Venus of Rags, 1968



## A Firmament of Rags

Pistoletto's use of rags dates back to 1968, a year in which world culture began the process of questioning its values. It was a time when the repressive social structures that dictated every artistic "image" were nullified and the corpses of appearance were revealed: the phantoms of an imperial doctrine, both in the East and the West, the aim of which was to universalize the world under a single word or figure. Such a univocal aesthetic rendered everything equivalent in the name of reduction and succession (you, the artist, must repeat yourself infinitely, as the worker or the student, in order to become with your emblem or chosen imagery-the cartoon, the cube, the fluorescent light, etc.--the metaphor of production.

This univocality is in direct opposition to the confusion and polyvalence of the "Emarginati," the casual and desperate communities of the world that are often identified as the dregs of society; the perverse, the corrupted, the third world people, women, prisoners, etc., that is "the rags" of society.

We are not dealing anymore with an ideal unity, but with a multiplicity of people or actors who see their own subjectivity materialize through their desire for continuous covering or disguise (again, the rags, as residue of a spectacular masking). Pistoletto has a consensual attitude toward the outcast elements of society.

After the libidinal reading of his Minus Objects, 1966 (a diverse range of formally unrelated sculptural and pictorial objects) and the

The Zoo, 1967-70 ( a small community based on artistic collaboration), Pistoletto further establishes a firmament of multiplied images in his Mirror paintings (which reflect the different environments in which they're placed) as well as with his galaxy of rags.

In his rag pieces constellations arise (there is Venus) where desires (Venus as love) emerge from craters of art. The rags become a volcanoe of erruption: The Orchestra of Rags, 1968, is formed by a crown of multi-color rags in the center of which pressure cookers are boiling and whistling. The crown is the symbol of head and the water of regeneration: a mental and visual system in continuous variation.

The transpositional character of Pistoletto's work allow for infinite interpretive possibilities: any single interpretation is equivalent to choosing one rag from the mass. Pistoletto's use of rags is depositary of a process of coagulum/desegregation that adapts itself to all contexts. Like the Mirror paintings, they are sensible pellicles that become animated in each circumstance, they reflect the museum as gallery and arsenal, changing its experience, allowing it to be amusing. Rags are reflected in the world and pour out it's figures. They displace them and transport them in a polyhedric system, where the walls become the scenearios of a "theatricum polyticticum."

As a growing body, the micro and macrocosm of rags draw pleasure and joy, so much that Venus plunges her face into them. Her body,
contaminated by their phantasmagoria (and coated with
mica particles) is covered
with stars and reflections
so that her skin multiplies
and nourishes her lovers,
"those who surround her."

Mutability and unrepeatability of expression in the absence of something mechanical appear as prodigy of immediate, sensual reproduction. If the mirror is the metaphor of immediate knowledge, the rags are the metaphor of pleasure tied to the continuous modification of existence: signs and particles which desire wear.

Germano Celant (Translated by Giovanni Tempesta) Works in MATRIX:

Arrow of Rags, 1980, wooden arrow and Museum balcony covered with rags.

Venus of Rags, 1968, cement copy of Venus covered with mica and rags, dimensions variable.

Orchestra of Rags, 1968, rags, glass, hotplates, tea kettles, dimensions variable.

Column of Rags, 1968, wooden columns covered with rags, dimensions variable.

Reclining Woman, 1967, collage on stainless steel, 47" x 59". Lent by Diana Fuller.

Selected one-person exhibitions: Galleria Galatea, Turin '60 & '63; Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, '64; Galleria Sperone, Turin '64; Galleria del Leone, Venice '64; Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich '65; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis '66; Galleria la Bertesca, Genoa '66; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels '67; Galerie Ileans Sonnabend, Paris '67; Kornblee Gallery, NY '67; Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam '67; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, West Germany '67; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY '67; Galleria dell 'Ariete, Milan '70 & '72; Galleria Sperone, Turin '70; Kunstverein, Frankfurt '72; Galleria Toninelli, Rome '72' Galleria Sperone, Turin '73; Galleria Marlborough, Rome '73; Galerie Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover '73 & '74; Sidney Janis Gallery, NY '74;

Galleria Sperone, Rome '75; Castelli Graphics Gallery, NY '75; Galleria Salvatore Ala, Milan '76; Galerie Saman, Genoa '76; Palazzo Grassi, Venice '76; Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art '79.

Selected group exhibitions:
2nd Biennale di San Marino
'59 & '61; Niewe Realisten,
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague '64;
The Object Transformed, Museum
of Modern Art, NY '66;
Documenta 4, Kassel, West
Germany '68; Land Art---Arte
Povera--Conceptual Art,
Museo di Torino, Turin '70;
Kunst van de 20 Eeuw, Museum
Boymans-van Beuningen,
Rotterdam '72; Realismus und
Realitat, Kunsthalle,
Darmstadt, West Germany '75.

of Michelangelo," Art News
'66. Celant, Germano. "Arte
Povera-appunti per una
guerriglia," Flash Art, no. 5
(Nov. '67).

Martin, Henry. "Specchio bello specchio," Art and Artists, (April '67).

Trini, Tommaso. "No Man's Mirror," Domus, no. 449 '67.
Schmied, Wieland.

"Interview Texts" in

Michelangelo Pistoletto

(Hanover: Kestner Gesellschaft
Gallery '73).

Krimmel, Bernd.

Michelangelo Pistoletto

(Darmstadt: Mathildenhohe

Gallery '74).

Celant, Germano. <u>Pistoletto</u> (Milan: Electa Editrice '76). Radice, Barbara. "Michelangelo Pistoletto,"

LAICA Journal, no. 18 (April - May '78).

Selected bibliography:

Michelson, Annette.

"Pistoletto's are Occasions for Reflection," Art International, vol. 8, 1964.

Friedman, Martin.

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Reflected World (Minneapolis:
Walker Art Center '66).

Simon, Sidney.

"Michelangelo Pistoletto,"

Art International, vol. 10,
no. 6, '66.

Ashbery, John. "Talking

MATRIX is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency.