

HUO: Normally I ask two last questions but you already answered one of them when we did the talk at the Serpentine gallery. It was the question about the future. You said: 'The future for me is not about the possession of the world; it is about making love with the world. It is our partner. If you make love with the world, you have to love humanity. If you love humanity, you love yourself.' But the question you have not answered yet is my recurrent question about unrealized projects, projects that were too big to realize, or too small to realize. When I asked you this question for the last time, in 1996, you answered with a very empty space you wanted to insert into a city. It was a cage—you wanted an empty cage in a city. That was your as yet unrealized project.

MP: I did realise it. It was exhibited, and it is called *Free Space*. It is free for everybody and can be everybody's space. It was good as the work was carried out by the occupants of a prison in Milan. I said: I want to do a work with you that brings you out of the prison. But this 'outside of prison' was in the centre of the prison. It was a free cage for everybody, because your mind should be free. And this is the cage that opens your mind. And they understood. They were very happy to do it. At the beginning they said: We are in a cage already. Why do we have to make a cage? And I said: This is the cage of your freedom.

HUO: So that project was realised. Is there something still unrealised?

MP: The project that is very necessary to do is a school of democracy in the world. At the moment democracy is just a word. It is not a real thing. This school should be a laboratory of real democracy that cannot exist without this idea of one to one. I am in front of you and someone is in front of me, even if it is their back. I have to respect people in front of me and behind me. This school does not exist at the moment. This is something we should do.

HUO: So this is very urgent. Michelangelo, thank you very much.

Part 3: Rebirth

Kunsthaus Graz

Universal museum
Joanneum

not work without omnitheism. Because if you have the omnitheistic idea, you always have a basic concern for absolutist systems. The absolute is always there. But democracy cannot be under the absolute.

HUO: Next comes Paris, the big exhibition at the Louvre. It is about December 21st, 2012, it is about the beginning of the *Anno uno* and it is the next step after the *Terzo Paradiso*. Can you tell us about it?

MP: December 21st, 2012 has been predicted as the end of the world, which in itself is a highly idiotic concept, but idiotic not to the point of being in some way related to the potential meaning we are talking about. We are currently in a huge crisis. Perhaps this is not the date of the end, but we are going towards the end. We are preparing, we are working for the end. And because we are working for transformation, for renovation, for reconsideration, for rebuilding the vision of the world, we said that it is important to transform this date of 'the end' into the day of rebirth.

That is why we call it 'Rebirth day'. 'Rebirth day'—a universal concept, a universal activity, universal participation in a new day that is a new holiday.

HUO: By new holiday you mean something like Christmas? It would not be a religious day, but it would be recurrent and could go on forever?

MP: I have always enjoyed celebrating Christmas as a feast although I have no religious feelings, because for me it is the feast of birth, of renaissance. The 21st is rebirth; it is not a religious concept, it is a social concept, to be reborn at the start. It is also a celebration that originates from long before the Christian concept of Christmas. It is the winter solstice for the northern hemisphere and the summer solstice on the southern side of the world. It was celebrated because it is the shortest day of the year—not the 24th, but the 21st, and after that the days get longer again. You start a new year. A new force is growing.

Serpentine show, and it had obviously to do with the religions presented, to quote you here: ‘The religions which are presented are the monotheistic religions which won over all the other earlier religions. These earlier religions did not concentrate on just one symbol. They were disseminated through many different symbols. The elements of nature for example were considered as separate gods. The transformation from the Roman gods to the Christian god was from many to one’. And that obviously also leads to the title of your show previous to the retrospective here, in Philadelphia and Rome. The title was *From One to Many*.

MP: The show in London was called *The Mirror of Judgment*. The idea that each individual—that the moment—is in front of the mirror, each person is forced to judge himself or herself. But in the exhibition it was not only the individual who was in front of the mirror, but the big, important monotheistic religions with the tools they use to integrate the public into religion, like a confessional. This instrument, the Church, is in front of the mirror. When you pray, you pray to yourself, because it is you in front of yourself on the other side, you do not pray to something very distant and unknown. You should know yourself and this is the point of the judgment—to judge yourself. To take responsibility. You decide in which direction you want to go. So religion is no longer a high point of reference for me but a vertical conception, a horizontal conception. The other is the rapport: each one is the other. So it is the concept of taking responsibility for the person in front of us and if I do that and everybody does that, this is the new religion, or rather it is the concept of spirituality. It is a way that means not being pushed down by something way up above us. My manifesto on this rapport now is relating to omnitheism instead of monotheism.

