

Luciano Fabro Disegno In-Opera

a cura di / edited by
Giacinto Di Pietrantonio

in collaborazione con / in collaboration with
Silvia Fabro (Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro, Milano)

Luciano Fabro. Disegno In-Opera

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a cura di / edited by Silvia Fabro

English Texts

Bergamo's *Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea* opens its new season of exhibitions with a display that stands at the very crossroads of those commitments, skills and emotions that a prestigious cultural institution should take upon itself: the study and promotion of leading figures on the national and international art scenario, affording the attentive public new keys for reading and appreciating contemporary art. The exhibition, titled *Luciano Fabro. Disegno In-Opera*, addresses the essentials of art history, in the person of the great Italian master, who died just recently. Fabro attributed to drawing the purely intellectual function of a research tool, one for defining forms, but equally a means of making his friends and other artists aware of his way of thinking. The underpinning to all this was an aesthetic philosophy rooted in the 1400s which, through stroke and line, led to the definition and conquest of the use of space that are such typifying traits of Italian art. The corpus of drawings that are the basis of the exhibition are shown in relation to a series of great plastic works that recount the artist's intense career.

The partnership between GAMeC, in the figure of Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, the exhibition's director and curator, and the Archivio Carla e Luciano Fabro, in the figure of Silvia Fabro, director and daughter of the artist, spotlights Fabro's classicality and his equally astonishing contemporaneity, his rigorous thinking and his equally generous intellectual disposition towards his students, "sheets" of his thoughts that testify the thoroughness of the creative process on an equal footing with his works, engaging the public in a compelling, richly expressive interaction with the great master.

Following the exhibition at GAMeC in Bergamo, the exhibition will travel to the

CIAC in Foligno, thanks to the valuable and significant cooperation that has been established between the two cultural institutions. This sharing underscores the will and cultural commitment that distinguishes the entire city of Bergamo and it is particularly significant with an eye to its candidacy for European Culture Capital 2019.

Claudia Sartirani

Bergamo City Councillor for Culture

The approach seen in the exhibition *Luciano Fabro. Disegno In-Opera* reflects the spirit of exploration and diffusion of contemporary artistic culture that GAMeC – *Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea* has chosen to pursue with resolve and coherence.

This is the same experimental character also pursued by the CIAC in Foligno, which has shared the opportunity to transfer the exhibition as a co-production, highlighting once more the evident importance of creating shared projects that can inspire new synergies and dialogues.

The exhibition investigates a little-known aspect of artist's activity, showing highly significant works that cover half a century of artistic research and reflection. The period is described mainly through drawings and designs, works still to be fully examined – this is the first exhibition in Italy that gathers together such an extensive and detailed selection – but decisive for achieving a complete overview of the artist.

The drawings are those that Fabro so often completed and gifted to people closest to him, which also means they were distant from him if we bear in mind the vast international recognition that the

artist reached in his lifetime. It was thanks to the willingness of these people and the affection that binds them to Luciano Fabro that this exhibition is possible, with the works and numerous, rich texts that the catalogue contains.

To document not only his artistic life but also his teaching, which is so important for our museum, this catalogue includes the three drawing lessons that the artist held during the significant years when he was a professor at the Brera Academy and the lecture at École Cantonale d'Art du Valais in Sierre.

Drawings, sculptures, designs, videos, and texts for an exhibition and a catalogue able to describe from a unique research perspective the development of an artist who cannot be overlooked in Italian art.

In particular, we wish to voice our heartfelt thanks to Silvia Fabro, the artist's daughter and the director of the Archivio Luciano e Carla Fabro. Her contribution and her intense commitment were crucial for providing such an intense and unique perspective for the project.

Without her this exhibition would not have been possible.

Mario Scaglia

President of the *Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea* onlus association

The occasion of a major exhibition of the works dedicated to Luciano Fabro testifies to the broad range of interests of the *Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Foligno* and its instrumental company, powerfully committed to investigating – through CIAC's initiatives – not only today's most commonly used artistic languages, but also the majority of expressive techniques, ranging from painting to sculpture, photography and architecture.

Today's exhibition, made possible thanks to the collaboration between our Artistic Director, Italo Tomassoni, and GAMEC's Director, Giacinto Di Pietrantonio (also a member of the CIAC Advisory Committee) and the openness of the artist's daughter, Silvia Fabro, is aimed at offering the public an important opportunity to investigate, study and learn more about the work of an artist unanimously acknowledged as one of the most significant and penetrating figures on the scenario of Italian art in the late twentieth century. Luciano Fabro created works with specific formal and conceptual relevance, using techniques and materials that unite the qualities of material culture with perceptual elements that are powerfully innovative and psychologically enthralling. In fact, it is no accident that Fabro developed an idea of the artist viewed as a figure who transmits experiences to the world without preconceived ideas.

The aim of this exhibition is to offer a series of works and drawings (most of which unpublished) to those who want to investigate and broaden their knowledge of Luciano Fabro's work and ideas, as part of a creative experience to which Foligno also wants to contribute on a level reflecting the artist's importance.

I am grateful for the extensive collaboration and participation committed to setting up an exhibition marked by the complexity and rigour of the works on display, excellently illustrated and documented by the catalogue and layout.

Special thanks go to the GAMEC of Bergamo, which shared the opportunity to co-produce the exhibition with Foligno, the lenders and, above all, Silvia Fabro, who confirmed her unique sensitivity and closeness to the projects of the CIAC, following her contribution and that of the late mas-

ter with the work *In cubo (In Cube)* for the inauguration of the CIAC with the 2009 exhibition *Spazio, tempo e immagine*.

Special thanks go to the CIAC Advisory Committee and the artistic director Italo Tomassoni, who wanted to stage the exhibition at the CIAC.

Lastly, special appreciation goes to the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Foligno, the City of Foligno and all those who made it possible to stage an initiative that marks an important place in the history of the CIAC and the Foundation, confirming the central and significant position of this city on the contemporary art scene, as demonstrated by the public and critical success of the most recent shows in spaces that continue to attract growing attention. I am convinced that this exhibition will gain the interest not only of scholars, critics and specialists, but also of all the enthusiasts who – here as well – care about culture and art, for the human and moral legacy these values represent for our present and, above all, our future.

Giancarlo Partenzi

President Centro per la cultura e lo sviluppo economico Srl

Preparing these exhibitions on my father's drawings has been an opportunity for me to rediscover my father, with his manner of approaching his work, life and relationships with friends.

I have recognized his lightness, his irony, his closeness to the people to whom he dedicated those drawings. Above all, however, I have rediscovered his confidence in arriving at the nucleus of things while presenting it delicately, in the form of a gift.

Silvia Fabro, July 2013

Luciano Fabro

COMPULSORY DRAWING EXERCISE NATURE/FIGURE/POSITION

Brera Art Academy, December 1997

The materials for this series of exercises are: a sketchbook with white pages approximately 33 × 48 centimeters, bearing in mind the possibility of keeping them together so that they can be leafed through.

Let's abandon the high-school tendency to use the "big rolled up" sheet; you need to get used to other rhythms, and then you can go back to the big sheets, but for now it is better to have something more agile.

The sheets should be of different weights and grains. I would get a few pads of different qualities, so that you can work alternately on different types of sheets, so that you begin and end by enjoying a measure of agility, even of the tools.

You also need six pencils, different but normal kinds of pencils, B4-B6, and a stone; choose one that is most suited to this exercise, it should be more or less 10 × 15 centimeters, and preferably irregular. You also need a cauliflower, which should last you at least two days, a condom and a mirror.

The drawings must be made in the order that I will give you, on the same sheet, without compositional intent, but with the possibility of immediate comparison.

Keep the five subjects on each sheet, every time you finish a series start again from the pencils and end with the mirror.

The drawings of each object can be bigger or smaller than the object itself.

As you will have noticed from the start,

I did not give you indication of time because in this exercise it is very difficult to define the time.

In the discipline of drawing, the question of time is decidedly personal; it is determined by many things, there is no categorical time but, as in all things, there is a right time: to figure out the right time of one's own way of drawing is fundamental.

When one draws one must not be too fast, because speed can lead to superficiality and "facile" effects. One cannot be too slow, either, because this can lead to uncertainty in both the sign and the vitality of details.

You will see that in making the first drawings you will be faster than in the subsequent ones, because only gradually you will realize the complexity of the question.

By making one thing and then the other at the same time you can compare the drawings among themselves.

I repeat that you must not make considerations like: "Look how well they go together!" but you should have the capability to concentrate by isolating each subject, even though you have the others nearby on the same sheet; the different drawings should be able to be placed in comparison, at the same time, even if you might have used different techniques, ways and paces of work. One same problem in one of the drawings could be badly resolved, but in the near-by drawing it could be resolved well.

Drawing A

Draw five pencils together until you note the difference between one and the other. This exercise serves to identify the "key detail" that makes an image unique, as unique as something is.

The problem of the image is what distinguishes the bad painter from the good one, and this is also true for the sculptor and the architect.

Why is that thing unique? Why is that thing there not like that other thing there? This is fundamental in order to be able to not say that the portrait is of that person and not of that other one only because one is blonde and the other is brunette.

One must really enter into another order of ideas, identify something deeper, more essential that is, however, visible. That is what led portraitists or figurative painters to spend lots and lots of time portraying the same person.

