

## The “Progetto Arte” manifesto (1994)

### **Preliminary Remarks**

To assess the heritage of history has become possible, now at the end of the century and the millennium is near.

The twentieth century has witnessed an exponential acceleration of scientific and technological progress. Traditional notions of space and time have changed, and humankind has entered a new dimension laid open by imagination and inventiveness.

Concurrently, a contrary development has brought significant numbers of living beings to extraordinary levels of social and existential degradation. An immense loss of “civil” balance has taken place, and an acute contrast has become manifest in the relationship between the rapidity of communication, which has brought the inhabitants of Earth closer together, and the age-old differences that have interposed themselves between one ethnic group and another, creating insurmountable distances among individuals.

It is a terrible dysfunction of which artists must become aware: they must wonder what role this world reserves for them.

The matter has troubled me deeply ever since the 1950s, and I have steered my work in the direction of individual conscience and interpersonal responsibility. Now, on the threshold of the new millennium, I think of art as a potential means of gathering together and joining all that which has been excised or driven apart. I believe art must recover its universal status.

### **The project**

Progetto Arte is based on the idea that art is the most sensitive and complete expression of human thought, and that the time has come for artists to take on the responsibility of establishing ties among all other human activities, from economics to politics, science to religion, education to behaviour – in a word, among the threads that make up the fabric of society. A basic tenet of the project is the conviction that, a civilisation can no longer be understood in terms of clearly defined territories, an outlook that will stimulate the expression of a “global civilisation “ is necessary. One motto, in this sense, might be, “eliminate distances while preserving differences”.

On this foundation a workshop will be constructed with the intent of forming a “hot core” of energy that will radiate on a broad scale, and not just in a limited field –in other words, to gather together those creative urges that seek to unite the innumerable potentials that exist unexpressed, and to

create, as a consequence, the channels of interaction that will form the spherical framework of human society on the planet.

Progetto Arte is the visible sign of a possible principle –that of the joining of opposites – which can be applied to all social contexts, in terms both ideal and practical .

Past and future are two opposites that join in the present. Consequently, to plan the future one must look contemporaneously to the past. The project assigns a fundamental role to the encounter between art and architecture, in the belief that artist and architect acted as one person in imagining and formulating the great civilisations of the past, and that their action was made possible by a sense of commitment on the part of those invested with public power, with whom they engaged in the pursuit of common goals. Today global power is managed by the so-called economic system – a system in which there is no place for thought offered free of charge and hence no room for the ‘opposite ‘ of the rule of profit. It follows that there cannot be an initiative that proposes to formulate a complete configuration of civilisation. Nevertheless one cannot help but acknowledge that the economic system, which is responsible for creating and maintaining world imbalance, is the principal interlocutor of the artist-architect, and that the new course must lead to a reestablishment of the ancient connection between art and power. Another motto of Progetto Arte might be, “the artist as a sponsor of thought”: it expresses the intention to effect an exchange of roles, as well as a reversal of the traditional conception of remuneration. Due account must be taken also of the fact that the principles which define and divide religions probably contain the most potent seeds of the aesthetic and moral conflict. The harshness of dogmatic methods no longer corresponds to today’s interpretative needs, which must reconcile the particular differences of cultures with the idea of universal concept. Hence I distrust all those positions that define their own view as the only positive one, perpetrating the primitive notion by which the negative sign is assigned to a frontal enemy who must be combated.

In the history of great civilisations, the temples, too, were designed by artist /architects acting in syntony with mythical and religious thought. Hence art must again take on the responsibility of establishing a spiritual connection between past and future – tempered by the awareness that the ‘ churches’ are also, anachronistically, the cause of a disastrous social imbalance; that they continue to provide the economic system with the support of the ancient cult of sacrifice; and that this cult is an inevitable accomplice of the modern machinery of war, which is profitable to the highest degree.

Another slogan of Progetto Arte might be, “love differences,” which means, think not of rigid rules of uniformity and equality, but of the extensive articulation of differences.

Indeed, the project is not a preestablished and formalised design, it is a free, dynamic, fluid, supple sign that fits between the old trenches to form a capillary connection in the flesh of a new, complex, self- designing body.

Michelangelo Pistoletto 1994