

**MICHELANGELO
PISTOLETTO**

**BEFORE
THE MIRROR**

Galleria Continua
SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA

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MICHELANGELO AND DANTE

CARLO FALCIANI

CARLO FALCIANI graduated from the University of Florence with a thesis on Rosso Fiorentino. As a research fellow of Villa i Tatti, Harvard University's Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, he developed a project on the Gallery of Fontainebleau, while as a research fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery in Washington, he pursued a research project on Bronzino.

He has published a monographic study on Rosso Fiorentino and a catalogue entitled *Pontormo, Drawings in the Uffizi*, both with Leo Olschki, alongside numerous essays on 16th century Florentine, Venetian and French painting which have featured in both Italian and international journals.

He has worked on numerous exhibitions in Italy and abroad, personally curating the exhibition entitled *Florence, Portraits à la cour de Médicis* for the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris in 2015, and co-curating two hugely successful exhibitions with Antonio Natali for Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, the first on *Bronzino, Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici* in 2010–11, and the second on *Pontormo and Rosso, Diverging Paths of Mannerism* in 2014.

He currently lectures in art history at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence.

Michelangelo Pistoletto spoke to me of our own time and of the far-off days when he used to devote his energies to painting, using words that were calm but firm, in the kind of outline form that only memories can shape. He made it clear to me at once that he has no books, that he has never read a book and that he trusts only oral culture, word of mouth; but then, in his day that culture did not simply carry fleeting words, it also had deep and ancient roots. As he spoke, there emerged from the depths of my boyhood memories the afternoons I would spend with a relation of my mother, a shepherd who knew Dante's *Inferno* by heart, and with my aunt, who would tell us tales with a moral to them which I only discovered were Poggio Bracciolini's *Faenze* when I got to university. Michelangelo, however, denies that that was also the case in the Piedmont. Yet his father's pointing him in the direction of traditional painting must have exercised the same kind of pull on him, because it still helps him when he formulates detailed descriptions of works on perspective and mathematics from the Quattrocento. So what one discovers rooted in him in place of the written word is the figurative style of his father, a painter and restorer who pointed him in the direction of mimetic painting as being the sole path for capturing and freezing the instant snapshot or the passage of one's own life story in a dimension outside of time. But the substance of time in the late 'fifties could not yet have an absolute quality to it, because though the rift with the past had already been consumed in art, the need for a narrative of social time was still striding ahead, propelled by the demand for information and for change, and a synthesis between the two possibilities was within people's grasp. What the contemporary style did offer this young artist was the debate between the abstract and the figurative, which in both cases pointed to a path of isolation and withdrawal into one's own individuality, a move which could be interpreted either by getting to grips with Pollock's abstract painting or else by tackling Francis Bacon's baggy yet nevertheless cutting figurative style – two avenues which, while seemingly divergent yet at the same time also convergent in Michelangelo's eyes, were incapable of meeting the needs of a lad from a different generation who was seeking new paths, new forms.

As a first step in that direction, Pistoletto's need to look within himself through different eyes drove him in 1956 to experiment with nuclear painting, the manifesto for which had been drafted in Milan in 1950. From that time we have a *Self-Portrait* showing his face alone, where the painting seethes with particles at once luminous and earthy which appear to give off heat from the friction generated by the act of painting and to take over almost the whole

of the blood-red monochrome background, which is confined to the corners. Yet the social urgency of a time that was surging powerfully forward led down that path too, a path which was both nuclear and French in its inspiration, thus unsatisfactory. Immediately afterwards in the chronological sequence of his works, the paths came together when he portrayed the compressed energy of the lethargic reflection, conducted on a never-ending afternoon, of a young man of twenty-five who had learned to paint with deference to tradition. The climate was almost the same as that “scorching and incredibly lovely September, that extended and obsessive summer, time dragging out unbearably” which Francesco Arcangeli found so oppressive in 1954 when he wrote about Morlotti’s informal painting in *“Paragone”*. Pistoletto’s paintings in that vein, recording his attempts to emerge from the “dramatic and tragic condition” of man number only a handful, yet they are almost symbolic steps forward in that they increasingly mirror a artistic pathway determined to “find a way out” (his own words) of the existential suffering that beset the postwar era. Pistoletto, however, imparts form to the same oppressively urgent need to overcome the sense of bewilderment of the times in his intense wrestling with painting by looking to Francis Bacon’s doleful obsessions. In the *Man Lying Beneath a Window*, painted in 1957–8, the architectural space so close to the English painter’s heart is diminished even further by an opaque glass window (in a workshop or factory at dusk), depicted at right angles to the canvas, just as his *Rolling Shutter* of many years later was to curb the mirror’s ability to reflect. Yet the man crouching in that picture still embodies a subjective present (as opposed to the impersonal present that Michelangelo was to consider the only option only a few years later) and his alter ego, also in 1959, is depicted in another painting in the imperious gesture of a painter hunched over a picture – Pollock had shown the way – still shown torn and bloody in the style of Bacon. That painting brought to a close a blind alley with no future, at the very moment that a crowd surged forward in a painting, also dated 1959, to demolish the railings that Pistoletto had painted over it in a similar picture painted only a short while before.

This desire to break through the pathways offered to a young painter at that moment could not be satisfied through gestural painting, so another option put in an appearance in several other pictures that he painted at around the age of twenty-five, the result of inspiration that was a combination of the tradition dear to the heart of his painter father (who urged him to restore the old and reflecting surfaces of unmoving icons) and, by analogy, the transfiguration of the equally anodine and reflecting surfaces in the industrial objects whose praises advertising was beginning to sing at that time. It is common knowledge that Armando Testa’s school, which Pistoletto frequented in those years, prompted him to look towards contemporary art: a new world opening up to Pop Art. Yet in his eyes that style, coeval with his own work, altered every modern icon, be it Marilyn Monroe or a commercial product, rendering it impersonal, and was unable to offer him the new vocabulary that an artist needed in order to express himself in a country where Humanism still had deep and vibrant roots. Of the thoughts that beset him then, Michelangelo recalls the urgency of once again placing man, thus himself, back in the centre of his artistic thinking while transcending the subjectivity of his early work. The golden surface of the Byzantine icon could thus serve not only to reflect the blaze of the Absolute but also to depict and at the same time to transcend one’s existence, imbued, if anything, with the power that only the cinema appeared to possess at the time. In Antonioni’s 1957 movie *Il Grido*, Aldo, the leading actor, moves clumsily around a postwar Italy scarred by





