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## Alternative Venice

### A Look at the Last Twenty Years of Artistic Autonomy, Activism, and Research<sup>1</sup>

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*Cristina Baldacci*

#### The Fragility and Resistance of a Cultural Archipelago

Laboratory, observatory, model: As a city on the water and part of a lagoon archipelago that has always been strongly anthropised, in its environmental, social and cultural complexity and uniqueness, Venice is today considered an ecosystem that symbolises and tries to cope with the repercussions of the climate crisis.<sup>2</sup> But the city became an icon of the Anthropocene long before this term entered use in the 2000s or the dramatic images of its flooding pervaded the global media in November 2019, when the water peaked at 187 cm above the mean sea level, submerging more than 70% of the historic centre. In the eyes of the world, Venice became part of our heritage that must be safeguarded as early as 1966, during the exceptional and uncontrollable phenomenon of the first high water that threatened the city's survival and led to a profound rethinking of the relationship between the environment, human beings and works of art. Since then, 'amidst fear, suffering and beauty', the rise of the seas, with their abnormal waves, has represented 'a sort of subversive drive demanding respect

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- 1 For the ongoing exchange, I would particularly like to thank: Giorgio Andreotta Calò, Marco Baravalle, Mario Ciaramitaro, Stefano Coletto, Pietro Consolandi, Sara Maggioni, Maria Morganti, Giovanni Paolin, Paolo Rosso, Alberto Restucci and Matteo Stocco.
  - 2 See Baldacci Cristina/Bassi Shaul/De Capitani Lucio/Omodeo Pietro (eds.): *Venice and the Anthropocene. An Ecocritical Guide*. Venice 2022; and Giupponi Carlo: *Venezia e i cambiamenti climatici*. Milan 2022.

for nature, even if humanised'.<sup>3</sup> This is how what has been called an 'early "environmentalism"' was born: animated by different orientations but focused 'on the city and the lagoon understood as the expression of a civilisation and a history', rather than on nature itself.<sup>4</sup>

In more recent years, alongside the physical defence of the city and its lagoon, primarily through massive hydraulic engineering works that culminated in the construction of the *M.O.S.E.* system of mobile dykes,<sup>5</sup> a less interventionist attitude, more sensitive to the rights of nature and to a respectful coexistence between human and non-human, has spread – especially on the initiative of environmental groups, cultural associations and independent art collectives. The preservation of the museum city, which responds to a model of development based on tourism, perpetuating the two-faced image of a mausoleum and a playground of memory, cannot – or at least should not – fail to take into account the needs and changes required by the living city.<sup>6</sup> The heart of this city is currently home to fewer than 50,000 residents, a number that has been in constant decline for decades, but also to a growing number of commuters from the mainland as well as others who, for different reasons – principally work and study – live in Venice on a daily or periodic basis, even though they are not officially based here.

Imagining and practising possible alternatives to the stereotypical reality of a Venice agonising under the waves of ever-higher water, unstoppable depopulation and excessive mass tourism – the three major causes of fragility for the city and its lagoon – is a necessary form of resistance for those trying to regenerate, and not only preserve, both its environmental and its socio-cultural biodiversity.

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3 Cf. Nezzo Marta: *Une ville d'art fragile*. In: *Laboratoire italien*. Vol. 15/2014. p. 155. doi.org/10.4000/laboratoireitalien.842. accessed on 03.01.2025.

4 Cf. Pes Luca: *Gli ultimi quarant'anni*. In: *Isneghi Mario: Storia di Venezia. L'Ottocento e il Novecento*, Vol. 3. Il Novecento. Rome 2002. p. 2401.

5 For a study of the pros and cons of *M.O.S.E.*, see Giupponi Carlo/et al.: *Boon and Burden. Economic Performance and Future Perspectives of the Venice Flood Protection System*. In: *Regional Environmental Change*, Vol. 24.44/2024. doi.org/10.1007/s10113-024-02193-9. accessed on 03.01.2025.

6 See Settis Salvatore: *If Venice Dies*. New York 2016; and Vettese Angela: *Venezia vive. Dal presente al futuro e viceversa*. Bologna 2017.

