

Francesco Marchetti

Memories
of
Venice

With a foreword by Tamara Ognjević

Tamara Ognjević

VENICE THROUGH THE EYES OF A VENETIAN

A wise traveler never despises his own homeland.

Carlo Goldoni

© 2026 Francesco Marchetti. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior written permission from the author.

Photographs: Francesco Marchetti
Book design: Francesco Marchetti

Foreword: Tamara Ognjević

First edition, 2026
ISBN: 978-1-7399349-1-0

When Francesco Marchetti mentioned to me several years ago that he had been photographing Venice for quite some time and that he would like me to write the introductory essay for the photo monograph he was planning to create from those photographs, I was struck speechless with joy.

Venice!

A magical word capable, in an instant, of unleashing dozens of exhilarating associations and, like a cosmic matchstick, igniting a firework powerful enough to illuminate centuries of history, countless creative spirits, daring seafarers, seductive adventurers, audacious fortune-seekers, shrewd merchants, irresistible courtesans, and an entire army of incomparable

artists. A mystical stage fashioned from stone lace woven in oriental patterns, Murano cobalt-blue glass, and the music of Vivaldi. The Bride of the Mediterranean who seduced Byron, George Sand, Ruskin, Mann, Hemingway, and Proust; who even posthumously bound Diaghilev, Ezra Pound, Stravinsky, and Peggy Guggenheim to herself; and who led Shakespeare, though he never visited her, to set one of his most celebrated plays, The Merchant of Venice, upon her canals, within the beautiful and terrifying embrace of unpredictable waters.

Alongside the excitement awakened in me by Marchetti’s idea, fear began to rise quietly, like an *acqua alta*.¹ At first gently, between the delicate veils of memory suddenly lifted by my many visits to Venice, and then more intensely as I re-

¹ Aqua alta (It.) — “high water”; a term Venetians use to describe the rise of sea levels in the lagoon resulting in the flooding of the city streets.

read Norwich, Mary McCarthy, Zorzi, Brodsky, Goethe, and Vladimir Pištalo. I began sincerely to doubt that the subject exceeded me.

That I was losing my bearings in the immeasurable historical and artistic material accumulated over more than a millennium, the very span of the *La Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia*,² just as an ambitious, feverish tourist, seized by curiosity, loses direction for a moment in the labyrinth of Venetian alleyways. A whole lifetime is needed for this, perhaps even two! I experienced genuine attacks of panic during which the very object of my fascination seemed to mock me:

“*The acqua alta has already reached the hooves of Saint Mark’s horses on the basilica terrace. You still have time to board the last ship and sail back toward your misty Balkan shores. Prossima fermata — Belgrado, Serbia!*”³

And then, in an instant, I understood. I was a foreigner in Venice, seeing her much like all other foreigners do — fortunate victims of her magical ability to offer every eye its own perfect mirror for dreaming. A stage upon which Venice herself serves as the flawless décor, while our own mental baggage creates the illusion that we have truly understood the city of a thousand masks. A cosmopolitan chimera raised upon barren islands at the mouth of a river associated by ancient writers with the

² *La Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia* (It.) — “The Most Serene Republic of Venice,” the name used for centuries to designate the powerful Venetian maritime state.

³ *Prossima fermata — Belgrado, Serbia!* (It.) — “Next stop — Belgrade, Serbia!” A humorous play on the automated announcements heard aboard Venetian *vaporetti* — the water buses that serve as public transportation along the canals — informing passengers of the next stop in preparation for disembarkation.

⁴ *Terraferma* (It.) — literally “solid ground” or “mainland.”

world of the dead, built through the spiritual force of Venetians so that it might become the *terraferma*⁴ from which their ships would harvest the raw materials, goods, territories, and peoples of the Mediterranean and its hinterlands. That mooring post to which they would tie their vessels only briefly, long enough to unload their cargo and prepare for yet another voyage.

