

Serpentine Gallery

Teachers' Resources

Michelangelo Pistoletto The Mirror of Judgement

12 July- 17 September 2011



Michelangelo Pistoletto
Labirinto e Grande Pozzo 1969-2008
Corrugated cardboard, mirror
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of Galleria Continua, San Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin
Photograph: Bertrand Huet
© 2011 Michelangelo Pistoletto

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Introduction

These notes are designed to support your visit to Serpentine exhibition, *The Mirror of Judgement*, by Michelangelo Pistoletto. They include planning prior to your visit and suggestions for discussion and classroom activities. They are aimed for key stage 3+4 but include activities that can relate to all key stages, enabling you to develop them to suit your needs and inspire discussion and practical work.

Michelangelo Pistoletto – artist and exhibition

For his exhibition, titled *The Mirror of Judgement*, the artist has devised a labyrinth that guides visitors through the Gallery's interior where they discover a series of sculptural works. He describes the labyrinth as 'a winding and unforeseeable road that leads us to the place of revelation, of knowledge.' Pistoletto's maze alters the viewers' understanding of the architecture and makes each one a fundamental part of the work itself.

Throughout his career, Pistoletto has worked as a theorist and activist using art to inspire and produce social change. In 2004 he announced the most recent phase of his work, the *Third Paradise*, an imagined new level of human civilisation. The exhibition includes elements from the *Third Paradise* series and representations of four major religions; Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism.

Born in Biella, Italy, in 1933, Michelangelo Pistoletto began as a painter in the mid-1950s and in the 1960s received critical acclaim for his series of Mirror Paintings. These works broke down traditional notions of figurative art by reflecting their surroundings and the viewer as a part of the image, linking art and life in an ever-changing spectacle.

Themes, ideas and questions to explore

Themes, ideas and questions to explore the exhibition *The Mirror of Judgement* by Michelangelo Pistoletto include discussions and activities for the gallery and classroom.

1. **Labyrinth**
2. **Reflection and Symbolism**
3. **Materials and meanings**

1. Labyrinth

For his exhibition, Pistoletto has created a Labyrinth that crosses through four of the galleries. In the first gallery, before entering the labyrinth, the visitors will encounter a circular mirror, representing an open well. 'The labyrinth is a place in which one loses oneself in order to search for oneself.'¹ Here, the mirror allows visitors to recognise their reflection before entering the maze and losing themselves.



Michelangelo Pistoletto
Labirinto e Megafoni 1969
Installation view at Museum Boymans van
Beuningen, Rotterdam
Courtesy of Galleria Continua, San
Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin
Photograph: Bertrand Huet
© 2011 Michelangelo Pistoletto

Discussions and activities

- Ask your group to give one-word responses to the labyrinth, before they enter and afterwards, (discourage repetition of words). Create a list of the words and discuss them.
- Before entering the labyrinth, imagine what you will encounter inside.
- What does the word labyrinth mean to you?
- There is a mirror in the first room of the exhibition. What can you see reflected in it?
- Divide your group and take different routes through the labyrinth. Afterwards discuss the journeys made by each group.

Keywords

self recognition – awareness – inner – exterior – threshold – enter – experience – journey – infinity – choices – pathways – passages – cosmos – polarity – past – present – future – mirror – reflection – orientation – positions

¹ Germano Celant, 'The Serpentine Temple of Michelangelo Pistoletto', *The Mirror of Judgement*, p.11, 2011

2. Symbolism and Reflection

Inside the labyrinth, Pistoletto has placed symbolic pieces from four religions. Two mirrors for Judaism, *prie-dieu* for Christianity, prayer mat facing the direction of Mecca for Islam and wooden sculpture for Buddhism.

