

FT Weekend

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17 February/18 February 2018

Critics' choice

Life&Arts

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

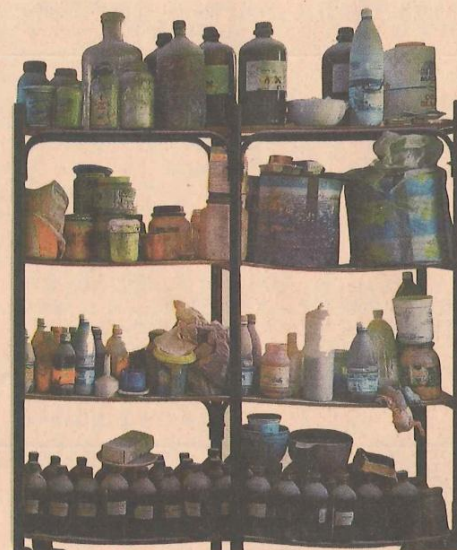
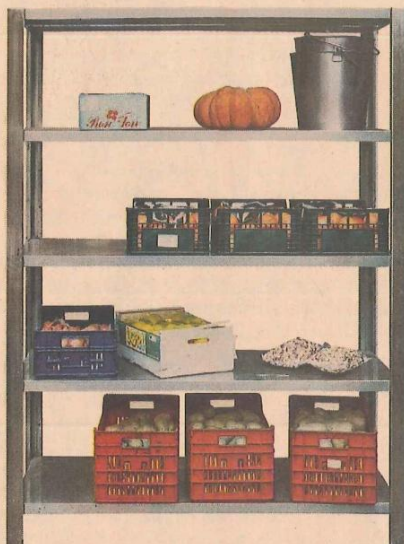
**Michelangelo Pistoletto:
Scaffali**

Simon Lee Gallery

An Arte Povera artist who uses the glossy material of highly polished stainless steel; a conceptual pioneer concerned with figuration; an individualist insisting art is a communal activity: through his 60-year career, Michelangelo Pistoletto has enjoyed paradox, tension, and the open-ended game of inviting audiences to complete his works.

His most celebrated series are mirror paintings, begun in 1961 when he painted his face on a varnished black background, "saw it come toward me" — and realised that "the true protagonist was the relationship of instantaneousness . . . created between the spectator, his own reflection and the painted figure, in an ever-present movement".

This show presents the latest variation on the theme: Pistoletto's "Scaffali" series of silkscreened images meticulously depicting shelves laden with particular sets of items, applied to large mirrored surfaces. Some have grid-like neatness — colourful crates and buckets in geometric formation; ordered layers of mallets, hammers, tools; rows of Chinese vases whose curves offset the horizontal shelves. Others are haphazard — a jumble of grey car parts and engine fixtures,



From left: Pistoletto's 'Scaffali: frutta e verdura', 'Scaffali: Accademia de Bellas Artes, La Habana' (both 2015)

heaps of fruit and vegetables — or emphasise asymmetry, with single doors to one side.

All evoke human narrative — greengrocer, car dealer — and, as always, the reflective sheen makes the audience integral to the work: we are playfully invited to reach for an object on the shelf. Yet even as our

fluctuating reflections bring dynamism to these static arrangements, the dominant, busy compositions also obstruct our presence in the mirror. Rigid composition set against elements of time and chance brought by our participation; the aesthetic versus the utilitarian; minimalist austerity

balancing pop's celebration of the everyday; material reality challenged by mirrored games with infinity: into these apparently straightforward works Pistoletto brings art history, social engagement and masterly play with form.

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February 23-April 7