



# ITADAKI MASU

## THE HIDDEN STORIES IN THE KITCHEN OF ANIME

An exhibition curated by Samuele Nazionale and Silvia Casini, 2025

Once again, thanks to Japanese animation, cuisine manages to be a source of unity, discovery and celebration. The dishes illustrated in the masterpieces of animation masters such as Hayao Miyazaki, Eichiro Oda and Masashi Kishimoto have captivated an entire generation, who spent their childhood summers between holidays and anime. Almost twenty years later, Japan and its traditional and pop culture are the protagonists of a cultural phenomenon of biblical proportions, whose wind blows with vibrant energy. Today, almost all of us are familiar with the names of dishes such as *Onigiri* and *Ramen*: the ground is therefore fertile enough to allow an in-depth investigation into the link between Japanese tradition and the cuisine of the anime and manga world.

These products are considered authentic works of art in the Land of the Rising Sun, as well as trusted companions in the daily lives of adults and children (I emphasise adults, as I hope it is well known that this is an art form aimed at everyone and can be classified into almost infinite genres). Among the many reasons to be fascinated by it, however, one deserves particular attention: the link between



The meticulous detail with which traditional Japanese dishes are rendered in anime gives an idea of their enormous cultural significance, but since this concept is not at all obvious to Western eyes, it is worth exploring this dimension.

In anime, people do not eat “just to eat”: in Japanese culture, food is nourishment for the soul, a source of growth and spiritual elevation, so you will never see a scene of food “thrown in at random”, but always associated with a crucial moment in the protagonists’ stories. Naruto, a young orphan from the village of Konoha possessed by a fearsome demon, receives love and trust from the village ramen master who welcomes him every evening and offers him comfort and warmth with a bowl of steaming ramen; Chihiro, who arrives lost in the hot springs of monsters and demons, is saved by the young spirit/dragon Haku, who consoles her despair with a plate of onigiri; Some eat to offer friendship and help, others to soothe a deep wound of the body or soul, and still others to give thanks for a long-awaited encounter. The dishes themselves chosen by the authors carry with them ancient and precious stories, thanks to which, with a little curiosity, we can learn much more about Japan than we ever imagined.



Here is a route designed to immerse you in the beauty of this place, in nine stages that will allow you to discover a hidden world from which you can learn so much:

# ANIME, FOOD AND JAPANESE TRADITION

## Purpose and objectives of Itadakimasu

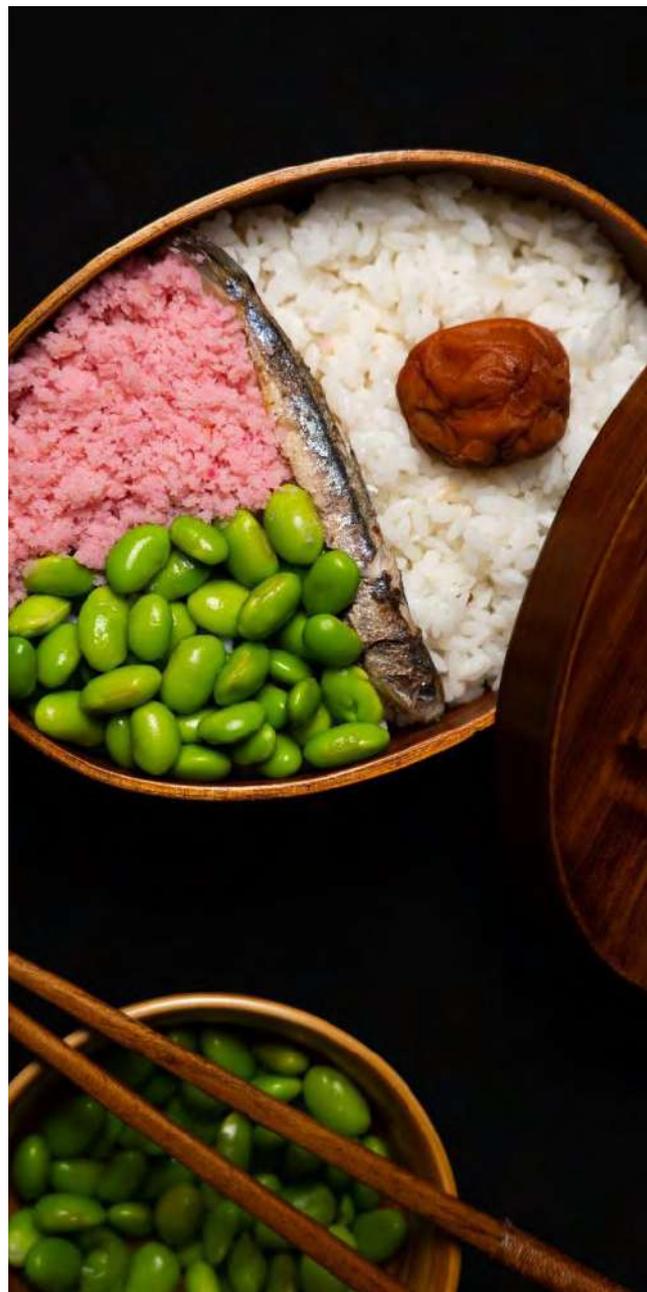
Why does a drawn dish make us hungry? How can an animated scene – steaming ramen, an onigiri wrapped in seaweed, a colourful bento box – arouse in us such a real desire for flavours we have never tasted? The answer is that in anime, food is not just nourishment: it is storytelling, emotion, culture. Every gesture, every detail, every dish is a bridge between imagination and reality, between us and Japan.

