

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI

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London, 11 October – 1 November

Francesco Vezzoli

The
Oedipus Complex



Carlo Orsi
Franco Noero

London
11 October – 1 November



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*The
Oedipus Complex*

Trinity Fine Art

Galleria Franco Noero

London
11 October – 1 November

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Carlo Orsi
&
Franco Noero

present

The Oedipus Complex

featuring

Francesco Vezzoli
&
Alessandro Rondoni

Trinity Fine Art
15 Old Bond Street
W1S 4AX London
11 October - 1 November 2021

Francesco Vezzoli

The Oedipus Complex

Andrea Bacchi The two busts you dialogue with in your *Oedipus Complex* were carved by Alessandro Rondoni between the summer of 1685 and the autumn of 1686 and depict a father, Giovanni di Jacopo Corsi (who was already dead at the time) and his son, Cardinal Domenico Maria, who commissioned them. In your work in which certain autobiographical elements rise to the surface you often mention or allude to your mother but never to your father. Here, on the other hand, you were prompted to reflect on a father-son relationship. Was that a new challenge for you?

Francesco Vezzoli Let's say that in this rather camp world I thought I'd already gone far enough in addressing the theme of the mother; I was one of the few artists to do so (fig. 1), along with Umberto Boccioni, De Chirico and a handful of others. In Arte Povera and the Transavantgarde you don't see many mothers, or even many fathers come to that. Exploring family ties – like exploring anything that is narrative, emotional and tends to be shunned by other contemporary artists – comes naturally to me. I think it's an interesting challenge. In addressing this theme I didn't feel ill at ease, in fact I tried to highlight the father-son dynamic even in the title. For me the relationship between classicism and the art of the past is clearly a search for the absolute, and bonds with parents are always there. It comes naturally to me to address such issues.





Fig. 1: Francesco Vezzoli, *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* (after Pinturicchio), 2011, video installation, colour, sound, 2' 15'', Prada Collection – Milan, Private Collection – New York & Turin

AB Here too, as indeed fairly often in the recent past, you have also curated the exhibition yourself, taking crucial decisions regarding the way the pieces are displayed. But then, you were the sole curator for the TV70: Francesco Vezzoli guarda la Rai exhibition at the Fondazione Prada in Milan in 2017. In actual fact, though, it's a somewhat subtler matter in this instance. You're clearly present as an artist yet you're showing a classical piece that you didn't create yourself, so your work of art here is actually your curatorship, or am I wrong?

FV Let's just say that for me the artistic gesture lies in tackling a theme, and I approach that process with the spirit of the profession I wanted to go into as child but never did: someone who reflects, rather than inventing. I would much rather have been a journalist than a head of state or minister: a disc jockey rather than a singer. They're what one might call "reflecting" identities. In fact, this reference also recurs in the materials chosen for this installation. To answer your question, I'd say that I don't consider myself a curator, because I'd be competing with people who've studied and analysed art history in depth, but I do feel like a person who reflects. I've read lots of reviews of the "TV70" exhibition and I was happy to see that simply and without excessive intellectualisation, various aesthetic worlds tune in to the broadcasts that I showed in that exhibition. For example, at 8 o'clock in the evening I watch Techetechetè [television program that runs a series of reels from the so called "golden age" of Italian television] which constantly shows my beloved divas, I see the millions of viewers who follow the programme, and so I tell myself "I was right on the mark!" As you can imagine, this isn't me reasoning either like an artist or a curator... possibly more like an anthropologist, or in any case like an observer eager to understand what makes people's hearts beat. Let me give you a couple of examples: We live at a time in history in which there are serious sociologists who study influencers and the borderline between private life and the commercialisation of privacy (I'm not on any social media). It's an issue that has always greatly interested me, ever since I produced embroidery on divas. Or for example, I've noticed that ever since Raffaella Carrà died, thousands of IG pages commemorating her have seen the light of day. What's happening is a process I'd call "social sanctification", which interests me immensely. Summing up, I'd say that when I do a digital, curatorial project or even when I put makeup on a statue, I'm merely reflecting something or reflecting on something.

