

scape is in this sense a theory and prospect of western visual civilisation.

But landscape, besides all these accepted meanings, is for Battaglia the conquest of a sensitive, mobile, transparent reality. His paintings, as he knows, can remind one of tides (rather than the sea), of day (the inseparability of space and time, rather than the sky). He avails himself of these approximations in order to introduce the spectator, and the titles given to his pictures are often provocative in this respect. But the game which he constructs is all in the virtually of colour. The true and only landscape is colour, is instability, duration and passage through time.

The phantoms and distances of reality

In such a determinate creative cycle, where reflection on the single phases of *pictorial practice* is directed towards the production of « matrices » of images rather than of detached two-dimensional configurations, every moment of the painting's growth is congruous and recognizable; but it is more difficult to gather what terms of comparison this painting poses vis-à-vis reality.

Tommaso Trini has noted that Battaglia's searchings started out again in 1967, from where Mondrian left off his *plus-minus*, with the « composition with lines » in 1917. This suggestion has a strong appeal and it explains an itinerary which by starting from geometrical abstraction quickly succeeded in reaching an abstraction that it has been possible to describe as postgeometrical (Reinhardt, Mangold, Poons, etc.) with an autonomy and liberty that demand *technical analyses* which involve the critic-reader in a *heretical* argument.

But at the present stage of Battaglia's creative path one may perhaps go so far as to suggest that he seems to be capable of fitting generative image products into reality. These firm but phantomlike structures seem to live in reality within a universe of tensions brought about by that « irruption of collective essence » which each work brings with it whilst still remaining open and ambiguous like all works that belong vitally to their own time.

The reference made earlier to Adorno can be taken further. Battaglia's work is subtly modern, it manifests the contradictions which the Frankfurter philosopher read in contemporary art, with peculiar intensity. The opposition between *mimetic* and *constructed*, and the *enigmatic character*, are easily recognizable in the paintings that this artist patiently and rigorously produces. The *mimetic* is in their open physicality, in that physicality which Battaglia has stated man times that he would like to submit to constructed virtuality, in a continual deferment to a further virtuality. Compare the virtuality of the images in Battaglia's paintings with what Adorno defines as aesthetic experience: « an experience of something which the spirit could not have, either from itself or from the world; a possibility promised by its own impossibility ». It is known that Adorno did not believe in straight interpretations. Battaglia does not propose univocal images; quite the contrary, he contends that the opposition between physical and mental, the *artifact*, also marks the opposition between the irrational moment and the rational planning of the work. It is the strengthening of

this rational moment that makes the modern work enigmatic. Battaglia knows that this super-investment can remove the work from consumption, from ideological integration and reification — the two traffic — jams of art in the contemporary world. But above all, I think that Battaglia, who knows how to look at the cultural universe behind us (and which we often pretend we can delete), would not mind subscribing to this doubt, « But what would art, the writing of history, become if it were to break with the memory of accumulated suffering »?

Reference and situation

Situated in the analytical area, Battaglia's work, which may be regarded as an exemplary feature of that area, according to what Menna has pointed out (19), does however detach itself from it somehow by way of an inward, autonomous growth plane of its own. The debts owed to the minimalist and conceptual area cannot be put on the budget here, and the linguistic reductions are not binding; the play of border-crossings is on the contrary urged and inherent in the very work practised by this painter. Any statement regarding the *new painting* done in Italy in the last three years cannot have helped being affected in some way or other by Battaglia's work. But he has always asked not to be dragged into a space with room for manoeuvre only between narrow margins. Battaglia is rash enough to be a *painter*, with the ruthless lucidity and authentic risk which a *craft* of this kind calls for today. The intention and meaning behind Battaglia's paintings are explicitly stated.

Vittorio Fagone

Michelangelo Pistoletto

TOMMASO TRINI

ELEMENTS OF CREATIVE STRATEGY

If you observe a reflecting surface by Pistoletto, moving, shall we say, from the observation of one of Yves Klein's blue paintings, you will be able to make better sense out of a statement Pistoletto made a year ago. He said: *when there is too much material in a place I go and look for the empty space that this material has left somewhere else*. You will agree that this movement rings with the magnitude of astronomic things.

The historical accumulation of painting is that over-fullness of material from which this artist moved away in the early 'sixties to go and seek the appearances of art, together with its place, wherever they seemed to be absent. Of course, Klein too elaborated on matter and emptiness, but he did so in different phases and in separate places; whereas in Pistoletto's art it may be said that everything is there jointly and simultaneously, due to the double or the reflection.

