

**MICHELANGELO  
PISTOLETTO**

**BREAKS  
THE MIRROR**

**GALLERIA CONTINUA**  
SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA

# CONTENTS

*Breaking the Mirror*  
(English translation)  
MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO  
7

*Rompere lo specchio*  
(original text)  
MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO  
11

*Palace of Mirrors*  
DANIEL BIRNBAUM  
15

Plates  
19

*Seventeen Less One*  
Performance,  
Yokohama Triennale, 2008  
20

*Twentytwo Less Two*  
Performance,  
53. Biennale di Venezia, 2009  
30

*Twentytwo Less Two*  
Performance,  
Le Centquatre 104, Paris, 2010  
48

*Eleven Less One*  
Performance,  
Andersen's Contemporary,  
Copenhagen, Denmark, 2014  
66

*Ten Less One*  
Performance, LCMF,  
London Contemporary  
Music Festival, 2014  
68

*Thirteen Less One*  
Performance,  
Bienal de La Habana, 2015  
80

List of works  
85

Michelangelo Pistoletto – Biography  
89

# BREAKING THE MIRROR

MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO

Among the many artistic, cultural and social implications regarding the multiplication of the mirror through its shattering, one is of particular importance, and it relates to the fourth dimension, active here in the relationship between the present and memory. *The breaking of the mirror* is a performance, that is, an action that takes place at a precise moment. The fragments fall to the ground, leaving holes of different form inside each of the large mirrors. The forms in each mirror remain fixed, while the mirrored images continue to change. And so, in the incessant flow of time we observe in the mirror, there appear the forms, which, black or coloured, remain immobile for ever.

These forms remain as memory, just like in a snapshot photo, of the performed action. Reiterated, then, is the same symbiosis between photography, testimony of a past moment and the continual mutation in the flow of the present that occurs in the “mirror pictures”. Photographic memory is simply replaced by the breaking of the mirror.



## ROMPERE LO SPECCHIO

MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO

Tra le tante implicazioni artistiche, culturali e sociali che riguardano la moltiplicazione dello specchio attraverso la sua frantumazione una è di particolare importanza, quella che riguarda la quarta dimensione, qui attiva nel rapporto tra il presente e la memoria.

*La rottura dello specchio* è una performance, cioè un'azione che avviene in un preciso momento. I frammenti cadono a terra lasciando in ciascuno dei grandi specchi dei buchi di diversa forma. Queste forme all'interno di ogni specchio rimangono fisse mentre le immagini rispecchiate continuano a cambiare. Dunque, nell'incessante trascorrere del tempo che osserviamo nello specchio, appaiono le forme, nere o colorate, che rimangono per sempre immobili.

Queste forme rimangono a memoria, esattamente come in un'istantanea fotografica, dell'azione compiuta. Si ripropone così la stessa simbiosi tra la fotografia, testimonianza di un momento passato e il continuo mutamento nello scorrere del presente, che avviene nei "quadri specchianti"; semplicemente la memoria fotografica è sostituita dalla rottura dello specchio.



DANIEL BIRNBAUM is the Museum Director at the Moderna Museet since November 2010. Birnbaum is a philosopher, critic and curator, previously director for IASPIS International Artists Studio Program in Sweden and 2001–2010 the director of, and professor at Städelschule Staatliche Hochschule in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Daniel Birnbaum was the artistic director for the Venice Biennale 2009

## PALACE OF MIRRORS

DANIEL BIRNBAUM

A contemporary of Descartes, Athanasius Kircher was the founder of an epistemology based on deception and play. He was also the inventor of the catoptric box, a chamber of mirrors that transforms a soldier into an army and a book into a library. The mechanism was ideal for staging evil games: put a coin in the box and watch people grab for illusionary riches. Put a cat inside and watch it chase its own reflections in a frenzy until finally collapsing in a state of exhaustion. Imagine encountering your enemy in this theater of multiplicities. That is what happens in Bruce Lee's last film, *Enter the Dragon*. He wears a black glove on his right hand. The left one has been replaced by a metallic device, a lethal weapon with four razor sharp fingers, which have already left brutal traces in Lee's stomach, breast, back and face. The mirror repeats the metallic device into a threatening series without end.