In reference to his use of religious elements, Pistoletto has stated, 'Biblical references are not intended in a religious sense, but are used to give meaning and strength to the concept of responsible social transformation, and to motivate a great ideal, which in a single step unites the arts, the sciences, the economy, spirituality and politics'²



Michelangelo Pistoletto
Innocchiatoio 2008
Mirror: 250 x 200 cm; wooden kneeling-
stool: 99 x 50 x 49 sm
Courtesy of Galleria Continua, San
Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin
Photograph: Aurélien Mole
© 2011 Michelangelo Pistoletto

Discussions and activities

- Discuss the objects that you encounter inside the Labyrinth.
- Why do you think Pistoletto has positioned figures from different religions?
- Create your own mythological or religious character. Think about the special qualities and symbolic representations it portrays.
- Look at the *Third Paradise* by Pistoletto, a symbol that represents man's relationship with the natural and the artificial, create your own symbol about something you feel strongly about. Present your ideas to your group.

Keywords

sociology – human – civilisation – religion – unity – pray – temple – intelligence – nature – co-inhabit – paradise – narratives – myths – minotaur – icon – symbols – representations – reflection - symbolism

² Michelangelo Pistoletto, *The Third Paradise*, http://www.pistoletto.it/eng/testi/the_third_paradise.pdf, 2003

3. Materials and meanings

Pistoletto chose cardboard as the material for his labyrinth. It is the same material he used for his work, *Pozzo (Well)*, in 1965. The cardboard is a historic reference to his journey as an artist, as well as a material that allows itself to take any shape and therefore to create any landscape.³



Michelangelo Pistoletto
The New Sign of Infinity, Symbol of The Third Paradise, 2005
51st Venice Biennale, Isola di San Servolo, Venice, 2005
Image courtesy of Cittiadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella
Photograph: Claudio Abate

Discussions and activities

- List the different materials used in the exhibition and discuss them. Which contexts would you normally see these materials in?
- Pistoletto was a founder of *Arte Povera*, explore this artistic movement and consider the exhibition in this context.
- Are there any shapes in the exhibition that link the works of art together?

Keywords

readymade – industrial – artistic – materials – colours – landscape – straight – curves – heavy – light – soft – hard – surface – cardboard – mirror – fabric – scale – installation

Cross-curricular links

Art and Design – Creative and Media Diploma – Design Technology – Architecture – Social History – Anthropology – Global Studies – Political studies – Religious Studies – History – English Literature and Language – Philosophy

³ Michelangelo Pistoletto in conversation, in German Celant, 'The Serpentine Temple' in *The Mirror of Judgement*, 2011, p.12.



Michelangelo Pistoletto
Pozzo (Well) 1965
Cardboard, canvases and broken frames
100 x 140 cm
Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella
Photograph: P. Pellion
© 2011 Michelangelo Pistoletto

Further Resources and links

Books

Pistoletto, M. *The Mirror of Judgement*, Serpentine Gallery, Koenig, 2011

Pistoletto, M. *The Third Paradise*, Marsilio, 2010

Bellini, A. *Facing Pistoletto*, JRP Ringier, 2010

Christov- Bakargiev, C. *Arte Povera*, Phaidon, 2005

Celant, G. *Arte Povera, History and Stories*, Electa 2011

Internet

Michelangelo Pistoletto website: <http://www.pistoletto.it/>

Text 'Third Paradise': http://www.pistoletto.it/eng/testi/the_third_paradise.pdf

Artists that explore similar themes or who have collaborated with Michelangelo Pistoletto

Alighiero Boetti

Lucio Fontana

Musica Elettronica

Maria Pioppi

Jannis Kounellis

Pino Pascali

Planning a Visit to the Serpentine Gallery

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Transport

The nearest tube stations are South Kensington (1.25 km walk), Knightsbridge (1.25 km walk) or Lancaster Gate (1 km walk)

Bus routes 9, 10, 52, 452, 94 and 148 stop near the Gallery

Group Visit Guidelines

To make your visit as enjoyable as possible, please read the following:

Before your Visit:

- Adult supervision of students under 16 is required at all times, including in the shop. An adult student ratio of 1:5 for under 5's, 1:10 for 5 - 11 year olds, 1:15 for 11 - 16 year olds and 1:20 for 16 - 18 year olds is required.
- We recommend a preliminary planning visit, as for some exhibitions there may be works that you consider unsuitable for your group.