For Venice is, above all else, a port. Grand, flamboyant, administratively impeccable, astonishingly democratic in an age of monarchies and empires, technically virtuosic in its production of ships and weaponry, moderately devout, measuredly decadent, because it understood the needs of sailors and merchants who spent long periods in dangerous places. Ultimately, its vast experience of the world taught Venice to understand, perhaps better than any other city, the importance of culture, presentation, and marketing. This is why it invested so generously in art, theater, music, and architecture. To leave behind the impression of immeasurable wealth, practical intelligence, and refined taste was essential for any power aspiring to govern the world and its resources. In all these respects — especially considering the profoundly unfavorable circumstances under which its triumphant historical ascent began in the seventh century — Venice stands as an authentic triumph of spirit over matter. Indeed, the city does not rest upon the wooden piles slowly sinking into the sandy floor of the lagoon, but upon the

shoulders of Venetians themselves, those daring and intelligent bridegrooms of the *Mare Nostrum*.⁵

For all these reasons, after the first great wave of enthusiasm and an even greater wave of panic, I realized I had to make my greatest effort yet: to forget everything I knew and everything I hoped for, and to look at Venice through the eyes of a Venetian. Through the eyes of Francesco Marchetti. A photographer, traveler, attentive listener, quiet observer, curious yet highly pragmatic explorer, elegant aesthete, and unsettlingly silent conversationalist who, whenever possible, places an image before you instead of an answer.

For more than two decades Marchetti has lived in England, traveling across the world, yet at steady intervals — at least once a year — he returns to his Veneto and walks through his Venice. Often this happens in winter or early spring, before the invasion of tourists. At a time when the air is transparent and an almost crystalline light illuminates the lagoon. The sea then is deep blue, nearly black, while the city acquires a subtle, understated gilding that makes its façades seem to glow from within. At the same time, these are the moments when Venetians reclaim the streets of Venice. There are no crowds in Saint Mark’s Square, gondoliers sun themselves upon the little bridges connecting the city’s quarters, the fish market lies eerily silent, and even the seagulls seem unwilling to cry out. As though they instinctively understand the blessing of this brief

peace before the arrival of the greatest conquering army of the modern world — tourists.

It is precisely this atmosphere that compels Marchetti the photographer to lift his camera and record the movement of light and people. He too is not immune to the city’s enchantments, to its eternal longing to awaken the imagination, to provoke possible — and even more eagerly, surreal — narratives. Yet his memories of Venice, the recollections of family and ancestors, the stories heard in youth, keep him firmly anchored between reality and invention. After all, he is Venetian, and like his older and more famous compatriots Marin Sanudo and Carlo Goldoni, he instinctively directs his gaze toward everyday life, toward people, gestures, and situations that have repeated themselves within Venice — behind and beneath all those glittering façades — for centuries, with the same rhythm and the same purpose.

An old woman at the fish market. Young girls reading while seated in a window. A boy playing with a dog in an empty square. A gondolier resting beneath a parasol while waiting for customers. Nuns — aging brides of Christ dressed in white — slowly descending stone steps. Carabinieri returning home from work. Laundry stretched between two buildings. A man lighting candles in a church. A businessman in high rubber boots wading through the *acqua alta*. A patriarch celebrating Mass in Santa Maria della Salute. Gondolas rocking gently in

⁵ *Mare Nostrum* (Lat.) — an ancient term for the Mediterranean Sea, meaning “Our Sea.”

the mist along the Riva degli Schiavoni... From these images emanates such serene silence that the viewer almost seems to hear the rhythm of footsteps and the soft lapping of water.

The delicate haze, traces of twilight, or the soft grayness of rain in Marchetti's photographs evoke no melancholy, least of all that Byronic-Ruskinian lament over the magical beauty of a city slowly consumed by the waters of the lagoon. His decision to combine family photographs — images of relatives and of himself as a child — with photographs taken in recent years suggests that this quiet Venetian is revealing to us his memories and his deeply personal experience of a city to which he is bound by the unbreakable threads of lineage. This juxtaposition reveals a process in which the scenery itself never truly changes — only the human being within it. At the same time, more powerfully than words, it suggests how profoundly a Venetian belongs to his homeland, and with what reverence he approaches it, fully aware that he too is merely a passerby within one brief temporal sequence of the city's long, complex, and enigmatic memory.

