



RITRATTI  
DEL  
POTERE  
Volti e meccanismi dell'autorità



strozzina | cc  
centro di cultura contemporanea a palazzo strozzi

1 ottobre 2010 – 23 gennaio 2011

FLORENCE  
CCCS - CENTRO DI CULTURA CONTEMPORANEA STROZZINA  
FONDAZIONE PALAZZO STROZZI  
FROM 1 OCTOBER 2010 TO 23 JANUARY 2011

## PORTRAITS AND POWER People, Politics and Structures

The CCCS – Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozziina – Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, will be staging an exhibition entitled *Portraits and Power: People, Politics and Structures*, from 1 October 2010 to 23 January 2011, which will run concurrently with the retrospective devoted to Bronzino, the undisputed master of the Mannerist portrait, on Palazzo Strozzi's *piano nobile*.

The exhibition, based on an original project by the CCCS in consultation with Peter Funnell (curator and director of research programmes at the National Portrait Gallery in London), Walter Guadagnini (chairman of the "UniCredit & Art" project's scientific committee) and Roberta Valtorta (director of the Cinisello Balsamo Museum of Contemporary Photography) and coordinated by Franziska Nori (director of the CCCS), will show the work of international artists and collectives such as Tina Barney, Christoph Brech, Bureau d'études, Fabio Cifariello Ciardi, Clegg & Guttman, Nick Danziger, Rineke Dijkstra, Jim Dow, Francesco Jodice, Annie Leibovitz, Helmut Newton, Trevor Paglen, Martin Parr, Wang Qingsong, Daniela Rossell, Jules Spinatsch, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and The Yes Men – who have all proved capable of developing a critical analysis of the portrayal and depiction of political, economic and social power in the media.

The exhibition explores its theme from two main standpoints: it analyses power as an expression of the charisma of those individuals who have become icons or symbols of their age; and it probes the power of institutions and social models that either represent themselves or are represented in a critical light.

The role played by images has grown to such an extent that it has led to the predominant emergence of their value not only in terms of portrayal but also of the successful establishment of power. The works of art on display bear witness not only to the self-referential strategies of power, but also to the different approaches artists adopt in deconstructing or chipping away at the images that represent social, economic and political power in a way that can not only bolster a leadership but that can also undermine its authority.

The National Portrait Gallery in London will be contributing works by three famous international photographers that explore the image of political authority. The series devoted to Queen Elizabeth II by Annie Leibovitz evinces a celebrated contemporary artist's dialogue with the great tradition of official portraiture, and the cycle entitled *Blair at War* by Nick Danziger gives an extraordinary vision of Tony Blair's daily life in the days immediately preceding the outbreak of the war in Iraq. The portrait of Margaret Thatcher by Helmut Newton

keeps alive the iconic role of one of the most influential politicians of recent decades despite the fact that her authority had waned.

**Clegg & Guttman** show the photographs of three managing directors of the Deutsche Bank. These images, while based on the official portraiture genre, provide the opportunity for a conceptual reflection on the theme of the public presentation of individuals who are at the same time both subject and patron of the work. **Christoph Brech** portrays a modern patron of the arts in a video that dwells on a detail of the hull of his yacht, *Sea Force One*, a floating museum filmed from a distance in Venetian waters.

The role of the image not only as representation but also as a tool for the construction or exploration of power is analysed by artists such as **Hiroshi Sugimoto**, whose *Portraits* bring to life wax effigies of historical or contemporary political figures through the evocative power of photography, and **Rineke Dijkstra** whose series of images of a soldier with the French Foreign Legion prompts a reflection on what remains of the individual when he becomes the representative of a military authority. **Francesco Jodice**, in his video entitled *Dubai Citytellers*, analyses the development and the social impact of one of the new centres of global economic power.

In the photo triptych *Past, Present and Future*, **Wang Qingsong** portrays himself as a bystander, bearing witness to fighters in poses mimicking celebrative and monumental Socialist sculptures, reflecting upon the contradictory nature of the actual power of masses in contemporary China.

**Tina Barney** records the life and domestic environment of the *beau monde*, combining the spontaneous feel of a private snapshot with a sophisticated aesthetic approach strongly echoing the world of art and traditional photography. The provocative photo series *Ricas y Famosas* by **Daniela Rossell** portrays the taste and excesses of the new super wealthy social oligarchy in Mexico, while Martin Parr's series entitled *Luxury*, which is devoted to fashion shows, horse-racing and art fairs in the world's major capitals, probes the lifestyle of the upper class in a globalized Western world. The pictures of **Jim Dow** portray the luxurious rooms of the great private social clubs of New York City's elite, fashionable places that are inaccessible to the general public.

A different critical approach to the theme of power is offered by the French collective *Bureau d'études* with its project involving mapping the links between political and economic power. The CIA's secret missions and operations, on the other hand, provide the focus for the work of **Trevor Paglen** who reconstructs top secret movements and connections. **Jules Spinatsch** presents a new work taken from his *Temporary Discomfort* video-photographic series, denouncing the controversial transformation of a place such as the island of La Maddalena in Sardinia into the venue for the G8 summit that never took place. Also on view is the antagonistic activism of **The Yes Men**, a collective who will be presenting their spectacular media initiative that rocked the image and power of the multinational corporation responsible for the Bhopal environmental catastrophe in India.

Finally, the composer **Fabio Cifariello Ciardi** uses famous politicians' public speeches as his raw material for the creation of electro acoustic music that will underline their rhetorical techniques of persuasion.

The exhibition catalogue, published in Italian and English, contains a series of essays by authors from different countries, backgrounds and disciplines, offering the visitor a chance to explore in greater depth the themes addressed by the exhibition.

A programme of lectures running concurrently with the exhibition will feature guest lecturers who are all experts in a field related to its general theme, providing the public with an opportunity to play an active role in debating the issues addressed.

Florence, 30 September 2010

## **PORTRAITS AND POWER. People, Politics and Structures**

Florence, CCCS - Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzi - Palazzo Strozzi

1 October 2010 – 23 January 2011

**Opening hours:** Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. Thursday 10 a.m. – 11 p.m. Monday closed.

**Ticket** (valid for one month): full price 5,00 €; discount price 4,00 € (university students and other concessions); Special price for schools 3,00 €

Thursday, admission free from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m.

**Catalogue:** Silvana editoriale ([www.silvanaeditoriale.it](http://www.silvanaeditoriale.it))

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**FRANZISKA NORI**  
Project director  
Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzi CCCS

### *Portraits and Power* \*

*Portraits and Power. People, Politics and Structures* is intended to explore the underlying principles in the representation of power in contemporary art. The traditional socio-political definition of power as the exercising of influence or the ability to condition other people's behaviour fails to account for the complex nature of power and the various (and often hidden) forms it takes in our society. In the present age, the role of images and their influence upon politics, economics and society in general has increased to such an extent that their value is now prominently emerging as a means not merely of representing power, but of affirming it. It is often through images that politicians make their fortunes or ruin their careers. It is by means of well orchestrated advertising campaigns that companies achieve commercial success. It is often images drawn from television or the media that societies take as their own reference models. The works on display will serve to illustrate self-referential strategies, as well as different approaches adopted by artists to de-construct or challenge representative images of social, economic or political power, images capable both of affirming leaderships and of challenging their authority.

The starting point for the planning of the exhibition was a comparison drawn between it and the one being held at the same time at Palazzo Strozzi: *Bronzino. Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici*. The many and sophisticated works that have contributed to the fame of this Renaissance artist also include portraits of powerful men of his day and most notably of his patrons: the Medici family. Bronzino depicted the Medici in classical poses and sporting official garments and jewels. The viewer is deliberately divided from the painter's figures by a distance aimed at eliciting respect and reverence for the latter's rank. Bronzino's paintings are not intended to help viewers identify with the subjects portrayed – members of the Florentine aristocracy of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; rather, they serve to legitimize the subjects' role. These characters are not depicted as mere individuals, but as embodiments of power and physical representatives of authority. Bronzino lends artistic shape to the self-representation of the powerful men of his day and to their political propaganda through art forms – the Medici family providing a celebrated example of the use of art for political aims.

The above historical reference represents a starting point for a reflection upon the representation of power today, in the present media and communications society. What is crucial here is the relation between artist, subject portrayed, and viewer. Historically, artists have been at the service of powerful men and entrusted with the duty of creating – for different purposes – society portraits. The central features of these have often been the extolling and affirmation of the leading character depicted.

For today's powerful people it is no longer so crucial to be portrayed by artists. The artists have been replaced by public relations experts, spin-doctors and highly specialized press offices which specifically develop campaigns for the various communications channels. In the communications sector, the public reputation of individuals, institutions and companies plays a fundamental role, so much so that it is always constructed according to the reactions by the public opinion being engaged with.

This is as true of politicians as it is of companies and institutions, whose presence in the media is constantly monitored and updated or changed on the basis of regularly commissioned opinion polls.

Artistic portraiture has thus become separate from strategically constructed images. On the one hand, the self-referential representation of power has taken on more subtle and sophisticated forms; on the other, the role of the artist in society has changed. The point of view of the artist appears interesting not so much for the way in which people who commission works such as portraits develop a strategy for constructing a public image of themselves, but rather for the artist's ability to look at reality in a new way by seeking to grasp the mechanisms and dynamics behind the representation of power and by considering power's relation to society itself.

The questions which have historically marked the art / power dichotomy remain relevant to this day: what is power really? Where does it manifest itself and how is it represented? These questions reflect the general problem that concerns all means of visual communication and artistic expression: how to translate into images the complex information and relations that characterize the globalized and interconnected world of today. In modern Western and democratic society, power is no longer the prerogative of single individuals or families, but is rather distributed by sophisticated systems and political and economic bodies that are mutually coordinated. Consequently, artists' relations to the representation of power are highly ambivalent and varied. No doubt, works are still commissioned, yet free art is chiefly engaged in critically independent discourses on a productive and conceptual level. At the forefront are the artist's gaze and his personal stance vis-à-vis his subject. Artists develop their works based on a vision of their own, as well as an awareness of earlier artistic approaches and iconographic choices. Artists today often employ citation as a cultural technique. They will appropriate and make use of languages and forms others have already employed, while in turn making their own work available as a starting point for future pursuits. By 'recycling' pre-existent forms and symbols, artists enter in dialogue with a network of previously defined meanings. The goal of the artist today – as already theorized by Nicolas Bourriaud in his famous book *Postproduction* – is not to develop new forms based on new materials, but rather to work with elements already present within his cultural circuit, thus establishing a network of meanings and interplay between past, present and future that assigns the public a central role as the receiver and interpreter of these contents. In an age of digital communication and networks, artworks no longer represent a point of arrival and cannot be conceived as being open to only one iconographic reading. Rather, each artwork becomes one of the various elements that contribute to shape the modern cultural process, which is increasingly discursive and less and less static and precisely defined.

The works presented at the *Portraits of Power* exhibition reflect the above attitude. What the exhibition is offering – almost as a challenge – is a chance to recognize and identify the various possibilities of representing power through different artistic approaches which nevertheless share a common dialogue with the long tradition of portraiture. To portray power is not merely to witness its existence, but also to de-construct it in such a way as to reconstruct its less evident essence, unveil its hidden mechanisms, and destroy its apparent form.

A first section of the exhibition features an analysis of images developed for media promotion of contemporary politicians and hence intended to reach as wide a public as possible. Helmut Newton's classic portrait of Margaret Thatcher stands as an example of the construction of a firm and forceful iconic image, seeking as it does to grasp the character of the so-called Iron Lady. Arrayed opposite this is Nick Danziger's documentary series on Tony Blair, which presents Mrs Thatcher's successor as a helpful and kind person, assuming no predetermined pose. Annie Leibovitz has instead photographed Queen Elizabeth II by drawing inspiration from classic royal iconography emphasizing the use of symbolic elements such as the Queen's crown and her rich official garb, thereby making a break with the rather modern and informal way in which the British royal family usually presents itself. Again within the context of the representation and analysis of the mechanisms of official politics, composer Fabio Cifariello Ciardi offers an instrumental rendering of the inflections and rhythms marking the spoken voices of distinguished politicians in famous and important speeches, thus illustrating the planning behind the rhetorical strategies adopted to persuade voters. Hiroshi Sugimoto goes one step further by focusing on the sheer iconic value of notable and popular politicians. He forgoes any attempt to portray real people in order to photograph their effigies in the form of wax statues.

A second thematic section of the exhibition features works by Martin Parr, Daniela Rossell and Tina Barney, and engages with the representation and self-enactment of members of international high society. While Rossell and Parr charge their images with colours, objects and settings that elicit misgivings rather than feelings of reverence on the part of the public, the work of New York photographer Tina Barney presents pictures of upper-class families by bringing out their elegance and formal composure. These three photographers explore upper-class modes of self-representation (and hence self-legitimation) by emphasizing – in different ways – the development of aesthetic tastes and specific iconographic languages that variously draw upon the traditional representation of power. This iconography of authority is not limited to individual or group portraits, but also includes their setting within appropriate architectural contexts or milieus. It is precisely a study of the 'architecture of power' that is the subject of Jim Dow's *New York Clubs* series. The American photographer succeeds in portraying the interiors of some of the most exclusive private clubs of Manhattan through a broad perspective and a clear and detailed gaze. In a different yet complementary manner, Italian video-artist and photographer Francesco Jodice presents an enquiry into what lies behind the façade of power and wealth. In his video *DUBAI CITYTELLERS* he describes and analyzes the conflicts and contradictions that mark Dubai, a place that has made its way into our collective imagination as a land of wonders, but which is nevertheless based on deep social imbalances and enduring forms of discrimination.

A different approach to power is adopted by Bureau d'Études, Trevor Paglen, Jules Spinatsch and the Yes Men. Their works and enterprises offer an analytical gaze on hidden authority structures and those systems and centres of power that seek to avoid being made the object of criticism and transparent information: multinational corporations, business banks, the CIA and supranational inspection bodies. Jules Spinatsch's works shows the security measures that accompany international meetings at the highest levels in various cities around the world, exploring the theme of the relation between the power of the state and the marks it leaves upon the urban landscape. With a media event, the Yes Men have instead drawn attention towards the chemical disaster caused by Union Carbide in Bhopal, India, in 1984 – without ever really paying for it – and which was running the risk of falling into obscurity. With the aim of providing counter-information to disclose the mechanisms of falsehood, the Yes Men take up and reproduce the media strategies adopted by large industrial groups, thus de-constructing the latter's public images. Trevor Paglen focuses on the black

world of the secret operations carried out by American military apparatuses on an international level without public knowledge. Through the use of photographic lenses and cameras of the kind usually employed in astrophysics, his work probes remote and concealed areas where the state operates in secret, transgressing the law. With its *World Government Map*, the Bureau d'études

duo provides a visual and schematic representation of the network constellations formed by political, banking and business powers on an international level, creating a critical chart that is both enlightening and highly disturbing.