the building sites of the era of reconstruction and development, hunching his shoulders in his shabby jacket and shoving his hands deep into his pockets as though to shield himself from events. A similar rejection becomes a silent, painted lament in the series of self-portraits that Pistoletto painted precisely between 1958 and 1961. A man alone stands out starkly against a backdrop from which every narrative word entrusted to an ever more solidly textured painting emerges increasingly devoid of structure and force. Michelangelo says that in the years of his youth “art had achieved complete autonomy from every event in the world”, that it could capture a place or depict a moment but that it could no longer relinquish that autonomy. The true path towards an Absolute that distinguishes the fleeting moment depicted from the idea external to that depiction contained in a single image had both begun and, at the same time, already been resolved in those early works. Thus the subjectivity of the narrative is captured in an objectivity which is real precisely because it is ideal, where the possibility of depicting the social is merely a corollary. As has always been the case throughout the history of painting, the tangible idea, pure thought, that embraces everything is thus visible in its objective truth but perceptible only in its countless replicas. These thoughts, which are there in embryonic form in Michelangelo Pistoletto’s first self-portraits, were many years later to achieve icy, unmoving depiction in the *Cubic Metre of Infinity* set inside a reflecting cube. Entering the cube, the visitor can only comprehend with his intellect the infinite reflection without any images in the mirrors that look solely at each other, while he can see with his eyes the reflection of his own self multiplied from one mirror to the other on the walls of the reflecting room.

Something similar happens in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, where Beatrice describes three mirrors in which to observe the multiple reflection of light.

Thou shalt take three mirrors; two of them removed
at equal distance from thee, let the third,
placed 'tween them, more remotely meet thine eyes.

Then, turning toward them, let a lamp stand so
between them, as to shine upon all three,
and be reflected on thee from them all.

Though the most distant light will not extend
so much in quantity, thou shalt see thereby
how it must needs with equal brightness shine.
(Dante, *Paradise*, II, 91–105)

Nevertheless, on the path down which Michelangelo had set out, the reflection of the visible in a reflecting plate was to be the ultimate achievement, to reach which it was necessary to completely remove all of the narrative elements entrusted up until that moment to painting; but more than anything, it was necessary for him to turn his gaze no longer on the world but on the work, a rotation that was to occur in physical terms in a self-portrait dated 1961, just before his first mirrors.

His removal of the painted narrative, on the other hand, began with his full-frontal three-quarter figure self-portraits in 1959. In one of them, we still see behind the artist a tight, geometric grid, maybe consisting of books, which disappears completely in another

painting of the same year. In this latter version Michelangelo portrays himself with folded arms before a silver space still vibrant with brushstrokes. From that moment on, all painted narrative superfluous to the figure on a monochrome background is removed, and while Pistoletto points to a path that is closed to subjectivity and open to objectivity, we can still read, in several large words that speak of images in a mirror, his metaphorical turning towards a different space from the space that had lain at the heart of painting for centuries – lofty words indeed, yet capable nonetheless of showing us how the slender thread linking him to the old world was not actually severed, unlike what was happening in American Pop Art. In Pistoletto's art, the bond with the ancient tradition of Italian art, called on since the era of Humanism to depict man and the Absolute in unity, continues to vibrate.

This tradition reared its head again in 1960 in a self-portrait on a gold background where, akin to a Byzantine icon, the artist depicts himself full-figure like some demiurge dissatisfied with his own features, which are imperiously erased to allow the polished, almost reflecting surface of the gold to emerge. Yet his eyes are still trained on the light of the world as though it were a cinema screen, as indeed they are in another self-portrait painted the following year, in which the figure rears up as though illuminated by a theatre spotlight, against a black backdrop capable, at this juncture, of autonomously reflecting the images that pass in front of it. This, because the face of those observing the work appear diaphanous beside that of the artist, blurred larvae against an intense black backdrop:

But, that I might behold it, there appeared
a sight, which to itself so closely held me,
that my confession I remembered not.

Even as from polished or transparent glasses,
or waters clear and still, but not so deep,
that wholly lost to vision is their bed,

the features of our faces are returned
so faintly, that upon a pallid brow
a pearl comes no less faintly to our eyes;

thus saw I many a face that longed to speak;
I therefore ran into the fault opposed
to that which kindled love 'tween man and fount.

As soon as I became aware of them,
supposing they were mirrored images,
to find out whose they were, I turned mine eyes;

and seeing nothing, back again I turned them
straight on into the light of my sweet Guide,
whose holy eyes were glowing as she smiled.
(Dante, *Paradise*, III, 7-24)

Dante too, in his *Paradise*, perceiving the angelic faces, believes that he can see only reflected images in a clear mirror, and so he turns around to look behind himself, seeking the truth in his vision; but finding nothing, he understands that the truth is contained in an image that appears to be a reflection. Thus in 1961 Michelangelo Pistoletto turned his own gaze towards the canvas in a self-portrait on a black backdrop where he is seen from behind and no longer looks at the world (which painting had attempted up until that moment to portray) but only at the reflected image. Yet unlike Narcissus, he does not focus on his own face and he skirts the risk of subjectivity by opening up to the images of society as a whole, including the blurred and chance images that are going to pass in front of the mirror over the years to come:

as in a mirror he perceives its flame,
who from behind is lighted by a torch,
before he has it in his sight or thought,

and turns around to notice if the glass
have told the truth, and sees that it accords
therewith, as with its music's time a song;

so likewise now my memory recalls
(Dante, *Paradise*, XXVIII, 4-10)

So once again, in Dante's words, an improved perception of the truth appears only through its reflection "in the mirror", to which truth is "tuned" like a note with its rhythmic metre, and the memory recalls it only through that image.

The transition has occurred towards a symbolic diaphragm which has reduced the figure of the artist to its objective essence, an impersonal demiurge who portrays everything in the mirror without his presence being revealed by a gesture or by an image, like God who mirrors everything but who is never mirrored:

for I behold it in the Truthful Mirror,
which of Itself makes other things a likeness,
though naught makes It a likeness of itself.
(Dante, *Paradise*, XXVI, 106-108)

After the self-portrait from behind painted in 1961, the heady possibility of being able to portray everything in its fleeting passage, of summing everything up in the impalpable idea of the reflecting diaphragm, opened up endless avenues. A great deal has already been written on that topic, so here we shall confine ourselves to indicating, as a corollary, the possibility (agreeing in this respect with Dante) of preserving as an opportunity for expression the images of the memory depicted in the fragile tissues that appear partially and fleetingly on the mirror's surface – women on a balcony looking elsewhere, as in *The Girlfriends* painted in 1955, or in Antonioni's *L'Avventura* filmed in 1960, he too a narrator of empty spaces filled with melancholy. In other, early mirrors, on the other hand, the tissue portrays the

partial and suspended gestures of a seated person lost in thought – movements that serve no purpose in the narrative but that are symbolic of a long wait or a good-bye, as in Luigi Tenco's *Ti Ricorderai* or in his *Una Vita Inutile*, written in 1961, humdrum and poetic words that encapsulate images of suspended lives or even lives that have gone astray, in the very moment an entire society embarks on irreversible change. But that, too, is a story about which a great deal has already been written.

