LUCIO FONTANA: SPATIAL ENVIRONMENT
(Ambiente Spaziale)

On View from January 23 to April 21, 2019

Educator Resource Guide
Grades 1 - 12
Dear Educator,

Ambiente Spaziale (Spatial Environment) is a collaboration between El Museo del Barrio and The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition Lucio Fontana: On the Threshold [on view at the Met Breuer and curated by Estrellita B. Brodsky and Iria Candela].

Ambiente Spaziale merges the characteristics of painting, sculpture and architecture in order to go beyond the very notion of these artistic languages and create a space where visitors can walk through and experience. The installation highlights the universal themes of space [dialectics], dimensions and sculpture. Works of photography, prints, sculpture, and ceramics accompany paintings in this multi-media exhibition that highlights the iconic presence of the human form in various ways.

We hope you will use the educational materials provided in this guide as a resource to support the different areas of study in your classroom and to help prepare your students for a visit to the museum. To help you plan your lessons and units, we have included contextual information and a classroom project guide with discussion questions and prompts.

We look forward to having you join us for a visit to El Museo del Barrio this season!

The Education Department of El Museo del Barrio
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About The Artist: Lucio Fontana

Lucio Fontana was born to Italian-immigrant parents, Lucia Bottini and Luigi Fontana, on February 19, 1899 in Rosario (a province of Santa Fe) Argentina. In the mid-19th century, Rosario, Santa Fe was the second largest city of Argentina and a favorite destination for Italian emigrants - so much so, that in 1900, half of the city’s population was of Italian origin.

Fontana spent his early childhood in Italy and traveled back to Argentina in 1905, where he lived until 1922, working as a sculptor with his father. During this time, Fontana began to live the life of a gaucho, distinguishing himself, according to his own account, as a gifted man with a pistol, riding horses while guarding cattle and, most importantly, experiencing the vastness of the Argentinean landscape.

In 1927 Fontana returned to Italy and studied under the sculptor Adolfo Wildt from 1928 to 1930, at the Accademia di Brera. It was there in 1930 that he presented his first exhibition, organized by the Milan art gallery Il Milione. During the following decade he journeyed in Italy and France, working with abstract and expressionist painters. In 1935 he joined the association Abstraction-Création in Paris and from 1936 to 1949 made expressionist sculptures in ceramic and bronze. In 1939, he joined the Corrente, a Milan group of expressionist artists.

- Can you think of a city where immigrants have greatly influenced the demographics?
In 1940 he returned to Argentina. In 1946, he founded the Altamira academy in Buenos Aires, together with a group of his students, and made public the Manifiesto Blanco ("White Manifesto"), where it is stated that "Matter, colour and sound in motion are the phenomena whose simultaneous development makes up the new art". In the text, which Fontana did not sign but to which he actively contributed, he began to formulate the theories that he later expanded as Spazialismo, or Spatialism, in five manifestos from 1947 to 1952.

Following his return to Italy in 1948 Fontana exhibited his first Ambiente spaziale a luce nera (1949) at the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan, a temporary installation consisting of a giant amoeba-like shape suspended in the void in a darkened room and lit by neon light. From 1949 and on, he started the so-called Spatial Concept or slash series, which consisted of holes or slashes on the surface of monochrome paintings, drawing a sign of what he named "an art for the Space Age". He devised the generic title Concetto spaziale ('spatial concept') for these works and used it for almost all of his later paintings. These paintings can be divided into broad categories: the Buchi ('holes'), beginning in 1949, and the Tagli ('slashes'), which he instituted in the mid-1950s.

In the last years of his career, Fontana became increasingly interested in staging his work in the many exhibitions that honored him worldwide, as well as in the idea of purity achieved in his last white canvases.