However, the most disquieting exten-

sion of Pistoletto's shifting adventures lies elsewhere and beyond, as he says, the affirmation that if you are an explorer you go into the desert, which sounds suspicious. The extension is in the basic understanding that art does not change in circumstances of fullness; it changes only when and where it is not yet there or is no longer there.

Except with Pistoletto whom I have been seeing for twenty years, I have never had to follow an artist's thinking as far as the extreme risk of a conclusion which substantially admits, if I am not mistaken, that in the universe of art the same law applies as in the universe of matter whereby nothing is created and nothing is destroyed.

Paradoxical as it may sound, this is true objectively as far as the historical evolution of languages and tastes and styles, which we know are cyclical, are concerned. That is, the formal appearances, as also the historical determinations, change in time and that is enough. Those who are not content to change position on the same walkway find it

necessary to emigrate to other values among other kinds of problems, that are not so much unknown as ignored, so as to regenerate structures underlying history; in short, so as to regenerate the creative process which in itself is not, of course, by any means changeable.

This is also the reason why Pistoletto has always looked with a reluctance bordering on aversion at critical attempts to comment in historical terms (to « historicize », as they say) on his work, apart from the human weakness of a man who, as the protagonist, is not fond of over-close comparisons or unembarrassed communities of associations with fathers and brothers. Before the time of poisoned laurels comes, as even the most generous examinations often end up by being turned into, the artist wants the truth of his message to be fully developed and placed in its proper perspective.

I shall talk therefore, of strategy. I do so without hindrance, although it is not customary to speak of strategy in connection with an artist, and despite the Machiavellian and warlike sound of the

term. The internal strategy of a creative work takes for granted, though not as resolved, the daily dispersion in the struggle to live and to get oneself loved as winner.

As an intellectual and social subject Pistoletto has on various occasions refused the capitalistic model of competition by showing a preference for group solidarity. He asked for this kind of collaboration when he opened his studio in 1966, renewed the request at the time of the Venice Biennale in '68 and put it into practice in his collective theatre, the Zoo, between '68 and '71, with what were at time ingenuous modes that took little account of the rules imposed by the market economy on the artistic establishment, with the result that colleagues and dealers grew alarmed. In his art it is the conflicts that act permanently on objects and situations with dramatic functions.

A fact to be noticed is, in other words, that all the objects used by the artist (and they are numerous and widely assorted) have the quality of being protagonists, *dramatis personae*, striving to reproduce from life conflictual situations with antinomies and contrasts, in cold and calibrated terms.

Whilst this is evident from the start in his mirror-paintings, it is equally true in the case of other works including some of his most recent. In *Cubi*, done in '71, in which four identical marble cubes each materialize and exchange four different meanings amongst each other, there is an interplay of parts where each cube can « impersonate » any one of the irreconcilable roles or significations, this being only one of the possible readings of this conceptual work. Another interpretation might consider it as equal to a game of chess diverted. And another still is in the conflict mentioned by the artist: « it can be noted that this work in addition represents the universal dynamics of explosion and implosion ».

All the oppositions are assumed at the beginning by the cognition and recognition of the *double*, which Pistoletto does not impose as a subjective theme upon any pictorial representation but rather, stirs up and obtains, certainly because he is attracted by it, when in 1962 he substituted a surface of reflecting metal for the canvas. The way he has explored these twisting splits situations and exchanges has been handed over to history in the form of paintings and numerous writings, so I shall not dwell on this here. The conclusive and new novelty is that the theme of the *double* here becomes a method.

About the reflecting paintings I have written elsewhere, after discussing it again with the artist himself, that « Pistoletto's painting receives the visual phenomena of reality and confronts them with the intellectual notions of art ». I could have put it better by saying: he brings them into collision. And I added: « Everything happens not according to a poetic attitude, but as in a chemical reaction ». The chemical analogy introduced the idea, subsequently verified, of a continual process that would eliminate gratuitous moves and endow the work with a circular structures of meanings. « Thus Pistoletto's painting involves us in a phenomenological experience. The

phenomenon of the concentration of antinomies comes about as a *process* and not as a rigid structure imposing one contrary term or the other. This work is in process whenever a spectator, even unknowingly, enters its visual field ».

