

Legal Trip at Hudson's

... the observer's space is transformed in a hallucinatory manner

Thomas Haroldson

1967

Between now and October 9th the J.L. Hudson Gallery is offering the public a legal trip via the work of Michelangelo Pistoletto.

Pistoletto, a 34 year old Italian artist, has succeeded in opening up an entirely new dimension in art through the relatively simple device of mounting life-size photographs on highly polished stainless steel plates.

The result, as the program admits, is that the program observer's space is transformed in a hallucinatory manner." The observer, in other words, becomes a part of the composition as his image is reflected in an infinite number of relationships with the figures in the paintings.

The viewer discovers, often to his horror, that it is almost impossible to escape involvement in the art. Many people come to the gallery expecting to look at pictures, and are visibly upset when they find that the pictures are looking at them. But Pistoletto's work goes far beyond merely turning the tables on the average American voyeur. The "metaphysical atmosphere," which the works create, permits one to overcome the usual limitations of physical sight and to become involved in a truly visionary experience.

To look into a mirror that is reflecting a mirror that is reflecting a mirror etc. is to look into infinity. In order to receive the full impact of Pistoletto's work, one must ignore the surface and look deeply into the polished metal.

It is there that the life-size photographs, that seem so flat close-up, take on a life of their own. The reflected figures are transformed into solid bodies that float in and out of focus as you walk by. Reflections catch reflections, are reflected back in turn. Spectators frequently drift about among the photographs and it is often difficult to tell one from the other.

Pistoletto's visionary work is an attempt to expand man's consciousness by offering him new optical vistas. William Blake, probably the greatest visionary poet and artist of all time, attempted the same thing when he would occasionally engrave a plate "backwards" in order to produce a reverse print. Blake wanted the viewer to see what the world looked like "behind the mirror."

Pistoletto, in the same tradition, attempts to enlarge man's vision by reversing, reflecting and compounding the stuff of everyday life. A lamp, a curtain, a broom, a man reading, all take on a special meaning when they are seen reflected in another work and blended into the kinetic whole that makes up the exhibit.

However, the heart of the show, the engine that makes it run, the factor that turns a hall of mirrors into a happening is—you, the spectator. If you don't want to get involved, it's just as well that you stay home. It's one thing to have eyes, and it's another to see. Blake once wrote: "I know that this is a world of imagination and vision." Of course it is, but unfortunately some people are blind. The uniformed guard at the gallery told me: "Boy, he's got a racket, I wish I could get two grand for sticking pictures on mirrors."

Well, as I was saying, if you've got eyes, imagination and something resembling a soul, go see Pistoletto's work. A good spot to start is to stand slightly to the left of a painting entitled "Vietnam" and pick up the multiple reflections of "No to the Increase of the Tram Fare."

Have a nice trip.

fifth Estate

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