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Figure as Model:

The Early Work of Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1956–1966

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Art History

by

Tenley Catherine Bick

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Figure as Model:

The Early Work of Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1956–1966

by

Tenley Catherine Bick

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor George Thomas Baker, Chair

In modern and contemporary art history, figuration has been characterized as propagandistic, anti-modernist, and invalid as a strategy for progressive creative practice in the twentieth century. This reading is especially well-supported by the history of postwar Italian art, largely defined by politicized cultural debates that set realism, primarily manifest in figurative painting, in conflict with abstraction, which ultimately emerged as the dominant form of vanguard Italian art post-Reconstruction. While scholarship has focused on abstraction's importance for key developments in postwar and contemporary Italian art, the continued history of figuration, from *neorealismo* to the *Transavanguardia*, remains largely unattended.

This dissertation revises the understudied history of figuration in postwar Italian art and the politicized historiography against it. The work of Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, a central player within the European avant-gardes of the 1960s best known for his association with Arte Povera, is used as a case study. Background discussion of the artist's early figurative paintings, design work, and writings from the late 1950s and early 1960s, some addressed here

for the first time, frames close study of three bodies of later work to demonstrate how Pistoletto negotiated conventional figuration as a problem for postwar Italian art by remaking the figurative strategy into a *figural* one that straddles realism and reality. Chapter One, “Reality as Realism: The Plexiglasses, 1964,” addresses a set of plexiglass structures and assemblages, which presents imagistic elements as real, everyday objects in the space of the viewer. Chapter Two, “Cold Images: The Protest Pictures, 1965,” calls attention to a little-known series of highly polished, steel “mirror paintings,” collaged with life-size figures sourced from photographs of Italian protests. Chapter Three, “Poor Designs: The Minus Objects, 1965–1966,” re-examines a collection of design-inspired objects in relation to a “figural turn” in postwar Italian advertising.

Using formal, semiotic, and social art historical analysis supported by extensive archival and field research conducted in Italy, France, and the United States, this dissertation situates Pistoletto’s “conceptual figuration” within the politicized national and transatlantic context of postwar Italian art. Building upon post-structuralist and art historical theories of “the figural,” it finds in Pistoletto’s practice a new model of postwar avant-gardism motivated by a strategic reworking of figuration. It also identifies a new politicized language of figuration for art history as one of increased economic and political agency for 1960s leftist subjects.

The dissertation of Tenley Catherine Bick is approved.

Michelle Clayton

Miwon Kwon

Steven D. Nelson

George Thomas Baker, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Cgil *Confederazione generale italiana del lavoro* (Italian General Confederation of Labor).
- DDP *Deposito d'Arte Presente* (Warehouse of Present Art).
- Fiom *Federazione impiegati operai metallurgici* (Federation of Employed Metalworkers).
- GES *Gian Enzo Sperone—Arte moderna* (Gian Enzo Sperone—Modern Art).
- MM Michelangelo Pistoletto, *The Minus Man: The Unsupportable Side* (1969–70), trans. Paul Blanchard, 1988.
- MTSF Umberto Boccioni, *Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista* (Milan: April 11, 1912).
- PCI *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party).
- PSI *Partito Socialista Italiano* (Italian Socialist Party).
- PSIUP *Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria* (Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity).
- SMDP Lucio Fontana, et al., *Secondo manifesto dello spazialismo* (Milan: March, 1948). Signed by Fontana, Gianni Dova, Beniamino Joppolo, Giorgio Kaiserlian, and Antonio Tullier.
- WAC Walker Art Center.

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especially important for the reproduction of my own photographs of Pistoletto's work, which provide valuable color counterparts to historical photographs available only in black-and-white. They were reproduced with the artist's permission.

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At the moment, the “thing” for me is the structure of figurative expression,
which I’ve accepted as reality.

–Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1964

VITA

EDUCATION

- 2009 M.A. Art History, University of California, Los Angeles
Thesis: “Vision as Excess: Reflections on Opticality in the Work of Olafur Eliasson”
- 2005 B.A. Art History (Honors), Stanford University, Double Minor, Italian and Urban Studies

SELECTED ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

UCLA, Department of Art History

Sole Instructor Contemporary Art: 1940s–1950s (upcoming; Summer, 2016)
Contemporary Arts of Africa and Its Diasporas (Summer, 2013)
Teaching Art History (Graduate seminar: Fall, 2009)

Teaching Assistant African Art (Spring, 2010)
Medieval Art (Winter, 2010)
Modern Art (Spring, 2009)
Renaissance and Baroque Art and Ideology (Winter, 2009)
Ancient Art (Fall, 2008)

City of Palo Alto Public Art Commissioner (2006–07)

PUBLICATIONS

- 2012 “Suspensions of Self-Perception: On Vision and Subjectivity in Contemporary Sculpture.” In *Theorizing Visual Studies: Writing Through the Discipline*, ed. James Elkins and Kristi McGuire, with Maureen Burns, Alicia Chester, and Joel Kuennen, 242–45. New York: Routledge. Refereed book chapter.
- Celant, Germano. “Interview.” Interview by Miwon Kwon and Philipp Kaiser. Translation from the original Italian by **Tenley Bick**. In *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1977*, ed. M. Kwon and P. Kaiser, 123–27. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art.
- 2011 Rosenfield, Susan, Lucian Gomoll, **Tenley Bick**, Kirk Sides, and Samuel M. Anderson. “First Word: Reports on the Fifteenth Triennial Symposium of African Arts.” *African Arts* 44, no. 3 (Autumn): 1–9. Conference proceedings.
- 2010 “Horror Histories: Apartheid and the Abject Body in the Work of Jane Alexander,” *African Arts* 43, no. 4 (Winter): 30–41. Refereed journal article.

FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS, AND DISTINCTIONS

- 2016 Italian Art Society Conference Travel Grant for Emerging Scholars.
Art History Conference and Research Travel Grant, UCLA.
- 2015 Edward A. Dickson Fellowship in Art History, UCLA.
Art History Conference and Research Travel Grant, UCLA.

- 2014–15 Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA.
 2013–14 Edward A. Dickson Fellowship in Art History, UCLA.
 2012–13 Institute of International Education (IIE) Graduate Fellowship for International Study (Italy). Affiliation: *Università degli Studi di Torino*. Funded by the Mellon Foundation.
 2012–13 IIE Fulbright Full Grant (Italy), Alternate.
 2012–13 Edward A. Dickson Fellowship in Art History, UCLA (declined).
 2011–12 Edward A. Dickson Fellowship in Art History, UCLA.
 2011–12 Patricia McCarron McGinn Memorial Award for Dissertation Research, UCLA.
 2010–11 Edward A. Dickson Fellowship in Art History, UCLA.
 2010 Art History Conference and Research Travel Grant, UCLA.
 Graduate Summer Research Mentorship (G. Baker, Art History), UCLA.
 2008 Quality Graduate Education Grant, UCLA.
 2007–08 University of California Regents Fellowship for Graduate Study.
 2005 Albert Elsen Prize for Excellence in Art History, Stanford University.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

- 2016 "Anachronic Casts: The Sculpture of Giulio Paolini in the Years of Lead, 1968–1982." The American Association for Italian Studies (AAIS) Annual Conference, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Apr. 21–23.
 "Beyond *Somalia Anno Uno*: Somali Narrative Film in Postcolonial East Africa." 104th College Art Association (CAA) Conference, Washington, D.C., Feb. 3–6.
- 2015 "Figure as Model: The Early Work of Michelangelo Pistoletto." The American Association for Italian Studies (AAIS) Annual Conference, University of Colorado, Boulder, Mar. 26–28.
- 2011 "'Somaliwood,' Ohio: Somali Cinema as Diasporic Phenomenon." Fifteenth International Triennial Symposium on African Art, Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA), UCLA, Mar. 23–27.
- 2010 "Joseph Beuys and Arte Povera: The Value of Poor Work." Presented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Jan. 13, in conjunction with the exhibition "Joseph Beuys: The Multiples," cur. Stephanie Barron and Eckhart Gillen (LACMA, 2009–10). Commissioned lecture.

PANELS ORGANIZED AND CHAIRED

- 2016 Panel organizer and chair, "African Arts and Italian Colonialism: A Missing Africanist History." Discussant: David Rifkind. 104th CAA Conference, Washington, D.C., Feb. 3–6. Sponsored by ACASA.
- 2015 Panel organizer and chair, "Unattended Figures: Revisiting Figuration in Postwar Italian Art, 1945–1980." AAIS Annual Conference, University of Colorado, Boulder, Mar. 26–28. Sponsored by the Italian Art Society.

Introduction.

Figure as Model: The Early Work, 1956–1964

September, 1964. In a small rented work space in the industrial Turinese neighborhood of San Donato, Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto was making the final preparations for his premiere solo exhibition at Italian art dealer Gian Enzo Sperone's eponymous gallery of contemporary art, to be held in the city center the following month.¹ At the time, the working-class area of Italy's postwar industrial capital was home to manufacturing plants, industrial suppliers, and major factories for Michelin and Fiat, a company whose unprecedented growth in the 1950s placed it at the forefront of Italy's postwar economic boom known as the *miracolo economico* or "economic miracle" (1958–63). Brought on by advances in manufacturing technology, labor organization, and marketing, which fostered unprecedented international demand for Italian appliances, cars, and other goods, the economic miracle was a period characterized by rapid economic growth, expansion of commercial exports, and concentrated industrialization that transformed postwar Italy from a protectionist, agrarian economy to a major player in international trade and a modern, industrial state.² While the economic miracle had many positive effects on Italian life, it also engendered a number of problems that would plague Italy in the long term. An emphasis on exports translated into a domestic economy geared toward private consumption and luxury goods, for example, while public consumption developed little.³ Mass migration of Italian workers to the northern "industrial triangle" of Turin, Genoa and Milan flooded the labor market; elevating already high levels of unemployment and keeping wages low, migration generated a steady surplus of inexpensive labor in the north that in large part made such "miraculous"

economic revitalization possible.⁴ Counter to the myth of democratic economic improvement associated with the period—now there was “a car for everyone,” as the Fiat 500 was advertised (fig. 0.01)—Italy’s majority working classes remained largely neglected during this period. Civic services were limited, factory conditions were poor, and cities struggled to accommodate their booming populations. While Italian commercial culture cultivated an image of a flourishing modern state, the reality was that most Italians were part of an impoverished working public with little buying power.⁵

Over the course of the economic miracle, these problems worsened, precipitating the rise of Italy’s workers’ movement in the early 1960s and period of collective action that would come later in the decade.⁶ Of particular importance to this timeline is the summer of 1962, when, just steps from Pistoletto’s studio, the largest workers’ strike in Italian history erupted in riots in Piazza Statuto, galvanizing the Italian labor movement and New Left, whose actions would play a defining role in the sociopolitical climate of Italy in the Sixties.⁷ Indeed, the events at Piazza Statuto sounded the death knell of the economic miracle and its promise of a utopian democratic Italian state. In Turin, where workers’ strikes, interventions by police, and mass protests became part of everyday life, frustrations were particularly concentrated.⁸ By the fall of 1964 and origin point of this story, the economic miracle was over, leaving a disillusioned, polarized Italy to face the long-lasting conflicts left in its wake.

At the time, Pistoletto was best known—as he remains today—for his celebrated *quadri specchianti* or “mirror paintings”: an ongoing series of highly-polished stainless steel mirror panels begun in March of 1962, which featured life-size, quasi-photographic cutouts of human figures (and the occasional object) collaged on their reflective surfaces (fig. 0.02). Meticulously traced from enlargements of photographs taken in the studio, then painted naturalistically by

hand, the mirror paintings' subjects nevertheless possessed a realism that was frequently mistaken as photographic, reminding many of contemporaneous experiments with photography and mechanical processes then associated with American Pop. Corroborating this association was the banality of Pistoletto's subjects and interactive experience they constructed. When viewers saw their own reflections in the mirrorized pictorial field, alongside Pistoletto's typically anonymous, ordinary subjects, they felt they were "in" the picture. Art had been brought into (and *to*) life.

The mirror paintings' inviting reflective surfaces and engaging life-size figures had quickly earned Pistoletto popular and critical acclaim on an international level. In the two years since their debut, the series had elevated the Piedmontese artist from a regional to international artistic platform, where critics readily ascribed his work to the camps of its formal analogues in Neo-Dada, *Nouveau réalisme*, and Pop—that is, to movements dominated by American, French, and (if to a lesser degree) British artists.

The popularity of the mirror paintings played out in a number of ways. Pistoletto had gained international representation at Ileana Sonnabend's prestigious gallery in Paris, where he joined Claes Oldenburg, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol, among others in the elite stable of American Pop and Neo-Dada artists, after the French dealer purchased his contract from the Turin-based Galleria Galatea, owned by Mario Tazzoli, in the spring of 1963 (along with the whole of his exhibition of mirror paintings then on display). He had received his solo debut in Paris, when Sonnabend awarded the relatively unknown Italian artist a major solo exhibition dedicated entirely to the mirror paintings, held in March of 1964.⁹ That same month, his work appeared for the first time in international media, when women's luxury lifestyle magazine *Harper's Bazaar* featured a number of the works in a series of fashion photographs by celebrated

Japanese-American photographer Hiro (Yasuhiro Wakabayashi) as part of their spring style guide (fig. 0.03).¹⁰

The mirror paintings had also led to Pistoletto's inclusion in a number of major exhibitions across Europe, including *Nieuwe Realisten* (New Realists) at The Hague's Gemeentemuseum (June 24–August 30, 1964), *Mythologies quotidiennes* (Everyday Mythologies) at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville in Paris (July–October, 1964), and *POP, etc.*, at the Museum des 20 Jahrhunderts in Vienna (September 19–October 31, 1964). American institutions were quick to follow. In the summer of 1964, his work was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and soon after, he made his American debut as one of the youngest artists selected to represent Italy at the Carnegie Institute Museum of Art's Annual International of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture (October 31, 1964–January 10, 1965).¹¹

By the point of his solo debut at the Galleria Sperone in the fall of 1964, then, Pistoletto had emerged as a leading figure within the young postwar generation of artists who would go on to form the European avant-gardes of the 1960s. As an Italian artist, he had also secured an all but singular position within the Transatlantic art circuit between Western Europe and North America, which, following the postwar rise of American Abstract Expressionism, the proliferation of U.S. international exhibitions during the early years of the Cold War, and arrival of American Pop in Europe—an act of cultural imperialism, as far as many Europeans were concerned, following Robert Rauschenberg's controversial win at the 1964 Venice Biennale—had come to be dominated by American artists, seconded by their British and French counterparts (that is, by those belonging to the former Allied Powers of their support).¹² On the international art circuit, Pistoletto was frequently the only Italian artist included—a position highlighted by the Galerie Sonnabend's advertisements in *Art International's* summer and fall

issues dedicated to the Biennale, in which Pistoletto's name was the Italian exception in a billing of otherwise American artists (fig. 0.04).¹³ By the end of 1964, Pistoletto's résumé for the year was unparalleled by any other Italian artist of the post-Second-World-War generation.

This was the moment in which Pistoletto radically redirected his practice. On October 2, 1964, in a move that seemed to eschew the success of the mirror paintings, he debuted a new body of work at the Galleria Sperone that made a number of departures from his earlier work and Pop aesthetic of its association. Entitled *I plexiglass* or "Plexiglasses," after the primary material of their construction, the rather lean, economical collection included just seven works: four vertically-oriented, six-by-four foot rectangular panels and three smaller geometric structures, all made of crystal clear sheets of plexiglass (fig. 0.05).¹⁴ On their surfaces—save one, left bare—Pistoletto placed, collaged, and otherwise affixed a range of everyday objects (a folded newspaper, a vinyl record), implements (black extension cords, a small coffee table, a sturdy step ladder), and signs (a small red circle or "signal," as he called it, about the size of a traffic light), both actual and imagistic, in either painted or photographic form. As opposed to showcasing what would otherwise have been a series of materialist sculpture, Pistoletto's Plexiglasses screened and propped up a tableau of the everyday constituted by, as he later told it, whatever was on hand at home or in the studio.¹⁵

Alongside the Plexiglasses, Pistoletto drafted a short artist's statement, entitled *I plexiglass* (Plexiglasses; *MPIP*) as an accompaniment to the works of the same title (fig. 0.06).¹⁶ Published as the sole text and central feature of the small trifold exhibition catalog, the one-page statement, dated September 10, 1964, outlined a narrative of Pistoletto's practice to date as a progressive investigation into the relationship between the virtual world of visual representation and the real world inhabited by individual subjects. Such an investigation would be levied

specifically through an inquiry into the figure, which, in his view, constituted a point of connection between representation and reality, image and referent, art and life (*MPIP*). As he put it:

I believe that man's first real figurative experience is the recognition of his own image in the mirror, which is the fiction that adheres most to reality. [...]. My first question on the canvas was the reproduction of my image, as soon as I accepted art as a second reality. For a while my work intuitively consisted of trying to bring my two images closer together: the one proposed by the mirror and the one proposed by me. The conclusion was the superimposition of the painting on the mirror: the picture is superimposed and adheres to the image of reality. The figurative object born therein gave me the opportunity to pursue my inquiry within the painting as in life, seeing as the two things are figuratively linked. In fact, I find myself inside the painting, even if not materially, beyond the wall opened up by the mirror.

(La mia prima questione sulla tela è stata la riproduzione della mia immagine, appena accettata l'arte come una seconda realtà. Il mio lavoro per un periodo è consistito intuitivamente nel tentativo di avvicinare le mie due immagini, quella proposta dallo specchio e quella proposta da me. La conclusione è stata la sovrapposizione del quadro allo specchio: la pittura si sovrappone e aderisce all'immagine della realtà. L'oggetto figurativo che ne nasce mi dà la possibilità di proseguire la mia indagine all'interno del quadro come all'interno della vita, visto che le due sono figurativamente legate. Infatti mi trovo nel quadro, oltre il muro bucato dallo specchio, anche se non materialmente [*MPIP*].)

Throughout this narrative, the figure—as image and body—unifies the artist's otherwise heterogeneous practice. From his first paintings in the mid-1950s dedicated to self-portraiture (that is, traditional figuration), to his experiments with photography, collage, and industrial materials in the mirror paintings, which positioned the image of the human body less as a visibly *symbolic* representation, and more as a “real” or concrete, substantive body to be encountered, the figure had unified the most conservative and experimental poles of his work to date. As for the mirror paintings—works he has referred to exclusively as “paintings” over the course of his nearly sixty-year career, this moment is the exception. Here, they are “figurative objects” (*MPIP*). The statement sheds light on a new framework for the experimental shift in Pistoletto's practice not as a reworking of painting, but as a reworking of the figure, specifically from the

figurative (symbolic, allegorical, representational) to the *figural*: a visual form that registers as real and concrete even as it necessarily retains some symbolic function (as all images do).¹⁷

The closing lines of the statement best direct us to this shift. Rather than shoring up figuration as a means to bring art into life—a conclusion to which the statement otherwise seems to lead—the final lines of the text ultimately open up a different history for the artist’s practice, in which figuration was not only reconceptualized but overhauled, perhaps even destroyed and disposed of altogether. As Pistoletto wrote:

Actually, seeing as it’s physically impossible for me to go into [the mirror], in order to investigate the structure of art from within, I have to make the painting go out into reality, creating the fiction of finding myself beyond the mirror [...] [underlining original].

(Anzi, siccome fisicamente mi è impossibile entrarci, per indagare nella struttura dell’arte devo far uscire il quadro nella realtà, creando la finzione di trovarmi oltre lo specchio [...] [underlining original; *MPIP*].)

Moreover, he continued:

A “thing” isn’t art. The idea expressed by the same “thing” can be [...]. At the moment, the “thing” for me is the structure of figurative expression, which I’ve accepted as reality. The picture’s physical invasion of the environment, carrying the representations of the mirror with it, allows me to introduce myself among the broken-down elements of figuration [underlining original].

(Una ‘cosa’ non è arte. L’idea espressa della stessa “cosa” può esserlo [...]. In questo momento per me la “cosa” è la struttura dell’espressione figurativa, che ho accettato come realtà. L’invasione fisica del quadro nell’ambiente reale, portando con sé le rappresentazioni dello specchio, mi permette di introdurmi tra gli elementi scomposti della figurazione [underlining original; *MPIP*].)

With the closing lines of the “Plexiglasses” statement, which lay out the Plexiglasses’ operation as a “breakdown of figuration,” we might say the artist introduced a counter-model to figuration as he had previously employed it. This turn in the Plexiglasses introduces a key point of conflict between the artist’s work in 1964 and the previously figurative framework of his practice: The Plexiglasses were the first series in the artist’s oeuvre in which the figure, as figurative

representation of the human body, was absent¹⁸ While the inclusion of several mirror paintings in the exhibition of the Plexiglasses may have obscured this otherwise notable absence, if we ignore or digitally remove the few mirror paintings that were included to fill out the exhibition space, this absence becomes more jarring (fig. 0.07). In place of the figurative image of the body were *figural* images of everyday objects (figures as well, though not specifically of the human body), that we perceive as real, concrete, material entities. While the mirror paintings had begun the shift from the figurative to figural in Pistoletto's work, it was the Plexiglasses that fully realized it, and shed light on this shift in the first place.

In contrast to the mirror paintings, the Plexiglasses were characterized by a somewhat economical visual and material aesthetic, which by all accounts seemed pared down—"almost sterile," as one critic would lament—and less engaging than may have been expected.¹⁹ Of course, the expectation that Pistoletto would exhibit new mirror paintings at the Sperone exhibit was not baseless. Pistoletto had debuted new mirror paintings at all of his solo exhibitions since the series' beginning: at the Galleria Galatea in Turin in April and May of 1963; the Galerie Sonnabend in Paris in March of 1964, and the Galleria del Leone in Venice, in September of 1964. While the deflated primary reception of the Plexiglasses seems based in part on the artist's turn away from the mirror paintings and the self-reflective viewing experience his audience had found to be so engaging, the crux of the matter seems to have been the artist's removal of the figure from his work.²⁰

To account for this counter-model calls for renewed attention to figuration in Pistoletto's early work, that is, as he employed it from the emergence of his artistic practice in 1956 to 1964. With this context in mind, let's return to Pistoletto's early career. Apart from a handful of

landscape and architectural paintings made in the late 1950s, such as *Interno di Cattedrale* (Cathedral Interior; 1959; fig. 0.08), *Campanile* (Bell Tower; 1959), and *Paesaggio del Po* (Po [River] Landscape; 1959), Pistoletto's practice had been overwhelmingly figurative since 1956 (a few one-off paintings precede this date), when he began making his own paintings regularly, first working in self-portraiture.

In his first solo exhibition in the spring of 1960, held at the Galleria Galatea, for which art critic Luigi Carluccio contributed the catalog essay, half of the works displayed included depictions of the human figure.²¹ Over the next few years, the direction of the artist's work demonstrated an increasing preoccupation with the figure. He began producing a large volume of paintings under titles denominating the position, activity, or number of figures in the work, such as *Persona seduta* (Seated Person; 1962) and *Persona in piedi* (Standing Person; 1963); *Uomo che dorme* (Man Who Sleeps; 1958) and *Persona che guarda, n. 1* (Person Who Watches, n. 1; 1963); *Gruppo di persone* (Group of People; 1963) and *Due persone, n. 1* (Two People, n. 1; 1962). By the time of his second solo show in the spring of 1963, also at the Galatea, nineteen of the twenty exhibited works included such representations.²²

To situate this problem within the artist's greater practice, however, first requires a brief review of the artist's career.

Pistoletto spent the majority of his childhood and adult life in Turin. Born in Biella in 1933, his family moved to Turin a year later, where they would remain, with the exception of the last two years of the Second World War, when they escaped to the Susa valley following increased military attacks on the city during German occupation. In his youth and early adulthood (from 1947 to the late 1950s), he worked as an assistant to his father, Ermanno Olivero Pistoletto, an artist and expert in the conservation of Medieval and Renaissance art, in his restoration

business.²³ While Pistoletto never received any formal artistic training, he had gained many years of technical experience by an early age. He also gained relevant experience when, like many Italians during postwar reconstruction, he attended trade school in an effort to gain employment—in his case, in design. In 1956, following a failed attempt at studying surveying, Pistoletto enrolled in a two-year graphic and televisual design course at the *Scuola Testa* (Testa School, est. 1956), recently founded in Turin by the designer and would-be advertising magnate, Armando Testa.²⁴ After one year of the two-year advertising program, according to the artist, Testa offered him a design position in his company. (Pistoletto declined the offer, however, as he was already in the process of opening his own graphic design firm.²⁵) Not long after the completion of the course, however, Pistoletto abandoned this effort, redirecting his attention fulltime to painting, earning early career accolades in regional juried exhibitions in northern Italy. In 1960 he began exhibiting with the Galleria Galatea. During these early years within the increasingly international artistic context of postwar Turin, Pistoletto was especially struck by the work of Francis Bacon, who had begun exhibiting at the Galatea in 1958 and at the Galleria Notizie in 1960.²⁶ To Pistoletto, Bacon's figurative paintings surpassed everything he had been striving for in his early work; their drama, as he put it, made him direct his practice toward creating a figurative model that would be as "objective" as possible, eventually leading to the mirror paintings. As Pistoletto became increasingly well-known over the course of the 1960s, especially in the late 1960s, when Germano Celant positioned his work as central to *Arte Povera* (poor art)—the Italian avant-garde of the late 1960s for which Pistoletto (in addition to his mirror paintings), is best known. By 1968, however, Pistoletto had given up conventional artistic practice and instead founded a street theater group, *Lo Zoo* (The Zoo), with whom he performed until 1970. Shortly thereafter, the boom of Turin's economy and contemporary art network was

in rapid decline, as Italy descended into an especially dark period of Italian history known as *gli anni di piombo* (the years of lead; 1968–84)—a period characterized by economic collapse, civil unrest, mass protests, unsanctioned strikes, political assassinations, and domestic terrorism by both left-wing and neo-fascist factions. With the years of lead came an artistic and cultural exodus from Turin; galleries and institutions closed, and many artists, including Pistoletto, left the city.

Over the course of the following decades, Pistoletto continued to have a prolific practice. He resumed production of the mirror paintings in the late 1960s, in private, switching to a serigraphic mode of production rather than the labor-intensive, partly manual model he used in the early works. He made large bodies of sculptural work, experimented with installation practice, and began developing the idea for a social art practice. In 1998, he opened his foundation, the *Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto*, an experimental institution housed in a converted textile mill in Biella, a small Piedmontese town in the Italian alps, located an hour north of Turin, where he continues to live and work today. The Cittadellarte (a portmanteau of *cittadella* or “fortress” and *citta dell’arte* meaning “art city”) houses the artist’s studio and archives, a museum dedicated to Pistoletto’s work as well as his own collection of Arte Povera, and an international artists’ residency program. Pistoletto has since devoted his work to using art as a force for social change; in projects such as *Love Difference* and *Il terzo paradiso* (The Third Paradise), he has fostered participatory, community-based art-making all over the world.

With this context in mind, let’s return to the moment of the Plexiglasses and the conceit of figuration they propose for Pistoletto’s early work. If we consider figuration as a conceit for Pistoletto’s early practice, as established in the 1964 statement, the body of his early work, otherwise characterized as highly differentiated, begins to seem more unified. Pistoletto’s

exploration of the figure spanned numerous, divergent styles of figuration: from the thick impasto of his self-portraits from 1957 (fig. 0.09), whose scratched and scraped surfaces recalled the primordial quality of Surrealist *grattage* (scraping) and material density of *haute pâte* (high paste) found in the work of Jean Dubuffet and *Art informel* (Informalist Art); to the more polished image of *Autoritratto linoleum* (Linoleum Self-Portrait) from 1960 (fig. 0.10), whose trompe l'oeil marbled background frames a quickly-rendered figure of a sharply-dressed man in a business suit, the on-the-go “New Man” populating contemporary Italian mass culture in advertisements ranging from Fiat to mass-produced clothing pioneer, Facis; and to the figure in silhouette, in a series of drawings from 1962 (fig. 0.11), in which the body is rendered in a perpetual state of becoming. In *Disegno I* (Drawing 1) from the same series, the edge of the face is depicted in hyper-realistic detail, but its veristic quality dissipates as the image fades into seamless *sfumatura*. This dynamic rendering suggests a condition of coalescence or dissipation more often associated with the photographic or printed image, with historic techniques of graphic transfer, or, as one critic noted, with broader new media processes that proliferated in the postwar period.²⁷

In addition to differential styles, Pistoletto also explored figuration in a wide range of processes, from assemblage—as with *Esperimento* (Experiment) from 1959 (fig. 0.12), in which mounted strings and wooden dowels cast shadows over a portrait bust painted in silhouette, itself a shadow of a figure—to photography and collage, as in the figure of the artist in a self-portrait mirror painting from 1963 (fig. 0.13). He also investigated the figure in various states of being. He rendered the figure in movement, in his paintings of acrobats, sportsmen, and cartwheeling gymnasts such as *Atleta alla sbarra fissa* (Athlete on the High Bar; fig. 0.14) from 1960, as well as the figure at rest, with the somnolent *Uomo coricato sotto la finestra* (Man reclining under the

window; 1957–58; fig. 0.15) and sedentary *Uomo sul sofa* (Man on the Sofa; 1958). He considered the figure *en masse*, in the frenetic throngs of *La Folla* (The Crowd; 1959) and *La Folla* (The Ungrateful Crowd; 1958–59; fig. 0.16) and in isolation, in *Uomo dietro il tavolo* (Man behind the Table; 1960; fig. 0.17), in which a single, somber figure sits alone in darkness, dwarfed by the large surface of the empty table before him and the great void of vaulted space above him. He rendered the body unified, as in *L'Equilibrista* (1958; fig. 0.18), and in parts, as in the untitled 1962 photomontage made for writer Carlo Montella's short story, *Compito in classe* (Classwork), published in the Turinese newspaper *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, in which a group of disjointed figures strides across a cobblestone pavement (fig. 0.19).²⁸ In Pistoletto's illustration, fragmented heads and shoulders rest on disproportionate, mismatched torsos, held up in turn by foreign ankles and orphaned feet that seem to belong to other people else entirely. He examined the figure as image, deploying the figure as archetype and icon, as in the closely cropped, anonymous figures of *Il Santo* (The Saint) and *Sacerdote* (Priest), both from 1957—each dressed in his respective vestments, rendered in reductive, geometric form, pared down to the minimum of detail required to signify their liturgical status (figs. 0.20–21).

But figuration serves to unify more than stylistic and procedural differences in Pistoletto's practice. In the mirror paintings, Pistoletto created his figures through a complex process that drew upon a variety of practices.²⁹ He began by tracing his mirror subjects from printed black-and-white photographic enlargements in pencil on sheets of tissue paper. After tracing the figure, leaving the tissue paper in place, Pistoletto used pencil and black paint to shade the image and block out dark areas of the print, carefully copying the light values and details of the photographic underlay. He then collaged the entire, hand-painted sheet painted side down onto the steel panel, in order to recreate seamless surface of a printed image. At this point

in the process, he added color to the figures, using a thinned oil paint to “stain” the sheet with color. While the first mirror paintings were done in black and white, then in sepia, by 1964, Pistoletto had begun using a naturalistic color palette in order to make his mirror subjects seem as real as possible.³⁰ It was only at this point, after the paint had dried, that Pistoletto used an X-Acto knife to cut out the figure, removing the tissue paper surrounding the subject.

Pistoletto’s cutouts function as representational figures within the work in its conception as a painting. They are also stand-ins for the painted figures of Pistoletto’s earlier, figurative paintings; their hand-colored form and delicate materiality underscoring their function as representational signifiers as they are also indexical ones. This semiotic duality of Pistoletto’s figures is yet again compounded by our encounter with them; as we see our own reflection in the unoccupied mirror surface surrounding the photographic figure, our initial impulse is to read the space of the mirror painting’s subject as contiguous with our own. In this capacity, the traditionally illusionistic space of a two-dimensional mimetic image—what postwar art historian Pierre Francastel would call “figurative space”—is substituted by the reflected image of the real space we inhabit.³¹ Representational space remains as such only insofar as the mirrored surface functions as a sign for the ground to Pistoletto’s figure—a semiotic slippage underscored by the fact that he still calls these works “paintings” despite the alternative media of their production. In this sense, Pistoletto’s mirror paintings remake figuration as a representational system with its own terms, allowing it to function as a conceptual model rather than a representational one.

The Plexiglasses statement and works of its implicit address have rarely been discussed in the large body of existing scholarship on Pistoletto, let alone within the discourses on postwar Italian and European art. They generally receive perfunctory, cursory references—generally in exhibition chronologies, reviews of the artist’s biography, and exhibition signage—in which they

have been summarily slated as precursors to Conceptual art, citing Pistoletto's notion of art as "an idea," as articulated in the Plexiglass statement (*MPIP*). When they have not been overlooked altogether, the Plexiglasses have categorized as a flat coda to the well-known mirror paintings preceding them or a lean prologue to the celebrated, experimental sculptural work that followed.³² Indeed, at the point of the Plexiglasses' production, Pistoletto was only one year shy of making the *Oggetti in meno* (Minus Objects; 1965–66)—a series of one-off, design-inspired sculptural objects, made of inexpensive, found, and otherwise readily available materials, which led Italian art critic Germano Celant to position Pistoletto as the father figure of *Arte povera* (Poor Art) in his seminal essay on the movement in 1967.³³

To regard the Plexiglasses as confluent with either project—the mirror paintings before them, or the Minus Objects that followed—however, is to miss a major shift in the artist's work: a shift that not only relocates the experimental crux of Pistoletto's practice (from the Minus Objects to the Plexiglasses), but calls attention to a turn from the figurative to figural that has yet to be addressed. This dissertation instead begins by finding importance in this moment of Pistoletto's work in its own right, as its emphasis on figuration (and the breakdown thereof) opens a series of new questions for the artist's practice and for the postwar Italian avant-garde, in turn. What did Pistoletto mean, precisely, by a "breakdown" of figuration, and how did it play out in the Plexiglasses? What was at stake in this narrative? (Making the work "go out" into real space, after all, "allow[s] [him] to introduce [himself]"). And more fundamentally, why was a young member of the Italian and European avant-gardes interested in figuration in 1964?

Building upon art historical scholarship that has begun to account for unconventional models of figuration in a wide range of contexts, this dissertation seeks to address how, why, and to what ends Pistoletto as a young member of the postwar Italian avant-garde and progenitor of

Arte Povera—a movement associated with the proliferation of anti-mimetic and anti-formalist practices in the late 1960s—pursued figuration as a platform for progressive creative practice.³⁴ This question is especially important given Pistoletto’s interest in figuration within the unlikely context of the mid-1960s, when figurative art was increasingly regarded as regressive, outmoded, and exhausted, following decades of postwar expressionism and socialist realism, and abstraction, by contrast, had emerged as the paragon of progressive artistic work. In the Italian context, more specifically, Pistoletto’s interest in figuration seems especially problematic, given its association with German and Soviet culture, as well as the totalitarian politics of Fascism, the Third Reich, and Communism.³⁵ What then might it have meant for a young Italian artist of the postwar avant-garde to pursue figuration within the politicized artistic context of Italy and Europe in the mid-1960s? And how might such pursuits shift our understanding of the postwar Italian avant-garde, models of avant-gardism, and twentieth-century art, more broadly? By demonstrating that figuration functioned as the central critical framework for Pistoletto’s early practice and as a method to examine and destabilize ideological structures in the service of liberation, this study challenges dominant narratives of postwar figuration that would see it peter out with neorealism by the end of the 1950s, and return only with neo-expressionism in the work of the *Transavanguardia*.

Study of figuration in Pistoletto’s practice has been largely limited to the figure’s representational and iconographic functions as a frequent subject in the artist’s early paintings (1956–62) and mirror paintings. At the same time, this scholarship has also emphasized the artist’s movement away from figuration in the mirror paintings as a conventional form of representation. This scholarship argues that Pistoletto’s turn to photography and use of new, reflective materials (in place of the traditional canvas support) was his solution to divest his work

of subjective affect and of visual elements associated with expressionism. More recent scholarship, namely on the part of Claire Gilman, has pointed out that Pistoletto nevertheless retained certain conventions of figuration within the mirror paintings in spite of these changes.³⁶ In her study of Pistoletto's mirror paintings, Gilman has argued the visible use of "painterly [processes]" such as hand-coloring, for example, humanize his photographic figures, endowing them with subjective qualities that seem to undermine the mechanistic objectivity often associated with photographic images.³⁷ Neither of these approaches, however, have considered figuration as a conceptual or political framework in the artist's practice.

To begin to theorize the new model of figuration Pistoletto laid out in the fall of 1964 requires a closer mapping of his terms. Implicit to Pistoletto's narrative is a worldview in which reality is framed, somewhat obtusely, as "the structure of figurative expression"—a structure that, by the end of the statement, has been broken down into its respective elements (*MPIP*). To understand Pistoletto's claim for the Plexiglasses necessitates an unpacking of this structure. "Figurative expression" engages both artistic and semiotic terminology. In the case of the former, we may understand figurative expression to mean an act or form of visual representation (pictorial or plastic), which, as opposed to abstraction, registers a recognizable formal connection, however remotely, to the thing it represents, as it exists in reality. In the latter, "figurative expression" might also refer to the form or articulation of meaning through figures, that is, through images as opposed to words, as with ideographic and pictographic languages, or through illustrative figures and diagrams used as demonstrative accompaniments to text. In linguistics it may also refer to an idiomatic expression, as in a "figure of speech," whose meaning is far removed from what might result from its literal interpretation. In the case of both, then, figurative expression denotes the articulation or form of signification whose relationship

with reality is referential or symbolic (as in rhetorical tropes such as metaphor and allegory), but might also be iconic, if not literal or tautological. Its structure, then, is a system of signification, a constructed network of relays between image and meaning. As such a system does not exist in a vacuum, its structure necessarily includes the spatio-visual dimensions of its environment as well as the dynamic, sensory mechanisms of the body that allow for the articulation and perception of its constitutive parts.³⁸

Of additional importance is the social and historical context of such a structure, which has informed the consolidation and dissemination of its symbolic lexicon (visual or linguistic), such that it is recognizable and legible to a dialogical collective—what Ferdinand de Saussure, writing on language, called a “linguistic community,” and Norman Bryson, writing on images, a “visual” one.³⁹ The requisitely communal terrain of signs is not only limited to mass legibility, then, but also extends to collective authorship and regulation. If the form and function of signs are established by the group who uses them, the individual, by contrast, as Saussure argued, “has no power to alter a sign in any respect once it has been established [...]”⁴⁰ Post-structural theorists have further contemplated the potential effects of this dynamic. In his theorization of the symbolic order, Jacques Lacan argued that the full realization of symbolic functions would amount to a complete *abolishment* of the entirety of an individual subject’s actions.⁴¹ Using Freud’s account of “the dream of Irma’s injection” as a model, Lacan proposed that such a realization would result in a far more incapacitating subject condition than that marked by an inability to amend signs, as proposed by Saussure.⁴² Lacan’s reading of Freud serves to illustrate the symbolic order’s inherent control over and threat to the subject as an individual agent beyond the scope of his power to change an existing set of visual or linguistic signs.

Endemic to figurative expression is a *communal* power structure, in which the individual

is largely disenfranchised as an agent of change with concern to the relationship between representation and its referent in reality. Recalling Bryson's discussion of mimesis, in which "the image must be understood instead as a milieu of the articulation of the reality known by a given visual community," this disenfranchisement also extends to the individual's ability to change the symbolic framework by which his community's articulated reality is structured.⁴³

With the requisitely communal purview of figuration and dialogical model of subjectivity above in mind, the Plexiglasses seem geared to counter these exigencies in order to reinstate the individual as a self-possessed, perhaps even sovereign subject. Indeed, Pistoletto's statement tells us the Plexiglasses expand what is possible for the individual subject (in this case, the artist). This expansion occurs by "allowing" the artist to do something, suggesting he has been granted access to previously prohibited or uncharted terrain. In this sense, the function of the Plexiglasses is to endow the subject with new agency. Tracing Pistoletto's logic, then, the production of the Plexiglasses is tantamount to an act of self-liberation and—within the historical context of the works' production in mid-1960s Italy—access to a more navigable world around him.

That Pistoletto exhibited a new body of work at this moment, then, was not only an artistic action but a political one as well. Indeed, Pistoletto's narrative of expanded agency situates the subject (Pistoletto) on seemingly unstable ground. He finds himself, in the end, "among the broken-down elements of figuration" (*MPIP*). If reality for Pistoletto is the structure of figurative expression, then the Plexiglasses have, in some way, broken down the real world as he sees it.

In the original Italian, *scomposti*—a participial adjective, translated here as "broken-down"—comes from the verb *scomporre*, meaning to disassemble, decompose, deconstruct, or break into parts. It signals a break-down in structure or reason, or a breakdown in composure,

self-control, and subjectivity. In mathematics, where the word is often used, it means to factor an equation. As opposed to signaling a destruction of form, entropy, or disfiguration of the figure, which might align Pistoletto with the French Informel or Italian Informale, among others artists of the Fifties and Sixties who pursued these strategies, the breakdown initiated by Pistoletto in the Plexiglasses was one of *deconstruction*. The undone, expanded model of figuration he created through the Plexiglasses ultimately stands to *reconstitute* the figure. Pistoletto's resulting position "among the broken-down elements of figuration," then, is one in which the artist may introduce himself, in his own terms, as a new element among those that have constructed the world as it was. At the same time, this position allows him to introduce himself as an integral element of a potentially new system of figurative expression and a new reality; that is, he also stands to be a part of a future reconfigured system, part of a reality yet to come.

The Plexiglasses statement narrates what we might call a "figural history" of Pistoletto's work: that is, a history of creative practice consisting of and driven by an investigation of the figure as both image and body—but not as a representation.⁴⁴ By invoking this concept, my study aligns itself with recent scholarly discussions in art history that have aimed to reconsider figuration and the figural within artistic and cultural practice. In their revisionist histories of art and culture in late Medieval and early Modern Europe, art historians Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood have proposed modeling a "figural" art history, in which the figural is simultaneously engaged as an historical subject of study and art-historical method. Nagel and Wood argue figuration in the Renaissance was often used to create imagistic forms (visual and plastic) that were both figurative (representational) as well as figural (bodily). In Medieval culture, *spolia*, icons, and religious statuary were figures that *embodied* their own signified.⁴⁵ While they still functioned as representations (as *figurative* images), their tendency to be

perceived as embodiments of their own referents—that is, as the referents themselves—endowed them with a reflexivity and *figural* function that superseded their figurative one.⁴⁶ Building upon earlier theories of the figural, namely that of the German philosopher Erich Auerbach, Nagel and Wood’s key contribution is that the condition of *figural*—of being imagistic or bodily—has been leveraged within the history of art to use images to constellate alternative, non-chronological models of history and time for the viewer, in support of religious as well as secular ideologies of the period.⁴⁷ Auerbach’s concept of the “figural”—first defined in his essay “Figura” and expanded in *Mimesis*, both published in 1946—defined the term as the condition and position that allows the symbolic or representational to retain a sense of being real. As he wrote:

[A] figural schema permits both its poles—the figure and its fulfillment [in the beyond]—to retain the characteristics of concrete historical reality, in contradistinction to what obtains with symbolic or allegorical personifications, so that figure and fulfillment—although the one “signifies” the other—have a significance which is not incompatible with their being real. An event taken as a figure preserves its literal and historical meaning. It remains an event, does not become a mere sign.⁴⁸

In this passage, Auerbach establishes that the figure (as image, representation, symbol, or allegory) can be perceived as something that is real and concrete (or has been)—a condition that should not be possible for symbolic and allegorical signification—when it is positioned within a “figural” framework. Auerbach theorized the figural through study of Western literature, focusing especially on texts that engaged with the religious or spiritual; mimesis in these fields positioned representation as reality, corroborating beliefs and belief systems. As an interpretive structure and existential position, Auerbach argued, the figural served to connect two points—the real and divine, the historic and present, e.g.—points that would otherwise be separated in time and space.⁴⁹

In my invocation of the term, a figural history would provide an account of Pistoletto’s

practice in terms of his investigation of the figure from the *figurative* to the *figural*. While the images discussed here—the Plexiglasses, mirror paintings, and Minus Objects— still refer to something out in the world, they present themselves to us more as embodiments of their own referents. The visual material in this figural history frequently evokes the body (or bodily) but not a representational one. The “figural” I use here, then, draws upon post-structuralist theories thereof, namely Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of the figural as non-representational and visual (as opposed to figurative or linguistic), which stands outside of (but is nevertheless connected to) discourse. Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the “Figure,” writ large, which expands upon Lyotard’s definition, is also of import.⁵⁰ For Deleuze, the “Figure” is the human body in visual form that, like the “figural” for Lyotard, is not representational, but rather “is”: We perceive it to be material, concrete, and present, as opposed to immaterial, symbolic, and represented—qualities associated with figurative images.⁵¹ The “figure” addressed in this dissertation aligns at various points with Lyotard’s and Deleuze’s definitions. It seeks to undo representation in favor of creating alternative realities, to be explored and experienced in real time and space.

Within the field of postwar art history, Robert Slifkin has joined Nagel and Wood in their interest in unconventional models of figuration as a blind spot for art history. Summarizing this discursive problem, Slifkin writes: “The morphological definition of figuration conventionally invoked in art-historical discourse has left art history unable to analyze alternative, analogical and temporal, models of figuration.”⁵² In response to this issue, Slifkin has revisited figuration in postwar American art through his study of Philip Guston’s figurative work in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵³ Citing figuration’s perilous position within the postwar period as an historical threat to both Modernism (joining Benjamin Buchloh) and American culture in the Cold War, Slifkin mounts his call for revisionist scholarship on the role of figuration in postwar art history

as an historiographic as well as political problem for the field.⁵⁴

Within scholarship on postwar Italian art, Claire Gilman has discussed the figurative in relation to Arte Povera. In her study of Pino Pascali's sculptural practice from the mid-to-late 1960s, Gilman argues Pascali's work was driven by an interest in figuration—a reading that problematizes the dominant narrative of Arte Povera as a movement fundamentally dedicated to anti-mimetic artistic practice.⁵⁵ For Gilman, the figurative drive of Pascali's sculpture, which she also sees in Boetti's works from the same period, is manifested in his ability to consistently privilege the viewer's perception of the work's semiotic function in advance of its material constitution; we see what the work *is* before we see of what it is *made*. In Gilman's model, when we view one of the artist's "bristle worms" (*Bachi da setola*, 1968)—a series of oversized, sculptural worms made of hard nylon bristles—for example, we read the form of the sculpture as a plastic representation of worms, before we take stock of the bristles as the medium of the work. Pascali's prioritization of figuration, Gilman continues, is corroborated by his use of unconventional materials, despite the increased difficulty they might present to such a task. Overcoming the visual interest of brightly-colored nylon bristles or a fuzzy swatch of faux fur, for example, with the gestalt or whole form of the work as a signifier, is more difficult than surmounting any visual interest conventional materials might hold for us, as they are to be expected and therefore more readily overlooked. Ultimately, Pascali was dedicated not to the unmediated manipulation of material in its raw or original state (as seen in process art, for example), but rather to an engagement of these materials to, Gilman contends, "[transform] them into *something else*" (italics original).⁵⁶ For Gilman, Pascali's sculptures—his series of cannons and weaponry made of recycled machine parts (*Le armi*; Weapons; 1965; fig. 0.20); his cloth-covered wood-frame sculptures of whales, dinosaurs, sharks, and other creatures from the *Finite*

sculture (Finished Sculptures) series of 1966–67 (fig. 0.21); and his bristle sculptures of earthworms, *Bachi da setola*, (Bristle Worms; 1968; fig. 0.22), among others—all present themselves to the viewer as the thing their material has been shaped into, without masking their material constitution. As Gilman put it: “Pascali’s sculptures consistently exploit the split between material substance and imagistic form.”⁵⁷

While Gilman’s reading of Pascali’s sculpture is perhaps more successful in some works than in others—the material constitution of the cloth-covered animal sculptures, for example, is less clear than that of the bristle worms (their wooden infrastructure is not always, as she contends, readily visible)—her reading nevertheless corroborates a larger point: Arte Povera did not, counter to existing scholarship, wholly reject figuration as a convention of artistic practice. Identifying similar strategies in the work of Giulio Paolini and that of Pistoletto, Gilman ultimately concludes these artists’ works share a “theatrical sensibility,” which emerged in response to the Romantic conceptions of authenticity and self-possession heralded by the stymied *Informale* of the 1950s and early 1960s. This sensibility, for Gilman, was defined by a self-consciousness engagement with conventions—of perception, of human behavior, of spatial relations—that counters the reading of Arte Povera’s ideology of unmediated presence, elemental form, and materiality.⁵⁸

While my study aligns itself with Gilman’s interest in Pascali’s engagement with figuration, the generalization of these artists’ practices under the theatrical suppresses the diversity of their figurative (and figural) strategies. What seems more pressing is to map the varied iterations and implementations of these practice in relation to their respective contexts, which often preceded Celant’s canonization of Arte Povera, as well as in relation their respective conceptions of their practices, rather than in Celant’s terms, which many rejected. That is,

Gilman's reading responds to a generalized conception of Arte Povera that has long been unsettled within art historical scholarship. To do so ultimately upholds Celant's grouping of these highly differentiated practices, and compares individual works to a reading that took shape, in many cases, long after their production. This problematic is best demonstrated in the following passage:

But what Pascali's sculptures evidence above all is the absurdity of Arte Povera's own pursuit of pure essence, a pursuit that underlies Modernism's dream of self-sufficiency more generally. His schematic creatures... foreground the representational process itself. These are figures of convention, figures that have passed through an organizing consciousness and that are by no means fixed or necessary. Implicit here is an acknowledgment that images are not simply found; they are received, reconstructed in and through the act of perception.⁵⁹

If the notion (largely attributed to Celant) that Arte Povera sought out its "pure essence" is absurd, perhaps there are other terms by which to measure what Pascali's sculptures accomplish. How might Pascali's figuration be read if examined in its own right? What Gilman's reading puts at stake is also consideration of the artists' own conceptions of their practices. My examination of Pistoletto's early practice has sought to provide closer consideration of the work of an individual artist, who would only later be grouped under Celant's framework, within the historically specific climate in which he pursued his practice.

With these questions in mind, I investigate the role and significance of the model of the figure Pistoletto proposes in the Plexiglasses and situate it within the historical context of mid-1960s Italy. In Chapter One, "Reality and Realism: The Plexiglasses, 1964," I address these questions through study of two objects of research: 1) the Plexiglasses and 2) the artist's writing that accompanied the series. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first is dedicated to an in-depth analysis of the Plexiglasses within the conflicted art historical and sociopolitical context of their production in Italy in 1964. Formal and semiotic examination of the series finds

a pointed engagement with two problems that were formative to the period—sociopolitical conflicts in the early decline of the economic miracle, and the anti-capitalist cultural politics of artistic practice in Italy during the ascension of American Pop in Europe. The second section focuses on the model of figure proposed by the artist in his writings composed in conjunction with the artworks. The third section places the preceding sections in dialogue with one another. What did Pistoletto’s model of the figure bring to this new understanding of the series (as proposed by this study) as a politicized artistic construction of cultural and socioeconomic critique? I argue the Plexiglasses do more than bring art into life, as is upheld in the existing literature on the artist: They constitute a carefully constructed “realist” scene that creates an experience of disillusionment for the viewer. When considered in conjunction with the series’ various references to contemporary art and economy, this experience parallels the widespread disenchantment of Italian society in the wake of the economic miracle, and of Pistoletto as an Italian artist in response to the commoditization of artistic practice. This chapter also traces the history of this expanded model of the figure as a creative platform in twentieth-century art, finding important antecedents in Italian Futurism and Spatialism. In so doing, it offers a new understanding of Italian Modernism and the avant-garde based on these movements’ investigation of the figure transitioning from representation to reality, as well as a new model of bringing “art into life” that is realized through a bodily exploration of space.

In Chapter Two, “Cold Images: The Protest Pictures, 1965,” these questions are brought to bear on the mirror paintings. Following the Plexiglasses, Pistoletto produced a series of mirror paintings that featured imagery from protests, workers’ strikes, leftist electoral rallies, anti-American and anti-war demonstrations then taking place in northern Italy. Made in advance of his first solo exhibition in the United States—*Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*,

curated by Martin Friedman (April 1966)—seven of the twelve “protest pictures,” as he called them, debuted to American audiences (fig. 0.22). In spite of the clear political current of these works, they were universally received as apolitical. Aligned with American Pop, largely through their “cool imagery”—a term used by Martin Friedman to refer to the series, the primary reception of these works reflected Cold War nationalism in American art criticism, which not only depoliticized Pistoletto’s series, but also attributed the artist’s innovations to a mimicry of “American” style. By examining the protest pictures’ distinctly figural navigation of Italian labor politics and the cultural geopolitics of the Cold War Transatlantic, I argue these works, like the Plexiglasses, consolidated a new model of political figuration for art of the 1960s, which repositions our understanding of the mirror paintings and postwar figuration in Italian art, as well as the European avant-gardes, more broadly.

Chapter Three, entitled “Poor Designs: The Minus Objects, 1965–1966,” considers these questions with regard to the Minus Objects (fig. 0.23). Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the heterogeneous set of sculptural objects as a radical break in the artist’s practice, based upon an anti-commercialist effort to break with the trappings of personal style. Following the first two chapters, however, the Minus Objects are less a singular radical break than part of a longer experimental turn in the artist’s practice, from late 1964 to early 1966. Drawing attention to Pistoletto’s early design work, this chapter situates the Minus Objects in relation to trends in postwar Italian design. Study of their relationship, and Pistoletto’s, to a shift in Italian advertising design from conventional figurative representation to figural imagery, in which products are made bodily, this final chapter considers the Minus Objects brings a new perspective to the Minus Objects as “figural objects”—that is, I argue their use of a specifically

figural languages then emerging within Italian design positions them as figural models, which stage an undoing of capitalist subjectivities and symbolic economies.

To situate Pistoletto's work within the context of the mid-Sixties in Italy first requires an overview of figuration in postwar Italian art and a mapping of the cultural debates that surrounded these practices. In the immediate postwar period, the direction of Italian art was largely informed by polarizing cultural debates that set realism and abstraction in conflict as viable creative strategies for the postwar period.⁶⁰ Italian art began to divide into two camps: Realism, primarily manifest in figurative painting, increasingly qualified as the moral duty of the Communist artist. It consisted of those practices (figurative realism in the visual arts, as well as neorealist cinema and literature) that were dedicated to democratic, lived experience. In cinema and literature, neorealism typically included an engagement with past and present; in the latter, individuals were supposed to participate in reality, which often took the form of participating in collective destinies.⁶¹ This frequently meant that the individual in Neo-Realism was often an allegorical figure; moreover, the trope of destiny reflected a collective sentiment of impotence in the immediate postwar period, as many Italians, struggled to rebuild daily life.⁶² The Neo-Realist narrative was often one of survival rather than agency, from Cesare Pavese's *La casa in collina* (The House on the Hill; 1947–48)⁶³ to Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952).⁶⁴ Figurative art, while also interested in the individual and his participation in postwar reality, was associated with a politicized historical legacy that problematized its postwar reception. Those who were critical of realism found problems in its association with Communism—historically, with strong connections to socialist realism and Soviet culture, as well as contemporaneously, as the championed style of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party; PCI), under the

postwar leadership of Palmiro Togliatti.⁶⁵ Others criticized realism as an atavistic return to neoclassical ideals, populist subject matter, and figurative allegories that had gained favor under Fascism in the form of the “modern” classicism of the *Novecento italiano*, as Emily Braun has described the style of the interwar movement.⁶⁶ By the mid-1950s, realism in Italian art had fallen out of favor, petering out by the end of the decade with the last gasps of neorealism in literature and cinema.⁶⁷ Abstraction (both geometric and gestural), however, was also politically contentious, due to its nationalistic associations with French cubism, *Art informel*, and American Abstract Expressionism, as well as its symbolic value, especially in the case of lyrical abstraction, as a sign for “Europeanism” and internationalism, which shored up an extra-national, non-Italian model of Modernism and modernity for which postwar Italy strived, in order to “catch up” to other European nations.⁶⁸ It was championed by those who favored this internationalization of Italian art, as well as by those who argued leftist politics should not limit the artist to a particular practice (in this case, figurative realism)—a position best articulated by the manifesto of *Forma I* in 1947.⁶⁹

In spite of these problematic cultural politics, however, abstraction (unlike realism) gained traction in postwar Italian art over the course of the 1950s. Primarily led by the rise of the *Informale* and the *Movimento spaziale* (Spatial Movement), the ascendance of abstraction was buttressed by movements in concrete art and geometric abstraction that opposed and eventually superseded their gestural counterparts.⁷⁰ By the opening of the 1960s, abstraction had emerged as the dominant form of vanguard artistic practice in Italy. This is not to say realism was denigrated outright; rather, it was regarded as somewhat historical. Guttuso, for example, was given a mini-retrospective at the 1960 Venice Biennale, while artists who had been associated with realism but tended toward abstract stylistics, such as Lionello Venturi’s *Gruppo degli otto* (Group of

Eight), were repositioned as part of European Informalist movements.⁷¹ While scholarship has focused on the numerous innovations and historical importance of abstraction for key developments in postwar and contemporary Italian art, however, little consideration has been given to the continued history and significance of figuration for the same period, instead leaving it largely unattended from the end of neorealism in the mid-1950s to the moment of its “re-emergence” in the late 1970s in the work of the neo-expressionist *Transavanguardia*.⁷²

Indicative of this problematic was the postwar cultural legacy of Italian figurative art of the 1920s and 1930s. In Turin, this legacy was best exemplified by Italian painter Felice Casorati (Novara; 1883–1963) and the *Gruppo di Sei* (Group of Six; alt. *Gruppo di Sei di Torino*), a leftist artistic collective that coalesced in the late 1920s under Casorati’s mentorship.⁷³ Casorati’s popular figurative style and predilection for familiar classical motifs spanned the entirety of his decades-long practice: From the stark, ordered, somewhat plastic figures in his work of the early 1920s, favored by the *Novecento italiano*, exemplified by *Silvana Cenni* (1922; fig. 0.24) and *Meriggio* (Mid-day; 1923; fig. 0.25), exhibited in the artist’s *sala personale* at the 1924 Venice Biennale, to the somewhat more textured, vaguely post-Impressionist renditions of similarly ordered bodies and compositions in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. First exhibiting on a major scale in 1907, when he was included in the Venice Biennale, Casorati was well-known by the 1920s. After the 1924 Venice Biennale, his popularity solidified over the course of the late 1920s and 1930s, in part due to his association with the Italian Novecento.⁷⁴ While Casorati was a prominent figure within the national artistic context of postwar Italy, as both artist and curator, regularly serving on selection committees and juries for national and international exhibitions of figurative art, as well as boards of local and national cultural institutions—the influence of his

work was particularly strong in his native Turin, where he had served as mentor, instructor, and galvanizing figure for young artists since the 1920s.

In the early 1920s, Casorati began running an unofficial school out of his studio, around which the *Gruppo di Sei* coalesced. In the postwar years, at the *Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti*, Turin's school of fine arts, he trained many Italian artists of the younger postwar generation from 1952 to his death in 1964.⁷⁵ Of particular importance was the conceit of the nude in Casorati's work, which by the postwar period had become a kind of standard for figurative representation in Turin and much of Italy. The figure of the *nuda casoratiana* (Casoratian nude) was characterized by its static, sculptural form and reserved, even somnolent expression, as well as its classical composition, often depicted in contrapposto, seated before a window, or reclining, in the form of an odalisque.

Casorati's problematic legacy for postwar Italian art stems from the bifurcated political associations of the artist's work. Casorati was (and had been) firmly aligned with the cultural Left. In the late 1920s, as part of the *Gruppo di Sei*, Casorati called for the use of creative practice as an anti-fascist, politicized artistic strategy, where he worked alongside leaders of the intellectual Left such as the artist and writer Carlo Levi (also a member of the Group) and Piero Gobetti, the prominent Turinese anti-fascist activist and political theorist, whose work (along with that of Carlo Rosselli) established Italian liberal socialism in the 1920s. Within these circles, Casorati was well-regarded, receiving praise for the disquieting effect of his listless figures and ability to capture the internal anguish of modern man.⁷⁶ For the Italian cultural and political Left, Casorati's figures embodied the existential strain of life after World War I and the mounting oppression of Mussolini's Regime during the *ventennio*.

In spite of Casorati's association with the Left, the strong spatial order of his compositions and sculptural quality of his figures nevertheless also led to his association with the Novecento.⁷⁷ His nudes, which appeared in the first and second exhibitions of the movement in 1926 and 1929 (curated by Margherita Sarfatti, prominent supporter of the National Fascist Party as well as Mussolini's long-time mistress), readily lent themselves to the tepid purism and modernized classicism of the movement,⁷⁸ while also embodying the tenets of Fascist ideology that placed new value on well-proportioned, idealized depictions of the human figure.⁷⁹

While Casorati's nudes and the figurative style of the *scuola casoratiana* remained dominant in postwar Turin, and prominent in broader Italy, Turin's conservative artistic climate began to open up in the 1950s to abstraction, primarily in the gestural and lyrical work of the *Informale*, as it gained traction over the course of the decade. This shift was supported in part by Turin's simultaneous emergence as a new artistic capital in northern Italy, during which time a number of progressive galleries, museums and cultural organizations opened, bringing an influx of art and artists associated with European modernism and international avant-gardes to the city.⁸⁰

The rise of abstraction within the artistic context of postwar Turin was further supported by a proliferation of international exhibitions held by these institutions across the decade, including the *Pittori d'Oggi: Francia-Italia* (Painters Today: France-Italy, 1951–61), an international biennial held at Turin's artists' club, the *Circolo degli Artisti*, which tended to favor the gestural abstraction of *Art informel* and the *Informale*. Also of note was *Arte nuova* (New Art), a major international exhibition curated by Michel Tapié in 1959 of work by the various movements that had come to be subsumed under his rubric of the *informel*, including Japanese Gutai, American Abstract Expressionism, and a smattering of other European artists⁸¹—

including Karel Appel and Asger Jorn, who had relocated to nearby Alba as members of the European avant-garde that had coalesced around Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio's experimental collective studio, the *Laboratorio sperimentale* (Experimental Laboratory).⁸² This rise of the *Informale* was paralleled by the rapid rise of Neo-Dada, American Pop, and *Nouveau réalisme*, whose work, while not abstract, shared abstraction's aim to do away with mimetic representation through the use of everyday materials, popular imagery, and processes of mechanical reproduction. As Turin's artistic context became increasingly international, mainstream figuration was joined by a thriving avant-garde and network of institutions who championed abstraction as the direction of contemporary art.

While postwar Italian realism was part of a broader originated "return" to figuration in postwar Europe, postwar Italian artists faced a unique set of circumstances that distinguished them from their European counterparts. In postwar France, expressionist representations of the body appeared within the range of heterogeneous practices categorized under *Art brut* (Raw Art), *Art autre* (Outsider Art), and *Art informel* (Informalist Art). Characterized by a deskilled, primitivist aesthetic or protean, inchoate sensibility, articulated by vaguely anatomical, embryonic, and indeterminately figural forms. Alongside these approaches, figuration in Alberto Giacometti's postwar sculpture, which resurrected the motif of the walking man, evoking the work of Rodin but in attenuated form, articulated a traumatic postwar subjectivity in the form of specters of Modernism, faced with the impossible task of moving forward in the aftermath of the Second World War. The figure in these examples is typically compressed in shallow perspectival fields, flattened on the picture plane, or pared down to its structural limit; its corporeality and subjectivity is articulated less through representational strategies than through the artist's application and manipulation of media as matter, as well as his deployment of primitivist

strategies and motifs. Paralleled by philosophical turns to the body and human condition in phenomenology and existentialism, figuration in postwar France illustrated the collective trauma of the war as the cultural, biological, and subjective devolution of man.

Figuration in postwar France was supported by a cultural legacy, however, that was in large part unavailable to Italian artists. (Many of the Surrealists survived the war and provided young artists in western Europe and the United States with a viable historical avant-garde to reflect on in the postwar period.) For young Italian artists, the problem of creating a valid, progressive artistic practice for in postwar Italy was complicated by the unique historical legacy of art and culture under fascism.

Contributing to this problem were the fraught legacies of both Italian Modernism and the historical avant-garde. By the late 1930s, Italian Futurism had come to be associated with fascism and the Regime, as had the conservative (if updated) neoclassicism and mythic realism of the Novecento. Metaphysical painting (*Pittura metafisica*)—best known by Giorgio de Chirico’s work of the 1910s and 1920s—was also problematic. Many of its practitioners had been based in Paris and were associated with Surrealism, making any potential legacy a somewhat international one, and its implementation of classicist visual languages positioned it too closely to “return to order” movements of the 1910s and 1920s and to the Regime’s predilection for the style.⁸³ Nor did Modernist abstraction provide a suitable reference; most of it would not be seen in Italy until after 1945, following the end of wartime isolationism, and what was available was primarily associated with Russian Suprematism, French cubism, and other European artistic movements situated outside of Italy.⁸⁴

Figuration in postwar Italy instead emerged primarily in the form of realism. Its origins were forged by a movement that predated the Second World War: The Milanese group, *Corrente*

(Current; 1938–43), which developed around the anti-Fascist youth journal on politics and culture, *Vita giovanile* (Youth Life, est. 1938). Following revisions of its title—first to *Corrente di vita giovanile* (Current of Youth Life), then to *Corrente* (1939–40)—the periodical evolved into an openly anti-Fascist publication and important visual arts review, made possible in large part due to private financial support from the founder’s (Ernesto Treccani) father, a senator in the Italian parliament, whose official affiliation with the Regime afforded the group some protection from censorship.⁸⁵ The leftist politics and varied artistic activities of *Corrente* galvanized a group of young literary critics, students, and artists, including Renato Birolli, Renato Guttuso, and Giacomo Manzù, and later, Bruno Cassinari, Ennio Morlotti, and Emilio Vedova.⁸⁶ When the publication was shut down by Mussolini’s administration in June of 1940, the group continued its operations in the form of an art gallery on Via della Spiga in Milan as well as a publishing house established for its members.⁸⁷

Of central importance to *Corrente* was the conflicted legacy of artistic modernism in interwar Italy.⁸⁸ Unlike the Third Reich, which categorically opposed modern art, the cultural policy of Italian fascism was rather open, accommodating certain forms of modernism and even endorsing “ultra-modern” art.⁸⁹ Indeed, fascist officials sought to cultivate a self-described “regime of liberty,” that claimed to value the creative and intellectual autonomy of the individual.⁹⁰ Because of this strategic fluidity, the young artists of *Corrente*, like many members of the nascent cultural Left, faced the difficult problem in developing an art form that could be modern and anti-Fascist at once.⁹¹

Unlike parallel developments in Italian neorealist cinema and literature, rather than committing to a specific style *Corrente* allowed for and even embraced different approaches to the democratic model of realism for which they became known, which reflected on reality as it is

as opposed to the aggrandized, mythical version of nationalist culture.⁹² In the early 1940s, Renato Guttuso recreated the sense of popular terror and chaos through the convention of history painting, in works such as *Fuga dall'Etna* (Fleeing Etna; 1939; fig. 0.26), which depicts a scene of villagers escaping the volcanic eruption alluded to in the title; filled with Romantic figural archetypes—strong, half nude women stand out in the crowd, leading the way to safety—Guttuso's work served to criticize fascist persecution in a visual language of realism that would be acceptable to the Regime.⁹³ Mario Mafai's work exemplified the expressionist current in the group; in his iconic series *Fantasia* (Fantasy; 1939–44; fig. 0.27), not shown until after the war, crudely rendered, contorted figures fill the pictorial field, while perpetrators of war are made grotesque, disfigured by their actions.⁹⁴

Rather than aligning postwar figuration with regressive provincialism, and abstraction with progressive transnationalism, Italian postwar realism was also invigorated by new access to culture outside of Italy, finding inspiration especially in Picasso's *Guernica* (1937).⁹⁵ In the *Manifesto del realismo di pittori e sculttori* (Manifesto of the Realism of Painters and Sculptors; 1946), more commonly known as *Oltre Guernica* (Beyond Guernica), as I will refer to it, *Guernica* was heralded as the work that did away with self-aggrandizing artistic practice and realized an image that captured the collective experience of fascist oppression.⁹⁶ Written by former members of *Corrente*, Morlotti and Vedova, whose group re-emerged after the war as the shortly lived *Nuova Secessione Artistica Italiana* (New Italian Artistic Secession; est. 1946), *Oltre Guernica* laid out new terms for realism that would also appear in the group's official manifesto later that year: Realism which would give view to reality as an objective entity of which "man is a part" (*l'uomo è una parte*).⁹⁷ Of critical importance was that the individual in realism would be repositioned as one of many, that painting and sculpture would be a form of

“participation in the total reality of man [...]” (*partecipazione alla totale realtà dell’uomo*).⁹⁸ As Morlotti and Vedova wrote:

Realism therefore does not mean naturalism or verism or expressionism, but the real concretized by one [man], when it determines, participates, coincides and is equivalent to the real of others, when it becomes, in sum, a common measure with respect to reality itself.

(Realismo non vuol dire quindi naturalismo o verismo o espressionismo, ma il reale concretizzato dell’uno, quando determina, partecipa, coincide ed equivale con il reale degli altri, quando diventa, insomma, misura comune rispetto alla realtà stessa.)⁹⁹

The problem of individual and shared experience, of what this “common measure” might look like, would be worked out further upon the formation of the New Secession.¹⁰⁰ Formed shortly after “Oltre Guernica,” the New Secession and the New Front of the Arts (the subsequent, slightly expanded incarnation of the group), similarly conceived of reality not as something to be copied through mimetic naturalism, but rather, as declared in their founding manifesto, as a “world of images” to be observed and experienced through “free exploration.”¹⁰¹ Artists were to seek out “singular affirmations” in this world, through which each individual’s conscious experience of reality would be enhanced.¹⁰² Rather than resurrecting the Romantic concept of the artist as singular genius, however, the New Secessionists’ valued the artist as a self-aware individual, who was consciously attuned to his emotional experience of reality in the world and capable of translating that experience into painterly and sculptural form. For the New Secessionists, each artist’s work would be unique, by virtue of the fact that every man’s experience of the world would be different than that of any other, even as the world itself would be the same for all. Implicit to this theorization of the artist was a reconceptualization of the artist’s relationship to reality: Artists were to seek out and give form to “the conscious emotion of the real, which [had] become a living entity.”¹⁰³ Reality was not an empirical structure or something to be encountered through sensory perception, or even an emotional experience;

rather, reality was a living thing unto itself. The liberal artistic subject of the New Secession and New Front was part of the world as an organism.

In early 1960s Europe, as Informalist abstraction was eclipsed by Neo-Dada, Pop, and *Nouveau réalisme*, champions of these movements consequently denigrated a second wave of figurative artwork referred to as “new figuration,” which emerged in the wake of neorealism both within and outside of Italy. For his part, however, Pistoletto did not view his work as aligned with the widely discredited, Florence-centered *Nuova Figurazione* (New Figuration) movement that emerged in Italy in 1962, nor did critics and curators align his work with these artists’ practices.¹⁰⁴ The Plexiglasses, however, nevertheless shared an interest in the rhetoric surrounding *Nuova Figurazione*, specifically with regard to the movement’s articulated efforts to move on from the frenetic, fragmented forms that had come with expressionism and the *Informale*. The response of *Nuova Figurazione* was to reconstitute figuration, not to question the movements that preceded them, but to move forward from what had come to be regarded as academic and passé practices.¹⁰⁵

For his introduction to an exhibition catalog published in conjunction with the international exhibition held in the summer of 1963 at La Strozzi in Florence, Florentine art critic and poet, Mario Bèrgomi defended the practices that had come under fire as a provincial, regressive, even treasonous revivalist enterprise.¹⁰⁶ Bèrgomi countered these critics’ reading of *Nuova Figurazione*, which included artists as varied as Enrico Baj, Roberto Crippa, and Antonio Recalcati, arguing instead that these artists could use the “remains” of figuration that constituted much of the *Informale*’s work, and “render the figure coherent unto itself.” As Bèrgomi put it:

I mean to say that in the work of the *Informale*, the figurative elements or fragments [...] indeed exist as detritus [...]. But one thing appears certain to me: That if New Figuration had to remain true to the dogma of allusiveness, resolving itself to a game of

contradictory appearances, it would be nothing more than a rather idle appendix of the poetic and repertoire of the Informale.

