ALMINE RECH

Francesco Vezzoli
VITA DULCIS. Paura e desiderio nell'Impero Romano

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Jointly curated by Francesco Vezzoli – one of Italy's most internationally acclaimed artists – and Stéphane Verger, director of the Museo Nazionale Romano, VITA DULCIS is an exhibition which strives to re-read and actualise the enduring fascination of ancient Rome through a new and surprising dialogue between contemporary art, archaeology and film. A Latinisation of Federico Fellini's well-known film La dolce vita, the title that has been chosen introduces – and is emblematic of – the agility with which this exhibition plans to move between different ages and contexts, from Classical culture to pop. The show will be articulated through seven thematic rooms pivoting around the central rotunda, which will function as an introductory space. Ancient history, in the form of works and archaeological finds from the various branches of the Museo Nazionale Romano – well-known masterpieces or pieces that have never been placed on public display before – will be shown alongside a narrative unfolding through images from major box-office hit films such as Cabiria, Italy's first epic movie made in 1914 on whose script Gabriele D'Annunzio also collaborated, Federico Fellini's Satyricon, Derek Jarman's Sebastiane, Ridley Scott's Gladiator. Works by Vezzoli incorporating elements of ancient art, or inspired by it, make up the third voice in this dialogue. Such a diversity of materials and temporality, in terms of intent and significance, will be mixed and grafted onto one another with the aim of creating – also thanks to the dramatic and immersive staging conceived by artist Filippo Bisagni in collaboration with celebrated cinematographer Luca Bigazzi – an entirely new narrative. One that brings back the passion and vitality that is so specific to Classical art, along with its human dimension, making it "present" once more and underlining how the instincts which drive human beings have remained unchanged over time. Using history as a means for implementing a critical reflection on the present has always been characteristic of the work of Francesco Vezzoli, who explores the inner workings of communication and power by addressing thorny issues such as celebrity, religion, sex and politics. The visionary and shared power of film has long been a reference for his work, be it video, embroidered canvases, installations or sculpture. His ambitious projects have involved international stars such as Natalie Portman, Lady Gaga, Cate Blanchett, Sharon Stone, Anita Ekberg. Vezzoli then developed a preference for, as he puts it, "the Louvre over Hollywood", placing art history – particularly works from Classical antiquity – centre-stage in his work. This manifested itself for the first time in the video Trailer for a Remake of Gore Vidal's Caligula, inspired by the Tinto Brass movie Caligola (1979) and presented at the 2005 edition of the Venice Biennale. His interest in ancient Rome has endured to this day, maturing his interest in working directly with works from this period. With them, Vezzoli entertains an ideal dialogue of sorts, but one that is not deprived of humour and a degree of parodistic detachment. He has, for example, placed a portrait of himself in Carrara marble facing an Eighteenth Century bust of Antinous, or inserted a Giorgio de Chirico-like bronze head onto Roman-era bodies in marble. Or even painted over white marble sculptures in lively colours, returning them to the original, ludic, carnal and "anti-Classical" appearance they would have originally had and which we, today, have forgotten. By presenting a novel take on Antiquity, a museology endeavour that at last brings together stars and history, VITA DULCIS is therefore the culminating expression of Vezzoli's complex and multifaceted artistic development, as well as a conveyance of its founding characteristics.