The political-philosophical interpretation of the concept of *resistance* derived from Jean-François Lyotard is taken up in this context. According to this line of thought, it is more appropriate to hypothesise specific ‘moments of resistance’<sup>7</sup> that subvert traditional ways of thinking and feeling, opening up questions for which forms of judgement or action have not yet been figured out. Therefore, resistance

is not something that is always the same, given in advance, supplied with a prior model, program, or an assigned place in the grand march of history. Born instead of an inchoate necessity, following unscripted paths, it calls for an invention or open experimentation in art and thinking, which accompanies the larger movement in which it figures.<sup>8</sup>

Every historical circumstance thus implies different forms of resistance in which art and culture, especially in their more autonomous and para-institutional expressions, play pioneering roles as proponents of counter-models and agents of change. In the case of Venice, which, even more than a ‘bipolar city’,<sup>9</sup> divided between insularity and mainland, is an archipelago historically made up of different communities – each with its own peculiarities and needs but firmly connected by more-than-human relations – *resisting* the challenges of the climate crisis, neo-liberalism and life after the COVID-19 pandemic means becoming a place of reflection and possibility. This process must start from the local dimension and the actualisation of vernacular knowledges, but avoid falling into the failed trap of blindly or nostalgically opposing ongoing planetary change.

*To resist* means, first of all, to ask oneself, with a great sense of ethical and civil responsibility: *What is to be done?* The artist Giorgio Andreotta Calò did this, in exemplary fashion, between 2022 and 2023, when he and two friends – Paolo Rosso and Marco Bravetti, one the promoter of the curatorial research initiative *Microclima* and the other the founder of the culinary collective *Tociale! Cucina e comunità* – took part in a municipal competition to ‘reclaim’ the island

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7 Cf. Rajchman John: Lyotard’s “Résistance” Today. In: Baldacci Cristina/Ricci Clarissa/Vettese Angela (eds.): *Double Trouble in Exhibiting the Contemporary. Art Fairs and Shows*. Milan 2020. p. 86.

8 Ibid.

9 See D’Agostino Roberto: *La città bipolare. Centralità urbana e qualità diffusa*. In: *La nuova dimensione urbana. Venezia-Mestre nella regione Veneto*. Venice 1990. p. 61.

of Sant'Andrea.<sup>10</sup> After winning the tender and obtaining the concession for a first part of the island, the greatest temptation – at least for Andreotta Calò – is to keep it as it is, to do nothing, so that it remains ‘a space for sharing and research among nature, culture and public commitment’.<sup>11</sup> Here, *non-action* clearly expresses a precise and firm artistic poetic-philosophical will.<sup>12</sup>

Situated in the northern lagoon, and a former bulwark of the city's defence that preserves the remains of the 16th-century fortress – the so-called *Forte* (in Italian, the term, besides being a noun, is also an adjective synonymous with tenacity) – Sant'Andrea is one of the last islands of the Venetian archipelago not to have been colonised by real estate and tourist speculation, as it can only be reached by private boats. As a place that is still *public* in the deepest sense of the term, it represents not only a rarity in Venice's natural and cultural ecosystem, but – even more than a symbol – a manifesto of resistance itself.

### ***Sale Docks: Towards an Alter-Institutional Radical Practice***

In the lagoon's artistic-cultural ecosystem, the radical experiment, now almost 20 years old, of the workerist collective *Sale Docks* can certainly be defined as another manifesto of resistance.<sup>13</sup> Established as the headquarters of Venetian art workers – many of them militants in the *Morion* social centre, active in the city

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10 The infinitive verb refers here to the noun ‘reclamation’, which alludes to the ecological actions undertaken by land artists in the 1960s and 1970s. See Morris Robert (ed.): *Earthworks. Land Reclamation as Sculpture*. Seattle 1979.

11 Cf. Baldacci Cristina: *An Archipelago of Ecological Care. Venice, Its Lagoon and Contemporary Art*. In: *Lagoonscapes. The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities*. Vol. 3.2/2023. p. 325. doi.org/10.30687/LGSP/2785-2709/2023/02/011. accessed on 03.01.2025.

