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MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO

Prima dello Specchio *Before the Mirror*

Opening: Saturday May 2nd 2015, Via del Castello 11, 6pm-midnight
Until 05.09.2015, Monday-Saturday, 10am-1pm, 2-7pm

Galleria Continua is pleased to welcome back to its exhibition spaces one of the leading figures on the international contemporary art scene, Michelangelo Pistoletto, with a solo show entitled ***Before the Mirror***. The exhibition comprises a considerable number of old works, through which the artist illustrates the genesis of the mirror paintings.

Pistoletto saw in figurative painting the path most suited to his own background and culture. He identified the self-portrait as the tool with which to respond to these needs, and focused his inquiries and production on it from the start. Between 1956 and 1958 he painted large-scale self-portraits that lay between the abstract and the material, with the face occupying the entire surface of the canvas. ***Before the Mirror*** features two of these very early oil and acrylic works on canvas.

In the years that followed, the artist dwelt on the issue of the realization of the background in his self-portraits. *"Between 1956 and 1958 I did those portraits, which, with time, became increasingly bigger, with*

an ever larger head. (...) Subsequently, the heads shrank to leave room for the body and the surrounding space. In this type of reduction of the figure to real dimensions I was greatly helped by the Bacon exhibition at the Galatea. Seeing Bacon I realized that my problem, my drama, was already there, declared, that of a man in search of his own dimension and his own space, an impenetrable cage of glass, in which the man lived in a state so dramatic as to be suffocated, to have no voice or space. A man who was stuck, hounded, ill, exhausted, anguish-ridden, splendidly painted, but, in this state, terribly isolated (...) I continued my exploration, condensing precisely my work on the man, but trying to do the opposite of Bacon: to remove all the expression and all the movement from the figure, so as to cool down the dramatic nature. (...) I continued to play on the relationship between the mass of this person and his background, and that's how I arrived at the gold grounds, the black grounds. I did backgrounds that were intended to be light, hence the glass, or totally automatic and inexpressive backgrounds. They were thousands of little lines or they were linoleum-like surfaces, that is, anonymous, decorative backgrounds, and from this anonymousness of the background I expected to see something happen."

(M. Pistoletto, interview with G. Celant, in *Pistoletto*, Electa, Florence 1984, p. 23). *Autoritratto su fondo argento* (Self-portrait on Silver background), *Il presente – Uomo di schiena* (The present – Man seen from behind), *Autoritratto oro* (Gold self-portrait) are some of the works realized by the artist between 1960 and 1961, and shown at the Galleria Continua. In these canvases, Pistoletto depicts himself life size, on monochrome grounds, increasingly immobile and inexpressive, like a prototype of a common human being.

In 1961, finally, came the turning point that led to the mirror paintings. *“When, in 1961, I began to paint my face on a black ground polished to the point of being a mirror, I saw it coming towards me, standing out in the space of an environment in which everything was moving, and I was shocked. I also realized I no longer had to look at myself in another mirror, but that I could copy myself by looking directly into the canvas. In the next picture I turned the figure round, because the painted eyes were still artificial, while those of the reflection appeared as real as those of the figure that was now on the surface of the picture looking into the picture. In fact, as it was now turned in the same direction as me, it possessed my very same eyes.”* (M. Pistoletto, “Il rinascimento dell’arte”, 1979, unpublished manuscript). *Persona di schiena* (Person seen from the back), a mirror painting realized in 1962, is one of the works that rounds off the exhibition.

Michelangelo Pistoletto was born in Biella in 1933. In 1960 he had his first solo exhibition at the Galleria Galatea in Turin. In 1961–62 he realized his *Quadri Specchianti* (Mirror paintings), and between 1965 and 1966 he produced a group of works entitled *Oggetti in Meno* (Minus objects), considered to be fundamental in the birth of Arte Povera. In 1967, with the formation of the Zoo group, he achieved the “creative collaboration” that he would then develop in the course of the following decades, bringing together and relating artists from different disciplines and sectors of society. In 1978 he presented two fundamental lines of inquiry for his future work: *Divisione e moltiplicazione dello specchio* (Division and multiplication of the mirror) and *L’arte assume la religione* (Art takes on religion). In the 1990s, with Progetto Arte and with the establishment, in Biella, of Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto and the University of Ideas, he placed art into an active relationship with the various spheres of the social fabric in order to inspire and bring about a responsible transformation of society. In 2003 he was awarded the Golden Lion for Career Achievement at the Venice Biennale. In 2004 he received an honorary degree in Political Science from the University of Turin, and announced the most recent phase of his Third paradise work. In 2007 he received the Wolf Foundation Prize in Arts in Jerusalem “for his constantly inventive career as an artist, educator and activist, whose restless intelligence has created prescient forms of art that contribute to fresh understanding of the world”. In 2011 he was artistic director of Evento 2011 in Bordeaux. In 2013 he had a solo show at the Louvre, entitled *Année1 – Le Paradis sur Terre*. In the same year he received the Praemium Imperiale award for painting in Tokyo. Works by Pistoletto are held in the collections of many leading modern and contemporary art museums.

For further information about the exhibition and for photographs:

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