AB This isn't the first time that you've interacted with the art of past centuries, in fact it's one of the leitmotifs of so much of your output, but it's chiefly since the 2011 exhibition at the Fondazione Prada in Venice, at Ca' Corner della Regina, that this dialogue has begun to physically call the works of the past onto the scene. It was a transition "from Hollywood to the Louvre" and I get the impression that in that sense a crucial moment was the exhibition that you curated in the first person, devising its extremely balanced layout, at the Museion in Bolzano in 2017. On that occasion too, an integral part of your work was the layout itself, the arrangement of classical pieces in relation to modern (or modernised) pieces. In the context of this multi-annual dialogue, what does directly involving classical items with their "Benjaminian" aura mean for you? Do you feel as free and unfettered as you were when you were working without physically involving such items, through citations from, for example, Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Theresa* or the *Ludovisi Throne* in Palazzo Altamps?

FV When I did the *Ecstasy of St. Theresa* with Eva Mendes (fig. 2), who was a very powerful sex symbol on a global level at the time, I was still living in Hollywood. In my eyes, Eva Mendes had a sacred aura, so I was very concerned that everything should be perfect: that she should arrive on time, that she should allow herself to slip into the diving suit made of veil, marble and lace that we'd built to make it look like the *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*. Then the world of Hollywood gradually lost its aura for me; I had worked with all my icons and my love for them was waning, like in a marriage where the attraction starts to wear off. I felt that working with original pieces would be more stimulating – by which I don't mean provocative – that it would more closely touch the notion of the sacred and that it would allow me to take a step forward. In fact I think I'm the only artist who does this. I'm not suggesting it's a question of quality, because of course everyone is free to criticise my work, but what I do lay claim to is its unique nature, I'm the only artist who builds sculptures using pieces of sculpture from the past, or restoring them. This choice has opened up a very interesting approach for me. It starts with buying the pieces at auction. In financial terms they're very expensive items and for me this phase, too, is part of the artistic gesture. Ever since I began this phase, I've been facing a very different kind of challenge and it's still ongoing. In October we'll be launching a new sculpture in Piazza della Signoria in Florence and this may be a circle finally closing because we'll be going to the home of Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, of "Ancient Not Ancient" fame ["Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes", 1946], one of those texts that one can still quote from in connection with all the issues you raise in your questions. Oddly enough, the operation I'm performing is better understood by students of ancient art, who I thought would in fact be angry with me; and even when I meet archaeologists, they're all on my side. So this love I have for archaeology is also appreciated by people who might have seen something blasphemous in my gesture, while it's the world of contemporary art that loses its bearings when confronted with my gestures... It doesn't understand them, it can't interpret them. I sometimes find myself talking with American collectors and I say "this is a Roman sculpture," only to hear them ask me "what is a Roman sculpture?," which prompts me to wonder "where do I even start telling the story?" I'm thrilled to discover that Carlo Orsi wants to do a project with me, when contemporary art galleries sometimes fear that I'll be accused of appropriation. My response is "appropriation of what? It's the history of my own country!" Then I think that if an Asian sculptor were to work on ancient pieces it would still be interesting, whereas everyone's hesitant and has qualms these days.



Fig. 2: Francesco Vezzoli, *La Nuova Dolce Vita* (from the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* to *Eva Mendes*), 2009, neon signs, 234 x 150 cm each, Prada Collection – Milan, Rennie Collection – Vancouver, Vanhaerents Collection, Brussels



Alessandro Rondoni
(Rome c.1644 – c.1710)
Bust of Marquess Giovanni di Jacopo Corsi (1600 – 1661)
marble, height: 72 cm
Provenance:
Commissioned by the sitter's son,
Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi, and
paid for in 1685;
Villa Corsi, Sesto Fiorentino

Alessandro Rondoni
(Rome c.1644 – c.1710)
Bust of Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi
(1633 – 1697)
marble, height: 77.5 cm
Provenance:
Commissioned by the sitter and paid
for in 1686;
Villa Corsi, Sesto Fiorentino



AB In the exhibition in Bolzano you showed a series of original classical pieces on which you'd intervened by changing their appearance, sometimes discreetly, at other times more decisively, with colours and additions in different materials. As you know, Rondoni worked for a long time as a restorer of ancient works, so in some ways he worked along similar lines because in the 17th century no one ever tried to meticulously recover the original aspect of a fragmentary piece and they'd show no hesitation in intervening to create new iconographies. Bernini himself, when he restored the *Borghese Hermaphrodite*, carved the famously soft mattress on which the young model is resting from scratch. Naturally, we can't call what you do "restoration", but in what way do you take into consideration the long history of recreative, inventive restoration, in other words before the restoration ethic that came into fashion with modern archaeology in the second half of the 19th century?

