

Traduzioni a cura  
del Career Service

### Portrait of Her

**Silvia Burini**

Associate Professor of Russian Art History and Contemporary Art History and Director of the CSAR (Center for the Study of Russian Art), Ca' Foscari University of Venice

in conversation with  
**Rachele Bastregghi**  
Singer-songwriter

**Rachele, you have spent over two decades navigating songwriting and experimentation as the voice and soul of Baustelle, and since 2015 you have embarked on a solo journey that has allowed you to explore increasingly performative territory. Looking back at your origins, was there a defining moment when you realized that music would become your primary language?**

Music has been a strong presence from my earliest years. My parents tell me – and I remember it too – that I would relax while playing with the keys of a Bontempi keyboard with one hand, while sucking my thumb with the other... I loved following along with the tunes I heard on TV or the radio, playing by ear. Then I started taking piano lessons – from ages 7 to 14 – and that became my first real instrument. I fell in love with classical music, with Bach, Beethoven, and so on. I discovered and loved harmony, minor chords, drama, counterpoint, soundtracks, and the emotional intensity of this inner expressive language. Meanwhile, I sang in church, at home with my siblings, at school, with friends. When adolescence hit, so did my passion for the guitar – first classical, then electric – and for rock, punk, soundtracks, Morricone, electronic music, etc. Every musical phase expressed the different emotions that needed to come out. Music has always held out its hand to guide me somewhere.

**You grew up in an Italian music scene often dominated by male figures. How did you experience this, and how do you think your artistic presence helped transform that environment?**

It is true, I have always been the only woman in the various bands I was part of, even back in high school. At the time, it felt normal to be seen as 'the girl with the guitar', the different one, the one with the shaved head...

I have always chased my dreams, with this strange, joyful, and cursed restlessness. I adapted, stayed quiet many times, blew up other times, cried and laughed a lot. I went through so many emotions and personal crises, made mistakes, had victories. It has been hard, and it still is – men make up 99% of the people I work with in this field. But I immersed myself in the lives and histories of women and artists who came before me, who fought and suffered and broke open the doors that now allow me to be who I am today.

**Throughout your journey, were there any female artists or figures who became role models for you? How did they influence you?**

Definitely. There are many women I have loved – both in my personal life and my artistic path. Each one left a different, powerful imprint. Distant souls, yet close ones, who helped shape my identity, made of many shades: my mother, Sarah 'cuore', Sandra, my piano teacher Maria Terzi, Patti Smith, Björk, Virginia Woolf, Anne Sexton, Dolores O'Riordan, Edda Dell'Orso, Patrizia Cavalli, Nina Simone, Nico, Patty Pravo, etc. Their past and present battles, their passion in finding a voice and a space for themselves – those are what guide my choices, courage, and needs every day.

**Speaking of your performance at Ca' Foscari for Art Night 2025, *Un giorno da Psychodonna* – *Concerto disegnato* is such a powerful title. Can you tell us where it comes from and what it means to you?**

*Un giorno da Psychodonna* – *Concerto Disegnato* is inspired by my solo album *Psychodonna*, released in 2021. It is an intimate punk performance that combines two art forms: music and comics, sound and image. Along with my producer Mario Conte, I perform my songs and a few covers that particularly represent me, while Alessandro Baronciani – comic artist and illustra-

tor – draws live illustrations inspired by the music. Together, we go through different emotional states of this multi-coloured female figure – complex and light, dark and bright, full of contradictions. *The Psychodonna* is a woman seeking her expressive freedom, her path, her voice. She is trying to find her own unique sense of balance.

**Why did you choose to hybridize your music with a different tool, i.e. drawing? Tell us about your collaboration with Alessandro Baronciani.**

The collaboration with Alessandro Baronciani stems first and foremost from a deep mutual admiration. We had worked together before, on his show *Quando tutto diventò blu*, and when a promoter from Florence who knew us, both suggested we should create a new project together, it only took one afternoon in a café in southern Milan to give shape to this kind of heroine who roams through the night, driven by emotions.

Also, drawing has been a passion of mine since I was a teenager. It is one of the things that relaxes me the most. Music ignites me, stirs everything inside me – drawing, instead, calms me and helps me focus. I draw portraits, faces, thoughts, words, doodles, ideas...

**Is there a phrase, a scene, or a moment in the show that you feel is the heart of the performance – the key to your world?**

I worked a lot on the lyrics – almost obsessively – trying to find the right words. There are many lines that feel sewn onto me, but this one really sums up a soul fighting for itself and for others, in hardship, in love, in pain. It is from the semi-instrumental piece that gives the album its name, *Psychodonna*:  
Psychodonna  
A cigarette  
A room  
The forest  
A party  
The war  
An examination is needed  
The heart is needed  
An examination is needed  
The heart is needed  
The revolution  
The peace

**Your artistic expression has always had a strong visual and performative component. How important is the body on stage to communicate what the voice alone cannot?**

Music is everywhere – in silence, in noise, in the feet, hands, shoulders, head, heart... I cannot stay still when the sound hits my ears. The body has its own language that sets me free, gives me joy, grounds me, completes me, strengthens me.

As a girl, I used to study Michael Jackson in front of the mirror for hours – I still love breakdance.

**Ca' Foscari is a place of learning and vision. What would you say to young women who dream of making art but face insecurity and judgment?**

Unfortunately, there is still a lot to be done regarding women's roles in society. We still live in a patriarchal, sexist, and unjust world. What needs to be done is rebelling, choosing yourself, accepting yourself, and persisting in your own fight and vision.

**And finally, if you could speak to the *Psychodonna* that lives inside each of us, what would you say to her?**

"May freedom be within you" as Patti Smith once said in an interview... What matters most is not depending on what others think of you.