HUO: That is the manifesto you are writing at the moment?

MP: Yes. *Omnitheism and Democracy*. Without the concept of democracy it would not work. And democracy does

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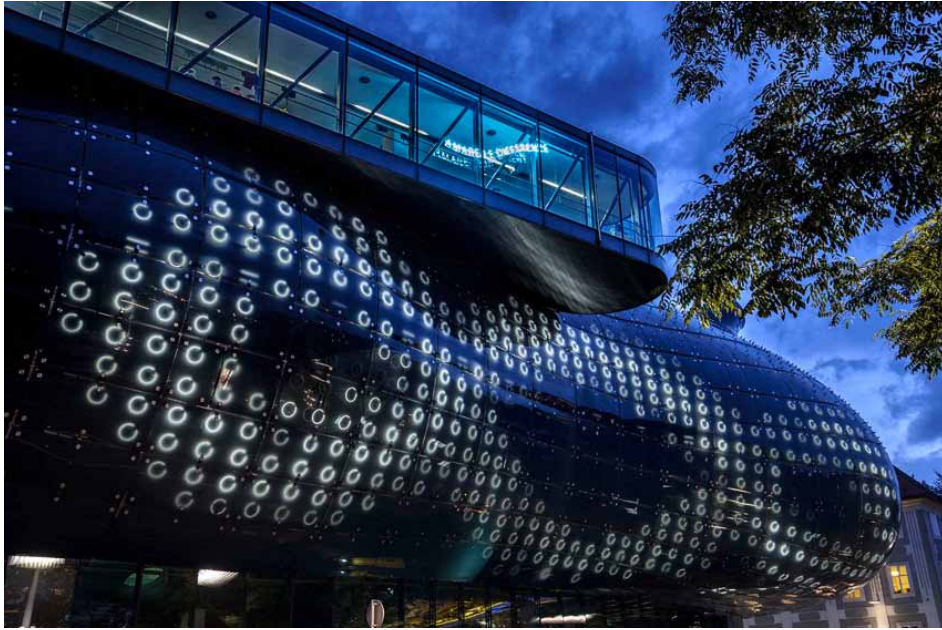
Ulrich Becker

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On the Presence of the Sacred in the Work of Michelangelo Pistoletto

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30.09.2012, Kunsthaus Graz



Kunsthaus Graz, BIX facade with *Terzo Paradiso*, 2012, Photo: N. Lackner/UMJ

problems is in conflict with nature. In the centre we have to combine nature and artifact. This is the future. We are opening up this new path.

HUO: When we discussed this in London we spoke about Jeremy Rifkin, the economist. He talks about the third industrial revolution and about the research that goes into creating new resources to deal with the 21st-century energy crisis. I was wondering to what extent Rifkin's concept of the third industrial revolution played a role when you came up with ...

MP: We really should plan a one-day discussion around this table about the third industrial revolution based on Rifkin's idea. I think this is fundamental because each one of us needs to produce energy. We can no longer just use candles or turn to the fire for warmth. We need energy. And energy comes from the sun. We can produce low-cost energy from the sun, but each one of us needs to take responsibility and start to create some kind of home... An individual's house is the place where you think about the world and you organize the potential for economizing energy and producing energy. The more energy you produce, the more energy can be used not only for you, but for society; to make cars move, make machinery move, to make social things move. This is the idea behind this revolution. It is related to the idea of the Internet, the concept that each person exists in a very strong way, but is related to everyone else. It is a kind of Internet transformation into the practical new system. Voilà, and the 'Third paradise' is not only about energy production; that is only one part of it. What it refers to is a change in mentality, as in the potential for producing a rapport of one and the other, in a spiritual way and in an economical way, in the practice of sharing. In Italian the word sharing comes from division. *Divisione* becomes *condivisione* in a social way, and means to divide *with*. So *sharing* in Italian is very clear.

