

Pistoletto past and present

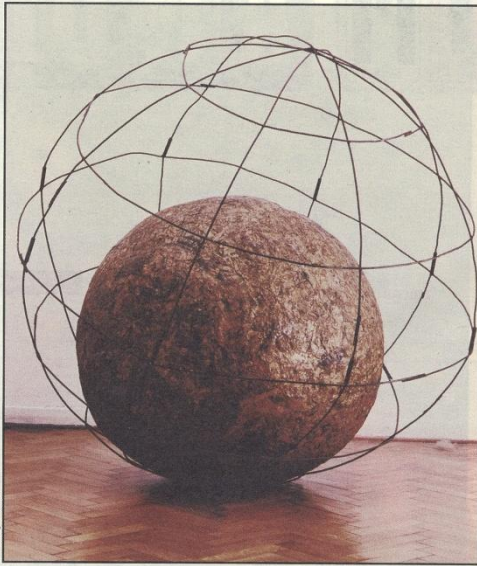
Retrospective in Rome of the influential Italian artist

ROME. Michelangelo Pistoletto, one of Italy's most influential living artists, comes home this month with a major exhibition of 116 early works at the MaXXi museum of 21st-century art in Rome. The Biella-born artist is considered a leading proponent of the hugely influential 1960s arte povera movement, which moved beyond minimalism by drawing on mundane, everyday materials (coal, wool, vegetables, even live animals), referencing history, the natural world, politics and science. Pioneered by Pistoletto, Mario Merz and Pino Pascali, the "poor art" school erased the boundaries between the exhibition space and the outside world.

Key "Stracci" (rag) sculptures on show, representative of Pistoletto's arte povera period, include *Venus of the Rags*, 1967, a kitsch, glittering statue of a goddess enveloped by a dishevelled bundle of cloths. "It is the most representative work of arte povera as it brings together the beauty of the past and the disaster of the present," Pistoletto told *The Art Newspaper*.

A group of works from the "Minus Objects" series (1965-66) represent the anti-market stance of arte povera, consisting of wildly disparate works that appear to be by different artists, thereby undermining the commercial ideal that an artist should have a signature style. "We were anti-commercial not because we were against the economy but because it felt like art was a prisoner of the economy," he said.

But a leading Italian curator has dismissed the exhibition.



© Michelangelo Pistoletto
Michelangelo Pistoletto, Mappamondo (Globe), 1966-68

"Pistoletto doesn't need to be re-evaluated as he is one of the most important Italian artists around. While the show does a disservice to the artist, it confirms, however, that most of the arte povera school had dried up by the mid 1970s," said Francesco Bonami, director of the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin. "I think that Pistoletto's work of the early 1980s was quite interesting; it's a pity that the curator

[Carlos Basualdo] didn't look at that period more carefully."

A selection of "Mirror Paintings" form the centrepiece of the exhibition; Pistoletto stresses that the phenomenological aspect of his approach was first evident in these works (begun in 1961), which are considered the foundation of his theoretical thought. These silk-screened figures superimposed on polished sheets of stainless steel prompted fresh thinking on perspective, representation of the self and others, and how the mirrored surface could reflect real time. "The past and the present live together [in the "Mirror Paintings"]. The viewer is inside [them]," said the artist.

The artistic eye of the Red Eminence

Richelieu's collection reunited

TOURS, ORLÉANS, RICHELIEU. The Museums of Fine Arts of Tours and Orléans and the Musée Municipal in Richelieu have collaborated on a three-site exhibition dedicated to the collections of Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu, the Cardinal-Duke of Richelieu (1595-1642) that he acquired and commissioned for his family seat in Touraine. Built in 1631 according to the plans of the architect, Jacques Lemercier, but destroyed in the 19th century, the chateau was said to have been one of the most beautiful palaces in Europe.

"The aim of this project is to show the best of the Cardinal's collection of paintings, sculptures and antiques in such a way that the most prestigious parts of his chateau will be 'reconstructed'," says Philippe Le Leyzou, the chief curator of the Museum of Fine Arts of Tours.

The Museum of Orléans displays antiques that the Cardinal acquired in Rome to decorate the gardens of the castle. Most



© The National Gallery, London
Nicolas Poussin's The Triumph of Pan, 1636

battles led by King Louis XIII and the Cardinal, which were restored in 2010 and never shown together, are on display at the Museum of Richelieu and Orléans. Finally, a 3-D film recreating the interior of the palace will be shown in the three museums.

"What visitors will learn about the Great Cardinal is that not only was he one of the most important patrons of the arts of

“The exhibition confirms that most of the arte povera school had dried up by the mid-70s”

Sections will also be devoted to "Le Zoo", Pistoletto's performance art collective (1968-70), and Cittadellarte, Pistoletto's non-profit foundation housed in a former wool mill in Biella, around 80km north-west of Milan, which, according to a project statement, is "a laboratory, a generator of creative energy".

"The relevance of the show is twofold: to present in depth a specific period of Pistoletto's work, which I believe has the potential to reassess the canonical narratives of post-war artistic practice, and to connect it to his current Cittadellarte project and to collective artistic practice in general," said Basualdo, who organised the exhibition at its launch venue, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, last year. ■ G.H.