

Kaleidoscope
Winter 2013/2014

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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KALEIDOSCOPE

Like Unlike

The art of
FRANCESCO VEZZOLI

Enter
#VOICEOVER

ELLA KRUGLYANSKAYA's
bombshell women

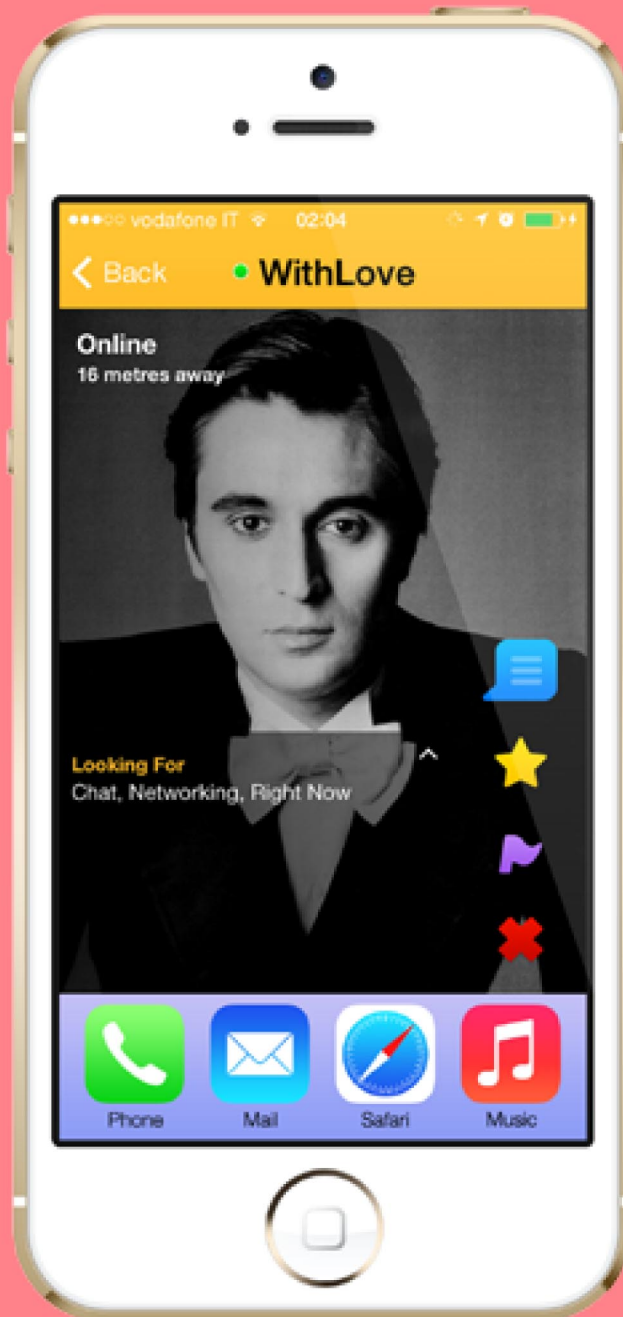
SHANGHAI
as seen by Birdhead

