Casa degli Artisti

IRIS
Practices of Relation
Art as a Practice of Relation, Research and Experimentation

Multidisciplinary Open Call

Applications: 17 November–31 December 2026 | Introductory workshops: February–March 2027 | Residencies begin: 21 April 2027

IRIS is Casa degli Artisti's 2027 open call: ten residencies in Milan dedicated to forms of relation, preceded by a programme of introductory workshops between February and March and commencing in April 2027. Each residency is accompanied by a scientific committee and a research component, and opens out to the city through a public programme.

How is an encounter created? What spaces, times, gestures and conditions enable people to connect with one another? And what role can artistic practices play in generating new forms of proximity, belonging and connection?

An estimated one in six people worldwide experiences loneliness, according to the World Health Organization's Commission on Social Connection in 2025, which recognised social disconnection as a public health issue.[1] Behind this figure lie very different stories. Some people seek solitude as a space for listening and creation; others experience it as distance from other people.

Artistic practices have always created the conditions for relationships: an exhibition, a performance, a concert, a celebration or a ritual changes the way people occupy a space, share time and meet one another. This is an ancient, deeply rooted form of knowledge, embodied in practice and passed on through experience. IRIS places it at the centre of a process of research and experimentation.

The name comes from a flower that holds within it a multiplicity of colours. Some iris species grow from an underground stem that spreads horizontally, giving rise to new roots and leaves. It is a rhizomatic structure, much like relationships themselves: what is visible on the surface rests on a hidden network. IRIS is conceived in the same way: residencies unfolding in parallel, forms of knowledge intersecting, and archives continuing to grow beyond each individual pathway. For this reason, mapping existing practices is an integral part of the project. It helps identify methodologies, outcomes and open questions, and build a network for exchange among artists, institutions and communities.

The quality of our relationships is part of our well-being and health, a principle also recognised by institutions. In 2019, the World Health Organization brought together evidence on the contribution of the arts to individual and collective health and well-being.[2] In Italy, the Cultural Welfare Center has brought these issues into the cultural and institutional debate, making a rich body of experience visible through research and mapping activities.[3] In April 2026, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Health

signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen the link between culture and health.[4] IRIS operates within this field, bringing artistic practices into dialogue with research, healthcare institutions and welfare, and working on the conditions that make relationships possible.

Criteria and guiding questions

Proposals are assessed on the basis that relation is not only the subject of the work, but also something the work itself produces.

The question guiding IRIS is how these transformations take place: what devices, spaces, timeframes and forms of participation can foster encounters, belonging and connection?

Each proposal is invited to engage with four guiding questions:

1. Which form of solitude, disconnection, connection or relationship does it seek to explore?
2. What kind of relationship can the artistic proposal activate?
3. What social context could the proposal involve?
4. What would the proposal like to change for the people involved?

People, communities, disciplines, technologies, organisms, territories, institutions or forms of knowledge can all be part of this relationship.

Existing projects and proposals still to be developed are welcome, including those built through scientific, cultural and institutional partnerships and networks. Applicants may also submit research questions and working methodologies they wish to put into practice: the application may describe a work that is still taking shape.

These areas of exploration are indicative and may be freely combined.

Who can apply

IRIS is open to artists, working individually or collectively; curators; and designers or project developers presenting proposals created in collaboration with artists. Researchers in scientific fields who are interested in bringing their practice into dialogue with other forms of knowledge are also welcome.

The call is open to all disciplines and forms of expression, including but not limited to: visual arts, performance, dance, theatre, music, sound, photography, video, writing, applied arts, architecture, design, digital and technological practices, participatory practices, body-based research, environmental practices, public space and hybrid forms.

Healthcare, education and welfare professionals may also apply, as may research institutions and universities, third-sector organisations, social cooperatives, healthcare organisations, archives, art foundations, philanthropic foundations and corporate foundations interested in developing hybrid projects at the intersection of art, science, territorial relationships and social relationships.

Research institutions and universities are specifically invited to bring expertise or a particular interest in loneliness, social disconnection or relationships, together with a

willingness to participate as scientific partners in IRIS's artistic research. They will contribute to observing and documenting what the projects developed during the residencies set in motion.

Applications from outside Italy are welcome. For applicants from non-EU countries, the selection process will take into account the time required to obtain any necessary visas (see "How to apply").

