

# PRETTO

REFLECTION(S) ON VISION(S)  
VISION(S) ON REFLECTION(S)

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My personal search for Truth has led me to believe that everything in the Universe exists as a reflection of itself. The physics inherent in a reflection, as that observed through a mirror, for example, applies to all existence, including Man. As part of the living cosmology, our consciousness responds in accordance to the principles of reflection. Reflective reasoning, or reflecting on some subject or on oneself, are some of the ways in which the physics of reflection is manifested within our own minds.

Reflection also gives meaning to who and what we are. For one, it acquaints us with the existence of opposites and the crucial role they play in helping us identify Reality. Opposites are the reflections of Truth in contradiction to itself. They are the mirrors which reflect the existence of our wholeness. Without opposites there would be no whole truth for us to grasp. Without opposites the infiniteness of the universe could not be validated. Opposites create the orderliness of symmetry within the chaos of the universe. And we would not be aware of opposites were it not for reflection—without which we would not be able to acknowledge our own existence.

When we see ourselves reflected in a mirror, what we see is not our identical replica, but our identical opposite, a reflected contradiction of ourselves, so to speak. If we lift our left arm in front of a mirror, the arm we see rising in the mirror is really our *right*, when thought of in terms of our mirror image's point of view. It is only because we are "observing" reality from *our* side of the mirror that we are made aware that the arm we have lifted is indeed our *left*. Free from any rational perceptual confinement, however, our reflection becomes a replica that stands in opposition to our true selves. Under this principle of universal perception, we can conclude, then, that our reflection's right arm is in reality our *left* and vice versa, depending on the *side* of the mirror we choose to acknowledge our consciousness from.

An objective perception of reality requires symmetry. Symmetry helps us establish that Truth is to be found in Reality's contradictions as born out by reflection. Symmetry gives physical evidence to Reflection and thus becomes the basic component of Reality, for it is symmetry which provides the mirror Truth needs to bear witness on the existence of itself. This does not mean that reality is to be mirrored with symmetrical exactness for it to be true. Indeed, reality

can be reflected asymmetrically, too. Asymmetry is the perception of reality in a state of disharmony. A realistic reflection of our state of mind, for example, doesn't have to be symmetrically crisp and evenly balanced, like that presented in a mirror for it to be truthful. When a pond's waters are not still, or when a mirror is distorted, our reflection is disturbed. But is that reflection untrue? The image we see of ourselves in the unstill pond behaves in a manner seemingly unrelated to the originating image on *this* side of the mirror. But, from *that* side, from the disturbed image's perspective, how is the originating image perceived?

I certainly don't know the answers to these questions and the many others I've come to encounter about the nature of reflection and all its cosmic and psychological implications, but its philosophical suggestions open doors to boundless inquiry. I've been exploring the sensations of reflection pictorially for some time through the use of and my fascination for perspective drawing and its relation to infinity.

Some years ago I found that perspective, as represented in MC Escher's graphic works, offered a fifth dimensional relationship with space and time that allowed for a near faithful representation of infinity and the perception of Truth. Near, but not quite. Escher's multiple reflective perspectives converged at graphically identifiable points of infinity, which, because of their specificity, didn't realistically represent or *reflect* Truth. The universe doesn't originate from one point but from *all* points. Infinity must be whole, universal in its embrace of Reality, for us to become truthfully aware of it.

In my recent works infinity is undefined by any point. Depth perception originates from virtually everywhere thus freeing the work from logical gravity. This opens the artwork to multiple viewing alternatives. Top or bottom, left or right of the painting are done away with. Even the intentional symmetry of the diptychs can be broken without disrupting the work's compositional "balance", thus allowing for free will in its arrangement. In short, the work can be contemplated in a myriad of positions, allowing for virtually a new painting, as it were, to be seen by simply moving the panels and reassembling them in whatever fashion pleases the viewer.

