



**MAŁGORZATA MIRGA-TAS**

**THE BIG DIPPER WILL  
FORETELL THE FUTURE OF  
THE ROMA**

This booklet has been created to accompany *The Big Dipper Will Foretell the Future of the Roma*, an exhibition conceived by Polish Roma artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas for Collezione Maramotti based on the images, stories, and documents she has collected regarding Roma and Sinti history in Italy, and particularly in Reggio Emilia.

It is a compendium of photographs, newspaper clippings, words and perspectives that have come out of meetings with the people involved in Mirga-Tas's project, as an expression of Sinti and Roma tradition—a heritage tied to an identity that is quite distinctive, yet also deeply rooted in the history and culture of Reggio and Emilia-Romagna.

The contents include information about the exhibition and the presentation of Mirga-Tas's works at Collezione Maramotti; a brief text about the RSC (Roma, Sinti and Caminanti) community in the municipality of Reggio Emilia; a story about *Lacio Drom*, a project encouraging school for Sinti and Roma minors in Reggio (1965-1982); some verses by Papusza, a Polish Roma poet who has been an inspiration for Mirga-Tas's artwork; the story of Johann Trollmann, a German Sinti boxer, told by a young Sinti man in Reggio as an example of courage; pictures of a historical plaque under the Porta Galliera arch in Bologna that quotes an ancient document attesting to the many centuries of Roma presence in Italy, and served as a jumping-off point for Mirga-Tas's project.

These brief texts are alternated with photographic reproductions of news articles connected above all to funfairs; with Mirga-Tas's preparatory sketches for the exhibition; with images and words from the fashion designer Noell Maggini; and with the photograph of a funeral, illustrating the sense of community and sharing that binds together Sintis in Reggio and around the world.



## The Big Dipper Will Foretell the Future of the Roma

Drawing on vintage photographs and family albums, oral accounts and conversations, books and archival sources, Mirga-Tas has intertwined her own complex narrative of the Roma people with stories of figures from the Sinti community in Reggio Emilia, whom she had meaningful opportunities to meet, get to know and collaborate with.

The idea for this exhibition project sprang from the community's deep ties to travelling entertainment and the management of funfair rides, a trade handed down from generation to generation that the artist identified as a specific characteristic of Romani culture in Italy. Drawing inspiration from the world of fairs, her new exhibition feels full of exuberant vitality. At the same time, it is inevitably imbued with a sense of impermanence and the memory of the persecution and forced displacement of the Roma and Sinti, who throughout history have often been denied the chance to settle in one place.

Mirga-Tas has focused in particular on the image of the chair swing ride, whose circular structure and constant movement round and round takes on a powerful symbolism: the passage of time, the way life seems to return with each new season, the wheeling of planets in cosmic space, the idea of perpetual travel.

The central part of the installation is dedicated to portraits of the present and past, in which people and modes of dwelling are fluidly combined to form warm, intimate images. The upper portion contains quotes from texts, including the words of Roma poet and singer Bronisława Wajs (1908–1987), also known as Papusza.

A large textile collage and several horses sculpted out of wood round out the exhibition, creating a dynamic space that prompts physical movement as well as a wandering gaze.

The textile elements and objects that Mirga-Tas incorporates into her work have been collected from family, friends and people she has met, or have been recovered from second-hand dealers. Imprinted with the bodies and lives of the people who have used them, these materials are transformed into vibrant, active presences within the work, to tell a collective story of the struggle with prejudice and the right to freedom as a universal cause.

The process of cutting and assembling these found materials, which are joined together with stitches that remain visible, suggests both a real and a metaphorical practice of repair, a repositioning of (and within) history, along with an empathetic inclination to care for what is considered marginal.

Romani identity, in all of its many facets, is inextricably woven into Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's investigation. The deeper meaning of her work is rooted in a desire to construct positive new paradigms through art: underscoring her origins, she reshapes the stereotypically negative imagery associated with the Sinti and Roma people (antiziganism), transforming and developing it into the vision of a transnational, transcultural, multilingual community that is free and non-violent.



The community of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (RSC) in Reggio Emilia is numerically the most significant one in Emilia Romagna, accounting for about one-third of the total RSC population in the region.

The Sinti are the largest group, and have been well integrated into the Reggio area for centuries. In the past, their most common occupation was in the field of travelling entertainment and circuses, with families of ride operators and circus performers regularly moving around the country for shows and funfairs.

These households had no stable residence, but would spend the winter in and around Reggio Emilia, which had businesses they could rely on for the purchase and repair of their fairground rides and circus equipment.