This exhibition aims to introduce visitors to one of **the most refined and significant culinary traditions in the world**, using a language they know and love: **Japanese animation**. Anime and manga have been part of the lives of entire generations, accompanying them with unforgettable stories and iconic characters. Through them, Japanese culture has entered the homes of millions of people, making its rituals and symbols familiar.

Within the exhibition, the most famous scenes from the works of **Studio Ghibli** and the films of **Mamoru Hosoda** and **Makoto Shinkai** become the starting point for explaining the profound meaning of food in Japan: an act of sharing, a moment of gratitude. The simple gesture of saying itadakimasu before eating reveals a philosophy of life that considers every meal a gift to be honoured with awareness.

Alongside the animated images, the exhibition presents **original ukiyo-e prints and authentic posters** of the most famous anime, to emphasise the continuity between traditional art and contemporary imagery. The prints, dating back to the Edo and Meiji periods, depict scenes from everyday life and historical events, showing how the representation of daily life and food was already central to Japanese culture centuries ago.

These works interact with **modern animation**, creating a narrative that spans time and reveals the power of a tradition capable of renewal.



The experience is not limited to visual contemplation: **educational panels, historical insights and interactive installations** guide visitors on a journey of discovery through recipes, utensils, rituals and curiosities related to Japanese cuisine.

The aim is to offer an authentic and profound understanding, capable of stimulating not only the appetite, but also curiosity and a desire to learn.

**Itadakimasu is more than an exhibition:** it is an invitation to explore the indissoluble link between food, art and identity through one of the most powerful means of contemporary pop culture. If, upon leaving, you have learned something new and felt, even for a moment, as if you were inside the scene of your favourite anime, then we will have achieved our goal: to transform curiosity into knowledge and emotion into culture.



# THE SHRINE OF KAMI

At the beginning of the exhibition, visitors will be greeted by the majestic Inari, the *kami* – or Japanese deity – of harvest, agriculture, fertility and prosperity, to whom they can offer symbolic gifts such as rice, beans, cereals, flowers or fruit, considered among the most precious gifts.

After introducing his messengers to the public, the beautiful white foxes that inhabit the Japanese archipelago, the *kami* will introduce his listeners to the journey that awaits them, telling them the story of Japan and its cuisine, based on respect for nature and divided into *washoku*, the traditional culinary art, and *yoshoku*, the cuisine consumed daily today, which originated in the *Meiji* era when the country opened its doors to Western culture. Against the backdrop of this first room are illustrations evoking characters from anime such as “Sailor Moon”, Miyazaki’s “Spirited Away”, “Inuyasha” and “Your Name”, whose protagonists, not surprisingly, are all priestesses of the *kami*.



