

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Greed in Rome: the Perfume

Posted by [Elisabetta Povoledo](#) in [Exhibits](#), [Rome](#)



The “GREED” exhibit at Rome’s Gagosian Gallery. (Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery)

Since it opened in December 2007, the [Gagosian Gallery](#) in Rome has strived to glitz up the capital’s contemporary art scene, featuring shows by Cy Twombly, Georg Baselitz and Richard Prince before presenting a project by a homegrown artist: “GREED, A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli,” which was launched to much fanfare last Friday.

The vernissage was a zoo, a cacophonous happening as befitting the presentation of a “signature perfume for the contemporary moment,” as the press release reads.

The piece is directly inspired by Marcel Duchamp’s readymade “Belle Haleine: Eau de Violette” (Beautiful Breath: Veil Water) perfume bottle, which the Dadaist created in

1921 with Man Ray (who for the logo photographed Duchamp as his female alterego, Rose Sélavy – a pun, perhaps, on the phrase “Eros, c’est la vie” or Love, life.)

For his contemporary update of the Rigaud perfume bottle, Vezzoli - who was born in Brescia, in 1971 and lives in Milan - called on fashion photographer Francesco Scavullo to capture his moment in drag. A short commercial for the perfume directed by Roman Polanski stars Natalie Portman and Michelle Williams duking it out over a bottle of the fragrance. It can be seen online [here](#).

Vezzoli’s perfume label reads “Eau de Larmes” (Tears Water) and he has adorned ten large portraits of famous female artists and icons – including Frida Kahlo, Georgia O’Keeffe and Tina Modotti – with bold tears embroidered using various materials. Though he works mostly in video, needlepoint is his weapon of transgression he told daily newspaper Corriere della Sera: “The women of my family never did needlepoint, not even my grandmother,” he said of his decision to use a needle and thread to épater his bourgeois family.

As a chronicler of contemporary society it’s fitting that Vezzoli looked back to Duchamp’s faux perfume, which is as highly charged sexually as it is ambiguous. Incidentally, one [Duchamp-Man Ray original bottle](#) will go on sale at Christie’s in Paris in late February. It is estimated to sell between 1 and 1.5 million euros.

Gagosian Gallery, via Francesco Crispi 16, tel. 06 42086498. Until March 21.