

Report Review

Visibility in the Italian Art World: How Far Along We Are

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Abstract

Even though the concept of “nationality” when we talk about an internationally acclaimed artists is more and more blurred and has little to do with the importance of the artworks, it is evident how small the Italian art presence in great international art manifestations is, sometimes almost negligible. It is then necessary to understand the causes of this situation, to draw a map of the current state of the contemporary Italian scene and state some resolutions from it. The first 2022 Report “How (well) known is Italian art abroad?” by BBS-Lombard Benefit Corporation, together with Arte Generali has investigated how much Italian contemporary artists are (in)visible in the international art market, laying the groundwork for a much more in-depth research of the art system, with the ultimate purpose of giving new solutions to overcome this situation, wondering whether Italian art has a business model with (still) some gray areas - unlike almost all other product sectors – and how building an economy to bridge the gap, having a market strategy and being attractive in the international positioning can be a strategic move. The study was conducted carrying out both qualitative and quantitative analysis throughout more than 20 interviews to Italian curators internationally known that have helped us understand causes, strengths and weaknesses of the Italian art system and a big data collection about the presence of Italian artist in international museums, art manifestations, biennials, such as Biennale di Venezia and documenta, international art galleries and auctions. The global media coverage of Italian artists was analyzed with the help of Artiker and through the artificial intelligence of Wondeur AI, partner of Arte Generali, it was possible to analyze the relationship between art development and cities, considering the city’s overall success rate (percentages of artists showing growth in the city) and the city’s risk propensity (ability to attract artists). The instrument of the Italian Council was also studied, the main MIC project (Italian Ministry for Culture) in support of Italian art and the initiatives of Italian cultural institutes abroad. From the overall analysis some relevant names have emerged: Francesco Vezzoli, Monica Bonvicini, Enrico David, Paola Pivi, Tatiana Trouv è, Roberto Cuoghi, Rosa Barba, Massimiliano Cattelan (above all) and a few others, all united by a time of study or work abroad which allowed them to create valuable relationships with curators, galleries and museums abroad.

Keywords

Art Market, Italian Contemporary Art, Art System

1. Introduction

The 2022 Report “How (well) known is Italian art abroad?” by Barril à Broccardi, Marchesoni, Pirrelli, Sanesi with support and collaboration of Arte Generali, Artprice and Articker/Phillips, has presented an independent study on the pres-

ence of Italian artists born after 1960 in the international contemporary art scene, fueling the dialogue over this matter, setting new goals and finding new possibilities for integration. The project, that in these years is progressing and updating

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itself, is setting the goal of identifying the state of the art and charting new paths and solutions to solve the many critical issues.

In this article we will revise the main findings of the Report after 16 years from the milestone research conducted by Professors Pier Luigi Sacco, Walter Santagata and Michele Trimarchi for Darc (Direzione Generale per l'architettura e l'arte contemporanea of the Italian Cultural Minister), "L'arte contemporanea italiana nel mondo", Skira, 2005. As previously done in the 2005 Study, the research in the 2022 Report has started from a question: what is the reputation of Italian artists born after 1960 and what is the presence of their artworks in the international art scene?

The year 1960 was chosen to exclude from the analysis all those well affirmed Italian artists that worked during the 50s, 60s and 70s finding both market and institutional success (such as Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri and the artists of Arte Povera). The key findings have been useful to further investigate important topics listed in the "anti-crisis recipe" paragraph of this article: from the importance of the recognition of artistic professions and the women's value to the central role of the "new" places for the arts – not only museums but independent centers, "off spaces" where young artists can be launched and grow and the creation of a network of relationships that is fundamental in a global market.

A tax reform is necessary to provide the country with a more competitive system in which artworks can be transferred easily. At the same time a business model for art and culture is needed to define the sector and make it more flexible.

2. The Work (in Progress) of the First Report: An Overview

The 2022 Report, the first of the produced studies, starts from a qualitative analysis, with 24 interviews to curators that have been promoting Italian art abroad to the results emerged from the research curated by Wondeur AI, company specialized in processing big data in the art market, though the analysis of the presence of Italian artists in the main exhibitions of the art world, in foreign museums and in the international press.

The study does not want to celebrate the domestic art; it aims to investigate its lack of competitiveness - with the awareness of having set a further step into the art system investigation which is already shaping up as a work in progress – and to describe the state of the art, identifying strengths and weaknesses, well knowing the situation in other countries that are much more competitive than Italy is and interjecting development trajectories from them.