FV I very often think of the issue of the old restoration of archaeological pieces, it's a theme I love and I find that reading the lives of art history's heroes tells us an awful lot about the intellectually unfettered approach to ancient pieces that held sway at the time.

It's both gripping and revealing: reading those texts is like rending a veil and shaking off the dust from an excessively paranoid and sacralising way of looking at art, which doesn't reflect the way it was experienced at that moment in history.

I held an exhibition at the Museo Bardini in Florence at which I remember seeing the *Madonna dei Cordai* (fig. 3), a fabulous piece that's so named because the city's ropemakers put together the money and went to Donatello to commission the work, in the greatest simplicity; it was all much freer and less presumptuous than you might think for a work of that level.

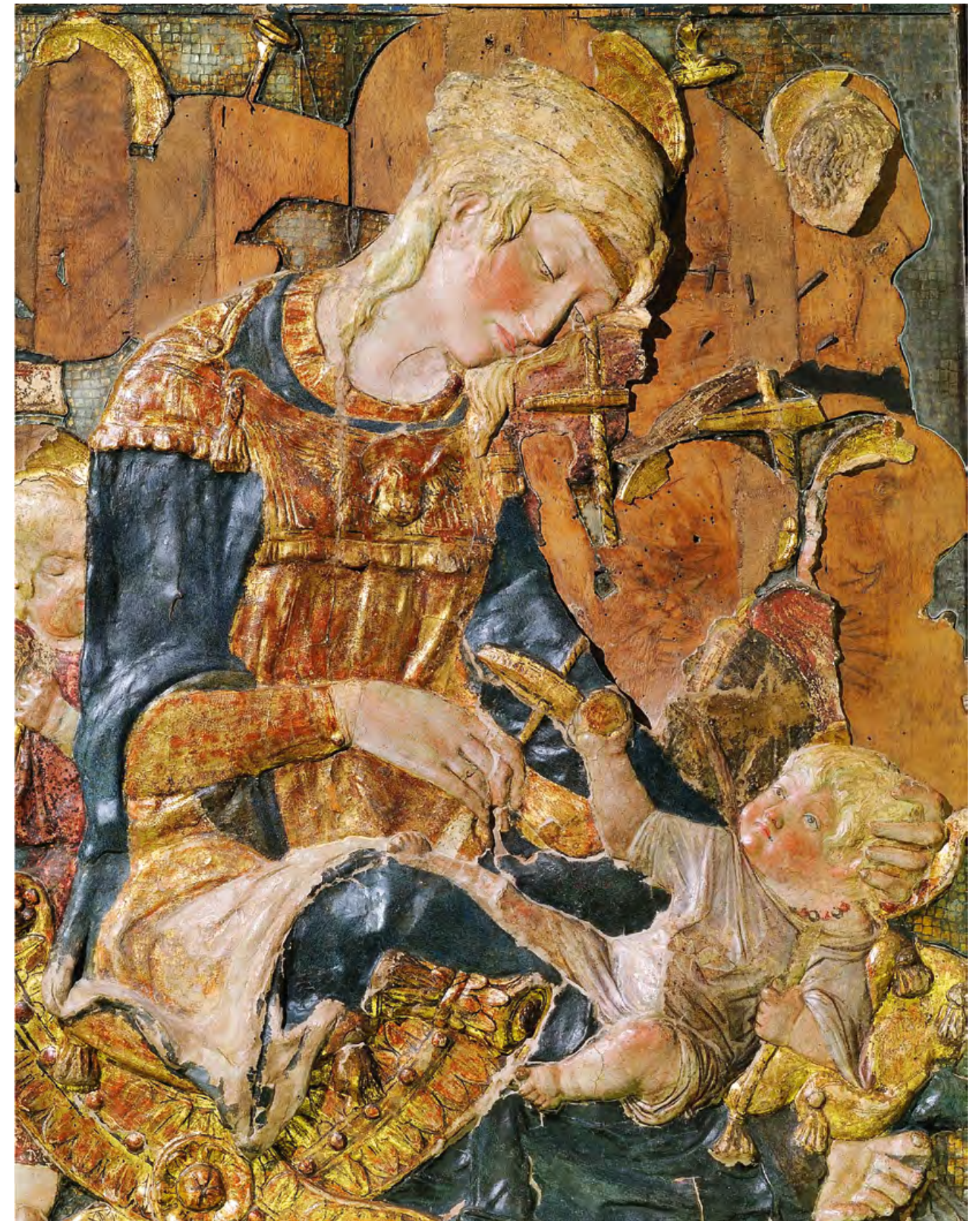


Fig. 3: Donatello, *La Madonna dei Cordai* (Madonna of the Ropemakers), Bardini Museum, Florence

