

Michelangelo Pistoletto

The Rooms

October 1975 – September 1976

The idea of holding this exhibition came to me after seeing the three new rooms of the Stein Gallery in Turin last Spring.

The Rooms open directly into one another, along the same central axis, creating a perspective effect. The dimensions of the "doorways" are those of my mirror pictures (125x230 cm) and thus I imagined a mirror surface placed on the wall of the end room, as a virtual continuation of the series of openings from one room into the next.

Until I saw this new gallery, I had never found a reason for exhibiting a mirror surface alone, without any form of intervention on my part. In my mirror paintings there is one aspect which is constant: the relationship between the static image, as fixed by me, and the dynamic images of the mirroring process: in the case in point, the static image is pushed right up to the outer edges of the picture, whose perimeter represents the outline of the doorways which precede it physically and which continue in the reflection.

There are many things I could say about this work; for example, that it can not be transported elsewhere without relegating it again to the status of a mere mirror; that it "magnetizes" all the space within the gallery by immobilizing it (by virtue of the fact that the gallery immobilizes the mirror for the duration of the exhibition). I could go on to speak of the viewer, and formulate a hypothesis about the immobility by which he would find himself surrounded (even if he were to move) should he realize that his relationship with the phenomenon is only one of "registration".

For his point of view in relation to the picture is immaterial, in that each and every point of the three rooms has been considered in perspective. The particular point on which I should like to focus attention is the fact that there are three "doorways" which become seven through reflection. Only recently scientists discovered the law that all phenomena can be verified in mirror form, except one. Whenever we arrive at a discovery via the instruments of art, it is never microscopic or macroscopic, but always in a *human* dimension.

THE ROOMS, PART II

I have written elsewhere that my mirror pictures cannot be reproduced: that is, they cannot be transformed into other media, for that would mean the elimination of the dynamics which is their essential aspect. I feel the same is true for this exhibition of "The Rooms"; the only proper medium

for its documentation is the living eye which records it. The viewer moves forward with the light which floods in and which gets dimmer from room to room.

The visitor's experience consists in walking up to the mirror (in the furthest and dimmest of "The Rooms") to find that in it he is almost flat up against the light from the door he has just entered by: it seems that if he were to take another step forward, he would become one with the mirror surface, with no body and no reflection.

The irreproducibility of this experience will emerge with "The Rooms II", in which the spectator will see the same exhibition as a reproduction.

Indeed, through the first doorway (printed life-size in a photograph placed directly over the opening) one sees the reproduction of the space one moved through previously.

The viewer will realize that the mirror has thus been "trapped" by the camera, which has forced it to reproduce "The Rooms" in definite form; that the real rooms have become virtual, in that they have been shut off behind their own photograph (which thus becomes the only tangible datum); and the impact with the present flatness of the subject (which one was able previously to enter and to explore halfway) makes one perhaps more sensitive to the previous experience. However, in addition to these observations, I should like to stress a *third* moment, which follows on from the two exhibitions: i.e. publication. For, in deciding to publish the image of the operations, I realized that the same photograph will do equally well for both.

In any piece of research, each single datum is precious.

One should not therefore ignore the fact that a medium "overturned" to serve creative expression not only becomes useful, but also declares its limits, fragility and precariousness.

Since 1964 I have been working with different media, modifying in every case their conventional use. Each of them, in the course of my research, has been made to determine and define the weight and the force or artistic concept. I do not allow my ambition to coincide with the unhesitating acceptance of the idea that the mass media are the message of today.

And this in itself is enough to allow me to use the same media as movers of other messages.

THE ROOMS, NUMBER THREE

Father, son and creativity

Every man is the son of the son, of the son, of the son, and bears within himself the father of the father, of the father, of the father, of the father. On the wall above each of the doorways in "The Rooms" I have placed first of all the word "figlio" (son) because it is from the son's point of view that I regard the work. The work is realized here, as we have seen, from the very first doorway. The word "figlio" is repeated above each doorway up to the threshold leading beyond the last of "The

Rooms". But this time, the illusion that the mirror reflection simply continues the series of openings and rooms is dispelled, since in the reflection it is the word "padre" (father) which is repeated from doorway to doorway, from room to room. The reflection never gives back its own side, but the opposite.

Thus, in virtue of this seventh opening or threshold, which I call the creative point, we are enabled to see ourselves come and go.

But I would add, as far as this exhibition is concerned, that we cannot consider ourselves as entirely "fathers" until we have walked the entire length of the path of the sons.