(Voglio dire che nel lavoro dell'Informale, gli elementi e frammenti figurativi [...] esistono davvero per l'appunto come detriti [...]. Ma una cosa mi pare certa: Se la Nuova Figurazione doveva restare fedele al dogma di allusività, si risolvendo a un gioco di apparati contraddittorie, non sarebbe più che un'appendice quasi indolente della poetica e repertorio dell'Informale.)¹⁰⁷

Rather than comparing *Nuova Figurazione* to the *Informale*, Bèrgomi encouraged others to examine the work on the basis of its own values. Indeed, in *Nuova Figurazione*, the artist should be able to “participate or adhere to reality,” “to express his own relationship with the world,” and, of most importance for this study, “have his own autonomy.”¹⁰⁸ While Pistoletto did not ascribe to *Nuova Figurazione*—indeed, his work abandons figuration in the conventional sense, altogether, not long after the emergence of the movement—he did, however, share its interests in “adhering” to reality (a phrase used often in his writings) and reclaiming agency, if not autonomy, in the world.

This connection between the artist and contemporary ideology associated with *Nuova Figurazione* in some ways clarifies the relationship between abstraction and figuration at this moment in postwar Italian art. As *Nuova Figurazione* did not amount to a disavowal of the *Informale*, Pistoletto’s interest in figuration did not amount to a disavowal of abstraction. The artist’s attitude toward postwar abstraction is best understood through analysis of the artist’s early writings in the late 1950s, which reveal an ambivalent view of modernist abstraction.¹⁰⁹

In 1957, Pistoletto, along with his friend, Milanese photographer Renato Rinaldi, joined a group of young artists, musicians, poets, and writers who had coalesced in Turin. Based in San Donato—first, on Via Bavena, then, after their first issue, on via Duchessa Jolanda, a few minutes’ walk from Pistoletto’s studio—the group named themselves the *Gruppo d’Arte “l’Arlecchino”* (The “Harlequin” Art Group)¹¹⁰—likely in a nod to the popular *zanni* or clown-

like servant character from the late Renaissance tradition of Italian popular theater, *commedia dell'arte*. The Group's interest in the Arlecchino registers a shift in the artistic and cultural reevaluation of the character who had come to be associated with Italian fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, when it appeared in the work of artists associated with Metaphysical painting and magical realism, such as Giorgio de Chirico, Antonio Donghi, and Gino Severini. A character of renewed interest in postwar Italy, the allegorical figure became associated with unbridled freedom of expression, the popular masses, and social revolution.¹¹¹ True to their namesake, then, the "Harlequin" Art Group dedicated themselves to fostering experimental, creative activity as part of the burgeoning, new generation of young artists coming of age within Italy in the late 1950s.¹¹²

Led by cultural critic Alberto Cesare Ambesi and poet Guido Raccone as managing and vice directors, respectively, the "Harlequin" Art Group's primary activity was the publication of their bimonthly arts and culture review, *Presenze* (Presences; nos. 1–11, May 1957–August 1960).¹¹³ Perhaps in a nod to the exhibition of the same title held at the 1956 Venice Biennale, *Presenze* directed its attention to forward-looking, contemporary Italian art and culture for modern Italy—that is, to cultural practices that would help realize an *aggiornata* or "up to date" Italy, fully caught up with modern Europe. In eleven issues published over three years, *Presenze* featured contemporary poems, stories, reviews, arts and culture news reports, essays, and artworks by various members and associates of the group. Artists associated with the group included, among others: the Turin-based Milanese artist Aldo Conti (1890–1988); Enrico Colombotto Rosso (Turin, 1925–2013), an artist later associated with *Nuova Figurazione*, best known for his distinctive, quasi-Surrealist style of figuration; Francesco Casorati Pavarolo (Turin, 1934–2013), son of Felice Casorati; and the well-known Turin-based sculptor Umberto

Mastroianni, then associated with the *Informale*, among others, who collectively constituted a group of artists that, although variegated in style, was unified by an interest in figuration as an important, vanguard strategy for contemporary culture.¹¹⁴ Indeed, in addition to providing a vehicle for the dissemination of the Group's own work, *Presenze* was also conceived as a platform to give voice to artists and thinkers whose work would lead to the renewal of art and thought as a matter of duty within the context of late 1950s Italy.¹¹⁵ As Ambesi and Raccone wrote in their editorial introduction to the first issue:

“Presences,” therefore, in affirmation of the requirements of renovation, is where the necessity of new dimensions of language and understanding will be outlined. It is—for the purposes of its publicists and editors—an act of duty, as contribution to that propaedeutic to the future whose character and to whose arrangement contemporary Art, Philosophy and Science, are going to direct themselves, by their own experiences.¹¹⁶

(“Presenze,” dunque, nell’affermazione di esigenze di rinnovamento, là ove si delineeranno necessità di nuove dimensioni di linguaggio e di comprensione è—nelle intenzioni dei promotori e compilatori—un atto di dovere, come contributo a quella propedeutica al domani il cui carattere precipuo e alla cui sistemazione l’Arte, la Filosofia e la Scienza contemporanea vanno instradandosi con l’esperienze [*sic*] loro proprie.)

A selection of Pistoletto's architectural and figurative paintings were published in various issues of *Presenze* in the form of photographic reproductions: *Sacerdote* (Priest), *Il Santo* (The Saint), and *Chiesa* (Church) in the second issue (July/August 1957); *Il Templo* (The Temple) in the double third and fourth issue (December 1957/January 1958); and *Uomo seduto* (Seated Man) in the double fifth and sixth issue (February–September 1958). *Presenze* also published two short essays written by the artist on issues in contemporary art. Pistoletto's then wife, Marzia Calleri, also contributed texts to the review for the duration of their activity with the group, from its inception in May of 1957 through its second penultimate issue in September of 1958.¹¹⁷

In an essay on abstraction published in *Presenze* in the winter of 1957, Pistoletto addressed popular criticism of Modernist abstraction as a formalist and therefore vacuous

enterprise. Offering a counterview to this opinion, Pistoletto urged readers to evaluate abstraction by different criteria, that is, to respect the “abstract experience” it offered. For Pistoletto, this experience was “born of an intellectual and spiritual opening, destined to broaden the rational capacities of man” (*nata da un’apertura intellettuale e spirituale destinata a dilatare le capacità razionali dell’umanità*).¹¹⁸ Pistoletto’s account of abstraction continued a narrative begun in an untitled essay published earlier that year, in which the artist situated abstraction as part of Modernism’s logical progression rather than devolution. In that essay, however, Pistoletto nevertheless expressed some skepticism with regard to abstraction, cautioning artists of the young Italian avant-garde against fashioning themselves in the existing terms of modernist abstraction. He used the essay to mount a kind of call of duty, echoing the “Harlequin” Art Group’s original directive, urging young Italian artists to innovate new creative means for themselves—means that might be better-suited to the new conditions of the contemporary world and the changing condition of man therein. As Pistoletto wrote:

Abstractionist ideology, modern art’s latest proposition, cannot repeat itself without degenerating into rhetoric, given that the creative impulse in which it originated has died down. The social function of art must ensure that the new artist seeks out, in the experiences of every modern trend and abstract symbolism, which are built on rationality and simplicity, the means to establish communications of a human reality that is of an increasingly interior and spiritual nature, and to realize expressions of increasingly subtle and as yet undisclosed feelings.

(L’ideologia astrattista, ultima deduzione dell’arte moderna, non può essere ripetuta per se stessa senza degenerare in retorica, essendo cessato l’impulso creativo che l’ha originata. La funzione sociale dell’arte deve far sì che il nuovo artista cerchi nelle esperienze di ogni tendenza moderna e nella simbologia astratta, costruita sulla razionalità e l’essenzialità, i mezzi per giungere a comunicazioni di realtà umana dal carattere sempre più interiore spirituale, a espressioni di sentimenti sempre più sottili non ancora rivelati.)¹¹⁹

Here, Pistoletto argues against the extension of modernist abstraction in the late 1950s as an already exhausted pursuit within contemporary European and American art. Compounding this

problem was abstraction's fundamental incompatibility to navigate the complex social and existential terrain newly confronting the contemporary artist. The problem with abstraction was not abstraction itself, then, but the reductive, hermetic character of its logic.

That Pistoletto tied his disavowal of contemporary modernist abstraction to a devolution into rhetoric is not incidental. Language was already a primary site of cultural debate and had become the central platform for new creative activity in the experimental poetry and writings of the *neoavanguardia*, as the Italian literary neo-avant-garde was known. Writers and poets such as Umberto Eco, often regarded rhetoric with disdain and criticized it as a meaningless pursuit associated with fascism and totalitarian propaganda. The persuasive, expressive function of the linguistic art form depends upon the speaker's ability to leverage, manipulate, and even exploit the words and figures of speech at his disposal. In light of these remarks, we might regard Pistoletto's "breakdown" of figuration a few years later as a means to conceptualize a new form of figuration that would be divested of the negative political connotations associated with figurative expression—both linguistic and visual. To do so would require shifting the figure from the rhetorical and representational—that is, from the symbolic—to a different order.

¹ In advance of his premiere solo exhibition in October 1964, Pistoletto's work was previously exhibited at Sperone's gallery in a four-artist group show with Mimmo Rotella, Aldo Mondino, and Roy Lichtenstein, held in May 1964 as the inaugural exhibition of the gallery. In the fall of 1964, Sperone's gallery was still under its original name: *Gian Enzo Sperone—Arte moderna* (Gian Enzo Sperone—Modern Art). It was shortened to *Gian Enzo Sperone* in April 1965 and a second and final time in June 1967 to *Galleria Sperone*, as it is best known. For clarity, I will refer to it as such throughout this dissertation. For this timeline, see Marina Cristina Mundici, "Torino, 1963–1968," trans. Paolo Delmastro, in *Gian Enzo Sperone: Torino, Roma, New York. 35 Anni di mostre tra Europa e America*, ed. Anna Minola, vol. 1, 1964–1972 (Turin: hopefulmonster [sic], 2000), 19.

² Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: 1943–1988* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003), 212–16.

³ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 213–14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 250–53.

⁷ Incited by protracted conflicts between Italy’s metalworkers’ trade unions and management at Turin’s Fiat, Michelin, and Lancia factories regarding poor work conditions and contract negotiations, the Piazza Statuto riots in 1962 were the largest and most violent in city and national history, involving six to seven thousand workers. The riots are associated with the city’s northern factories—those adjacent to Pistoletto’s studio at the time—where Fiat’s ironworking center was located. They are frequently cited by scholars as a key early moment in the Italian labor or “workerist” movement, *operaismo*, and precursor to the larger riots that followed later in the decade, during Italy’s “hot autumn” in the fall of 1969. For discussion of the riots and Turin’s central position within the 1962 national trade union conflicts, see Stefano Musso, *Storia del lavoro in Italia: dall’Unità a oggi* (Venice: Marsilio Editore, 2002), 225–26; Marco Scavino, “Sviluppo economico e culture del conflitto. Grande industria e sindacati negli anni del boom economico,” in *La città e lo sviluppo: Crescita e disordine a Torino 1945–1970*, ed. Fabio Levi and Bruno Maida (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002), 474–78; and Ginsborg, 250–53.

⁸ On riots and police conflicts in Turin, see Ginsborg, 251.

⁹ See Michael Sonnabend, Tommaso Trini, and Alain Jouffroy, *Pistoletto* (Paris: Galerie Sonnabend, 1964). Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held March 4–, 1964. Precise closing date unknown; solo exhibitions at Sonnabend’s gallery typically lasted two weeks.

¹⁰ Unlike other images of contemporary art and artists published by *Harper’s* in the Sixties—Francesco Scavullo’s portraits of Donald Judd from 1966, previously discussed by James Meyer, are perhaps the most well-known of these—Pistoletto’s mirror paintings were not the main subjects of either the photographs or the article they accompanied. *Harper’s* use of the mirror paintings as props highlights the commercial interest the series generated, and serves as an example of some of the problems (for Pistoletto) of their reception. See “International [Spring] Collections,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (March/April 1964): 156–74. For Hiro’s photographs, see p. 158, 162, 163, and 174. Also see James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 24–29.

¹¹ Of the forty-three Italian artists included in the 1964 Carnegie International, only Giorgio Azzaroni (b. 1939), Gaetano Pompa (b. 1933), and Mario Schifano (b. 1933) were younger than Pistoletto. See *The 1964 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, 1964). Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held October 30, 1964–January 10, 1965.

¹² Of the many accounts of postwar American Modernism and Cold War politics, see especially Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and early essays on the topic by Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum* 12, no. 10 (June 1974): 39–41, and Max Kozloff, “American Painting during the Cold War,” *Artforum* 11, no. 9 (May 1973): 43–54.

¹³ Also see *Dessins Pop* (Paris: Galerie Sonnabend, 1963) [no catalog] and *Beyond Realism*, ed. Michael Kirby (New York: Pace Gallery, 1965). Catalog published in association with the exhibition of the same title, held May 4–29, 1965. Pistoletto was the only Italian artist in these exhibitions of otherwise exclusively American artists. *Dessins Pop* was held at the Sonnabend December 11–, 1963. Precise closing date unknown.

¹⁴ The primary translations of *I plexiglass* used in English publications to date are “Plexiglas” and “Plexiglass”; the latter follows the existing unattributed translation published in the catalog of Pistoletto’s 1976 retrospective held at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice. Both translations, however, are problematic. “Plexiglas” substitutes the brand name for the generic material one referenced by the original title. Both translations drop the definite article included in the original Italian, which denotes either a plural number of discrete works (as opposed to the singular or unspecific quantity implied by the translations) or a set of different types of plexiglass. (Plural forms of materials, in Italian, are commonly formed in this manner; *i metalli* or “metals,” for example, might refer to a set that included lead, bronze, nickel, etc. As the same type of plexiglass was used throughout the series, this meaning does not apply here.) Pistoletto, however, uses one kind of plexiglass (with the exception of the red plexiglass disk). “Plexiglasses,” as I will refer to the works throughout this dissertation, offers the closest translation, as it preserves the generic form of the material and clarifies the plurality of the works in number. “Plexiglass Works” or “The Plexiglasses” are other options, although they are more cumbersome than the original.

¹⁵ See Pistoletto, “Michelangelo Pistoletto,” previously unpublished interview by Celant (May 1971), in *Michelangelo Pistoletto*, ed. Celant and Ida Gianelli (Florence: Electa Editrice, 1984), 41.

¹⁶ Pistoletto, *I plexiglass* (Turin: September 10, 1964), in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: I plexiglass* (Turin: Gian Enzo Sperone—Arte Moderna, 1964), n.p. Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held October 4–, 1964. Precise closing date unknown; solo exhibitions at the Galleria Sperone typically lasted three weeks. All translations of Pistoletto’s texts are mine unless otherwise noted. For my translation and a reproduction of the original document as published in the catalog, see Appendices A.1 and A.2. Subsequent references to the text will be cited parenthetically with the abbreviated title, *MPIP*.

¹⁷ These definitions draw on Erich Auerbach’s definition of the figural, to be discussed later in this introduction. See Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. William R. Trask, Princeton Classics (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University

Press, 2003). Originally published in German as *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: Francke, 1946). Chap. 8, “Farinata and Cavalcante,” 174–202, is particularly useful in clarifying Auerbach’s distinction between the figurative and figural.

¹⁸ While Pistoletto did make a number of individual mirror paintings that featured objects instead of figures, these works were neither conceptualized nor produced as a unified set. They were also always exhibited with more numerous figurative examples, which had and continue to dominate presentations of the mirror paintings to date.

¹⁹ See Angelo Dragone, “‘Realtà’ di Pistoletto,” *Stampa Sera*, October 21–22, 1964. Translation by the author.

²⁰ The plexiglass surfaces, while glossy, did not include representations of the body, nor did they register the viewer’s own reflection back to him. When standing in front of the Plexiglasses, the viewer can see a faint trace of his reflection from certain angles, but it is far from visually prominent.

²¹ See Luigi Carluccio, *Pistoletto* (Turin: Galleria Galatea, 1960). Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held March 30–April 15, 1960. A champion of neo-naturalism and figurative painting in the postwar period, Carluccio undoubtedly encouraged Pistoletto’s continued work in figurative painting. He introduced Tazzoli to Pistoletto’s work after serving on the jury of the 1958 *Premio San Fedele*, where Pistoletto received first prize. See Elkann, 66.

²² See Carluccio, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Opere recenti* (Turin: Galleria Galatea, 1963). Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held April 27–May 14, 1963.

²³ Rather than assigning the emergence of Pistoletto’s work to either date exclusively, as is often done, I will refer to 1956 as the beginning of Pistoletto’s practice and 1958 as the beginning of his career throughout this dissertation. The precise date of Pistoletto’s departure from his father’s studio is unclear.

²⁴ According to the artist, Pistoletto enrolled in Testa’s program after his mother encouraged him to pursue a career in Turin’s expanding advertising industry rather than continuing to work in restoration with his father, which he had done since a failed effort to study surveying (at the *Istituto Tecnico San Massimo*) in the late 1940s. See Elkann, 23, 59–60.

²⁵ See Elkann, 59–60.

²⁶ See Luigi Carluccio, *Francis Bacon* (Turin: Galleria Notizie, 1958); *Selezione I* (Turin: Galleria Galatea, 1960), with Balthus, Giacometti, Gorky, Pollock, Tobey, and Vieira da Silva; *Selezione 2* (Turin: Galleria Galatea, 1960–61), with Carrà, Casorati, De Chirico, De Pisis, Ernst, Giacometti, Gorky, Kandinsky, Klee, Klimt, Licini, Moore, Morandi, Pollock, Savinio, Sutherland, Tobey, and Vieira da Silva; and *Selezione 4* (Turin: Galleria Galatea, 1962), with Brancusi, Casorati, Dali, De Chirico, De Pisis, Ensor, Feininger, Giacometti, Klimt, Morandi, Richier, Sironi, Sutherland, Schlemmer, and Tanguy.

²⁷ Andreina Griseri compared the figure in these drawings to a *spolvero* (literally, “undusted”), a figure produced through the antiquated practice of transferring an image by dusting pulverized pigment, chalk, or charcoal over a perforated stencil made from a traced drawing of the original. See Griseri, “Pistoletto Olivero Michelangelo,” in *Disegni e parole*, ed. Luigi Carluccio, Ezio Gribaudo, and Edoardo Sanguineti (Turin: Edizioni d’arte fratelli rosso, 1963), n.p.

²⁸ Montella’s *Compito in classe* was published September 16, 1962.

²⁹ Gilman and Suzanne Penn both call attention to the complexity of Pistoletto’s process in their readings of the work. See Gilman, “Pistoletto’s Staged Subjects,” 54, 58; and Penn, “‘The Complicity of the Materials’ in Pistoletto’s Paintings and Mirror Paintings,” in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: From One to Many, 1956–1974*, ed. Carlos Basualdo (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, in association with the PMA, 2010), 147–60. Catalog published in association with the exhibition of the same title, held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, November 2, 2010–January 11, 2011. Traveled to the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo (MAXXI), Rome, as *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Da uno a molti*, March 4–August 15, 2011. Subsequent references to this catalog will use the shortened form, *From One to Many*.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See *Peinture et Société: Naissance et destruction d’un espace plastique. De la Renaissance au Cubisme* (Painting and Society: Birth and Destruction of a Plastic Space, Paris, 1951). It was first translated into Italian by the Turinese publishing house Einaudi in 1957. See Francastel, *Lo spazio figurativo del Rinascimento al Cubismo*, 3rd ed., Saggi 219 (Turin, IT: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1957), especially section III, “Verso un nuovo spazio,” 155–94.

³² For example, while the Plexiglasses were included in the 2010 PMA retrospective, they go undiscussed in the large catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition. Lengthy catalog essays were dedicated to the the early paintings (Angela Vettese), the mirror paintings (Penn), the Minus Objects (Jean-François Chevrier, Gabriele Guercio), and Pistoletto’s performance troupe of the late 1960s, *Lo Zoo* (The Zoo; Gilman). As this exhibition presented itself as the most comprehensive examination of Pistoletto’s practice from this period to date, the editorial omission of the Plexiglasses in the catalog provides a striking example of the general disinterest in the series within scholarship on Pistoletto. The catalog’s primary focus on the mirror paintings and Minus Objects reinforce the dominant historical narrative of the artist’s practice, in which the Plexiglasses are of little to no consequence.

³³ Celant, “Arte povera: Appunti per una guerriglia,” *Flash Art*, no. 5 (November/December, 1967): 3.

³⁴ See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Memory Lessons and History Tableaux: James Coleman’s Archaeology of Spectacle,” in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, October Books, (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2000), 141–78; Nagel and Wood, “Interventions: Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism”; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*; Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*; Robert Slifkin, *Out of Time: Philip Guston and the*

Refiguration of Postwar American Art (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, with The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., 2013); and Gilman, “Figuring Boetti,” in *Alighiero Boetti: Game Plan*, ed. Lynne Cooke, Mark Godfrey and Christian Rattemeyer (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 133–42.

³⁵ This is not to say that the association between figuration, fascism, and Soviet Communism in postwar Italy, however, should be understood as a statement of fact or agreement with art historical readings—many since revised—which placed figuration within the purview of cultures under totalitarian regimes. (Benjamin Buchloh, for example, revised his own critique of neo-expressionist painting from the mid-1980s in the mid-1990s.) Scholarship on Italian culture under fascism has long established the relatively permissive tastes of Mussolini’s regime, which allowed for abstractionist and figurative practices alike, in comparison to the cultural policy of the Third Reich. Instead, the politics of postwar Italian art should be understood as the result of often conflicting declarations offered by politicians, artists, artist groups, art critics, and other cultural figures of what postwar Italian art should be. Additionally, there were some exceptions to this model. Some artist groups associated with the political left embraced abstraction alongside the figurative practices for which they were primarily known. *Gruppo Forma I* (Group Form I) famously declared that Marxism and “form”—that is, formalist abstraction—were not mutually exclusive, countering Togliatti’s declaration of a strictly straightforward, figurative art for the PCI, and the primarily figurative *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti* (New Front of the Arts; est. 1946) also included members who worked in abstraction. See Buchloh, “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting,” *October* 16, *Art World Follies* (Spring 1981): 39–40, and Adrian Duran, *Painting, Politics, and the New Front of Cold War Italy* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), especially chap. 5, “The Communist Politics of Abstraction and the Onset of the Cold War,” 99–118.

³⁶ See Gilman, “Pistoletto’s Staged Subjects,” *October* 124 (Spring 2008): 53–74. Also see the first chapter of the same title in her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, “Arte Povera’s Theater: Artifice and Anti-Modernism in Italian Art of the 1960s” (Columbia University, 2006), 36–92.

³⁷ Gilman, “Pistoletto’s Staged Subjects,” 70. For Gilman, this quality serves to alert the viewer to a conscious engagement in an interpersonal, visual encounter with Pistoletto’s figures—an encounter she argues places the mirror paintings firmly within the purview of the theatrical.

³⁸ This connection of imagistic discourse to sensory experience was proposed by Jean-François Lyotard. Drawing upon the embodied, sensory subject in phenomenology, Lyotard challenged the primacy, autonomous characterization of language in structuralist conceptions of discourse. Lyotard contended that notwithstanding the semiotic function of images, we nevertheless *see* them as opposed to reading them—a point that distinguished Lyotard from other post-structuralists, primarily Roland Barthes. Therefore, Lyotard argued, discourse cannot exist in the absence of the perceptual senses, especially vision. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011), especially “The Bias of the Figural,” 3–19; “Dialectics, Index, Form,” 23–50; and “The Line and the Letter,” 205–32. Originally published in French as *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971).

³⁹ Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. and annot. Roy Harris, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, with Albert Riedlinger (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Trade, 1986), 68–69; Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983): 13.

⁴⁰ Saussure, 68.

⁴¹ Jacques Lacan, “The dream of Irma’s injection (conclusion),” in *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1991), 168.

⁴² Lacan, 168.

⁴³ Bryson, 13.

⁴⁴ Nagel and Wood first discussed this term in a co-authored article published in 2005. They have since expanded upon it with their respective and collaborative publications. See Nagel and Wood, “Interventions: Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism,” *Art Bulletin* 87, no. 3 (September 2005): 403–15; Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008); and Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Zone Books, distributed by MIT Press, 2010), especially chap. 1, “Plural Temporality of the Work of Art,” 7–20, and chap. 3 “What Is Substitution?” 29–34.

⁴⁵ See Nagel and Wood, “Interventions,” 409.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 406; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 29–34.

⁴⁷ Nagel and Wood, “Interventions,” 408–09.

⁴⁸ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 195–96.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵⁰ See Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* 1, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York, 2003). Originally published in French as *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, ed. Harry Jancovici (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1984).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² See Slifkin, 6.

⁵³ See Slifkin’s introduction, “Figuration Circa 1970,” 1–28.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵ Gilman, “Figuring Boetti,” 133. Also see the chap. 3 of Gilman’s unpublished dissertation, “Pascali’s Consumer Creatures,” 158–219.

⁵⁶ Gilman, “Figuring Boetti,” 134.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 135–38.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁰ Many texts have discussed the debates between abstraction and figuration in postwar Italy and the polarizing effect they had on what was initially a more pluralist artistic field. For a key primary text, see Tristan Sauvage [Arturo Schwarz], *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra (1945–1957)*, Collana di Storia e Cultura XI (Milan: Schwarz Editore, 1957), especially part II, “Dalla figurazione all’astrazione, e viceversa,” 49–90. Key secondary sources include Paola Barocchi, “Tra realismo e astrattismo: 1943–48,” in *Storia moderna dell’arte in Italia: Manifesti polemiche documenti*, ed. Paola Barocchi, vol. 3:2, *Tra Realismo ed anni novanta, 1945–1990* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1990), 3–7; Mario De Micheli, “Realism and the Postwar Debate,” in *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900–1988*, ed. Emily Braun, 187–92 (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1989); Nancy Jachec, “The Abstraction-Realism Debate and its background, 1938–1948,” chap. 1 in *Politics and Painting at the Venice Biennale, 1948–1964: Italy and the Idea of Europe*, Critical Perspectives in Art History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 18–35; and Marcia E. Vetrocq, “Painting and Beyond: Recovery and Regeneration, 1943–1952,” in *The Italian Metamorphosis: 1943–1968*, ed. Celant (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; Rome: Progetti Museali Editore and ENEL, 1994), 20–31.

⁶¹ John Gatt-Rutter, “Neo-Realism,” in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 535.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 535.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁶⁵ In his review of the important *Prima mostra nazionale d’arte contemporanea* (First National Exhibition of Contemporary Art) in Bologna in the fall of 1948 (written under the pseudonym “Rogerigo Di Castiglia”), for example, as Adrian Duran has discussed, Togliatti ridiculed abstraction as mere “scribblings.” See Rogerigo Di Castiglia, “Segnalazioni,” *Rinascità: Rassegna di politica e cultura italiana* 5, no. 11 (November 1948): 424. Reprinted in Barocchi, 77. Also see PCI Leadership (under Togliatti), *Per la salvezza della cultura italiana* (March 1, 1948) (Rome: *VII Congresso del Partito Comunista Italiano—Documenti politici del Comitato Centrale, della direzione, della segreteria*, July 6–7, 1949). Reprinted in Nicoletta Misler, *La via italiana al realismo* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1973), 133–35. See Duran, “Abstract Expressionism’s Italian Reception: Questions of Influence,” 138–151 in *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, ed. Joan Marter (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007): 145–46. Also see Duran, “The Communist Politics of Abstraction and the Onset of the Cold War,” in *Painting, Politics, and the New Front*, 99–118.

⁶⁶ This is not to say that the Novecento was uniformly fascist, or that the tendency toward neoclassicism in the interwar period should be understood as a wholesale investment in the Regime. Emily Braun, for example, has attributed the Novecento's tendency toward classical tropes in the early *ventennio* as a reaction to the relative instability of the historical avant-gardes and revolutionary movements that preceded it and to the Regime's rise to power. See Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 108.

⁶⁷ "Modern classicism" is Braun's astute term for the movement's updated classicism, which blended plastic geometry and architectonic forms with classical content. For a review of the characteristics and development of the movement, see Braun, "Sironi and the Novecento," chap. 5 in *Mario Sironi*, 90–112, especially 95–105. The literature on the history of Italian realism is abundant. Given this study's interest in art and politics, Italian historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat's work on *Corrente* provided a particularly useful account of the incarnations and shifting politics of realism from the interwar to postwar period. See Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "The Politics of Realism: *Corrente di Vita Giovanile* and the Youth Culture of the 1930s," *Stanford Italian Review* 8, no. 1–2 (1990): 139–64. On the exhaustion of Realism by the mid-1950s, see 162–63.

⁶⁸ On the *Informale* and Europeanism, see Nancy Jachec, "The 1958 Biennale: The collapse of the *Ente* and the rise of gesture painting as the "European Idea'," chap. 4 in *Politics and Painting at the Biennale, 1948–1964: Italy and the Idea of Europe*, 86–105. Also see Duran, "Abstract Expressionism's Italian Reception: Questions of Influence," 138–51.

⁶⁹ Vetrocq, 20–22. For *Forma*'s manifesto, see Carla Accardi, et al., *Manifesto* (Rome: March 15, 1947). Reprinted in *Pittura Italiana Del Dopoguerra (1945–1957)*, ed. Tristan Sauvage, Collana di Storia e Cultura XI, 248–49. Milan: Schwarz Editore, 1957.

⁷⁰ Primary among these movements were: *Origine* (1950–51), constituted by Mario Ballocco, Alberto Burri, Giuseppe Capogrossi, and Ettore Colla; *Forma I* (Rome, 1947–52), whose major members included Carla Accardi, Piero Dorazio, and Pietro Consagra; the *Gruppo MAC* (*Movimento arte concreta* or "Concrete Art Movement," based in Milan, with later outposts in Rome, Turin, and Naples, and other Italian cities, 1947–58), founded by Gianni Monnet, Atanasio Soldati, the former Futurist Bruno Munari, and the critic Gillo Dorfles. Later members included Enrico Prampolini, Lucio Fontana, and Dorazio. The late 1950s included the short-lived but impactful movement *Azimuth* (Milan, 1959–60), led by Piero Manzoni, Enrico Castellani, and Agostino Bonalumi; and *Continuità* (Rome, 1961), which included designer and architect Ettore Sottsass, Jr., Fontana, Dorazio, and Accardi.

⁷¹ See Duran, "Abstract Expressionism's Italian Reception: Questions of Influence," 150.

⁷² See Achille Bonito Oliva, "The Italian Trans-Avantgarde," *Flash Art International*, no. 92–93 (October/November 1979) 17–20.

⁷³ With regard to Casorati, this reading is aligned with Francesco Poli's assessment of postwar figurative art in Turin, in which Casorati is named the representative of Italy's "old" guard of artistic masters. See the first three sections of Francesco Poli, "Le arti figurative," in *Storia di Torino*, ed. Nicola Tranfaglia, vol. 9, *Gli anni della Repubblica*, part II, *Cultura e religione del*

Novecento (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1999), 481–531. The *Gruppo di Sei* (alt. *Gruppo di Sei di Torino*; Group of Six) included Casorati, Gigi Chessa, Francesco Menzio, Ernesto Paulucci, Carlo Levi, Nicola Galante, and British artist Jessie Boswell. Casorati, Chessa, and Menzio all had sons who were young artists and contemporaries of Pistoletto's in artistic context of 1950s and 1960s Turin. Especially noteworthy is Paolo Menzio, with whom Pistoletto collaborated on one of ten experimental films, *Frankenstein prossimamente* (Frankenstein: Coming Soon), now lost, produced for Pistoletto's 1968 solo exhibition at the Galleria l'Attico.

⁷⁴ Arturo Schwarz's 1957 book, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra (1945–1957)*, authored under the pseudonym "Tristan Sauvage", remains a key survey text on postwar Italian art, but is also a primary text that sheds light on postwar perspectives of early twentieth-century and interwar Italian art. That Schwarz devoted a large portion of his discussion of abstraction and concrete art in Turin from 1920 through the 1950s to Casorati and the scuola casoratiana, indicates the historical importance Casorati had already accrued for Italian art history of the 20th century before his death in 1964. See Sauvage, "Astrattisti e concretisti a Torino," in *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra (1945–1957)*, 123–32, especially 123–28.

⁷⁵ For a survey of Casorati's work from this period, see Francesco Poli with Giorgina Bertolini, eds., *Felice Casorati: Dagli anni venti agli anni quaranta* (Milan: Electa, 1996).

⁷⁶ Gobetti, for one, saw in Casorati's work a "sense of mystery like nothingness, like fearsome absence of a vital animating core [...]. [The human figures] veil things in their nakedness, keeping therein a tormenting isolation." Fernando Mazzocca, "Arti e vita: Miti e protagonisti del Novecento," in *Novecento: Arte e vita in Italia tra le due guerre*, ed. Fernando Mazzocca (Milan: Silvana Editore, 2013), 37. Mazzocca leaves out Levi, focusing instead on Gobetti; this point regarding the range and nature of Casorati's favorable primary reception is his. See Piero Gobetti, "Un artista moderno: Felice Casorati," in *L'Ordine Nuovo* (June 19, 1921), op cit. Mazzocca, "Arti e vita," 37.

⁷⁷ Guido Armellini, *Le immagini del fascismo nelle arti figurative* (Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, 1980), 130.

⁷⁸ These descriptions belong specifically to Casorati's work of the 1920s. In her thorough study of the Novecento, Rossana Bossaglia describes the movement as a kind of tepid purism and modern classicism—qualities which are exemplified by Casorati's 1920s works. See Bossaglia, *Il Novecento Italiano* (Milan: Edizione Charta, 1995), 18.

⁷⁹ Silvia Regonelli discusses works of the Novecento in relation to the fascist "cult of the body," referencing Casorati's paintings of female nudes as exemplary of the movements classicist female imagery. See Regonelli, "Giovinezza, Giovinezza...Il culto del corpo e l'ideologia dello sport," in *Novecento*, ed. Mazzocca, 294.

⁸⁰ The Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM) re-opened in a new location in 1959 after nearly two decades of inoperation, amidst the opening of the galleries Notizie, established by Luciano Pistoletto in 1957, Narciso (est. 1960, Marzio Pinottini), Il Punto, opened by Bartolomeo Pastori in December, 1962, and Il Prisma (est. 1957), in nearby Cuneo, all of which exhibited work by international artists from the European, South American, and American avant-

gardes. In 1960, these galleries were joined by the International Center of Aesthetic Research, a cultural institute and exhibition space founded by Michel Tapié and Italian architect Luigi Moretti; Tapié and Moretti's exhibitions and seminars attracted international members of French *Art informel*, the Italian *Informale*, and Gutai, leading to an influx of Italian and European artists to the city and the surrounding area.

⁸¹ See Angelo Dragone et al., *Arte nuova: Esposizione internazionale di pittura e scultura. Ikebana di Sofu Teshigahara* (Turin: Circolo degli artisti, 1959). Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held May 5–June 15, 1959.

⁸² It is worth noting that Pistoletto, who would later write about Pinot-Gallizio's importance for Italian art upon the artist's death, was not only well aware of but also very interested in the avant-garde circle in Alba as early as 1956, when the artist says he participated in a collective performance work at Pinot-Gallizio's studio. This was quite early in Pistoletto's career and preceded Pinot-Gallizio's exhibitions held at the Galleria Notizie in the early 1960s, when he became better known in Turin. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find documentation of this event or of Pistoletto's activity at the Experimental Laboratory in my research to date. Pistoletto, in response to the author, "Session Two: Pistoletto and Arte Povera," *Three Conversations with Michelangelo Pistoletto, Germano Celant, and Carlos Basualdo* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, October 31, 2010). Program associated with the exhibition of the same title.

⁸³ See Keala Jewell, *The Art of Enigma: The de Chirico Brothers and the Politics of Modernism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

⁸⁴ Duran, *Painting, Politics, and the New Front*, 103.

⁸⁵ Bette L. Talvacchia, "Politics Considered as a Category of Culture: The Anti-Fascist *Corrente* Group," *Art History* 8, no. 3 (September 1985): 337, 340. Also see Duran, "Corrente, Italian Art under Fascism and the Resistance," in *Painting, Politics, and the New Front*, 14–15.

⁸⁶ Talvacchia, 338–39; Duran, *Painting, Politics, and the New Front*, 11–15.

⁸⁷ Talvacchia, 350–51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁸⁹ For a comparison of Italian fascist cultural policy with that of the Third Reich, with specific attention to *Corrente*, see Duran, "Corrente, Italian Art under Fascism, and the Resistance," chap. 1 in *Painting, Politics, and the New Front*, 12–13, 15. On fascist cultural policy and modernism, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Toward a Fascist Culture," chap. 1 in *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 17–45; as accommodating, Roger Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, Oxford Readers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60–61; on the "ultra-modern," Talvacchia, 342.

⁹⁰ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 22–25.

⁹¹ Talvacchia, 348.

⁹² Celant, “Reasons for a Metamorphosis,” in *The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943–1968*, ed. Celant (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; Rome: ENEL and Progetti Museali Editore, 1994), xix.

⁹³ Fanette Roche-Pézarid, “La situation des arts plastiques en Italie et la veille de la seconde guerre mondiale,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 30, no. 3 (July–September 1983) 472.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 471–72.

⁹⁵ Vetrocq, 21, 23.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* See Ennio Morlotti and Emilio Vedova, *Oltre Guernica*, Milan, February, 1946. First published in *Numero 2*, no. 2 (March, 1946). Signed by Ajmone, Rinaldo Bergolli, Egidio Bonfante, Gianni Dova, Ennio Morlotti, Giovanni Paganin, Cesare Peverelli, Vittorio Tavernari, Gianni Testori, and Emilio Vedova. Reprinted in *Sauvage*, 232–33.

⁹⁷ See Renato Birolli, *Manifesto di Fondazione della “Nuova Secessione Artistica Italiana”*, Venice, October 1, 1946. Signed by Birolli, Bruno Cassinari, Renato Guttuso, Carlo Levi, Lencillo Leonardi, Ennio Morlotti, Armando Pizzinato, Giuseppe Santomaso, Giulio Turcato, Emilio Vedova, and Alberto Viani. Reprinted in *Sauvage*, 234.

Morlotti and Vedova, n.p.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, n.p. Duran emphasizes this point in his discussion of the manifesto, as well. See Duran, *Painting, Politics, and the New Front*, 49.

⁹⁹ Morlotti and Vedova, n.p.

¹⁰⁰ Many artists associated with *Corrente*—Morlotti in Milan, Vedova in Venice, and Guttuso, in Rome—became key members of these groups, alongside other artists, including Giulio Turcato in Venice and Armando Pizzinato in Rome.

¹⁰¹ Birolli, *Manifesto di Fondazione della “Nuova Secessione Artistica Italiana”*, in *Sauvage*, 234.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Duran, *Painting, Politics, and the New Front*, 68. Also see Luciano Caramel, “La premessa e l’eredità di Corrente, i ‘realismi’ a Milano e Roma, il Fronte Nuovo delle Arti,” in *Arte in Italia, 1945–1960*, ed. L. Caramel (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1994), 15–18; and Vetrocq, 22.

¹⁰⁴ This date corresponds to Bèrgomi’s exhibition of work by Antonio Bueno, Silvio Loffredo, and Alberto Moretti, after which the movement was named. See Bèrgomi, *Nuova Figurazione* (Florence: La Strozziina, 1962).

¹⁰⁵ On the relationship between *Nuova Figurazione* and the *Informale*, see Bèrgomi, “La nuova figurazione,” introduction to *La nuova figurazione: Mostra internazionale di pittura sotto gli auspici del Comune di Firenze* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1963), n.p.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ These writings have never been discussed in art historical scholarship. Their only mention is in the biographical chronology in the 2010 PMA catalog by Pistoletto’s chief archivist, Marco Farano, and on the complete list of the artist’s writings, posted on his website: http://www.pistoletto.it/it/scritti_pistoletto_elenco.htm. Previously believed lost, during my research I found them in their entirety in the Biblioteca Musicale Andrea della Corte in Turin; they are now available through Pistoletto’s archive. See Marco Farano, “Chronology of Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1956–74,” in *From One to Many*, 352.

¹¹⁰ This name appears in the first two issues of the group’s arts review, after which it was replaced by *Presenze: Bimestrale d’arte e cultura* (Participants: Bimonthly Review of Art and Culture). Whether the group dropped the name entirely from usage is unclear.

¹¹¹ Parallel with the Group’s activity, Arlecchino was emerging as a popular topic within international scholarship on commedia dell’arte. See, for example, Fausto Nicolini’s *Vita di Arlecchino* (Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1958) and Allardyce Nicoll’s *The World of Harlequin: A Critical Study of the Commedia dell’Arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). Michele Bottini, “You Must Have Heard of Harlequin...,” trans. Samuel Angus McGehee and Michael J. Grady, in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell’Arte*, ed. Judith Chaffee and Olly Crick (New York: Routledge, 2015), 56.

¹¹² See Alberto Cesare Ambesi and Guido Raccone, untitled editorial statement, *Presenze* 1, no. 1 (May/June 1957): 1.

¹¹³ Work by Pistoletto and/or Calleri was included in the first four of the review’s six publications. Whether they chose not to contribute to the last two issues, had departed the group, or were excluded is unclear; given the pair’s consistent participation in the preceding issues, however, changes in the review’s leadership and editorial direction after the fourth issue suggests Pistoletto and Calleri likely departed from the group at some point between September and October of 1958.

¹¹⁴ Although Mastroianni belonged to an older generation than Pistoletto, his inclusion in *Presenze* is indicative of his little-known role as a mentor to young members of the avant-garde developing in Turin in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Of particular interest to this study is his relationship to Franco Giachino-Nichot, a young Turinese artist who worked as a studio assistant to Mastroianni in the late 1950s, with whom Pistoletto later collaborated on the experimental film, *Vernissage* (Opening, 1968). Franco Giachino-Nichot, interview with the author, November 3, 2014.

One-off artworks by international artists from Germany, Hungary, and the U.S. also appeared in *Presenze* in its later issues, though the collaboration of Galleria la Bussola. This issue is of particular interest for further research as the Turin-based office of the U.S. Information Services participated as a collaborator on the issue.

¹¹⁵ In Italian, “presenze” may also refer to participants or attendees (i.e. people present at an event); the implication is that the publication’s contributors both make and review creative work.

¹¹⁶ Ambesi and Raccone, 1.

¹¹⁷ Gruppo d’arte “l’arlecchino”, *Presenze: Foglio del gruppo d’arte “l’arlecchino”* 1, nos. 1–2 (May/June–July/August 1957); *Presenze: Bimestrale d’arte e cultura* 1, no. 3–4 (December 1957/January 1958); 2, no. 5–6 (February–September 1958) and no. 7–10 (October 1958–May 1959); 3, no. 11 (July/August 1960). Pistoletto’s essays [an untitled text and “Astrattismo” (Abstraction)] were published in no. 2 (July/August 1957) and no. 3–4 (December 1957/January 1958), respectively. Images of his paintings were published in nos. 2, 3–4, and 5–6 (February–September 1958). Calleri’s texts include: an untitled essay on the problematic state of young Italian art and value of newly revived figuration; a second essay, “La Retorica” (Rhetoric), lamenting the devolution of language in contemporary culture; and a third, “Binario vivo” (Living Binary), in which she expressed the need for new creative practice in postwar culture. These essays were published under Calleri’s then married name, Marzia Olivero Pistoletto, and appeared in issues 1, 2, and 3–4, respectively.

¹¹⁸ Michelangelo Olivero-Pistoletto, “Astrattismo,” *Presenze: Bimestrale d’arte e cultura* 1, no. 3–4 (December 1957/January 1958), n.p.

¹¹⁹ Pistoletto, untitled essay, *Presenze: Foglio del gruppo d’arte “l’arlecchino”* 1, n. 2 (July/August 1957): 1. Translation by the author.

Chapter One.

Reality as Realism: The Plexiglasses, 1964

Let's overturn everything, then, and proclaim the *absolute and complete abolition of finite line and closed statuary*.
Let's open the figure wide, and enclose the environment therein.

–Umberto Boccioni, 1912¹

We want painting to go out of its frame and sculpture to go out of its bell-jar. [...] [Today], we, Spatial Artists, have escaped our cities, have broken out of our shell, our physical cortex, and we see ourselves from above, photographing the earth from rockets in the air.

–Lucio Fontana, Gianni Dova, Beniamino Joppolo,
Giorgio Kaiserlian, and Antonio Tullier, 1948²

The picture's physical invasion of the real environment, carrying the representations of the mirror with it, allows me to introduce myself among the broken-down elements of figuration.

–Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1964³

October, 1964. On October 2, 1964, Pistoletto debuted the Plexiglasses at the Galleria Sperone in Turin (fig. 1.01). The seven works (four panels, three structures) were well-suited to the small exhibition space on Piazza Carlo Alberto. Propped up against the white gallery walls, or staged freestanding on the floor, the small group transformed the space into a cohesive, if rather ordinary scene. On the surfaces of these works—save one, *Il muro* (1964; fig. 1.02), left bare—Pistoletto had collaged, painted, and otherwise affixed a range of actual, material objects as well as imagistic ones, presented in either painted or photographic form, including: everyday objects (a folded newspaper, a vinyl record), furniture items (a small coffee table), implements (black

extension cords, a sturdy step ladder), and signs (a small red circle or “signal,” as he called it). Using whatever was on hand at home or in the studio as material and subject matter, Pistoletto created what at seemed to be a mundane setting of everyday objects and necessities. Standing in stark contrast to the elegant, historic square outside the door, however, the scene inside the Sperone gallery was a rather peculiar sight, made even more so by its composition.⁴

This grouping of objects formed a strange tableau because the items of the Plexiglasses' collective presentation (and representation) were bifurcated between tangible, readymade objects and illusionistic, imagistic ones. What looks like a table with a clear glass top and iron legs—*Tavolino con disco e giornale* (Small Table with Record and Newspaper; 1964) turns out to be a painted, plexiglass square prism (fig. 1.03), while the newspaper and vinyl record resting on its surface are real objects, waiting to be enjoyed. A long black extension cord—*Filo elettrico appeso al muro* (Electric Cord Hanging on the Wall; 1964) hangs on the wall at elbow-height, ready-at-hand, neatly coiled around its metal pin (fig. 1.04). A second cord, *Filo elettrico caduto* (Fallen Electric Cord; 1964) is in need of tidying; it lies on the gallery floor in a haphazard tangle (fig. 1.05). Neither, however, is in fact really there; in their place, we find life-size photographic cutouts, each mounted on a plexiglass support. Elsewhere, on one of the gallery's small white Laccio tables, a stack of vinyl records—*Pila di dischi* (Stack of Records; 1964) invites perusal (fig. 1.06). Indeed, their haphazard alignment suggests they are in frequent rotation. Unlike the real record on the table, however, the records in this case are fakes, comprised of eleven photographs collaged onto eleven squares of clear plexiglass, stacked one on top of the other. Elsewhere, a large step ladder—*Scala doppia appoggiata al muro* (Double Ladder Leaning Against the Wall; 1964) is propped up against the wall; slightly open, it appears to have been temporarily abandoned by its user (fig. 1.07). Its rungs face outward, away from the wall; its

orange shelf—a platform for cans of paint, hammers, or other tools—tilts downward toward the floor. Like the table, records, and power cords, however, the ladder is also a fiction: a life-size photographic reconstruction, supported by two sheets of plexiglass propped up against the wall. One sheet, which measures approximately five feet in height, is placed in front of a slightly larger one, which measures one foot taller. Propped up against the white walls of the gallery or freestanding on the showroom floor, the Plexiglasses ultimately staged a somewhat duplicitous world; punctuated by real things and illusions thereof, like mirages for the viewer to encounter, the scene was less one of reality than *realism*. Even after we realize that the figures (images) that the Plexiglasses present to us are photographs of objects and not the objects themselves, we are acutely aware that they were formatted and presented so that they would appear real to us. Although we are aware they are images, Pistoletto's figures register less as symbolic and more as concrete, real things, thereby constellating a different setting than the one in which they are placed. When we discover that the world the Plexiglasses construct is an illusion, our experience of reality—that is, what we perceived to be the real, concrete, material world— is transmuted into a paradoxical experience of reality and realism, simultaneously. We are aware that the real world around is a veristic illusion, but nevertheless engage with these illusions not as referential images but as the referents they initially pose as and present to us as viewers.

Rounding out the collection was an outlier: *Segnale rosso su plexiglass, sul muro* (Red Signal on Plexiglass, on the Wall; fig. 1.08) consists of a translucent, red plexiglass disc mounted in the lower-left-hand corner of an otherwise bare sheet of clear plexiglass. Propped up against the north wall of the gallery, *Red Signal on Plexiglass, On the Wall* set up a visual and spatial correspondence between itself and an identical red circle painted on the south-facing side of *Small Table*, positioned on the floor directly in front of it, in alignment with its left-hand edge

(fig. 1.09). Within the context of the exhibition, the red signal calls attention to the material presence of its transparent support as well as that of *Small Table*. As a result, the signal undermines the illusion of the rectangular plexiglass prism is a table. As a double of the red circle on the table, the red disc is the only object in the collection that initially registers as a sign: an abstract piece of plexiglass that points us to the illusions the plexiglass creates.

By leveraging the physical, formal, and spatial properties of the plexiglass panels and structures—their material transparency, visual lightness, and large flat surfaces—Pistoletto was able to use them as inconspicuous structural supports, on which to mount “objects” both real and mediated. By extension, the artist was able to emplace both sets—both image-objects and material ones—in the three-dimensional space of the viewer, thereby constructing what seems to be a real setting, furnished with real objects made available to us. Consequently, Pistoletto displaced the conventionally illusionistic, diegetic, or otherwise separate space of visual representation (both photographic and painted, documentary and narrative) with the real space of the gallery.

When we move closer to the works, however, the illusionistic methods of their production become clear; upon closer inspection, we realize that what at first appeared to be a real environment is in fact largely fabricated, comprised of life-size, artificial stand-ins, two-dimensional photographic reproductions, and imagistic reconstructions that, unlike their referents, have little to no potential utility. Upon the viewer’s inevitable realization that the majority of the setting’s objects are mediated, the Plexiglasses stage an effective withdrawal of the things the series originally seem to offer him. The experience is one of disillusionment—if not displacement—of the reality that the Plexiglasses initially appear to constitute.

Pistoletto prepared a short artist's statement, a form of introduction to the works, which was printed in a small, tri-fold, exhibition catalog. While addressed at length in my introduction, the Plexiglasses' effective restaging of reality as something more like realism, merits revisiting a section of the text. Toward the end of the statement, Pistoletto laid out the terms for a specific worldview, in which reality was constituted by figurative expression.

A "thing" isn't art. The idea expressed by the same "thing" can be [...]. At the moment, the "thing" for me is the structure of figurative expression, which I've accepted as reality. The picture's physical invasion of the environment, carrying the representations of the mirror with it, allows me to introduce myself among the broken-down elements of figuration [underlining original].

(Una 'cosa' non è arte. L'idea espressa della stessa "cosa" può esserlo [...]. In questo momento per me la «cosa» è la struttura dell'espressione figurativa, che ho accettato come realtà. L'invasione fisica del quadro nell'ambiente reale, portando con sé le rappresentazioni dello specchio, mi permette di introdurmi tra gli elementi scomposti della figurazione [underlining original; *MPIP*].)

By "invading" the environment of display, the Plexiglasses would intervene in the real world as well as in the space of figurative expression—spaces that are, somewhat paradoxically, one and the same for Pistoletto. How did the Plexiglasses engage with figurative expression and reality in Pistoletto's terms, and to what end? And more complexly, why might such a task have been of import to the Italian artist in 1964? Why would Pistoletto, an artist who became (and is still regarded as) a leader of the Italian avant-garde of the 1960s, be interested in figuration in the first place? Major theories of artistic Modernism and modernity have repeatedly condemned figuration. As a system of representation, it has been historically associated with historical narrative, allegory, genre, realism and expressionism, among other conventions that Modernism has denigrated in its move to expunge these conventions from artistic practice, and especially from painting.⁵ That the Plexiglasses portend to go against mimesis by intervening in reality,

they simultaneously deconstruct representation—and yet still, these “broken-down elements” of figuration continue to constitute reality; they are what Pistoletto has “accepted.”

A response to these questions necessitates an account of the mirror paintings as the first departure from more traditional figuration in his early paintings. As in the Plexiglass paintings that followed, Pistoletto had made the mirror paintings with store-bought materials and photographic processes but to different ends. The complex process, often confused in the literature on the artist, merits closer attention.⁶ The mirrorized surfaces were collaged with hand-painted, tissue paper cutouts of life-size figures and the occasional object, which Pistoletto traced in graphite from printed enlargements of photographs taken by the artist’s friend, photographer Paolo Bressano, of scenes Pistoletto meticulously staged in his studio.⁷ After creating a template of the photographic image by hand—outlines and fine details were traced in pencil, which was also used for some initial shading; any large, dark areas were blocked out in black paint—the tissue paper sheet would be collaged onto the steel panel (in early works, with a “boat varnish” adhesive, soon replaced with white enamel paint), front side facing down, so that any sign of the subject’s manual production (superficial indentations from the pencil, brushwork, facture) would be obscured by the seamless surface of the recto side of the sheet.⁸ Subjects in the early mirror paintings (1962–64), rendered only in black paint and pencil, were at this stage, complete; the excess tissue paper would be cut off with a razor blade. For those mirror paintings that had a naturalistic color palette, begun in 1964, Pistoletto would then add color to his subject in the form of thinned oil paint, which allowed him to stain the tissue paper rather than apply it to its surface, potentially detracting from smooth, untouched quality of the paper.⁹ The result was that Pistoletto’s mirror subjects were at once photographic and painterly, real and realistic.

Ordinary in appearance, Pistoletto's subjects' unexpressive countenances and relaxed poses lent them a sense of anonymity and banality; readily translatable to any location, they could belong anywhere. In the mirror paintings, viewers could see their own reflections and the context of display register on the same surface as Pistoletto's photographic figures. The effect was that viewers saw themselves and the real space around them become part of the tableaux before them, reflected back to them as if they were "inside" the painting. This interactive model of spectatorship was referred to by many as a kind of game; one review even billed the experience in advertorial terms, telling readers: "Now you can put yourself in the picture."¹⁰ By moving around in front of the work, viewers could navigate, "enter," and "exit" the painting as they desired, in real space and time, interacting with Pistoletto's figures along the way.

Scholarly discussions surrounding the mirror paintings have largely focused on their engagement with the traditional conventions of painting. Upon their debut in Turin, *La Stampa* art critic Marziano Bernardi called them "paintings with the help of photography," while Luigi Carluccio questioned whether calling them "paintings" was still the right term.¹¹ Pistoletto's use of industrial materials, mechanical reproduction, and reflectivity to open up painting to its environment are all strategies that defy modernist conventions of the medium. This postmodernist reading of the mirror paintings as marking the end of painting and medium specificity has situated them as conceptual painting. While Pistoletto displaced painting's traditional media and techniques, he continued to explore what might be called its "syntactical structure": the structure by which painting exists, creates signs, and articulates.¹² In this sense, the mirror paintings find ready comparisons in parallel developments in conceptual art. They are "critical non-painting paintings," to borrow Douglas Crimp's phrase; they constitute a kind of painting by other means.¹³

But as the Plexiglasses statement tells us, figuration was the predominant problem for Pistoletto in his early career, even more so than painting. The literature on the mirror paintings in this regard has also registered a pervasive interest in Pistoletto's figures. Various referred to as "silhouettes," "characters," "personages," and "subjects" in both primary and secondary sources, the figures in the mirror paintings have been frequently noted for their characteristically apathetic demeanor, listless countenances, casual postures, and tendency to be turned away from the viewer in *profils-perdus*, as if they are looking toward some distant horizon.¹⁴ Some have compared this alienated, detached quality to contemporary developments in Italian neorealist cinema, arguing Pistoletto's figures share a sense of modern ennui associated with the characters in Michelangelo Antonioni's found dystopic films including *L'Avventura* (The Adventure; 1960), *L'Eclisse* (The Eclipse; 1962), and *Red Desert* (1964), among others.¹⁵ In these readings, Pistoletto's disaffected figures embody the alienated condition of modern life, and thereby serve as a social commentary on industrialization and commercialization in early 1960s Italy. Others have focused on the semiotic function of these same enigmatic qualities, finding in Pistoletto's subjects an emptying out of meaning and unmooring of signification associated with the postmodern condition. In these readings, Pistoletto's figures are "cipher-like," as Nicholas Cullinan has called them; they are stand-ins or placeholders.¹⁶ This interpretation finds its closest antecedent in a description of Pistoletto's figures made by French writer and avant-garde associate Alain Jouffroy in March of 1964. In his essay for the catalog of Pistoletto's solo exhibition at the Galerie Sonnabend, Jouffroy characterized the mirror subjects as "flat, [like] the figures in playing cards," whose wan coloring and shadowy appearance made them look like "twilight reflections."¹⁷ More recently, Claire Gilman has interpreted Pistoletto's subjects in the mirror paintings as theatrical characters; for Gilman, they have a "theatrical sensibility," and are

positioned as “staged” characters in meticulously-composed “theatrical tableaux.”¹⁸ Despite their differences in theoretical interests, the formalist, social art historical and post-structuralist readings of Pistoletto's mirror subjects promote an interpretation of the figures in terms of a postmodern condition, whether in articulation or affect.

If Pistoletto's mirror paintings are part of the postmodern “end” of painting and the increasingly distracted condition of the postmodern subject, what does their investment in figuration mean for this moment? Consideration of the Plexiglasses makes this the more pressing question; as Pistoletto’s statement for the Sperone catalog lay plain, it was figuration, even more so than painting, that was the model for his early work—as well as the site of its intervention. This language emphasizes two points: First, the Plexiglasses announced a transition in the artist’s conception of his practice from painting (if by other means) to sculpture, and from an interest in the virtual space of representation to the environmental space of lived experience.

These transitions were enacted in large part by the relationship between figure and ground constellated in the Plexiglasses. The works’ material properties—namely transparency, achromatism, and slight, planar depth—endow them with a visual lightness of structure and surface. Propped against walls or staged free-standing directly on the floor, the somewhat ghostly set of works articulate themselves less through any overt material presence or physicality, than through the quiet demarcation of their contours, signaled by thin gray edge shadows, the occasional trace of a meager, linear silhouette, or brief flashes of light, refracted on their surfaces. If material and surface in the mirror paintings were leveraged for their optical function, here they are utilized for a place-holding one, both spatial and syntactic. If because of the Plexiglasses’ visual lightness we might visually privilege the environmental context of their display, Pistoletto’s placement of found objects on their horizontal surfaces (the folded

newspaper on the tabletop of *Small Table*, e.g.) draws attention to the physical presence of the material support we might otherwise overlook.

Unlike various, more or less contemporaneous experiments with similar materials in American Minimalism and the Light and Space Movement—Larry Bell’s glass boxes (1962–63) and Douglas Wheeler’s illuminated, painted plexiglass works (begun in 1964), especially, come to mind—Pistoletto’s work with plexiglass was invested in its material and optical properties only as secondary tools to support his primary inquiry into figurative representation. While Pistoletto’s investigation of inhabited, real space placed him on common ground with these counterparts, his use of figurative images and imagistic material would be anathema to these movements.

Pistoletto’s application of images in the Plexiglasses, however—images that, as life-size photographic copies or hyper-realist depictions painted in trompe-l’oeil, might be perceived as the material, real thing they depict—utilizes these properties to different ends. In the collaged plexiglass panel *Electric Cord Hanging on the Wall*, for example, a life-size photographic cut-out of a coiled, black extension cord hanging on a nail has been glued to the left-hand vertical registry of the transparent panel, several feet above its lower edge. This placement of the collage element on a clear panel leaning against the wall corresponds to the position an actual cord might occupy on the wall behind it, thereby creating the illusion that the photographic cord is in fact the physical, material object of its depiction, hanging in real space on the wall. Recalling Marcel Duchamp’s glass panel sculptures, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23), better known as *The Large Glass*, and *Glider Containing a Water Mill in Neighboring Metals* (1913–15), the Plexiglasses also constituted an experiment with montage and transparent material supports to explore structures of signification. While the images in both works engage a

personalized, idiosyncratic visual lexicon that is connected to the artist's previous work—which required consultation of Duchamp's extensive accompanying notes to be understood—Pistoletto's Plexiglasses favored readily legible subject matter and structures of signification. Ordinary subject matter was presented to the viewer in an image format that optimized their natural ability to be read for their material referents. By formatting the images in full-scale, cutting them out along the perimeter of each object, and then positioning them where they might be positioned in real space, Pistoletto's the imagistic elements acted as natural symbols for their referents—so much so that we initially perceive them to be those referents: real concrete things in real space.

In *Fallen Electric Cord*, a photographic cut-out once again functions as an illusionist stand-in for the corresponding material object (fig. 1.10). This time, the photographic cord is on the floor, where it lies in haphazard loops and twists. Mounted on an irregular piece of cut-out plexiglass placed on the floor against the base of a larger blank plexiglass panel above it, the cord snakes around the middle of the plexiglass, looping twice over its edge out onto the real floor. In this case, the efficacy of the illusion is supported by placing the flat image on a stepped structural support. The photograph seems to be a real rather than imagistic object because its material is manipulated structurally in real space, on a clear support that endows the image-structure with illusionistic three-dimensionality, by placing it in the same position a three-dimensional cord would occupy if it had fallen on the ground.

In a 1971 interview with Germano Celant, Pistoletto explained that the mirror paintings and the Plexiglasses were differentiated by their respective modes of imagistic engagement with reality. In both series, for Pistoletto, the image is a “fiction,” or stand-in for the real thing it depicts. In the mirror paintings, Pistoletto's imagistic subjects appear to occupy real space

because of their placement on the surfaces of steel mirror panels, which reflect the environment of display. The specular images of the environment they create, however, look like extensions of real space rather than reflections thereof. Because of this illusion, the cut-outs in the mirror paintings appear to be three-dimensional figures that stand within the real space of the gallery. The imagistic forms of the Plexiglasses, however, commingle with reality by virtue of their placement within the ambient space of the gallery, which Pistoletto achieved by moving the plexiglass sheets away from the wall. Both strategies create the illusion that a two-dimensional image is a real, three-dimensional entity.

In the mirror paintings, fiction adheres to reality by staying on the surface of the mirror [...]. But with the “plexiglasses,” fiction adheres to reality by moving itself into visible space, and the experiment is unequivocal. By detaching itself gradually from the mirror according to the requirements of different subjects, the plexiglass surface, in its transparency, is only represented as a support, and carries the subject (the image of the object) to the exact place the object would occupy in reality.

(Nei quadri specchianti la finzione aderisce alla realtà restando sulla superficie dello specchio [...]. Ma con i “plexiglass” la finzione aderisce alla realtà spostandosi nello spazio visibile e l’esperimento è inequivocabile. Staccandosi gradualmente dal muro, per le esigenze dei diversi soggetti, la superficie di plexiglass, nella sua trasparenza, non si rappresenta che come supporto e trasporta il soggetto [immagine dell’oggetto] esattamente nel luogo che l’oggetto occuperebbe nella realtà.)¹⁹

For Pistoletto, then, the illusion achieved by the Plexiglasses allows fiction to stand in for reality, imagistic representation for objective, physical presence.

The success of this illusion, however, is constantly pressured by the visible border of the plexiglass panels. Their edges function as a kind of frame, repeatedly cuing the viewer to the images’ constructed nature as an image, articulated on a flat surface. In this sense, Pistoletto’s emplacement of figurative elements (representations) within the real, such that they are encountered as real objects (the real thing out in the world they represent and pose as) is always intentionally tenuous; the occasional glare on a clear surface, the gray shadow of a panel, cast on

a wall, the Plexiglasses act as props and screens simultaneously, serving as empty bracketed fields and platforms that allow for the articulation of alternative realities or injunction of new elements into the existing world. The portability, iterability, and standardized format of the panels— the transparent flat, quadrilateral structural support for a single, cut-out, isolated photographic or trompe l'oeil image), draw upon early animation's use of cels for elements that would be repeated in a scene; rather than tediously painting or printing the image for every frame, this technique allowed for the re-use of the cel, greatly decreasing production time for animation film. Within the context of the postwar period, these characteristics of the Plexiglasses parallel concurrent explorations of the technique in experimental cinema and animation.²⁰ German-American experimental filmmaker Oskar Fischinger began painting plexiglass panels in his animated films in the 1940s (see *Motion Painting I*, 1947, e.g.). In *New American Cinema*, Harry Smith and Stan Vanderbeek used direct to film techniques (in the case of Smith) and photographic collage in their animated films in the late 1950s and early 1960s.²¹ Recalling historical moving-image and animation practices (stop-motion collage animation especially comes to mind), and the pressures of Fordist capitalism that frequently gave rise to this technology, the Plexiglasses seem to expand and reconfigure the diegetic space of cinema, disrupting the sequential logic and duration of film with a constellation of still frames in a single scene; often screening images that double as real things emplaced in real space, the definitive separateness of diegetic space is undone. In this sense, the Plexiglasses variously acted as frame, screen, and prop within the context of their display, which subtly subvert the illusion of the world they simultaneously construct.

But what might merit this expansion? What kind of world did the Plexiglasses implicate? Returning to the production of the works begins to answer these questions. While the workaday

iconographic repertoire united the Plexiglasses under the theme of the “everyday,” individual elements were differentiated with regard to their material constitution and mediating functions. Some of the works—*Electric Cord Hanging on the Wall* and *Fallen Electric Cord*—were products of photo-montage, in which the plexiglass panels served as a ground upon which Pistoletto collaged life-size photographic cut-outs of items of his selection—in this case, of black electric cords. For the former, Pistoletto photographed an electric cord that was hanging on the wall in his studio, coiled around a metal pin, printed an enlargement from the film negative, such that the size of the cord in the image corresponded to that of the cord in real space, and then cut and collaged the photographic cord onto the surface of the plexiglass panel. Propped up closely against the wall, the panel held the photographic cord one or two inches out from the wall, and three or four feet up from the floor—that is, in the same position as that of the real cord in the studio. For the latter (*Fallen Electric Cord*), Pistoletto’s process was similar; Pistoletto photographed the power cord in a different position, lying entangled on the ground, on a piece of plain white paper on the floor (fig. 1.11). Following the same procedures, he collaged the photographic image of the cord, this time, onto an irregularly-shaped piece of plexiglass, which had been cut to line up with the exterior edges of the image mounted on its surface. Once the image was mounted on its plexiglass backing, it was placed horizontally on the floor, in front of a second panel (left bare), which was propped up against the wall. As in *Hanging Electric Cord*, the two-dimensional photographic image corresponded in position and size to the real, material object the artist had photographed in his studio.

Other works, namely *Double Ladder Leaning against the Wall* and *Stack of Records*, incorporated the same techniques of enlargement and photomontage into works of structural assemblage. Here, photographic reproductions of objects (in this case, a work ladder and vinyl

record) were once again applied to sheets of plexiglass. This time, however, Pistoletto collaged the images onto more than one panel, either dividing the photographic reproduction of the object across more than one sheet, as in *Double Ladder*, in which two photographic cut-outs were made, from two separate images, one for each of the ladder's two legs, glued to two separate sheets of plexiglass, and then propped up, one in front of the other, against the wall, or by printing the same image in multiple, as in *Stack of Records*, in which he collaged eleven photographic reproductions of the same vinyl record onto eleven identical squares of plexiglass, and then stacked them, one on top of the other. In *Double Ladder*, then, the photographic reproduction is also a structural reconstruction of its subject; in *Stack of Records*

, we might say it is also an allegorical one. In its display of multiple photographic copies (imagistic records) of the vinyl record—that is, records of records, in the sense that the object, like the photograph, is both mechanically reproducible and a document of its subject—the work underscores the mechanical reproducibility and documentary function of its subject and medium; in its arrangement of these images, one on top of the other in a serial compositional format, it also underscores the commercial logic of its terms.

Others still included painted representations of their subjects, as opposed to photographic ones, as well as real, tangible objects, or readymades. In *Small Table*, a real newspaper and black record rest on the surface of a plexiglass prism. Its horizontal surface is bordered by a precise, one-inch-wide outline of black paint, which continues over its edges an equal distance, and runs down all four vertices to the floor. The table in *Small Table*, then, is both the clear plexiglass cube, which actually supports the newspaper and record, and the constellation of lines painted on its surfaces, which create a three-dimensional image of a black, metal table with four legs and a clear glass top.

The effect, however, was such that these differences were temporarily suspended. Within the spatial environment of the works' display, these material and semiotic differentiations (between presentation and representation, readymade and image, signified and signifier)—become less clear. Within the context of the finished work—that is, as photographic images applied to the indiscernible, transparent surfaces of plexiglass structural supports that are positioned in real, three-dimensional space rather than hung against the wall—these collage elements seem to occupy real space in turn. They cast shadows in the space around them and appear to be the three-dimensional material objects, that is, the real objects to which they refer. By situating the plexiglass work in the space of the gallery in such a way as to spatially align the photographic image of an object with the location the corollary material object might occupy, Pistoletto creates the optical illusion that the photographic image is in fact its photographic subject, as opposed to appearing as it actually is—that is, as an image glued to a flat, superficial ground.

Indeed, for the viewer who encounters the Plexiglasses, the series' imagistic items initially appear as real, tangible objects that are available for use at the viewer's disposal. Photographic cut-outs of extension cords, for example, appear to be real cords, which hang pendulously with real weight from a nail on the wall or lie on the ground in a coiled heap. The photographic reconstruction of the ladder seems to be a real ladder, propped up against the wall, ready for use. The photographic series of vinyl record appears to be a real stack of records, waiting to be played.

In *Small Table*, however, the Plexiglasses' logic of anti-mediation—that is, the act of semiotic play or illusion that makes signs and systems of meaning appear to be stripped of referentiality—is complicated by two objects that rest on the surface of the cube: a newspaper

and a record, the only readymades in the series, which highlight the materiality of the clear plexiglass that supports them.²² In this case, the semiotic function of *Small Table* is multiple. It is at once an illusion of a structural object (the black table we see) as well as an axonometric model thereof (the structural representation of the black table in plexiglass and paint), in addition to being the structural object it actually substantiates (a rectangular cube with a tabular surface).²³ As if to call attention to the conflict of this multiplicity—*Small Table* cannot at once be all three successfully—a small, painted, opaque, red circle no more than three inches in diameter marks one of its lateral panels. By pointing out the physical presence of its transparent ground, the sign simultaneously undermines the object's pretensions for illusion (the field it marks is not, in fact, an empty space) while shoring up its anti-mimetic one, by validating the tangible form of the real, material object (the plexiglass box) for the viewer who encounters it within the context of the work's display. The same sign appears in *Red Signal*, in the form of a red plexiglass disk. Affixed to an otherwise bare sheet of plexiglass, on the lower left quadrant of the panel, six inches from its bottom and left-hand edges, its position corresponds to that of its painted double that appears in *Small Table*—a point highlighted by the alignment of the works in the installation layout—establishing a relay between the two works. As a sign, the red plexiglass disk calls to mind red traffic lights and road signs, specifically those that regulate space and prohibit movement—*divieto di accesso* (“access prohibited”), *vietato l'ingresso* (“do not enter”), and *zona limitata* (“restricted area”), are all *segnali rossi*. It also evokes the image of the *paletta del poliziotto*, or red “signaling disk”—the handheld plastic sign used by Italian police to direct motorists to stop. In this sense, the “red signal” does more than alert Pistoletto's viewer to the physical presence of the clear plexiglass support. As a public, authoritarian sign, it codifies the spatial environment of the works' display as one of institutionalized, systemic control and bodily

regulation. As part of a popular lexicon, it evokes a social space that is regulated and determined by institutions and systems of capital (e.g. privatization), in which access is limited, and places the viewer in a position of disciplined movement and spectatorship.

These operations gain further significance with closer examination of the Plexiglasses—an examination that uncovers additional details that have never been identified or discussed within the vast literature on the artist. In *Small Table*, for example, the newspaper is a copy of *Stampa Sera* (Evening Post), the evening edition of Turin's daily newspaper, *La Stampa*. On the upper corner of the newspaper, we find the publication date in fine print: Monday, July 19–Tuesday, July 20, 1964—that is, a date approximately ten weeks in advance of the Plexiglasses' debut. While this specific date may seem unimportant, other than as a familiar sign of the everyday, within the Italian and European artistic context of 1964, it corresponds to a key moment in Italian politics and art history.