Residency timeline
The programme unfolds in four phases.

Application and selection. Applications are open from 17 November to 31 December 2026. Proposals will be assessed by Casa degli Artisti's curatorial team together with the scientific committee, which brings together artistic, scientific, social and institutional expertise and evaluates the strength of each proposal's research framework. Ten artistic projects will be selected, with the results announced by early February 2027.

Incubation. Between February and March 2027, an introductory programme will take place, including workshops and preparatory meetings at the intersection of art, science and health. Short residencies may also be arranged in March, with a pause during the first days of April for Design Week and the possibility of resuming afterwards.

Residency. The residencies are divided into two cycles: the first five projects will run from 21 April to mid-September 2027, and the second five from mid-September 2027 to mid-January 2028. The duration of each residency is flexible within its cycle, and requires participants to be present at Casa degli Artisti in Milan. Time in residence is dedicated to research and project development, alongside open workshops, co-design sessions and opportunities to exchange ideas with partners in the scientific and cultural network. Participants will retain their autonomy while engaging with the other residents, Casa degli Artisti's curatorial team and the organisations and individuals involved in the project.

Public presentation and programme. Each residency concludes with an event open to the city, as described in the "Public programme and presentation" section. Where envisaged by the project, the research processes and outcomes may also feed into scientific publications developed together with research partners.

Research
The scientific component can become part of the process and take shape in response to the specific characteristics of each practice. Artistic projects and research may engage in dialogue with research from a range of fields, from neuroscience and psychology to cognitive and social sciences; from physiology to public health; from sociology to philosophy and aesthetics; and from education to cultural welfare. The aim is to identify questions, tools and methods of observation.

When the research component involves audiences or participants, the project may use tools suited to the artistic practice and the residency context. These may include standardised questionnaires on loneliness, social connection and well-being; interviews

and reflective conversations; logbooks and participant observation; relational mapping; narrative accounts or participatory photography; and, where appropriate, non-invasive physiological tools. In all cases, participation in the research will be voluntary and subject to an informed-consent procedure and, where necessary, an ethical assessment agreed with the scientific partners involved, in compliance with personal data protection legislation.

The project also builds on the experience Casa degli Artisti has gained through 40Hz and its collaborations with the University of Pavia and the Polytechnic University of Turin. These may be complemented by new relationships with universities, research centres and organisations active in health, education and cultural welfare.

The scientific committee
IRIS is supported by a scientific committee bringing together scientific, institutional, social and artistic expertise.

The committee supports Casa degli Artisti's curatorial team in assessing applications and validating each project's research framework, checking the robustness and feasibility of the proposed observation process. It also helps identify projects that could connect with ongoing research and build collaborations with universities and research centres.

- **Catterina Seia** — institutional affairs and cultural welfare. President and founding member of CCW – Cultural Welfare Center, an Italian research centre for cultural welfare, and Vice-President of Fondazione Fitzcarraldo.
- **Giovanna Forlanelli Rovati**, specialising in art and science. President of the Luigi Rovati Foundation in Milan, established to foster dialogue between artistic and scientific research, centred around a museum that brings together the Etruscan collection with modern and contemporary art. With a background in medicine, she founded the publishing house Johan & Levi in 2005.
- **Serena Barello** — scientific area, health psychology. Associate Professor at the University of Pavia, where she heads the Health Psychology Unit at the WHYpsy Lab. Her work focuses on engagement in care pathways and tools for assessing people's experiences.
- **Emanuela Confalonieri** — scientific area, developmental psychology. Full Professor of Developmental and Educational Psychology at the Catholic University of Milan. Her work focuses on adolescence, bonds and emotional relationships.
- **Anna Ogliari** — scientific area, clinical child and adolescent psychology. Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology at Vita-Salute San Raffaele University, where she heads the Child in Mind Lab, and Director of the UniSR School of Specialisation in Clinical Psychology.
- **Franca Zuccoli** — social and educational area. Full Professor of Teaching Methods and Special Needs Education at the University of Milano-Bicocca (Department of Human Sciences for Education "Riccardo Massa"), where she coordinates the PhD programme in Intangible Heritage in Socio-Cultural Innovation.

Depending on the fields addressed by the applications received, the selection committee may be supplemented by external experts chosen for their specific expertise. The final composition of the selection committee will be published together with the results.

