Enzo Cucchi: Testa

Exhibition 3 October- 21 November 1987
Admission free

"The pictures are like caves, like huge caves, full of fears, full of doubts and dark for all of us. All caves are full of fear, full of death, but out of this very death comes the possibility of inventing everything once again. There is nothing you cannot choose."

Enzo Cucchi's most recent works grouped in this exhibition under the title *Testa (Head)* share a common feature of melancholic grandeur and spiritual power. Recurrent themes of birth, decay, and apocalypse are reflected in both his choice of images and in his use of dark, brooding colours, coarse-grained surfaces and thick, scabrous layers of paint. This exhibition strikingly illustrates the artist's ability to combine his experience of natural phenomena with a vibrant sense of the supernatural. The works strive to be at once modern and timeless and to take their place in the body of work which is art at its most serious and universal.

Enzo Cucchi lives and works in the ancient Italian coastal town of Ancona. A place where the proximity of the sea and countryside and a sense of tradition in custom and taste is deeply felt by the inhabitants. Cucchi's ever repeated themes, the cycles of decay, metamorphosis and rebirth are intrinsic in nature and also visible in the passage of time and its effects on the changing face of the city. A self-consciously 'European' artist Cucchi is deeply affected by the various forms of art and architecture which are part of his immediate environment and indeed are part of the rest of Italy and Europe. He sees this living heritage as the crucial factor which distinguishes the European from the American artist. With this considerable awareness of the past it is no surprise that one of the subjects which Cucchi chooses to depict is the city of Rome. *Vista Roma I* and *Vista Roma II*, however, do not dwell upon the specific details of the city. The artist is not interested in topography. Rather the works suppress details in order to create an image more dreamlike, more elemental and essential. Ancient is indistinguishable from modern and buildings are distilled to their most basic forms. The apocalyptic theme is picked up in the huge muscular feet which appear to be stepping across the sky and out of *Vista Roma I* and by the curtain-like shape which cuts into the sky of *Vista Roma II*. The strangeness of these images is further increased by the addition of alien figures and landscapes in two and three dimensions. Always in Cucchi's art the recognisable and simple is undercut by the unexpected and the unnerving. Indeed Cucchi's personal iconography transforms and revitalises many diverse images,

forms and styles. His unique and powerful vision embraces both 'everyday certainties' and the cataclysmic. Cucchi views the role of the artist as essentially a spiritual one: "For society the artists are those who remember, who dream and who recount their dreams".

The paintings in the lower gallery are complemented by a selection of the artist's drawings which exist in their own right and as preparations for later works. These exhibit the artist's same obsessions and themes.

Enzo Cucchi has shown widely in both Europe and America. This however, is his first solo museum exhibition in Britain. It was organised by Lenbachhaus in Munich and will be shown at the Musee de la Ville de Nice later this year.

The Fruitmarket Gallery

45 Market Street
Edinburgh, EH1 1DF, Scotland

P +44 (0)131 225 2383
F +44 (0)131 220 3130

info@fruitmarket.co.uk
www.fruitmarket.co.uk

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