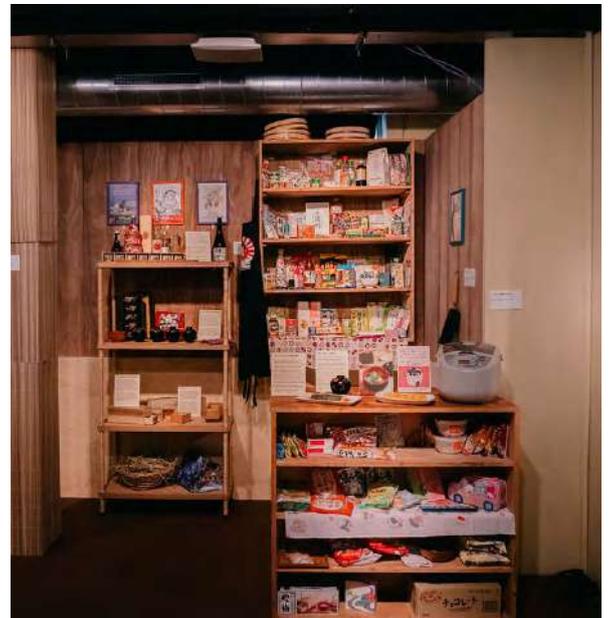
Bidders will be asked to recall a moment of ritual offering, not just a thank you but an expression of gratitude and appreciation for food and its lifeblood. Now, the journey through the exhibition can begin!

# ROOM OF BENTŌ

## How to start your day when you're in Japan

Every morning in the Land of the Rising Sun, mothers, young people, students and workers wake up early to prepare **bentō**, the typical Japanese lunch box, usually based on rice, but full of delicious and nutritious foods such as fried meat and fish, meatballs and tamagoyaki, arranged with great care. The bentō must be cooled, drained of liquids and plated in the most aesthetic and practical way possible: preparing it is, to all intents and purposes, a ritual that has its roots hundreds of years ago.

*Itadakimasu. Hidden Stories in Anime Cuisine*, in a setting that recreates a typical Japanese kitchen with a retro feel, offers several variations: those for children, with shapes of animals or kawaii creatures, and those immortalised by great animated films, such as Hayao Miyazaki's "My Neighbour Totoro", an iconic film beloved by several generations, or "Suzume", Makoto Shinkai's



You will also find the Bentō Game (お弁当ゲーム), an activity that allows you to compose your own bentō by carefully choosing ingredients, shapes and colours. With rice, vegetables, a protein source, a dessert and decorations, the goal is to create a balanced and harmonious composition.

Take a photo of your bentō and share it on Instagram to enter your bentō into the game.

# RĀMEN ROOM

Despite its Chinese origins, *rāmen* is now one of the most iconic dishes of modern Japanese culture, as well as the first that the West came to know on a large scale thanks to the anime series *Naruto* by master Kishimoto Masashi.

A *rāmen bar* inspired by traditional Tokyo establishments: a cosy atmosphere, with a long wooden counter separating customers from the open kitchen, where each seat is designed for eating alone, focusing on the flavour of the dish while watching the chef prepare the *rāmen*.

The dining room aims to offer an overview of the vast universe of this dish, starting with a surprising fact:

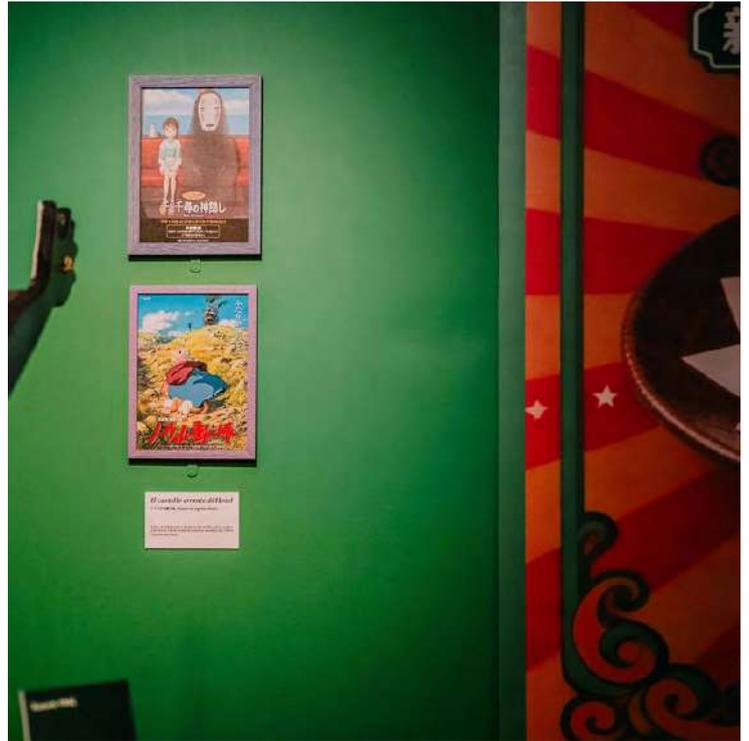
in Japan, there are over two hundred officially codified types of *rāmen*. All of them developed from four main variants, which originated in the early 20th century and then intertwined with the regional and seasonal cuisines of the entire Japanese archipelago.



# BANQUET OF THE KAMI

'Spirited Away', a masterpiece by master Hayao Miyazaki, is considered one of the most important animated films of all time. It is a profound tribute to the values and folklore of Japanese culture, which finds one of its most powerful symbols in food. Emblematic is the scene of the banquet offered to the character of 'No-Face' (*Kaonashi*), in which an extraordinary variety of traditional dishes appear: each dish has specific historical and cultural roots, carefully chosen by the master not only for their visual impact, but also for their symbolic meaning.

Within the exhibition, it is the table in this room that offers some of the most evocative and culturally dense ideas of the entire Itadakimasu exhibition.



# TANABATA

## Summer Matsuri and street food

Japan would not be the same without the big summer festivals that attract huge crowds to cities every year and transform the streets into a riot of colour and sound. For those who have never been there, the exhibition will allow you to soak up the atmosphere, thanks to a room where typical street food stalls, the real stars of these festivals, will be recreated with their delicacies: here you will find *takoyaki*, octopus balls symbolic of Osaka, *korokke*, potato and meat croquettes, colourful *kakigori* granitas, *taiyaki*, fish-shaped snacks, and *temarizushi*, typical of the *Tanabata* festival, the festival of stars and wishes, which celebrates the reunion of the folklore figures *Orihime* and *Ikoboshi*, who, according to legend, are separated by the Milky Way.

The room will be made even more special by traditional decorations and *tanzaku*, coloured paper strips on which the Japanese write their wishes... which our travellers will also be able to write and deliver to Princess *Orihime*. In short, entering this environment will be like walking through the streets of Kyoto during the wonderful *Tanabata* summer festival.



# CHRISTMAS ROOM

The exhibition then continues with a small room dedicated to the festive season par excellence, Christmas, decorated with typical Western festive objects and colours transported into a Japanese home.

You will learn about typical dishes: Kentucky Fried Chicken, which became popular in Japan following a surprising advertising campaign in the 1970s, and Christmas Cake, which even inspired a famous emoji. In all anime featuring Christmas scenes, the characters are seen eating one of these two dishes, such as the two protagonists of "Nana", a work by mangaka Ai Yazawa.



# HARBOUR OF YOKOHAMA

Japan's opening up to the West during the Meiji era represented an epoch-making turning point in the country's history.

From the second half of the 19th century onwards, port cities such as Yokohama became gateways to the world and meeting places for cultures, technologies and lifestyles that had been unknown until then.

In the gastronomic sphere, this change led to the emergence of a new cuisine: *yōshoku*, the result of adapting Western dishes to local tastes and ingredients. A new Japan began to take shape in those years, and understanding this transformation is essential to gaining a complete picture of Japanese culture and cuisine.



# CAFÈ

Anyone who visits Japan, even for just a few days, is fascinated by the incredible variety of cafés: well-kept, contemporary and often themed venues where you can enjoy a colourful selection of drinks, desserts, soft drinks and sometimes even hot dishes.