BEFORE THE MIRROR











MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO

Michelangelo Pistoletto was born in Biella in 1933.

His artistic training began in the studio of his father, a painter and restorer, where he went to work at the age of fourteen. He subsequently attended Armando Testa's advertising design school.

In 1955 he began to exhibit the results of the inquiry into self-portraiture that characterized his painting in the late fifties. He received the San Fedele Prize in Milan in 1958. In 1960 he had his first solo show at Galleria Galatea in Turin. That same year he made several life-sized self-portraits on gold, silver and copper monochrome backgrounds. In 1961 he created the series of works entitled *The Present*, painting his own image on a black background to which a layer of transparent varnish gave a mirror gloss.

In 1962 he perfected the technique of his *Mirror Paintings*: he produced an image on tissue paper by enlarging a photograph to life size, painting it with the tip of a brush, then affixed it onto a sheet of mirror-finished stainless steel (after 1971 the painted tissue was replaced by a silkscreen of the photographic image). These works directly include the viewer and real time, and open up perspective, reversing the Renaissance perspective that had been closed by the twentieth-century avant-gardes. The *Mirror Paintings*, shown for the first time in March 1963 at Galleria Galatea, quickly brought Pistoletto international acclaim and

led to his inclusion in major exhibitions of Pop Art and Nouveau Realisme. During the sixties the artist had solo shows in important galleries and museums in Europe and the United States (in 1964 at Galerie Sonnabend in Paris, in 1966 at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, in 1967 at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, in 1969 at the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam). In 1967 he received the Belgian critics' prize and that of the São Paulo Biennale. The *Mirror Paintings* are the foundation of Pistoletto's subsequent artistic output and of the theoretical thought that consistently parallels it.

In 1964, at Galleria Sperone in Turin, he showed the body of work called *Plexiglas*—a first transposition in real space of the new open dimension of the mirror paintings, as well as a declaration of art's "conceptual" character.

In 1965-1966 he showed a set of works, entitled *Minus Objects*, in his studio. These works, made in the contingent dimension of time and based on the principle of difference, broke with the dogma of the uniformity of individual artistic style. They are considered fundamental to the birth of Arte Povera, an art movement theorized by Germano Celant in 1967, of which Pistoletto was an animating force and a leading figure.

In March, 1967 Pistoletto began to work outside traditional exhibition spaces. In December of that year he announced the opening of

his studio, in a manifesto. In this context The Zoo arose—a group of people from different artistic disciplines, together with whom Pistoletto carried out actions conceived as creative collaborations from 1968 to 1970. Invited to the Venice Biennale in 1968, he published his *Manifesto of Collaboration*.

Between October 1975 and September 1976 Pistoletto carried out a work that was intended to fill a full year. Divided into twelve consecutive exhibitions, entitled *The Rooms*, the piece occupied the spaces of Galleria Stein in Turin. It was the first of a series of complex works, each developed over a year's time and named "time continents". Other works from the series are *White Year* (1989) and *Happy Turtle* (1992). In 1976 he published *One Hundred Exhibitions in the Month of October*, a booklet that describes a hundred ideas for works conceived over a month, many of which he carried out in the following years. In March 1978, in a show at Galleria Persano in Turin, Pistoletto defined two main directions his future artwork would take: *Division and Multiplication of the Mirror* and *Art Takes On Religion*. In this same month he began a one-year residency at DAAD in Berlin, in which city he presented a retrospective exhibition at the Nationalgalerie and in thirteen public places. Over the two-year period, 1978-1979, he presented a series of one-person shows, installations and actions in cities across the United States. This included Creative Collaboration in Atlanta, a broad creative partnership extended to the entire city, in which he involved local artists from different disciplines together with artists with whom he had worked in the past (actor Lionello Gennaro, musician Enrico Rava, composer Morton Feldmann) and members of his family. His artistic collaborations continued throughout 1979 in different places, particularly at Corniglia (Liguria), a village with whose inhabitants he staged the play *Anno Uno* at the Teatro Qurino in Rome in 1981. In 1981, at Salvatore Ala Gallery in New York,

Pistoletto showed *The Nativity*, a first example of the rigid polyurethane sculptures he created in the early eighties. In 1984 he remade some of these works in marble and on a large scale in his one-person show at Forte di Belvedere in Florence.

From 1985 to 1989 he created a new cycle of works, made up of surfaces and volumes in anonymous materials and dark, gloomy colors, called Art of Squalor, exhibited at Galleria Persano in Turin and at Galleria Pieroni in Rome.

In 1991 he was appointed Professor of Sculpture at the Vienna Fine Arts Academy, a position he kept until 2000. With his students, he developed an innovative program intent on breaking down the traditional barriers between artistic disciplines.

In 1993 he began the phase called *Art Sign*, based on an idea conceived in *One Hundred Exhibitions in the Month of October* (1976). In addition to producing a series of works sharing a form that constituted his personal *Art Sign*, the artist invited other people, on diverse occasions, to create and present an *Art Sign* of their own.

In 1994 began *Project Art* with which Pistoletto — by means of a program manifesto, public meetings, displays and exhibitions that involved artists of different disciplines and representatives of broad sectors of society — placed art at the center of socially responsible change. 1998 witnessed the establishment of Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto in a former mill in Biella, Italy, acquired by the artist in 1991. Here the goals expressed in *Project Art* are still being developed and accomplished.

2000 saw the inauguration, at the Paoli-Calmettes Cancer Institute in Marseille, of the Place of Meditation and Prayer, a multiconfessional, secular space conceived and executed by the artist.

In 2002 Pistoletto was Artistic Director of the Turin International Biennial of Young Art entitled *Big Social Game*. That same year he received the Diploma di Benemerito della

Cultura e dell'Arte from the President of the Italian Republic.

In 2003 he was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale. At the same Biennale he presented *Love Difference - Artistic Movement for an InterMediterranean Politic*, a project born in April 2002 at Cittadellarte, for which Pistoletto made a large reflecting table in the shape of the Mediterranean basin, around which many of the subsequent activities of *Love Difference* took place.

In 2004 Turin University graduated him with a laurea honoris causa in Political Science. On that occasion the artist publicly announced the most recent phase of his work, *Third Paradise*, the symbol of which is the New Infinity Sign he created in 2003. From 2007, with the collaboration between Pistoletto and the musician Gianna Nannini, curated by Zerynthia - RAM Radioartemobile, the *Third Paradise* evolved into a multimedia work in progress. In 2007, in Jerusalem, Pistoletto was awarded the Wolf Foundation Prize in the Arts, "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 2010 he wrote the essay *The Third Paradise*, published in Italian, English, French and German. In 2011 he was the artistic director of *Evento 2011 - L'art pour une révolution urbaine* in Bordeaux.

In 2012 he started promoting the Rebirth-day, first worldwide day of rebirth, celebrated every year on 21st December with initiatives taking place all around the world.