Francesco Vezzoli

BI (A Roman Marble Janiform herm head, circa 2nd Century A.D.), 2015

Marble sculpture, plaster, pigments

41 x 34 x 23 cm - Unique

Courtesy Galleria Franco Noero, Turin



AB Greek and Roman busts and statues have an intrinsic “aura”, as we said, that isn’t only the aura of their artistic value, it’s also the aura of their antiquity, of their ability to withstand the passage of time, change and the fall of civilisations. In other words, they have a kind of sacrality that is even stronger than post-classical work. A large part of your work revolves around the theme of iconicity, high and low, ancient and modern; I’m thinking, just to give you a random example, of your reflection on the face of Lady Gaga. What’s the kind of aura, the potential aura, in your view, of these busts by Rondoni, who’s an important artist but certainly not as well known by the general public as Canova, Bernini... or even Vezzoli for that matter?

FV They certainly do have an aura. When I found myself addressing these works, I never considered Rondoni to be a minor artist. I’m happy to have works of art of this level in relation to a work of mine, in fact I believe that Rondoni is underestimated and that he deserves a little glamour. Quite honestly, I find it hard to consider myself better known than Rondoni, it embarrasses me that you should say so. In any event, I’m happy to be in his company. Someone needs to rediscover Rondoni the way Longhi rediscovered Caravaggio... I’d love to be that person. You just have to look at these busts to realise that Rondoni was extraordinarily skilled at breathing life into a piece of marble.

AB If you had to dialogue with Bernini or Canova, whom you’ve often cited in the past, I don’t think we’d be running the risk of finding ourselves facing an excessive imbalance between the names in play, because you’re a global celebrity today. In this case you’re undoubtedly the better known artist in the exhibition, maybe somewhat ironically, you’re interacting with an artist of the past who never achieved the total success in his own day that you enjoy today. What does this mean for you? Did you feel the need not to overwhelm the busts you’re interacting with?

FV I recall the exhibition on Bernini at the Galleria Borghese, which I visited with Anna Coliva who co-curated it with you, and I was dazzled. It was one of the most beautiful things I’ve ever seen. As an artist who’s asked why he uses ancient pieces, I always reply that I don’t like it when people say that ancient pieces are modern or contemporary, I always reply that certain pieces are “present”. The important thing is that art should be present and these two pieces by Rondoni are very present, as indeed is the whole of Bernini’s opus. This is an art that grabs you, that excites you, that still speaks to us today, that’s truly present in every sense.





Fig. 4: Statue A, Riace Bronze, Reggio Calabria, Archeological Museum of Reggio Calabria

AB Ever since you accomplished the transition “from Hollywood to the Louvre” you’ve been working with classical art a great deal. And in fact as long ago as 2014 you were invited to show your work at the Museo Bardini, as you just mentioned, and at Casa Martelli in Florence, thus interacting first and foremost with Renaissance art, from Botticelli to Raphael. This collaboration with Carlo Orsi of Trinity Fine Art seems to me to be your first major opportunity to dialogue directly with 17th century work since your participation in the collective exhibition entitled *Carta bianca* at the Museo Capodimonte in Naples in 2017-2018, where you worked also with 17th century pieces from those collections. What do you understand primarily by the term “Baroque”? Do you associate it chiefly with the name of Bernini? I ask you this because I’m thinking back to the photograph of Eva Mendes that you described earlier as St. Theresa in *La nuova Dolce Vita*, the exhibition at the Jeu de Paume in Paris in 2009.

FV Many contemporary art collectors, curators and gallery owners certainly consider me Baroque, then they see me in sweat pants and tennis shoes and they realise I’m not Baroque as a person but that I choose Baroque because it’s a personal obsession of mine. The same applies to my obsession with bronzes, because of the issue of colouration – ancient statues tend to have lost their coloured eyeballs – which for me also raises the issue of eye contact. I saw an exhibition on classical bronzes both at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence and at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Only very few ancient bronzes have come down to us intact, and when they even still have their coloured eyeballs that stare at you, I defy anyone not to surrender to the extremely strong emotion of eye contact (fig. 4). What more can we possibly want? They’re the mirror of a present that no longer exists but that’s still there in those statues’ eyes. I’m obsessed with Baroque because, as with these bronzes, I think that it’s an excess of expressiveness... it exudes life, and you just grab hold of that life.