Between its many statistics, the Report estimates the Italian presence at the Venice Biennale that "in the art system represents one of the most important steps in an artist's career and a great chance for visibility in front of an international public" as we find in the Report, that, also, stresses that Italy

has won the Leone d'Oro just once, in 1999 for a project by female artists Monica Bonvicini, Bruna Esposito, Luisa Lambri, Paola Pivi and Grazia Toderi.

The editions analyzed are the ones from 2007 up to 2022: among all, the 2013 edition stands out, when Italy was awarded with the Leone d'Oro alla Carriera (honorary prize) to Marisa Merz, a special mention to Roberto Cuoghi and the creative direction of Massimiliano Gioni that raised the number of Italian artists to 14 out of 164 (8,4%).

Apart from rare appearances, the Italian presence was not relevant: in 2007, with the curator Robert Storr, in both Giardini and Arsenale, only six out of 100 were the Italian participants (6%), ten out of 87 in 2009 with curator Daniel Birnbaum (11,5%) and ten out of 84 during the 2011 edition curated by Bice Curiger (11,9%).

The number of Italian artists goes down to four out of 139 in 2015 Biennale by Okwui Enwezor (2,9%), five out of 193 in 2017 with Christine Macel (2,6%) and it decreases again in 2019 when only two Italian artists out of 84 participants (2,4%) took part in Ralph Rugoff's Biennale.

Italian art's potential clearly stands out from the Report. From the auction results of Italian Old Masters at international auction houses, to the perception of Italy as an expression of a history, stratified over centuries: archeology, Roman vestiges, Renaissance; Italian art is certainly better known abroad for its past than for its present, which is not a bad thing, even though is quite reductive.

Investing and communicating only the past can lead to disastrous consequences for contemporary artists, leading to their reduced presence at auctions, binding them to a growing oblivion outside of the (few) places dedicated to their visibility (such as contemporary art centers and galleries) and, as a result of all this, lower attractiveness of the national market and its related industries – which is no small thing.

The study comes from the need for a broader vision to deeply understand the limits that contemporary Italian art, and artists born after 1960¹, encounter in spreading their work and why Italy is still on the margins of a galaxy that, on the contrary, could see it as protagonist and as an important hub for cultural and economic exchanges in the sector.

If we talk about visibility and attractiveness towards foreigners, if we really want to imagine today's Italian art and artists as part of an international and global system, then we can look abroad to compare and understand what works best and what doesn't, to improve and to borrow good practices.

"Since the analysis 'L'arte contemporanea italiana nel mondo' conducted in 2005 by Pier Luigi Sacco, Walter Santagata and Michele Trimarchi for the Direzione Generale per l'architettura e l'arte contemporanea of the Italian Ministry of Culture, there has been no interest in investigating the topic, placing it within a market that goes well beyond national

¹ Looking at the results, the choice of starting the research from 1960, was initially dictated by the mere identification of an analysis criterion that led to mapping a statistical population that could be defined as "young". The choice became then incisive, as the Italian artist who stands out the most in the report is Maurizio Cattelan, born in 1960.

borders and, even worse, nor there has been interest in systematically investing in the contemporary art sector. A mortal sin, I would say. Inexplicably in recent decades Italy has invested very little in cultivating contemporary art talents, despite having extraordinary and formidable masters. This was a very serious mistake, since Italian creativity lives not only in the past².

The Report provides some information that confirms the fortunes of “historicized” art: at a museum and market level it is in fact the Italian art of the 50s-60s-70s (Fontana, Burri, Arte Povera) that stands out. Artists born after 1960³ have a different positioning if we look at the success of their works in the main institutional and commercial places of international contemporary art in the last ten/twenty years.

From the answers to the interviews with the twenty-four curators, the list of Italian names on which attention is focused is rather short. Maurizio Cattelan stands out above all followed by Francesco Vezzoli, Monica Bonvicini, Enrico David, Paola Pivi, Tatiana Trouvé Roberto Cuoghi, Rosa Barba and a few others.

Work quality and ongoing research are the starting point of their success which mainly depends, in the unanimous opinion of the interviews, on the study and work experience gained abroad by the artists. It is not a simple xenophilia case, but the opportunity and ability to form a solid and branched network of relationships with curators, critics, collectors, galleries and museums.

Abroad, unlike Italy, the importance of the network is broadly understood, it exists, and it is effective, in most cases. However, it is true that outside of Italy the contemporary art system is concentrated in few designated centers that correspond to very specific cities⁴, while, one of the Italian peculiarities and one of its strong points is its “diffusion”⁵: it is not impossible (it is in fact reality) to find a museum in the smallest and most remote town, it is common to come across an art gallery in a remote place, from Trentino to Sicily, or, again, to discover an independent cultural center, one of those hybrid hubs from which the artist’s careers generally begin, before landing in an art gallery or meeting an art dealer or art advisor⁶.

