

**Wallpaper\***

# Povera goes palatial: Michelangelo Pistoletto settles in at Blenheim Palace

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One of the founding fathers of Arte Povera, Michelangelo Pistoletto installs a show at Blenheim Palace, one of England's wealthiest private stately homes. Pictured: *Venere degli stracci* / *Venus of the Rags*, 1967-2014. Photography: Tom Lindboe. Courtesy Blenheim Art Foundation

Michelangelo Pistoletto was one of the founding fathers of Arte Povera, the influential 1960s art movement that literally translated as 'poor art'. As such, his aim has always been to embrace worthless materials, to reject wealth and commodity in the art world, and to pave the way for art to become a means of social change. So what is he doing installing a show at Blenheim Palace, one of England's wealthiest private stately homes? Pistoletto explains all to Wallpaper\*...

**W\*: I see they haven't let you smash any mirrors [as in Pistoletto's seminal performance piece *Ten Less One*] but have you had fun taking over the palace?**

MP: I always have fun. It's normal for me.

**Good! But I mean, Blenheim is a symbol of English tradition, establishment, power... I thought you might have been interested in taking this on – with or without a sledgehammer!**

This palace is an important symbol of tradition but today we have to use the concept of power in a different way. The fact that it is open to art and creativity means it's open to a new vision. The palace can be the conjunction of old and new perspectives. The old perspective is the storytelling of the past. Now we have to propose a new story.

**You have created all sorts of stories around the grounds here, including a rather sinister one – a gold Volkswagen Polo sinking in the fountain. What does this propose?**

I saw that work as a mirage – I had a spontaneous vision of it when I first came here. It suggests disaster. We are in a time of disaster.

I made the car in gold. Like the palace the car is, for us, a symbol of gold – only for people of today the car represents gold in terms of modernity, science, technology. Look at the palace: the gold is still here, but the real use is past. It has sunk; it's not active any more. The same thing with the car. In this situation, magnificence and disaster occur at the same time. I'm interested in the point of friction where opposing forces like magnificence and disaster meet, that's what people perceive.

**So you intend to create a sense of drama through contrast?**

Contemporary art and an antique palace – they are totally different things. It is very interesting to see the contrast between both situations. Bringing them together you open up the void between them. We need the void in order to change – *la marcia* – what is it called in the car?

**The gear?**

You have to change gear, go into neutral, before you change speed. Then you produce a new direction.

**Perhaps Arte Povera has found its perfect point of polarity, in a luxurious English palace?**

Art Povera doesn't mean miserable art, it means essential, it means excluding the superfluous. When you have a vision of something you want to reach, first of all you have to ask: what is the opposite of it? You have to consider what is different about the opposite and then set about moving everything.

In other words, if you have a thesis, you look to the antithesis, and then you make a synthesis. Always make a synthesis. If you simply make a thesis, the antithesis exists somewhere that will make a war with your thesis. You have to make the synthesis yourself. If everybody makes that, we have an exchange of synthesis. Synthesis is always a creation. The synthesis is essential. And you always have to have two polarities in order to create it.