

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Art

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Art Show | Francesco Vezzoli's Eau de Faux

By Linda Yablonsky



Photos courtesy of

Francesco Vezzoli Studio Michele Williams and Natalie Portman star in a new commercial for "Greed: The Fragrance."

If unseemly displays of wealth are offensive in a recession, their trappings still glitter and goad. They certainly tested the moral fiber of the crowd attending Francesco Vezzoli's opening at the Gagosian Gallery in Rome last Friday night, when the artist introduced "Greed: The New Fragrance," his signature scent for an art world just beginning to suffer the effects of the current financial crisis.

Vezzoli drew a crowd thick enough to stop traffic and lively enough to incite the explosion of one stink bomb and at least one fistfight between guests desperate to get

in. Among those declining to run the blockade at the door was Roman Polanski, whom Vezzoli had asked to direct a commercial for “Greed,” starring Natalie Portman and Michele Williams.

The commercial was playing on a monitor just outside the central exhibition space, which Vezzoli had draped in red velvet curtains, giving the room a certain Fascist splendor.

Spotlighted in the center, was a bottle of “Greed,” surrounded by a dozen needlepoint portraits of women artists like Frida Kahlo, Meret Oppenheim, Eva Hesse and Louise Nevelson endorsing the product, though with tears in their eyes.

Vezzoli’s crystal bottle has a provenance in Marcel Duchamp’s “Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette,” but the perfume itself does not exist, except as a cultural critique. Its debut, however, indicated that an omnivorous appetite for fashion and celebrity is far from a thing of the past.



“It’s a statement that can’t be ignored,” said the fashion publicist Susan Billingsley, speaking of the event, not just the show, which drew at least as many personalities from the world of fashion as art. In fact, attending the dinner following the opening was like crashing the wedding party in “The Godfather.” Instead of the five Mafia families, the

guests for this marriage of art and commerce included five of the top design families in Italy — Fendi, Missoni, Prada, Versace and Agnelli.

The individual parties barely seemed to acknowledge one another's presence, taking their own tables and keeping their own counsel. Polanski — whom Gagosian had flown in from the Berlin set of his new movie, and who showed up late and with Miuccia Prada — created his own inner circle. He and Prada retired to a "V.I.P." parlor where Dasha Zhukova, the founder of Moscow's Center for Contemporary Arts; the artist Piotr Uklanski and his wife, Alison Gingeras (a curator for Francois Pinault); and the dealer Larry Gagosian held court.

Having set the promotional wheels in motion, Vezzoli then disappeared, leaving the bittersweet smell of success in the air behind him.