Here, then, is the catalyser, the third element variously engaged among the forces at work, by his presence or only by his point of view: the spectator. For his entertainments in the street or theatre, between '68 and '71, after having « thought of creating a Company of Spectators », the artist jointly penetrated into the little community of the Zoo, « those behind bars ». As I have already pointed out, « the spectator is the Pistolettian character par excellence; the one who is awaited and whose place the artist takes ». And vice versa, of course. His purpose is imponderable, like that of the demiurge and indeed it lies outside that of all set roles.

The agent of representation is also he who measures all its visual and mental mechanisms, seeing that everything is learned objectively, assessed with precision and then abandoned to the wishes of each one.

Yesterday's researches are now a common and widespread heritage. The point now is to find out whether art, which is today ever busier inquiring into itself and analysing itself, must carry on doing this and solely for the benefit of its own autonomy; or whether instead, by expending an autonomy conquered a long time ago, it must apply its investigations to the struggle against the social wear and tear of creativity.

Pistoletto is definitely pursuing this second untrodden path, and has been doing so since times in which he could not have been suspected of demagogy. We know that the primary scene of his imagination and of his analyses is situated beyond the canvas and on that limit represented by the mirror-surface (and later by the transparent plexiglass pieces, the transparent screen of photographic film, etc.) which divides all the pairs of opposites that range from art to life, from reality to unreality, and so on. This practically unattainable limit, unless it be by the imagination or desire, Pistoletto calls the *creative threshold* and he sees it in continual movement both in time and in space. What his strategy really boils down to is the identification of this creative threshold wherever it happens to be.

But not only this. The survey is neither statistical nor purely artistic. The thresholds have to be multiplied. It is no paradox that the idea of the limit, or of limiting or of a boundary, happens to be identified by Pistoletto with the actual idea of every creative possibility. The transformations of contraries into identities, as also the coincidence of transparency or reflection with the entity that we call conscience, are part of the actual structure of the creative process. What a strategy can pursue is, as indeed in the case of this work, the permanent regeneration of the creative process right within the very activities that use it up.

A cycle of photographic works conceived some years ago and realised in 1975 materializes a poetic mental image (written in the book *L'uomo nero il lato*

insopportabile, 1969, and resumed in the performance of *Bello e basta*, in 1970): « there is no light if there is no place for it to settle on... ». Again we have the searching for a creative threshold, but this time it is between the essence and the contingency. It is a cosmic kind of metaphor that on earth assumes the appearance of the relation between thought and the subject-matter that finds philosophy. In these works the photographic reproduction tends almost exclusively to reproduce the photographic process. It abandons the mirror for the transparent diaphragm of a film exposed to the atmosphere; it loses the colours of representation to become a map of the relations between all the possible points of view. It assumes the typical granular substance of photosensitive material in the image of the stellar universe. Only projections of light.

As can be seen better in the exhibitions of *Le stanze* (The rooms) still going on, the artist has now populated with both minimum and maximum events the strategic picture which his reflections on art have gradually brought to maturity. I would say, he casts new doubts on it, as always, because it is not a system.

If we follow the chronology of his work, we can retrace the line of strategy which the artist has consciously and accurately stated in the various passages, moves and changes in his developments. They are routes that we have taken and will take again because the work is still in progress and the present modifies one's comprehension of the past. Elsewhere I have written: « In his work up till 1962 Pistoletto set himself the problem of whether figurative painting had to disappear or whether it might become the specific instrument of his inquiry into the material and mental processes of art ». I now add that Pistoletto's work is set in a zone situated between the history of art and the life of mass-media from which he drew the model for his photographic pretence. With acute historical awareness he has left mass-media to look after the evolution of the visual modes of representation, as people are now beginning to understand, and he has kept for himself the concepts and techniques of art to investigate art, but also to bring to light the underlying creative process.

It is a different strategy from the analyses of conceptual art. For this one proceeds from abstract art and narrows its critical questionings, though approximately Marxist, down to language viewed as a model of communication or, at the most, as an ideology. It uses conceptual tools that are external to the history of art, and guides artists' social practice, once again, outside art.

There is a difference, because work like Pistoletto's proceeds conversely from the functions that art has had historically in supplying society with stratifications of symbols and modes of representation. His is certainly an analytical art, but not with abstract and ideological purposes. The more they disclose the visual and symbolic processes diffused in everyday life, the more his analyses pass through into social reality.

Tommaso Trini