

# To Dwell Is To Feel At Home Everywhere

Orietta Brombin





## INTRODUCTION

Since 2018, PAV Parco Arte Vivente, an experimental centre for contemporary art in Turin, has been a permanent contributor to the cultural programme of CasaOz, a major social institution in the city. CasaOz is a true home for children and young people living with illness, disability, and vulnerability, and their families. The working methodology adopted by PAV in this context – rich in psycho-physical and cultural opportunities – nurtures creativity, emotional connection, and cognition through art and its many languages. In this text, curator and art educator Orietta Brombin reflects on the collaboration between PAV and CasaOz.





## Why CasaOz

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, written by Frank Baum and published in 1900, is considered the first American fantasy novel for children. It transports readers to a magical world where courage leads to discoveries that make us stronger, and, most importantly, less alone. One emblematic moment of this journey is told in the chapter ‘The Guardian of the Gates’ when the weary and hungry protagonists, having arrived at the gates of the Land of Oz, are welcomed at a farm. Here, they are reassured and nourished with a fine feast offered by kind hosts.

It is in this spirit that CasaOz was created. Today, it is a place where people can eat, study, play, learn new things, and restore balance and wellbeing while developing their autonomy and potential. In essence, the institution’s aim – also reflected in its methodology – is to be a source of healing in everyday life.

Enrica Baricco founded CasaOz in 2005 together with a group of citizens to support families with children hospitalised at the Regina Margherita Children’s Hospital. Born from the founder’s personal family experience, CasaOz supports people who encounter illness and, more broadly, vulnerability, stemming from situations that can shake the equilibrium of any family’s life. A storm sweeps away Dorothy, disrupting normality and making a calm life seem a distant dream, but the protagonist of *The Wizard of Oz* finally manages to return home at the end of her journey, after having overcome adversity.

## Care through Art and the Senses

The marvellous landscapes traversed by Dorothy in the land ‘over the rainbow’ offer fertile ground for the imagination. One such example, from the chapter ‘The Road through the Forest’, is the plant imagery inspired by wild flora encountered along the way in gardens and woods. The novel has been a valuable source of inspiration for PAV’s workshops developed over eight years in collaboration with CasaOz’s cultural programme for children and young people during out-of-school hours.

For instance, in the workshop *Inside the Farm*, food becomes a creative medium, because of its convivial and taste-exploration quality. Making herbal teas together using wild herbs (for instance mallow or wild fennel) creates opportunities for sharing and connection. Everyday rituals and rural traditions associated with recycling and environmental sustainability highlight the imaginative potential and creative solutions offered by repurposing objects that have lost their original function but retain transformative value.