While *Maid Cafés*, *Butler Cafés* and *Neko Cafés* are the best known types in the West, in Japan there are also cafés dedicated to specific colours, temporary events or kawaii animals (such as capybaras, llamas or hamsters). Animation icons such as *Sailor Moon* and *Creamy* are often set in these very spaces: in the room inspired by them, you can immerse yourself in a reproduction of an authentic Japanese café, enriched with replicas in *shokuhin sampuru* technique, original gadgets and interactive video content.



# HANAMI

## The cherry blossoms

As in all Vertigo Syndrome exhibitions, an experiential and immersive room was a must, and this time it was decided to dedicate it to a crucial period of the year, probably the most important in Japanese tradition, that of *Hanami*: the blooming of the sakura cherry trees in spring. A moment full of cultural and symbolic significance, where the harmony of nature is celebrated and thanks are given for life and also for death.

For those who have never had the chance to witness this spectacle of nature, *Itadakimasu* will allow them to do so: under a shower of petals recreated with light and shadow effects, visitors will enjoy their picnic under the trees, just as the Japanese do between March and April, or contemplate the blossoming of the flowers in their purest form, alone or in company.



# THE CURATORS

## @PRANZOAKONOHA

@pranzoakonoha is a project launched in June 2021 to recount the journey of Sam, 27, as he discovers Far Eastern cuisine, starting with Asian communities in Italy.

Especially in the Eastern conception, food is a catalyst for history, culture, religion and art: it is therefore one of the most efficient channels for learning about Asia.

Sam's community has over 100,000 followers on Instagram: on his channel, you can discover important pieces of the immense Eastern cultural heritage through authentic Asian recipes, with a special focus on the world of manga/anime.

Alongside his social media activity, Sam takes @pranzoakonoha around Italy with cooking shows and conferences at exhibitions, schools and cultural events such as the Festival dell'Oriente.

## SILVIA CASINI

Silvia Casini, born in Rome, graduated in Foreign Languages and Literature, works in cinema as a project manager, journalist and writer.

She has held the position of project manager at the International Institute for Cinema and Audiovisual Arts of Latin Countries founded by Gillo Pontecorvo and Sandro Silvestri.

She has been involved in international relations and the promotion of Italian films abroad. She then specialised in strategic marketing and began collaborating with various film and television production and distribution companies in the field of product placement.

She has contributed to various newspapers and websites. Her published books include *Il gusto speziato dell'amore* (The Spicy Taste of Love) (Legge-reditore) and *Tra le stelle e il cuore* (Between the Stars and the Heart) (Bibi Book).





## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

### Number of rooms:

9 themed rooms,  
conference room,  
themed bookshop

### Number of works on display:

14 original Ukiyo-e prints  
35 Japanese shokuhin *sampuru* sculptures  
22 original Studio Ghibli posters  
37 original Japanese anime posters  
4 original Japanese anime cardboard cut-outs  
15 original video recipes

### Curators

Samuele Nazionale, Silvia Casini



### Contact

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[www.mostraitadakimasu.it](http://www.mostraitadakimasu.it)

# WHAT IS VERTIGO SYNDROME?

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vertigo S.R.L. is a cultural enterprise operating since 2022, specialising in the conception, design and production of exhibitions and exhibition events in Italy and abroad. The company offers turnkey solutions for public bodies, museums, foundations and cultural institutions, combining scientific content and immersive technologies.

## COMPANY DATA

- Company name: Vertigo S.R.L.
- Registered office: Corso Milano 23, Monza
- Legal form: Limited Liability Company
- Year of incorporation: 2022
- Sole Director: Chiara Spinnato (CEO & Institutional Relations)

## ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

Vertigo is involved in the creation of:

- Temporary exhibitions produced in-house
  - Strategic consulting
  - Design of exhibition itineraries for third parties (museums, organisers, public and private bodies)
  - Integrated services: curation, set-up, graphics, transport, technical coordination
- Main clients: private entities (exhibition organisers), public bodies (municipalities, museums), cultural associations, private museums, collectors.

