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**Heaps of Rags and Double Visions
The Interpretation of the Classical Venus in Arte Povera**

This article examines the reception of the classical Venus in Arte Povera through two case studies: *Venus of the Rags* (1967-1974) by Michelangelo Pistoletto and *Mimesis* (1975-1976) by Giulio Paolini. By adopting a cultural biographical approach, the reception of the original archetype, i.e. the Greek lost original *Aphrodite of Knidos* by Praxiteles, is investigated through its replicas and imitations, specifically the Roman copy, known as the *Medici Venus*, for the work of Paolini, and *Venus with the Apple* by the Neoclassical sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen for Pistoletto. The use of ready-made replicas prompts a discussion on the reproducibility of sculpture and the dichotomy between the original and the copy, while an analysis of the materiality of the sculptures makes it possible to shed light on the role of the plaster casts in the history of art and the references evoked by the use of different materials, including those with kitsch associations. The choice of Venus as a subject is analysed as connected to a meditation on the concept of beauty, both intended as an aesthetic ideal within the domain of art and in its large variety of feminine versions. Lastly, the reception of classical sculpture will be analysed from a perspective of continuity with the past and with Mediterranean artistic heritage, as an attempt at reclaiming an endangered cultural memory at a time of rapid changes and international influences.