AB Do you think we can talk about the Baroque above and beyond the period of history it's identified with, in other words the 17th and 18th centuries? For instance in art history people often talk about the Pergamon Altar as pointing to the development of classical art in a "Baroque" direction. And people have also spoken of 19th and even 20th century Baroque (for instance in relation to Lucio Fontana's ceramic works, or those of Leoncillo). This, because the Baroque is associated with richness of expression, with emotional involvement, with breaking the classical standard, with taking the viewer by surprise, with theatrical effects and so on. What affinity do you see between your work and the Baroque?

FV I want to feel emotion and so I seek out the Baroque, where by Baroque I mean the historical style but also an emotional characteristic that's present in every age. There's also a great deal of Conceptual Art that's Baroque, although at times it's called that with pejorative intent. It's a post-Marxist stigma that I abhor and reject. And I'm sure Orsi rejects it too.



AB Do you feel a connection between the Baroque and the 20th century categories of Kitsch and Camp?

FV Yes, I do sense a relationship between Camp, Kitsch and the Baroque but in a positive way. I'm thinking, for instance, of Jeff Koons. Many people in Europe thought that Koons was gay because he worked with the themes of Camp and Kitsch, which in the critics' eyes were confined to that gender agenda. I find that judgment to be astonishing in its sheer stupidity. So yes, there is this tendency to sideline anything Kitsch, Camp and Baroque, like Guido Gozzano's books which are relegated to libraries' darkest corners. I say: Enough of that! They're different categories and every category has a profound dignity and *raison d'être* of its own.

AB At the start of your career you often embroidered tears, intervening on standard works in Western art. The Baroque 17th century is a century jam-packed with tearful saints and heroines; one has but to think of the paintings of Carlo Dolci and Guido Reni, or of Bernini's *Proserpina* at the Borghese, with an unprecedented sculpted tear (fig. 5). Do you think that 17th century art lay at the origin of your tears, or was it primarily postwar films, or even some other source?

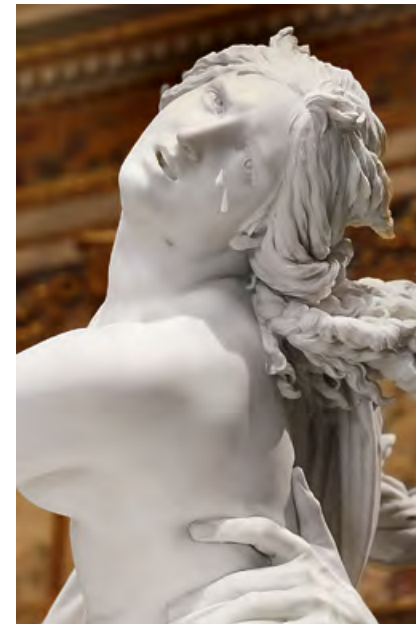


Fig. 5: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Rape of Proserpine* (detail), Borghese Gallery, Rome

FV I've studied tears, and in certain periods of art there isn't a single one. The origin of my tears are the films of Raffaello Matarazzo, which have also been relegated to the darkest corners of film libraries. Then at one point I began to visit old master museums and to look for tears. There aren't many even at the Louvre... in general, in art history, there aren't that many famous paintings with tears.

There isn't much laughter either, for that matter. Then you read Picasso's biography and you realise that he laughed, cried, screwed, loved, betrayed...

When you study, you realise that all artists live an intense life and experience very strong emotions. There's a rather Calvinist attitude – a rather “Yale” approach – on the critics' part that prompts them to censure sentiment in order to make a work of art more intellectually acceptable. I reject that attitude. I shall die an Almodovarian.

AB Heinrich Wölfflin, at the turn of the 19th century, theorised the contrast between the classical and the Baroque, between closed form and open form, between linear and painterly, and so forth. In this game of contrasts, there is also the contrast between male and female, and the Baroque with all its curves and its sensuality might well be associated with the latter pole. Michelangelo used to say as long ago as in his own day that Flemish art was meant for, and appreciated by, women, while his Italian art was *ipso facto* “virile”. By the same token, fresco was male and oil painting was female, You virtually began by practising the technique of embroidery, which in Italy at least is traditionally associated with women. Plautilla Bricci, who is famous today as history’s first woman architect and as a painter, also practised that technique. This year a great deal of interest was aroused by an image that all the media picked up on, showing English diver Tom Daley, who is openly gay, knitting while watching the Olympics in Tokyo (fig. 6). Do you think that there are gender connotations in art, or is everything more fluid today and there’s no longer any sense in talking about such things?

