

Please find below the English text of the presentation being given in Italian by Graziella Giusto during the VOICES FROM VENICE conference.

MY VOICE FOR VENICE

I am a voice from Venice, I'm here to tell you about my being a Venetian on the mainland during the "lockdown", when you couldn't move more than 200 metres from home and Venice was so far away at that moment, it was 35 kilometres and so absurdly far!

But how could I tell about her with my art, how could I design my jewels dedicated to her by having her photos tell me the details of her ... I am not sure what this means.

The absence of everything, even knowing that I could take a train and go, yet the trains were so sparse and the silence so strong that when I heard one pass through the nearby station of my city I had a thrill, a feeling of freedom for a second, in silence and fear I remembered moments of having a happy heart and then I moved on to remembering, I thought about when I would see her again ... and even if I would see her again!

Then, as if to "review" in my mind, as if it were in a poem, I saw its walls, its waters and then one day I imagined myself flying above you, no-one would ever stop a bird, no-one would ever look where it came from and where it went, free above the canals, above the roofs, touching bell towers and chimneys... FREE.

Just in that period I became more fond of Ruskin and "The Stones of Venice", having that book so full of sketches and thoughts, has always helped me in the realisation of my jewels, which more and more often imitate Venetian buildings but now I tried more, incredibly feeling the writer's emotion and putting it next to mine, and inside me I thought what would Ruskin say to see Venice like this? Recently the high water "Acqua Granda", as we call it, had raped her and now an epidemic was giving her another hard blow ... reading, learning, however, made me think I could be useful to her one day and with a broken heart I hoped in one of its rebirths, Venice has been reborn many times like the Phoenix from its ashes, perhaps I too could have contributed with a small seed, with small things that

do great things if there are many together! Yes, I wanted to be there to contribute, thinking about this I felt a rare sense of well-being that led me to positivity, to plan for the future, her future and mine... together... but how?

For this reason when, in April of that year, I was asked to contribute a chapter in the book "Venice Rising, Acqua Granda, Pandemic Rebirth" edited by Kathleen González, whose proceeds from sales went to associations that work for the well-being of Venice, I felt like one of those seeds and I immediately accepted to write a chapter about Venice ... a book with a title that included the word "rebirth" and support for those associations I wanted to be there, and I had no doubts about what to write because of what I was living, my dreams of returning; and my feelings were experienced in dreams so clearly that it really seemed that everything had happened to me, that I imagined flight over the Grand Canal to its end, admiring palaces and churches, and then in Piazza San Marco, the Basilica, hearing the bells in celebration ... and so I flew, I flew to my Venice and between the pages of that chapter knowing that this was a beginning, to do something for her.

The restrictions caused by the pandemic were finally improving, we could start moving, that announcement was sealed by a big rainbow, I will always remember it, it was April 29, 2020, I went out on the terrace under the very fine droplets of rain, hood raised up, I photographed it as much as I could, trying to get around chimneys and roofs... it was a divine sign I thought to myself, soon that same rainbow photographed in Venice would go around the world becoming the symbol of rebirth.

I still remember the first trip to her, I was still so afraid but I could not stop, what a thrill, she was there and she was even more beautiful, she smelled of salt and loneliness, not of destruction but of rebirth and inside me the words resounded that I have always repeated and that close my chapter in the book Venice Rising: "VENICE IS NOT DEAD, VENICE IS RESTING"

My artist friends were no longer there, they had lost everything, first with the "granda" high water, some lost their shops with the precious materials, others lost their works, others, Venetians by adoption, returned to their homeland, now with the closures , restrictions, not

being able to exhibit, work, sell, even the last of them who lasted the longest had to abandon his dreams, and with them I had lost all the artistic and social possibilities of expression through my creations, my jewels that spoke only of Venice had now become silent, far from you and even the most interesting work would have remained invisible! But the will-power, positivity and resilience that distinguish me brought me more and more into thinking of having my artistic studio in Venice, creating there, exhibiting there, it's true everyone else was closed but I wanted to open, work for her and with her, being surrounded by someone like me and spending hours talking in front of a painting or a statue, even looking at a brick wall, crumbling for others but a source of inspiration for me ... working, creating objects, create events to bring together people who would have come from afar, have a special kind of tourism with clear goals: art, above all art, respect and love for Venice. Meanwhile the weeks went by and art was reopening to the world with difficulty, but in September 2020 one event took me in a leap beyond desires, where there are those who are about to be realised, a word has lit a fire, a couple of Venetian artist friends, with the same ideas as were on my mind, they told me that they saw a sign posted on a window saying "surrender warehouse" (this is how the rooms on the ground floor of buildings for residential use are defined in Venice, once used as a warehouse for goods) a spark made me ignite my heart, head, soul.... I ran to see ...

It was not the predestined place but the spark and the beginning of a great search!

In August 2021, I have a key in my hand, the door is green and corresponds to Cannaregio's 4248, there is a lot to do to fix it but I'm in no hurry now, my instructions for the company that deals with the "Building Renovation" are mandatory: nothing is touched that has to do with its past and at least two walls must remain uncovered, bare stone, no matter if they are beautiful or damaged, for me it is important that they are stones, stones of Venice, and when I will feel the need, when I am lacking in energy, I will rest my hand or I will look at the cracks, I will dream of the past making conjectures of discord heard and scenes seen, all absorbed in those red bricks and infinite dust. It will become my studio, and an "open" atelier, mine and for those who, without this possibility like me in the past, want to present their work to friends, to their public, with my invitations to them I will move even the laziest to action and for Venice it will be

of such nourishment, and the well-being given by its beauty will be enjoyed and the meeting of friends in art will invite them to return soon.

Here, this is me, one of the many voices of Venice that - thanks to you - was able to be heard, a voice that believes in craftsmanship and creativity and that will fight to be recognized as an integral part of Venice.

Let us have no more cold souvenir shops selling work produced abroad; artisan shops are on the way, our tourists, who live the fairy tale of their holiday, deserve to take home as a souvenir something conceived in Venice and which has a Venetian soul!

Thank you for giving voice to this mainland Venetian who has always wanted Venice and will now be adopted by her!

Graziella Giusto, April 2022