Shortly before his death he was present at the "Destruction Art, Destroy to Create" demonstration at the Finch College Museum of New York. After returning to Italy, he moved to his mother’s hometown of Comabbio (in the province of Varese, Italy), where he died in 1968.
About The Exhibition: Ambiente Spaziale (1968)

The idea of the Spatial Environment traces to 1949, the same year that Fontana began describing his artworks as “Spatial Concepts”. Produced for the Galleria Naviglia in Milan. This incipient work consisted of abstract sculptures hung from the ceiling that were illuminated by a black-light. In letters to his colleagues in Argentina, Fontana described the Milan pieces as “something very important”, and later recognized it as the conceptual beginning for the Spatial Environments that he realized during the 1960s.

Executed in various locations across the globe ranging from Amsterdam to Minnesota, each of Fontana’s Spatial Environments were integrated into the architecture with unique characteristics including neon; luminous colored lights that saturated the space; labyrinthine walls; and the artist’s characteristic holes and slashes. These innovative environments foreshadowed and continue to influence contemporary artists like Julio Le Parc, a one time student at the Academia Altamira; Yves Klein; artists associated with the kinetic movement such as Carlos Cruz Díaz, Jesus Rafael Soto; and Light and Space artists like James Turrell.

The Spatial Environment (1968) reconstructed at El Museo del Barrio follows the exact specifications of the artist’s final work in this series. Originally conceived in 1968 with the collaboration of Italian architect Aldo Jacober, the installation was presented at documenta 4, the contemporary art exhibition that takes place in Kassel, Germany every five years, and is considered among the most prestigious exhibitions in the world. Created shortly before Fontana’s death, Spatial Environment (1968) is an all-white monochrome labyrinth, whose maze-like path culminates with an example of the artist’s signature slash.

This installation coincides with the exhibition at the Met Breuer Lucio Fontana: On the Threshold (on view January 23 through April 14, 2019), curated by Iria Candela, Estrellita B. Brodsky Curator of Latin America in the Met’s Department of Modern and Contemporary Art.
Classroom Project Guides: Grades 1-5

Preparing for Your Visit to El Museo del Barrio

The following preparation is intended to support teachers in integrating the exhibition Spatial Environment (1968) on view at El Museo del Barrio into their curriculum. Use the discussion questions and activities outlined in the guide before and after your visit to foster conversation with your students.

Feel free to come to the museum with the material you created in your classroom or send images to educationprograms@elmuseo.org.

We will try to include your work in your visit.

Art Exploration:

- When you think of art, what is the first thing that comes to mind?
  - Brainstorm with your students and write down their responses.

- Follow up with more questions like:
  - What do you like about art?
  - Are there artworks at home, at school or around the neighborhood?
  - What has been an impactful artwork for you? Why?
Before Your Visit to El Museo del Barrio

Objective:
Students will begin to familiarize themselves with vocabulary used to describe Lucio Fontana’s art. Students will read to the book Lucio Fontana by Fausto Gilberti to better connect with the artist, his practice and purpose.

Materials:
Lucio Fontana by Fausto Gilberti available in PDF by emailing educationprograms@elmuseo with subject line: Lucio Fontana Resources.

Instructions:
Before reading the story, introduce vocabulary – ask students what each of the following words mean to them or what they think the word means before providing meaning or words they hear within the vocabulary that they have heard before.

Artist: a person who produces works in any of the arts that are primarily subject to aesthetic criteria.

Two-Dimensional (2D): (of a work of art) having its elements organized in terms of a flat surface, especially emphasizing the vertical and horizontal character of the picture plane: the two-dimensional structure of a painting.

Three-Dimensional (3D) [Art]: having, or seeming to have, the dimension of depth as well as width and height.
Spatialism: An art form titled by Lucio Fontana that goes beyond 2-D and 3-D art.

- Read Lucio Fontana by Fausto Gilberti
- Let’s reflect together: What did you like most about the story? What would you ask the artist if he were visiting the classroom? (Write these question on a note card)
Extending Your Visit to El Museo del Barrio: Classroom Activity

- **3D Cube Making**

**Objective:**
Students will understand the idea of 2D object in relation to a 3D object in order to begin understanding the idea behind Spatial Art. Students will interact through an art making to understand how to transform a 2D object to a 3D object.