HUO: You said that paradise does not come from religion; but religion nevertheless played a big role in the

religion. It was used by religion, but the word ‘paradise’ means garden, from the old Persian word. So based on that, maybe you can tell us what the epiphany for the *Terzo Paradiso* was.

MP: I think that it was a converging of various needs. One was the sign of infinity related also to the idea of division and multiplication of the mirror. And the sign of infinity for me is very important because the line that creates two circles, like an eight, always passes through itself. It crosses itself continuously. This means that you go from a positive to a negative, from a negative to a positive. The mathematic sign of infinity represents the mirror for me. Because in the mirror you see an image that is coming and passing. The present always connects life and death. You can see at each moment in the representation in the mirror that nothing is static. Everything changes. But it changes so rapidly that you do not perceive the fact that an image is dying at the moment it is born, making room for another image. So the point where the two lines cross is the point of living and dying. But when you die you start a new life on one side and on the other side, too. It is not your life, but a reconstruction of life in the universe, life itself. That’s why I said we do not die every day, but we survive, we live. Our lifetime on earth becomes a circle that crosses the line of infinity twice, leaving the time to live in the middle. It can be the lifetime of a person, the lifetime of a society, the lifetime of an era, but it is the lifetime of what exists, and there is the duration of an instant that is life and death. We make room for that dynamic. At that point I said, ‘OK, what do I call that?’ And then I found the word *paradise*. *Paradise* means garden, protected garden. I think this is closely related to the current need to protect, to protect our garden. The garden is the earth in itself, and the atmosphere is the wall around the garden, and this wall, the atmosphere, is very fragile and we must preserve it. So this is a very physical and scientific conception of life. And this is why the third paradise is the connection between two circles with a third one. One circle represents nature, the other circle represents artifact; the artificial world that is currently creating

With his *Terzo Paradiso*, **Michelangelo Pistoletto** proclaimed the dawning of a new age in which art and life unite. This age began on December 21, 2012, the day of the predicted Mayan apocalypse, on which like-minded people throughout the world celebrated the *rebirth day!* This third stage of paradise, which brings art into life, was to be manifested worldwide together with as many followers as possible. Accordingly, the end of the old world and birth of a new one was celebrated in places like the Paris Louvre, the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and the Beijing Gallery Quarter 798.

On that day of winter solstice, *Cittadellarte* invited people to participate in a winter solstice festival of democratic sharing, to mutually recreate yesterday with Heidenspass and REBIKEL, to an apocalyptic dinner with **Leopold Calice**, and to a real democratic vote on recycling materials from our *KunstStadt*. Music and other things from the local community—welcome to the re-birth!

2 pm – 4 pm: HEIDENSPASS (www.heidenspass.cc) and guests assembled a huge recycling collage

2 pm – 4 pm: REBIKEL (www.rebikel.at): Pimp up your bike!

4 pm: Voting: Wood of Transformation; what shall we do with the construction material from the exhibition?
Presentation: Gunda Bachan

5 pm: Masala Brass Collective in concert

5.30 pm: Rebirth dinner with Leopold Calice



MP: When we began Cittadellarte in the 1990s we started with a university of ideas, *università delle idee*. The idea of having not just a notionistic university, but a university that entails a dynamic of ideas. For me Cittadellarte was like a cell, a body cell. A cell is not enough. You have to divide the cell, and then you already have the dynamic of the origin of a body. If you divide these two cells, you get four cells. This is an idea that started from the division and multiplication of the mirror. The more you divide the mirror, the more mirrors you have inside. That's the multiplication. So I translated this into the concept of the body and the division became—let's say—the point of reference, the basic concept of evolution: dividing in order to grow. Multiplication occurs only through division. It does not occur as a principle, because if you don't divide the cell there is no multiplication. So division is the basic principle for everything. Male and female come from the division of the nucleus, negative and positive, good and bad ... All opposites come from what I call the division of zero. From zero you get two. Zero because zero for me is the mirror. The mirror does not recognize itself. It does not exist. It needs something in front of it in order to exist. This is why I divided the mirror in order to make two mirrors, one looking at the other, so in that way the two mirrors looking at each other multiply themselves into infinity. From zero to infinity. And I don't claim to be making an infinity of sections in Cittadellarte, but a certain number: yes. The cells within Cittadellarte are called 'offices', taken from the idea of the Uffizi in Florence, i.e. the Renaissance idea of offices. Each office is dedicated to a sector of social life: economy, politics, communication, production, spirituality, the idea of architecture up until construction, fashion—all the simplest things in life. But all of that has to be transformed—this is the material of transformation.

