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Roman Holiday: RAVEN's guide to contemporary art in Rome

Arts writer and curator Naima Morelli reveals contemporary art spaces amidst the ancient sites of the Italian capital.



White Noise Gallery, installation view of *Moodboard* by Pax Paloscia, March 2014. Image courtesy of White Noise Gallery

When visitors plan their art tour of Rome, they don't often get beyond the Vatican Museums, the Galleria Borghese and Saint Peter's. Dazzled by ancient and Renaissance art, they tend to forget that Rome is also Italy's capital of contemporary art. In the Eternal City, in fact, local talent mixes with international tendencies.

The best part is that visitors don't necessarily have to choose between ancient and contemporary art. Most of the art galleries are found in the city's historical area. By strolling from one gallery to another, you have access to plenty of monuments on your way.

There are four major art hubs in Rome – the city centre, the Roman Ghetto, Corso Vittorio Emanuele and San Lorenzo – and they are all within walkable distance from one another.



Modern masters at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna

CITY CENTRE

If Rome for you conjures up beautiful marble buildings, romantic terraces and lavish gardens, you should start your gallery marathon from the city centre. Without further ado, walk up the Spanish Steps to reach your first stop: **Villa Medici**. This Mannerist architectural complex is home to the French Academy, and regularly hosts exhibitions of artists from Poussin to Su-Mei Tse.

Colazione: To kick off the morning, a croissant and espresso at the Villa Medici café is highly recommended. The place still retains its bohemian feel from back when Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull were regular guests.



The Ara Pacis Augustae, an altar dedicated to Pax (the Roman goddess of peace) in honour of Emperor Augustus

From Villa Medici, walk through the nearby Borghese gardens till you get to the **Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna**, a neoclassical building hosting a vast collection of Modern masters. If you're all about the contemporary though, you should take a detour to Barberini, where the Roman branch of the art multinational **Gagosian** is situated. In this large and pristine space, you'll find the biggest names in the contemporary art establishment.

A short walk away there is the **Ara Pacis Museum**, where tastes for the ancient and the contemporary are equally appeased. The museum is a Modern structure conceived around the Ara Pacis Augustae, a Roman monument built in honour of Emperor Augustus. The bottom floor, however, is devoted to exhibitions by contemporary artists and designers. Fashion designer Valentino famously showcased his trademark red gowns around the Roman altar.



Courtyard of Galleria Lorcan O'Neill. Courtesy of Galleria Lorcan O'Neill Roma

ROMAN GHETTO

Next make your way to the Largo Argentina. **Galleria Lorcan O'Neill** has recently relocated to the district, taking up an impressive 5,400-square-foot space in the 17th-century stables of the Palazzo Santacroce. The gallery represents a mix of young talents, such as Eddie Peake, and revered artists like Richard Long. **Galleria 1/9 unosunove**, another space just next door, has a similar cross-section of represented artists.

Cross the road and you'll get into one of the most fascinating areas of Rome. The Ghetto has a lively and intimate feeling to it. It is home to the Jewish community as well as some interesting galleries. **Valentina Bonomo** is definitely the most active space on the block, representing artists from the Italian Transavanguardia movement including Mimmo Paladino and Enzo Cucchi.



Galleria 1/9 unosunove, installation view of *In Praise of Learning* by Per-Oskar Leu, 2014. Image courtesy of Galleria 1/9 unosunove

In the neighbouring Via della Reginella you'll find an entirely different space, the **Takeawaygallery**. This gallery specialises in selling small works at affordable prices by both established and emerging artists. **Pranzo:** At lunchtime the Roman Ghetto is the place to be. There is a reason why **Nonna Betta's** tables are always full, with their delicious selection of kosher cuisine with a Roman twist.



Takeawaygallery

CORSO VITTORIO EMANUELE

To get you moving again after a well-earned lunch, there's nothing better than a stroll along Corso Vittorio Emanuele. This wide street is forever jammed with buses and cars during the day. For the galleries though, you should take the side roads. Streets like Via Giulia and Via di Monserrato used to be dotted with artisan workshops. Today, shoemakers and luthiers have given way to interior decoration and antique stores.

This area is home to galleries of all stripes. From the hyper-conceptual **Giacomo Guidi**, to the illustration-based **Galleria Varsi** and **Tricromia**, there is something to accommodate every taste. One gallery that is definitely worth a visit is **Monitor**, which has an international air and represents Italian contemporary art stars from Zimmerfrei to Nico Vascellari.



Peter Linde Busk, *Gentlemen*, 2015, installation view at Monitor, Rome. Photo credit: Giorgio Benni. Courtesy: the artist and Monitor, Rome-New York

Next turn onto Via del Paradiso, literally 'Paradise Street', for the celebrated gallery **I' Attico**. Located on the second floor of an old building, you have to ring the bell to get in. Since its inception in a garage in the '60s, the gallery has repeatedly changed location, but the owner Fabio Sargentini still supports the artists he discovered back in the day.