The relation between images and identity is the central theme explored by artists Rineke Dijkstra, Christoph Brech and Wang Qingsong. The subject of Dijkstra's photographic series *Olivier* is a reflection upon what remains of the identity of an individual when he becomes the representative of a military authority such as the French Foreign Legion. Wang Qingsong, by contrast, explores the transformation of Chinese society under the influence of Western consumerism, drawing upon the aesthetics of Socialist propaganda and ironically commenting upon the efficaciousness of the idea of communal power. Christoph Brech shows a detail of the hull of a yacht anchored at the Punta della Dogana during the last Venice Biennale. Its image becomes reminiscent of an abstract painting that alludes to power by concealing the subject's identity behind an impenetrable façade. A broad perspective on the construction of power by means of images is provided by the work of Michael Clegg and Martin Guttman. By reflecting upon the role of the artist in relation to power, these two artists de-construct the mechanisms behind the representation of authority, exploring the theme of the traditional commissioning of private works and analysing the symbols and features typically associated with the representation of power.

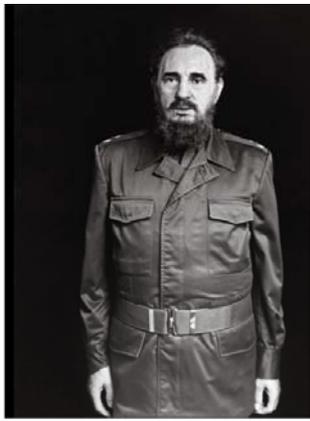
Michael Clegg and Martin Guttman are also the authors of one of the essays featured in the catalogue of the exhibition and which variously contribute to broaden its reflection upon the art / power dichotomy. Clegg & Guttman here illustrate their own work – spanning several decades – by describing the conceptual approach they have developed and which is aimed at de-constructing the representation of power and image control. In his essay 'Power of Appearance', American scholar of media and cultural history and politics Stephen Duncombe examines the main positions held in the critical debate on the issue of the self-representation of political power, from Niccolò Machiavelli to Antonio Gramsci, Luis XVI and Barack Obama. Peter Funnell, the curator of the National Portrait Gallery in London, is instead the author of 'Portraits, Power and Gender', an essay comparing the works which the Gallery has kindly lent the Strozzi Centre for Contemporary Culture with other works both present and past.

Like all other exhibitions designed for the Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzi, *Portraits of Power* will be accompanied by a programme of lectures held by experts in various fields. The aim is to explore the theme of the exhibition from different vantage points and to invite the public to embark upon a broader reflection upon the issues suggested by the exhibition itinerary. While on the one hand this calendar of lectures offers specific engagements with the contemporary relation between art and power, on the other it investigates the meaning of power in contemporary society, focusing in particular on the question of how and in what way this become visible. The first of these two aims will be pursued through the lectures held by Cristina Casero (lecturer in the History of Photography at the University of Parma) and Marco Scotini (critic, curator and teacher at the New Academy of Fine Arts of Milan). The remaining lectures will instead be devoted to the forms that power takes in our society: Alessandro Casiccia (University of Turin) will examine the connection between power and luxury and excess; Vanni Codeluppi (sociologist and lecturer at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia) will analyze the way in which the capitalist system asserts itself and influences our lives; finally, Marco Belpoliti (writer, essayist, critic and lecturer at the University of Bergamo) and Vincenzo Susca (sociologist and lecturer at the Paris Sorbonne University) will investigate the role of politics and the imagery it creates. The programme also includes a meeting with Francesco Jodice, an artist whose works will be on display at the exhibition, as well as two precious joint ventures. The first will be with the exhibition *Bronzino. Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici*: as a guest of the Centre Strozzi, its curator Antonio Natali – also the Director of the Uffizi Gallery – will be accompanying the public of the contemporary exhibit into 16<sup>th</sup> century Florence by guiding them in the discovery of the grand decorative plan of the Chapel of Eleonora di Toledo. The second joint venture is instead intended to renew the partnership between the Centre Strozzi and Festival dei Popoli - International Documentary Film Festival in Florence. It will feature a screening in the halls of Strozzi of *L'esplosione (The Explosion)* a documentary by Giovanni Piperno on illegal building in Italy, a manifest and dramatic sign of the rule of money and unregulated business in the country.

*Portraits of Power* is a project developed by the Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzi thanks to the expert advice of Peter Funnell (Curator and Head of Research Programmes at the National Portrait Gallery in London), Walter Guadagnini (President of the Scientific Committee of the 'UniCredit & Art' project) and Roberta Valtorta (Director of the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Cinisello Balsamo). Their contribution has been crucial for defining the themes of the exhibition and selecting the artists.

Florence, 30 September 2010

\* From the catalogue *Silvana Editoriale*



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**JAMES M. BRADBURNE**  
General director  
Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi

The Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzina (CCCS)

The mission of the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi is to revitalise the public spaces of the Palazzo Strozzi, one of Florence's finest examples of Renaissance architecture, and to establish it as an exciting, dynamic and international cultural destination for visitors of all ages and interests. Now, after just three years, the exhibitions held in the Palazzo's grand spaces on the first floor are attracting international attention for their quality, their innovation and their diversity. The Palazzo's courtyard now hosts a café, a shop and a permanent exhibition on the history of the Palazzo, as well as a varied programme of concerts, fashion shows and performances. From the outset, a key part of the Palazzo Strozzi project was to create a centre for contemporary culture at the very heart of Florence, and the Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzina (CCCS) was created in the former wine cellars under the courtyard of Palazzo Strozzi – known as 'La Strozzina' – which hosted Florence's most important international exhibitions in the years after the Second World War until the flood of 1966. The challenge posed by the Renaissance architecture of Palazzo Strozzi for contemporary art is a stimulus to treat each new event and project almost as theatre, constantly pursuing new possibilities of artistic communication, presentation and mediation. Since opening in November 2007, the CCC Strozzina has hosted exhibitions featuring the work of William Kentridge, Dan Perjovski, Damien Hirst, Cindy Sherman and Andreas Gursky, and more recently, Wolfgang Tillmans, Antony Gormley and Gerhard Richter.