HUO: Which brings us to *Terzo Paradiso*. At the beginning of the Serpentine conversations—when we were working on the show last summer in Kensington Gardens—you mentioned religion, the idea of non-religion and also the notion of paradise. Paradise does not in fact come from

this, when I made my manifesto—whenever I make a new manifesto ... Now I am writing the last one. I am writing my last manifesto, *ultimo mio manifesto*: it will be ready in a few days.

HUO: Are you writing it here in Graz?

MP: No, I'm not writing it in Graz, but a section of it is told here. The manifesto says that it is now vital to be engaged in various fields of social life in order to give a new sense to the concept of power. To give art enough power to change the system of power. That is the basic principle. Everybody said, 'Oh, great idea, bravo, but that's pure utopia'. Yet finally, little by little, Cittadellarte brought this idea out of utopia. And now we are rooted in reality. And I think that this show here demonstrates that this reality has continued, not only because of Cittadellarte, but because so many things have happened in these past two decades around the world and so many artists have moved in the direction of transformation. This show presents a limited number of these activities, but I'm sure we could stage a show like this involving the entire city of Graz because there are so many similar activities within the dimension of transformation. Artists are taking so much responsibility, and not only artists, also scientists, with a lot of research being carried out at the university... We are changing. We need to change. It is a basic request from society.

HUO: Cittadellarte grew organically and I think that in some way, like a complex dynamic system with many feedback loops, it became more and more complex. For those of us here who have not been to Cittadellarte, it would be interesting to know how it works. You have artists in residence, you have a school, but there is also a workshop for sustainable architecture, for sustainable building processes whereby people from the region and from local villages can buy materials to make architecture more sustainable. So there are workshops, there is of course your studio, there are many parallel realities. Can you tell us how it stands now and how all these things work together?



Sacred Objects

On the Presence of the Sacred in the Work of Michelangelo Pistoletto

Ulrich Becker

The revolutionary desire to realize the kingdom of God on earth is the elastic point of progressive education and the beginning of modern history. Whatever has no relation to the kingdom of God is of strictly secondary importance in it.

Friedrich Schlegel, Athenaeum Fragment No. 222

Dogmatic systems, as Michelangelo Pistoletto recently explained in an interview, he rejects. Clearly this distancing is aimed not least of all at the church's dogmas. His art, according to Pistoletto, is far removed from religion, with a scientific, philosophical base focusing primarily on man in his—increasingly precarious—relationship with nature. No expectations of the hereafter, rather a resolute positioning in the here and now. In future the concern must be not with life after death, but with stark survival here.

Who also would have expected something else from such a pronounced exponent of modern art? The dominance of the profane is so closely linked to the concept of Modernism that a continuation of the sacred appears to be excluded from the outset. Ultimately this applies to the art: its development and diversification are analogous in their relation to traditional sacred themes to that of the demands and self-conception of Modernism and the present that seem to be cultivated towards churches in general, to their traditional messages. In any case the latter seem to have been assigned a marginal space.

your idea in Biella, constructing something that would grow organically over many decades or centuries, even. I wanted to ask you—as we are sitting here in the middle of the Cittadellarte village—if you could tell us about the epiphany for Cittadellarte and how it started. When did this idea come to you?