Do you think that if Picasso had been a person who got bored by his own work he would have been able to do it? It would absolutely not have been possible! Maybe it would have been a whole year of continued concentration for him, and even Stein would have had days when she would have been busy with other things!

It seems that, even though Cézanne made few portraits, he would make two hundred and fifty sittings. It seems Van Gogh's continued crises were caused precisely by the fact that he did not have professional models. Living in the country, it was no simple matter to get young women to come from the city to his studio. What's more, he could have been considered a bit "off" because he drank, smoked, etc. So all this made the situation a bit difficult. It is even thought that his crises were brought on by the fact that he never had a subject for his portraits available.

So this exercise makes you aware of a certain question: the uniqueness that we know about the thing and that we must reconstruct in the drawing. This also naturally is true for painting and for anything you make.

One of the things that make it very difficult to say, "But is this work finished? Is it a work of art? Is it still missing something?" derives from the fact that it is difficult to identify just this sense of uniqueness.

The artwork that enters into us in this way is recognized, but it is not something that one recognizes on the first day, one recognizes it after gaining a lot of intimacy with it.

In the work of art we end up completing the thing with its identity. Even when you make a stone, from the moment it enters the spectrum of the artwork, it automatically must also acquire an identity.

In any case, for now, the first exercise is on uniqueness and that seems to me to already be enough.

You will see later that the problem

of identity is a problem that courses through all the questions of Art, and it is one of the problems that is not resolved, except case by case, when a work of art comes out well, but is still not resolved definitively over an entire lifetime, it is always a problem that reappears.

Thus we have an image that is as unique as is the thing itself.

Drawing B

Using any pencil, draw the stone in a way that its roughness, smoothness, veins and weight can be sensed. This exercise serves to tighten the eye/hand/drawing triangle regardless of the recognizability of the subject, but in relationship to the sensual experience.

Let's see if I can be clearer. When we look at something we set all the senses into motion. If I look at velvet, not only do I see the lines and colors but I can almost feel it in my hands; but if I look at it as a painter, or in any case as an artist, I also feel its weight in my hands, regardless of the fact that something can trick us because of a particular effect. For example: a dress can have an air of lightness, but when you put it on you realize that it has a certain weight. This means that the sensation of its lightness did not correspond to reality, even if the dress communicated it.

So this sense of lightness, of the skin of a thing, of its way of being, are all senses that we, through daily experience, construct from the first days of life, probably even earlier, and we put it inside our limited visual sensation.

So in the drawing we must be able to transcribe all this, even trying to find strategies with which to do it. For example: how to place, illuminate, or signal something, etc. Because we cannot do everything. We must exclude elements and put in others; or else it would become something amorphous.

All this happens slowly, until we seem to have made "naturally" what we see in that given thing. Looking at the drawing we must feel the various sensations that are communicated by that thing.

It is easy to make the sensation of the thing felt if we make it recognizable. If I make a horse, even with four lines, and

I love horses, I immediately have the sensation of the horse, so that I feel its mane, I smell the odor of the horse, and I even feel like I am sitting on it. All this because we attach new mental things to recognizability.

In this case we must get used to distinguishing sensations independently of the mass of sensations that creates an identity. Thus, exactly as we see in art history, everyone finds an expedient of his or her own in order to obtain things, it is also a way to sense oneself.

We say we have sensations in common, but there are others who say that we do not have any sensations in common at all, but that we agree only on certain sensations like language. If you speak to me this way, I understand it like this, and that understanding each other is a form of agreement. But even in language, as soon as we are a bit outside, to the side, are immersed in a language that we do not know, communication becomes terrible, and becomes extremely complicated in its details.

Thus we do all this work of gestural, manual and technical "transcription" of sensations and you will see that slowly, even in this case, the second drawing will be more difficult than the first and the third more difficult than the second. According to *passive education* the first exercise is more difficult than the second, the third even less so and so on. In this case, however, the second is more difficult, the third even more difficult and so forth.

Just as you saw in painting, this means *self-education*, free education. Even when it will seem to you that you have acquired a certain fluidity, you will find that in this fluidity you are losing something, then you will try to recover and the difficulty that you will encounter will be the confirmation of your growth. The confirmation of your growth will be what tomorrow, over time, will even adjust the question of security and insecurity. Insecure people withdraw when faced with new difficulties, while secure people face new difficulties because they know they are growing.

Eye-hand-drawing: thus giving recognizability to the subject in relation to sensual experience.

So we are out of the figurative question, we are not in the question of external figuration but we are in the sphere of sensations, or better, of the representation of sensation.

Drawing C

Use as many pencils as you want to draw a cauliflower, in a way that describes its organic being, its being alive and well.

I mean to say that you should look at the cauliflower with that same exact gaze you use when you go to the greengrocer, that gaze that makes you say: "Oh! How fresh that cauliflower is!" or "But how old it is!" or, "I think that this cauliflower is rotten inside!" In sum, all those observations that we make almost automatically, we have to make them emerge from another automatic awareness, and have the gaze not of the draftsman and the painter from Art High School,¹ but rather our natural gaze towards that object. In order to identify this thing, the subject must be alive and well, not seeming like a dried out, dead or plastic thing. At the same time we must describe its organic state of being.²

Being organic means being in a different way from being mineral. It means being in a different way even from being something else, for example, a construction, because the organic state of being has its own way of organizing itself, of following certain lines, it has its own complexity, its own way of simplifying itself and even of rendering the idea of how it develops. These are a whole series of observations that we make when observing something in Nature with simplicity, without problems. But when you find yourself drawing or painting you see that most of the drawings or paintings are, on the other hand, meaningless. One copies the most unrefined parts and loses the essential part. One should instead have the capability to look this way first and then work as if our hands were looking at what they are doing on the sheet.

This exercise serves to represent the fact that living bodies are "uninterrupted," which means: in the live body there is never an interruption. A vein of a stone can be interrupted, a pencil can have an

end, while the live body is as if it is always veined. Blood travels all the way down until it comes back, it is always surrounded by life, it is always full of pulsations everywhere. When everything flows and everything comes back, to be able to give this sense of continuity, of how a live body moves, is one of the most difficult problems of representation, even in photography.

Many times you notice this in many images, even in moving images on television and in the cinema, at a certain point we see things that are dead, that are false and give us a sensation of disappointment, of impatience, precisely because the sensation of life is not given to us.

Even in this case you will see how to be able to render everything that requires effort.

I said: "uninterrupted," so something that moves like water that turns upon itself, for which it also becomes important to identify the "morphemes" that mark the thing that we are observing.

Morphemes are the basic forms that strangely enough we find in all organic forms.

You will say that even certain stones can seem to be parts of a body or details of nature, but this does not contradict what has been said up to now, because at the moment the stone is worked by water or wind, it becomes Nature in movement, so in a general sense it develops in an organic way.

Another characteristic of the organic is the question of relationship. No organic exists that does not live from a relationship.

In this exercise you will find elements that you will then use elsewhere.

To put it brutally, in the cauliflower you will find what could be a tree, a leaf, you could even find sexual organs or any part of the body, in sum, everything. It is clarifying a morpheme, a form, through the experience of analogous forms placed in other contexts.

Drawing D

Draw a condom, inflated to its fullest, in a way that its organic structure made of natural rubber, the transparency of its body, of its concavities and convexities, of its orifice, are all visible.

I think you all know what a condom is, you have seen it at least in the movies. When you inflated it fully it takes on a form, let us say, that is well known, then it can give a little bit on one side or another. This object also serves to de-emphasize the "question," because in three months someone will turn up here in the classroom with the sketch of a penis or a vulva thinking that they are scandalizing the world. It happens regularly every year that someone comes with an object made of one or more condoms without, however, wanting them to seem like condoms, perhaps they paint them and think that as such they cannot be recognized.

Today condoms have become fashionable subjects for still lifes, people used to come with three apples, now it is three condoms. In any case, beyond the attempt to create a diversion that de-emphasizes the situation, the main reason is that condoms, at least they tell us so, are among the few objects in pure natural rubber, and thus they have a great elasticity. When they dilate we almost have a return of the original filaments of natural rubber, so there are not exactly uniform but we have different levels of transparency and tension. Inflate it to its maximum so that the organic structure of the rubber, the transparency of the body, the concavities and convexities are highlighted, in this way we will have an outside, an inside and an orifice.

If you observe it well, you will see that inside there is a bit of almost all the things that one deals with when one deals with a human body.

This exercise serves to highlight the skin of bodies in its dilated state and in its contracted state.

Thus, we have a body with its "skin" that at certain points is dilated to the maximum of its possibilities in the way the various curves and meanders organize themselves and when it shrinks into itself.

If we draw it in a superficial way, as you might draw it in the beginning, we will have a pure and simple "description." But when we want to be able to give the sense that it is not just a point of reference, a point of recognizability, then we realize that it is not so simple, but that we must go deeply into the thing and see up to what point we are able to go deeply.

There are questions of light, transparency, earlier we spoke of weight, now of lightness.

Think that when a painter had to paint an angel, he did not have the problem of how to make its legs or other details of the body, he knew how to make those perfectly, but it was extremely difficult to make it light. All this is definable as "the work of the artist" from time immemorial! And given that artists are who they are, they are often not perfect, ninety percent of the time their angels seemed like people hanging there by a rope behind them.

In any case, even if in this case there is not the problem of weight, there is, however, that of lightness.

Drawing E

Draw a mirror freely.

