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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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The Conversation Francesco Vezzoli

Artist



Biography

Francesco Vezzoli is a contemporary artist renowned for his provocative video installations starring celebrities. His new exhibition, *The Trinity: Galleria Vezzoli*, is showing this year in Rome, New York and LA

PORTRAIT BY
ERNESTO RUSCIO

You're putting on a trio of exhibitions at Rome's Maxxi museum, New York's MoMA and the MOCA in Los Angeles this year – that sounds like a lot of work.

It is. Especially because it's not the same show. I kind of grew tired of the whole scheme of art exhibitions – they start in one place and then go to another place and they travel around the world for maybe a year or a year and a half. That used to function well back when there was no internet or Instagram, but now once something is out, it's out.

You're only 41, and yet you're having a retrospective of your work. Does it feel a little strange?

I don't like the word retrospective. It

scares me and makes me feel old. It is a bit of a retrospective, but I'd call it more of a crazy-spective. For MoMA, we're buying a church in the south of Italy and we're bringing the church to the gallery [in New York]. We're slicing it up like a cake, wrapping the pieces up and putting them on a cargo boat.

How do the galleries feel about you rebuilding their spaces?

As an artist I wouldn't mind if a crazy gallery in the East End found 10 works of mine and hung them upside down – I would find it hilarious. Or if they just showed the back of the frame.

You're known for shocking videos that feature famous people, particularly your *Caligula* trailer with

Helen Mirren and your Greed perfume video with Natalie Portman. How did you get them on board?

I certainly didn't pay them. Money wouldn't get you there. It would be so expensive if I did everything in the regular way. If they asked me for 12 make-up people, I would have paid for it – because that would still have been one-hundredth of the cost of paying the actor's actual fee.

Has anyone ever turned you down?

Nicole Kidman rejected me. Shit happens.

You were at London's Central Saint Martins college during the reign of the YBAs – that must have been exciting.

For me it was very strange because I had been educated in Arte Povera and conceptual art and all of a sudden – bam! –

'My nation is having a shaky moment'

you take a newspaper and it's all over the place. This had never happened in Italy. I never imagined contemporary art would end up with such a high media

profile. I knew Sarah Lucas back then, and the fact they had such strong identities – working class and this and that – made me put myself under scrutiny.

British art hasn't had that sort of hype in a long time.

British artists got all of that coverage because it was the last artistic movement. I can speak about Central Saint Martins and the schools: maybe they became so famous and so expensive that now they attract a crowd of people that are more privileged. It's difficult. I wouldn't want to say the British artists of today are less good than the ones back then.

Why is fashion a big part of your work?

I see it as a political gesture. My nation is going through a very shaky moment, and a lot of the industries that used to represent the excellence of my country are no longer that excellent, and fashion is the only true excellent bridge to worldwide culture for my nation. The companies that produce fashion are the ones that sponsor art or the restoration of ancient monuments and keep up the few cultural institutions. *

INTERVIEW BY LIAM O'BRIEN