MP: The concept of collaboration and social transformation started in the 1960s when I opened up my studio to collaboration, and also my room at the 1968 Venice Biennale. I wrote a manifesto of collaboration. I opened up my studio so that anybody would be able to come and present their work and we could start putting together different languages, like music, cinema, visual arts, poetry and theatre. So then my studio was full of these languages. And we brought something different into action in order to go outside, to go onto the streets, to find a larger space. And this larger space was society. We really started to interact between different languages, but with the perspective of making ourselves part of social activity. That was very much related to the era. It was 1968, and people were really motivated in aspiring to transformation. And for me it was an opportunity to integrate our art and our activities into that moment and into that situation. But I didn't stop at that moment, I carried on. I think that Cittadellarte arose as a consequence of that time. It was that ultimately the necessity to achieve transformation didn't end with that time, but rather totally changed the approach to producing it. Instead of simply escaping institutions, it was intended also to go beyond the artist's atelier; it was to go outside of any institution. And then at a certain point it became increasingly important to me to create an institution—an institution that would be able to achieve the things one could not yet achieve at that time. I think it is still difficult to achieve transformation in an institution nowadays, even if there are already changes underway. It is important to show an alternative way of running an institution, and this is what Cittadellarte represents. It can be an experiment forever. It is a general experiment, and if it works this is not only good for Cittadellarte, it's good for everybody. And in the last 20 or 18 years I have seen

you were talking about 1989 and about the idea that major changes would come about in that year, and there were of course major changes. And that was the *Anno bianco*. Can you tell us about it?

MP: Yes, at the end of 1988 I was invited to put on a show at a location in Perugia, a public space, showing a black sculpture I was making at that time. I said: ‘OK, the title of the show will be *Anno bianco*, white year.’ And they asked: ‘You show black things and call it white year. Why?’ I replied: ‘Yes, the black was up until yesterday. Now we come out of black and enter into white.’ And the *White* was conceived as one year, like a white page, a big white book, that was to take the images of what was going on in 1989. At the end of 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, so that was the image that was captured at the end of the *Anno bianco*. So it was a way of including change in my work. It was a one-year work. After that I carried on with this same idea of time.

HUO: Another interesting thing about the *Anno bianco* is that billboards were involved. It went far beyond the idea of an exhibition. There were huge billboards, there were manifestos, many different things. Could you tell us about the role of the manifesto, the billboards and all of these aspects?

MP: The billboards showed the photography of the universe, taken by an observatory, with all the stars of the visible universe. I made a work showing that every point in the universe is its centre. So the billboard was about that. Every point in the universe is its centre. There isn’t any centre in the universe, that’s the way I discovered that.

HUO: I remember that in an interview we did in the 1990s we talked about the idea of *long duration*, by which I mean Fernand Braudel’s notion of *longue durée*. We talked about how you can go beyond these short temporalities of the art world, of biennales and exhibitions and art fairs and so on and how you go into longer temporalities. And we started to talk about this idea that there could be a project that would not end, which was

In so doing, it is deliberately overlooked that in the marginalisation of the Christian, the sacred has in no sense disappeared. On the contrary: the holy elements have remained. Not infrequently secularisation results in sacralization in another area, merely other contents, on to which devolve the now vacant spaces in the scale of public engagement. This swansong to the religious is nothing new: in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* by Novalis we find: ‘In the period of the world that we live in, direct communication with heaven no longer takes place’.

And the artist? He has long considered himself as unrestrainedly autonomous, he knows the kingdom of sacred contents and themes to be long since behind him. Meanwhile he has been unable or unwilling to escape the fascination of the sacred. An example for this is the preference for the objectsymbol, which is now relieved of all obligation to paraphrase contents and so is all the more possessed of its presence as a mere object. It must necessarily take on a quasi-sacred quality; its author, the artist, still holds the longknown role of creator and plays the demiurge or *Deus artifex*. He carries out coram publico a kind of honorary office, for which he has been prepared by the now truly respectable history of the cult of the artist.

Just as we are told the ancient story of King Midas, how everything is turned to gold by touch alone, so it is the artist’s act of will that turns objects into art, lending to what is unspectacular that enduring aura, whether one believes in Benjamin’s dogma of reproducibility or not. Once begat, the artistic act is turned into an act of faith. Marcel Duchamp’s objets trouvés have become holy things, even the *merda d’artista* by Piero Manzoni; in the case of the latter, there may even be a satirical inversion of the primary relic, or—at least as applicable—confirmation of the fascination of the sacred.