FV We should take care not to say in America that Michelangelo considered his art to be virile and Flemish painting more feminine, otherwise the MET’ll consign all his work to the flames! The male gaze of Michelangelo.

As I said, in my view gender connotations in art make no sense. Twenty-five years ago I sat on a chair wearing the same dress as Veruschka and I embroidered her face (fig. 7); at that moment I took responsibility for my gesture, and dear Tom Daley, with whom I’d love to go out to dinner, can knit as many pullovers as he wishes, but I lay claim to the originality of my gesture.

I put all my emotional charge, all my intensity into it. The important thing for me is that it was an original gesture, I wasn’t interested in what people might read into it. Where gender disparity is concerned,



Fig. 6: Tom Daley knitting a sweater at the Tokyo Olympics, 2020

in my work I’ve spoken at length of Anni Albers and of how the 20th century avant-gardes called themselves politically correct, only to then relegate women to the minor arts. I hope all of that is now a thing of the past, but it’s a territory on which I’m not interested in venturing. I’ve done my embroidery, my tears, and I was the first to do them, before it became a fad. And I’d like people to recognise that fact and to give me credit for it.



Fig. 7: Francesco Vezzoli, Self-Portrait with Vera Lehndorff as Veruschka, 2001, Digital Print on Aluminium, 120 x 125 cm, AGI Collection – Verona



Fig. 8: Francesco Vezzoli, Self-portrait as Pope Innocent X (after Diego Velázquez), 2013, inkjet print on rag paper, 158 x 128 cm, private collection, Germany

AB One aspect of your work that seems to me to be in tune with the Baroque, and on a broader level with the 17th century as a whole, is your obsession with your own image, in other words with the self-portrait genre that you have addressed with such explosive imagination. Rembrandt, Velázquez, Rubens, and even Bernini himself, portrayed themselves on more than one occasion. And on a more general level, the individuality and iconicity of such figures as Sophia Loren have stimulated your creativity, and the 17th century is the golden century of portraiture. You yourself donned the garb of Pope Innocent X by Velázquez (figs. 8-9), providing a very different interpretation from that of Bacon (fig. 10). It's only a small step from all of this to egocentricity and narcissistic vanity. Bernini was famous for creating an auto-mythography during his own lifetime, angling for the publication of an openly celebratory biography of himself. You've appeared in many of your own works, ever since the legendary 1997 video in the Museo Praz with Iva Zanicchi in the title role. Has there been an evolution on your part in the way you've used your face and your image in the course of your career spanning the past twenty years and more?

FV Yes, I too am obsessed with my image and I've attempted to conjugate it in several of my works. This obsession, for me, is the most tragically representative factor of the historical period we're in. I think that I'll probably stop, going forward, but I admire those who've always had the courage to use self-representation, among other reasons because it's now become nodal not only in the artistic field but also in the social, cultural and anthropological spheres.



Fig. 9: Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Pope Innocent X Pamphilj*, Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome

Fig. 10: Francis Bacon, *Study After Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, oil on canvas, 153 x 118 cm, Des Moines Art Center – Des Moines

AB Ever since you began to work a great deal on the theme of interaction with ancient art, you've tackled a medium that certainly isn't usual for contemporary artists, and that's marble. Bernini was an unequalled genius with the chisel, and almost all 17th century sculptors, including Rondoni, spent long years training in workshops before being able to master such a difficult technique. Having achieved total success as early as in his twenties, Bernini often delegated the material execution of his masterpieces to pupils and assistants. What relationship do you have with the material aspect of these recent works of yours?

FV I just got back from Carrara. The workshop in which I produced my first sculpture for the Fondazione Prada now works for Koons, making the more difficult pieces that they don't have the skills to make in America.





Fig. 11: Francesco Vezzoli, *Self-Portrait as the Apollo Belvedere's Lover*, 2011, contemporary self-portrait bust sculpted in marble, 76 x 51 x 50 & 85 x 52 x 50 cm, Prada Collection - Milan

AB In your exhibition at the Museo di Capodimonte you placed a series of busts in succession, gazing at each other, and that theme also lies at the root of *The Oedipus Complex*. In fact it's a recurrent theme in your work, and I'm referring primarily to your *Self-portrait as Lover of the Belvedere Apollo* in 2011 (fig. 11). And you've explored the theme of the association between two busts or heads on other occasions as well. What can you tell us about it?