This is a fundamental exercise in two-dimensional arts (I mean painting as a two-dimensional art, but not the only one, there is also photography, video, engraving, etc.): which serves to learn the virtual language, specific to each art.

If I start drawing Alessandra, it is clear that her measurements, her profile, her color are virtual and "virtual" does not mean "not real."

A normal attitude, which is natural for any painter, is that of having to do with something real. Thus he considers the passage from real to virtual to be something direct. The mirror, on the other hand, highlights exactly this virtuality.

The mirror is already in itself something flat and disturbs us because it has diverse angles, it has different tones, lights and lights, we sense that we are working on a visual trick. When you draw the live model, if you move a bit to the right or left, the thing does not seem to change; with the mirror, however, changes as soon as you move it, it makes you notice that virtuality, this thing that is not real but appears real changes in relation to you. In front of a mirror, as soon as you move a bit, everything that is in the mirror changes, while, without a mirror, the thing changes anyway but you don't notice it.

So the mirror keeps you in check, it highlights further sensations for you, and even highlights the fact that in the

end that gaze is you. You are very important as a gaze. And that thing on the other side, the image, follows you like a dog, comes behind you. It is not the other thing that handles you but rather it is you that are handling it.

So it is about your choice, the choice of the positioning point, the choice of the time.

With the mirror you will always have to be careful to be strong enough, because if you start out nice and straight and strong and after an hour you double over, the image will be off.

Last year you did the exercise of the mirror as little as possible, however it is the thing that you should have done the most. I saw in your attempts last year that the mirror tended to always be less important than the real image, even if the mirror is clean.

It is up to you, however, to get your attention back and put yourself in relation to the mirror at the right level. Even those people who have the habit of making the image of the mirror by using tricks like a "rubbed out effect" will see that after a few attempts that way of working will not satisfy them anymore.

Class discussion with the students³

S: Regarding the speed with which we are supposed to draw the pencils: every pencil has its own shadow... how are we supposed to make it?

L. Fabro: This is the first theme of the passage from High School to Academy, or from craft to Art.

It is a problem and it is a problem that you begin to face today and that you will never resolve, considering that you have the spirit of the artist it is certain that you will never resolve it!

So it will be what we call "research,"⁴ a search for the thing that we know exists, we know that every thing is that thing and not another. That is the work of a lifetime. We begin this here in the Academy, like when one takes a running start, and we continue it all our life if we are artists. Even if we do other creative work, think of advertising: if one has to do an advertisement for "so and so" pencils, not only must he convince people to buy those pencils and not others, because

the uniqueness of pencil "X" is different from the uniqueness of pencil "Y", but the problem of uniqueness of your propositions emerges that is different if you are a painter or do another kind of work.

M.: The pencil exercise is difficult because each pencil has its own characteristics. For example the difference of softness; these are characteristics that we know exist even if they are not so visible and this already makes it easier to see the differences.

S.: But I know that my pencils are a 4B, a 2B, etc., though in the drawing they are all the same because the external form is the same.

M.: But they are not all the same; if you observe a 6B and a 6H carefully, you can see that they have different tips: 6B's is much sharper than the other one because it is softer than 6H, thus more sensitive to etching, while the tip of 6B is also wider.

L.F.: But how did you draw the pencils?

M.: I drew them by making the lead inside the pencil, even though I tried to see them as pencils and not only as lead.

L.F.: As you will have noticed, I was not very detailed in the description of the work because the detail is up to you, it is up to you to decide which element qualifies that difference.

A.: I think that a key role is played by distance, because at the distance from which I drew the other time I saw the pencils in their complexity and mine was more the problem of perspective: to understand how a pencil determined a line and how to identify the vanishing points of the whole composition of pencils; however, when I got closer I had other problems, which are those that we just discussed.

L.F.: You will have noticed that I did not say at what distance you should draw the pencils.

S.: I think that the time required to complete all these works should be very short in the end, since, as you said, we must become students who keep running, but for example, in making the cauliflower I had to work for a whole afternoon in order to get inside it, and I saw that a cauliflower is many cauliflowers, and who knows how many other things I could notice inside the cauliflower if I dedicated more time to it. So I think that I could spend a whole year drawing a cauliflower.

L.F.: Indeed, while for the painting I gave a set time, for this exercise I did not give a time. In any case, there will be the person who can take a year to arrive at the drawing of the cauliflower that, as we have seen, shows emblematic things. Morandi spent a lifetime putting vases and containers next to each other. Times vary from person to person when one wants to achieve a satisfying image.

Your satisfaction with your work is what also gives the level of your attention, your perception, your culture.

S.: In fact, you said that the first times we would have made them much faster than the following times, when we would have been working on them longer in order to succeed.

L.F.: This is because the first time you will just do it, based on your culture. One supposes, even if it is not true, that those who went to high school, even the *liceo classico* [Humanities High School]⁵ and have never drawn before, come here with a predisposition, a certain ease with drawing, so even if they know how to do things only in a certain way, they usually have problems with the live model because it has to do with anatomy, but with a still life there shouldn't be any basic problems.

What, on the other hand, imposes itself as a moment of difficulty and stops you all in your tracks is this quest for perfecting that is no longer based on pure and simple recognizability of the object, and this was the typical problem in high school, to make something that is recognizable as such, but rather to penetrate, to know what we have in front of us and see how many possibilities it has. To know the object, because in the end, the more you enter inside it the more it becomes yours. Making something yours does not mean drawing it in your own way, it has a more vast significance, now it acquires a deeper significance: I make mine something in the sense that I enter into that thing. Also because I can decide to enter into that thing there, but I can't force the poor thing to enter into us, with the cauliflower this would be the worst of all, but with the model...

M.: Well, I could always eat the cauliflower.

L.: Certainly, but then you wouldn't be able to draw it anymore.

C.: In this exercise, it bothers me to have to think of the other objects as well. When I am concentrating on an object, I know I am going deep in order to know it but when I know that I must fit the cauliflower and the condom into the same space...

L.F.: This is the problem of adolescence, when a guy and a girl meet everything goes well, it is all great, then over time you have to put up with the brother, then you meet the father and the mother...you are right, it is really annoying, except that this means maturing.

C.: However, I noted that after having made the model, facing the pencils again was very difficult. Even if it was the first exercise, so gradually we arrived at making the live model. Now I found great difficulty to relate to very simple pencils again, they became very complicated to do, exactly like the stone and the cauliflower.

L.F.: You see, I am more ignorant than all of you because I did not go to the Academy or Artistic High School or even the Art Institute. From this ignorance of mine derives the fact that I considered that even in the experience of drawing or painting there was an order: first one did the geometry, then the solids, the volumes, so that drawing a chair was easier than drawing an apple. Drawing a room in perspective should be a given for you, it should be easier for you to draw a room with objects than a still life, where there are different lines and things of "natural" Nature, like our cauliflower.

I thought that after the geometric solids, the construction, the environment, and the perspective would follow Nature: flowers, a vase of flowers and lastly the living Nature of the model.

So I thought that copying the model required all the rest, and I continued to have this illusion for a long time even at the Academy.

At a certain point, by chance, as when one passes by and realizes that despite having passed along that street a hundred times, there was something on the wall that you have never looked at before, I asked myself: "How come you do not know that I know how to draw a chair? You do not know that I know how to draw drapery?" You always make the model for me on a white background, as if it were an angel

suspended on the clouds. So I started to put on the pressure until all my students drew the other things too, otherwise nobody will understand upon what the model rests her fat. That is how I discovered that you do not know how to do that, I saw crazy things done with the perspective.

Then there were years during which I made [students] work hard on perspective, and certain errors came out anyway. This year, following my indications, we will do all the steps and we will verify them all, in a way that all these steps become experience for the next step.

Therefore, discipline: we will discipline ourselves not to leave gaps.

Until now we have been running, we have worked at quite a fast pace to make a first selection among you. I gave you the chance to verify your times and your ways, so that you can decide seriously. Also because in order to do things well, one also needs to have a certain measure of enthusiasm. One cannot work well and at a good pace if one does not have enthusiasm for what one does.

Thus, we can arrive at the experience of the live model as a total completion of the experience between us and things, and there will obviously also be the experience of space.

I am telling you now that the next exercise will be to place the model and all these objects that you are drawing in the same environment and it is not an exercise that one does at a single go.

I spent months trying to explain that if the model's finger did not come out well for you, you should have made thirty fingers in a corner of the sheet, until it came out right for you. Nobody understood me! In order to draw the finger they redrew the entire model.

I believe that this mental obtuseness is unacceptable for people who will have operational responsibilities. And given that life now is coming back in a very hard way, you risk going towards a life of a postwar type: you will not have work, in order to work you will have to go far away, in sum, it will be very hard. People will try to strike you down.

If you come out of here with weak muscles it is much better if you leave now to work in a bar or as babysitters, do something else. Because if any of you want

to take up creative responsibilities, you must also toughen your muscles, the pace for those muscles, the exercises for those muscles, and after that you must be able to defend your freedom.

In fact, if you noticed, there are always parallel exercises both of discipline and of freedom, so that you understand up to where discipline reaches and one understands where freedom begins and how far freedom can go. Because these are things that one learns, and one learns with the force of character, because people often believe they are free and instead they are being subtly manipulated.

The generation that preceded yours lived this equivocation of living a free life while in reality living a life of subtle manipulation, because the subtly manipulated person believes he is doing what he wants.