In 2013 the Louvre in Paris hosted his personal exhibition *Michelangelo Pistoletto, année un – le paradis sur terre*. In this same year he received the Praemium Imperiale for painting, in Tokyo.

In 2014 the symbol of the Third Paradise was installed in the hall of the headquarters of the Council of the European Union in Bruxelles for the period of the Italian Presidency of the European Council.

In May 2015 he received a laurea honoris causa from the University of Arts of Havana in Cuba for "his contribution to contemporary art and his influence on different generations of artists". In October of the same year his monumental sculpture *ReBirth* will be unveiled in the Ariana Park in Geneve, in front of the Palais des Nations, to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the United Nations.

MAIN SOLO EXHIBITIONS IN MUSEUMS:

1966, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; 1967, Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels; 1969, Boymans van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam; 1973, Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover; 1974, Matildenhöhe, Darmstadt; 1976, Palazzo Grassi, Venezia; 1978, Nationalgalerie, Berlin; 1979, Rice Demanil Museum, Houston; 1983, Palacio de Cristal, Madrid; 1984, Forte di Belvedere, Firenze; 1988, PS.1, New York; Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden Baden; 1989, Kunsthalle, Bern; Secession, Vienna; 1990, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome; 1991, Museet for Samdikt Kunst, Oslo; 1993, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg; 1994, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul; 1995, Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Wien; 1996, Lenbachhaus, Munich; 1997, Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato; 1999, MMAO, Oxford; Henry Moore Foundation, Halifax; Galerie Taxispalais, Innsbruck; 2000: GAM, Turin; MACBA, Barcelona; 2001: Musée d'Art Contemporain, Lyon; Contemporary Museum of Bosnia, Sarajevo; Ludwig Museum, Budapest; 2003, MuHKA, Antwerp; 2005, Galleria Civica, Modena; 2007, MAMAC, Nice; NCCA, Moscow; 2010: MARCA, Catanzaro; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; 2011: MAXXI, Roma; 2012: Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz; 2013: Musée du Louvre, Paris; 2014: Beirut, Beirut Exhibition Center.

He has participated twelve times in the Venice Biennale (1966, 1968, 1976, 1978, 1984, 1986, 1993, 1995, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2011) and four times in *Documenta*, Kassel (1968, 1982, 1992 and 1997).

His works are present in the collections of leading museums of modern and contemporary art, including:

Antwerpen, MuHKA - Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst
Barcellona, Macba - Museu d'art contemporani de Barcelona
Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie
Bruxelles, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique
Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art
Des Moines, Des Moines Art Center
Detroit, Detroit Institut of Art
Eindhoven, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum
Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi
Fort Worth, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Frankfurt am Main, MMK – Museum für Moderne Kunst
Gent, S.M.A.K. – Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst
Graz, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum
Houston, The Menil Collection
Ithaca, Herbert F. Johnson Museum
London, Tate Modern
Los Angeles, LACMA - Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
Marseille, MAC - Musées d'Art Contemporain
Marseille, MuCEM - Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée
Milano, Museo del Novecento
Minneapolis, Walker Art Center
Mönchengladbach, Städtisches Museum Abteiberg
München, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus
Napoli, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina Madre
Napoli, Museo di Capodimonte
New Orleans, New Orleans Museum of Art
New York, Brooklyn Museum
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, MoMA - The Museum of Modern Art

New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
Nice, MAMAC - Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain

Northampton, Smith College Museum of Art
Oslo, The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design
Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum
Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou-Musée National d'Art Modern
Porto, Fundação de Serralves - Museu de Arte Contemporânea
Prag, National Gallery - Veletrní Palace
Prato, Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci
Rivoli, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Castello di Rivoli
Rochechouart, Musée départemental d'art contemporain
Roma, GNAM - Galleria Nazionale d'arte moderna
Roma, MAXXI - Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo
Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen
Rovereto, Museo per l'Arte Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto (MART)
Saint-Étienne, Musée d'art moderne de Saint-Étienne Metropole
San Francisco, MOMASF-Museum of Modern Art
Seul, National Museum of Contemporary Art
Torino, GAM - Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea
Toyama, The Museum of Modern Art
Toyota, Toyota Municipal Museum of Art
Vaduz, Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein
Washington, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution
Washington, National Gallery of Art
Wien, MUMOK - Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig

WORKS EXHIBITION HISTORY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Autoritratto, 1956
oil and acrylic on canvas
140 x 90 cm



Exhibition history and biography:
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many. 1957-1974". (pp. 144, 170)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti. 1957-1974". (pp. 162, 188)
Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum - Neue Galerie Graz, 1 June - 7 October 2012, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Spiegel- und Minusobjekte".
Arles, Chapelle Saint-Martin du Méjan, 8 July - 26 October 2014, "Le Troisième Paradis".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

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Firenze, Forte di Belvedere, 24 March - 27 May 1984, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 16)
Bruno Corà, *Michelangelo Pistoletto. Lo spazio della riflessione nell'arte*, Essegì, Ravenna, 1986. (p. 25)
Jeremy Levison, Michael Auping, Pascal Gielen, *Michelangelo Pistoletto. Mirror Painting*,

Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2010 (p. 11)
Paris, Louvre, 25 April - 2 September 2013, "Michelangelo Pistoletto - Année 1, le Paradis sur Terre". (p. 154)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voce di Pistoletto*, Bompiani, Milano 2013 (p. 54)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *The Voice of Pistoletto*, Rizzoli, New York 2014 (p. 54)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voix de Pistoletto*, Actes Sud, Arles 2014 (p. 357)

Autoritratto, 1957
oil and acrylic on canvas
200 x 100 cm



Exhibition history and biography:
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MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti. 1957-1974". (pp. 53, 162)

Figura umana, 1957
oil and acrylic on canvas
120 x 90 cm



Exhibition history and biography:
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

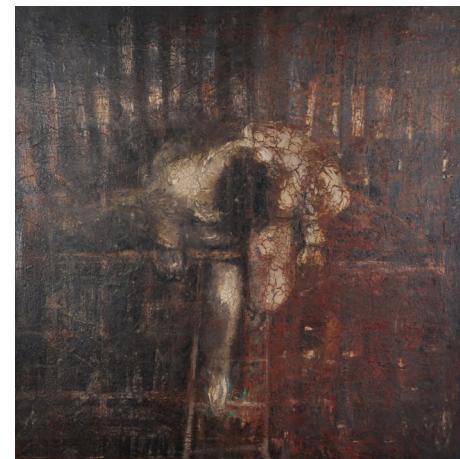
La folla ingrata, 1958-1959
oil and acrylic on canvas
140 x 100 cm



Exhibition history and bibliography:
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Further bibliographical references:
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many 1957-1974". (p. 34)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti. 1957-1974". (p. 54)

Acrobata, 1958
oil on canvas
120 x 120 cm



Exhibition history and biography:
Torino, Galleria Galatea, 30 marzo - 15 aprile 1960, "Michelangelo Pistoletto".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

La folla, 1959
oil and acrylic on canvas
200 x 100 cm



Exhibition history and bibliography:
Torino, Palazzina della Società della Promotrice delle Belle Arti, 17 November 2000 - 8 March 2001, "Michelangelo Pistoletto, Io sono l'altro". (p. 43)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many 1957-1974". (p. 170)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti. 1957-1974". (p. 189)
Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum - Neue Galerie Graz, 1 June - 7 October 2012, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Spiegel- und Minusobjekte".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Il pittore, 1959
oil on canvas
120 x 120 cm



Exhibition history:
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Bibliography:
Firenze, Forte di Belvedere, 24 March - 27 May 1984, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 18)

Esperimento, 1959
silver, acrylic, rope, wood and canvas
74 x 60 cm



Exhibition history and bibliography:
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many. 1957-1974". (p. 172)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti. 1957-1974". (p. 190)
Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum - Neue Galerie Graz, 1 June - 7 October 2012, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Spiegel- und Minusobjekte".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Figura oro, 1959 - 1960
mixed media
100 x 100 cm



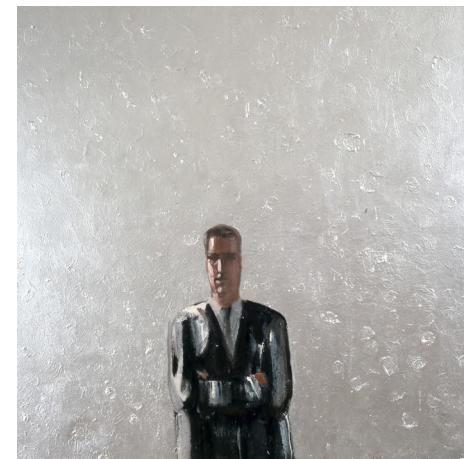
Exhibition history:
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

L'uomo nero, 1959
oil on canvas
120 x 120 cm



Exhibition history:
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Autoritratto su fondo argento, 1960
acrylic, silver and plaster on canvas
150 x 150 cm



Exhibition history:
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Further bibliographical references:
Wien, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 30 May - 10 September 1995, "Michelangelo Pistoletto - Zeit-Räume". (p. 2)
Barcelona, MACBA - Museu d'art Contemporani de Barcelona, 27 January - 29 March 2000, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 15)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many. 1957-1974". (pp. 40, 147)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti. 1957-1974". (pp. 60, 165)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voce di Pistoletto*, Bompiani, Milano 2013 (p. 55)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *The Voice of Pistoletto*, Rizzoli, New York 2014 (p. 55)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voix de Pistoletto*, Actes Sud, Arles 2014 (p. 67)

Linoleum, 1960
oil, acrylic and silver on canvas
100 x 100 cm



Exhibition history and bibliography:
Venezia, Palazzo Grassi, 16 June - 31 July 1976, "Michelangelo Pistoletto".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Further bibliographical references:
Bruno Corà, Michelangelo Pistoletto. *Lo spazio della riflessione nell'arte*, Essegì, Ravenna, 1986. (p. 27)
Napoli, Museo di Capodimonte, March 1989, "Sette Rilievi. Un'opera di Michelangelo Pistoletto al Museo di Capodimonte". (p. 18)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many. 1957-1974". (p. 41)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti. 1957-1974". (p. 61)

Autoritratto oro, 1960
oil, acrylic and gold on canvas
200 x 150 cm



Exhibition history and bibliography:
Firenze, Forte di Belvedere, 24 March - 27 May 1984, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 28)
Marseille, Musée Cantini, 29 novembre-25 gennaio 1987, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Jalous anciens, oeuvres récentes". (p. 13)
New York, The Institute for Contemporary Art P.S. 1 Museum, 2 October - 27 November 1988, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Division and Multiplication of the Mirror". (p. 37)
Roma, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, 8 June - 30 October 1990, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 73)
Madrid, Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 6 October - 6 December 1992, "Repetition - Transformation". (p. 124)
Rivoli, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 5 February - 25 April 1993, "Un'avventura internazionale. Torino e le arti 1950 - 1970". (p. 284)
Barcelona, MACBA - Museu d'art Contemporani de Barcelona, 27 January - 29 March 2000, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 16)
Torino, Palazzina della Società della Promotrice delle Belle Arti, 17 November 2000 - 8 March 2001, "Michelangelo Pistoletto, Io

sono l'altro". (p. 45)
Nice, MAMAC - Musée d'Art Moderne et Art Contemporain, 29 June - 4 November 2007, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 49)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many. 1957-1974". (p. 174)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti. 1957-1974". (p. 192)
Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum - Neue Galerie Graz, 1 June - 7 October 2012, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Spiegel- und Minusobjekte".
Arles, Chapelle Saint-Martin du Méjan, 8 July - 26 October 2014, "Le Troisième Paradis".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Further bibliographical references:
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Germano Celant, *Pistoletto*, Fabbri Editori, Milano 1992 (p. 33)
Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, Phaidon, London 1999 (p. 154)
Laura Tansini, *Il mondo allo specchio*, in "Ars. Il nuovo nell'arte antica e moderna", Milano, dicembre 2000. (cover and p. 49)
Vittorino Andreoli, *Delitti*, Rizzoli, Milano 2001 (reproduced on the cover)
Germano Celant, *Arte Povera. Storia e storie*, Electa, Milano 2011 (p. 147)
London, Serpentine Gallery, 12 July - 17 September 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. The Mirror of Judgement". (p. 37)
Massimo Melotti, Opere di Pistoletto. *Massimo Melotti a colloquio con Michelangelo Pistoletto*, Allemandi, Torino, 2011 (p. 56)
Paris, Louvre, 25 April - 2 September 2013,

"Michelangelo Pistoletto - Année 1, le Paradis sur Terre". (p. 23)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voce di Pistoletto*, Bompiani, Milano 2013 (p. 102)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *The Voice of Pistoletto*, Rizzoli, New York 2014 (p. 102)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voix de Pistoletto*, Actes Sud, Arles 2014 (p. 360)
Massimo Melotti, Pistoletto: *Works, Massimo Melotti Talks with Michelangelo Pistoletto, Allemandi*, Torino, 2015 (p. 56)