What is missing from this photograph (which in some ways

represents a “de facto system”) is “efficient organicity”. There are many reasons, and they lie, in part, in parochialism and unproductive protection of identities and, in part, in the absence of an efficient control room. Among the many reasons for a late - and not yet full - valorization of Italian art, the interviews reveal a lack of networking and promotion of contemporary art abroad.

The most desirable solution in this scenario is believing in the cause and working to develop a circular and organic economy between training, production, communication, promotion and valorization (it almost sounds like the Columbus’s egg), while being able to draw inspiration from foreign practices and policies with both their advantages and disadvantages, looking for an Italian way.

The concepts of circularity and organicity become fundamental to put to good use the funding that are already present to produce the artworks. Academies and the education system in general are among the subjects of the supply chain: these are the places responsible for building the professionalism from which artists should – in theory – emerge to enter the system and the market that, at that point, should worry about their career, not so much because of the retention of talents by looking at this business model from a “glocal” (global – creative – local) perspective, but rather for the accreditation of contemporary Italian art and its valorization.

However, the map of international museums where contemporary Italian art has been exhibited, reveals that it is not completely invisible, on the contrary: 61 permanent collections over 76 foreign museums examined present artworks from Italian artists, 51 of which are artists covered by this study.

The artworks that are most present are the ones by Maurizio Cattelan, Rosa Barba, Vanessa Beecroft, Luisa Lambri, Tatiana Trouvé Monica Bonvicini, Enrico David, Diego Perrone and Francesco Vezzoli, a list that, once again, indicates a defined generational framework and that, with some exceptions, rewards artists who have chosen to live abroad for part of their lives, or even permanently, building their career elsewhere on their own, rather than thanks to a structured system in their country.

The Venice Biennale is a further test for the Report’s findings (especially for the directly proportional link between curator’s knowledge of Italian artists by, even foreign ones, and the artists’s presence in the exhibition): the editions from 2007 to 2019 show a reduced participation of Italian artists. With Cecilia Alemani, curator of the 2022 Biennale, Italian artists finally “count” as a double-digit number with the 12% of the total, compared to the 5% of the previous Biennials mentioned (2007-2019) - proving that knowing the Italian scene certainly helps to enhance local artist: you promote what you have knowledge ad practice of.

The Italian Pavillion of the Venice Biennale, which for years has favored the collective formula (less easy to communicate and not the best solution to make individual artistic projects emerge) in 2022 for the first time assigned the space

² These were the words of Dario Franceschini, former Minister for Culture, who spoke at the first presentation of the Report that took place in Rome at Palazzo Bonaparte on March 24th 2022.

³ This date was not a random choice since Cattelan was born in this year and the Report confirms his primacy. If it was decided to start the research from 1961 the results would have been very different, presenting an even more disheartening picture.

⁴ For this reason, the Report also investigates the “attractiveness” of cities with the help of Wondeur AI.

⁵ A concept that is very reminiscent of the one coined by the Italian art historian Antonio Paolucci in reference to the Italian typicality of being unique not only, and not so much, for the quantity of cultural sites officially recognized as UNESCO’s heritage, but rather for the Italian cultural heritage, made up of museums, churches, archaeological parks, libraries, archives and much more, which are intimately connected to the landscape and form a whole with it that is a true continuum, framed by nature.

⁶ CheFare association has realized a map of the independent cultural centers in Lombardy which confirms this varied picture.

to a single artist, Gian Maria Tosatti, a successful experiment repeated in this year's edition, 2024, by Luca Cerizza who curated Massimo Bartolini's exhibition.

More data on the international art market needs to be provided to paint a complete picture: the Art Basel and UBS Report 2024 curated by Claire McAndrews shows us that after two years of growth, sales on the global market in 2023 slowed down and reached a total of \$65 billion, losing 4% compared to 2022 which had recorded a value of \$67.8 billion. In 2023, however, the volume of transactions grew by 4%, rising to 39.4 million. The most important loss on business volumes affected the auction houses, which lost 7% compared to 2022, while the galleries lost 3%. However, private auction sales in continue to grow (2% more than in 2023). [1] A more reassuring picture emerges from the 28th Artprice Report, according to which 2023 stands out as the most dynamic year in the history of the global art market, with over one million works of art put up for auction and 763.000 transactions while the unsold rate remained stable. The slowdown seems to only concern the masterpieces segment, also due to issues related to the geopolitical context: the number of transactions exceeding \$10 million decreased by 25% but the number of lots sold worldwide increased by 5%. The most positive data, however, is represented by the increase in the activities of auction houses on the internet with a growth of 545% in the advertising of internet auctions and 285% in the number of sales throughout the world [2].

