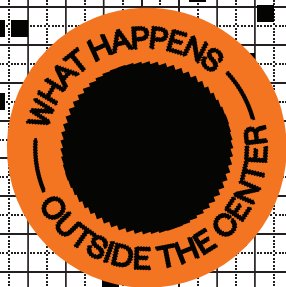
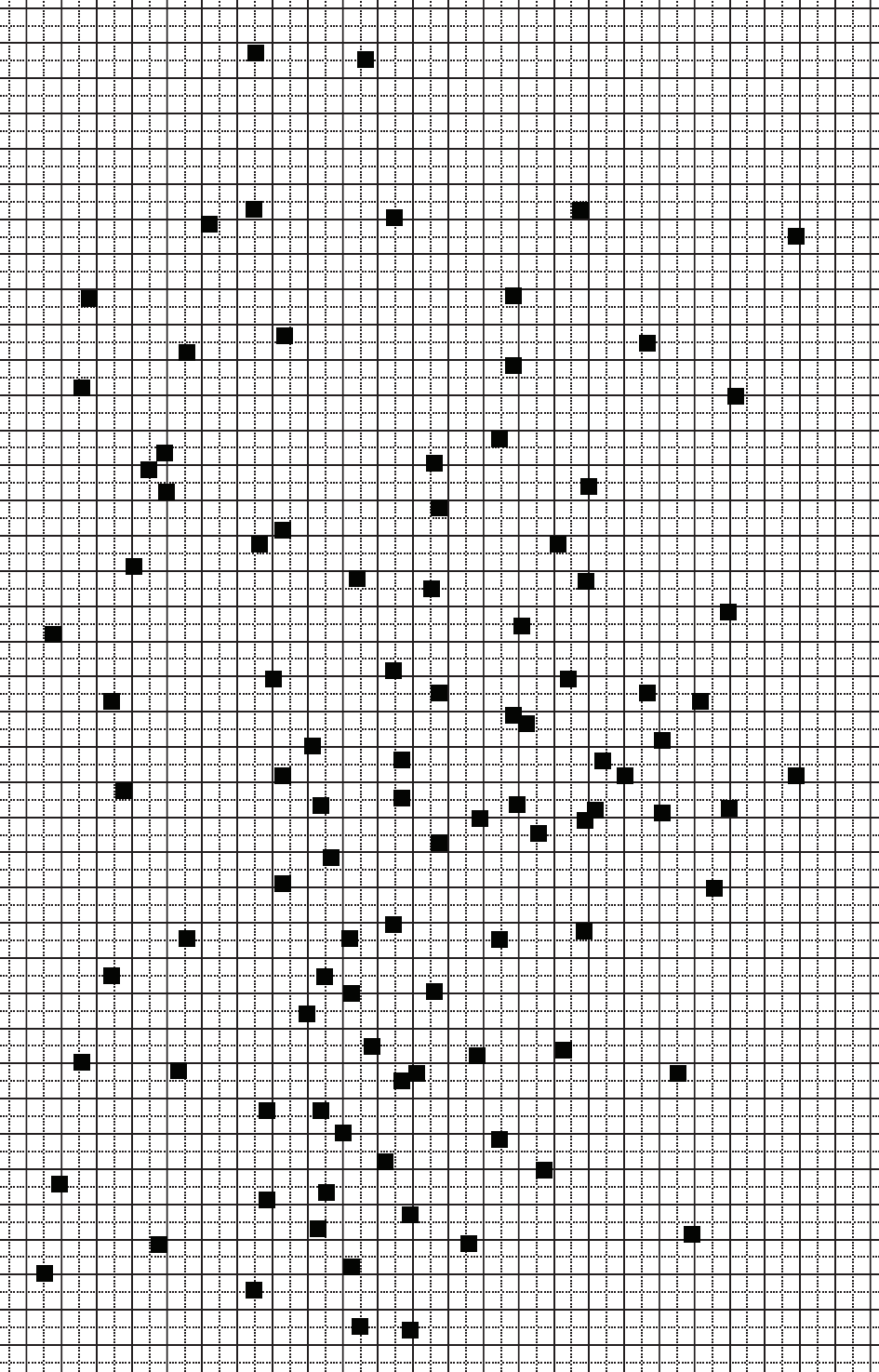


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TERMS WE USE ■

REDESIGNING DESIGN WEEKS (RDW)

■ is an umbrella programme. Initiated by the Nieuwe Instituut (Rotterdam), CIVICITY has been developed in collaboration with the Embassy and Consulate-General of the Netherlands in Italy and Milan-based cultural transformation agency cheFare. It is a multi-year residency programme that invites resident designers to rethink the current format of design weeks.

CIVICITY

■ is the first project within RDW, focusing on the relationships between people, place and participants. Derived from the Latin *civis* (citizen), CIVICITY explores how design can engage more meaningfully with urban communities. Curated by Collective Works (The Hague), it highlights the connections that arise when citizens actively shape their environments, recognising that cities thrive through collective engagement. Within this framework, the residency locations, the Critical Friends network and the participating designers together form an ecosystem that supports research, experimentation and reflection. Using Milan Design Week as a case study, the programme does not seek to criticise design weeks, but to reframe them by positioning design as a public practice that is measured not only by economic return, but also by social value.

TERMS WE USE ■

RESIDENT DESIGNERS

■ are those selected for the CIVICITY residency programme. The first residents (2025) were invited through a direct call curated by Collective Works and subsequently selected by a jury. For the second year (2026), an open call was initiated.

RESIDENT LOCATIONS

■ are organisations based in Milan that host the resident designers, offering their expertise, fieldwork experience, and ongoing engagement with local communities. They are not design institutions, nor are they located within Milan's established design districts. Rather, they are organisations deeply involved in socio-cultural work and community-based projects. They are therefore not merely locations that host designers, but places that actively collaborate with them, supporting the development of meaningful responses to specific questions and needs emerging from the local context.

THE CRITICAL FRIENDS NETWORK

■ is an informal group of activists, researchers, university professors, designers and representatives of Milan-based spaces who act as local mentors for the resident designers to varying degrees. Through formal and informal sessions organised by cheFare, the network helps to create a local context of exchanges, contacts and reflections for the designers that is deeply rooted in Milan's systems and dynamics.

We launched the CIVICITY project in Milan in 2025.

Although design residencies are nothing new, our approach was slightly different.

CIVICITY emerged from a shared curiosity: how might we, as institutions and designers, contribute to design weeks in a more meaningful, sustainable and engaged way?

For many of us, this meant adopting a new role.

We became not only participants in the design scene, but also hosts, collaborators and facilitators of exchange.

The first year brought valuable insights and new partnerships. It enabled us to test ideas, build connections and start shaping the framework of what CIVICITY could become.

In 2026, we are continuing this process, building upon the knowledge gained during the first edition in 2025.

At the same time, we are strengthening existing relationships and welcoming new resident designers to the project.

This booklet offers an insight into how CIVICITY operates as an evolving, layered initiative.

We use design, the lens through which we view the world, to offer alternatives to the status quo.

Through articles, introductions, reflections and questions from across the team, we aim to provide a more in-depth view of our motivations, the people involved and the lessons learned.



TEAM CIVICITY

**COLLECTIVE WORKS
PETER ZUIDERWIJK & KARIN MIENTJES
CIVICITY CURATORS**

**CIVICITY:
A DIFFERENT
RHYTHM
FOR
MILAN DESIGN
WEEK**



During Milan Design Week the city shifts into overdrive. Brands launch, districts compete and exhibitions spill into every available space. The centre expands outward, absorbing former industrial zones and turning outskirts into destinations overnight.

The energy is real. The visibility is global. The machinery works. CIVICITY is not separate from this, but operates from within it.

In 2025, the first edition of CIVICITY, organised by the Nieuwe Instituut in collaboration with cheFare, Collective Works, and the resident designers, explored possible alternatives to this model. It examined the urban impact of the event, its infrastructures, flows and blind spots. It also questioned how a temporary exhibition economy reshapes a city. In 2026, the focus shifts: from the city as a stage to design itself.

With the start of CIVICITY 2026, CIVICITY2025 comes to a close. The residencies of Pete Fung and Studio Method conclude, marking the completion of the 2025 edition. What began as a set of hypotheses has now been put to the test.

We are no longer discussing what CIVICITY could mean; we are talking about what it has made possible, challenged and revealed. Building on this experience, the shift towards design itself is necessary.

What is the role of design in this context? Who decides what counts as design? When does making become recognised as design, and when does it remain invisible? Who is granted the title of designer, and who is not? How do we distinguish between the city centre, the official event, and the community work at the city's edges?

These questions are not just theoretical exercises. They are tested in practice. CIVICITY centres on residencies and making. It focuses on designers who choose to work with what is already there, on reuse

and circular strategies, on socially engaged practices and on experimental or critical approaches. It focuses on smaller budgets and smaller production scales, and on cultivating sustainable relationships instead of temporary exposure.

Milan Design Week currently lacks space for a different approach to become visible. All too often, the discussion appears polarised. Commercial versus critical; market versus ethics; centre versus margin. The reality is more complex, yet the nuance rarely finds a platform.

CIVICITY aims to be that space within Milan Design Week where a different perspective can be developed. Not as an opposition, but as an addition. Not as a moral statement, but as a working method.

The project will unfold over time. It connects institutions and local stakeholders. It supports designers who are willing to question their own position. It considers what it means to design within the context of a global event economy. The week is treated not only as a showcase, but also as a site of research.

The collective work produced through CIVICITY is an evolving story. It reflects the shifting and expanding sensibilities of Milan Design Week. It traces how peripheral practices enter the conversation. It demonstrates how slowing down and situating the process of making can offer an alternative view of what design is allowed to be.

**There is conviction behind CIVICITY.
Not because everything must change at
once, but because something must begin.
Milan Design Week is a powerful engine,
and it can also accommodate a different
rhythm. CIVICITY proposes that rhythm.**



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THE APPROACH: A CIVIC ECOLOGY OR HOW WE BUILT THE CIVICITY RESIDENCY ■ PROGRAMME

01

BACKGROUND:

MILAN & MILAN DESIGN WEEK



The Salone del Mobile began in 1961 and went international in 1967. The Fuorisalone emerged spontaneously in the 1980s. Together, they evolved into what is now known as Milan Design Week.



Due to its economic and cultural significance, Design Week has become a key indicator of Milan's urban health, especially since the city gained global prominence following Expo 2015 and ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympics. However, this growth has also intensified urban pressures, including rising living costs, housing displacement, and increasing inequality.



Recent editions, such as the 2024 Salone which attracted 361,000 visitors to a city of 1.4 million, have raised concerns about the event's sustainability. Key issues include housing affordability, the environmental impact of installations, transport and logistics pressures, pollution and the social imbalance of an event that primarily serves temporary city users rather than residents.

02 INITIATING THE PROJECT



The project emerged in response to growing concerns in Milan that the current Design Week model is unsustainable. These raised the question of how designers and institutions could engage with design weeks differently, by investing in the city, its communities and its citizens in the long term, rather than just for 10 days. In response, the Dutch Embassy explored the possibility of offering Dutch designers an alternative platform and inviting others to participate in this initiative. Rather than adding another short-term presentation to the Design Week landscape, the intention was to explore whether a slower, research-based format could offer different ways of engaging with the city and its inhabitants.

03 INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

■ Nieuwe Instituut joined this initiative. Rethinking design manifestations aligns with its broader programmes, such as New Store and Redesigning the Designer, which experiment with alternative relationships between design and society. cheFare co-designed the programme and joined the project as the local partner, continuing its 10-year journey of working closely with local communities and undertaking place-based residencies in Milan and throughout Italy (Civic Media Art, Bagliore, Archivio Meraviglioso, etc.).

04 CREATION OF REDESIGNING DESIGN WEEKS

■ This collaboration led to the Redesigning Design Weeks (RDW) format: a multi-year residency programme aimed at building long-term relationships and developing design based on local needs. The programme treats the design week as just one moment within a longer process of research, making and reflection, rather than as a starting point and end point. Each edition builds on the experiences, questions and relationships developed in the previous year.

05 CURATORIAL GUIDANCE

■ Collective Works was invited to act as curator, bringing experience in socially engaged projects, hands-on design practices and a critical perspective on design week formats. In the collaboration between institutions, partners, and designers, the curators act as mediators, connecting the various elements of the programme: the institutional framework, the residency process, and the local contexts in which the designers work.

06 ON CIVICITY

■ CIVICITY is the response to the question of how design weeks can become more sustainable in Milan. It is the first project within Redesigning Design Weeks. CIVICITY focuses on the relationships between people, places and participants. The project aims to uncover and focus on the connections that emerge when citizens engage with their surroundings, recognising that cities thrive when people actively shape their environments. Rather than treating the city as a backdrop for temporary installations, CIVICITY approaches Milan as an active context in which designers engage with existing relationships, conversations and tensions.



