



CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

Museo d'Arte Contemporanea

Piazza Mafalda di Savoia, 10098 Rivoli (Torino)

tel. 011. 9565222 / 9565220

Exhibition

Francesco Vezzoli

Curator

Marcella Beccaria

Press Office

Massimo Melotti, Responsible
Alessandra Santerini, Consultant
Manuela Vasco, ph. 011 9565209
Silvano Bertalot, ph. 011 9565211
fax 011 9565231
e-mail: press@castellodirivoli.org

Press preview

Monday, January 28, 2002, 11:30 a.m.

Opening

Tuesday, January 29, 2002, 7:00 p.m.

Dates

January 30 – May 5, 2002

Hours

Tuesday – Friday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday, 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.
1st and 3rd Sat. of the month, 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Entrance

€ 6.20 (Itl. 12,000) full price; € 4.13 (Itl. 8,000)
reduced price

Location

Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea
Piazza Mafalda di Savoia 10098 Rivoli (Turin)

**Education services
and public programs**

Education Department
ph. 011 9565213 - fax 011 9565232
e-mail: educa@castellodirivoli.org

Shuttle bus service

Saturday, Sunday and holidays
departure from Turin, Piazza Castello
information ph. 011 9565280

Information

ph. 011 9565220
www.castellodirivoli.org
e-mail: info@castellodirivoli.org

The exhibition

Francesco Vezzoli drew the attention of international critics with his first videos, where the technique of embroidery becomes the cornerstone around which the artist creates veritable cinematic cameos. Invited to participate in the last Venice Biennale, he aroused particular interest, on the part of critics and public alike, with his performance, *Veruschka Was Here*, on the occasion of which he convinced the former model to perform live, playing herself in the act of embroidering one of the photos taken of her during the 1960s.

Vezzoli's works, which include video installations and embroideries he has executed in petit-point, mix heterogeneous languages and genres, bringing together pop icons, auteur cinema, art history and costumes. According to Marcella Beccaria, curator of the exhibition, "like a collector, who by his very nature gathers a number of scattered fragments, Francesco Vezzoli collects references and quotations. Collected in each work, these compose a tale permeated with beauty and decadence, fame and human pain." To accomplish his works the artist involves movie stars who have experienced fame or jet set personalities who still live on in the collective imagination. The protagonists of his video works have included, for example, Valentina Cortese, Marisa Berenson shot as Edith Piaf, or Helmut Berger playing a role in *Dynasty* together with the artist.

Conceived for the spaces of Castello di Rivoli, Francesco Vezzoli's exhibition includes his new double video installation, *The End of the Human Voice* and a series of embroideries made specifically for this occasion. *The End of the Human Voice* is taken from the theatrical text *The Human Voice*, written by Jean Cocteau in 1930 and brought to the large screen by Roberto Rossellini in 1948. The subject was inspired by the amorous delirium of a woman who, on the telephone, talks for the last time with the man who has just left her. As is characteristic of his work, Vezzoli mixes different genres in this case involving Bianca Jagger, famous former wife of the leader of the Rolling Stones and queen of the gossip columns, and today a committed civil rights activist. In one of the two video projections that make up the installation, Bianca Jagger, who has never acted, does so for Vezzoli and plays the dramatic role of the abandoned woman, a part the public knows through the masterful interpretation of Anna Magnani in Rossellini's film. Reversing the Neorealist version, the video is set in a luxurious and decadent atmosphere, but through a refined use of black and white, it intentionally carries on a dialogue with the film version.

In the other video that makes up the installation, Vezzoli himself plays the part of the faithless lover, creating for himself a role that doesn't appear in Cocteau's theatrical text or in Rossellini's film version. Quoting the figure and works of Jean Cocteau, in a sort of literary self-portrait, the artist composes an almost static image, the bright colors of which present a Surrealist-like atmosphere.

A new series of embroideries included in the exhibition also are inspired by the life and works of Jean Cocteau. Vezzoli has stated: "Through petit-point embroidery, I wanted to romanticize the erotic drawings of the French intellectual." In dialogue

with the historic spaces of the Castello, the artist presents them as “the room of the white book,” composing them in a single installation that runs along the walls of the room.

The catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by the first monograph dedicated to the artist, edited by Marcella Beccaria. Richly illustrated and furnished with biographical and bibliographical information, the catalogue provides a critical framework for the artist's work and covers all Vezzoli's video work thus far. The book, published by Castello di Rivoli, continues the series of monographs that already include Maurizio Cattelan, Grazia Toderi and Mona Hatoum.