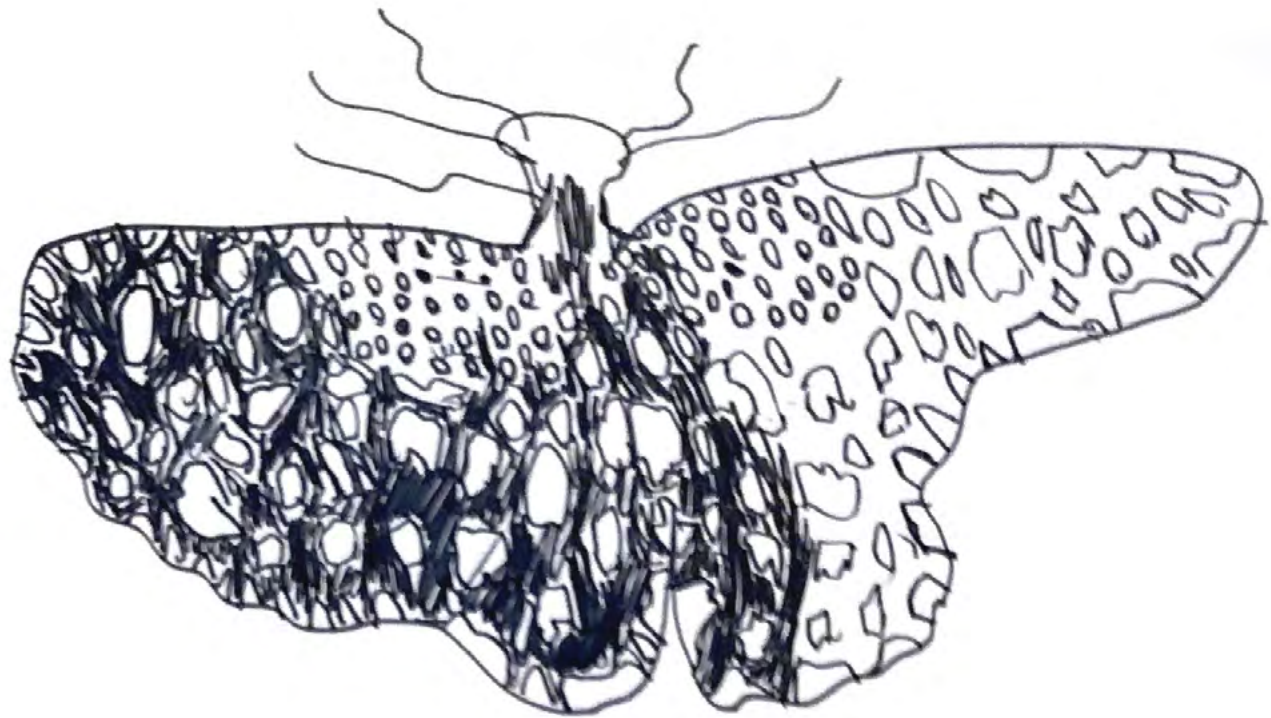
In *StoriediStorie* (Stories of Stories), suggestions from literary and musical works are explored in a search for synaesthesia, following the words of Vassily Kandinsky: ‘It seemed to me that the living soul of colours emitted a musical call when the brush’s inflexible will tore a part of life from them.’ The goal is to simultaneously perceive, from an individual perspective, the full range of sensory stimuli, and also to develop the ability to see with others, to feel together, to listen to a colour, and to taste the scent of a sound.

The workshops always create a link between an artistic theme and a visit to PAV’s indoor spaces, the interactive *Bioma* trail by Piero Gilardi, and exhibitions at PAV such as *Weed Party III – The Party of Weeds* by Zheng Bo, *Before Plants Had a Name* by Uriel Orlow, and, more recently, the soil collection for Alan Sonfist’s *Seeds of Time* exhibition.

## Nature and Daily Life

For the young participants in the workshops, PAV’s 23,500-square-metre park with its numerous environmental installations serves as a rich landscape for exploration. The methodology for the visits and workshops usually involves stimulating introspection within the group, encouraging observation of one’s sensory world, memories, and the development of questions: What do we see in the story we hear? What colours and details define the landscapes we cross? Who are the travellers telling stories? The creative responses sparked by these questions become a training ground for interpreting and representing the







familiar world through the languages of contemporary art.

The artistic practice of Ugo La Pietra, an artist who has been featured multiple times in PAV's programmes, begins with everyday experience to explore its creative transformation. 'I've always believed that a human being ensures their survival through transforming the environment in which they live and work.' Expanding on the meaning of daily life and habit, La Pietra says: 'To dwell is to give meaning, to expand one's personality; in this sense I have developed environments, objects, and symbols over the years, to provide tools for the re-appropriation of the public environment, both mentally and physically.' With the phrase *to dwell is to feel at home everywhere*, La Pietra constructs a metaphorical image that begins with the domestic space and expands into a broader public sphere so it may be transformed by actions both creative and political.

The challenge of PAV's workshops for the CasaOz groups is to translate artistic inspirations into empathic experiences, continuously attuning to the needs of participants. For those living with psycho-physical fragilities, and especially for children and young people with autism, even the smallest change can be overwhelming. Thus, *to feel at home everywhere* requires great sensitivity and professional commitment. It is important to understand the impact of small routine changes, and manage them well. One needs to deal with different behavioural and interactional difficulties and communicate clearly, always taking care to make gradual, progressive changes.