3. Different Focuses in the Report

The main focuses identified in the Report are indicated below.

3.1. What Happens to Cultural Production

There is no doubt that contemporary art (more correctly, the contemporary in general in its most diverse languages) has suffered from a historical and cultural misunderstanding: for a long (too long) time, production has been considered a single and personal affair and it didn't seem to concern the system nor the community. The emerging picture is decidedly paired with the situation of cultural assets and activities (the previous name of the MIC, Ministry for Culture, once separated from tourism) in which the concept of cultural enterprise⁷ has been mistakenly confused with profit purposes. The concept of stable business with the aim of creating cultural, social, community and public value was not grasped. It must be said that another historical misunderstanding lies in the limited reading given to article 9 of the Italian Constitution: "The Republic promotes the development of culture and of scien-

tific and technical research. It safeguards natural landscape and the historical and artistic heritage of the Nation". The word Republic has long been associated with the State and not with the *Res-publica*, implying a civic call addressed to everyone. This has spread a common feeling that it was the State, both at a central level and with its territorial branches, that should directly deal with the needs of cultural heritage. Furthermore, a primogeniture conceived by the founding fathers, namely placing the promotion of development before protection, has not been grasped too. The fragile state of the legacy left by our ancestors has placed the primary need for conservation and safeguarding of this heritage, investing the resources available for its protection, forgetting cultural and artistic production with a break in the economic and management that will need time, energy and vision to be overcome. The instrument of the Art Bonus, in its preliminary trial phase and in the subsequent one as a fully implemented standard for the support of the nation's cultural heritage by private individuals and businesses, aimed to capture this "private" sphere, from *Res-publica*, once again incentivizing those who invest in protection and not only in promotion and production.

3.2. Education

Another focus studied by the Report concerns the field of education and training. Over the years, high school curricula have undergone a significant reduction in artistic disciplines. Academies also suffer from a deficit of communication and opportunity. As highlighted by the Report, if study and work experience abroad give visibility to the artist (which allows the creation of a network of international relationships between curators, galleries and museums), Academies should be the subject that enables these paths. There is, however, a communication gap with the artistic careers: importance has been given, and rightly so, to STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) but it is time to give voice to the PAS subjects (Performing Arts, Painting, Sculpture) and any other acronym is welcome as long as we talk about it.

3.3. Italian Council and Italian Cultural Institute

The Italian Council was, and still is, the first real resource established in favor of the contemporary art system in general and artists in particular.

A comment can be made on the strengthening and reviewing of the financing timing: the fact that an important part of the contribution arrives "ex post" prevents the elasticity of the instrument together with risks generating situations where "it is better not to participate without the resources to pre-finance the operation". In this scenario a good part of the road has already been made; it is just a question of eliminating the weaknesses.

⁷ With law 206 of December 27th 2023 "Disposizioni organiche per la valorizzazione, la promozione e tutela del made in Italy" a new regulation was given to ICC (Creative and Cultural Enterprises). The law gives the definition of "Imprese Culturali e Creative", providing that they are registered in a specific section in the business register (art. 25).

The Italian Cultural Institutes also represent an important tool for promotion, communication and visibility for Italian art abroad. Yet, monographic exhibitions or exhibitions by Italian artists able to convey their production abroad, are still rare.

Among the fundamental issues there is the function – that cultural institutes share with museums and galleries – to shape the public's taste for the contemporary. Only by being exposed to the contemporary, one really can begin to consider it, beyond the merely aesthetic factor. A new need for coordination returns and this also applies to the Italian Cultural Institutes, which present a rich valorization activity that lacks in organicity and concentration.