**Materials:**
- Cube template (available in Appendix I)
- Scissors
- Glue sticks

**Instructions:**
1. Give each student one template
2. Ask students to cut the outline of the shape
3. Explain to students that this shape is considered two-dimensional because it does not have depth.
4. Ask students to think about how they would create a 3D object out of this shape without any other materials - share ideas
5. Ask students to fold along the dotted lines by bringing bring together the outside corners to the middle to create a 3D Box.
6. Glue the corners to secure the structure

Enhance this art making activity by including the following:

- **The Emotions of Color**

**Objective:**
To understand how we think about emotions and their relationship to art.

**Materials:**
- Color Wheel found in Appendix III
- Markers, color pencils, crayons
- Multi texture paper for collage, fabric or paper scraps
- 3D paper sculpture created in previous art making activity *Make sure structures are not yet glued to be able to enhance with this activity.*
Procedure:
Initiate a discussion on colors – talk about objects in the room and have students identify the colors they see. Discuss color preferences in clothing (ex: Why are you wearing a yellow shirt today? Do you feel differently when you wear a color that you like or dislike?) Lead discussion into the ties between colors and emotions.

1. Introduce the color wheel and invite students to provide examples of what objects (ex: the sun is yellow – yellow is serenity, joy and ecstasy. Being out in the sun makes me happy) they can identify that match each emotion.

2. Ask students to dedicate one color and feeling to their sculpture and use materials to interpret that feeling by drawing with that one color or by adding pieces to the sculpture.

3. Spend time sharing each piece by asking students to take turns explaining why they chose that color and its meaning.
Classroom Project Guides: Grades 6-8

Preparing for Your Visit to El Museo del Barrio

The following preparation is intended to support teachers in integrating the exhibition Spatial Environment (1968) on view at El Museo del Barrio into their curriculum. Use the discussion questions and activities outlined in the guide before and after your visit to foster conversation with your students.

Feel free to come to the museum with the material you created in your classroom or send images to educationprograms@elmuseo.org.

We will try to include your work in your visit.

Art Exploration:

- When you think of art, what is the first thing that comes to mind?
  - Brainstorm with your students and write down their responses.

- Follow up with more questions like:
  - What do you like about art?
  - Are there artworks at home, at school or around the neighborhood?
  - What has been an impactful artwork for you? Why?
Before Your Visit to El Museo del Barrio

- **Grades 6 - 8 Art Exploration: Emotional Canvas**

**Objective:**
For this activity, students will explore how abstractions can express concepts or moods.

![Lucio Fontana. Concetto spaziale.](image)

**Questions:**
- What do you see? What do you see that makes you think this?
- What materials do you think the artist used to create this piece?
- Does this piece convey an emotion(s) or mood?
**Instructions:**
1. Ask students to think of a time or situation in which they have felt more than one emotion - possibly two conflicting emotions. Have them write words or phrases to describe these emotions. Encourage students to share these situations or moments and how they felt.

2. As a group, open up the discussion - how can we use points or lines to express the two conflicting emotions previously discussed? What kinds of feeling can long, short, light, dark, thick, thin, fast, slow, straight, crooked, or curved lines express? How can lines or shapes interact with each other on the piece of paper to show conflicting emotions? Will they be interwoven, separated, etc.? What other marks might help to express the emotion?

3. Ask students to explore the emotions they felt using just lines and marks. Limit students to a pencil or colored pencils and one piece of plain white paper. They can also use geometry tools: a compass, a protractor, a ruler.

4. Pairing up students, ask them to trade emotion(s) with their partner and attempt to create their own representation of the emotion(s). Once they have finished, they should compare their results. How did each student make different choices?

**FUN FACT!**
Fontana’s slash was so famous that many tried to copy his style. To make his work authentic, he added an anecdote of his life on the back of each canvas.
Extending Your Visit to El Museo del Barrio: Classroom Activity

In the 1940’s, Fontana began to puncture and cut the surface of his canvases. In fact, a hole or ‘buchi’ in his canvases eventually became his signature gesture. What may seem as a simple gesture became groundbreaking in the arts for his cut broke the membrane of two-dimensionality in order to highlight the space behind the picture.