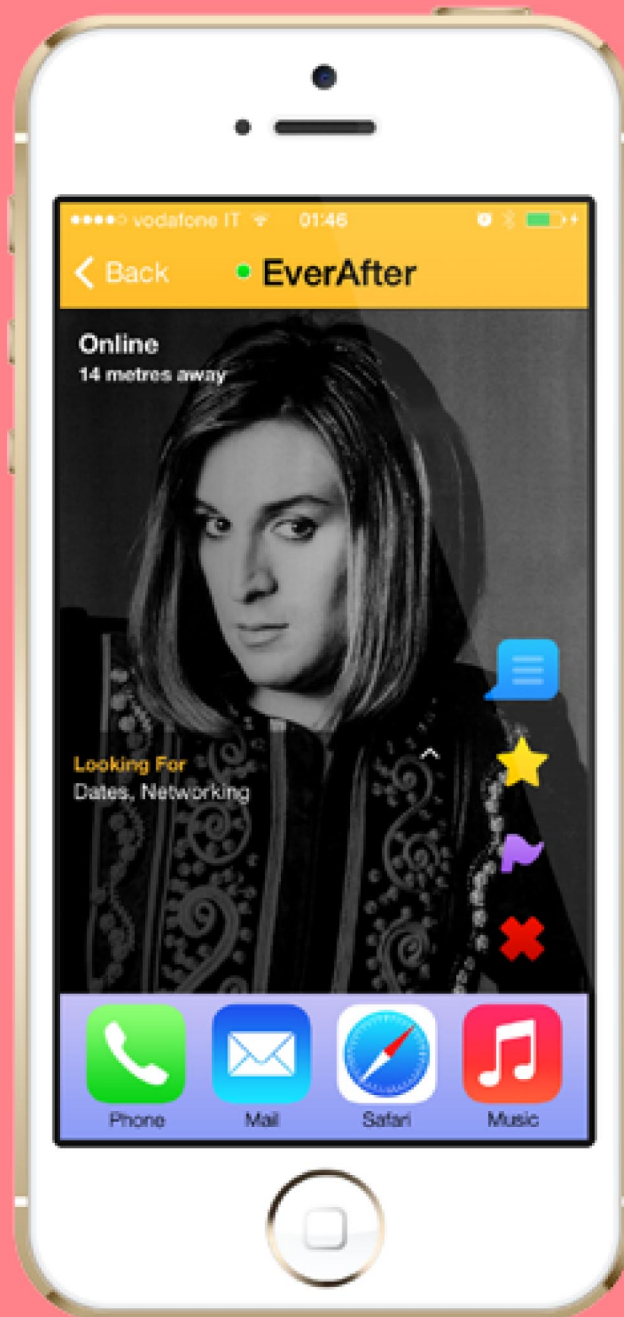
Looking back to
DAVID ROBILLIARD

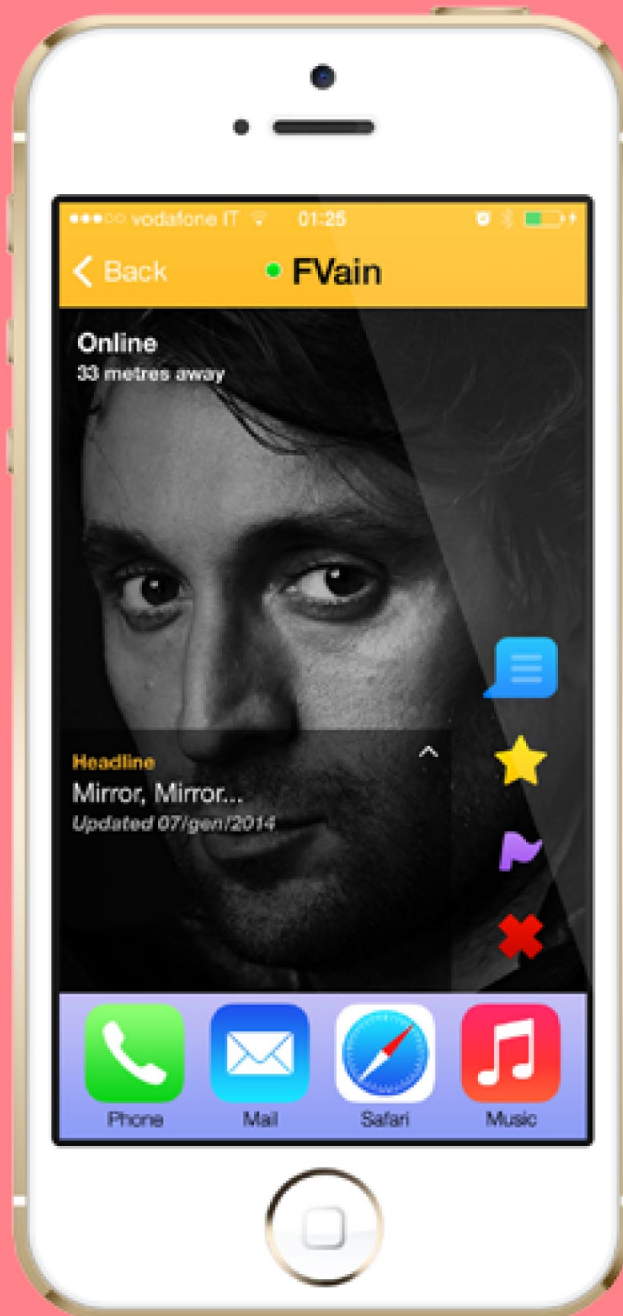
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INTERVIEW
BY KEVIN MCGARRY

KMG I am looking at these images that you've created to accompany this interview: iPhone screens showing mock Grindr profile pages with your pictures.