Principles for a CIVIC design week.

The following principles serve as basic tenets for the residency programme, influencing how designers approach research, collaboration and presentation within the project.

- **Embedded, not extracted: resident designers work with local partners.**
- **Participation as the core, not an add-on: the process is shaped together.**
- **From temporary to transformative: projects consider life after Milan Design Week.**
- **Mediating urban tensions: design opens spaces for dialogue.**
- **Inclusion as a guiding principle: attention to who is included.**
- **Local knowledge as the blueprint: design starts with community wisdom.**

07

LOCAL RESEARCH CONTEXTS RESIDENCY LOCATIONS



Many residents in Milan's outlying neighbourhoods experience Milan Design Week with indifference or see it as a disruption. Attempts to bridge this gap, such as expanding Design Week into new design districts, risk increasing unsustainability, including rising costs and housing pressure. Therefore, the key question for CIVICITY and subsequent such projects is how design can create real value for local inhabitants, rather than reinforcing the extractive dynamics of large-scale events.

The question of which design skills are most relevant for residents is also important, as well as how marginalised or less visible groups might use design to strengthen their capabilities and claim their right to the city.

■ **Residency locations therefore function as research contexts in which designers can engage with specific local realities, organisations and communities over a longer period of time.**

08 PROJECT AIMS

■ **The central question is how design can generate real value for local residents, especially in outlying neighbourhoods, rather than reinforcing the extractive dynamics of large-scale events such as Milan Design Week.**

■ **The residency programme is not intended to solve large design-related questions. It is intended to offer alternative ideas for participating in design weeks.**

■ **The project therefore focuses less on definitive solutions and more on testing different ways of working, collaborating and presenting design within the context of a design week.**

09 DESIGN RESIDENCY



The focus of RDW – CIVICITY lies in social design, which addresses and questions complex human and societal issues while exploring alternative design approaches. Each resident designer is connected to one local neighbourhood/community and organises their research around this.

Elements of the CIVICITY design residency are:

- Design research: focuses on defining needs from the community.
- Design outcomes: focus on scalability and replicability, with consideration of the outcome's role and impact beyond presentation.
- Meetings with Critical Friends: for mentoring and feedback.
- Intermediate design presentations: as status reports and reflection opportunities prior to further exploration.
- Regular meeting with the curators, cheFare and the Nieuwe Instituut.



The residency is an ongoing process that moves between research, making and reflection. Designers engage with the context through conversations and local collaborations, gradually shaping proposals that respond to the specific situation.



Material outcomes are not only understood as final products, but also as a means of testing ideas and positions about what design can do in this context.

10

SELECTING

RESIDENT DESIGNERS



An open call is a more accessible format that broadens the pool of applicants. In the case of CIVICITY, resident designers are selected by a jury consisting of cheFare, the Nieuwe Instituut, the curators and a critical friend.



Selection criteria Resident designers for CIVICITY are selected based on:

- Activist approaches that challenge norms and systemic inequalities.
- Collaborative mindsets: working with diverse communities and partners.
- Narrative skills: the ability to connect stories to real-world contexts.
- Process-oriented thinking: prioritising relationships and methods over outcomes.
- Playful experimentation: combining investigation with intuition.
- Urban awareness: an interest in urban development, material flows and the social and ecological role of design.
- Resident designers are expected to navigate Milan's complexities, engage with local ecosystems, and reflect on global design practices.

- They are also expected to collaborate with local partners and participants within a shared process of authorship.

11 INTERDISCIPLINARY REFLECTION

- A journalist is invited to join the resident designers. Rather than being tied to a single location, the journalist uses Milan as a broader research environment, providing critical insights and narrative framing. Through writing and documentation, this role helps to translate the residency process into a wider conversation about design weeks in general and their potential future.

12 CRITICAL FRIENDS NETWORK

- A network of city stakeholders, known as Critical Friends, was assembled to mentor the group and provide the resident designers with local experience and knowledge. The network brings together academics, community activists, intellectuals, and representatives of local organisations.
- The group aims to give the resident designers a nuanced understanding of Milan and its dynamics. The objective is to enable the designers to position their work within an ecosystem that is deeply rooted in the city, and to respond meaningfully to the needs of its neighbourhoods.



One of the network's primary objectives is to prevent forms of involuntary cultural colonialism across multiple dimensions, including from wealthier countries with significantly higher cultural investment towards poorer ones, from large international institutions towards small, local socio-cultural centres, from urban centres towards the city's outskirts, and from privileged classes towards the underprivileged.



Beyond mentorship, the Critical Friends also act as sounding boards, helping to challenge assumptions and situate the projects within the broader urban context.

13

PRESENTATION AT MILAN DESIGN WEEK & ASSOCIATED EVENTS



The outcomes of the residency are presented during the following Milan Design Week. The presentation brings together local networks and an international audience to showcase and explore the added value of a residency programme and design solutions developed from local needs. The presentation includes a public event for a broader audience, mainly international, addressing themes related to the project and Design Week.



Rather than merely serving as a final showcase, the Design Week event provides an opportunity to share ongoing processes and initiate discussions about alternative ways of participating in Design Weeks.



Midway through the year, a smaller, more intimate local gathering is organised to reflect on and discuss the project's development.



**BERTRAM NIESSEN
CHEFARE**

133 QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DESIGN WEEK



**“A year ago, we gathered
133 questions about
the Milan Design Week.**

**They could have been
1,330, or even 13,330.**

**But in the end,
the question remains the same:
what can we do to move beyond
a major event that consumes
the city, in order to build meaning
together with the people who
actually live there?**

Meanwhile,

**the 133 questions
remain the same”**

■ 1/133

Where do the cleaners of the Design Week live?

■ 2/133

And where do the security guards live?

■ 3/133

And where do logistics workers of the Design Week live?

■ 4/133

Those who move boxes and set up stands, the ones that move chairs, tables, bottle holders, corkscrews, sofas, carpets, lamps, umbrella stands?

■ 5/133

And where do those who take care of catering, appetizers, finger food, focaccia, small pizzas, and couscous tiny portions live?

■ 6/133

Do they live within the municipality of Milan, or in the hinterland?

■ 7/133

Do they live in the nearest municipalities like Assago, Corsico, Cinisello Balsamo, Cusano Milanino, Opera, Pioltello, Peschiera Borromeo, San Giorgio su Legnano, and Segrate?

■ 8/133

Or do they live in more distant municipalities like Bellinzago Lombardo, Cassinetta di Lugagnano, Trezzo sull'Adda, Inveruno, Marcallo con Casone, Robecchetto con Induno, or Zibido San Giacomo?

■ 9/133

How many kilometers will they travel during the Design Week to go from home to work and back?

■ 10/133

Will they travel by Ferrovie Nord trains or Trenitalia trains?

■ 11/133

By private car or by company car?

■ 12/133

By traditional bicycle or by electric bicycle?

■ 13/133

By scooter or by unicycle?

■ 14/133

How many hours will they spend?

■ 15/133

What contracts do they have?

■ 16/133

What kind of life do they live?

■ 17/133

Also; what kind of life do all those who come here from the rest of the world lead?

■ 18/133

Why do people really come to the Design Week?

■ 19/133

And how do they get here?

■ 20/133

If we close our eyes and try to see them with the eyes of the mind, what shape do they take?

■ 21/133

Are they swarms, as if they were insects?

■ 22/133

Are they clouds made of people, with colored eyeglass frames and open laptops in front of them?

■ 23/133

Are they processions of trains?

■ 24/133

Of cars?

■ 25/133

Are they queues of airplanes?

■ 26/133

Also; thinking back for a moment about those appetizers, finger

food, focaccia, small pizzas, and couscous tiny portions: how many will be eaten and how many will be thrown away?

■ 27/133

How many will become improvised ashtrays?

■ 28/133

And how many Spritz Campari, Spritz Aperol, Ugo, Negroni, Negroni Sbagliati, industrial beers, craft beers, vodka shots, and glasses of whiskey will be drunk?

■ 29/133

And how many will fall to the ground?

■ 30/133

How many will fall on other people?

■ 31/133

On t-shirts, sweat-shirts, coats, pants, skirts?

■ 32/133

How many on shoes?

■ 33/133

And what kind of shoes will they be?

■ 34/133

Sneakers, boots, stiletto heels or comfortable heels?

■ 35/133

Sandals, flip-flops?

■ 36/133

How many will fall on computers, cell phones, smartwatches?

■ 37/133

And how many on posters, flyers, magazines?

■ 38/133

Also; how many people will leave Milan during the Design Week?

■ 39/133

Will they go to their second home by the sea or in the mountains?

■ 40/133

Will they return to their childhood bedroom at their parents' house in Bagnara Calabra, Cividale Camuno, Montemassi?

■ 41/133

Or will they depart for the Azores, Bali, or the Camargue?

■ 42/133

How many of them will rent their houses to the city users?

■ 43/133

And how will they be paid?

■ 44/133

In cash?

■ 45/133

By bank transfer?

■ 46/133

Through a platform?

■ 47/133

Will these be regular payments or undeclared ones?

■ 48/133

Who will pay taxes on them, and who won't?

■ 49/133

How much does the Design Week affect rental costs throughout the year?

■ 50/133

And the price of houses for sale?

■ 51/133

What would a real estate agent say?

■ 52/133

And a sociologist, an urban planner, a jurist, an economist?

■ 53/133

What is the grey economy of the Design Week?

■ 54/133

And what about the black one?

■ 55/133

How many opaque or unmentionable exchanges take place during that week?

■ 56/133

Will more cocaine, more ketamine, more heroin, more ecstasy circulate?

■ 57/133

And how much?

■ 58/133

Is there anyone who comes to Design Week to take magic mushrooms?

■ 59/133

Or benzodiazepines, beta-blockers, serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, tricyclic antidepressants, antipsychotic medications, antihistamines, monoamine oxidase inhibitors?

■ 60/133

Also; what happens during the Design Week in the neighborhoods that don't have their own 'week'?

■ 61/133

What happens in Baggio, Adriano, Chiaravalle, Quarto Oggiaro, Barona, Bovisasca?

■ 62/133

Are the residents happy or unhappy?

■ 63/133

Do they care at all?

■ 64/133

Is there a 'normal' Milan, while the one during the Design Week is 'exceptional'?

■ 65/133

Does this question even make sense?

■ 66/133

If on the Design Week map almost everything happens within the Circonvallazione, what happens outside?

■ 67/133

Do those who come for the Design Week and need accommodation spread out along the metro lines?

■ 68/133

Is the Design Week different for the peripheral neighborhoods served by the metro?

■ 69/133

Is it different for Crescenzago, Cimiano, Corvetto, Porto di Mare, Lorenteggio, Giambellino?

■ 70/133

Is it different for those who live there, for those who use the neighborhoods just for a week, for those who work there?

■ 71/133

Also; what would Milan be like if the Design Week didn't exist?

■ 72/133

Would it be a better or worse place?

■ 73/133

Would it just be a different place?

■ 74/133

Would the housing crisis still exist?

■ 75/133

Would people still leave Milan because it's too expensive?

■ 76/133

Would the city still feel so international?

■ 77/133

What would change for the art world?

■ 78/133

And for the fashion world?

■ 79/133

And for universities?

■ 80/133

And for art academies?

■ 81/133

Also; how many cheek kisses are exchanged during the Design Week?

- 82/133
And how many hand kisses?
- 83/133
How many acts of love are consummated by those in the city for the Design Week?
- 84/133
How many condoms are discarded?
- 85/133
How many couples are formed?
- 86/133
How many couples break up?
- 87/133
And what about polyamory groups?
- 88/133
And how long do they last, then, over time?
- 89/133
How many are, and who are, the children conceived during the Design Week?
- 90/133
And the grandchildren?
- 91/133
Also; does the Design Week gentrify neighborhoods?
- 92/133
And what does "gentrify" even mean?
- 93/133
Who profits and who loses when the old residents of a neighborhood leave?
- 94/133
Is there a need to politicize the Design Week?
- 95/133
Is it a matter of unionization for those who work in cleaning, logistics, security, and catering?
- 96/133
Is it something that mainly concerns designers?
- 97/133
And if so, does it concern them because they should unionize or because they should consider more political themes in their work?
- 98/133
Who really profits from the Design Week?
- 99/133
The exhibitors?
- 100/133
The buyers?
- 101/133
The students?
- 102/133
Those who have a house or a room to rent?
- 103/133
Also; what is the biome that lives on the skin of those who come to the Design Week?
- 104/133
How many bacteria, viruses, fungi, and algae move with people?
- 105/133
Do new seeds, new species arrive?
- 106/133
What changes during the Design Week for the pigeons of Milan?
- 107/133
And for the parrots?
- 108/133
For the crows, rooks, blackbirds?
- 109/133
For the herons and peregrine falcons?
- 110/133
For the rats, coypu, squirrels?
- 111/133
And for the cockroaches, ants, bees, blowflies, mosquitoes?