Looking at power is an obsession in Florence. In 1513, just after the collapse of the Soderini Republic and the return to power of the Medici, who had him arrested and tortured, the Florentine civil servant and diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli wrote in his famous – and infamous – book, *The Prince*:

*"it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new. This coolness arises partly from fear of the opponents, who have the laws on their side, and partly from the incredulity of men, who do not readily believe in new things until they have had a long experience of them. Thus it happens that whenever those who are hostile have the opportunity to attack they do it like partisans, whilst the others defend lukewarmly, in such wise that the prince is endangered along with them."*

*The Prince – Chapter VI*

Living in Florence one quickly becomes an attentive student of power and its various manifestations, and one quickly realises that not much has changed in four centuries – at least when it comes to power. In the city of Machiavelli it is difficult to ignore the currents, counter currents and undercurrents of power and the powerful. Notwithstanding its ubiquity, as I get older, I have to confess to an increasing inability to understand its attraction – or even its nature. What exactly is this thing we call power, and what makes it so desirable? Power clearly manifests itself in two aspects, positive and negative. The first is the ability to implement a plan without encountering opposition, the second to obstruct another from implementing an undesired plan.

But what exactly is power? As a creative person, I understand the power of – and the need for – a vision, and I understand the need for creative people to determine the nature of various parts to create a single coherent whole. I began my career in exhibition design in earnest with the 1986 World's Fair in Vancouver, and was a devoted convert to

the idea of the 'storyline' and the need to control the message and the narrative. Now – dozens of projects and several institutions later – I believe that real power – if it can be called that – consists of creating a context in which meaning-making can flourish, rather than insisting on a particular meaning itself. In short, my creative approach – and my understanding of power – has changed from that of an author to that of a gardener. But do gardeners have power?

This exhibition – designed to run concurrently with the retrospective Bronzino. *Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici* at Palazzo Strozzi's Piano Nobile– looks at the many ways of representing power, and the many ways in which power can be expressed. It looks at expressions of corporate power, personal power, political power, in media such as painting, drawing, video, multi-media and installations. Just as they did four centuries ago, Political leaders, multi-national corporations and individuals still carefully craft and control their self-representations to influence and intimidate. In the contemporary world, power is increasingly diffuse, and wielded in through increasingly complex networks – webs of power. Nevertheless, at its heart power and its self-representation remain a central feature of contemporary life. As with every exhibition developed by the CCCS, the work of the artists shown in this exhibition asks us to reflect about the nature of the world we live in, and in this exhibition, to question the continuing use of symbols of power to shape politics, make markets and 'win hearts and minds'. Today, in a world sorely in need of tolerance and reason, of critical distance and independent thought, the issues explored by *Portraits and Power* are ones that reward our close and critical attention.

Florence, 30 September 2010



**TINA BARNEY** (USA, 1945)

*The Granddaughter*, 2004 | *The Ancestor*, 2001 | *The Brocade Walls*, 2004 | *The Bust*, 2003

C-prints

Courtesy the artist and Janet Borden Inc., New York

Since the mid-1970s, Tina Barney has been focusing her work on the portrayal of the exponents of high society, seen either in their own homes or on certain special occasions. The style of the pictures ranges from that of *tableaux vivants* to that of genre paintings, drawing expressive force from the interaction between wealthy settings and the people who move about in them. An extended time exposure and high resolution enable her to render the details of each setting in detail.

The characters Barney portrays are the representatives of a social class that normally exercises careful control over the circulation of pictures of its members, whether in the form of family photographs or official portraits, often published on the pages of glossy magazines. The people portrayed all come from families educated in the awareness of their own social role: discipline, self-control and rigour are features to be observed in all the subjects photographed, and they share the same high level of composure. Neither the formal way of dressing nor the furnishings can be traced back to any particular fashion: Tina Barney seeks to produce timeless pictures that at first sight will appear closer to traditional painting than to contemporary photography. Hers is not merely the gaze of an onlooker, but that of a trusted person, who has personal relationships with her subjects, not aiming to display the wealth of these families, but to analyse their social and family dynamics.

The figures portrayed have a rigid and formal countenance, which makes them appear markedly detached from one another, even though it is often brothers and sisters or parents and children who are photographed together: "this is the best that we can do. This inability to show physical affection is in our heritage". These photographs give a sense of the fleetingness of their relationships behind the mask of self-controlled bearing.

**CHRISTOPH BRECH** (Germany, 1964)

*Sea Force One*, 2009

Video 5'09"

Courtesy Galerie Kunstagenten, Berlin

In *Sea Force One*, Christoph Brech focuses on a apparently insignificant episode: two men aboard a small boat are cleaning the black hull of a big yacht. The traces left by the foam and the waves reflecting on the black surface engender a sort of abstract pictorial composition, which comes and goes in the continuous loop of the video.

The large boat is a luxury yacht named after the American presidential plane Air Force One, created by the mysterious ship-owner Captain Magic. It was anchored outside the new Punta della Dogana museum on the day of its inauguration, when only selected guests and VIPs had been invited, protected and concealed by an impenetrable security service. Brech has turned his camera on a moment that would otherwise have gone unnoticed, deliberately choosing not to record the sumptuous affirmation of wealth of the yacht. It is the contrast between the size of the latter and that of the small boat, or between the black hull of the yacht and the evanescent white of the soap and of the reflections upon the water, that brings out the greatness of the vessel, the actual size of which we do not grasp. The artist succeeds in moving beyond the façade of power and wealth by stopping at its surface. He seems to be suggesting that the strategy for the construction of an image of power may lie in its antirepresentation: the "myth" of power is created by veiling or concealing the identity of those who hold it.

**BUREAU D'ÉTUDES** (France)

*The World Government*, 2005 – Wall map

*Administration of Terror*, 2010 – Publication for free distribution

Courtesy the artists

The work of Bureau d'études, a duo of artists formed by Léonore Bonaccini and Xavier Fourt, combines art, theory and research. Their works lend expression to the forms of mutual interdependence existing among individuals, politics, institutions and businesses. For several years the two artists have been drawing maps through which they analyse and compare different political, social and economic systems found in the contemporary world. The aim of these maps is to make visible what is usually concealed, namely the informal relations that organize business and politics.

The *World Government* map illustrates the complex intertwining among different structures of global power. It represents an attempt to visually display the intricate mutual interaction of financial cores, strategic and diplomatic think tanks, scientific and technical research, planning offices, political influence networks, mafias, intelligence-gathering services and legal and accounting consultancy.

The artists make no claim to be exhaustive. On the contrary, they envisage their work as the snapshot of a methodical and constantly developing research. Authority does not exist as a clearly defined centre, but rather presents itself as a flexible, meta-administrative network that operates on a global level, in ever new forms.

*The journal "Administration of Terror" is a free press produced by the artists for the exhibition visitors*

**FABIO CIFARIELLO CIARDI** (Italy, 1960)

*Tre Piccoli Studi sul Potere*, 2010

For video and flute, clarinet and cello sounds

Produced by Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzi, Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi; Ex Novo Ensemble; Edison Studio

*Tre Piccoli Studi sul Potere* (Three small studies on power) is based on an accurate instrumental transcription of the inflections and rhythms of the spoken voice. A software developed by the author is here used to "unmask" the music concealed in three famous speeches delivered by politicians and devoted to war, to its consequences in terms of terrorism and to the search for a desirable solution. President Bush's announcement of the beginning of the war in Iraq on 19 March 2003, Tony Blair's national address in occasion of the terrorist attack at London on 7 July 2005, and President Obama's memorable speech at the University of Cairo on 6 April 2009.