12 See, in this book, Giorgio Andreotta Calò's letter to Salvatore Settis about the island of Sant'Andrea. chapter 4.

13 In the 1960s and 1970s, Venice, as the home to heavy industries in Mestre and Porto Marghera, was one of the nerve centres of Italian Operaismo (Workerism). It is the region where theorists such as Antonio Negri, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Massimo Cacciari began their political-intellectual parabola and the *Montedison* workers were among the first to make ecological demands, denouncing the environmental toxicity of the petrochemical plant in which they worked. For an in-depth study of the visual dimension of Workerism in Italy, see Galimberti Jacopo: *Images of Class. Operaismo, Autonomia and the Visual Arts (1962–1988)*. London and New York 2022.

since 1990<sup>14</sup> – and as a project space for artists, its history began in 2007 with an occupation.<sup>15</sup> The chosen location was a historic building in the Dorsoduro district. As the name indicates, it is a long-abandoned 15th-century salt warehouse, which started to be used in the 1970s as an additional exhibition venue during some editions of the Venice Biennale. Overlooking the Giudecca Canal and next to the *Accademia di Belle Arti* and the *Fondazione Vedova*, it is strategically located close to the *Peggy Guggenheim Collection* and to the *Punta della Dogana*, which opened two years later (2009), in conjunction with the *Fondazione Vedova*, and as another venue of the *Pinault Collection* alongside *Palazzo Grassi*.

As a self-managed aggregation centre, the *Sale*, as it is usually called by Venetians, responds to a practical need in a particularly delicate moment for Venice. Its intention is to criticise, through militant actions, the neo-liberal model of cultural valorisation in an attempt to make the city's cultural policies more inclusive and equitable, finding valid alternatives to the precariousness of cultural work, especially among young people. As its co-founder, Marco Baravalle, recalls:

It seemed to us then that we were in the midst of a paradigm shift, if not from the art city to the creative city, at least from the museum city to the contemporary city. We read the maturing of this transition in certain facts: the opening (at Iuav University of Venice) of a new art faculty with an ambitiously international scope, the purchase of Palazzo Grassi by François Pinault (2005) and his plan to restore Punta della Dogana to display his own contemporary art collection, the growth in the number of countries interested in having their own representation at the Biennale, the budding of collateral events (even unofficial ones) in international exhibitions, with a relative and constant increase in audiences and, finally, the attempt to root small private foundations in the city.<sup>16</sup>

14 In addition to the *Morion*, other social spaces with a pronounced cultural agenda include the *Centro Sociale Rivolta*, which opened (also with an occupation) in Porto Marghera in 1995, and the more recent *Palestra Popolare Zenobia*, which opened on the island of Giudecca in 2024.

15 For an overview of the many projects of *Sale Docks*, see [www.saledocks.net](http://www.saledocks.net). accessed on 03.01.2025.

16 Cf. Baravalle Marco: *Sale Docks, un'alteristituzione contro la valorizzazione neoliberale dell'arte*. In: *L'autunno caldo del curatore. Arte, neoliberismo, pandemia*. Venice 2021. p. 90; and also, idem: *Art Populism and the Alter-Institutional Turn*. In: *e-flux Journal*. Vol. 89/2018. [www.e-flux.com/journal/89/182464/art-populism-and-the-alter-institut](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/89/182464/art-populism-and-the-alter-institut)

Baravalle's analysis is extremely lucid. He presents the new phase of accelerated cultural transformation that postmodern Venice is going through at the start of the third millennium: a 'paradigm shift' that follows in step with the long tail of the city's economic and social change. In the historic centre, one witnesses, among other things: a disappearance of productive and administrative activities; an increase in the number of tourists and, accordingly, a lengthening of the high season; an exodus of Venetians towards Mestre and the mainland and a consequent re-adaptation of buildings and flats as either exhibition venues or tourist lets, driven by the spread of Airbnb; and an arrival of large international investors, with a growth in speculation especially in the cultural and luxury spheres. The gradual spread of the tourist development model, for better or for worse, has been drastically changing the Venetian artistic and cultural context, with its desperate lack of spaces for free sharing. Public and private cultural activities invade and give new impetus to the city, but, at the same time, they stifle independent initiatives. Contemporary art plays a leading role in this process, complicitly embodied by the Venice Biennale, which, in its various manifestations (art, architecture, cinema, dance, music, theatre) and with its related events – even when unofficial – expands temporally (almost without interruption) and spatially (outside the institutional venues of the Giardini and the Arsenale into all six city districts and even beyond).<sup>17</sup> By doing this, the Venice Biennale confirms itself as a brand closely connected with the image of the city in which it was born.<sup>18</sup>

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ional-turn/. accessed on 03.01.2025. See also the conversation with Marco Baravalle, chapter 16.

