

Michelangelo Pistoletto

Soul

1983

Many years ago science and technology were of great interest to everybody, as they produced thrills and wonders.

Nowadays, everything that happens is taken for granted, it is an “intelligence” which evolves of its own free will, developing automatically. I have lived before and after the conquest of space (man on the moon). Before, I remember looking at a village with the sensation of my thoughts being drawn up toward the heavens. Afterwards, viewing the same place, it was as though I saw it from above, from out of this world.

Before doing the mirror-paintings I looked at art and wondered how to progress, now I look back and go ahead without problems. I used to feel that there was something, somewhere that had to “come out” - it was the mirror. (As when looking at medieval painting, one understands that in those days artists revolved around something, somewhere that had to “come out”. It was perspective). I arrived at the mirror-paintings a few years before landing on the moon. These things happened in the sixties and so now we go forward looking back, or if you prefer, backward looking forward.

It's the prophecy of the mirror come true. There is something in the art of the past which has nothing to do with handicraft. The Easter Island statues are not handicraft, but the works of Michelangelo Buonarroti aren't either. In the same way, there is now something in art which has nothing to do with technology or science. But what was there in antique art that cannot be defined as craft? The production of “sacredness”.

The great works always turned their gaze or thoughts turned upward. Certainly immense achievements remain as evidence that everyone who created them expected that someone from heaven would come to see them. Therefore, is there something in today's art that can be distinguished from the practical application of the law of progress?

Conceptual art is the highest secular endeavour of an antique spiritual gaze toward the heavens. But art reached this goal when we were already returning from the moon.

Capsized by the mirrored-dome we returned upside down to see the great monuments and tiny villages on the face of the earth. What I really want to say is that the only thing has changed in art, with respect to the past, is that now the “sacred” is produced via a descent instead of an ascent.

I substitute the word “conceptual” with the word “spiritual”, turned toward the past with the sense that it didn't have in the past, because its direction has been changed. The gigantic statues on Easter Island and the marbles of Michelangelo both has cultural soul which reaches across time and space. It is this soul that I have found again today in sculpture.

The controversy over the interpretation of the term sculpture lies here. It's a question of soul or no soul, center or no center, full or empty. God or no God.

I didn't identify myself with the art of the seventies, I tried to reconstruct objectively the center of spirituality of art.

I see this central spine, this sacred column of art, in the soul of sculpture. I understand sculpture as the true form of this soul, which reaches across time with its concentric presence, compact and solid.

This sculpture is formed and informs, allowing itself to be moulded without being broken up, allowing itself to be penetrated without leaving itself with emptiness, distorting itself, tearing itself to pieces or annihilating itself. The seventies registered themes of emptiness, that is of space, of environment. Environments can enter one another but inside they are empty. The object enters into the environment, but the object is literally punctured, it's empty. The intervention into the environment is a further explosion of emptiness, it doesn't give form to the fullness.

Painting summarizes its cataloguing of materials in a single medium, but it is perforated, it is full of cracks. Paintings stay on the walls which surround us, leaving us still in emptiness.

The soul of sculpture is in the center of space and every piece of sculpture is a fragment that recomposes the center.

Sculpture is the fullness which opposes the emptiness inside and outside the environment. The full form opposes the emptiness of a room, it is interpreted in a way opposite to that in which one interprets the walls which make up the architectural box.

Thus sculpture defines by compressing itself in a silent expansion into both limited internal space and unlimited external space.

When the volume of a work of art can be called sculpture, then it is soul. Today it clearly and surely is, because it has been recomposed and resuscitated.

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