Over the years, the gradual decline of this traditional sector led more and more of them to abandon their former professions. At the same time, since they no longer had any reason to travel around for work, the Sinti population increasingly settled in one place.

In addition to this community, Reggio Emilia was home to a smaller group of Roma, who arrived in the 1990s-2000 with Romania's entry into the European Union.

The area of Reggio Emilia was also one of the first places in Italy to witness the emergence of religious movements associated with the Catholic Church that placed RSC groups at the centre of their ministry, also providing them with social support.



## Rino, “The Marziano”

Marziano’s story is connected to *Lacio Drom* (“bon voyage,” in Romani), a project carried out at the Baragalla school in Reggio Emilia from 1965 to 1982.

This initiative, which grew out of an agreement between the Ministry of Public Education, the Pedagogical Institute at the University of Padua, and the Catholic association Opera Nomadi, was meant to encourage school attendance among Roma and Sinti children and youth, and involved creating separate classes that were often housed in the unused spaces of public school buildings.

Despite the marginalization and segregation caused by these “special classes”, there were also, according to Marziano, positive experiences due to the help and support that many teachers provided.

There is still immense prejudice in Italy against Roma and Sinti, however, and people are often afraid to tell anyone at school or work that they belong to this community.

As Marziano says, summing up the essence of antigypsyism in just a few words:

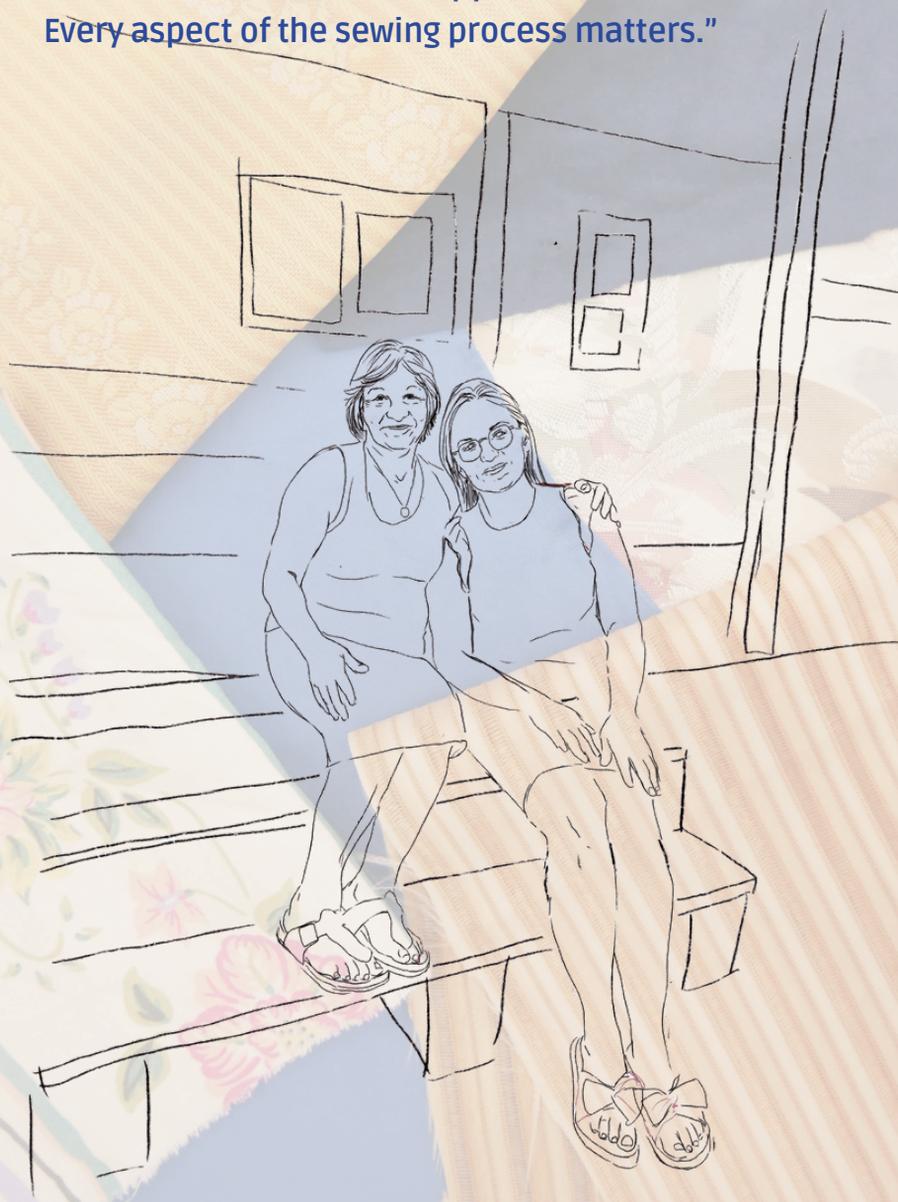
**“I’m from Reggio, I’m seventy-two, and I’ve always lived here. Yet in some places I get nasty looks, even though I’ve always been part of this city.”**