What other difficulties and perplexities did you encounter? Perhaps you also have suggestions that could be useful.

M.: I had a hard time reducing the weight, because weight is also a question of comparison: I know that something is heavy if there is also something that is lighter. For me it is very difficult to say that something is heavy if there is not another thing that is light.

L.F.: But I did not tell you to draw something heavy, I did not prohibit you from drawing something light.

M.: You said to draw a stone and nothing but this stone.

L.F.: You see, that is subtle manipulation! She has already transferred something that she believes was said but in reality was not.

Observe the sequence carefully: *6 normal pencils of different types, 1 stone that is irregular in type and form, 1 cauliflower, 1 condom, 1 mirror.*

The drawings must be made in the following order but on the same sheet, without compositional intent but with the possibility of immediate comparison. As you can see there is no reference at all to weight.

S: The cauliflower is like an apple that falls when it is ripe, because it must fall on its own, and this is perhaps the continuity of Nature; on the other hand, we have to go break the rock ourselves.

L.F.: Indeed, I wanted to see if any of you, due to a critical mindset, went out to look for a stone that had the air of living Na-

ture. The stone worked by wind or water has the same dynamics of living Nature. Certainly there are reasons for drawing things that differentiate by way of these characteristics.

In any case you do not need to think that by doing these exercises you do not need to do anything else. Systematically you must get used to this: you must acquire different paces of work and times, even when you are at home and you have free time you can start doodling something. Because if the problem remains open for you, in a free moment you can make something.

These are exemplary things, in the sense that you can do this work with anything, not just a stone or a cauliflower, doodling as all artists do.

Even when you face the "spatial" problem of how to place a work of art, if you do not have a good hand for drawing the thing you must place as an object or installation, you will not give the idea of whether that thing there is something made of hanging feathers or something made of hanging pieces of stone.

I always suggest that if one makes installations, since it takes a very long time to mount and remove things, if one finds the right way to draw and draws thirty or forty possible hypotheses, in no time at all one can draw a thousand ways to put something, and one can already decide how to proceed.

This is the practical function; one must have the practical capability to transfer "by signs."

Among other things, these exercises are also for when you need to take photographs, if you become photographers or work with photography.

Another thing that you are neglecting in your drawings is light. You put your live model or your stone or our cauliflower there, but you don't work on the light. A photographer, as terrible as he may be, before he sets up his camera and shoots a picture, makes an infinite number of tests to find the right light and reflections to highlight what he knows that he will then do with the camera. You, on the other hand, always work with flat light, with a flat effect. If a photographer did the same nothing good would come out of it! The preparation, set-up, point of view, are

all unsaid things that I did not tell you right away, in order to leave this autonomous path up to you so that you could try and make attempts.

If you make progress on your own you will gain confidence. If you always get there after me, on the other hand, you will start to ask yourselves: "And what about when he's no longer around?" or "But why didn't I think of this sooner?" Because things that you have been told always seem like stupidities: "But look at that fool, I could have thought of that!" and to tell yourself you are a fool day in and day out generates what we call insecurity, low self-esteem.

Your work is to anticipate the questions and solutions, to be able to say: "Even on my own, I am going on the right path." This is something important, this is freedom: to see that among many paths, the right one is precisely the one you have chosen.

When I myself, for any reason, go down the wrong path, I must check with someone who has already tried going that path more correctly, I am a person who feels rather sure of what he thinks, and even so I very much appreciate when I can adopt a solution that I did not find myself, as an addition to my own culture.

Of course, in any case, it is something I myself have worked on a great deal, it is not something that caught me unawares, it is simply something that escaped me and so it comes back to me.

S.: I think that solitude helps a great deal in all this.

L.F.: No, what helps is being able to concentrate.

S.: When one is alone it is easier to concentrate and penetrate more deeply into things, having someone around who is talking doesn't permit this.

L.F.: If you go by bicycle, obviously you go, run and make the times you want and perhaps during practice you are able to achieve times that you would never even do in a race.

The problem is that quality, the ability to concentrate that you acquire when you work in a noisy place, becomes greater tomorrow because obviously sooner or later you will find yourselves all alone in your studios and there you will work better and with greater concentration.

Once you have overcome the insecurity of your relationship with the public and are able to concentrate even in public, you will work better in private.

S.: My problem is to be able to feel completely at ease in any place.

L.F.: You must be able to brave difficult situations. Certainly it is more difficult to read in a library than at home, it is more difficult to read on the bus than in the library. Someone who knows how to read at home perhaps does not know how to read on the bus, but someone who knows how to read on the bus has no problem reading at home, with or without people around, even in the library. When you are in the bus and you have arrived at half a thought and have to get off, you get used to such an ability to concentrate that when you are in a calm place you feel like you have read for an hour while you have actually read for four hours.

The problem is: "Why do we meet a difficulty at a certain point? In order to learn to defend our freedom and our force of character. For freedom one needs muscles. You have found a world of mothers, and fathers who are mothers, who always understand: "Put on a shirt, don't run like that, be careful not to trip, don't go out, it's raining" an so on, it is a terribly tiring thing, because it destroys you to have a person who is always telling you what it would be better to do or not do, it leaves no energy to decide.

¹ High schools in Italy are divided by fields of study: classical, scientific, technical, linguistic and artistic.

² Fabro uses the word "organicità," which is untranslatable in English.

³ We have used students' initials because in the archival material their names were not given.

⁴ Here Fabro plays with the dual meaning of the word "ricerca" (research and search).

⁵ See note 1.

Luciano Fabro

LESSON ON THE LIVE MODEL¹

Brera Art Academy January 14, 1998

This lesson on the nude model is the final lesson on the question of drawing.² Last time we saw the difference that exists between drawing a stone, a condom, a cauliflower and the pencils.

Drawing is something that designates,³ it indicates not only what that thing is but also designates what, for example, a cauliflower does. If I write the word "cauliflower" in letters, whether I write it in capital letters or I write it in Gothic letters, in any case the cauliflower does not change; while in our drawing we want the qualities that characterize that thing, that object, to be there.

In the stone, for example, we have the volume, we have the weight, the grain that is extremely varied and that is there to indicate how its interior is constructed; if it is a stone that splinters, like slate, it will be made of layers that are sheets; granite, however, is grainy, so that if we smash it, what is left is something that is made up of grains. The stone, then, gives us its external skin, its internal structure, and it also gives us the difference between that which it has of its own,⁴ I mean by this its naturalness, and that which, on the other hand, it becomes as a result of a human intervention, as an intervention of work. A stone that was in a river also indicates the work that was done on that material: if it is shiny it is something, if it is not shiny it is something else, if it is cut or sawn, it is something else altogether. The stone feels all these things and drawings indicate them.

In the condom, beyond other things we also have its relationship. We have, that is, its relationship between that which is a thing and that which is its use, its history; this includes its history with us, in our context, so much so that there was a modesty on your part about something of this kind. So just by indicating that object, we automatically call to mind an entire series of very questionable parallel issues.

Even with the condom we have the question of weight: it is light, and we must designate this lightness. We also have volume, but it is a completely different volume from that of the stone. We must designate that it has to do with a volume that lives by its own transparency. On the contrary, it is almost a volume of which we see one thing as well as its opposite. We have an elastic material, we feel its elasticity, we feel something that is this way but could also be different.

On the contrary, you could not imagine a stone that is made in one way one day

and the in another the next day, you feel the stone's consistency, its being very stable in its measurements, its volume, its characteristics, thus it resists its relationship with our experience: it is a static and immutable relationship.

In the case of the condom, however, there is a relationship of volume that can change, and which consequently also changes the transparency, the type of shadows. I chose the condom for this reason, beyond giving a bit of humour to things. In addition, it is one of the few natural things; being made of natural rubber in its pure state, its color is natural; a small balloon, on the other hand, would have been colored.

In the cauliflower we have a recognizable form that is more evident than in the condom and the thing that amazed me is that you had a very hard time defining the "form of recognizability" of the cauliflower.

What happens in the cauliflower when you confront its form demonstrates that the matter becomes more complicated, more than when you confront its weight. This is because it has to do with a form that has to be recognizable like an organic form and in the organic form we have the inescapable relationship, fluidly, without interruption, between the part and the whole.

In a stone I can also go on with pieces of stone, putting them one next to the other and making a mountain. In fact, when you draw the stone you can draw it little piece by little piece, according to the terrible habit of [Art] High Schools.⁵ It is not a great problem, because the homogeneity of the thing allows one to proceed by aggregation. In the organic form, however, first there is the whole, then there is the part and then again the part. Even when only a part remains, it must be seen as a part of the whole. Every part of the part must be looked at as a part of the part of the whole. It is there that almost all of you have erred, because when you had the little grain, the cauliflower bud, you looked at that bud as if it were a cotton ball or a rose. You did not discern something crucial, and consequently you did not show it: that each of these parts of the cauliflower was like the leaf of a tree attached to the little branch that is at-

tached to the branch, which is in turn attached to another branch, and so on until the trunk. You did not live the problem of being able to give a synthesis to the image made of many tiny details.

If someone drew a tree only as a pole with a ball on top, you would say that it is too infantile as a drawing. If someone thought to draw a tree by making all of its twenty billion leaves, which in reality belong to it, we could only think that he were a schizophrenic.

So what happens in drawing? In drawing one designates the essential, one decides how many leaves or how the image of the leaf and the branch should be translated in order to give the idea that it is a tree with leaves, with branches.

