

# sculpture

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**Karla Black Mona Hatoum Michelle Lopez**





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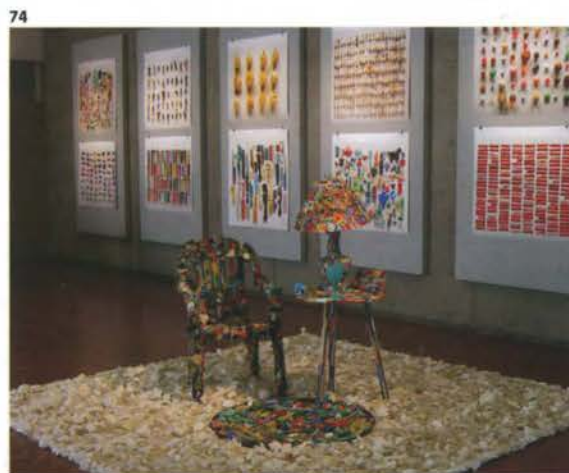
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On the Cover: Karla Black, *Platonic Solid* (detail), 2009. Plaster powder, powder paint, sugar paper, chalk, and lipstick, 70 x 1600 x 1040 cm. Installation at Modern Art Oxford. Photograph: Andy Keate, Courtesy the artist; Mary Mary, Glasgow; Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne; Modern Art Oxford.



## ROME

### Gregorio Botta Fondazione Volume!

La Fondazione Volume!, established by Francesco Nucci in 1997 with the help of Alfred Pirri, Jannis Kounellis, and Bernhard Rüdiger, is located in a defunct glass works storefront in the Trastevere neighborhood. With its irregular white plaster walls, uneven floors, vaulted arches, and thin winding corridors, the reconstructed space has provided Rome with one of its most distinctive venues for non-traditional exhibition formats since Sala Uno. In fact, the history of Volume! (collected in a recently published catalogue) shows how the constraints of the site were turned time and again into unique art-making situations. The roster of invited artists is international, and their installations have ranged from eccentrically situated two-dimensional works to live performances, video projections, and sculptural ensembles, but almost all of them have included some element of archaeological digging. Explicit permission to build new walls, to seal

off sections of the space, and to alter anything that doesn't maintain structural integrity allows each installation to become a unique sculpting of volume.

In a historically stratified city like Rome, the layering of successive cultures is visible in a tangible way. Like the urban envelope surrounding it, Volume! has built layer upon layer of artworks into its physical structure. As a laboratory for completely unexpected spatial configurations and an entirely unfettered space for contemporary art (without concern for economic returns), it has proven itself to be a marvelously supple container.

Volume! stayed true to its character with a recent exhibition of works by Gregorio Botta, whose sculptures and low-relief paintings rely on an understated language of symbols. His best-known works employ a rectangular tabula rasa image that recalls a blank sheet of parchment, glowing with softly muted colors, to elicit the viewer's imaginative creation of space and luminosity out of nothing. Other times, he uses the simple silhouette of a house or the form of a votive dish to the same ends. These works, which explore the void as a potential and vital energy, are both beautiful and satisfying. After an extended meditation on Keats's tombstone in the New

Protestant Cemetery in Rome (its epitaph reads, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water"), Botta took a different direction for this show, turning his attention to a more active principle, that of creating light spaces.

The exhibition title, "Accendere una lampada e sparire" ("Light a lamp and disappear"), comes from an Italian translation of Emily Dickinson, to whom Botta dedicated this installation. He situated three works in Volume!'s cavernous and darkened spaces, each one activated by hidden mechanisms and consisting of a visual cycle completed in something other than itself.

On entering the dimly lit gallery, viewers first encountered a small house-like volume apparently without openings. After a few moments (to allow the eyes to adapt), moving lights became visible to the left of the miniature building. Closer examination revealed them to be reflections of candle flames (the candles were located inside the house) captured by large glass panes placed beyond the structure. *Casetta* (Little house) plays off Plato's metaphor of the cave: everything is seen by reflection and through the distortion of the senses.

*Fiato* (Breath) consisted of a bellows mechanism and a small circu-

Gregorio Botta, *Anello*, 2009. Water, light, carved and cast concrete, and electric motor, 10 x 6.5 x 30 ft.

lar perforation in the wall that opened to reveal a burning candle. The viewer watched as the flame faltered and almost died, accompanied by the sound of exhalation, only to come back in full force accompanied by an inhalation. The ebb and flow of the sound mirrored the visuals. On the other side of the corridor, a ring of light seemed to move along the wall, accompanied by a soft whirring sound. *Anello* (Ring) cut a circular channel into an inclined concrete floor. A hidden jet spun water through this conduit, casting shimmering reverberations onto an adjacent wall.

In this multi-part installation, Botta stepped back from the fixity of the artwork, allowing the viewer to live in the perceptual moment created by the work. Turning directly to the elements, flame and water, these works bypassed symbolism to inscribe spaces of light and experience. This momentary disappearing act and Botta's incorporation of transitory elements may have been the result of his meditation on Keats and Dickinson. They are now also a significant part of his poetic evolution.

—John O'Brien