- **Art Exploration: 3 Dimensional Cutout Card**

**Objective:**
This project aims for students to experience the transformation of a two-dimensional object into a three-dimensional one by using every day materials.

**Materials:**
- 8.5” x 11” white paper
- 8.5” x 11” card stock in contrasting color
- Scissors
- Glue stick
- Ruler in centimeters
Instructions:
1. Take one piece of paper, hold it horizontal and then fold it in half, so it looks like a book.
2. Cut through the folded edge along the dotted line above. The cut should start half way up and down the fold and go half way to the right along the folded paper.
3. Now fold over one half and crease, as shown above.
4. Open up the folded-over creased flap, and fold it inside itself.
5. Next, make two cuts half way through each of the folded edges, at the dotted lines.
6. The cuts will be half as long, and again the cuts should be half way up and down each edge and go only half way through the piece. Be careful not to cut too far!
7. Once you’ve made the two cuts, fold over and crease the flaps. How can you tell which ones to fold over? You want to end up with something looking like a staircase.
8. Next, you unfold the flaps, and invert them.
9. Repeat the same cutting, folding and inverting, but this time you need to make four cuts instead of two. Fold and flip the flaps.
10. Repeat this again, making eight cuts total to have your final product.
11. Choose a piece of heavier paper in a different color, and fold it in half. Place the cutout inside it, like the pages of a book. Open it gently, and apply glue to the solid areas of the fractal cutout, and then glue it in place inside the folded outer paper.

*This great activity was provided by the Fractal Foundation: https://fractalfoundation.org/resources/fractivities/fractal-cutout/
Classroom Project Guides: Extended Assignment

Middle School and High School

Cutting the canvas surface open with the knife, Fontana did not intend to destroy. Rather, he showed the viewer what lay beyond the canvas: real space, as opposed to the traditional illusory space of painting. This unconventional approach at the time can be seen as a radical gesture for it unframed what art is and what art can be. It is neither a painting nor a sculpture but the expansion of both.

Research Project:

- Start your project by asking your student to research the following questions:
  - What is Deconstruction in art?
  - How many artist can you find were influenced by Fontana's work?

Invite them to create a presentation with images for the class.

- After the presentation, ask your students to get back to their findings and look for Latinx, Latin American or Caribbean artist who uses with Deconstruction in art and/or who were influenced by Fontana:
  - What did they find?
  - Who are/were they?

Invite your students to share their findings.
Before or After Your Visit to El Museo del Barrio

- **Art Exploration: 2-Dimension Collage or Sculpture**

**Objective:**

This workshop takes students on a journey across three different art techniques; drawing, collage and assemblage, taking the process of two-dimensional picture making into three-dimensional space, thus the picture becomes sculptural.

**Materials:**

- Colored Construction Paper
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Scrap paper
- String

**Instructions:**

1. This can be a collaborative or individual activity in which students will collect as many materials as possible and begin to tear the different types of paper in a variety of shapes and sizes.
2. Afterwards, they can draw over the different types of paper or surfaces.
3. They can start organizing their collage and attaching their work to the string.
4. Once finished, they lift their work to see the pieces hang and see their sculpture appear.
Extending Your Visit to El Museo del Barrio: Light and Space

Fontana’s idea of spatial art, a concept that would underpin all of his work after the Second World War, involved two things: a revolution in the materials used to make art and a transformation in the conventional relationship between art object and surrounding space.

- **Art Exploration: Light Environment**

**Objective:**
In this project students will examine characteristics of light and can analyze the two most observable behavioral characteristics of light: *reflection* and *refraction*.

**Materials:**
- Colored glass in different sizes and shapes
- White surface
- Natural or artificial light (flashlight)
- Cardboard box

**Instructions:**
1. Choose a big cardboard box and inside it organize the different sized glass as you like.
2. Afterwards, make holes on the cardboard box of where you would like the light to travel through.
3. Once everything is set and everything is dark, turn on the flashlight and explore how the colors travel within the space.
Glossary

Abstract: the depiction of subject matter in a non-representational manner.