■ 112/133

And what about the cats living in feral colonies?

■ 113/133

What about apartment dogs?

■ 114/133

What about goldfish?

■ 115/133

What about the pigs, chickens, and cows in intensive farms around the city?

■ 116/133

And what about the hackberry trees, the oleanders, and the acacias?

■ 117/133

Also; how much does toilet usage increase during the Design Week?

■ 118/133

How many more times is the toilet flushed?

■ 119/133

How many rolls of toilet paper are used?

■ 120/133

And how many wipes?

■ 121/133

And how many sanitary napkins?

■ 122/133

How much does the sewer load increase during the Design Week?

■ 123/133

What changes for the city's waterways, those hidden under the asphalt and those still in plain sight?

■ 124/133

For the Lambro, the Olona, the Seveso, the Cavo Redefossi, the Acqualunga, the Pudiga and the Merlata, the Vettabbia, the Naviglio Martesana, the Naviglio Grande, the Naviglio Pavese?

■ 125/133

Also; what's the point of asking questions about the Design Week?

■ 126/133

Is the Design Week just something that exists, and that's it?

■ 127/133

Is the Design Week a spontaneous event, unregulated and unregulatable?

■ 128/133

Do we have to accept it as it is, otherwise it would not be the Design Week anymore?

■ 129/133

Is it something that needs to be changed?

■ 130/133

And, if so, who should change it?

■ 131/133

The exhibitors, the city council, the universities, those who come from other parts of the world, the residents of Milan?

■ 132/133

Is there anything more idle than asking questions about the Design Week?

■ 133/133

Or will someone have to ask how to redesign it?

THE VOICES OF CIVICITY



PETE FUNG

is a researcher, teacher and social designer who works with local communities, focusing on social contexts that help citizens realise how impactful small, everyday actions can be. Experimenting with different outputs, Pete Fung layers these experiences into a critical and reflective design.



2025

Resident Designer
@petefung

STUDIO METHOD

is a research-based architecture and design practice, founded by Riel Bessai and Pedro Daniel Pantaleone, that aims to create sustainable environments in response to urgent environmental crises. With a working methodology of 'contingent design' (that challenges existing systems of power) and a hands-on mentality.



2025

Resident Designer
@studio__method

COLLECTIVE WORKS

is a collaborative design studio based in The Hague, NL, founded by designers Karin Mientjes and Peter Zuiderwijk. The studio's practice focuses on engaging with communities and environments to address socio-spatial questions through collaborative projects. Its work takes various forms, including activist campaigns, spatial support structures, participatory design and institutional programming. It is also part of the transdisciplinary design-build network Constructlab, which focuses on innovative and socially engaged projects across Europe.

■
2025 & 2026
Curators
@collectiveworks_nl

NIEUWE INSTITUUT

is the national museum and institute for architecture, design and digital culture, located in Rotterdam's Museum-park. Through exhibitions, events, research and other national and international initiatives, we show how design ideas contribute positively to urgent societal and ecological challenges. Nieuwe Instituut is a place where designers, thinkers and the public meet. We manage the National Collection for Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning and the Sonneveld House Museum, an icon of Dutch functionalist Warchitecture dating from 1933.

■
Commissioner,
project lead,
programme
development, NL
@nieuweinstituut

CHEFARE

is a cultural transformation agency founded in 2012. Currently, cheFare works to map, connect and support cultural innovative experiences in Italy and abroad. cheFare works nationally and internationally with public and private actors, policy-makers, researchers, cultural institutions and grassroot organisations. It makes collaborative processes possible, producing live gatherings of practitioners in the social and cultural fields and editorially curating the national debate on culture, innovation and policies. The agency's ongoing activity bridges different audiences on complex issues, developing strategic tools for the public administration and cultural organisations.

■ project lead,
programme development Milan.
@quindi_chefare

NURIA RIBAS COSTA

is a journalist and jurist based between Rotterdam and Ibiza, where she is originally from. Formerly a member of the public relations team at OMA, she now works as an independent researcher and policy analyst in urbanism and culture. Nuria manages the communications of the urbanism agency Humankind and works closely with the applied research team Vigla and the Center for Music Ecosystems. She is also an editor at De Dépendance and writes for independent magazines. She is a member and co-programmer of the listening space KODA (Schiedam) and a broadcaster on Operator Radio.

■
2025
Journalist reflectant
@nrc.fm

DEMO- PRACTICE

is a social design collective based in the Netherlands, Demo-practice was founded by Alessandra Pandolfi and Phoebe Hotopf, who share an interest in civic life as a designed system. Through collaborative and participatory forms of community engagement, they investigate how behaviours, technologies and governance structures shape collective rights and access to public spaces. Acting as mediators and facilitators, they co-create tools and spaces that enable communities to articulate, negotiate and transform their social environments.

■
2026
Resident Designer
@demo__practice

NED KAAR

is an Irish designer based in the Netherlands, Ned Kaar has an interdisciplinary practice spanning objects, installations, exhibition-making and collective projects. His research focuses on questions of value in design, freelance labour conditions, and the role of craft and materials in global economic systems. He is particularly interested in gift economies as modes of reciprocity that challenge transactional models of design and cultural production.

■
2026
Resident Designer
@nedkaar

HANI SALIH

is a researcher, writer, and curator at the edge of a long list of disciplines and practices, connecting the dots between them. His interests are informed by a foundation in critical spatial thinking, through his background in architecture, and further refined by his postgraduate studies at the London School of Economics. Through a systems lens, Hani aims to bridge gaps between different contexts through his research, curation, and programming work to establish necessary connections and facilitate positive social change. Currently, Hani is a curator and moderator at De Dépendance in Rotterdam.



Journalist reflectant
2026
@haanisaalih

CIVICITY

CIVICITY

2025

& 2026

CIVICITY

CIVICITY

RESIDENT

DESIGNERS

CIVICITY

CIVICITY

REFLECTIONS

CIVICITY

CIVICITY

LOCATIONS

& COMMUNITIES

CIVICITY

CIVICITY



CIVICITY 2025 RESIDENT DESIGNERS PETE FUNG & STUDIO METHOD

- During their two-month residency in Milan, the resident designers work in close dialogue with a local community, developing design responses that emerge from its specific needs, contexts, and lived realities.



CIVICITY 2026 RESIDENT DESIGNERS DEMO-PRACTICE & NED KAAR

- Building on the research, relationships, and exchanges initiated in 2025, the resident designers for the 2026 edition will continue this evolving dialogue, further deepening community engagement and expanding the project's inquiry.

**CIVICITY 2025
JOURNALIST REFLECTANT
NURIA RIBAS COSTA
&
CIVICITY 2026
JOURNALIST REFLECTANT
HANI SALIH**

- Complementing the design residencies, an invited journalist follows and reflects on the development of CIVICITY each year.
- Rather than being tied to a single site, they are given the freedom to engage with Milan as a whole, tracing the city before, during, and after Design Week.
- Through this expanded perspective, they examine the narratives, frictions, and imaginaries that shape both Milan and its most internationally visible event, from local vibes to global spectacle.
- Their reflections will form part of the project's final output, alongside the contributions of Collective Works, cheFare, and the resident designers.



CIVICITY 2025 LOCATIONS: MAGNETE (ADRIANO) & TERZO PAESAGGIO (CHIARAVALLE)

■ In 2025, CIVICITY's designers undertook residencies in two contrasting areas on the outskirts of Milan: Studio Method was based at Magnete in Adriano in the north-east, while Pete Fung was based at Terzo Paesaggio in Chiaravalle in the south.



MAGNETE @ADRIANO

■ Magnete is a community hub in Quartiere Adriano, a district shaped by post-industrial transformation and residential expansion. Often considered peripheral, Adriano faces the challenges of limited public spaces and fragile social connections.

■ Untouched by gentrification, Adriano's parks and slower pace of life offer space and opportunities for experimentation. Magnete enthusiastically embraces this through a programme of cultural events, workshops, educational projects and every-day initiatives that encourage participation. These initiatives help to strengthen ties within the neighbourhood and reconnect it to the wider city.



TERZO PAESAGGIO @CHIARAVALLE

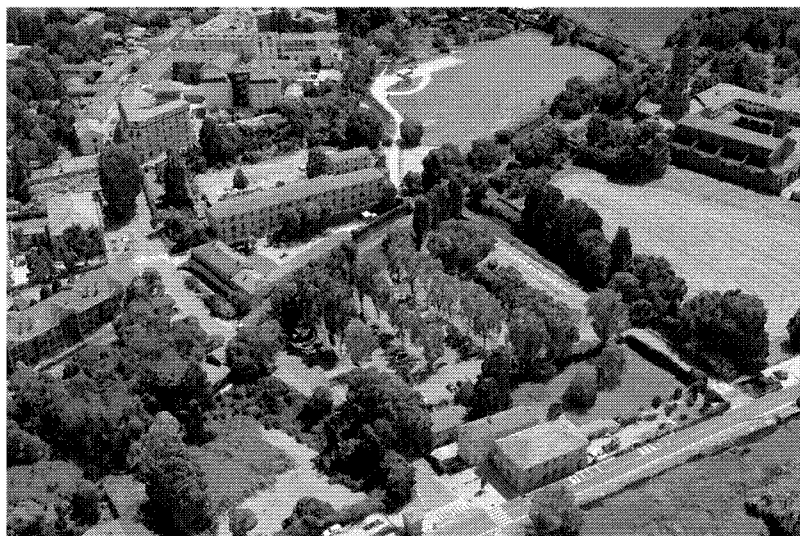
- Terzo Paesaggio is a cultural organisation in Chiaravalle, where rural landscapes, historic heritage and urban life converge. Historically shaped by its abbey and agricultural tradition, the neighbourhood is perceived as distant despite being part of Milan. Limited mobility and services reinforce this impression.
- Nevertheless, Chiaravalle's abundant nature, open spaces and strong sense of community are valuable resources in a major city. Terzo Paesaggio builds on this foundation by linking cultural programming with sustainability and helping to redefine Chiaravalle as a unique part of Milan, where social innovation grows from the landscape itself.



ADRIANO

2025

CHIARAVALLE





BARONA

2026

NIGUARDA





CIVICITY 2026 LOCATIONS: BARRIO'S (BARONA) & FONDAZIONE ABITIAMO (NIGUARDA)

- In 2026, CIVICITY is moving to two new locations: Ned Kaar will be based at Barrio's in Barona in the south-west, and Demo- practice will be based at Fondazione Abitiamo in Niguarda in the north.



BARRIO'S @BARONA

- Barrio's is a major social and cultural landmark in Barona, a district with a strong tradition of community life and a history rooted in working class culture.
- The neighbourhood has experienced cycles of regeneration alongside persistent inequality, particularly affecting its young people.
- Barrio's addresses this social reality directly. Through youth programmes, education and inclusive cultural initiatives, it creates targeted opportunities. More than just a venue, Barrio's is a place where relationships grow and where the neighbourhood can imagine its future – firmly anchored in the city, yet proudly defined by its own identity.



FONDAZIONE ABITIAMO @NIGUARDA

- **Fondazione Abitiamo plays an important social role in Niguarda, a historically independent district that was once a separate village. Although today the area is well-connected and equipped with major services, it faces vulnerabilities that are shared by many urban districts, including housing fragility, social isolation and hidden inequalities.**
- **Fondazione Abitiamo's projects focus on living, care and inclusion, supporting residents and reinforcing the social fabric. Its activities encourage participation and help forge connections between individuals, institutions and local communities, showing how 'inhabiting' a place can also entail building solidarity and a sense of belonging.**

**ALICE PREVITALI OF CHEFARE, REFLECTS
ON THE FLOURISHING RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN RESIDENT DESIGNERS AND CITY
RESIDENTS ESTABLISHED BY THE 2025
CIVICITY RESIDENCIES**

CIVICITY: A CITIZEN'S EYE VIEW OF DESIGN WEEKS



When we conceived CIVICITY, we were guided by a core question: can we view Design Weeks not merely as showcases, but as opportunities for reflection, dialogue and reimagining urban dynamics and social sustainability? In an era where cultural events and ‘weeks’ are becoming increasingly commonplace, exerting pressure on their locations while fuelling consumption and inequality, we felt an urgent need for a shift in perspective. In Milan, for example, there are now more ‘weeks’ than there are weeks in a year. The current Design Week model is proving increasingly unsustainable and contributing to local pollution, rising living costs, housing crises, social disparities and overcrowding.