Cifariello Ciardi's work aims to explore the possibility of translating the rhetorical emphasis of politicians into music, thus emphasizing how in the context of political speeches the rhythm and "melody" of one's language also represent crucial elements for building consensus-searching strategies. Unlike other works by the author, in this case the sound underwent no electronic processing: each politician's voice was merely transcribed for a musical instrument. Cifariello Ciardi observes that "often power speaks not so much to people's heads as to their stomachs. How so? Perhaps, also through the 'music' concealed in their speech".

*Tre Piccoli Studi sul Potere* illustrates how images of power draw their strength not merely from what meets our gaze, but also from what becomes the object of our most deep-seated perceptions – via hearing, for instance – in a more efficient way. And one harder to decrypt.

**CLEGG & GUTTMANN** (Ireland / Israel, 1957)

*The Board I, II, III*, 2007 print 2010

C-print, mounted behind plexiglas

*Politisch-physiognomisches Fragment #2*, 2001

*Politisch-physiognomisches Fragment #3 (Ties & necklaces)*, 2001

Ilfochrome behind plexiglas on mdf pedestals

Courtesy the artists and Galerie Christian nagel, Cologne, Berlin, Antwerp

*Grand Master*, 1985

Cibachrome

Courtesy Sammlung Wiese

Michael Clegg and Martin Guttman have devoted over thirty years of research to the representation of power in portraiture. In their works, the two artists imitate and deconstruct the typical rituals behind the representation of authority. The most recent of these works, *The Board*, depicts three top executives from Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt, heart of German and European finance. In portraying these figures, Clegg & Guttman are not acting as the mere executors of a commissioned work, but rather as independent artists. It is they who have chosen each and every element in the composition of the picture, ranging from the subjects' pose to the lighting, style of clothes and background. By contract, they also ensured they could display and make use of the work at their own discretion. The traditional relation between artist and client is therefore overturned. The three subjects were photographed in different sessions against a neutral background; the photos were then assembled to form a group portrait, which bears clear traces of this procedure of digital assemblage. As a background to the composition, a series of windows were inserted that open up on the city of Frankfurt, the headquarters of Deutsche Bank and the heart of German and European finance. This opening up on the outside, just like the striking interplay of light and shadow, is a borrowing from traditional portraiture, which often shows subjects standing against vistas alluding to their properties or evoking their homelands.

The work entitled *Politisch-Physiognomische Fragmente* consists of photographic fragments: details from representations of politicians portrayed according to the poses typical of the enactment of male power. The artists here feature accumulations of single fragments – such as hands arranged in a pose, or ties – that represent common expressions and symbols of the authoritative nature of political figures. The work serves as an analytical deconstruction of the principles behind the typical representation of power by isolating and showing the elements that stand at the basis of the well-planned iconographic norms employed by the world of politics for its media representation.

For *Grand Master*, Clegg & Guttman asked an actor to display certain poses characteristic of power, presenting him as the representative of a non-specified institution. The background of the image consists in a fictional architectural scenario – one simply simulated by using photographed space – the artificial nature of which is revealed by certain incongruities in the lighting effects. What is central here, once more, is the reflection offered on the controlled and never spontaneous construction of an image of power.

**NICK DANZIGER** (United Kingdom, 1958)

*Blair at War*, 2003

Photo series - Bromide prints

Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London

Between March and April 2003, the photojournalist Nick Danziger and journalist Peter Stothard spent thirty days in close contact with the then Prime Minister Tony Blair and his entourage. Their aim is a special report on the occasion of Blair's fiftieth birthday, one based not on official photographs but on a way of perceiving and depicting power from the point of view of everyday life – the interior of private and usually inaccessible places, removed from the more distinctly representational ones. Danziger was able to document scenes that could otherwise never have been made visible, capturing apparently insignificant moments that actually express all the underlying tensions and dynamics of those days, during which Blair decided Great Britain's intervention in the Second Gulf War.

On his first day of work, Danziger was in Blair's so-called "den" – the Prime Minister's private workroom in Downing Street. Blair is shown in a non-conventional and informal pose at the phone. A mirror here gives us a glimpse of Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's ever-present spin doctor, and the person responsible for his public image. This reflection becomes a sort of picture within the picture, a reminder of the assemblage of Danziger's photographic documents, which are never created by chance, but always follow from a conscious decision on the photographer's part. Yet it is worth recalling that the Blair government had developed a very careful and well-thought strategy for controlling its own public identity. And New Labour's promotion of its own political class as one close to ordinary people has been a central feature of its platform.

**RINEKE DIJKSTRA** (The Netherlands, 1959)

*Olivier - The French Foreign Legion*, 2000-2003

Photo series – C-prints

On loan from The Bank of America Merrill Lynch Collection

Rineke Dijkstra has carried out profound research in the field of photographic portraiture exploring the theme of identity and its representation. A crucial feature of her photography is her desire to show the true personality of her subjects, as opposed to any simulated one. Her work method, whereby subjects are usually portrayed frontally, leads to the creation of bare and detached pictures in which people display an inevitably fragile and vulnerable air.

The *Olivier Silva* project centres on the figure of a young man who in July 2000 enrolled in the French Foreign Legion. Dijkstra portrays crucial moments of his intense training – from the day of his enrolment, to the missions he was sent to fulfil in various parts of the world. The photographs clearly illustrate the metamorphoses of a innocent looking boy becoming an elite soldier enlisted in one of the world's toughest and most controversial army corps.

Olivier's personality evolves in the course of his training, as is clearly revealed by his attitude and the look in his eyes, as well as by the very way in which his facial features change. The recruit's personality is annulled in order to then recreate it according to new parameters: the youngster draws closer and closer to the prototype of the soldier as we progress from one photograph to the next. Just as all new recruits of the Foreign Legion are assigned a new name and identity, after three years Olivier no longer looks (even physically) like the same person as before.

This series shows the dissolution of the original identity of a man subjected to the conditions dictated by an apparatus of power. Every soldier is at the service of the country he fights for and becomes one of its official public representations, embodying its military power.

### **JIM DOW (USA, 1942)**

*Library Metropolitan Club, New York, 1999 / 2010*

*Dining Room, Morgan Library, New York, 1999 / 2010*

*Member's Racks, University Club, New York, 1998 / 2010*

Chromogenic color prints

Courtesy the artist and Janet Borden, Inc., New York

Photographer Jim Dow approaches places as meeting points bearing visible traces of people's mutual interactions. Dow gives a concentrated and authentic view of architectures, furnishings and places.

For the series on display, Dow has been able to make his way into some of the most exclusive private circles of New York City, such as the renowned Metropolitan Club, which was founded in 1891 by John Pierpont Morgan, and once listed James Roosevelt and William K. Vanderbilt among its members. Most of these circles require strict adherence to rules consolidated by tradition. Though there are over twenty circles of this kind in New York, outsiders will rarely notice their presence. While they no longer exercise the kind of political influence they used to, these clubs are now undergoing a new renaissance. An increasing number of politicians and businessmen are choosing to meet in their secluded rooms. With his descriptive and comparative photographs, Dow is giving a face to these exclusive meeting places, inviting viewers to join him in admiring the timeless opulence of their rooms. We can say architecture is the primary and most powerful form of mass-communication; at the same time, it is a mirror for power and its strategies, for the consolidation of authority and its effects on those who exercise it. Architecture is power and is intentionally exploited to seduce, impress, and intimidate.