Here Pistoletto makes no exception, it seems. The holy is present already in the film *Buongiorno Michelangelo* (Ugo Nespolo, 1968/69), albeit inconspicuously. Of course it takes some time until it is discovered in the young artist’s



Michelangelo Pistoletto, exhibition view, Neue Galerie Graz,
Photo: N. Lackner/UMJ

cluttered studio. The hectic camera work recording the amazing chain of events forces us to look several times, to then perceive that unremarkable medieval wooden statue of the Virgin, which was recently exhibited in the Graz exhibition, too. In any case only the work of a regional no-namer, it was presented here in a somewhat alienated fashion, yet without depriving the piece of its sacred dignity. While Pistoletto provided the lower parts of the body of the simple sculpture with a transparent covering, he deliberately plays with the auratic aspect of the figure, which is impressive precisely due to its simplicity, yet which is no longer a cult image or an artwork in a museum, just an object first and foremost. Yet paradoxically this so dull-seeming object quality is what enables access to our consciousness, as if through the back door: unavoidably it has the character of an idol. Whether it is only a relic, a memory etc., in short, the artistic act turns it into a holy object.

Since time immemorial, theatre has been the—occasionally rather unloved—sister of liturgy, the latter pushing its way out of the church, and a *spettacolo* such as the *Teatro Baldacchino* (1968) is also permeated with the aura of the extraordinary, even the holy, the parade through the city

is based on the concept of time: you see time passing in the piece of art, into the mirror of the paintings. Time connects the past and the future to the present. I have produced many works specifically activating time. In 1975, for example, I produced a one-year show divided into twelve exhibitions in one specific gallery. Each month there was an innovation in the exhibition, but the entire show was on for one year. It was called *Le stanze*, the rooms, so I engaged the rooms in the activation of time. I named it after continents of time, because it is time that really creates continents. It is the landscape transformed into time, and time transformed into landscape. The *Tartaruga felice* you refer to was in Kassel. When I was invited for a solo participation in Kassel—in 1992—I said that I would like to have a space next to the street, and they gave me a shop in front of the Friedericianum. When entering the shop I said: ‘Now I will make 31 rooms’. And Denys Zacharopoulos, who drove me there, said: ‘There is no space for 31 rooms.’ Not in space perhaps, but in time there was. It was just one year before the inauguration of the *documenta* in Kassel. So I said I will stage 31 events over the course of the year. Why *Tartaruga felice*? *Tartaruga* means turtle. We were sitting in a restaurant, trying to come up with a title for the event in Kassel and in that restaurant there were three turtles that came to the table and asked for food. I started to feed these turtles, they were like dogs, very lively, and I said: ‘They are happy, happy turtles.’ And so ‘happy turtle’ became the title. Also because I realized that the turtle carries its home around. And this was exactly what I was doing, bringing my space of Kassel to 31 different places. This is time and space; it’s my field of action.

HUO: As with *Le stanze*, it lasted longer than usual. It was not an exhibition limited to just a month, or two months.

MP: One year. Always one year. Another one was *Anno bianco*.

HUO: Meaning ‘White year’, which is actually uncanny, almost a premonition. When I visited you in the studio

Michelangelo Pistoletto and Hans-Ulrich Obrist on the Urgency of Social Sculpture

30.09.2012, Kunsthaus Graz

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Thank you very much for the invitation. It is extremely exciting that we can continue the conversations that began with Michelangelo Pistoletto exactly 25 years ago. I was 18, 19 years old and went to visit Michelangelo in Turin. He actually said that I should come back a couple of months later, but that I should speak Italian better, that it would be a further-reaching and better conversation if I could speak Italian. So it is really down to Michelangelo not only that I came to understand many things about art, but also that I learned Italian. And somehow this conversation has continued ever since. We thought it would be interesting to talk about time today and about the big projects Michelangelo has developed over many years. It actually started with the *Tartaruga felice*; then there was *Anno bianco*, the *Terzo Paradiso* and at this point we will step into the future with *Anno uno*, Michelangelo's project for December 21st of this year, which also leads on to the exhibition at the Louvre.¹ But before we get to that, let's go a little bit further back into the past. I remember in that first conversation we had, when I came to see you in Turin, you explained the notion of longer time spans. You explained the whole concept of the *Tartaruga felice*, some kind of a time-piece. Can you tell us how this 'Tartaruga' project started?