- 17 While biennial events were already invading the urban space in the 1970s, exhibitions and collateral events really began colonising the city in the 1990s, notably with the Venice Biennale 1993 – and the show within the show *Aperto '93* – curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, and the Venice Biennale 1999 – not coincidentally entitled *dAPERTutto* – curated by Harald Szeemann.
- 18 For an interpretation of the Venice Biennale as one of the most enduring brands of modernity, see Martini Vittoria: How La Biennale as a Brand was Born. Venice as the Archetype of a Biennial City. In: *Oboe Journal*, Vol. 1.1/2020. p. 99–107. doi.org/10.25432/2724-086X/1.1.0008. accessed on 03.01.2025. In the article, the author also highlights the mission that the Venice Biennale, in the wake of the 1968 ideological protest, gave itself between 1974 and 1978 'as an institution that would work for the "salvation" and "vivification" of the city' (cf. p. 107, footnote 33).

In the era of the *Biennialocene* – the assembly of art and cultural workers, founded in May 2023 on the initiative of the *Sale* and the *Institute of Radical Imagination*, together with *ADL Cobas* and *Mi Riconosci?* (both workers' rights associations) (Fig. 1) – simply regaining space becomes the first requirement for those who position themselves as an alternative to the art mainstream and the 'artistification'<sup>19</sup> of Venice.

Fig. 1: *Biennialocene*, Venice Biennale, 2024.



Photo: Nicolò Zanatta. Courtesy of *Biennialocene*

From this point of view, the *Sale* continues to be a beacon in the city, although its radical model, based on collective action and an 'alter-institutional'<sup>20</sup> impulse, has not always been successful or even popular.<sup>21</sup> Despite its failures, difficulties and ongoing battles, the *Sale* certainly has the merit

19 Cf. Baravalle Marco: *Sale Docks, un'alteristituzione contro la valorizzazione neoliberale dell'arte*. In: *L'autunno caldo del curatore. Arte, neoliberalismo, pandemia*. Venice 2021. p. 91. To learn more about the *Biennialocene* initiatives, see: <https://www.biennialocene.com>. accessed on 03.01.2025.

20 Ibid. p. 89.

21 One of the aspects which, by Baravalle's own admission, the *Sale* initially failed to come to terms with, because it was too busy pursuing a radical ideology and militancy,

of having been the most tenacious agitator and having stuck rigidly to its demands. Throughout these years it has shown that an alternative to the neo-liberal cultural hegemony can be collectively constructed in Venice ‘as a right to the city, as the conception of new institutional architectures, as the reinvention of cultural formats [...] in the name of the common’.<sup>22</sup>

### **Microclima: A Curatorial Approach**

Social and environmental responsibility are the basis of many artistic and curatorial practices that have spread in the Venetian cultural ecosystem in recent years and, while perhaps less radical than those carried out by the *Sale*, are no less relevant. These are collaborative practices that envisage the involvement of various public and private, local and international actors in single projects – even long-term ones. And while these practices do not always involve cohesion or even a shared design, they have a research methodology that unites several experiences and usually includes, depending on the case: walking in the landscape, educating about art and respect for the city and its lagoon, caring for others (interspecies collaboration), sharing and working together, developing the idea of community (in the singular but more so in the plural), archiving collective experiences, memories and knowledges, trying to regenerate what remains, avoiding intrusive attitudes and – last but not least – (re-)imagining the present and a possible future.

This procedural specificity found a catalyst in the self-funded project *Microclima*, which is based in the *Serra dei Giardini* next to the Venice Biennale (hence the name), and in its initiator, Paolo Rosso. Since 2011, the project, which has an essentially curatorial approach, has made a name for itself in the Venetian context as an assiduous promoter of ‘independent and anarchist experiments’.<sup>23</sup> Born out of the cooperation between amateurs and interdisciplinary professionals and focused on ‘the natural world, cultural heritage and the public sphere’, these *experiments* seek to recreate, from time to time, ‘a

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was its failure to consider that the art workers of 2000 were not moved by the same revolutionary fire that had characterised their predecessors in the 1970s. Ibid. p. 91.

22 Ibid p. 95.

23 Cf. [www.microclima.net](http://www.microclima.net). accessed on 03.01.2025.

hospitable and welcoming microclimate triggering actions of a cultural nature in different contexts'.<sup>24</sup>

Among the *microclimates* recreated by Rosso and his many partners and companions – including the artist Edoardo Aruta – the most enduring and, for the moment, perhaps the most successful, is the *Cinema Galleggiante* (Fig. 2). Since 2020, this has presented an annual programme of screenings of artists' films on a floating platform located in the southern part of the lagoon, opposite the island of Giudecca.