3.4. The Cities: How Geography Redesigns the Movements of the Contemporary System

In the 2022 Report, Arte Generali's analysis with the support of Wondeur's artificial intelligence helped to analyze the role of cities in the art system: Milan is the most cutting-edge in the Italian artistic ecosystem, with a much higher success rate than Rome or Venice (even if its risk appetite – another factor analyzed by the research – is not different from the other two cities). In Europe, Paris and Berlin are the cities that stand out for their leadership; it is interesting how Brexit has had the effect of dropping London's positioning in this chart, giving way to the French capital. Both Paris and Berlin, compared to Italian cities, benefit from a less fragmented national context, and this makes the risk indicator raise. If we look overseas, Los Angeles stands out, proving how large-scale factors, starting from economic, technology and innovation, can influence the success of a city – for contemporary art also. Los Angeles seems to have stolen the place New York previously held. New York stills remains a landmark for museums and galleries (and for the artists), though, for risk appetite and positioning analysis, it had to give in to the attractive force of a real melting pot of a contemporary mixite made of business, science, technology, innovation and experimentation. Wanting to identify an entirely Italian characteristic that (almost) differentiates Italians from the rest of the world onto which we can build a (equally Italian) development path, it should be remembered that valuable museums and art galleries can be found in the most remote corners of the country. The idea of Italy as a “open air museum” previously mentioned, has triggered – since the post war- the birth of cultural centers and galleries that have discovered and valorized local talents, carrying out a very important work of research and disclosure, attenuating the polarization, which is normal if we look to other countries. It is no coincidence that to date, despite very different characteristics, in Italy we find a competition between three cities, Milan, Rome and Venice. It is true, although, that the general trend, as we have seen, goes towards a convergence on the new cities of the art system.

In April 2024 a great step forward was taken by the Italian Government for the valorization and diffusion of contempo-

rary art in Italian cities with the call for designation of the first Italian Capital of Contemporary Art for the year 2026, a recognition established to encourage and support the planning and implementation capacity of Italian cities in the valorization and promotion of contemporary art [3].

4. An Anti-Crisis Recipe

Considering the focuses analyzed so far, some possible solutions are listed to overcome the weaknesses of the system, without claiming to have a magic wand.

4.1. Recognize Artistic Professions

Italian art is not invisible, as we have seen, but there are very few artists who have been recognized as “successful”.

As far as the world of entertainment is concerned, an accreditation process has been carried out with legal, fiscal and social security implications. This process has effectively defined the professions that operate in that world, but art professionals are still in the middle ground, and because of it, they are invisible. Art workers carry out an activity that cannot be perceived and traced back to the hobby and leisure sphere. It is certainly not easy to classify them according to old and obsolete models (for almost all economic categories) in Fordist style (the assembly line) and their working hours cannot be traced back to swiping a badge. This does not mean that a model that makes the art workers independent cannot be imagined (there are many kinds of dependencies, to the detriment of productivity and quality).

The AWI Art Workers Italia association is playing an active role in carrying out an accreditation of the art related professions, for their legal, fiscal and contributory recognizability and they have also written a manifesto in 2020 stating their requests and long term objectives including the development of an official list of contemporary art professions and the identification of critical issues relating to the contractual positions of at workers in the current legislation [4]. The art system includes the visual artist, the critic, the curator and all the related professions paying attention to the (sometimes blurred) boundaries between professional and artisan (another important topic).

4.2. Recognize Women's Value

Art, not unlike sport, is focusing its attention on activities and professions carried out by women: an example of this is the choice of the curator Cecilia Alemani, mentioned in the introduction, for her 2022 Biennale, to host young women artists such as Ambra Castagnetti (Genoa, 1993) and Chiara Enzo (Venice, 1989). “The Milk of Dreams: The Venice Biennale opens with a metamorphic and feminine (not feminist) exhibition” [5]. When Linda Nochlin wrote about it in 1971 “Why there have been no great female artists”, she highlighted a gender gap that is hard to die even today – more than 50 years

later [6]. It is not just a question of invisibility, as both the Report and this paper have repeatedly stressed, but rather the fact that “women, although recognized among the protagonists of contemporary art, often remain a phenomenon to be thematized and presented in a separate form, only a few big names stand out on their own”. Another interesting passage in Guerisoli’s article is, commenting on research promoted by NABA, the absence of data. How is it possible that for any other sector – from science to economics – it is not difficult to find the gender gap data that would always emerge, while with (contemporary) art the data, the primary source for starting any analysis, is not available? The Report also tries to fill this gap: a data gap that represents a weakness, to start to seriously (in evaluations) and effectively (in solutions) reflect on it with better information in quantity and quality.