THE ROOMS, ACT FOUR

The development of this line of research in "The Rooms" and in the twelve planned programmed exhibitions follows the logic of space, time, and my own presence verifying the effect.

The moment of this writing (4 pm on January 16, 1976) marks the shift from the third to the fourth show, in traditional numerical sequence.

Number three encapsulates the parity of the two (the father and the son) who are reflected in the uneven, central point (the mirror).

Four is even and does not reveal disparity in any way. In Four the central point in which the opposing points find verification generates a cross, since it is transfixed not by a single line of projection (as in the previous show) but by two, which form four equal angles.

The four points are now, as it were, at the extremities of two intersecting mirrors. Each point is projected sideways onto the mirror surface, instead of striking it directly.

There is no point in leaving the mirror exposed to view in this show, for, in any case, a single surface would not be sufficient.

Furthermore, this symmetry of parity would prevent us from verifying our double optically, shifting our gaze toward the two lateral points which represent the width of the mirror before us, while our reflected image would take shape at the opposite end of another mirror. We see this mirror sideways, as on a knife's edge: indeed it has our own thickness, exactly as it has the thickness of a point. Optically, therefore, we would be able to perceive only two dimensions. But after the experience of the third, we can imagine the fourth.

The shift from one point to another, between the extremities of the cross, creates a square whose sides become longer or shorter depending on the speed at which we leave one point and approach another.

At minimum speed we have maximum space; and with maximum speed we reach the four points which stick firmly to the central one (still hiding it). For this reason show number four cannot but

be “Time” - the time we take (or which the instrument takes) to move from one point to another point within “The Rooms”. In the exhibition, the terms of time itself are pushed to extremes, beyond the imaginationless dynamic which lines the environment. But here imagination presents itself at the same time as its explanation.

I have loaded the future with memory; and this memory seeps away automatically with every moment that enters the past; while the instruments which mark the passage of time mechanically do not move beyond their mechanism.

THE ROOMS, FIFTH EXHIBITION

The four months of exhibition which have already passed are the part of the voyage in time which I have covered till now aboard the vehicle “The Rooms” since October of last year.

As with a missile flashing through the interstellar void, each exhibition materializes as a separate stage which gives way subsequently to another stage, then to a third, and so on.

Thus my inquiry delves also into the mechanisms which make thought proceed. Indeed, each of these writings on the exhibitions precedes the actual concrete realization of the exhibition to which it refers and follows the moment in which the exhibition has been conceived.

Each separate piece of writing becomes a functional part of the work itself, since its words adjust the trajectory of the imagination while each of the exhibitions adjusts the trajectory of the writing.

Speaking of the previous exhibition, I mentioned the image of a cross consisting of the diagonals of a square indicating a space whose dimensions can be perceived in relation to the dynamics of time. I linked the fourth exhibition to the fourth dimension, but did not describe the work, for because it was an experience of the imagination, explained through the turning inside-out of the memory, I did not want the viewer’s imagination to come into play outside the place and the context which I had decided on for the operation. I say this because I want the reader to realize that for me the written work is simply a part of the engine, which cannot be replaced by another mechanism.

In the fifth exhibition singularity and centrality are the protagonists. The dimensions vary along with the expansion or contraction of volumes around that center on which all diagonals converge. Thus, just as a cube may be any size you like but will always have the same center, so “The Rooms” now contract and expand physically around their central point.

The work is like this: the three rooms are reproduced in the middle room on a smaller scale and in perspective. The viewer, proceeding in his visit, enters “The Rooms” twice growing in size in relation to them.

THE ROOMS, THE SIXTH EXHIBITION

The sixth exhibition of “The Rooms” might be called “The Twins”. It is seen from the point of view of the father, who produces in his children the widening of his own expressive range. And indeed, The Twins is a doubling of the number three, “Father, Son and Creativity”.

But the real title of this sixth exhibition ought to be “Moving Away”. The father moves away from his children, and they move away from him. The farewell is the symbol of this parting.

The father, as he moves away, sees the image of his children diminish then disappear entirely. Of course, the children do not get smaller in any real sense, nor do they disappear: they remain the same as always, but elsewhere. A cell divides itself into two eyes which look at each other. They move away from the central point which formerly united them. The facing eye, as it moves away, is transformed from object to image, and begins to grow smaller to leave room for the universe of images. While one eye remains on this side, the other, on the other side, projects the universe toward the first. The two eyes are now located at the entrance and at the far end of the three rooms. The number, two, is the parity which doubles the disparity of the three rooms making them six. The second exhibition turned reality virtual while making virtuality real. Now, in exhibition number six, the doubling of “The Rooms” is achieved by dividing the two phenomena, the real and the virtual, as if they too were entering the mechanism of our optical perspective. Thus reproduction waives its claim to total substitution of the gallery, and real space absorbs reproduction.