The paper is folded into quadrants, and only the upper-right hand area of its front page faces up toward the viewer (fig. 1.12). While only part of the main headline and cover stories are in view, the visible portion includes leading phrases: *si avvia alla conclusione* (“headed toward a conclusion”), *elenco dei ministri [...] il centro sinistra* (“list of ministers [...] the center left”), *Rumor in tutti le fasi della crisi* (“[Mariano] Rumor [Secretary of the Christian Democratic Party] in all phases of the crisis”), and, the headline in best view, on the right-hand side of the page, *Il testo dell'accordo: La priorità alle misure anticongiunturali* (“The text of the agreement: Priority to remedial economic measures”).²⁴ For Pistoletto's viewer in the fall of 1964, these headlines would have readily recalled the tumultuous political events of the past summer: a month-long governmental shutdown that resulted from conflicts over economic policy measures. These conflicts were precipitated by inter-partisan, intra-governmental conflicts

between representatives of the anti-leftist Christian Democrats (DC) and the center-left Italian Democratic Socialist Party, which led to the fracture of the Italian government and resignation of then newly elected prime minister, Aldo Moro, in late July, less than one week after the publication of this issue. Pistoletto's selection of this paper, then, seems specifically motivated, namely to cue the viewer to crises and failures of conservative government, economy, and politics. By October of 1964, Pistoletto's inclusion of this issue specifically conjures the damaging effects of anti-leftist politics in Italy, as the Italian economic crisis continued without improvement. The paper, then, functions as a politicized, anti-capitalist sign of economic struggle and social critique.

The anti-capitalist message of the summer newspaper is amplified by the similarly embattled artistic context it might evoke. The paper Pistoletto selected was published one month after the opening of the XXXII Venice Biennale (June–November, 1964). On Sunday, June 20th, 1964, it had been announced that American artist Robert Rauschenberg had been awarded the prestigious international Grand Prize in painting for his Combines—a controversial decision that incited outrage across Europe that lasted for months, well beyond the closure of the exhibition that November. Italian critics and institutions, as well as those from broader Europe lambasted Rauschenberg and his American compatriots, labeling them “impotent by nature,” while criticizing their work as a “grotesque plagiarism of Dada” that amounted to “mental infantilism.”²⁵ These critics argued that continued celebration of such work would amount to “suicide” for the Biennale.²⁶ Communists and conservative Catholics found common ground on this point; for both, as *The New Republic* critic Tullia Zevi observed in her report on the controversy from Venice, “To them, it is pop-art [*sic*] vs. the soul” (italics original).²⁷ The European response to the 1964 Biennale was so strong that art critic Annette Michelson

referenced the backlash in the opening lines of her report on the Biennale for the fall 1964 issue of *Art International*, written several months after Rauschenberg's award. As Michelson wrote: "As everyone knows by now, this year's affair has had a violently hostile press in Europe."²⁸ The 1964 Venice Biennale was perceived as an American invasion of Europe that declared the official arrival of Pop art, and Rauschenberg's win was vehemently discredited and ridiculed by the Italian press.

Rauschenberg's victory was reviled in part because of the formal qualities of the work displayed. His Combines were largely ridiculed by European critics for their hodge-podge, assemblage aesthetic, while they were simultaneously upheld by American critics as representative of the superiority of American art relative to European practices. But the controversy also stemmed from the unprecedented arrangement of the American installation. The high volume of American artwork to be shown at the Biennale exceeded the space available in the official exhibition site, leading to an agreement to install the work in two locations.²⁹ Works by Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Claes Oldenburg, and John Chamberlain would be installed in the American pavilion, along with a few works by other artists, including two of Rauschenberg's smaller Combines.³⁰ The rest of the work, including twenty-two by Rauschenberg, would be exhibited in an auxiliary space outside the Giardini.³¹ When Rauschenberg emerged as the favored candidate for the award, questions concerning his eligibility were posed by the dissenting jurists.³² Heated debates between the jury and the American team followed. Solomon threatened to withdraw the American exhibitions; rumors circulated through Venice that the Americans would withdraw all funding from the financially ailing Biennale, were flying in paintings on fighter jets, and sending ships to Venice to secure Rauschenberg's win by way of military intervention.³³ The matter was not helped by the fact that the American pavilion was for

the first time sponsored not by a private institution, as was tradition, but by the U.S. Information Agency, the governmental organization responsible for foreign propaganda programs.

Ultimately, the jury agreed to allow Solomon to move three of Rauschenberg's Combines to the Pavilion, thereby satisfying the award requirements. When the Italian photographer, Ugo Mulas, encountered the early morning transfer of Rauschenberg's works by gondola, subsequently documenting the event in images later disseminated widely by the European press, public perception was that the Americans had made an under-handed agreement with the Biennale administration to ensure Rauschenberg's win.³⁴

The controversy led to widespread characterization of the rise of American Pop in Europe as both a cultural apocalypse and militant act of cultural imperialism. One French critic forewarned of an American takeover and subsequent "murder" of art: "The Rauschenbergs will proliferate and invade us, they will murder the pictorial idiom with their childish gadgets."³⁵ In Italian media, the headline of Milan-based political weekly *ABC*'s report lamented "All is lost, even shame" (*Tutto è perduto, anche il pudore*), using the Italian word *pudore*, meaning "shame" in the sense of modesty, highlighting the vulgarity and perversion many Europeans associated with the work.³⁶ Indeed, the Vatican vetoed the Biennale on these grounds; and Cardinal Giovanni Urbani (then patriarch of Venice) asserted the "moral disorder" of the American pavilion was evidenced by the "disintegration of the human image" in their work.³⁷

Although Pistoletto would later note the importance of this moment with regard to Rauschenberg's presence in Italy, closer examination of the vinyl record also discloses other details that corroborate the artist's conscious engagement of Pop and cultural politics suggested by the newspaper. In *Small Table*, the record rests on the plexiglass surface, A-side facing up, listing a number of names belonging to artists associated with American Pop: Jim Dine, Jasper

Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, and others. If we read the fine print of the record label (fig. 1.13), we discover it is a recording of artist interviews conducted by Billy Klüver in association with *The Popular Image*: an exhibition of Pop, Neo-Dada, and New Realist art curated by Alice Denney (with Castelli, Richard Bellamy of the Green Gallery, and Ivan Karp of the O.K. Harris Gallery, as advisors) at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art in the spring of 1963—that is, a year and a half prior to the Plexiglasses’ debut.³⁸ Regardless of the international origins of these movements (Pop in the British Independent Group; New Realism in French *nouveau réalisme*, as named by the critic Pierre Réstany; and Neo-Dada, whose historical precursors were based in French, German, and Swiss camps of Dada), *The Popular Image* exhibition showcased work exclusively by American artists, including Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol, and Tom Wesselman, to name a few. Indirectly or otherwise, Denney and the American art dealers who advised her attributed these international movements to American culture and their innovations to American artists.³⁹ Compounding the nationalist cultural politics of *The Popular Image* exhibition was the introductory essay to the associated catalog, written by Alan Solomon, then curator of the New York-based Jewish Museum and would-be curator of the contested American Pavilion at the 1964 Venice Biennale.

These points gain further significance when we consider the reception of Pistoletto’s early 1960s practice, specifically in the mirror paintings, as part of Pop and New Realism. The popularity of the mirror paintings continued the following year with the artist’s inclusion in canonical exhibitions such as *Beyond Realism* at the Pace Gallery, New York (May 4–29, 1965) and *Pop*, at the Galleria Sperone, where he was once again the only Italian artist included, alongside seven American Pop artists, including Jim Dine, Roy Liechtenstein, and Tom Wesselmann, among others (Turin: Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone, June/July, 1965). That same

summer he also attracted the attention of Martin Friedman, the director of the Walker Art Center (WAC) in Minneapolis, who, after seeing his work at the Galerie Sonnabend in Paris, gave the young artist a solo exhibition to be framed as an early career retrospective, held the following spring (*Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*, April 4–May 8, 1966).⁴⁰

Indeed, for his part, Pistoletto was conflicted about the reception of his mirror paintings as part of Pop and New Realism, for artistic as well as political reasons. Although the Pop and New Realist interpretations of his work had brought him much success, Pistoletto's chagrin at his association with these movements was linked to a broader distrust of American capitalism and its association with the commoditization of artistic practice that was shared by many Italian artists in the mid Sixties. To elucidate the cultural politics surrounding the polarized reception of American Pop in Italy and Europe merits discussion of its fundamental causes. Indeed, the Italian perception of Pop art as the cultural arm of American capitalist imperialism stemmed from broader histories and conflicts dating to the pre- and postwar periods alike.

One major antecedent underpinning this reception was Italy's great history of socio-communist political thought and cultural activism, much of which was centered in Turin. Beginning in the 1910s, the work of Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), Piero Gobetti (1901–26), Carlo Rosselli (1899–1937), and Norberto Bobbio (1909–2004), cultivated a strong legacy of leftist thought within Italian culture, as did the widely distributed leftist publications they helped establish, including *L'Ordine nuovo* (The New Order, 1919–22, Turin), for which Gramsci was a co-founder, *Avanti!* (Forward!; 1911–93; Milan), *La rivoluzione liberale* (The Liberal Revolution; 1922–25; Turin) founded by Gobetti, and *L'Unità* (Unity; 1924–; Milan), established by Gramsci, among others.⁴¹ The proliferation of leftist writings in Italy in the late 1910s and 1920s was incited in large part by the excited leftist global climate surrounding the

success of the Bolshevik revolution, and was subsequently spurred on by heated intra-party debates that took place within the PSI. As these debates resulted in the historical compromise of 1923, leading to the splitting off and formation of the PCI and fracturing of Italy's once powerful political left. Within this context, Italy's intellectual left, equally if not more so than its weakened political leaders, became central to the anti-Fascist resistance, as they curated modes of resistance and disseminated calls to revolution against the rise of fascism in the interwar period. As Italy grappled with the aftermath of World War II, this legacy provided postwar Italians with an alternative national history and cultural identity in the wake of fascism, leading to a popular and political resurgence of leftist politics in the postwar period.

Other contributions to this view include the United States' political and economic interventions in Italy in the immediate postwar years with the onset of the Cold War. Fearing Italy may become a communist country in the wake of World War II, the U.S. government tied critical economic aid it provided to Italy under the Marshall Plan to an anti-communist political agenda, threatening to rescind all forms of Marshall Aid (foodstuffs, goods, medicine, business loans and grants, etc.) and even intervene with military force should the PCI rise to power.⁴² Famously providing extensive financial support to the then in power center-left Christian Democrats (DC) during the elections of 1948—a tactic since identified as a key fire-starter of the Cold War—the United States guaranteed the moderate right's win of a majority presence in Parliament, effectively condemning the PCI as well as Italy's Socialist Party, the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI), to their protracted status as minor, weak political factions. Although the majority of Italians identified with the political left, these interventions in Italian politics on the part of the U.S. allowed the U.S. to exert political control by proxy, wresting the postwar opportunity for political agency and representation from the Italian populace. Waging what

historian Kaeten Mistry has called a “war short of war,” in a play upon Truman-era diplomat George F. Kennan’s Cold War policy turn-of-phrase, these interventions laid the groundwork for wide-spread anti-American sentiment across popular Italy in the postwar period.⁴³

Of particular import to Italian anti-American sentiment in the postwar period was the Marshall Plan’s impact on Italian labor organization and workers’ rights. Business loans extended to Italian industry under the Plan—the overwhelming majority of which were taken by the automobile industry, centered in Turin, with the largest share taken by Fiat—were contingent upon the institutionalization of specific changes in management, infrastructure, labor organization and performance that would improve Italian commercial production and ensure loan repayment.⁴⁴ Time limits were imposed and tightened for various work tasks, and conservative workplace conditions were ushered in, which included the elimination of workers’ rights to discuss politics and religion in the workplace. Most importantly, factory and trade unions were no longer allowed to negotiate or interfere in any way with company management.⁴⁵ These institutional changes in Italian industry inculcated by American policy in the Marshall Plan radicalized Italian labor conditions, resulting in stricter and more demanding work environments that could no longer be contested, as the work force had been largely divested of its collective-bargaining power and advocacy rights. The association between anti-capitalism and anti-Americanism in the postwar Italian popular imaginary was cemented under these conditions. As these conditions largely endured for decades beyond the end of Marshall Plan aid, so too did this sentiment among Italy’s predominantly Socialist and Communist majority working classes. Establishing a long-term connection between workers’ rights, class polarization, and Cold War politics in Italy—especially in Turin, as Italy’s postwar industrial capital and historic cradle of Italian communism and the political left—this sentiment only increased in the 1950s, coming to

a head in the early 1960s in the form of militant protests, protracted strikes, and riots that marked the beginning of Italian *operaismo* that carried throughout the decade.

With these points in mind, Pistoletto's inclusion of the *Popular Image* record and the July 21st issue of *La Stampa* in the Plexiglasses gains significance beyond their function as signs of the everyday, or even of capitalist modern life, as mass-produced industrial commodities. Attribution of the paper to its date and the record to the American nationalist Pop exhibition redoubles Pistoletto's readymades as signs of American cultural imperialism and Cold War culture within the context of mid-1960s Italy. Within the context of the collective series, they are uniquely positioned as the only discrete, material objects (as opposed to imagistic representations thereof) within the scene; their presence as commodity objects, then, is underscored by this categorical specificity as the only tangible objects made available to the subject within the staged tableaux. They stand in stark contrast to the image of the work ladder and the laboring subject it elicits: a far cry from the Romantic and hyper-masculine depictions of agrarian and factory workers that populated Fascist imagery and mass media in the Twenties, Thirties, and early Forties. Within the increasingly industrialized context of postwar Italy, the work ladder's connotation is with the struggle of the lower classes, and the desperation of the postwar Italian populace in a time of mass poverty and unemployment.

Indeed, in *Double Ladder*, Pistoletto's ladder recalls unskilled labor and the motif of the menial worker established in Italian neorealist cinema.⁴⁶ Perhaps most of all, it conjures the iconic scene from Vittorio De Sica's masterpiece, *Ladri di biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves; 1948).⁴⁷ De Sica's film follows a day in the life of Antonio Ricci (played by Lamberto Maggiorani), an unemployed father who is struggling to support his family amidst widespread poverty in postwar Rome. With luck, Antonio finds a job for the day plastering movie posters around the city, the

only requirement for which is possession of his own bicycle. Supplied with a wooden ladder, bucket of adhesive, and brush, and dressed in a worker's jumpsuit, Antonio sets off on his bicycle, one of the family's few possessions, freshly oiled for the day by his young son, Bruno (Enzo Staiola), whom he accompanies to his own job at a local gasoline service station. Cycling alongside other workers, each carrying his own ladder through city traffic, Antonio arrives at his post, parks his bicycle against the wall, and begins his work following brief instruction from a manager (fig. 1.14). In this iconic scene, we see Antonio smile brightly as he picks up his supplies and enthusiastically climbs the ladder, cheered by the security of a day's pay ahead of him. Once in position, he sets about his work, plastering quickly, following his instructions (fig. 1.15).

In a matter of seconds, however, a young man emerges from his hiding spot in the adjacent row of parked cars. Moving quickly, he steals Antonio's bicycle and pedals furiously away, disappearing into heavy traffic in the city center. While Antonio catches the thief in the act, it is too late for him to stop him (fig. 1.16); the thief escapes successfully, leaving Antonio running behind him. Unable to complete his work without the bicycle, a demoralized and downtrodden Antonio—later joined by his son—spends the rest of the day trying to find his bicycle with no success. Having lost his bicycle in addition to his day's wages, Antonio and his family face are left facing an even more precarious future. In De Sica's heartbreaking depiction of Italian postwar life, the ladder functions as a symbol of the worker, of unskilled labor, and of postwar Italy's majority working classes, more broadly. In *The Bicycle Thief*, the ladder also represents a job secured and the promise of a day's wages ahead. As Antonio runs after the thief, abandoning the ladder on the wall behind him, it functions as a sign for the futility of his effort, the relatively meager value of menial labor, and throwaway condition experienced by Italy's

lower working classes within an increasingly industrial and socially-polarized postwar Italy.

We might say then that the work ladder—as part of the visual lexicon of neorealist cinema—functioned as a socialist sign within postwar Italian mass culture. Within the context of the Plexiglasses’ production, its image metonymically conjures empathetic images of the unskilled worker, in turn, specifically as circulated within the collective cultural imaginary in postwar Italy: that is, as the hardworking but nevertheless downtrodden individual and earnest icon of the majority lower working classes, unjustly marginalized during the years of the economic miracle. That Pistoletto incorporated the ladder specifically in the form of a photograph—that is, as a mechanically-produced, reproducible image—underscores its position as a mass-mediated image within postwar Italian visual culture, and its semiotic function as a symbol of the proletariat, thereby creating a politicized, anti-capitalist field of viewership within the series. As an implement in the service of physical labor, the ladder in Pistoletto’s series also invoked an embodied working subject within the context of the exhibition. *Double Ladder* projects this subject model for the embodied viewer of the series. To make such a move—that is, to position the viewer as worker, and to model spectatorship as prospective labor—in 1964, also amounted to an artistic engagement with Italy’s rising workers’ movement, and the revolutionary role of the worker of its support.

This subject model is complicated, however, by the viewer’s progressive examination of the work. Initially, the viewer sees a real, three-dimensional ladder within the environmental space of the work’s display, as opposed to what is, in fact, a photographic, structural assemblage; at this point, the viewer occupies this position of the laboring subject. When he realizes his mistake—that is, that *Double Ladder* is not a real ladder—the subject model posited by the work also shifts, in turn. Within the context of 1960s Italy, this shift may be interpreted in two ways:

Either the laboring subject is denied the opportunity to work—work he needs, however meager the wages—or the model of labor evoked by the ladder is positioned as a thing of the past. Indeed, as a photographic object, *Double Ladder* is inextricably tied to a prior moment in time; because the viewer encounters it in the present, however, the work stages its own withdrawal from the viewer creating disjunctions of signification (from material to imagistic) and temporality (present to past).

Whether the historicity of the work suggests a positive or negative social change for Pistoletto's viewer remains in question: Either the work is a Marxist symbol of a successful workers' revolution, or it is a lamentation for the underemployed class of unskilled workers who were disenfranchised by shifts in labor, production, and industry during the economic miracle. In the latter, *Double Ladder* is a symbolic image for a type of labor (menial) which had been displaced by industrial development, mechanization of labor, and economic expansion in postwar Italy, and the impotent social class and subject position of its association. As an illusion of a ladder—that is, as an illusion of a potentially useful implement that facilitates human labor—*Double Ladder* seems to create an experience for the viewer that symbolically recreates the withdrawal of such employment opportunities in postwar Italy, from the perspective of the working classes. On this point, as a photographic object—that is, a reproducible form and product of mechanical technology—the work goes even further. It models this withdrawal with the material and processes associated with mechanization, mass media, and consumer culture—that is, with the very agents that caused such opportunities to disappear in Italy over the course of the economic miracle.

This symbolic function of the ladder in *Double Ladder* is problematized, however, upon further examination of its references. In the mid-1950s, a major Italian synthetic textile company

and primary supplier to Italy's mass-produced clothing industry, Rhodiatocce, launched an advertising campaign and brand expansion program, which introduced a new quality certification seal, the *Scala d'oro Rhodiatocce* (Rhodiatocce Golden Ladder), or simply *Scala d'oro*, as it was commonly known (fig. 1.17). The seal was a circular logo, which featured a graphic of a ladder at its center, the tagline *prodotto di qualità* (quality product), and a bold, capital "R" in sleek, script type floating in its upper right-hand quadrant. Encircled by the words *Scala d'oro* and the company name, the seal of the Golden Ladder appeared on product packaging, print advertisements and in popular extended-format television commercials known as *caroselli*, for both Rhodiatocce and its major clientele.⁴⁸ In a 1956 advertisement for the pioneering line of ready-to-wear men's suiting from Turin-based company *Facis* (*Fabbrica Abiti Confezionati in Serie*; Mass Produced Clothing Factory), designed by Armando Testa, for example, the Golden Ladder appears as a bright gold circle, just ahead of the modern businessman who strides across the advertisement with a new blue suit in tow (fig. 1.18). In a well-known series of animated and live-action *caroselli* for Rhodiatocce that marketed women's stockings and garments made with Nailon and Terital, the company's brand name nylon and polyester fabrics, throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, the Golden Ladder always appeared at the beginning and end of the ad, accompanied by the slogan, *Rhodiatocce Scala d'oro: Il marchio a guardia della buona qualità!* (Rhodiatocce Golden Ladder: The Brand That Guards Top Quality!) announced by a grandstanding narrator or catchy chorus (fig. 1.19). In these ads, the circular seal functioned as a leitmotif around which the commercial's narrative took place, appearing in various circular forms: as a bouncing ball in a park; as a film reel; on the shield of the Roman centurion, *Caio Gregorio*, an unofficial mascot for the company and popular star of its *caroselli* of the 1960s; on a button of a man's dress shirt; in the circular viewfinder of a telescope, superimposed over

beautiful Italian vistas and on garment tags examined by discerning Italian shoppers.⁴⁹ Often appearing at the beginning and end of commercials, the *Scala d'oro* was a pervasive commercial marker in 1960s Italian consumer culture.

Advertising new, synthetic products for the equally new and “modern” Italian man and woman, Rhodiatoce’s caroselli regularly included life-scenes in which discerning Italian customers remarked upon the high quality of the mass-produced artificial cloth (as opposed to the natural-fiber, hand-woven, and more expensive fabrics that preceded the postwar innovation of mass-produced synthetic textiles).⁵⁰ Within the context of the economic miracle, the *Scala d'oro* branded not only a certain kind of product—a modern, industrially-produced, synthetic, specifically Italian one—but also a certain model of subjectivity, in which the modernity and class of the Italian subject is defined by commercial consumption, as opposed to labor. Indeed, the popular image of the idealized Italian subject that circulated 1950s and 1960s Italian mass culture aligned Italian modernity with nationalist consumerism. As one commercial put it, the Rhodiatoce customer was “A modern woman, a woman who knows what she wants and what she needs, and as such, her linens must be beautiful, practical, elegant, indubitable [...]. [She is] a self-assured woman” (*Una donna moderna, una donna che sa ciò che vuole e ciò che le occorre, e poiché la sua biancheria deve essere bella, pratica, elegante, non ha dubbi [...]. Una donna sicura*).⁵¹ While advertising campaigns such as Rhodiatoce’s often showcased products that were the result of innovations in mass-production and industrial technology in scenes that modeled an increasingly accessible, even democratic consumer economy that was open to all Italians, the reality was that such a world remained inaccessible to the majority of the national populace.

The image of the ladder in *Double Ladder*, then, gains further significance—especially as a photographic, mechanically-reproducible one—as a symbol of commodity branding and Italian

consumer culture during the economic miracle. Mounted on vertically-oriented, large sheets of plexiglass, the image within the context of the work calls forth a scene and experience of window shopping (sheets of plexiglass were, after all, largely manufactured for commercial businesses, who used them in window displays as a more durable alternative to glass that allowed businesses to showcase their goods to passersby more securely. In this sense, when the viewer of the Plexiglasses approaches *Double Ladder*, and realizes the ladder is not actually there, but is instead an imagistic construction, this perceptual disillusionment repositions the object of the works' depiction as a symbolic, commercial good. As a good that is inaccessible to the viewer, it also recreates an experience of economic dispossession. Within the context of the work's debut in 1964, then, as the previously booming Italian economy was giving way to economic collapse, Pistoletto's recreation of such an experience also functions as a form of sociopolitical critique that targeted the myth of widespread economic prosperity constituted by the economic miracle.

With these points in mind, we might say the Plexiglasses constellated a symbolic economy that was bifurcated between anti-capitalist, socialist signs associated with Italian culture and capitalist, commercial ones associated with American Pop. Ultimately, the Plexiglasses constellate a mirage of postwar Italian economic and artistic modernity that captures the frustration of the Italian populace, and of Pistoletto as an Italian artist. It is a world of disillusionment, furnished with duplicitous images, useless goods, and false promises of leisure and upward mobility. Recalling the concluding lines of the Plexiglasses statement, in which Pistoletto states that the "physical invasion of the picture into the real environment, [...] allows [him] to introduce [himself] among the broken-down elements of figuration," the statement now seems to offer something like a liberation for the subject—a liberation from the economic and

artistic constrictions of mid-1960s Italy (*MPIP*). In so doing, it places him on a platform where the constellation of a different reality seems to be a real possibility.

This concern with an individualist, liberal model of subjectivity was not exclusive to Pistoletto but had wider roots in early 1960s Italian culture. At the same historical moment, concurrent with Pistoletto's presentation of the Plexiglasses, ideas about finding new value in the individual as a sovereign, voluntarist subject began to circulate within the Italian New Left. This subject was brought to the fore of Italian leftist thought when it was theorized as one in possession of what Antonio Negri would call "self-valorization": the ability to determine one's own value in terms that transcend capitalist economic systems.⁵² This is not to be confused with new concepts of the individual emerging in the same moment in theories of modernity, such as Hans Blumenberg's concept of "self-assertion" (*Selbstbehauptung*), in which modern man is defined by his drive to systematically expand his skill set and knowledge to facilitate his adaptation to the world around him and "assert" himself therein.⁵³ Alongside these developments in Italian political theory, backlash in Europe against the success of American Pop at the 1964 Venice Biennale incited similar thinking in the Italian and European cultural Left. Consider, for example, Milan-based art dealer Arturo Schwarz's statement in the October 1964 issue of *Art International*: "Noi non ci occupiamo di 'Pop Art'; siamo interessati agli individui non alle scuole o agli scolari" (We don't concern ourselves with "Pop Art;" we are interested in individuals, not in schools or schoolboys).⁵⁴

For Schwarz, who flatly renounced any prospective interest in exhibiting Pop art in his eponymous gallery, individuality was a progressive humanist ideal and marker of artistic legitimacy. This idea of the individual here was not a resurrection of the Romantic notion of the artist, whose creativity is innate to the subject. Rather, Schwarz' assertion was that the artist

finds value in creative practice that does not aspire to or align with any recognized style or movement, or for that matter any signature style, which would compromise the individual to economic interests. Implicit to the concept of the “individual” articulated in Schwarz’ collective statement (“We don’t concern ourselves”) is a demarcation between Italian (and possibly European) subjects, and the American artists of his critique. Indeed, within the context of postwar Italy, this reconceptualization functioned as a political tactic to clear a space for artistic and subjective agency during the onset of the Cold War.

This expanded concept of figuration surpasses its conventional definition as a system of representation. I would like to suggest that what I have called Pistoletto’s conceptual, and in this case, spatialized model of figuration constitutes an art historical flashpoint in the late Fifties and early Sixties for a broader intellectual shift in the Sixties and Seventies, in which the figure—as image, as body—was positioned as a means to challenge, open up, and revolutionize discursive systems. This concept of figuration would find perhaps its best articulation in literary theory shortly after this period of Pistoletto’s work in the early poststructuralist writings of Jean-François Lyotard, whose concept of the “figure”—first laid out in his 1971 book, *Discours, figure* (Discourse, Figure)—posed the imagistic, the sensory, and the bodily as necessarily imbricated with structures of discourse but nevertheless endowed with the special capacity to exceed, transgress, and transform them.⁵⁵

This excavation of the figure as a model for the first decade of Pistoletto’s practice prompts similar reconsideration of the work of other Italian artists who became central players in *Arte povera* and the Italian avant-garde of the 1960s. We might begin with Alighiero Boetti, whose practice has recently attracted study that has come closest to this line of questioning. Mark Godfrey has recently written about Boetti’s experimental self-portraits of the late 1960s, for

example, as a conceptual strategy to contemplate the figure of the artist and to rethink subjectivity within the context of industrial postwar Italy.⁵⁶ Beginning in 1966, the young Turinese artist began using photographic and sculptural processes to produce a variety of unconventional self-portraits.⁵⁷ In *Autoritratto negativo* (Negative Self-Portrait; 1968; fig. 1.21), Boetti carved the imprint of a life-size face into a large stone; although the carving is somewhat rudimentary, capturing more of a generalized face, at best, rather than a masterful, mimetic representation of the artist, it nevertheless appeared as if the artist had pressed his face into plaster or another malleable material. Best known by its photographic reproduction in the catalog for *When Attitudes Become Form* (1968), in which the artist lies supine on the floor, juxtaposing his own face with the negative self-portrait at his side, *Autoritratto in negativo* for Godfrey debased the figurative conventions of the portrait bust by lowering it to the ground, and by doing away with portraiture's requisite likeness to its subject. Rather than serving as a lasting record of the artist's countenance, then, *Autoritratto in negativo* is a work about, as Godfrey puts it, "hiding, withdrawal, and self-cancellation"—a point reinforced by the fact that at the end of its exhibition in Milan, the artist brought back the stone to Turin and hurled it into the River Po, where Godfrey rightfully imagines its image, or better, face—that is, of both stone and portrait—would erode until it was worn away entirely.⁵⁸ For Godfrey, *Autoritratto in negativo* exemplifies the kind of anti-egoism and reflexive criticality that characterize what he calls "self-effacing self-representations." Such representations, Godfrey explains, are "[those works that] aim to subvert the historical enterprise of artistic self-portraiture and refuse the spectacle and myth attached to the representations of several of the 1960s artists already mentioned"—namely Yves Klein and Joseph Beuys, for Godfrey.⁵⁹

In addition to Boetti's "self-effacing" self-portraits, Godfrey identifies a second

figurative strategy in Boetti's work that similarly worked to "[revolutionize] self-portraiture" in the late 1960s.⁶⁰ While *Autoritratto in negativo* reworked self-representation by erasing—sometimes literally—the image of the artist as a mythic or fetishized subject, Boetti simultaneously explored strategies of self-multiplication and division to similarly destabilize univocal models of artistic subjectivity, signification, and their attendant conventions of figuration.⁶¹ In the iconic photomontage *Gemelli* (Twins; 1968; fig. 1.22), we see two similarly posed “Boettis” standing hand-in-hand—identical with the exception of their slightly different facial expressions. By using two, slightly different images of himself, as opposed to reproducing one, and by reprinting the photomontage into a seamless image, Boetti creates a picture in which he appears not as a double or copy of himself, but as two separate individuals, if twinned.

We might also think of Mario Merz, another fellow Turin-based artist and future member of Arte Povera, who, in the early 1950s, began his artistic career making paintings that featured farmers, welders, and workers, in advance of his better-known early works of animals and natural imagery (figs. 1.23–24). Like Pistoletto, Merz moved from figurative painting to a non-figurative, three-dimensional practice in the mid-1960s that set up a specific kind of experience for an embodied, mobile viewer. In *Objet cache-toi* (Hide-Yourself Object; 1968–77; fig. 1.25), one of Merz' igloo structures, for example, this experience seemed attuned less to self-introduction than to self-protection; both artists, however, seemed to be concerned with spatial and political agency, and similarly invoked signs to implicate commercial capitalism as an agent of subjective control. In his igloo structures, Merz' often used neon signage and plates of glass, creating structures that suggest the artwork resides in an embattled economic space.

Or perhaps we might think of Luciano Fabro, whose *In cubo* (In Cube; 1966; fig. 1.26), through this line of inquiry, might be viewed as a play upon classical figurative sculpture. In this

work, Fabro famously built a fabric-covered, steel frame cube whose height and width were determined from the measure of his own body. Recalling classical studies of bodily proportion and humanist worldviews, Fabro then entered the cube, whose bottom side was open, enclosing himself inside the constructed form. In so doing, Fabro undermined abstractionist claims for geometric sculpture at the time, by making the white cube figuratively, if not literally, a figurative sculpture. Fabro's "breakdown" of figuration amounted to a displacement of a represented body with his own, and a reclamation of the visibility of his body and the agency associated with revealing himself to gallery members only when he desired.

Other examples of figural experimentation abound within Arte Povera, which similarly enacted experiences of agency for the artist or viewer. We might think of Giuseppe Penone's *Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quel punto* (It will continue to grow except for at that point; 1968–2003; fig. 1.27), in which the artist placed a bronze cast of his own hand around the trunk of a sapling in the Maritime Alps in northern Italy, only returning thirty-five years later, by which point the tree's growth bulged around the the hand, making a figural index of the artist's body (the bronze cast) an index of the artist's intervention on the tree (the hand in the tree). We might also think of Giulio Paolini's work, who began experimenting with plaster-cast figurative sculpture in the late 1960s. Works like *L'altra figura* (The Other Figure; 1982; fig. 1.28) seem especially pertinent. In that work, Paolini used plaster casts of two classicist busts placed on two columns; these figures gaze down to the floor in between them, where plaster fragments are scattered, suggesting that a third figure has been shattered. In this work, Paolini or the viewer, presumably, takes the place of the would-be "other figure" in the scene. Paolini literally "breaks down" the elements of figuration in the real space of the gallery, allowing himself, or someone else to introduce themselves within that space.

With these thoughts in mind, Pistoletto's Plexiglasses (and the body of early figurative paintings they frame) do more than ask us to consider the role of figuration in the postwar Italian avant-garde. Ultimately, Pistoletto's reconceptualization of figuration into the figural in 1964 asks us to consider what a figural history of modern and contemporary art might look like.⁶² How might these new narratives redress existing histories and theories of Modernism? This figural art history cuts across historical and cultural contexts, opening new narratives and genealogies of twentieth-century avant-gardes, while repositioning the postwar Italian avant-garde within historical narrative of postwar art, expanding the art historical discourse, in turn.

When we consider Pistoletto's early writings in relation to the works of their address, new histories, genealogies, and narratives begin to constellate around the artist and his work, and around postwar art in turn. The Plexiglasses' engagement of new synthetic materials, geometric structure, and the spatial environment surrounding the work of art, for example, invite comparison to Italian Futurism. These terms also align Pistoletto with the interests of the *Informale* within the postwar Italian avant-garde, especially to *Spazialismo* (Spatialism) and the self-titled *Artisti Spaziali* (Spatial Artists), including Lucio Fontana, Gianni Dova, Roberto Crippa, and Enrico Donati, and critics Giorgio Kasserlian, Beniamino Joppolo, and Milena Milani.⁶³ In the late 1940s, these artists called for the migration of painting and sculpture out into space and for the production of an *arte aerea* (aerial art). Of particular interest is a passage from the *Secondo manifesto dello spazialismo* (SMDS; Second Manifesto of Spatialism), dated March 18, 1948, in which Fontana and his fellow Spatial Artists called for painting and sculpture to "go out" (*esca*) from their respective conventional positions of the frame and glass-enclosed pedestal.⁶⁴ They wrote: "We want painting to go out from its frame and sculpture to go out from its bell jar" (*[Vogliamo] che il quadro esca dalla sua cornice e la scultura dalla sua campana di*

vetro; *SMDS*).⁶⁵ Pistoletto echoed the Spatial Artists' rhetoric nearly two decades later in his Plexiglass statement, when he declared that, in order to examine the structure of art, he "must make the painting go out into reality" (*devo far uscire il quadro nella realtà*; underlining original; *MPIP*). If for Pistoletto this turn to ambient space resulted in a "break-down" of figuration, in which its constitutive elements are dispersed across a spatial field, then this point of connection between Pistoletto's spatial interests and those of the Spatial Movement prompts new examination of the latter with concern to figuration, as well.

Such an examination might begin with Fontana's own work, as the central player of the movement. Concurrent with his production of spatial artworks—the *Buchi* (Holes), *Tagli* (Cuts), *Concetti spaziali* (Spatial Concepts) and *Ambienti spaziali* (Spatial Environments; fig. 1.29), for which he is best known—Fontana simultaneously pursued a figurative practice, making hundreds of figurative drawings over the course of his career. Extending an interest that has largely been associated with his early career, Fontana's figurative project in fact spanned the entirety of his work; it was conducted not only in tandem with but as a baseline to his work in abstraction. While Fontana's early interest in the figure is well documented (in his drawings, mosaic sculptures, and ceramic works of the 1930s, e.g.), scholars in recent years—especially Anthony White and Yve-Alain Bois—brought this early work into dialogue with Fontana's abstraction, repositioning these early works as a gateway to the artist's exploration of space not only as artistic "medium" but as something that surrounds the body. From this perspective, Fontana's "abstractionist" turn to space emerges as inextricably tied to his thinking about (and rethinking of) the figure and the body. As Fontana experimented with figuration, playing with open contour line and expanded, disconnected forms to define the body, so too did the artist's reconceptualization of painting and sculpture take the shape of an experimentation with

processes of opening and spatial expansion—which is to say, Fontana’s holes, cuts, spatial concepts, and environments should be understood not as *figurative* but rather *figural*. The spatial works are not representations of the human figure; instead, they are bodily, figural forms *presented* in the space of the viewer (rather than in representational, figurative space). Compare, for example, the artist’s study for his door design for the Duomo in Milan with an abstract preparatory drawing for the *Ambienti spaziali*, of the same period (figs. 1.30–31). The drawings demonstrate a shared interest in the expansion of form—of arms reaching, curvilinear forms stretching; for Fontana, figure and space were both not only material, but bodily. Indeed, Fontana’s sketches, paintings, and sculptures, even those which have been typically regarded as wholly abstract, belie the figural underpinnings to his concave forms, rounded contours, and dynamic shapes.

This connection between the body and spatialist abstraction in Fontana’s later work prompts further consideration of the Spatial Movement’s relationship to the figure. Examination of the artists’ writings in this respect uncovers new points of contact between Spatialism and the Plexiglasses. Like the Spatial Artists, who wanted “to recuperate [their] real nature, [their] real image,” Pistoletto wanted to “find” and “introduce himself” beyond the mirror. Indeed, this shared anxiety about securing and restoring control over one’s own image, body, and self, seems to have been worked out by both the Spatialists and Pistoletto through a spatial reconceptualization of figuration. In 1950, the Spatial Artists declared they “no longer imposed a figurative theme on the viewer, but rather *placed him in the condition of creating himself by himself*, through his fantasy and the emotions he experiences” (italics added; “[*Non*] *impone più allo spettatore un tema figurativo, ma lo pone nella condizione di crearselo da sé, attraverso la sua fantasia e le emozioni che riceve*”).

Pistoletto, for his part, imagined introducing himself in an expanded spatial and symbolic field of disassembled figuration.⁶⁶ Only by “making the painting go out in reality,” he wrote, would he be able to find and introduce himself:

[I] have to make the painting go out into reality, creating the fiction of *finding myself* beyond the mirror. [...] The physical invasion of the painting into the real environment [...] allows me to introduce myself among the broken-down elements of figuration.

([Devo] far uscire il quadro nella realtà, creando la finzione di trovarmi oltre lo specchio. [...] L’invasione fisica del quadro nella realtà mi permette di introdurmi tra gli elementi scomposti della figurazione” [underlining original; *MPIP*].)

For Pistoletto, then, the spatial recontextualization of the work of art provided a solution to a problem of access and spatial agency. In the mirror paintings, Pistoletto wrote, he was able to “find himself in the painting,” that is, within the illusionist three-dimensional space of the mirror that seems to be an extension of real space through the wall on which the mirror hangs, rather than a specular reflection of real space in front of it (*MPIP*). While this phenomenological model of self-discovery, retrieval, or reunification allowed the viewer to see his own reflection and identify it as his image-self, thereby giving him an experience of self-integration into an empowered, self-possessed, whole subject, it was nevertheless limited by its disallowance of the viewer to *physically* enter the world and access his reflection as a tangible body rather than image in front of him. As Pistoletto wrote:

Rather, given that physically it’s impossible for me to go into the mirror, in order to investigate the structure of art, I have to make the painting go out into reality, thereby creating the fiction of finding myself beyond the mirror [underlining original].

(Anzi, siccome fisicamente mi è impossibile entrarci, per indagare nella strutture dell'arte devo far uscire il quadro nella realtà, creando la finzione di trovarmi oltre lo specchio [underlining original; *MPIP*].)

As the Plexiglasses’ spatial interests were invested in a reconceptualization of figuration, they also negotiated the Spatialists’ formative interest in the history and transformation of figuration.

In late 1946, Fontana and his students at the *Altamira Escuela Libre de Artes Plásticas* (Altamira Free School for the Visual Arts) in Buenos Aires, where the Argentine-born Italian artist relocated during the years surrounding World War II (1940–47), published the *Manifiesto Blanco* (White Manifesto), which became a kind of proto-manifesto for Spatialism, established by Fontana the following spring in Italy. In the *White Manifesto*, the Altamira group declared they would re-ignite the evolution of art, which had fallen into a state of “latency.”⁶⁷ To do so, they would create a “greater” art: an art of new media, technology, and dimensions, which would move beyond the obsolete (in their view) traditional arts (visual, plastic, and literary), to instead engage light, sound, time, and space. This “four-dimensional” art, they argued, would respond to the “new spirit” of modern man as a subject of the new, “mechanical age”: a period of technological advancement, scientific discovery, and industrial expansion that had fundamentally changed the nature and condition of man, as well as the organization of the world in which he lives. Attendant to this call for a new art was the authors’ narration of a history of the arts that focused on the representation of “space and depth,” which they viewed as the origin point and measure of progress in modern artistic practice. Within this context, a short passage on the Baroque is particularly noteworthy. For Fontana and his students, from their perspective in 1946, the expanded representation of space in the Baroque period remained unparalleled within the history of art. What is important for our discussion is that the proto-Spatialists described this achievement in terms of figuration; that is, the “breadth” and “grandeur” of spatial representation achieved by Baroque artists was not positioned as a function of scale, nor one gained by advances in the representation of perspectival space, nor even a result of the dynamism that is characteristic of Baroque imagery. Instead, Fontana and his students attributed this expansion of space to a transformation of the conventional terms and conditions of figuration, writing: “The

figures seem to leave [*abandonar*] the plane and carry the represented movements into space.”⁶⁸ Indeed, the early Spatialists qualified the new magnitude of space (in both scale and degree) achieved in the Baroque as a function of the period’s reconceptualization of the spatial purview of figuration: from a discrete, two-dimensional “plane” or surface (on which an image was conventionally rendered or painted), to an unbound, three-dimensional, ambient environment, freeing the figure from the limiting conventions of traditional media and mimesis, and allowing representational, figurative space to move out into real space, in turn.

While much of the rhetoric in the *White Manifesto* was informed by existing ideas circulating the Argentine artistic avant-garde (an interest in new technology, e.g.), as well as by revisionist cultural theories offered by a scrutinized intellectual Left under the Perón regime, this interest in spatialized figuration intensified in the years that followed in Italy, in a number of Fontana’s projects.⁶⁹ Returning to the *Second Manifesto of Spatialism*, a text better known for its celebration of modern technology, “artificial forms,” and “luminous scripts,” Fontana and his fellow artists also declared a desire to “recuperate our real face, our real image” by breaking out of their physical form and earthbound environment. They wrote:

If, initially, closed in his towers, the artist represented himself and his astonishment and the landscape he saw through the windows, and then, descended from the castles in the cities, knocking down walls and intermingling with other men, saw trees and objects close up, today, we, Spatial Artists, have escaped our cities, have broken up our shell, our physical cortex, and we see ourselves from high up, photographing the earth from rockets in the air. With that [...], we want to recuperate our real face, our real image: a change awaited by all of creation, anxiously. The spirit spreads its light, in the freedom that we had been given.

(Se, dapprima, chiuso nelle sue torri, l'artista rappresentò se stesso e il suo stupore e il paesaggio lo vide attraverso i vetri, e poi, disceso dai castelli nelle città, abbattendo le mura e mescolandosi agli altri uomini vide da vicino gli alberi e gli oggetti, oggi, noi, artisti spaziali, siamo evasi dalle nostre città, abbiamo spezzato il nostro involucro, la nostra corteccia fisica e ci siamo guardati dall'alto, fotografando la terra dai razzi in volo. Con ciò [...], vogliamo ricuperare il nostro vero volto, la nostra vera immagine: un mutamento atteso da tutta la creazione, ansiosamente. Lo spirito diffonda la sua luce,

nella libertà che ci è stata data [SMDS].)

Ultimately, Fontana and his fellow “Spatial Artists” conceived of a spatialized subject as a kind of unbounded light, freed from the limits of the physical body and ground to move as it likes. While the spatial environments, then, formally register as experiments in abstraction, perhaps they should rather be regarded as experiments in figuration.

As the Plexiglasses’ spatial interests were invested in a reconceptualization of figuration, then, they find their most compelling precedent in the figurative practice of Italian Futurist Umberto Boccioni. Pistoletto’s self-described process of staging a “physical invasion of the picture into the real environment” echoes Umberto Boccioni’s call in 1912 for a *scultura d’ambiente* or “sculpture of environment,” as well as the militancy of the Futurists’ rhetoric and ideology.⁷⁰ In his *Manifesto tecnico della scultura Futurista* (MTSF; Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture) of 1912, Boccioni laid out Futurism’s aim to renew the languishing art of sculpture by abolishing the historic and—in his view—anachronistic conventions of the medium (both academic and formal) that were holding it behind other visual arts (namely, painting).⁷¹ For Boccioni, traditional sculpture was best represented by statuary, in which figurative form was bound by an impenetrable, uninterrupted line; this line, Boccioni argued, demarcated the body for the viewer as a finite, closed form that was definitively separate from the “invisible, enveloping” spatial environment of its display (MTSF). This formal and perceptual demarcation of the body from its spatial surround was, for Boccioni, a function of the conventionally unitary or indivisible form of figurative sculpture. To revolutionize sculpture, then, Boccioni proposed, Futurism would dissolve formal, perceptual, and material boundaries between the sculptural object and its ambient surround. By doing away with closed forms, finite lines, and traditional media, Futurism would create a *scultura d’ambiente* or “sculpture of the environment” (MTSF).

Whereas by 1912 Futurist painting had overcome this convention of figuration, Boccioni lamented that Futurist sculpture still lagged behind other visual and literary arts alike. If painting had already been “revitalized” under Futurism “by making the landscape and the environment simultaneously act on the human figure and on objects”—an operation achieved, Boccioni explained, through the formal strategy of “interpenetration” (*compenetrazione*; an idea first introduced in the group’s *Manifesto tecnico della pittura futurista* of 1910, Boccioni points out)—Futurist sculpture would have to create a new, plastic strategy that would overcome this problem in three-dimensional space, that is, in the purview of sculpture.⁷²

To do so, Futurist sculpture was to be made up of an “interpenetration of planes,” which would make the material work of art coextensive with the immaterial spatial environment surrounding it (*MTSF*). As opposed to traditional sculpture, the Futurist strategy of interpenetration would seek to incorporate environmental space into the “plastic block” or material form of sculpture and vice versa, by articulating form as an endless series of dynamic, intersecting planes and geometries (*MTSF*). If interpenetration allowed Futurist painters to create images of a world in which subjects, objects, and spaces were interconnected by a confluent plasticity, three-dimensional interpenetration in Futurist sculpture would allow bodies and objects to be modeled in a wide range of materials, lines to be woven between naturally separate forms, and a new reality to take shape, in which “the figure and things” could “live [...] outside the logic of physiognomy” (*MTSF*). As Boccioni wrote:

In this way a figure can be clothed on one arm and nude on the other, and the different lines of a vase of flowers can nimbly chase themselves between the lines of a hat and those of the neck. In this way transparent planes, windowpanes, sheets of metal, electric cords, electric outdoor and indoor lights will be able to indicate planes, inclinations, tones, half-tones of a new reality.

(Così una figura può essere vestita in un braccio e nuda nell'altro, e le diverse linee d'un vaso di fiori possono rincorrersi agilmente fra le linee del capello e quelle del collo. Così

dei piani trasparenti, dei vetri, delle lastre di metallo, dei fili, delle luci elettriche esterne o interne potranno indicare i piani, le tendenze, i toni, i semitoni di una nuova realtà [MTSF].)

In Boccioni's list for Futurist sculpture—an uncannily familiar one, when we consider the Futurists' practice in relation to Pistoletto's—describes an expansion of material and semiotic possibilities for three-dimensional artistic practice. Sculptural interpenetration and dynamic line would establish a harmonic interconnection between the figure and environment, creating a material or “plastic rhythm” between the two, expanding the body such that its parts were made free to move around and become part of the environment around it.

Implicit to these tasks, then, was the remaking of the human figure as well, which surprisingly endured as a motif for the Futurists despite the movement's condemnation of the traditional conventions of figuration (the classical nude, monumental statuary) and its associated academicism and historicity. While calling for the “destruction of the systematic nude” in the *Technical Manifesto for Futurist Sculpture*, then, Boccioni seems to articulate a pathway that would allow the Futurists to do away with figuration as it had been known in sculpture, but without excommunicating the figure, and therefore the body—a subject of great interest to the group—entirely from its practices (MTSF).⁷³ The solution, it seemed, was a reconceptualization of the figure, an opening up of the body and incorporation of its environment:

Let's overturn everything, then, and proclaim the *absolute and complete abolition of finite line and closed statuary. Let's open the figure wide, and enclose the environment therein* [italics original].

(Rovesciamo tutto, dunque e proclamiamo *l'assoluta e completa abolizione della linea finita e della statua chiusa. Spalanchiamo la figura e chiudiamo in essa l'ambiente* [italics original; MTSF].)

In the original Italian, this imperative to open—*spalanchiamo*—calls for an action of extreme degree. The verb *spalancare* is used in a variety of contexts in the Italian language: to open your

arms wide for an embrace, for example, or more commonly, to fling open a door. In proper usage, however, the action is limited to parts of the body or sensory organs—e.g., to open your eyes or mouth as far as possible. The implication of Boccioni’s sculptural directive, then, should be understood as a call to open the figure to its sensorial, corporeal, and subjective limits.

Indeed, Boccioni’s proposal in the *Technical Manifesto for Futurist Sculpture* calls for an opening up of the body and purview of the subject on an environmental scale, to such a degree that the subject reaches a corporeal and psychic breaking point—a breaking point that threatens to destroy the figure even as its domain is expanded.⁷⁴ As Boccioni envisioned it:

We proclaim that the environment must be made to be part of the plastic block as a world unto itself, with its own laws; that the sidewalk can go up onto your table, and that your head can cross the street while your lamp ties its web of rays of gesso between one house and another.

(Proclamiamo che l’ambiente deve far parte del blocco plastico come un mondo a sé e con leggi proprie; che il marciapiede può salire sulla vostra tavola, e che la vostra testa può attraversare la strada mentre tra una casa e l’altra la vostra lampada allaccia la sua ragnatela di raggi di gesso [*MTSF*].)

In these lines, Boccioni imagines a physical world in which figures are able to simultaneously inhabit different places, move in different directions, and occupy disconnected spaces simultaneously. On the one hand, then, the figural imaginary of Boccioni’s Futurism models a liberated subject position, characterized by expanded spatial and bodily agency. On the other, however, this expansion is envisioned as a breaking apart or dismemberment of the body—specifically here, in the form of decapitation—that would seem to simultaneously destroy the subject. (If our “head[s] can cross the street,” in Boccioni’s Futurist environment, so must our bodies be left headless [*MTSF*].) If this is the result of bodies and objects expanding into some connected plastic world, Boccioni’s figuration functions according to what Hal Foster has called “the double logic of the prosthesis”—the paradoxically productive and destructive relationship

between the body and technology he sees variously played out by early-twentieth-century Modernisms.⁷⁵ However, Pistoletto's apparent adaptation of Boccioni's reconceptualization of the figure, that is, as a means to revolutionize sculpture, provides us with the opportunity to trace a different approach to the body and to figuration within the historic Italian avant-garde. The spatialized, environmental approach offers a counter-model to the better-known Futurist motif of the indefatigable, racing "machinic body" of this logic's basis and advancement.

What we might call the Futurist motif of the "ambient" or "environmental figure," in which the body is both in and constitutionally of the world, seems to have originated in Boccioni's figurative drawings and sculptural experiments of the early 1910s, in which the artist sought to realize his reconceptualized figure, newly connected with the world, somewhat literally. In a series of gesso sculptures begun in 1912, including *Testa + luce + casa* (Head + Light + House; 1912; fig. 1.32) and *Fusione di una testa e di una finestra* (Fusion of a Head and a Window; 1912–13; fig. 1.33) for example, Boccioni addressed this problem by taking on the traditional convention of the sculptural portrait bust, remaking the masterfully crafted, idealized, aristocratic, and typically historical subject of its depiction into inelegant, somewhat boorish figures and works of undignified bricolage. The convoluted, agitated bodies of Boccioni's sculptural subjects in the early 1910s seem to intractably expand and unfurl despite their increasing disfigurement, as they push through ornate iron balustrades, blocks of wood, panes of glass, walls, houses, stone foundations and other divisive structures that bisect, cleave, and cross through them. Rejecting traditional sculptural fine art media of marble or bronze and the neo-classical dictum of Beaux-Arts style, Boccioni instead employed an expanded, diverse material repertoire that included pre-fabricated, industrial items (store-bought wooden window frames, plate glass, iron hardware), media associated with the decorative, domestic, and applied arts

(porcelain, gesso); and a selection of personal accoutrement, specifically of the compensatory (a woman's hairpiece, made of braided horsehair) and prosthetic variety (a pair of painted, glass eyes). While this heterogeneous, democratic material strategy associated (if not emplaced) the work of art within the increasingly industrialized spaces of mass culture and everyday life in urban Italy in the early twentieth century, as scholars have often noted, consideration of its significance in relation to the body provides us with a different and potentially more provocative reading. In *Fusione di una testa e una finestra*, for example, this material selection—especially the hairpiece and the glass eyes—also associated Boccioni's figure with the ugly and the prosthetic, as opposed to the classical ideals of symmetry, beauty, able-bodied-ness, and bodily autonomy—that is, with bodies that might be regarded as less than ideal, marked by lack, or other than autonomous and whole.⁷⁶

This type of environmental disfiguration should not be confused with or taken as a precursor to other models of disfiguration that emerge in the postwar period: the “défigurations” of Asger Jorn; the “creaturely” or therianthropic model of CoBrA's primal, bestial, and crude subjects; or the “distorted and depleted” figurative aesthetic of Georg Baselitz and German neo-expressionism in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.⁷⁷ On the contrary, the figure in Boccioni's *Fusion of a Head and a Window* is both materially and spatially of the world. As opposed to the virile, technocratic Futurist subject envisioned by Marinetti in 1909 in the founding manifesto of the movement—proposed by the high-speed, superhuman, “machinic” body we readily associate with the Italian historical avant-garde—the Futurist subject Boccioni envisioned in the early 1910s seems less empowered and self-possessed than vulnerable and decentered. Rather than rendering the subject weak, however, these qualities seem to stem instead from Boccioni's conceptualization of a receptive and inclusive body: As this body expands spatially, it

incorporates objects, structures, and all other forms that may have otherwise constrained or dictated its movement. Boccioni described this process in terms of a new “harmony” for the modern world:

A Futurist sculptural composition will contain in itself the marvelous mathematical and geometric elements of modern objects. These objects will be not placed alongside the statue, like so many explanatory attributes or separate decorative elements but, following the laws of a new conception of harmony, they will be embedded in the muscular lines of a body. Sculpture therefore has to make objects live, making their extension in space sensible, systematic, and plastic, seeing as no one can doubt anymore that an object ends where another begins, and there isn't a thing that surrounds our body: bottle, car, house, tree, street, that doesn't cut it and doesn't divide it with an arabesque of curves and supports.

(Una composizione scultoria futurista avrà in sé meravigliosi elementi matematici e geometrici che compongono gli oggetti del nostro tempo. E questi oggetti non saranno vicini alla statua come attributi esplicativi o elementi decorativi staccati, ma, seguendo le leggi di una nuova concezione dell'armonia, saranno incastrati nelle linee muscolari di un corpo. La scultura deve quindi far vivere gli oggetti rendendo sensibile, sistematico, e plastico il loro prolungamento nello spazio, poiché nessuno può più dubitare che un oggetto finisca dove un altro comincia e non v'è cosa che circonda il nostro corpo: bottiglia, automobile, casa, albero, strada, che non lo tagli e non lo sezioni con un arabesco di curve e di rette [MTSF].)

Ultimately, Boccioni's Futurist subject does not conform to or become one with the modern world; instead, he expands around and through it—both the body and material world expand together.

As Pistoletto's deconstructionist ambient figuration constellates new art historical genealogies that engage the figure as model for creative practice, the postwar Italian avant-garde gains new significance within the history of twentieth-century art, by opening up new histories that originate, figuratively, from neither beginning nor end, but somewhere in the middle. As such, we might consider Pistoletto's conceptual figuration as itself a kind of figure: as a means to open up alternative histories of modernism and the avant-garde. Such consideration might position Pistoletto as the inheritor of the avant-garde trajectory inculcated by Italian Futurism

and Duchamp, and pre-cursor to later conceptual explorations of the figure and figural in the work of artists like James Coleman and Robert Whitman.⁷⁸ Within Italian art, this line of thinking connects Pistoletto to a number of practices in the late 1960s and 1970s that engaged the body, embodied and figurative space, theatricality, and the cinematic, as in Fabio Mauri's "projection actions," such as *Intellettuale* (Intellectual; 1976), in which the artist projected Pier Paolo Pasolini's film, *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo* (The Gospel According to St. Matthew; 1965; fig. 1.33) onto the director's own T-shirt clad body. It also connects him to the photographic practice of Mario Merz, who explored the figural as a point of social and relational connectivity, as in his parenthetically titled series, *Senza titolo (Una somma reale è una somma di gente* [Untitled (A Real Sum is a Sum of People, 1972; fig. 1.34), in which the number people gathered in a restaurant progressively multiplies, following the Fibonacci series from 1 to 55 figures across the photographic stills.

This examination of Pistoletto's early work and writings has opened up what we might call a figural history of the Italian avant-garde, constellated between Futurism, Spatialism, and the avant-garde of the 1960s. In so doing, Pistoletto has emerged as the inheritor of the avant-garde model of what I have called spatialized or ambient (dis)figuration: a model that cuts through the intersection between the anti-mimetic turn to real space (anti-diegesis), as well as the anti-mimetic turn to the body. As his figuration opens up a new historical genealogy of the Italian avant-garde, so too does it open a space for a new trajectory ahead.

¹ Umberto Boccioni, *Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista* (Milan: April 11, 1912), n.p. Originally published by the Futurists under the above title and date, then in the Italian serial, *L'Italia* (September 30, 1912). It was the first Futurist manifesto to be reprinted in the postwar

period, when it was published in 1950 as a book, *Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista*, by Le Edizioni di Cavallino (Venice), in association with the 1950 Venice Biennale. The original Italian reads: “Rovesciamo tutto, dunque e proclamiamo *l'assoluta e completa abolizione della linea finita e della statua chiusa. Spalanchiamo la figura e chiudiamo in essa l'ambiente*” (italics original). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

² Lucio Fontana, et al., *Secondo manifesto dello spazialismo* (Milan: March, 1948). Signed by Fontana, Dova, Joppolo, Kaiserlian, and Tullier. In *Lucio Fontana: Concetti Spaziali*, ed. Paolo Fossati, Einaudi Letteratura (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1970), 127. The original Italian reads: “Se, dapprima, chiuso nelle sue torri, l'artista rappresentò se stesso e il suo stupore e il paesaggio lo vide attraverso i vetri, e poi, disceso dai castelli nelle città, abbattendo le mura e mescolandosi agli altri uomini vide da vicino gli alberi e gli oggetti, oggi, noi, artisti spaziali, siamo evasi dalle nostre città, abbiamo spezzato il nostro involucro, la nostra corteccia fisica e ci siamo guardati dall'alto, fotografando la terra dai razzi in volo. Con ciò [...], vogliamo recuperare il nostro vero volto, la nostra vera immagine [...].”

³ Pistoletto, *I plexiglass*, n.p. The original Italian reads: “L'invadenza fisica del quadro nell'ambiente reale, portando con sé le rappresentazioni dello specchio, mi permette di introdurni tra gli elementi scomposti della figurazione.”

⁴ See Pistoletto, “Michelangelo Pistoletto,” interview by Celant (May, 1971), in *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant and Ida Gianelli (Florence: Electa Editrice, 1984), 41. The interview was not published until 1976, when selections were included in the catalog for his exhibition at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice. This account, however, was not published until 1984, when it was included in the catalog for his solo exhibition at the Forte di Belvedere in Florence.

⁵ These thoughts build upon Benjamin Buchloh's discussion of Modernism's dedication to the destruction of cultural memory. For Buchloh, those conventions that were not unique to painting—that is, “historical narrativity, figural representation, [and] theatrical enactment”—have been the “declared enemies” of the entirety of Modernism's various trajectories in the twentieth century. See Buchloh, “Memory Lessons and History Tableaux: James Coleman's Archaeology of Spectacle,” in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2000), 144.

⁶ Accounts of this process abound in the literature on Pistoletto. The best account in terms of accuracy and thoroughness belongs to Suzanne Penn, a conservator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. See Penn, 142–67, especially 147–60.

⁷ For an account of Pistoletto's work with Bressano in the early mirror paintings, see Penn, 149. Also see Gilman, “Pistoletto's Staged Subjects,” 73.

⁸ Penn, 149–52.

⁹ Penn, 152.

¹⁰ “Now you can put yourself...in the picture,” *Minneapolis Tribune Picture Magazine*, April 3, 1966, 12–13.

¹¹ Bernardi, “Pitture sperimentali di giovani,” 5. Carluccio, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Opere recenti*, n.p.

¹² Laurie Schneider Adams, *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 141.

¹³ Douglas Crimp, “The End of Painting,” *October* 16, Art World Follies (Spring 1981): 73. These thoughts are also indebted to Kaja Silverman’s work on Gerhard Richter’s photo pictures and abstract paintings. In that essay, Silverman unpacks the artist’s description of his practice as “photography by other means” to offer a theory of photography as analogy. See Silverman, “Photography by Other Means,” chap. 7 in *Flesh of My Flesh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 168–221.

¹⁴ See, for example, Tommaso Trini, “Scheda su Michelangelo Pistoletto: 1,” *L’Uomo e l’arte* 7 (December 1971): 28; Carluccio, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Opere recenti*, n.p.; Alain Jouffroy, untitled essay, in *Pistoletto* (Paris: Galerie Sonnabend, 1964), n.p.; and

¹⁵ See Basualdo, “Michelangelo Pistoletto: From One to Many, 1956–1974,” in *From One to Many*, 5, and Romy Golan, “Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art of the 1960s,” *Grey Room*, no. 49 (Fall 2012): 102–27. For a primary source, see the following interview with fellow Turinese artist and friend Piero Gilardi, who also shares this view. See Piero Gilardi, “An Interview with Piero Gilardi,” interview by LeGrace G. Benson with Gabriele Muresu, *Leonardo* 1, no. 4 (October 1968): 431.

¹⁶ See Cullinan, “From Vietnam to Fiat-nam: The Politics of Arte Povera,” *October* 128 (Spring 2008): 14.

¹⁷ Jouffroy, untitled essay, in *Pistoletto* (Paris: Galerie Sonnabend, 1964), n.p.

¹⁸ Gilman, “Figuring Boetti,” 136, and Gilman, “Pistoletto’s Staged Subjects,” 73.

¹⁹ Pistoletto, interview by Germano Celant (Genoa: February, 1971), in *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1976), 8. Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title organized by Giorgio Persano, held at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice, at the Centro internazionale delle arti e del costume, June 16–July 28, 1976.

²⁰ Artist Gualtiero Schönenberger has also compared Pistoletto’s work to animation, albeit in relation to the mirror paintings. See Schönenberger, “Scheda su Pistoletto: 4,” *L’Uomo e l’arte* 7 (December 1971): 39.

²¹ My thanks go to Maureen Furniss and Celia Mercer for directing me to examples of experimental animated films that have used material photographic imagery (as opposed to Xeroxed or screen-printed images), whether used for direct to film or for background imagery.

²² The term “antimediation” has previously been offered by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. as a term for the kind of signatory “trickery” and “play on language use” that seem to remove referentiality from sites and systems of meaning. Antimediation might, for example, reposition allegory as

literal fact. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifyin(g): Rhetorical Difference and Orders of Meaning,” chap. 2 in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988), 25th anniversary ed. (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 49–96.

²³ In this respect, we might also regard the Plexiglasses as an extension of Synthetic Cubism; they similarly use collage techniques—here, in the form of photo-montage—and signs of the everyday, but expand the medium into the real space.

²⁴ *Stampa Sera*, front page headlines, July 20–21, 1964.

²⁵ For the first and second quotations, see Leonard, “Des dollars chez les Doges,” *France Observateur*, June 25, 1964. Available online as “Cartoon satirizing Robert Rauschenberg winning first prize at the Venice Biennale art exhibition, 25 June 1964,” Alan R. Solomon Papers, 1930–72, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. For the third, see Bernardi, “Vecchia di 80 anni l'arte 'moderna' degli americani trionfanti alla Biennale,” *La Stampa*, June 25, 1964.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tullia Zevi, “The Biennale: How Evil is Pop Art?” *The New Republic* 151, no. 12 (September 19, 1964): 33.

²⁸ Annette Michelson, “The 1964 Venice Biennale,” *Art International* 8, no. 7 (September 25, 1965), 38.

²⁹ Laurie J. Monahan, “Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale,” in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945–1964* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1990), 372.

³⁰ Monahan, 372–73.

³¹ Annie Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle: The Life of Leo Castelli*, trans. Mark Polizzotti with Cohen-Solal (New York: Knopf, 2010), 296–97. Cohen-Solal gives a detailed account of the week preceding the award (June 14–19), including installation specifics, correspondences within and between the jury, Solomon, Castelli and Sonnabend (who were there as the artists’ gallerists), and lobbying tactics. See Cohen, Solal, 294–98. Monahan, 371.

³² Cohen-Solal, 296–97.

³³ For the debates, see Cohen-Solal, 297. For rumors, see Monahan, 371.

³⁴ Cohen-Solal, 298; Monahan, 373.

³⁵ Uncited critic quoted by Tullia Zevi. See Zevi, 34.

³⁶ Renata Pisu, “Tutto è perduto, anche il pudore,” *ABC* (June 28, 1964): 8–11.

³⁷ Giovanni Urbani as quoted by Zevi. See Zevi, 33.

³⁸ While it is unclear how Pistoletto came to be in possession of the record from this exhibition, it seems most likely that he received a copy from Ileana Sonnabend or perhaps Gian Enzo Sperone, as both dealers worked with artists included in the show (although Sperone would not until 1964). See Denney, *The Popular Image*, with a text by Alan Solomon (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Gallery of Modern Art, 1963). Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held April 18–June 2, 1963.

³⁹ Other exhibitions in the early 1960s similarly claimed these movements, especially Pop art, as an American product. See *Pop Art, U.S.A.* (Oakland, CA: Oakland Museum of Art, 1963), catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, presented by the Oakland Art Museum and the California College of Arts & Crafts, held at the Oakland Art Museum, September 7–29, 1963; and *Amerikansk Pop-Konst*, ed. Carlo Derkert, with texts by Billy Klüver, Alan Solomon, and Oyvind Fahlström (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1964), catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition held at the Moderna Museet, February 29–April 10, 1964.

⁴⁰ Clarification of when Friedman first saw Pistoletto's works was provided by Jill Vuchetich, Head Archivist, WAC Archives. Email correspondence, April 22, 2015.

⁴¹ As *Avanti!*'s early years (1911–14) are associated with irredentist politics and Mussolini, who was an editor at the paper, I mean to reference the paper's activity from 1914 onward, following Mussolini's expulsion from the publication.

⁴² See Ginsborg, 115–16; and Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of Cold War: Waging Political* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), especially chap. 5, "Means Short of War (1946–1948)," 95–126 and chap. 8, "Organising Political Warfare (1948–1950)," 176–99.

⁴³ Mistry, 19, 95–126. These loans constituted approximately twenty percent of the 1400 million dollars in Marshall Aid that was distributed to Italy from 1948 to 1952. Also see Ginsborg, 158.

⁴⁴ On Fiat and the Marshall Plan, see Ginsborg, 214. On changes in management, infrastructure, labor organization and performance, see Stefano Musso, *Storia del lavoro in Italia: dall'Unità a oggi* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2002), 209–10, 216.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Notable examples include the following: Shoeshine boys in *Sciuscià* (Shoeshine; dir. Vittorio De Sica; 1946); men working on the docks in Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (The Earth Trembles; 1948); rice workers in *Riso Amaro* (Bitter Rice; dir. Giuseppe De Sanctis; 1949); and apprenticed brick-layers in *Il Tetto* (The Roof; dir. De Sica; 1956).

⁴⁷ While the title of the film translates to "Bicycle Thieves" in English, it was released for Anglophone distribution as "The Bicycle Thief," as it remains best-known in these contexts.

⁴⁸ For clarity, subsequent references to *caroselli* as a medium will appear in plain text, non-italicized format (i.e. carosello, caroselli).

⁴⁹ Rhodiatocce, *Caio Gregorio er [sic] guardiano der [sic] Pretorio*, carosello, dir. Gino and Roberto Gavioli, episodes *Montgolfier* (1960), *Parcheggio* (1960), *Penelope* (1960), and *Lucrezia Borgia* (1964).

⁵⁰ Italy's textile industry had produced synthetic fabrics on a large scale since the 1920s. Production during the interwar period was limited to artificial cellulose-fiber fabrics such as artificial silk and rayon; postwar production introduced synthetic resin-based fabrics including nylon and polyester, which were invented in the late 1930s and early 1940s, respectively. See Vera Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy, 1860–1990: Recovery after Decline* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1993), 276–77.

⁵¹ Rhodiatocce, *Montgolfier, Caio Gregorio* series, carosello, 1960.

⁵² See Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*, trans. James Newell (Cambridge and Cambridge, MA: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell, 1989).

⁵³ See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1985). Originally published in German in 1966 as *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit (erweiterte und überarbeitete neuausgabe*, by Suhrkamp Verlag (Frankfurt). Blumenberg's theory, however, is a useful model for understanding certain shifts in Italian literary Modernism, as Remo Ceserani has argued. See Remo Ceserani, "Italy and Modernity: Peculiarities and Contradictions," in *Italian Modernism*, ed. Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni (Toronto, Buffalo, NY, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 44–46.

⁵⁴ Arturo Schwarz, *Art International* 8, n. 8 (October, 1964).

⁵⁵ See Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011), especially "The Bias of the Figural" (3–19); "Dialectics, Index, Form," (23–50); "The Line and the Letter," (205–32); and "Desire in Discourse," (277–326). Originally published in French as *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971).

⁵⁶ Mark Godfrey, "The Artist According to Alighiero e Boetti," chap. 3 in *Alighiero e Boetti* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 73–117.

⁵⁷ Godfrey, "Alighiero e Boetti," 74.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 73–74.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶² Nagel and Wood, “Interventions: Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism,” 403–13; Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 7–20, 29–34.

⁶³ Artists involved with Spatialism declared themselves “Artisti Spaziali” in Fontana, et al., *Proposta di un regolamento del movimento spaziale* (Proposal for a Set of Rules for the Spatial Movement; Milan, April 2, 1950). Signed by Fontana, Milani, Giampero Giani, Joppolo, Crippa, and Cardazzo. Reprinted in *Lucio Fontana*, ed. Enrico Crispolti and Rosella Siligato (Milan: Electa, 1998), 174. This text is regarded as the group’s third manifesto.

⁶⁴ Fontana, et al., *Secondo manifesto dello spazialismo*, n.p. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically with the abbreviated title, *SMDP*.

⁶⁵ My translation seeks to preserve the meaning of *esca* (from the verb *uscire*, meaning “to go out”). While *esca* in this line is typically translated as “escape” or “leave” in English-language publications—a translation better-suited to the verbs *scappare* and *fuggire*—that translation changes the tone of the original text, while shifting the emphasis of the movement from the space *to which* the movement is oriented to the point *from which* it left. While the Spatialists regarded the frame and pedestal as historical conventions from which art should move away, their writing was more often focused on the possibilities of using space as artistic material than on a denigration of historic artistic practices. For these reasons, I am translating *esca* as “go out,” here.

⁶⁶ My reference to an “expanded field” of figuration of course makes use of Rosalind Krauss’ term coined in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, where it referred to the postmodern expansion of the medium. The term has since been expanded in scope by George Baker to offer a theoretical mapping of new directions in contemporary photography. See Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1981), and George Baker, “Photography’s Expanded Field,” *October* 114 (Fall 2005): 120–40.