BRIDGING MILAN'S DESIGN VOCATION

- **CIVICITY is not an isolated experiment, but a concrete attempt to bridge Milan's design vocation with places not typically associated with the discipline.**
- **In 2025, with the support of the Nieuwe Instituut and the Netherlands' Consulate General, we invited resident designers Pete Fung and Studio Method to immerse themselves in Milan's urban, social and environmental fabric. We selected community organisations in two distinct locations: Terzo Paesaggio in Chiaravalle and Magnete in the Adriano neighbourhood – both environments with strong identities and unique challenges.**
- **The journey has not been straightforward. We have navigated the inherent tension between the established, market-driven Design Week model and our desire to introduce practices that pay more attention to relationships, environmental impact and the communities that inhabit the city. The designers engaged in dialogue with residents, observed marginal spaces and experimented with micro-interventions rooted in daily life.**

STUDIO METHOD @ADRIANO

- **Designers Pedro Daniel Pantaleone and Riel Bessai (Studio Method) experienced life flowing differently in Adriano – a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city. Design originating from the periphery appears to start from different premises, prioritising functional dynamics over purely aesthetic ones. The focus here is not on creating**

something beautiful for a storefront, but on making – or remaking – something useful.

■ Studio Method's approach focuses on seemingly small solutions that can have a profound impact on the daily lives of local residents. Through their portable kiosk, the Arrotino del Design inspired by traditional neighborhood repairers they fixed glasses and scooters and taught local young people how to build stools from scrap materials. They used design to respond to local needs rather than chasing fleeting trends. For Pedro and Riel, "a design based on care, reuse and repair can be just as creative as if not more so than the invention of something new. When rooted in the community, design moves away from commodification and towards regeneration."

PETE FUNG
@CHIARAVALLE

■ Designer Pete Fung worked in Chiaravalle, on the opposite side of Milan. This area feels like both the city's fringe and an idyllic green oasis, far from the rush of urban life. There, he collaborated with two centres for unaccompanied foreign minors that are "hidden in plain sight." Pete reflects: "At first glance, the question of rethinking Design Week seems worlds away from the daily lives and concerns of those in Chiaravalle. Yet parallel promises of a better future create a link: on the one hand, a group seeking more dignified living conditions and economic opportunities; on the other, design as a discipline that often promises something – anything – better." We are thus forced to confront these promises, uncertain if they will ever truly be fulfilled.

■ Adopting a design-as-research approach, Pete developed and led a series of design workshops exploring these minors' relationship with mobility, belonging, desires, and dreams. These workshops challenged the binary social labelling of these young people as either victims or potential trouble-makers. Another outcome was the development of the Pizzeria of Promises or Pizzeria delle Promesse, a project that challenges one of the most powerful clichés of Italian culture, which is largely kept alive today by migrant communities. Run directly by the young residents, this mobile wood-fired pizzeria empowers them and provides a space to collectively address themes of hope, hardship and the ability to shape one's own future.

FROM RESIDENCY TO APPROACH

■ Through CIVICITY, we have seen relationships flourish between designers and citizens, and between institutional actors and local communities. We have witnessed the emergence of collective investigations into the impact of Design Weeks, and we have observed how a cultural project can become firmly embedded in the city over the long term. Having reached this point, we must ask: how can we make these emerging practices systemic?

■ How can we multiply the workshops, collaborations and experiments blending aesthetics, community and urban care? CIVICITY aims to be more than just a residency; it strives to be an approach, a prototype and a catalyst, a starting point for new editions and neighbourhoods.



**NURIA RIBAS COSTA:
JOURNALIST REFLECTANT 2025**

THERE'S HOPE IN THE PERIPHERIES



Milan went from post-industrial neglect to hip must-see design destination in a few decades. What has its furious, investment-oriented urban transformation meant for spaces for culture in the city? How did it affect the evolution of the Design Week, of one of Milan's most well-known cultural events? And if that model is obsolete – as many argue – does Milan have answers – for itself and beyond?

**"FOREIGN INVESTMENT HAS BEEN
THE ONLY OBJECTIVE OF MILAN'S
URBAN DEVELOPMENT FOR
DECADES."**

It's 7:45 am and Alessandro Coppola, Professor of Urban Planning and Technology at Politecnico di Milano and member of Abitare in Via Padova, a collective of residents, and activists working on housing rights in Milan, is rushing to work. We're talking on the phone while he walks, endless sounds of construction blurring his voice.

“It’s the Milan model,” he continues. I picture him among a whirlwind of workers, scaffolding everywhere, skyscrapers sprouting like mushrooms. “After the 2015 Expo, the city chose a clear path, prioritising financial and real estate capital. Nothing was really controlled: price, social composition, functions and structure of neighbourhoods... Letting the market govern every aspect of urban development meant little control over the final outcomes, and now we’re dealing with the consequences of that.”

A lethal laissez-faire approach, where every square metre is now ruthlessly exploited. Space has become Milan’s biggest asset, and its financialisation worsened the challenges: peripheries disregarded; infrastructure selectively developed; harder, harder, and harder access to housing, and a steady loss of its social fabric. A generic glossing over the city’s most intrinsic urban complexities reminiscent of the issues many other European cities are also grappling with.

In Milan, this brutal neoliberal approach is asphyxiating the everyday lives of the working class that keeps the city running, and the creative one that keeps it sparkling. Yet, the city resists giving up on lipstick and highlighter. Are cosmetics and show-off everything there is about Milan’s urban development?

THE MILAN MODEL AND CULTURAL VENUES: HIGHER PRICES, LESS INDEPENDENCE

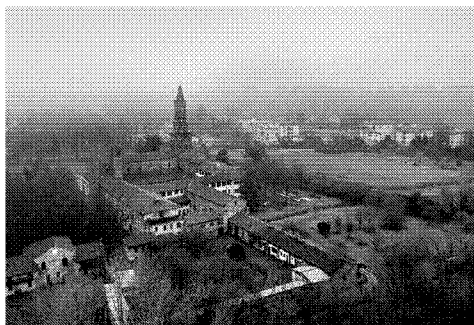
“The Milan model created a strong contradiction: the city becomes richer, yet less affordable. When it comes to space for culture, three key indicators tell of the tipping point we’re at: higher costs of food and drinks in venues, higher ticket prices, and higher rents.” Bertram Niessen, President and Scientific Director of cultural agency cheFare, is critical. “There is a clear difference between Milan and other Italian cities, where the focus on social and cultural capital is much bigger – here, it’s about fast and furious consumption, about the hyper-marketisation of space”.

Spaces for culture in Milan – that is, venues dedicated to any cultural field, from theatre to contemporary art, from music to design – are, in most cases, privately-owned, predominantly focused on distribution rather than production (at any level – from the most mainstream to the most underground of art forms), geographically scattered, and either completely grassroots, or completely institutional. It’s a landscape of extremes, Niessen explains, topped with the ever-present challenge of the increasingly high financial costs of maintenance.

One would think this hostile context could have meant a teaming up of different venues and organisations, especially those



■ LEONCAVALLO IS ONE OF MILAN'S MOST EMBLEMATIC SOCIAL CENTRES, WHICH HAD EXISTED SINCE A FORMER FACTORY ON VIA LEONCAVALLO WAS SQUATTED IN 1976 AND UNTIL ITS EVICTION IN 2025.



■ AERIAL VIEW OF THE PERIPHERAL NEIGHBOURHOOD OF CHIARAVALLE, IN THE SOUTH OF MILAN.



■ "THE MILAN MODEL" HAS MEANT A RUTHLESS REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY. AERIAL VIEW OF THE PERIPHERAL NEIGHBOURHOOD OF QUARTIERE ADRIANO, IN THE NORTH OF MILAN.

independent, but Niessen argues it has not. “It’s very hard to stay afloat, and in Milan, exchange seems to be strictly connected to ‘closing a new deal’ – the networking element always seems marketing-oriented.”

As he tells me this, I’m nodding, but also fidgeting. Roughly three months ago, when the eviction of Leoncavallo – one of Milan’s most emblematic social centres – sent thousands of protesters to the streets, Niessen himself described it in *Il Post* as an emotional event that reunited the most traditionally and openly antagonistic people, and those who had rarely or never been to Leoncavallo or similar spaces; who all seemed to agree, Niessen writes, on the fact that “today, more than ever, there’s a need for what social centres can offer cities”. That is – spaces for independent, collective, innovative, locally-rooted and, most importantly, radically democratic culture.

Yet both Niessen and Coppola make a clear distinction between Leoncavallo, other social centres like Cantiere, and the rest of the city’s cultural venues.

GRASSROOTS VS GLOBAL: AN IRRECONCILABLE MATCH?

“The main point is this: cultural spaces in Milan are not always but quite often about smart entrepreneurship on a managerial level; and their audiences are mainly wealthy international students and early graduates from art and design academies –

basically temporary city-users. Their cultural capital is very high, they are extremely 'cool', and so is their taste, but they don't usually exchange with the city", Niessen explains. "Places for social movements and activism in Milan are quite different: their focus are alternative forms of life and political action and their organisers and audiences' taste is often older and generally not as innovative (though with some exceptions, like Macao). Yet, unlike many 'high-end' cultural venues, they are very locally-rooted".

This disconnect feels strange. It reminds me of the awkward dullness in Vincenzo Latronico's *Perfection*, a novel telling the story of Anna and Tom, two southern European graphic designers living in a Pinterest-looking Berlin apartment in the trendy Neukölln. Over time, we come to feel an uncomfortable disgust for Anna and Tom's privileged local disconnect – and so do they.

I'm not saying every cool-looking person in Milan is a version of Anna and Tom, but many are; and there is something wicked about this naïve fiction that globalised 'cool crowds' inhabiting spaces of design and hip culture in the city are not connected to local struggles – because they are.

While this ecosystemic nature of Milan's cultural landscape is perhaps not evident at first sight, there are many signs of it – especially in the design scene.

One, the fact that "designers often don't see themselves as the poor of the future",

in the blunt words of digital strategist and social innovation expert Zoe Romano. “We have the established ones, and the ones that still need to find their place – and they won’t recognise their precarity, even if they are precarious. If they don’t ‘make it’ in five years, they will leave the city.”

Luca Marullo, of design and research studio Parasite 2.0 and art space and collective DOPO? in Corvetto, adds more context: “Milan brands itself as a vibrant place, full of young creatives; but keeps the focus on attracting foreign investment – which meant an invasion of the hyper-wealthy in the city. These people are not interested in going to a squatted building – they want a city that works. And so, the urban fabric transforms according to their needs, displacing the grassroots and independents to the peripheries. Ten years ago, Milan was full of artist-run spaces. Parasite was born because there was space and opportunity, but this is slowly disappearing.”

A comprehensive mapping of the different spaces for culture and their ownership and governance models does not (yet) exist in Milan – and neither do the mechanisms to properly map the impact of those places on the city’s social fabric. Yet, it’s pretty evident to the cultural scene that “the city needs the industry, and the industry needs the subcultures,” in the words of Emanuele Bonetti, co-founder of FRAKAS.

There is a second part to that quote though: “the industry eats the subcultures”.

A harsh statement that leaves me thinking, once again, about the eviction of Leoncavallo last August, the one lurking around the corners of Cantiere, and the fierce defending of these spaces on street level.

These episodes of the social fabric raising against evictions of legendary social centres – thus highlighting questions of access to and governance of spaces for culture – feel like an exciting barometer of a potential moment of implosion, where there seems to be increasing opposition to the unregulated approach to urban development that Milan has become a symbol of. Linda DiPietro, Chief Cultural Officer at the Tortona-based cultural centre BASE, is very clear: “People taking to the streets against the eviction of Leoncavallo are also a form of Milan’s antibodies against the ultimate gentrification of the city.”

I quite agree with DiPietro, even if I’m just an outsider observing. I do feel that if this is an un-smoothing of Milan (a sort of reverse of René Boer’s definition of *smooth city*), Milan emerges as a rough gem whose social fabric is as powerful as ever – and there’s something very interesting about the way space, here, remains both ravaged and reclaimed.

MILAN DESIGN WEEK: A MESSY TURNING POINT

The interdependency of the spatial cultural ecosystem of Milan becomes even more present during the Design Week, one of the

city's most large-scale events and a crucial meeting point for the industry globally.

In the 1990s, when Fuorisalone started – a collateral event to the furniture fair Salone del Mobile, initiated in 1961 – it was originally thought of as a way to co-create, open up, and use the pull of Salone to showcase and involve “everyone” in the creation of a cultural programme that filled every corner of the city. From using public space in completely new ways – as places to be in rather than go through, as Coppola argues – to involving whole neighbourhoods in cultural programmes, Fuorisalone slowly but steadily became one of the most important design events worldwide.