## Women and Institutions

Manuela Lietti

Researcher, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

In conversation with

Caterina Barbieri

Musician and composer, Artistic Director of Biennale Musica 2025-2026

From the curatorial premises and the program that has been presented, *La stella dentro* (October 11–25, 2025) – even from its title – gives the impression of being an edition of Biennale Musica that merges the search for the most experimental and innovative musical forms with an almost ontological and semantic reflection on sound, on the essence of music, and on its meaning in our lives. This edition seeks to go beyond mere current events and the themes that are often expected in a biennale in order to be considered ‘contemporary’. We know that events of this magnitude, even when sincerely aiming to capture the spirit of the times, sometimes risk falling into stereotype or political correctness. In your case, what emerges is a deep, all-encompassing reflection that ventures into the territories of philosophy, mysticism, and technology, using a systematic, trans-disciplinary, and poetic approach. How did you structure your research? How does it align with your usual *modus operandi*?

First of all, thank you for your kind words. I'm glad that the trans-disciplinary spirit came through, as well as the intent to include music that transcends geographic boundaries with a less Eurocentric perspective. This approach developed naturally, without any deliberate intent to represent one group of individuals over another. Perhaps this organic quality in the programming comes across so naturally also thanks to my experience as an artist. I believe that my artistic identity is the added value I bring to my curatorial work: over the past ten years, thanks to my work and concert activity, I've had the opportunity to travel extensively. This has allowed me to come into direct contact with the vitality of today's musical language, with diverse communities, and to develop a personal knowledge of different worlds without prejudice. I think this organic nature of the program is the result of those interactions.

Beyond the ‘grand narratives’, there is a clear reflection on music in a broader sense—its function, beauty, and even its magical power. You had already spoken about this during the press conference in Venice, but I'd love for you to expand on this point. I believe this aspect invests music with a kind of cognitive hope—that it can help individuals discover themselves, but also the world. A necessary stance, in such a complex, dark, and troubled time for all of us.

Music—whether for modern or ancient humanity—has always responded to the human desire to communicate with something greater than one's individual existence, because it connects us with the unknown, with mystery. Perhaps this is where its magical function lies. For me, this aspect today also carries a strong social and political value. If we think about the ritual function of music within the social fabric, in the past music always had a cathartic role, alongside other performative arts such as theatre. For this reason, music encouraged a sense of togetherness, offering moments of collective transformation. However, this deeply ritualistic value—which has always characterised Western music too—has been lost. Due to the standardisation of the classical concert format, music has become an art form experienced in a static, frontal, formal way, which often bypasses the listener's direct experience and the original idea of music as a transformative process—something that used to be lived collectively.

So for me, the magical aspect you mention is linked to the spiritual breath that music still carries with it—and the desire to reclaim that in a society where it is increasingly difficult to do so, precisely because we've partly lost the original spirit of music and the idea that a concert can be a transformative, cathartic experience.

On this basis, even in the Biennale's programming I preferred alternatives to the static concert format, favouring more immersive listening experiences that stem from direct engagement.

A number of projects aim specifically to restore to sound its ritualistic value. The opening event is an example of this: a musical parade by the Bolivian-born multidisciplinary artist and musician Chuquimamani-Condori, also known as Elysia Crampton Chuquimia—a project commissioned by the Biennale Musica that will resemble a kind of ceremony, a musical procession of small boats. The idea is precisely to involve local residents as much as possible in an event that is both music and participatory experience. There will also be space for programming more focused on immersive listening, on deep listening—with concerts that extend beyond the standard format and act as an invitation for listeners to be part of a space where they can move, enter, exit freely, and experience a more engaging mode of listening than the standard setup.

One very interesting aspect of your program is the hybridisation of languages. It is fascinating that it spans

from works using vaporetto engines to traditional instruments like the lute. This philological exploration is grounded in a deep knowledge of music history, but also of the present moment—without needing to marginalise either area. This contrast-based approach is, in fact, one of the many strengths of this Biennale.

Avoiding compartmentalisation is really the foundation from which the idea of connecting seemingly distant languages emerged — celebrating music's metamorphic power, its ability to remain fluid and transcend boundaries. In the cultural sphere — even at the institutional level — there is often a tendency to place things into ‘boxes’, to isolate content into neatly defined categories. That may respond to a need for formalisation which, while it can provide critical tools for understanding, also risks stifling imagination.

But all art — and music in particular — holds the incredible power to move across time and space. In the ecstasy of listening, rigid definitions of time and place begin to dissolve, because the act of listening always happens in the present moment. So the idea of music as something that brings us back to the here and now, that refines our perceptual awareness and allows us to overcome disciplinary rigidity, is crucial. This perspective translates into a program that embraces resonance — allowing early music and contemporary music to co-exist. In this sense, I'm interested in attracting a trans-generational audience. I'd love for listeners more accustomed to classical music to encounter something unexpected, and perhaps find it enriching through this more open approach.

**Speaking of audiences — contemporary music, much like contemporary art, often seems trapped between two poles: on the one hand, a certain trivialisation, where lack of context or education leads people to say, “I could have done that too”; on the other, a kind of demonisation, where its visual or sonic language is dismissed as cryptic or elitist. With the Biennale — which is quite different from your solo work and aimed at a broader audience — did you ever worry about accessibility or legibility?**

Honestly, no — that has never been a concern for me. I think artists and curators — and in this case, I carry both identities — have almost a duty to challenge the public with emotions that are difficult to process or understand. Art has the power to transform the complexity of those emotions into something meaningful. So I've never been afraid of ambiguity or opacity. Even as an artist, I never start from the audience's point of view — I always aim to offer something as authentic as possible. And when art is rooted in truth and authenticity, I believe it always finds a way to speak to people. So for me, the most important aspect is the quality — the depth — of the work.

You mentioned the word curator — which seems particularly meaningful in this context. Perhaps even more

than an artistic director, a curator is someone who ‘gets their hands dirty’, who mediates between different situations and takes care of them. Do you think this curatorial experience might lead you to theorise or historicise musical practices more deeply — or even inspire your future creative work?