This work of designating the continuity of Nature is a problem that comes up every time we have an organic image.

If we want to draw a cauliflower well, we must draw it not only as it is, but we also must feel that it is a part. For this reason I said "part of the whole," because it is a part that has been cut. Thus, in practical terms, we must see it as a photographic sequence in which we have: first the cauliflower in the field, then the cauliflower removed from the field, then we open up the cauliflower and there, we have arrived.

This will seem like a theoretical discourse to you, but this year we will only have practical lessons, and this is a practical discourse.

The eye must educate itself about material, you must develop an eye for pictorial material if you paint, or material-material if you make objects.

You must develop an eye for material that is outside of you, that is the thing with which you begin to have a relationship of recovery, of assumption.⁶

What changes is that in the cauliflower plant, with respect to other things that are homogenous, there is the color, and that too has to be designated by the drawing.⁷

In organic Nature, color is not homogenous, as it is, however, in the nature of the stone. Stone can have one or more veins, it can have many shades of color,⁸ but once you find the scheme of that stone, even if it were an alabaster, you can repeat it and you will obtain the drawing of the stone, because that scheme repeats itself.

However, organic Nature develops, and the indication of this development also happens through color.

We thus have another problem of the same color in different moments of light, in different tones of the same color, a problem that you will encounter later and that you have already encountered with these exercises.

In an apple you have different colors and for a same color you have different variations of tone, while the cauliflower always has only green that, however, can be darker or lighter until it becomes white. In this case, you have Nature that develops in an organic sense even by way of color, and this must be designated.

This designation does not happen by chance, but rather according to vital circuits: to indicate, to designate a variation of color in Nature also indicates a vital circuit, the sense of how one comes to develop life, how life flows.

That's what you should already have done.

In the pencils we have another situation: we have regular forms, while the stone was not regular; in fact, I did not tell you to take a block of stone with a regular form.

The pencil is regular in its form and is also regular in the way it comes to be worked by the person who uses it, its tip is repeatedly sharpened, whether it is carried out with a sharpener or a small knife; it is regular even if we change its colors at its head or at its tip, it is a geometric form, a polyhedron, or it can also be a cone.

With the pencil we have three material situations. The material of the lead—and I saw that someone was able to indicate that there were different kinds of lead—these are small details that one is able to make, however. There is the wood in its brute state, corresponding to where it was sharpened. Then we have the simulating materials: like the paint and the writing [on the pencil] that simulate other things but are not material, the paint is something that simulates something else. If, for example, I whitewash a wall, I don't have the material wall on the whitewashed material but rather I simulate light, I simulate a reflection, the more I work the more I simulate other things;

the simulating materials are materials that become clothing over the materials themselves and have their own characteristics of the imitation. There will be the sheen and there will be the writing. You all will ask yourselves if you must indicate what type of pencil it is, even by its label: if it is a B1 or if it is a B6. These are all things that one must choose and that also count both in theoretical and practical terms when you must, perhaps, prepare a flyer for a brand of pencils it will be very important that you also write the brand name. It is always a language, independent of the fact that it has a purely aesthetic or practical function. Now, what was not so evident in the preceding examples becomes evident with the pencils: spatiality.

Whichever way you put the pencils, they become spatial indicators, indicators of direction, even of the light source, and we saw how light changes even according to inclination.

Thus, the pencils become indicators of space, light and even rhythm.

So by placing them in one way or another, you begin to give things a rhythm, like when I play a drum and I decide the intervals and the intensities.

This whole discourse has allowed me to arrive at the concept of the model.⁹ Taking a situation as a model is useful for practicing our capacity to transcribe everything that we observed and to verify the level of our observation.

First we observe, then we try to transcribe that which we observed, and we verify two fundamental things: first of all we verify our observation, because perhaps it can happen that we someone comes along and tells us that there is no cauliflower on our sheet, but rather an artichoke. We also see how we are able to attest to the subject of our observation, we know that we must select what we designate, because we cannot put in everything—as I said earlier—we must make fundamental choices each time, this yes and that no. We then verify our level of choice, that is, what our behavioral attitude is with respect to the thing that we are observing. What I consider secondary I don't put in: thus, for example, if I wanted to draw that sweater I could choose to show how folds are moving or else the ribs; or else,

I could have studied them very well, but I then decide not to make them, nobody can force me. But it would be different if I asked myself after arriving at a certain point: "But why didn't you make those ribs?" and I answered: "Oh my, I didn't notice that it had ribs."

We thus have the verification both of the observation, in which I should see everything, the most things possible, and of the verification of what I came to choose between the whole and the most things possible.

The new theme of today's lesson is the nude figure, which contains everything in relation to the preceding models.

First of all, it contains a type of suggestion in its ability to be recognized: the nude figure has always been considered the synthesis of all those qualities that we articulated earlier, because it is necessary for the form of the model to be objectively recognizable, that is, that it does not seem to be a horse, thus it has a harmonic and aesthetic ability to be recognized. If, given all the attention that she surely has for her body, our model discovered that she had calves like those that you are making, she would cry for the rest of her days and who knows where she would go hide. All of her efforts to make her body better, just to get these results in the end? What emerges from your drawings is that you do not work on the body that you are drawing with the same attention that the model works on her body, thus you do not recognize what you have in front of you. It is as if a person had decided make up her face very well but remained indifferent to the rest of her body. It is a rather stunning fall, and it is also a fall of modern art. In the sense that modern art wanted to indicate some things while eliminating others in order to try to get out of academicism.

For example, your great myth Schiele wanted to highlight eros, like all of Freud's contemporaries; Picasso sometimes wanted to highlight eros while sometimes plasticity; each person made specific choices. Two good artists were able to coordinate this particular choice together with all the rest. I give you the example of a painter, not exactly an excellent one in my opinion, Modigliani, who, in any case, worked hard to highlight the trans-

parency of skin. The beauty of Modigliani is precisely his having been able to highlight the transparency of skin with respect to the materialness of fabrics or of everything that was around him through a very sophisticated process of line, a process that is analogous to what the Greeks did at the same time as vase painting, but it is the painting that we have lost. This work of the epidermal-ness¹⁰ of line and contour is the relationship between transparency of skin and manual materials of work such as that of fabric.

In the model you will also find weight, but not dead weight, the still weight of the stone or the condom, which is light, or of the cauliflower; you will have a weight that is always in a relationship between static and dynamic. Even when it is in a static position the weight of the body is there to indicate that it is ready to enter into a dynamic one.

How does it transmit all this to us? From what do we deduce its state? How has it transmitted this to us even before we perceived it as an effect? It did it through harmony and rhythm; the harmony of the parts is there precisely to indicate the function of the parts, the rhythm is the movement, inasmuch as it is a body prepared to have rhythmic movement and we feel it also by looking at it. Look at a racing dog, a show dog, a guard dog, look at birds, all of them are constructed according to a harmony that carries within it the rhythm of movement. This harmony and this rhythm are thus the things that we must recognize and indicate. All this means being able to give what we call an aesthetic vision, thus a harmonic vision. A harmonic vision of the body because we consider it a beautiful body, a harmonic vision of the drawing because we consider it an excellent drawing and the drawing must have the same identical characteristics as the live body, that is, it must be something that is indeed still but that seems as if it were almost about to move. The great work of the artwork is always this: to be a form in a precarious balance of movement, I repeat this many times but always with different words. Then, in the human figure, we are also favorably disposed to identify the type of plasticity, of elasticity. You see how many other things there are to consider

and how the problems come back again, precisely when beginning with muscular, physical solidity: we feel the vital energy that is beneath it and we must indicate this in our drawings.

Another thing that the live body gives us is the relationship between the push that comes from inside and the push that comes from outside, because weight, where it rests, how it moves, is the push that comes from the outside with respect to the inside. In the stone it is there, but we don't see it, nor do we see it in the cauliflower, nor even in the pencils, but here we must feel it.

Look at how much work was done from the moment in which this kind of attention was abandoned, in the Byzantine period for example, because attention was not directed towards Nature except by way of schemes.

We know that from 1300 until Caravaggio, artists worked in order to slowly arrive at feeling the body that expands towards the outside, towards the world that is physical, in order to feel the body's relationship with the world, with Nature that presses upon the body. Artists felt what it meant to fly, and what it means to make someone who flies, what it means to make someone who moves and how to make a step or someone who is turning. All this involved an enormous amount of work that required centuries and centuries of genius.

In the body we have the parts in harmony among themselves in such a way that we call them *arti* [ndr *limbs*];¹¹ we cannot say *arto* [ndr *limb*] of a cauliflower or a tree, while in the human body, which we know well and with which we can also enter into sentimental relationships, we can use that word.

Thus, if I see skin I can feel its heat, its mode of being, the personal relationship that there is between skin and skin, between person and person. In this case, the parts become so harmonious and so tied to established proportions that they remain within this harmony, which we call *arti*. We can say that *arte* [ndr *art*] derives precisely from this capacity to identify the harmony of the bodies.

But what flows in all this, in this live model? Life flows! This is a fundamental thing. When the Academy was a school,

one began by drawing from plaster [casts] for years and years until one reached perfection in the ability to identify the proportions and all the other things that I have already spoken to you about, until one arrived at the live person; only then could one say whether someone had understood and learned everything: same nose, same mouth, same ear, same hands, same ass, same feet, everything done as best one could. Only at that point did the true selection begin, one arrived at the live model; the only difference was that the model was really alive, whoever could make this live figure was "on the way to becoming an artist," while others were "on the way to becoming decorators," do you understand the concept?