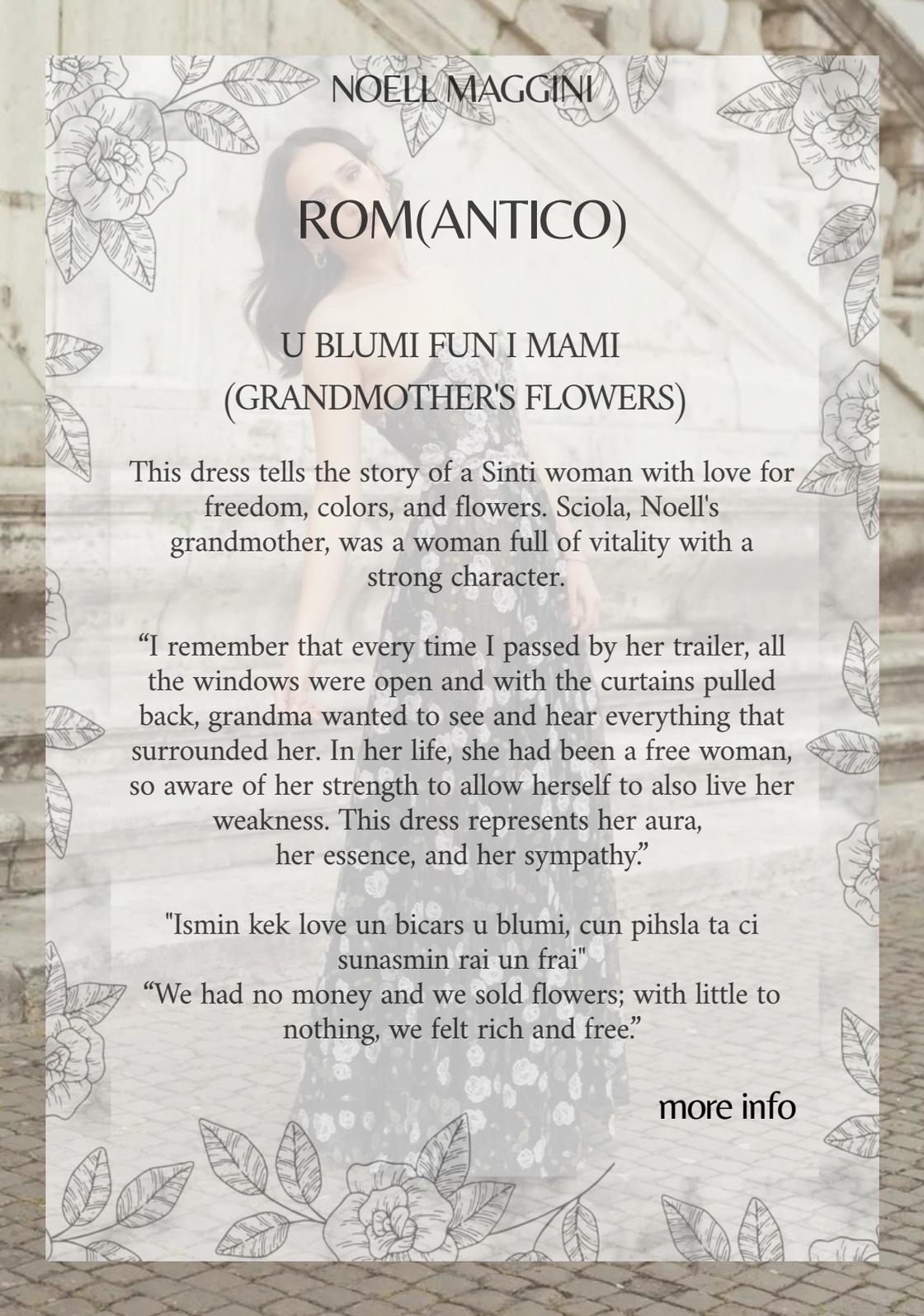
The Official Journal of the European Union defines antigypsyism as “an unusually prevalent form of racism, which has its origins in how mainstream society views and treats those considered as ‘gypsies’ in a process of historical ‘othering’, which builds on stereotypes and negative attitudes that may sometimes be unintentional or unconscious,” and which is thus more common and tolerated than other forms of racism.