This curatorial role has been deeply inspiring for me — I truly immersed myself in it, as if driven by an inner fire. The invitation from the Biennale came at a time when I had completely different plans. At first, it was a shock, but I embraced the opportunity with gratitude and enthusiasm. When I first arrived in Venice and met the Biennale team, I had not yet confirmed my involvement. I remember lying awake in my hotel room that night, my mind on fire — I could not stop thinking about what I might do. And that night, the image of music as the star within came to me. I went out to see the sunrise in Piazza San Marco because I could not sleep — and I saw the last stars still visible in the sky just as the first light of day began. That vision was the initial inspiration.

From there, I seized the opportunity to dive much more deeply — especially on a theoretical level — into topics I had long been curious about but never had the time to explore, due to my artistic commitments. I've always found creative nourishment not only in music, but also in literature, philosophy — and I've always cultivated a theoretical side that informs my artistic work. But in recent years, constant commissions, productions, and travel had pulled me into a kind of bubble, narrowing my focus to just the themes closest to my individual practice.

In contrast, this role — with its responsibility to an external institution — allowed me to delve into a wide range of new subjects. And that, in turn, generated creative feedback in my own work. As you said, it meant ‘getting my hands dirty’ — taking care of something beyond myself. I've always had a strong desire to create space for emerging artistic voices. Research is a process that inevitably inspires me as well. For years, I had been feeling a call to explore more collective formats. After being so intensely focused on my individual career, especially before and during the pandemic, I began to feel an urgent need to move toward something more curatorial — to share my resources, to create room for others.

So when the Biennale reached out, I saw it as part of this broader transformation — albeit on a much larger and more institutional scale, given the Biennale's unique place in the cultural landscape.

One aspect I'd like to explore with you is the variety of compositional methods emerging today. Given the sheer range of tools available, contemporary music is also questioning the how of composition — the possibility of a method that maybe transcends method itself. Music has this autopoietic nature — a self-generating capacity that continuously renews itself with-

out ever denying its value, and without needing justification. In an age where, technically, everything is available to everyone, where composition is becoming more and more random, and where artificial intelligence is a new variable in the equation — what do you find are the most interesting approaches to composition today? I ask this to both the composer and the listener in you — since some methods you may not enjoy as a listener could still fascinate you as a composer.

I'm definitely fascinated by the generative nature of music — in fact, this became one of the themes of the festival. Music as a living organism, an autopoietic form capable of evolving its own inner laws, has always drawn me in. I'm captivated by the endless potential of the musical language: how, starting from a limited set of rules, it can expand into infinite possibilities, into highly complex systems. This idea has deeply influenced my compositional practice, and I've explored it using specific analog technologies. My work often hinges on a kind of tension with machines — because machines come with many limitations, with sometimes esoteric interfaces — and I've always found that friction incredibly fertile. I'm also drawn to working with random or semi-random processes, integrating the chaos and unpredictability of machines into creative thinking — this unpredictability has long inspired me. Right now, everyone is talking about artificial intelligence. My view is somewhat critical: I think it can be a useful tool — for building systems, for accelerating certain processes — but I have not yet seen results that are truly compelling from a creative perspective. Often, what AI does is give us the illusion of novelty, but it is usually just a repackaging of the already-known. There is a kind of repetition of sameness that I do not find particularly creative. And while AI is seductive — thanks to its slickness, its seamless interfaces — that very lack of friction becomes problematic. When we listen to music or see artwork made by AI, there is often nothing wrong with it. But that is the issue — there is nothing wrong, and so what we get are smooth surfaces of meaning: flat planes where meaning flows without resistance. And in the absence of friction, no questions arise. There is no suspension of sense — and it is precisely that suspension that often leads to something truly interesting. These smooth surfaces do not spark the imagination. In fact, I often find them narcissistic — in that they reflect back what we already know. They momentarily satisfy us with the familiar, but they never push meaning beyond what is already been said or felt.

Yes, and there is this idea of infallibility too. But in truth, it is often within error, within the unplanned, that potential emerges. We have this tendency to want to explain everything, to untangle every knot — but maybe it is precisely in not untangling things that we open new paths. It is within that friction, as you said, that something powerful can arise — something beyond dualisms.

I really believe that fallibility needs to be protected — because within fallibility lies mystery. It is like a space that meaning cannot quite reach. For me, preserving that dimension of mystery is essential in art. And I'm not sure AI, at least for now, is capable of doing that.

Your work is also rich in literary and female references — I'm thinking of Saint Teresa, Emily Dickinson, Rosi Braidotti... figures who are powerful, radical in their positioning. Where do these references come from? What do they mean to you? Are there others?

I've always loved poetry — it is one of the languages I feel closest to music. Take Emily Dickinson, for instance: no matter how many times I've read her poems, it always feels like the first time. Just like hearing a beautiful melody — there is this sense of continual birth that never gets old. Poetry, because of its closeness to music, is a major source of inspiration for me — especially in recent years. The female figures you mentioned are specifically tied to my 2021 album *Spirit Exit*. I composed the music during the pandemic, in a rather extreme lockdown in Milan. For two months, I did not leave my house — all I did was make music. It was a radical but fascinating experience, because I lived in a state of confinement, of repression, of sensory deprivation. That external silence amplified the power of the imagination. Music became the only way to travel beyond the limits of that pandemic existence — and that drew me closer to the thought of female mystics and ascetics. Living in a state of sensory deprivation is central to many mystical traditions, because it is through isolation that one finds a deeper connection with the self — and a way to cultivate the vastness of the inner world. Saint Teresa of Ávila, for example, was a mystic who explored the 'interior castle' — nurturing a form of spirituality that resonates with Emily Dickinson as well. Dickinson's poetry is filled with almost extraterrestrial journeys, cosmic visions. Some even consider her a pioneer of science fiction literature. She lived a highly repressed, isolated life — and was never recognised during her lifetime. There is that tension again: a life that was tightly confined, yet brimming with visionary capacity and immense inner worlds. This has always been a central theme for me. I find Rosi Braidotti's work particularly compelling because of her post-human perspective. I've found several points of resonance between her philosophical thinking and my own understanding of music. For me, music is a language that brings us closer to listening to the Other — and this is not only metaphorical but physical: vibrations reaching our ears connect us with what surrounds us. It is an act of interconnection and empathy. This idea runs through Braidotti's work as well, which embraces a radically immanent view of the world — acknowledging not just human connections but also non-human ones, which are fundamental to how our universe operates.

