



## HE WALKS AND WALKS AND WALKS

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Walking is man's most natural activity. Unless something unfortunate intervenes to prevent it. So, if we consider art as special or different, it may come as a surprise that something as self-evident as walking can be elevated to an art form and find its place in the art world.

In 2002, Museion exhibited a large number of photographic works by the little-known Italian artist **Gianpietro Fazon**. They showed views he had taken while hiking through **the mountains of South Tyrol and Trentino** in the 1960s. On these largely aimless jaunts through the wild, Fazon always tried to create an intimate connection with nature. From 1967 to 1972, his oeuvre evolved in parallel with **Land Art**, which also provides a fitting context for it. What is particularly special about his work, though, is its **spiritual connection with Buddhism**. Fazon spent hours carving signs into rock, including symbolic circles, spirals, and angles that allude to pine tree needles. The photographs in his series "**Non opera**" (Non-works) cast rocks and plants in the guise of divine ready-mades. Whereas, the series "**Non luoghi**" (Non-places) focuses on the immaterial places of the imagination, such as a cave, a map with the place names deleted, or an empty chair in a monastery cloister ...

Perhaps it is no surprise that **Fazon abandoned the art world** in 1971 after learning that a work by Van Gogh had been sold at auction for a ridiculously high price. The sale demonstrated the **collision between radical art and the marketplace** that he simply could not accept. Fazon explained his reasons in an open farewell letter to the art world, as follows: "*I am well aware that my decision will not change the system that accepts me when I go along with it, and does not miss me when I withdraw, but a different consciousness has grown within me, a new light: we still need heaven.*"

So, **Fazon gave up art**, spent several years in India, and immersed himself in **the teachings of Buddhism**. Upon returning to Italy, he became an important figure in the interreligious dialogue between Buddhism and Catholicism, as evidenced by numerous publications. In the late 1990s, **he donated** the remaining artworks in his possession – mainly photographs as well as a number of textual works – **to Museion**, as he said he no longer needed them and wanted them to be preserved for posterity in a museum. Today Fazon lives in a nursing home near Assisi.

### Hamish Fulton

Hamish Fulton, who also has a number of works in the Museion collection and, unlike Fazon, already has a place in the annals of art history, describes himself as a "**walking artist**." Like his fellow students Gilbert & George, the British artist replaces conventional art objects with action. So, **walking becomes an art form**. A solo exhibition of Fulton's murals was held at Museion in 2005 after he had climbed **nine different peaks in Val Badia on nine consecutive days**. Like the artist's other walks, this action was spread over several days, had a clearly defined starting and end point and a coherent timeframe: nine days for nine peaks. The artist dedicated one of the large murals in his exhibition at Museion to this enterprise. It was purchased for the museum's collection, along with a series of drawings documenting a **twenty-four-hour walk the artist took**



with Reinhold Messner.



Hamish Fulton, "Dolomites", 2004. 45,5 x 60 cm. Ed. 1/46 – 46/46 + 4 e.d.a. Museion Collection.  
Foto: Ivo Corrà

Is Hamish Fulton a **spiritual artist**, like Fazion? It's hard to say. In any case, he is primarily concerned with the experiences he has during his walks, which he usually takes alone. Knowing that Fulton walks approximately the same distance as a marathon every day gives us an idea of the intensity of his endeavors. These can be called borderline experiences. The photographic works, drawings, and murals he makes of individual moments from his walks therefore represent objectifications of an otherwise **intangible flow of movement and experience**. In a sense, then, Fulton's works can be seen as the waste products of his experiences, and yet they are also the only way of stopping these transient enterprises from disappearing altogether.

Fazion and Fulton – together with the English artist Richard Long, who has a stone circle, a photographic work, and a textual work in the Museion collection – can be seen as **part of the Land Art** phenomenon, a movement with a tendency towards **dematerialization and conceptualism** that appeared on the art scene around 1970. Unlike Long, who altered the landscapes he traversed by creating circles, rectangles, or other shapes with found stones and other materials, Fulton simply walks. **He deliberately refrains from interfering with nature**. Out of respect.

Fulton is well aware that being an artist who travels the world for his walks and exhibitions means leaving a substantial carbon footprint. He is not proud of this, but he cannot avoid it as long as he is active as an artist. Ideally, he says, it would better not to transport his works from place to place for his shows, **but to create everything on site** – as was the case with his "wall pieces" exhibited at Museion. Alternatively, the works should be so small – like the sticks displayed in an exhibition at Messner's Juval Castle in 2002 – that they can be carried in a jacket pocket.

In an interview printed in the Fulton catalogue published at Museion in 2005, the artist talks about the "marathon monks" in Japan. As a physical and spiritual exercise, these monks circle Mount Hiei over and over again on an 84-kilometer trail. This comment certainly indicates Fulton's interest in the spiritual dimension of walking, even if he generally prefers not **to refer to his own spirituality**. His statement, "Making art should be as simple as sweeping the floor," is also a clear allusion to the centrality of simple actions in Zen Buddhism and, therefore, perhaps a hidden reference **to spirituality**, which he otherwise tends to minimize.

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