

Entrepreneur and former gallerist active between Switzerland, Spain, and Italy, Marinotti talks about GAZE-OFF, a visionary incubator of beauty

“It neither proposes nor opposes; it neither points nor establishes paths; it is not a curatorship, nor a trend, nor a counter-trend.”

So what, then, is GAZE-OFF? Franco Paolo Marinotti — entrepreneur and former gallerist active between Switzerland, Spain, and Italy — tells us in this interview.

He has chosen to focus on a hybrid creation capable of giving visibility to emerging artists, but not only: artists who work along the borders between media and disciplines, exploring themes such as identity, boundaries, memory, future, and the gaze on the present.

“A territory of freedom and autonomy, accessible yet discreet, a kind of Zona Franca — a free zone, a delimited space within a wider context, such as an art fair...”

From Milan to Lugano and Barcelona: between these cities GAZE-OFF has taken shape. Could you tell us a bit about the project and its key stages?

It actually began in Lugano. It's one of those ideas that arise spontaneously in the evening among a few friends and then take shape around an even smaller table, after dinner, speaking about a drifting world — a world that has lost its ability, or perhaps its simple willingness, to look beyond.

And so, quite suddenly, GAZE-OFF was born: a project conceived as a territory of freedom and autonomy, accessible yet discreet, a kind of Zona Franca, a bounded space within a wider context such as a fair.

A complementary — and decidedly alternative — proposal.

Over the years, GAZE-OFF has proved to be, for me, the natural maturation of the earlier Berlin project — an unmistakable awakening, an acknowledgment that the “dream” now needs new and more adequate impulses, because the context that had generated those ideas, that social engagement, that genuineness of intent and inspiration, that creative freedom and independence in proposing, is no longer the same as it was in the effervescent, almost surreal Berlin of the early 2000s.

It is also a continuation in terms of relationships with the artists themselves, who continue to play a central and proactive role in the project's development and who enjoy the absolute freedom to represent and promote themselves without any form of constraint.

It is therefore not only about representing the artist, but about repositioning them at the center of their own market — not as a brand or a signature, but as an essential and determining lever of the mechanism: an active body, author of themselves.

GAZE-OFF looks at what moves art and probes the limits of its language. It observes what constitutes the founding elements of a work — those that often remain hidden, either simply or deliberately. It grants imagination a leading role, making it the very object of the work, and not merely a functional or misleading part of the process.

GAZE-OFF: “a configuration in space describing the behavior of a system.” How can we summarize such an ambitious and prolific project in a few words?

The phrase comes from Aldo Runfola, an artist I had asked to describe in two words the project in which he took part during its first edition in Lugano in 2022. I found it brilliant and perfectly fitting.

GAZE-OFF is a relationship with the audience and invites the viewer to contemplate the possibility of atypical behavior within its space.

We are losing the concept of storytelling, and the neoliberal frenzy that now dominates the art system renders the presentation of artworks at fairs flat and self-referential — or rather, with a single end: the economic one.

These spaces no longer describe or narrate; they are simply arrangements — accrochages — that, even when of high quality, do not question themselves or enter into dialogue. They are simply beautiful exhibitions.

We have lost the ability to look, to contemplate; and when we do, we rarely go beyond the surface. It is easier to walk with the crutches of the system, because to look “beyond” means having the ability to abstract, to imagine, to interpret without instrumentalizing — to free thought.

It may seem impossible, but visitors who enter our booths perceive it.

In conclusion, I believe that one can be at a fair without becoming the fair, that one can share without promoting, and be visible without yielding.

The GAZE-OFF project deals entirely with the present. How does it manage to balance itself, time after time, amid the great and small changes of our time?

GAZE-OFF literally means “to look beyond,” and in this sense I would not impose precise visual references or temporal boundaries to determine where the gaze should be directed.

It is a focused vision that is neither a starting point nor a destination — it is simply an “off-gaze” that neither constrains nor imposes, but offers itself unconditionally to consideration, allowing it room to exist.

In a context that privileges visibility, efficiency, and repetition, GAZE-OFF reintroduces the unexpected, slowness, and deviation. It restores projectuality to the places where the present is consumed.

Amid art fairs and their linear rhythms, their predetermined paths, GAZE-OFF proposes the possibility of a disaligned time — of an attention not subjected to an end.

What has been the most important and rewarding result achieved through GAZE-OFF so far?

To tell the truth, I am not obsessively seeking results — at least not in the conventional sense.

For me, the best outcome is the reactivation of the “dream” I mentioned earlier, and it is precisely the artists who take part each time that make it possible: they allow me to keep being surprised by their projects, to live and share with them moments, actions, perhaps even a kind of magic — including powerful contrasts — to travel with them, to exchange emotions.

GAZE-OFF is not a collective, but perhaps closer to a way of feeling, of thinking, and seeing the world.

Is GAZE-OFF also a tool for glimpsing a (perhaps unthinkable) future?

If by “tool” we mean “opportunity,” then yes — the project may activate, for those who wish, a process of analysis and awareness of the system’s criticalities, which emerge by contrast, relying then on the interpretive sensibility of those who perceive in it a valid cue for a possible change of course.

GAZE-OFF is a concrete space of freedom, creativity, exchange, and reflection — as much as of introspection: a space where questions rediscover their fundamental importance and identity, through dialectical synthesis and in opposition to a pre-established system increasingly intoxicated by false dogmas.

If not an opportunity, it is nonetheless a good way to imagine — and, if desired, approach — a different future.

The tangibility of a gallery and the (almost) immateriality of the digital world: where and how do we place Play, the project born in Berlin?

The gallery itself, and consequently PLAY in Berlin, is a container — a box hosting contents that may, depending on the project, be more or less “immaterial,” which I do not see as an exclusive prerogative of the digital realm.

In fact, PLAY proposed works exclusively in the field of film and video — hence, perhaps immaterial indeed, although at the time the technology was predominantly analog.

I believe that possessing a physical space does not determine the materiality (or immateriality) of a project as such.

What has been the most important lesson learned so far from this journey through the “art system”?

Frankly, I have never felt I belonged to any system — least of all the art system. I respect it, and I do not necessarily oppose it; I simply position and define myself as “other.”

And this “otherness” is evidenced by the fact that it nonetheless participates and manifests itself in the context of fairs, while respecting their criteria.

The lesson, if one can call it that, is perhaps the realization that even — and especially — within the art system, concepts such as inclusion and sustainability are not themes but critical urgencies: not slogans to declare, but conditions to practice.

GAZE-OFF offers no solutions but opens cracks.

It promises nothing — yet it persists.