



THE WORLD OF WOM:EN FOUNDATION ROME ETS

PALAZZO  
NARDINI

GOVERNO VECCHIO 39



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## ABOUT US

The World of Wom:en Foundation Rome ETS is founded on the belief that culture shapes reality. Based in Palazzo Nardini, in the heart of Rome, we operate across multiple dimensions of human experience, focusing on the visual arts, culture and pedagogy as tools for social transformation.

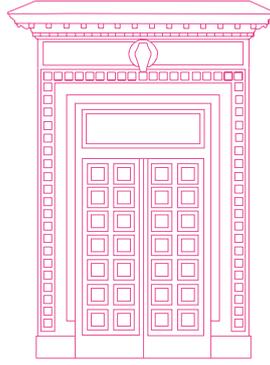
Our work starts from a fundamental premise: every work of art, every cultural narrative, every educational act contributes to shaping the way we see ourselves and the world around us. When these narratives systematically exclude entire perspectives, we live in a distorted understanding of human experience.

The Palazzo itself, with its layers of history from the 15th century to the present day, reminds us that every place is also a living archive of those who have passed through it. Yet the traces left by wom:en in cultural spaces have often remained invisible or undervalued.

Our mission is to bring them to light, with an openness to all forms of knowledge and creation in which wom:en's contributions have been decisive: from the arts to the sciences, from literature to philosophy, from technology to social activism.

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## PALAZZO NARDINI

A space of wonder and a prism of narratives

Palazzo Nardini's walls enclose a layering of stories that perfectly embody our mission: to demonstrate how spaces can be transformed, how power structures can be reinvented, how places can become catalysts for wonder and change.

Built in 1472 by Cardinal Stefano Nardini, governor of Rome under Pope Sixtus IV, the palace was the epicentre of the Church's temporal power for centuries. In 1960, it was abandoned, becoming an evocative setting for the film sets of the Roman *Dolce Vita*. In 1976, the most significant transformation took place: a group of feminists, disguised as a film crew, occupied Palazzo Nardini and founded the International Women's House, the most significant feminist political experiment in Italy.

What had been a temple of institutional male power thus became a unique laboratory for women's liberation. This was not only a symbolic occupation, but a generative action: from these very rooms, campaigns were launched that led to the legalisation of abortion in 1978, radically changing

Italian society. When the experiment ended in 1984, the building fell silent for forty years.

WoW represents the natural evolution of this story. The feminist energy that once pulsed through these rooms has not disappeared, but has waited for the right moment to re-emerge, revive and ready to face contemporary challenges.

Palazzo Nardini is a place of wonder for us because it concretely demonstrates that transformation is possible. It is a prism of multiple narratives because each room reflects different stories that intertwine without cancelling each other out.

This building teaches us that cultural institutions can be living organisms, where the past is activated, and history becomes a tool for imagining alternative futures. Its walls remind us that culture is never neutral and that every space tells a version of the world.

**WoW exists driven by the mission of multiplying these versions to make them more complete, more just, more humane.**



## DIMENSIONS OF OUR PRACTICE

### VISUAL ARTS as primary language

Why start from visual arts? Because in the contemporary world, through screens and technology, the visual universe is predominant, and its richness as a space for understanding and interpreting reality in its conscious and unconscious dimensions is immense. Art and feminism have adopted eccentric positions in relation to the dominant culture, illuminating its blind spots, contradictions, and the normalization of violence and domination.

This is why, at WoW, we unite art and feminisms as inseparable practices of liberation.

For us, wom:en's art is not an artistic genre, but a perspective that has enriched and continues to enrich contemporary visual culture. The visual arts are at the heart of WoW as the most immediate language for expressing the complexity of hum:an experiences. As vital as freedom of speech, the arts offer a space where complexity and contradictions can exist without resolution. Through painting, sculpture, photography, video, sound, installations and performance, artists have always found ways to say the unsayable, to make the invisible visible, to transform pain into beauty and anger into creative energies. Our approach rejects the illusion of aesthetic neutrality. What we exhibit is never outside of history – every work dialogues with the present, questions the past and imagines the future.

### CULTURE as a living ecosystem

Culture is the terrain where individual and collective identities are constructed. It is through stories, symbols, rituals and traditions that we learn who we are and who we can become. WoW is not limited to art, but embraces all cultural expressions in which wom:en have played a leading role: from literature

to cinema, from music to design, from activism to research. Our cultural programme builds bridges between generations, disciplines and geographies, where writers dialogue with visual artists, where activists of yesterday meet those of today, where academic research is contaminated by social practices, challenging the hierarchies of expressive forms and hybridising them, from performance to verbal expression, from poetry to visual arts.

