

I suppose we should be thanking Luigi Brugnaro, the mayor of Venice. By exerting his political agenda, and denouncing the photography of Gianni Berengo Gardin, the brutal images of the big ships have been shared with indignation around the world. The exhibit has now opened at FAI Olivetti Negozio on Piazza San Marco, despite the mayor's attempts to keep the photographs hidden. ([versione italiana](#))

Brugnaro seems to be in denial.

When I asked him on twitter about the issue of mass tourism in Venice, he shot back: "*non lascerò che alcuni "intellettuali da strapazzo" continuino a denigrare #Venezia dicendo di amarla.*" Or in plain English, " I will not let some "hack intellectuals" continue to denigrate Venice while saying he loves her. "

It is now a badge of honor to be considered an intellectual hack by the mayor of Venice. We hacks see the devastation that the cruise ships and rampant tourism are causing. We see the inflated rents and illegal short-term rentals. We see the struggles of artisans, residents, and Venetian shopkeepers. We see the crowded calle and the disrespect. We see that the stones, which have existed for over 1,500 years are crumbling. Literally. This is not a metaphor for the loss of cultural integrity (hastened by the mayor's misinformed proposition to sell the art work of Klimt and Chagall). The stones really are crumbling. Our steps, all 30 million of us that visit each year, are wearing down a city that can no longer sustain our love.

We are the *foresti*, the outsiders. Some of us come to Venice to replenish our souls, to experience her beauty, her food, and her art. We don't buy cheap souvenirs and we don't picnic on monuments. We search out artisans wherever we can find them. And we've become brokenhearted.

We're witnessing the demise of Venetian civilization. As the cruise ships exponentially grow in size and number, the residential population falls. Are there many contributing factors? Of course, but this inverse relationship epitomizes the issue.

When Calvino's Marco Polo was describing Venice to the Kublai Kahn, he explained, "Without stones there is no arch." Without Venetians, there will be no Venice. How can we, the people who are privileged to cross your bridges in our lifetime, help stop the exodus?