Fig. 2: *Cinema Galleggiante – Acque Sconosciute*, 2023.



Courtesy of Riccardo Banfi & *Microclima*

So far it has had five editions, which, over the years, have shaped 'a collective vision and desire', rethinking the city 'starting from the lagoon'.<sup>25</sup> Between late August and early September, in conjunction with the *Biennale Cinema*, this independent emulation of Venice's international film festival brings together

24 Ibid.

25 Cf. <https://www.cinemagalleggiante.it/it>. accessed on 03.01.2025.

institutions, associations, museums and local and international festivals to address topical issues that start with the particular (Venice and its lagoon) and open up to the universal (the world). These issues include *Unknown Waters* – which was the focus of the first edition and constituted the conceptual frame, as well as the subtitle, of the following editions – the journey, the dreamlike and surreal dimension, living (from an ecological and more-than-human perspective) and the inner world. The leitmotif pays homage to two central figures of psychiatric reform in Italy, Franco Basaglia and his wife Franca Ongaro, both Venetians.

In addition to being an artistic-cultural event, the *Cinema Galleggiante* is also a party for the extended Venetian community, bringing together old friends and new companions and experimenting with different forms of conviviality, including sustainable cuisine. Artistic-culinary collectives such as the aforementioned *Tocia!* – often aided by the duo *Barena Bianca*<sup>26</sup> (Fabio Cavalletti and Pietro Consolandi) or other professionals – reinvent Venetian and international cuisine under the banner of sustainability by studying the ecology of the lagoon – especially the precious ecosystem of the salt marshes – and only using it in ways that do not endanger biodiversity.

Practices like these show how Venice and its lagoon – both as a physical context and as a metaphorical milieu – become a self-reflexive device, a kind of *meta-lagoon*<sup>27</sup> that enables us to understand, respect and try to help this special environment.

## Coexisting Responsibly in an Artistic Ecosystem

The desire to question and challenge the established system and act in an experimental and courageous manner in order to promote a more democratic

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26 The collective is itinerant and operates in different contexts, collaborating with numerous initiatives, but also has a fixed base at *Spiazzi*, a cultural association inaugurated in 2003 in a former carpenter's workshop a stone's throw from the Arsenale. For research into *Barena Bianca*, see [www.barenabianca.earth](http://www.barenabianca.earth). accessed on 03.01.2025.

27 In this regard, see in particular the projects: *Metagoon*, an online platform initiated by the artist and video maker Matteo Stocco, and *wetlands*, a publishing house founded as a non-profit social enterprise: <https://www.metagoon.net> and <https://www.wetlandsbooks.com>. accessed on 03.01.2025.

idea of culture has been a common feature throughout the history of artistic-cultural activism, in Venice and elsewhere. This essentially means abandoning obsolete models and concepts, including the traditional definition of art and the recognised role of the artist, while being aware of the risks of swimming against the tide. However, every experience that seeks to be independent of the system constitutes a model of action and a critical device in its own right that is dependent upon the historical moment and the context in which it operates, the situation from which it starts and the objectives that it sets for itself.<sup>28</sup> The relationship with the territory and the community gives rise to ‘a situated projectuality (in the public space and in the local dimension)’<sup>29</sup> that can last for years – as in the two Venetian cases of *Sale Docks* and *Microclima* – or rapidly die out like a meteor. Self-management is hard to sustain, especially for economic and relational reasons, despite the awareness that it is vitally important to remain united in order to cope with difficulties.

Non-profit spaces, multidisciplinary collectives, artists’ studios and residencies, social centres and other hybrid entities belong to the galaxy of independents that have alternated in Venice over the last 20 years with new initiatives that act in the liminal spaces between art and activism, art and life. The reasons for this creative volatility are numerous and many have already been highlighted, but we must not forget the importance of Venice as a city that trains young artists and creative and cultural practitioners. A key role is played by the city’s two universities, *Iuav* and *Ca’ Foscari*, the *Accademia di Belle Arti* and the *Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa* – with its atelier programme, which has been its main activity, by statute, for more than a century (it was founded in 1898, almost at the same time as the Venice Biennale), as well as its exhibitions. The result is that Venice is home to many young people who, at least at the beginning of their careers, are strongly influenced by its environmental, social and cultural uniqueness and who live between the need to leave, due to the actual

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28 For an in-depth look at independent art initiatives in Italy, see, among others: Artissima Lido (ed.): *An Almost Complete Directory of Independent Artist-Run Spaces and Collectives in Italy*. Milan 2012; Brusarosco Patrizia/Farronato Milovan (eds.): *Souvenir d’Italie. A Nonprofit Art History*. Milan 2010; Pinto Roberto/Spampinato Francesco (eds.): *Skank Bloc Bologna. Alternative Art Spaces since 1977*. Milan 2024.