FV Yes, it's a mix of professional photography and some of my artwork. It's funny; just this morning there was an article by James Franco in the New York Times about the importance of selfies.

KMG I saw that — it sounds like the perfect place to start. I didn't read it yet, though, did you?

FV Yes, it was quite interesting for me. Everyone seems obsessed by selfies — common people use them to look more glamorous, celebrities use them to look more accessible.

KMG What do you think about the phenomenon of the selfie? Is it a neologism for an impulse that's always been there?

FV Selfies remind me a lot of Andy Warhol. Recently Diane von Furstenberg declared that "Andy understood all this way before than everyone else" and as a matter of fact the way we portray ourselves in selfies has a visual style that undeniably refers to the polaroid. Both selfies and polaroids are often overexposed in order to erase wrinkles and imperfections. Self-portraiture was certainly a *fil rouge* in Warhol's work and mine too, although I am more interested in the way it was conceived of and perceived in past centuries as a private pleasure rather than a ticket to the world of public pleasures and voyeurism. Grindr is the most evident playground for these kind of games.

KMG Do you use Grindr?

FV Yes, I use it. I mean, not all the time, but yes. You know, it's fun. It's like being in a bar without having the burden of worrying how I look.

KMG When we decided to do this interview, I thought it would make sense for us to connect on Grindr but realized it would be technologically impossible, because the only way to find somebody on it is through physical proximity.

FV Well, unless you are close to me and you become one of my favorites, and then I can find you wherever you are. But first, we have to be close to each other.

KMG I use Grindr, too, and actually the first time I used it, I was in a hotel room in Athens and the other guy was just six feet away, in the same room as me, but one floor below, and we had

the same flight to Berlin in the morning and so we had a totally platonic encounter of going to the airport together. He showed me where to go when we arrived, so it was a very nice, gay, utopian connection.

FV I think what is interesting with Grindr is if you travel and you keep it on all the time, you just see it's a kind of anthropological evolution and revolution somehow—you see faces and bodies changing. Once I did this project, *Non-Love Meetings*, about this movie by Pasolini titled *Comizi d'amore* (1964), where Pasolini traveled around Italy asking everybody, you know, how they perceive sex, prostitution, homosexuality, and of course he filmed people and he dealt with the way they looked. The thing with Grindr is that in a more metropolitan environment, you have all these perfect bodies and perfect hairdos, and the more you move into the province, the more you realize that the bodies and fashions are different. Where you are now, for example?

KMG I'm in Boulder, Colorado.

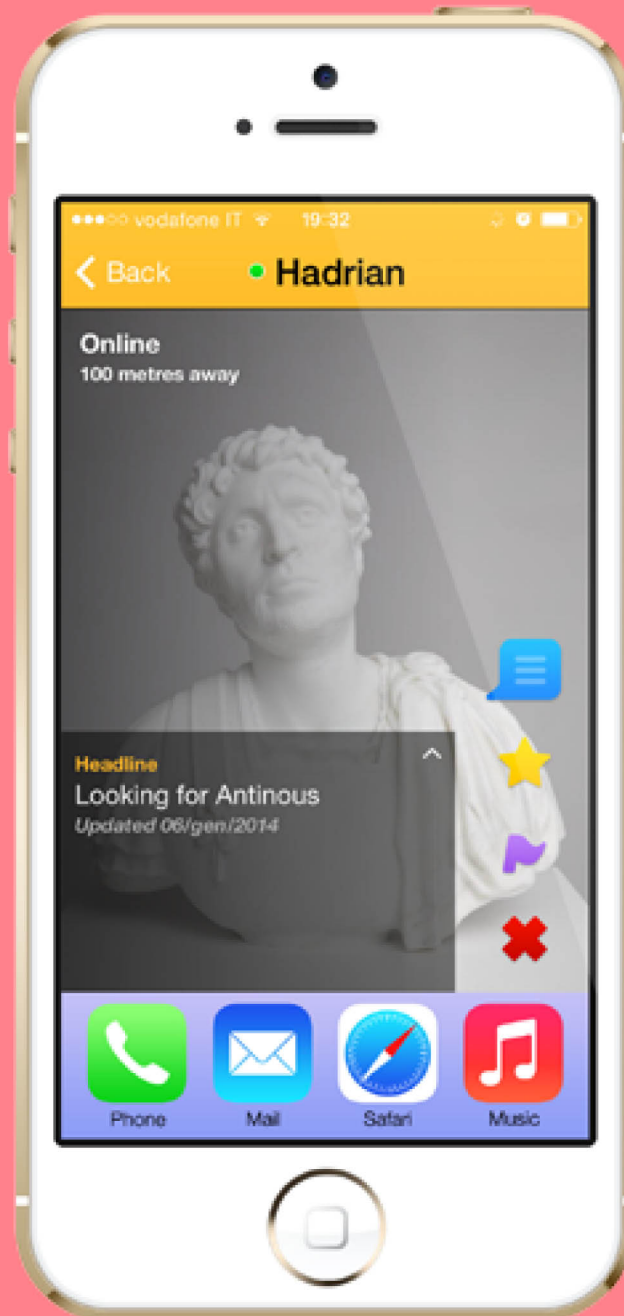
FV Okay, if you take a train from Denver, all the way to where you are now with your family, and you turn on Grindr, you will see the bodies changing.