This kind of practice is crucial in developing ideas about the future of our species, especially in the face of today's

ecological crises and the urgent need to move beyond anthropocentrism. We must take into account our connections with animals, plants, the planet itself. This theme of interconnectedness is reflected in the Biennale too — particularly in the presence of cosmic music.

In the Biennale you curated, there is a clear attention to female presence — but not just in terms of ticking boxes or resorting to easy rhetoric around 'giving space to women'. That said, being a woman professional in this field still often means navigating male-dominated territory. How do you experience that personally? And how did you choose the women featured in your program?

It is definitely been a struggle to move through a predominantly male space, and that struggle has shaped my path from the beginning. But I've always had such a strong sense of purpose, a clear vision, that in a way I became immune to the difficulties — or maybe I embraced them. In fact, those difficulties only strengthened my desire to assert my voice without compromise. That does not mean it has been easy, especially in Italy and in the field of electronic music. Coming from a conservatory background — the academic world — made it even harder. Sometimes academia is even more rigid. At one point, I had to leave Italy because I kept running into resistance, often from men in academic positions. I often felt a strange mix of admiration and attraction — as if I were some alien creature to be protected — paired with hostility, envy, even contempt. I was fortunate to do an Erasmus program in Stockholm, and that gave me a huge boost. Sweden has always been more open in discussing these issues, and I felt welcomed and encouraged. What is always frustrated me is the ghettoisation of women artists. From my very first interviews in Italy, the questions were always about being a woman, being young — and the entire conversation would revolve around that. But I wanted to talk about music, about the ideas I was exploring. Unfortunately, this approach is still too common — even with something as high-level as the Biennale. After years of not having to deal with that kind of dynamic, coming back to Italy in this role, I found myself being asked those same questions again. It is an important topic, yes — but we need to address it without turning it into a system of ghettoisation. I believe in taking real, structural steps — like creating concrete programming guidelines that ensure gender diversity and balance. This is how we can give space to less-heard voices in a meaningful way. In my curatorial work, I tried to really highlight the role of women pioneers in contemporary music. It is something I want to do more of, especially in the Italian context, but in a way that feels organic and spontaneous. These voices should be offered real opportunities — not reduced to a matter of identity politics.

The choices you made for the Golden and Silver Lions are quite emblematic in this regard.

Yes, it was very important to me to award the Golden Lion to a pioneering female figure in electronic music. Meredith Monk was the perfect choice. Her work is truly multidisciplinary — she is crossed boundaries between performance, vocal experimentation, theatre, movement, visual installation, stage design. She has developed an expressive language that feels deeply contemporary and modern. This award was also a deliberate gesture: to give voice and recognition to a woman artist who has been at the forefront for decades. That spirit runs throughout the entire program. I wanted to spotlight key figures in electronic and electroacoustic music, such as Lori Spiegel, Éliane Radigue, and Catherine Christer Hennix. Hennix, in particular, is still relatively unknown — a Swedish composer who passed away last year. I've been working to bring her work more visibility. It is not easy to present these artists — many are quite esoteric, and difficult to reach. One of the biggest challenges has been the physical logistics of bringing these women to Venice — many are elderly and simply cannot travel. For example, Lori Spiegel declined to attend for health reasons. Éliane Radigue is over 90 and lives in Paris — she is also unable to travel. Still, I felt it was important to amplify these voices. Many of them are only now being rediscovered, but they're still not given the recognition they deserve. I also feel a personal connection — I see my own practice as part of this tradition and lineage of female thought in music. The Silver Lion was awarded to Chuquimamani-Condori, whose work is incredibly compelling. They reconnect with Indigenous folk roots and reframe them in a contemporary setting using electronic music, club culture, remix culture — creating hyper-modern digital soundscapes that still speak to the past. One of their performances includes a procession of small boats, inspired by a subculture in Venice — local kids speeding through the canals in modified boats with powerful sound systems. I loved the idea of starting from that vibrant, youthful, local subculture and weaving it into a global narrative — a syncretic dialogue between traditions. Chuquimamani-Condori's music often engages with water ceremonies, an integral part of their community's heritage — sonic rituals performed on boats at dawn for the morning stars. This award also reflects the importance of moving beyond Eurocentric perspectives.

Beyond the Biennale, do you have any personal projects in Venice over the coming months?

Learning how to drive a boat! I'm fascinated by the lagoon — by water as a language. There is something beautiful about the fact that if you have your own boat, you gain a kind of freedom — you can explore even the wildest, most hidden parts of the lagoon. One of these places will be the setting for a mystical-musical journey we're organising as a special project for Biennale Musica — in collaboration with *Microclima*, Paolo Rosso's Venetian initiative.



## My Skills Capacità al centro

### Zoe Irene Albisetti

Research Fellow at Venice School of Management

### Fabrizio Gerli

Full Professor at Venice School of Management and Director of the Ca' Foscari Competency Centre

### Sara Bonesso

Associate Professor at Venice School of Management and Vice Director of the Ca' Foscari Competency Centre

### Laura Cortellazzo

Associate Professor at Venice School of Management and Member of the Ca' Foscari Competency Centre

## Women and Leadership Styles: Success Stories and Models of Effectiveness at the Top

The characteristics of leadership are attracting increasing interest, and numerous studies have explored the impact of top-level leadership on organizational climate and business performance. The most recent Italian statistics reveal that, while the proportion of women in leadership positions is gradually increasing, it still remains below the European average. A growing number of international research reports show that accessing leadership roles remains particularly challenging for women, who continue to face stereotypes and other dynamics – such as those related to motherhood – that may limit opportunities to attain top-level positions.