⁶⁷ Bernardo Arias, Horacio Cazeneuve, and Marcos Fridman, *Manifiesto blanco* (Buenos Aires: October–November, 1946). Also signed by Pablo Arias, Rodolfo Burgos, Enrique Benito, César Bernal, Luis Coli, Alfredo Hansen and Jorge Roccamonte. Fontana participated as an author but did not sign the manifesto. Reprinted in *Lucio Fontana*, ed. Enrico Crispolti and Rosella Siligati (Milan: Electa, 1998), 115–17.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* The original Spanish reads: “El espacio es representado con una amplitud cada vez mayor durante varios siglos. Los barrocos dan un salto en ese sentido: lo representan con una grandiosidad aún no superada y agregan a la plástica la noción de tiempo. Las figuras parecen abandonar el plano y continuar en el espacio los movimientos representados.”

⁶⁹ While Brest’s call for a “spiritually” social art form in 1946 echoed the Perón Regime’s nationalist concept of “spiritual unity,” it should not be understood as an authentic shift away from the cultural and political Left, but rather reflective of an effort to incorporate language into his work that would make it acceptable to the Perón regime. See Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 36–39.

⁷⁰ Boccioni, *Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista*, n.p.

⁷¹ Ibid. Boccioni references the academic conventions of sculpture throughout the manifesto; the most detailed passages are in the early pages of the text. Subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically with the abbreviated title, *MTSF*.

⁷² See Boccioni, et al., *Manifesto tecnico della pittura futurista* (April 11, 1910), n.p. Signed by Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini. Available in English as “Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto,” in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey et al., trans. Lawrence Rainey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 64–67.

⁷³ This call to destroy the nude comes from the penultimate point in Boccioni's list of findings presented at the end of the manifesto.

⁷⁴ These thoughts respond in part to Hal Foster's mapping of the technological body in early twentieth-century Modernisms, and discussion of the “fetishistic logic” underpinning the creation of what he calls the machinic figure. See Hal Foster, “Prosthetic Gods,” chap. 3 in *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2006), 109–49.

⁷⁵ Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, 109–14.

⁷⁶ The Futurist exploration of ugliness as a thematic can be traced to Marinetti's *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature; May 11, 1912). In Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria, I meridiani (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1983), 179.

⁷⁷ On CoBrA and the creaturely, see Foster, “Creaturely CoBrA,” *October* 141 (Summer 2012): 4–21.

⁷⁸ Benjamin Buchloh has discussed figuration in Coleman's projections as a kind of “refiguration.” See Benjamin Buchloh, “Memory Lessons and History Tableaux: James Coleman's Archaeology of Spectacle” in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, 141–78 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000). Originally published in *James Coleman: Projected Images, 1972–1994* (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1995).

Chapter Two.

Cold Images: The Protest Pictures, 1965

He who makes a protest picture limits his vision to the fact that he depicts. I can choose a subject of political protest as an occurrence in real life, really to put it in a condition that goes beyond that.

–Michelangelo Pistoletto¹

In many respects, Pistoletto's artistic ambience is an American one, although he has never lived here. [...] One of Pistoletto's most cohesive groups of works shows marchers and political demonstrators. Yet, these pictures remain apolitical [...].

–Martin Friedman²

April, 1966. The cover of the exhibition catalog for Pistoletto's spring 1966 solo show at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis—his first at an American institution—might have been mistaken for one dedicated to Andy Warhol were it not for the Italian artist's surname, stamped in large black capital lettering across the header of the page (fig. 2.01). Created in-house by then design curator Peter Seitz, a Modernist designer in his own right, the cover featured a serigraphic reproduction of the photographic figures from one of the artist's latest mirror paintings, printed in black halftone with accents of bubble-gum-pink ink on a square sheet of cardstock covered in reflective silver foil.³ The four figures—three young men and one woman—are depicted from the chest up, spaced across the lower register of the image field. Against the reflective ground of the catalog cover, the silkscreened figures appear to us as passersby, crossing in front of a picture window. Cleanly shaven, neatly coiffed, and sensibly dressed in collared coats of black wool and

leather, they are a handsome, if somewhat aloof group. Lost in their own worlds, their condition is one of absorption: Turned away from us in *profils-perdus*, they are wholly preoccupied with their own thoughts and activities.⁴ They seem dismissive, “detached,” and “impersonal” in relation to both viewer and scene, as curator of the exhibition and then Walker Director, Martin Friedman, described Pistoletto’s frequently dispassionate mirror subjects in his catalog essay. Despite their bright, candy-colored skin, they seem “drained,” as American art critic Annette Michelson characterized them on occasion of the exhibition’s members’ preview.⁵

The cover is paradigmatic of what Friedman called Pistoletto’s “cool imagery”: images that are recognizably “objective”—that is, in appearance, if not in fact—in subject matter, media, and production.⁶ Borrowed from the critical lexicon then surrounding American Pop, where it accounted for a similarly detached, impersonal, and apathetic affect of Pop art and artists alike, the term summarily referred to what many viewed as a comparably anti-expressionist drive in Pistoletto’s mirror paintings and subjects.⁷ Given the artist’s use of unconventional, mass-produced materials, photo-mechanical processes of reproduction, and everyday subject matter, the term suited the dominant reading of Pistoletto’s work in terms of Pop and New Realism—a logical if biased one, as Italian art critic and Pop scholar Alberto Boatto later pointed out.⁸

Closer study of the scene supports this reading of the artist’s work as “cool.” Returning to the catalog cover, we see a young man in profile, facing the right-hand side of the page. His mouth is slightly open, and his cheeks are pinched from what is likely an early fall or late winter chill, based on his dress. Two other figures precede him: a young woman with a chic blunt bob and sleek black eyeglasses, at far right, and a young man wearing a carefully tied gray neckerchief, at center. Both are looking away from us, such that their faces are out of view. A fourth figure stands to their left, just behind the central figure. The latter holds what appears to

be a sign, although its pixelated, somewhat irregular form make it difficult to place. In the absence of other clues about the object or context of the scene, we cannot be sure. For all intents and purposes, the object as it appears in this image is a generic accessory, no different than the young woman's black eyeglasses: by our best estimation, an unremarkable gray umbrella, in an equally ordinary scene of everyday people, passing by a window.

For his part, however, Pistoletto expressed discomfort, as did many Italian critics, with the categorization of his work in terms of Pop and consequent alignment with a movement that was primarily viewed as an exclusively American enterprise. Reflecting on this conflict in a later interview with Germano Celant, Pistoletto explained:

Naturally I was thrilled to have found an international platform, which was nowhere to be found in Turin; even still it posed the problem of a misunderstanding: being regarded as one of the American painters. As the only European painter, the idea of becoming part of what was viewed as Pop was an artistic ambiguity that I didn't really love.⁹

(Naturalmente ero felicissimo di aver trovato una dimensione internazionale, introvabile a Torino, tuttavia si poneva il problema di un fraintendimento: l'essere considerato tra i pittori americani. Essendo l'unico europeo, l'idea di essere inserito in una prospettiva pop era un'ambiguità che non amavo molto.)¹⁰

The problem was more than one of nationality: It hinged on Pop's engagement of a specifically capitalist model of mass culture. Echoing the central argument in 1960s Italian art criticism against his ascription of the Italian artist to Pop, Pistoletto continued:

The American objectification [of artistic practice] was obtained through the image of consumption and of distribution; it was through identifying itself with the banal object of the American flag, like Jasper Johns. [...] It's consequential that the American flag becomes Coca-Cola, the seriality of the car accident and Marilyn Monroes and the comic strip, elements referring to American social factors. *On the contrary my work isn't born from an image of local or national involvement, of consumerism or of public figuration, but derived from the centrality of the human figure* [italics added].¹¹

(L'oggettivazione americana era ottenuta attraverso l'immagine di consumo e di divulgazione, era identificarsi con l'oggetto banale della bandiera americana, come Jasper Johns. [...] Per me era uscire da una frantumazione astratta dei disegni informali. È consequenziale che dalla bandiera americana si faccia la Coca-Cola, la serialità

dell'incidente automobilistico e delle Marilyn Monroe, del fumetto, elementi riferiti ai fattori sociali americani. Al contrario il mio lavoro non nasce da un'immagine di coinvolgimento locale o nazionale, di consumismo e di figurazione pubblica, ma deriva dalla centralità della figura umana.)¹²

For Pistoletto, Pop's engagement of American commercial culture amounted to a marginalization, if not expulsion, of the human from its social values. His work, by contrast, was categorically different from American Pop because it "derived from the centrality of the human figure."¹³ To that end, as he wrote to Friedman in February of 1966, the only American Pop artist who seemed to share his interest, as he wrote to Friedman, was George Segal, whose plaster-cast figures and tableaux suggested the Italian and American artist had a "common need to consider life through the human figure" ([...] *[La] mia affinità con Segal consiste nella comune necessità di considerare la vita attraverso la figura umana*).¹⁴ Whether Pistoletto regarded this humanist worldview as his alone or as that of Italian culture is less clear; he was, after all, careful to note that his work did not stem from "an image of local or national involvement"—a model which, in postwar Italy, was too closely aligned with the nationalist rhetoric of fascist culture. Similarly, his reference to a "public" model of figuration also distanced him from the problematic associations of socialist realism in the Italian artistic context, where it had come to be strongly associated with Italian figuration since the politicized cultural debates of the late 1940s and 1950s, in which the PCI had established itself as the champion of realism. While these disclaimers don't amount to a characterization of his own work in terms of a personal or "private" form of figuration, they do serve to distinguish his practice from models of politicized (and political) figuration already in place.

Segal aside, the problem of Pistoletto's alignment with Pop, for him, was implicitly one of geopolitical as well as artistic misidentification. While Pistoletto acknowledged he shared in Pop's interest in artistic "objectivity"—that is, in anti-expressionist modes of authorship—vast

differences in his approach to this goal set him apart from the American movement, as did major economic, commercial, and technological disparities between American and Italian mass culture.¹⁵ Whereas American Pop artists moved toward objective artistic authorship by drawing upon popular imagery and mechanical processes, the “only instrument” Pistoletto had used to do so, in his view, was photography.¹⁶ Even then, however, photography was only a starting point for the artist’s work. Unlike the object cut-outs in the Plexiglasses, the collage elements in the mirror paintings were not actual, material, photographic prints. Rather, as reviewed in my introduction, they were hand-colored, tissue paper cut-outs, carefully traced in graphite from enlarged black and white photographic prints.¹⁷

Against the specular ground of the mirror panels, which reflect the environment of the work’s display, the mirror subjects register less as flat material pasted on flat material supports—that is, as collage—and more as real subjects, standing within a space contiguous with the viewer’s. Often installed against a wall with the foot of the mirror panel placed directly on the floor, Pistoletto’s mirror paintings created a visual experience in which the material ground seems to disappear; their subjects appear to exist independently in real space. This illusion is supported by the realistic quality of Pistoletto’s mirror subjects. They are endowed with a realism that is at once painterly and photographic, which, within the context of the mirror painting, makes them appear to exist not as imagistic cutouts in real space, but as real people and objects therein. When we cross in front of them and see our own reflections in the mirror, the illusion is not ruined but rather reversed. Rather than seeing the mirror subject as real subjects in real space—that is, in our space as viewers—we see our own reflections registered alongside or (if blocked) “behind” the cutout (as subject of the image). At that moment, we feel as if we are in the space of the mirror—that is, we feel as if we are “in” the “painting.” Ultimately, this

experience amounts to a transformation of our experience of real space into that of “realist” space. Indeed, Pistoletto’s mirror paintings are better accounted for in terms of an expanded, spatialized model of figurative realism than Pop.

At the same time, however, Pistoletto’s process is grounded in photographic figuration, even as it moves away from it. While it is difficult to discern the precise process from visual study alone, the images nevertheless articulate their basis in some form of technological production (and mechanical reproducibility) that seems to beg comparison with Pop.¹⁸ Even as Pistoletto’s process undermines the mechanicality, reproducibility, and decentered authorship of the photographic image through manual modes of reproduction, he nevertheless uses the photograph as the model for his mirror subjects. That is, he nevertheless placed processes of mechanical production and the property of technological reproducibility at the foundation of the very works that sought to disrupt these points.

In spite of Pistoletto’s assertions, then, the mirror paintings of 1965—such as the one reproduced on the catalog cover—seemed to counterintuitively advance interpretations of Pistoletto’s work in terms of Pop. Unlike the early mirror paintings (made from March of 1962 through December of 1964), these works were among the first Pistoletto made using photographic images he did not personally compose; its subjects were instead excerpted from a number of snapshots taken by someone else: Renato Rinaldi.¹⁹

Prior to the production of the 1965 works, Pistoletto had carefully arranged the photographic subjects that appeared in the mirror paintings. While he had never personally taken the photographs from which he traced his figures (a task instead assigned to another friend, the photographer Paolo Bressano, whose studio and equipment facilitated their production), he had controlled the entirety of their production with meticulous precision, making minor adjustments

to lighting and instructing his models (generally his peers) to adopt certain poses.²⁰ If we are to regard the mirror paintings as “theatrical tableaux,” as Claire Gilman has described them in her account of Pistoletto’s directorial model of artistic authorship, then the mirror paintings of 1965 constitute a major point of rupture in the artist’s practice. As with the Plexiglasses, this shift has long been glossed over in scholarship on Pistoletto—a point that is particularly glaring, given the large volume of scholarship that has developed around the mirror paintings.²¹ That these subjects were appropriated from existing images—specifically works of journalistic street photography, a genre aligned with mass media and technologies of reproduction—amounts to a seemingly paradoxical about-face in the artist’s practice. Indeed, by the moment of these works’ debut in the spring of 1966, the direction of Pistoletto’s mirror paintings seemed to have moved even closer to the models of decentered authorship, rote objectivity, and “cold literalism” aligned with American Pop.²²

What might have led to such a radical and counterintuitive change in the artist’s work at that moment? Why has it been largely glossed over in the literature on the artist? And how might we account for the new form of potentially political figuration these works articulate? These seem especially pressing in consideration of the historical context of these works’ production—that is, the increasingly contentious political climate of mid-1960s Italy and the Cold War Transatlantic.

Based on Pistoletto’s billing as a Pop artist, visitors to *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World* (April 4–May 8, 1966) were likely unsurprised by the work they found inside the exhibition: thirty-three of the artist’s most recent mirror paintings (dating from 1963 to 1965), dedicated to scenes and subjects of everyday life. The majority of the works featured ordinary figures, some isolated, others in groups; often lost in routine and leisure activities, they

are “entirely meditative,” as Sidney Simon observed in his exhibition review for *Art International*.²³ In the first two of the three sizeable galleries devoted to the artist’s work, viewers saw their own reflections on the highly polished surfaces of the steel panels alongside the banal, life-size, photographic cut-outs the artist had affixed to their surfaces (figs. 2.02–03). Among these subjects, viewers encountered a man standing in a doorframe, smoking a cigarette; the artist tying his loose shoelace; other figures, leaning against a balcony, waiting in line, and resting languidly in chairs.²⁴ Interspersed among them were other mirror paintings that featured equally generic furnishings (a coffee table, potted plants) and common objects (a hanging incandescent light bulb, an empty wine bottle).

In the third gallery, however, viewers encountered a much different set of mirror paintings. Among them was the work that had ostensibly been reproduced on the catalog cover: a mirror painting that featured a group of marching figures, armed with large red, Communist flags and protest signs held above their heads. Entitled *No, all’aumento del tram* (No, To The Tram Fee Hike; 1965; figs. 2.04–05), after the Italian message posted on a sign carried by the figure at the far left of the scene, it was one of twelve mirror paintings (not seven, as stated in the existing literature) Pistoletto made between 1965 and 1966 leading up to his American debut, featuring images of workers’ strikes, mass protests, anti-war (specifically anti-American) demonstrations, and leftist political rallies then taking place in Italy.²⁵

Indeed, alongside *No, all’aumento del Tram*, visitors encountered similar images, which spanned two walls of the Walker gallery (fig. 2.06). In *Comizio I* (Rally I), *Comizio II* (Rally II), and *Corteo* (Demonstration or Picket, exhibited as *Procession*), figures carry giant red Communist flags (figs. 2.07–09). In others, such as *Vietnam* and *Corteo III* (Demonstration III), people march with long banners bearing messages in crisp, if hand-painted, bold-faced sans serif

capitals (figs. 2.10–11). In *Vietnam*, a woman carries a wooden post that supports the tail end of a horizontal sailcloth banner as she strides across the image field. Only the last few feet of banner text are visible, but the partial message we can see—“NAM”—is enough to tell us she is marching in a protest of the escalating Vietnam War, like the many held in Italy in response to the American deployment of combat troops to the southeast Asian country in March of 1965, and to what was perceived as culpable silence on the part of the Italian government, who had yet to comment on the conflict.²⁶

And yet, the source image for *Vietnam* was not one taken at a protest against the war (although many were held in Italy). Rather, it was based on a photograph of a Communist electoral rally used in *Corteo III*, a smaller work that was installed adjacent to it in the Walker exhibition. In *Corteo III*, figures march with another banner, whose message was also a partial one, but far less discernible. Based on source photographs taken at a political rally dedicated to a political candidate by the name “Giovanni”—not just any candidate, as existing literature has held, but specifically one from the PCI, as evidenced by the Communist flags in the images (figs. 2.12–13).²⁷ Electoral politics in Italy were particularly heated in the fall of 1964, after Prime Minister Aldo Moro’s resignation in June (and installment of a new cabinet of his own choosing only a month later), led to a reshuffling of the national government.²⁸ Also contributing to the political turmoil was the formation of the *Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria* (PSIUP; Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity) as a new party (in January of 1964), which led to the emergence of new candidates to support that fall. Major electoral rallies were held in Milan in mid-November, to which date we may likely attribute Rinaldi’s source photograph for this image.²⁹ While the banner text is difficult to read, the presence of the same figure in *Vietnam*—

the woman in a pink coat—cues the viewer to its message. Confirming the trace of the lettering that spans the banner—“etna”—*Corteo III* is also an image of protest against the war.

Indeed, both works were made from the same two source photographs taken at the electoral rally. The works’ installation adjacent to one another highlights the connection between the two; their banners seem to be one and the same, as if the works are part of the same scene, which has been split in two. That the woman in the pink coat appears in both images, however, makes the pair less contiguous than sequential. One precedes the other temporally. By displacing the banner text dedicated to the Italian, PCI candidate with the name of the southeast Asian country, Pistoletto created scenes of protest against the war, encoded with the activism of the Italian Left. Within this context, his figures are not only those of anti-war protest, as American audiences would read them, but also an anti-American one, as well. As a temporal sequence, they repeatedly restage the protest in real time, in the space of the gallery, for the viewer who encounters them.

Closer examination of these works’ production relative to the artist’s professional timeline supports this hypothesis regarding the anti-American politics of these images. Of the twelve protest-themed mirror paintings, seven were debuted at the Walker exhibition.³⁰ These included: *Ragazzo* (Boy); *Comizio I* (Rally I); *Comizio II* (Rally II); *Corteo* (Picket; exhibited as *Procession*); *Vietnam*; *No all’aumento del tram* (No, To The Tram Fee Hike), *Corteo III* (Picket III; exhibited as *Procession III*), all 1965. With the exception of *No, all’aumento del tram*, all were exhibited under English titles.³¹ Originally intended for the artist’s first solo exhibition at a U.S.-based gallery, to be held in early 1966 at Leo Castelli’s prominent outpost of contemporary American art in New York, the works were shipped directly to the Walker from Castelli’s gallery when, for a variety of reasons, the Castelli show was cancelled. This is an important point: Not

only were these works specifically made for exhibition in the United States, but they were also made for a commercial venue known for its prestigious stable of American Pop artists.³² The implication of this context, then, is that the leftist political gambit of these works was also potentially an anti-American one.

Framing the artist's production of the "protest pictures," as he called them, were two events that precipitated rampant anti-American sentiment in Italy and broader Europe as well as a cataclysmic shift in cultural geo-politics of the 1960s. First was the controversial XXXII Venice Biennale of 1964, already covered in the previous chapter, where the international prize for painting was awarded to Robert Rauschenberg, inciting public outrage in Italy and broader Europe against what was perceived as American cultural imperialism.³³ Second was the escalation of the Vietnam War, led by the American deployment of combat troops to South Vietnam in February of 1965—a move that incited Italian protests, primarily led by the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiana*, PCI), against militarized, anti-Communist, interventionist foreign policy on the part of the United States. That the latter was followed shortly thereafter by the American invasion of the Dominican Republic in April of 1965 to defeat a leftist coup (that aimed to reinstate democratically elected national leadership overthrown in 1963) only exacerbated the problem.³⁴ The Santo Domingo Crisis and mass Dominican casualties that resulted from American intervention were widely reported in Italy, fueling anti-American sentiments. Often organized at *Camere del Lavoro* (Labor Offices; syndicalist labor union centers) in Milan, Genoa, Turin, Rome, and other major Italian cities, the Italian Left coordinated a protest program that condemned the U.S. as a new fascist power, beginning with major demonstrations, rallies, and peace marches in March, May, and November of that year.³⁵ Complicating this political context was a third dynamic, namely a number of domestic crises in

Italy—failures of governance, worsening economic conditions, and mounting national debt—that prompted union strikes, mass protests, and public outrage, compounding tensions within Italy’s majority leftist populace.³⁶

I examine the protest pictures as the site of two parallel shifts in Pistoletto’s practice: first, a move from a directorial, production-based model of authorship (used to stage his own photographic subjects in the early mirror paintings) to an appropriative, editorial one (used to select his subjects from Rinaldi’s photographs); and second, a turn away from universally mundane, everyday imagery to a political (and politicized) one united by anti-capitalist, and at times anti-American sentiment. The convergence of these shifts in these works begins to shed light on the aforementioned form of political figuration, “private” or otherwise, that Pistoletto referred to in his correspondence with Friedman. By examining the protest pictures’ figural navigation of Italian labor politics and the cultural geopolitics of the transatlantic artistic context of the early years of the Cold War, I argue these works, like the Plexiglasses, consolidate a new model of political figuration in the Sixties, which repositions our understanding of the mirror paintings as well as the history of postwar figuration in Italian art and the European avant-gardes, more broadly. In the Plexiglasses, Pistoletto used full-scale figures (imagistic forms), structural media, and ambient installation practices to stage illusions of concrete, material objects in the environment of the work’s display, creating an experience of disillusionment and withdrawal for the viewer. In the protest pictures, Pistoletto also used figures (here, life-size images of people), but turned to other techniques the figural schema of the series. Rather than bringing the images out into ambient space, the protest pictures utilized reflective materials to create the illusion that the figures exist within the same space as the viewer. What makes these mirror paintings distinct

from those before them, however, is that here, Pistoletto's use of the figural acted as a politics that amplified the symbolic content of these images.

Friedman first encountered Pistoletto's work while visiting Paris in the summer of 1965, when he saw some mirror paintings on display at the Galerie Sonnabend.³⁷ By that fall, he had written to Ileana Sonnabend to express his interest in presenting a solo exhibition of Pistoletto's work at the Walker.³⁸ At less than ten months from Friedman's first encounter with Pistoletto's works to the opening of the artist's exhibition at the Walker, the curatorial timeline for Pistoletto's exhibition was extremely compressed.

As part of his preparation for the 1966 exhibition, Friedman sent Pistoletto a list of questions about his work.³⁹ One addressed the protest pictures outright. The question and the artist's response were as follows:

[Friedman:] Some critics might consider that your work represents the social commentary of the 1960s—that is, the “protest paintings” cannot really be considered as detached as are the images of anonymous observers. Can you comment on this?⁴⁰

[Pistoletto:] In my most recent paintings I want to show that even the most diverse meanings can live in this demystified dimension; violent or peaceful, they exist with us. He who makes a protest picture limits his vision to the fact that he paints. I can choose a subject of political protest as an occurrence in real life, really to put it in a condition that goes beyond that. Even the images of the anonymous observers are conditioned to go beyond their observation.⁴¹

With these points in mind, that Friedman and other critics would characterize these works as wholly *apolitical*—a view still upheld today—becomes more troubling. Consider Friedman's remarks in his catalog essay:

One of Pistoletto's most cohesive groups of works shows marchers and political demonstrators. Yet, these pictures remain *apolitical* [...]. His marching figures, for all the apparent fervor of their cause, [...] remain archetypes of remoteness [italics added].⁴²

Here, Friedman not only asserts that the works are *apolitical*, but are also populated by generic individuals, despite appearances to the contrary, whose activities, however impassioned in

appearance, are nevertheless “remote.” Critical to this claim, then, was Friedman’s parallel unmooring of Pistoletto’s figures and the scenes of their engagement from any specific place, context, or agency.

Friedman was not alone in his interpretation. American art critic Annette Michelson had a similar, if more nuanced view of the works.⁴³ Noting Pistoletto’s frequent use of somewhat apathetic figures who are turned away from the viewer, Michelson offered, “[They] are involved in somewhat relaxed, casual, and somewhat un-vivacious modes of activity. Even the processions of the protests on Vietnam, are seen in attitudes of relative passivity or relaxation.”⁴⁴ In his review of the exhibition, *ARTnews* critic John Ashbery also dismissed the potential politics of these images, citing the apathetic, even “amused” demeanor of their subjects. As he put it:

His people are the ones we see every day—journalists, architects, secretaries, artists, students, workers—“people from all walks of life.” They are neither happy nor sad, and tend to assume casual, graceful, slightly weary poses. Even when taking part in a political rally (as in *Demonstration*) they seem detached and even amused (it is true that in this particular one they are merely protesting a rise in trolley fares, so their apathy is perhaps pardonable).⁴⁵

Where Ashbery found apathy in Pistoletto’s protestors, if by way of assumption (the hike in public transit fees in Italy was far from a small matter), Simon would flatly reject the series as “patently ludicrous.”⁴⁶ Focusing on the presumably outdoor setting of the protest pictures’ events as an illogical disruption of the exhibition’s otherwise interior, even domestic ambient, he wrote:

Of the three galleries, only in the third did the mirror images seem particularly destructive of what one assumed was the desired intent. Here the various groups of figures were seen to be out-of-doors in the streets of the city where, with banners flying, a rally and a protest march were taking place simultaneously. It was not to bypass the reflections if that were the point; but the more one looked at the walls of the gallery reflected in the various panels, the more unreasonable an intrusion they seemed. For it was quite impossible to bridge the gap in any logical manner between the out-of-doors event that were the basis for the representation and the in-doors reflections. By no stretch of the imagination could the resulting confusion be called either mysterious or alienating. *It was patently ludicrous, plainly without either meaning or focus* [italics added].⁴⁷

And so this interpretation continued. This depoliticization of the protest pictures was so pervasive in 1960s art criticism that it even gained traction in Italian art criticism of the 1970s. In a review of Pistoletto's first museum retrospective in 1976 at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, Vittorio Rubiu similarly pointed out the "neutralized" quality of *Vietnam*, alongside the artist's banal imagery.⁴⁸

Within the primary literature on Pistoletto, it was ironically an American art critic living in Italy, Henry Martin, who came closest to addressing the politics of these works. A sometime collaborator of Pistoletto's as a participant in his experimental theater collective *Lo Zoo* (The Zoo; 1968–70), Martin's intimate knowledge of the artist's practice and involvement with international neo-avant-gardes operating in Italy uniquely positioned him within the context of art criticism in the late 1960s. In an essay written for the catalog of Pistoletto's 1969 exhibition at the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam (March 22–May 4), Martin outlined a number of subjects featured in the mirror paintings, listing a protest at an American embassy among them. While Martin's account provides previously undisclosed information about this set of mirror paintings, specifically about *Comizio II* (Rally II; 1965), it is the critic's distinctive view of the commonality between these works not as ordinary but "unstable" that is most compelling. He writes:

A dog is seen in the act of walking, one foot up off the ground; a naked woman is in the middle of a phone conversation; [...] an act of protest is taking place in front of the American Embassy, perhaps just a moment before the police arrives. *Pistoletto has taken to using pictures of situations that are unstable*, and their stability on the painting has a sense of paradox (italics added).⁴⁹

The common denominator of Pistoletto's mirror subjects was less an interest in the banality of the everyday for Martin than the *instability* thereof.

Pistoletto's mirror paintings of strikes, protests, and political rallies are undeniably leftist, anti-capitalist images, made specifically for an American audience; their politicized reception by the Walker, as I have laid out above, precipitated long-term effects of Cold War culture on the global reception of Pistoletto's work and of Italian art of the 1960s. Indeed, in the sixty years since their exhibition at the Walker, Pistoletto's political mirror paintings have been little shown and rarely discussed. They have yet to be the object of art historical research and have been all but absent in the discourses on Pistoletto, postwar Italian art, and postwar art history, more broadly—an especially noteworthy absence, given the high volume of literature that surrounds the mirror paintings alone. While some of them have recently re-appeared in exhibitions of the artist's work, most prominently at the 2010 retrospective at the PMA and the 2013 retrospective at the Musée du Louvre, curated by Marie-Laure Bernadac, the terms of their primary reception continue to remain unquestioned. In turn, what few mentions they have received in the literature on Pistoletto either assert they lack an ideological viewpoint and should be read as belonging to any context (historic or cultural), or continue to uphold Friedman's original argument that these works are strictly apolitical.

While we might attribute this depoliticization of Pistoletto's mirror paintings to the Cold War cultural climate of their reception in the transatlantic artistic context of the 1960s, no such rationale exists for the endurance of this interpretive model today, more than a quarter century after the end of the conflict. Indeed, this apolitical reading of Pistoletto's work continues to be upheld in contemporary discussions of the artist's practice. That these scenes were far from ordinary and banal within the context of northern Italy, however, seems to have mattered little. Others have accounted for them in overly generic terms, describing all of them as "demonstrations," and even going so far as to qualify them as scenes of folly, as one scholar

wrote in an essay contributed to the catalog for the 2010 PMA retrospective, in which they were described as a “series of parade photographs.”⁵⁰ Regardless, problems of specificity notwithstanding, these same voices follow suit with those outlined above, and proclaim these works, regardless of imagery or inspiration, were not in fact political.

However, despite—or perhaps even due to—Pistoletto’s manipulations of imagery, the overall series does not reveal an ideological point of view. He, in fact, sidelines personal politics in favor of rendering each of these scenes as sufficiently suggestive to evoke politically driven subjects, while nevertheless remaining ambiguous enough to imply that they could exist in any geographical or historical context. Extracting the individual from the rowdy squares and crowded streets, Pistoletto places his subjects in a new narrative in which they act out their roles away from their original context.⁵¹ The problem with these readings is that they stem from the assumption that everyone is readily positioned to grasp the full weight of these images as signs of major sociopolitical issues affecting mid-1960s Italy. Most indicative of this problem is the refusal in the literature on these works to acknowledge their anti-American charge.

What seems at stake in this interpretation is a destabilization of longstanding capitalist-centric models in modern and contemporary art history that have subordinated postwar Italian art (as well as that of other former Axis powers and Socio-Communist nations) within historical narratives that identify “progressive,” creative practice as the product of democratic, Anglo-European culture. To this end, recent scholarship has begun to revise this history through new work on Soviet Productivism, German modernism, and Eastern European conceptualism, among other comparable subjects of research. To that end, more recent scholarship by Nicholas Cullinan, Elizabeth Mangini, and Jason E. Smith have turned our attention to the relationship between Italian art of the late 1960s and the tumultuous social context of this period in Italian

history known as “the years of lead” (*gli anni di piombo*)—a time characterized by mass protests, political assassinations, and domestic terrorism.⁵² This study addresses a gap in modern and contemporary art history that remains in spite of these scholars’ efforts: specifically that of Italian art and politics beyond the years of postwar reconstruction (1945–52), but in advance of 1967—regarded as the start date of the years of lead and Arte Povera, alike.

Let us return to *No all’aumento del tram*. Unlike the altered version of the work that appeared on the catalog cover, the general politics if not the specific directive of the original mirror painting were clearly articulated by a number of visual cues that were expunged, neutralized, or otherwise removed from the reproduction on the cover (fig. 2.14). Most notable among them was a huge red flag marked with a small gold crescent—the distinctive, curved blade of a sickle. The Communist *bandiera rossa* or “red flag” was adopted by the Italian Left in the early twentieth century as an icon of proletarian revolution and subsequent namesake of the *Bandiera Rossa*, a major anti-fascist movement operative during the Resistance. By the decades following World War II, the *bandiera rossa* (and popular protest song of the same name) was primarily associated with the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI; Italian Communist Party) and workers’ unions of their support, including the *Confederazione generale italiana del lavoro* (Cgil; Italian General Confederation of Labor), Italy’s national trade union, and the *Federazione impiegati operai metallurgici* (Fiom; Federation of Employed Metalworkers) or metalworkers’ union, both of which were dominated by the PCI.

In Pistoletto’s original work, the *bandiera rossa* cuts boldly across the image from the upper-left-hand corner to the midline of the painting. Curvilinear shadows wrap around the large swath of fabric as it swirls around a pole crowned with a gold finial and ornamental spear tip.

Swollen with gusts of wind, the flag appears to be on the precipice of unfurling in one loud whoosh across the entirety of the scene and rectangular steel panel of its support. Of note is the shape of the panel (an irregular one within the artist's collective mirror paintings) and proportions (nearly twice as long as it is high). This distinctive shape within the mirror paintings seems to be a play on Jasper Johns' flag paintings of the mid-1950s, which had come to be regarded as iconic works of American Pop, to forecast the waving of the great red banner across its field.⁵³ Far from the "becalmed space" Friedman found in these mirror paintings, the space of *No all'aumento del tram* is agitated and premonitory.⁵⁴

Lest this removal of the flag seems incidental—a one-off preference in design, perhaps—the fact that other political signs included in the original image were removed from the cover suggests it was intentional, perhaps even strategic. As with the flag, some of these signs were cut out of the image in their entirety. By cropping the original image at the shoulder of the young man in profile (at far left, on the cover), for example, two other figures were also severed from the reproduction (fig. 2.14): first, a man in business dress, who carries a sign bearing the message "NO! all'aumento del **TRAM**" (NO! to the **TRAM** fee hike; emphasis original) in block lettering; a second man, also dressed in suit and tie wears a bright red card or *tessera* (often worn in protests, rallies, and demonstrations to announce one's political party), a sign for his membership in the Communist party, pinned to his lapel. Other signs were instead divested of their political charge through adjustments of color, that is, by being printed in black and white rather than in full color per Pistoletto's original image (fig. 2.15). The gray neckerchief worn by the cover's central figure, for example, was, like the flag, actually bright red, which is to say it is a very specific accessory: The scarf of the *partigiani* (Partisans) adopted by young Italian communists in the decades following World War II as a sign of their ideological and historical

connection to the members of the Italian anti-fascist Resistance (the majority of whom had belonged to the PCI). While it is unlikely that American viewers would have recognized the red scarf in the work specifically as that of the Italian *partigiani*, it seems still more unlikely they would have missed its valence as a leftist political sign, given its color correspondence and proximity in the composition to the Soviet flag, and one of mass revolution, more broadly, dating to late-18th-century France. With these points in mind, we might say the Walker's curatorial presentation (in the catalog design, Friedman's essay, and exhibition programs) of Pistoletto's work functioned to depoliticize the artist's practice within the context of his debut in the United States at the height of the Cold War—in this case, by defusing and dismantling, with considerable precision, the work's Communist iconography and anti-capitalist directive.⁵⁵

Ultimately, the Walker did more than make Pistoletto's work apolitical: It made it into a work that looked like a product of American Pop. Indeed, the de facto template for the cover image, with its heightened contrast, black and white photographic printing, shiny silver background, and hot pink Day-Glo accents seems to be Andy Warhol's photo-silkscreened silver canvases of the early-to-mid-1960s, such as *Silver Liz* (1963; fig. 2.16), whose spray-painted metallic backgrounds and candy-colored, anti-naturalistic accents, similarly emphasized the media form of his subject matter, as commercial, mechanically reproducible images, and the unrealistic popular fantasy of their subjects (in the case of his series of American celebrities and icons) such images serve to construct. In this sense, the implication of this revision of Pistoletto's work (intentional or otherwise) was to frame the Italian artist as a Pop artist, specifically of the American variety. The effect is such that the great difference in the context of American Pop and Pistoletto's respective emergences and practices are masked, and that the Italian artist's work,

while engaging and generally well received, was ultimately billed as derivative of a movement led by American artists.

Further examination of the exhibition and the critical reception of these works within the U.S. evince the broader dimensions of this problem. Titles of the protest pictures, for example, were translated with much liberty, such that originally provocative titles were replaced with more benign Anglophonic monikers.⁵⁶ One work entitled *Corteo* (meaning “assembly” or “rally,” specifically of the political variety), for example, was exhibited as *Procession*, an event that holds no such political connotation in English. Another work, *Comizio II* (Rally II), was, like *No all’aumento del tram*, re-worked for its presentation on the exhibition signage, which was prominently displayed on the building exterior by the main entrance (figs. 2.17–18).⁵⁷ And as there were many other, ostensibly less controversial works in the exhibition that did not feature political imagery—a generous twenty-six of the thirty-three displayed—the Walker’s decision to select images for the catalog cover, title signage, and press kit from the handful of works that did include leftist and anti-American iconography seems all the more a pointed one.

When we situate these works within the context of their production in northern Italy, however, the figures and events of these images are anything but relaxed, passive, and ordinary. To review, the economic miracle had drawn to a close (in 1963), precipitated by mounting inflation, capital flight, and an overextended credit system, among other problems.⁵⁸ If 1964 had been a fraught year in Italian history, as I discussed in Chapter Two, the fracture of the Italian Socialist Party in January of 1964, crisis of governance (including Moro’s resignation, that July), unabated economic decline, and increased unemployment during that year set the stage for still more problems in 1965.⁵⁹ Within this context of popular unrest and economic uncertainty, debates over public services and workers’ rights emerged as two of the most prominent of these

issues. Although Italian urban populations had boomed over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s, policy measures to offset mounting deficits of public transit services included raising ticket prices for buses, trams, metros, and trains run by state (Trenitalia, e.g.) and municipal operations (ATAC and STEFER in Rome, ATM in Milan, GTT in Turin, e.g.). The move was viewed by the majority of the Italian populace as a direct attack on the already low-earning urban (and suburban) working classes, the primary demographic affected by the proposed fee hike. Exacerbating existing frustrations regarding the already poor state of public services, and a previous fee hike levied only a few months prior in November 1963, the proposal and eventual implementation of the second fee hike in April, 1965 generated widespread agitation and heated conflict in Italian cities nation-wide (fig. 2.16).⁶⁰ This was especially the case in the so-called “industrial triangle” of Turin, Genoa, and Milan, which was home to large populations of factory laborers. From late 1964 to early 1966, under the leadership of the PCI and Cgil, mass protests and workers’ strikes were held in these cities by industrial labor forces (especially those enlisted in Italy’s transportation infrastructural production), public transit employees, and those who relied upon it to travel to their places of work, creating major disruptions in city life and sometimes erupting in riots.⁶¹

The relationship between the PCI and these unions during the 1960s was critical to the political power of both the Italian Left and the workers’ movement during this period, as the PCI was a weak, parliamentary minority within the Italian government, then dominated by members of the conservative *Democrazia cristiana* (DC) or Christian Democratic party.⁶² This was especially important after the PSI joined the DC in 1964, forming the so-called *centro-sinistra* or “center-left,” to gain legislative power and to advance an economic program that promised to improve public services.⁶³ This relationship between the PCI and unions, then, was such that

workers' strikes organized by the Socialist-Communist union of the Cgil, such as the one depicted in Pistoletto's work, were synonymous with the (primarily Communist) politics of the far Italian Left.⁶⁴

Undergirding the political charge of these images are the historical conventions of figuration they engage. Images of workers have long featured prominently within histories of artistic realism. In Italian art, images of laborers were a cornerstone of the mid-to-late-nineteenth-century realism of the Florentine Macchiaioli (1855–1900)—a group widely known within Italy, but less so in international scholarship—who followed slightly earlier iterations of European realism in the mid-nineteenth century—most notably in the work of Gustave Courbet (see *Stonebreakers*, 1849). In Telemaco Signorini's iconic *L'Alzaia* (Towrope; 1864), for example, a line of five laborers spans over half of the horizontally oriented, long, rectangular canvas (fig. 2.17). They work in unison; their heads are turned away from the viewer, as they lean forward, facing the left-hand side of the elongated image field. Using the full force of their body weight, they tow a boat through a narrow waterway, which is out of view. The figures fill the lower register of the image. Our view is from a crouched position, low to the ground. They stand on a sunken surface, slightly below the sandy area that spans the rest of the ground in front of us. The visual of the workers being “cut off” at the knees is one of many strategies that serves as a marker of difference in this image. Off to our left, a man stands with his young daughter in the distance. He wears a top hat and coat; he is well-to-do—the rarified, wealthy counterpart to the majority working classes. Signorini's social realist images often used compositional strategies to highlight divisions in race and class, as *L'Alzaia*, as well as in gender.⁶⁵ In a later work, *The Prison Baths at Portoferraio* (1890; fig. 2.21), Signorini used similar strategies. Two rows of prisoners extend out in front of us, lining either side of a dark hallway. They frame a

smaller group comprised of two men, finely dressed in dark suits, and two guards, dressed in elaborate white and yellow uniforms. Here, Signorini's style reflects a dialogue between the Macchiaioli and French Impressionists. His prisoners are rendered in dappled ochres, browns, and blacks that make the figures appear to be an extension of the walls of the prison.⁶⁶

Iconographic and narrative analogies might be made between Pistoletto's protest pictures and protest imagery of postwar Italian social realism. Renato Guttuso's *Occupazione delle terre incolte in Sicilia* (Occupation of the Uncultivated Lands in Sicily; 1949; fig. 2.19) or *Comizio (Omaggio a Giuseppe De Vittorio)* [Demonstration (Homage to Giuseppe De Vittorio); 1962; fig. 2.20], Mario Mafai's *Il corteo con bandiere* (Rally with Flags; 1950; fig. 2.21), and Giulio Turcato's *Comizio* series of the late 1940s and early 1950s (fig. 2.22) especially come to mind. Pistoletto's protest pictures reflect a more nuanced engagement with the figurative conventions and painterly strategies of Signorini's social realist paintings of the Italian Risorgimento.⁶⁷ In images like *No, all'aumento del tram*, the horizontal line of figures, compositional cropping of their bodies, hand-painted ruddy coloring, and dimensions that emphasize the horizontality of the figures evoke the unity of the masses. The protest pictures translated Italian social realism of the Risorgimento—which may have provided a less contentious interlocutor than postwar Italian social realism—into comparably political pictures in the Sixties. By using photography as his source material, however, Pistoletto also pushed against the history of figurative representation, or perhaps, allowed it to function and be accepted in an international context, in the guise of the cold “objectivity” of Sixties American Pop.

Closer examination of the protest pictures reveals the complexity of their politics. *Person—Back View* (1965; fig. 2.23) is a closely-cropped, portrait-style image of a young woman. Rather than facing the camera straight-on, however, Pistoletto has inverted the logic of

the figurative convention; her face is turned away from us, in a kind of reverse, three-quarters view. She is framed at left by the dark sloping of a shirtsleeve, belonging to an otherwise out-of-view figure who stands in front of her, and at right, by a paper sign board mounted on a wooden post, held above her by someone behind her who stands outside the image field. While her face is largely out of view, her dark eyeglasses, bobbed hair, and leather jacket identify her as the same woman in *No, all'aumento del tram* (fig. 2.24). While some details have been changed—her jacket is earthy brown rather than hunter green; her glasses tortoise-shell instead of black; she faces left instead of right—she is decidedly the same figure, situated in the same scene, positioned between the same dark jacket and sign. While the figure carrying the latter in this case remains out of view, by contrast it is here that we are able to see the text, if partially, that is posted on his sign, which is oppositely turned away from us in *No, all'aumento del tram*. In faded block lettering, it reads “OPERAI” or “WORKERS,” followed by a partial letter: perhaps an “T” (a plural determiner), or just as likely, an “F” (for “FIOM,” maybe), as varied spacing in protest signage was a regular practice, after which point the text is cut off by the image frame. In Italian, “operai,” as opposed to “lavoratori” (workers in any field) or “braccianti” (day laborers or hired hands, generally associated with farm or construction work), specifically refers to industrial workers, and is associated with low- or unskilled labor positions performed by the lower working classes. In 1960s Italy, the term was most associated with the large population of factory workers, which had quickly amassed as a result of rapid industrialization during the economic miracle, and the nascent *movimento operaio* or workers’ movement of their development. While today “operaio” is often invoked as a classist, derogatory term—someone who is simple-minded, low class, or unknowingly average in some capacity is an “operaio” of said task—in the early 1960s it emerged as a position of collective political empowerment, as the

worker was called upon as the agent of social change in a new discourse of Italian neo- and post-Marxist thought, first in publications such as *Quaderni rossi* (Red Notebooks; Turin, 1961–65) and *Classe operaia* (Working Class; Milan, 1964–67), led by major figures of the Italian New Left such as Antonio Negri, Raniero Panzieri, and Mario Tronti, and in political organizations such as *Potere operaio* (Workers' Power), *Lotta Continua* (The Struggle Continues), and *Autonomia* (Autonomy) in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁸ With regard to its appearance in Pistoletto's work of 1965, the term was enough to place our subject not only in a workers' protest but also to situate her within the broader terrain of a major social movement taking place in Italy that would come to define the Sixties and Seventies in that country. As a portrait, then, the image is less one of a "passive" individual than that of a "faceless" representative of Italian collective action and a new workers' body politic.

In *Person—Back View*, the figure stands at the center of the picture field, framed at bottom right by a dark shape, the jacket sleeve of another figure standing in front of her, and protest sign at upper right, mounted on a wooden stick that emerges from the midpoint of the right-hand side of the picture, approximately level with her shoulder, suggesting the presence of a third figure no more than a few steps behind her. Her body is directed toward the left-hand side of the image; her head is turned away from us, forty-five degrees to her right, in *profil-perdu*. The temple bar of her glasses functions as an orthogonal line, which traces an imaginary path from our subject to the object of her gaze, located somewhere beyond the left-hand side of the pictorial field further back in perspectival space. The convention directs our attention to her eye line, and to its divergent orientation relative to that of her body and fellow figures. We are made aware that her activity is unlikely that of gazing without reason into the distance, but one of purposed looking, or perhaps, active disregard for the viewer. While she represents a type of

social subject, she does not engage with us. Unlike the use of *profil-perdu* in Signorini's laboring subjects, where it serves as a sign of dejection and concentrated, physical effort, Pistoletto's use of the figurative convention empowers the protest figures.

While we might interpret this strategy as means to align the viewer with the mirror subject—we look at them as they look at someone else—the unprecedented compositional cropping and horizontality of the protest pictures articulate an impasse between viewer and figure. In *Person, Back View*, the composition frames the figure at the center of the image field. As we face the mirror painting frontally, we are made acutely aware of the contrast of our own body position to the figure's: She is turned perpendicularly to our own. The sign behind her, as previously discussed, places her within a line of protestors; the suggestion is that she is passing in front of us in a horizontally-oriented space that extends out to the right and left of the image, behind and in front of the figure. The disjunction between her space and ours, however, is more than one of direction. First, because the figure is closely cropped in portrait view, we aren't given a clear picture of her body moving through or inhabiting that space; she doesn't seem to "stand" within our own space, as suggested by earlier mirror paintings, which typically provided the viewer with a more complete view of the figure's body. This technique makes our view seem more limited than earlier mirror paintings; the closeness of the cropping reads as if the "back view" of the figure is presented to us through a small window. While she is presented in life-size scale, and positioned on the wall such that her eye level approximates our own, this combined use of bodily orientation, *profil-perdu*, and cropping of the figure and image creates the effect that we are not standing in the same space as the mirror subject. The physical wall of the gallery becomes a barrier between ourselves and the mirror subject passing by. She is inaccessible to us—a point underscored by the protest sign that, unlike the figure, is turned to face us.

Ultimately, her inaccessibility registers her protest as impervious to us. We are unable to participate or respond.

Corteo (fig. 2.08) also disjoins the “space” of the mirror with the space of the viewer through these techniques. In *Corteo*, a female figure on the right-hand-side of the image faces the left-hand side of the the image; her head is turned, again, away from us—a point we seem directed to by the large black hair bow that draws our attention to the back of her head. A figure marches in front of her, also facing the left-hand-side of the image. His body, by contrast, is turned slightly toward us, while his gaze is directed straight ahead of him, somewhere beyond the left-hand edge of the image field. As in *Person, Back View* and *No, all'aumento del tram*, the figures are cropped at waist-height and above, and arranged such we imagine a horizontal space (relative to our own position) extending out in front and behind them, on either side of the mirror painting. Here, however, the figures are not cropped quite as closely as in *Person, Back View*. There is some space left blank between the two figures—enough that we might stand in front of it, trying to see ourselves “in” the picture. The problem, however, is that if we move close enough to the panel so that our reflection approximates the size of the figures, there isn't enough space for our reflection to be registered without being blocked by one of the two figures. (The problem is the same in all other areas of potential access to the painting—either a flag behind the female figure crosses in front of us, or we are pushed out of the frame in front of the male figure. In this scenario, when we try to “enter” the painting, we are necessarily positioned further back from the picture plane than the figures, off to the side of the protest. Furthermore, in the most inviting viewing position (between the two figures), where the empty space is largest, we are made to be the subject of the female figure's gaze—directed to us in protest as we stand off to the side, as she continues marching forward. The alternative scenario is that we move away from

the panel, in an effort to register the entirety of our reflection on its surface in order to successfully create the illusion that seems to be offered to us—that is, to become part of the scene. The problem here, however, is that we are made to move so far away from the image—so much so that we necessarily distance and eventually remove ourselves from the scene. The problem is the same in other protest pictures. *Comizio I* (fig. 2.06), *Comizio II* (2.07), and *Boy* (2.26), all refuse us access or make us the object of an accusatory gaze of a figure positioned in *profil-perdu* (see the third figure from right, in *Boy*, especially). The protest pictures use figurative conventions to create a figural scene—a scene we visually and bodily engage with as real, as filled with inhabitable space and real human subjects. These strategies in the protest pictures, however, turns the entertaining invitation many saw in the early mirror paintings into a dismissive, even hostile, experience for the viewer: Either we accept that we are not allowed “in” the scene, or we make ourselves the subject of its protest.

Study of the mirror paintings that feature readily apparent protest imagery sheds light on the political significance of the supposedly banal imagery in other works. Close examination of Rinaldi’s photographs alongside Pistoletto’s mirror paintings of 1965 reveals that Pistoletto used the same images in other works previously unlinked to the protest-themed series. In *Due persone che passano* (Two People Passing By; 1966), for example, we should recognize the figure on the right-hand-side of the image—a man in business dress, with a distinctive mustache and white political party membership card pinned to his lapel: He is the same figure who appeared in *No, all’aumento del tram* (fig. 2.25). While the man’s Communist affiliation and specific cause were made clear in that work, this coupling of the works reveals that *Due persone che passano* is more than an image of an everyday passersby. Instead, at least one of its co-protagonists was a protestor. By using a vertically reversed image (or mirror image) of the figure (he faces left, in

his later appearance), and slightly different coloring (sepia-toned, rather than naturalistic), Pistoletto seems to seek to be differentiating the two, perhaps to optimize his usage of photographs already available to him in order to avoid staging new photographs with new subjects. At the same time, this reversed doubling (or mirroring) of the imagistic figure and revision of its coloring seems to play upon chronological, narrative, and technological structures that point to a more nuanced relation between the two. The shift in coloring emphasizes the historicity of the figure as a photographic subject; the redirection of the figure suggests an action of return; and both point to the figure's re-appearance as a reproduced image.

Indeed, the figure at left in *Due persone che passano* also made an earlier appearance in the artist's works, in *Ragazzo* (Boy; 1965; fig. 2.26), where the political context was also withdrawn. In *Ragazzo*, a boy stands at center right, dressed in a school uniform and a large, double-breasted blue coat. He is framed by a group of bystanders at right and a young man, who strides away from him, and has just begun to cross beyond the left-hand edge of the steel panel. Study of Rinaldi's source photograph places the subjects in a large public gathering in a city square; whether it is a strike, protest, or rally is not immediately clear (fig. 2.27). Two figures in the background carry a large banner, which faces away from us, and crowds of onlookers have gathered on either side. In the absence of partisan flags or other political paraphernalia in the image, however, let alone a clear view of the banner's text, it would seem impossible to identify its subjects or event beyond this point. Closer examination of the banner, however, reveals several lines of faded text, printed on the rear-facing side of the fabric (fig. 2.28). Based on the reversed vertical orientation of the lettering (from bottom to top instead of top to bottom), it seems the banner is in the process of being unfurled, at the beginning of the event, or rolled up, at the end of its proceedings. Printed along the bottom edge of banner, as it appears to us in the

image, then, it reads: “Contributo della Lombardia alla Resistenza” (Lombardia’s contribution to the Resistance). Other words including “partigiano” (partisan), a member of the anti-fascist Resistance, “comunisti” (Communists), and “patrioti” (patriots), can be made out in the lines that follow. The scene, then, is one of commemoration: a public celebration, on occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the end of Second World War, in recognition of the province’s active role in the Resistance, and in honor of those who risked or lost their lives in their commitment to bringing an end to fascism.

In the early 1960s, art critic Barbara Rose invoked “coolness” as a term in an early critique of Neo-Dada (which in the early 1960s included Wesselmann, Lichtenstein, and other artists now associated with Pop), describing the American movement as a “cool detached art.”⁶⁹ For Rose, this “cool art” had “little in common” with its supposed historical precedent of European Dada—a precedent that, by contrast, was “anti-art, anti-war, anti-materialism,” and “the art of the politically and socially engaged.”⁷⁰ To that end, Rose dismissed the term as a misnomer as well as any associations proposed between the two, emphasizing the passive nature of the Neo-Dada artist.⁷¹ “One popular misconception is that new Dada is an art of protest,” she wrote.⁷² That Rose grounded much of her argument in the groups’ polarized capacities for protest seems to have set an important precedent within American art criticism. Situating the movement after Abstract Expressionism and the American “action painters,” a name for the movement coined by Harold Rosenberg in 1952, she wrote:

[But] younger artists, experiencing the war years as children and adolescents, learned to accept in a dispassionate manner what would outrage and inflame a generation that had known something else. Playing a passive role from the start in the events that shaped our world, they are passive, acquiescing and accepting still. Every generation to some extent feels itself the inheritor of a world not of its making, but this feeling usually engenders protest. In this case, however, the futility of protest and the early acceptance of the

horrible, the atrocious and the insane as objective facts of life led rather to detachment and non-participation. [...] Artists are no longer political, nor is art a vehicle for propaganda. The neo-Dadaist, though he uses the content of life, stands apart from it—amused, detached. [...] Unlike European Dada, it seeks neither to criticize, to satirize nor to scandalize. It does not affirm, like socialist realism, or protest, like Expressionism it suspends judgment in a passive, detached fashion.⁷³

Indeed, not long after Rose aligned the cool detachment of American Pop with political passivity, Peter Selz, then curator of painting and sculpture at the New York Museum of Modern Art, would similarly refute readings of Pop as a critical, politically-engaged movement, focusing on the movement's apparently lax attitude and ambivalent affect.⁷⁴ Citing a “lack of stance” and “lack of involvement” on the part of the Pop artist—the Pop artist “plays it cool”—the problem with Pop for Selz was the impotency of its players. Writing for the *Partisan Review* in 1963, he wrote:

What is so objectionable about Pop Art is this extraordinary relaxation of effort, which implies further a profound cowardice. It is the limpness and fearfulness of people who cannot come to grips with the times they live in.⁷⁵

As with Rose, Pop for Selz was “far from being an art of social protest,” and instead should only be regarded as one of “abject conformity.”⁷⁶ In *ARTnews*, Thomas Hess invoked the term to account for American Pop's “cool attitude toward tradition,” describing the movement's relationship to history as a kind of “trivial” “pastiche.”⁷⁷ For Hess, Pop was only “political in that it keeps urging the belief that everything is pretty rosy [...]”⁷⁸ Echoing these critics in the fall of 1964 was Alan Solomon, curator of the hotly contested American Pavilion at that year's Venice Biennale. Reflecting on the “regrettable distortion” of Pop resulting from public criticism following Rauschenberg's award, Solomon agreed that Pop “had been misinterpreted as an art of protest and a reflection of discontent in the modern world.”⁷⁹ Rather than condemning Pop's “cool” attitude and the “certain detachment and impersonality” of its work, however, Solomon

suggested these qualities gave the work a potentially productive “openness”—an exclusively American one.⁸⁰ As he put it:

Their attitude is what we would call nowadays “cool,” and they actually tell us very little about themselves, their real personal feelings, and their attitude toward the situation in the painting. Instead of protesting, or satirizing, they are telling us that anything goes [...]. This openness, so much a determinant in the attitude of the new American generation, comes not from indifference, but from a desire for a new esthetic and a new morality. Such a point of view is absolutely incomprehensible to Europeans, except for a few who have had some taste of contemporary American life.⁸¹

By the moment of Pistoletto’s debut at the Walker in the spring of 1966, “coolness,” had long been established as a term that defined an exclusively American brand of non-committal, disengaged authorship and sociopolitical apathy.⁸² It is not surprising then that Friedman would situate the protest pictures as both “cool” and “American” at the same time:

In many respects, Pistoletto’s artistic ambience is an American one, although he has never lived here. Certain affinities, some admittedly tenuous, exist between his pictures and Pop art, environmental experiments and “happenings.” His relationship to current Italian painting and sculpture is negligible [...]. Pistoletto’s figures appear either in relaxed, contemplative attitudes or are shown as part of processions frozen in motion. Figures and objects based on actual photographs are shown in mildly distorted ‘actual’ color produced with crayon and other means. Such selective use of the photographic process, frequently used in American Pop art, implies a ‘cool,’ detached manner of direct presentation—with immediately recognizable images whose presence in the painting remains enigmatic and rather mysterious.⁸³

It is this specifically American depoliticization (and colonization, even) of Pistoletto’s mirror paintings that I am interested in as an historic (and historiographic) problem for his work and for the broader field of postwar Italian art. Lucio Fontana’s work, for example, was similarly received. In a review of Fontana’s retrospective at the Walker Art Center in 1966, held shortly after Pistoletto’s exhibition, Sidney Simon referred to the Italian Spatialist as a “latter-day or ‘cool’ Futurist,” whose “coolness consist[ed] in having rejected Futurism’s romantic militancy and fascist tendencies [...]”⁸⁴ Unlike the “impassioned forebears” of the Italian historical avant-garde, Simon wrote, Fontana’s interest in the future was grounded in “an underlying faith in

technological evolution” and governed by his “clinical matter-of-factness.” Neither to be aligned with the “revolutionary destructiveness of Dada” or the idealism of the Bauhaus—historical avant-gardes with ties to Communism, it seems, were also to be distanced from significant contemporary art—Fontana’s “coolness” amounts to a characterization of his work as passive and apolitical. Simon’s underlying point is that Fontana’s ostensibly vanguard artistic practice was passive and apolitical, Fontana was distinguished from other European historical avant-gardes.⁸⁵ He retained the “best Futurist tradition” and none of its threatening politics.

Two years later, as co-curator with Alan Solomon of the 1968 exhibition *Recent Italian Painting and Sculpture* held at the Jewish Museum in New York, Kynaston McShine would describe the generation of Italian artists who emerged in the 1950s as “‘international’ Italians” with a “truly universal” aesthetic—an aesthetic that, for McShine, “transcended the possible ‘city-state’ provincialism” that afflicted the work of “national” or somehow more authentically “Italian,” Italian artists.⁸⁶

What this overview of primary invocations of the term also tells us is that “coolness” allowed critics to label practices by non-American artists that may have shared formal qualities with American Pop as mimicry. That concessions were only made for those artists who may have “had some taste of contemporary American life,” as Friedman put it, by living in the U.S. or embracing American culture only reinforces the term’s valence as an agent of imperialist nationalism.⁸⁷ Indeed, as Thomas Hess observed, it was only “In Italy, where Americanization was met with less resistance from native customers, [that] Pop [was] beginning to flourish.”⁸⁸ Implicit to such equivocations, however, is the assumption that formal qualities convey the same meaning universally.

If Pop was associated with an abatement of artistic labor—a “relaxation of effort,” as Thomas Hess put it—Pistoletto’s turn to procedures associated with Pop and American culture specifically for a series that features imagery from Italian labor protests becomes more compelling. Scholarship on Pop and readymade practices has in recent decades contended that selection as an artistic process is aligned with capitalist activities (shopping, for example), drives (desire), and subject positions.⁸⁹ If we regard Pistoletto’s decision to use Rinaldi’s photographs as a capitalist endeavor, then his adoption of this material and method in the service of producing anti-capitalist images, seem to be equally if not more subversive than the subject matter of the protest pictures series.

Closer attention to the work’s production seems to corroborate this proposal. While Pistoletto used Rinaldi’s photographs, the resulting mirror subjects were not simply enlarged reproductions of these images. As with his earlier mirror paintings, the process involved several steps that differentiated the ostensive reproduction from its source. First, Pistoletto had Bressano re-photograph Rinaldi’s images, so that the collaged figure, which is glued facing down, would be oriented in the same direction as in the original photograph. Next, he printed a life-size enlargement from Bressano’s negative onto a sheet of tissue paper. The remainder of the process does not need re-visitation. This step, however, could be understood as a kind of doubling of the reproduction and distribution of the image. That they circulate through several iterations before their articulation on the metal panel makes them more labor-intensive, distancing Pistoletto from the “cool” as “lazy” interpretation of Pop exemplified by Hess’ argument. At the same time, however, the fact that the protest pictures were made with the use of even more reproductive processes (than all of the mirror paintings preceding them) also aligns them more with Pop. That these images are images of workers, however, suggests that Pistoletto’s attention to labor-

intensive processes might serve to align him, intentionally or otherwise, with the subjects of his pictures. To this end, perhaps the mode of figuration Pistoletto employed (or perhaps better, deployed) in the protest mirror paintings served to create less “cool” images, in the sense of being detached and impersonal, as Friedman invoked the term, than “cold” ones: political images that undermine and threaten, if indirectly, a global economic and, in this case, cultural adversary. If American Pop had the potential to hook into the communicative capacities of capitalist popular culture, reaching an ever-expansive audience through mass media, production, and distribution networks, as Lawrence Alloway would later write, Pistoletto’s political mirror paintings seemed geared to expose and disrupt the structures of power that govern these networks.⁹⁰

It is through this lens that Pistoletto’s later comments on the protest pictures, which contradicted his initial remarks on the series, begin to seem more logical. Indeed, in the spring of 1967, just one year after the Walker exhibition, Pistoletto seemed to downplay and even dismiss the potential politics of the works. In a review of the artist’s solo exhibition at the Kornblee Gallery in Buffalo, New York, *New York Times* art critic Grace Glueck reflected on her conversation with the artist:

For the arbitrary, pasted-on figures, Pistoletto selects the most banal, anonymous photographic images he can find, often snaps taken by his friends [...]. “The subject is not important,” he says, dismissing the idea of commitment that might be expressed by the couple carrying Vietnam protest banners. “I am a political man, but if I wanted to paint political pictures, I’d go much further.”⁹¹

That Pistoletto was able to achieve international career success, specifically in the United States, as an Italian artist in the mid-1960s hinged in large part on such ambiguous statements. Rather than putting full faith in the artist’s dismissal of the works’ politics, perhaps the question was not whether he *would* “go further,” but if he *should*.

In the photograph taken by the *Times* as part of their coverage of the exhibition, Pistoletto poses in front of his mirror painting, *Vietnam* (fig. 2.29). Mimicking the protestors in the scene, he holds his body as if he were mid-stride, one arm forward and one arm back, as if he was swinging them in time with his gait; his weight is shifted onto one leg as he leans forward in alignment with the protestors featured on the work behind him. With his head held high and eyes fixed on a point well behind the camera, Pistoletto recreates the protest within the real scene of the gallery—and, by virtue of this publicity, within the space of American media.

Excavation of the politics of Pistoletto's protest works brings a new perspective to other areas of the artist's practice. One of the most pressing revisions they suggest for existing interpretations of the artist's mirror paintings is the protest pictures' relation to a smaller series of mirror paintings, which featured full-scale reproductions of works of American Pop. Made alongside the protest pictures in 1965, the Pop-themed mirror paintings featured life-size cut-outs of photographic reproductions of works by American Pop artists Claes Oldenburg and John Chamberlain as they were installed at the Venice Biennale.

In addition to the change in subject matter in this series, there was a shift in the artist's methods. Like the protest pictures, the Pop-themed mirror paintings were made with source images drawn from pre-existing photographic images; these images, however, did not belong to a fellow artist nor even to an individual author. Instead, they were drawn from mass media sources, more specifically from Italian political publications and cultural reviews. Pistoletto's *La Stufa di Oldenburg* (Oldenburg's Stove; 1965; fig. 2.30), for example, featured an enlarged color photograph of the Swedish-American artist's *Stove (Assorted Foods on a Stove)* (1962; fig. 2.31). The photograph was taken upon the recent exhibition of the sculpture at the controversial 1964 Venice Biennale, where it featured prominently as part of the American pavilion. The

painted, plaster-cast model of the appliance laden with encrusted, papier-mâché meats was part of Oldenburg's series of everyday objects, foodstuffs, and bric-a-brac produced as part of his commercial installation, *The Store* (1962). For this work, rather than using a photograph he had staged—which could have been possible, given the artists' friendship—Pistoletto used a pre-existing image that had been published in *L'Europeo* (The European), an Italian weekly political news review, as part of its July 1964 issue dedicated to the contentious XXXII Biennale, where the work had been exhibited (fig. 2.32).⁹²

In the scholarship on Pistoletto, these works have yet to be seriously considered. Instead, they have been largely written off as somewhat facile, “tongue-in-cheek” puns on Pop, in the wake of the exhibition of these works in the American Pavilion at the controversial 1964 Venice Biennale. Exceptions to this interpretation include Romy Golan's reading. In a 2012 article on the artist, Golan wrote:

Pistoletto had no works in the 1964 Biennale, and the two [three] mirror paintings he created based on pop works he saw there—one featuring a cutout of Oldenburg's Stove; the other featuring a cutout of a crushed-metal sculpture by John Chamberlain—can be read as his way of absenting himself from the commotion and stating, “I saw and did not partake; these are souvenir pictures.”⁹³

Such loose attention to these works and creative interpretation of their significance—the line about “souvenir pictures” does not belong to Pistoletto, and in the absence of a citation, seems to belong to no one but the author—has allowed misinformation to circulate unquestioned within the discourse.

Two mirror paintings featured a full-scale photographic cut-out of one of John Chamberlain's iconic abstract welded sculptures made of painted car parts and beat-up metal siding, painted in a garish palette of bubblegum-pink, carnelian, turquoise, and indigo: *Scultura di Chamberlain* (Chamberlain Sculpture; fig. 2.33) and *Man with Chamberlain Sculpture* (fig.

2.34), both 1965. Both works featured Chamberlain's sculpture as it had appeared on the cover of the Italian art review, *La Biennale* (fig. 2.35): resting on a white plinth, as it was displayed at the 1964 Venice Biennale, marked with a small label bearing Chamberlain's surname in black typeface.⁹⁴ On the cover of the Italian review, Chamberlain's evocation of American capitalism and consumer culture is amplified; we are reminded of industrial production and demolition, consumption and waste: the organized assembly line of Fordist manufacture remade into colorful and shiny assemblage. The appearance of Chamberlain's sculpture on the surface of Pistoletto's mirror painting has a similar effect. In this way, Pistoletto juxtaposed American cultural practice—specifically works selected to represent America on a global stage—with protest imagery that is specifically of an anti-American, anti-capitalist variety. By strategically placing these works in the same context of display as his protest images, the Pop-themed mirror paintings were often reflected in the surfaces of the latter. They are positioned for the viewer, then, as the objects of these protestors' critique.

As opposed to thinking about the Pop and protest mirror paintings as arbitrary, one-off themes, their production in 1965 as parallel projects suggests a more intimate connection between the two. In a photograph of *Due persone che passano* (fig. 2.36) taken upon the opening of the artist's exhibition at the Galleria Sperone in Milan on November 8, 1966, we see *Scultura di Chamberlain* reflected in the surface of the protest picture. A second image, also taken at the Sperone exhibition, captures *Due persone che passano* in the surface of *Scultura di Chamberlain* (fig. 2.33). While these images were taken by Bressano, Pistoletto's likely involvement in the installation layout supports the dialogical relationship between the series. As if to underscore the fact himself, there is a third picture he took himself. It is a self-portrait of the artist with his mirror painting, *Stufa di Oldenburg* (fig. 2.37). We see Pistoletto in the act of taking the picture,

reflected in the mirror panel, peeking out from behind an easel.⁹⁵ A different kind of protest picture, we see Pistoletto negotiate his position between his mirror paintings and Pop.

¹ Pistoletto, "Questions to Pistoletto" (Turin: February, 1966), unpublished responses to list of questions sent by Martin Friedman (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center (WAC) Archives), question no. 13. For Friedman's questionnaire, see Appendix B.4. For Pistoletto's original responses in Italian, see Appendix B.5. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted. The WAC Archives have an unattributed English translation of this document that was ostensibly used by Friedman to prepare his catalog essay. As that translation takes some liberty with Pistoletto's language—not enough, however, to misconstrue its content, thereby misleading Friedman to some of the claims he makes for the work—I have used my own translation here. The original Italian reads: "Voglio mostrare nei quadri più recenti che anche i più diversi significati possono vivere in questa dimensione demistificata; siano violenti o pacifici, essi esistono con noi. Uno che fa un quadro di protesta limita la sua visione al fatto. Io posso scegliere un soggetto di protesta politica come un avvenimento reale della vita, proprio per metterlo in una condizione che va oltre. Anche le immagini degli osservatori anonimi sono messi in condizione di andare oltre la loro osservazione."

² Martin Friedman, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World* (Minneapolis: WAC, 1966), n.p. Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held at the Walker Art Center, April 4–May 8, 1966.

³ Attribution of the cover design to Seitz provided by Jill Vuchetich, WAC Head Archivist, e-mail response to author's research inquiry, February 28, 2016. The WAC employed Seitz, a German-born, American designer, as design curator and sole employee of the design department from 1964 to 1968. During that time, Seitz was responsible for the design of all museum publications and publicity materials; he also edited the in-house periodical *Design Quarterly*. For in-house design projects, Seitz would consult with Friedman, to whom he reported. Consultation of other examples of Seitz' work at the Walker suggests the creative direction of the catalog cover for Pistoletto's exhibition may have incorporated Friedman's input, as it is somewhat of an anomaly in the designer's work from the period—typically, geometric or text-based designs. No other files relating to the cover design (budget, art direction, e.g.) remain extant. There is no record of Pistoletto's own input for the catalog design. Given that all correspondence with Pistoletto was saved, we can him out as a possible contributor to the catalog's design. On Seitz's reporting to Friedman, see Ryan Gerald Nelson, "From Ulm to Minneapolis: Tracing Peter Seitz's Modernist Traditions," *The Gradient*, WAC blog, October 31, 2007: <http://blogs.walkerart.org/design/2007/10/31/ulm-minneapolis-tracing-peter>. For more on Seitz, see *Peter Seitz: Designing a Life*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt and Pamela Johnson (Minneapolis: Minneapolis College of Art & Design, 2007).

⁴ This description relies on Michael Fried's discussion of absorption in eighteenth-century figurative painting and its effect on the relationship between image and viewer. See Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁵ See Friedman and Annette Michelson, "Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World. Members' Preview with Art Critic Annette Michelson," April 4, 1966. QuickTime audio, track 2 of 5, WAC Archives, digital audio of reel-to-reel original from the WAC Collections and Resources Database, previously available at <http://collections.walkerart.org/item/archive/110>.

⁶ Friedman, *A Reflected World*, n.p.