29 Cf. Coletto Stefano: *From Bevilacqua to Collective Ateliers. Communities of Relations in Venice*. In: *Quaderni d’arte italiana*, Vol. 2.5. *Community*. Rome 2024. p. 80–85. Also available online: <https://www.quadriennaleidiroma.org/en/from-the-bevilacqua-to-collective-ateliers-communities-of-relations-in-venice>. accessed on 03.01.2025.

difficulties of living in the city, and the desire to stay, to try to contribute to its defence and growth.

*Fig. 3: Maria Morganti, Self-Portrait Panel (detail). 17.02. Being Among Others. Artist's Wednesdays, 2022. p. 2024. Digital printing on cotton paper, artist's proof. Archive no. 2022\_Panels\_Self-Portrait Panels\_033.*

111- Luigi Viola	126- Marina Gasparini	141- Jeffrey Throwell
112- Gaston Ramirez Feltrin	127- Franco Gasparri introduce Wall(k)	142- Lucas Reiner
113- Private Gallery	128- Silvano Rubino, Augusto Maurandi, Roberta Iachini	143- Stefano Boccacini
114- Tobia Ravà visita mostra a Villa Dona delle Rose	129- Maja Dalevich	144- Stefano Calligaro
115- Nikola Usunovski	130- Honorine Töpfer	145- Marcello Maloberti
116- Angiola Charchilli	131- Wanda Casaril	146- Serena Nono
117- Aldo Ranfola	132- Amy Worthen	147- Susan Crite
118- Katia Ceccarelli	133- Enrica Cavarzan, Lisa Castellani, Gloria Saffot-Trio, Maria Iacchi	148- Carlo Steiner
119- Serena Nono	134- Amalia Dal Ponte	149- Sonia Rolak
120- Tania Bruguera	135- Sabrina Mezraqi	150- Paolo Iandolo, Gerardo Balestrieri
121- Sebastian Zabronski	136- Tobia Ravà mostra	151- Maria Grazia Rosin mostra al Fortuny e Luca Clabot performance alla Querini
122- Julie Cook	137- Federica Bortolotti	152- Mario Bottinelli Montandon mostra allo Spazio Thuis
123- Visione video intervista Gilbert and George	138- Francesco Scarfone	153- Augusta Atla
124- Nicola di Caprio	139- Progetto Morinho	154- Cecio Casali
125- Katja Noppes, Alessandro Capozzo	140- Kim Jones, Dan Perjovschi, Ernesto Salvemón	155- Anne Walden
187- Mauro Chiglione	202- Paola Volpato	218- Nicola Hanke
188- Luca Clabot	203- Mario Alrò	219- Roberto De Pol
189- Diego Marcon	204- Monica Trevisan, Cristina Lombardo	220- Claudia Rossini
190- Peggy Millerville	205- Manuela Vallicelli	221- Marianna Marchloro
191- Peter Feldstein	206- Uria Ograbek	222- Visione film "Gomorra" in previsione gita a Scampia
192- Vendaval (Pablo Alonso de la Sierra, Rocio Arévalo Vargas)	207- Primoz Birjak	223- Italo Euffi
193- Laura Viale	208- Enzo De Leonibus	224- Associazione "E"
194- Roberta Orio	209- Fabrizio Sartori	225- Renzo Brugin
195- Sergio Avveduti	210- Marya Kazoun	226- Kaitlin Foran McDonough
196- Dominika Sobolewska	211- Lia Cecchin, Marisa Albanese	227- Maurizio Donzelli
197- Gabriele Soave	212- Alessia Armeni	228- Francesco Liggieri
198- Antonio Catalani	213- Giulio Squillacciotti	229- Michele Sambin
199- Adele Prosdocimi	214- Giuliana Rocco	230- Luca Pucci
200- Delfina Marcello, Francesco Urbano, Francesco Magarri	215- Sonia Rolak	231- Nicola Ruben Montini
201- Olga Vannoncini, Bruno Lorini	216- Fabiola Faldiga	232- Renzo Brugin
	217- Luca Bertolo, Chiara Canonì	

