

Venetian Tradition and Sustainability: The Laguna Goes Red

Roberta Cutillo (May 13, 2019)



American artist Melissa McGill paints the Venice Laguna 52 shades of red with her Red Regatta, a participatory project celebrating the city's traditions and cultural heritage while also bringing attention to the rising threat of climate change.

On May 11, during the opening week of the [Venice Biennale](#) [2], Venetians and visitors saw the North Laguna turn red for the trial run of the Red Regatta: a site-specific public artwork by American artist [Melissa McGill](#) [3].

Organized alongside [Magazzino Italian Art Foundation](#) [4] and Venice's Vela al Terzo Association, with the support of [Mazzoleni](#) [5] and the participation of over 250 collaborators throughout the city, the project curated by Chiara Spangaro and managed by Marcella Ferrari consists of a Venetian



“regata”, a race of traditional “vela al terzo” sailboats.

Only, for this occasion, the artist had each sail hand-painted a different shade of red. The result is a spectacular choreography; the different reds reflect and mix on the surface of the water, illuminating the Laguna and the city.

Red Regatta will take place on June 30 on the North Laguna, between the islands of San Servolo and Poveglia, then again on September 1st on the San Marco basin, as the opening to the annual Historical Regatta, and a final time on September 15 back in the initial location. These performances will be visible from different parts of the city, which can be found by consulting the interactive map on www.redregatta.org [6].

Melissa McGill is an interdisciplinary artist living and working in New York. Having lived in Venice from 1991 to 1993, she often returns to the Italian city and had previously created pieces that simultaneously celebrate its beauty and tradition and reflect upon the challenges it faces, such as her 2017 work [“The Campi.”](#) [7] a series of sound sculptures invoking daily life in a Venetian “campo” (square) while also highlighting its precariousness as Venice is increasingly taken over by tourism and citizens forced to move out.

With Red Regatta, McGill wishes, on the one hand, to celebrate the Venetian tradition of the regattas as well as pay homage to the city's history; in fact, the color red can be found all throughout Venice, in its terracotta roofs, its flag, in the paintings of Titian, Tintoretto and other Venetian masters.

At the same time, the work is also intended to bring attention to the issue of climate change and particularly the melting of glaciers and rising of sea levels, which threaten the city and this very heritage.

The project is the first artwork to be registered as a [“Clean Regatta](#) [8],” the sustainability certification for water-based events created by Sailors for the Sea in order to mobilize navigators in protecting the sea through good practice and activism. Throughout the duration of the Biennale, the artist will participate in public talks and labs about art and activism alongside partners such as Ocean-Space and [No Longer Empty](#) [9].

Also important is the collaborative aspect of the work, which saw the participation of over 250 members of the local community and was conceived to involve and entertain the citizens and honor their love for Venice.

Red Regatta “will contribute to the maintenance, conservation, and restoration of the typical Venetian vessels (“vela al terzo” boats, e.d.) belonging to the Municipality,” commented City Commissioner Giovanni Giusto, then adding that this collaboration strengthens the bond between Venice and the United States, “This way the colors of Tintoretto, which are [exhibited in the National Gallery of Art in DC](#) [10], return to the Laguna.”



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- [3] <https://www.melissamcgillartist.com/>
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- [7] <https://www.melissamcgillartist.com/work/campo-box/>
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