

Michelangelo Pistoletto

Plexiglass

1964

The beginning and the end of this story is the wall. For it is on the wall that pictures are hung; but mirrors are fixed there too. I believe that man's first real figurative experience is the recognition of his own image in the mirror: the fiction which comes closest to reality. But it is not long before the reflection begins to send back the same unknowns, the same questions, the same problems, as reality itself: unknowns and questions which man is driven to re-propose in the form of pictures.

My first "question" on canvas was the reproduction of my own image: art was only barely accepted as a second reality. For some time my work went ahead intuitively in the attempt to bring closer together the two images – the one offered by the mirror and the one I myself proposed.

The conclusion was the superimposition of the picture directly on the mirror image.

The figurative object born of this action allows me to pursue my inquiry within the picture as within life, given that the two entities are figuratively connected. I do indeed find myself inside the picture, beyond the wall which is perforated (though not, of course, in a material sense) by the mirror. On the contrary, since I cannot enter it physically, if I am to inquire into the structure of art I must make the picture move outward into reality, creating the "fiction" of being myself beyond the mirror.

At the present time it is easy to play on the identity between reality-object and the art-object. A "thing" is not art: but the idea expressed by the same "thing" may be.

Aesthetics and reality may be mutually identified; but each remains within its own autonomous life. The one cannot replace the other unless one or the other gives up its need to exist. This is why I wish to conclude this presentation of my work by returning ideally to the wall. For it is on this idea of the wall that we may conveniently "hang" the idea of the picture, and to the latter that we may link the idea of the subject. For me at this time the "thing" is the structure of figurative expression, which I have accepted as reality. The physical invasion of the picture in the real environment (bringing with the representation of the mirror) gives me the chance to introduce myself among the broken-down elements of figuration.

(Michelangelo Pistoletto, first published in the catalogue of the exhibition "Michelangelo Pistoletto", Torino, Galleria Sperone, 1964)