During your Visit:

- Teachers/group leaders and accompanying adults are responsible for their group's behaviour whilst at the Serpentine Gallery.
- Please make sure your group is aware of the following Gallery guidelines:
 - No running
 - No touching
 - No leaning against walls or plinths
 - No shouting
 - No photography
- Many contemporary artworks are fragile and damage easily. Please make sure that your group understands that this is why they are not allowed to touch the art.
- Lecturing: If your group is larger than 30 please split them into smaller groups in the exhibition space and do not lecture in rooms where talks are already in progress.
- Drawing: If you would like to do some drawing please check with the gallery what materials you will be able to use in the exhibition

Education and Family Events

Education is at the core of the Serpentine Gallery's activities. Through practical, artist led workshops and discussion, talks, events and projects the Education Programme offers a diverse range of innovative ways to engage with modern and contemporary art and architecture for all ages.

Please refer to the Serpentine Gallery Bulletin or www.serpentinegallery.org for information on events and activities taking place as part of the Education Programme during the exhibition by Michelangelo Pistoletto, *The Mirror of Judgement*.

Our entire Teachers' Notes are also available to download free at www.serpentinegallery.org:

Peter Zumthor, Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2011, 1 July-16 October 2011
Mark Lecky, 19 May-26 June 2011
Nancy Spero, 3 March-2 May 2011
Marcus Coates, 3 March-2 May 2011
Philippe Parreno, 25 November 2010-13 February 2011
Klara Lidén, 7 October-7 November 2010
Anish Kapoor, 28 September-13 March 2011
Jean Nouvel Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2010, 10 July-17 October 2010
Wolfgang Tillmans 26 June-19 September 2010
Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow, 8 May-13 June 2010
Richard Hamilton: Modern Moral Matters, 3 March-25 April 2010
Design Real, 26 November 2009-7 February 2010
Gustav Metzger: Decades 1959-2009, 29 September-8 November 2009
Jeff Koons: Popeye Series, 2 July-13 September 2009
Luke Fowler, 7 May-14 June 2009
Rebecca Warren, 10 March-19 April 2009
Indian Highway, 10 December 2008-22 February 2009
Gerhard Richter, 23 September-23 November 2008
Richard Prince, 26 June-7 September 2008
Maria Lassnig, 25 April-8 June 2008
Derek Jarman, 23 February-13 April 2008
Anthony McCall, 30 November 2007-3 February 2008
Matthew Barney, 20 September-11 November 2007
Hreinn Fridfinnsson, 17 July-2 September 2007
Paul Chan, 15 May-1 July 2007
Allora & Calzadilla, 17-29 April 2007
Karen Kilimnik, 20 February-9 April 2007
In the darkest hour there may be light, works from Damien Hirst's murderme collection, 25 November 2006-28 January 2007
Runa Islam, 25 October-5 November 2006
China Power Station: Part 1, 8 October-5 November 2006
Uncertain States of America, 9 September-15 October 2006
Thomas Demand, 6 June-20 August 2006
Ellsworth Kelly, 18 March-21 May 2006
Elmgreen & Dragset, 26 January-26 February 2006
Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, 19 October 2005-8 January 2006
Oliver Payne & Nick Relph, 6 September-2 October 2005
Rirkrit Tiravanija, 5 July-21 August 2005
Andreas Slominski, 26 April-12 June 2005
Tomoko Takahashi, 22 February-10 April 2005
Monika Sosnowska, 5 December 2004-16 January 2005
Glenn Brown, 14 September-7 November 2004
Gabriel Orozco, 1 July-30 August 2004
Cy Twombly, 17 April-13 June 2004
State of Play, 3 February-28 March 2004
Hiroshi Sugimoto, 18 November 2003-18 January 2004
John Currin, 9 September-2 November 2003
Cindy Sherman, 3 June-25 August 2003
Takahashi Murakami, 12 November 2002-26 January 2003
Kutlug Ataman, 11 February-9 March 2003

Michelangelo Pistoletto *The Mirror of Judgement*

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