Yet, the very same laissez-faire approach that led Milan's urban development also dominated the evolution of Fuorisalone – now generally referred to, collectively with Salone, as the “Milan Design Week”. If in its genesis, it was about effervescence, now it seems to be about suffocation.

“It grew too much”, Niessen argues. “At the time, Milan was moving from a post-industrial city in crisis towards a new identity, defined by a new wave of urban regeneration of which skyscrapers became the best example.” In such a context, the practices of the former Fuorisalone changed: instead of explosions of public access to innovative and experimental culture, they morphed into vehicles for the exacerbation of the market economy. In this extreme profit-driven economy, “the market ate Fuorisa-

lone, and spat something completely different out”, explains Giulia Cantaluppi, member of the Board of Directors of Stecca3, a cultural space in the heart of Milan’s Isola neighbourhood.

When it comes to the way the city’s built environment has been utilised during the Design Week over the years, things have also changed.

We now see a further distancing between the centre and the peripheries, from the point of view of investment, attention and care. This is also highlighted by another contradiction: while there is a tendency towards “spatial extractivism”, in the words of Giulia Cantaluppi, – the process through which, during the Design Week, cultural activities and events take place in suburban or contested neighbourhoods without acknowledging their stories and complexities; basically arriving, extracting value, and leaving – there is, at the same time, disregard and unawareness within institutionalised cultural circles about the artistic and design happenings in the periphery.

Access – or should I say, the war to access – also deserves a special mention. It’s not only the suffocating feeling of endless queues and untouchable guestlists – if at the start of it all public space felt like a place of possibility, now it seems quite the contrary – but also the question thereunder: who is the Design Week for, and what is its spatial legacy in the city that hosts it?

The predominance of commercial uses (even if disguised as cultural ones) is overwhelming, and it is becoming increasingly impossible for upcoming or independent designers to access space to exhibit – as brands take over, autonomous places diminish. “In my view, in the long run, many creatives will leave – and many already did. The city will become culturally poorer, ripped off its creative force”, argues Mariana D’Ovidio, Associate Professor of Sociology of Environment and Territory at University of Milano-Bicocca, and author of *The Creative City Does Not Exist*.

The city’s cultural venues that do participate in the Design Week cope as they can – according to their values. Stecca3, for instance, argue that “with one week’s rent, during the Design Week, we make sure the programming for the rest of the year is free and affordable and public. While this is one dangerous vicious cycle – the more expensive the rents, the more expensive the city in the long run – it is also a form of critical participation. “We accept that we’re part of a system, even if we don’t want to, and actively look for ways of doing things differently, while also boycotting the system itself from the inside for instance by engaging local artisans and supporting site-specific public art projects like last year’s Kiosk of Reciprocity”, explains Cantaluppi.

BASE has that ‘change it from the inside’ attitude too. “We receive so many requests from brands and commercial entities to use our space”, explains DiPietro. “Our geo-



■ MILAN WENT FROM POST-INDUSTRIAL NEGLECT TO HIP MUST-SEE DESIGN DESTINATION IN THE SPAN OF A FEW DECADES.



■ ENTRANCE OF LOUIS VUITTON'S EXHIBITION DURING MILAN DESIGN WEEK 2026 AT PALAZZO SERBELLONI. PACKED EXHIBITIONS AND ENDLESS QUEUES HAVE BECOME ONE OF MILAN'S MOST WELL-KNOWN IMAGES DURING FUORISALONE.

graphical position forces us to be part of the Design Week [Tortona is a post-post-post-gentrified neighbourhood and a Design Week hotspot], and we know that is one of our major sources of financing, so we still work with brands and partners – but not on what they want to do, but on what we want to do, maintaining our own power and legitimacy. We find brands before they find us, and filter them.” This way BASE keeps an interesting programming, combining commercial uses to sustain themselves financially, and non-commercial ones to contribute to the independence of the industry.

While Leoncavallo, Cantiere and other representatives of the grassroots scene might feel very far from a place like BASE or even Stecca3 – and rightfully so, despite the latter’s activist origins – I still see a hopeful link: there is an underlying common will for creating spaces for open, public and democratic culture, of which both the more activist, grassroots venues and the more established spaces are symptomatic.

FUTURES AND HOPES: CULTURE AGAINST GENTRIFICATION

I asked Luca Marullo, from Parasite 2.0, about the role of the Design Week vis-à-vis the challenges cultural venues in Milan are facing, in particular, and the question of space for culture, more broadly. “Is the Design Week really the place to raise awareness about spatial issues in Milan?”, he replied. And then added, provocatively: “Maybe not.”

I was reminded of Joshua Segun-Lean's argument on Frieze that "today's biennials aestheticize risk and vulnerability while seeking to appeal to a so-called general spectator" – one that can quickly become numb to the biennial's own hypocrisy, I would add. Sure, maybe a similar kind of dullness from reading about Anna and Tom's life in Neukölln can be felt when witnessing (yet another...?) exhibition about how we need to change the way we do things in the design and art worlds (and then we don't).

But in Milan, and for all these cultural spaces, perhaps it's not only about the Design Week itself discussing what it does to the city, but also about all the actors in the ecosystem doing something different with the built environment so as to remodel the Design Week – and its future iterations – into something that does not dispossess and extract.

"We need to think about common uses of space," argues D'Ovidio. "When one says this, people often get defensive, because space is one of the most accessible financial assets, and nobody wants that to be regulated – but it is very important to do so."

Redistributing resources among the industry, strengthening collaborations across cultural fields and neighbourhoods and proposing a different temporality, based on long-term uses of space that can create attachment – and thus challenging the very core of the 'week system', where

everything happens in five days, and the rest seems dust and nothingness, are some of the solutions several venues in Milan are testing during the Design Week, and trying to implement them outside of it (take BASE's *Performing Architecture* project, for instance).

Many of these experiments are taking place in the city's fringes, from Corvetto to Chiaravalle, from Adriano to Niguarda. "There's hope in the peripheries", a spokesperson at Fondazione Abitiamo, the foundation attached to one of Milan's largest housing cooperatives, told me. I've heard about this excitement before.

"It's not the presence of culture what drives gentrification, it's ownership over space," explains Bertram Niessen. "At cheFare, we want to investigate what happens when culture develops within, for example, cooperative housing – our hint is that it will not cause gentrification, but help stopping it." This will be one of the objectives of the new iteration of the multi-year project Redesigning Design Weeks, an initiative of the Embassy and Consulate-General of the Netherlands in Italy, Nieuwe Instituut and cheFare that aims to explore alternatives to the current design week model, in Milan and beyond.

As the Winter Olympics are just around the corner [at the time of writing – ed.], the capital of Lombardy is busy with yet another one of the large-scale events that catapulted the city to global fame. Some argue, how-

ever, that we're at the end of two decades of this vicious urban development model. If so, what turn will the city take after Cortina 2026?

"We could regain the centrality of culture, and reinstate the role of cultural centres in the face of urbanisation and gentrification," BASE's Linda DiPietro tells me, firmly.

Sounds about right to me.



**NURIA RIBAS COSTA
READ HER
ARTICLES HERE**



**HANI SALIH:
JOURNALIST REFLECTANT 2026**

REDIRECTING SYSTEMIC INERTIA



Every year, in any number of cities across Europe, a machine whirs into life. Overnight, posters, banners and colourful pamphlets begin to appear. They are plastered onto the sides of buildings and stuck to the clear, glossy, fronts of design studios and offices. Crisp white gazebos and lanyards sit quietly rustling in the wind, awaiting the start of panel discussions, product demonstrations and exhibitions that spin out of the city centre and into peripheral locations, filling nooks and crannies in search of influence and sales. Design weeks have become a staple of the annual design calendar. During their cycles of encroachment and retreat, a network of local and often international actors descend on the host city and project a carefully choreographed performance.

The infrastructure of design weeks is a microcosm of everyday life. This is evident in the constant negotiation of international borders, the movement of goods and people, and the negotiation of the city's sites. It encapsulates the relationships that are made and unmade daily, at speed and scale. The metabolism of the design week requires a complex interplay between permanent and temporary systems to meet this annual rush.

However, as design weeks continue to prioritise branding and marketing exercises, it begs the question of whether they are still fit for purpose – namely, the celebration of design and craft. With the growth and proliferation of these events across the world, we must question whether they are truly the best use of our resources. Developing systems is an energy-intensive process that requires huge amounts of inertial motion to work effectively. Given this structure and its ceaseless momentum, can designers redirect the system to meaningfully and sustainably transform a city?



PETE FUNG
RESIDENT DESIGNER 2025 REFLECTS ON
HIS PROCESS, WORK, COLLABORATIONS
AND OUTCOMES

SMALL
PIZZA,



BIG
PROMISES

THE INFLATIONARY LOGIC
OF INFINITE BETTER FUTURES



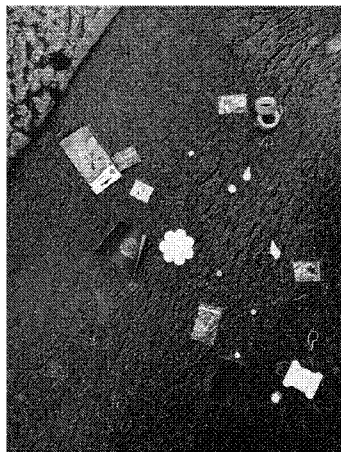
PETE FUNG WORKED WITH
TERZO PAESAGGIO IN CHIARAVALLE,
PRODUCING WHAT HE DESCRIBES
AS NOT SO MUCH AN OUTCOME,
BUT A NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS.

"THAT'S SO FAR AWAY!"

■ Walking the streets on a grey drizzly day during the first few days of my residency, I couldn't help but reminisce about my first time in the city (and Europe for that matter) some 9 years ago. I was captivated by the sophistication of design, the laid-back approach to life, and I promised myself I would return. A miscellaneous collection of objects presented themselves to me on this walk after being washed up onto the curb. Lying amongst the debris was a rain-soaked passport cover that reads "Unione Europe Republic Italian" ^[1]. A political instrument in its own right, it represents EU citizenship, and a "better life" to those who are not born with one. I picked it up without thinking too much about it - little did I know at the time, it became a foreshadowing of this residency.

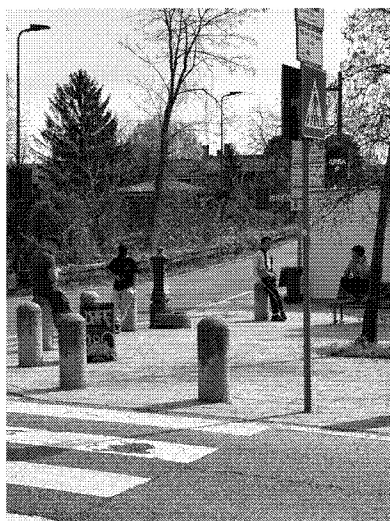
■ I was positioned to work with Terzo Paesaggio, a cultural centre and art space in Chiaravalle. "That's so far away" is often the first response when I mention the neighbourhood, even though it is technically part of Milan. Chiaravalle has long had an ambivalent relationship with the city: once central to the region's agricultural development, it was incorporated into Milan in 1923 and now faces new transformations, from the promises of a new football stadium ^[2] to discussions of UNESCO recognition.

■ This tension shapes local perceptions. Eleonora, who was born there, described Chiaravalle as the "Sherwood forest" of



1

3



2



Milan, an idyllic escape from the city's noise, yet she also wishes for stronger connections to it. Terzo Paesaggio similarly benefits from the area's distance, experimenting with alternative economic and artistic models while remaining tied to Milan's cultural network. In this sense, it exists intellectually in the city centre but physically in Chiaravalle. Despite its intentions, however, its connection with local residents remains limited. In a way this is a microcosm of broader debates around access, mobility, and audience that the CIVICITY residency seeks to address.

A RESIDENCY IN TWO PARTS

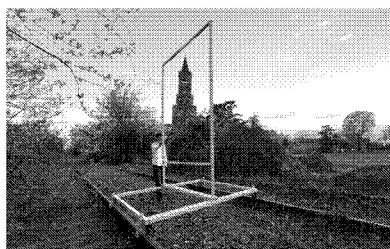
■ It is April, and after a couple of weeks of daily bus rides from the city centre to the suburb to conduct my designerly research of Chiaravalle, I cannot help but notice the large yellow house that stands next to the bus stop, with a couple of benches in front, often occupied by teenagers on their phones. As a non-european, and someone who visually does not 'belong' to Chiaravalle, I am able to strike up conversation with one of the local boys, who goes by the pseudonym Sadman. I learned that he is from Bangladesh, and the house is run by Fratelli San Francesco. It represents one of the two transitional houses in Chiaravalle that are home to unaccompanied immigrant minors until they turn 18, and gain permanent residency status. It is not a coincidence these houses are located here, on the margins of the city, out of sight and out of trouble, as reported by Hidden in Plain Sight ^[3].