**Pretto**

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*"The cosmos and the role it plays in the universe is the source of the philosophical considerations I entertain when developing my works. My pictorial expression is a product of the creative tension brought on when I couple those considerations to my artistic impulses. Developing themes pictorially on these mental foundations gives way to personal reflections which expand my knowledge about a subject and how I relate to it."*





<b><u>SOLO EXHIBITIONS</u></b>			
1976	"Pretto's Pictorial Universe"	Dept. of Artistic Expressions	University of Panama
1977	"PRETTO, Pictorial Work"	Alliance Francaise	French Embassy
1977	"Two Artists"	Amador-Washington Library	U.S. Information Service
1977	"Rogelio Pretto"	Museum of the Panamanian Man	Nat'l Institute of Culture
1977	"PRETTO"	Panama-AMORC National Convention	Panama Lodge
1980	"Pretto in Miniature"	Galeria Habitante	Panama
1980	"Rogelio Pretto: MINIATURES"	Meeting Point Art Center	Miami, Florida
1981	"Images f/the MezzoCOSMOS"	Galeria Habitante	Panama
1981	"Rogelio Pretto from Panama"	Museum of Cont. Latin American Art	OAS
1982	"Doors, Puppies and Walls"	ARTE CONSULT	Washington, D.C.
1982	"Rogelio Pretto: Recent Works"	Meeting Point Art Center	Panama
1984	"National Peace: A Pictorial Essay"	Museum of Contemporary Art	Miami, Florida
			Panama

<b><u>GROUP EXHIBITIONS</u></b>			
1977	"Xerox International" '77	XEROX International Contest	Nicaragua
1977	"Against Racial Discrimination"	Int'l Poster Exhibition	United Nations
1977	"ETS-Travelling Art Show"	Travelling Exhibition	New York
1977	"Young Artists Group"	Travelling Exhibition	Panama
1978	"DEXA Artists"	DEXA Gallery	Panama
1978	Biennal DOMECC	Museo de Arte Nacional	University of Panama
1978	"Five Colon Painters"	INAC Gallery	Mexico City
1979	"Painters in Circulation"	Travelling Exhibition	National Institute of Culture
1979	"Young Artists"	PANARTE Gallery	National Institute of Culture
1980	ARTEGULF-80		Panamanian Institute of Art
1980	PANARTE	Annual Auction	San Juan
1981	Ciudad del Niño	Annual Auction	Museum of Contemporary Art
1981	PANARTE	Annual Auction	Museum of Contemporary Art
1981	"Young Artists"	ARTECONSULT	Museum of Contemporary Art
1982	"Colon Artists"	National Institute of Culture	National Bank of Panama
1982	"Flowers"	ARTE 80 Gallery	Panama City
1982	"Small Art"	ARTE 80 Gallery	Panama City
1982		Travelling Show	Panama City
1982		Travelling Show	Plaza Gallery
1982		Travelling Show	Greens Gallery
1982	Ciudad del Niño	Annual Auction	Cary Galleries
1982	Lion's Club	Annual Auction	Sayville, N.Y.
1982	PANARTE	Annual Auction	Minneapolis, Minn.
1983	Ciudad del Niño	Annual Auction	S.F., California
1983	Lion's Club	Annual Auction	Panama
1983	PANARTE	Annual Auction	Panama
1984	Ciudad del Niño	Annual Auction	Museum of Contemporary Art
1984	PANARTE	Annual Auction	Panama
1984	Lion's Club	Annual Auction	Museum of Contemporary Art
1984	"Homage to Gomez Sicre"		Museum of Contemporary Art
1984	"Latin-Americans"	MOOSART Gallery	Panama
1984	Biennal Wilfredo Lam		Miami
1985	Southeby's	Auction	Casa de las Americas
1986	Ciudad del Niño	Annual Auction	Havana
1989	"Encounters With Art"	Corporate Gallery Show	N.Y.C.
1989	"3 Americas in Paris"	Musée de Luxembourg	Panama
			Miami
			France

<b><u>AWARDS and DISTINCTIONS</u></b>			
1974	Honorable Mention	XEROX Annual Art Contest	Casa del Periodista
1976	2nd & 3rd Prize + Mention	Atlantic Art Circle Juried Show	Washington Hotel
1976	Jury selected to enter contest	XEROX Annual Art Contest	Panamanian Institute of Art
1977	1st Prize	1st Contest For Invited Artists-ETS	University of Panama
1980	1st Prize: Works on Paper	ARTEGULF-Annual Contest	Panamanian Institute of Art
			Panama

**COLLECTIONS**  
 Permanent Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Latin America, OAS, Washington D.C. • Museum of Contemporary Art of Panama • Museum of Religious Art Panama • Banco Nacional de Panama, Panama • Chase Manhattan Bank, Panama • National Institute of Culture, Panama.