In Venice, the mask worn by Marchetti — settled in England, married in Serbia, perpetually moving across the map of the world — disappears. At home, he is simply Venetian, and it is precisely this fact that transforms his photographs into a kind of optical lens through which an enchanted foreigner may glimpse Venice from an entirely different angle. So that, for a moment, he too may possess the eyes of a Venetian.

Only one photograph in this deeply personal album by Francesco Marchetti forcefully reminds the viewer that all these scenes of daily life captured by the camera unfold within the capital of a once mighty republic whose stone lion can still be encountered throughout the Mediterranean — from Constantinople to the Dolomites, from Crete to Istria. It is an image of numerous boats laden with goods and passengers sailing from Venice toward nearby Giudecca. The sea is dark and restless, as is the sky filled with threatening gray clouds. In the distance rise the tall bell tower and the white façade of the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer (Il Redentore). A storm hangs in the air, yet the people aboard the small boats seem utterly indifferent to the menacing vortex of elements that appears ready at any moment to erupt into cosmic fury.

That image speaks more eloquently than a thousand words about Venetians: about their familiarity with challenge and their ability to master fear. Whether fishermen or doges, lovers or artists. Or, ultimately, Marchetti himself, who from the quiet, dreamlike rhythm of ordinary people and their daily occupations suddenly transports us, through this powerful and dramatic image, into yet another reality of his city — one defined by the perpetual struggle against the harsh environment upon which Venice was built. For the foreigner, especially the learned foreigner inclined toward romantic visions, this storm-filled scene contains that heroic atmosphere which foreshadows extraordinary turns of fate and inspires powerful verses. For the Venetian, it is simply life, in which the most

important thing is to steer the rudder calmly in the proper direction.

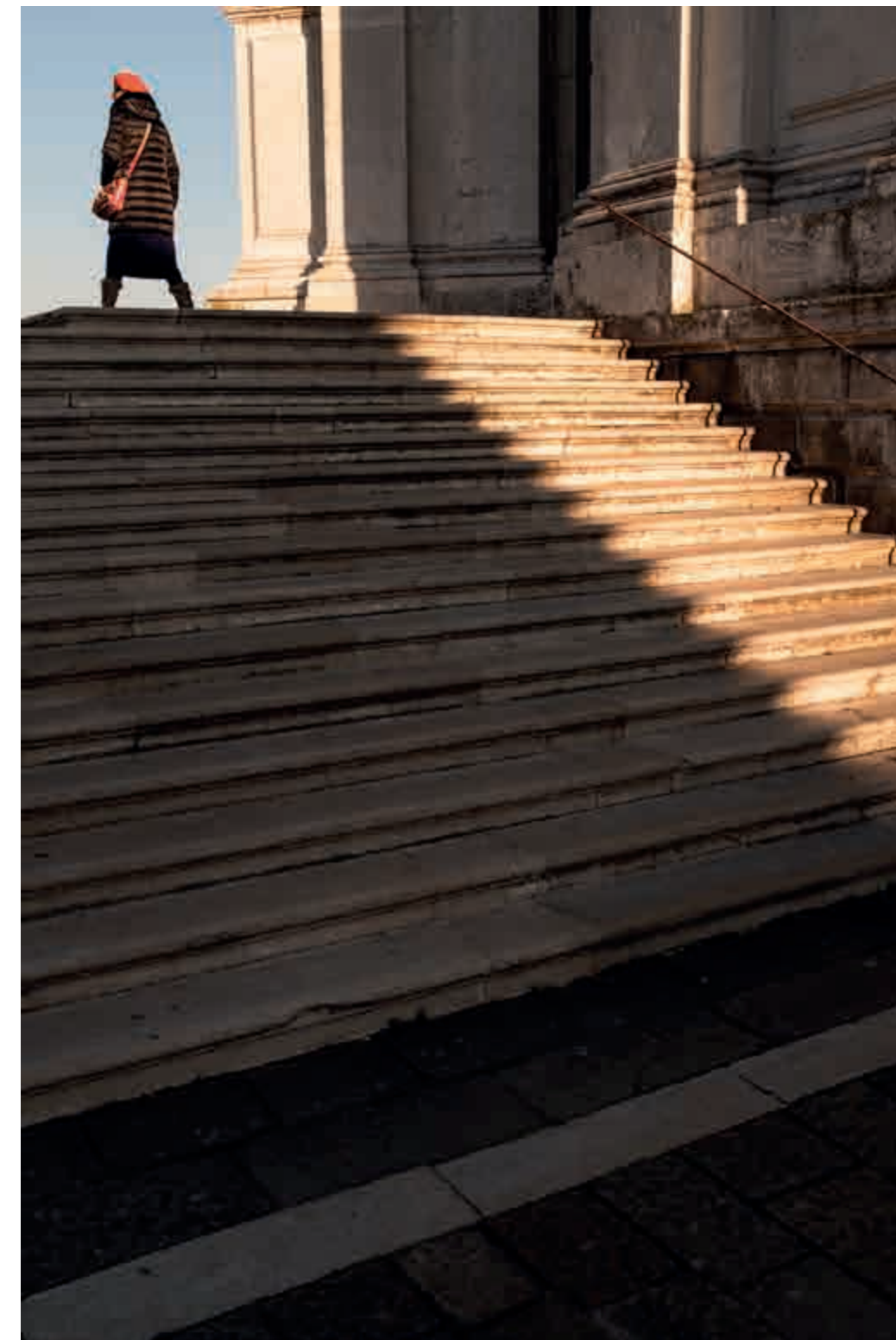
Ultimately, Marchetti's *Venice* may well perplex — perhaps even disillusion — those foreigners who, upon hearing the magical name of the city, expect fireworks, carnival masks, gold-embroidered brocade, or at least one exuberant Veronese *Feast in the House of Levi*. Yet for those who wish to discover the subtle poetics of a Venetian and to see this enigmatic city through his eyes, to encounter its inhabitants and immerse themselves in the silence of an invisible world, this personal and familial album will possess the same alluring and mysterious effect as Giorgione's *Tempest*.

