

## WOMEN LIKE US: 100 STORIES OF ITALIANS WHO HAVE DONE SOMETHING EXCEPTIONAL

### 1. Women who fight

#### Jane, love and Venice

*“Too often we expect others to commit themselves to what is close to our hearts. But I have chosen to dedicate myself to Venice, and those who live there, having to deal with a thousand difficulties.”*

“Venice” is a word of wonder. The intricate palaces, the reflection of their facades on the water, the sound of footsteps in silent streets...

Everyday reality in the lagoon, however, is very different, above all for those who live there. Approximately 30 million tourists a year descend upon the city whose inhabitants are constantly diminishing: today there are little more than fifty thousand. Those who stay resist with difficulty. But there is also someone who works hard to defend this fragile corner of the world.

Environmental scientist: Jane da Mosto.

Born in South Africa, raised in London, she has lived in Venice for twenty years for love and by choice: she has a very Venetian husband and four children. “I dedicate the time and energy that I have to the city”, she says. “Too often we expect others to commit themselves to what is close to our hearts. So I am here to do what I can for Venice. Which, crowded as it is, seems alive, but instead it is only consumed.

The objective of Jane and of We are here Venice, the association of which she is the spirit, is to make the world understand how delicate the city’s situation is. With a style that is not Italian at all: no scaremongering, no emotionalism, lots of scientific rigour. An example? We talk about the cruise ships that pass in front of St Mark’s Square and other sensitive settings. “I do not object to them because they are ugly and spoil the view, but because their impact on air quality is very serious. And this is not what I say, but what the scientific data says.”

Jane and We are here Venice aim to restore dignity and vitality to Venice, at a time when reflections of this kind are taking hold all over the world. “All the large cities invaded by mass tourism run the risk of losing their soul and becoming a sort of theme park, spectacular but without spirit: at this point, it would be better to go straight to see the replica in Las Vegas. But Venice is different: it is depopulated. The first goal is therefore to succeed in defending the habitat of the Venetians.” This relates directly to those who live here and those who come to visit. “It is important to protect the historical memory of the city and its competencies. Repairing a crack in a Venetian wall or palazzo is different to other cities: only an artisan from here knows how to do it in the right way. But again, the inhabitants are needed to do that: only those that live in a place notice if there is a plant to water, a corner to clean, damage to repair...”

As for damage, in fact, Venice has no equal: every day, every second, the bricks of its buildings are eroded by salt deposits and by salts from the water that cause the walls to crumble when they crystallise. Every day it is besieged by cruise ships. Every day it is swamped by an incalculable number of tourists that consume, demanding products and services out of scale compared to the physical capacity of the city. And, still, Venice must defend itself from increasingly violent “acqua alta” that puts the delicate lagoon ecosystem at risk.

What can be done? “Resources are needed for restoration and maintenance and I believe that a better balance between the benefits and costs of tourism must be reached. Visitors come and go, tourist market speculators live elsewhere, whilst us residents pay for the rubbish, the sewers, the maintenance of our houses, which are already few with respect to the apartments and properties converted to tourist accommodation. ‘Quick getaway’ visitors now surpass cultural visitor numbers and their daily spend is minimal. So, this money must stay in the city to help repair the abuses it supports. There’s something wrong with a system that benefits few and damages much, including the tourists that see the most beautiful city in the world crowded and shoved, without minimum services, without a bench to stop and rest upon, without the shelter of a public bathroom. And here, obviously, it is central to make the administration, politics, informed and responsible.”

Jane looks away, hoping that Venice can become a positive global example. “It is the right city to become the place of sustainable tourism and development. Not antiquated but turned towards the future.” Difficult, however, to launch ahead in a depopulated city whose young people leave. Jane has four children: what will they do? “My children are very attached to Venice, each one in a different way. Of the three eldest, Delia, who has left the city to study Medicine, would like to return to intern in a Venetian hospital. Vittorio is a citizen of the world, but comes home every time he can, with a few friends to whom he un.masks Venice with pride. Instead, Pierangelo breathes only here, and it is not by chance that he studies at the Nautical Institute.”

Jane da Mosto, with girlish eyes, a voice that trembles with passion and unyielding determination, received the Osella d’Oro della Senza in May 2017, an award bestowed on those who do something important for the city. In its long and often underestimated history, la Serenissima has always resisted. But what made her unique was her ability to do. Jane da Mosto and We are here Venice do not resist, they do.