

BLOUINARTINFO.COM: 'Francesco Vezzoli', October, 2013



NEWSMAKER

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI

WITH AN OEUVRE that includes religiously inflected needlepoints, over-the-top videos co-starring Gore Vidal and Benicio del Toro, and sculptures that pair marble self-portraits with 18th-century busts, Francesco Vezzoli has a reputation for going big. He's transporting a church piece by piece from Italy and rebuilding it in the courtyard of MOMA PS1, where next month it will be used as a film-screening venue. The New York exhibition is the second part of "The Trinity," an enormous, multicity retrospective that began at MAXXI in Rome and will conclude at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los

Angeles. (He also has a show this month at the QMA Gallery in Qatar.) *Modern Painters* executive editor Scott Indrisek met with the Italian artist during a sojourn in New York.

SI: What is your ambition with "The Trinity"?

FV: I'm trying to make a surreal version of a midcareer survey show. I've realized that I have done so much that many people don't know about. With this project, it's freshening up the concept of a midcareer survey—a phrase I hate, that makes me feel old.

SI: What brings you to New York?

FV: We're here to film a new video in which

Jessica Chastain plays a Southern woman who becomes an adept of my religion.

SI: She starts worshipping you?

FV: Well, me or...the work.

SI: And you'll be showing this film, with others, in the church that you're taking apart and then rebuilding in the courtyard of PS1. How did you pick this particular church?

FV: We picked it based on availability and deconsecrate-ability, because you can't do that to a church that is consecrated; otherwise, you'll end up in jail or in hell. And because it was small and old and it looked like a church. I wanted it to have an ancient feeling. It's

NEWSMAKER

rather rustic, from the country. Stone walls. Hopefully, it will play a striking contrast with the cement walls of the PS1 courtyard. It's bringing elements of my roots into a space where supposedly such things don't belong, always some kind of *détournement*—a sense of sliding, something accidental, something that you don't expect to find.

SI: How did this concept of three exhibitions in Rome, New York, and L.A. come about?

FV: It was Klaus Biesenbach's idea, because he kept saying that my work shifts between art, cinema, and religion. And I thought: the gallery, the church, the cinema.

SI: For the first installment at MAXXI in Rome, you drastically transformed a space designed by Zaha Hadid.

FV: I think it is important to create some kind of tension. Zaha is a good friend. She knows my attitude toward things. She stood up at the dinner and said she really enjoyed the mess that we made, so that made me happy.

SI: How hard is it to get well-known actors to work with you? They're surrounded by so many layers of publicists.

FV: The works are acts of war against the system of agents and publicists. The fact that I was convincing enough to get them in front of my camera: That is the artwork. I started with local Italian celebrities who were meaningful for me. In America it is always more difficult because rules are stricter, like unions—I'm not against it, I understand it, but I'm a bit of

"It's easy—what do you do with the market? You put it to good use."

a thief. I steal performances. I steal images. Now that the work is so big and broad, it's surprising how many people judge it not from the conceptual point of view but from the point of view of enjoyability. Some people think that because the audience is broader, the work is less sophisticated.

SI: Are you happy to have a broader audience?

FV: Yes, and I think it's impossible to fight it. Art is a bit of a no-man's-land, a limbo. I think we're slowly exiting the limbo—all these new magazines that are sold are promoting art in a fashionable way. They're not like *Artforum*; they're just another segment of the media market that has the art world as its study.

SI: Do you think the art world has gotten more celebrity-obsessed? I just saw Jay-Z's performance at Pace, and it was a bit weird to see all these art world personalities there.

FV: I was invited to be a sitter, but to me, the invitation looked like a take on some of my artwork. I was surprised to hear that some important artists were going to be part of this game. Because when I was doing my game, I was asking celebrities on the level of Jay-Z to be part of my artwork. Now Jay-Z is asking Marina Abramović to be part of his videos. So I think it is a very interesting dynamic in itself.

SI: What's next for you, after "The Trinity"?

FV: If I were in a financial position that would allow me to do so, I would love to produce things, sponsor things. If I saw that a Rodarte fashion show was sponsored by Wade Guyton, that would be cool. I think the only possibility today for contemporary art certainly isn't painting versus sculpture versus multimedia versus whatever; it's about the role of the artist. Artists are still thinking in the old style, like an artist from the '70s. Now, I think if



I were an artist with a big Chelsea gallery and I had a political agenda, for the kind of money that revolves around one exhibition, I could pretty much open a newspaper.

SI: So why don't you do that?

FV: Well, I think I am already pursuing my agenda at the highest level. My agenda was to be deconstructive of the media. I was already infiltrating the system at the top level. But if I had a strong political agenda in mind, I would go to my dealers and say, "OK, I'll do an exhibition with you, but with this money, we buy *Il Manifesto* [an Italian left-wing newspaper] and we save the most political newspaper in my nation, for the price of a Chelsea exhibition. Real artists could have an impact on real politics. I think the real debate today of the art world is, What do we make of this potential power? I think that when artists

realize they could have all this power, they retreat into more traditional techniques, like painting. But for me it's about pushing the boundary and seeing how many crazy, great things artists can do using all these resources that our industry is now giving to us.

SI: You've also got the show this month in Qatar.

FV: It is somehow an extension of this "Trinity" survey. It is called "Museum of the Crying Women." It is going to be an extensive selection of all the works with crying divas. We're reproducing a section of the Palace of Versailles. We're

Francesco Vezzoli

ABOVE: *Cleopazza (Study for "Surrealiz")*, 2008. Inkjet print with collage, 12½ x 10¼ in.

LEFT: Still from *Trailer for a remake of Gore Vidal's Caligula*, 2005. Video transferred from 35 mm film, 5 min.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Vezzoli with a marble self-portrait, 2013.



bringing a portable Versailles to the nation that is building so many museums—a slice of fake history. On one wall we will put all the needleworks about vanity, and the other side will be mirrors, reflecting the works.

SI: *What else do you have planned?*

FV: I was approached by the Museo Madre in Naples to do something. I said, “Let’s do a documentary on the famous dinner that Lucio Amelio held when he invited Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol to do an exhibition together at his gallery. And I want to be the producer of this documentary, not the director. I want to find the resources and facilitate. After that, I would like to commission a nightclub in Milan.

SI: *That’s moving quite far from the idea of making an artwork.*

FV: Coming from Europe, having grown up with a poster of Beuys saying We Are the Revolution, I must think in those terms. It’s still an extension of my vision. It seems like the only debate existing is the one about the market. It’s easy—what do you do with the market? You put it to good use. Stop

blaming money; use it in a smart way. Without sounding arrogant, I see myself like a Renaissance artist. I’m not that wealthy, but there is a potential for a new Renaissance artist out there because our industry is doing well. **MP**

Francesco Vezzoli
Portrait of Sophia Loren as the Muse of Antiquity (after Giorgio de Chirico), 2011. Bronze, 75 x 23¾ x 23¾ in.