In this context, it is extremely valuable to understand what traits characterize women who successfully take on leadership roles. In particular, identifying their leadership styles and the contexts in which these styles are most effectively expressed can help disseminate behaviours that may serve as models for future women leaders. As part of the PARI Directive (Innovative Network Projects and Actions for Gender Equality and Balance), funded by the Veneto Region together with the ESF+, the Venice School of Management at Ca' Foscari University conducted research within the project *A Room of One's Own: Physical, Cultural, and Economic Spaces for the Development and Valorization of Female Leadership*, promoted by the lead organization ESAC S.p.A. The aim was to investigate the role of women who hold leadership positions effectively across companies of various sizes. The project was inspired by the metaphor of 'rooms', based on the British writer Virginia Woolf's argument on the importance for women to have enough space and resources to achieve emancipation. Within the cultural 'room' of this project, the research fellowship *Female Leadership Models: Analysis and Comparison* focused on the profiles of women leaders in the province of Vicenza, with the aim of promoting practices that support the attainment of top roles.

A total of 41 women leaders were inter-

viewed, including 24 entrepreneurs (owners or co-owners of companies) and 17 managers (holding senior roles and heading business units). The sample was selected based on a set of performance indicators to identify leaders contributing to successful companies. These women represented a wide range of ages (from 35 to 79 years old), leadership experience (from less than one year to over 29 years), and industry sectors. This diversity made it possible to gather rich and valuable stories, which were then analysed to identify the leadership styles they exhibited.

The Behavioural Event Interview technique was used to explore how these leaders performed in their roles based on concrete experiences. The interviews aimed to capture behaviours in response to four main themes: crisis management, innovation generation, implementation of processes supporting employee wellbeing, and corporate sustainability initiatives. The results revealed that the most commonly adopted leadership style was the 'coaching' style, which places emphasis on the growth and development of team members. Like effective sports coaches, these leaders actively support their teams in achieving shared goals – such as completing a complex project or hitting an ambitious target. They excel in fostering individual development by offering mentorship and targeted training to enhance both technical and soft skills. For instance, a leader might encourage a team member to attend an advanced course or present an idea to a broader audience to boost their communication skills. These leaders view mistakes as essential learning opportunities rather than grounds for punishment, analysing them with the team to derive lessons and prevent future issues. Coaching leaders are characterized by their ability to instil trust, delegate meaningful responsibilities, promote autonomy, and show genuine interest in each team member's aspirations by offering tailored, constructive feedback to maximize potential.

In addition to this, many participants also displayed an 'affiliative' leadership style. This approach prioritizes harmony within the team and proactively manages conflict, acting almost like a mediator. These leaders work to build positive, lasting relationships among team members – for example, by regularly organizing activities to promote mutual understanding and strengthen interpersonal bonds. Their attention extends beyond professional dynamics, considering emotional wellbeing and personal sensitivities that naturally influence group dynamics and workplace climate. An affiliative leader is attentive to signs of distress or tension and intervenes quickly to resolve disagreements and restore harmony – for example, mediating between two colleagues with opposing views on a project by finding common ground and valuing both perspectives. The primary goal is to ensure that each team member feels valued, heard, and part of a supportive and collaborative environment, where emotional wellbeing is seen as equally important as performance targets. This results in greater team cohesion, more open communication, and lower turnover, as employees

feel more connected to their company and colleagues.

The leadership styles observed in real situations where women leaders demonstrated effectiveness provide useful examples for understanding which behaviours to adopt. These findings offer a foundation for developing future leaders by sharing and promoting effective leadership practices. The role models analysed in this study represent an inspiring resource: each individual story stands as a valuable testimony to support professional development and career advancement.



## Lei & The World

### Riccardo Campana

MA graduate in Languages and Civilisations of Asia and Mediterranean Africa, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

### and Fabiola Nicodemò

Ph.D. student in Asian and African Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

### in conversation with

**Karine N'guyen Van Tham and Parul Thacker**

Artists

The interview took place during the exhibition *Per Non Perdere il Filo*, curated by Daniela Ferretti and dedicated to the works of the two artists, which was held at Palazzo Vendramin Grimani from 20 April to 24 November 2024. The exhibition was part of the collateral events of the 60th International Art Exhibition.

**To begin with, could you introduce yourselves and share something about your experiences as female artists?**

**Karine:** My name is Karine N'guyen Van Tham, and I am 35 years old. I was born in the south of France, in Marseille, but I have been living in Brittany for eight years. I studied at the École supérieure d'Art et de Design Marseille-Méditerranée before turning to craft studies as an upholsterer, focusing particularly on textile practices. I then started a creative process that bridges two worlds: traditional craftsmanship techniques and the artistic realm, an extremely fertile inner universe. Over time, I developed these two aspects of my work, which eventually merged to

create a deeply personal artistic language. Thanks to this new language, I was able to reinvent some craft techniques, moving away from the rigid technical structure that craftsmanship often imposes.

As for the second part of the question, I do not have strong experiences as a female artist; I simply consider myself an artist. I exhibit, meet people, and what motivates me is sharing my art beyond my identity as a woman. The female component does not dominate me; in fact, sometimes in my work I perceive a more masculine strength, other times a more feminine one. It's a bit like *yin* and *yang* – both aspects complement each other, and neither one dominates the other.

**Parul:** My name is Parul Thacker, and I live in Mumbai, India. I have worked in Mumbai and Pondicherry, in the south of the country. My journey began at the Sophia Polytechnic College of Art and Design in Mumbai, where I learned the basics of various weaving and printing techniques. I later studied Fiber Art at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad with my mentor Nita Thakore. Later on, I began to exhibit in various parts of the world, showcasing my works that not only delve into the theme of thread but also address metaphysics, particularly that of Vedic texts, as they represent one of the major sources of contemporary Brahmanic religion, primarily containing descriptions of various ritual practices and their meanings. Even though I see the process of artistic creation or co-creation as more connected to a feminine energy, my vision of the artist remains deeper than the simple dualism of man and woman. In this regard, in some of the works, I have depicted the elements of *lingam* (phallus symbol) and *yoni* (symbol of female genital organs), which in the Indian imagination refer to the divine masculine and the divine feminine. Moreover, the latter are never depicted alone but always together.