4.3. Communicate and Promote (Maybe Even Accredited) the Other Places That Deal with the Contemporary

Knowing young artists makes it possible to confirm, on a national scale, how their starting point, that sometimes corresponds to their artistic debut, was often not in a museum or in an art gallery but in an independent cultural center. Let’s therefore imagine a much more multifaced picture, different from other sectors: who could ever think of setting up a wool mill if not in a designated place to properly carry out the activity? Let’s imagine a scenario in which, alongside the commonly known places where art is made and exhibited (museums, galleries, public places, libraries, open spaces, parks) there is a multitude of other places that have welcomed and continue to host over the years the early and sometimes experimental work of emerging artists. In 2021 the Fare association with the support of Cariplo Foundation has published a study [7] mapping this situation in Milan and in the Lombardy Region. From the study emerges an extremely vital “bottom-up” cultural ecosystem (yet still unstructured) that “lacks in solutions for recognizing, valorizing and networking experiences that we can call “bottom-up”, “off” or “independent””: realities that in many international contexts are recognized as integral and indispensable parts of contemporary systems and that in Italy, on the contrary, tend to be considered as subordinate and marginal. The cornerstone places of these practices are the new cultural centers and off-site spaces. The organizations that animate them (both as promoters and partners) carry out widespread and continuous activities, supporting research and productions, attracting students, researchers and artists, building international relationships. The languages and practices that pass through them are the most disparate: sound art, multimedia art, performative practices, radio art, visual design, interactive design, hybrid mixed reality practices, art and science, public and relational art”. It is plausible to think that if the same research were extended to the other Italian regions a very similar picture would emerge. To say it is interesting and relevant is an un-

derstatement and “from it emerges a whole (which is not an ecosystem) made of many spread pieces across the territories that draw unusual maps, karst rivers and leopard spots. Museums (including corporate ones), outdoor and indoor public spaces, places of culture (archives, art galleries, parks, etc.), cultural heritage in the broadest sense and art galleries have a central and irreplaceable role: they are the “on” spaces: institutional, orthodox, born “for” it, with their own purposes of display, exhibitions, sales, valorization and cultural production. In all of them there are people who work, not just artists. The question is: are they also the only (to read alone) places where culture is produced? Absolutely not” [8].

A myriad of independent centers, mainly managed by third sector organizations, enriches the list of “off” spaces, revealing how they have often been a launching pad for young artists as well as the only ones (to read alone, but also incomparable), willing to bet, to risk and get involved.

The list of these spaces is fortunately open and still long, in an inclusive and unconventional logic, (even synesthetic due to the thousand hybridizations). Bringing art to non-places means activating unprecedented generative processes in shopping centers, hospitals, stations, airports, hotels and spaces where people work such as companies, offices, shops etc. triggering positive effect in terms of cultural welfare, new collaborations co-planning, meeting opportunities between cultural institutions, stakeholders and givers.

The assumption that art, culture and design can improve the well-being and health of individuals is now an assumption accepted by the scientific community, corroborated by studies, research and the 2019 WHO European region Report “What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review” [9] which presents a correlation between participation in cultural and creative activities and an improvement in the mental health and well-being of individuals as well as improvements in soft skills. It is no coincidence that the New Agenda for Culture 2030 incorporates the intersection between well-being, culture and health among the pillars of the new European cultural policies. In Italy there is an interdisciplinary center that already deals with these topics: CCW Cultural Welfare Center, created to promote study, research, skills building, support of policies and strengthening of good practices. The Center was born from the need to face the complexity of the present and the great challenges of the contemporary world. In this scenario it is essential to start a deep and constructive dialogue between social, healthcare and culture, for solid and effective interdisciplinary cooperation.

4.4. Networking to Overcome Power Distance

This is what was repeated like a mantra by the curators who took part in the 2022 Report.

The Report notes that “relationships are fundamental in a global market: visibility and the possibility of making Italian art known abroad as well as bringing foreign operators and

collectors to Italy are an obligatory step. The work of Italian Cultural Institutes is crucial but a direction that coordinates, defines times and themes and allows Italian artists to meet foreign operators – and vice versa – is missing. Ultimately, that systematically creates a network by not relying on the abilities of the single managers”. The network is not just an internal and domestic issue: if we have seen that success comes from experience abroad, it is a network that has a broad georeferencing, connected to other countries and different institutions: from and to Italy with a custom that is the result of a plan and sees curators, museum directors, critics and foreign cultural operators organize artists' studios visits, maybe including one of those “off” independent centers mentioned, like museums and Galleries in a “New Grand Tour”.

4.5. Work on a Tax Reform

In this anti-crisis recipe one ingredient that couldn't be missed is the tax issue, in this case with an integrated and non-fragmentary vision, keeping art. 9 of the Italian Constitution in mind and acting coordinately between promotion, production and protection of culture and art.

