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# Italian Entrepreneurs Stand Up for Venice

Since Tuesday, the city has been deluged by flood water, which damaged its artistic heritage, storied hotels and stores.

By **Alessandra Turra** with contributions from **Martino Carrera** on November 15, 2019



A flooded St. Mark's Square Flooding in Venice, Italy - 15 Nov 2019  
 Nicola Marfisi/AGF/Shutterstock

**MILAN** — Venice is sinking.

With floodwaters reaching their highest level in 50 years, the Italian government has declared a state of emergency in the city, where the iconic Piazza San Marco has been closed to the public and its Basilica seriously damaged.

On Thursday, Italy's Prime Minister **Giuseppe Conte** said the government will set up emergency measures, including the allocation of 20 million euros for the most urgent repairs.

Since Tuesday, dramatic images have been circulating on global media showing how water has seriously damaged not only boutiques — including the Celine store, which was submerged — but also iconic destinations such as The Gritti Palace hotel.

Reached by phone on Friday, **Edoardo Caovilla**, creative director and chief executive officer of Venetian footwear label René Caovilla, described the situation in the city as dramatic.

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“Being from Venice, we are particularly in pain for what is happening,” he said. “Venice must be considered a museum like the Uffizi in Florence and needs to be managed that way.”

Caovilla, who said the company’s store on Piazza San Marco is severely damaged, suggested adopting measures to reduce the volume of tourists visiting the city every day and protecting the delicate ecosystem of the Laguna. “Those who can afford should pay a ticket to get into the city and the number of accesses should be limited. For those who can’t afford that, the city should put at disposal guided tours with eco-friendly ferries. It’s mandatory to take action to save Venice, if not it won’t survive,” said Caovilla, who added he is meeting other local entrepreneurs to organize concrete actions focused on saving the artistic heritage, as well as supporting commercial businesses and citizens.

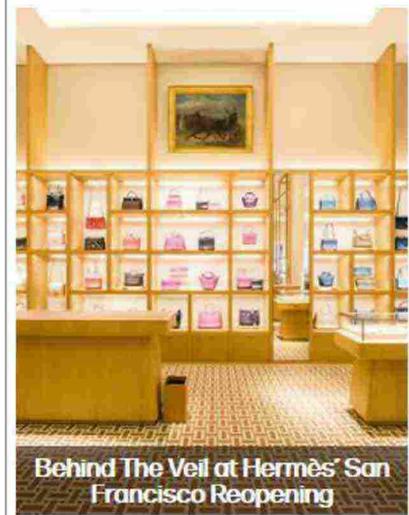
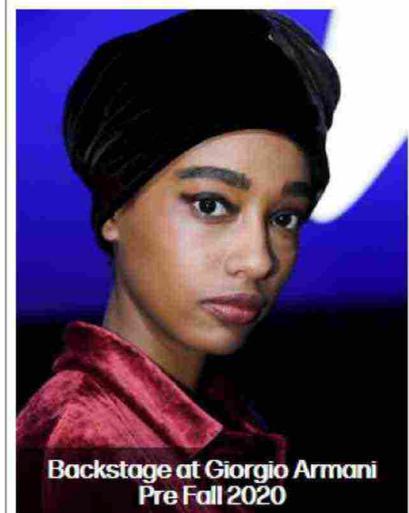
Another entrepreneur deeply linked to the city, **Renzo Rosso**, who sponsored the restoration of Venice’s iconic **Ponte di Rialto and the Rialto covered walkways**, expressed on Friday his disappointment with **Italy’s** politicians and the country’s slow bureaucracy.



**Renzo Rosso's** Instagram post with caption reading “#Venice, we are all with you.” Courtesy Photo

“Here in Veneto, we are known to be hard workers. We always try not to depend on anyone to fix our problems and, even if we are working together to physically take the water out of the stores, the overall situation is much bigger than us,” said Rosso, referring to the Mose project aimed at building a barrier at sea to defend the city, which was started in 2003 but never completed because it was plagued by problems such as corruption, cost overruns and prolonged delays. “Myself and other entrepreneurs can put some pressure on institutions to try to complete the project, but unfortunately there is no chance we can directly intervene with investments. It’s frustrating seeing all these politicians visiting Venice now, the problem has been there for so long. If Italian politicians were anything like our entrepreneurs, things would work very differently in this country.”

Because of the Venice situation, Geox had to move its Friday presentation of the latest **Geox Dragon's Formula E racing car** from the lagoon to the close city of Mestre. “We as a company are very close to Venice. The city is not just Italian, it belongs to the world and is highly recognized. We feel engaged with what happened to the city and close to it,” said Geox president and founder **Mario Moretti Polegato**. The event, he said, proves that “the city can keep going.” The entrepreneur also noted that the company’s premises, located in Montebelluno, on the outskirts of Treviso in the Veneto region, were not affected by the flooding.



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Based in Venice, Italian retailer OVS is giving concrete support to its city with the #ViviamoVenezia initiative. From Nov. 16 for a week, 20 percent of the sales of the company's 12 stores in the Venice area will be donated to the city's SS. Giovanni and Paolo hospital to finance the purchase of a fast rescue boat.

Reached on Friday, Prada, Kering and LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, all operating not only stores but also artistic centers in Venice, including the Prada Foundation, François Pinault's Punta della Dogana and the Espace Louis Vuitton, declined to comment.

Italy Rene Caovilla Renzo Rosso



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