■ Sadman tells me, “I just want my papers and I want to work so I can contribute to society. I am not here to cause no trouble”. After multiple exchanges, learning about his lifeboat experiences, why he left and his girlfriend, no less, it is clear that the hierarchy of needs is different, let alone their access and relation to design: our “problems” are still very much within the realm of his “solutions”. In fear of performing the ‘designerly saviour complex’ (especially knowing the residency was only two months long), of creating another bandaid solution or representational proposals and promises that will never be fulfilled, I developed a number of other prototypes and engagements to understand the neighbourhood: an visual-ethnographic research at either end of the historical train track, the margin of margins, greeted by an elderly artist who squatted the abandon track on one end^[4] and being thrown a stick at by drug users on the other^[5]. A movable empty billboard to be filled with paradoxical questions^[6], and speculation meetings with local residents on what a ‘Chiaravalle Design Week’ or with other local boys on what ‘Mariza Design Week’ might look like^[7]. And yet, I couldn’t seem to shake off this idea of ‘promises of better’. An uneasy link emerged between a visibly present demographic of young people searching for improved economic and living conditions in a big European city, and design itself - a hopeful discipline that so often situates itself at the betterment of our present moment.



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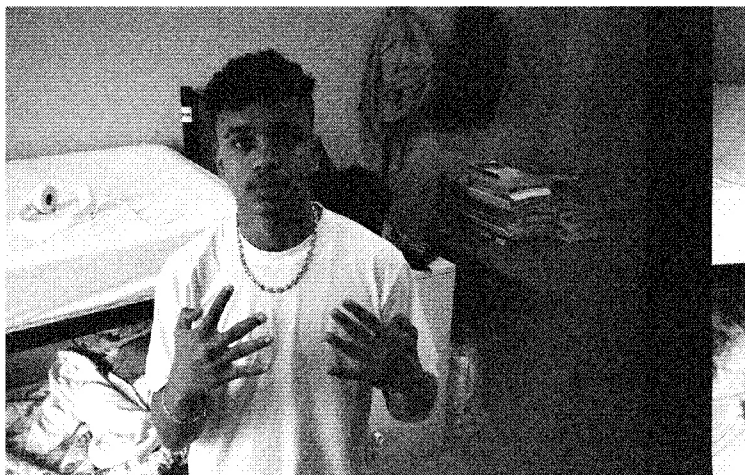


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■ To investigate sensitively, three disposable camera probes were given to Sadman to share with his peers to document their daily lives ^[8], and yes - instructions were provided - who knew film cameras are not common knowledge among those who were born after 2007! Simultaneously, a guided tour was designed and three other boys from the same house, Moussa, Babacarr and Moemen Adel Mohamed joined to visit Milan Design Week 2025 for the first time ^[9]. From more traditional showrooms filled with slick objects, hyped installations from fashion brands they know, to critical readings of the design of prison furniture, it was refreshing to see the design week through their eyes - how design is not the subject but a way to look at and engage with the world.

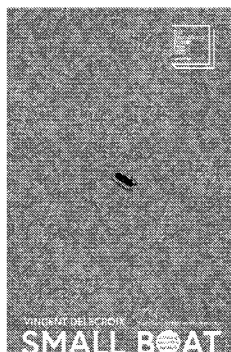
■ Fast-forward to September, and after our initial trust-building exercises in April, we were able to set up a strategic link with the head of Fratelli San Francesco, explaining our goals and intentions. Together with fellow designer and educator Matilde Patuelli, who I invited to help with Italian language and communication, we were able to extend the approach of 'seeing through design' through a series of design workshops developed and facilitated at Terzo Paesaggio, with 15 minors, around their relationships to mobility, locality, desires and dreams ^[10].

■ This marked a shift in the residency mode from speculation and observation to co-creation through situated, participatory action - as well as disrupting the power dynamic of the 'locals'. These workshops sought to

challenge the binary social positioning of these young minors as victims or potential problems - both within design and their local community^[11]. This perception resonates, as we journey on as part of the workshop into a guided tour at Triennale di Milano, visiting its exhibition at the time, titled “Inequalities”, where many of the “issues” from the minors’ home countries are put on display in the white cube^[12]. Zooming back locally, in the fact that the minors, who live literally 50 meters away from Terzo Paessagio had never engaged with or set foot inside the space until these workshops. It became instantly clear what the CIVICITY residency set out to question (and by extension the many, dare I say elitist, discourses within our cultural field) is so far removed from the everyday social reality of the context in which the residency is situated.

WEEKIFICATION FOR WHOM?

■ These experiences and the overarching question of ‘Redesigning Design Weeks’ led me to grapple with some equally large questions around ethical positioning, representational politics, internationalisation vs locality and designing within unequal power structures. Throughout the calendar year, there is always a “week” happening in the city, Milan Fashion Week, Milan Green Week, Milan Game Week, Milan Gelato Week; and in parallel, there is always a design week happening somewhere around the world: Bangkok, Auckland, Boston, Munich, Melbourne, Helsinki, Barcelona, Cairo, Detroit, Vienna, Lima, Seoul to name a few^[13]. This



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27JAN-02FEB	TORONTO	10JUN-12JUN	COPENHAGEN	20OCT-26OCT	EINDHOVEN
10FEB-16FEB	BANGKOK	23JUN-29JUN	KHON KAEN	03NOV-09NOV	TOKYO
17FEB-23FEB	ANCHORAGE		GDYNIA		LIMA
03MAR-09MAR	AUCKLAND		BUSAN		CHILE
10MAR-16MAR	SAO PAULO	01SEP-07SEP	DETROIT	10NOV-16NOV	CHENGDU
	NAIROBI	03SEP-12SEP	PARIS		LIMA
	LONDON	08SEP-14SEP	DETROIT		CHILE
07APR-13APR	MILAN		HELSINKI		SEOUL
21APR-27APR	BOSTON	15SEP-21SEP	DETROIT		IRELAND
	INDIANAPOLIS		RHODE ISLAND	17NOV-23NOV	CAIRO
	LONDON		HEBEI		LIMA
28APR-04MAY	BOSTON		SAN DIEGO		CHILE
	KYIV		SHENZHEN	24NOV-30NOV	CAIRO
	BERLIN	22SEP-28SEP	DETROIT		LIMA
05MAY-11MAY	BOGOTA		BEIJING		CHILE
	VANCOUVER		ZAGREB	08DEC-14DEC	CHIANG MAI
	TIJUANA	29SEP-05OCT	BEIJING		
12MAY-18MAY	MUNICH		ATLANTA		
19MAY-25MAY	GALICIA		VIENNA		
	ŁÓDŹ	06OCT-12OCT	BARCELONA		
	MELBOURNE		MEXICO CITY		
26MAY-01JUN	BUCHAREST	13OCT-19OCT	BARCELONA		
09JUN-15JUN	CARACAS		VENICE		
	THESSALONIKI		SEOUL		

‘Weekification’, to borrow from Gerhard Haupt’s “Biennialization”^[14], certainly physicalises questions around how these events can responsibly connect with local communities, whilst also granting freedom for artistic inquiry and balancing the pressure of internationalisation. It led me to ask: what does meaningful participation look like? Who is involved in these conversations? And more importantly, what are the aftercare of projects (thinking back to the graveyard of past projects left lying around Terzo Paesaggio)?^[15]

■ **The list of cities and countries the minors we met traveled from and through does not overlap in the slightest with that of the aforementioned list of cities and countries that host design weeks: Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Algeria, Libia, Cairo, Bangladesh, Tunisia, Guinea, as gathered from a “river of life” session within the design workshops^[16]. We can find parallels in stories of migration and stories of travelling for design. But whose mobility is celebrated? In one, transience represents the melting pot of design and culture, bringing a boost to the economy. In the other, migration is deemed problematic and a resource drain. Arguably, the glamorous nature of Milan Design Week eclipses the everyday wishes of the city and its hopeful residents.**

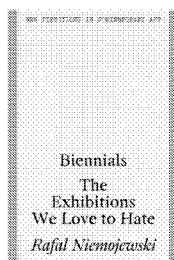
SMALL PIZZA, BIG PROMISES

■ **During one of the September workshops, with a mix of innocence and sincerity, one**

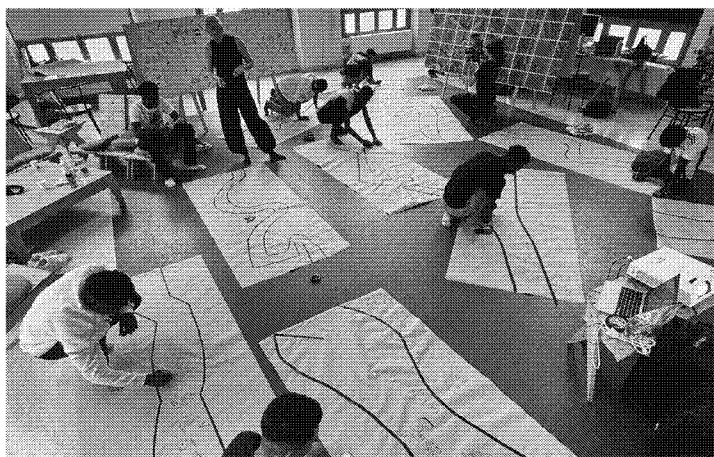


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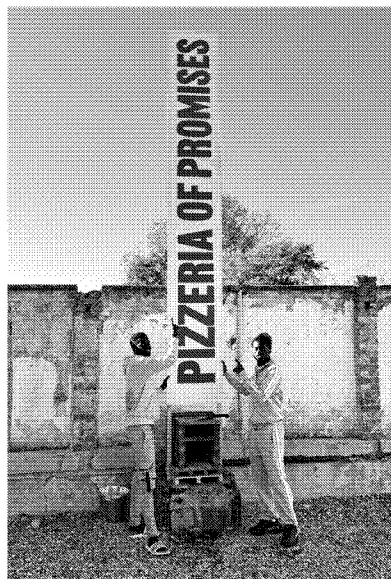
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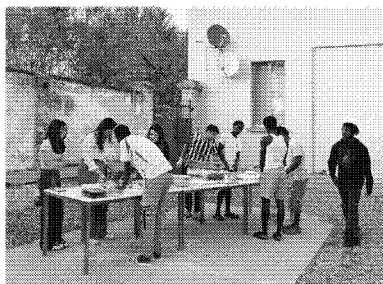
minor, Babacarr, proudly mentioned his summer job in a pizzeria. He stated that he wanted to share the skills he gained there with his peers and community. And hence, the Pizzeria of Promises began^[17]. Staying true to trying to practice the radical inclusion of everyone involved in the process of designing instead of only through the design outcome, a prototype pizza oven was built together with the boys in their backyard using low tech materials. A pizza making and eating party was hosted on the last day of the residency.^[18]

■ Using Milan Design Week as a generative space of action means shifting from a platform of display to a platform of encounter, where the dense concentration of attention, resources, and mobility can be redirected toward civic engagement rather than spectacle. A mobile pizza oven, run by unaccompanied immigrant minors, intervenes in the expected dynamics of the week by replacing the logic of polished installations with embodied exchange: preparing dough, serving slices, handling money, and sharing stories as forms of design practice. Instead of being represented as beneficiaries or symbolic participants, the minors act as hosts and economic agents, subtly redistributing visibility and value within an event typically centered on authorship.

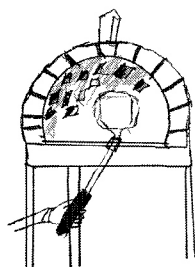
■ The Pizzeria of Promises^[19] presented at MDW is not an outcome but a constituency of relations developed over the course of the two month residency. The gesture exposes the contrast between the hyper-mobility



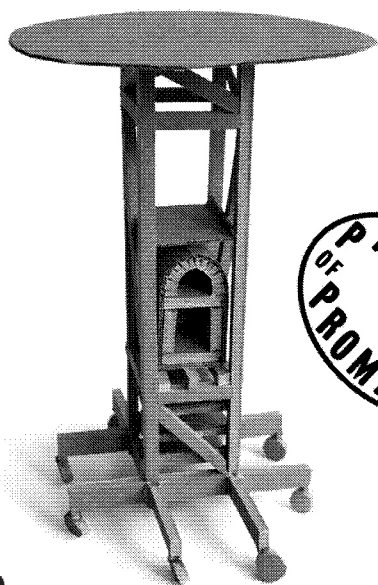
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celebrated by international design culture and the constrained mobility experienced by those awaiting residency papers, while grounding the conversation in the scale of the everyday - in food, work, and aspiration. In doing so, we attempt to demonstrate that design's transformative potential lies less in producing objects than in reorganizing who gets to act, earn, and belong within its spaces.