⁷ Characterizations of Pop's practitioners and artworks as "cool" can be found in the following sources: Sidney Janis, "On the Theme of the Exhibition," *The New Realists* (New York: Sidney Janis Gallery, 1962), n.p.; Barbara Rose, "Dada, Then and Now," *Art International* VII, no. 1 (January 1963): 23; Peter Selz, "Pop Goes the Artist," *Partisan Review* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1963): 315; John Coplans, "Pop Art, USA," *Artforum* 2, no. 4 (October 1963): 28; Thomas Hess, "Pop and Public," *ARTnews* 62, no. 7 (November 1963): 23; and Alan Solomon, "Jim Dine and the Psychology of the New Art," *Art International* VIII, no. 8 (October 20, 1964): 52. Pop artists also used the term to describe their own work. See Roy Lichtenstein in conversation with Gene Swenson, for example, in "What is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters, Part I," *ARTnews* 62, no. 7 (November 1963): 27.

⁸ See Alberto Boatto, *Dentro/fuori lo specchio* (Rome: Fantini Editrice, 1969), 7.

⁹ Pistoletto, interview by Celant (1984), in *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant and Gianelli, 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ One of the most prominent refutations of this reading of Pistoletto in Italian art criticism was made by the designer Ettore Sottsass, Jr. Sottsass argued that differences in commercial culture and everyday life in Italy and America made it impossible for Pistoletto's work, or that of any Italian artist, to be those of Pop. See, "Pop e non-pop: A proposito di Michelangelo Pistoletto" (February 22, 1964), *Domus*, no. 441 (May 1964): 35.

For quotation, see Pistoletto, interview by Celant (1984), 31. Translation by the author.

¹² Pistoletto, interview by Celant (1984), 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Pistoletto, "Questions to Pistoletto," question no. 3. See Appendix B.5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Pistoletto, interview by Celant (1984), 29.

¹⁷ See my introduction, p. 11.

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," 3rd version, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 254. Also see Silverman, 167–221.

¹⁹ Penn, 157, 160. The first work Pistoletto made with an image taken by someone else was *Due donne nude che ballano* (Two Nude Women Dancing; 1964). Those figures were extracted from a photograph by Eadweard Muybridge.

²⁰ See Gilman, "Pistoletto's Staged Subjects," 57–58.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

²² Friedman, *A Reflected World*, n.p. While there were many comparisons made between Pistoletto and Pop within the primary reception of his work, as I discussed in Chapter 2, notable descriptions of Pistoletto's mirror paintings in the Walker exhibition as "cool" were also offered by Michelson and an un-authored exhibition review in *Picture Magazine*, a Sunday magazine associated with the Minneapolis Tribune. See Friedman and Michelson, track 2 of 5, and "Now You Can Put Yourself...in the Picture," *Picture Magazine* 35, no. 14 (April 3, 1966): 12–13.

²³ Sidney Simon, "Michelangelo Pistoletto," *Art International X*, no. 6 (Summer 1966): 70.

²⁴ Details of the exhibition layout were culled from Simon's review of the exhibition. See Simon, "Michelangelo Pistoletto," 69, 71.

²⁵ Ten were made in 1965, followed by an additional pair, made in 1966, which were exhibited in that year's Venice Biennale. The previous count of seven protest-themed mirror paintings is also problematic because it includes works from different series (i.e. the *stracci* or "rag" works of the late 1960s), periods (anywhere from 1965 to 1976), and methods (silkscreened mirror paintings, in addition to the hand-painted, tissue paper media Pistoletto actually used in the series). See *Pistoletto Politico: Works by Michelangelo Pistoletto*, ed. Daniella Luxembourg, Amalia Dayan, and Alma Luxembourg (London: Luxembourg & Dayan, 2013). Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held February 12–April 12, 2013. To avoid confusion with incorrect translations under which the works have been sometimes been exhibited, I will refer to the protest pictures by their Italian titles throughout this chapter, rather than using their English titles for subsequent references, as in my other chapters.

²⁶ This labeling of *Corteo* corrects existing documentation of the Walker exhibition presented in the secondary sources. The PMA exhibition checklist names *Ragazzo* as having been labeled *Procession*; the dimensions of *Ragazzo*, however, as a vertically-oriented work, do not align with those of *Procession*, a horizontally-oriented work, as listed in the Walker catalog. My tracing of the retitling of this work and others in the series at the Walker was supported through comparison of the 1966 catalog checklist, the loan request form from the Walker sent to Leo Castelli's Gallery (see Appendix B.3), and examination of exhibition photographs. See Jennifer

Wilkinson, entry 33, “Checklist of the Exhibition,” in *From One to Many*, 376; Friedman, “Checklist of the Exhibition,” in *A Reflected World*, n.p., and WAC, loan request, Leo Castelli Gallery, March 3, 1966, WAC Archives.

²⁷ The identification of the sign’s text as the name of a political candidate comes from Penn’s essay on the mirror paintings, based on a conversation she had with the artist in 2009; she did not identify the candidate’s affiliation with the PCI. This point requires further research, as I have not been able to find a political candidate of that name, however, in all of my research on elections (municipal and national) in Italy from late 1964 through 1965. See Penn, 157.

²⁸ The PSIUP established in 1964 should not be confused with the PSI’s former use of the same name. The PSIUP referenced here split from the PSI in 1964 in response to Moro’s election. While Moro’s government received some support from the PSI, other party members who went on to form the PSIUP believed his election compromised their values.

²⁹ For an example of the dozens of reports on political rallies in this period, see *Corriere della Sera*, “I comizi elettorali,” November 17, 1965.

³⁰ Existing literature states the entirety of the series was shown at the exhibition. See *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant, 16. Other works in the series were debuted later that year at the artist’s eponymous solo exhibitions at the Galleria del Leone in Venice (July 10–, 1966; precise closing date unknown) and Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone in Milan (November 8–, 1966; precise closing date unknown). Others still seem to have been sold directly to collectors in the United States without exhibition, presumably by the Castelli Gallery.

³¹ These aforementioned titles correspond to the provided translations, unless otherwise noted.

³² For information on the Castelli Gallery and WAC exhibition plans, see Ileana Sonnabend’s unpublished letter to Friedman, dated November 3, 1965, WAC Archives. See Appendix B.1.

³³ For a review of this debate, see Chapter 1.

³⁴ Protests were held in the Piazza del Duomo in Milan on May 22, 1965. See *Corriere della Sera*, “Scontri in centro tra polizia e comunisti,” May 23, 1965.

³⁵ For reports on these protests, see, for example: *Corriere della Sera*, “Oggi a Roma: Un’assurda ‘marcia della pace’,” May 20–21, 1965; M. B., “La ‘marcia’ antiamericana organizzata dai comunisti,” *Corriere della Sera*, May 21, 1965; *Corriere della Sera*, “Dopo il comizio per il Vietnam: Scontri in centro tra polizia e comunisti,” May 23, 1965; *Corriere della Sera*, “Le Manifestazioni Antiamericane: Violenti scontri a Genova tra polizia e dimostranti,” May 25, 1965; *Corriere della Sera*, “Manifestazione comunista contro la guerra nel Vietnam,” November 27, 1965; and *Corriere della Sera*, “Sotto la pioggia a Roma, le dimostrazioni per il Vietnam,” March 28, 1966.

³⁶ Nicholas Cullinan has also emphasized the importance of the 1964 Venice Biennale and the Vietnam War for the political climate framing Arte Povera's emergence later in the decade. See Cullinan, "From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam," *October* 124 (Fall 2008): 8–30.

³⁷ Clarification of when Friedman first saw Pistoletto's work was provided by Jill Vuchetich, WAC Archives, e-mail correspondence with the author, April 22, 2015.

³⁸ Ileana Sonnabend mentions hearing from Friedman in her unpublished letter to the curator. See Appendix B.1.

³⁹ Friedman, "Questions for Pistoletto." See Appendix B.4. Also see note 1 in this chapter.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 13. See Appendix B.4.

⁴¹ Pistoletto, "Questions to Pistoletto," no. 13. The WAC Archives also have an unattributed English translation of this document, which was ostensibly used by Friedman during his preparation of his catalogue essay. As the translation takes some liberty with Pistoletto's language—not enough, however, to misconstrue its content, possibly explaining some of Friedman's claims for the work—I have used my own translation. For Friedman's list of questions and Pistoletto's responses in Italian, see Appendices B.4 and B.5.

⁴² Friedman, *A Reflected World*, n.p.

⁴³ Friedman and Michelson, track 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Ashbery, 64.

⁴⁶ Sidney Simon, "Michelangelo Pistoletto," *Art International* X, no. 6 (Summer 1966): 70.

⁴⁷ Simon, "Michelangelo Pistoletto," 70.

⁴⁸ Vittorio Rubiu, "Il quadro come specchio della vita," *Supplemento del Corriere della Sera*, July 25, 1976.

⁴⁹ Henry Martin, "Michelangelo Pistoletto," in *Pistoletto*, ed. Renilde Hammacher-van den Brande (Rotterdam, NL: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1969), n.p. Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held March 22–May 4.

⁵⁰ For the first quotation, see "Comizi (Demonstrations)," label text, *From One to Many*. For the second, see Penn, 157.

⁵¹ "Comizi (Demonstrations)," label text.

⁵² Cullinan, "From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera"; Elizabeth Mangini, "Arte Povera in Turin 1967–1978: Contextualizing Artistic Strategies During the *Anni Di Piombo*,"

Ph.D. dissertation (New York: The City University of New York, 2010); and Jason E. Smith, “Giving Time to Time: Boetti and Italy’s ‘Creeping May’,” in *Alighiero Boetti: Game Plan*, ed. Lynne Cooke, Mark Godfrey, and Christian Rattenmeyer (London: Tate Publishing, 2012): 143–53.

⁵³ Pistoletto typically made the mirror paintings with stainless steel sheets measuring 90 1/2 x 47 1/4 inches (230 x 120 cm), the largest size available for purchase from local manufacturers. See Penn, “The Complicity of the Materials,” 157.

⁵⁴ Friedman, *A Reflected World*, n.p.

⁵⁵ Pistoletto was not involved in the catalog design. See Note 3.

⁵⁶ This was not for a lack of information, as the Walker was in possession of the works’ original Italian titles, with which they requested the works from lenders. WAC, loan request. See Appendix B.3.

⁵⁷ In the absence of a color photograph of the exhibition sign—a point confirmed by the WAC Archives—I can only estimate that the reproduction of the image followed similar formatting guidelines as the catalog cover. While the reproduction of *Comizio II* preserves the flags from the original image, they were likely printed on the steel sign in grayscale, thereby neutralizing their political significance. Supporting this estimation is fact that the image was cropped precisely below the flag’s star-shaped *puntale* (finial), thereby removing the Communist symbol that appears in the mirror painting.

⁵⁸ Ginsborg, 274.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 274–75.

⁶⁰ See the following news reports on workers’ strikes and mass protests against new public transit fees in 1965: *L’Unità*, “L’80% dei tramvieri partecipa allo sciopero” [Milan], March 3, 1965; *L’Unità*, “La città protesta contro l’aumento” [Rome], May 4, 1965; Giancarlo Galli, “Il tram che mangia oro” [Milan], *Corriere della Sera*, March 6–7, 1965.

⁶¹ See, for example, the following reports: *Stampa Sera*, “Domattina i tram fermi per lo sciopero,” February 22–23, 1965; *Corriere della Sera*, “Tram: le cifre dello sciopero,” March 3–4, 1965; Arturo Barone, “Tram e pullman fermi per ventiquattro ore. Lo sciopero dei trasporti pubblici ha paralizzato ieri Roma e Lazio,” *La Stampa*, July 16, 1965; *L’Unità*, “Contro l’aumento bloccati i tram,” February 23, 1964; *L’Unità*, “Milano: fallito l’attacco alla CGIL. L’80% dei tramvieri partecipa allo sciopero,” March 3, 1965; *L’Unità*, “Caos per la taglia sulle tariffe. La città protesta contro l’aumento,” May 4, 1965; *L’Unità*, “Ritirare il progetto per il ‘caro-tariffe’,” May 23, 1964; *Il Messaggero*, “Il Paese paralizzato dallo sciopero ferroviario,” April 15, 1965; *La Stampa*, “Lo sciopero dei trasporti pubblici ha paralizzato ieri Roma e il Lazio,” July 16, 1965.

⁶² For more on this relationship, see Musso, 227–28.

⁶³ Italian economist Christian Marazzi has emphasized the weakening effect that this partisan reshuffling had on Italy's labor movement. See his conversation with Sylvère Lotringer, "The Return of Politics," in *Semiotext(e)* III, no. 3, *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* (1980): 17.

⁶⁴ Musso, 227–28.

⁶⁵ For more on the Macchiaioli and social realism, see Norma Broude, *The Macchiaioli: Italian Painters of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), on Signorini and social realism, 149; and Albert Boime, *The Art of the Macchia and the Risorgimento* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), especially chap. 2, "Strategies of Representation," and chap. 7, "Religious and Social Themes," 235–96.

⁶⁶ Christopher M. S. Johns, review of *The Macchiaioli* by Norma Broude, *Italica* 67, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 223.

⁶⁷ Recalling the review of cultural debates surrounding realism in the introduction, the connotation between postwar Italian social realism and socialist realism presented a potential problem that Pistoletto may have wanted to avoid by the mid-1960s.

⁶⁸ Following the example of these political reviews, workers' movements such as *Potere operaio* also had their own publications. See, for example, self-titled reviews by *Potere operaio* (1969–73) and *Lotta continua* (1969–72).

⁶⁹ Rose, 23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 23. Rose would go on to champion certain figures in the movement, namely Claes Oldenburg, in the late 1960s.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷³ Rosenberg coined the term in his essay, "The American Action Painters," *ARTnews* 51, no. 8 (December, 1952): 22–23; 48–50. For Rose's quotation, see Rose, 25, 28.

⁷⁴ Selz, 315. Selz first delivered these ideas on occasion of the New York MoMA Symposium on Pop Art (December 13, 1962). Excerpts of Selz's comments were published in "From 'A Symposium on Pop Art'," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 7 (April, 1963): 36.

⁷⁵ Selz, "Pop Goes the Artist," 315.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁷⁷ Hess, 23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁸¹ Ibid., 52.

⁸² On “cool” as non-committal, see Selz, “Symposium,” 315.

⁸³ Friedman, *A Reflected World*, n.p.

⁸⁴ Sidney Simon, “The Fontana Problem,” *Art International* X, no. 6 (Summer 1966): 58–59. Fontana’s retrospective was curated not by Friedman but Jan van der Marck, also of the Walker.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 58–59.

⁸⁶ Kynaston McShine, foreword, *Recent Italian Painting and Sculpture* (New York: The Jewish Museum, with the collaboration of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura of New York, 1968), n.p.

⁸⁷ Friedman, *A Reflected World*, n.p.

⁸⁸ Hess, 59–60.

⁸⁹ Helen Molesworth, “Rose Sélavy Goes Shopping,” in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 173–88; Richard Meyer, “Warhol’s Clones,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1994): 79–109; Hal Foster, “Death in America,” *October* 75 (Winter 1996): 36–59.

⁹⁰ Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1974), 1. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title held at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

⁹¹ Grace Glueck, “The Hokiast Show in New York,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1967.

⁹² See *L’Europeo* XX, no. 29 La Biennale (July 19, 1964), n.p. The source of this image was brought to my attention by Laura Iamurri’s “Il pennello nell’occhio. La pop art sui rotocalchi, prima e dopo la Biennale del 1964,” *Studi di Memofonte* (November 2013): 135 (fig. 3). Online journal: <http://www.memofonte.it/contenuti-rivista-n.11/1.-iamurri-il-pennello-nell-occhio.-la-pop-art-sui-rotocalchi-prima-e-dopo-la-biennale-del-1964.html>

⁹³ Romy Golan, “Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art of the Mid-Sixties,” *Grey Room* 49 (Fall 2012): 117.

⁹⁴ I am grateful to Marco Farano, head archivist at Pistoletto’s foundation, for his work to find the source images for the Chamberlain sculpture, and generosity in sharing them with me when I inquired about them during my archival research conducted in support of this study.

⁹⁵ Here, Pistoletto has adopted the convention of artistic self-portraiture established by Diego Velázquez (see *Las Meninas*; 1656)—a fitting model for a photograph of a mirror painting.

Chapter Three.

Poor Designs: The Minus Objects, 1965–1966

The works I make shall not be constructions or fabrications of new ideas, as they shall not be objects that represent me, to be imposed or to impose myself upon others. Rather they are objects through which I free myself from something—they aren't constructions but liberations—I don't consider them to be extra objects but minus objects, in the sense that they bring with them a perceptual experience that is definitively realized. According to my idea of time, you must learn how to free yourself from a position even while you are engaged in conquering it.

–Pistoletto, 1966¹

Liberalism conceives of liberty not as a fact of nature, but as becoming, as development. One is not born free; one becomes free. And one stays free by retaining an active and vigilant sense of one's autonomy, by constantly exercising one's freedoms.

–Carlo Rosselli, 1930²

January, 1966. Over the course of two months in the winter of 1965–66, in a new live-work space in the basement of an apartment building located just a few blocks from Fiat's largest factory in the Turinese neighborhood of Lingotto, Michelangelo Pistoletto made thirty-three sculptural objects, each unique in material, process, and form (fig. 3.01). Made with materials that were ready-at-hand in the studio or easily available at local hardware stores and industrial suppliers, the resulting *Oggetti in meno* (Minus Objects; 1965–66)—a turn of phrase that is closer in meaning to “fewer” or “minor objects,” rather than “minus objects,” as it is typically translated—were privately exhibited in two installations for his friends and fellow artists in January of 1966 (fig. 3.02). The eclectic series included one-off sculptures, photographs,

geometric constructions (some makeshift, others made-to-order), and design objects, all made as close to the moment of their conceptualization as possible.

Among the Minus Objects were such varied works as the free-standing *Struttura per chiacchiere in piedi* (Structure for Chatting while Standing; 1965–66)—fitted with railings at elbow and ankle height for viewers to lean against while engaging in conversation—and a brightly painted model of a two-story house, *Casa a misura d'uomo* (Man-Sized House; 1965), which stands just a few inches taller than the artist (fig. 3.03). There was a simple wooden table and set of folding bistro chairs, set up not far from the green glow of a mercury street lamp, fitted with a colored bulb, and a wall-sized, commercially printed photographic portrait of a grinning Jasper Johns, taken by the well-known Italian photographer Ugo Mulas.³ This arrangement was balanced by a number of decorative accents: a hand-painted sign that reads “TI AMO” (I love you), in bold block lettering; a multicolored grid of store-bought, decorative plastic tiles, in *Semisfere decorative* (Decorative Semispheres; 1965–66), taped to the wall; a lopsided, papier-mâché ball, *Sfera di giornali* (Sphere of Newspapers; 1965), made of hand-shredded local newspapers—old pages torn from *La Stampa* and *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, including some clippings from the artist’s exhibition reviews (figs. 3.04–05). Other works integrated Pistoletto’s personal possessions: an iron-framed twin bed, in *Sfera sotto il letto* (Sphere under the Bed; 1965); Nativity figurines, posed on the paper terrain in *Paesaggio* (Landscape; 1965); and a fifteenth-century wooden statue of the Madonna, partially encased in bright orange plexiglass.

The inspirations for the Minus Objects were as heterogeneous as their formal properties. Some responded to an observed commercial need or a new product that had caught Pistoletto’s eye; others were solutions to studio clutter; others still were elicited by childhood memories and personal imaginings, or were made simply because they were things he liked.⁴ While the Minus

Objects may have seemed mismatched, even “incoherent,” as Germano Celant would soon call them, the collection was unified by an interest in both design and impoverished materials unsuitable for commodity production.⁵ In spite of their frequently worn out, makeshift, or cobbled-together affect, however, the Minus Objects’ geometric lines, bright colors, synthetic materials, and modular, graphic aesthetic proclaim the works fundamentally as objects of design. To that end, within the artist’s live-work space, they registered less as an exhibition and more as a thoughtfully curated (if rather eclectic) home: personalized interior design that reflected the artist’s individual taste and character.

As Pistoletto tells it, it was a New York visit with art dealer Leo Castelli and curator Alan Solomon in the fall of 1964—the moment of the Plexiglasses—that catalyzed his decision to make the Minus Objects.⁶ During a meeting with Castelli, the successful dealer urged the artist to produce more of the commercially successful mirror paintings, insisting that Pistoletto’s potential career hinged on increased production of these works. Put off by Castelli’s enterprising agenda and wary of the trappings of signature artistic style, Pistoletto left the United States and returned home. While he periodically visited the U.S. and continued to produce mirror paintings the following year (such as the protest pictures, discussed in the previous chapter), those works revealed a concerted redirection of the artist’s practice away from the everyday, universal thematic for which he had become known toward anti-capitalist political critique. In the fall of 1965, when some of Pistoletto’s mirror paintings were vandalized at Castelli’s gallery (allegedly by an American artist), he separated himself from the dealer. He would not return to the U.S. for over twenty years.

Reasons for Pistoletto’s reaction include the Pop reception of his work in the U.S., or the increasingly tense cultural politics of the transatlantic context of 1960s art during the Cold War,

or pervasive anti-capitalist sentiment in northern Italy that was building with the rise of the workers' movement. Perhaps in a nod to the connection between the protest pictures and the Minus Objects, a little-known photograph of the series shows *Comizio II* (Rally II) installed among them (fig. 3.06). Likely a combination of these reasons, Pistoletto resolved at that point to make work that ignored both the art market and its valorization of signature style.⁷

Concurrent with the Minus Objects' production, as with the Plexiglasses, Pistoletto prepared an artist's statement of the same title. In the statement, Pistoletto situated his new work within the longer trajectory of his recent practice. The story begins with his exhibition of *Il presente* (The Present; 1961) at the *Società Promotrice delle Belle Arti* (Fine Arts Society) in Turin in March of 1962: a large painting of a seated figure against a glossy black background that had a peculiar visual effect.

The painted man came forward as if he were alive in the live space of the environment; but the real protagonist was the relationship of instantaneity that was created between the viewer, his reflection, and the painted figure in every "present" movement that made the past and the future converge within it, as much as to cast their existence into doubt: it was the dimension of time.⁸

(L'uomo dipinto veniva avanti come vivo nello spazio vivo dell'ambiente; ma il vero protagonista era il rapporto di istantaneità che si creava tra lo spettatore, il suo riflesso e la figura dipinta, in un movimento sempre 'presente' che concentrava in sé il passato e il future, tanto da far dubitare della loro esistenza: era la dimensione del tempo.)⁹

In this passage, Pistoletto introduces a new term for his work. The relationship between viewer, reflection, and figure in the painting—which here, he refers to as “the first mirror painting”—was not only spatial but also temporal. If with the Plexiglasses, he continued, he had “aim[ed] to bring the meaning of the mirror into inhabited space,” the Minus Objects reflected a subsequent exploration of time. Echoing the narrative of self-introduction articulated in the Plexiglass statement, Pistoletto continued:

It seems to me with my recent works that I've gone into the mirror, that I've actively entered that dimension of time that was represented in the mirror paintings. My recent works bear witness to the need to live and to act according to this dimension, that is, according to the unrepeatability of each second, of each place and therefore of each present action. [...] What I'm interested in today is to introduce myself, physically, on this line where the four dimensions converge, as if I succeeded in living between the silhouette and the mirroring ground.¹⁰

(Mi pare, con i miei recenti lavori, di essere entrato nello specchio, entrato attivamente in quella dimensione di tempo che nei quadri specchianti era rappresentata. I miei recenti lavori testimoniano la necessità di vivere e agire secondo questa dimensione, cioè secondo l'irripetibilità di ogni attimo, ogni luogo e quindi di ogni azione presente. [...] Quello che a me interessa oggi è di introdurmi fisicamente in questa linea di convergenza delle quattro dimensioni, come se io riuscissi ad abitare tra la silhouette e il fondo specchiante.)¹¹

In the original Italian, the word Pistoletto uses for “living” is *abitare*, in which “to live” means “to dwell” or “reside,” as opposed to *vivere*, where it means “to be alive” or “to exist.” How can we account for this radical redirection of the artist’s practice? And what logic, if any, may have framed the production of such a series? To parse these questions requires situating Pistoletto’s work within the historical context of its production, with specific attention to the design-based commodity culture of the Minus Objects’ apparent engagement.

Perhaps the myth surrounding late 1950s Italy is best captured by Federico Fellini’s iconic film, *La Dolce Vita* (1960; fig. 3.07). The film depicts a glamorous image of contemporary Rome, filled with shiny Alfa Romeos, lux Brioni suits, oversize Gucci sunglasses, and other recognizably Italian products, signifying the boom of Italian marketing, product design, and industry during the economic miracle. As a seductive representation of a thriving, post-Reconstruction Italy, fully recovered from fascism, Fellini’s made-in-Italy material excess satirically points to the problematic relationship between Italy’s prosperous design industry and the commodity culture it produced, which created a new sense of post-fascist national identity that excluded the majority working classes.¹² As the image of post-fascist Italy became one of *la*

dolce vita enjoyed by the bourgeoisie and elite, millions of poorer, working class citizens were increasingly socially and geographically marginalized. Living in the squalor of make-shift shelters and shantytowns (*borgate*) that cropped up on the outskirts of Turin, Milan, Rome, and other major cities, the plight of the Italian working classes at the turn of the 1960s was placed increasingly out of view by the advent of Italy's new urbanism.

As depicted in relatively lesser-known films, such as Ermanno Olmi's *Il Posto* (The Job; 1961), the popular classes were largely excluded from a more consumer-friendly model of reality. In the late neorealist film, the young protagonist, Domenico (Sandro Panseri) leaves his dilapidated apartment in the outskirts of Milan in search of employment; while he is ultimately successful in this endeavor, securing work as an errand boy (and later, following an employee's death, a clerk), as is Antonietta (Loredana Detto), his female counterpart in the story, the narrative is not a happy one. His work will be tedious; his pay low. As he walks around the city with Antonietta, his position is continually re-inscribed as one of spatial and socioeconomic exclusion. The pair stand in the rain outside a well-lit shop window, admiring the pristine display of shiny, white appliances—a blender, refrigerator, oven, and washer—all the latest in Italy's booming *elettrodomestici* industry (fig. 3.08). He timidly enters a shop selling ready-to-wear men's suiting; unable to buy anything, he nevertheless tries on a number of jackets, which hang awkwardly on his young, almost gaunt frame.

As *La Dolce Vita* suggests, the conditions of the economic miracle led to a newly globalized, post-fascist Italian identity based on the international success of its design and commercial industries, but also fueled new internal conflicts and sociopolitical tensions, particularly in the industrial north.¹³ Economic and design historians have argued that Italy's new identity was in large part constructed and disseminated by its postwar media, design-based

commercial industries, and advertising practices.¹⁴ What it meant to be “Italian” in the 1950s and 1960s was in large part defined by a particular model of bourgeois private consumerism with a taste for *bel disegno* or “good design.” Consider an advertisement for sewing machine company Necchi from 1960 (fig. 3.09). A young glamorous young woman stands against a hot pink background, balanced by the tagline, *La Necchi è stile* (Necchi is style) printed in bold black lettering on the right-side of the page. Elegant in a black sheath dress and elbow-length black gloves, she holds a single long-stem rose out to the viewer. In front of her is a portable sewing machine, *Necchi’s* latest model; listed as one of Necchi’s *supermodelli* (supermodels), the image of the sewing machine in front of the woman’s body is one of equivalence: It is a sewing machine as beautiful as the subject to whom it’s suited. As the ad tells us, the Necchi is “modern, for the modern woman.” It is “indispensable” to keeping a beautiful home.

The subject of the Necchi advertisement is as much the sewing machine as it is the woman who stands behind it. Together, they model an idealized picture of Italian modernity, predicated upon private consumption of well-designed, Italian products—an image that typified commercial culture during the economic miracle. As the ideal modern Italian woman, the female model is attractive and domestic, stylish and practical. But with a list price of “only” 300,000 lire (the equivalent of over \$1300 in today’s buying power), the home appliance (and style of its association) would have been far out of reach for Italy’s majority working classes, who possessed little buying power. Such an image therefore also illustrates the economically privileged relationship between the politics of national identity and those of representation in postwar Italy. This disjunction between popular images of modern Italians enjoying democratic economic advancement and the poorer reality most Italians experienced was vast. The boom of Italy’s commercial exports shifted the domestic economy to a focus on private consumption,

whereas public consumption developed little.¹⁵ Public institutions and civic services remained relatively unchanged. Housing conditions were poor, especially in working class neighborhoods, which had developed around city peripheries to accommodate booming labor populations.

In the years following the economic miracle, a number of Italian artists working in the urban centers of Rome and the northwestern “industrial triangle” of Turin, Genoa, and Milan began making what would come to be known as *Arte povera*, or “poor art.” First named by Celant in September of 1967 on the occasion of the eponymous exhibition *Arte povera—IM Spazio* (Arte Povera—Imperia [Liguria] Space) at the Galleria La Bertesca in Genoa, the loose group included, in addition to Pistoletto, Turinese artists Giovanni Anselmo (b. 1934), Alighiero Boetti (b. 1940), Luciano Fabro (b. 1936), Mario and Marisa Merz (b. 1925 and 1931), Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947), and other northern Italian artists who—with the exception of Jannis Kounellis (b. 1936, Piraeus, Greece), who moved to Italy in 1956—grew up in the final years or immediate aftermath of Italian fascism.¹⁶ The majority of the group was centered in Turin around Pistoletto and Merz, as slightly older, father figures of the movement. After this first exhibition, Celant published his now canonical essay “Arte povera: Appunti per una guerriglia” (Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War) in the November/December 1967 issue of *Flash Art*, in which Celant described the work of Arte Povera as an internal “revolution” against a culture of “mass consumption” and “rich,” or consumer-oriented artistic practices (namely Minimalism, for him).¹⁷ As “extremely poor works,” the Minus Objects were positioned by Celant as paragons of the new movement, as was the anti-capitalist model of their production: “A free act, unbound and unpredictable [...]”¹⁸

Like Pistoletto, these artists used rags, newspaper, old clothes, food, cardboard, sticks, rocks, gravel, leftover plywood, animals, and other cheap, scrap, or readily available materials,

making work that is often characterized as “simple,” “informal,” or makeshift in kind.¹⁹ In light of Celant’s leftist, quasi-New-Age rhetoric and frequently anti-capitalist overtures, it makes sense that most scholarship on postwar art (largely conducted within Western, capitalist societies) has emphasized Arte Povera’s Post-Minimalist stylistics, reading “poor” in terms of this somewhat impoverished material repertoire, sometimes formless structure, and predilection for “dematerialized” and ephemeral conceptual practices.²⁰ This politicized historiography, however, has suppressed Arte Povera’s more varied efforts that challenge a formalist reading and the Anglo-Americentric and capitalist-centric history of (post)modernism upon which it depends.

In conjunction with the impoverished material repertoire outlined above, for example, these artists also used colored plastics, plexiglass, Lucite, steel, mirrors, fluorescent tubes, fiberglass, and other new synthetic materials associated with Italy’s new design industries and commercial culture. Pistoletto’s *Vetrina* (Display Case; 1965) showcased the artist’s worn pants, t-shirt, and boots, dirtied from a day’s work in the studio, followed by a worn worker’s jumpsuit, also belonging to the artist, displacing the fine clothing presented in such displays as the Italian department store, *La Rinascente* (fig. 3.10).²¹ In a later interview with Germano Celant held in 1971, Pistoletto offered an account for his conceptualization of this work, among others. On *Vetrina*, he said:

The Minus Objects were born from several reasons. [...] [I] imagined another thing of the character of design; that is, I made a small display case; I didn’t know what I could put in it. I drew it up and had it made by a carpenter. [...] [When] it arrived in the studio, I was looking at it over and over until I had to go out. I took off my dirty work clothes, shoes, jacket, and pants, and instead of putting them on a chair, I put them in the little display case: They became clothes in a vitrine.²²

(Gli “Oggetti in meno” sono nati per motivi vari. [...] [Ho] immaginato un’altra cosa che era del carattere del design, cioè fare una vetrinetta entro cui non sapevo cosa avrei potuto mettere; ho disegnato la vetrinetta e l’ho fatta fare da un falegname. [...] [Quando] è arrivata in studio io la stavo guardando e riguardando fino all’ora che dovevo uscire, mi

sono tolto i vestiti sporchi dal lavoro, scarpe, giacca, pantaloni e invece di posarli su una sedia li ho messi nella vetrinetta: sono diventato vestiti in vetrina.)²³

Recalling the factory labor that then supported more than one third of the population in Turin, Pistoletto's clothes displaced the desirable goods or commodities a showcase is made to present. By virtue of their proximity to the artist's laboring body, the clothes function as a metonymic symbol for manual, physical labor, as well as a figural index thereof. The exertion of his body marks the clothes with sweat and progressive wear on the material, whose arrangement in the case correlates to the bodily form of the artist they covered. While the *Vetrina* presents the artist, vis-à-vis his body, and his work as commodities, then, it also symbolically displays the human labor that, following Marx, is secreted therein. Rather than articulating what Celant would later call "maximum entropy of work in art" in his introduction to the major exhibition *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* (1970), in the *Minus Objects*, Pistoletto by contrast seemed to draw attention to, and perhaps even exaggerate (given *Display Case*'s origins in outsourced work), the artistic labor exerted in his production of the *Minus Objects*.

Mario Merz' *Trucioli* (Shavings; 1967–69) is another such contradictory object: a misshapen bale of wood shavings, haphazardly bound with twine and intersected with a fluorescent neon tube that sticks up from the loosely packed form (fig. 3.11). In Italian, *trucioli* generally refers to wood shavings or sawdust, with specific emphasis on the material as a by-product of mechanical woodworking. It is also commonly used to refer to various packaging materials, such as shredded paper (*trucioli di carta*), straw (*trucioli di paglia*), and plastic stuffing (*trucioli di cellophane*), often used for decorative purposes. Under such a title, the viewer is directed less to the work's formal qualities (that is, to its primarily organic form), and more to its economic ones. In *Igloo di Giap* (Giap's Igloo; 1968), whose title refers to the North

Vietnamese general of the same name, a mound of sandbags is decorated with neon script lettering, like that which decorates Italian storefronts in Milan and Turin (fig. 3.12). Jannis Kounellis' *Untitled (Carboniera)* [Untitled (Coal container); 1967]—a sleek, steel trapezoidal cube seems to have failed (somewhat impossibly) to contain the white wool stuffing that pushes through its corners (fig. 3.13). On the one hand, then, these objects function as material signs of the economic success of Italian design and advertising, post-fascist contemporaneity and renewed nationalism in the *secondo dopoguerra*; on the other, however, they also functioned as social signs of the problems engendered by the economic miracle, as well as those that were made to seem less real by idealized popular imagery of Italy that circulated during the period in support of Italian commerce.

Given the movement's bifurcated material repertoire—between the high- and low-tech, durable and flimsy, and popular and passé, that is, a division ultimately based on salability—more recent scholarship has aptly resituated the movement less as a literal exercise of “poor” materialism and more as one of experimentation and new processes, theatricality, collaboration, leftist activism, technology, and engaged with artifice.²⁴ For Celant's part, he would attribute this contradiction to an “incoherence.”²⁵ In spite of these efforts, however, study of the movement relative to the socioeconomic context of Italian design culture—perhaps *the* marker of artifice and urbanism in postwar Italy—has yet to be explored.²⁶ If Arte Povera's objects were conditioned by what we might call, following Marx, a “material dialectic”—a seemingly contradictory meeting of impoverished and commodity materials—how did it play out in the Minus Objects, and to what ends? Drawing attention to Pistoletto's own design work, this chapter situates the Minus Objects in relation to distinctive re-workings of figuration in Italian advertising that constitute what I call a “figural turn” in postwar Italian commercial culture. The

Minus Objects' navigation of those conventions of figuration and the politics of representation of their association, I argue, repositions them not only as "lesser" objects, but as "lesser" *figural* objects. That is, rather than viewing the Minus Objects only as a critique of Italy's design-based commercial culture through its own terms, I argue that their use of a specifically figural language then emerging within Italian design positions them as figural models, which stage an undoing of capitalist symbolic economies and subjectivities through this dialectic.

As reviewed in my introduction, Pistoletto's artistic training included design coursework in the late 1950s at the *Scuola Testa* in Turin, where he studied under the then up-and-coming designer, Armando Testa.²⁷ By the mid-1960s, Testa had emerged as an advertising icon, known for his minimal aesthetic, whimsy, and colorful, geometric forms, which had, through his many campaigns become a defining feature of Italian popular culture. Successful early campaigns for Italian companies Martini e Rossi (1946), Superga (1947), Carpano (1953), Pirelli (1954; fig. 3.14), Borsalino (1954), and ready-to-wear clothier Facis (1956) earned Testa a succession of national design awards and campaigns for other companies, many of which adopted Testa's designs in the long-term as part of their visual brand. Other campaigns quickly followed, for Peroni (1960), Punt e Mes (1960; fig. 3.15), Paulista (Lavazza; 1964; fig. 3.16), and Sasso (1964), to name a few. Testa's success was well publicized in Turin. Newspaper exposés celebrated his work as that of an *artista* (artist) or *cartellonista* (poster artist), as opposed to a commercial designer or head of an advertising agency (fig. 3.17).²⁸ Some of Testa's designs scandalized northern Italians, especially his iconic campaign for *Carpano* vermouth, which included caricatures of historical figures of the former Italian nobility and monarchy; in response to the criticism, Testa defended the campaign and its anti-authoritarian politics.²⁹ On the whole,

however, his images were more often embraced for their whimsy and irreverence rather than criticized. As his designs became pervasive in Italian commercial culture, they were embraced by Turin for their artistic value, helping to bolster the city's cultural capital in the postwar period.³⁰

Critical to Testa's success was his ability to marry abstraction, which informed his geometric, pared-down style, to more popular figurative design. The result was a new form of design, which often conflated representations of the body with object forms in such a way as to literalize figurative (symbolic) meaning in *figural* form. One of the earliest examples of this strategy was Testa's 1956 campaign for the cold and flu remedy *Algo Stop* (fig. 3.18). The advertisement depicts the face of a man whose nose has been displaced by a faucet. His eyes are squinted and puffy, his mouth open as he strains to breathe. The tagline—*Raffreddore Algo Stop! ([Fa] bene in fretta.)* (Cold? Algo Stop! Feel better fast.)—offers a solution to what the figure tells us: The man has a cold and is suffering from a stuffy nose. The image does not represent an actual person suffering from a stuffy nose; rather, it articulates its subject through visual material that literalizes the bodily experience of a cold in *figural* rather than conventionally figurative form.

Testa's prolific work quickly concretized a graphic style that would influence Italian design through the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties, and come to be associated with Italian products on a global scale as commercial exports expanded into foreign markets. While we will recall that Pistoletto declined Testa's invitation to join his firm in 1958 in favor of opening his own graphic design business, as discussed in the introduction, the Minus Objects' geometric forms, bright color palette, and foregrounding of their material construction aligned Pistoletto's

works with Testa's popular style and the new mode of Italian commercial design it helped initiate.

While Pistoletto's exploration of design aesthetics is perhaps most pointed with the *Minus Objects*, this history prompts consideration of the longer trajectory of design in the artist's early practice as well as its significance for *Arte Povera*. As a professional graphic designer in the late 1950s and early 1960s—a career path also pursued by Pino Pascali (who worked as a graphic designer and advertisement illustrator) and Giulio Paolini (who trained in graphic design)—Pistoletto designed ads for Necchi, Singer, Visnova, and Pibigas, among other well-known Italian companies of the period.³¹ In his 1958 print advertisement for Visnova (fig. 3.19), a sewing machine company established in 1954, a piece of cloth hangs from the foot of an unmanned, portable electronic sewing machine, where it is tacked in place by the lowered needle. As the cloth drapes down toward the center of the image, the flat textile gains volume and takes the shape a human figure, nearly the size of the sewing machine above.³² The figure's arms are outstretched toward the lower register of the page, where she directs our attention by pointing to the company logotype printed below.³³ As a design, Pistoletto's advertisement reflected figurative conventions in postwar Italian advertising: First, the manipulation of scale such that the size of the figure would match that of the advertised product, and second, the more product-specific motif of the figure using the machine to sew the garment she is currently wearing. At the same time, Pistoletto departs from these models. The figure is no longer a distinct entity from the appliance; instead it is conflated with the cloth being run through the machine. The suggested message is that the Visnova sewing machine can assemble new garments as well as new subjectivities. The appliance is a transformative one, employed in the production of clothes that will enable you to present a new identity and self to the world.

This conflation of figure and object (or user and product) parallels a similar renegotiation of the figure in other areas of postwar Italian graphic design. In Severo Pozzati's 1959 campaign for Lebole (fig. 3.20), a yellow measuring tape loops and bends around the page, tracing the form of a human figure. He carries a smart, orange sport jacket, which hangs neatly in the crook of his left arm, whose enumerated ticking runs under the fabric, framing it on either side. In his right hand, signified by the rolled end of the tape, he holds a sign of the same color that reads *crociera*, meaning "cruise." The efficacy of the resort wear advertisement hinges on the symbolic value of the jacket and tape measure: rather than seeing a real person modeling the clothing, we are presented with a symbolic subject—a traveling, well-to-do gentleman, with tailored, well-fitting clothes—evoked only by the article of the design's advertisement.

A similar reworking of consumer and product can be found in the work of Franz Marangolo, most famously in his campaign for Campari from 1960 (fig. 3.21). In a print advertisement, we see the iconic Campari soda bottle (the miniature take on the Erlenmeyer flask was designed by Italian futurist Fortunato Depero in 1930), filled with the signature red beverage, centered in the upper register of the image, and tilted slightly forward, against a lime green background. A pair of shapely legs clad in high heels sprout from the base of the bottle, which in turn doubles as the hemline of a red shift mini dress. With her left foot kicked up behind her, the Campari bottle-as-coquette skips across the page. The bottle cap, flipped open, serves as a pillbox hat. She glances over at us with a single well-lined eye, which is enough to suggest a flirtatious look. Framed by the tagline *per la vostra sete* (for your thirst), the advertisement's directive is delivered at the footer of the page: *Campari soda corre col tempo!* (literally, "Campari soda runs with time!"). The advertisement, however, communicates the figurative meaning of the slogan—"Campari keeps you satisfied"—through a *literal* depiction of

the tagline in the form of the bottle-as-figure—that is, in the form of a figural, rather than figurative representation. Campari quenches the thirst of the on-the-go modern subject in the the long run.

Through this re-working of the figure, these designs (as well as Pistoletto's) are examples of a broader figural turn within postwar Italian commercial culture. Like the idealized, modern Italian bourgeois subject exemplified by the Necchi advertisement, these designs set up an equivalence between the modern Italian subject and the well-designed Italian product. What is distinctive about these designs however, is that the equivalence is articulated in the form of the representation of the product (to be consumed), *subsumed* into the representation of the consumer (the figure).

Study of Pistoletto's own design work as part of this figural turn in postwar Italian commercial imagery brings a new perspective to the Minus Objects. We become attuned to the torso-shaped cutout in *Bagno* (Bath; 1965–66; fig. 3.22) a fiberglass basin, coated in glossy white lacquer paint. The sleek lines and flat lip of the basin fakes Italian architect and designer Gio Ponti's famous vitreous china bathroom fixtures (made by Italian company Ideal Standard in the mid-1950s), in fiberglass (fig. 3.23). Ponti's fixtures were designed to best accommodate the body—the trapezoidal basin of Ponti's sink was designed to naturally accommodate the size and shape of a subject's arms while washing his hands, as demonstrated by Ponti's preparatory sketches (fig. 3.24)—Pistoletto's tub has a torso-shaped, terraced basin that stops short, providing little or no space for the would-be bather's legs.³⁴ The ridges of its terraced interior advertise an uncomfortable experience for the viewer as its potential user—a photograph of Emilio Prini trying it out confirms its failure in this regard (fig. 3.25) Closer examination of its form reveals irregularities and imperfections that belie somewhat sloppy craftsmanship, as

opposed to the perfectly smooth and precise form we would expect Ponti's industrially produced object to have. Indeed, the glossy finish of Pistoletto's white basin and the perfect flatness of its upper lip—likely achieved by working on a flat board or table, before inverting the fiberglass form—stands in stark contrast to the unfinished semblance of the dark grey exterior—a contrast that suggests Pistoletto's "bathtub" is not meant to be freestanding, but rather is a recessed model, which has yet to be installed. On the one hand, then, we might understand these works as structurally "poor" designs made with commodity materials, or on the other, materially "poor" designs with a commodity aesthetic. Either way, they are "lesser," recalling their Italian title, because they are ill-suited, even aggressive, to the body.

We also notice the empty seats in *Quadro da pranzo* (Lunch Painting; fig. 3.26), a symmetrical, large geometrical box frame with two built-in chairs and a table surface. *Lunch Painting* seems to be an inviting place, where the viewer and a friend might enjoy a leisurely mid-day meal. Its shallow seats and material constitution—it is made of discarded, unfinished two-by-fours—however, suggests lunch might be a precarious, splintery occasion. We might also notice the size of *Casa a misura d'uomo* (Man-Sized House), whose figural scale invites us to imagine how we might physically inhabit such a confined space (fig. 3.27).³⁵

As a photograph of Pistoletto standing next to *Man-Sized House* suggests, the title of the work might be interpreted in two ways. First, we might regard it as a literal construction of its title, modeled after the figure (as body) rather than subject—a "man-sized house," more logically, would refer to an individual dwelling. After all, the measure of *Man-Sized House* as a material structure—that is, as a geometric form rather than "house"—approximates that of the human body; its width correlates to the span of one's arms if held horizontally, in opposite directions. If the structure were outfitted with a physical point of entry as opposed to a

representational one (a painted, green rectangle signifies a front door), it could feasibly accommodate one person, if uncomfortably; his movement would be greatly limited by its walls and hip roof. Alternatively, we might regard it as a representational structure; if we regard the measure of *Man-Sized House* as a symbolic, scaled one, it does not offer the same accommodation for the body. As an architectural model, the front door illogically spans two stories: the shorter *piano terra* or ground floor and more spacious *piano nobile*. As approximately a one-seventh scale model of a three-story house, the front door of the represented house would stretch over twenty feet high, reminding us less of a classical model designed around the measure of the human body, and more of the elongated, looming structures found in Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical paintings of the 1910s. Rather than functioning as a feasible architectural model, then, that might be scaled to best accommodate its hypothetical dweller—that is, the symbolic figure such a representational structure denotes—*Man-Sized House* instead is dysfunctional, insofar as its form directly corresponds to the human body and physical figure of the viewer rather than being scaled to it. The work sets up a phenomenological experience for the viewer, who becomes aware of this correspondence; in so doing, the viewer is made to see the house less as a representational model and more as a rote, material structure—a structure, however, that nevertheless retains its symbolic meaning as a dwelling, if at a diminished level. At that moment, the disjunction between the physical size of the material structure and its symbolic devaluation renders it absurd. After all, fitting in *Man-Sized House* could never amount to living in it.

Implicit to this paradigmatic shift, as with the Plexiglasses, is a parallel slippage of symbolic meaning and reprioritization of the figure of the viewer. What *Man-Sized House* ultimately presents to the viewer is the absurdity of the fixed, limited subject position denoted to

us by physical, material things, as opposed to the self-determined and less restricted positions and pathways we might enjoy as subjects who move away from such structures.

This point is in part supported by the work's engagement and manipulation of classical visual languages of architectural, spatial, and perspectival order from Roman antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, in which articulated the world is structured according to the human body and individual subject its unit of measure. Often represented by a single, stationery figure positioned within a spatial schema, drawings by Leon Battista Alberti and Filippo Brunelleschi as well as paintings by Piero Della Francesca and Masaccio both affirmed the subject, while nevertheless inscribing him in place. By literalizing classical orders of architecture and perspective modeled on the figure, *Man-Sized House* points out this misgiving through satire, while also offering an alternative. Rather than seeing the world as structured according to the human body, Pistoletto's *Man-Sized House* proposes a model of being in the world that prompts a revision of humanist thought; the subject is made to realize how ill-suited, limiting, and parodic such structures might be—and how much freer he might be should he step away from them.³⁶

Other Minus Objects similarly evoke the image of the physical human body as contained within their form. In *Sarcofago* (Sarcophagus; 1965–66), a rectangular volume with an arched top, we are prompted to imagine that the body is locked inside its form (fig. 3.28); it is just the right size for its function.³⁷ *Corpo a pera* (Pear-Shaped Body) takes its figurative title literally: The six-foot-tall cylinder is cut around its circumference in the shape of a pear (fig. 3.29). It is not a figurative sculpture, but rather a figural one. It doesn't resemble its referent. It evokes it through literal bodily form.

What distinguishes Pistoletto's Minus Objects from analogous works by his contemporaries (Merz's igloos, Boetti's dysfunctional furniture objects, e.g.) in this regard is that

many of his objects stage the dialectic of poor design as a figural problem. That is, while these works are united in their construction of a phenomenological viewing experience, many of Pistoletto's objects are themselves bodily. But unlike other bodily, "failed" objects of the Italian and European neo-avant-gardes—Piero Manzoni's *Fiato d'artista* (Artist's Breath) from the *Corpi d'Aria* series (Bodies of Air; 1959–60; fig. 3.30) and *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit, 1961), as well as Joseph Beuys' fat sculptures of the early 1960s [*Stuhl mit Fett* (Fat Chair; fig. 3.31) and *Fettbatterie* (Fat Battery), e.g., both 1963]—a large subset of the Minus Objects are bodily insofar as they are figural: They present themselves as figures not as representations of the body, but by evoking the *image* of the body within their material physical form.

This is a point that the artist seemed to underline when he created a second set of Minus Objects. Some of these *Versioni* or "Versions," were completely new works, such as *Letto* (Bed; 1965–66), a full-size, twin bed, with a blue velvet headboard and mirror in place of a platform, and *Metro cubo d'infinito* (One-meter infinity cube; 1966), a four-foot-square cube made of six mirrors, bound together with rope, with their reflective surfaces turned inward. Other Versions were less variations on a theme than revisions of the originals. A pear-shaped mirror slab was cut to fit the top of *Pear-Shaped Body*, which, after being repainted in glossy white paint with a royal blue trim became *Corpo a pera-specchio* (Pear-Shaped Body-Mirror; 1966; fig. 3.32). A mirror panel was added to the front of *Vetrina*, which became *Vetrina-Specchio* (Mirror-Display-Case; 1966), obscuring its contents (subsequently removed) from view. The broken-down canvases in *Pozzo* (Well; 1965–66) were replaced with a round mirror. And a mirror was added to span the space between two of the three cement columns, resulting in *Portico* (Portico; 1966).

After completing the versions, Pistoletto rearranged the Minus Objects in his studio. The newly reflective objects, like the mirror paintings before them, invited viewers to move around—

to look down into the paper well to see their own reflections on the mirrored disc below, to lean over a mirror-clad bed, to stand up on their tip-toes to get glimpse of themselves on the mirrored surface of the whimsical *Pear-Shaped Body-Mirror*. With the second set, Pistoletto created an experience in which the viewer saw his own reflection registered on already figural objects (fig. 3.33).

The Minus Objects present themselves as a collection of bodily design objects, situated in the space of an embodied, consuming subject—or in some cases, as Veronique Goudinoux has suggested in *Sarcofago* (Sarcophagus), one consumed.³⁸ Goudinoux has argued the Minus Objects are things to be encountered, inhabited, or arranged within a space. To this end, several of these works would be showcased the following summer (June–July 1966) at the Galleria Sperone in Turin in a group exhibition of *arte abitabile* or “inhabitable art,” featuring similarly inspired works by Piero Gilardi and Gianni Piacentino, with whom Pistoletto worked closely in 1965 (fig. 3.34).³⁹ The central stake of the *Minus Objects* as objects of design, then, is determined as much (if not more) by the collective installation of the works as by the individual objects themselves. Arranged and re-arranged around the studio like things in a home interior, as Briony Fer has suggested, or perhaps as an editorial arrangement of objects, staged in a furniture showroom, department store, or pavilion at the Milan Triennial of contemporary design, these works take on a collective affect as commodity objects, design prototypes, or floor models, regardless of their varying media constitutions.⁴⁰

When we think of them as bodily objects, however, they constellate something like a room filled with rather subversive subjects. Consider *Sfera di giornali* (Ball of Newspaper; 1965–66), a papier-mâché ball of torn-up newspaper, which rests on the floor like a decorative accent. In the Italian, however, this work not really meant to be a “ball” or *palla*, but rather a

“sphere” (see fig. 3.04). As a lumpy (and *lumpen*) misshapen volume, it is a failed attempt at creating the perfect sphere: a recalcitrant, revolutionary object parading as a bourgeois, capitalist commodity; a subversive object and symbol of the proletariat.

This dialectic is also played out on the level of process and the perceived quality of the work’s fabrication. Some of the works appeared to be the products of slapdash efforts, yet by contrast, were highly labor-intensive in their construction, even absurdly so. *Sfera di giornali* required tearing up newspapers by hand, pressing them together until the artist formed a ball with a nearly three-foot diameter, then sealing and smoothing out the surface with layers of papier-mâché. By contrast, the pristine, glossy surface and symmetrical form of *Semisfere decorative* (Decorative Semispheres), suggests some involvement. Instead, it was made in a few quick steps, by sticking nine perforated sheets of plastic hemispheres onto the wall with pieces of scotch tape.

It is as a group that the *Minus Objects* most resemble Italian furniture designs found on the pages of such publications as *Domus* (est. 1928), *Casabella* (est. 1928), *Abitare* (1961–2014), *Stile Industria* (1954–63), or other industrial arts and trade show magazines that flourished during the economic miracle, through which “Italian industrial design achieved both visibility and national identity in an international market,” as David Raizman has noted.⁴¹ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the proliferation of design publications, advertising schools, and commercial design firms led to increasing emphasis on design in both Italian production and advertising, leading to huge success in Italian product growth. Smaller companies such as Arteluce (est. 1939), Brion Vega (est. 1945), Tecno (est. 1952), Gavina (est. 1953), and Zanotta (est. 1954) gained commercial success as their brands became known for a particular “Italian” aesthetic, typically characterized by bold, bright colors, regular, geometric forms, a strong sense of line, and a structure as functional as it is formally pleasing.⁴² Advertising campaigns by Olivetti, Fiat,

Pirelli, and other larger companies further emphasized the distinction of “good” design that came with buying an Italian product. In a 1960s advertisement for Olivetti (fig. 3.24), for example, a typewriter is juxtaposed with a large ovoid object decorated with swirling colors, referencing traditional Italian artisan practices of paper production and glassblowing in Venice and Lombardy. The economic miracle was the beginning of Western consumer demand for that *Italian* car, washing machine, typewriter, textile, kitchen appliance, piece of furniture, liqueur, or suit that persists today in nearly mythic proportions, as consumers have internalized the economic miracle’s ideology that buying “Italian” is a guarantee of quality manufacture and exercise in “good” taste.

By using the same aesthetics in the Minus Objects as iconic Italian design, then, Pistoletto capitalized on design’s new role as the signifier of contemporary Italian identity. Beginning with Pistoletto, then, Arte Povera’s object-based practices often used “poor” as an agent for revolution against the new exclusionary consumer culture—that is, the new identity or “Italianicity,” as Roland Barthes might put it, of post-fascist Italy—that was disseminated by postwar advertising, signified by design materials and aesthetics, and soon, internationally recognized as an icon of contemporary Italy.⁴³

Of course, this impoverished quality of structure, material, or workmanship was neither new to the Italian avant-garde nor to other European movements. In the forties and fifties, Alberto Burri (b. 1915) sewed together old burlap sacks, like those that held foodstuffs sent over by U.S. Marshall Plan aid, transforming the historically sleek monochrome into a patchwork of painted rags; Lucio Fontana used glitter, neon paint colors, light bulbs and hunks of clay in his *Ambienti spaziali* (Spatial Environments) and *Ceramiche spaziali* (Spatial Ceramics), exploring “poor” as kitsch, and a younger Piero Manzoni used Italian peasant bread as a sculptural

medium, dipping the knotted rolls into kaolin slip for one of his *Achromes*.⁴⁴ Given that Burri, Fontana, and Manzoni explored impoverished materiality in different and often multiple ways—as the damaged state of postwar Italy, as kitsch or “low” culture, and as the social immobility of the poor working classes in early 1960s Italy—it makes sense that the younger Arte Povera generation would similarly model poor in a way that is specific to their social context.

Given the rise of leftist interventionism and anti-capitalist sentiment in northern Italy during the Vietnam war and the events leading to May 1968, as Nicholas Cullinan has discussed,⁴⁵ it follows that Italy’s internationally renowned design industries became a site of inquiry for these artists who, perhaps with Burri, Fontana, and Manzoni in mind, similarly used impoverished (and impoverishing) materials, symbolic economies, and processes as critical strategies. As design historian Jonathan Woodham has explained, resistance to the “Italian Style” was already developing in Italian avant-garde design circles as early as the late 1950s:

In the increasingly contested debates at the Milan Triennali [Triennials] [...], many members of the Italian avant-garde reacted strongly against notions of ‘Italian Style’ as the bedrock of Italian design, despite the cultural approbation that the ‘Linea Italiana’ or ‘Bel Disegno’ had gained in Europe and the United States. They saw the stylized elegance of the furniture, domestic artifacts, and dress of fashionable society, or the design-as-art collections of the Museum of Modern Art New York, as manifestations of a capitalist society in which the manufacturer was responding to the economic dictates of the market-place[...].⁴⁶

In a similar political vein but perhaps with a more subversive approach, Pistoletto “corrupted” Italian design with “poor” materials, form, and structure, undermining *bel disegno* and *linea italiana* from within. Materializing the “poor” reality that design-based media and consumer culture had concealed, the poor/design dialectic of the *Minus Objects* ultimately exposed the fallacy of the economic miracle and social problematic of postwar Italy.

In this sense, these works are rightly *Oggetti in meno*, which in the original Italian literally means “fewer objects.” The phrase also connotes a state of insufficiency; they are “less” objects than they are something else. Their title suggests that if the Minus Objects are somewhat “poor” designs and failed objects, they are purposefully so. It is this effort toward failure that was explored by Pistoletto and others during the peak of Arte Povera from 1967 to 1972. In *Sit-In* (1968; fig. 3.34), a rectangular tray filled with wax and the words “sit-in” mounted in neon script across its surface, Merz seems to translate Arte Povera’s material dialectic into a potentially scarring experience for the viewer. Taken as a practical, if sadistic directive, “sitting in” the wax and on the hot fluorescent tubes would certainly subject the viewer to an exercise of enduring pain. At the same time, if we read the words figuratively, however, Merz’ work becomes both a poor example of design—or perhaps better, good example of poor design—and a serious call for civil disobedience and political protest in late 1960s Italy. In Giovanni Anselmo’s *Senza titolo (Struttura che mangia)* [Untitled (Eating structure); 1968; fig. 3.35], a rectangular granite block stands on its end; a smaller block is tied around its top with copper wire, holding a head of lettuce wedged between the two. As the lettuce rots, of course, the tension loosens and the smaller block falls to the floor. The structure then, fails. Or if it has succeeded, as an “eating” structure, its success is its self-destruction.

It might be said that Pistoletto’s Minus Objects precipitated a broader revolution in the arts levied against capitalist consumer culture in the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, Pistoletto, Valerio Adami, and other artists withdrew their work from the Venice Biennale as a form of protest, while many more turned their paintings toward the wall and refused to open their exhibition rooms.⁴⁷ Others such as Giangiacomo Spadari would be carried away by police In

place of exhibiting his works as planned, Pistoletto posted a flyer. Dated April 2, 1968, Turin, it read:

With this manifesto, I invite those who want to collaborate with me at the XXXIV Venice Biennial: By collaboration I mean a human relationship that is not competitive but rather sensitive and perceptual in agreement.

(Con questo manifesto invito le persone che lo desiderano a collaborare con me alla XXXIV Biennale di Venezia: Io per collaborazione intendo un rapporto umano non competitivo ma di intesa sensibile e percettiva. Cedere una parte di me stesso a chi desidera a cedere una parte di sé stesso è l'opera che mi interessa.)⁴⁸

Similarly, young designers at the XIV Milan Triennale of 1968 destroyed washing machines, refrigerators, television sets, and other *elettrodomestici*, for which Italy had become well known in international commercial markets. Destroying the economic miracle's image of material excess and luxury domesticity pictured in Fellini's Rome and Olmi's Milan, these artists dumped the debris into a pile and presented it as their exhibition (fig. 3.36), igniting the radical design movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s that would come to be known as *controdisegno* (counter-design)—a movement for which Pistoletto's Minus Objects now seem a likely precedent.

This moment was paralleled, however, by Pistoletto's own form of protest within Arte Povera. On this point, we might turn our attention first to the *Deposito d'Arte Presente* (Warehouse of Present Art, est. 1968), a privately funded experimental arts and exhibition space in Turin, conceptualized by collector Marcello Levi and Gian Enzo Sperone, who together, with art critic Luigi Carluccio (of early texts on Pistoletto, written for his exhibitions at the Galleria Galatea) developed funding for the project.⁴⁹ Founding patrons included an eclectic group of art collectors, businessmen, and gallerists, including Christian Stein (gallerist Margherita Stein, a major supporter of Arte Povera), who supported exhibitions or collective displays set up by the

artists themselves (fig. 3.37), as well as performance work, experimental theater and music events [see Pistoletto's own performances with *Musica Elettronica Viva* (Live Electronic Music) and *Lo Zoo* (The Zoo), discussed below, e.g.).⁵⁰ Established in a former automobile showroom on via San Fermo 3, closed sometime between its opening in 1962 and the mid-1960s,⁵¹ the DDP was found on the ground floor of a mixed-use palazzo just outside the historic center, on one of Turin's steep, hillside streets that rise perpendicularly from the River Po. Works by Anselmo, Boetti, Mario and Marisa Merz, Paolini, Penone, Pistoletto, Zorio, and other members of Arte Povera filled the former display space in exhibitions held in December of 1967, June of 1968, and June of 1969, replacing sleek cars—those symbols of the economic miracle—with a range of objects, assemblages, and structures that, like the Minus Objects—many of which were displayed—seemed structured according to a similar material dialectic.⁵² There were works made of large stones and sleek metal sheeting, plexiglass vitrines and colored sand, wood and Formica. Rather than thinking about the *Deposito* as an “industrial” and/or alternative arts space, as it is sometimes referred to, the site and works exhibited were firmly grounded in the spatial and symbolic economies of 1960s Italian consumer culture.⁵³

The DDP's attraction of a cultural elite as its patrons might also be understood as part of the slow process of subsuming Arte Povera's experimental practices into the commercial mainstream. In the end, the DDP was short-lived, in large part because of expectations between patrons and artists—a point Pistoletto later attributed to one of capitalism. The funders did not understand, he wrote, that “to have a part in culture they had to give money to the artists for every creative project without expecting anything preordained in exchange” (per avere una parte nella cultura dovevano dare soldi agli artisti per ogni progetto creative senza attnedersi nulla di preordinato in cambio).⁵⁴ (Conflicts between artists and performers were also heated, leading to a

schism in the group associated with the DDP.) Indeed, by 1968, Pistoletto had abandoned individual, product-based practice. In March of 1967, he declared *La fine di Pistoletto* (The End of Pistoletto), in a collective action of the same name staged at the Turin location of the Piper Pluriclub (fig. 3.38). Dozens of performers wore masks—a cutout photograph of Pistoletto’s face—shook sheets of metal, and created deep oscillating sounds that reverberated throughout the space. That same year, he published a statement, entitled *Le ultime parole famose* (Famous Last Words), in which he expressed frustration with the fetishization of the work of art as a representation of the artist himself. Echoing the sentiment first articulated in the *Minus Objects* statement, he wrote:

The way I move now is by stepping to one side. Every piece I make is a liberation and not a construction that is intended to represent me. I am not reflected in them, and the others cannot reflect upon me by means of them. Every piece I make is destined to proceed on its own way by itself without dragging me along behind it, since I am already somewhere else and doing something different. There is no longer any sense in the problem of being up to date in form. The problem is not to change the forms and leave the system intact, but rather to take the forms intact out of the system. In order to do this it’s necessary to be absolutely free.⁵⁵

(Il mio modo di procedure ora è di fianco. Ogni mio prodotto è una mia liberazione e non una costruzione che vuole rappresentarmi; né io mi rifletto su di essi, né gli altri si possono riflettere su di me per mezzo dei miei lavori. Ogni mio prodotto è destinato a proseguire la sua strada da solo, senza trascinarci con sé perché io sono già attivo in un altro luogo.)⁵⁶

Pistoletto would take up this pursuit in the form of experimental performance and collective practice in the form of The Zoo (1968–70), his experimental theatre troupe and one-time commune—see Corniglia, summer of 1969—with whom he performed at the DDP. While The Zoo has often been understood as a communitarian project, whose rag-tag aesthetic, beatnik philosophy, and street theater activities smacked of an already codified form of anti-capitalist, “counter-cultural” practice, Pistoletto’s writings of the period give us a different understanding

of the group. On December 15, 1969, Pistoletto purchased a 365-page journal, to be filled over the course of one month, without any predetermined narrative or objective. Part manifesto, part stream-of-consciousness project, Pistoletto included descriptions of the group's activities and reflections on collaborative practice throughout its pages. One passage in particular captures the theme of the work:

The economy in our civilization is the most disorganized thing that exists. Ditto the mental economy of one's own individual time. Everyone is a victim of it, industrialists and laborers, statesmen policemen and artists. Now let me tell you one of my almost daydreams. A company of young people gets together to do some theater. But not traditional theater, to do living, directly creative dramas (*MM* 61).

(L'economia nella nostra civiltà è la cosa più disorganizzata che esista. La stessa economia mentale del proprio tempo individuale. Ne sono vittime tutti, gli industriali come gli operai, gli statisti come i gendarmi e gli artisti. Ora ti racconto uno dei miei occhi semiaperti. Una compagnia di giovani si compone per fare del teatro. Ma non del teatro tradizionale, per fare degli spettacoli vivi, direttamente, creative.)⁵⁷

While The Zoo was dedicated to working, that is *living*, as a group, their activities and rules were formed around the value and free will of the individual subject, which was not to be compromised. *The free open character* (*MM* 112).⁵⁸ Their performances would be unpretentious: *A creative little thing, of little importance* (*MM* 115).⁵⁹

To that end, rather than making Minus Objects, Pistoletto created a set of activities, games, and even “research” with The Zoo based on a figure he called the *L'uomo nero* (fig. 3.39). While the phrase literally translates to “the black man,” Pistoletto has always translated it as “the Minus Man,” to avoid misinterpretation of the term as about race. Instead, Pistoletto intended to invoke blackness as a void or untenable space, where the figure would exist on his own terms. Conceived as an allegorical figure for the artist, the Minus Man would always be active somewhere other than expected. In the game of the Minus Man, the members of The Zoo enacted this allegory. *The opening scene of the Minus Man, marking out the circle, and all the*

*others inside the circle become participants in a competition, planned in advance [...] (MM 45).*⁶⁰ Sometimes the game was a scheduled performance—at the Galleria Sperone in Turin, for example, in the fall of 1969. *[It] ends with a revolt and the lynching of the winner and everyone goes to sleep powerless because in the circle the game there'll be another minus man [Minus Man], immediately afterward while one sleeps [...] (MM 45).*⁶¹ Other times it was played in private. Members took turns in the role. *Everyone will play his role as best he can (MM 113).*⁶² Played regularly in Corniglia, in the summer of 1969, the game was less about individual control and subjugation, if played by everyone, and more one of liberation:

[The] game of [the] minus man [Minus Man] became a circular situation. The freedom of each person was closed in the circle of a freedom organized by everyone, by turns. What does someone do when it isn't his turn to be free? He isn't free. And there were twelve of us. Each person got a moment of freedom in every twelve. [...] Then there was the freedom of one's own turn that entered into a circle of repetitive actions, that became the performance of one's own freedom in a possible play (MM 45)

(Il gioco dell'uomo nero è diventato nel tempo dei quattro mesi a Corniglia una situazione circolare.” La libertà di ognuno si chiudeva nel cerchio della libertà organizzata per tutti, a turno. Cosa fa uno mentre non è il suo turno di libertà? Non è libero.)⁶³

Somewhat different than a communitarian activity, the Minus Man game, while played as a group, was one in which each individual was given the same opportunity to act out his “freedom,” in whatever form he desired.

The game of the Minus Man was used as a model against which The Zoo created a different mode of collaborative practice in their daily lives. The idea was for each person to do what he or she wanted to do, alongside one another. Members of The Zoo participated in “research” sessions, dedicated to the Minus Man. *There's more serenity in the air, there are people that do singular things without trying to crush the others (MM 112).*⁶⁴ Perhaps the result would be one of supported group living, or the production of new creative forms, or nothing at

all. Either way, The Zoo was an experiment in modeling a new way of living and creating in the world: having full control over oneself, while respecting the right of others to have full control over themselves, finding value in the collective. Like the Minus Objects, The Zoo's dedication to the autonomy of its individual actors was central to its project.

This practice of continually exercising individual freedom and repeatedly making individual works echoes Carlo Rosselli's theory of liberal socialism, best laid out in his canonical text, *Socialismo liberale* (Liberal Socialism; 1930). Originally published in France where Rosselli was residing after escaping fascist imprisonment, *Liberal Socialism* was a work of intellectual resistance against fascist totalitarianism, which called for personal action against authoritarian rule. As Rosselli wrote:

Liberalism conceives of liberty not as a fact of nature, but as becoming, as development. One is not born free; one becomes free. And one stays free by retaining an active and vigilant sense of one's autonomy, by constantly exercising one's freedoms.⁶⁵

([Il liberalismo] concepisce la libertà non come un dato di natura, ma come divenire, sviluppo. Non si nasce, ma si diventa liberi. E ci si conserva liberi solo mantenendo attiva e vigilante la coscienza della propria autonomia e costantemente esercitando le proprie libertà.)⁶⁶

For Rosselli, this constant exercise of personal autonomy was the only way to achieve liberal democracy.

Within the context of the late 1960s, the Italian New Left would take renewed interest in Rosselli (and Gobetti) as icons of authoritarian refusal. Whereas these thinkers of the 1920s and early 1930s—both executed by Mussolini's Regime—positioned themselves against fascism, the New Left in the Sixties would identify many of the same qualities in capitalism: the regulation of the individual; the primacy of work as the organizational structure of life; and the value of the subject only insofar as he is productive. Rather than thinking of The Zoo as a communitarian

experiment or the Minus Objects as simply anti-capitalist objects, we should regard them, more suitably, as liberal, socialist ones?⁶⁷ This perspective highlights the Minus Objects and The Zoo's mutual dedication to a humanist, anti-capitalist model of form and process in which the individual figure (as image and body, in the Minus Objects, and as body and character, in The Zoo), is the means to a liberal collective—a new model of plurality within the spaces of commercial culture and counter-culture, alike.

The Zoo's political and conceptual connection to the Minus Objects suggests that the latter's simultaneous engagement of the body and undermining of good design were related strategies. Because Pistoletto envisioned the Minus Objects as contextually contingent and unrepeatable in form and process, his production of the series amounted to an exercise of individual autonomy, enacted by the artist's action and symbolized by the resulting object, each unique in form. As a collection, the series is a symbolic model of a new social order, specifically a liberal, socialist one. Making "lesser" objects was not a reflection of failure or act of giving up, but rather a mode of resisting a commercial culture from within its discourse, and instead, creating a different value—for one's work, for oneself, for others—on one's own set of terms.