### PEDAGOGY as shared transformation

Pedagogy is much more than education for us: it is a practice of collective liberation that recognises each person as a bearer of valuable knowledge.

Our initiatives start from the principle that learning is always a reciprocal process, and our pedagogical practice is inspired by feminist methodologies that privilege lived experience, value informal knowledge, and recognise the importance of emotions in learning processes. Every person has the right not only to access culture, but also to produce, interpret and transmit it. In this process are found the seeds for the culture of peace that our civilization urgently needs.

### OPENNESS towards new territories

Our vision is that of an institution that evolves and enriches itself over time, opening spaces for all forms of knowledge and creativity that have seen wom:en as protagonists.

Palazzo Nardini is designed to welcome science, technology, social innovation, philosophy, literature, music, design, architecture and all those fields in which wom:en's contributions have been underestimated or made invisible.

Our structure is modular and adaptable, transgenerational, capable of accommodating new forms of knowledge and new ways of sharing it.



## OPERATING MISSION

WoW operates as a generative institution that actively creates the conditions for the emergence of new cultural forms. Through visionary exhibitions, critical workshops, collaborative events and celebratory gatherings, we promote dynamic experiences that transform both participants and the wider cultural landscape. Our practice is based on four fundamental principles:

**Care over exploitation:** We replace extractive cultural models with regenerative approaches. We allocate 5% of each exhibition's budget to directly support vulnerable women, ensure that each project gives back to the community more than it takes, and design sustainable practices that can last over time.

**Collaboration beyond domination:** We work with artists, curators, researchers, and activists as equal partners. Each project is born out of authentic dialogue in a spirit of cooperation.

**Visibility beyond erasure:** We do not simply exhibit wom:en artists, but work to structurally transform the mechanisms of cultural production, distribution and recognition. We want to change not only what is seen, but also the way it is seen.

**Complexity beyond simplification:** We embrace contradictions, ambiguities, and layered narratives. We reject simplifications that reduce the richness of human experience to pre-packaged formulas. We protect complexity and surprising discoveries.

### The meaning of “Wom:en” – WoW’s Perspective on Feminisms

The colon in “wom:en” is a linguistic choice that expresses the idea that gender identities exist along a spectrum rather than within fixed categories. While recognising the biological reality of sex, we embrace the view that gender is also a social and cultural construct, historically used to create and maintain hierarchies of power.

By opening up the meaning of the word “woman”, we create space for the complexity of lived experiences. Our use of “wom:en” includes all members of the LGBTQIA+ communities, recognising that the experiences we seek to represent are as diverse as the individuals who embody them. This linguistic choice reflects our philosophy: categories should expand rather than limit, include rather than exclude.

We do not intend to create a separate category for women’s art nor to exclude men’s art, but to reveal the completeness of an artistic and cultural heritage that has been systematically hidden.





## CURATORIAL VISION

Our exhibition programme functions as an active cultural intervention. Each exhibition operates as research, each installation as a topic, each encounter as a possibility for transformation. We do not curate exhibitions to preserve existing narratives, but to generate new ones, amplifying and exploring voices that are often untold. We accompany each exhibition by public programmes and intergenerational workshops, ensuring that our audience can engage with these ideas in hands-on ways. Five thematic columns represent the heart of our curatorial vision:

### ROOTS - Feminist Foremothers

We pay tribute to the early feminist figures and movements of the 1960s and -70s that have shaped contemporary art. Through research-based exhibitions, we celebrate the legacy of these visionary women, recontextualising their contributions and making visible those who have been silenced by time. These exhibitions offer a deeper understanding of history and reflect on how the struggles of the past continue to be present.

### HOT SPOTS - Iconic voices

We celebrate the influential *grandes dames* of contemporary art, whose works and ideas have redefined the cultural landscape. Their innovative ideas and practices draw widespread attention to pressing feminist issues while inspiring new generations. These exhibitions are both a tribute and a beacon: they honour lasting contributions and represent an important driving force for cultural change that resonates far beyond the art world.



### **ART OF TODAY - Critical Perspectives**

We present artists whose research combines formal depth with clear political and social urgency. Their works challenge dominant narratives and address urgent issues related to power, community, identity and resistance. These exhibitions foreground feminist strategies of critique and imagination, offering audiences a lens on the present – and proposals for the future.