In fact, tax rules tend, for better or for worse to impact a sector in which emotional and experimental aspect is very strong but if we want it to become a sector with a strong economy it is necessary to work on policies that at least consider what is happening a few kilometers away from us. It is no coincidence that the Report presents the eloquent French example, which has a VAT rate of 5.5% (compared to the Italian 10% rate) that allows companies with a French VAT number and foreign operators with a French tax representative, to defer VAT payment at custom to subsequently compensate it with the corresponding credit, making the operation financially neutral.

Implementing a reform means not only intervening on rates but also, after a context analysis, providing the country with a more competitive and transparent system: thanks to which circulation would be more fluid and would facilitate the artworks transfer.

A few years ago, Italy has also borrowed from France the Art Bonus as a tax credit, placing a series of limits on it and redefining the beneficiaries (a new setting that has gradually expanded, to be honest, including also festivals).

A great step ahead was the enabling law, legge delega per la riforma tributaria, 9 August 2023 n. 111 that intends to introduce a new regulation that could exclude from taxation capital gains both realized by collectors and from the sale of artworks from successions, donation etc. therefore excluding all operations in which lacks the speculative intent.

Furthermore, the law delegates the Italian Government to reduce the VAT rate on the importation of works of art by transposing Council Directive (EU) of 5 April 2022 and extending the reduced rate also to the sale of objects of art, antique or collectibles. They all are interventions that have not

yet been implemented but which denote a renewed interest in providing certainty to the art market, currently devoid of defined rules [10].

A further challenge aimed at widening the list could be to use it as incentive to the cultural and artistic production, complementary to the public call of Italian Council, so that both private individuals and businesses can contribute to find resources to allocate to the “arte alla maniera d’oggi” as Giorgio Vasari would call contemporary art. Sometimes it is easy to forget that the great names of the past, those artists (mostly men) who made Italy a treasure chest on which we are now sitting, benefiting from our unique position, were contemporary at their time as contemporary was the aristocratic class first, and the mercantile and entrepreneurial one after, that believed and invested in art thinking it was the best income one could imagine.

4.6. Make a Design Thinking Effort and Build the Business Model

For a product sector to have economic relevance it must have its own business model.

On several occasions the issue of the absence (or partial presence) of a business model for art and culture has been highlighted [11]. Unlike all other product sectors (from tourism to the “aesthetic goods” supply chain such as fashion, wine and food, etc.), art and culture do not have a clear and defined business model in Italy – divided as they are between public and private, profit and non-profit and a set of actors who struggle to form a system. A certain fragmentation of the offer, of the declinations and of the artistic forms is part of the Italian cultural sector together with the different ways these creative expressions are proposed to the public.

A “design thinking” effort to imagine a tailor-made business model that could define the sector and provide itself with the necessary flexibility, could significantly contribute to turn organizations into cultural enterprises, from individual artist's workshop/atelier, up to the largest and most complex realities. The issue of autonomy and competitiveness is not the only one in stake: also, a powerful communication and impact on the Italian art system and its social and community development, since art and culture (along with landscape) are very relevant for the Italian identity, for the sense of belonging, active participation, inclusion, welfare and empowerment.

Considering the multiple and experiential nature of the used languages, artistic forms and organizations that promote them and offer them to the public, the business model is not going to be an “assembly line” one⁸, nor a supply chain, as some-

⁸ The business model for arts and culture proposed by Lerro and Schiuma, called the “Business Model Prism” (BMP), is made up of a three-dimensional structure that at its basis has a “social and cultural value and impact” and “economic resilience and funding”. It also presents on the sides of the model “stakeholders”, “strategies”, “processes”, “human and organizational resources” and “partnership”. This model establishes the social and cultural function of organizations together with their economic and financial sustainability, as its basis. Starting from this unique assumption of creation and delivery of cultural, social and economic value,

times happens with other models [12]. The final consumer is not a mere user but a “prosumer”: producer and consumer at the same time, thanks to digital evolution where boundaries are increasingly more and more blurred. Today the provoking cutting act of Lucio Fontana has new followers such as Beyoncé and Jay-Z who filmed in 2018 a videoclip⁹ at the Louvre Museum that, after the huge hit and video was released dedicated an itinerary to the pop star couple [13].

Starting from Saul Kaplan’s (2011) assumption that “Business Models Aren’t Just for Business” [14], the design of the model must hold together the way art (and culture) can create, distribute, communicate and (re)acquire value by involving all actors and operators in this path of “cultivation of value”, regardless of their profit, non-profit, public or private nature.