How to exit this maze? There is no escaping the hall of mirrors save the destruction of the very sphere of reflection itself. The mirrors must break. This might imply madness. Orson Wells – his *The Lady from Shanghai* no doubt provided the blueprint for Lee's Kung Fu version – makes clear that it most likely also implies death. In the palace of mirrors everything is multiplied into infinity. The last conversation before the shooting starts: "I'm aiming at you, lover. Of course killing you is killing myself. It's the same thing."

The painter at the center of the palace of mirrors is equipped with a massive hammer. His image is multiplied into infinity. To escape this labyrinth of simulacra he must destroy his own image. The mirrors must break.



*Seventeen Less One*, 2008









*Twentytwo Less Two, 2009*



*Two Less One, 2009*





*Buco Nero*, 2010, exhibition view,  
Galleria Continua, San Gimignano



*Black and Light, 2012*



*Two Less One Black, 2011*



*Eleven Less One, 2014*



*Two Less One colored, 2014*













## LIST OF WORKS

pp. 8-9  
*Twentytwo Less Two*  
(detail)

2009  
mirror, wood  
22 elements, 300 x 200 cm each  
Photo Alicia Luxem

pp. 10, 12-13  
*Ten Less One*  
(details)

2014  
mirror, wood  
10 elements, 300 x 200 cm each  
Photo Lorenzo Fiaschi

pp. 16-17  
*Two Less One Black*  
(details)

2011  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
2 elements, 180 x 120 cm each  
Photo Lorenzo Fiaschi

pp. 20-21, 23-25  
*Seventeen Less One*  
2008

mirrors, wood  
17 elements, 243 x 178 cm each  
Photo Lorenzo Fiaschi  
Installation view Yokohama Triennale, 2008  
Collection MoMA, Museum of Modern  
Art, New York City

pp. 22  
*Seventeen Less One*  
2008

Performance in Yokohama Triennale  
duration: 10 min approx  
Photo Ueno Norihiro  
Courtesy of The Organizing Committee for  
the Yokohama Triennale

pp. 26-27  
*Black and Light Flux - Dark*, 2008  
*Black and Light Flux - Light*, 2008

black and silver mirror, wood  
245 x 180 cm each  
Photo Hauck Peter  
Installation view at Art Basel Unlimited,  
2008

pp. 28-29  
*Cittadellarte Black and White - Light*, 2008  
*Cittadellarte Black and White - Dark*, 2008

silver and black mirror, wood  
245 x 180 cm each  
Photo Bertrand Huet  
Installation view at Galleria Continua, Les  
Moulins 2008

pp. 30-33, 36  
*Twentytwo Less Two*  
2009

mirror, wood  
22 elements, 300 x 200 cm each  
Photo Ela Bialkowska  
Performance view at Fare mondi / Making  
worlds 53. Biennale di Venezia, 2009

pp. 34-35, 37  
*Twentytwo Less Two*  
2009  
mirror, wood  
22 elements, 300 x 200 cm each  
Photo Ela Bialkowska  
Installation view at Fare mondi / Making worlds 53. Biennale di Venezia, 2009

pp. 38-39  
*Two Less One*  
2009  
gilded wood, mirror  
2 elements, 180 x 120 cm each  
Photo Ela Bialkowska

pp. 40-41  
*Buco Nero*  
exhibition view,  
Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, 2010  
Photo Ela Bialkowska

pp. 42-43  
*Buco Nero*  
2010  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
250 x 360 cm  
Photo Aurélien Mole  
Installation view Salle de la Maquette,  
Louvre, Paris, 2013

pp. 44-45  
*The Cubic Meter of Infinity*  
1966-2013  
mirror  
6 elementi 100 x 120 cm; overall: 120 x 120  
x 120 cm  
Photo Aurélien Mole  
installation view Salle de la Maquette,  
Louvre, Paris, 2013