In this operation the twins which greet one, from the far end of the gallery are brought into the foreground on the scale which the photographic eye has registered from a distance. Through this scale we see the twins reproduced life-size at the far end of the real gallery. Thus our seeing eye will now reduce their dimension to the same scale as in the photographic foreground.

The dimensions at the two opposite poles are maintained constant by perspective as it runs back and forth among the three rooms.

NUMBER SEVEN OF THE ROOMS

This is the second time we encounter the number seven.

We found it in the first exhibition, when it was used to identify one-ness, singularity, the undoubled. In the story of “The Rooms”, number six is the half-way mark. The number seven means that I am now writing the the first of the other six pages which, ideally, will come to rest on the first six bringing to a close my text for “The Rooms”. What, then, is the difference between the seventh exhibition and the first? The seventh is, as it were, the mirror of the first. In the first a mirror was set so as to “imitate” the six openings or doorways (three real and three reflected); whereas in the

seventh the six openings (real and reflected) imitate the mirror. And I - between these two reflecting exhibitions - recognize myself as the creative point.

I shall create this exhibition by breaking a corner of the mirror, placed once again at the far end of "The Rooms". I shall apply some plaster to the inside of the doorways so as to give the openings the same new shape as the mirror. Thus these openings will be "false" - both on this side and the other side of the mirror -whereas the mirror itself will be its real shape.

NUMBER EIGHT OF THE ROOMS

I would not trouble, in the case of this eighth exhibition, to point out how it reverses the previous exhibitions, except to indicate its direction in the development of the signs of parity. In this exhibition, positive and negative, fullness and emptiness, are intertwined without allowing us to make out the point of interchange between reality and image which I identify with the mirror.

Thus, mingling the imagined vision with the physical one, the eye may set out either from the entrance or from the far wall beyond the three doors, passing indifferently through the empty space. The image I present here is that of fullness corresponding to the dimensions of the first door, but seen in perspective, standing at the other end of The Rooms. This perspective of fullness is introduced into the perspective of empty space which I see from this end of "The Rooms". The sum of the full and empty spaces thus perceived is eight.

THE ROOMS: NINE

I have never been to see my mother's grave.

It would seem to me a rather odd thing to do.

Dante uses the number nine to indicate the perfect rings which, in the *Divine Comedy*, represent his wandering through the *Inferno*.

My ninth exhibition in "The Rooms" is the visit to hell. But its title is "Approach". In number six, the daughters moved away from the father, whereas here it is the mother who comes closer to the son.

Dante does not visit the *Inferno* by actually entering it, but by bringing its symbols to the pages of his work. Thus my own visit will stop at the first of the three doorways of "The Rooms", while the stone which seals off the world in which my mother now lives will be placed against the far wall of the gallery. This stone will appear as a virtual threshold, separating two forms of a single reality.

THE TENTH MOMENT IS THAT OF THE REAL ROOMS

THE ROOMS: CHAPTER ELEVEN

During my first night in Venice this year, I dreamed of a sequence of baroque rooms. While dreaming, in a brief moment of lucid awareness, I studied the images carefully, and noticed that “The Rooms” were all perfect in every detail of style, totally consistent, without the slightest degree of uncertainty or interruption; yet it wouldn’t have been an easy task to describe or draw them with anything like the same degree of precision.

Thus I realized that even the most ignorant of men can dream “in perfect style” like a camera. But after my dream I had occasion to visit a number of Venetian houses, with baroque rooms in which I found the same perfection of image. Here, too, no part of any wall was without its stylistically perfect detail. These real rooms are the physical exposition of the single dream of the person who imagined them.

The title of this eleventh chapter is “The Transfer”. What had happened was that in coming to Venice my "rooms" had become overlaid with baroque dreams which I now translate into physical terms, transferring their image onto the pages of this review.

The white rectangle interrupts the eleventh image as a break in the dream.

The white walls of “The Rooms” in Turin are the ideal support for the reality of the paper.

In September 1976 Galleria Stein in Turin sent the recipients of the preceding eleven blurbs a completely black page, devoid of text, as the announcement and execution of the twelfth exhibition.