### **GROUP EXHIBITIONS - Social Fabrics**

Thematic in nature, these exhibitions examine how individual experiences and collective histories continually shape and reshape each other. Through feminist theory and practice, these exhibitions explore themes such as the body, identities, memory, care, trauma, and ritual. They invite reflection, challenge established norms and open up a space to transform realities into new cultural imaginaries.

### **ART AND ACTIVISM - Movements for Justice**

We create space and allow visibility for activism, movements, collectives, and individuals working toward social justice. This section invites activist voices to inhabit Palazzo Nardini, share their struggles, strategies, and visions, and engage directly with the public. Through presentations across media, we host their work, exposing injustice around gender, race, ecology, and systemic inequality.

## THE GENDER GAP IN NUMBERS

Public cultural narrative, by default, has always been that of men.

The time has come for a space for Wom:en, not as a polemical counterpoint, but as a necessary correction. In Rome, a city of history and symbols, we have the opportunity to build a cultural institution that finally reflects the fullness of human creativity, a welcoming platform for everyone.

These are not random numbers, but the result of systematic exclusion. A culture that rules out half of humanity is by definition an impoverished culture, limited and incapable of understanding the complexity of the world we live in.

WoW was created to correct this historical distortion through structural cultural action that demonstrates the richness and necessity of fem:ale perspectives in contemporary art and culture.

### Museum collections are male-dominated

In major US museums, 87% of artists in permanent collections are men, and 85% are white. Emblematic examples of this systemic distortion: the National Gallery of Art in Washington did not host a single solo exhibition by a female artist in its first fifty years; at the Louvre, less than 5% of the works on display are by women, and many of these are anonymous or misattributed; in the Gallerie degli Uffizi less than 7% of the works are by female artists, excluding contemporary works.

### Exhibition spaces and biennials reflect the same bias

The Venice Biennale, the world's most prestigious art event, presents unequivocal data: from 1895 to 1985, only 10% of the artists exhibited were wom:en. Gender balance only began to change in the 2000s, with Cecilia Alemani's 59th Biennale representing the most significant example of this shift.

### The art market mirrors the problem

From 2008 to 2019, works by female artists accounted for only 2% of the global art market value. At auctions,

only 13 female artists have had works sold for more than \$1 million, compared to hundreds of male artists who have reached and exceeded this threshold.

### The gap between art education and professional opportunities for women

Italian data reveal a particularly striking paradox: 67% of students enrolled in Italian fine arts academies and other art institutions in the 2021/22 academic year were wom:en, as were 69% of graduates in these fields. However, only 19% of exhibitions in museums, foundations and private galleries are dedicated to female artists. Women dominate art education but disappear from professional recognition.

### Money talks: the pay gap for women

The gender pay gap in the art world is around 33%, with female artists earning around a third less than their male counterparts. Older female artists, over 60, are three times less likely to be exhibited than their male counterparts, revealing how exclusion intensifies with age and experience.





## NETWORKS AND ALLIANCES

The WoW Foundation is conceived as a node in a broader cultural ecosystem, and as such seeks to invite international dialogue on representation and systemic biases in heritage and culture.

We are committed to building long-term local and transnational collaborations and co-producing knowledge through artistic practice.

We actively seek partnerships with:

- museums, cultural institutions and off-space networks;
- universities and research centres;
- feminist archives and activist groups;
- EU-funded platforms promoting gender equality.

WoW aims to be a public engine for equality, expression, and reparation.

WoW is a political horizon committed to expanding and transforming itself.



MANIFESTO

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1

We believe that culture shapes reality and that every excluded narrative impoverishes the world.

2

We are at the service of humanity in its infinite diversity, promoting equity and mutual care.

3

We protect art as a language of free speech, transformation and social change.

4

We promote the visibility of wom:en and artists who are systematically underrepresented.

5

We are rooted in our territory, building bridges between historical memory and a possible future.

6

We guarantee wide range accessibility: free culture for all and spaces sensitive to different needs.

7

We practise social redistribution through cultural production and shared knowledge

8

We operate with transparency, sustainability and responsibility towards future generations.

9

We develop cultural innovation at the service of European gender equality policies.

10

We demonstrate that cultural institutions can be catalysts for justice and repair.





WoW is an exercise of freedom  
and political imagination manifested through art.  
Palazzo Nardini continues its history  
as a laboratory for progress and action.

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