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## Pistoletto Does It Chiefly With Mirrors

By John Ashbery

PARIS, March 2.—This is an exceptionally desolate week for art in Paris, but an Italian named Pistoletto (I am told his first name is Michelangelo) compensates for it with one of the brightest and most original shows of the season. He is showing at the Jeanne Sonnabend Gallery, which launched Pop Art here and whose motto, rather than "Excelsior!", seems to be "Farther out!"

Pistoletto's method is the following: onto a large metal mirror he glues life-size cutouts of figures which are actually photographs on silver-gray paper "improved" by the artist with a little pencil drawing and some paint. Period.

Simple-minded as it sounds, Pistoletto's art is fascinating and even haunting. For one thing, the mirror surfaces automatically pick up the rest of the room including you, who suddenly find yourself, like it or not, the subject of a Pop picture. Not the main subject, either, but somewhere in the background—the foreground being taken up by your anonymous two-dimensional companions.

These figures have a peculiarly oppressive quality. Well-dress-

ed in a white-collarish way, they remind you of the languid countesses and business executives in Antonioni's movies (Pistoletto is from Turin, where "Le Amiche" was filmed). They either turn away from you gazing listlessly into the mirrored depths of the picture, or slump in modern chairs, fixing an unexpectedly pale and unsettling gaze on the viewer.

Two of his pictures contain no people, only objects. One is a modern glass cocktail table supporting four empty highball glasses and a pair of horn-rimmed glasses. The other—possibly his most daring conceit—is merely a bottle placed in the lower left corner of an unrelieved expanse of mirror.

It reminded me of Wallace Stevens's poem "Anecdote of the Jar," which begins:

I placed a jar in Tennessee  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.

and which ends:

It took dominion everywhere.  
The jar was gray and bare,  
It did not give of bird or bush,  
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

Pistoletto's work gives nothing,

either, and is like nothing in Tennessee or in Paris for that matter. But it organizes its "slovenly" environment, including you the viewer, emptying it of meaning and at the same time hinting at another kind of meaning, beyond appearances. It is an exciting experiment, which, if only for its strangeness, merits your attention. (37 Quai des Grands-Augustins; to April 4.)

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It is not often that costly limited editions of poetry with illustrations give me a desire to own them. Even when the text is something more than a pretext for the illustrations, they have something cold and forbidding about them and seem much better off in the plush art galleries where you usually see them.

An exception is Michel Butor's new book "Litanie d'Eau," with illustrations by Gregory Masurovsky, which is the subject of an exhibition at La Hune. Here both text and illustrations are of a high quality, and seem to have been created to supplement each other.

Faithful to the principles of the *nouveau roman*, of which he is one of the originators, Butor does not depart from physical description in this long poem.

about the sea. The metaphysical dimension of the work is elaborated by Masurovsky, so that the roles of artist and writer are reversed.

Masurovsky, an American who has been a resident in Paris for some years, has received wide recognition from the French (including an award at the recent Paris Biennale) for his drawings, which is all the more significant in that they stand apart from current trends. With tiny fragments of outline that look like magnetized iron filings, he builds up fragile, complex compositions whose resemblance to natural forms is only coincidental.

These etchings are the best work he has exhibited. Without actually drawing waves, he gives a vivid impression of the meaning of wild, desolate spaces of water which is played down in Butor's poem. Despite their small size, these strange pictures give a monumental effect of romantic grandeur. (170 Bld. Saint-Germain; to March 10.)

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Another bright spot in a generally bleak picture this week is the show of Chazottes, a Montpellier painter, at the Galerie L'Entremonde. Actually, "bright" is not a word to be used in connection with his work which draws all its force from slight contrasts between dim, dark areas.

The pictures look uniformly somber when you enter the gallery, but slowly the eye begins to decipher them, the way it makes out walls and furniture in a room in the first light of early morning. As far as one can tell, these are mostly scenes of empty rooms, except for one of the sea, recognizable by a faint horizontal band of foam. The immense gray top of a table, the black of a window with night outside, the dark green of a curtain serve both as a pretext for geometrical composition and for the expression of some secret angst. (50 Rue Mazarine; to March 26.)