Here is a reasoned index on which to base the construction of a model with cultural business as its final goal.

- 1) Training: it starts here, with the education and training system.
- 2) Hybridization: a good dose of innovation can be generated by a synesthetic approach where the historicized heritage dialogues with the contemporary.
- 3) Risk appetite: we cannot only invest in safe used vehicles. From Old Masters auctions to tourism based on the art of the past: we need to go further and add a good dose of risk appetite (mitigated depending on the public or private nature of the organizations), without which one cannot become a “business”.
- 4) Co = read together: collaboration and co-planning. The issue of the network must not be addressed downstream (to be clear about communication/promotion), it must be addressed upstream (in the phase of rethinking cultural policies).
- 5) Competitiveness: the art market needs dynamism, transparency, clear rules, investments, otherwise let’s not be surprised if the names are always the same and this, paradoxically, benefits even those who are successful.
- 6) Resources: the solution is not to evoke an increase in public funds but to ensure that those present work well to pool them with other resources according to a (winning) funding mix logic.

each company can develop its own business model by identifying its own mission and the strategies and processes necessary to achieve it. According to this approach, to position the company and its proposal, it is important to identify who are the stakeholders to reach. It is also fundamental to make a report of the present resources and of the ones to be integrated. Lastly, to continue this process of creating value – *raison d’être* of each business model – possible partnerships to be established and cultivated are to be valued.

⁹ It’s 2018 when Beyoncé and her husband Jay-Z launch their first single *Apeship* inside the Louvre Museum that remained closed for an entire night. The protagonists of the video, together with the couple, were the artworks from the most famous collection in the world that celebrate Western art. Starting from the video clip, the Louvre inaugurated an unprecedented, dedicated itinerary, including (obviously) Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* and Canova’s *Cupid and Psyche*, earning millions of likes. It starts from the *Nike of Samothrace*, continues with *Madonna of the green cushion* by Leonardo da Vinci, *The Wedding at Cana* by Paolo Veronese and the *Venus de Milo*.

7) Organizational structure: there is no business without an adequate organizational structure: in this business model this structure will be less pyramidal (than usual) and more horizontal, but it must be there.

8) Promotion: is fundamental, together with communication, both in Italy and abroad, built not on press releases but on solid relationships.

Is it a great job? Surely.

Will it be successful? There’s a very good chance it will be.

5. Conclusions

The research is obviously not exhaustive but some considerations can come from it: contemporary Italian artists who seem to have achieved international recognition are a limited number and well established. What seems, from the interviews to curators, to give the artists the right visibility are study and work experiences abroad that allows them to create a network of international relationships. The reasons for this lack of valorization from the Italian system are many, according to the curators interviewed, and they all lie in the lack of strategy vision from Italian cultural institutions for the promotion of the contemporary, as well as the lack of funding for the sector. However, Italian contemporary art is not invisible, as we have repeatedly stressed in this article, and it certainly is not invisible in international museums and the Venice Biennale had dedicated the Italian pavilion to one Italian Artist.

Starting from the Report “How (well) known is Italian art abroad?” [15] by BBS-Lombard Benefit Corporation a series of “anti-crisis recipes” have been listed in this article to overcome the weaknesses of the sector, without claiming to change the system overnight. One of those advice is the recognition and definition of artistic and art related professions well as the recognition of women’s in the arts value. The importance of bringing contemporary art outside of institutionalized places – and into the lives of people, and workers – has been proven to be beneficial both for the community and for the single person/worker. The importance of forming a solid network was stressed, together with the urgency of a tax reform, looking at other countries to take inspiration and best practices. Lastly, a tailor-made business model for art and culture can be the right way to define the sector and provide flexibility: the article ends with some advice on how to start constructing a model that has cultural business as final goal.

Abbreviations

DARC	Direzione Generale Per l’architettura e l’arte Contemporanea
MIC	Italian Ministry for Culture
AWI	Art Workers Italy
NABA	Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti
CCW	Cultural Welfare Center

WHO	World Health Organization
VAT	Value Added Tax
ICC	Creative and Cultural Enterprise
BMP	Business Model Prism

Author Contributions

Irene Sanesi is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Irene Sanesi is a chartered accountant and cultural economist. She is founder and Name Partner of BBS-pro. For 30 years she has been dealing with project and process management, third sector, advocacy, fundraising, taxation, higher education and strategic philanthropy. She has written many publications about cultural economics, sustainability and fundraising. Gestionalia is the title of her column on Artribune. She has held, and still holds, institutional volunteering positions in both national and international cultural institutions.

Research Field

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