World War II on the threshold of the economic boom known as the 'Italian miracle', of which Milan itself was one of the principal motors. Like a thunderbolt of intense activity, between September 1959 and July 1960, Azimut/h is evermore acknowledged in the collective consciousness of critics and historians as a critical episode, marked by radical experimentation, energized by its ties to some of the major figures of the art scene in those years and by lively international dialogue. Different in the spelling of their titles, Azimut (the gallery) and *Azimuth* (the review) together formulated 'a new artistic conception' (title of the second edition of the review, published in four languages, as well as of one of the more important group exhibitions of the gallery), that thrived on the dialectic of 'continuity and newness' (the title of an article by Castellani published in the second issue of *Azimuth*).

Underlying the exhibition, which is philological in conception, is the idea that each work on display derives from the review, from the gallery, or from the orbit of Azimut/h's contacts. In this way the visitor is plunged into a space where he or she is intellectually, almost physically in contact with the protagonists of this extreme avantgarde of the late 50s early 60s, consecrated in important international exhibitions, with special attention given to American Neo-Dada which *Azimuth* promoted in advance of its general reception by critics. The art historical importance of the exhibition is founded on the cooperation of the archives and foundations of the artists that participated in the movement (especially the Fondazione Piero Manzoni and the Fondazione Enrico Castellani), as well as institutions that have agreed to lend works of art, such as Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, the Herning Museum of Contemporary Art (both in Denmark), and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The exhibition installation is articulated in six galleries, in which each work of art is eloquent of a certain artistic and historic episode, each narrating its own part of the story, like so many

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windows offering different points of view on the Azimut/h experience, and supported by a rich selection of documents, many of them unpublished.

The exhibition opens with a section dedicated to the central figures and their fellow travelers who constitute the ideal matrix of this context: Lucio Fontana and Alberto Burri, the Americans Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, and the closest, most fraternal artists in the movement, Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely. A room of astonishingly original works by Manzoni and rare canvases by Castellani follows this, constituting the germinal nucleus of the new artistic vision. Subsequent rooms present Azimut/h's national and international network, with art by Agostino Bonalumi, Dadamaino, Gianni Colombo, Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker, among others. Particular attention is given to the 'object-container', with works that have become icons of contemporary art such as the *Lines* and *Artist's Shit* by Manzoni, in dialogue with comparable creations by Johns and Mimmo Rotella. A multimedia project, realized by Zenith, enables the visitor to access the documentary and visual world of Azimuth through photographs and period films, which are the basic materials of research. Again, visitors will have the opportunity to become 'living sculptures', stepping onto Manzoni's 'magic base', the pedestal that transformed all those who stood on it into works of art.

With *AZIMUT/H. Continuity and Newness*, Luca Massimo Barbero, Associate Curator of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, adds to a series of exhibitions he has curated researching the art scene in the postwar decades. The exhibition anticipates another celebration of the European neo-avantgardes of that time: *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s*, opening October 10, 2014, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, curated by Valerie Hillings, Curator and Manager, Curatorial Affairs Abu Dhabi Project. The German group Zero (1957-66) and the international artists that were drawn to it, including those of Azimut/h, had in common the ambition to redefine and transform art in the postwar years.

The catalogue of *AZIMUT/H. Continuity and Newness*, published by Marsilio Editori in Italian and English, documents and extends the exhibition itself, with more than 600 pages of scholarship, plates, comparative imagery, unpublished materials, and reproductions of periodical literature, being the research conducted for the exhibition, and a series of essays covering different aspects of Azimut/h, by Luca Massimo Barbero, Flaminio Gualdoni, Antoon Melissen, Francesca Pola and Federico Sardella.

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