

Nowak on Offseen, the App mapping world's exhibits

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CERRETO LAZIALE, Lazio — In a village an hour east of Rome, Dobroslawa Nowak is building a map of the world's art. She launched offseen, a curated global map of exhibitions and events, about a year ago, and says it is still being improved every week.

Writer, art expert, and curator, Nowak also publishes The Italian Art Guide, an English language magazine covering Italian art that grew out of her social media following five years ago. She runs both from the Lazio countryside, and spoke to Italy Now about democratising art, the human voice in the age of AI, and why she thinks artists should wait until 45.

Q. Where did the idea for the map come from?

"I was on the side of the traveller who is also passionate about art," Nowak said. "I was in South Asia and I discovered there was no way to learn what was going on around me in contemporary art. I remembered seeing something a year earlier on Instagram, but I had no idea how to find that information now. So I thought I would be the person who does it. I sat down for six months with one developer, then another, and we are still making it better every week."

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/dobroslawa-nowak-on-mapping-the-worlds-exhibitions/



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Various Dobroslawa Nowak (*Credits: Offseen*)

Q. The magazine was not planned. How did it start?

“I didn’t plan to have a magazine,” Nowak said. “I was thrilled to write independently about art for various media outlets. I had about 20 of them on my roster, lived in an Italian metropolis, and felt really good about this lifestyle. Yet I was often approached by people asking me to participate in their events, review their shows, and share them on social media. My DMs were full, so I created a dedicated email address for that purpose, and then a website with a submission form to make things easier. It almost naturally led me to start writing about Italian art on my own. After five years I am here with an actual magazine.”

Q. What do the app and the magazine have in common?

“They are very different, but they share the same foundation,” Nowak said, “making art more democratic and accessible, for everyone to discover. With The Italian Art Guide, artists started reaching out to tell me that they had no way of getting their exhibitions covered in the media, because no serious journalist would come from Rome to see a show in a small city. My approach to art has been radically open minded from the very beginning.”

“With the offseen app, the issue concerns visitors more than artists,” she said. “People sometimes don’t go to see an exhibition not because they aren’t interested, but because they have no idea where to go beyond the renowned museums, how to get there, what they will find, or whether they will be accepted. The offseen map is inclusive of everyone. No invitation, no registration, you simply find an exhibition nearby and go.”

Q. Where does AI leave a small art magazine?

“I want the magazine to remain a human voice,” Nowak said. “When new contributors write for The Italian Art Guide, I always tell them to be themselves and not shy away from being opinionated, because we want to differentiate our voice from simply providing information. People have to remain people, not by making mistakes to prove they are human, but by bringing their complex psychology and history and experience. AI doesn’t have personality. Maybe one day it will. For now, I still like the human voice more, because I can relate to it.”

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Q. You have hit a problem with AI and facts. What happened?

“I googled something I already knew the truth about, and I read in AI a completely false statement,” Nowak said. “Then I found it was written on two other websites, and that was enough to make it true. Whatever is written is considered to be true. This is very dangerous.”

Q. What are you looking for in an artist now?

“After seeing many exhibitions over the years, what attracts me most is maturity,” Nowak said. “The artist doesn’t have to be well financed to be good, but the work has to have that level of maturity. I value every artistic expression by default, but it can take decades for it to find its form and truly resonate with people. I think artists should start exhibiting after 45. They can be exceptional and start earlier, but you need to have your head on your shoulders. It is very hard to do something truly worthy when you’re young. You need to live something first, be coherent enough to process your experiences and, finally, transform this raw matter into a form that is universally recognisable. It takes time.”

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