

**MICHELANGELO
PISTOLETTO**

**BEFORE
THE MIRROR**

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ori **GALLERIA CONTINUA**
SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA

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(English translation)

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MICHELANGELO AND DANTE

CARLO FALCIANI

CARLO FALCIANI graduated from the University of Florence with a thesis on Rosso Fiorentino. As a research fellow of Villa i Tatti, Harvard University's Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, he developed a project on the Gallery of Fontainebleau, while as a research fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery in Washington, he pursued a research project on Bronzino.

He has published a monographic study on Rosso Fiorentino and a catalogue entitled *Pontormo, Drawings in the Uffizi*, both with Leo Olschki, alongside numerous essays on 16th century Florentine, Venetian and French painting which have featured in both Italian and international journals.

He has worked on numerous exhibitions in Italy and abroad, personally curating the exhibition entitled *Florence, Portraits à la cour de Médicis* for the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris in 2015, and co-curating two hugely successful exhibitions with Antonio Natali for Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, the first on *Bronzino, Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici* in 2010–11, and the second on *Pontormo and Rosso, Diverging Paths of Mannerism* in 2014.

He currently lectures in art history at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence.

Michelangelo Pistoletto spoke to me of our own time and of the far-off days when he used to devote his energies to painting, using words that were calm but firm, in the kind of outline form that only memories can shape. He made it clear to me at once that he has no books, that he has never read a book and that he trusts only oral culture, word of mouth; but then, in his day that culture did not simply carry fleeting words, it also had deep and ancient roots. As he spoke, there emerged from the depths of my boyhood memories the afternoons I would spend with a relation of my mother, a shepherd who knew Dante's *Inferno* by heart, and with my aunt, who would tell us tales with a moral to them which I only discovered were Poggio Bracciolini's *Facezie* when I got to university. Michelangelo, however, denies that that was also the case in the Piedmont. Yet his father's pointing him in the direction of traditional painting must have exercised the same kind of pull on him, because it still helps him when he formulates detailed descriptions of works on perspective and mathematics from the Quattrocento. So what one discovers rooted in him in place of the written word is the figurative style of his father, a painter and restorer who pointed him in the direction of mimetic painting as being the sole path for capturing and freezing the instant snapshot or the passage of one's own life story in a dimension outside of time.

But the substance of time in the late 'fifties could not yet have an absolute quality to it, because though the rift with the past had already been consumed in art, the need for a narrative of social time was still striding ahead, propelled by the demand for information and for change, and a synthesis between the two possibilities was within people's grasp. What the contemporary style did offer this young artist was the debate between the abstract and the figurative, which in both cases pointed to a path of isolation and withdrawal into one's own individuality, a move which could be interpreted either by getting to grips with Pollock's abstract painting or else by tackling Francis Bacon's baggy yet nevertheless cutting figurative style – two avenues which, while seemingly divergent yet at the same time also convergent in Michelangelo's eyes, were incapable of meeting the needs of a lad from a different generation who was seeking new paths, new forms.

As a first step in that direction, Pistoletto's need to look within himself through different eyes drove him in 1956 to experiment with nuclear painting, the manifesto for which had been drafted in Milan in 1950. From that time we have a *Self-Portrait* showing his face alone, where the painting seethes with particles at once luminous and earthy which appear to give off heat from the friction generated by the act of painting and to take over almost the whole

Book published on the occasion of the exhibition

MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO

PRIMA DELLO SPECCHIO

Galleria Continua, San Gimignano

2 May - 5 September 2015,

Publisher

Gli Ori, Prato

Editorial Coordination

Veronica Tronnolone

Book Design

Rocco Poiago

Printer

Baroni & Gori, Prato

Special thanks to:

Alessandra Ammirati, Carlo Falciani,

Marco Farano, Alessandro Lacirasella,

Verusca Piazzesi, Maria Pioppi and all the

staff of Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto.

Photo credits

Ela Bialkowska

Lorenzo Fiaschi, pp. 9, 11, 71

Francesca Spanò, p. 88

All works collection of the Artist except:

Acrobata, 1958, private collection;

Il pittore, 1959, private collection;

L'uomo nero, 1959, private collection

All works courtesy of the Artist and

GALLERIA CONTINUA,

San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana

ISBN: 978-88-7336-586-0

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