Michelangelo Pistoletto: Thank you. Yes, my work, starting at the beginning with the 'mirror paintings', really



Teatro Baldacchino, Turin, 15.12.1968, Photo: Paolo Pellion di Persano, Courtesy Cittadellarte Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella

streets that is spectacular in the truest sense of the word. *Occupy avant la lettre*? In any case an occupation of public space in the form of a quasi-religious procession. It gives rise above all to the thought that the origin of comedy lies in the antique *komos*, the public procession. The absurdity with which, for example, *Lo Zoo* denied the behavioural code of the pragmatic post-war years, which seemed socially penned in, was not just an expression of the need at the time for political protest in the era of the Vietnam War. It was a sensually fully-lived desire in public, which here created attention for itself and validity, a single negation of the bourgeois demand for control over feelings (as postulated for behavioural sociology since the Early Modern Period by Norbert Elias). It appears to have come quite close to medieval models, but also Early Modern Period ones, too.

So nothing more than the continuation of an ancient tradition. Here very much the child of the changing times around 1968, the young Pistoletto allowed an unquestioned place in his work to the quasi-sacred, just as he also knows how to stylise his own person sure in the knowledge of the effect of models from more recent art history. When he poses in a flower-decorated hat, a mischievous look on his face, there is recourse here to another tradition, the *tableau vivant*. The pose itself is nothing other than homage to an early grand master of



Pia Epremi, *Pistoletto & Sotheby's*, February 1968, also title of the programme for the solo exhibition in the L'Attico Gallery, Rome, February 1968, Courtesy Cittadellarte Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella

the unfathomable and the sarcastic on the cusp of Modernism, to whom satirically connoted excursions into the sacred sphere were not unfamiliar at that: James Ensor, whose *Autoportrait au chapeau fleuri* (Ostend, Museum) was paraphrased here in filmic form (Pia Epremi, *Pistoletto & Sotheby's*, February 1968). The photo landed on the cover of the programme for the solo exhibition held at the same time in the L' Attico Gallery, Rome.

Another main work of Ensor's, *Christ's Entry into Brussels* (Malibu, The J. Paul Getty Museum), evidence of distinctly greater satirical aggressiveness, may have been kept in mind at the Actions of *Lo Zoo*. Regardless of all distance maintained to religion—which may apply to Ensor as to Pistoletto—the procession, a religious, liturgical act, in both cases retained its artistic legal title: but instead of being rescued into Modernism as a manifestation of religious beliefs (professedly having outlived themselves), it now became an instrument at the service of an artistic intention. At least for Pistoletto it may be the case that

As for the 'Turin Shroud', the same may apply here as in the case of Pistoletto's attitude towards religious questions in general, it is embedded in the memory of a rich, cultural-historical past. In contrast, it is on the present and the future that Pistoletto's current, rather ambitious project of a 'third paradise' is focused, un *terzo paradiso*. August Comte's periodisation seems to be returning. The frightening medieval chiliasm has received a modern counterpart that has turned to the pacifist and the ecological. Pistoletto's last word is a manifesto of the future, yet it describes not least of all a continuity of historical social utopias. A kingdom of God therefore, but without an appeal to an authority in the hereafter.

¹ Michelangelo Pistoletto: année 01 – le paradis sur terre. Louvre, Paris, April-September 2013.



Michelangelo Pistoletto, exhibition view, Neue Galerie Graz,
Photo: N. Lackner/UMJ

between self-reflection and self-promotion, from the second half of the 20th century, not only in Parisian jazz cellars. All faiths of every kind have ultimately had their priests, so why should it be any different with art?

Pistoletto's sense of the effect of secondary relics has led him to go one step further, wherein lies another reference to his home region: if with *Vetrina* (1968), he presents a sprinkled overall, the artist's work clothing, in an installation (hinting at a glass shrine) made to resemble a relic, he thus alludes to the 'Turin Shroud', that *Sacra Sindone* to which the question of historical authenticity is linked like almost no other relic. Needless to say, this question was never relevant for Pistoletto, but it is no way superfluous to state that in the case of *Vetrina* the question of genuineness is answered—in favour of the artist.



