

Francesco Vezzoli
The Metamorphoses of Francesco Vezzoli

10 June – 31 July 2015

Galleria Franco Noero is pleased to present *The Metamorphoses of Francesco Vezzoli*, a solo exhibition of works by Francesco Vezzoli, specially created by the artist for the premises in Via Mottalciata.

One of the most famous and celebrated Italian artists of the past twenty years, Vezzoli has made use both of classic forms of expression, such as sculpture and photography, and of decidedly less traditional media, of which his use of embroidery and television formats are but two examples. His highly personal artistic world is based on a complex interweaving of high and low references, which range from the history of art to cinema, through to music and literature.

In this exhibition, Vezzoli takes inspiration from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and in particular from the myth of Apollo and Marsyas, creating an unusual and quite stunning interpretation of the episode in which Marsyas is flayed alive, transforming the gallery into an allegorical space inhabited by two sculptures and nine light boxes. In his famous tale, Ovid tells of the irrepressible rage of Apollo, the god of music, against the satyr Marsyas, who is guilty of having challenged him with his *aulòs*, a wind instrument that had been thrown into a lake by Athena. Apollo accepts the challenge and calls the nine Muses to judge the contest. The jury are particularly struck to begin with by the melodies that Marsyas makes with his *aulòs*, so Apollo, fearing defeat, begins to play his lyre and to sing at the same time, challenging his rival to do the same. Unable to sing and play on a wind instrument simultaneously, the satyr gives in and the god is declared victorious. As punishment for having dared compete with a god, Apollo subjects Marsyas to the most terrible torture, having him bound to a tree and flayed alive.

Vezzoli reinterprets the famous story and intervenes in the layout of the space, creating a fixed route that gradually takes the visitors towards the scene that he has created in the central part of the gallery. The first passage leads us into the presence of the nine Muses – silent judges and witnesses shown here in a new series of light-box works. These are inspired by fifteenth-century engravings known as the *Muses of the Mantegna Tarot*, which have always – though possibly erroneously – been attributed to Mantegna himself, and which are one of the earliest examples of "high" art with a popular, social function. Upon entering the central area, visitors find themselves in the presence of an original Roman sculpture in marble dating from the first century AD (with eighteenth-century additions). The statue is of a satyr, over which looms a contemporary sculpture that portrays the god Apollo in his best-known and most exploited iconography, as the *Belvedere Apollo*. The latter has the features of the artist himself and we see him inflicting the terrible punishment on the satyr who has dared to challenge him, as we read in the story by Ovid – an author who has recently been blacklisted by students at the Columbia

University in America as too politically incorrect, "sexually explicit and violent".

The Metamorphoses of Francesco Vezzoli is an operation that condenses past and present, entering into a dialectic between the antique and the non-antique, between classical aesthetic and contemporary iconicity, which are key to the artist's recent work.

Francesco Vezzoli (Brescia, 1971) lives and works in Milan. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions in public and private institutions, including the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Bologna (2000), Castello di Rivoli (2002), New Museum, New York (2002), Museu Serralves, Oporto (2005), Tate Modern, London (2006), The Power Plant, Toronto (2007), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2009), Jeu de Paume, Paris (2009), MAXXI, Rome (2013), QMA, Qatar (2013), MOCA, Los Angeles (2014), and MoMA PS1, New York (2014). He has also taken part in many festivals, including the Istanbul Biennial (1999), Venice Biennale (2001, 2005 and 2007), Liverpool Biennial (2002), Sao Paulo Biennale (2004), Prague Biennale (2005), Whitney Biennial (2006), Shanghai Biennale (2006), and Taipei Biennial (2006).

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