This is the moment in which one distinguishes between decoration and art in the sense that we define as aesthetic-creative. Not that one is more technical than the other, and I don't believe that many people jumped onto the statues;¹² but whoever is able to transcribe this vitality has the character and the sensitivity of the artist. Sensitivity both in observing and transcribing. Around this living material we have dead material, that which for us is *natura morta* and for the English is *materia silente* [ndr still life]. It can be Nature, like an apple, or a coat, which is made out of wool anyway, it could be wood or an easel that can also be painted over with color, but we feel that it is wood and is simulating materials. It can also be a material in which the element that covers it is such that it modifies the material itself, like the way a very light covering of silver nitrate transforms glass into a mirror.

Thus, we have a whole series of material hypotheses that we observe and indicate, or that we designate, we draw.¹³ We cannot erase something, otherwise we lose the relationship that exists between what is live and what is not, between what is "active Nature" that weighs on "passive Nature" that, in turn, presses. Practically, the live model is pressed upon by all the natural material that is around her, she is also pressed upon by the space that is around her and she is centered in that space, she sustains that space; inasmuch as if that figure were not there then perhaps we would not even take that space into consideration. I say this to give the

idea of the meaning that a live model must have for you.

You must think of a live model as a tabernacle, almost as something sacred that represents not only what you see but also a whole other infinite series of things, of relations, of possibilities, all that can be taken into consideration. Imagine what must have happened when the Giorgione's or Titian's Venuses appeared, who knows what people said, "Heavens! But the sensation one feels in front of this image is really true!" That image, which is not the real thing, fools my sensation, which is something real.

We have the objects: mechanical, rigid, modeled plastic forms, objects and fabrics, forms with passive expression, relaxed muscles, and forms with active expression: tense muscles (I use the example of the live model), all this in a context of spatial signs dictated by light, directions, perspective, rhythms.

Everything that I have told you up to now is physical information; thus, take what is given to you by the physicality and put it on a piece of paper, on a canvas in the form of drawing or writing, music or painting; recreating that physicality, which in its integrity is nothing more than an elementary metaphysical act.

The apparent physical act of taking things and sensations and putting them on a piece of paper (the musician will put them into music, the writer into words), is not a physical act but the most elementary metaphysical act, that is the translation of physicality towards something that is not physical but has the sensations, the tensions, the vitality of physicality.

In Art, this is the basic concept of metaphysics and, in making all this, one cannot expect an immediate result as for a mathematical formula.

These are all things which one must try to reach step by step and, each time we get distracted, we must go back and begin to reach again, step by step, with modesty, with simplicity, with obstinacy and once in awhile to be satisfied that we have signals that confirm to us that we are on the right track.

Do not betray yourself by saying: "I'll do this: I'll start working for three hours..." No, work and you will be stubborn, be careful not to lose time and you will con-

centrate, once in awhile there is a signal, that tells you that maybe you are on the right track.

Today I cited for you the example of that boy whom I told to draw a coffee cup. In the first fifty drawings there was the coffee cup with the handle, then, given the difficulty, he decided to leave out the handle and continue to work.

Every fifty drawings or so the boy realized that there had been progress made and if you look at his sketchbook today you will realize the dedication and the progress that had been made from drawing to drawing. In every conversation that we had about the cup (you can read it in *Regole d'arte*¹⁴ the boy faced a moment of the problem of this work he was doing. There is no difference in this sense between Western Art, Oriental Art, popular Art, Art that the Indians made in the sand... the Art is always identical, this is the attitude.

In everything you make, you must keep in mind your cup, just as is described in *Regole d'arte*, and whether that you are making the lines or something that seems much more remunerative to you, the attitude to maintain is identical and those who will make it will make it and those who will not make it... For this reason I told you: "God gave us the landscape, the rest is courage."

¹ In this case, as in elsewhere in the text, Fabro uses the Italian word "modella" to discuss the live model; however, the English word "model" also appears in other places in the text when he discusses the model as an abstract concept (in Italian, "modello"). As much as possible, we have chosen to leave Fabro's idiosyncratic language and syntax intact in the translation, including the word repetitions, which maintain its particular rhythm.

² See *Compulsory Drawing Exercise: Nature/Figure/Position*, Brera Art Academy (Milan, December 1997) published in this catalogue on pp. 225–230.

³ Frequently in the text, Fabro plays on the similarity between the two words "disegnare" (to draw) and "designare" (to designate, to indicate). This lexical and sonic play is lost in the English translation.

⁴ Fabro uses the word *lei* or "she" to describe the stone's identity, because in Italian the word "stone" is feminine (*la pietra*). This is lost in the English translation, where "stone" is gender-neutral.

⁵ In Italy, high schools are divided according to fields of study: humanistic, scientific, artistic, linguistic and technical.

⁶ Here Fabro means the act of recovering something and making it yours.

⁷ Here again Fabro plays with the two words "disegnare" e "designare" by saying "designato dal disegno."

⁸ Here Fabro uses the word "cangiante."

⁹ Here, as elsewhere in the text, Fabro plays with the Italian word "modello", now intending "model" as abstract concept but at the same time gesturing back to his opening title of "modella" as "live nude" in a new way.

¹⁰ Fabro uses the Italian term "epidermicità," which is untranslatable.

¹¹ Here in Italian, Fabro is using the word "arti" for "limbs" in order to play with the word "arte" (art).

¹² In Italian, "saltare addosso" has a slight sexual connotation.

¹³ Yet again Fabro writes "designamo, disegnamo," thereby playing with the two words. This similarity and connection is lost in the English translation.

¹⁴ Luciano Fabro, *Regole d'arte*, Milano, ed. Per L'arte 3, 1980.

Luciano Fabro

DRAWINGS AND PROJECTS¹

Lecture, École Cantonale d'Art du Valais, Siere, March 2001²

There are many kinds of drawings, but we do not know which was the first one, the oldest one, we only know which are the most recent ones in order; but this does not mean that this order was always followed.

I will list some types of drawing for you: indicative drawing, that which illustrates something that is happening; imperfect or past drawing, that which illustrates memory; future drawing, that which illustrates something that will be; subjunctive drawing, that which illustrates something that could perhaps be this way or perhaps that way; infinitive drawing, that which defines the way something is. Why have I defined drawing using verb moods and tenses?

Because in the cases I cite, drawing tells a story and, as in any story, one can be brief or detailed, in any case one must choose. In indicative drawing one chooses the immediate fleeting expression (see Picasso); drawing in the past, one chooses that which one remembers or wants to remember and pass on (see icons); drawing in the future has the characteristics of something never seen before (see Mondrian

and Malevich); subjunctive drawing indicates the various possibilities and various hypotheses (see Giacometti...since we are in Switzerland); while we could also see infinitive drawing as more defined, like that which tends to differentiate among things, not only by way of their attributes, but also through their substance (see the Flemish and Leonardo).

As you can see, in all these cases drawing lies in the sphere of communication and language.

Then there are also types of drawings: there are those that express the relationship between the subject and object. Let us take a few of them: technical drawing, sensual drawing, sentimental drawing, metaphysical drawing.

Technical drawing is that which tends to coordinate one's observation with one's hands; sensual drawing is that which tends to give free release to our actions through signs, whether we do or do not have images and figures of reference; sentimental drawing is that which tends to attest to one's emotions; metaphysical drawing is that which results from dedicating oneself to the exercise of signs as if these were a prayer.

Today, however, all these types of drawing are no longer considered interesting; today the only kind of acceptable drawing is project drawing insofar as it indicates that which one promises to do.

This³ lecture of mine introduces, or should introduce, within the limits of a conversation, two crucial subjects for the person who takes up a creative profession; that of creativity and that of designing.⁴

These two terms, in our time, have gained in use as much as they have lost in content. I will make this premise only: as long as the role of creativity remained in the hands of the Gods, we (the creative types) felt like curious people who tried to understand some of the Gods' secrets in order to design, in a very modest way, something similar. When we were successful at something, whether it was a painting or a machine, we would hear people say with admiration: "You are an artist!" Today Leonardo da Vinci still represents this. This modesty however did not spare the ancient creative person from the revenge

of the Gods, as documented by all of mythology: remember what happened to Prometheus?

Once the Gods no longer had the exclusive rights to creation, everybody wanted to personalize the question and change the rules of the game: from DNA to an omelette, the search for creativity no longer knows any boundaries.

So therefore today we can affirm that creativity has become part of the bill of rights of all citizens; and up to that point we are happy. The question immediately arises: it seems obvious that once creativity is guaranteed, its process of designing should also be guaranteed.

If we leave behind the logic of theoretical speculation and observe the reality of facts, the possibility of designing opens up in front of us like an abyss, and on the other side of the abyss creativity appears like a mirage, a *fata Morgana*.

Let us remove our gaze momentarily from this dizzying vision. We could, on the other hand, deal with the "housewife's accounting";⁵ creativity on its own does not cost anything, what counts is the designing.

Thus it is the designing that holds court. And who controls the designing? The economy, or better said, finance. Thus designing enters the bill of rights of finance, so that, by making creativity available as a democratic right (as I said above), creativity cannot only take place in the abstract but also in practice (nothing is easier to demonstrate!)