**Now, moving on to the title of the exhibition: *Per Non Perdere il Filo*. The thread is a common image across many cultures worldwide and evokes a wide range of meanings and symbols. How have your stories and cultural backgrounds influenced your creative process in interpreting this theme?**

**K:** My relationship with fabric is rooted in my childhood, a period marked by the loss of my grandmother, who passed away when I was only eight years old. She was a seamstress and instilled a deep respect for fabric in my mother. For example, during the mourning period, my mother would often touch and arrange my grandmother's clothes with great reverence. I remember one particular anecdote: one day, we were in my grandmother's garden, and my mother had just finished washing some clothes. She was wearing a wool jacket, as she always did when going out. Afterwards, she hung the jacket at the en-

trance. Seeing that she had forgotten it there, I pointed out that she had left it behind. She stopped me with a gesture and replied, “No, we’re not touching it for now. It is the last thing my grandmother wore. I want it to stay there”. Her solemn attitude toward the fabric profoundly marked me, influencing my view of textile practice to this day. From that moment on, I no longer saw clothing as merely a means to cover or protect oneself, but as a form of sacred sculpture. At the same time, I’ve always been attracted to shamanism, a practice where clothing and costumes play a central role. So, there is no specific reason that led me to choose this particular material; it is the material that chose me – an intuitive process.

**P:** I trained as a weaver, but in addition to using various embroidery techniques, I have also experimented with welding and casting over these twenty years. In any case, in all the works I have created, the central theme remains that of thread and embroidery. For example, with thread, I created my *Portals* series, referring to two important texts from ancient India, which are the Vedas and the cosmology described in the texts of the Tantras. Thus, these works, which besides thread contain other materials like stones, wood, or metals, reflect a certain sacred geometry that is used in India, and also in ancient Egypt, for the construction of temples. It is as if, through the thread, there is a mathematical algorithm that reappears in all the works and, in turn, reflects that cosmic geometry described in the Tantras. Also, in the installation located on the ground floor, *The Book of the Time-Travellers of the Worlds: The One by Whom All Live, Who Lives by None*, the theme of thread and embroidery recurs. In this case, as well, I wanted to incorporate everything I learned through my studies of metaphysics, the Tantras, cosmology, and mathematics. The work begins precisely with forms taken from Tantric texts, then representing a broader scale that depicts energy maps, planets, and spacecraft. In this sense, the thread is conceived to represent both mundane realities and the vastness of the universe. The Tantras constitute a collection of texts containing information about ancient practices, rituals, and reflections primarily concerning the presence of other dimensions beyond the material one, which can be accessed, indeed, through these rituals.

**You’ve mentioned more than once how the city of Venice was crucial to the realisation of this project. How has its unique environment influenced your work?**

**K:** As soon as I arrived in Venice, I spent a lot of time observing and contemplating it. I saw it as a body – an open body right before my eyes. The facades of some buildings reminded me of muscles, often damaged, torn by history and weather conditions. I felt like I was entering a body and could

touch the heart of the city. However, I did not only see Venice. This period of observation also made me reflect deeply on myself and my relationships with others. The people we meet and spend time with have a great influence on us, leaving real traces. Moreover, some people are better at reading us than others, to see our fragilities and vulnerabilities. We choose whether to open up depending on who we are with. So, I perceived Venice as a layered system composed of traces of modernity and history, beauty and fragility – a mirror of our relationships with others, and thus, of life itself. I believe this vision was fundamental on several levels, including philosophical, psychological, and visual. The residency work proved to be very lengthy to complete for this very reason. More specifically, I wove and overlaid many layers which I then ‘ruined’, for example by using stones or pieces of concrete, aiming to recreate these traces, these scars that tell our story.

**P:** The city of Venice and water have been fundamental throughout the creative process, from the idea to the realisation of the works. I have always had the feeling that Venice is a woman, a female entity. The work on the ground floor that I mentioned earlier (*The Book of the Time-Travellers*) is dedicated to the waters of Venice in sync with the North Pole and the Arctic Circle. In this sense, the work is an energetic map made up of metaphysical drawings, starting from the Tantras, that represents the divine feminine. Traveling in the Arctic territories has been one of the deepest experiences of my life. When you are in those territories, you perceive not only the true beauty and greatness of the Planet but also all the energies that flow through the Pole. From this experience, I learned to see water in a completely new way, and when Daniela Ferretti called me for this installation, the first thing I saw in Venice was, of course, the water. It was magical. The work is indeed dedicated to the waters of Venice and represents a glacier through which it is impossible to see, where the fabric used perfectly conveys the idea of the transparency of ice.

#### **Karine N’Guyen Van Tham**

Karine N’Guyen Van Tham (Marseille, 1988) studied at the École supérieure d’Art et de Design Marseille-Méditerranée and then trained as an upholsterer, where she developed a passion for fabrics. In 2014, she began her apprenticeship as a self-taught weaver, before deciding in 2017 to design her own fabrics in the form of clothing. In the same year, her first wall piece, *Cérémonie lunaire* – inspired by the traditional Kimono – was awarded the Prix création de la région Bretagne des Métiers d’art. Today, she works in her studio in Brittany. She has always conceived her textile works as objects of heritage and transmission, relics imprinted with life, smells, postures, and emotions: the artist feels, writes, weaves, immerses

her hands in natural dyes, embroiders, wears, sculpts, and molds.