Michelangelo Pistoletto, exhibition view, Neue Galerie Graz,
Photo: N. Lackner/UMJ

satirical belligerence and comedic playfulness balance one another. By the way, the old Pistoletto has also taken into his repertoire a literally spectacular variant on the religious act, iconoclasm.

Thus Modernism, apparently so far removed from religion, knew very well the effect of the auratic, understood the need for purist rigour. This concerns the aura of the object as well as the surrounding space. Not least to this basic approach, which was born from the overcoming of the horror vacui, owes the *white cube* its existence.

Whoever set foot in the first room of the Graz Pistoletto exhibition in summer 2012 may have shared this impression. The elongated room seemed like a nave, the *quadri specchianti* rowed up on each side recalled altar paintings, as we know them from flat-roofed hall churches from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. What pushed its way back into one's consciousness was something decidedly post-medieval: the aura of the *aesthetic church* evoked by the Age of Sentiment and Romanticism, the nucleus of the modern museum experience. Nothing could lie further away from Pistoletto, however, than this excursion to an 'inwardness' that is individualistic to the

highest degree, and very North Alpine. For an exponent of *Arte Povera*, however, an opposing, genuinely Italian tradition must be brought into play, the tradition of the mendicant order arising from the spirit of the *poverello*, St. Francis of Assisi. Who, looking at the young Pistoletto, covered during his *azioni povere* in Amalfi (1968) in a coarse habit with a knitted belt, would not think of the *poverello*? And moreover, *Oggetti in meno* – Minus Objects – the Minorites: the chain of association is too tempting on a linguistic level alone. Regardless of all the differences, it is distinctly closer to Pistoletto's decidedly civil-society orientation, with which it also shares common roots in a centuries-old urban environment.

The history of public space as a location where discourse and demonstrations develop includes not only the exterior space, but also the interior space. In particular, in Italy, the emergence of civil-society elements cannot be understood without the church space as it has existed up to the present day in traditional as well as self-confident communities such as Florence or Bologna, above all in the form of the mendicant order churches, also called 'sermon barns'. A particular austerity is common to them all, though this may be softened by frescos. It is no coincidence that *Arte Povera* exhibitions are held in just this sort of room. It should not be forgotten that precisely in Upper Italy, i. e. in Pistoletto's home region, Piedmont, radical religious movements such as the *Fraticelli* had their centres. Their egalitarianism stood out in sharp contrast with the Roman Curia, not infrequently showing social-revolutionary characteristics. And so chiliastic notions, as they spread in the milieu of medieval mendicant orders, may have been the force behind that civilian religion that Pistoletto recently proclaimed: freed from Christian starting points, this sketch of the future, it seems, succeeds another model of thought, which derives from a period that believed with downright religious fervour in teleologies, Auguste Comte's history of philosophy.

Medieval austerity and Baroque exuberance—this complex piece of Italy's heritage has always found unity again



Michelangelo Pistoletto, exhibition view, Neue Galerie Graz,
Photo: N. Lackner/UMJ

in the visual-theatrical, and also forms a formative legacy for contemporary Italian art. Piedmont was not only the location of radical medieval reform movements. It experienced on its soil the greatest amount of Counter-Reformation piety. As a reminiscence they live on in Pistoletto's early work, confirming the theatrical element in its right just as the *azioni*. Thus the relief landscape *Paesaggio* (1965) draws on the staging techniques that characterise Italian arrangements of the Christmas manger—an invention, incidentally, of the *poverello*. In Piedmont (also in Pistoletto's home town of Biella) the famous *sacri monti*, those elaborate *teatri sacri*, attest to a closely related perspective. It is no exaggeration to speak of this passion theatre, transplanted to the mountain setting with all the staging tricks of the Counter-Reformation, as evidence of an event culture of Early Baroque: maximum visualisation of dramatic scenes using strong colours, then again austere black, that minimised colour as an expression of the solemn gloominess of death—the predilection of this period, shaped by Spanish court ceremony, for a further event culture, that of the funeral, is clear. Irrespective of all differences in world view, an affinity is expressed here to clerical black. This is known to belong to the basic outfit of a quasi-liturgical artist's appearance, oscillating