And with this one could end this lecture, but instead I would like to give you the illusion that there is an escape route of liberation, by taking advantage of the fact that in our time the two terms, creativity and designing, have gained in usage as much as they have lost in content.

Creativity should mean working on harmony, in harmony. This is a concept that by now is totally removed from our mentality, and it means this for three reasons. One, because it presupposes natural morals or revealed morals. Two, because it presupposes a humanistic, global vision, thus a naïve one in our analytic eyes. Three, because ours is a competitive mentality, which rewards personal interests, it is therefore "scompensatory."⁶

Thus today the real and true concept of

creativity returns to Olympus, given that it is unthinkable for our mentality.

Once the mirage has been erased (the creativity-mirage that was beyond the abyss-project), we can think of kinds of projects that are no longer mythical but simply practical.

We will examine three of them: bureaucratic project, political project, instinctive project.

By nature, we are all more or less capable of changing in part, and maintaining in part, that which falls into our hands.

This modification travels between two extremes: destroy and create. These two extremes are in direct relation with each other: destroy in order to create, create in order to destroy. Both bombing and sculpting speak by using dynamite.

To destroy something means to annul, even before the idea of the person who wanted it, the effort and thoughts of the person who constructed it.

At the same time, to construct places the question between opportunity and abuse. In substance, everything resolves itself in the type of aesthetic ideology called consumerism.

Let us now speak about the political project. We design by reason of a social State. Every society is dialectical by nature, our project will be engaged in this dialectic.

In order to be put to work, the project will have to resolve itself in a choice of field; the choice of field presumes an ideological choice.

Aesthetics, in a political project, are nothing more than giving visibility to an ideological choice.

This project is also called promotional.

Then there is the bureaucratic project, it could be a subspecies of the political project, while it really has more to do with metaphysics, that particular form of metaphysics that tends to promote laws and regulations and is the most advanced moment, or consequently more sophisticated, of every civilization, whether it is religious, political, mechanical, economic or other.

Even if it presents itself under the form of a pragmatic project, the political project is fundamentalist, totalitarian, it voids every instinctive project, like every other dialectical process. Its moral code is self-referential, its aesthetic is self-referential.

This is the project that characterizes our times in all forms and latitudes.

Why do I call project this forest of laws and regulations? Why does this mark the path, even if the forest developed in an impenetrable way and has been made inaccessible?⁷

In this way, whomever takes over the forest becomes master of the project!

Who, in our case, is the master of the forest?

One would think of the engineer, but it is not like that. The engineer must submit to function, his power leads up to the structure.

The true master of the forest is actually the architect, he is the master in virtue of the rules, he has decreed the project with relative regulations, he has decreed the model with its regulations, he has decreed the implementation with its regulations; and he has called the whole of these regulations Aesthetics.

Today the only person who possesses the regulations⁸ of Aesthetics can make the drawing, after the drawing itself has become regulation. Thus, only in the case of the architect does the project become at once aesthetics and regulations. With this the interest of the architect connects up with the interest of the political man in designing in order to regulate.

The most culturally attentive nations such as France are already running for cover, impeding architects, or the bureaucratic designers, to participate in competitions for the realization of artworks.

To conclude: for now there is no way of escape and salvation, I would say that there is not even a line for reflection but I, in any case, would like to maintain a line of curiosity, in order to be able to glimpse what could happen beyond the abyss, even if it seems like a the act of a sycophant.

¹ Translator's note: wherever possible, Fabro's idiosyncratic language and syntax have been left intact in this lecture.

² Published in *Luciano Fabro. 100 Disegni*, Winterthur Kunstmuseum, 26 January – 14 April 2013 (Düsseldorf: Richter / Fey Verlag, 2013) pp. 29–32.

³ From here onwards, published as Luciano Fabro, "Creatività e progetto", in *Il pensiero visivo: Dalla progettazione alla produzione nelle scuole ad indirizzo artistico*. Conference Proceedings, 15–17 March, 2001,

ed. Giuseppe di Napoli, Monza, Istituto Statale d'Arte, 2001.

⁴ Fabro uses the word "progettazione," thus referring back to the title of the lecture and the key concept of "progetti" (projects). However, in English this word can only be translated as "designing," as is the case with "progettare."

⁵ This idiomatic Italian expression means "getting the most for one's money."

⁶ "Scompensativa" does not exist in Italian or in English, although Fabro intentionally used it to mean compensatory.

⁷ Given Fabro's intentional reference to the opening lines of Dante's *Inferno* (the "selva oscura") the English use of the word "forest" refers to the accepted translation of the Italian "selva."

⁸ Fabro here evokes the concept of "regolazione", by which he intends rules but also in the political sense of bureaucratic regulations.

Luciano Fabro

DISCUSSION ABOUT DRAWING¹

Brera Art Academy, Milan, March 8, 2002²

L.F.: When no ideas come to you, or you are in a difficult moment, I keep telling you: "Draw!" Instead, what happens is that when you arrive in your first year at the Academy you are always there with the pencil ready to draw, draw... after a month of being here you do not draw any more. So I seem to understand that the misunderstanding lies in this: you draw after the idea, if you have an idea sooner or later you draw it, this is the question: if I do not have an idea what do I draw? Instead there are various kinds of drawings. There is the drawing that is made in an almost distracted way, or a bit by way of habit, which means with the obsession of the draughtsperson, so that I draw the bag that is over there, and in the meantime I listen to what everyone else is saying, I look at what the others are doing. We can say that in this case drawing is sort of a pastime.

Then there is another kind of drawing, that which is useful in order to find something, and then in this case I decide to draw this bag, but not so much because the bag interests me as much as for the fact that by copying it, seeing it, at a certain point formal stimuli come to me, these two handles I see are be-

coming more and more important, they become like two ears and I start to fantasize about them.

Or, as when I told you to make the cauliflower, the stone and the condom, I decide to see, to draw in a certain way, I evaluate how I can draw this bag, I try in various ways, using a certain type of technique, and this is quasi-analytical drawing.

First: *distracted* drawing, quasi-distracted drawing.

Second: *analytical* drawing, when I am interested in drawing that thing there, but not just for the thing itself as much as because through that object I carry out formal and technical research.

When, on the other hand, I want to work, think of a work,³ but I do not know what to make, I make a vase, a landscape, I don't know, a sign, a logo, anything.

This is the drawing in which I realize that what has come to be missing in you is setting out without any prejudice. Drawing, doodling, one makes a line, makes two lines, then one makes a circle, makes a sign and sees that it can seem like a wave, a spring, one begins to glimpse something in this drawing, just like Leonardo said, one can glimpse something within wood, within the wall. If you observe pieces of wood they could seem to you like trees or faces. Certain walls could seem like landscapes or clouds. From this glimpsing, at a certain point a work could be born, like a released spring, which, when placed together with that thing, could be a sea. Glimpsing images that before, outside of this casual exercise, would not have appeared, is a kind of fantastic stimulus, so for this reason I suggest to you that you make one hundred drawings every time you do not know what to do.

As soon as you glimpse something, try to follow that idea immediately, they are all chance things that you could find anywhere, you could let yourself be stimulated by various things that can be found before your own eyes, this in fact allows one to depart completely from what one is doing. If I am making a pair of keys and at a certain point I look at something and see that it has nothing to do with the keys, I gather up that stimulus.

When one then has individuated an idea, a construction, at that point one carries out another operation, which is that of

mentally constructing that image that is pretty clear, which means: it came to my mind that at the end of the day I could really make a vase, but I do not have the vase, therefore I set out to draw it, I try to do it with this curve, but it is not exactly the one I like, so then I try with another curve, I try to be ever more precise, then I must see the vase as it should appear from above, then I start drawing it in axonometric projection, I start drawing it in perspective, there, that is the *constructive* drawing.

So we can define a series of types of drawing that are completely different from one another: the *analytical* drawing, which was the first, the past-time drawing that, however, in its own way serves a great deal as a form of letting off steam and can also become terrain for research, the *research* drawing that begins in chaos and tries to find something in the chaos, in the occasional, in the automatic; there is also *automatic* drawing from which one can then recover something conscious. Then there is *constructive* drawing, in which, once a certain image is identified, one can work around it in order to construct it well. For example, if I must make a landscape it is better that I draw it, I cannot be trying it out in oil; or, if I must make a sculpture, I must draw it by imagining it seen from different viewpoints, also in order to understand how it will stand up, because if I make one part too wide and the other one narrow I must make corrections.

Normally the person who works as an artist has very special talents in making these kinds of drawings, while there are people who are unable to abstract an image in their minds by drawing it.

You must be careful about this, because you arrive here from high school where you are used to always copying something fixed, and that is fine in the sense that you learned a technique, but it is dangerous in the sense that if you take away the bag that was in front of you, you no longer know how to draw a bag. For example, I realized that in certain years, even in the case of students who drew the model well, if you took the model away they no longer knew how to make a reclining woman with her arms in pro-

portion, with her legs in proportion, they made something standard, like a Barbie, incapable of visualizing within their own cerebral coordinates the variations that the experience of each person allowed them to apply very well.

So what you are missing, and it is something that I am pulling out for the first time after many years, but that I realize now, is this capacity to start from zero, from the chaos and make this kind of drawing, that which later leads to new work. This can apply to any medium, probably also for people who make videos or films. For example I see that even directors, even when they are at the café, usually notice a possibility that in that moment there is interesting, even if they do not have any plans for using that thing.

