

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Historical links

Yang Lan



*Francesco Vezzoli's sculpture work
Photo: Yang Lan/GT*

For an hour Saturday night, the 62-meter-high screen outside of the Aurora Building played a video by Francesco Vezzoli, marking the first time the internationally acclaimed Italian artist shared his work with a Chinese audience.

The 15-second video was a fake facial cream commercial in which Vezzoli played a crying Roman Togatus. The tears are a Vezzoli signature. The artist is known for recreating the portraits of famous people and then adding embroidered glittering tears to their faces. He has replicated the portraits of famous actors such as Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo.

“For me, faces of glamour are beautiful, but they are not entirely true,” Vezzoli told the Global Times. “They show only the gilded side of life. But life has a painful side. By adding the tears, I am adding my signature of truth.”

To get his ideas across, Vezzoli makes use of different media, including needlepoint, sculptures and videos. He directed the *Trailer for a Remake of Gore Vidal's Caligula*, starring Gore Vidal, Helen Mirren and Benicio Del Toro. His work *GREED, A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli* imitated a perfume commercial that featured a fragrance called Greed. In the video, two women, played by the actors Natalie Portman and Michelle Williams, wrested each other to the ground while fighting over the perfume.

Vezzoli has become one of Italy's most famous contemporary artists. His work has been selected to represent Italy at three Venice Biennales. Internationally, the 2006 Whitney Biennial in New York, the 6th International Biennale in Istanbul, and the 26th Biennale in Sao Paulo also exhibited his work. Vezzoli has held exhibitions and shows in museums around the world, such

as the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and the Tate Modern in London.

Davide Quadrio, the curator of the exhibition *The Making of the Museum* at the Aurora Museum, invited Vezzoli to Shanghai to discuss working with the museum on an exhibition in China.

On Saturday, he sat in a talk with Leo Xu, Shanghainese art critic and Shaway Yeh, group style editorial director of Modern Media Group. They discussed Vezzoli's artistic styles and his passion for history.

The Aurora Museum has a collection of thousands of Chinese cultural artifacts, including porcelain and Buddhist statues. Along with displaying Chinese antiquities, the museum employs a professional research team to study the artifacts. It also organizes special exhibitions for visitors.

Quadrio said he invited Vezzoli to Shanghai because of the nature of the latter man's work, especially the work he has done with artifacts from the Roman Empire. "Everything we do at the museum needs to have a connection with the past," Quadrio told the Global Times.

Quadrio has asked Vezzoli to create a series of artwork related to Chinese antiques. He is also working with museums in Italy to bring a collection of Vezzoli's work to the Aurora Museum.

In the near future, the Aurora Museum will collaborate with important museums in Italy to present an exhibition that links the pasts of both Italy and China through the eyes of Vezzoli.

"Being a contemporary artist is very difficult in Italy, because they are constantly compared with ancient masters. It is challenging to stand on the shoulders of the ancient masters," said Stefano Beltrame, the Consul General of Italy in Shanghai.

By showing the work of contemporary Italian artists, the consulate hopes to introduce Italy into Shanghai's contemporary art scene. "We would like people to know that Italy does not only have ancient masters. We do have good contemporary artists such as Francesco Vezzoli," Beltrame told the Global Times.