### **FRANCESCO JODICE (Italy, 1967)**

*DUBAI\_CITYTELLERS, 2009*

video, 58'

Courtesy the artist and Unicredit Group Collection

Ibrido tra cinema, video-arte e documentario, *DUBAI\_CITYTELLERS* ha per oggetto le recenti A hybrid of cinema, video art and documentary-making, *DUBAI\_CITYTELLERS* focuses on the recent transformations of Dubai – the only state in the Arab peninsula that has founded its economic fortune not on petrol, but on finance and real estate. The video unfolds through scenes filmed on site and interviews with Western and Eastern immigrants, as well as local politicians and journalists.

Jodice focuses in particular upon an analysis of the living conditions of immigrants, who are employed as cheap labour in the building sector. The formidable economic growth of the country is based precisely on the exploitation of the work of these men, who have enabled the construction of vast real estate assets.

Dubai emerges as a place ridden with deep social and cultural contradictions. It is the city housing the tallest skyscraper in the world, as well as some of the most original experimental works of engineering and architecture. The taste for luxury of Western high society is here put on full display. At the same time, Dubai is also a Muslim state, with laws that are still very harsh when it comes to the morals and lifestyles of its citizens. This sense of contradiction that Westerners

perceive is emphasized by Jodice through the use of effective oxymora such as the juxtaposition between images of the desert landscape of Dubai and those of a ski slope covered in snow or of an extraordinary aquarium – artificial places created to entertain wealthy Western guests.

The opulent welcome people receive is geared towards constructing an image of the place that may attract economic investments. While the recent financial crisis has partly hampered this process, Dubai still stands as the perfect example of a state that has proven capable of representing itself as a land of wonders where everything is possible, by concealing the problematic social and cultural dynamics on which it is founded.

**ANNIE LEIBOVITZ** (USA, 1949)

*Queen Elizabeth II, 2007*

Chromogenic prints

Collection National Portrait Gallery, Londra

In 2007, the world-famous photographer Annie Leibovitz was asked to portray Queen Elizabeth II of England in occasion of the sovereign's travel to the United States – the first in sixteen years.

Drawing inspiration from the evocative photos that Cecil Beaton had taken of the Queen Mother in 1939, Leibovitz chose as the setting for her portraits the White Drawing Room of Buckingham Palace and asked the Queen to pose in official attire, that shows her in a manner quite unlike that which the British court has sought to display itself over the past years by favouring more ordinary attitudes and attires.

The most frequently mentioned and gossiped-about episode in the meeting between these two figures so different from each other was the moment when for one of her shots Annie Leibovitz invited the Queen to take her crown off in order to assume a "less dressy" air. Visibly annoyed, Elizabeth pointed to the dress she was wearing and answered, "Less dressy, what do you think this is?". The artist is used to rigorously directing her photographic sets, but in this photo session Leibovitz's authority had to measure itself against that of the Queen. The photographer appears to have given the Queen directions as she would have to an ordinary model, treating the crown as a stage accessory.

The photographs emphasize an unusual discrepancy between the artificial way in which the Queen is presented on stage – almost as if this were a fashion shoot – and the perfect authenticity of the context (for the court hall and clothes worn reflect the sovereign's real social status). The American photographer therefore portrays the Queen as she appears in the collective imagination, as a vision shaped by traditional iconography: a dignified and timeless figure in her rich official residence, the furnishings of which reflect the long history of the royal family.

**HELMUT NEWTON** (Germany, 1920 - USA, 2004)

*Margaret Thatcher, 1991*

Bromide print

Collection National Portrait Gallery, London

Helmut Newton è conosciuto come uno dei fotografi che hanno fatto la storia della fotografia, Helmut Newton is known as one of the photographers who made the history not only of photography, but also of female imagery in the contemporary world. His celebrated portraits are characterized by refined and elegant eroticism: female bodies whose beauty he brings out, and which establish an ambiguous relation with the viewer.

A perfect example of Newton's relation with the female universe is his portrait of Margaret Thatcher, the first and to this day only woman to have served as Prime Minister in Great Britain. As Newton himself stated, "Margaret Thatcher has been the top: is there anything more sensual than power?"

Newton succeeded in bringing out the character of a woman who has gone down in history as a radical conservative unwilling to strike any compromise. Newton avoided a three-quarter pose and captured Mrs Thatcher's visage in a frontal position. He emphasized the strength of his subject but also made her completely exposed to the viewer, with the light here in no way concealing the wrinkles and imperfection of the skin. When Newton asked Mrs Thatcher to pose with an austere and serious air, she replied: "Oh, but one looks so disagreeable when one does not smile". Margaret Thatcher faces the public as all politicians attempt to do, by seeking consensus: here she shows herself with a reassuring smile, soberly displaying a pearl necklace and elegant suit.

At the time the picture was taken, Mrs Thatcher's influence had already declined and Newton seems to be providing a sort of final statement of power on the part of a woman who had described herself as the Iron Lady. In showing this

woman still proud of her image of strength despite its being in decline, Newton grasped the essence of the relation between public figure and photographic lens: a strategy of affirming one's power through the language of images.

**TREVOR PAGLEN** (USA, 1974)

*Limited Telephotography*, 2005-2010 – photo series, C-prints

*Rendition Flights 2001-2006* – print on plexiglas

Courtesy Galerie Thomas Zander, Köln and Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco

Trevor Paglen's work spans geography, human rights activism and the artistic representation of the landscape. For many years now he has been focusing on the so-called black world, that infrastructure of the US military apparatus and CIA which seeks to remain secret and concealed from public opinion.

In *Rendition Flights 2001--2006*, Paglen traces the various routes followed by CIA front companies running airlines whose function is to transfer suspects – with no legal authority – from the most distant countries to US detention centres. His photographic series *Limit Telephotography* instead for the first time shows secret US bases. Often built in the desert, they are places invisible to public opinion. To record them, Paglen uses powerful lenses of the kind employed for space photography, capturing them from as far as 100 kilometres away.

The distance from their subjects give these pictures an almost abstract quality, pushing them to the very limits of their intelligibility. What really goes on in these hidden areas remains a secret. For this reason, Paglen presents the result of his investigations without making them laden with interpretations, explanations and judgements.

These photographs would almost appear reminiscent of the images used by the Bush administration in 2003 as proof of the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Paglen invites viewers to consider the relation between seeing and knowing, and the complex connection between photographs and facts. In this way, his photos are made not only to show the border zones of a secret power apparatus, but also to engage with the use of photography as an instrument of power.

**MARTIN PARR** (United Kingdom, 1952)

*Luxury*, 2004-2008

Photo series - Pigment prints

Courtesy Martin Parr / Magnum Photos

Martin Parr takes his camera near people and their social milieus, capturing moments of everyday life, shot from unusual perspectives and similar to snapshots. Only under closer scrutiny you understand they have been skilfully construed and arranged. In his photographic series, Parr has developed a highly distinctive and almost unmistakable style marked by dazzling colours obtained by the use of flash on top of natural light.

While always taking widespread social stereotypes as their starting point, Parr's images are never banal. The perspective they convey stands out for the way in which it takes viewers by surprise and for the ironic detachment with which the photographer turns to his subjects: "We are so used to digesting pictures that are pure propaganda, that people are surprised when someone like me shows them images that are closely tied to reality. I, at least, don't lie".