On this point, we are reminded of the work of Jerzy Grotowski, a leading figure within the Polish avant-garde and European experimental theater in the 1960s. In 1965, Grotowski first published his concept of a "poor theater," which would be fundamental to Celant's subsequent theorization of Arte Povera. In "poor theater," the actor would give himself wholly to the action, "freeing" himself in the process:

By a complete stripping down...the actor makes a total gift of himself. The result is freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction...Ours then is a *via negativa*—not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks (emphasis original).⁶⁸

Following Grotowski's *via negativa*, Pistoletto's Minus Objects as figural objects seem to model a similar "stripping down" of the subject, a casting off of ideological structures that model him, to free the self for a more open, liberated exploration of the world. Perhaps this view of making Minus Objects (and Minus Men) as a mode of revolution is what Pistoletto meant when he wrote the following in 1966:

They are objects through whose agency I free myself from something—not constructions, then, but liberations. I do not consider them [as] more but [as] less, not additional but minus objects... According to my idea of time, one must learn how to free oneself from a position even while one is engaged in conquering it.⁶⁹

(I lavori che faccio non vogliono essere delle costruzioni o fabbricazioni di nuove idee, come non vogliono essere oggetti che mi rappresentino, da imporre o per impormi agli altri, ma sono oggetti attraverso i quali io mi libero di qualcosa—non sono costruzioni ma liberazioni—io non li considero oggetti in più ma oggetti in meno, nel senso che portano con sé un'esperienza percettiva definitivamente esternata. Secondo l'idea che ho del tempo, bisogna sapersi liberare di una posizione mentre la si conquista.)⁷⁰

Far from a negative outlook or defeatist attitude for these artists, then, "poor" was a *positive* endeavor. From this perspective, those works in Arte Povera that have seemed to model a "withdrawal" or "self-cancellation"—Pistoletto's Minus Objects, Minus Man, and staged "end of Pistoletto," e.g., and Boetti's *Autoritratto in negativo*—were instead positive and productive: They realized a liberation of the self from the over-determinations of capitalist culture.⁷¹ Through a subversion of existing systems of value and meaning, these Minus Works and Men opened a space for a new subject position, in which value was determined by the subject for himself.

¹ Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Oggetti in meno* (1966), n.p. Translation by the author. See Appendix A.7 for complete translation. First published by the artist; first reprinted as "Pistoletto 1966" in *Pistoletto* (Genoa: Galleria La Bertesca, 1967), 12–16. The original Italian reads: "I lavori che faccio non vogliono essere delle costruzioni o fabbricazioni di nuove idee, come non vogliono

essere oggetti che mi rappresentino, da imporre e per impormi agli altri, ma sono oggetti attraverso i quali io mi libero di qualcosa—non sono costruzioni ma liberazioni—io non li considero oggetti in più ma oggetti in meno, nel senso che portano con sé un’esperienza percettiva definitivamente esternata. Secondo l’idea che ho del tempo, bisogna sapersi liberare di una posizione mentre la si conquista.” All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

² “Freedoms” is intentionally plural, here. Carlo Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, ed. Nadia Urbinati, trans. William McCuaig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 85. Originally published in French in 1930 as *Socialisme libéral* (Paris: Librairie Valois). Published in Italian in 1973 as *Socialismo liberale* (Turin: G. Einaudi). The original Italian reads: “[Il liberalismo] concepisce la libertà non come un dato di natura, ma come divenire, sviluppo. Non si nasce, ma si diventa liberi. E ci si conserva liberi solo mantenendo attiva e vigilante la coscienza della propria autonomia e costantemente esercitando le proprie libertà.” See Rosselli, *Socialismo liberale* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1973), 435.

³ Previously unattributed, the image belongs to the exhibition catalog published in conjunction with *POP, etc.*, held at the Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts in Vienna in the summer of 1964. Both Pistoletto and Johns were included in the show. See Appendix C.1.

⁴ On commercial need, see Pistoletto, *Oggetti in meno*, n.p. On new products, studio clutter, and childhood memories, see Pistoletto, conversation with Basualdo, Celant, and Christine Poggi, “Session Two: Pistoletto and Arte Povera,” *Three Conversations with Michelangelo Pistoletto, Germano Celant, and Carlos Basualdo* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, October 31, 2010). Program held in conjunction with *From One to Many*. On childhood memories and things he liked, see Pistoletto, “Interview with Germano Celant” (1971), in *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant and Gianelli, 50–52.

⁵ Celant, *Arte povera*, ed. Galleria de’ Foscherari (Bologna: Galleria De Foscherari, 1968), n.p. Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title held at the Galleria de’ Foscherari, February 24–March 15, 1968.

⁶ Pistoletto, *Oggetti in meno*, n.p.

⁷ Pistoletto expressed this perspective in his discussion of the production of the *Minus Objects*. See Pistoletto, untitled [on the production of the Minus Objects], excerpted from an unpublished interview by Celant (1971), in *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant (Venice: Electa Editrice, 1976), 50–58.

⁸ Pistoletto, *Oggetti in meno*, n.p. Translation by the author. See Appendix A.7.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² For more statistics on industrialization in Italy, see Ginsborg; David Carson, “Marketing in Italy Today,” *Journal of Marketing* 30, no. 1 (January 1966): 10–16; and Adam Arvidsson,

Marketing Modernity: Italian Advertising from Fascism to Postmodernity (New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹³ On national identity and the success of Italy's design industries, see Arvidsson, "The economic miracle: Mass consumption and modernization," in *Marketing Modernity*, 67–89.

¹⁴ See Arvidsson; Carson, 10–13; David Raizman, *History of Modern Design: Graphics and Products since the Industrial Revolution* (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2003), 275; and Penny Sparke, *Design in Italy: 1870 to the Present* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988).

¹⁵ Ginsborg, 216.

¹⁶ The only other artist in Celant's set who was not from northern Italy was Pascali (b. 1935), who was from Bari but based in Rome. In addition to Pascali, the following artists were also included in Celant's first exhibition: Pier Paolo Calzolari (b. 1943); Emilio Prini (b. 1943); and Gilberto Zorio (b. 1944). For biographical information and exhibition histories, see the following major catalogues: Galleria De' Foscherari (ed.), *Arte povera* (Bologna: Galleria De' Foscherari, 1968); Celant, *The Knot: Arte Povera at P.S. 1*, trans. Joachim Neurgroschel, (Long Island City, NY: P.S. 1, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources; Turin: Umberto Allemandi & Co., 1985); Richard Flood and Francis Morris, *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; London: Tate Modern, 2001), and Celant and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera: Art from Italy 1967–2002* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2002).

¹⁷ Celant, "Arte povera: Appunti per una guerriglia," *Flash Art*, no. 5 (November/December 1967): 3–4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ On Arte povera's objects as "simple," see Robert Lumley, *Arte Povera* (London: Tate, 2004), 50. On their informal and makeshift qualities, see Alex Potts, "Disencumbered Objects," *October* 124 (Spring 2008): 170.

²⁰ See Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), and Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object, 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

²¹ Design historian Jonathan Woodham has noted the role of *La Rinascente* in promoting design culture in Italy. The department store hired prominent Italian designers Franco Albini and Gio Ponti to produce lower-cost items for the mass-market. See Woodham, *Twentieth-Century Design*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997): 126.

²² Pistoletto, interview by Celant (1971), in *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant and Gianelli, 50–52.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ On Arte Povera and experimentation, see Flood and Morris, “Introduction,” *Zero to Infinity*, 9–21, especially 16–20; and theatricality, see Gilman, “Arte Povera’s Theater: Artifice and Anti-Modernism in Italian Art of the 1960s,” and “Pistoletto’s Staged Subjects,” 53–74; and political activism, see Cullinan, 8–30; and technology, see Mirella Bandini, “Turin in the 1970s: FIAT, Arte Povera, and Other Heroes,” *Flash Art XXIV*, no. 160 (October 1991): 105; and artifice, see Potts, and Christopher G. Bennett, “Boetti and Pascali: Revisiting Arte Povera through Two Case Studies,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008.

²⁵ Celant, *Arte povera*, n.p.

²⁶ Romy Golan has come closest to addressing this problem in her article on Pistoletto’s mirror paintings, “Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art in the 1960s.” Her focus, however, is not on the works themselves but rather on the photographic documents thereof, which indirectly place the mirror paintings in dialogue with design objects (namely furniture), which happened to be part of many galleries’ décor and therefore often appeared in exhibition photographs of Pistoletto’s work. See Golan, “Flashbacks and Eclipses,” *Grey Room 49* (Fall 2012): 102–27.

²⁷ See my introduction, p. 8.

²⁸ See, for example, *La Stampa*, “Notizie” [Armando Testa Awarded First National Prize in Advertising for his campaign *Re Carpano*], November 7, 1953; *Stampa Sera*, “Artisti torinesi premiati a Bologna,” March 30–31, 1955; L.A., “La tecnica della suggestione: Un cartellonista torinese illustra i segreti della sua professione,” *Stampa Sera*, February 26, 1956; and *Stampa Sera*, “Vinto un torinese il concorso per le Olimpiadi: Un manifesto chiama la gioventù del mondo,” June 3–4, 1958.

²⁹ See Testa’s response to a reader’s letter published in *La Stampa*, which had criticized his figurative designs used in the *Carpano* campaign as a smear campaign of Italian (and specifically Piedmontese) history. Turin was the home of Italy’s monarchy and government post-Unification. Testa, reader’s letter, “Specchio dei tempi: Il re e la pubblicità,” *La Nuova Stampa*, June 23, 1956.

³⁰ The recent erection of a monument dedicated to Testa’s designs (in 2015) is indicative of how iconic his campaigns were (and remain) in Italian popular culture. The monument, in the form of Testa’s design for *Punt e Mes* liqueur from 1961, is located in the piazza in front of Porta Susa train station, where it is one of the first things visitors to Turin encounter.

³¹ Evidence of Pistoletto’s design work for these companies specifically comes his 2012 interview with Alain Elkann and an illustration of his advertisement for Visnova, reproduced in the catalog for the 1984 retrospective in Florence. On Necchi, Singer, and Pibigas, see Elkann, 60; for the ad, see “M. Pistoletto, bozzetto pubblicitario, 1953,” in *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant and Gianelli, 24.

³² The catalog for the 1984 retrospective dates this image to 1953. This is undoubtedly an error, however, given that the artist didn’t work professionally as a designer until 1958. I am dating it

to that year for this reason, as well as the visual proximity of the two dates, which might account for the oversight. See “M. Pistoletto, bozzetto pubblicitario, 1953.”

³³ I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge that the depiction of the figure in the advertisement seems to draw upon racist visual stereotypes characteristic of popular imagery in early and mid-twentieth-century Italy. The figure’s unkempt hair, enlarged facial features and exaggerated expression, coupled with his dark skin and cartoonish countenance, recapitulate the gross racial stereotype of black Africans that circulated in Italian colonial imagery since the late nineteenth century. While Italy lost its colonies in north and east Africa in 1945, concurrent with its defeat in World War II, Italian colonial power was shortly thereafter reinstated in these regions—specifically in Somalia—in the form of trusteeship governments, which remained in place until 1960. While this image was composed in the final moments of Italy’s colonial activities, it unfortunately recapitulated an image that would remain part of Italian popular culture well beyond the 1950s, and an idea that would endure far thereafter (and in some cases, persists today). While Pistoletto’s relationship to race and racial stereotypes merits further discussion, it falls outside the scope of this project and should be taken up by others or addressed in a future study.

³⁴ See Claudio Piersanti and Rita Rava, “Ceramica e architettura,” in *Gio Ponti: Ceramica e architettura*, ed. Gian Carlo Bojani, Claudio Piersanti, and Rita Rava (Florence: Centro Di, 1987), 68.

³⁵ Veronique Goux also discusses word play and scale in *Casa*, as well as the humanist tropes it evokes. See Veronique Goudinoux, “*Oggetti in meno: Redefining the Work*,” in *Michelangelo Pistoletto* (Barcelona: Museu d’art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2000), 66. Also see Goudinoux’s doctoral dissertation, “Pratique du divers la forme, l’atelier, le spectateur et l’exposition autour des *Oggetti in meno* (1965–1966) de Michelangelo Pistoletto et de leurs constructions critiques,” Université de Lille III, 1996.

³⁶ Pistoletto’s work was engaged in broader renegotiations of classical humanism then taking place in Italy within the cultural and intellectual Left. Many members of the leftist postwar generation, as Antonio Tricomi has written, felt a sense of connection and duty to uphold the achievements and humanist ideals of the anti-fascist partisan Resistance before them as they sought to create a new Italy. Over the course of the 1960s however—a decade witness to a series of internal economic, social, and political failures—the prospect of creating a utopian Italian democratic state seemed increasingly impossible. By the point of Pistoletto’s production of *Man-Sized House* and the Minus Objects in 1966, the regard for these traditions was one of ambivalence. See Antonio Tricomi, “Killing the Father: Politics and Intellectuals, Utopia and Disillusion,” in *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Violence in Italy, 1969–2009*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O’Leary, *Italian Perspectives* 18 (London: Legenda, 2009), 17.

³⁷ Goudinoux, “*Oggetti in meno: Redefining the Work*,” 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

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- ³⁹ Pistoletto, “Interview with Germano Celant” (1971), in *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant and Gianelli, 52.
- ⁴⁰ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art after Modernism* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2004), 174.
- ⁴¹ Raizman, 275.
- ⁴² Woodham, 127.
- ⁴³ See Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image–Music–Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): 34–35.
- ⁴⁴ For more on Fontana’s use of kitsch, see Anthony White, “Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch,” *Grey Room* 5 (Fall 2001): 54–77 and White, *Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2011). Also see Yve-Alain Bois, “Fontana’s Base Materialism,” *Art in America*, 77, no. 4 (April 1989): 238–48.
- ⁴⁵ Cullinan, 810.
- ⁴⁶ Woodham, 191.
- ⁴⁷ For an account of artists’ protests at the 1968 Venice Biennial, see Chiara Di Stefano, “The 1968 Biennale. Boycotting the Exhibition,” in *Starting from Venice: Studies on the Biennale*, ed. Clarissa Ricci (Milan: Et al., 2010): 131.
- ⁴⁸ Pistoletto, *Manifesto della collaborazione* (Turin: April 2, 1968). printed flyer made from hand-written original. Reproduced in Marco Farano, Maria Cristina Mundici, and Maria Teresa Roberto, *Michelangelo Pistoletto. Il varco dello specchio. Azioni e collaborazioni* (Turin: Edizioni Fondazione Torino Musei, 2005), 79.
- ⁴⁹ Robert Lumley, “Arte Povera a Torino: l’intrigante caso del ‘Deposito d’Arte Presente’ /Arte Povera in Turin: The Intriguing Case of the *Deposito D’Arte Presente*,” in *Marcello Levi: Ritratto di un collezionista / Marcello Levi: Portrait of a Collector. Dal Futurismo all’Arte Povera / From Futurism to Arte Povera*, ed. Lumley and Francesco Manacorda (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2006), 91. Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art in London, September 14–December 18, 2005.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 92.
- ⁵² Exhibition dates were compiled from Celant, *The Knot Arte Povera*, 220, and Lumley, “Arte Povera in Turin,” 96.
- ⁵³ On the DDP as an alternative arts space, see Francesca Pola, “Intersezioni e sconfinamenti: Luoghi di una identità plurale,” in *Torino sperimentale 1959–1969. Una storia della cronaca: il*

sistema delle arti come avanguardia (Turin: Allemandi, 2010), 448. I am aligned with Robert Lumley in this regard. His careful reading of the DDP as a bourgeois space is based on a detailed account of its financial model as well as its social, commercial and artistic use, supported with valuable archival research on Levi and oral testimonies. See Lumley, “Arte Povera in Turin,” 89–107.

⁵⁴ Pistoletto, *The Minus Man: The Unbearable Side* (1969–70), trans. Paul Blanchard. In *Pistoletto: A Minus Artist* (Florence: hopefulmonster, 1988), 117. For the original Italian, see Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero. Il lato insopportabile* (1969–70), in *Un artista in meno* (Florence: hopefulmonster, 1989), 117. Originally published in 1970 (Salerno, IT: Marcello Rumma).

⁵⁵ Pistoletto, *Famous Last Words* (Turin, 1967), trans. Paul Blanchard. In *Pistoletto: A Minus Artist* (Florence: hopefulmonster, 1988), 20. Originally published by the author as *Le ultime parole famose* (Turin, 1967).

⁵⁶ Pistoletto, *Le ultime parole famose*, n.p.

⁵⁷ See Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero*, 60–61.

⁵⁸ This and subsequent italicized passages in the text are quoted from Pistoletto, *The Minus Man*. Subsequent quotations from the English translation will be made parenthetically with the abbreviated title “MM.” For fluidity, the original Italian text for these passage will be footnoted, with the exception of block quotations. Here, the original Italian reads: “L’animo libero aperto.” See Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero*, 112.

⁵⁹ The original Italian reads: “Una cosa creative da poco.” See Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero*, 114.

⁶⁰ The original Italian reads: “La scenetta iniziale dell’uomo nero che traccia il cerchio e tutti gli altri all’interno diventano concorrenti in una gara già predisposta [...]” See Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero*, 44.

⁶¹ The original Italian reads: “[Lui] finisce con la rivolta e il linguaggio del vincitore e poi tutti vanno a dormire impotenti perché nel cerchio del gioco, un altro uomo nero ci sarà di nuovo, subito dopo mentre si dorme [...]” See Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero*, 45.

⁶² The original Italian reads: “Ognuno giocherà la sua parte come meglio gli va.” See Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero*, 112.

⁶³ See Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero*, 44.

⁶⁴ The original Italian reads: “C’è nell’aria più serenità, c’è gente che fa cose singolari senza cercare di schiacciare gli altri.” See Pistoletto, *L'uomo nero*, 112.

⁶⁵ Carlo Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, 85.

⁶⁶ Rosselli, *Socialismo liberale*, 435.

⁶⁷ These thoughts align this study with Christina Kiaer’s work on Russian Constructivism as “socialist objects.” It also suggests that the categorization of artworks and practices in terms of political ideologies and/or economic models needs further nuancing. Variations in economy, politics, and context require further distinction between “socialist” or “capitalist” (for example) practices. This seems especially important (and useful) for those practices that too often lumped together as “anti-capitalist”—a label that only re-inscribes capitalist-centric structures against which such practices are positioned in the first place. See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ Jerzy Grotowski’s writings were first published in Italy in 1965 due to the efforts of an Italian student, Eugenio Barba, who smuggled his work out of communist Poland and translated the essays for publication. See Jerzy Grotowski, “Towards a Poor Theatre,” trans. T. K. Wiewlorowski, in Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968): 16–17. Originally published in Polish as “Ku teatrowi ubogiemu,” in *Odra*, no. 9 (1965): 21–27.

⁶⁹ Pistoletto, *Oggetti in meno*, n.p. Translation by the author. See Appendix A.7.

⁷⁰ Pistoletto, *Oggetti in meno*, n.p.

⁷¹ I am thinking here of Mark Godfrey’s description of Boetti’s *Autoritratto in negativo*, discussed in Chapter One. See Godfrey, 73–74.

Conclusion.

Figuring a Way Around, or “To Step to the Side”

After every action, I take a step to the side; I don't proceed in the direction depicted by my object, because I don't accept it as a reply.

—Pistoletto, 1967¹

December, 1967. If you happened to be window shopping on via Roma that day, you might have crossed paths with a young man, rolling a giant ball of newspaper out in front of him, as he strolled through the iconic arcades lining Turin's most elegant shopping street. Dressed in an elaborate, Ottoman-style coat with shaggy fur trim, velvet appliqués, and floral embroidery, he would have been hard to miss—impossible even, with his obtrusive counterpart—among the famously conservative, well-dressed Turinese. Winding his way past designer stores, artisanal chocolate shops, and historic cafés, he kept the ball rolling, giving it a good push every few steps, prompting passersby—some delighted, others undoubtedly annoyed—to step to the side.

Entitled *Scultura da passeggio* or “Walking Sculpture,” Pistoletto's action was staged in conjunction with the group exhibition *Con temp l'azione* (December 1967), a play on the Italian *contemplazione* (“contemplation”) that translates to “With Time, Action.”² Curated by Daniela Palazzoli, the exhibition was held at the galleries Il Punto, Gian Enzo Sperone, and Christian Stein, all located within a few blocks of each another in the well-trafficked area of the historic center between Piazzas Carlo Alberto, Carignano, and C.L.N.³ While a few of the Minus Objects were included in the show, *Scultura da passeggio* was his primary contribution. Staged with

another Minus Object, *Sfera di giornali* (Sphere of Newspaper; 1965–66), *Scultura da passeggio* was a singular action; after its completion, the object was installed at the Sperone Gallery, where it remained for the remainder of the exhibition. In the wake of the work, many would interpret it in terms of its apparent interlocutors, comparing its action-based format to American Happenings, its interest in found objects and urban excursions to Dada and Surrealism, and its interventionism to practices of the Situationist International. By bringing the newspaper sphere out of the studio and into the public space of the city—that is, by making the work “go out into reality”—*Scultura da passeggio* might be better understood through different terms. Consider Pistoletto’s own words, written earlier that year:

In my new work each product is born from an immediate intellectual stimulus, but it doesn’t have a single character of definition, justification, or response. It does not represent me. [...]. After every action, I take a step to the side; *I don’t proceed in the direction depicted by my object*, because I don’t accept it as a response [italics added].

(Nel mio nuovo lavoro ogni prodotto nasce da uno stimolo immediato dell’intelletto, ma esso non ha nessun carattere di definizione, giustificazione o risposta. Esso non mi rappresenta. [...]. Dopo ogni azione io faccio un passo di fianco e *non procedo nella direzione raffigurata dal mio oggetto*, perché non lo accetto come risposta [italics added]).⁴

Here, building upon a model of artistic practice first laid out in 1964, Pistoletto frames his work as a challenge to and revision of figuration, as an effort to destabilize structures of representation and reality, if not to find a way out, then to figure a way around them. His objects, he stresses, do not have a single “carattere,” a word that can refer to a “character” as in a typographical letter, or, as in this case, a to a “character” in the sense of someone’s disposition, nature or personality. They are not subjective; they do not reflect or, as he says here, “represent” him. They do, however, represent—in fact, they “portray”—different directions (of creative practice, of being) for him to follow.⁵ They are figurative models around which he must navigate. To step to one

side, then, is to continuously assert his spatial, creative, and subjective agency. If the Plexiglasses “allowed him to introduce himself,” the actions following the Minus Objects were based on viewing such agency as his right.

That same winter, Pistoletto was preparing for his first solo exhibition at the Galleria L’Attico in Rome, to be held that spring (March, 1968). As part of that show, he began collaborating on a series of short films—ten, to be precise—with experimental filmmakers and fellow artists. One of those films, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (Good Morning, Michelangelo; 1968), was loosely based on a restaging of *Scultura da passeggio*.⁶

Directed by Ugo Nespolo, the film was made about a month after the initial work.⁷ It opens with Pistoletto in front of one of his mirror paintings, shaving for the day (fig. 4.01). A lilting melody, late Sixties Irish folk rock, plays in place of any recorded audio.⁸ Pistoletto, wiping his face clean, turns and grins at the camera. Daniela Palazzoli and Maria Pioppi roll the newspaper ball up the dark ramp out of the studio. The newspaper ball rolls out of the doorway out onto the sidewalk; moments later, Fiat running, top down, *Sfera di giornali* in (or rather *on*) the back seat, we are off (fig. 4.02).

As we drive from Lingotto to the center, the worn-down, modern outskirts begin to give way to the late Baroque architecture of the center. The screen cuts to Pistoletto and Pioppi rolling the newspaper ball out ahead of them, first past concrete buildings with long vacant commercial spaces, a sign of the post-boom economic downturn, then past grander palazzi (fig. 4.03). Soon the artist and his partner arrive on via Roma, Turin’s glamorous shopping street; they cross under illuminated signs advertising Campari and Cinzano in the arcades around the great expanse of Piazza San Carlo. Pistoletto stands outside the Bialetti shop, some distance from us, the sphere

next to him. At over half his height and nearly triple the width of his body, from our perspective the sphere looms larger than the artist (fig. 4.04).

The film is divided by a raucous, nighttime scene, where Paolini, Piacentino, Tommaso Trini, Sperone and others join in. Games are played, the sphere taking center stage; cars and passersby are harassed, when the sphere is rolled in front of them, “refusing” to move until a policeman intervenes. Daylight brings with it a set of different players. We see the Minus Object *Rosa bruciata* (Burnt Rose; 1965–66), hanging out of the second-story window of the Galerie Stein, suspended by a rope, likely quite a sight for shoppers at *La Rinascente*, a few doors over (fig. 4.05). Pioppi hoists the giant cardboard onto her back; at nearly twice her size, it overwhelms her small frame. The frame turns upside down and then quickly right-side up (fig. 4.06).

Turned away from the camera, *Rosa bruciata* becomes its own subject. She runs across street, her high-heeled, stockinged legs sticking out from the cardboard blossom that forms her body. Crossing through Piazza C.L.N., she pauses in front of the monumental, classical marble sculptures—allegorical figures of the Rivers Po and Dora Riparia (fig. 4.07). Theirs was a space originally intended for monumental, figurative sculptures dedicated to Mussolini and Vittorio Emanuele III. The scene constellates reality as one of figurative and figural contrasts: The differences in the figures’ bodies resonate with the symbolic differences of the scene. In the shadow of would-be fascist monuments, the anti-fascist valence of our rose—a symbol associated with the *partigiani* and the PSI—is brought to the fore. Within the scene, it calls to mind not war but love, evoking contemporary ideas circulating the Sixties counterculture. The frozen, unmoving mass of the statues highlights the sprightly freedom she embodies. As she

turns to go, the rose has transformed again; it scampers across the street in slacks and dress shoes, traffic whizzing around it (fig. 4.08).

In the final moments of film, we see Pistoletto standing in the Piazza, holding the flower up above him in the air. Before hoisting the flower onto his back, the picture flips upside down for a moment (fig. 4.09). Pistoletto stands in the square, smiling at the camera, the rose in his arms. A moment later, the artist steps to one side and disappears. The rose, wearing trousers and Chelsea boots, runs at full tilt, out into Piazza San Carlo, staging its own “invasion of the environment.” It pauses, turns to the camera, and runs to catch the bus, headed somewhere else (fig. 4.10).

While *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* is typically referenced as part of a broader shift in Pistoletto’s late Sixties practice away from the studio and the artistic conventions of its association, the film’s engagement of *Scultura da passeggio* and *Rosa bruciata* as figures in the film connects it to an earlier trajectory within Pistoletto’s practice that I’ve mapped in this dissertation—that is, to his reworking of figuration in the early-to-mid 1960s into new visual languages of conceptual and political figuration and figurality. Looking at the film in this way, in conjunction with the mirror paintings, Plexiglasses, Minus Objects, and work of The Zoo, Pistoletto’s reworking of (or better remodeling of) the figure from the figurative to the figural emerges as the conceptual framework for the entirety of Pistoletto’s Sixties practice—the most important period of his work, in terms of its contributions to Arte Povera and the European avant-garde. To regard Pistoletto in this way has not only remapped our understanding of postwar Italian art and the Italian historical avant-garde, but gives us a new model of progressive artistic practice that may provide new insights into other practices in modern and contemporary art, in and outside of Italy.

¹ Pistoletto, “Le ultime parole famose” (Turin, 1967). All translations by the author. The original Italian reads: “Dopo ogni azione io faccio un passo di fianco e non procedo nella direzione raffigurata dal mio oggetto, perché non lo accetto come risposta.”

² The opening for *Con temp l'azione* was held at 9 p.m. on December 4, 1967. The precise date of *Scultura da passeggio* is unknown. For more on the exhibition, see Palazzoli (ed.), *Con-temp-l'azione* (Turin: Christian Stein, Gian Enzo Sperone, and Il Punto, 1967).

³ For a map of *Scultura da passeggio*, see Appendix D.1.

⁴ Pistoletto, “Le ultime parole famose,” n.p.

⁵ Ibid., n.p.

⁶ For a map of *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, see Appendix D.2. Pistoletto and Nespolo, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (1968), 25 min., 16mm, black and white. Note: The date of the film is typically listed as 1968–69. It was, however, made in January of 1968 and shown at Pistoletto’s solo exhibition that March in Rome; the music track, however, includes songs that weren’t released until 1969. Whether Nespolo included different audio in the original is unclear. To avoid confusion, I am referencing the original date here.

⁷ Ugo Nespolo, during the symposium, “Michelangelo e il suo doppio,” held at the Circolo degli Lettori, Turin, November 13, 2012.

⁸ The song is “Strangely Strange but Oddly Normal” (1969), by Dr. Strangely Strange.

Figures.

Il progresso della produzione

FIAT

a vantaggio dell'auto per tutti

LA 500 A 395.000 LIRE

versione economica

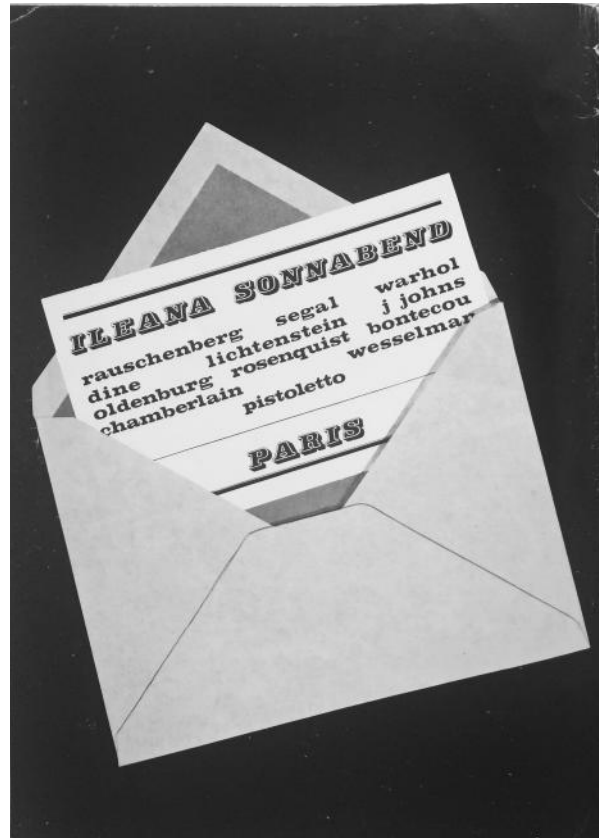
0.01. Fiat, *Il progresso della produzione a vantaggio dell'auto per tutti* (The advantage of production progress is there's a car for everyone), print advertisement, 1957.



0.02. Photograph of Michelangelo Pistoletto at the Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, on occasion of his exhibition, *Pistoletto*, March, 1963. Photograph by Harry Shunk. Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute.



0.03. Hiro (Yasuhiro Wakabayashi), fashion photographs featuring mirror paintings by Michelangelo Pistoletto, published in "International [Spring] Collections," *Harper's Bazaar*, March/April, 1964.



0.04. Galerie Sonnabend, print advertisements, published in *Art International* 8, no. 5–6 (Summer, 1964) and no. 7 (September 25, 1964).



0.05. Exhibition view, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: I plexiglass*, Gian Enzo Sperone—Arte Moderna (GES), Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy.



Torino, 10 settembre 1964

La parete esiste come principio e come fine di questa mia storia. Sulle pareti si appendono sempre i quadri, ma è sulle stesse pareti che si mettono anche gli specchi. Credo che la prima vera esperienza figurativa dell'uomo sia il riconoscere la propria immagine nello specchio, che è la finzione più aderente alla realtà. Ma subito dopo il riflesso dello specchio incomincerà a rimandare le stesse incognite, le stesse domande e gli stessi problemi che ci pone la realtà; incognite e *questioni* che l'uomo è spinto a riproporre sui quadri.

La mia prima *questione* sulla tela è stata la riproduzione della mia immagine, appena accettata l'arte come una seconda realtà.

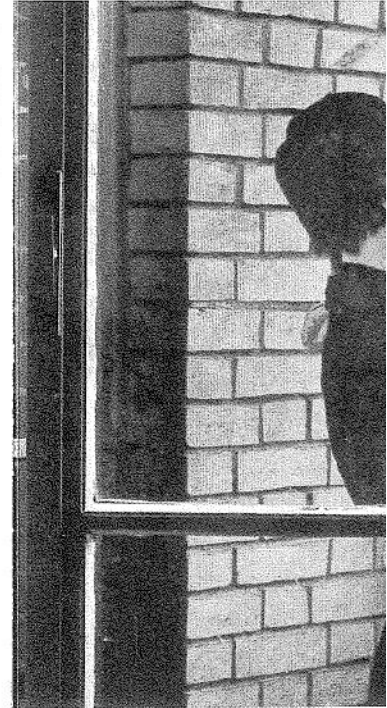
Il mio lavoro per un periodo è consistito intuitivamente nel tentativo di avvicinare le mie due immagini, quella proposta dallo specchio e quella proposta da me. La conclusione è stata la sovrapposizione del quadro allo specchio: la pittura si sovrappone e aderisce all'immagine della realtà.

L'oggetto figurativo che ne nasce mi dà la possibilità di proseguire la mia indagine all'interno del quadro come all'interno della vita, visto che le due cose sono figurativamente legate. Infatti mi trovo nel quadro, oltre il muro bucato dello specchio, anche se non materialmente. Anzi, siccome fisicamente mi è impossibile entrarci, per indagare nella struttura dell'arte devo far uscire il quadro nella realtà, creando la finzione di trovarmi oltre lo specchio.

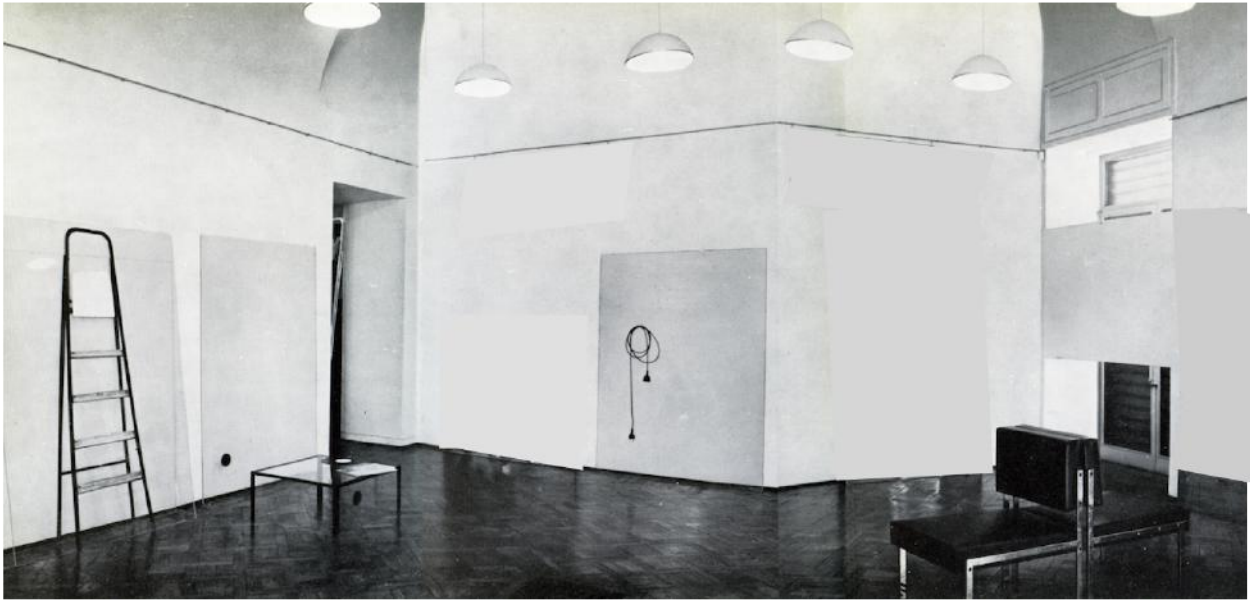
È facile in questi anni equivocare sull'identità tra oggetto-reale e oggetto-arte. Una « cosa » non è arte: l'idea espressa della stessa « cosa » può esserlo.

Estetica e realtà si possono identificare, ma ciascuna restando nella sua vita autonoma. Non si possono sostituire l'una all'altra senza che una delle due rinunci alla sua necessità di esistere.

È perciò che finisco questa presentazione del mio lavoro rimanendo all'idea del muro. Perché all'idea del muro può stare attaccata l'idea del quadro, a cui può essere legata l'idea di un soggetto. In questo momento per me la « cosa » è la struttura dell'espressione figurativa, che ho accettato come realtà. L'invasione fisica del quadro nell'ambiente reale, portando con sé le rappresentazioni dello specchio, mi permette di introdurre tra gli elementi scomposti della figurazione. M. PISTOLETTO



- 0.06. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *I plexiglass*, September 10, 1964 (artist's statement). In *Michelangelo Pistoletto: I plexiglass* (Turin: GES, 1964), n.p. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



0.07. Exhibition view, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: I plexiglass*, digitally altered by the author to remove the mirror paintings included in the installation.



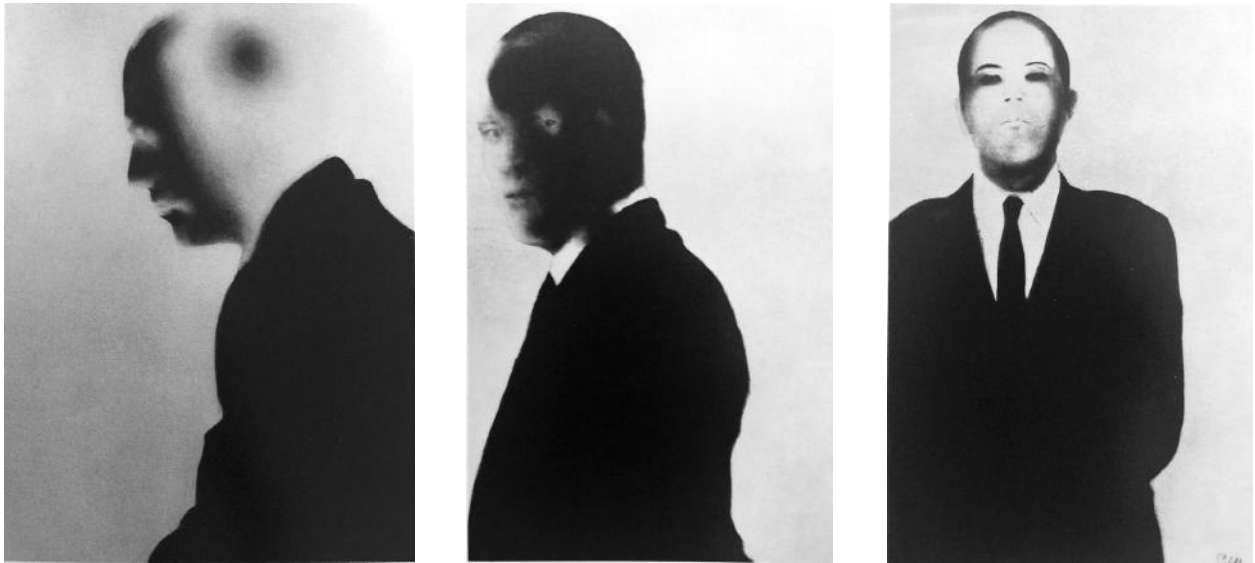
0.08. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Interno di cattedrale* (Cathedral Interior), 1959. Oil on canvas, 19 ⁵/₈ x 23 ⁵/₈ in. (50 x 60 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



0.09. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Autoritratto* (Self-Portrait), 1957. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (200 x 100 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



0.10. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Autoritratto* (Self-Portrait), 1957. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (200 x 100 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



0.11. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Disegno* (Drawing); *Disegno I* (Drawing I); *Disegno V* (Drawing V), all 1962. Pencil on paper, *left*, 23 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ (60 x 45 cm); *center*, 26 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (67 x 48 cm); *right*, 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (65 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm.) Reproduced with the artist's permission.



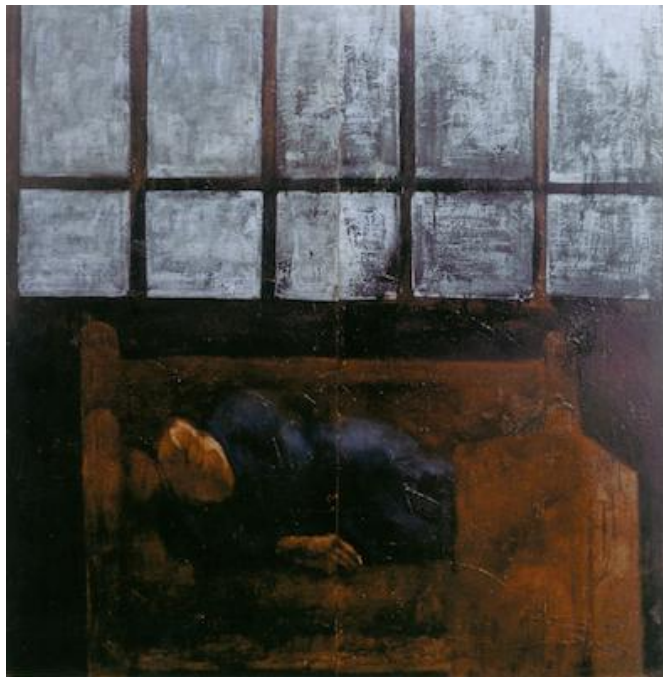
0.12. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Esperimento* (Experiment), 1959. Silver, acrylic, rope, wood, and canvas, 29 1/8 x 23 1/2 in. (74 x 60 cm.) In *From One to Many*, PMA, November 1, 2010. Photograph by the author. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



0.13. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Autoritratto* (Self-Portrait), 1963. 47 1/4 x 47 1/4 in. (120 x 120 cm.) In *Michelangelo Pistoletto: I plexiglass*, GES, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



0.14. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Atleta alla sbarra fissa* (Athlete on the Fixed Bar), 1960. Oil on canvas, 43 1/3 x 27 1/2 in. (110 x 70 cm.) Cover image, *Michelangelo Pistoletto* (Turin: Galleria Galatea, 1960). Reproduced with the artist's permission.



0.15. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Uomo coricato sotto la finestra* (Man Reclining under the Window), 1957-58. Oil and acrylic on Masonite, 78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in. (200 x 200 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



- 0.16. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *La folla ingrata* (The Ungrateful Crowd), 1958–59. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 55 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (140 x 100 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.
- 0.17. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Uomo dietro il tavolo* (Man Behind the Table), 1960. Oil on canvas, 57 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 44 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (146 x 113 cm.) Image: Artnet Auction Record, Sotheby's Milan, *Arte Moderna e Contemporanea* (Palazzo Broggi, Nov. 21, 1995). Also printed in black and white in Commissione Artistica dell'Associazione Piemonte Artistico e Culturale, *Artisti piemontesi contemporanei* (Turin: Adriano Arizio, 1961), 12. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



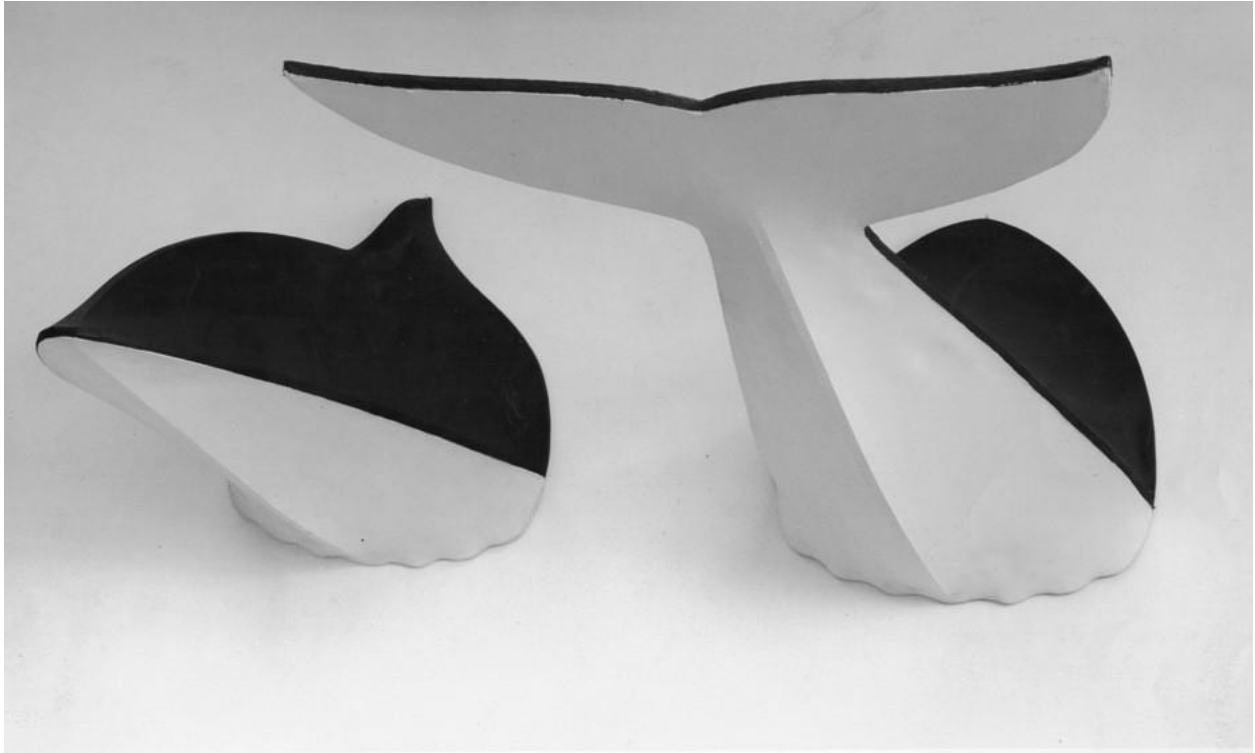
0.18. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *L'Equilibrista*, 1958. Oil on canvas, 47 ¼ x 47 ¼ in. (120 x 120 cm.) Reproduced with the artist's permission.



0.19. Michelangelo Pistoletto, untitled illustration in Carlo Montella's short story, *Compito in classe* (Classwork), published in *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, September 16, 1962. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



0.20. Pino Pascali, *Contraerea* (Anti-Aircraft Gun), from the *Le armi* (Weapons) series, 1965. Wood, paint, discarded mechanical parts.



0.21. Pino Pascali, *Delfino* (Dolphin), 1966, from the *Finite sculpture* (Finished Sculptures) series, 1966–67. Acrylic paint, white canvas on wooden frame.



0.22. Pino Pascali, *Bachi da setola* (Bristle Worms), 1968. Metal and acrylic bristles. Six elements, dimensions varied.



- 0.23. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Il Santo* (The Saint), 1957. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (200 x 120 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.
- 0.24. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Sacerdote* (Priest), 1957. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (200 x 120 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



0.25. Exhibition view, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*, Walker Art Center (WAC), April, 1966. Photograph by Eric Sutherland. Courtesy of the WAC Archives. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



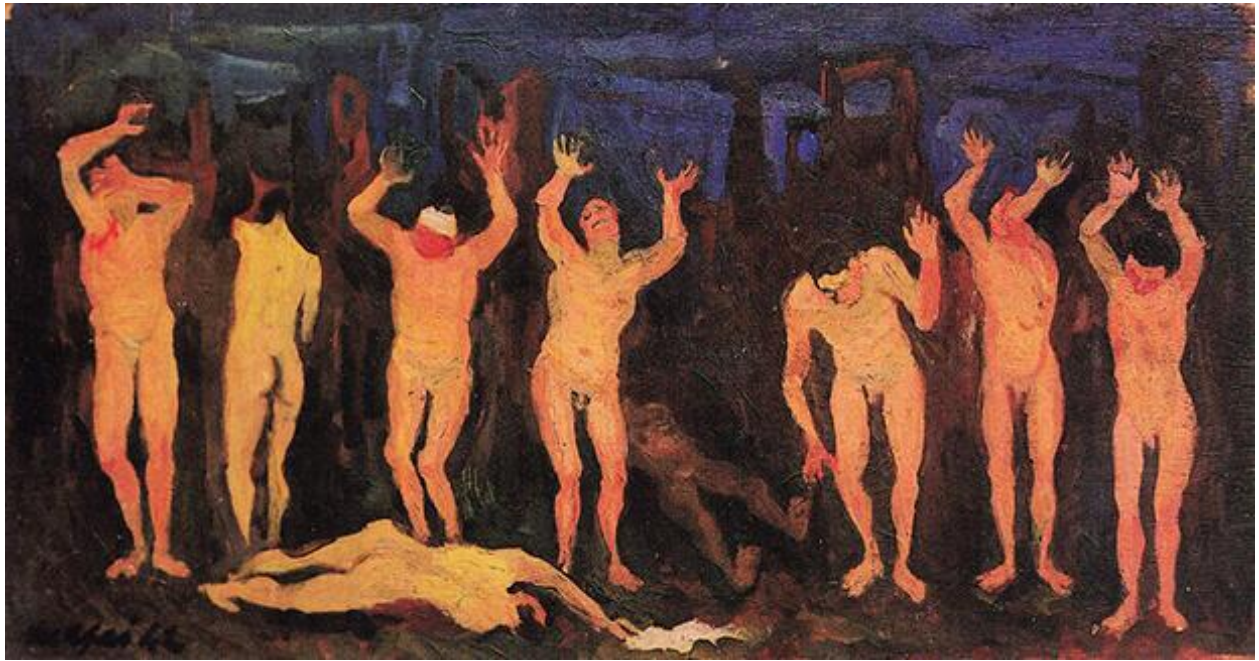
0.26. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Oggetti in meno* (Minus Objects), January, 1966. *Top row*, first installation; *bottom row*, second installation, with *Versioni* (Versions). Photographs by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



0.27. Felice Casorati, *Silvana Cenni*, 1922. Tempera on canvas, 80 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 41 $\frac{1}{3}$ in. (205 x 105 cm.)



0.28. Felice Casorati, *Meriggio (Mid-Day)*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 47 x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ (119 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 130 cm.)



0.30. Mario Mafai, *Fantasia, n. 9* (Fantasy, n. 9), 1942. Oil on canvas, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 29 $\frac{1}{3}$ (40 x 74 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm.)



1.01. Exhibition view, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: I plexiglass*, Gian Enzo Sperone—Arte Moderna, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.

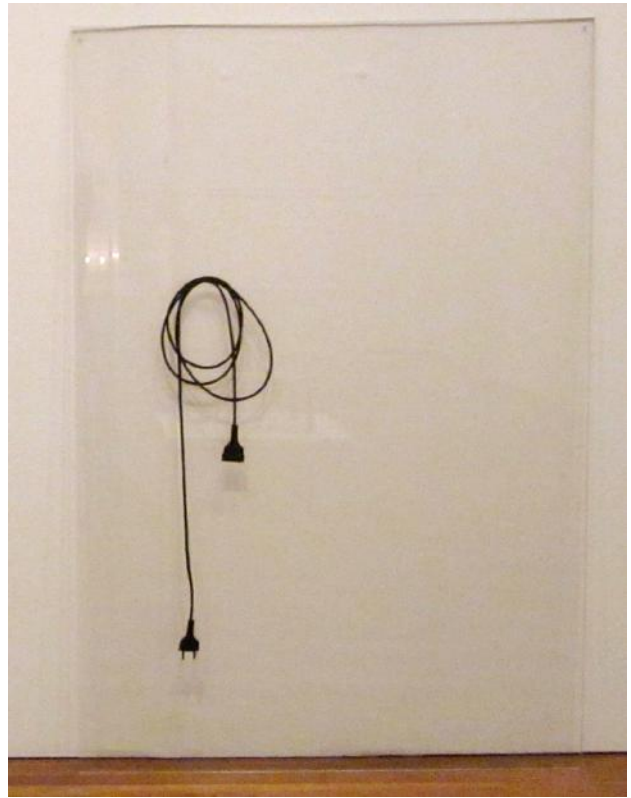
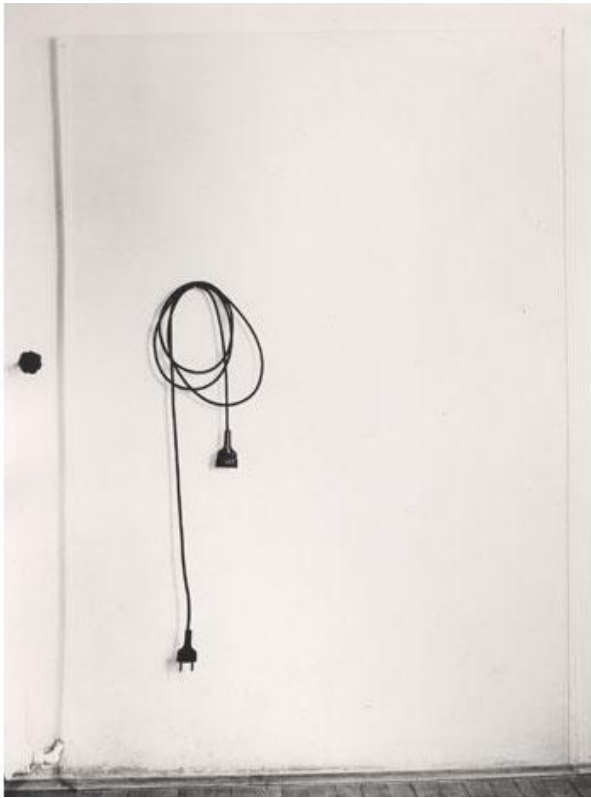


1.02. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Il Muro* (The Wall), 1964. Transparent plexiglass, 70 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (180 x 120 cm.) In *I plexiglass*, Gian Enzo Sperone — Arte Moderna, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.

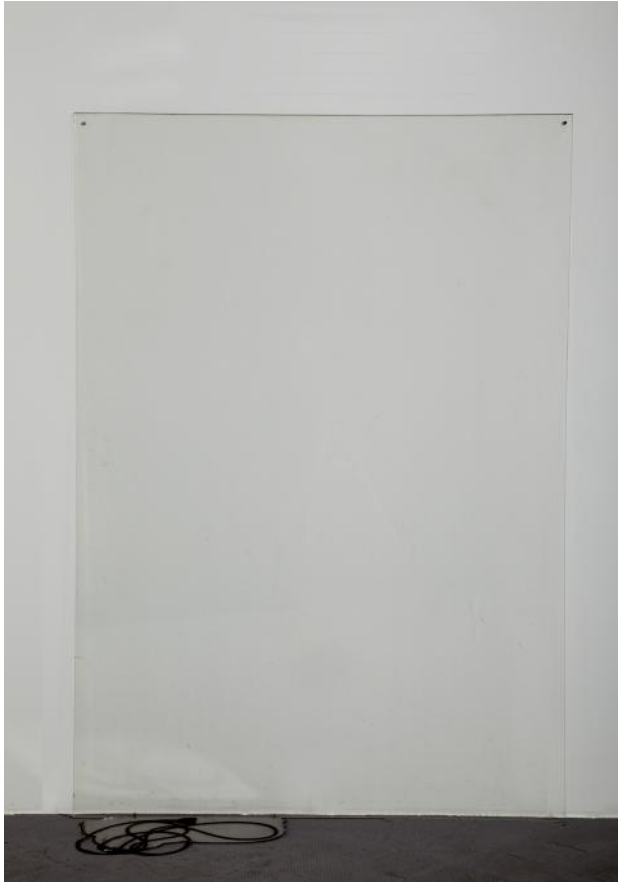


- 1.03. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Tavolino con disco e giornale* (Small Table with Record and Newspaper), 1964. Painted plexiglass, record, and newspaper, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (60 x 60 x 35 cm.) *Above*, in *I plexiglass*, GES, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto. *Below*, photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.

[Note: Two photographs are provided for each of the Plexiglasses, when possible. My color photographs are included to supplement the original black-and-white photographs.]



- 1.04. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Filo elettrico appeso al muro* (Electric Cord Hanging on the Wall), 1964. Photograph on transparent plexiglass, 70 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (180 x 120 cm.) *Left*, in *I plexiglass*, GES, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto. *Right*, photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



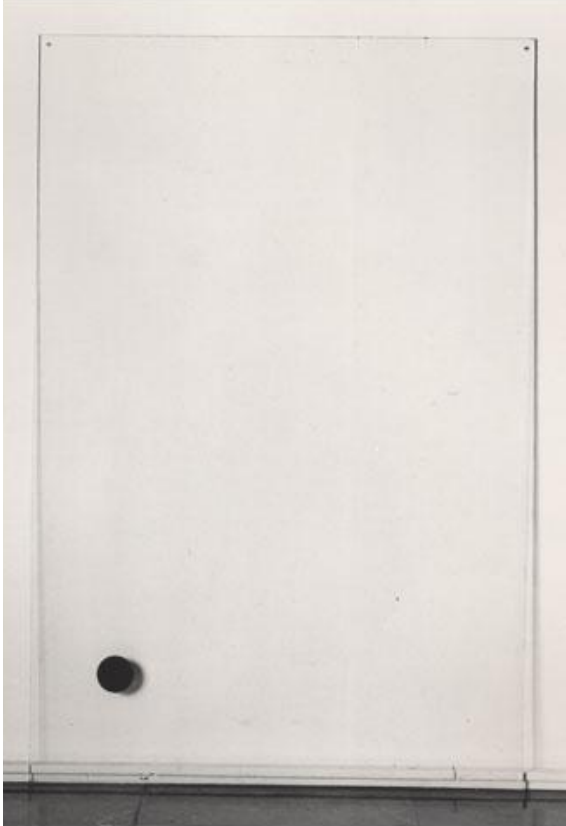
- 1.05. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Filo elettrico caduto* (Fallen Electric Cord) [alt. *Filo elettrico caduto per terra* (Electric Cord on the Ground)], 1964. Transparent plexiglass (2), photograph. Plexiglass (panel), 70 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (180 x 120 cm.); plexiglass (floor piece), ca. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (40 x 80 cm.) *Left*, in *I plexiglass*, GES, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto. *Right*, photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



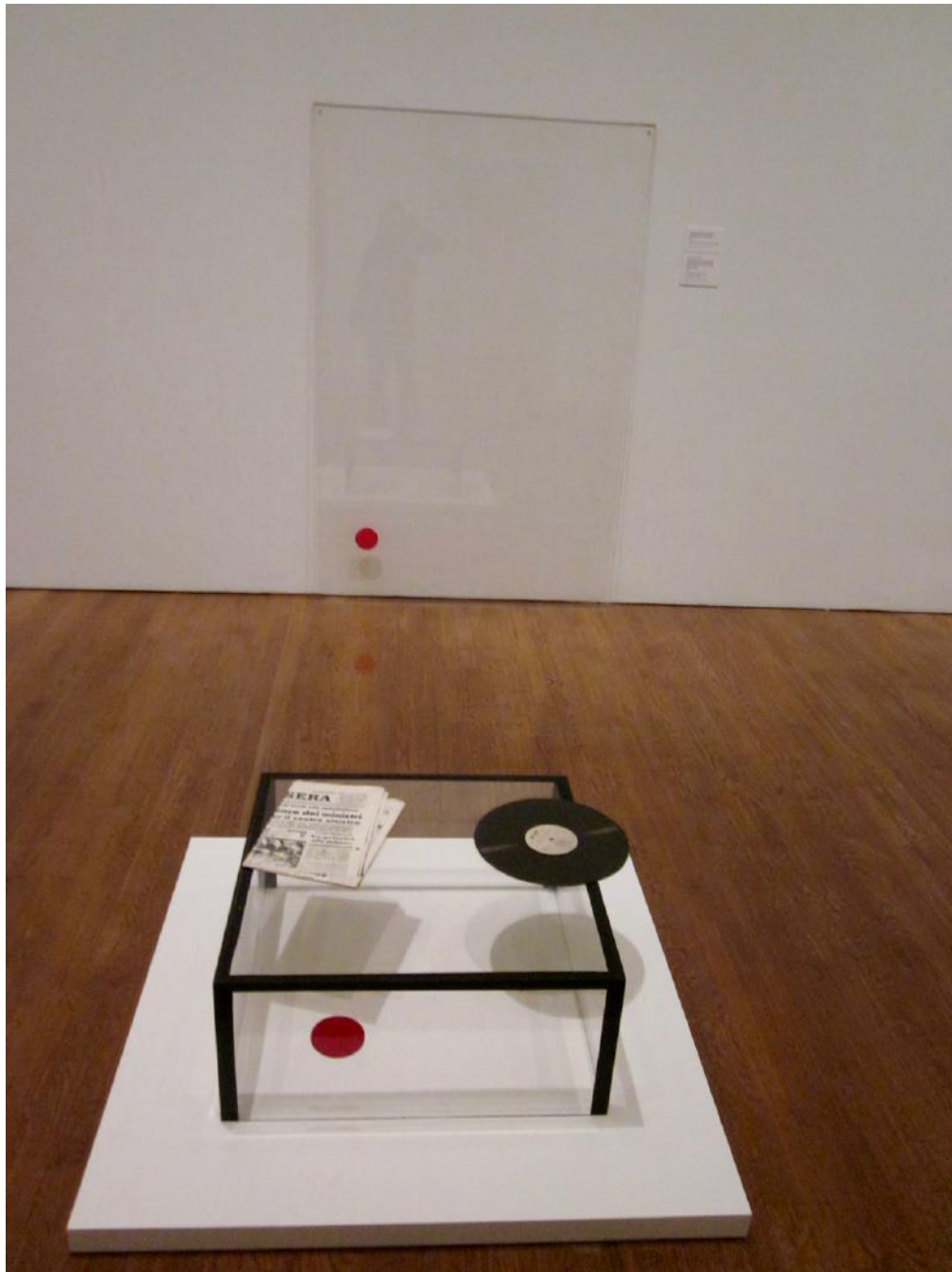
1.06. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Pila di dischi* (Stack of Records), 1964. Photographs on transparent plexiglass. Eleven elements. Each 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (40 x 40 cm.) *Above*, in *I plexiglass*, GES, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto. *Below*, photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



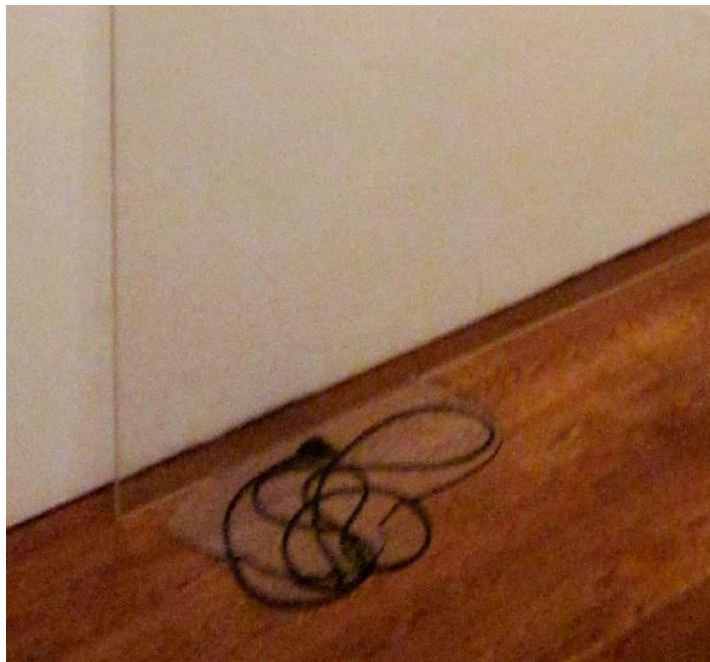
1.07. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Scala doppia appoggiata al muro* (Double Ladder Leaning Against the Wall), 1964. Photograph on transparent plexiglass. Two elements, 70 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (180 x 120 cm.); 59 x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (150 x 120 cm.) *Left*, in *I plexiglass*, GES, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto. *Right*, photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



- 1.08. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Segnale rosso su plexiglass, sul muro* (Red Signal on Plexiglass, On the Wall), 1964. Paint on transparent plexiglass, 70 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (180 x 120 cm.) *Left*, in *I plexiglass*, GES, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto. *Right*, photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



- 1.09. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Segnale rosso su plexiglass, sul muro* (Red Signal on Plexiglass, On the Wall) and *Tavolino con disco e giornale* (Small Table with Record and Newspaper), both 1964. Photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



- 1.10. Michelangelo Pistoletto, detail, plexiglass collage element, *Filo elettrico caduto* (Fallen Electric Cord), 1964. Photograph on transparent plexiglass, ca. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (40 x 80 cm.) *Above*, in *I plexiglass*, GES, Turin, October 2, 1964. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto. *Below*, photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



1.11. Michelangelo Pistoletto, staging the photograph for *Filo elettrico caduto*, 1964. Photograph by the artist. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto



1.12. Michelangelo Pistoletto, detail, newspaper in *Tavolino con disco e giornale* (Table with Record and Newspaper), 1964. Photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



1.13. Michelangelo Pistoletto, detail, "Record of Interviews with Artists Participating in the *Popular Image Exhibition*, ed. Billy Kluver, The Washington Gallery of Modern Art, April 18–June 2, 1963," in *Tavolino con disco e giornale*, 1964. Photograph by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



1.14. Vittorio De Sica, *Ladri di biciclette*, 1948. (Film stills.)



1.15. Vittorio De Sica, *Ladri di biciclette*, 1948. (Film stills.)



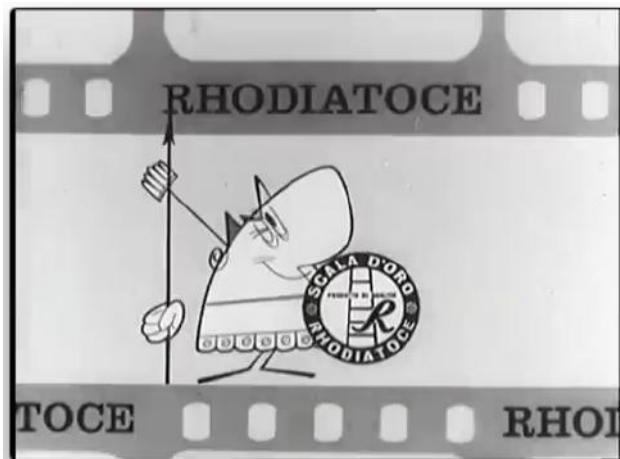
1.16. Vittorio De Sica, *Ladri di biciclette*, 1948. (Film stills.)



- 1.17. Rhodiatocce, *Scala d'oro Rhodiatocce* (commercial logo) in *Scala d'oro*, carosello by Nino and Toni Pagot, art direction Studio Stile, 1955. (Film still.) Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7I2bbRqpL0c>.



- 1.18. Facis, *Di corsa di indossarlo è un abito Facis*, print advertisement by Armando Testa, 1956. Archivio Storico Armando Testa.



- 1.19. Rhodiatoce, *Caio Gregorio*, caroselli by Roberto and Gino Gavioli, 1960–64. *Top to bottom: Penelope*, 1960; *Montgolfier*, 1963; and *Lucrezia Borgia*, 1964. *Penelope* and *Montgolfier* restored in 2000 by the Fondo “Gamma Film di Roberto Gavioli” [Rodengo Saiono, IT: Fondazione Museo dell’Industria e del Lavoro di Brescia (MUSIL)]. *Lucrezia Borgia*, Archivio Nazionale Cinema d’Impresa. (Film stills.)



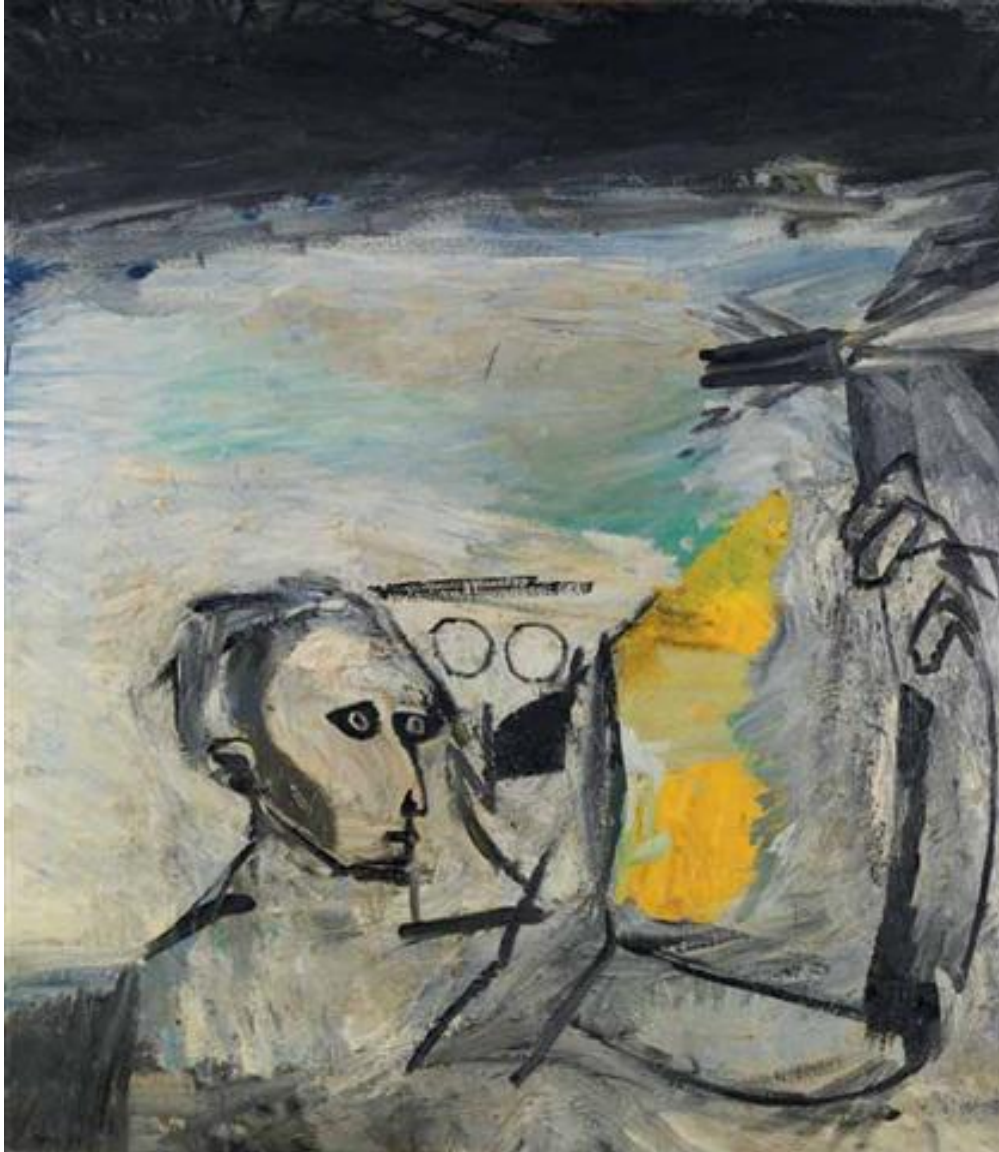
1.20. Photograph of Alighiero Boetti with *Autoritratto in negativo*, plaster cast, 1968. Reproduced with the permission of the Archivio Alighiero Boetti, Rome.



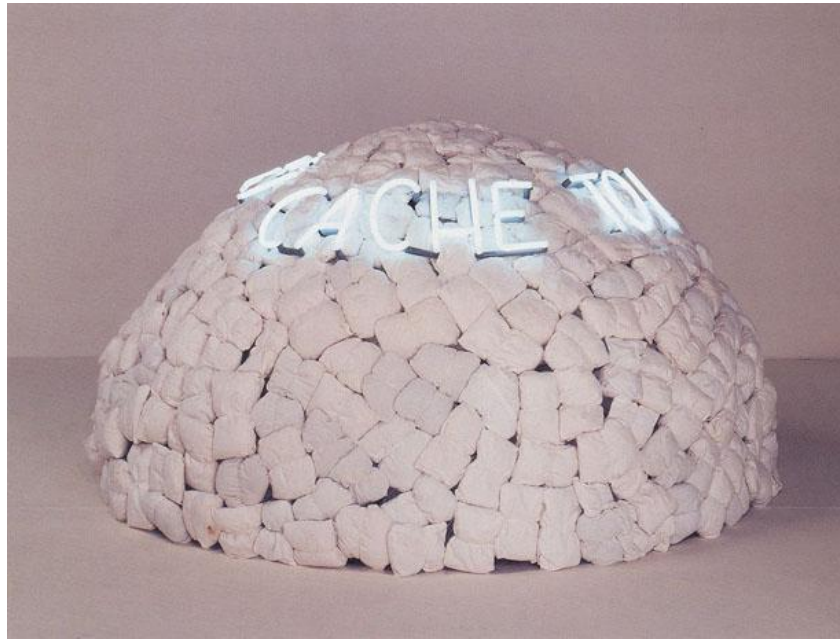
1.21. Alighiero Boetti, *Gemelli (Twins)*, 1968. Photograph, edition of 50, 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (15 x 10 cm.) Reproduced with the permission of the Archivio Alighiero Boetti, Rome.



1.22. Mario Merz, *Contadino*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 51 ¼ x 43 ⅓ in. (130 x 110 cm.) Private collection, courtesy Archivio Merz.



1.23. Mario Merz, *Il saldatore* (The Welder), 1956. Oil on canvas, 57. 44 ⁷/₈ x 39 ³/₈ in. (114 x 100 cm.) Source: Mario Merz, et al., *Mario Merz* (Turin: Fondazione Merz, 2006), 32 (plate 17).