FV In our case I wanted to forge a dual relationship between the busts in a kind of psychoanalytical game, because the father and son are positioned as though they're looking at one another but in actual fact they're separated by reflecting walls in which they appear to languidly reflect their own image, while looming over them is two-faced Janus who presents one face in perfect condition while the other is marked by the ravages of time... I often return to the dual theme in my work, for example I'm currently producing a sculpture called *The Pessimistic Narcissus*, a dual portrait of the singer Fedez caught in a moment in which he's trying to kiss himself. There are two types of marble involved, Carrara and Bardiglio. The idea came to me when Fedez asked me to do the cover for his new album. I decided to produce a fully-fledged work of my own. Fedez is a divisive and polarising icon by definition, so I wanted to show him in this splitting of an ego rejecting itself. I'm currently working with the sculptors, we've found a piece of Bardiglio without veining, very dense.

AB Whether in Hollywood or in the Louvre, you always, or almost, always start working with a reflection on history or on works of art from the past or figures who belong to our collective imagination. In that sense, citation is a key factor in a large part of your work. In one interview you mentioned Gore Vidal’s opinion of Quentin Tarantino: “He is and always will be a VHS store salesman” and you yourself consider him to be “encyclopaedic, an archivist”, How can one redeem citation without falling into mere citationism?

FV In the world of cinema I’ve always preferred Pedro Almodovar to Tarantino because he cites more directly, more emotionally, whereas Tarantino does so by taking and mixing scripts and music. I, too, have done all those citations in my videos... so I understand the mechanism. But I’m convinced that when we cite something, it’s important to succeed in recounting its roots, its context, while at the same time explaining why we’re citing it and why it strikes a chord in our imagination. That’s the only way to redeem citation from being unavoidably barren. I don’t cite everything, only those things that have been crucial for me, that have allowed me to discover and unlock themes I was interested in. But there are people who cite, period; who cite everyone on everything, indiscriminately... and at the end of the day that’s like not knowing anything about anyone.

AB But you have a Vezzoli touch in your citations!

FV Having the touch – at this moment in history when everything is confused with everything else – is a major compliment. If it’s a professor citing, that’s fine, but if it’s an artist doing the citing, then he has to explain to us why that specific citation has a meaning for him, otherwise it feels like a mere display of erudition and it’s sterile. Here too, the Baroque, classical sculpture, Greek mythology, parental ties, psychoanalysis and all the other values we’ve mentioned are sources of inspiration summarised in an installation that talks about my studies, my past, the things I love... basically, it talks about me.



Reflected Gazes

Notes on an exhibition design project

The installation I designed for the project at Trinity Fine Art in association with Galleria Franco Noero, was born from Francesco Vezzoli's desire to juxtapose and relate his sculpture BI (A Roman marble janiform herm head) with the two baroque busts portraying Giovanni di Jacopo Corsi and his son, Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi. The only starting point given to me was the title: *The Oedipus Complex*.

In an impossible dialogue between gazes, the three sculptures are positioned at heights normally considered erroneous according to the usual codes of placement and installation, but which acquire a unique value through this "staging"; The two-faced Janus by Vezzoli is placed centrally on a very high plinth covered in mirror glass; whilst the two busts are placed either side in profile on lower plinths which are upholstered in moiré silk in a distinctive colour which relates to the office of a Cardinal. The two busts are placed as if they were scrutinizing their own