The *Luxury* series portrays personages from the international jet set, photographed in different settings around the world – from the Miami Art Fair to horse races in Durban and polo tournaments in Dubai. With these images, Parr has intentionally moved away from his previous subjects to focus on the life of the upper classes: for, as he himself has noted, the main problem the world is facing is not poverty but wealth – excessive development and prosperity. These photographs offer the perspective of an external, non-involved observer, whose gaze is drawn towards minor details that usually find no place in the common representations of these events. The centrepieces of these photos are the superficial clichés that the people participating in the events adopt as tokens of their upper-class identity.

**WANG QINGSONG** (China, 1966)

*Past, Present and Future*, 2001

C-print

Courtesy Collection Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation, Switzerland

Wang Qingsong's artistic work is focused on the metamorphosis of contemporary Chinese society. His pictures, which are often ironic or humorous, draw upon Chinese propaganda art, merging its forms with the equally exaggerated visual language of the Western advertisement.

The triptych *Past, Present and Future* serves as a reflection upon the history and future of the Chinese people. The three photographs in question portray groups of people in the *tableau vivant* style, recalling the monument outside the Mausoleum of Mao in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Each of the three photographs stands for a specific time period. The photo on the right refers to the past and is comprised of seventeen figures on a war footing, covered in mud and arranged on a wide pedestal. The artist has portrayed himself as he stands at the foot of this monument, gazing at its figures from a removed position, his head wrapped in a bloodstained bandage. Through digital manipulation of the image, the artist has made himself smaller than the other figures and he holds not a weapon but a bouquet of flowers in one of his hands.

On the left-side panel, *Present*, the same subjects are featured as workmen, with work-tools and protective lenses – signs of the economic drive of the country. The group, again portrayed as a monument, is covered in a silver hue. Here too the artist is shown as an outsider, this time a youngster with a Western-style baseball cap and a small dog on a leash, standing aside like an isolated individual.

In the central picture, *Future*, all the figures are golden. Carrying flowers and baskets of fruit, they look straight towards what lies beyond the frame of the work, directly addressing the public. This frontal composition, designed by Wang Qingsong himself, no longer reflects traditional socialist sculpture. Here, in a golden age yet to come, it is the artist who is the central figure. A pair of cymbals in his hands show him as the character giving rhythm to the composition and acting as the guide to this utopian future society.

**DANIELA ROSSELL** (Mexico, 1973)

*Untitled (Ricas y Famosas)*, 1999-2002

Photo series – C-prints

Courtesy the artist; Sprüth Magers Berlin London; Greene Naftali Gallery, New York

The photographs of this Mexican artist reflect the tradition of society portraits as much as they do that of social documentation. The subjects chosen by Daniela Rossell for her *Ricas y Famosas* series are young women – often friends or acquaintances of hers – from the upper classes of her country.

The new oligarchic classes in Mexico display their power and wealth in a casual and proud manner, choosing to live in extravagant villas with sumptuous furnishings. By adopting wide-angle perspectives and playing up the pictorial integration of the various reflexes of colours and light, the artist has produced pictures in which the female figures portrayed become part of the interior decorations themselves, emphasizing the exasperated character and kitsch taste of the rooms they are in by their way of dressing and gestures. What is striking is how most of these young women have chosen to adopt poses that mirror the stereotypes about sensuality typical of the way in which women are represented in films and on television. The medial models for gender roles presented by consumer culture surface as leitmotifs in the lives of these women.

The titles of the photographs – for instance, *Janita in Her Father's Office* – illustrate how the power of these women depends not on their own person but on their status as the wives or daughters of powerful and important men, in a world in which the female image fluctuates between that of the princess and that of the luxury ornament.

Rossell herself belongs to this social class and has testified with her photographs the condition of these women and their often grotesque image: "Wealthy women in Mexico are prisoners of their houses, style and excess. They really want to look American, like what you see on TV, and they go to a lot of work to accomplish that. It's a kind of hell. There's so much unhappiness among the people who supposedly have everything".

**JULES SPINATSCH** (Switzerland, 1964)

*Opportunity for Action - A Story of Onna 1944-2010*

Photographs and texts

Jules Spinatsch explores the effects of globalization and "economization" upon natural and urban spaces. A characteristic of his procedure is the way in which he never points the camera directly upon the place he is examining, but rather chooses to focus on secondary settings and marginal areas.

For his *Temporary Discomfort* series, which includes several works featuring both videos and photos, the artist followed the meetings held at large international summits such as those of the World Economic Forum and the G8 in places such as Genoa, Geneva/Evian, New York and Davos. On each of these occasions a photographic series was developed that explores a specific aspect of the site hosting the meeting – a militarized area in an emergency situation. The centrepieces of these works are not official speeches or press conferences, but rather the giant security structures specifically set up for the events, which profoundly alter the image of the cities that house them. Jules Spinatsch makes unconventional use of photography, whose interaction with other technologies he also explores. Aside from taking photographs, the artist also employs security cameras which he personally installs in the places he wishes to portray. The images he thus obtains provide the material for his construction of wide-scale panoramic views; by recording each site for an extended period of time, these show the unfolding of events that could not be fixed through the instant shots of a photographic camera.

For *Portraits and Power* the artist began a new project dedicated to the Abruzzo region. In the spirit of his *Temporary Discomfort* series, the artist describes, in images and texts, traces of political decision-making, which have been left either on the territory or in historical memory. His work focuses on the town of Onna, subjected to political actions from the Second World War to the 2009 earthquake and the G8 Summit of the same year.

### **HIROSHI SUGIMOTO (Japan, 1948)**

*Pope John Paul II, 1999*

black and white photograph

Courtesy Rosa e Gilberto Sandretto

*Fidel Castro, 1999*

black and white photograph

Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs convey a conceptual attitude aimed at stripping images down to their bare essence, thus emphasizing the primacy of the idea over the object portrayed. The *Portraits* series was first developed in 1999, starting from a portrait of King Henry VIII of England and then continued with different subjects, including famous contemporary figures who have entered the collective imagination, such as the Cuban *líder máximo* Fidel Castro and Pope John Paul II. They are not portraits of the original subjects, but of wax sculptures reproducing them in the most hyperrealist way possible. The figures are illuminated by a source of direct light and strongly stand out against a black background in an extremely theatrical way, imitating poses typical of the characters, while removing them from all context and thus emphasizing their nature as icons rather than human beings.

These works stand in continuity with the artist's unique reflection upon the nature of photography and its relation to history and time. Here he embarks upon a reflection on portraiture and the process whereby an image is translated using different media, emphasizing the problematic "realistic effect" of photographic reproduction. Our gaze will strongly be drawn towards the extraordinary elegance and aesthetic refinement of these works, which reveal the uncommon technical abilities of Sugimoto, marked as they are by the endless range of white, grey and black shades typical of him. He attains a balance between life and death that is characteristic of photography but also of portraiture, whereby what counts is not the reality or the life of a subject, but the latter's value as an image in itself, beyond time and everyday life.

### **THE YES MEN (USA)**

*The Yes Men Fix the World, 2009*

Video, 18'

Courtesy The Yes Men

The Yes Men is a group of American netartists and activists who, often concealing their real identity, practice so-called guerrilla communication. Their work is based on the subversion of the communication strategies of institutions and multinational corporations.