- 1.24. Mario Merz, *Objet cache-toi* (Hide-Yourself Object), 1968. Iron, wire mesh, wood shavings, linen, neon tubes, 43 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 82 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (110 x 210 cm.) Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany. Courtesy Fondazione Merz. Photograph by Frédéric Delpech, Bordeaux.



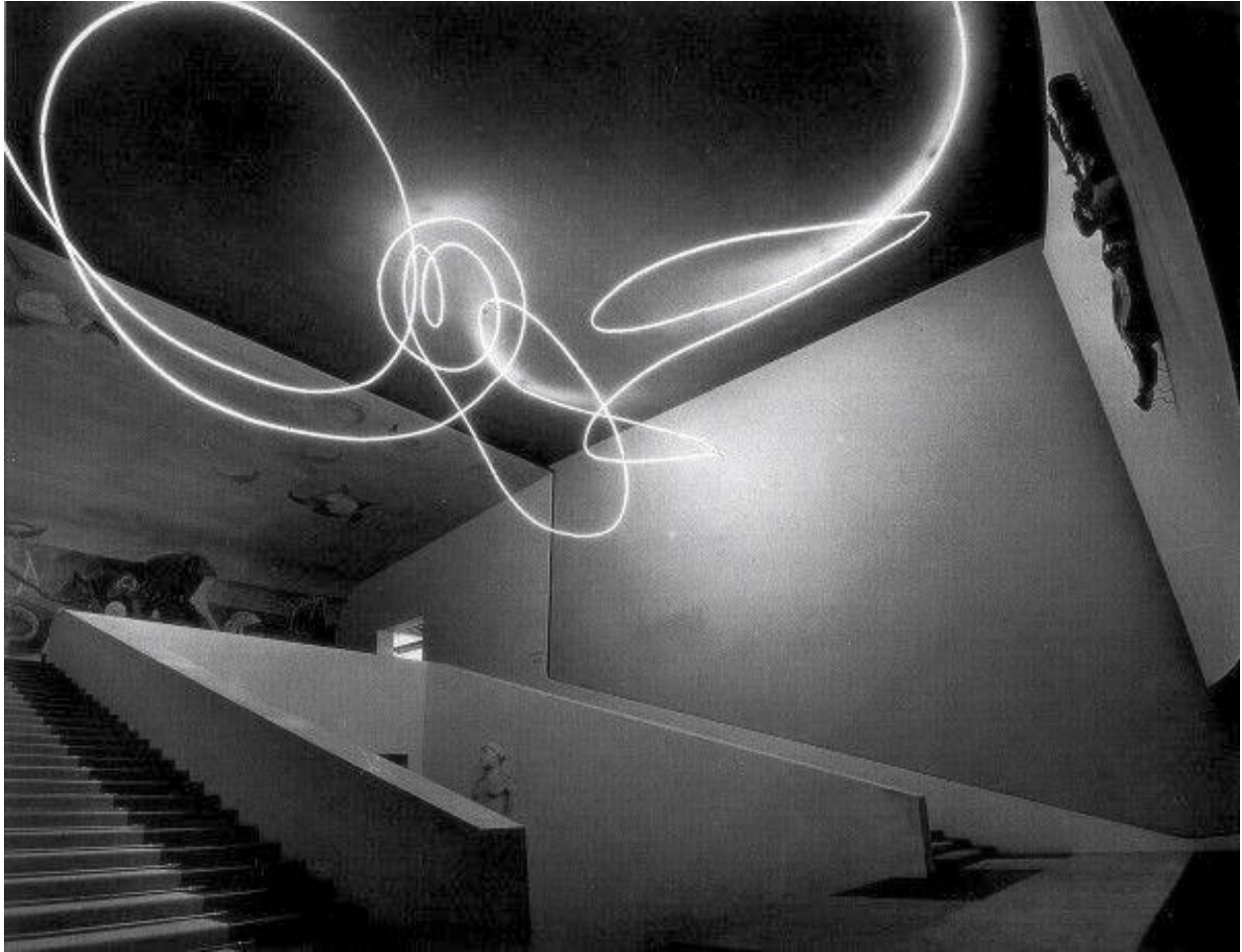
1.25. Luciano Fabro, *In cubo* (In Cube), 1966. Canvas, wood and metal frame, 72 x 72 x 71 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (183 x 183 x 182 cm.; interior), 79 $\frac{7}{8}$ 79 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 76 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (203 x 203 x 195 cm.; exterior). Photograph by Giorgio Colombo.



1.26. Giuseppe Penone, *Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quel punto* (It will continue to grow except for at that point), 1968–2003). Bronze.



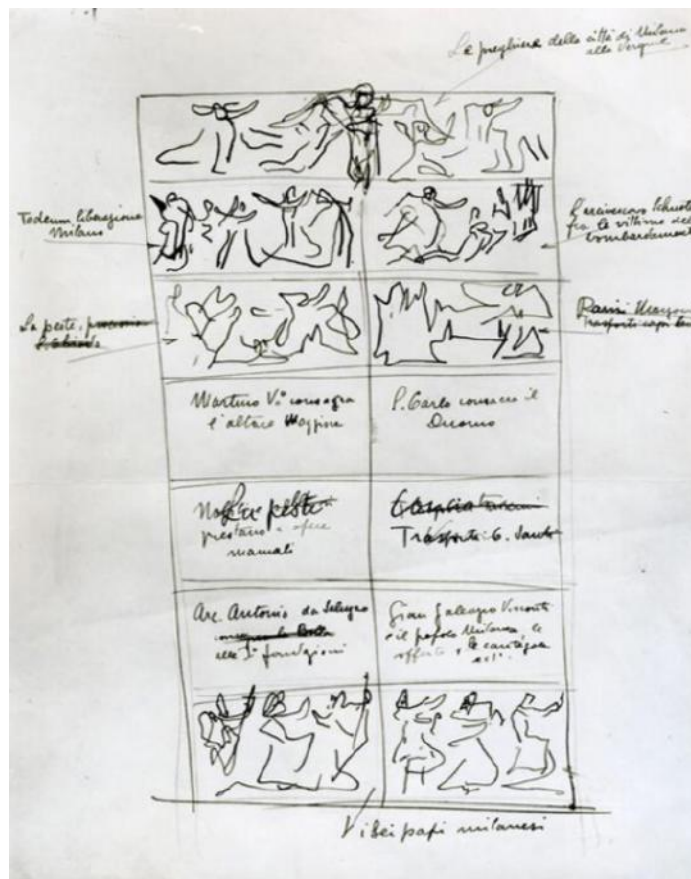
1.27. Giulio Paolini, *L'altra figura* (The Other Figure), 1984. Plaster casts and wood plinths. Two busts, $29 \frac{3}{8} \times 17 \frac{3}{4} \times 15 \frac{1}{3}$ in. (65 x 45 x 39 cm.), broken bust fragments (variable). Installation: $73 \times 98 \frac{3}{8} \times 74 \frac{3}{8}$ in. (183 x 250 x 190 cm.) Courtesy of the Fondazione Giulio e Anna Paolini, Turin.



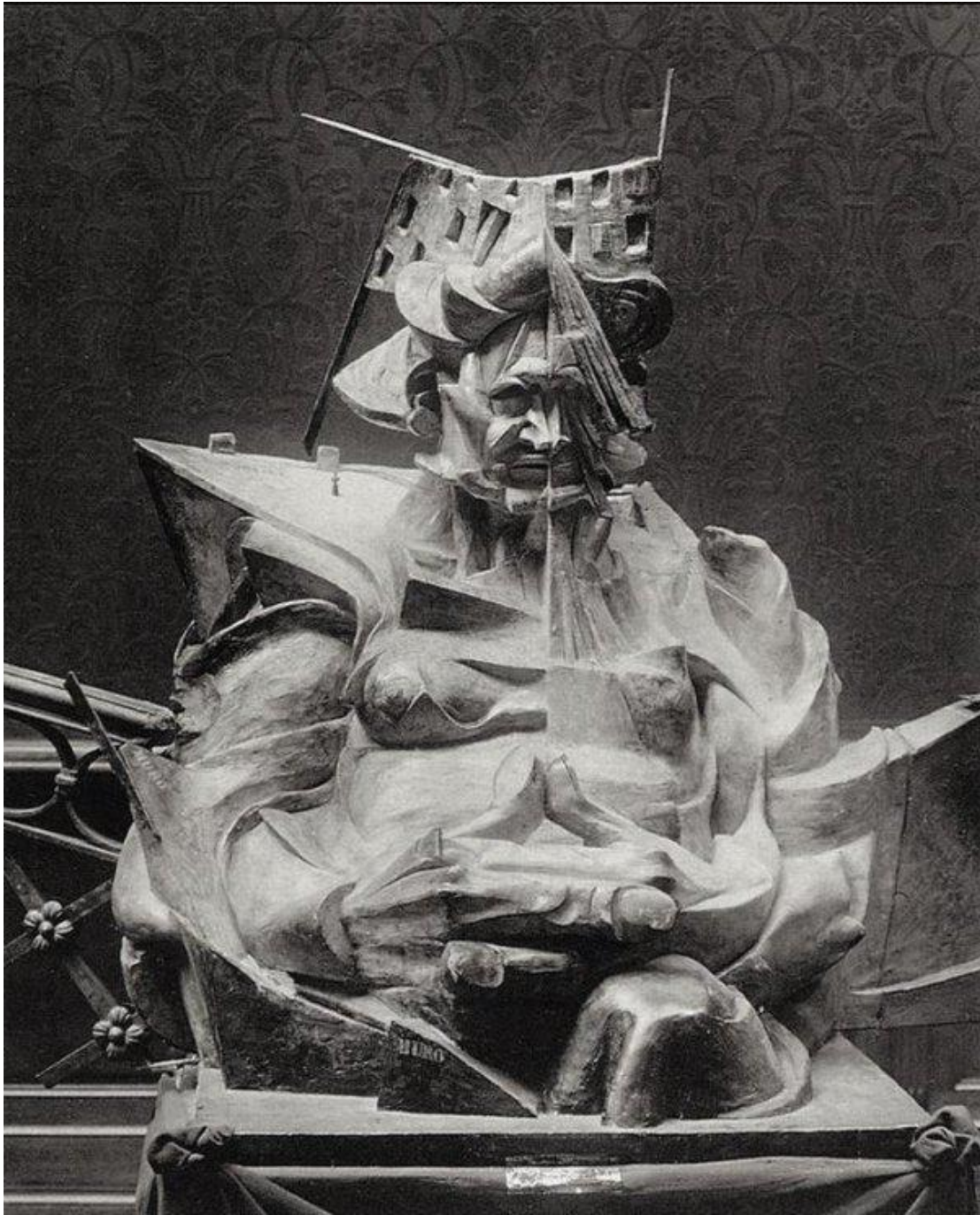
1.28. Lucio Fontana, *Struttura al neon* (Neon Structure), IX Triennale di Milano, 1951. Glass tube with white neon, 328 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (100 m.; length) x $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (18 mm.; diam.). Destroyed. Courtesy of the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan.



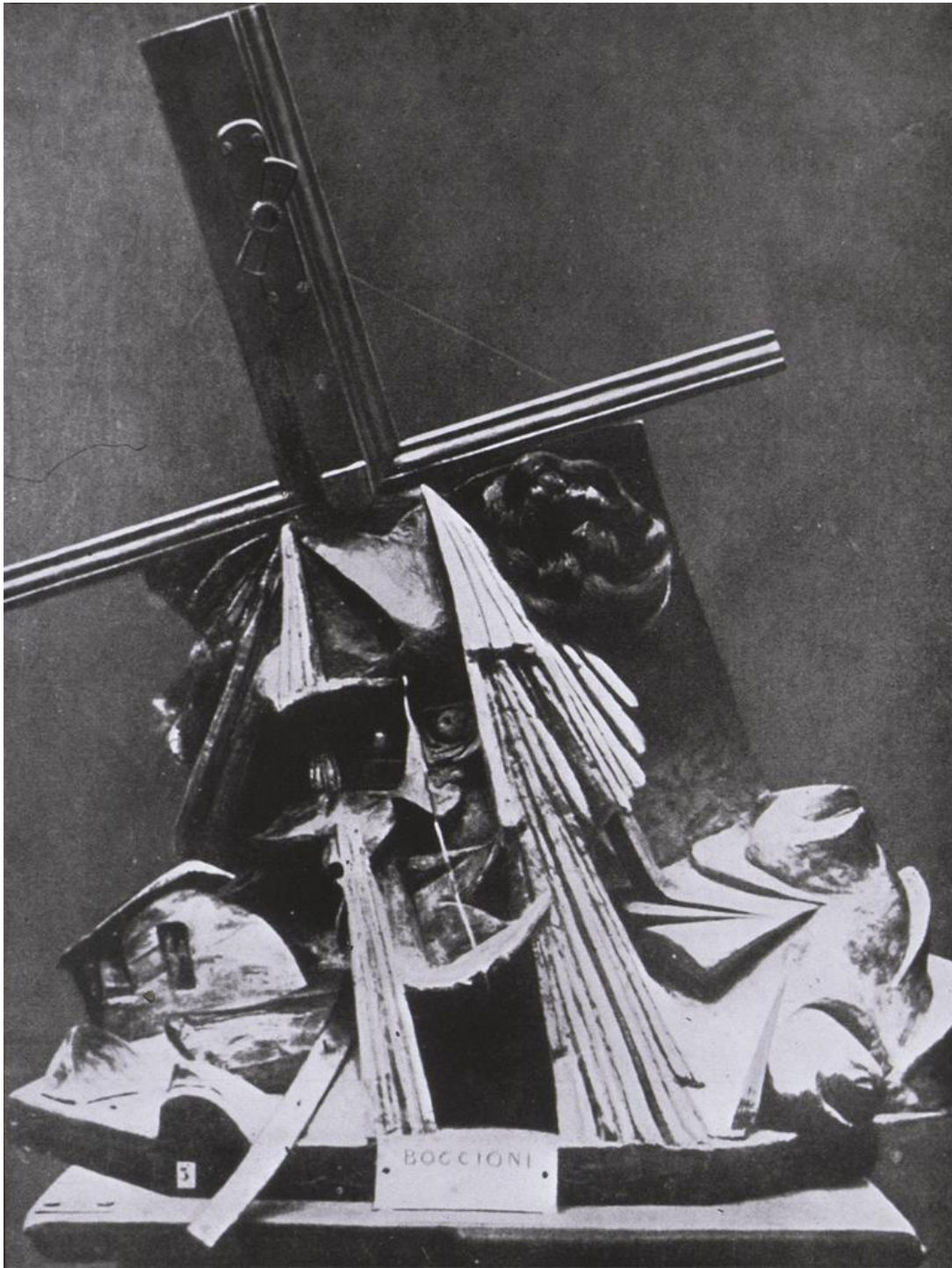
1.29. Lucio Fontana, study sheet, *Ambiente spaziale* (Spatial Environment), 1949. Pen and ink on paper, 8 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 11 $\frac{2}{3}$ in. (21 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 29 $\frac{2}{3}$ cm.) Courtesy of the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan.



1.30. Lucio Fontana, study sheet, door of the *Duomo di Milano*, 1950–51. Pen and ink on paper, 8 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 11 in. (28 x 22 cm.) Courtesy of the Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan.



1.31. Umberto Boccioni, *Testa + casa + luce* (Head + House + Light), 1912. Gesso, wood, iron, and mixed media. Destroyed. Source: Ester Coen and Maurizio Calvesi, with Clelia Ginetti and Mimma Paulescu, eds., *Boccioni* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1983), 425.



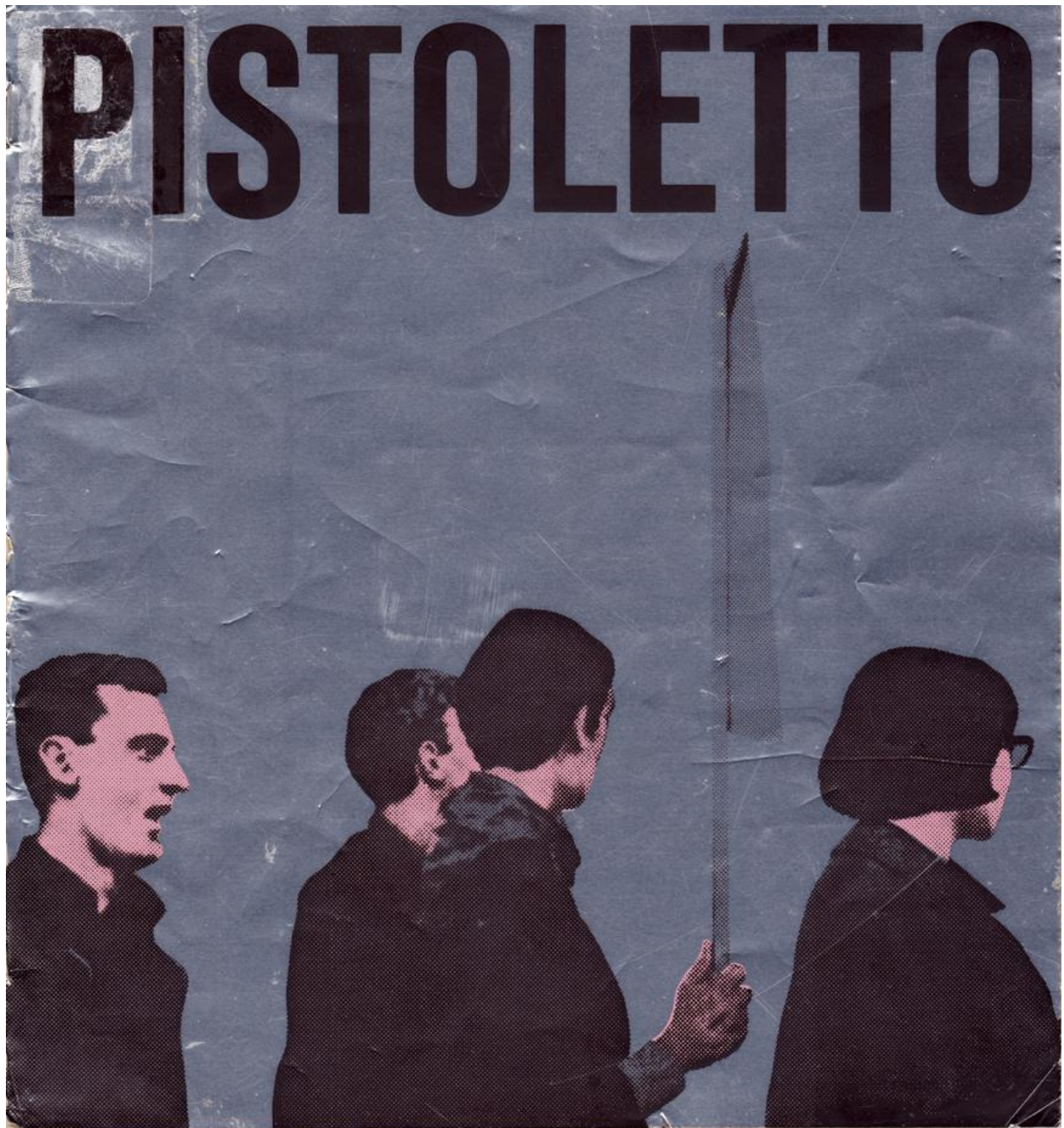
1.32. Umberto Boccioni, *Fusione di una testa e di una finestra* (Fusion of a Head and a Window), 1912–13. Gesso, iron, wood, plate glass, horsehair, glass eyes, porcelain. Destroyed. Photograph by Luca Carra. Source: Coen and Calvesi, with Clelia Ginetti and Mimma Paulescu, eds., *Boccioni*, 427.



1.33. Fabio Mauri, *Intellettuale*, 1975–1994, with Pier Paolo Pasolini. Projection action. Photographs by Antonio Masotti.



1.34. Mario Merz, *Senza titolo (Una somma reale è una somma di gente)* [Untitled (A Real Sum is a Sum of People)], 1972. Edition of 5. Eleven gelatin silver prints mounted on panels in Plexiglas frames, neon and electrical hardware. Each photographic element: $9\frac{3}{4}$ x $12\frac{3}{8}$ in. ($24\frac{3}{4}$ x $31\frac{1}{2}$ cm.) Overall: $21\frac{1}{4}$ x $171\frac{1}{2}$ in. (54 x $435\frac{5}{8}$ cm.) Photograph by Paolo Pellion. Collection Fondazione Merz, courtesy Archivio Merz.



2.01. Cover, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1966). Serigraph on silver foil, 8 ½ x 8 ½ in. Designed by Peter Seitz. Catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, held at the Walker Art Center (WAC), April 8–May 4, 1966. Reproduced with the permission of the artist and the WAC Archives.



2.02. Exhibition views, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*, WAC, Minneapolis, 1966. Photographed by Eric Sutherland. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto. Reproduced with the permission of the WAC Archives.



2.03. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *No, all'aumento del tram* (No, To The Tram Fee Hike), 1965, in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World* (April 1966). Photograph by Eric Sutherland. Courtesy of the WAC Archives. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



2.04. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *No, all'aumento del tram* (No, To the Tram Fee Hike), 1965. Oil and graphite on tissue paper on stainless steel, 85 x 47 ¼ in. (220 x 120 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



- 2.05. Exhibition view (digitally reconstructed by the author), gallery three, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*, WAC, Minneapolis, 1966). All works date to 1965 unless otherwise noted. Originally titled, from left: *No, all'aumento del tram* (No, To The Tram Fee Hike); *Comizio I* (Rally I); *Corteo* (Demonstration); *Comizio II* (Rally II); *Ragazzo* (Boy; 1966); *Corteo III* (Demonstration III), and *Vietnam*. Exhibited as: *No all'aumento del tram*; *Rally I*; *Procession*; *Rally II*; *Boy*; *Procession III*, and *Vietnam*. Photographs by Eric Sutherland. Courtesy of the WAC Archives. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



2.06. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Comizio I* (Rally I), 1965. Published in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World* (Minneapolis: WAC, 1966), n.p. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



2.07. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Comizio II (Rally II)*, 1965. Painted tissue paper on polished stainless steel, 84 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (215 x 120 cm.) In *From One to Many*, 158 (fig. 144). [Font show-through original to reproduction]. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



2.08. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Corteo* (Demonstration), 1965. 47 x 85 in. (120 x 216 cm.)
Image source: Christie's, 2015. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



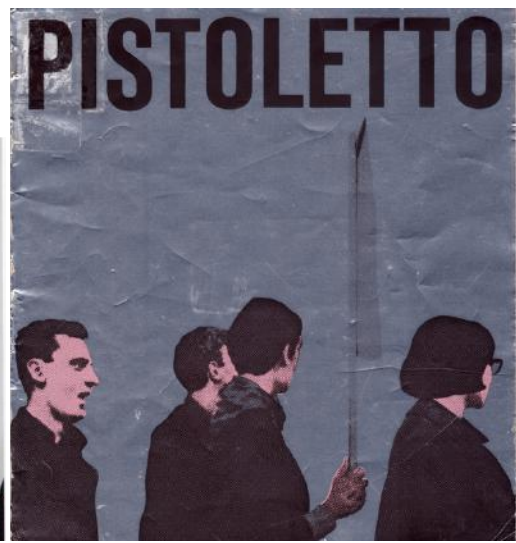
- 2.09. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Vietnam*, 1965. Graphite and oil on tissue paper on stainless steel, 86 ⁵/₈ x 47 ¹/₄ in. (220 x 120 cm.) Photograph by George Hixson. Courtesy of The Menil Collection, Houston. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



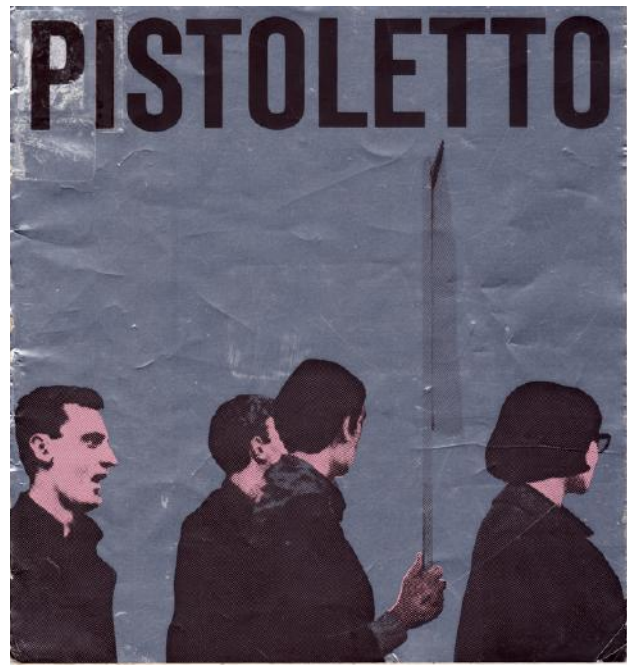
- 2.10. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Corteo III (Demonstration III)*, 1965. Oil and graphite on tissue paper on stainless steel, 39 ³/₈ x 47 ¹/₄ in. (100 x 120 cm.) In *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World* (1966). Photograph by Eric Sutherland. Reproduced with the permission of the artist and the WAC archives.



2.11. Renato Rinaldi, source photographs for Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Vietnam* and *Corteo III* (both 1965), Milan, dated by the author to late 1964. In *From One to Many*, 159 (fig. 145). Reproduced with the artist's permission.



2.12. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *No, all'aumento del tram*, 1965. Cf. Cover, *A Reflected World* (1966).



2.13. Michelangelo Pistoletto, detail, *No, all'aumento del tram* (No, To the Tram Fee Hike), 1965. Cf. Cover, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*, 1966.



2.14. Andy Warhol, *Silver Liz [Ferus Type]*, 1963. Silkscreen ink, acrylic, and spray paint on linen, 40 x 40 in. (101 ⁵/₈ x 101 ⁵/₈ cm.)



2.15. Exhibition signage, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*, WAC, Minneapolis, April 1966. Excerpted from local news footage of the exhibition. (Film stills.)

[Note: Exhibition signage used the shortened title, *Pistoletto: A Reflected World*. The official title of the exhibition was *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*.] Reproduction permission courtesy of the WAC Archives and WCOT-TV, CBS Minneapolis.

ANO: fallito l'attacco alla CGIL

**L'80% dei tramvieri
partecipa allo sciopero**

CAOS PER LA TAGL

I mezzi pubblici non sono più consentiti: rimandata la grande fuga. Ecco, ad una fermata del T3, un gruppo di giovani che tratta con un tassista in quanto, oltre a far alla spiccia, viene al tempo, anche, in treno.

**La città protesta
contro l'aumento**

Il costo delle tariffe tramviarie è aumentato del 10 per cento. In effetti, è stata la prima volta dopo la guerra che il servizio di trasporto pubblico di una città ha aumentato le tariffe. Il motivo è la mancanza di fondi per la manutenzione delle rotaie e dei tram. Il servizio è stato interrotto per un periodo di una settimana.

**L'aumento delle tariffe tramviarie
dibattezza i nostri milanesi**

Con un aumento del 10 per cento il costo del biglietto è passato da 100 a 110 lire.

COMUNISTICO

— un piano di organizzazione e coordinamento della lotta di massa; — un piano di lotta che sia capace di vincere; — il mantenimento della lotta di massa di massa; — il mantenimento della lotta di massa di massa; — il mantenimento della lotta di massa di massa.

FOR - PCI (COMUNISTICO)

Un valentino d'attacco dei giovani comunisti e socialisti di Milano in cui si denuncia la gravissima situazione del servizio di trasporto pubblico di questa città e si chiede la riorganizzazione del servizio di trasporto pubblico di massa.

MILLE E UNA PIAGA DELL'ATM

Il tram che mangia oro

L'azienda denuncia un disavanzo che minaccia di ingoiare un quarto del bilancio comunale - 70 miliardi dilaganti in 20 anni - La via degli aumenti del biglietto è proprio l'unica per fronteggiare la situazione?

Quella dell'ATM è una malattia cronica che si aggrava anno dopo anno. Il progressivo aumento del biglietto (da 50 a 100 lire) è dovuto al fatto che i dipendenti hanno in tasca un fufemismo del 35 per cento e già si è alle soglie di un collasso. I biglietti con le macchinette automatiche, di fronte a un aumento del 10 per cento, hanno scatenato uno sciopero, concesso tutto. Quel funzio-

2.16. Italian news reports, workers' strikes and mass protests against new public transit fees, 1965. Clockwise from top left: *L'Unità*, "L'80% dei tramvieri partecipa allo sciopero" [Milan], March 3, 1965; *L'Unità*, "La città protesta contro l'aumento" [Rome], May 4, 1965; Giancarlo Galli, "Il tram che mangia oro" [Milan], *Corriere della Sera*, March 6–7, 1965.



2.17. Telemaco Signorini, *L'Alzaia* (Towrope), 1864. Oil on canvas, 23 x 68 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (58 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 173 $\frac{1}{3}$ cm.)



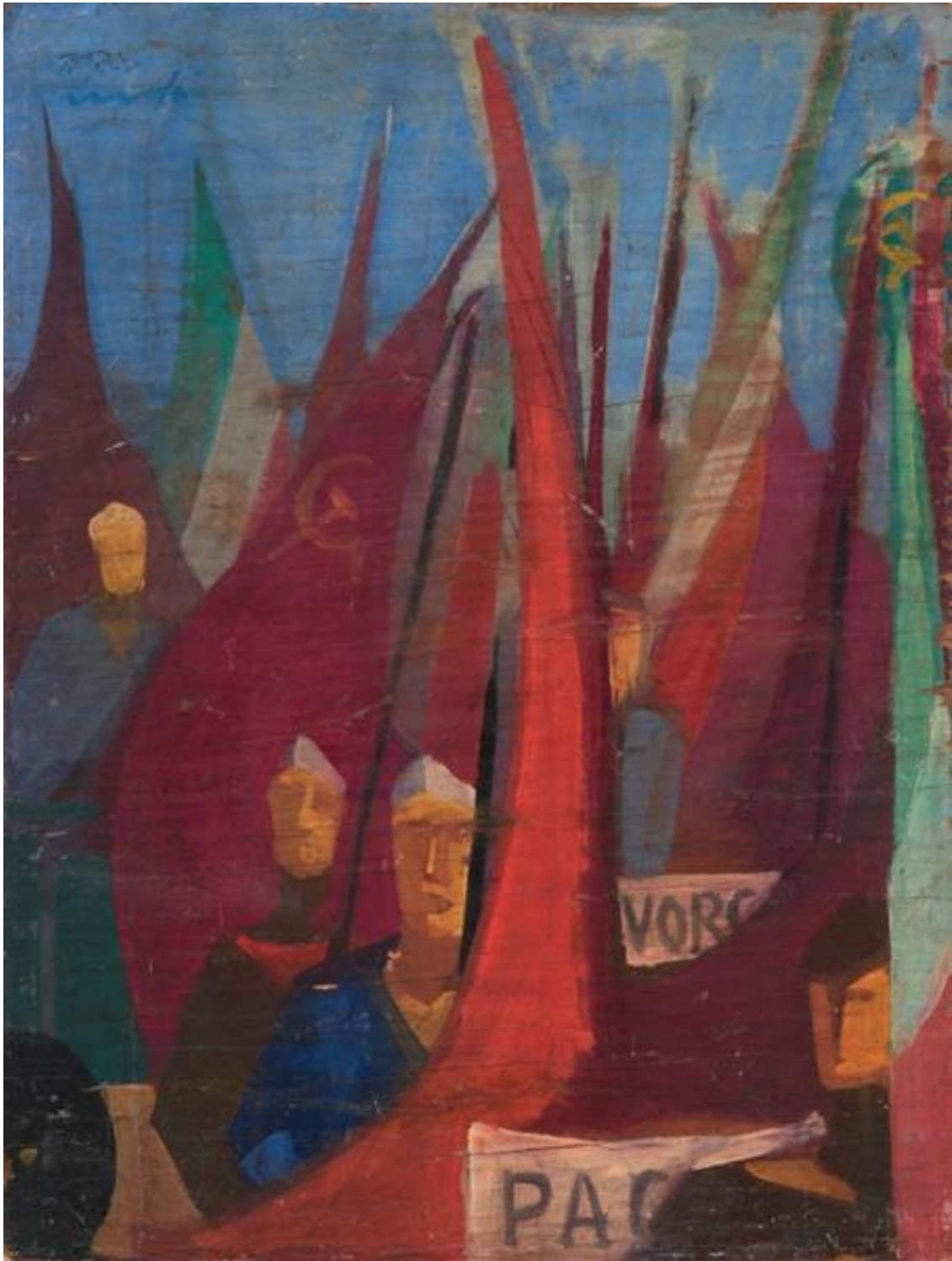
2.18. Telemaco Signorini, *Bagno penale al Portoferraio* (Prison Baths at Portoferraio), ca. 1890. Oil on canvas, 55 x 79 in. (21 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ cm.)



2.19. Renato Guttuso, *Occupazione delle terre incolte in Sicilia* (Occupation of Uncultivated Lands in Sicily), 1949. Oil on canvas, 106 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 129 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (270 x 330 cm.)



2.20. Renato Guttuso, *Il comizio (Omaggio a Giuseppe Di Vittorio)* [Demonstration (Homage to Giuseppe Di Vittorio)], 1962. Oil on canvas, 94 ½ x 115 ¾ in. (240 x 294 cm.)



2.21. Mario Mafai, *Il corteo con bandiere* (Protest with Flags), 1950. Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{2}{3}$ in. (67 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 50 cm.)



2.22. Giulio Turcato, *Comizio*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 57 1/8 x 78 3/4 in. (145 x 200 cm.)



2.23. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Person-Back View*, 1965. Graphite and oil on tissue paper on stainless steel. 22 ½ x 16 ¼ in. (57 ¼ x 41 ⅜ cm.) Source: *From One to Many*, 32 (plate 36). Reproduced with the artist's permission.



2.24. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Person-Back View*, 1965. Cf. *No, all'aumento del tram* (No, To The Tram Fee Hike), 1965.



2.25. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Due persone che passano* (Two People Passing By), 1966. Painted tissue paper on polished stainless steel, 47 1/4 x 90 9/16 in. (120 x 230 cm.) Reproduced with the artist's permission. Cf. *No, all'aumento del tram*, 1965. Image (above): *From One to Many*, 225 (plate 38).



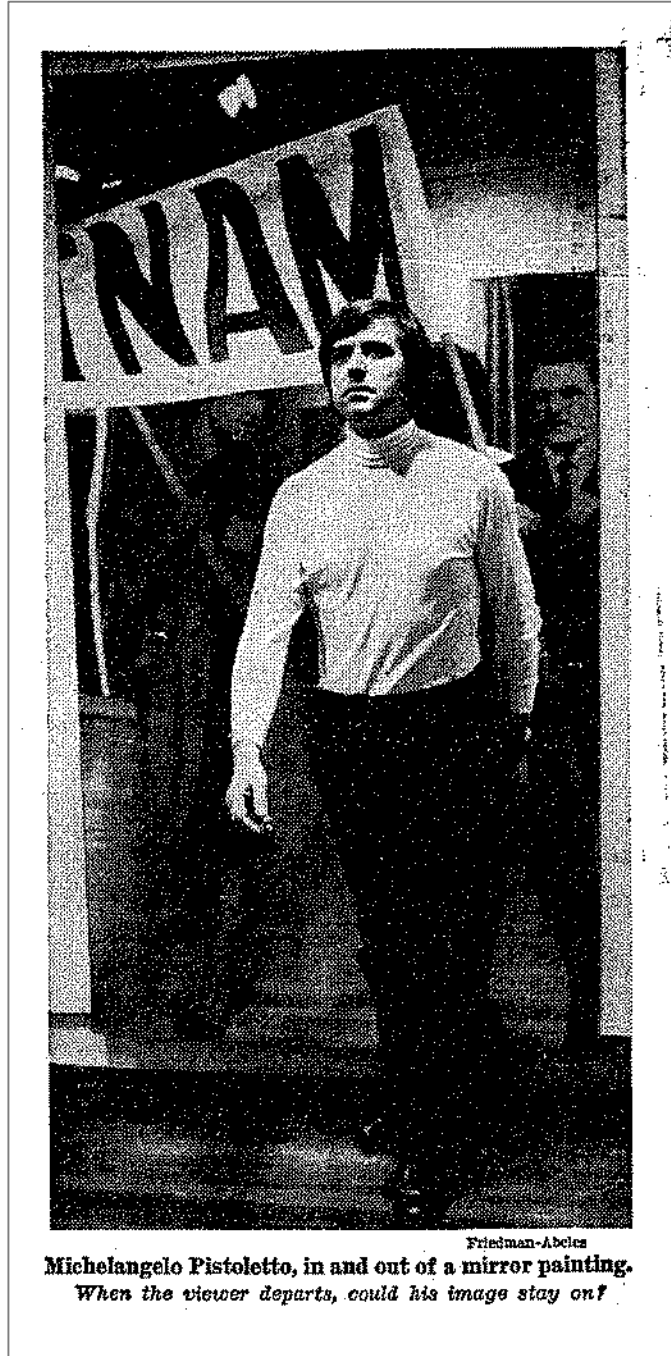
2.26. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Ragazzo (Boy)*, 1965. Painted tissue paper on polished stainless steel, 86 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 46 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (220 x 120 cm.) Image: *From One to Many*, 217 (plate 33). Reproduced with the artist's permission.



2.27. Renato Rinaldi, source photograph for *Ragazzo* (Boy; 1965), *Biennale 66* (Biennial 66; 1966), *Due persone che passano* (Two People Passing By; 1966). In *From One to Many*, 158 (fig. 141). Reproduced with the artist's permission.



- 2.28. Renato Rinaldi, detail (banner), digitally inverted by the author, source photograph for *Ragazzo* (Boy), *Biennale 66* (Biennial 66), and *Due persone che passano* (Two People Passing By), Milan, 1965. The banner reads: *Contributo della Lombardia alla Resistenza* (Lombardy's contribution to the Resistance). The photograph captures a rally commemorating Lombard Communist participation in the anti-fascist Resistance. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



- 2.29. Photograph of Michelangelo Pistoletto with *Vietnam*, 1965, on occasion of his exhibit at the Kornblee Gallery, New York, held April 22–May 18, 1967. Photograph by Friedman-Abeles (Leo and Sy Friedman, Joseph Abeles). Published in the *New York Times* review of the exhibition, captioned: “Michelangelo Pistoletto, in and out of a mirror painting. *When the viewer departs, does his image stay on?*” *New York Times*, April 30, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.



2.30. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *La Stufa di Oldenburg* (Oldenburg's Stove), 1965. Painted tissue paper on polished stainless steel, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (200 x 120 cm.) Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.

2.31. Claes Oldenburg, *Stove (Assorted Food on Stove)*, 1962. Muslin and jute fiber papier-mâché, enamel paint, plaster, 57 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (146 x 72 x 70 cm.)



- 2.32. Source photograph for Michelangelo Pistoletto, *La Stufa di Oldenburg* (Oldenburg's Stove), 1965: Photograph of Claes Oldenburg, *Stove (Assorted Food on Stove)*, 1962, published in *L'Europeo* 20, no. 29 (July 19, 1964). Captioned: *Contro chi vogliono protestare i roast-beef finti e la cucina vera?* (Against whom do they want to protest—fake roast beef and the real stove?)



2.33. Photograph of *Scultura di Chamberlain*, 1965, with *Due persone che passano*, 1966, reflected on its surface. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. In *Michelangelo Pistoletto* (Milan: Galleria Sperone, November 8–, 1966; precise closing date unknown). Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



2.34. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Man with Chamberlain Sculpture*, 1965. Oil and graphite on tissue paper on polished stainless steel, 86 x 47 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (220 x 120 cm.) Photograph by Rich Sanders, Des Moines, Iowa. Courtesy of the Des Moines Art Center.

LA BIENNALE



JOHN CHAMBERLAIN, *Scultura in metallo dipinto*

Quest'anno la rassegna veneziana ha suscitato polemiche come da tempo il mondo artistico non conosceva. Abbiamo chiesto un giudizio sulla Biennale e sulla pop-art americana a critici e pittori italiani di tutte le tendenze

- 2.35. Source image for *Scultura di Chamberlain* and *Man with Chamberlain Sculpture* (both 1965), in “La Biennale,” *La Biennale di Venezia* 14, no. 54 (December 1964). Caption: *Quest'anno la rassegna veneziana ha suscitato polemiche come da tempo il mondo artistico non conosceva. [...].* (This year the Venetian exposition has caused debates like the art world hasn't known for some time. [...].” Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



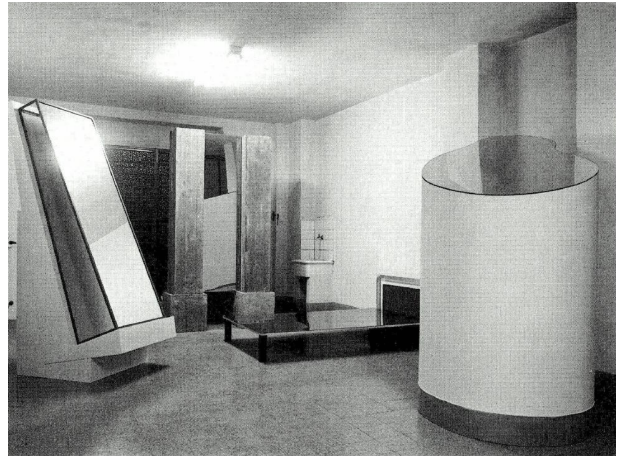
2.36. Photograph of *Due persone che passano* (1965) with *Scultura di Chamberlain* (1965) reflected on its surface. In *Michelangelo Pistoletto* (Milan: Galleria Sperone, November 8, 1966), photograph by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



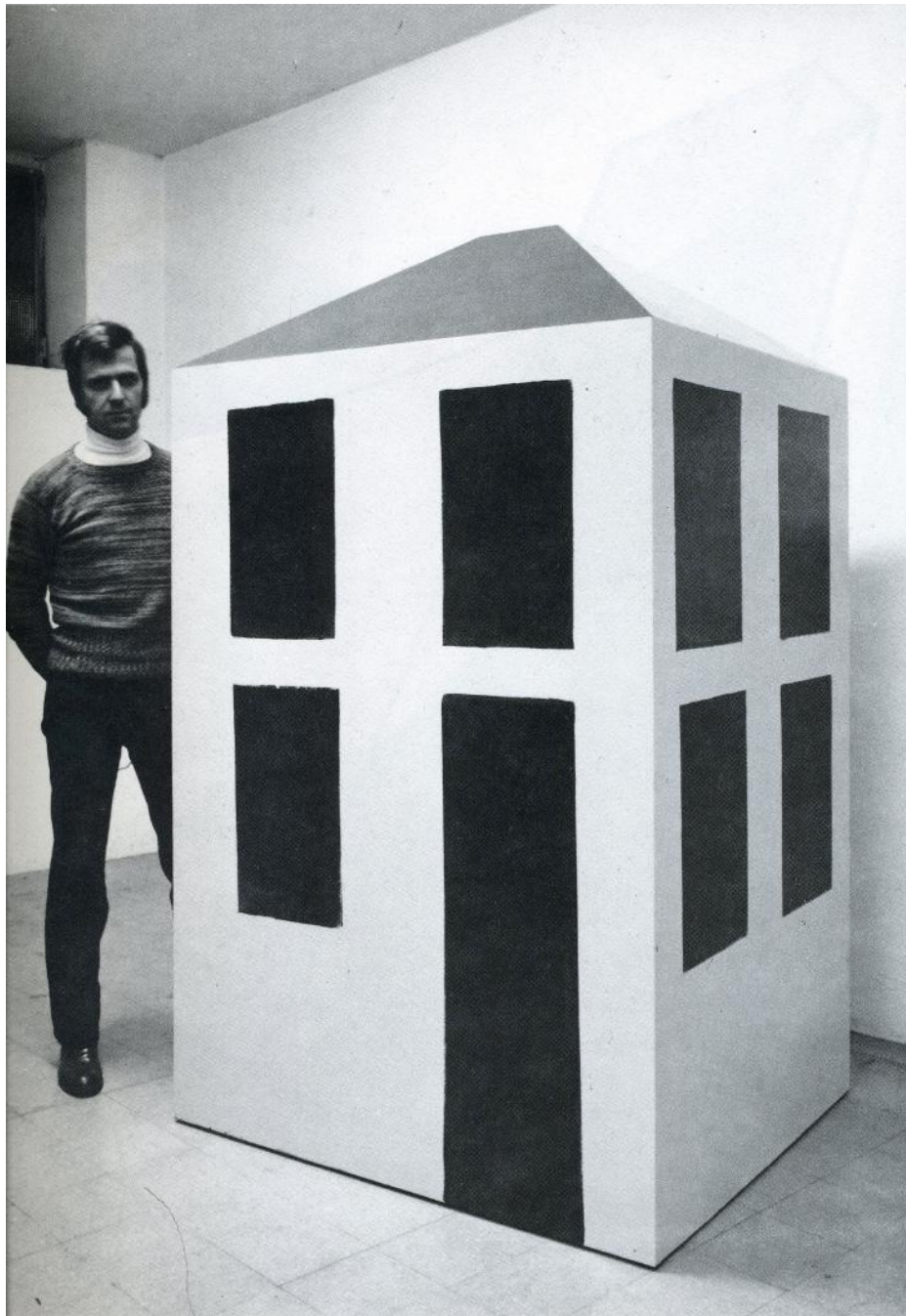
2.37. Michelangelo Pistoletto, photographic self-portrait with his *Stufa di Oldenburg* (1966), Studio Pistoletto, Turin, 1966. Image source: *Pistoletto*, ed. Celant (Venice: Electa, 1976), 14 (plate 22). Reproduced with the artist's permission.



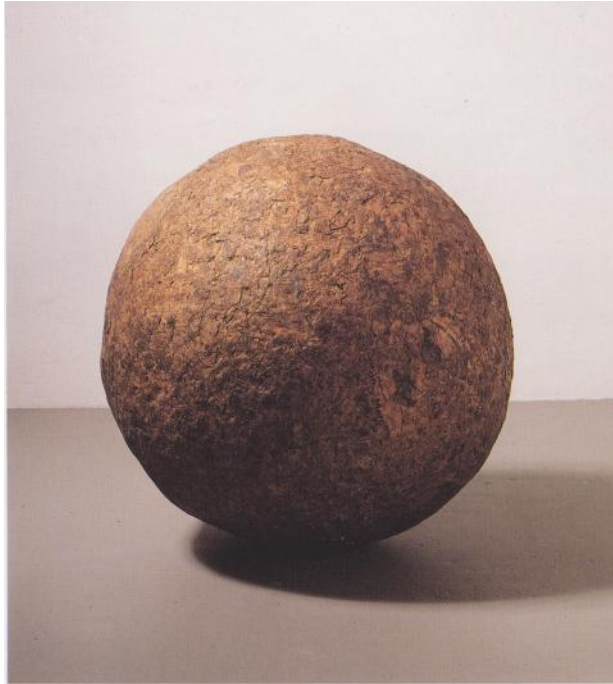
3.01. Historical site of Studio Pistoletto, via Carlo Reymond 13, Turin, and Fiat factory, Lingotto, as seen from studio building, corner of Carlo Reymond and Finalmarina, Turin. Photographs by the author, February 5, 2012.



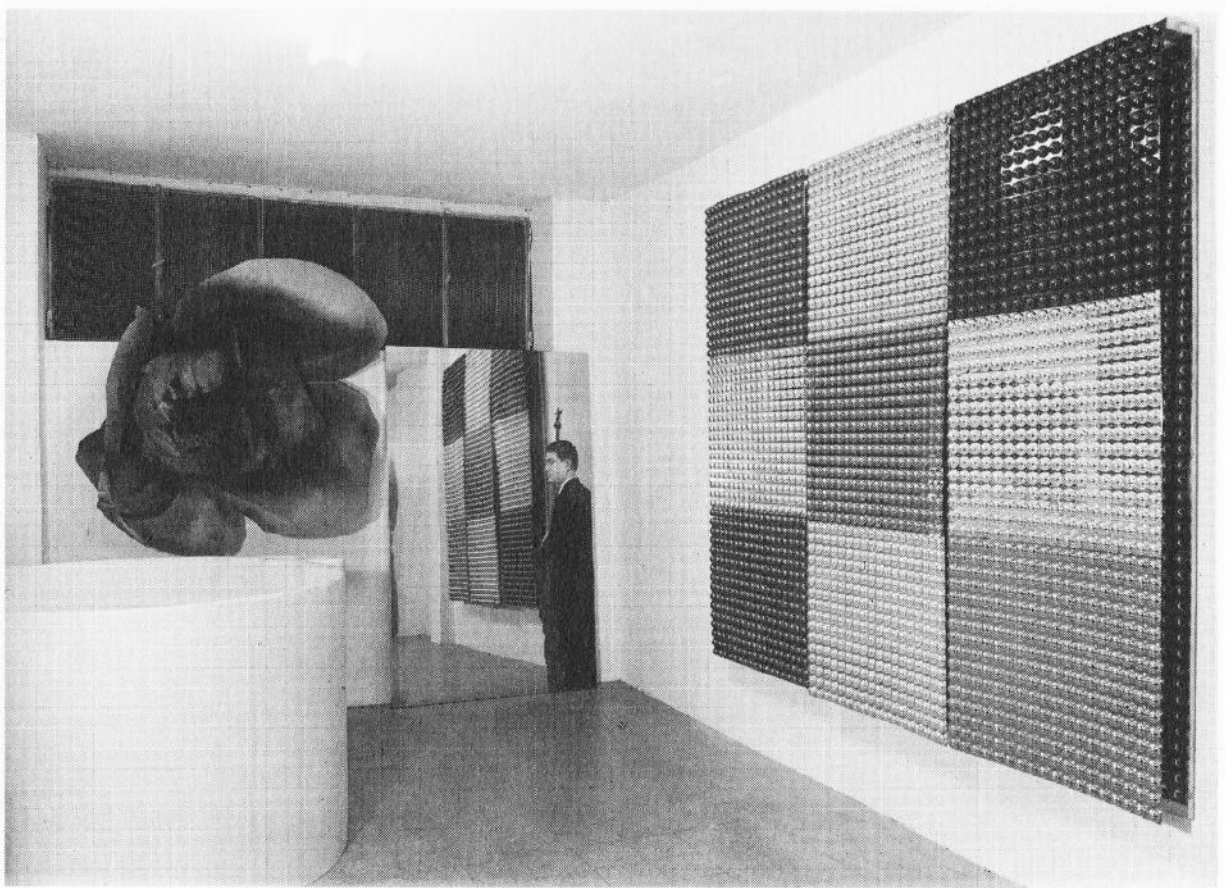
3.02. Exhibition views, Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Oggetti in meno* (Minus Objects; 1965–66), two installations, Studio Pistoletto, January, 1966. *Top row*, first installation; *bottom row*, second installation. Photographs by Paolo Bressano. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



3.03. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Casa a misura d'uomo* (Man-Sized House), 1965. Wood and lacquer, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (200 x 100 x 120 cm.) Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Reproduced with permission of the artist.



- 3.04. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Sfera di giornali* (Newspaper Sphere), 1966. Pressed newspaper, papier-mâché. 39 3/8 in. diam. (100 cm.) Photograph by Paolo Pellion. Image source: *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Oggetti in meno* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1989), n.p. Reproduced with permission of the artist.
- 3.05. Michelangelo Pistoletto, detail, *Sfera di giornale* (Newspaper Sphere), 1966. In *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Année 1. Paradis sur terre*, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photograph by the author, May 20, 2013. Reproduced with permission of the artist.



3.06. Studio Pistoletto, *Comizio II* (Rally II), with the *Oggetti in meno* (first installation), 1966. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Image source: *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Oggetti in meno* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1989), n.p. Reproduced with permission of the artist.



3.07. Federico Fellini, *La Dolce Vita*, 1960. (Film still.)



3.08. Ermanno Olmi, *Il Posto*, 1961. (Film still.)

Moderna
per la donna moderna,
la NECCHI è la macchina per cucire
del nostro tempo.
Così preziosa, così completa,
così facile da usare,
così bella,
la NECCHI è indispensabile
e fa la casa più bella!

MODA PRATICA

In tutti i negozi NECCHI
i Supermodelli
GRAZIA-NECCHI
della collezione 1960/61
Costano solo L. 300

NECCHI oggi
NECCHI sempre

La NECCHI è stile

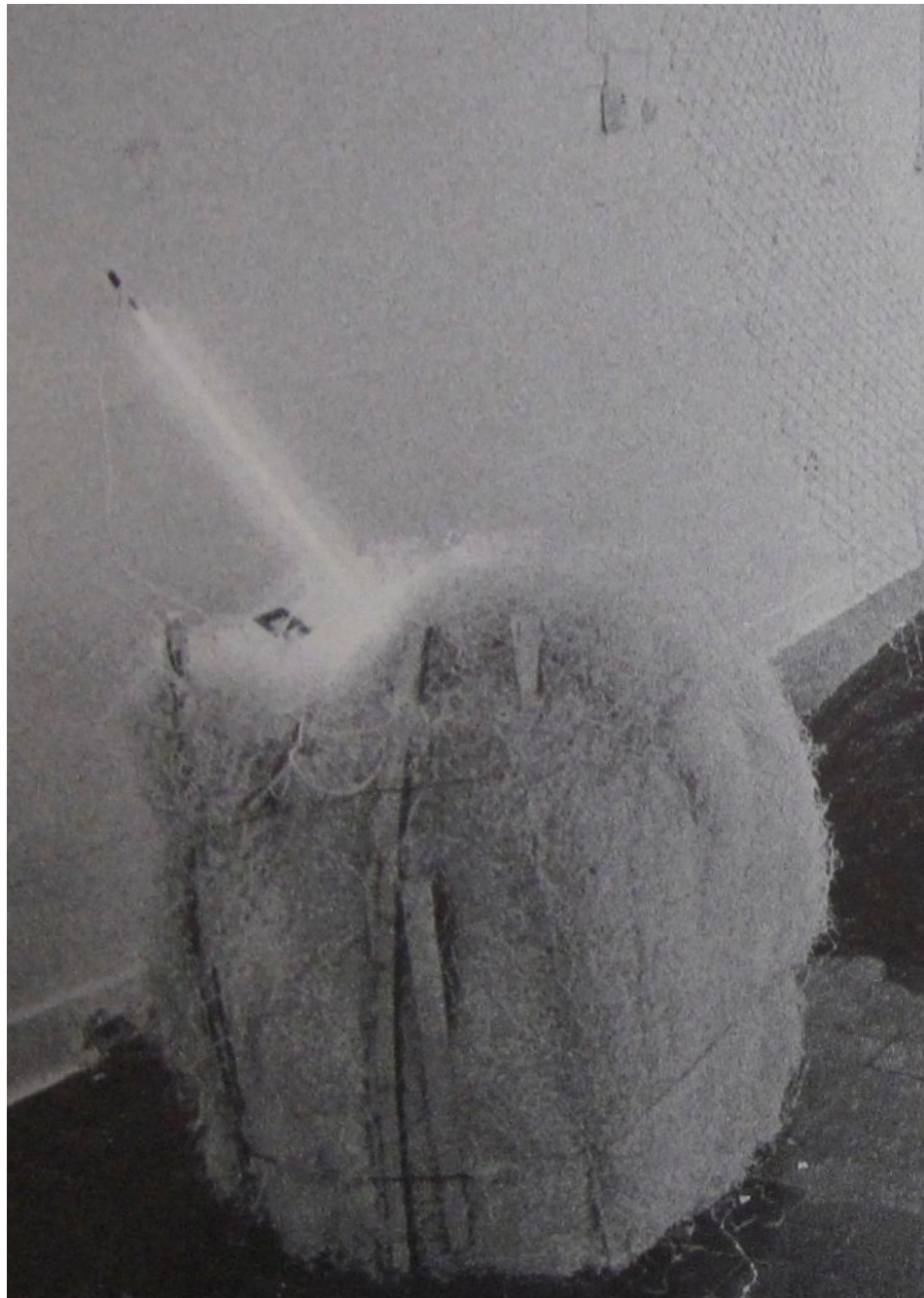


NECCHI

3.09. Necchi, *La Necchi è stile* (Necchi is Style), print advertisement, 1960.



- 3.10. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Vetrina* (Display Case), 1965–66. Wood, metal, paint, t-shirt, pants, boots (artist's own). jumpsuit 92 ½ x 39 3/8 x 31 ½ (235 x 100 x 80 cm.) *Left*, in *Studio Pistoletto*, photograph by Paolo Bressano (detail), 1966; *right*, in *From One to Many*, PMA, photograph by the author, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with permission of the artist.



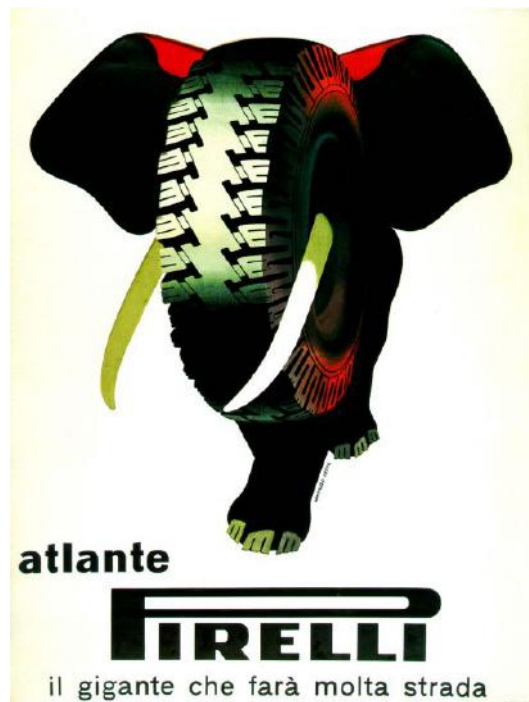
3.11. Mario Merz, *Trucioli* (Shavings), 1967–69. Wood shavings, fluorescent light tube, twine.). 59 x 31 ½ x 27 ½ in. (150 x 80 x 70 cm.) In *Mario Merz* (Rome: Galleria L'Attico, February 1969). Published in *Mario Merz*, ed. Celant (Milan: Mazzotta, 1983), 51 (plate 37).



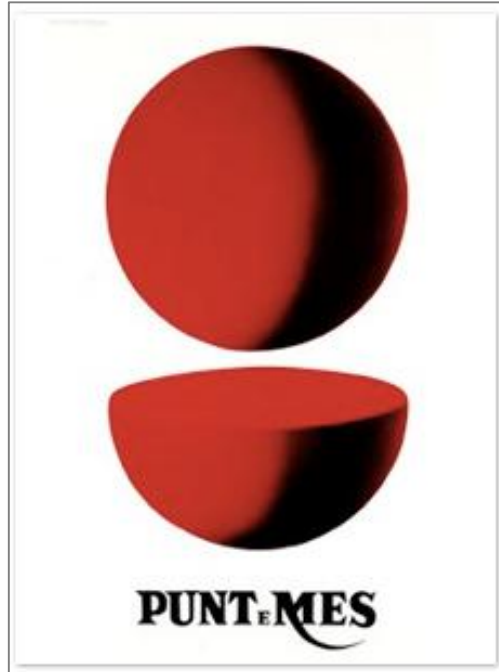
3.12. Mario Merz, *Igloo di Giap*, 1968. Iron infrastructure, plastic bags filled with clay, neon, batteries, accumulators, 47 ¼ x 78 ¾ in. (120 x 200 cm.) Photograph by the author, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, May 19, 2013. Collection Centre Georges Pompidou.



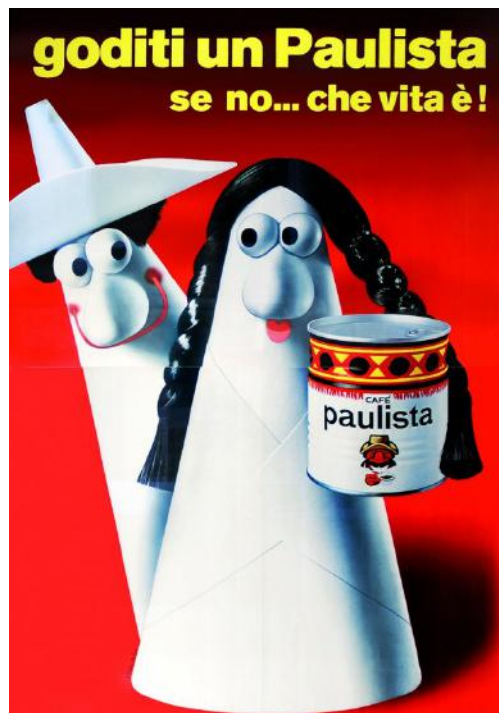
3.13. Jannis Kounellis, *Senza titolo (Cotoniera)* [Untitled (Cotton Container)], 1967. Steel, cotton. Image: Artstor.



3.14. Pirelli, *Atlante: Il gigante che farà molta strada* (Atlas: The giant that will take you far), print advertisement by Armando Testa, 1953. Collection Armando Testa.



3.15. Punt e Mes, *Punt e Mes*, print advertisement by Armando Testa, 1960. Collection Armando Testa.



3.16. Paulista (Lavazza), *Goditi un Paulista. Se no... che vita è!* (Taste a Paulista. Don't...and what life is that?), print advertisement by Armando Testa, 1964. Collection Armando Testa.

LA TECNICA DELLA SUGGESTIONE

Un cartellonista torinese illustra i segreti della sua professione



L'artista disegna e lavora



Tardi, magari altri è tardi

Armando Testa è un uomo che pare più un ingegnere che un pubblicitario. È un uomo che, con la sua mente, ha creato un mondo nuovo. Un mondo in cui la pubblicità è una scienza esatta, una tecnica precisa. Un mondo in cui il cartellonista è un artigiano che lavora con la mente e con la mano.

Armando Testa è un uomo che ha fatto della pubblicità una professione seria, una professione che richiede studio, lavoro e dedizione. È un uomo che ha capito che la pubblicità non è solo un'arte, ma anche una scienza. È un uomo che ha capito che il cartellonista non è solo un disegnatore, ma anche un ingegnere.

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UN RE BONACCIONE E ARGUTO FRA CELEBRITA' DI IERI E DI OGGI

Il mondo attuale vive un periodo di crisi, un periodo di incertezze e di angosce. In questi tempi, il re Bonaccione è un personaggio che ha una grande importanza. È un re che è stato celebrato in questi giorni, un re che ha fatto un grande lavoro.

Bonaccione è un re che è stato celebrato in questi giorni, un re che ha fatto un grande lavoro. È un re che è stato celebrato in questi giorni, un re che ha fatto un grande lavoro. È un re che è stato celebrato in questi giorni, un re che ha fatto un grande lavoro.

Bonaccione è un re che è stato celebrato in questi giorni, un re che ha fatto un grande lavoro. È un re che è stato celebrato in questi giorni, un re che ha fatto un grande lavoro. È un re che è stato celebrato in questi giorni, un re che ha fatto un grande lavoro.



... il re di bonna



Cos'è Napoleone... prima di Waterloo



«Viva V.E.R.D.I., Maestri!»



«Al gallo, che c'è, diamo un po' di vita»

In pubblicità la logica è sconfitta dal fascino curioso del paradosso

La pubblicità moderna è un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso.

La pubblicità moderna è un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso.

La pubblicità moderna è un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso. È un'arte che si basa sul paradosso.

La disavventura di un angioletto troppo ghiotto

Un uomo dallo strano naso e la polvere che non teme l'umidità. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza.

Un uomo dallo strano naso e la polvere che non teme l'umidità. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza.

Un uomo dallo strano naso e la polvere che non teme l'umidità. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza. È un uomo che ha una grande importanza.



«Perfetto: non vi pare?»



«Due velli, due mazzette, due mazzette: un solo stivale»

NON TEME L'UMIDITÀ

La Salitina - M. A. è un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità. È un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità. È un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità.

La Salitina - M. A. è un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità. È un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità. È un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità.

La Salitina - M. A. è un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità. È un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità. È un prodotto che protegge la pelle dall'umidità.

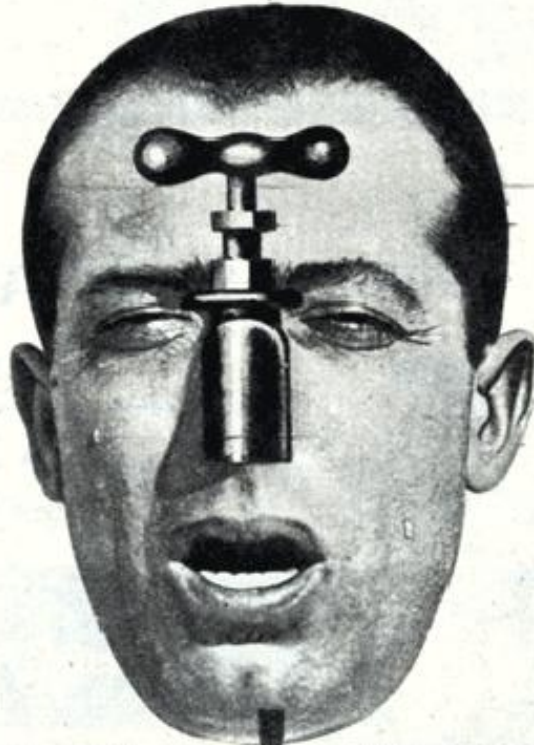


«Cosa che possono capitare in un'angioletto di carta come nella terra!»

3.17. L.A. "La tecnica della suggestione: Un cartellonista torinese illustra i segreti della sua professione" (The Technique of Suggestion: A Turinese poster artist illustrates the secrets of his profession), *Stampa Sera*, February 26, 1956. Archivio storico, *La Stampa*.

RAFFREDDORE

ACIS 84 STUDIO TESTA 13



ALGO!STOP

(fa bene in fretta)



Mal di testa?
ALGOSTOP



Mal di denti?
ALGOSTOP



Influenza?
ALGOSTOP



Reumatismi?
ALGOSTOP

È DOLCE E SI PRENDE COME UNA CARAMELLA
STABILIMENTO CHIMICO FARMACEUTICO MARCO ANTONETTO-TORINO

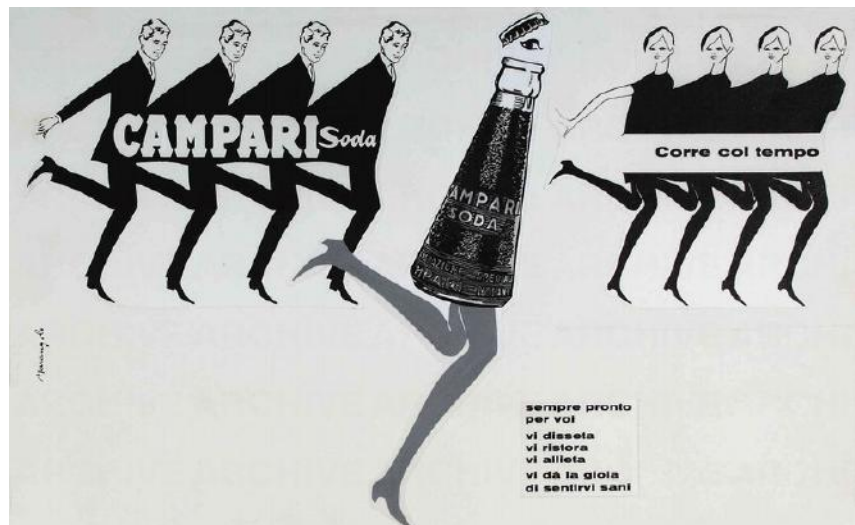
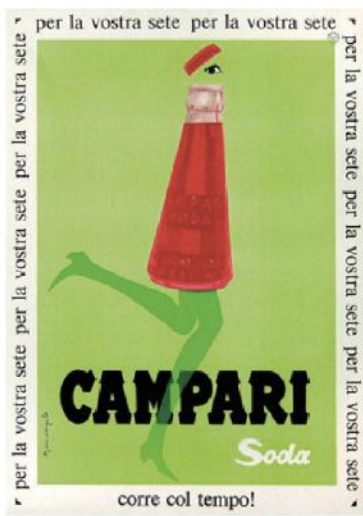
3.18. Algo-Stop, *Fa bene in fretta* (Feel better fast), print advertisement by Armando Testa, 1956. Archivio Storico del Progetto Grafico. Collection Armando Testa.



3.19. Visnova, *Cucite Visnova*, print advertisement by Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1958. In *Pistoletto*, eds. Celant and Gianelli (Florence: Electa, 1984), 24. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



3.20. Lebole, *Lanerossi*, print advertisement by Severo Pozzatti, 1959.



- 3.21. Campari, *Per la vostra sete, Campari corre col tempo!* (Campari satisfies your thirst for the long run!), print advertisement, and *Campari Soda: Corre col tempo*, study, both by Franz Marangolo, 1960. Sources (left to right): *Made in Italy: Rethinking A Century of Italian Design*, eds. Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 10 (fig. 04). Archivio Massimo e Sonia Cirulli.

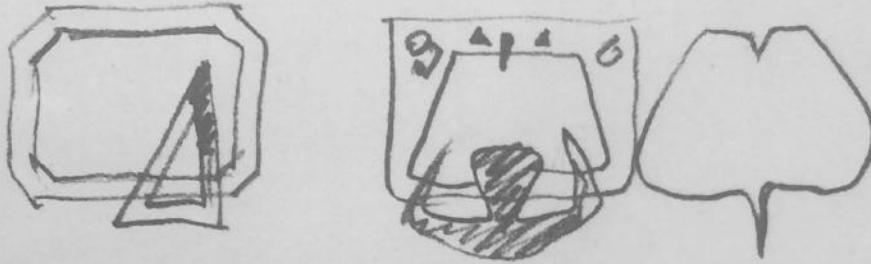


3.22. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Bagno* (Bath), 1965–66. Fiberglass, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (60 x 200 x 100 cm.) Photographs by the author, PMA, October 30, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.

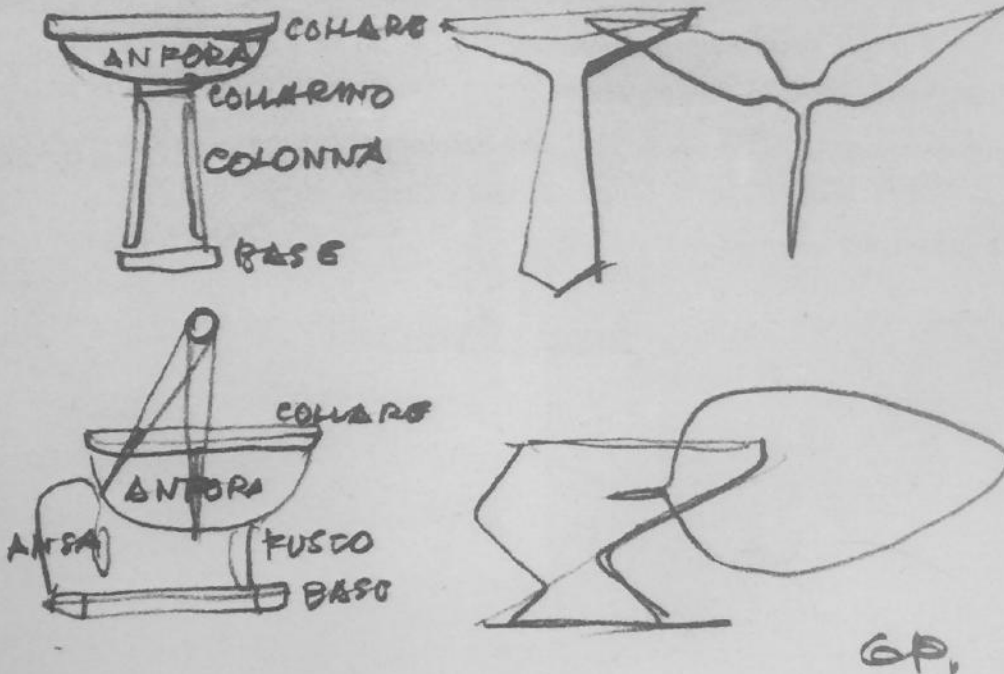


3.23. Gio Ponti, with George Labalme, Giancarlo Pozzi, and Alberto Rosselli. *Serie P* (P Series) bathroom fixtures, designed for Ideal Standard, Milan, 1953. Redesigned, 1962. Vitreous china.