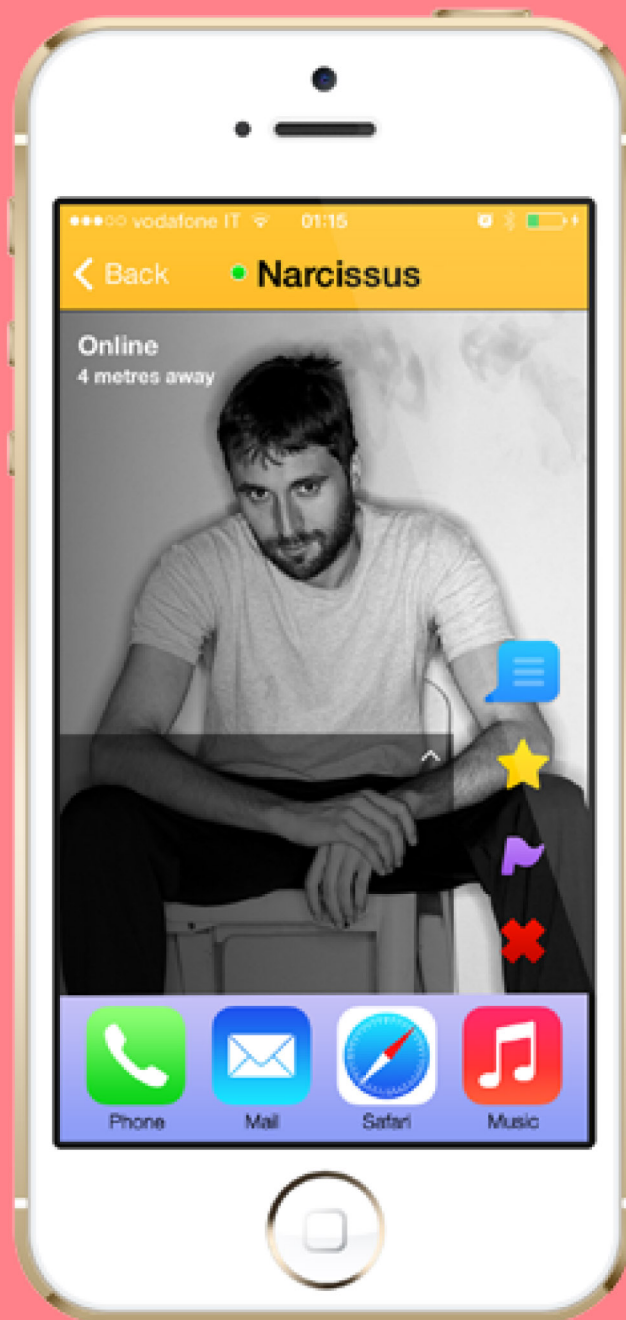
KMG Boulder is actually a haven of athletically obsessed people! But I know what you are saying, and it's true. Standards of beauty and standardization in general are manifested via hookup apps.