Graphic design: Marta Magini. Photo: Francesco Allegretto. Courtesy of the artist

Moreover, the particular configuration of Venice as a pedestrian (or at most nautical) city encourages sociability and the sharing of the increasingly crowded and less available public spaces and the few but inclusive private interiors. An exemplary case in point is Maria Morganti's studio, which opened its doors at 6pm every Wednesday between 2002 and 2012, offering other artists in the city the opportunity to come together (Fig. 3). In ten years, 254 artists

visited Morganti's studio or, sometimes, the spaces of the *Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa*, jointly creating 'a space for the silent [...]; an intimate space within the public space [...]; a space which represents a multitude of individuals, of artists who each express their world with their meaning'.<sup>30</sup>

Given the frequent lack of accessibility of more traditional venues, artists' studios and flats have also often acted as sharing spaces and hosted exhibitions. Besides the ongoing activity of *Casa Punto Croce* (which started in 2012), the many other examples include the initiatives *Proj V-Incontrare* (at Tobia Tomasi's), curated by the *Mobel Cultural Association*, and *Hic Sunt Leones* (at Sandro Zoico's and Pinuccia Casaccio's), both of which date from 2007.<sup>31</sup>

It would obviously be neither possible nor particularly useful to list the many initiatives, stable or otherwise, that have been promoted by independent artists and curators in Venice since 2000. We will therefore limit ourselves to a few brief considerations and hints that may help to offer an initial picture of the current situation. First of all, it should be noted that, despite the initial discouragement, the prolonged lockdown and other difficulties experienced by the world of art and culture due to the COVID-19 pandemic stimulated artists to react, reorganise and come together again. In 2020 alone, Venice, Mestre and Marghera saw the birth of such artistic-curatorial collective projects as *aarduork*, *Kadabra*, *Bardadino*, *Friche*, *Casablanca* and *Extra Ordinario*, to which we must add the multitude of earlier and later experiences that the *ComeCome* association attempted to map in its recent three-day *Walking Tour* (3–6 October 2024)<sup>32</sup> (Fig. 4).

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30 Cf. the artist's website: [www.mariamorganti.it/en/self-portrait/17-being-with-others/17-02-artists-wednesday-meetings](http://www.mariamorganti.it/en/self-portrait/17-being-with-others/17-02-artists-wednesday-meetings). accessed on 03.01.2025.

31 Cf. Boragina Federica/Brivio Giulia (eds.): *Interno domestico. Mostre in appartamento 1972–2013*. Verona 2013, p. 121–123; and the website of *Casa Punto Croce*: [www.casapuntocroce.org](http://www.casapuntocroce.org). accessed on 03.01.2025.

32 The association's website contains the most comprehensive current list of artist-run spaces in Venice, to which we refer for a presentation of the individual experiences: <https://www.comecome.info>. accessed on 03.01.2025.

Fig. 4: 'Walking Tour', programme, Venice, Mestre, Marghera, 2024.

## ComeCome Walking Tour

### 3 ottobre 2024

h. 14.45  
Fondazione Malutta  
Via Angelo Scarsellini 11, Marghera

h. 16.00  
Kadabra  
via Giuseppe Verdi 57, Mestre

h. 17.30  
Telespazio  
via Fellsati 12, Mestre

h. 18.30  
zofforosso  
viale San Marco 96 I, Mestre  
+ Scafandra  
+ Tocial Cucina e comunità

### 4 ottobre 2024

h. 14.00  
Cazzo Spazio  
Cannaregio, 6262

h. 15.00  
Aarduork  
+ Extragarbo  
Castello, 4931

h. 16.30  
Panorama  
San Marco, 602A

vaporetto San Zaccaria → Giudecca Palanca

h. 17.45  
Cosmogram  
Giudecca, 624

h. 19.15  
Studio Distilleria  
Giudecca, 796

vaporetto Giudecca Palanca → Zattere

h. 21  
Casa Punto Croce  
Da Venezia Under tide a Binario17  
Santa Croce, 2125

### 5 ottobre 2024

h. 14:00  
Dopplo Fondo  
Santa Croce, 1256

h. 15:00  
Joystick, Fondazione Malutta  
Santa Croce, 2125

h. 16.30  
zofforosso  
+ Gli Impresari  
Santa Croce, 1894

h. 17.45  
Terzospazio  
proiezione in collaborazione con  
NAZRA Palestine Short Film Festival  
Santa Croce, 1996