A revealing episode occurred on 3 December 2004, when Andy Bichlbaum, one of the group's founders, appeared in front of BBC cameras in the role of Jude Finisterra, a fictional spokesman for Dow Chemical – the multinational corporation that owns Union Carbide, the company responsible for the chemical disaster that took place in the area around the city of Bhopal in India. On the night between 2 and 3 December 1984, an abandoned pesticide plant released

a cloud of toxic gas that caused 3,000 deaths in the immediate aftermath of the accident and 120,000 over the course of the following years, as well as very serious long-term environmental damage.

In the interview the BBC conducted on the day of the twentieth anniversary of the catastrophe, the phony Dow Chemical spokesman announced that his company was finally willing to offer compensation to all the victims of the disaster, for a total of around twelve billion dollars. While the company immediately denied these statements, in the twenty minutes that followed the interview Dow's stocks lost 4% of their value. Besides, the action also helped to bring the Bhopal disaster into the spotlight again and to once more draw the attention of the public on the matter. It is estimated that since 2004, partly because of this action organized by the Yes Men, Dow's stock has declined in value by two billion dollars.

The Yes Men's challenging of power is based on the principles of counter-information. In the contemporary society of images, attacks against the power of an economic or political authority will prove more effective if they are directed against its façade as opposed to its internal mechanisms.

PALAZZO STROZZI, FLORENCE  
FROM 1 OCTOBER 2010 TO 23 JANUARY 2011  
***METROCUBO D'INFINITO IN UN CUBO SPECCHIANTE***  
by Michelangelo Pistoletto

From 1 October 2010 to 23 January 2011, visitors to Palazzo Strozzi will encounter *Metrocubo d'Infinito in un Cubo Specchiante (Square Metre of Infinity in a Mirror Cube)* by Michelangelo Pistoletto. This installation will be on view concurrently with the exhibition *Portraits and Power: People, Politics and Structures* in the CCCS and *Bronzino. Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici* on Palazzo Strozzi's piano nobile.

*Metrocubo d'Infinito in un Cubo Specchiante (Square Metre of Infinity in a Mirror Cube)*, an installation covered externally with opaque steel plates and internally clad with mirrors, is intended to offer the public an opportunity to experience boundless space. Its centre will be occupied by one of this Piedmontese artist's historic works, the *Metrocubo di Infinito (Square Metre of Infinity)*, 1966, which consists of exceptionally opaque surfaces on the outside and reflecting surfaces on the inside, thus taking the potential of refraction to its extreme limit.

Mirrors are a crucial element in Pistoletto's art. They represent the physical and intellectual extension of the human mind, revealing that which is normally hidden from the human eye. Pistoletto himself argues that "the mirror expands the eye's characteristics and the mind's capabilities to the point where it offers a vision of totality". He also says that "this space for concentration is designed to be one of art's places of prophecy, a territory where art succeeds in expressing its religious value". The work of art becomes a secular place for meditation, where man with his capacity for imagination is the only true value.

The event follows similar initiatives in 2008 and 2009, when Wang Yu Yang (Harbin, China, 1979) and Yves Netzhammer (Schaffhausen, Switzerland, 1970) produced site-specific installations for the courtyard. The project, devised and produced by Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi – in cooperation with Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin – marks the start of a new partnership with Castello di Ama per l'Arte Contemporanea in Gaiole in Chianti (Siena).

Florence, 30 September 2010

#### Michelangelo Pistoletto

Born in Biella in 1933, Pistoletto is one of Italy's most famous contemporary artists. He started to exhibit his works in 1955 and in 1960 he had his first solo show, at the Galleria Galatea in Turin. His early work experimented with the painting of self-portraits. In 1961-1962 he produced the *Quadri specchianti (Reflecting Pictures)* that include the presence of the spectator in the work itself, creating a new real-time dimension and challenging the idea of perspective. These works brought him international recognition and success, resulting in solo exhibitions in prestigious European and American galleries during

the Sixties. The *Quadri specchianti* would become the basis for the entire Pistoletto's artistic production and theoretic reflection.

From 1965 to 1966 Pistoletto produced a series of works entitled *Oggetti in meno* (*Fewer Objects*) which played a key role in launching Arte Povera. He began to take his art outside traditional exhibition venues in March 1967, leading to the first of the so-called "creative collaborations". Pistoletto was to develop this approach during the following decades, always cooperating with several artists coming from different disciplines and social fields.

In the Seventies he revived the mirror theme, developing it in such works and actions as his *Divisione-Moltiplicazione dello Specchio* (*Division-Multiplication of the Mirror*) and *L'Arte assume la Religione* (*Art Takes on Religion*). In 1975 to 1976 he produced at the Galleria Stein, Turin, a work that stretched over time: *Le Stanze* (*The Rooms*) was an exhibition lasting a year, divided into twelve sections of a month each. It was the first of a series of complex works intended to be shown for a full year, such as *Anno Bianco* (*White Year*), 1986, or *Tartaruga Felice* (*Happy Turtle*), 1992.

In 1978 he had an exhibition at the Galleria Persano in Turin, where he showed two of the most important new directions of his artistic research and production: *Divisione e moltiplicazione dello specchio* (*Division and Multiplication of the Mirror*) and *L'arte assume la religione* (*Art Takes on Religion*). At the beginning of the Eighties he created a series of sculptures in stiff polyurethane, which were translated into marble for the solo show at the Forte Belvedere, Florence, in 1984. From 1985 to 1989 he worked on his series of "dark" volumes, entitled *Arte dello squallore* (*Art of Squalour*), displayed at the Galleria Pieroni in Rome.

During the Nineties, through *Progetto Arte* (*Art Project*) and the creation of *Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto*, he created a straight and active link between different social fields aiming to achieve a responsible transformation of the society.

In 2003 he was awarded the Leone d'Oro, or Golden Lion award, for his career at the Venice Biennale. In 2004 the University of Turin awarded him with a *honoris causa* degree in political sciences. On this occasion he unveiled the most recent phase of his work, which he called *Terzo Paradiso* (*Third Paradise*). In 2007 he was awarded the Wolf Foundation Prize in Arts at Jerusalem, "for his constantly inventive career as an artist, educator and activist, whose restless intelligence has created a prescient form of art that contributes to a new understanding of the world". In 2008 Pistoletto – Cittadellarte received the Sasso Marconi city Special Award for his new use of languages.

In 2009 he has shown at Galleria Continua, San Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin two installations dedicated to spirituality: *Metrocubo d'Infinito in un Cubo Specchiante* e *Il Tempo del Giudizio*. He is currently preparing for the October 2010 retrospective at the Contemporary Art Museum, Philadelphia. He has been recently nominated Artistic Director for the Bordeaux Event in 2011 and has published the essay "Il Terzo Paradiso" (*The Third Paradise*), Edizioni Marsilio.

#### MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO

*Metrocubo d'Infinito in un Cubo Specchiante*  
(*Square Metre of Infinity in a Mirror Cube*)

Florence, Palazzo Strozzi - Cortile

1 October 2010 - 23 January 2011

#### Free entrance

Daily 9 a.m. – 8 p.m.

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