Objectives and research areas

IRIS pursues three interconnected objectives: to activate artistic, design and research practices capable of generating, making perceptible or transforming relationships; to create a public programme that fosters encounters, exchange and relationships among residents, audiences, communities, the research world, institutions and territories; and to contribute to knowledge about the value of relationships, including through scientific publications developed with research partners on the basis of the processes, methods and, where applicable, data generated by the projects.

Within this framework, we are interested in proposals that explore different forms of solitude; isolation and social disconnection; relationships and interdependence; belonging and community; encounters and proximity; cooperation and reciprocity; the body and perception; relationships between human beings and other forms of life; territory, the environment and memory; physical and digital networks; attention and shared presence; and the relationship between art, health, well-being and quality of life.

These areas of exploration are indicative and may be freely combined.

Public programme and presentation

Each selected project will be expected to produce a form of public experience: exhibitions, performances, installations, participatory formats, interventions in local contexts or the sharing of good practices. Presentations will take place across different venues, with Casa degli Artisti as their hub, as well as at other organisations and public spaces.

Documentation of the practices, relationships and experiences activated may become part of a living archive and of digital, print and multimedia publications, documenting methodologies, outcomes, questions and testimonies beyond the duration of the individual residencies.

Where provided for in the research project, the public experience may also become an opportunity for observation through questionnaires or other tools suited to the practice, in accordance with the participation and safeguarding procedures described in the “Research” section.

What Casa degli Artisti provides

Each selected project will have access to a workspace at Casa degli Artisti for the duration of the residency. The space is intended as a place to develop works, relationships, encounters and potential collaborations with fellow residents and with the network of scientific and cultural partners.

Casa degli Artisti

Casa degli Artisti will provide a financial contribution to support the residencies, amounting to a total of €20,000 to be allocated among the selected projects according to the duration and structure of each residency. It is also seeking additional resources which, if secured, may supplement the residency budget. Any updates will be communicated to the selected projects.

It will also provide support for research and production, opportunities to engage with IRIS's scientific and cultural network, and assistance with organising public presentations and communications.

Rights and production commitments

The work and/or research developed during the residency will remain the property of its creator or the proposing organisation. Casa degli Artisti retains the right to communicate and disseminate the work and to archive it, and reserves a right of first refusal to organise exhibitions, presentations or cultural initiatives related to projects developed within IRIS, under the terms and for the period defined in the residency agreement.

Documentation of the process, including texts, images, videos, recordings and related materials, also produced by Casa degli Artisti's communications office, will become part of the IRIS living archive and may be used for communication, research and the promotion of the project.

Data and results generated as part of the scientific research may be used in aggregated form for scientific publications jointly developed with research partners, in compliance with the data protection procedures described in the "Research" section.

How to apply

The application must include:

- a brief description of your practice;
- a proposal, research question or research idea;
- a description of the relationships the project activates or intends to activate;
- a portfolio or documentation of previous work (max. 3 MB, or a link);
- a valid identity document or passport;
- for applicants from non-EU countries, confirmation of their availability to begin the visa application process if selected;
- any information about forms of knowledge, disciplines or individuals/organisations with whom you would like to enter into dialogue.

Letters of support and expressions of interest from organisations, partners and networks connected to the proposed projects are also welcome and will be viewed favourably.

The online application must be accompanied by the application form and the privacy notice concerning the processing of personal data pursuant to EU Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR).

Submit applications: ONLINE FORM
For information and enquiries: opencall@casadegliartisti.org

Calendar
Call published: 17 November 2026
Application deadline: 31 December 2026
Selected projects announced: by early February 2027
Workshops and preparatory meetings: January, February and March 2027
Optional short residencies: March 2027
Residencies begin: 21 April 2027
First cycle: 21 April to mid-September 2027
Second cycle: mid-September 2027 to mid-January 2028
Location: Casa degli Artisti, Milan
Please note: only complete applications received by the deadline will be admitted to the selection process.

The network of scientific, cultural and institutional partners will be built progressively over the course of the project.

Notes

[1] World Health Organization (2025), From loneliness to social connection: charting a path to healthier societies, Report of the WHO Commission on Social Connection.

[2] Fancourt, D., Finn, S. (2019), What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67.

[3] Cultural Welfare Center, culturalwelfare.center

[4] Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Health (2026), Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen the link between culture and health, 29 April 2026.