

Michelangelo Pistoletto – Biography

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 multireligious, 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*, whose symbol is a reconfiguration of the mathematical sign for infinity conceived by the artist in 2003. From 2007, with the collaboration between Pistoletto and the musician Gianna Nannini, curated by 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 that same year he is bestowed the title of Grand Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.

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 an honorary degree from the Universidad de las Artes of Havana in Cuba for "his contribution to contemporary art and his influence on several generations of artists".

In October of the same year he realized a work, called *Rebirth*, in the park of the Palais des Nations in Geneva, headquarters of the UN, constituted of a huge symbol of the Third Paradise formed of 193 stones, one for each UN State Member. In April 2016, the Brera Academy of Fine Arts conferred him an honorary degree in Communication and Art Education.

In 2017 a re-elaborated version of the symbol of the *Third Paradise* was adopted for the VITA space mission logo; during the mission, the photos taken by astronaut Paolo Nespoli were shared through the SPAC3 app to create a social planetary artwork.

In the same year the text written by Michelangelo Pistoletto *Ominitheism and Demopraxy. Manifesto for a regeneration of society* was published.

In 2018 he received the Roswitha Haftmann Prize in Zurich, in 2019 honorary degrees from Lecce's and Catania's Academies of Fine Arts, and in 2020 the Clavis Palafoxiana Prize in Puebla.

Between 2018 and 2020 the activity of the *Third Paradise* has further intensified, in particular through the development of an international network of Embassies and Forums. In these same years he has been particularly active in various South American countries (Mexico, Chile, Peru, Argentina, Cuba), with personal exhibitions and a series of initiatives linked to the *Third Paradise*.

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, P.S.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; 2016: GAMeC, Bergamo; Blenheim Palace, Woodstock; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, La Habana; 2018: MAC - Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Santiago de Chile; Museo de Arte Italiano, Lima.

He has participated thirteen times in the Venice Biennale (1966, 1968, 1976, 1978, 1984, 1986, 1993, 1995, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2017) 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-Musee 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 modene 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