Il presente - Uomo di schiena, 1961
acrylic and paint on canvas
200 x 150 cm



Exhibition history and bibliography:
Barcelona, MACBA - Museu d'art Contemporani de Barcelona, 27 January - 29 March 2000, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 18)
Torino, Palazzina della Società della Promotrice delle Belle Arti, 17 November 2000 - 8 March 2001, "Michelangelo Pistoletto, Io sono l'altro". (p. 47)
Nice, MAMAC - Musée d'Art Moderne et Art Contemporain, 29 June - 4 November 2007, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 50)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many 1957-1974". (p. 173)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti 1957-1974". (p. 196)
Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum - Neue Galerie Graz, 1 June - 7 October 2012, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Spiegel- und Minusobjekte".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Further bibliographical references:
Massimo Melotti, Opere di Pistoletto. *Massimo Melotti a colloquio con Michelangelo Pistoletto*, Allemandi, Torino, 2011 (p. 57)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voce di Pistoletto*, Bompiani, Milano 2013 (p. 104)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *The Voice of Pistoletto*, Rizzoli, New York 2014 (p. 104)
Massimo Melotti, Pistoletto: *Works, Massimo Melotti Talks with Michelangelo Pistoletto*, Allemandi, Torino, 2015 (p. 57)

Il presente - Autoritratto in camicia, 1961
acrylic and paint on canvas
200 x 150 cm



Exhibition history and biography:
Firenze, Forte di Belvedere, 24 March - 27 May 1984, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 22)
New York, The Institute for Contemporary Art P.S. 1 Museum, 2 October - 27 November 1988, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Division and Multiplication of the Mirror".
Roma, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, 8 June - 30 October, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 75)
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Wien, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 30 May - 10 September 1995, "Michelangelo Pistoletto - Zeit-Räume". (p. 21)
Torino, Palazzina della Società della Promotrice delle Belle Arti, 17 November 2000 - 8 March 2001, "Michelangelo Pistoletto, Io sono l'altro". (p. 46)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2 November 2010 - 16 January 2011, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. From One to Many 1957-1974". (p. 177)
MAXXI, Roma, 3 March - 15 August 2011,

"Michelangelo Pistoletto. Da uno a molti 1957-1974". (p. 195)
Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum - Neue Galerie Graz, 1 June - 7 October 2012, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Spiegel- und Minusobjekte".
Arles, Chapelle Saint-Martin du Méjan, 8 July - 26 October 2014, "Le Troisième Paradis".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Further bibliographical references:
Oslo, Kunstnernes Hus, 25 January - 23 February 1986, "Pistoletto. Skulptur - Male-rei". (p. 19)
Baden-Baden, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 8 October - 27 November 1988, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Distanza". (p. 26)
Nice, MAMAC - Musée d'Art Moderne et Art Contemporain, 29 June - 4 November 2007, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 14)
Andrea Bellini, Facing Pistoletto, JRP/Ringier, Zurich 2009 (p. 14)
Catanzaro, MARCA, Parco Archeologico di Scolacium, 24 July - 3 October 2010, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Il DNA del Terzo Paradiso". (p. 113)
Massimo Melotti, Opere di Pistoletto. *Massimo Melotti a colloquio con Michelangelo Pistoletto*, Allemandi, Torino, 2011 (p. 11)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voce di Pistoletto*, Bompiani, Milano 2013 (p. 103)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *The Voice of Pistoletto*, Rizzoli, New York 2014 (p. 103)
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alain Elkann, *La voix de Pistoletto*, Actes Sud, Arles 2014 (p. 359)
Massimo Melotti, Pistoletto: *Works, Massimo Melotti Talks with Michelangelo Pistoletto*, Allemandi, Torino, 2015 (p. 11)

Uomo grigio di schiena, 1961
acrylic and aluminium on canvas
140 x 100 cm



Exhibition history and bibliography:
Roma, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, 8 June - 30 October 1980, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 74)
Seul, The National Museum of Contemporary Art, 20 July - 21 August 1994, "Pistoletto through the mirror". (p. 30)
Barcelona, MACBA - Museu d'art Contemporani de Barcelona, 27 January - 29 March 2000, "Michelangelo Pistoletto". (p. 19)
Torino, Palazzina della Società della Promotrice delle Belle Arti, 17 November 2000 - 8 March 2001, "Michelangelo Pistoletto, Io sono l'altro".
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Further bibliographical references:
New York, The Institute for Contemporary Art P.S. 1 Museum, 2 October - 27 November 1988, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Division and Multiplication of the Mirror". (p. 30)
Barcelona, Centre d'art Santa Monica, 22 November 1990 - 10 January 1991, "L'arquitetura del mirall. Pistoletto". (p. 79)
Germano Celant, *Pistoletto*, Fabbri Editori, Milano 1992 (p. 26)
Hamburg, Deichtorhallen, 11 March - 10 May 1992, "Michelangelo Pistoletto-Die Minus-Objekte. Spiegel. Gitter". (p. 4)

Persona di schiena, 1962
painted tissue paper on polished stainless steel
125 x 66 cm



Exhibition history:
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Bibliography:
Bruno Corà, Michelangelo Pistoletto. *Lo spazio della riflessione nell'arte*, Essegì, Ravenna, 1986. (p. 28)

Esperimento per due figure, 1962
painted tissue paper on polished stainless steel
125 x 51,5 cm



Exhibition history:
San Gimignano, Galleria Continua, 2 May - 5 September 2015, "Michelangelo Pistoletto. Prima dello Specchio".

Bibliography:
Maddalena Sisto, Il doppio lo specchio l'illusione, in "Casa Vogue", maggio 1982, n. 130, Milano. (p. 277)

MICHELANGELO E DANTE

CARLO FALCIANI



Michelangelo Pistoletto mi parla dei giorni nostri e di quelli lontani in cui si dedicava alla pittura e mi offre parole quiete e ferme, cesellate dalla sintesi che solo i ricordi possiedono. Egli subito dichiara di non possedere alcun libro, di non averne mai letto uno e di aver fiducia solo nella cultura orale che tuttavia, al tempo della sua gioventù, non portava solo parole trascorrenti ma aveva ancora radici profonde e antiche. Mentre lui racconta, dalla mia memoria di ragazzo affiorano i pomeriggi passati con un parente di mia madre, pastore, che conosceva a memoria l'inferno di Dante, e con mia zia, che al cammino raccontava storie morali che solo negli anni dell'Università ho scoperto essere le *Facezie* di Poggio Bracciolini. Michelangelo, tuttavia, nega che questo avvenisse anche in Piemonte. Una simile potenza dovevano avere però in lui le indicazioni del padre verso l'espressione pittorica della tradizione, che ancora lo aiutano quando cesella descrizioni esatte di opere prospettiche e matematiche del Quattrocento. Dunque, in lui, al posto della parola scritta si scopre radicata la lingua figurativa del padre, pittore e restauratore, che lo aveva indirizzato al dipingere mimetico, come unica strada per cristallizzare al di fuori del tempo la visione istantanea e il trascorrere della propria autobiografia.

