

The Serpentine Temple of Michelangelo Pistoletto

Nicola McCartney, Monday 18th July 2011



The Serpentine's new exhibition, 'The Mirror of Judgement', is an anti-climax. Pistoletto is an important artist for several reasons; he is a founding member of the Arte Povera movement, winner of the Golden Lion Award for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale (2003) and has played an intrinsic part in the development of conceptual art. In his youth, Pistoletto made a name for himself by encouraging collaboration, audience participation and an interdisciplinary approach – he has initiated workshops and foundations for the study and promotion of creativity of all kinds. However, 'The Mirror of Judgement' does little to affirm this and it is hard to believe that it forms part of the same practice that is synonymous with inspiring and activating social change.

'The Mirror of Judgement' is an installation of corrugated-cardboard intertwined throughout the Serpentine's gallery rooms, punctuated by sculptures representative of four major religions; Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. The sculptures are extracts from Pistoletto's ongoing series, *Third Paradise*, a project examining imagined and/or proposed new human civilisations. They comprise a mirrored obelisk, prayer rug and kneeling-bench, among other unimaginative religious paraphernalia he has previously exhibited. Because the cardboard is less than chest height, and I'm not quite 5.4", it does little to emulate its described 'labyrinth' because even the little people can see where it leads; a rather tedious and singular path through the middle of each room.

The best aspect of 'The Mirror of Judgement' is in the entrance gallery, where the cardboard encases a large convex mirror reflecting the above skylight window. On a good day, when the sun is out, the effect is resonant of the Sistine Chapel and cleverly highlights the beauty of the Serpentine's architecture whilst simultaneously changing it. Otherwise, 'The Mirror of Judgement' is good for small children and reminding us adults that there are major religions outside of those associated with the media's 'War on Terror' and constant polarization of the West and rest of world.

'The Mirror of Judgement' is on at the Serpentine Gallery, London, until 17 September 2011. More information can be found at www.serpentinegallery.org