

MAKE SOME NOISE

A disused garage at Rome's MAXXI Museum was recently transformed into a red-lit, noisy scene of menacing actors in cloaks and an underground DJ as part of the immersive exhibition *Revenge* (until 2 September), created by Italian artist Nico Vascellari in collaboration with Fendi. **Ali Y. Khadra** caught up with Vascellari after the opening act (7 June) to find out about the artist's transition from underground music to performance art.



Nico Vascellari. *REVENGE* (prelude). 2018. Performance at Museo Maxxi, Rome. Image courtesy of the artist

Ali Y. Khadra: What can we expect to see at your exhibition at MAXXI?

Nico Vascellari: *Revenge* [an award-winning work, previously shown at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 and acquired for the museum's permanent collection] is a rather large ambient installation made of burnt wood and speakers that were borrowed from underground bands. The speakers are activated by memories of the performance, with sound exploding in the room every now and then. In addition, there are two light installations and a small work on paper.

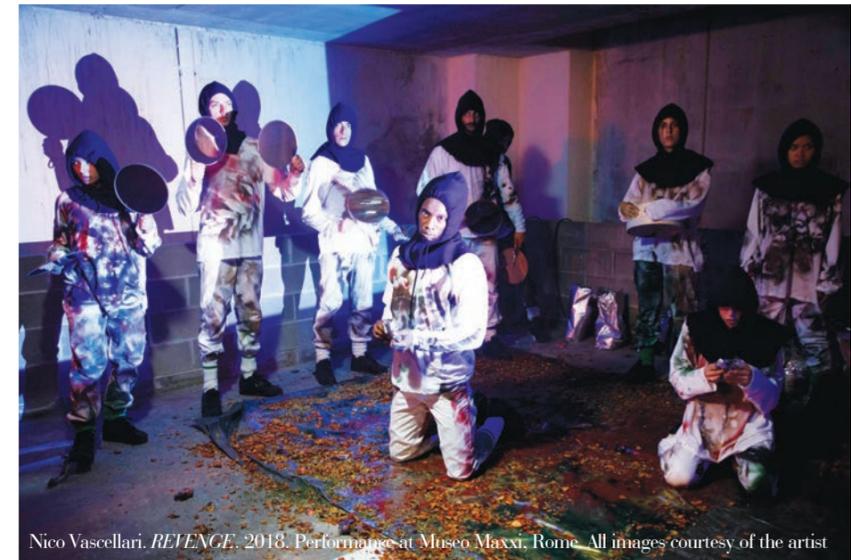
AYK: Why is the *Revenge* installation being shown again in the framework of a new performance?

NV: Bartolomeo Pietromarchi [current director of MAXXI Arte] really liked the work when he saw it at Venice and thought it was a good

moment to show it again in the context of planning this show. I didn't necessarily agree, to be honest, because I rarely repeat a performance, but this one functions almost as a device or a transformative sculpture. In the end we came across a non-exhibition space at MAXXI – an underground two-storey garage that has never been open to the public, which I thought would fit the performance perfectly, especially with this idea of layers and experiences, of purity and being closer to the centre of earth.

AYK: You began your career in the underground punk rock scene. How did that happen?

NV: I was 15 and lived in the countryside, in a province that felt completely segregated but I was too young to go anywhere else.



Nico Vascellari. *REVENGE*. 2018. Performance at Museo Maxxi, Rome. All images courtesy of the artist

There was just boredom and solitude and I thought, if I can't go to the concerts myself, perhaps the concerts could come to me. Whenever my parents were away for the weekend, I invited bands to play in the garage or the living room. I found that I had to promote the shows, make flyers and decide on sound and lighting, which made me realise that the idea of doing things myself was very important.

AYK: How did you then move to the art world?

NV: Somewhere along that path, I felt a switch when I understood what I wanted to do in life; I wanted to be independent and claim my freedom, poetically and emotionally. All of a sudden, the music scene was no longer enough for me because I couldn't have complete control over a squat, club, stage or lights. I was about 23 or 24 and

started to develop an interest for art. I went to a lot of museums, but there I felt a lack of physicality and missed the improvisational element of concerts.

AYK: So that's how you were drawn to performance?

NV: Yes, performance first struck me because I felt a profound link to what I was already doing on stage with my band. I fell in love with the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, Bruce Nauman and Mike Kelley, and with Viennese Actionism. I told my parents I wanted to quit university and my dad said, "Nico, what are you are going to do?" I told him, "Well, I am an artist." In that sense, being an artist has a deep connection with faith; you have to believe in yourself, before you convince your family and those you are close to.