Ma il tempo, alla fine degli anni Cinquanta, non poteva ancora avere una consistenza assoluta giacché, se nella rappresentazione si era già consumata la frattura col passato, il desiderio della narrazione di un tempo sociale avanzava a passo veloce, spinto da istanze d'informazione e di cambiamento, e la sintesi fra le due possibilità era a portata di mano. A lui giovane artista l'espressione contemporanea offriva invece il dibattito fra astratto e figurativo, che in entrambi i casi proponeva la via di un isolamento all'interno della propria individualità, che poteva essere celebrata o nel corpo a corpo con la pittura astratta di Pollock oppure nella figurazione slabbrata ma tagliente di Francis Bacon. Due possibilità all'apparenza divergenti e, al contempo, coincidenti ai suoi occhi ma incapaci ormai di offrire risposte a chi era d'altra generazione e chiedeva forme nuove.

Nel 1956, come primo passo in quella direzione, il bisogno di guardare in sé con altri occhi portava Pistoletto verso le esperienze della pittura nucleare, il cui manifesto era stato stilato a Milano nel 1950. Di quell'inizio rimane un *Autoritratto* del solo volto, dove la pittura brulica di particelle luminose e terrose insieme, che paiono sprigionare calore nella frizione dell'atto pittorico e invadere quasi per intero il fondo monocromo, rosso sangue, ridotto agli angoli. Tuttavia, l'urgenza sociale di un tempo dal poderoso sviluppo rendeva anche quel tentativo, d'impronta nucleare e francese insieme, insoddisfacente, e subito dopo, nella

sequenza cronologica delle opere, le strade si sommano quando egli ritrae l'energia compresa della torpida riflessione, condotta lungo un pomeriggio interminabile, di un giovane di venticinque anni che aveva imparato a dipingere nell'ossequio della storia. Il clima è quasi lo stesso di quel "settembre ardente e dolcissimo, estate prolungata e ossessiva, tempo ormai insostenibile" che nel 1954 opprimeva Francesco Arcangeli quando su "Paragone" scriveva della pittura informale di Morlotti. In questa direzione le tele di Pistoletto che registrano i tentativi di uscire dalla "condizione drammatica e tragica" sono esigue nel numero ma quasi gradini simbolici, nel loro essere sempre più specchianti, di un percorso volto a "trovare una via d'uscita" (sono parole sue), dalla sofferenza esistenziale del dopoguerra. La medesima opprimente urgenza di dover superare lo sconcerto dei tempi nel corpo a corpo con la pittura viene però figurata da Pistoletto guardando alle cupe ossessioni di Francis Bacon. Nella tela con un *Uomo coricato sotto la finestra*, del 1957-1958, lo spazio architettonico caro al pittore inglese viene ancora più ristretto attraverso una vetrata opaca (da studio o da fabbrica al crepuscolo), disegnata ortogonale alla tela, come una *Saracinesca* di molti anni dopo limiterà la possibilità dello specchio di riflettere. Tuttavia, in quella tela l'uomo rannicchiato dichiara ancora un presente soggettivo (e non impersonale come a Michelangelo sembrerà via irrinunciabile da lì pochi anni), e il suo alter ego, sempre nel 1959, è rappresentato in un'altra tela nell'atto imperioso del gesto di un pittore curvo sulla tela (come Pollock aveva insegnato), che è ancora ritratto con la figurazione lacerata e sanguinante cara a Bacon. Una strada che con quel dipinto si chiude senza futuro, nel momento in cui la folla già avanza in una tela, sempre del '59, a rompere quelle grate che Pistoletto aveva dipinto sopra in un'opera simile di poco precedente.

Un tale desiderio di infrangere le vie che in quel momento erano offerte ad un giovane non poteva essere risolto nell'atto pittorico gestuale, e dunque un'altra possibilità si affaccia in altri dipinti eseguiti intorno ai venticinque anni, ed è il frutto di indicazioni che sommano sia la tradizione cara al padre pittore, (che lo invitava a restaurare superfici antiche e riflettenti di icone impossibili), sia analogicamente la trasfigurazione di quelle superfici, altrettanto anodine e riflettenti, negli oggetti industriali che la pubblicità di quegli anni iniziava ad esaltare. Come è noto, la scuola di Armando Testa, frequentata da Pistoletto in gioventù, lo aveva spinto a guardare verso l'arte contemporanea: un mondo nuovo che si apriva all'espressione Pop. Nondimeno, quella figurazione a lui coetanea, rendeva ai suoi occhi impersonale e muta ogni icona moderna, fosse Marilyn o un prodotto commerciale, e non poteva offrirgli parole nuove necessarie ad esprimersi in un paese dove l'umanesimo aveva ancora radici vive e profonde. Dei pensieri di quei giorni Michelangelo ricorda l'urgenza di rimettere l'uomo, e dunque se stesso, al centro della propria riflessione, superando nondimeno la soggettività delle sue prime opere. La superficie dorata delle icone bizantine poteva dunque servire a riflettere non solo l'abbaglio dell'assoluto, ma a figurare, e a trascendere insieme, la propria esistenza contemporanea forte semmai della potenza che solo l'immagine cinematografica aveva in quel momento. Ne *Il grido* di Antonioni del 1957 Aldo, il protagonista, si muove impacciato in un'Italia post bellica, lacerata dai cantieri della ricostruzione e dello sviluppo, e si stringe nella sua giacca goffa, spingendo le mani in fondo alle tasche, come a fare scudo agli eventi. Una medesima chiusura che diventa muto grido, ancora pittorico, appare nelle serie degli autoritratti che Pistoletto dipinge proprio fra il 1958 e il 1961. Un uomo solo si staglia di fronte ad un fondo dal quale viene sempre più elisa ogni parola nar-

rativa affidata alla pittura, che si fa materia ogni volta più solida. Michelangelo dichiara che negli anni della sua gioventù "l'arte aveva raggiunto una totale autonomia rispetto ad ogni fatto del mondo" poteva fermare un luogo, figurare la folla, ma non poteva più rinunciare a quell'autonomia. Il percorso verso un assoluto che distingue il trascorrente figurato e l'idea esterna alla figurazione contenute in una sola immagine era iniziato, e allo stesso tempo risolto, già in quelle prime tele. La soggettività della narrazione si cristallizza dunque in un'oggettività vera proprio perché ideale, dove la possibilità di figurazione del sociale è solo un corollario. Come sempre è stato nella storia della pittura, l'idea intangibile, puro pensiero, che tutto comprende è dunque invisibile nella sua verità oggettiva ma percepibile solo nelle sue infinite repliche. Questi pensieri che sono in *nuce* nei primi autoritratti di Michelangelo Pistoletto troveranno, molti anni dopo, una figurazione fredda e impassibile nel *Metro cubo d'infinito* collocato all'interno di un cubo specchiante. Entrato in esso il visitatore può solo comprendere con l'intelletto l'infinito riflettersi senza immagini degli specchi che guardano solo se stessi, mentre può vedere con i propri occhi il riflesso di sé moltiplicato da uno specchio all'altro sulle pareti della stanza specchiante.

