

APALAZZOGALLERY

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI

FRANCESCO BY FRANCESCO: BACK TO THE MIRROR

3 December 2025 – 7 February 2026

Originally conceived in 2002 as a collaboration with the iconic fashion photographer Francesco Scavullo, *Francesco by Francesco* investigates the artist's long-standing fascination with self-representation, glamour, and the performative construction of identity.

More than twenty years later, this exhibition reintroduces the same body of work — a series of photographic self-portraits and embroidered “crying” portraits that elevate the most glamorous Divas of the 1980s (from Jacqueline Bisset to Christopher Reeve, from Lauren Hutton and top model Kim Alexis to the most gender bending icons of Andy Warhol's factory) — inviting viewers to rediscover the artist's early reflections on image, transformation, and the fragile pain of desire.

In *Back to the Mirror*, the artist once again confronts his own gaze, through a “red-carpet-esque” installation (designed by Filippo Bisagni), revealing how the language of beauty and celebrity endures as a timeless stage for the art of self-invention.

"What is glamour if not the possibility of living many different lives and experiencing many different universes? Glamour is the miracle of continuously reinventing your persona, transforming yourself into infinite desirable others. Movies, fashion, and the work of Francesco Vezzoli do exactly this.

Vezzoli himself is a glamorous invention, a smart entertainer, and a dramatic diva, a suffering, forever-young teenager and an old, stoic philosopher, an inventive, eclectic decorator and a modernist master engineer. His life has been his major artwork, and at every step of the way, at every turn and change of direction, he has left behind puzzle-like works—videos and embroideries, narrative tapestries and red velvet curtains, photographs and performances—each of which is now open to multiple interpretations, as all really good art should be.

In 2002 in Leipzig, at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Vezzoli presented a new body of work titled *Francesco by Francesco*, a series of black-and-white photographs by fashion photographer and glamour prophet Francesco Scavullo, author of the iconic book *Scavullo Women*, featuring before and after photographs of glamorous women—without and with makeup. In *Francesco by Francesco*, Vezzoli poses as himself “before,” in a naturalistic and careless portrait, open-shirted, with wild hair and a beard, then “after,” all spruced up, wearing a vintage Yves Saint Laurent tuxedo, bow tie, slicked-back hair, and lots of makeup. Finally, in *Francesco by Francesco: Before & Ever After*, he appears as a nondescript woman, a modern version of Marcel Duchamp's alter ego Rose Sélavy, wearing simple clothes, long hair, and a 76 touch of glittery eye shadow to reveal the joke: she is neither a transgressive transsexual nor a sexually charged female character, just a woman who does not want to be a woman.

Vezzoli had appeared in many of his previous works, most often in his videos, usually as a young man embroidering in the background of some diva's performance, a spectator to his own enigmatic narrative. For the first time with *Francesco by Francesco*, however, the artist appears alone in the mirror of the photographer's camera. These are his first self-portraits; they channel the technical and aesthetic know-how

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of Scavullo, known for his covers for Cosmopolitan and Harper's Bazaar, to speak to the viewer about the artist's self and his practice. But they are equally about the process of becoming and the play of identity.

In this sense, these photographs are another note in the song that Vezzoli has been playing throughout his career. The search for identity, the act of undertaking a Pop kind of makeover, as Andy Warhol himself did many times, is a key part of Vezzoli's performance art, and it is what glamour is all about. In *Francesco by Francesco*, Vezzoli's proximity to this research on identity is more evident than ever, recalling Cindy Sherman, who has similarly used herself as a model and played fashion-vocabulary tricks in her work. "I am becoming my own diva," declared Vezzoli in an interview for the fashion bible Women's Wear Daily, again the perfect magazine for a review of Vezzoli's work.

For the first time with *Francesco by Francesco*, the artist has become actor and model in his own film, showing a confidence and a maturity that seem to surprise even him. Yet nostalgia, drama, and tragedy can also be glimpsed in these images, and never cold predetermination or cynical analysis.

His decision to work with Scavullo, by 2002 an aging legend outside the fashion circuits, is not so different from his choice to collaborate with familiar aging divas — Gloria Swanson or Anna Magnani for his embroideries, Valentina Cortese or Marisa Berenson for his videos, Veruschka in his performance at the Venice Biennale. In these dramatic photographic portraits, we see the lingering memory of a young Helmut Berger in a film by Luchino Visconti, one of Vezzoli's recurrent obsessions.

These images are never simply photographs, not even for a second, but a contamination of cinema, fashion, and art, one folding into the other, the inevitable equation of all Vezzoli's work".¹

Francesco Vezzoli (b.1971, Brescia, Italy) lives and works in Milan, Italy. He received his B.A. in 1995 from Central St. Martin's School of Art, London. His work has been exhibited at many institutions including: Modern Art Museum (MAM), Shanghai, China (2025); MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Italy (2025); Couvent des Jacobins, Rennes, France (2025); Centre Pompidou-Metz, France (2025); Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Villa Paloma, Monaco (2025); Museo Correr, curated by Donatien Grau, Venice, Italy (2024); Palazzo delle Esposizioni, curated by him and Stéphane Verger, Rome, Italy (2023); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2017-2018) and Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France (2019); Museo Museion, Bolzano, Italy (2016); Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco (2016); MOCA, Los Angeles, US (2014); Museo Bardini, Museo di Casa Martelli and Museo Bellini, Florence, Italy (2014); MoMA PS1, New York, US (2014); Qatar Museums Authority, Doha, Qatar (2013); Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow, Russia (2010); The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, US (2007); Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2006); Tate Modern, London, UK (2006); Serralves Museum, Porto, Portugal (2005); Fondazione Cini, Venice, Italy (2005); Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (2005); Comizi di Non Amore (Non-Love Meetings), Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (2004); The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, US (2002); Museo Contemporaneo Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy (2002).

Founded in 2008 in Palazzo Cigola Fenaroli in Brescia, **APALAZZOGALLERY** is run by Chiara Rusconi and Francesca Migliorati. The gallery offers an inclusive, multidisciplinary and multicultural programme that supports both established and emerging Italian and international artists. Each project is developed through an in-depth dialogue between the artists and the gallery, resulting in solo or group exhibitions that engage with the space and its architecture in innovative ways. The gallery also facilitates this dialogue by offering artist residencies and promoting artists at art fairs and through international and local curatorial projects. APALAZZOGALLERY represents the following artists: Sonia Boyce, Ann Iren Buan, Edson Chagas, Giorgio Ciam, Raúl De Nieves, Nathalie Du Pasquier, Emkal Eyongakpa, Larry Stanton, Paolo Gonzato, Ibrahim Mahama, Eva & Franco Mattes, Olivier Mosset, Servane Mary, Jonas Mekas, Lucia Pescador, Marta Pierobon, Nathalie Provosty, Alan Reid, Olympia Scarry, Augustas Serapinas, Alexandra Sukhareva, The Reader, Francesco Vezzoli and Luc Ming Yan.

¹ Stefano Tonchi, from *Francesco Vezzoli*, Rizzoli International Publications Inc, New York, 2016.