### 6 ottobre 2024

h. 16.00  
*The Parliament of Things*  
workshop a cura di BARN  
Cooperativa Sociale "Il Cerchio"

ComeCome propone un tour di tre giorni alla scoperta dei diversi volti, mani, menti e luoghi che animano la rete delle realtà indipendenti tra Mestre/ Marghera/ Venezia.  
Dal 3 al 5 ottobre esploreremo insieme agli amici\* di BARN (Brussels Artist-Run Network) studi d'artista, spazi no-profit, collettivi multidisciplinari ed entità ibride che proliferano tra terraferma e città storica.  
Domenica 6 ottobre ci ritroveremo presso la cooperativa Sociale Il Cerchio per *The Parliament of Things*, un workshop partecipativo in cui scambiarsi pensieri sul fare arte oggi a Venezia, a Bruxelles and everywhere.

ComeCome proposes a three-day tour to discover the multiple faces, hands, minds and places that animate the network of independent realities between Mestre/ Marghera/ Venice.  
From October 3 to 5, together with our friends from BARN (Brussels Artist-Run Network), we will explore artist studios, non-profit spaces, multidisciplinary collectives and hybrid entities that thrive between the mainland and the historic city. On Sunday 6 October, we will gather at Cooperativa Sociale Il Cerchio for *The Parliament of Things*, a participatory workshop where we will exchange thoughts on making art today in Venice, Brussels and everywhere.

Courtesy of *ComeCome*.

At least two other initiatives should also be mentioned due to the stable presence that they have enjoyed in the city for over a decade. The first is the *Fondazione Malutta*, an artistic collective with more than 40 associates that was formed in 2013 within the framework of the courses – especially the painting courses – of the *Accademia di Belle Arti* and whose intent is, in a certain sense, to represent a self-managed alternative to the (municipal) *Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa*. The second is *Spazio Punch*, a non-profit organisation located in the area of the former breweries – now an art district – on the island of Giudecca that has ‘investigated and organised cultural events, exhibitions and talks’ since 2011.<sup>33</sup> Its founder, Augusto Maurandi, is also one of the promoters of the symptomatically named network of artists and cultural professionals *Venezia c'è (Venice is there)*, which campaigns publicly to ensure that the Venice Pavilion at the Giardini of the Venice Biennale – which is currently mis-managed by local politicians – will have a scientific committee composed of members of the city’s artistic community.

For the Venetian *artist* community, the Venice Biennale remains by far the most prestigious, powerful and influential institution that it must deal with in redefining the socio-cultural ecologies of the city.<sup>34</sup> As the latest significant example in this area, we can mention the *rebiennale* collaborative platform, which enables a ‘network of Venetian citizens, students, architects, artists and political activists to share methods, procedures, skills and know-how in the field of self-building’.<sup>35</sup> Set up in the context of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2008, it proposes a bottom-up and communitarian practice of living, far from building speculation and (largely) from power, that focuses on the dismantling of exhibitions as a form of recycling and redistributing used materials in the territory. For example, *rebiennale* collaborated with the *Sale* in setting up the exhibition *Open#6* (2013), which was made with salvaged material. This exhibition was part of a series dedicated to young artists that recalled the eponymous

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33 Cf. <https://www.spaziopunch.com>. accessed on 03.01.2025.

34 For a review of the topic, see Tarocco Francesca: How Do Venetian Artists Contend with Mass-Tourism? In: *Frieze*. 5 April 2024. <https://www.frieze.com/article/venice-biennale-tourists-everywhere-242>.

35 Cf. <https://www.rebiennale.org>. accessed on 03.01.2025.

*Aperto*, a historic presentation of emerging art at the Venice Biennale, that was held from 1980 to 1993, precisely at the *Magazzini del Sale*.<sup>36</sup>

As this brief account of independent art-curatorial practices during the last two decades shows on several levels, the theme of *living together* – which we now also ecologically define as *coexistence* – is particularly special, as well as urgent, to Venice. An archipelago that, according to the most catastrophic predictions and like other small and medium-sized islands threatened by rising seas, is not destined to last long. So, *what is to be done?* This question constantly resounds among (art) activists and independents who love and respect Venice and who keep it alive with their actions.

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36 For an accurate study of *Aperto*, see Ricci Clarissa: *Aperto|1980-1993. La mostra dei giovani artisti della Biennale di Venezia*. Milan 2022.