**“Fabric, for me, holds deep significance—it becomes a carrier of emotion and energy. The stories we tell are literally sewn into the material. Each thread stitches together individual lives, personal histories and shared traumas. The thread itself becomes a kind of connector—a form of therapy. Every aspect of the sewing process matters.”**

From the interview to Matgorzata Mirga-Tas by Valeria Tassinari, *Il Giornale dell'Arte*, Oct. 2025.





NOELL MAGGINI

## ROM(ANTICO)

### U BLUMI FUN I MAMI (GRANDMOTHER'S FLOWERS)

This dress tells the story of a Sinti woman with love for freedom, colors, and flowers. Sciola, Noell's grandmother, was a woman full of vitality with a strong character.

“I remember that every time I passed by her trailer, all the windows were open and with the curtains pulled back, grandma wanted to see and hear everything that surrounded her. In her life, she had been a free woman, so aware of her strength to allow herself to also live her weakness. This dress represents her aura, her essence, and her sympathy.”

“Ismi kek love un bicars u blumi, cun pihsla ta ci sunasmin rai un frai”

“We had no money and we sold flowers; with little to nothing, we felt rich and free.”

[more info](#)

“I form a strong attachment to the figures  
and to the stories I’ve been given.

They stay with me. I take something from  
each one, and I remember them.

What strikes me is how similar our lives  
are. We are guided by shared values, by a  
sense of care for the future and for the  
generations that will come after us.

Identity is something deeply rooted.  
These women remember exactly where  
they come from. That’s why I approach  
their portrayal with great sensitivity—  
how I illustrate them, how I choose to  
show them, matters.

I selected quotes from Papusza’s poetry  
with them in mind. Like them, she lived a  
life on the move—and, at some point, she  
too had to stop.”



# FROM "SONGS OF THE ROMA"

[...]

Oh how lovely it is to gather mushrooms,  
To carry love,  
to bake potatoes in the fire...

And the Roma horse waits on the meadow, while the wagon is made ready for the road...

Oh, how beautiful are the sleepless nights, listening to the frogs playing their sweet serenades!

In the sky, the hen and her chicks, and the Big Dipper will foretell the future of the Roma and the silver little moon, father of our Indian forefathers, brings us his light, he watches over the children in the tent, guides the Roma woman gently so she may swaddle her child with ease.

IN THE SKY, THE HEN AND HER CHICKS, AND THE BIG DIPPER WILL FORETELL THE FUTURE OF THE ROMA AND THE SILVER LITTLE MOON,



THE SKY, TO GATHER IN THE HEART ITS MANY SHADES OF BLUE!

Oh, how beautiful it is to gaze at the sky,  
to gather in the heart its many shades of blue!

[...]

Oh, how beautifully the forest hums for us  
it is he who sings me songs.

Oh, how beautifully the rivers flow away  
it is they who gladden my heart.

How beautiful it is to gaze into the depth of the river  
and to tell it everything. Everything, everything has  
long since passed,  
and everything, everything  
has been taken along with it  
even my youthful years.

**Bronisława Wajs (Papusza)**





"Cronache Reggiane", 26th March 1970



"Cronache Reggiane", 27th March 1966



Studio Vaiani, "Car-railway gymkhana. Funfair"  
 Public Gardens, Reggio Emilia, c. 1965