Among recent group exhibitions: *Âmes sauvages*, The 6 Gallery, Morlaix, France, 2023; *Japanese Textile & Craft festival*, Craft central, London, United Kingdom, 2021; *Japanese Textile & Craft festival*, Craft central, London, United Kingdom, 2020; *Invisibles présences*, The Fibery, Fiber art gallery, Paris, France; *Parures, Objets d’art à porter*, Factory Museum, Roubaix, France, 2019; *Latelier, d’Ateliers d’Art de France*, Paris, France; *Maison & Objet*, Paris, France, 2017.

#### **Parul Thacker**

Parul Thacker (Mumbai, 1973) trained as a traditional weaver, studying Textile Design at the Sophia Polytechnic College of Art and Design in Mumbai (Bachelor of Arts), focusing on weaving and printing techniques. At the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, she studied Fiber Art with Nita Thakore as her mentor. Since 2008, she has been active as an artist and has presented her works at the India Art Fair, Art Dubai, Frieze London, Art HK, and Shanghai Contemporary. She lives in Mumbai and often travels to Golconda in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where she studies and practices her art, consisting of sewn metaphysical drawings and woven sculptures.

Her recent exhibitions include: *Surface*, curated by Mayank Mansigh Kaul, Sutrakala Foundation Jodhpur, India, 2023; *North Pole: a treatise on earth Arctic summer, art and science expedition*, International Territory of Svalbard, Norway, 2023; *Form: Flow a two-solo presentation* by Amar Gallery, London, 2017; *Parul Thacker*, Beirut exhibition center, 1x1 art gallery with Beirut Exhibition Center, Lebanon, 2015; *Approaching Abstraction*, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai, India, 2015; *I For Inscription*, The Luxe Museum, Paradox and 1x1 art gallery with J.P. Morgan, Singapore, 2013; *One Year in Berlin*, Galerie Christian Hosp, Berlin, Germany, 2010; *Matrix Natura Miniarthtextil*, Como 18th international exhibition of contemporary textile art, Como, 2008.

#### **Wanna be Her**

##### **Ionela Lorena Spalatelu**

Master’s student in History of the Arts and Conservation of Artistic Heritage Ca’ Foscari University of Venice

##### **in conversation with**

##### **Elena Brugnerotto**

Sketchnoter, trainer, visual facilitator

*Wanna be her* is a column dedicated to exploring and promoting innovative, ‘unconventional’ or hard-to-access professional roles in fields that may inspire Ca’ Foscari students. In this issue, we delve into the professions of the sketchnoter and Visual Facilitator.

##### **Introduction**

In a world increasingly flooded with information, data, and innovation, a fig-

ure emerges that brings clarity through visual representation of complexity: the sketchnoter. Alongside them, visual facilitators are gaining ground in companies and collaborative settings. These professionals transform complex conversations into shared, understandable visual maps. The roles are closely related, often overlapping, yet they operate in distinct contexts and with different goals. One mission unites them: to make thinking visible.

Sketchnoting – literally ‘taking notes by drawing’ – is a hybrid practice between writing and drawing. Practitioners listen and distil key concepts into words, icons, arrows, and visual metaphors. Born from the need to learn more effectively, it has evolved into a professional visual language: today, graphic recording is in demand at companies, schools, and events to create real-time visual notes that can be shared with participants or used as a collective memory. While the sketchnoter often acts as an external observer, the visual facilitator steps into the heart of the process – whether it is brainstorming or problem-solving. Their task is to foster communication by creating visual maps during meetings, workshops, or team-building sessions. Using whiteboards or digital tools, visual facilitators translate words into images and diagrams in real time, helping participants see paths, blocks, and connections. It is a job that demands active listening, quick synthesis, aesthetic sensitivity – and above all, systemic thinking.

#### **The Hard and Soft Skills Required**

Among the hard skills, the ability to visualize information stands out: turning abstract concepts into understandable images, icons, and symbols. You do not need to be an artist – simple but effective drawing is enough. Spatial organization and structured notetaking are also essential. Whether using paper and pen or digital apps, familiarity with both analogue and digital graphic tools (like tablets or graphic boards) is helpful.

Sketchnoting also relies heavily on soft skills. First and foremost is active listening: identifying the core message, extracting key concepts, and discarding the superfluous. Critical and synthetic thinking are vital to reinterpret content without distorting it. Creativity plays a central role – finding visual connections, inventing symbols, and organizing content in an original way. Since sketchnoting often takes place live during events, it also requires speed, stress management, and mental flexibility.

#### **Are specific qualifications needed?**

No specific academic degrees are required for this profession. Curiosity, a sense of aesthetics, and lots of practice are key.

**You followed a non-traditional career path. From a degree in Chinese and International Relations to working as a personal assistant – how did**

### **these seemingly unrelated experiences shape your current outlook?**

The path I followed to reach my current job was anything but linear.

What I have never lacked, though, is determination. I completed my degree in Chinese, but more than the language itself, I loved drawing the characters with precision. Working as a personal assistant taught me organization, which came naturally to me and soon became a real strength. Talking with people, creating order from chaos, giving timelines – these were innate skills that found real application in that job. That experience became my first stepping stone toward entrepreneurship.

Even as I started working in a company, I already felt the desire to build something of my own. I had a clear idea of how I wanted to live my work life: authentic collaboration, constant stimulation, continuous learning, and curiosity. I enjoyed taking careful notes, organizing ideas, and absorbing knowledge. Above all, I wanted to make my own decisions and be responsible for my successes. A salaried job felt too linear: I gave a lot, but the paycheck was always the same. As a freelancer, every effort pays off directly. And that freedom made all the difference.

It was in the company where I accidentally discovered sketchnoting during a training session. It was a revelation – it brought together all the things I loved: notetaking, listening to lectures, learning, and visual synthesis. Drawing and writing together – I realized this could be my future. I had no design background, but I learned through practice. I often say this is my Ikigai. Anyway, I opened my VAT number and gave myself a year to try. If it worked, great. If not, I would find another job. But it did work. Today, I can say that the irregularity of my journey has become my true strength.

### **What advice would you give to someone facing a career crossroads and looking for a path that combines passion and skills?**

Two things I would recommend to anyone going through a moment of change.