pp. 46-47  
*Vortice-dittico (Vortex-diptyque)*  
2010-2013  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
diptych: 201 x 141 cm each  
Photo Alicia Luxem  
installation view Salle de la Maquette,  
Louvre, Paris, 2013

pp. 48-51  
*Twentytwo Less Two*  
2009  
mirror, wood  
22 elements, 300 x 200 cm each  
Photo Carolina Lucchesini (pp. 50-51, 52  
top, 53 top)  
Photo Romain Eludut (pp. 52 bottom, 53  
bottom)  
Performance view at Le Centquatre 104,  
Paris, 2010

pp. 52-53  
*Black and Light*  
2012  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
7 elements, variable dimensions  
Photo Alicia Luxem

p. 54  
*Black and Light*  
2012  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
180 x 115 x 5,5 cm  
Photo Ela Bialkowska

p. 55  
*Two Less One Black*  
2011  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
2 elements, 180 x 120 cm each  
Photo Oak Taylor-Smith  
Installation view Aveline Jean-Marie Rossi,  
Paris, 2014

pp. 56-57  
*Vortice-pentittico (Vortex-quintiptyque)*  
2010-2013  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
5 elementi: 201 x 141 cm each  
Photo Oak Taylor-Smith  
Installation view Aveline Jean-Marie Rossi,  
Paris, 2014

pp. 58-59  
*Vortice-pentittico (Vortex-quintiptyque)*  
(detail)  
2010-2013  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
5 elementi: 201 x 141 cm each  
Photo Ela Bialkowska  
Installation view Galleria Continua, San  
Gimignano, 2013

pp. 60-63  
*Frammenti di un metro cubo di specchio*  
2013  
mirror  
undimensioned  
Photo Ela Bialkowska  
installation / performance view Galleria  
Continua, San Gimignano, 2013

pp. 64-65  
*Vortice-trittico (Vortex-triptyque)*  
2010-2013  
black and silver mirror, gilded wood  
diptych: 201 x 141 cm each  
Photo Alicia Luxem

pp. 66-67  
*Eleven Less One*  
2014  
mirror, wood  
11 elements, 300 x 200 cm each  
Photo Anders Sune Berg, DK  
Installation view Andersen's Contemporary,  
Copenhagen, Denmark, 2014  
Collection Kunsten - Museum of modern  
Art Aalborg

pp. 68-71  
*Ten Less One*  
2014  
mirror, wood  
10 elements, 300 x 200 cm each  
Photo Lorenzo Fiaschi  
Installation / performance view at London  
LCMF, London Contemporary Music  
Festival, 2014

pp. 72-73  
*Two Less One colored*  
2014  
mirror, gilded wood  
2 elements, 150 x 110 cm each  
Photo Ela Bialkowska

pp. 74-75  
*Two Less One colored*  
2014  
mirror, gilded wood  
2 elements, 180 x 120 cm each  
Photo Duccio Benvenuti

pp. 76-77  
*Color and Light*  
2014  
juta, mirror, gilded wood  
8 elements: 180 x 120 cm each  
Photo Giulio Kirchmayr  
Installation view Aveline Jean-Marie Rossi,  
2014

pp. 78-79  
*Color and Light*  
2014  
juta, mirror, gilded wood  
4 elements: 180 x 120 cm each  
Photo Lorenzo Fiaschi  
Installation view Art Basel 2015

pp. 80-83  
*Thirteen Less One*  
2015  
mirror, wood  
13 elements, 300 x 200 cm each  
Photo Pierluigi Di Pietro  
Performance view Bienal de La Habana,  
2015

# 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 *Plexiglass*—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 Gennero, 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 multifunctional, 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 ré-évolution 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 Geneva, 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 Dementil 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 Samdtkunst, 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, Mosca; 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  
Barcelona, 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 Moderne  
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 Métropole  
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

**MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO**  
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