Belgrade, April 2026























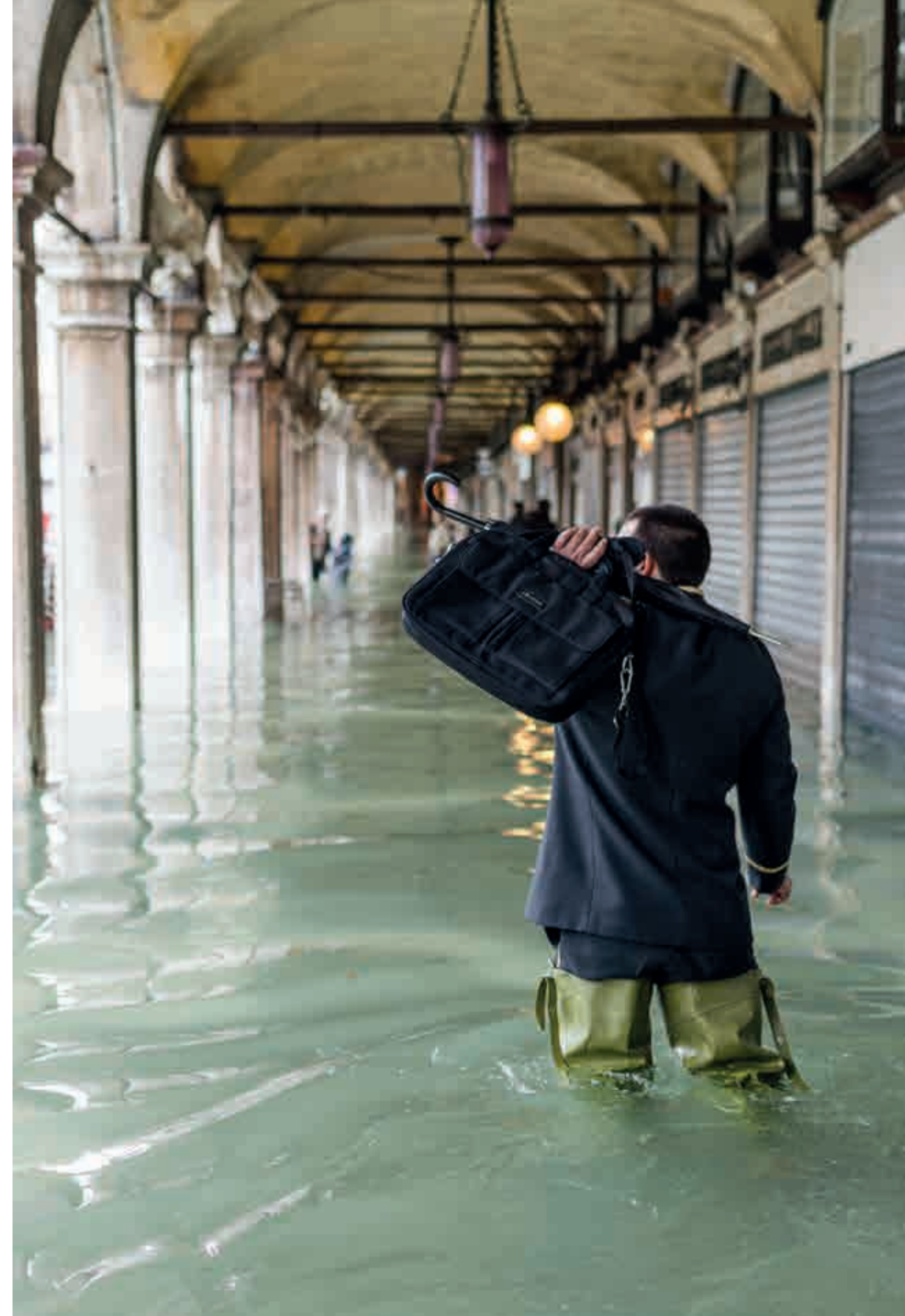
Venezia - Festa dello Sposalizio -
- giugno 1914 -







- Venezia - L'acqua alta in piazza S. Marco - Dicembre 1915





November 2019 — Debris left behind after the 'acqua alta' receded.

Only days earlier, Venice had been struck by one of the most devastating acqua alta events in its recorded history. On 12 November, the tide reached 187 cm, the highest level since the catastrophic flood of 1966.



21 November — Venetians cross the Grand Canal to reach the Basilica of Santa Maria della Salute, built in fulfilment of a vow after the plague of 1630–31, in a centuries-old act of devotion to the Virgin Mary.











December 2021 — St. Mark's Square in silence, when even Venice seemed to pause.











January 2018 — At Rialto's historic fish market, the banner "Rialto no se toca" — "Don't touch Rialto" — protested proposals to move the wholesale fish market away from its traditional home.

