

Michelangelo Pistoletto
Art takes on religion

1978

When, in October 1975, I held the first of the twelve exhibitions entitled "The Rooms", I identified in the exhibited mirror the phenomena of uniqueness, oneness, and singularity.

I mean that all the items there shown could be verified in their double through the mirror reflection; only the mirror was unable to double its own image. In the light of this consideration, I realized that in order to let the mirror having its double as well, I had to divide it in two. This is what I did, cutting the mirror together with its frame; so that the two halves of the frame, sticking to the two mirrors, testified to their original oneness

A series of works and operations on the divided mirror followed in different places and environments, from Corpus Christi in the United States, to Aalborg in Denmark.

At the same time, my cooperative work, began in 1967 with the poster for my studio opening, continued.

Thus, the theoretical and factual side of my work proceeded along parallel lines. The mirror stood for the theoretical side, cooperation stood for the factual one. My individuality, compared to the singularity of the mirror, was divided and multiplied when I created with someone else, just as the mirror is divided and multiplied. The two halves of the mirror, being mirrored one into the other, endlessly multiply themselves; likewise cooperation offers a creative relationship widening into a multiplicity of encounters.

Creativity becomes also procreation. "It takes two to create" - a sentence I wrote in 1977, connects creativity and procreation. Another sentence I wrote in 1969 said: "Light isn't aware of being if it doesn't find a body on which it can fall"; connecting the cosmic dimension of energy with the presence of art. Life, just like light, needs a body - the art - on which on which it can alight. Art, as a reflection of life, gives back to energy its power of self-identification. In the exhibition for Brunelleschi's anniversary, held in the cloisters of Santa Maria Novella in Florence in October 1977, I had planned to use a mirror as an altar piece, but I changed my mind after realizing the risk of being misunderstood which arose from the redundant use of mirrors by the architects of that exhibition. I later carried out this idea in San Sicario, where I placed a mirror, where usually there was a painting, in a baroque frame upon the altar of the church. Thus, just as in the early sixties I replaced canvas with mirrors over the walls of houses, art galleries, and museums, here, I replaced the canvas upon the altar with a mirror. The mirror upon the altar does not take the place of a generic subject but replaces a precise subject or, at least, a theme representing the image of God.

The mirror is a symbol which is at the same time an antisymbol. It is simply the physical and intellectual extension of the human phenomenon: from the eye to the mind, to action, the human being is a entire series of reflections.

In the mean time, possibilities of mirroring are not containable within a limited dimension; a mirror can potentially reflect every places and goes forward reflecting even where and when human eye is absent.

Then the mirror, being upon an altar or not, anyhow within the realm of art, becomes the meeting point between the human mirroring and reflecting phenomenon and the universal reality which the mirror itself is able to reflect. That is, the mirror is the mediator between the visible and the invisible, carrying sight beyond its normal possibilities. The mirror, in rooms or upon the altar, expands eye's features and mind's capacity up to the point of offering us the vision of totality.

I think there is only one mirror, which is divided and therefore multiplied in every other mirror. Man's dimension must be seen in terms of this power to embrace the universal and the particular at the same time.

An original creative sensitivity gave birth to the divine images of antiquity, and this transfiguration stimulated, through imagination, a unifying perception and a common understanding. These images have crystallized in their codification to such an extent that, today, they are used in a way opposite to their primitive reasons. Art has moved away from its socially active context.

In the mirror man and God enter the same dimension but leave the realm of dogma. Individual freedom and responsibility, as symbolized by the mirror, don't generate a still image of man or God, but a creative movement that can be extended to everyone.

Acts of expression and communication must gain in quality, while maintaining the original charge without submitting to the fossilization of symbols. Official codes, form a wall around society, in the long run stifle all dynamic interpretation of the codes themselves, ultimately making their terms illegible.

This eventually gives rise to alienation and revolt. Whereas art, though it generates its own codes, can change its terms at the right and most convenient time. Through the centuries then art has lost its autonomy and begun to symbolize power forms. Consequently people have lost their faculty to understand each other through artistic sensitivity.

At the beginning of our century, the avant-garde made art again autonomous. Art ceased to be a symbol of religious and political power, but it is still far from the people, because its autonomy regards only its aesthetic side. Now art must find an autonomy for its factual side as well.

At a moment in which charismatic figures and images in which they are proposed to masses of frightened or alienated people have again become popular, art must acquire its own kind of power.

"Art takes on religion" means that art actively takes possession of those structures such as religious which rule thought; not with a view to replacing them itself, but in order to substitute them with a different interpretative system, a system intended to enhance people's capacity to exerting the functions of their own thought. By dividing and multiplying mirrors I wish to create something analogous to a new family.

I think that the family, one of the most basic social structures, must recover its reason for being. Individuals come from a division of the unitary entity, which started the multiplication of its descendants. The division of the mirror is meant to show that the same principle and process are valid for art too.

A mirror placed in every house can reflect the whole of humanity, so it follows that the mirror used by each individual is already the large mirror, divided and multiplied. Everyone has a work of art in his house: a mirror. My aim is to enlarge the family of art by fecundating this mirrors. One must be brave enough to become a father, which means on one hand a confidence in universal centrality, and on the other a

multiplication of this confidence within the conscience of others. This can be achieved without increasing one's own dimension, but by continuously dividing it.

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