

# Rome, Open City

Rome has long been a draw for international artists and now, increasingly, galleries. Have Italian artists been left at the gates?

BY ILARIA PURI PURINI

Winters in the Italian capital are sunny and mild, casting a special light and atmosphere over the city. Artists from around the world have long come to Rome to bask in its climate, study its treasures and, although a lot has obviously changed since the days of the Grand Tour, Rome is still a major draw for artists. This transience adds another layer to Rome's already complex and often-contradictory art scene, one that is frequently caught between localism and internationalism.

Last spring, the South African artist William Kentridge completed his monumental outdoor fresco *Triumphs and Laments* (2016), which stretches 500 metres along the banks of the Tiber and which will gradually disappear over time. The mural depicts some of the city's major episodes: its fratricidal founding myth, destructive emperors, years of terrorist attacks in the 1970s and the arrival of immigrants and refugees in recent years. Kentridge was a guest at the American Academy on the Gianicolo hill, one of the institutions – along with the Swiss Institute and British, French, German and Spanish academies – that play a crucial role in bringing international artists to town. Through various residency schemes, these artists are provided with extraordinary places to research, work and converse with other academicians. But one negative aspect of these comfortable breaks, which are frequently hosted in the opulent villas overlooking the city centre, is that visiting artists are removed from the artistic life of the city.



Jonathan Baldock works (all 2016) in 'Conversations Pieces | Part 3', Fondazione Memmo, Rome, 2016–17. Courtesy: Fondazione Memmo, Rome; photograph: Daniele Molajoli

There are, however, some institutional bridges between Rome's academies and the people who live and work in the city. For example, Fondazione Memmo, a private foundation that opened four years ago, organizes an annual group show with artists from these schools. The third of these, 'Conversation Piece | Part 3', on view until 2 April, brings together former British Academy resident Jonathan Baldock; Italian Piero Golia, who lives in Los Angeles (his partner is a current American Academy resident); Magali Reus, a Dutch fellow of the American Academy; and Claudia Weiser, currently at the German Academy's Villa Massimo. The artists were asked to think about the agency of objects and the result is a frenzied dialogue between artworks. Those by Weiser and Baldock (suggestive of Roman antiquities) are especially frantic, reflecting upon the complexities of objects caught between a glorious past and a hectic present.

Such activities highlight the importance of private foundations in an exhibition environment that lacks the state support available in other major European capitals. Fondazione Giuliani (established 2010), Fondazione Nomas (2008) and Spazio Indipendenza (2012) all offer exhibitions and residencies that are unheard of by most Romans but better known abroad. Indipendenza's current exhibition, for example, features Brazilian painter Lucas Arruda, who has produced delicate abstract works that inhabit the domestic spaces of the foundation. It is Arruda's first solo show in Italy.

While the Roman art scene has developed a particular ecology for visiting artists from overseas, often with support from well-informed and well-travelled collectors, commercial galleries are shaping the city in a different way. The Irish gallerist Lorcan O'Neill opened one of the first international commercial spaces in Rome in 2003, with a programme of both British and established Italians, such as Enrico Castellani and Luigi Ontani. Currently on view is a solo show by the young Roman painter Gianni Politi, running until 4 February.

In 2007, Larry Gagosian opened his seventh gallery worldwide in a former bank building on Via Francesco Crispi, near the Spanish steps. More recently, in 2015, fellow New Yorker Gavin Brown decided to turn an 8th-century church, Sant'Andrea de Scaphis in the Trastevere neighbourhood, into his third, fourth or fifth space, depending on how you're counting. (In the early 2000s, Brown ran a gallery in Rome called Roma Roma Roma with fellow dealers Franco Noero and Toby Webster.) The young Glaswegian James Gardner opened Frutta at the beginning of 2012, the Belgian Marie-Laure

Fleisch opened a gallery in Rome (in 2009), prior to opening in Brussels (in 2016); and, since organizing exhibitions at Lira Gallery, beginning in 2015, Viennese Emanuel Layr has opened his own space in the city with his current show 'The Year of the Monkey' (until 23 March). These international galleries supplement those that have been operating in the city for some time, like the Neapolitan T293, and Galleria Sales, Monitor and Magazzino – who are showing Elisabetta Benassi, an artist committed to work in her city, until 28 February.

For permanent residents, however, studio spaces are typically found in those same neighbourhoods that are depicted by *Neorealism* filmmakers, along the Casilina and Portonaccio roads: areas that spread outside the ancient Roman walls in the 1950s. Due to the lack of good art schools in the city, Italian artists tend to either be self-taught or, train under another more experienced artist, much like an apprentice – a relationship that can dictate the course of an emerging artist's career. The Pastificio Cerere, an ex-pasta factory, has been converted into studios spaces and is the setting for many of these intergenerational exchanges while also running exhibitions and events.

There was a time when Roman artists were well represented in the main commercial galleries and museums. The collection of the recently refurbished Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (GNAM) reflects this period, with important acquisitions made under the directorship, from 1942–75, of the energetic Palma Bucarelli. At the time, foreigners participated in the artistic life of the city, exhibiting with local galleries and alongside local artists: most famously, Cy Twombly visited, and later moved to Rome in 1957. Support for local Roman and Italian artists has waned since those days. The difference now is that museums feel pressured to show international artists who often have little relationship with the city but might attract bigger audiences. There are other institutions in Rome that could champion local and Italian art: the city council-run Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome (MACRO) and the Museum of the Arts of the XXI Century (MAXXI). But rather than diversifying their mission, these institutions compete for the limited funds available and have fragmented collections and tangled exhibition programmes.

These are strange times for a city that has grown accustomed to selling itself to a global audience. Locals will tell you how they remember a Rome that was different to the one driven by the pleasures of foreign tourists. Similarly, it is worth remembering how quickly the international interests of private investment and philanthropy, combined with a limited arts educational system and fragmented public arts policy, have left Italian artists at the gates. The irony, of course, is that those born in a capital city that is synonymous with art's imperial internationalism have, in an era of globalized capital, been rendered strangers to their domestic arts scene. Little wonder that so many now send postcards from New York, Paris, London, Berlin or elsewhere – places where they can find support and opportunities.