So when you are in a crisis because you do not have ideas, if you practice all these types of drawing, you will not ever have empty moments and you will never have gaps in production, because there will always be something that comes. When it has come then it might also be that it is not something that is worth realizing, but in any case it is a work that comes and develops itself naturally. If on the other hand you start thinking "What can I make?" then the ideas do not come, things simply exist between themselves and come to you to make because you do not remember, but you have already seen them, felt them, not understood them well, and then it is a double disappointment.

In-Class Discussion:

Nicola Palumbo: I remember several works that we made in certain years, like the drawing of: the stone, the cauliflower, the pencils,⁴ the exercises of the canvases, the year before that the ones of the boxes⁵ – I mainly remember these two – even thinking about what came back to me [from them], also things that are precisely in the kind of work, in the sense of making work.

L.F.: Indeed, when you started making the artworks, you stopped drawing and then you did not even make the artworks anymore. There is probably a visual-mental exercise that assumes other types of exercises, it's probably that. But

from a cultural viewpoint, one must be strongly supported in this, because, for example, if, in making the cauliflower you applied yourself a great deal and by chance the image of the artwork came to you "from behind," you then maybe felt that you had dedicated a great deal of attention to the making of the cauliflower while you believed that the other work came to you for free.

This is the discussion that we were having yesterday, saying: "This image came to me like this," while it is not true, it was the observation of the cauliflower that "went behind," took a "tour" inside you, and came back out in the form of a stimulus.⁶

One must be strongly supported from a cultural standpoint to think that something did not come to us by chance. And it is this insecurity about what was given that at a certain point makes you say: "Well then, in that case I will wait for another idea to come, something else." Yet even so, nothing more will come, because there is nothing that took a "tour." Is this concept clear?

If you think you can make a work about silence, it will not come, but if you put yourself there and observe this bag, I don't know, you get stuck on making the drawing, even if you couldn't care less about doing that thing, so much so that then you won't make a painting about the bag, in the meantime something else will come, perhaps determined by the fact that you are analyzing a series of things that fit together among themselves and an idea of the connection that, however, is an artwork.⁷

Probably the question of art in any case is a question of work.⁸

N.P. One can say that this vitality, which can be a fantastic imagining, when you have to transform it into a work of art, must no longer become imagining, but rather [something] physical?

L.F. No, it is a physicality that becomes a fantastic imagining, at a certain point in passing from one to another it loses many connotations. For example, I am a person who never draws, but if at a certain point I need to create an idea for myself, to pull out something for an exhibition, and all things considered, I'd like to present a new artwork, then I start doodling, to

make, to try. At a certain point, after a day, after ten days, after fifteen days, I start to glimpse or I feel ideas that I had pulled out emerging, but I don't get there if I am filled with anxiety about which one I should make, the keys or the camera.

When you have the idea, you also have the artwork and you immediately take off with the technical drawing.

I am talking about when you have made all your ideas and you have discharged,⁹ one must also have these moments and for a bit one just sits there... then, however, one says to oneself: "Now I want to do something new, make the one from before again, greener or redder."

For example, when I decided to make the *Piedi* (Feet), I had the idea: now I will make it with this drapery. I did not start out by making, I started off from that base, from that model, and I asked myself how I could coordinate it, move it. I made an infinite number of drawings, some more precise, some less, when I then found myself with the wax, I didn't make any of them, but by drawing I understood the way of seeing it in all its ways, so that even if I made it in yet another way, I already understood how to identify the form.

Student: I am stuck when faced with this kind of work.

L.F.: Nobody is stuck, I call it that greed, if in order to do something one has to say: "Here, this is getting at something." In this case, however, you don't know what you are getting at, it is an act of generosity towards chance and can go on for a long time.

For example, you who had this idea, in my opinion, should have seen how this idea developed, and in fact I intervened; in substance I did something that you could have easily thought of first, but you stopped at the point of departure. You don't give the thing all that you can give it, you don't need genius in order to do this, one only needs [generosity].

Many times I see your works and when I don't find them resolved, I continue to work in my head to complete them; because they are not mine, naturally don't you think that all of this intense activity in substance doesn't allow things to come to me from the other side?

Some time ago, I don't remember who

said to me: "I don't know what the use of the Academy is," certainly, from the time I began to teach I never stopped to think what I should have done.

Normally, works made at school are sloppy, because once they are installed at school they are then abandoned, like any homework that got its grade, they are not revitalized by the loving gaze of the author or the viewer. I see your works die under my eyes because of your negligence and given that for my professional position, since I am your professor, I can't adopt them, I hope at least to take up the echo of their "artistic act" in my artworks.

¹ Fabro's idiosyncratic language and syntax have been preserved throughout the translation.

² Published in *Luciano Fabro. 100 Disegni*, Winterthur Kunstmuseum, 26 January – 14 April 2013 (Düsseldorf: Richter / Fey Verlag, 2013) pp. 33–35.

³ Throughout the discussion, Fabro plays extensively with the word "lavoro," using it interchangeably, both to describe "work" and "artwork". In English we have chosen to make the distinction for the sake of clarity for the reader.

⁴ See Luciano Fabro, *Compulsory Drawing Exercise: Nature / Figure / Position*, (Brera Art Academy, December 1997), in this volume on pages 223–229.

⁵ See Luciano Fabro, (Brera Art Academy, academic year 1996–1997).

⁶ Fabro uses the expression "fare un giro" which is untranslatable, the idea is that the work gains an interiority and comes back out as a formal stimulus.

⁷ See note 2 above for the word "lavoro," which Fabro uses both for "work" and "artwork."

⁸ See note 2 above.

⁹ Here Fabro intends the concept of discharging tension after making the work.

Giacinto Di Pietrantonio **DISEGNI IN-OPERA**

Why stage an exhibition of drawings by Luciano Fabro, given that he never drew much and, above all, rarely showed his drawings?

The most obvious answer might be: "Because it would be unprecedented". And it would suffice us to avoid viewing this as a one-off exhibition aimed at gaining the attention of the media and consider it, instead, as an opportunity to study an unknown side of the work of an artist who was fundamental in the history of art

and culture at the turn of the twenty-first century. In fact, the exhibition brings together about one hundred drawings and around a dozen large works: works chosen for their characteristics as signs, in an attempt to create a bridge between drawings and works. This became necessary because the drawings are not "project-related", meaning that they are not preparatory drawings but independent works, exercises in signs that Fabro made and then gave away to friends and relatives. In addition to not being preparatory in scope, these drawings were not even made primarily for exhibition purposes, much less commercial ones. Consequently, they show very unique autonomy and great freedom even with the respect to the discipline itself, although – as we will see – they are an integral and essential part of Fabro's œuvre.

In fact, on the one hand Fabro was an artist committed to developing an art that would bear the discipline itself in mind – and thus he anticipated postmodernity without ever actually being postmodern himself – but at the same time he always promoted and experienced this return to art not only as *Arte torna Arte* (Art Returns to Art), in the sense of an art for art, but also as a cultural and civil commitment. Therefore, it is no accident that *Arte torna Arte*¹ is the title of a book with a series of lessons the sculptor Fabro held at the Brera Academy in Milan, where he held the Chair of Painting from 1981 to 2002. *Arte torna Arte* focuses not only on training oneself for oneself, but training oneself for others. It is a fundamental book, published and republished, to which we can add his unabridged lessons on drawing published for this occasion. The aim of this volume is to provide greater insight into the historical-cultural value of his œuvre, which looks towards the past, not to cite it uncritically, but as a means to convey present knowledge in relation to the past and the future, so it can be given to others.

This is one of the areas of discussion in which we must also include the drawings we are showing here.

At first glance, because of the reasons we have cited and will repeat, these drawings are something private, but with Fabro, the private also pertains to the public realm,

given that he made this realm one of the linchpins of his work. Indeed, his drawings do not escape this formulation, as he stated time and again. One example is the interview with Francesca Pasini, in which he said, "When you decide to be an artist, you must have a very clear, distinct and active sense of identity. You also can't be indifferent, because otherwise you don't work as an artist. You do something else."² The drawings allude to this precisely because of the fact that they were made and then given away: the drawing on display – excepting those from the Fabro Archives – come from people and institutions that received them from the artist as a gift, the "gift of a gift". Fabro's generosity provides one of the keys to interpreting his drawings. It is natural that an artist's integrity – in whichever work he has created – will reveal his full effort, but I also think that when these works are made to be given away, then there is also another value, above and beyond that of art alone. As Marcel Mauss recalled in the theory he devised in the 1920s – but one that is still topical today – a gift implies building a relationship and a freedom, because it has an inherent asymmetrical reciprocity, in which the obligation to give back is merely moral, as there are no guarantees for the donor, thereby requiring great trust in others.³ Elena Pulcini, full professor of philosophy at the University of Florence, adds, "If selfishness is being for oneself, altruism is being for another. The gift pertains to the intermediate dimension of being with the other," which leads us to building a society rich in terms of human relations. Therefore, these drawings also talk about human relations, friendship, ethics, ourselves and others. The other, for Fabro, is also the student (the students) to whom he dedicated four lessons on drawing that provide valuable elements for interpreting the drawings themselves and his œuvre in general. In fact, these lessons – which at first glance may seem very technical and specifically designed for students – provide information to understand his drawings as well as his entire corpus of works, as we can glean when he says: "When one draws one must not be too fast, because speed can lead to superficiality and 'facile' effects. One cannot be too