Qualcosa di simile avveniva in un luogo dantesco, dove Beatrice descrive tre specchi dove osservare il molteplice riflesso della luce.

Tre specchi prenderai; e i due rimovi
da te d'un modo, e l'altro, più rimosso,
tr'ambo li primi li occhi tuoi ritrovi.

Rivolto ad essi, fa che dopo il dosso
ti stea un lume che i tre specchi accenda
e torni a te da tutti ripercosso.

Ben che nel quanto tanto non si stenda
la vista più lontana, lì vedrai
come convien ch'igualmente risplenda.
(Dante, *Paradiso*, II, 91-105)

Nondimeno, nel percorso intrapreso da Michelangelo il riflesso del visibile in una lastra specchiante sarà il raggiungimento ultimo, al quale servirà una quasi totale sottrazione degli elementi narrativi affidati fino a quel momento alla pittura; ma soprattutto sarà necessario volgere gli occhi non più sul mondo, ma verso l'opera, una rotazione che avverrà fisicamente in un autoritratto del 1961, subito precedente i primi specchi.

La sottrazione di parole pittoriche inizia invece a partire dagli autoritratti, a mezzo busto frontale, del 1959. In uno di essi, alle spalle dell'artista sta ancora una griglia serrata e geometrica, forse di libri, che scomparirà in un'altra tela dello stesso anno. In quella Michelangelo si raffigura a braccia conserte davanti ad uno spazio argenteo ancora mosso di pennellate. Da quel momento ogni parola dipinta in più rispetto alla sola figura sul fondo monocromo viene sottratta, e se Pistoletto dichiara una direzione che si chiude alla soggettività e si apre all'oggettività, potremo ancora leggere in alcune parole grandi, che parlano di immagini allo specchio, il suo volgersi metaforico verso uno spazio altro rispetto a quello che era stato per secoli al centro della pittura. Parole altissime che potranno tuttavia indicarci come il filo

sottile che lo univa a quel mondo antico non venga in realtà tagliato, a differenza di quanto accadeva nella Pop americana. Sempre in lui rimane invece vivo il legame con la tradizione antica dell'arte italiana chiamata fin dall'umanesimo a rappresentare uniti l'uomo e l'assoluto.

Una tradizione che nel 1960 torna evidente nell'autoritratto su fondo oro, dove al pari di un'icona bizantina l'artista si rappresenta ormai a figura intera come demiurgo insoddisfatto del proprio volto, cancellato in un atto d'imperio a far affiorare l'oro lucidato e quasi riflettente. I suoi occhi sono però volti ancora verso la luce del mondo quasi fosse uno schermo cinematografico, pari di un altro *Autoritratto* di un anno successivo dove la figura si erge come fosse illuminata da un faro teatrale su un fondo nero che è ormai capace di riflettere in modo autonomo le immagini che gli scorrono davanti. Il volto di chi osserva l'opera appare infatti diafano accanto a quello dell'artista, una larva sfuocata sul nero intenso:

ma visiōne apparve che ritenne
a sé me tanto stretto, per vedersi,
che di mia confession non mi sovvenne.

Quali per vetri trasparenti e tersi,
o ver per acque nitide e tranquille,
non sì profonde che i fondi sien persi,

tornan d'i nostri visi le postille
debili sì, che perla in bianca fronte
non vien men forte a le nostre pupille;

tali vid'io più facce a parlar pronte;
per ch'io dentro a l'error contrario corsi
a quel ch'accese amor tra l'omo e 'l fonte.

Sùbito sì com'io di lor m'accorsi,
quelle stimando specchiati sembianti,
per veder di cui fosser, li occhi torsi;

e nulla vidi, e ritorsili avanti
dritti nel lume de la dolce guida,
che, sorridendo, ardea ne li occhi santi.
(Dante, *Paradiso*, III, 7-24)

Anche Dante, nel *Paradiso*, di fronte ai volti angelici crede di vedere solo delle immagini riflesse in uno specchio limpido, e volge la testa verso le sue spalle, cercando la verità nella visione, ma non trovando nulla capisce che la verità è contenuta in un'immagine che pare riflessa. Così, nel 1961 Michelangelo Pistoletto volge i propri occhi verso la tela in un autoritratto su fondo nero dove egli è di schiena e non guarda più verso il mondo (che la

pittura aveva tentato fino a quel momento di figurare) ma solo verso l'immagine riflessa. Ma all'opposto di Narciso non si concentra sul proprio volto e sfugge il rischio della soggettività aprendosi alle immagini dell'intera società, anche quelle indistinte e casuali, che trascorreranno davanti allo specchio negli anni a venire:

come in lo specchio fiamma di doppiero
vede colui che se n'alluma retro,
prima che l'abbia in vista o in pensiero,

e sé rivolge per veder se 'l vetro
li dice il vero, e vede ch'el s'accorda
con esso come nota con suo metro;

così la mia memoria si ricorda
(Dante, *Paradiso*, XXVIII, 4-10)

Sempre nelle parole di Dante, una migliore percezione della verità appare dunque solo attraverso il suo riflesso "in lo specchio", al quale il vero si "accorda" come una nota col suo metro ritmico, e solo attraverso quell'immagine la memoria si ricorda.

Il passaggio è avvenuto verso un diaframma simbolico che ha ridotto ad essenza oggettiva la figura dell'artista, demiurgo impersonale che nello specchio tutto raffigura senza che la sua presenza sia rivelata da un gesto o da un'immagine, come il Dio che tutto specchia ma non è mai specchiato:

perch' io la veggio nel verace speglio
che fa di sé pareglio a l'altre cose,
e nulla face lui di sé pareglio.
(Dante, *Paradiso*, XXVI, 106-108)

Dopo l'autoritratto di spalle del 1961 la vertigine della possibilità di figurare ogni cosa nel suo trascorrere, e di riassumere il tutto nell'idea impalpabile del diaframma specchiante, si apriva sconfinata. Di questo si è scritto molto, e qui ci piace solo indicare come corollario la possibilità di conservare come occasione espressiva, in accordo con Dante, le immagini della memoria figurate nelle veline fragili che si affacciano parziali e fuggenti sulla superficie dello specchio. Donne al balcone che guardano altrove, come avveniva ne *Le amiche* del 1955, o ne *L'avventura* del 1960 di Antonioni, anche lui narratore di spazi vuoti colmi di malinconia. In altri specchi degli inizi la velina ritrae, invece, gesti parziali e sospesi di chi, seduto, si è astratto in un pensiero. Moti inservibili alla narrazione ma simbolici di un'attesa o di un addio, come in *Ti ricorderai*, o in *Una vita inutile*, di Luigi Tenco del 1961. Parole banali e poetiche che racchiudono le immagini di vite sospese, e anche smarrite, nell'attimo del cambiamento irreversibile di un'intera società. Ma anche questa è una storia di cui si è già molto scritto.

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