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No other artist in Panama is perhaps as popular or as controversial as Rogelio Pretto. That distinction is due primarily to the public dust storm raised by his polemical 1984 exhibition titled NATIONAL PEACE—A Pictorial Essay and presented in Panama's prestigious Museum of Contemporary Art. The 42 piece collection of perfectly executed Temperas plowed open the country's closeted issue of false nationalism. Never had an artist in Panama devoted such a serious body of work to exposing the misguided and corroded patriotic values of the nation.

The show's importance took on greater dimensions by the fact that it was presented when Noriega's firm grip over the country discouraged any form of political intellectual dissent among artists. Only when the works were actually hung the morning before the opening (planned by the artist) did the Museum authorities come to realize the powerful implications of what was being shown. As it turned out, the exhibition sparked a heated public debate the likes of which Panama had never seen instigated by a single artist. The commotion brought Pretto national notoriety and popular acclaim.

But, controversy and popularity aside, the degree of impression Pretto has made in Panamanian Art is perhaps best gauged by the way he is perceived by his fellow nationals. There are those, for example, that believe that Pretto's status as an important Panamanian artist was established as soon as he made his first unsettling appearance on his country's art scene in 1976. Some hold that the fresh turn he gave Panama's lethargic artistic currents set the stage for a new vigor in Panamanian Art.

To Panamanian intellectuals and historians, Pretto is an original, an enigmatic maverick artist whose lucid and unprecedented 1984 pictorial assault on the nation's erred sense of national identity etched his permanency in Panama's cultural history

And then there are those from

Panama's Art establishment who aren't as ready to grant the artist as much importance. Yes, they accept Pretto as an original, but with distilled trepidations. Although they concede to the unquestionable mastery of his craft, they have trouble accepting the artist's esoteric subjects and unfamiliar style of expressing them. They're also troubled by the artist's uninhibited political views—a trait more admired by Panamanians in general who see the artist as a staunch individualist, respected for his courageous devotion to the philosophical and social principles he dares express publicly both in and out of his works.

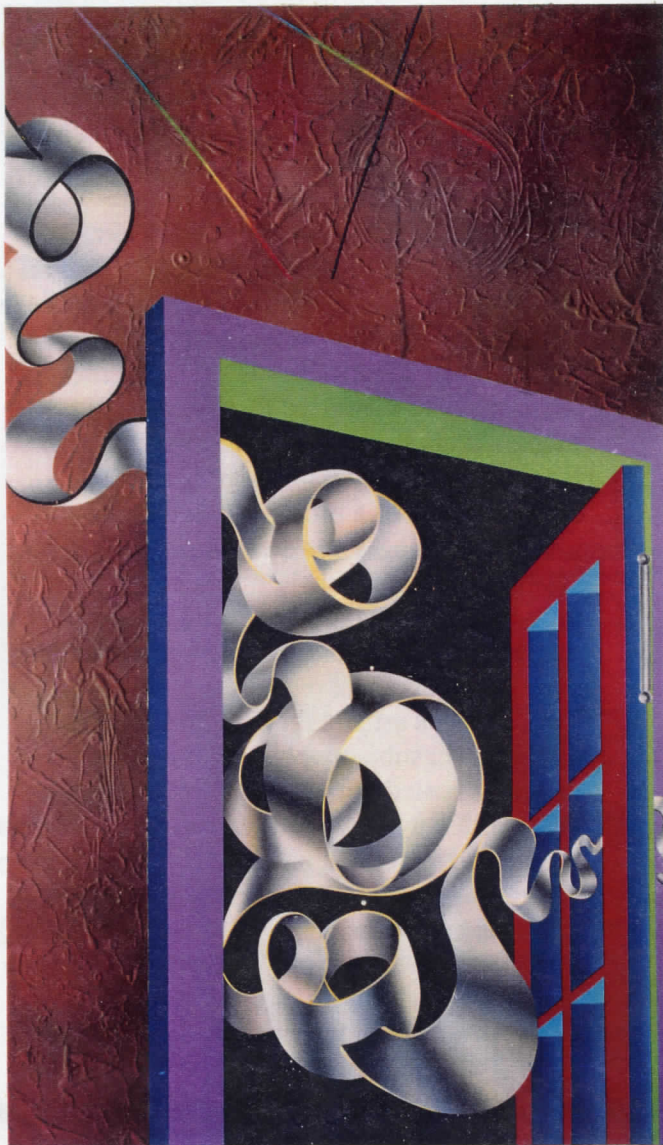
Pretto's genuine originality within Panamanian Art is most exemplified by his unusual connection with the urge to paint, a connection that doesn't quite fit the standards by which most artists are measured. His reluctance (he claims inability) to think and express himself in more habitual stylistic terms, may have been the reason why Guillermo Trujillo, Panama's most noted master, referred to Pretto as a "phenomenon"