First: ask for help. We often think we have to face everything alone, but that is not true. There are career services, coaching programs, and professionals who can offer an outside perspective, free of the biases we carry. When I chose to become a freelancer, I took a coaching course that helped me immensely. Self-reflection is essential but doing it alone can be tough. You need someone to help you clarify who you are, what you want, and where your strengths lie.

Second: do not be afraid to make mistakes. The choices we make do not have to be perfect. Sometimes, we do not take the most direct or logical path, and that is fine. In fact, it is often the longer way around that gives us the experiences and insights to understand what we truly want. Eventually, everything falls into place. You find balance – a natural flow that carries you to where you want

to be, even if things were not clear at the beginning. Trust the process: even seemingly off-course experiences bring new people, fresh perspectives, and parts of yourself you did not know.

### **In 2022, you founded RebelHands with Chiara Foffano and Ariele Pirona. The project combines training, facilitation, and visual communication. How did this collaboration begin, and how would you describe the visual identity behind it?**

It all began very organically. RebelHands was born from the idea of giving a shared identity to our collaborative and creative way of working. The collaboration with Chiara Foffano started when publisher Erickson asked me to write a book on introducing sketchnoting in schools. Chiara was essential in this project: she has a fresh style, a writing voice that resonated with mine, and she became a mirror for improving and refining my content. From there, she officially joined RebelHands, bringing her vision and managing communication, from social media to workshops that blend words and images.

Later, in my ongoing search for people to collaborate with and be inspired by, I met Ariele Pirona, an illustrator and graphic designer. At first, she felt disconnected from my work – her world is all about detailed illustration and meticulous colour work. Yet, we clicked. We realized you do not need to be the same to work well together – difference creates richness. She, too, is a rebel in her own way. And so the trio was born.

RebelHands is a space for meeting and cross-pollination. Each of us brings different skills, but we share a vision of creativity and collaboration. We work with visual communication, but always with an open mind – curious and evolving. We've built our own little 'micro-company', a safe space where we exchange ideas, support each other, and listen.

### **As a visual facilitator, you often enter very diverse educational and professional environments. What strikes you most about how people react to visual thinking?**

One thing I often notice – especially at the beginning of a workshop – is a certain skepticism. Sometimes it is real; sometimes, it is just in my head! Many adults, especially in corporate settings, walk in doubting whether visual thinking is 'serious'. Drawing is still perceived as childish or playful – almost out of place in a "professional" environment. But that is where the transformation begins.

It takes very little: a few hands-on exercises and people begin to realize that visualizing a process, idea, or problem completely changes the perspective. Drawing a business process requires deep thinking. When you put it on paper, you see if it makes sense, where it breaks down, where something is missing. And more importantly, anyone who sees that drawing instantly understands – even without knowing all the steps. It creates a shared, immediate

language with a huge impact on teamwork.

I remember one powerful moment: during a course, I asked a participant to explain his job visually to someone who knew nothing about it. After just ten minutes, I asked the listener to repeat what she had understood. The man, surprised, said, "She got more now than my coworkers have in twenty years". That is the power of visual thinking.

### **Have you noticed gender-based differences in response? What is your typical audience?**

In my open-enrolment courses, the majority of participants are women. Ideally, we would have more variety – different styles and approaches enrich one another. In general, women tend to pay more attention to detail and decorative elements, while men are often more essential and schematic.

Age also plays a role and can hinder the introduction of these practices in companies. The average age is around 45-50, but many companies will undergo generational turnover in a few years. Young people think visually, learn through images, and are already fluent in this language. Investing in these tools now means preparing for the future. When I work with younger generations, I also try to convey this: visual thinking is a tool for leadership – not authoritarian, but soft leadership, in service of the group. If you stand up during a meeting, go to the board, and sketch the key points to help others gain clarity – you are already leading. Those who can facilitate visually have an edge.

### **Your work reflects an inclusive, creative, and non-competitive form of leadership. How are you embodying this in your practice?**

As a visual facilitator, I practice a kind of leadership that serves others – a creative, non-competitive leadership aimed at unlocking collective potential. We live in a fragmented, complex world where no one has all the answers, but everyone has something valuable to offer. A leader's job is to recognize each person's unique contribution and create conditions where diverse skills can connect and work together.

### **Finally, if you had to draw a symbolic image of your journey, what would it look like, and what would it represent?**

If I had to represent my journey, it would be a multi-coloured ball of yarn. Each thread has a different shade and tells a part of my story. Some intertwine with others, marking significant encounters. Some stretch in different directions, reflecting detours, attempts, explorations. There are knots, of course. It has not been a straight path. But those knots are not mistakes – they are turning points, transitions that made the thread stronger. There are also breaks – threads that ended, experiences I have let go of – like the path in Chinese that I have left behind but that still ties into the centre of the yarn. It is

part of my story, even if it is no longer present. And there are bows, small celebrations: milestones, insights, intentional changes in direction. All these threads, even as they go in different directions, are connected. Together, they form a vibrant and intricate tapestry – everything has contributed to who I am today.

### **Elena Brugnerotto**

After a short stint as an employee, she realized her path would be different: she wanted to freelance, build something of her own, and work on her own terms. With a degree in Chinese, a specialization in International Relations, and various roles as a personal assistant, she still had not found her path. Yet every detour taught her something: precision, curiosity, understanding business dynamics. The turning point came six years ago when she discovered sketchnoting: listening to new ideas, capturing them visually, and transforming them into value was exactly what she was looking for. She had found her Ikigai. That discovery launched her journey into visual facilitation, still a relatively unexplored field in Italy. In 2022, she co-authored *Sketchnotes in the Classroom* (Erickson) with Chiara Foffano to bring the technique into schools. In 2023, together with Chiara and Ariele Pirona, she founded RebelHands – a project that unites training, facilitation, and visual communication. Today, she is passionate about personal development, business organization, and everything related to visual thinking.

