

Artist Michelangelo Pistoletto decorates the Louvre's iconic pyramid



AN ITALIAN artist decorated the Louvre museum's glass pyramid Wednesday for the first time in the iconic monument's history, in a protest against capitalism. Picture: Jacques Brinon

The artwork, a huge three-looped infinity sign made of mirrors, faces due west onto France's business district, La Defense. Michelangelo Pistoletto, one of the world's leading conceptual artists, covered one panel of the pyramid with the reflective symbol that's meant as a defiant political gesture: Politicians and society must look at follies of excess that led to the global financial crisis. It had spectators gawping - some in awe, others in confusion. *"It's fantastic. It's like an eye looking out onto what Paris has become: finance, greed,"* one spectator, Fabrice Bing, said. Pistoletto, one of the main exponents of "Arte Povera," an influential movement that uses poor and everyday materials in art to protest against consumerism, has no doubt as to his art's message.

"Politicians should look at themselves in the mirror, and learn to take responsibility for this terrible mess and think of the infinite future ahead for humanity," he told The Associated Press.

Pistoletto is the first artist the Louvre has invited to work on the outside of the pyramid, the large glass and metal structure, designed by architect I. M. Pei, that was commissioned nearly 30 years ago - to great controversy - by former President Francois Mitterrand. The installation continues deep inside the museum in more than a dozen separate works that the artist has "hidden" among the sprawling classical antiquities, made from mirrors and secondhand rags.

"It's a mystery. The public is asked to come on a treasure hunt," said curator Marie-Laure Bernadac, who agreed that the works will appeal to the many tourists who still come and see the pyramids because of the mysterious associations from Dan Brown's best-selling book *The Da Vinci Code*. But the works also have their fair dose of humor. One work near the *Mona Lisa*, consists of mirror with an image of a tourist taking a photo.

"I'm also poking fun ... I'm trying to say that people don't look with their eyes any more, they just consume and take photos of the Mona Lisa because it's famous. I'm trying to make people think," Pistoletto said.



The three-looped infinity sign is an artistic gesture aimed to show politicians and society the follies of excess that led to the current financial crisis. Picture: Jacques Brinon

One of the strongest works is a marble statue of Venus, being pushed back by a gargantuan heap of rags. Pistoletto said it was a metaphor for how all the refuse in the world has cluttered and polluted nature. *"They're secondhand rags, but they're all very well washed,"* he joked. *"Don't forget, this is the Louvre."* Pistoletto's *Year 1, Heaven on Earth* will run until Sept. 2.

Italian conceptual artist Michelangelo Pistoletto at the Louvre Museum in Paris. It is the first time an artist has worked on the outside of the famed Pyramid, commissioned by former French President Francois Mitterrand nearly 30 years ago. Picture: Jacques Brinon