Pretto's artistic product is rooted more in philosophical inquiry than in artistic inspiration, thus, it is intellectually rich. At times the artist has been criticized for "excessively mentalizing" the creative process, but he is first to point out that his works are not concocted out of a process of deliberate reasoning. Images for new works, he claims, "pop up" spontaneously in his mind. It is only after they make their initial visceral philosophical impact that they begin to render their full intellectual meaning.

Pretto's artistic product is symbolically eloquent yet subjectively uncluttered and it is uniquely vested with a colorful flamboyance quite unlike what we are accustomed to. Pretto has beaten a creative path of his own within an artistic supermarket saturated with overrehearsed styles and trends.

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Judging by the popular success of his 1984 political exhibition, Panamanian Rogelio Pretto may be mistakenly categorized as a political artist. In fact, Pretto's works have little to do with political ideological pronouncements. They are, rather, more the product of profound cosmic considerations which touch on a whole range of subjects including politics.

Throughout his career Pretto's primary preoccupation has been with the Cosmos and the idea of formulating its revelations about universal wisdom into some form of practical philosophy that can illuminate the difficult paths that fog our everyday existence. Giving pictorial form to the cosmological principles and questions he confronts during the course of his personal maturation is what Pretto's been doing since he decided to leave his post as a corporate CEO in Panama and become an artist.

Depth perception has been an essential ingredient in most everything the artist has produced over the years. At the beginning, Pretto relied on the use of the vanishing point as employed in architectural draftsmanship, to give his cosmological visions the timeless and infinite quality he was after. His images fell short, however, of invoking the true infiniteness he sensed existed, but was unable to grasp. The difficulty lay in that he was representing space in three dimensional terms—all he was capable of envisioning at the time. As a result, his paintings, dynamic and intellectually stimulating though they were, only hinted of the timeless Self he now existed, but which remained out of both his artistic and philosophical reach. He needed the personal and artistic maturity which were simply not available to him yet.

Rogelio tried everything to gain *knowledge*: Yoga, psychedelics, meditation and lots of reading material on Self awareness and consciousness raising; and of course, the discipline of painting, which seemed to nudge him progressively closer towards the windows of spiritual understanding and cosmic perception.

In 1972 the artist came across a book on M.C. Escher. Escher offered graphic images where perceptual opposites—like up or down—became almost indistinguishable to the mind. It was the visual tonic Rogelio needed to broaden his understanding of infinite space. Escher's images helped free Pretto's restricted understanding of the universe and allowed him new graphic potentials to represent its philosophical implications. The body of work that followed was expressively richer and showed the new creative aplomb with which Pretto now undertook his determined journey towards Self discovery.

Later, Pretto realized that Escher's works fell short of capturing the real essence of infinity. Pretto understood Infinity as boundless. Escher's depiction of it wasn't. It was determined by graphic lines converging at determined points. Pretto searched on and found a way of expressing the perception of space without the use of a vanishing point. It allowed Pretto to explore graphic possibilities which allow a painting to be viewed in a variety of positions by literally turning the painting around on any of its sides. Multi-panelled paintings offer even greater viewing alternatives, i.e., more panels, considerably more possibilities.

Ribbon-like patterns—a graphic ingredient also present in his earlier paintings—make capturing infinity possible. Freefloating in space and dancing whimsically over textures vested with magical iridescence, the “ribbons” (now used in much grander scale) has replaced the figure. It is part of a trio of graphic elements the artist has chosen to restrict himself to. Together they represent the Universe's basic essentials of Time, Matter and Space, and they make for fascinating viewing. Never have Pretto's works been so richly endowed with such simple but vibrant visual dynamics. They are the product of a tenacious search for visions that reflect true universality. Pretto has created a visual formula that is truly democratic and perfect for public display.

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