Francesco Vezzoli. Catalogue edited by Marcella Beccaria, published by Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Rivoli-Turin. Text by Marcella Beccaria, detailed entries of video works with quotations selected by the artist, biographical and bibliographical information. Bilingual Italian / English edition, 73 pages, 48 color illustrations, 9 black and white. ISBN 88-900751-0-4.

From the text in the catalogue

Fragments of an Amorous Discourse

Marcella Beccaria

[...] Vezzoli's installation for Castello di Rivoli stems from the idea of presenting in video form a fragment of Jean Cocteau's theatrical text *The Human Voice*, produced for the first time in 1930 and brought to the screen in 1948 by Roberto Rossellini, who was a close friend of Cocteau. Conceived with the intention of "writing an illegible work", according to the author, the text was created as an experiment in "pure theater" and "a pretext for an actress." Aiming for the maximum simplicity, Cocteau's goal, in fact, was to present "one act, one room, one character, love, and the common accessory of modern dramas, the telephone." Unanimously accepted by the actors of the Comédie Française, to whom Cocteau read the text for the first time, the theatrical production, however, aroused polemical reactions. Rossellini's neorealist version was no more successful. Conceived as the first part of *Amore (Love)*, a two-episode film, *La voce umana (The Human Voice)* featured Anna Magnani, who was the director's companion at the time, but who, in a cruel twist, was left by him shortly after the film was made. "They called it filmed theater, and they understood nothing," Rossellini said after the film's negative critical reception. "What I did with *Amore* had never been done before. First of all it was a formidable technical investigation that alone should suffice to make a film successful. But even better, there is an individual weighed down, placed under the microscope, scrutinized in depth. It is the study of a human face, the penetration of the innermost wrinkles of a physiognomy. And this, if I am not mistaken, is an investigation of expressive means that no one has ever dreamed of attempting." Anna Magnani lent her dramatic face and talent to Rossellini's microscopic investigation, and the director constructed the film according to a variation of shots, where the face of the actress stood out on the screen, almost as if her head were separate from her body.

"I'm interested," Francesco Vezzoli says, "in developing my projects according to a contrapuntal process, whereby destabilizing elements are inserted within the discourse." This method, which regulates the artist's approach to every new work, is brought to extreme consequences in *The End of the Human Voice*. In fact, the video extends the principle of quotation to paroxysm, in that the actress selected by Vezzoli, despite certain liberties, follows Cocteau's text. In the form of a veritable soundtrack that punctuates the acting with a chiasmic structure, the pieces of music chosen are Erik Satie's *Gymnopédies* piano sonatas, which Cocteau himself described as the music of sorrow. At the same time, with regard to the film version, Vezzoli's video, however, has an entirely different language, which seems to reverse the experimentation of Rossellini's version, turning it into a Hollywood-like production. The framing of the video's shots insists on maintaining a certain distance from the character, exhibiting a discretion that was not meant to be part of the neorealist poetics. Above all, compared to Anna Magnani's magisterial interpretation, Vezzoli offers the difficult leading role to an actress who in reality has never acted. Bianca Jagger, the celebrity involved in this project, is a figure who doesn't owe her notoriety to cinema or theater, but rather to the glitzy gossip columns of the 'Seventies. [...] All these aspects

constitute fertile terrain for Vezzoli, who is always drawn to contradictions and the new interconnections they imply. More than involving merely an actress, the artist presents a character with multiple identities, someone who by her very presence is capable of opening up the work to a complex series of interpretations. Thus, when the work is projected, we don't see the image of the "anonymous woman," as Cocteau had conceived. Nor do we see an actress of natural dramatic predisposition, as Anna Magnani was for Rossellini. Quite the opposite: what we see is the exotic queen of nightlife, the woman who was always on the telephone, the betrayed wife, and finally the political activist of international stature. Indeed, this year Bianca Jagger gave a speech on peace at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. In Vezzoli's work, following the English version of the text, interpolated with tragic invocations in Italian ("amore mio"), Bianca Jagger stages a credible drama, wherein the silences that define the rhythm of the original text are replaced by incessant monologue. Vezzoli's liberties and added digressions lend a full-bodied depth to the character in real life. The scene of the woman who, at the height of her desperation, sedately adjusts her hair and carefully applies makeup, in fact belongs neither to the theatrical text nor to the film version, but it clearly is an homage to the well-known vanity of Bianca Jagger. It is rumored that while she was in Paris, rather than cancel a date at the hair salon, she instead canceled an appointment with Mick, who had come there from New York specifically to see her. [...]