■ We frame the everyday ritual of pizza as a collective act of release, staged within the intensity of Milan Design Week: visitors are invited to write a promise (personal, professional, political) onto a pizza box [19], acknowledging the culture of projection and future-making that design so often sustains. Guided by the minors as facilitators, who hold the authority of those whose lives are shaped by very real bureaucratic promises of residency and stability, the act of disposal becomes charged with lived experience.

■ They explain the rules, collect the boxes, and lead participants to a designated space where the promises are deliberately discarded. The gesture does not mock aspiration but questions the inflationary logic of endless "better futures" by creating space to relinquish them. In a context where design weeks trade in announcements, launches, and speculative claims, the pizza inverts the dynamic: instead of presenting new promises, it invites their surrender. What remains is not the written declaration, but the shared acknowledgment of its weight.

THE AFTER TASTE

■ As designers and cultural organisers, we must extend beyond what's presented on the table and their accompanied promises. If design weeks, and cultural institutions by extension, continue to privilege measurable outputs such as installations, footfall, media coverage, proposals and designer profiles over intangible yet meaningful relationships, then I believe designers must actively resist this imbalance. This means committing to work at the scale of the everyday (not in the romantic sense through the uses of artifacts, but through mundane encounters, programmed social interactions and expectations): decentering authorship, redistributing resources, and engaging locally in ways that outlast the event itself.

■ Social practices cannot be evaluated solely through institutional metrics of success; they require different forms of accountability grounded in trust, reciprocity, and long(er)-term presence, as we have experimented with during the residency process. To work responsibly within design weeks is therefore to question the structures that frame participation, and continue asking how promises of inclusion are measured.



**STUDIO METHOD
RESIDENT DESIGNER 2025 REFLECTS ON
THEIR PROCESS, WORK, COLLABORATIONS
AND OUTCOMES**

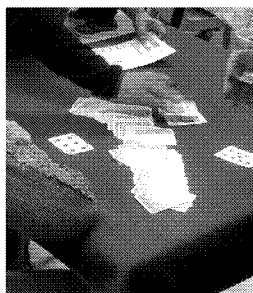
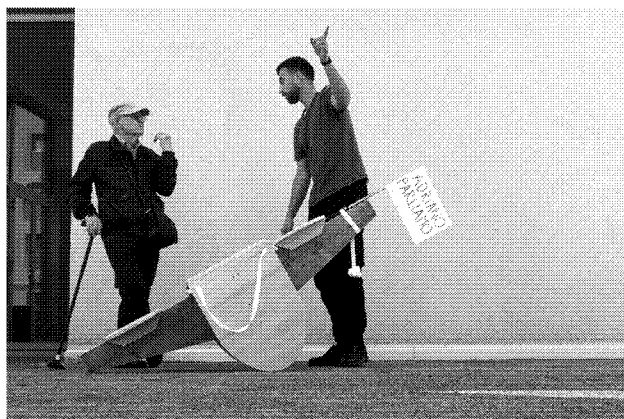
THE MICRO DESIGN- BRIEF



**STUDIO METHOD (PEDRO DANIEL
PANTALEONE AND RIEL BESSAI) WORKED
WITH MAGNETE IN ADRIANO ON A NEW KIND
OF DESIGN BRIEF THAT RESPONDS TO
LOCAL NEEDS.**

FROM DESIGN WEEK TO THE DONDOLO

- The CIVICITY residency took place in two parts: the first was a one-month period in April 2025, leading up to Milan Design Week; the second was a one-month period in September 2025. The first period was primarily research-driven and exploratory. Given the scope of our guiding question – how can we redesign design weeks? – our research spanned global, urban and local scales.
- We examined how design weeks function as a public-facing model for design, how cities like Milan organise themselves around short cycles of cultural influx, and how these dynamics play out in practice.
- In Quartiere Adriano, the neighbourhood in which we were tasked with working, Design Week was considered both irrelevant to daily life and potentially harmful due to the gentrification pressures it tends to bring. Rent prices in the area remain significantly lower than in Milan's city centre, for example. To better understand this local context, we spent the first month participating in neighbourhood life and building relationships. Much of this took place around the Magnete community centre, which offered a wide range of activities: art classes, music performances, theatre, sewing and painting workshops for children. While these activities may not attract major cultural institutions, they play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion.



■ To engage residents more directly, we built a small device called the Dondolo: a portable bench that only works when two people sit on it together. Built using the woodworking workshop of a nearby school in Cimiano, it became a conversational tool. We used it to gather opinions about the neighbourhood and its relationship to Design Week. We also joined walking groups, played cards at a centre for older people and organised a workshop during Adriano's community days, where children painted the Dondolo together.

ARROTINO DEL DESIGN

■ After returning to the Netherlands for the summer, and with stronger relationships in place, we developed a proposal for the second residency period. The idea was to test an alternative to the traditional design brief by creating a 'micro-brief' based on the everyday needs of residents. This led to the concept of the Arrotino del Design, inspired by the traditional Italian travelling craftsman who moved between neighbourhoods repairing objects. During the first few weeks of the second residency period, we fabricated the Arrotino, arranged logistics and organised moments of activation.

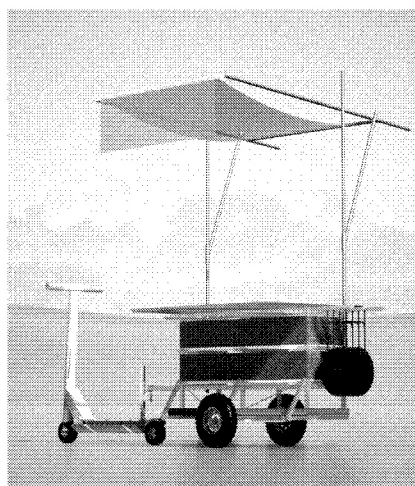
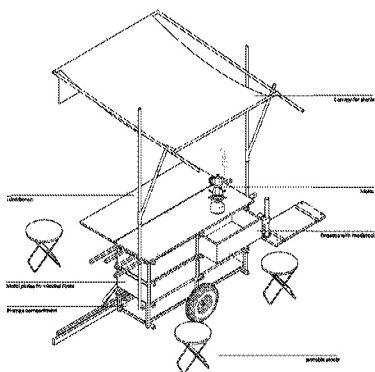
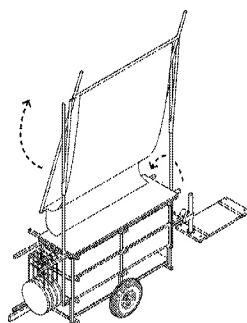
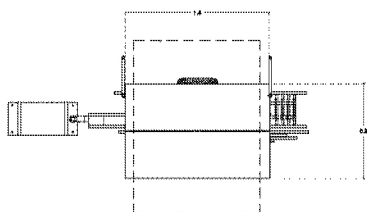
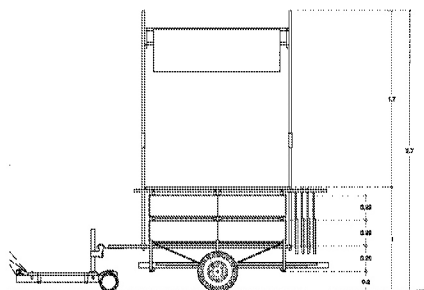
■ The project culminated in two workshops connected by the physical journey of the cart, which travelled through the city attached to a hacked Lime scooter. The first workshop took place in Quartiere Adriano during community days, where residents

brought small items to be repaired and learned through practical experience. The second workshop took place in Tucidide, a former industrial complex in eastern Milan. There, we carried out three site-specific repair interventions: one in a waste area, one on a broken pipe and one on a broken vase. These interventions were carried out using a more formal design approach, while residents were able to observe, assist and learn over time.

LISTENING AND ORGANISING

■ The first phase of the residency focused on listening. The complexity of the CIVICITY theme meant that time was needed to dwell on things, observe, and allow interactions to unfold organically. Designing and building the Dondolo as a conversational device exemplified this approach. Rather than extracting information, we prioritised building trust, forming relationships and gaining an understanding of what was already present, such as needs, rhythms, sensitivities and limits. We used Milan Design Week itself as a research site, speaking with residents and visitors alike to gather opinions. We also did a lot of reading and writing to slowly shape a position.

■ The second phase was much more operational. This involved organising logistics, fabricating the Arrotino, coordinating workshops, managing communication and taking responsibility for tangible outcomes. While the first phase broadened the scope





ESCA

Civility DESIGN DESIRES CART
Established in Milan in 2025

Sedia a dondolo
Sedile di tela, rotta in
lasciata a
la vorrebbe vivace, la parte
che la tiene deve essere
colorata

Due notti durante la MDW

Submitted on: 25/09/2025

Author:

Project description: The project is a design for a cart that is established in Milan in 2025. The cart is a mobile workstation for a designer, and it is designed to be a functional and aesthetically pleasing piece of furniture. The cart is made of metal and has a wooden top. It has two large wheels at the back and a smaller wheel at the front. The cart is designed to be a functional and aesthetically pleasing piece of furniture.



Civility DESIGN DESIRES CART
Established in Milan in 2025

Stool making

Scrap wood and zip-ties

I want to sit in the park
wherever I go. It needs to
flatpack and look cool!

I will gift it to the Designer
that will make me one :)

Submitted on: 11/09/2025

Project description: The project is a design for a stool that is established in Milan in 2025. The stool is a mobile workstation for a designer, and it is designed to be a functional and aesthetically pleasing piece of furniture. The stool is made of wood and has a metal frame. It has two large wheels at the back and a smaller wheel at the front. The stool is designed to be a functional and aesthetically pleasing piece of furniture.

Civility DESIGN DESIRES CART
Established in Milan in 2025

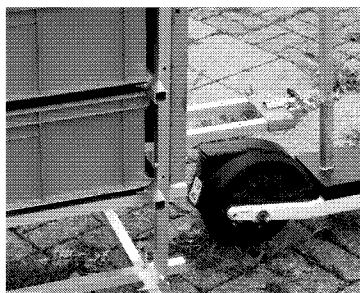
Due tavolini per il centro
studenti

Met or chipboard/ heavy desk
for cho k in

They constantly break/they
need them for their games to
feel official

Submitted on: 11/09/2025

Project description: The project is a design for a cart that is established in Milan in 2025. The cart is a mobile workstation for a designer, and it is designed to be a functional and aesthetically pleasing piece of furniture. The cart is made of metal and has a wooden top. It has two large wheels at the back and a smaller wheel at the front. The cart is designed to be a functional and aesthetically pleasing piece of furniture.



of the project, the second phase narrowed it down, necessitating decisions, commitments, and trade-offs.

THE SAVIOUR COMPLEX

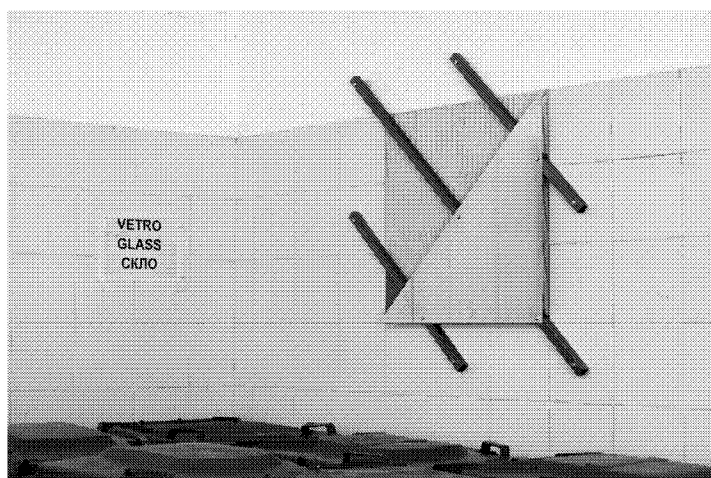
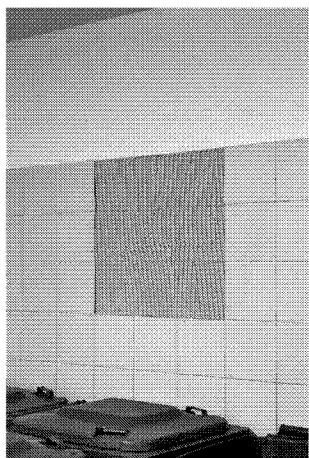
- One of the main challenges was resisting the ‘saviour’ reflex that designers are conditioned to have. When faced with complex social and urban problems, the instinct to ‘solve’ them quickly becomes dominant. CIVICITY challenged us to suspend this impulse and instead support existing capacities. The Arrotino emerged precisely from this shift: not as a tool to introduce something new or improved, but as a means of amplifying existing care practices.
- Another challenge was scope. The research question operated simultaneously at global, urban and local levels, which made it easy to lose focus. A significant amount of work went into refining our objectives and accepting that the project could not resolve everything, but rather needed to articulate one clear position. From a technical and logistical standpoint, producing a mobile object abroad without stable access to materials, tools or workshop space was challenging. We deliberately chose to materialise the project, partly to counter the tendency in socially oriented design to avoid the risks of physical output. This exposed the project to failure, inconsistency and constraint. Fabricating the cart through a hybrid process – part industrial and part improvised, using second-hand materials – was

an experiment in itself and required careful coordination within tight time constraints.

LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS

■ The relationships established during the residency were one of its most positive outcomes. Organisations in Adriano, particularly Magnete and Ecate, showed a strong commitment to their local area. Although participation can fluctuate, their long-term presence and dedication are notable. Our collaboration with Magnete was equal and based on mutual understanding. Over time, this evolved into a friendship with Sara in particular, whose work had a significant impact on the project's direction.

■ Other local groups, including the centre for older people and the walking group, were also welcoming and enthusiastic, often expressing their gratitude for the attention given to their neighbourhood. We also worked closely with We Make, a youth centre in Dergano where we made the Arrotino. Their work with teenagers facing social challenges closely aligned with the project's values. In Tucidide, Lorenzo Bondavalli played a crucial role in connecting us to the local community and facilitating the workshop. The Critical Friends network was instrumental in shaping the project intellectually. Over time, our conversations shifted from broad discussions about Design Week to more focused exchanges that helped to clarify the project's position. Contributors such as Annibale D'Elia and Donatella Ron-



chi offered valuable insights into the intersection of cultural production, social policy and design in Milan.

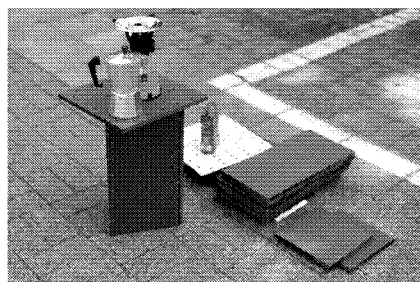
COUNTER-BALANCING DESIGN WEEK

■ Throughout numerous discussions with both residents and individuals involved in the design community, a consistent sentiment emerged: a sense of relief that someone was challenging Design Week from within. Residents often felt excluded from its relevance, while professionals expressed fatigue with its cyclical intensity. CIVICITY's relationship with Milan Design Week is less oppositional and more counter-balancing. It offers a way of slowing down, redistributing attention and experimenting with alternative modes of engagement that prioritise conviviality, care and continuity over spectacle.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

■ The most significant change that CIVICITY brought to our practice was a reversal of perspective, shifting the focus from what design can do for residents to what residents can contribute to design. This repositioning forced us to reconsider agency, authorship and responsibility in contexts of shared creation. The project brought to light an unresolved tension that now lies at the heart





CIVICITY

CIVICITY

TEAM

LEARNINGS

CIVICITY

CIVICITY

2025



**1. DESIGN EVENTS MUST SHIFT
FROM SHORT-TERM SPECTACLE
TO LONG-TERM LOCAL IMPACT**

■ Instead of operating as a design week that generates temporary, high-intensity cultural consumption, Civicity showed how much more it can be when meaningfully connected to local communities. It highlights the need to shift toward slower, place-based processes that build lasting relationships and create meaningful impact for residents beyond the event itself. As with every project, it is challenging that only a fragment of the work developed during the residency can be presented during the week, even when the process itself is structured differently.

2. SOCIALLY ROOTED PRACTICES ARE OFTEN UNDERVALUED BUT ESSENTIAL FOR REDEFINING DESIGN

■ The project revealed that grassroots, community-driven cultural practices, especially in peripheral areas, are frequently not recognised as “real” design or culture. However, these practices are crucial for developing more inclusive, sustainable, and context-sensitive outcomes, something that designers are looking for in relation to the value of the discipline. This suggests that design weeks should incorporate projects rooted in social value and everyday needs, rather than focusing primarily on formal or market-driven output. In doing so, it is important to work with people who are part of the local community and its everyday life.

3. RELATIONAL PROCESSES REQUIRE TIME, FLEXIBILITY, AND ACCEPTANCE OF UNPREDICTABILITY

■ When designing place-based residencies that are deeply rooted in local contexts and involve community groups, it became clear that relationships take time to develop. These relationships are inherently fluid, encompassing moments of exchange, proximity, and conflict. As a result, a certain degree of unpredictability must be anticipated and embraced. This also raised questions around participation, in particular the difference between being invited into a process and being involved in making or decision-making. In this perspective, project outcomes do not always manifest as tangible creative outputs, but often reside in the quality and depth of the relationships built throughout the process.

4. MULTI-STAKEHOLDER RESIDENCIES ENTAIL HIGHER COMPLEXITY AND RESOURCE INVESTMENT

■ Residencies such as CIVICITY, which involve a plurality of stakeholders with different roles and expectations, proved to be more complex than traditional formats based solely on a commissioner–artist relationship. This diversity generates added value but also requires a significantly greater investment of time, energy, resources and coordination capacities. This complexity should be considered early in the project’s design and management.

5. BUDGETING MUST ACCOUNT FOR RELATIONAL AND PROCESS-BASED UNCERTAINTY

■ Given the unpredictable nature of relational dynamics and their impact on project trajectories, it became clear that it is important to incorporate a degree of flexibility into the initial budgeting phase. Financial planning should allow for adjustments over time, acknowledging that processes rooted in social interaction may evolve in unforeseen ways.

6. LONG-TERM FRAMEWORKS STRENGTHEN CONTINUITY AND IMPACT

■ One of CIVICITY’s key strengths lies in its integration within a multi-year programme. This structure enables local host organisations to remain involved across different editions, in varying capacities, fostering continuity in relationships and reinforcing the project’s long-term impact. Such sustained engagement proved crucial for building

trust, deepening collaboration, and ensuring that the residency's effects extend beyond its immediate duration.

7. THE MEDIATING ROLE OF THE RESIDENCY PROGRAM

■ Civicity is a residency that is deeply embedded in the local context and strongly connected to the communities involved. As a result, designers from outside become immersed in the city's dynamics, including its news, tensions, and ongoing developments. This proved to be essential for the residency framework to support designers in positioning themselves in ways that are informed, sensitive, and coherent.



LEARNINGS FOR FUTURE RESIDENTS

■ STUDIO METHOD

- **Prepare the logistics early on.**
Even when working locally and with care, material production takes time and coordination. Preparing the infrastructure in advance can prevent the need for costly last-minute solutions.
- **Narrow your entry point.**
The residency covers a large and complex theme. Choosing a specific angle early on helps to maintain focus and depth.
- **Build relationships before projects.**
Trust and familiarity are prerequisites for meaningful collaboration.
- **Take material risks.** Producing something tangible brings ideas into contact with reality and creates productive friction.
- **Accept incompleteness.**
The residency is not about solving everything, but about articulating a clear position.



PETE FUNG

- **Building trust takes time, so don't underestimate the value of design as a tool for engagement.**
- **Prototype as much as possible in the early stages!**
- **Remain flexible and open to different opportunities, and adjust the project when necessary.**
- **Stay focused and objective: who are you designing with/for? Who are your collaborators and allies? Inclusion means different things in different contexts. You can never please everyone.**
- **Think systematically and structurally about your local 'problems' and consider the other social, cultural and economic factors at play.**
- **Talk to locals - don't interview them! — whether that's in person or by spying on their neighbourhood Facebook groups. Local residents are experts in their own lived experiences.**
- **Pick your battles and be strategic about the scale at which your design will have the greatest impact.**



■ CREDITS

CURATOR

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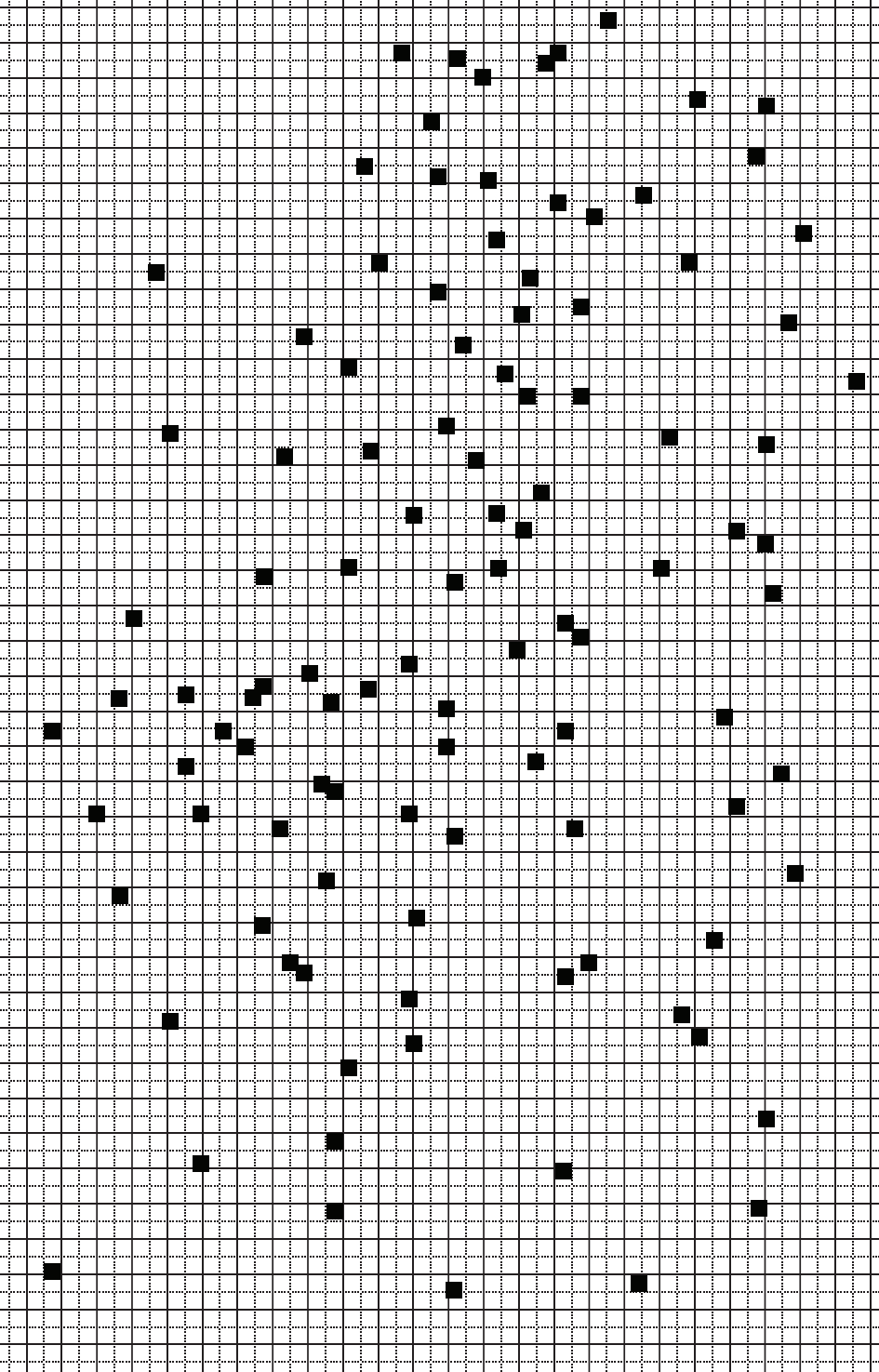


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THIS BOOKLET GATHERS THE FIRST
OUTCOMES OF CIVICITY.

IT BRINGS TOGETHER REFLECTIONS,
QUESTIONS AND FRAGMENTS FROM A
YEAR OF WORKING IN MILAN, CARRIED
INTO MILAN DESIGN WEEK.

WHAT SHIFTS WHEN MAKING
BECOMES PART OF THE CITY, RATHER
THAN A TEMPORARY OVERLAY. WHAT
HAPPENS WHEN THE WORK SHOWN
DURING THE WEEK GROWS OUT OF
LONGER, COLLECTIVE TRAJECTORIES
DEVELOPED IN THE CITY.

CIVICITY LOOKS AT DESIGN WEEKS
FROM WITHIN. THROUGH RESIDENCIES,
COLLABORATIONS AND SMALL-SCALE
INTERVENTIONS, IT ENGAGES WITH
REUSE, LOCAL CONTEXTS AND SHARED
FORMS OF AUTHORSHIP.

NOT TO OPPOSE THE EXISTING
MODEL, BUT TO STRETCH IT.

WHAT YOU FIND HERE IS NOT A
CONCLUSION. IT IS A SNAPSHOT OF AN
ONGOING PROCESS. A WAY OF MAKING
VISIBLE WHAT OFTEN REMAINS AT THE
EDGES.