# O styago le romengo

**TWO HORIZONTAL STRIPES  
REPRESENT THE SKY AND THE EARTH.**

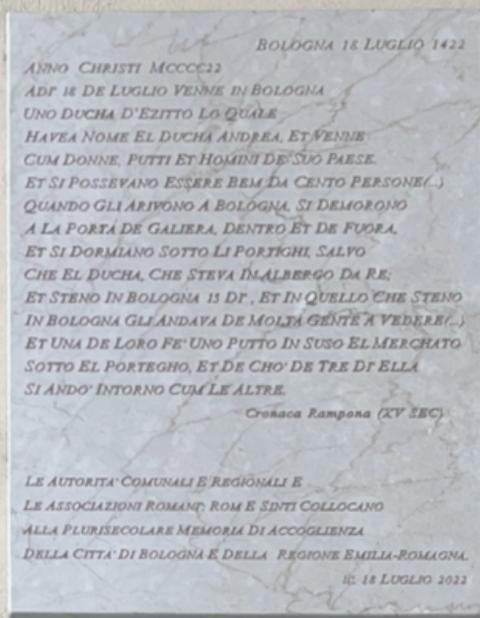
**IN THE CENTRE, THE RED WHEEL  
SYMBOLIZES CONTINUOUS MIGRATION.**

**THE WHEEL IS REMINISCENT OF THE ONE  
ON THE FLAG OF INDIA, THE LAND  
FROM WHICH THE SINTI AND ROMA CAME.**



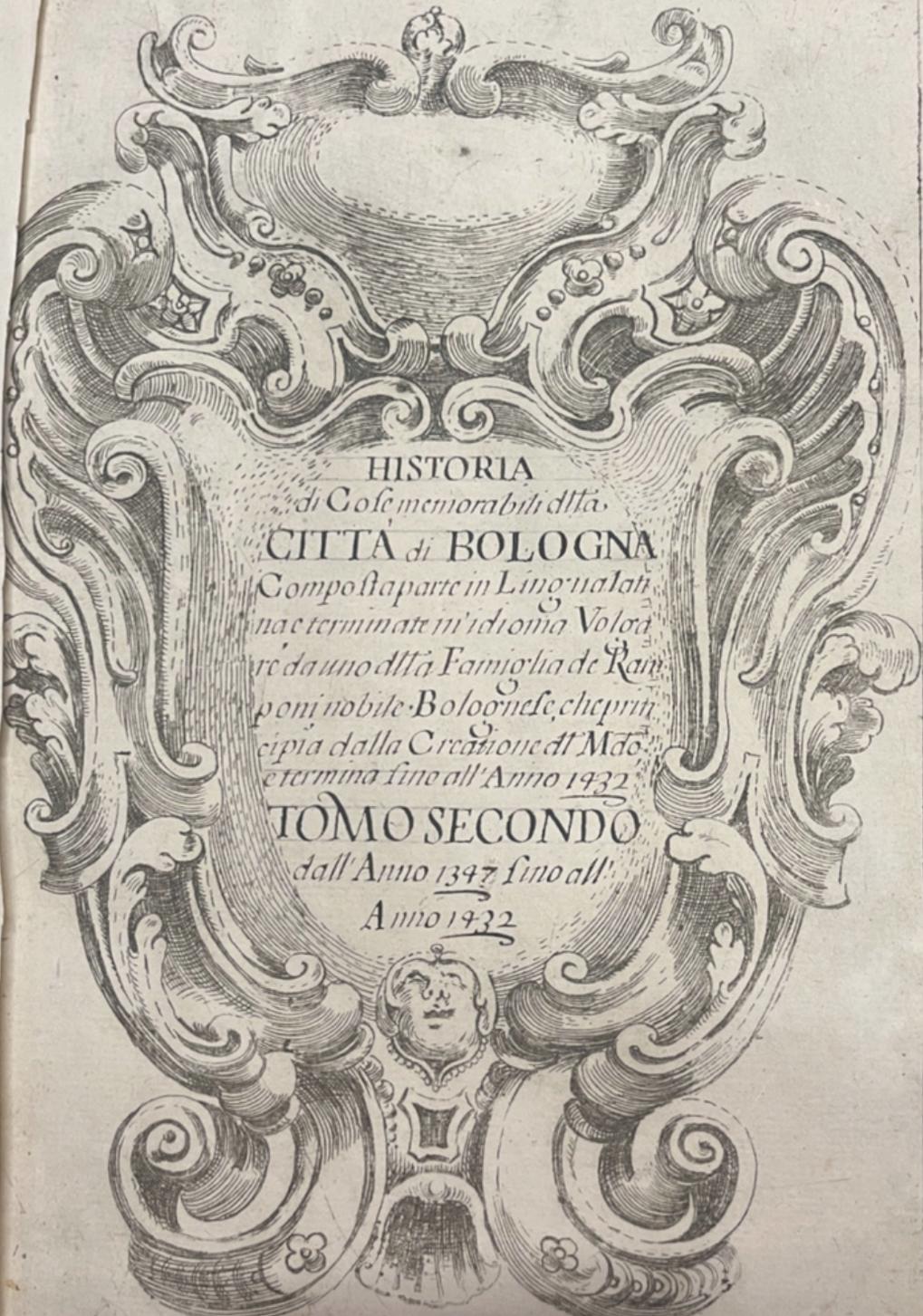
“The work I created also begins with a quote from an information plaque in Bologna from the year 1422, which records the welcome of Roma and Sinti to the city. [...] A historical plaque from Bologna commemorates their early presence, but this recognition does not reflect their current living conditions.”

