

Michelangelo Pistoletto

(Biella, 1933)

At the beginning of his career as an artist, Michelangelo Pistoletto focused on the search of his own identity, producing several self-portraits. The surfaces of his works progressed from being pictorial and shiny to becoming metallic and reflective and thus able to capture not only the figure of the artist, but also his relationship with the world. As in other works executed during the same period, in *Lampadina (Light Bulb)* and *Ragazza che cammina (Girl Walking)*, both dated 1962-1966, the representation of an ordinary object or a detail tied with everyday existence is obtained through a painted tissue paper, applied to a stainless steel sheet polished to a mirror surface. Opening up to a dialogue, the mirror surface is ready to reflect the world, including the uniqueness of each visitor who is encountered, infinitely expanding the images and situations that the work can contain. Interested in reality, in 1967 Pistoletto began creating installations with found materials. In *Venere degli stracci (Venus of the Rags)*, 1967, a copy of a classical statue is installed with its back to the viewer, supporting a pile of used clothes. Art and life confront one another, or rather come together, as for the artist they are inseparable.

Pistoletto further develops the relationship with the historical memory of classical sculpture at the beginning of the 1980s, in a series of large-scale works where the traditional heaviness of marble is replaced by the simple lightness of polyurethane. *Figura che guarda nel pozzo (Figure Looking into the Well)*, 1983-1984, belongs to an immediately subsequent phase, when the artist began to reproduce in marble works he previously made in polyurethane. The relationship between copy and original and between individual and double guides this process.

One of the protagonists of Arte Povera, Pistoletto has always paid considerable attention to the power of art as an agent of social aggregation and transformation. In recent years, this direction has materialized in the establishment of Cittadellarte in Biella, a thriving organism that hosts and encourages exchanges between cultures, artists, individuals, and groups and puts art in relation with the various segments of society, from economics to politics, from education to production, from spirituality to communication. (MB)