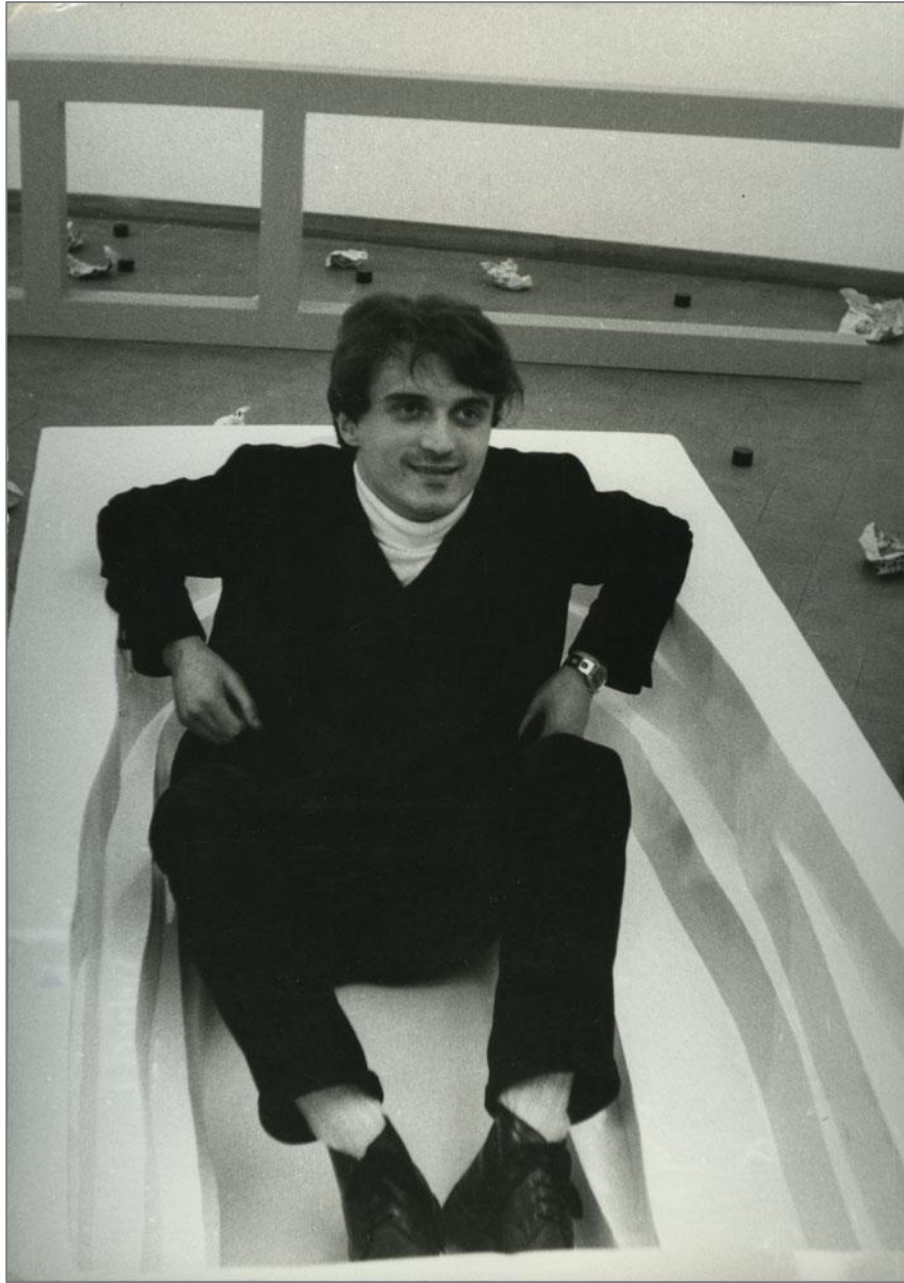
DA UNA FORMA GEOMETRICA
AD UNA FORMA NATURALE



DA UNA FORMA ARCHITETTONICA
AD UNA FORMA NATURALE



3.24. Gio Ponti, study sheet, *Serie P* bathroom fixtures, *Ideal Standard*, early 1950s.



3.25. Photograph of Emilio Prini in *Bagno*, ca. 1970.



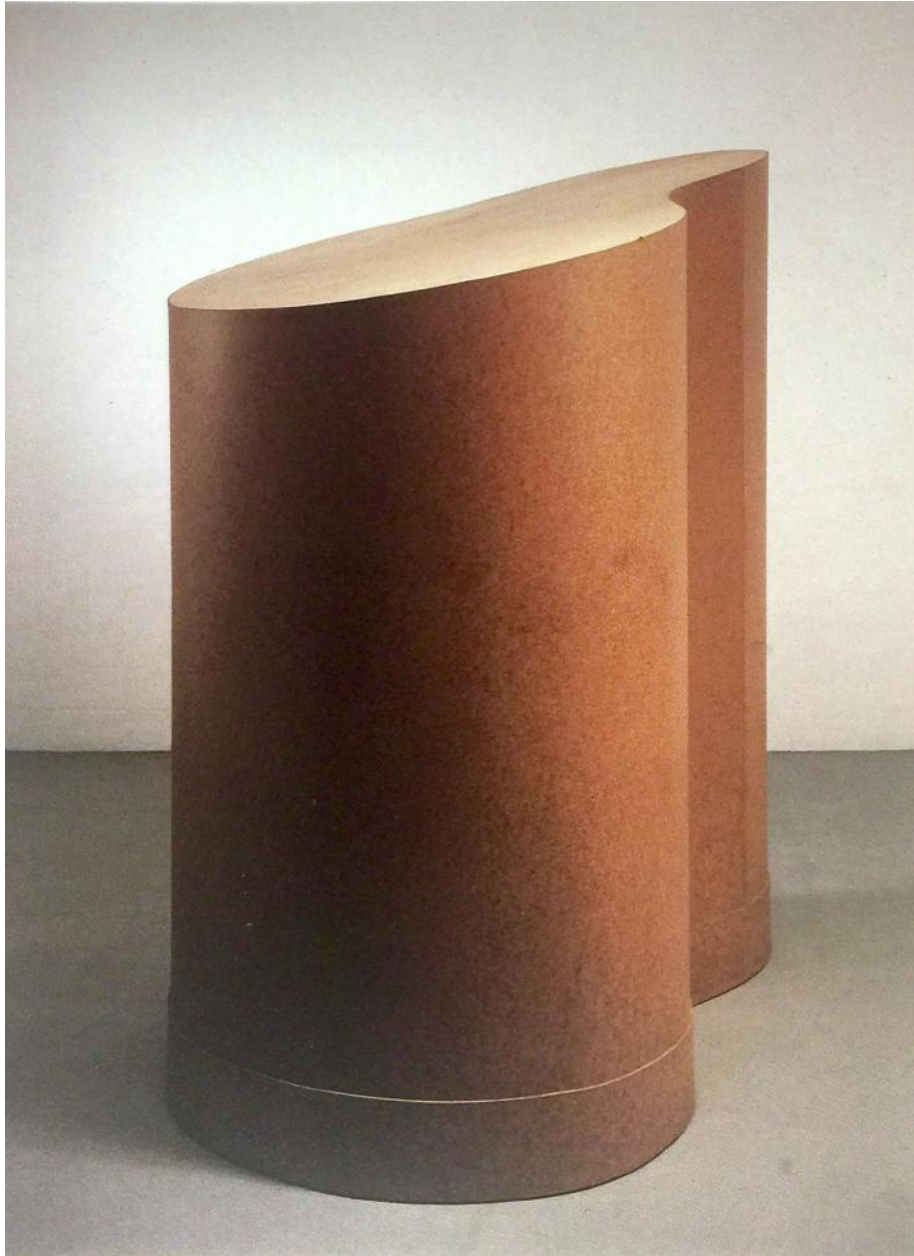
3.26. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Quadro da pranzo* (Lunch Painting), 1965. Wood, nails. 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (200 x 200 x 50 cm.) Photographs by the author, PMA, October 31, 2010. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



3.27. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Casa a misura d'uomo* (Man-Sized House), 1965. Photograph by the author, *From One to Many*, PMA, October 31, 2010. [Also see 3.03.] Reproduced with the artist's permission.



3.28. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Sarcafago* (Sarcophagus), 1965. Wood, cement, mica, $59 \frac{7}{8} \times 39 \frac{3}{8} \times 29 \frac{7}{8}$ (152 x 200 x 76 cm.) Photograph by Paolo Pellion. Image source: *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Oggetti in meno* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1989), n.p. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



3.29. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Corpo a pera* (Pear-Shaped Body), 1965–66. Masonite, chipboard, 82 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 69 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (210 x 177 x 120 cm.) Photograph by Paolo Pellion. Image source: *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Oggetti in meno* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1989), n.p. Reproduced with the artist's permission.



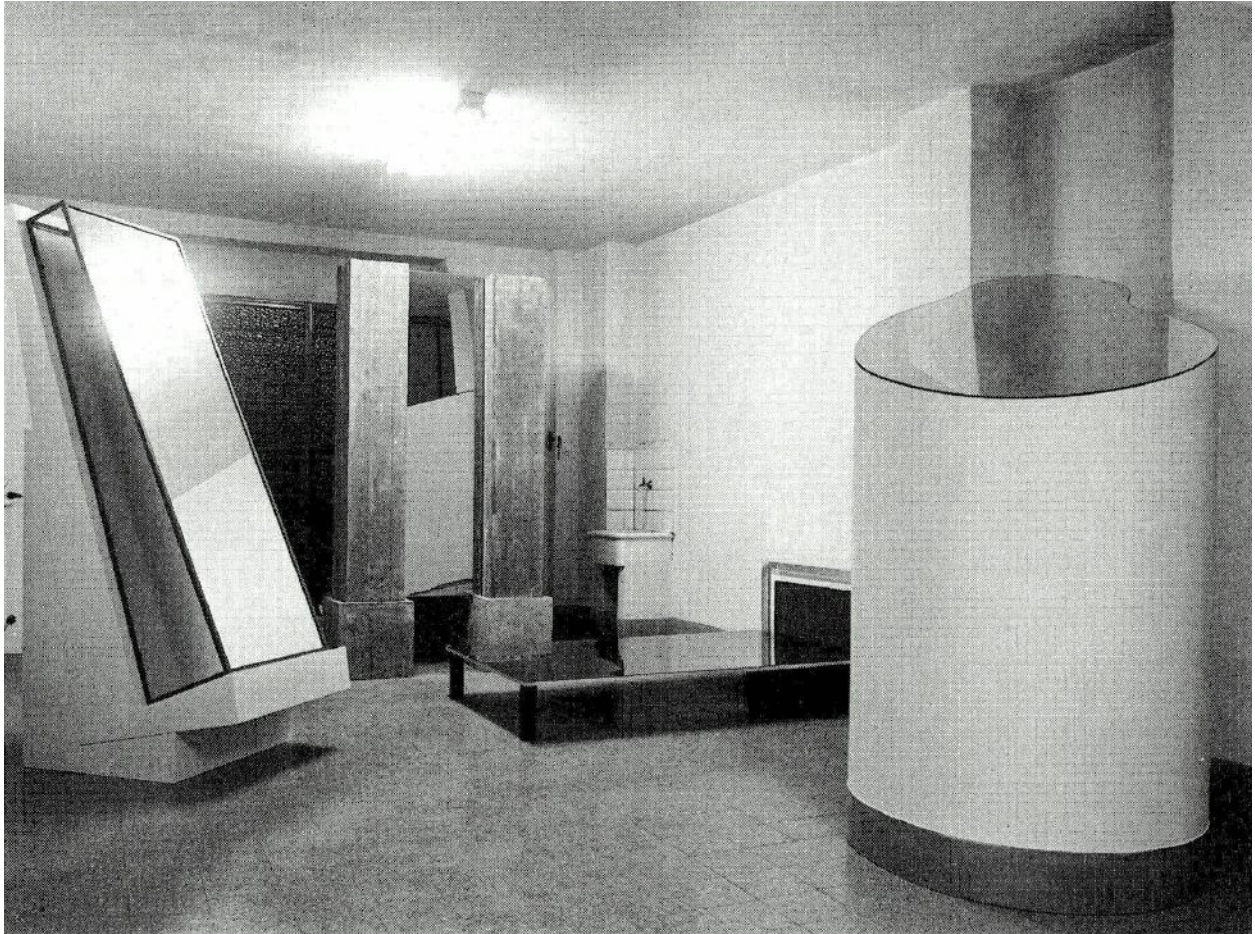
3.30. Piero Manzoni, *Fiato d'artista* (Artist's Breath), from the *Corpi d'aria* (Bodies of Air) series, 1960. Balloon, artist's breath, wood, twine, glue, dimensions variable.



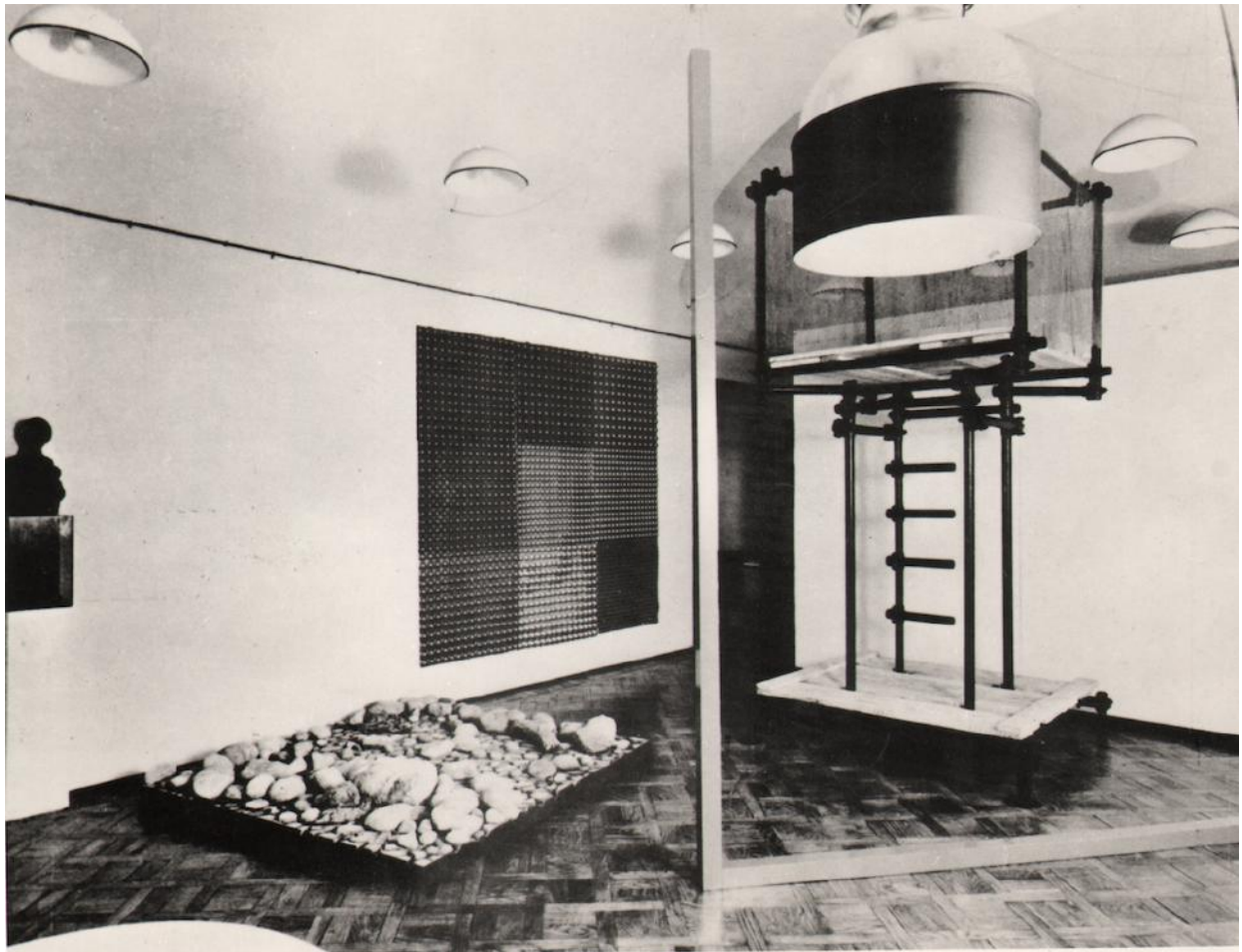
3.31. Joseph Beuys, *Stuhl mit Fett* (Fat Chair), 1963. Wire, wooden chair, fat, 37 ¼ x 16 3/8 in. (94 ½ x 41 2/3 cm.)



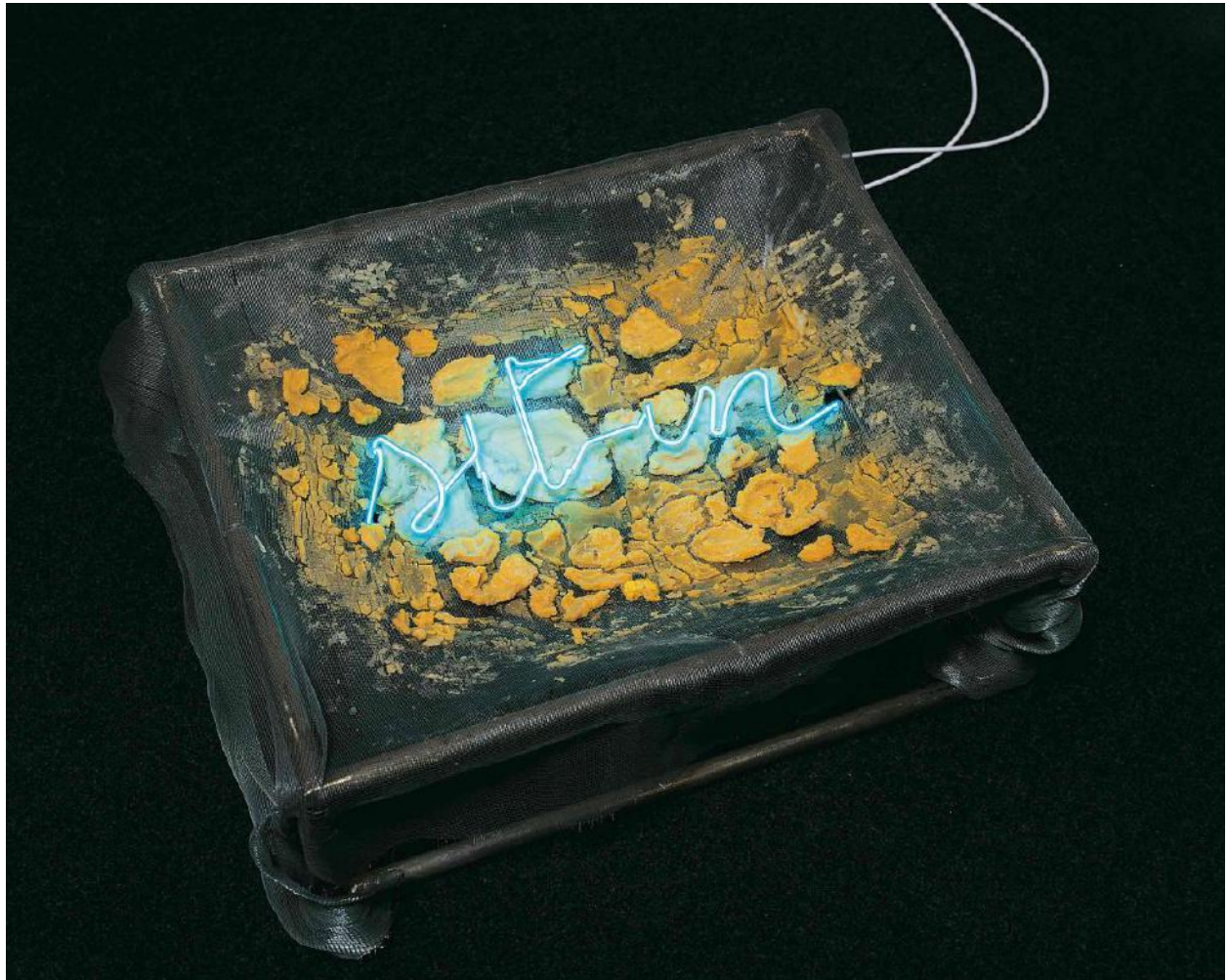
3.32. Photograph of Michelangelo Pistoletto with *Corpo a pera-specchio* (Pear-Shaped Body-Mirror), 1966. Mirror, Masonite, chipboard, $82 \frac{2}{3} \times 69 \frac{2}{3} \times 47 \frac{1}{4}$ in. (210 x 177 x 120 cm.) Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Reproduced with permission of the artist.



3.33. Exhibition view, *Minus Objects (Versions)*, second installation, 1966. Photograph by Paolo Bressano. Reproduced with permission of the artist.



3.34. Exhibition view, *Arte abitabile* Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin, July 1966. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



3.35. Mario Merz, *Sit-in*, 1968. Wax, neon, metal structure and mesh, neon, 7 1/8 x 22 x 25 1/4 in. (18 x 56 x 64 cm.) Photograph by Paolo Pellion. Merz Collection, courtesy Archivio Merz.



3.36. Giovanni Anselmo, *Senza titolo (Struttura che mangia)* [Untitled (Eating Structure)], 1968. Granite, copper wire, lettuce, sawdust. 27 ½ x 11 ¾ x 11 ¾ in.



3.37. Exhibition view, “La Protesta dei giovani” (section), *Grande numero* (exhibition), XIV Triennale, Milan, 1968. Photograph by Olimpia Publifoto. Image: *Zero to Infinity*, 58.



3.38. Exhibition view, *Deposito d'Arte Presente* (Warehouse of Present Art), Turin, December, 1967. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



3.39. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *La fine di Pistoletto* (The End of Pistoletto), Piper Pluriclub, Turin, March 6, 1967. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



3.40. *Lo Zoo (The Zoo)*, *La ricerca dell'uomo nero (Research of the Minus Man)*, Corniglia (Cinque Terre), Italy, Summer, 1969. Photograph by Paolo Mussat Sartor. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.



4.01. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968, 11 min., 16mm, black and white. (Film still.)



4.02. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film still.)



4.03. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film stills.)



4.04. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film stills.)



4.05. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film still.)



4.06. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film stills.)
This scene takes place in Piazza C.L.N. Umberto Baglioni's sculptures of the allegorical figures of the Rivers Po and Dora Riparia are in the background.



4.07. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film stills.)



4.08. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film still.)



4.09. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film still.)



4.10. Ugo Nespolo and Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, 1968. (Film still.)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Original Texts by Michelangelo Pistoletto, Author's Translations

A.1. Michelangelo Pistoletto, “Plexiglasses” (Turin: September 10, 1964), trans. by the author. Originally published in Italian as “I plexiglass,” in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: I plexiglass* (Turin: Gian Enzo Sperone—Arte Moderna, 1964), n.p.

Note: The only existing translation of this essay was authored by Paul Blanchard in 1988 for the English publication of Pistoletto’s writing anthology, *Pistoletto: A Minus Artist* (Florence, Italy: hopefulmonster [sic], 1988), 229. Blanchard frequently wrote English translations of Italian artists’ texts for Italian publication house hopefulmonster [sic], now directed by Beatrice Merz. However, the Blanchard translation—entitled “Plexiglas” (Pistoletto, 1988) or “Plexiglass” (Stiles, Selz (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 1996) depending on the printing—has many errors. Because the Blanchard translation has been reprinted in later exhibition catalogues and anthologies, these errors have become part of the artist’s historical record. In order to avoid the problems of using Blanchard’s translation, I am providing my own translation here.

Plexiglasses

The wall exists as the start and the end of this story of mine. It’s on walls that paintings are always hung, but it’s on the same walls that mirrors are also placed. I believe that man’s first real figurative experience is recognizing his own image in the mirror, which is the fiction that fits closest to reality. But soon after, the reflection in the mirror will start to send back the same unknowns, the same questions, the same problems that reality posed; unknowns and questions that man is pushed into putting forth once again to the paintings.

My first question on canvas was the reproduction of my image; art had just been accepted as a second reality.

My work for a time intuitively consisted of the effort to bring my two images closer together, the one proposed by the mirror and the one proposed by me.

The conclusion was the superimposition of the picture on the mirror: the picture overlaps and sticks to the image of reality.

The figurative object born thereof gives me the possibility to pursue my inquiry inside of the painting as within life, seeing that the two things are figuratively connected. In fact, I find myself inside the painting beyond the hole in the wall made by the mirror, even if not materially. Or better, since it’s physically impossible for me to go into it, in order to investigate within the structure of art I have to make the painting go out into reality, creating the fiction of finding myself beyond the mirror (underlining original).

These years, it’s easy to mistake between real-object and art-object. A “thing” is not art; the idea expressed by the same “thing” can be (underlining original).

Aesthetics and reality can be mutually identified, but with each staying in its autonomous life. They cannot stand-in one for the other without one of the two giving up its need to exist. It's for this reason that I'm concluding this presentation of my work staying with the idea of the wall. Because to the idea of the wall can be attached the idea of the painting to which can be linked the idea of a subject.

At this time the "thing" for me is the structure of figurative expression, which I've accepted as reality. The physical invasion of the painting into the real environment, bringing the representations of the mirror with it, allows me to introduce myself among the broken-down elements of figuration.

A.2. Michelangelo Pistoletto, “I plexiglass” (Turin: September 10, 1964), in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: I plexiglass* (Turin: Gian Enzo Sperone—Arte Moderna, October 1964), n. p. Courtesy of the Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



Torino, 10 settembre 1964

La parete esiste come principio e come fine di questa mia storia. Sulle pareti si appendono sempre i quadri, ma è sulle stesse pareti che si mettono anche gli specchi. Credo che la prima vera esperienza figurativa dell'uomo sia il riconoscere la propria immagine nello specchio, che è la finzione più aderente alla realtà. Ma subito dopo il riflesso dello specchio incomincerà a rimandare le stesse incognite, le stesse domande e gli stessi problemi che ci pone la realtà; incognite e *questioni* che l'uomo è spinto a riproporre sui quadri.

La mia prima *questione* sulla tela è stata la riproduzione della mia immagine, appena accettata l'arte come una seconda realtà.

Il mio lavoro per un periodo è consistito intuitivamente nel tentativo di avvicinare le mie due immagini, quella proposta dallo specchio e quella proposta da me. La conclusione è stata la sovrapposizione del quadro allo specchio: la pittura si sovrappone e aderisce all'immagine della realtà.

L'oggetto figurativo che ne nasce mi dà la possibilità di proseguire la mia indagine all'interno del quadro come all'interno della vita, visto che le due cose sono figurativamente legate. Infatti mi trovo nel quadro, oltre il muro bucato dallo specchio, anche se non materialmente. Anzi, siccome fisicamente mi è impossibile entrarci, per indagare nella struttura dell'arte devo far *uscire* il quadro nella realtà, creando la finzione di trovarmi oltre lo specchio.

È facile in questi anni equivocare sull'identità tra oggetto-reale e oggetto-arte. Una « cosa » non è arte: l'idea *espressa* della stessa « cosa » può esserlo.

Estetica e realtà si possono identificare, ma ciascuna restando nella sua vita autonoma. Non si possono sostituire l'una all'altra senza che una delle due rinunci alla sua necessità di esistere.

È perciò che finisco questa presentazione del mio lavoro rimanendo all'idea del muro. Perché all'idea del muro può stare attaccata l'idea del quadro, a cui può essere legata l'idea di un soggetto. In questo momento per me la « cosa » è la struttura dell'espressione figurativa, che ho accettato come realtà. L'invadenza fisica del quadro nell'ambiente reale, portando con sé le rappresentazioni dello specchio, mi permette di introdurre tra gli elementi scomposti della figurazione. **M. PISTOLETTO**



- A.3. Michelangelo Olivero-Pistoletto, “Abstraction” (Turin: 1957), trans. by the author. Originally published in Italian as “Astrattismo,” *Presenze: Bimestrale d’arte e cultura* 1, no. 3–4 (Dec./Jan, 1957-1958), n. p.

Abstraction

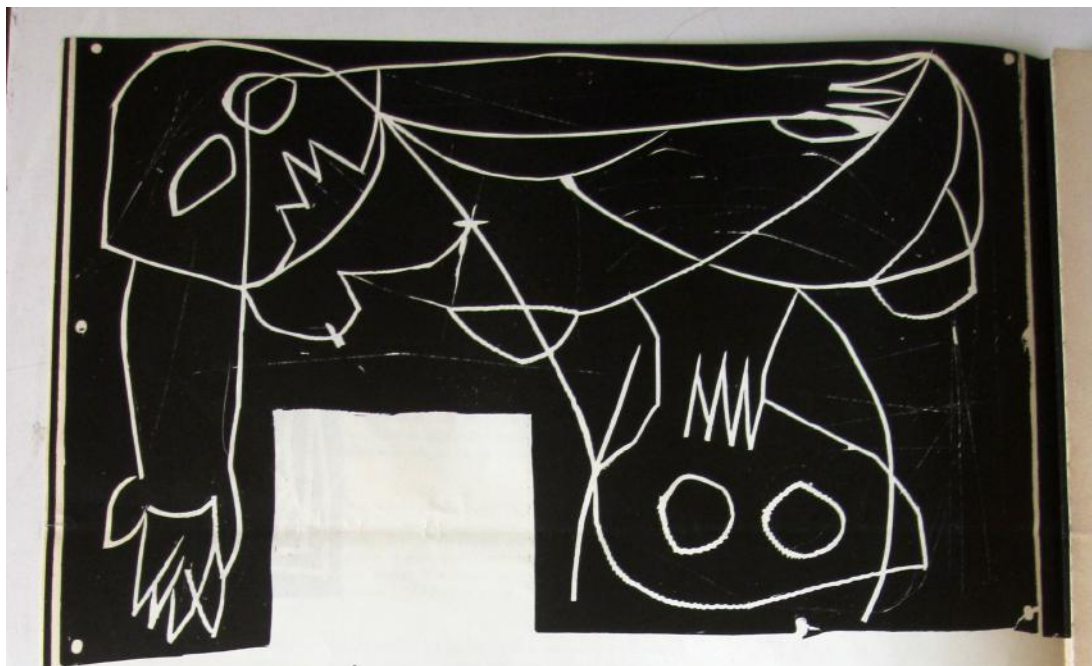
The current moment in painting is undoubtedly personified by abstraction: it seems to me then not yet outmoded to consider, with the expansion of this trend, its givenness to contribute to clarify a situation that’s often in large part misunderstood by society.

Abstraction finds, as is known, its basis in the spiritual demands of a Kandinsky and a Paul Klee, who were positioned as a consequence of movements that had rebelled against nineteenth-century mannerism to move toward penetrating the creative mystery, and therein made an ideology adapted to discover the essence in it. Little by little the creative impulse moved from a sentimental aspiration to an increasingly rational intention, until the same “abstract” term revealed the most adapted to signify an artistic movement whose protagonist element is thought. The wide incomprehension of abstraction existing still today derives from the error to seek in the abstract work a sentimentally natural meaning, removing the new meaning it had assumed by becoming a symbol of an ideology.

Certainly an ideology, making itself art’s expression, taking material form, so much more if it’s artistic expression that must in turn illuminate the idea—but the same matter, entering the service of rationality, undergoes an elevation, in as much as it unites its traditional meaning with that imposed by human will. The first abstract masters in fact having recognized that “the world in its current form is not the only one possible” (p. klee) [sic], themselves set out on the research of elementary forms to adapt them to the creation of a sphere recognizable only by intellect. In other words, man wants to know his own means and his own limits, for an interior deepening of the abilities that consist of exactly of rational human qualities.

If abstraction is therefore essentially thought, it’s absurd, as it happens for certain criticism, to tax it with the judgment of exteriority, unless it sees itself through painters who for their part demonstrate by holding onto it as a pure formal exercise, build on passive acceptance of others’ principles. In that case abstraction would be judged by the side of decadence, whose index is certainly the multiplication of painters of scarce original value.

A.4. Michelangelo Olivero-Pistoletto, "Astrattismo," *Presenze: Bimestrale d'arte e cultura* 1, no. 3-4 (December 1957/January 1958): n. p. Illustration by Aldo Conti.



Astrattismo

Il momento attuale in pittura è senza dubbio imperonato dall'astrattismo: mi pare quindi argomento non ancora sorpassato considerare, con l'espandersi di questa corrente, il suo portato interiore per contribuire a chiarificare una situazione intesa spesso in modo errato da gran parte della società.

L'astrattismo trova, come è noto, le sue basi nelle esigenze spirituali di un Kandinsky e di un Paul Klee, i quali lo hanno posto come conseguenza del movimento che si erano ribellati al manierismo ottocentista per tendere alla penetrazione del mistero creativo, e ne hanno fatto un'ideologia adatta a scoprirne l'essenza. L'impulso creativo è venuto man mano spostandosi dall'aspirazione sentimentale verso un'intenzione sempre più razionale, finché il termine stesso « astratto » si rivelato il più adatto a significare un movimento artistico il cui elemento protagonista è il pensiero. La larga incomprendimento dell'astrattismo esistente ancora oggi, deriva dall'errore di cercare nell'opera astratta un significato sentimentale naturale, tollendole il nuovo significato che essa ha assunto divenendo simbolo di un'ideologia.

Certamente un'ideologia, facendosi espressione d'arte, assume forma materiale, tanto più se è l'espressione artistica che deve a sua volta illuminare l'idea — ma la stessa materia, entrando a servizio della razionalità, subisce un'elevazione. In questo senso al suo tradizionale significato quello imposto dalla volontà umana. Avendo infatti riconosciuto i primi maestri astratti che « il mondo nella sua forma attuale non è l'unico possibile » (P. Klee), si sono posti alla ricerca delle elementarità formali, per adottarle alla creazione di una sfera riconoscibile dal solo intelletto. Insomma, l'uomo vuole saggiare le proprie possibilità e conoscere i propri limiti, per un approfondimento interiore i cui mezzi consistono appunto nelle qualità razionali umane.

Se l'astrattismo è dunque essenzialmente pensiero, è assurdo, come avviene per certa critica, tassarlo col giudizio dell'esteriorità, ameno che lo si veda attraverso pittori che dimostrino di ritenerlo da parte loro un puro esercizio formale, costruito sulla passiva accettazione di principi altrui. In tal

caso sarebbe giudicare l'astrattismo dal lato della decadenza, il cui indice è certamente il moltiplicarsi di pittori di scarso valore originale.

Le esperienze astratte, da Kandinsky a Mondrian alle realizzazioni di qualche artista più recente, condotte nella ricerca, esame e selezione di ogni elementarità formale ed ogni possibilità materiale, non vanno intese soltanto come bizzarre invenzioni decorative di buono o cattivo gusto — poiché nell'essenzialità del segno grafico, nella più ricca cromia e nell'assenza di colore o nella materia più casuale, l'astrattista scopre i mezzi espressivi e dà significato ad ogni forma — anche decorativa — a cui non vuole mutare nome, ma impadronirsene come di ogni elemento che si presti alla creazione. Quindi questo processo, anche se appare materializzato, è di origine puramente ideale ed interiore, perché spinto da un'alta necessità di conoscenza, o meglio di coscienza umana della materia.

Per chi poi vede nell'astrattismo il pericolo di un eccessivo cerebralismo a sfavore della spontaneità dei sentimenti, dirò, non certo per primo e spero nemmeno per ultimo, che nulla più della civiltà ha caricato la mente umana di sovrastrutture e costretto, atrofizzato, spersonalizzato molti sentimenti: è perciò che l'uomo ora cerca di rendersi conto dell'originalità creativa per poter esprimere genuinamente sentimenti purificati ed essenzializzati e per dare alla civiltà il suo giusto valore, usando ciò che di essa è base ed impulso: la ragione. Finché questo processo avviene come impulsiva reazione e spontanea ricerca rivelativa, rimane fuori da ogni giustificata attribuzione di cerebralismo.

Non deve essere privilegio di pochi il comprendere l'importanza interiore dell'esperienza astratta, poiché essa è nata da un'apertura intellettuale e spirituale destinata a dilatare le capacità razionali dell'umanità. Certamente, se la società non si renderà gradualmente conto della portata interiore di quest'arte, ne accetterà solo i lati decorativi, che sostituiranno quelli tradizionali e non conseguirà quell'evoluzione intellettuale che l'astrattismo propone.

Alla critica e alla filosofia l'arduo compito di rendere la civiltà sempre maggiormente consapevole di ciò.

MICHELANGELO OLIVERO-PISTOLETTO

- A.5. Michelangelo Olivero-Pistoletto, “Untitled” (Turin: 1957), trans. by the author. Originally published in Italian without a title, *Presenze: Foglio del Gruppo d’arte “l’arlecchino”* 1, no. 2 (July/August, 1957): n. p.**

Untitled

Within the cultural environment of the avant-garde, there is a certain pessimism for the current artistic moment. There is serious talk of a crisis of art and even of decadence.

Nevertheless, the majority of young painters—who are fascinated by the creations of the early masters of the modern current—are satisfied with taking up the masters’ constructions and retracing the forms therein.

Criticism in turn remains tied to the need to uphold the validity of all the elements that meet a certain level within the conventional measure of modern art. Criticism doesn’t conceal its pessimism, however, disapproving of the conspicuous multiplication of painters, the majority of whom have precious little to say.

Many intellectuals limit themselves in abstraction as the only way open to the spiritual needs of man today, carrying on with practices of ever more crumbling substance. Perhaps they will do so until overcoming the very same one?

Finally, in more diverse environments quite a lot of voices attribute the cause of the current surplus of painters to the presumed facility of modern art, for which many, through the mixture of the abstract and concrete, succeed in masking incompetence and insufficiency.

Across the various forms of minor art, the rules dictated by the modern aesthetic are spreading into civil humanity; but they could be used exclusively to substitute the preceding ones in a sterile alteration of formal values. If the new artists sketch themselves out on the premises of their predecessors, they can do nothing but arrest the living process of artistic evolution, and in its social function, their work will not demonstrate the outcome the preceding artist anticipated.

It is the current artist who must humanely fulfill the idealistic initiatives of modern art to reveal the validity within them.

Abstractionist ideology, latest deduction of modern art, cannot be repeated to itself without degenerating into rhetoric, the creative impulse that gave rise to it having stopped.

The social function of art must ensure that the new artist seeks in the practice of every modern tendency and abstract symbology, built on rationality and essentialism, the means to arrive at communications of human reality of an increasingly interior and spiritual nature, and at expressions of increasingly subtle and as yet undisclosed feelings. At the same time society, having assimilated the forms of modern art, will be able to understand through itself the new

contentual expressions that will tend toward forming a new tradition, based on more rational and open education.

The pessimisms for the current moment will dissolve when the same artistic and cultural environments put faith in the active possibilities for the moral rebuilding of our time.

And, in the field of painters, most of those who today flatter themselves that they uniquely express what's new through the means of little gimmicks of a technical, exterior, and superficial order will feel useless in the face of finely-tuned artistic intentions that are substantiated by a high level of content.

A.6. Michelangelo Olivero-Pistoletto, "Senza titolo" (Turin: 1957), *Presenze: Foglio del Gruppo d'arte "l'arlecchino"* 1, no. 2 (July/August, 1957), n. p.



ABB. POST. GR. IV° ANNO I° - N. 2 - LUGLIO-AGOSTO 1957

presenze

FOGLIO DEL GRUPPO D'ARTE "L'ARLECCHINO",
BIMESTRALE - DIREZIONE - REDAZIONE: VIA D. JOLANDA 16, TORINO (ITALIA)

Nell'ambiente culturale di avanguardia si registra un certo pessimismo sull'attuale momento artistico, si parla seriamente di crisi dell'arte e addirittura di decadenza.

Ciò nonostante gran parte dei giovani pittori, affascinati dalle creazioni dei primi maestri della corrente moderna, si accontentano di cimentarsi sulle loro costruzioni ricalcandone le forme.

La critica rimane a sua volta legata alla necessità di ritenere validi tutti gli elementi che raggiungono un certo livello nel metro convenzionale dell'arte moderna. Essa non nasconde però il suo pessimismo disapprovando l'apparente moltiplicazione di pittori, di cui la gran parte ha ben poco da dire.

Molti intellettuali si limitano nell'astrattismo come unica via aperta alle esigenze spirituali dell'uomo d'oggi, proseguendo in esperienze di sempre più sgratolata materia. Forse fino al superamento della medesima?

Infine nei più diversi ambienti parecchie voci addebitano la causa dell'attuale scredenza di pittori al carattere di presunta facilità dell'arte moderna, per cui molti, nella mescolanza di astratto e di concreto, riescono a mascherare l'incapacità e l'insufficienza.

Attraverso le molteplici forme di arte minore, le regole dettate dall'estetica moderna si stanno diffondendo nell'umanità civile; ma esse potrebbero servire esclusivamente a sostituire le precedenti in uno sterile mutamento di valori formali.

Se i nuovi artisti si schematizzano sui presupposti dei loro predecessori, non possono che arrestare il vivo processo di evoluzione artistica e nella funzione sociale la loro opera non dimostrerà le conseguenze che si aspettava l'artista precedente.

E l'artista attuale che deve realizzare umanamente le iniziative idealistiche moderne per dimostrarne la validità.

L'ideologia astrattista, ultima deduzione dell'arte moderna, non può essere ripetuta per se stessa senza degenerare in retorica, essendo cessato l'impulso creativo che l'ha originata.

La funzione sociale dell'arte deve far sì che il nuovo artista cerchi nelle esperienze di ogni tendenza moderna e nella simbologia astratta, costruita sulla razionalità e l'essenzialità, i mezzi per giungere a comunicazioni di realtà umana dal carattere sempre più interiore e spirituale, o espressioni di sentimenti sempre più sottili, non ancora rivelati. Nel contempo la società, avendo assimilato le forme moderne, sarà in grado di comprendere attraverso ad esse le nuove espressioni contenutistiche che tenderanno alla formazione di una nuova tradizione, basata su una educazione più razionale ed aperta.

I pessimismi sul momento attuale si dissolveranno quando gli stessi ambienti artistici e culturali crederanno nelle possibilità attive di riedificazione morale del nostro tempo.

E, nel campo dei pittori, gran parte di quelli che oggi si illudono di esprimere del nuovo unicamente per mezzo di trovate di ordine tecnico, esteriore, superficiale, si sentiranno inutili di fronte a ben precise intenzioni artistiche sostanziate di un alto contenuto.

MICHELANGELO OLIVERO-PISTOLETTO

SACERDOTE - Dipinto cm. 120 x 200 di MICHELANGELO OLIVERO - PISTOLETTO

- A.7. Michelangelo Pistoletto, "Minus Objects" (Turin: 1966), trans. by the author. Originally published in Italian as "Oggetti in meno" by the author; first reprinted in *Michelangelo Pistoletto*, ed. Germano Celant, Edizioni di arte contemporanea, no. 2 (Genoa: Galleria La Bertesca; Masnata Trentalance; 1966), 13–16.

Minus Objects

In March of 1962 I exhibited the first mirror painting, entitled *The Present*, at the Turin Club.ⁱ The painted man came forward as if he were alive in the live space of the environment; but the real protagonist was the relationship of instantaneity that was created between the viewer, his reflection, and the painted figure in every "present" movement that made the past and the future converge within it, as much as to cast their existence into doubt: it was the dimension of time.

It seems to me with my recent works that I've gone into the mirror, that I've actively entered that dimension of time that was represented in the mirror paintings. My recent works bear witness to the need to live and to act according to this dimension, that is, according to the unrepeatability of each second, of each place and therefore of each present action.

In the presentation leaflet I wrote for the exhibition of the Plexiglasses shown in Turin by Sperone in 1964, I spoke of my aim to bring the meaning of the mirror into inhabited space.

The new dimension within the mirror paintings revealed itself by virtue of the simultaneous representation of the three traditional dimensions and of the reality in motion that was literally reproduced. All the ingredients of the picture are such real elements that the resulting one could not be a hypothesis: The resulting picture is real. It is necessary to find the point in which the three dimensions converge plus stasis and movement—we can individuate this area of convergence on the contour line that signals the passage between *silhouette* and the mirroring ground.ⁱⁱ This line is at once immobile like the *silhouette* and mobile like the ground—it's traced on a superficial plane that includes the *silhouette* and the ground, and therefore is the contour of two-dimensional figures, so that the ground is also turned over on a superficial plane—the third dimension is revealed on this same line as the sense of distance that we perceive between us and the *silhouette* and our own reflections: Everything is focused on this line. This line, that is partly mobile and partly static, that beyond being one-dimensional is two-dimensional and three-dimensional, it is "contemporaneity," and it is represented in my picture. What interests me today is to physically introduce myself within this line where the four dimensions converge, as if I've succeeded in living between the *silhouette* and the mirroring ground.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is essential to consider that each place is created by virtue of a movement, in other words, a distance is measurable in relation to the speed of traveling it. In my mirror paintings the dynamic reflection doesn't create a place, because it does nothing but reflect a place that already exists—the static *silhouette* only re-proposes a pre-existing place. But I can create a place provoking the passage between the film still and the mirror. This place is the total time. If the film still was able to fulfill a second gesture beyond its interrupted gesture, it would begin to exist in a time

between the two gestures, for which the film still represents the maximum of slowness. By its virtue the reflection is simultaneously located in the real image – time doesn't elapse between the body and its reflection –if the reflection took place a second before or a second after the presence of the body, the speed it takes for the image to become reflection would be measurable, but this doesn't happen—in the case of the mirror the image is so fast by being body and reflection simultaneously, and therefore it represents the maximum of speed.

In the span between the film still (minimum speed) and the reflection (maximum speed) exist all possible places and all possible times—but given that these two extremes coincide in the picture, we perceive the erasure of all places and all times created at once, that is, erasure at the moment of creation.

In this story the past and the future have nothing to do with seeing.

Only material and language endure to bear witness to my action in a precise moment, but if I limit myself to repeat the same action in time, I won't realize the conclusive meaning of the instant that is always new and always overturned, both absolutely open and blocked, which I had represented with the action of the mirror paintings, while their meaning suggests actions free to be manifested whenever and wherever. In fact, my works don't want to occupy a space in time, but through contingency, will open and close their history. As the relationship between the *silhouette* and the mirror doesn't occupy space (it just suggests all the time that exists) so does each new work take place like the shutter click between the tissue paper and the film still and the mirror of the preceding paintings.

A language for the present becomes un-present—if the artist prolongs it rather than the protagonist of the language, becoming executor therein, goes out with that of the present time.

But there isn't a right moment to renew language: It is always too late, if a general developmental mechanism is accepted.

It is necessary that artistic action contains within itself a dynamic, individual system. My idea of newness is contradictory to timing. By timing I mean an action at once original and absolutely new that satisfies the expectation of a society that asks for the continual renewal of the artistic landscape, when the otherwise legitimate and real requirement of this society, becomes automatic like a vice. The individual who accepts this automatic mechanism of evolutionary request risks being tied to a single moment in time. Both to reinforce, in order to give volume and diffusion to the idea, and to satisfy its desire to be recognizable and to be the idealizing current within society, is constrained to be repeated and to leave the present that follows to another.

If the person in his own individual system doesn't swallow the dynamic idea of the transformation and unrepeatability of every action, he is confined to dramatic moments that derive from seeing the current moment in the hand of others. I myself was able to see the passing of the contemporaneity of many interesting artistic situations and, even if historical value remains in them, I cannot think of the inevitable situation of the artist's anxiety that was once

protested in the current action and is now excluded. The same thing can happen for an action that will be current in the future. I myself don't feel like adhering to an idea of present-ness that is established in advance: in the best of cases each predisposition in this sense dramatizes the present in its anxiety to abandon the past and in its hope for a future realization. I'm interested in framing my action outside of time as it is conventionally understood. It doesn't matter to me if one of my works responds more or less to the general present demand, but rather that each work expresses a real contingent perception, and that it is, however, always different from the expression that preceded it. If my action is perceptively authentic and in line with contingency, it will not need to be repeated, because it will be exhausted upon its execution. The relationship with external modernity should however be implicit, as the combination of the experience of my preceding actions and those furnished by external knowledge determine my new perception. I want the outcome to calm rather than dramatize my relationship with the outside world.

The works that I make don't want to be constructions or fabrications of new ideas, as they don't want to be objects that represent me, to be imposed or to impose myself upon others, but they are objects through which I free myself from something—they aren't constructions but liberations—I don't consider them extra objects but minus objects, in the sense that they bring with them a perceptual experience that is definitively realized.

According to the idea I have of time, it is necessary to know how to free oneself from a position while you are conquering it. Perhaps it's closer to reality that others, instead of making their own opinion about me, change it. I believe that, if I act according to the dimension of time, it's difficult to find me in the place where I am expected.

My evolutionary idea is at the same time anti-evolutionary, like walking on a mechanical walkway that is going in reverse.

Unlike the mirror paintings, my things of today don't represent, but "are." A single work is a vocabulary of a discourse that could last a lifetime and, at the same time, is a language closed on itself. In this sense I'm trying to consider the span of my life like a picture freed from any place. Each object, from the moment it's made, can go into the inertia of an energy consumed without dragging me with it, if I am already active in another place.

The material is chosen from time to time in accordance with a particular need that's perceived. All materials are suitable to me, there aren't more modern or less modern materials. An object that's really complicated by materials and ideas can have a primary sense like a really simple object that responds to an elementary need, because it will be regarded as a measure closed unto itself for its total unity. An element, for example the mirror in many of my recent works, can also be kept constant in more objects, because when it's combined with different situations and materials, it takes on a different meaning each time within the new combination. Other objects can be determined right away by a purely practical consumer need, like the *Structure for chatting while standing*, etc. etc...[sic].

ⁱ Pistoletto refers to the *Promotrice di Torino*—a shortened form of Turin’s *Società Promotrice di Belle Arti* or “Fine Arts Society.”

ⁱⁱ The original uses the Italian *più* as a conjunction and operation here, which I have translated to “plus.” Stasis and movement are added to the point of convergence, in the mathematical sense, as opposed to converging “with” the three dimensions at said point. Its use in the original is intentionally awkward; which I’ve aimed to preserve in my translation.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the original Italian, Pistoletto concludes this sentence as follows: [...] [*Come*] *se io riuscissi ad abitare tra la silhouette e il fondo specchiante*. *Abitare* is best translated to “living.” The reader should keep in mind however that in the original Italian, this term means to live *somewhere*—as in to dwell, reside, or occupy—as opposed to *vivere*, which means to live in the sense of being alive or of living a certain way.

APPENDIX B
Archival Documents, Walker Art Center

ILEANA SONNABEND

37 QUAI DES GRANDS AUGUSTINS

PARIS VI

39

3 Novembre 1965

*file
original*

Mr. Martin Friedman
Walker Art Center
1710 Lyndale Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dear Mr. Friedman,

I did indeed wonder what had happened to you, since we could have perhaps lunched together as soon as my cold cleared up. Having called the Montalambert, I knew you were not there.

The new work of Pistoletto would have especially interested you, and I was eager for you to see them-- he is using color in a most exciting way. Although the work is difficult to photograph, I am going to send you some photos anyway.

Leo Castelli is going to have a Pistoletto exhibition soon in his gallery, and I am about to send the pieces to New York. You will probably be able to see the work there. I should be delighted if an exhibition could be arranged at the Walker Art Center and am hoping we can discuss it when I am in the United States around the middle of the month.

Please send my regards to your wife, and I am looking forward to seeing you again and talking with you.

Sincerely,

Ileana Sonnabend

ILEANA SONNABEND

Walker Art Center Archives

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WORKS BY MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO

<u>Title</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>Person to Contact</u>	<u>Location</u>
SMALL TABLE	29-1/2 x 39-1/4"	Castelli Gallery BU 6-4820	4 E. 77 St.
MAN WITH CIGARETTE	79 x 39-1/2"	"	"
WOMAN WITH CHILD	78-5/8 x 47-1/4"	"	"
SELF-PORTRAIT WITH TWO PEOPLE	30 x 40"	"	"
OLDENBURG STOVE	78-3/4 x 47-1/4"	"	"
CHAMBERLAIN SCULPTURE	86-5/8 x 47-1/4"	"	"
FICUS	78-7/8 x 47-1/4"	"	"
NUDE WOMAN WITH TELEPHONE	84-3/4 x 47-1/4"	"	"
PHILODENDRON	47 x 47"	"	"
PROCESSION	47-1/4 x 85"	Castelli Gallery	Santini Whse.
COMIZIO I	47-1/4 x 85"	"	"
SANSEVIERA	39-3/4 x 19-1/4"	"	"
COMIZIO II	84-7/8 x 47-1/4"	"	"
DOG	47-3/4 x 39-1/4"	"	"
NO, ALL'AUMENTO DEL TRAM	47-1/4 x 85"	"	"
RAGAZZO	86-5/8 x 47-1/4"	"	"
VIETNAM	86-5/8 x 47-1/4"	"	"
SELF-PORTRAIT WITH PLANT	78 x 47-1/4"	"	"
VASSO ROSSO (PLANT IN RED POT)	19-3/4 x 29-3/4"	"	"
ALPINE SOLDIER	?	"	Castelli storage?

BOTTLES 70 x 47"
HANGING LIGHT BULB 79 x 39-1/2"
PERSON - BACK VIEW 53 x 31"
MRS. LICHTENSTEIN 39-1/4 x 29-1/2"

Castelli Gallery

Castelli, 100 W. 23rd St.

Mr. Norman H. H. H. H.
(no phone)

Reynolds, 100 W. 23rd St.

Philip Johnson
375 Park Ave.
PL 1-7440

Jeffery
Rosen 2nd floor
New York City, Conn
375 Park Ave. 2nd fl.

~~TABLE WITH GLASSES 25-1/2 x 39-1/4"~~

Mrs. Burton G. Frawley
c/o Mrs. Elmer Thompson
The Miller Company
99 Canal Street
Boston, Conn.

~~MAN - BACK VIEW 70 x 47"~~

"

STANDING MAN IN BLACK - 67 x 39-1/4"
3/4 VIEW

Mrs. John G. Roberts
1307 1/2 St. Louis, Mo. (no phone)

~~MAN WITH YELLOW PANTS 79 x 39-1/2"~~

Mrs. George G. Miller
The William of Morris Art
115 1/2 St. Louis

**REQUEST FOR LOAN
FROM**

Mr. Leo Castelli
Leo Castelli Gallery
4 East 77th Street
New York, N. Y. 10021

date 3 March 1966

Exhibition or purpose for which requested MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO - April 4 - May 8, 1966

Shipment requested to arrive no later than March 20, 1966 To be returned approximately June 1, 1966

Shipping agency A. P. F., New York, N. Y. Return address*

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ARTIST	TITLE AND DATE	MEDIUM include support	DIMENSIONS height first	INSURANCE VALUE
Michelangelo Pistoletto	ALPINO *	collage on stainless steel *		
	PETITE TABLE 1963	ALL THE WORKS *HAVE THE SAME MEDIUM AS ABOVE	29-1/2 x 3 39-1/4"	
	BOTTIGLIA PER TERRA 1963	*	70 x 47"	
	MAN WITH CIGARETTE 1964	*	79 x 39-1/2"	
	MARZIA CON LA BAMBINA 1964	*	78-5/8 x 47-1/4"	
	AUTO PORTRAIT ET 2 PERSONNAGES 1963	*	30 x 40"	
	HANGING LIGHT BULB 1964	*	79 x 39-1/2"	
	CORTEO 1965	*	47-1/4 x 85"	
	COMIZIO I 1965	*	47-1/4 x 85"	
	SANSEVIERA 1965	*	39-3/4 x 19-1/4"	

* Please fill in appropriate information.

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1710 Lyndale So., Minneapolis, Minnesota

SIGNED Kay Beaman

TITLE Gallery Secretary

Walker Art Center Archives

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REQUEST FOR LOAN FROM

Mr. Leo Castelli
Leo Castelli Gallery
4 East 77th Street
New York, New York 10021

date 3 March 1966

Exhibition or purpose for which requested MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO - April 4 - May 8, 1966

Shipment requested to arrive no later than March 20, 1966 To be returned approximately June 1, 1966

Shipping agency A. P. F., New York, N. Y. Return address*

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ARTIST	TITLE AND DATE	MEDIUM include support	DIMENSIONS height first	INSURANCE VALUE
Michelangelo Pistoletto	COMIZIO II 1965	*	84-7/8 x 47-1/4"	
	LA STUFA D'OLDENBURGZ 1965	*	78-3/4 x 47-1/4"	
	CANE 1965	*	47-3/4 x 39-1/4"	
	SCULTURA DI CHAMBERLAIN 1965	*	86-5/8 x 47-1/4"	
	NO, ALL'AUMENTO DEL TRAM 1965	*	47-1/4 x 85"	
	RAGAZZO 1965	*	86-5/8 x 47-1/4"	
	VIETNAM 1965	*	86-5/8 x 47-1/4"	
	AUTORITRATTO CON PLANTA 1965	*	78 x 47-1/4"	

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ARTIST	TITLE AND DATE	MEDIUM include support	DIMENSIONS height first	INSURANCE VALUE
Michelangelo Pistoletto	VASSO ROSSO 1965	*	19-3/4 x 29-3/4"	
	FICUS 1965	*	78-7/8 x 47-1/4"	
	DONNA NUDA AL TELEFONO 1965	*	84-3/4 x 47-1/4"	
	FILODRENDO 1965	*	47 x 47"	

* Please fill in appropriate information.

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SIGNED Kay Beaman
TITLE Galley Secretary

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Questions for Pistoletto

- ✓ 1. Comment on the "environmental" aspect of your mirror paintings.
- ✓ 2. Discuss the relationship between the spectator's involvement in the physical presence of these paintings and the similar experience of attending a happening.
- ✓ 3. What affinities do you see between your work and that of American artists such as George Segal, who presents the human figure in a milieu or environment; or Rauschenberg, Johns and Dine, who frequently set up enigmatic relationships between actual objects and the image or "illusion" of objects.
- ✓ 4. Please comment on the way in which your paintings appeal to the spectator on various levels (visual, intellectual, psychological). Which of these aspects should predominate, if any, in your opinion?
- ✓ 5. Please describe the actual process involved in making the "mirror" paintings.
- ✓ 6. Discuss the photographic aspect of the painted images in your work. Do you work from photographs? To what degree does photographic realism, verisimilitude, play a role in the paintings?
- ✓ 7. Who are the personages that appear in your paintings? Are they usually meant to be anonymous?
- ✓ 8. How is the scale of your paintings determined? Comment on figure-format relationship. Are the figures reduced or enlarged from life-size?
- ✓ 9. What characterized your work previous to the current style? In what ways is your present work a continuation of, or reaction to, your previous ideas? How did the first "mirror" paintings come about?
- ✓ 10. Discuss the relationship of the spirit of your work to the spirit of Antonioni's films, Resnais, Fellini, and the Italian neo-realist cinema which preceded them.
- ✓ 11. At what point did you begin to use color in your paintings and what particular attitudes do you have about the kind of color you employ?
- ✓ 12. How do you feel your work relates to other current Italian painting? M
- ✓ 13. Some critics might consider that your work represents the social commentary of the 1960's -- that is, the "protest paintings" cannot really be considered as detached as are the images of anonymous observers. Can you comment on this?
- ✓ 14. Do you see any relationship between your work and that of other artists making specific use of photographic processes? I think of Nikos and Warhol.

Note to Pistoletto: I realize these questions will involve some exhaustive self analysis and exposition -- terse answers will only confuse the issue and I hope that in the interest of the exhibition and whatever future publications may result from it that you will be able to approach these in some depth. I greatly admire the paintings and value the opportunity of showing them at our museum. If at all possible, it would be wonderful to have you here for the opening of the exhibition April 4. Certainly I look forward to meeting you soon. Martin Friedman.

15. *Your work has a seems to reflect our scientific age. What would you care to discuss this?*

Torino, febbraio 1966.

1. Forse non é esatto definire "pittura su specchio" i miei lavori, perché lo specchio é un oggetto. Tutto cambierebbe nei miei quadri se partissi dallo specchio.
Considero il quadro come un concentrazione dell'universo visibile, non come un frammento di realtà riflesso nello specchio. Non mi considero legato a un particolare ambiente, posso vivere in un appartamento come in un aeroporto. Il mio mondo circostante é il mondo intiero; mi trovo in un punto a caso della terra. Per me non può più esistere una maniera regionale di essere. Tutto sta intorno a me come sta intorno alle figure che dipingo.

2. Purtroppo non ho mai assistito a un happening, ma se un happening é un avvenimento spontaneo proposto da un artista, direi che il mio spazio é disponibile per un happening continuato.
La presenza fisica dello spettatore nei miei quadri é disposta in modo da comporsi nello spazio con le figure dipinte. L'avvenimento fa parte del quadro, le persone o le cose eseguite da me sono disponibili all'avvenimento. Può anche nascere un colloquio tra lo spettatore e le mie figure.
Le persone e le cose dipinte esistono come lo spettatore riflesso. Sono entrambi nella stessa situazione, nessuno dei due può imporre la propria volontà all'altro; hanno in comune la vita che sta intorno come essa si presenta in quel momento: tutto può esistere nel quadro, non propongo soluzioni. E' proprio lo spettatore che, considerando queste condizioni della realtà, può mettersi in contatto con se stesso, con le figure dipinte e quindi con me, con un semplice atto di disponibilità. Lo stesso atto di disponibilità che io gli mostro col quadro.

3. Gli oggetti come le persone hanno una continuazione nella vita che nessun gesto individualistico può fermare.

La mia posizione, come penso quella di Rauschenberg, Segal e in maniera meno diretta di Johns, Warhol e Lichtenstein, è quella di seguire gli oggetti nella normale circolazione - in più la mia affinità con Segal consiste nella comune necessità di considerare la vita attraverso la figura umana.

L'ambiguità di relazione tra l'oggetto e la sua immagine permette di mantenere una visione non personalistica.

Io sembro lasciare le cose al loro stato naturale e fisico, ma questo avviene solo nella mente, proprio perché attraverso il quadro che conserva le sue regole. Io adatto il materiale all'esigenza di seguire la realtà: il rosso di cadmio e il giallo di Napoli sono diventati acciaio e carta velina: la differenza non è mentale ma di struttura molecolare.

Le immagini ci sono, ci sono i rapporti di masse e di luce, i rapporti cromatici, c'è persino la prospettiva, tutto su una superficie piana. E' una semplice sostituzione di materia che permette alla vita di manifestarsi all'occhio dello spettatore come se fosse la realtà stessa.

4. Tutto quello che si può pensare sui miei quadri, parte da un'azione visuale di immagini in rilievo come in un "cinemascope", che presenta appunto immagini in movimento e in rilievo, pur su uno schermo piatto. Oltre a una dimensione di profondità, c'è la dimensione del tempo, che lo specchio non potrebbe dare perché la sua immagine è solo contemporanea.

Il fotogramma applicato è scattato nel passato; esisteva prima del quadro, ma dura dentro alla rappresentazione riflessa, che è al presente. La consapevolezza che la rappresentazione continua nel futuro dà al gesto interrotto della figura dipinta la contemporaneità in ogni momento a venire. Tutto questo condensato mentre si guarda il quadro. E' una contemporaneità tra il tempo permanente e il tempo fuggitivo.

5. I miei quadri sono lastre di acciaio inossidabile lucidate a specchio. Sopra sono incollate figure ritagliate in carta velina e dipinte in modo da suggerire la riproduzione fotografica. Dipingo la velina al rovescio; riportando la figura al diritto, il colore si applica sull'acciaio nudo ed è visto attraverso la trasparenza della velina, che gli toglie la materia.

6. L'unità della resa meccanica tra l'immagine riflessa e quella dipinta esige la fotografia. Il fotogramma dipinto è necessario per fissare continuamente lo spettatore e gli oggetti riflessi, come una serie di scatti fotografici. Le immagini meccaniche dello specchio richiedono una presenza pittorica altrettanto meccanica e altrettanto reale, come può essere la fotografia. L'unità visiva tra le due cose è essenziale, perché appartengono allo stesso modo di essere.

7. Sono delle persone, degli oggetti o delle scene alla mia portata di mano, come d'altronde possono esserlo per tutti. Non vogliono essere caratterizzati, come d'altra parte il riflesso dello spettatore non va considerato come ritratto.

8. Io cerco la dimensione della vita naturale. Una fotografia è ingrandita in modo da apparire a grandezza naturale, per la necessità di comporla con la dimensione reale riflessa.

9. Nelle tele del '57-'58 pesava sull'uomo dipinto a grandezza naturale un'angoscia esistenziale. La presenza era un'esistenza travagliata da necessità interiori di esprimersi e dall'alienazione provocata dal non afferrare il senso dei valori della vita. Nei quadri successivi non ancora su lamiera specchiante, le persone non apparivano né tristi né

allegre né agitate, ma l'angoscia era rimasta dentro di me - cercavo solo di non rappresentarla, non volevo che ci fosse, ma non era sufficiente non dipingerla. Nei quadri su lamiera specchiante, le persone dipinte appaiono calme in atteggiamenti comuni e banali, l'angoscia si è scaricata da me ed è finita sul fondo dinamico del quadro: è ritornata al punto da dove prima essa partiva per venire a me.

Nel '61 dipingevo le persone su fondi dipinti su tela con oro, argento, bronzo e vernice nera lucidissima. Quando su una grande tela a vernice nera già specchiante cominciai come al solito ad abbozzare la testa di un "uomo in piedi", rimasi scioccato nel vederla venire verso di me staccandosi dal fondo del quadro, che non era più pittura, ma il muro della stanza che mi stava alle spalle.

10. Io non vedo relazioni con i film di questi artisti, come non mi interessa copiare il linguaggio del cinema. Comunque vedo un mio quadro come uno schermo che rappresenta immagini in movimento senza che esistano macchine da ripresa o da proiezione.
11. Il colore è entrato nei miei quadri quando ho trovato il modo di farlo senza altro significato che di definire ancor più la massa. Esso esiste come componente dell'oggetto.
12. Non sento nessun rapporto con correnti di pittura italiana. Se si trova che c'è un senso italiano nei miei lavori, questo può essere implicito, ma non è voluto come posizione. Non m'interessa di fare un'arte italiana, come non mi interessa una scienza italiana.
13. Voglio mostrare nei quadri più recenti che anche i più diversi significati possono vivere in questa dimensione demistificata; siano violenti:

o pacifici, essi esistono con noi.

Uno che fa un quadro di protesta limita la sua visione al fatto. Io posso scegliere un soggetto di protesta politica come un avvenimento reale della vita, proprio per metterlo in una condizione che va oltre. Anche le immagini degli osservatori anonimi sono messi in condizione di andare oltre la loro osservazione.

14. Non conosco l'opera di Nikos, ma penso che ci sia un rapporto con Warhol parlando della fotografia. Particolarmente nei suoi film, dove l'immagine, anche seguendo gli scatti del susseguirsi dei fotogrammi, rimane fissata come in un quadro.

Nella sua pittura, la ripetizione delle fotografie sulla superficie piana demistifica il senso della fotografia unica. Nei miei quadri, il fotogramma demistifica la natura nella ripetizione in profondità.

15. Per me il metodo scientifico diventa un'attitudine per affrontare la vita. Lo spazio vitale dell'uomo oggi é visibile attraverso le condizioni della scienza e della tecnica.

La scienza ha un'idea staccata dell'universo, che le permette di forzare la natura in certi punti, per seguire una spinta attiva di conoscenza. L'esperienza del passato e la possibilità del futuro non hanno valore in sé, servono unicamente per un movimento nel presente.

Wicholy Ristallo

NEWS RELEASE

#244
18 February 1966
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WALKER ART CENTER 1710 LYNDAL AVENUE SOUTH MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55403 FE3-3215

PAINTINGS BY
PISTOLETTO
COMING TO
WALKER

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.--The first U.S. exhibition of works by Michelangelo Pistoletto, Italian artist who creates a startling illusion by painting life-size human figures and objects on mirrored surfaces, opens at Walker Art Center on April 4. Approximately 30 works lent from American and European collections are included in the one-man show, being organized by Martin Friedman, director of Walker Art Center.

Pistoletto applies photographic collage images on polished, unoxidized steel which reflects the room in which the painting is placed. Thus the viewer and his environment virtually become part of the painting--a startling result similar to the experience of "happenings" in which the spectator is an active participant.

Pistoletto's figures appear either in relaxed, contemplative attitudes or are shown as part of processions frozen in motion. Figures and objects are based on actual photographs and are shown in mildly distorted "actual" color produced with crayon and other means. Such selective use of the photographic process, frequently used in American Pop art, implies a "cool," detached manner of direct presentation--with immediately recognizable images whose presence in the painting remains enigmatic and rather mysterious.

Composition is a critical element in Pistoletto's work. His figures are carefully located on the picture surface and great attention is given to their contour. The background of the composition is deliberately left incomplete--the room in which the picture is placed becomes the background, since it is reflected in the picture's surface.

Pistoletto was born in Turin, Italy, in 1933, and his work has appeared in group exhibitions in Europe and the U.S. His first one-man show in the U.S., at Walker Art Center, will continue through May 8.

Torino, 15 April 1966.

Dear Mr. Friedman,

I am very sorry I couldn't come to Minneapolis for my exhibition, as I would have liked very much. Actually I have to finish some works for the Biennale in Venice and I am already late.

I feel quite pleased to have a personal exhibition at Walker Art Center and I am specially proud of your personal interest.

I thank you so much for all, in particular for your very good essay. The catalogue is really beautiful, and I wonder I may have others of them to give to people who wish to have it.

With this letter I want to thank also all your collaborators who have attended to the preparation of the exhibition.

Yours sincerely



Michelangelo Pistoletto

via Cibrario 42

Torino, Italia.

Walker Art Center Archives

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APPENDIX C
Documentation, The Minus Objects, 1965–1966

- C.1. **Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Foto di Jasper Johns* (Photo of Jasper Johns) [*Oggetti in meno* (Minus Objects)], 1966. Photographic print, 98 2/5 x 39 3/8 in. (250 x 100 cm.)**

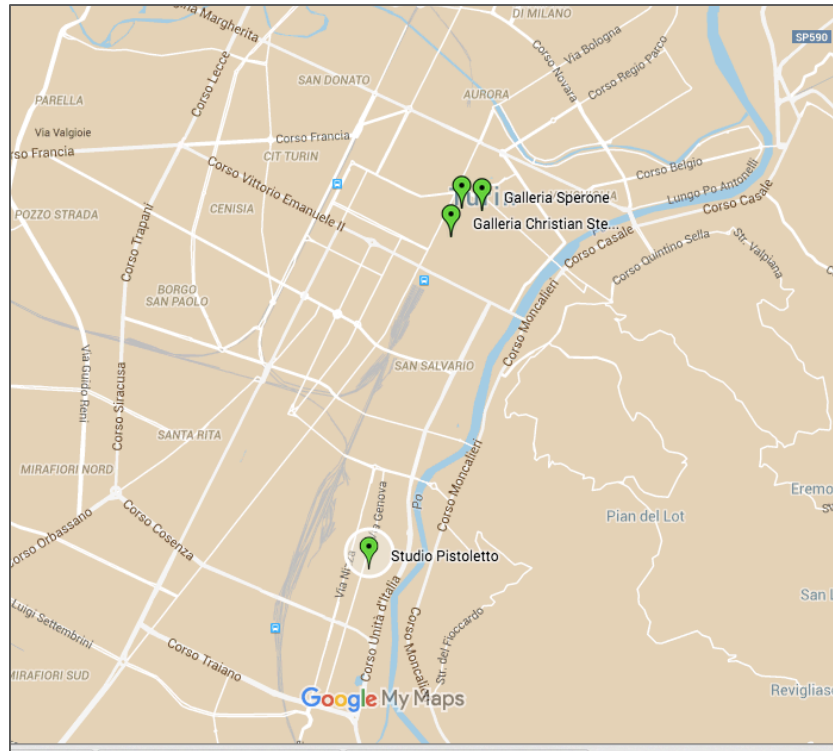


C.2. Ugo Mulas, photograph of Jasper Johns, in *POP, etc.* (Vienna: Museum des XX Jahrhunderts, 1965), n. p.



APPENDIX D
Documentation, Walking Sculpture, 1967; Good Morning, Michelangelo, 1968

D2. Map of Ugo Nespolo with Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (Good Morning, Michelangelo), 1968. Studio Pistoletto is marked in the lower register of the map.



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