FV My personal obsession is with Roman or Greek cultures, you know. And I always think of those times in history when a member of a certain royal family was obliged to marry another member of the royal family whom he had never met, but would only see in a portrait from a painter—aren't those portraits some kind of Grindr profiles?

KMG Well yeah, and it's going back to a time when relationships and marriages were more overtly transactional, used for merging families, or royalty resources and political situations. And now Grindr is so transactional, too. It's come full circle in that sense.

Another interesting aspect is that when you make a profile you're sort of distilling yourself, you are just drilling down to simple messaging, a simplified and bettered public persona for yourself. Self-representation like this, particularly the kind that occupies a gray area between reality and fiction, seems to relate to your work. You've managed to develop a big career that runs in part on energy that's kind of glitzy and hedonistic, and to be honest I don't know a lot about your personal life or if you've intentionally cordoned it off from your art practice.







FV There are two public Francesco Vezzolis and only one private one. For a long time people assumed I was hanging out all the time with movie stars or fashion designers, just because they saw the very same people appearing in my work, but that was not the reality at all. Then there is the other public Francesco Vezzoli, the one photographed by Scavullo, by Annie Leibovitz, the one that becomes a Roman emperor, or even Antinous. This other Francesco Vezzoli doesn't have much to do with the real one either. I guess I am just like an actor, taking other people's identity for a ride and then running back to my own private self as fast as I can. Grindr, too, is a game of roles, and I am not interested in revealing my true identity or, for that matter, finding out the true identity of the person I am talking to. Art and sex are both about what we project onto our objects of desire.

KMG Lately, though, it appears they're less in dialogue than before.

FV I have a feeling that this has to do with the general acceptance of desire. In the '80s, in the art system, successful artists like, say, Francesco Clemente were all over the place, having sex, a lot of flings, and it was okay because it was part of their public image and of their glamour. Now — this is just a personal feeling — I think we have shifted from the art system to an art industry, where sex is perceived as an element that can be a detriment to the productivity of an artist.

KMG Yeah, it becomes a liability, in the most conservative sense. I see what you're saying.

FV I am sure there is a lot of literature being written about Grindr, but what is interesting is if we put it in relationship to artistic discourse. And this can apply to social networks in general. For example, I just recently did a post for Hans Ulrich Obrist's Instagram account — it was fun. He is one of the few, so far, who has found a way to use social networks with a cultural agenda and a decent number of followers. Personally, in the future, I would like to play with social media the way that in the past I did with mass media, like TV or the movies. For instance, it would be fun to create a fictional profile of an artist on Instagram, or even on Grindr, transplanting a virus into an environment that is supposed to be so viral, and see how people react to the parody. Let's see.

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI was born in 1971 in Brescia, Italy. He studied at Central St. Martins School of Art in London from 1992 to 1995. He currently lives and works in Milan. The artist's work has been presented in various museums including MAXXI - Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo, Rome (2013), MoMA PS1, New York (2007), Fondazione Prada, Milan (2004), The Garage CCC, Moscow, (2010), Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2009), Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris (2009), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2009), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2007), New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2001). His works have featured in diverse biennials, including the 2006 Whitney Biennial, the 49th, 51st and 52nd Biennale of Venice, the 26th Biennial of São Paulo, the 6th International Biennial of Istanbul, and in numerous group shows.

Current and Forthcoming

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI's upcoming solo show "Cinema Vezzoli" will open on 27 April 2014 at MOCA Grand Avenue, Los Angeles.

Authors

ANDREA VILLANI is the Director of the Museo MADRE in Naples, Italy. Previously, he served as the Director of the Fondazione Galleria Civica in Trento (2009–2012); curator of the MAMbo in Bologna (2005–2009); and assistant curator at Castello di Rivoli in Turin, Italy (2000–2005). In 2010 he was appointed member of the Agent-Core Group of dOCUMENTA (13) and in 2012 he co-curated, with Aman Mojadidi and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, a part of dOCUMENTA (13) in Kabul and Bamiyan (Afghanistan).

KEVIN MCGARRY is a New Hampshire-born writer and curator based in Los Angeles and New York. He is a contributor to *Frieze*, *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, *Modern Weekly*, *artforum.com*, *W Magazine* and several other art and culture publications. McGarry recently co-programmed the fourth annual Migrating Forms festival of film and video in New York City.