A short walk from one another, **Operativa Arte Contemporanea** and **Ex Elettrofonica** are trendy launching pads for emerging artists. Operativa focuses on the local scene, plucking its artists straight from Rome's art academy. Ex Elettrofonica's peculiarity is its space. Its walls are shaped like the interior of a mushroom and it has no sharp corners – definitely a space where the viewer is challenged.

Spuntino: After taking in all that art, you'll need some refreshment. In Rome there are more ice cream shops than churches – and make no mistake, there are plenty of churches. Don't settle for the first gelato place you encounter though! If you're one for genuine ingredients, you should definitely stop at **Grom**, near Piazza Navona.



Galleria 291 Est, exterior view, image courtesy of Galleria 291 Est

SAN LORENZO

To end the day with something more grassroots, hop on the first bus to San Lorenzo in the eastern part of the city, and discover the working-class soul of Rome. Although the capital has a lack of artist-run initiatives, San Lorenzo's galleries are the closest equivalent.

Galleria 291 Est is located in a basement and since opening has been the place for emerging artists and curators to experiment. Their engraving workshop is available to exhibiting artists to produce their own prints. Although their preference is for graphic work, 291est also exhibits more conceptually-focused artists.

A must-see in San Lorenzo is the ex-pasta factory **Pastificio Cerere**, now turned into an exhibition space and housing resident artists. Since the 1970s the space has seen the birth and development of art movements which have made Pastificio Cerere their headquarters.



Galleria 291 Est, installation view of *1915* by Sevak Grigoryan

Because of cheaper rent, many artists have their studios in San Lorenzo amongst the students and activists that call this area home. Not surprisingly the galleries in this area are younger and more risk-taking. This is certainly the case with **White Noise**, a gallery devoted to new directions in art.

Cena: If you have made it to the end of your tour, you definitely deserve a pizza. The Roman pizza is flatter and thinner than the Neapolitan one, but just as good. A great option in San Lorenzo is **II Maratoneta**, a typical Roman pizzeria decorated with images of marathon runners. In Rome, the art might be amazing, but food is a damn serious business.



Enrico CASTELLANI, Richard LONG, Jeff WALL. Installation View, 2014 – Galleria Lorcan O'Neill. Courtesy of the artists & Galleria Lorcan O'Neill Roma

Accademia di Francia – Villa Medici, Viale della Trinità dei Monti 1, 00187 Roma, Tues to Sun 9.30am-5.30pm, villamedici.it

L'Attico, via del Paradiso 41, Roma, Mon to Fri 5-8pm, Sat call to check opening times, +39 066869846, fabiosargentini.it

Ex Elettrofonica, Vicolo di Sant'Onofrio 10, 00165 Roma, Tue to Fri 4- 8pm, exelettrofonica.com

Fondazione Pastificio Cerere, Via degli Ausoni 7, 00185 Roma, Mon to Fri, 3-7pm, Sat 4-8pm, pastificiocerere.it

Gagosian Gallery Rome, Via Francesco Crispi 16, 00187 Roma, Tues to Sat 10am-6pm, gagosian.com

Galleria 291 Est, Viale dello Scalo San Lorenzo 45/49, 00185 Roma, Tue to Fri 11am-7.30pm, Sat 4-10pm, galleria291est.com

Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Vicolo Dei Catinari 3, Roma, Tues to Sat 11am-7pm, lorcanoneill.com

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Viale delle Belle Arti 131, 00196 Roma, Tues to Sun 8.30am-7.30pm, gnam.beniculturali.it

Galleria 1/9 Unosunove arte contemporanea, Via degli specchi 20, 00186 Roma, Tues to Fri 11am-7pm, Sat 3-7pm, unosunove.com

Galleria Valentina Bonomo, Via del Portico D'Ottavia 13, 00186 Roma, Tues to Sat, 3-7pm, galleriabonomo.com

Galleria Varsi, Via di S. Salvatore in Campo 51, 00186 Roma, Tue to Sat 12-8pm, Sun 3-8pm, galleriavarsi.it

Giacomo Guidi Arte Contemporanea, Largo Cristina di Svezia 17, 00165 Roma, Mon to Fri 11am-1.30pm, 3-7.30pm, giacomoguidi.it

Monitor, Via Sforza Cesarini 43, 00186 Roma, Tue to Sat 1-7pm, monitoronline.org

Museo dell'Ara Pacis, Lungotevere in Augusta, 00186 Roma, Tues to Sat 9am-7pm, arapacis.it

Operativa Arte Contemporanea, Via del Consolato 10, 00186 Roma, Wed to Sat 4.30-7.30pm, operativa-arte.com

Takeawaygallery, Via Della Reginella 11, 00186 Roma, Thu to Mon 10am-1pm, 3-6pm, takeawaygalleryroma.altervista.org

Tricromia, Via della Barchetta 13, 00186 Roma, tricromia.com

White Noise Gallery, Via dei Marsi 20/22, 00185 Roma, Tue to Fri 12-8pm, Sat 4-8pm, whitenoisegallery.it

<https://www.ravencontemporary.com.au/roman-holiday-ravens-guide-contemporary-art-rome/>