(From the interview to Malgorzata Mirga-Tas by Valeria Tassinari, Il Giornale dell'Arte, Oct. 2025).



The plaque to which the artist alludes was placed in 2022 under the archway of Porta Galliera by the City of Bologna. It quotes the beginning of the Cronaca Rampona, which, along with the Cronaca Varignana, is the oldest document testifying to the presence of Roma in Bologna.

In the Cronaca Rampona, one reads that on 18 July 1422, a number of pilgrims were welcomed by the local authorities and one of them gave birth to a child.



HISTORIA  
*di Cose memorabili ditta*  
**CITTA di BOLOGNA**  
*Composta parte in Lingua lati-  
na e terminata in idioma Volgar  
e da uno ditta Famiglia de Ran-  
poni nobile Bolognese, che prin-  
cipia dalla Creazione di Mdo.  
e termina fino all'Anno 1432*  
**TOMO SECONDO**  
*dall'Anno 1347 fino all'  
Anno 1432*

Out of the many stories collected from the Sinti community in Reggio Emilia, there is one that looks to Sinti history for an example of strength, courage and determination.

**Johann Trollmann (1907–1944, Germany), was a boxer who stood up to the Third Reich.**

Born into a Sinti family in Lower Saxony, he fell in love with the sport as a young boy and became one of the most skilled boxers in Germany, known for his quick, agile, dance-like style.

Despite winning many matches and a middleweight championship, in 1933 he was forced by the Nazi regime to take part in a rigged match with the German boxer Gustav Eder. Instructed to limit his movements unless he wanted his license revoked, Trollmann protested by showing up for the fight with his hair dyed blond and his body whitened with flour, as a caricature of an Aryan. Trollmann, defeated and at this point a sworn enemy of the Nazi regime—which saw the boxing ring as a perfect arena for affirming the supremacy of the “Aryan race”—was persecuted for the rest of his life, eventually dying in the Neuengamme concentration camp in 1944.

He has now been commemorated in many ways: by a monument in Berlin and by films and books such as *Razza di zingaro* (2016), by the Nobel Prize-winning dramatist Dario Fo, or *Alla fine di ogni cosa* (2016), by the Roman journalist Mauro Garofalo.

**Johann Trollmann, a symbol of the strength of his people, was nicknamed Rukeli, which in the Sinti language means “tree”.**







All of the stories collected through meetings with Reggio's Sinti communities show a striking common denominator: the sense of sharing connected to every part of life—from joy, to birth, to more painful times, in which grief becomes collective.

"When one of us is ill, we are ill as a whole people, united in experiencing that pain until it is over" (Noell Maggini, fashion designer).

Another key moment linking these communities is the kind of party they call "baracca", the elements of which—from big tents to music—are famous throughout Italy. During these celebrations, everyone comes together: children, young people, adults and the elderly.



Sinti funeral ceremony in Reggio Emilia



The dancing man is Fioravante Lucchesi (Bastia Umbra, Perugia, 1927 – Reggio Emilia, 1996). In 1940 he was interned in Prignano sulla Secchia (near Modena), along with his family and other Sinti who had settled in the town for the winter. When the armistice came, the Prignano camp ceased to be guarded, and once he was free, Lucchesi joined the partisans fighting in the Emilian Apennines.

After the end of the war, he settled in Reggio Emilia and in 1948 married Lucia Santa Pozzi (1934–2016), portrayed here on the left, leaning against the car.

## Artist bio

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas (b. 1978 in Zakopane, Poland) lives and works in Czarna Góra, Poland, in the Tatra Mountains.

She holds a degree in Sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. In addition to her work as an artist, she is an educator and activist.

She has taken part in exhibitions around the world, even representing Poland at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022, with a pavilion titled "Re-enchanting the World".

Her most recent solo shows have included: Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz; Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne; The Whitworth, Manchester (2025); Västerås Konstmuseum, Västerås, Sweden; High Line, New York; Tate St. Ives, St. Ives; Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (2024); Haefner Foyer Kunsthaus, Zurich; Andalusian Center for Contemporary Art, Seville; Frith Street Gallery, London; Brücke Museum, Berlin; Göteborgs Konsthall, Göteborg; Zachęta-National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; The Living History Forum, Stockholm; Karma International, Zurich; Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw (2023).

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