

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 Squalore*, 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 1999. 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 multiconfessional, 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*, the symbol of which is the *New Infinity Sign* he created in 2003. From 2007, with the collaboration between Pistoletto and the musician Gianna Nannini, curated by Zerynthia - 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 Michelangelo Pistoletto wrote the essay "the Third Paradise", published by Marsilio Editori.

He has been nominated Artistic Director of *Evento 2011* in Bordeaux.

His works are present in the collections of leading museums of modern and contemporary art, including: MOMA, New York; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Beaubourg, Paris; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome; Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Seoul; Municipal Museum of Art, Toyota; Museo Reina Sophia, Madrid; MACBA, Barcellona; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington; Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli; Tate Modern, London.

He has participated twelve times in the Venice Biennale (1966, 1968, 1976, 1978, 1984, 1986, 1993, 1995, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2011) and four times in Documenta, Kassel (1968, 1982, 1992 and 1997).

Principal one-person museum shows:

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; Fondazione Burri, Città di Castello; 2001, Contemporary Museum of Bosnia, Sarajevo; Ludwig Museum, Budapest; 2003, MuHKA, Antwerp; 2005, Galleria Civica, Modena; 2007, MAMAC, Nice; NCCA, Mosca; 2010: Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; 2011: MAXXI, Roma.