### **The Future of a Shared Home Project**

But things change and transform. As part of a broader journey, CasaOz is expanding its environment and capacity to offer services in support of people in the area of Turin. The aim is to develop a former mill, provided by the city, into a daytime social rehabilitation centre for minors, a facility for the prevention and treatment of eating disorders, with residential spaces for young people with disabilities pursuing independence, and multi-functional spaces open to the community. And these are just a few of the projects underway.

The mill, currently undergoing renovation, is a natural extension of the location: a verdant area along the banks of the River Po in Turin. The redevelopment of the large green space will include the creation of a fully accessible educational garden for horticultural therapy and environmental education activities. The garden will be cultivated in a community spirit by CasaOz children, adolescents under the care of the Child Neuropsychiatry Department at Regina Margherita Children's Hospital, as well as pupils from local schools.

### **Nature Is Synergy, Even in Art**

The workshop activities, which mirror PAV's experience and its large park used for ecological, environmental, and botanical-scientific exploration, are already taking the future developments at CasaOz into account. The annual art lab experiments, for example, encourage the participants to immerse themselves in the surrounding nature to observe its rich biodiversity, and to learn to recognise plant species.

Change always implies inner transformation, however gradual. In the metamorphosis-themed workshops, children reflect on transformations in nature and within themselves through storytelling, drawing, and the construction of a collective work. They create herbariums by combining botanical observation with their own imagination; they explore the relationship between plants and pollinators, like bees and wild insects; and they observe the synergy among plants and within urban ecosystems.

The discussions revolve around the values of cooperation between different species, animals, plants, humans, as well as within each of them. This principle stands far from survival-of-the-fittest competitiveness, and is instead rooted in the concept of mutual aid as articulated by the Russian philosopher, biologist, geographer, zoologist, and anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin. Knowing nature, understanding inter- and intra-species relationships, and recognising ourselves



as part of them – *being nature* – offers a path to wellbeing: for ourselves, and with the many species that cooperate within our shared environment, our Planet, our common home.









## CONTEXT

This text is one of the pilot studies of *Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action*. In these contributions we explore and reflect on artistic practices and experimental approaches in the cultural field that can engage and activate audiences and communities to address ecological, social, and political challenges. The pilot studies provide an overview of practices of cultural organisations that can serve as models, recipes, or tools for transformation for current and future generations of cultural workers and artists.

*Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action* (2023–2027) is a four-year transnational co-creation and circulation project of fourteen interdisciplinary art organisations across Europe. The project aims to equip and empower young Europeans through artistic practices to better withstand societal challenges triggered by rapid climate change.

The Re-Imagine Europe partnership is a collaboration of: Paradiso<sup>(NL)</sup>, Sonic Acts<sup>(NL)</sup>, Elevate Festival<sup>(AT)</sup>, INA grm<sup>(FR)</sup>, A4<sup>(SK)</sup>, Borealis<sup>(NO)</sup>, KONTEJNER<sup>(HR)</sup>, BEK<sup>(NO)</sup>, RUPERT<sup>(LT)</sup>, Disruption Network Lab<sup>(DE)</sup>, Semibreve<sup>(PT)</sup>, Parco Arte Vivente<sup>(IT)</sup>, Kontrapunkt<sup>(MK)</sup> and Radio Web MACBA<sup>(ES)</sup>.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Orietta Brombin** is an expert in art education who has been working at PAV Parco Arte Vivente since its foundation in 2008. At this experimental centre for contemporary art in Turin, established by Piero Gilardi, she leads the Educational and Training Activities. She curates the annual programme of workshops led by Italian and international artists, the programmes for students and young artists, and also coordinates the public programme. Brombin is the author of many essays and articles, has curated numerous exhibitions, and participated in major collaborative projects with contemporary art foundations and museums, associations, research centres, and training institutions in Italy and internationally. Since 2020, she has also taught ‘Museology of the Contemporary’ at the Albertina Academy of Fine Arts in Turin.



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