Abstract Expressionism: A non-representational school of painting that arose after World War II, characterized by emotions and feelings expressed through action, and the use of color and form.

Assemblage: A sculpture constructed by combining objects or materials not traditionally used in making art.

Collage: A two-dimensional work of art made by gluing pieces of pictures, paper and/or found materials.

Color wheel: A diagram representing the spectrum of colors and their relationship to each other.

Environment: the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates.

Gaucho: is a skilled horseman, reputed to be brave and unruly. The gaucho is a national symbol in Argentina and Uruguay, but is also a strong culture in the far south region of Brazil. Gauchos became greatly admired and renowned in legends, folklore and literature and became an important part of their regional cultural tradition.

The gaucho in some respects resembled members of other nineteenth century rural, horse-based cultures such as the North American cowboy, the Chilean huaso, the Peruvian chalan or morochuco, the Venezuelan or Colombian llanero, the Hawaiian paniolo, the Mexican charro or the Portuguese campino. According to the Diccionario de la lengua española, in its historical sense a gaucho was “a mestizo who, in the 18th and 19th centuries, inhabited Argentina, Uruguay, and Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, was a migratory horseman, and adept in cattle work.” In Argentina and Uruguay today a gaucho is, according to the same source, simply “A country person, experienced in traditional livestock farming.”

Immigrant: a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

Light: is the form of energy that makes it possible to see things: the brightness produced by the sun, by fire, by a lamp, etc.

Migration: movement from one part of something to another.

Monochromatic: Referring to a color scheme that uses one hue with the addition of black and white.

Reflection: is the bouncing of light off a surface, the simplest example being the reflection of a laser beam off a mirror.
**Refraction:** Refraction of light involves the 'bending' of light as it travels from one medium to another, and is the result of a change in the velocity of light. An example of this 'bending' can be seen with a spoon placed in a glass of water.

**Sculpture:** is any artwork made by the manipulation of materials resulting in a three-dimensional object.

**Spatial concept:** define the relationship between us and objects, as well as the relationships of objects to each other.

**Three Dimensional Space (3D):** A three-dimensional object is solid rather than flat, because it can be measured in three different directions, usually the height, length, and width. In art, it includes sculpture, installation and performance art, craft and product design.

**Two Dimensional Space (2D):** A two-dimensional object or figure is flat rather than solid so that only its length and width can be measured. Of a work of art, having its elements organized in terms of a flat surface, especially emphasizing the vertical and horizontal character of the picture plane.

**World War I:** also called “First World War” or “Great War”, was an international conflict that in 1914–18 embroiled most of the nations of Europe along with Russia, the United States, the Middle East, and other regions. The war pitted the Central Powers—mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey—against the Allies—mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and, from 1917, the United States. It ended with the defeat of the Central Powers. The war was virtually unprecedented in the slaughter, carnage, and destruction it caused.

**World War II:** also called “Second World War”, conflict that involved virtually every part of the world during the years 1939–45. The principal belligerents were the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan—and the Allies—France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, China. The war was in many respects a continuation, after an uneasy 20-year hiatus, of the disputes left unsettled by World War I. The 40,000,000–50,000,000 deaths incurred in World War II make it the bloodiest conflict, as well as the largest war, in history.
Common Core Standards for College and Career Readiness

CCSS.Math.CONTENT.7.G.A.3
Describe the two-dimensional figures that result from slicing three-dimensional figures, as in plane sections of right rectangular prisms and right rectangular pyramids.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.R1
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.R2
Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.R7
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.R9
Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Appendix I: World Map
Appendix II: 3D Cutout
Resources and Acknowledgments

Dr. Anthony White, lecturer, School of Art History, Cinema, Classical Studies and Archaeology, University of Melbourne (2005).


Reflection and Refraction of Light & It’s Applications

https://hubpages.com/education/Reflection-and-Refraction

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