Biography

Born in Brescia in 1971, Francesco Vezzoli currently lives and works in Milan. He attended the Central St. Martins College of Art and Design in London, where he took his BA in 1995. It was while living in London that Vezzoli took up embroidery in reaction to the artistic climate around him. On his return to Italy, Vezzoli produced his first video works in the form of a trilogy conceived as an alternative history of cinema seen through the medium of embroidery. *An Embroidered Trilogy* is composed of *OK, the Praz Is Right!*, 1997, *Il sogno di Venere*, 1998, *The End (teleteatro)*, 1999. An obsessive cinephile, Vezzoli elaborates a highly personal language, weaving through each work a complex, tightly meshed web of references to both high and pop culture. The videos all feature famous figures from the world of showbusiness, while Vezzoli, absorbed in his embroidery, appears in a series of silent walk-on parts. Each video in the trilogy is about the length of a pop video and has a different director, chosen by the artist for their suitability to the project in question. In his subsequent video pieces, *A Love Trilogy – Self-Portrait with Marisa Berenson as Edith Piaf*, 1999, and *The Kiss (let's play Dynasty!)*, 2000, which Vezzoli himself directed, the artist develops a narrative structure that gradually approaches the world of his own dreams and of the icons who populate it. In parallel with each of his videos, Vezzoli produces a number of embroideries on a subject related to that particular work, while other pieces of embroidery form a commentary or homage to particular periods of art history.

Vezzoli has had several solo shows, among which the 1999 presentation of *An Embroidered Trilogy* in the following spaces: Giò Marconi, Milan, The British School, Rome, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London. In 2000 a show of his works was held in the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, as part of its Open Space program.

The artist's work has also featured in a number of international group shows including, in 1997, *Fatto in Italia / Made in Italy* at the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève; in 1999, the 6th International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul and *Videodrome* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; in 2000, *Migrazioni e Multiculturalità*; in 2001, *Magic and Loss* at the Lux Center, London, *Remedy for Melancholy*, Sollentuna, Sweden, *Squatters*, Fundação Serralves, Porto, *Boom!* Manifattura Tabacchi, Florence. Again in 2001 Vezzoli took part in the 49th Venice Biennale where, together with a series of embroidery works, he presented a performance featuring the fashion model and, Sixties symbol, Veruschka.

MB

Exhibition Checklist

The End of the Human Voice, 2001

Double DVD projection, dimensions variable, b/w and color, stereo sound, 15 min.

Directed by Francesco Vezzoli. With Bianca Jagger and Francesco Vezzoli. Executive Production by Chiara Bersi Serlini. Art Direction by Luca Corbetta. Photography by Darius Khondji. Filmed in the Royal Suite of London's Claridge's Hotel, December 2001. Screenplay taken from Jean Cocteau's monologue for theater, *The Human Voice*. Embroideries of the faces of Vezzoli and Cocteau. The image of Vezzoli was inspired by the "poet" character played by Cocteau in his last film, *Testament of Orpheus*.

The soundtrack features Erik Satie's "Les Gymnopédies", piano version, played by Reinbert de Leeuw, Claude Debussy's orchestration, conducted by Michel Plasson.

La stanza del libro bianco (The Room of the White Book), 2002

11 drawings on canvas with metallic embroideries

room dimensions, 208 5/8 x 255 7/8"; embroideries, 25 1/4 x 20 1/2" each.

The installation's title is inspired by Jean Cocteau's *Le livre blanc (The White Book)*, 1928.

The embroideries consist of details from faces taken from Cocteau's erotic drawings, which accompanied the second edition of the novel, published in 1930.

Hommage a Jean Cocteau: Toulon (Homage to Jean Cocteau: Toulon), 2002

Hommage a Jean Cocteau: Querelle de Brest (Homage to Jean Cocteau: Querelle de Brest), 2002

5 elements

Hommage a Jean Cocteau: Raymond Radiguet et le poete (Homage to Jean Cocteau: Raymond Radiguet and the poet), 2002, dyptich

Hommage a Jean Cocteau: marin (Homage to Jean Cocteau: sailor), 2002

Hommage a Jean Cocteau: Le livre blanc (Homage to Jean Cocteau: The White Book), 2002, dyptich

Courtesy the artist; Galleria Giò Marconi, Milano; Galleria Franco Noero, Torino