

Senatore lights up Piazza San Marco for Biennale

Posted on May 7, 2026 by Alina Trabattoni, Sabina Castelfranco

VENICE — We met artist Marinella Senatore at La Casa di the Human Safety Net inside the Procuratie Vecchie on Piazza San Marco, on the eve of the 61st Venice Biennale Arte. Her exhibition “We Rise by Lifting Others” opens here on May 7 and runs until March 22, 2027. At its heart is a monumental luminaria, the kind of baroque light architecture that lit southern Italian street festivals long before electricity reached the South, now rebuilt with recycled mercury-free green neon. Around it hang glowing tapestries embroidered with the Chanakya School of Craft in Mumbai, carrying sentences born from more than a year of workshops with families, children and stigmatised groups from Mumbai to the Mediterranean to South Africa. Born in Cava de’ Tirreni in 1977, trained as a violinist, then in fine arts in Naples and cinematography in Rome, Senatore founded the School of Narrative Dance in 2012, which has since drawn more than 8 million people across 23 countries. She lit Maria Grazia Chiuri’s Dior Cruise show in Lecce, has shown at the Centre Pompidou, the High Line and MAXXI, and in 2026 alone is Artist of the Year at Rome’s Galleria Nazionale and headed to the Chengdu Biennale.

Q. For visitors stepping in off Piazza San Marco, what do they see, hear and feel?

“We Rise by Lifting Others is a show and the final restitution of a process more than one year long, activations, gatherings and workshops with families including their children and fragile or stigmatised groups. The tapestries and the big luminaria are monuments, in a very contemporary way, to people and to our participants. Stories of resilience, empowerment, emancipation and the activation of their creative potentiality.”

Q. The luminaria, those handmade light sculptures from Apulia, now in recycled green neon. What keeps drawing you back to that southern Italian ritual?

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“Tradition for me is a very vibrant mechanism, able to activate process here and now. This tradition comes from Barocco, the most crazy and fantastic moment in the history of art, when people were celebrated through this machinery and apparatus. It’s a tradition that can activate something now.”



Marinella Senatore (*Credits: The Human Safety Net*)

Q. The School of Narrative Dance has reached 8 million people in 23 countries. What actually changes in the room when a community works with you?

“These are environments that are very safe and not judgemental, where people don’t think about themselves as I’m successful, I’m productive, I’m performative enough. My job is to create a context. I don’t deliver instructions. I let them be whatever they decide to be in that moment, even rethink themselves. It’s carefully crafted to allow individuality to flourish.”

Q. From Dior in Lecce to the Pompidou, the High Line and now Piazza San Marco. How does the same light travel through such different worlds?

“Participation is not just a methodology for me, it’s content. I research theoretically and collaborate

with philosophers, social scientists and neurologists. Everywhere I go I find people, and people means life, energy, resilience, possibility of empowerment. That’s the common thread.”

Q. What do you want a visitor to carry home when they step back out into Piazza San Marco?

“I hope these processes we activate with people will have consequences, and it’s fantastic that these consequences are not led by me. People decide how to use the experience and how to evolve. I activate a process I cannot fully control, and that’s what I really wish people will take with them.”

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