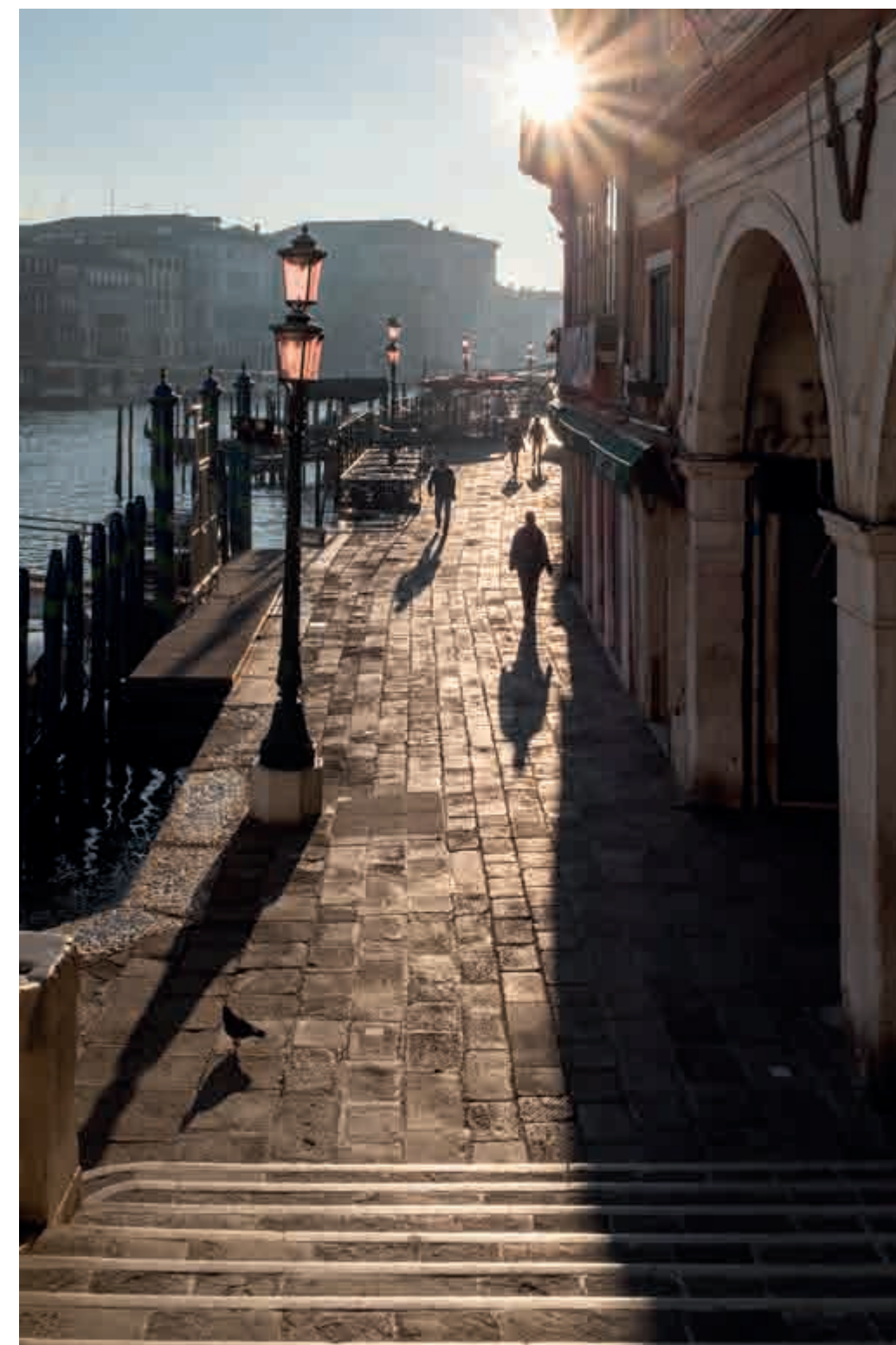




November 2019 — A protest against the “grandi navi”, the large cruise ships long seen by many Venetians as a threat to the fragile life of the lagoon.





























Francesco Marchetti

Francesco Marchetti, an award-winning photographer, was born in Venice, Italy. Since 2001 he has lived in London, where he combines his professional work with his passion for photography. He completed a course in documentary photography at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts. His main areas of interest are street, portrait, and documentary photography, and his work has been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in London, Paris, and Belgrade.

Tamara Ognjević

Tamara Ognjević holds an MA in Art History and a PhD in Cultural Management. She is co-founder and Director of the Artis Center (Belgrade, Serbia). She is an expert in the management, interpretation, and communication of art and cultural heritage, and a former long-standing official of the National Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM Serbia) and the International Committee for Museum Public Relations and Marketing (ICOM MPR/ICOM COMMS).

Tamara Ognjević is the author of numerous books, scholarly papers, and popular articles in the fields of art history, cultural history, museology, and heritology, including the landmark publication *Treasure of Serbia: Cultural and Historical Heritage*. She is also the author and leader of award-winning multidisciplinary cultural heritage projects (Living the Past, Pastry Shop, Museum and Communication, etc.), a curator of numerous exhibitions, a lecturer, and coordinator of various educational programs focused on art and heritage.