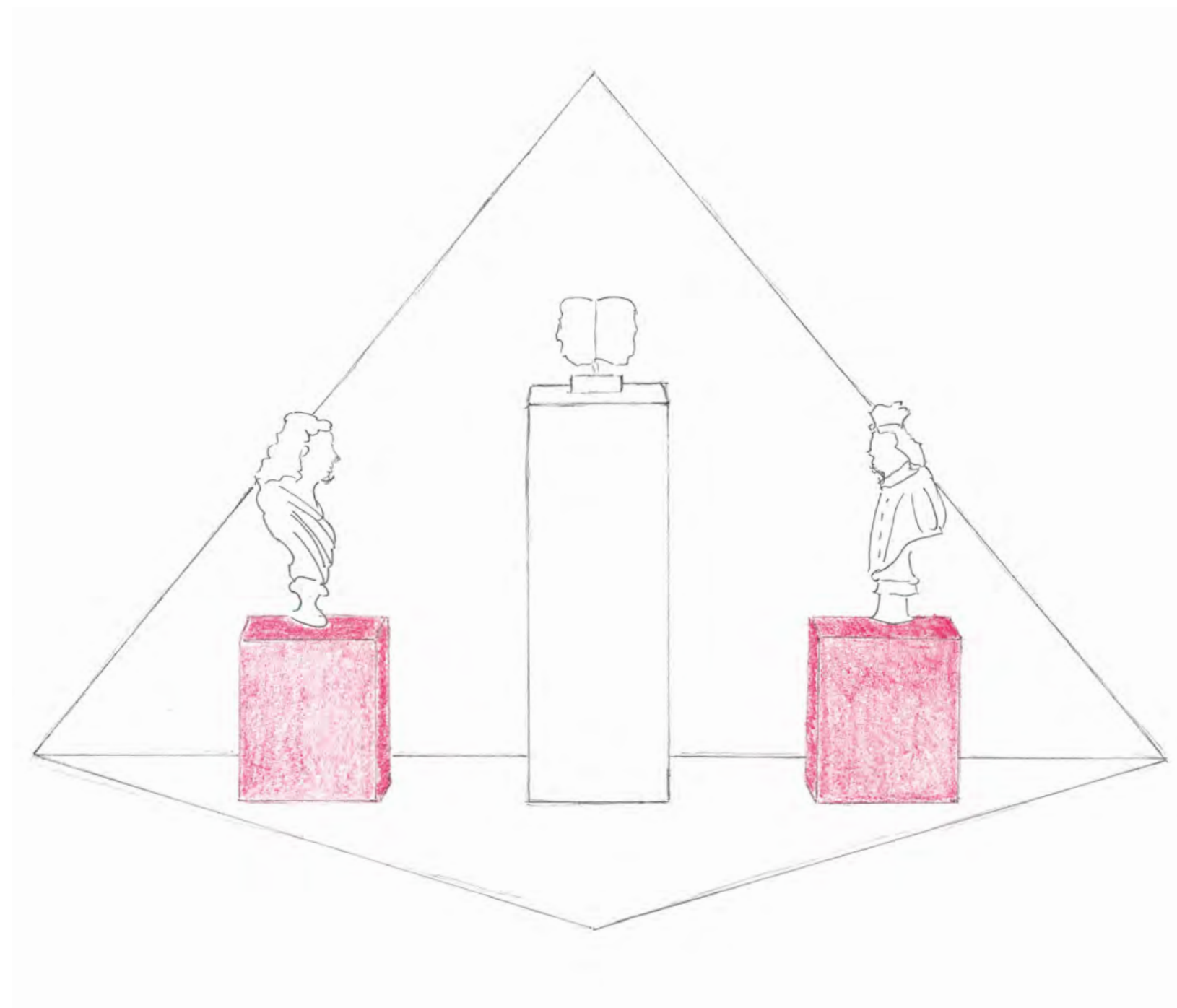
images reflected in the central plinth; and at the same time, they are observed from above by the two mirror faces of Janus. None of the gazes ever find each other, but all are held in the overarching composition.

The whole scene, whose theatricality is inspired by Canova's cenotaph for Maria Cristina of Austria, takes place on a well-defined space, based on the shape of a triangle. This geometric form recalls the father-mother-child triangulation on which Freudian theory is based, but also the enigmatic persona of the mythological figure of Oedipus, who, moreover, finds himself having to solve the riddle of the sphinx like the one which lies recumbent near the pyramids of Giza.

The highly graphic composition that is the hallmark of this exhibition is the formal, physical translation of a visual mechanism which is thus brought into being. Such a device works as a tiny stage formed by a single scenographic device that acts as a backdrop and proscenium: from one side, the triangular wall placed vertically, frames the three sculptures in a visual structure which draws the viewer's eye and guides it by way of the parallel lines towards an interpretation of what is being represented; on the other, the triangular base on the ground connects those same sculptures to the surrounding space and projects them into the context of the room in which they are installed. The location close to the large windows places the structure deliberately against the light and leaves the vertical triangular wall in shadow, whilst the sculptures are illuminated with very narrow directional spotlights which act like those aimed at actors on a stage, thereby amplifying the theatricality of the concept.

The spectator becomes an active part of this visual mechanism and is called upon to participate in the "staging" by observing the works from various determined points of view.

Filippo Bisagni – Exhibition Designer



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