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LUCIO FONTANA (1899-1968)

Concetto spaziale

signed 'l. fontana' (on the side)
glazed ceramic
10 x 12½ x 9½in. (25.4 x 31.7 x 24.2cm.)
Executed in 1964-1965

£120,000-180,000
\$160,000-230,000
€140,000-210,000



PROVENANCE:

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner in the 1960s.

This work is registered in the Archivio Lucio Fontana, Milan, under no. 4102/1.

Enamelled ceramic that shimmers with deep oily blues and reds as light glances off its curves, Lucio Fontana's *Concetto spaziale* recapitulates a number of the artist's visionary projects of the late 1950s and early 1960s in an exquisite ovoid form of motion and weight. One of a series of spherical or egg-shaped ceramic pieces produced at this time, its surface is punctured by two holes that open up the dark interior space of the work to the viewer, transforming our sense of the work's formal integrity. The work is in one sense a continuation of the artists' *Nature* cycle of rock-like terracotta forms incised with trademark Fontana slashes, but the piece also shows common ground with Fontana's work on canvas: its lustrous, glazed surface evokes the *Olii* works he had begun in 1957, whose liberal use of oil paint gave them a gleaming, almost lacquered finish, while the two holes at the heart of the piece mirror his long established and truly ground-breaking *Buchi* series of perforated paintings.

Though now perhaps best known for his canvases, Fontana actually began life as a sculptor. Not only was his Italian father a successful decorative and architectural sculptor in Rosario, Argentina, Fontana's birthplace, but Fontana's own formal artistic training came under Adolfo Wildt at the Accademia di Brera in Milan, known for his mastery over marble; indeed, before 1949, Fontana was thought of almost exclusively as a sculptor. However, his first *Buchi* works revealed the extent to which Fontana's developing thought and practice was beginning to elide these generic distinctions

'My discovery was the hole, period. And it wouldn't matter if I had died after this discovery.'

—LUCIO FONTANA

– his first holed canvases were first unveiled, controversially, in the sculpture section of the 1950 Venice Biennale. These holes were for Fontana the embodiment of his new Spatialist theories that he had spent the decade developing: for Fontana the sculptural quality of the *Buchi* resided in the way in which they introduced real physical voids into the flat plane of the painting, their holes collapsing the illusionistic depth of the canvas and inviting the viewer instead into a dynamic consideration of space that moved into and out of the work, in front of it and behind. Fontana had written in his famous *White Manifesto* of 1946 that 'The old static images no longer satisfy the modern man who has been shaped by the need for action, and a mechanized lifestyle of constant movement. The aesthetics of organic motion have replaced the out-moded aesthetics of fixed forms' (B. Arias, H. Cazeneuve and M. Fridman, *Manifesto Blanco*, Buenos Aires 1946) – and the hole offered him the opportunity to introduce this sense of movement to the viewer's experience of art.

In this *Concetto spaziale*, Fontana's holes continue to enable this sense of dynamism, drawing the viewer along a vector linking interior and exterior, just as the sculpture's liquid curves and reflective colours carry the eye through the space around the work. In this it achieves what Fontana had always wanted his art to achieve: space, time and movement are alchemised into one single, sublime artistic entity.



Alternate view.