

UGO MULAS

The Sensitive Surface

Opening NAPLES: Saturday November 22, 2014, h 11am – 7pm
Galleria Lia Rumma, Via Vannella Gaetani 12 – 80121 Naples
Gallery opening hours: Tuesday-Saturday h 10.30am - 1.30pm / 2.30pm - 7pm

Opening MILAN: Thursday November 27, 2014, h 6.30pm – 9pm
Galleria Lia Rumma, Via Stilicone 19 – 20154 Milan
Gallery opening hours: Tuesday- Saturday h 11am – 1.30pm / 2.30pm - 7pm

Galleria Lia Rumma is pleased to announce the representation of Ugo Mulas, one of the most important twentieth century photographers.

Curated by the New York-based curator Tina Kukielski, in collaboration with the Archivio Mulas, a distinct bodies of works demonstrating the wide breadth of Mulas's life and career will be on view simultaneously at both the Naples and Milan galleries.

By the time of his untimely death in 1973, Ugo Mulas was recognized as a master of portraiture, reportage, fashion and advertising photography. He photographed artists and artworks during one of the most dynamic periods in the history of art, the 1960s, when he portrayed the likes of Jasper Johns, Alexander Calder, Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp and countless members of the Italian avant-garde like Lucio Fontana. Lesser known is the work Mulas made at the end of the 1960s, work that explores the conceptualist potential of photography at that time. This exhibition features this robust period of experimentation centered in the artist's studio dating from 1969-1973. Complimenting this late period in Mulas's career are selections of the artist's lesser-known color work and a few standout examples of the artist's enlarged contact sheets, a motif that found recurrence in Mulas's work following a seminal trip to New York City in 1964.

Collaborating with Bruno Munari and Luciano Caramel, Mulas co-organized Campo Urbano, an exhibition of performances and events that took place on the streets of Como in 1969. Recognizing the photograph as inherently performative in its own right, Mulas shot sequences of images askew and oblique at times that played with the unpredictable, ephemeral quality of the happenings. Often printed and enlarged directly from the contact sheets, Mulas's Campo Urbano works subvert the narrative, chronological framing of the event to become something else entirely, another kind of art work or experience.

The contact sheet would be the readymade that Mulas would most frequently return to throughout his career. At the gallery in Naples, contact sheets including the rarely seen sequences of Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein, Pino Pascali and Andy Warhol will also be included alongside selections from Campo Urbano. Featured in Milan, will be the artist's prelude to his best-known Verifiche series, also on view upstairs. Known as the Verification proofs, these mostly black photographs printed directly from blank negatives and left uncropped challenge the language and temporality of the picture frame, opening up the photograph to something more than a simple record of a moment, time or place. In focusing on the machinery of picture-making, Mulas presents us with a compelling new face for art, as vivid today as it was at the time of first exposure.

In both galleries two rare documentary films will be screened: the Naples show will include a video regarding the project Campo Urbano, whereas a documentary shot by Nini Mulas with interviews by Rossana Rossanda to main New York based artists, will be visible in Milan.

Ugo Mulas (Pozzolengo, 1928 - Milan, 1973). Self-taught, his career developed in contact with the artistic and cultural scene in Milan in the early Fifties. After his debut in photojournalism (1954) Mulas rose rapidly to renown in Italy in various different fields of professional photography, publishing his work in magazines such as *Settimo Giorno*, *Rivista Pirelli*, *Novità*, *Domus*, *Vogue* and *Du*. In that period he worked on a series of reportages in Europe with Giorgio Zampa for *L'illustrazione italiana* and in an artistic partnership with Giorgio Strehler for Milan's *Piccolo Teatro*, a partnership that continued over the years. Mulas photographed the Venice Biennale exhibitions from 1954 to 1972 and worked in close contact with the artists. In that period the representation of the art world became the photographer's main focus. Projects of note include the famous series on Alberto Burri (1963) and Lucio Fontana (1965) and his reportage in Spoleto for the "Sculpture nella città" exhibition (1962), where he met the artists David Smith and Alexander Calder. The series dedicated to Eugenio Montale's poetry collection *Ossi di Seppia* also dates to this period. After discovering Pop Art at the 1964 Biennale, Mulas decided to go to the United States (1964- 67), where he created his most important reportage, the book *New York: The New Art Scene* (1967). His encounters with Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol, and his discovery of the photography of Robert Frank and Lee Friedlander, influenced his new work of the late 1960s, in which he moved away from traditional reportage.

Large formats, projections, solarisations and the use of the proof as an aesthetic device are elements that Mulas borrowed from the experimentation of Pop art and New Dada, and the practical business of photography. In the late Sixties he participated in the aesthetic and conceptual renewal of the neo-avantgarde movements, working on the catalogues (*Amore Mio*, 1970) and various document-books. This was the period of his reportage on the tenth anniversary of *Nouveau Réalisme* (Milan, 1970), his unpublished work *Vitalità del negativo* (Rome, 1970) and at least five other books: *Alik Cavaliere* (1967), *Campo urbano* (1969), *Calder* (1971), *Fausto Melotti: lo spazio inquieto* (1971) and *Fotografare l'arte* (1973). Mulas was also involved in experimental work on theatre, working with the director Virginio Puecher for the sets of *Wozzeck* by Alban Berg and Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, both in 1969. The decline of the reportage format, superseded by television, led Mulas to profound rethinking of the historic function of photography, and these aesthetic and phenomenological reflections led to his portfolio on Marcel Duchamp (1972) and the project *Archivio per Milano* (1969-72). His *Verifiche* (1968-72) were also produced in this period: the series of 13 works encapsulates Mulas' experience and his ongoing dialogue with the art world. A pivotal work in contemporary photography, the *Verifiche* series was to be his last work, as the photographer fell seriously ill. Mulas died on 2 March 1973, a month before the opening of a retrospective dedicated to his work at the University of Parma, and the publication of his book and final testament, *La Fotografia*.



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