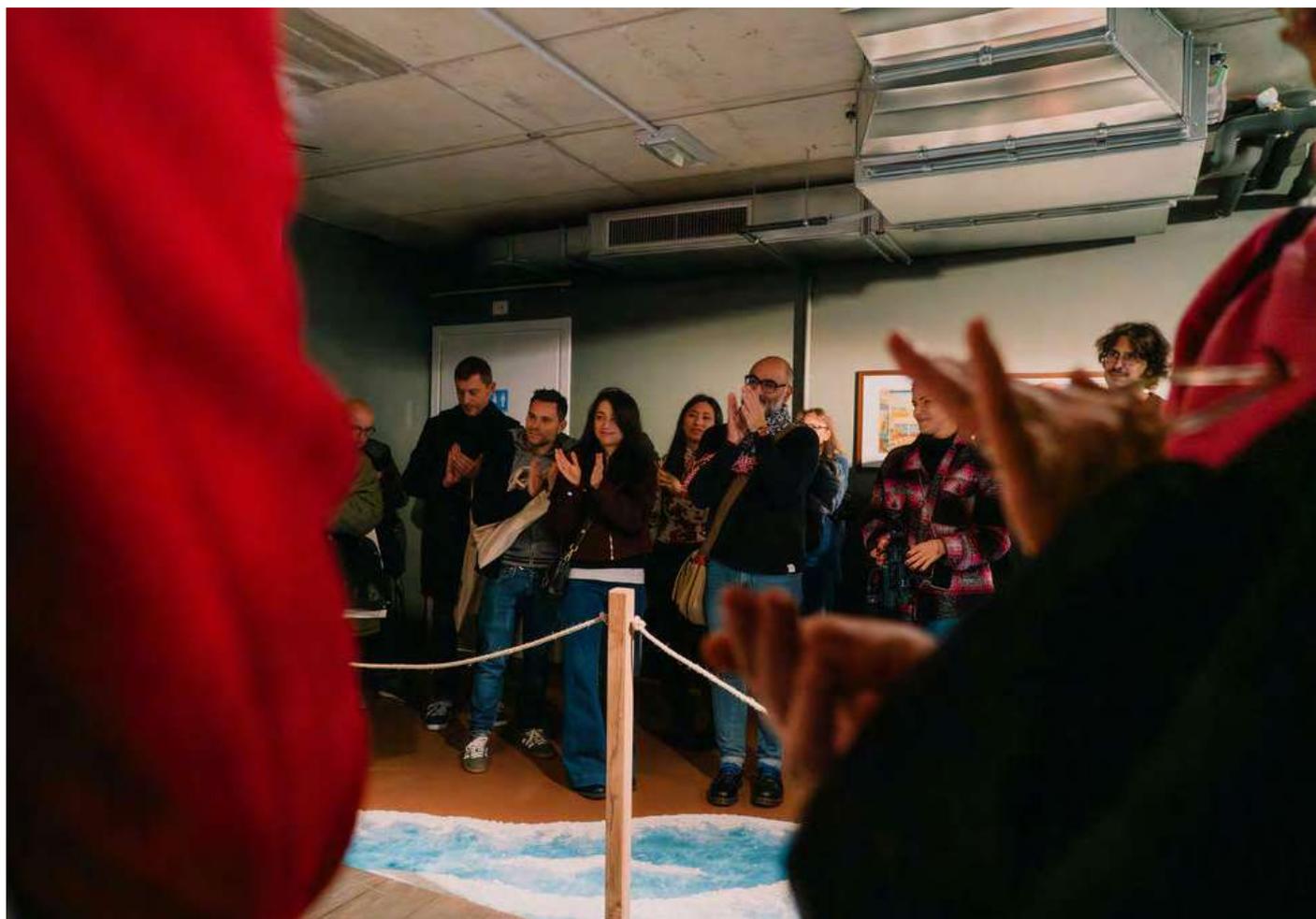
# THE VERTIGO SYNDROME BRAND

In just a few years, Vertigo Syndrome has built a highly recognisable brand, focused on an innovative, accessible and engaging cultural offering.

The exhibitions produced by Vertigo Syndrome are aimed primarily at a non-specialist audience, using narrative, visual and technological languages that aim not to bore visitors who may arrive at the exhibition legitimately unprepared for the theme covered.

The scientific content is always rigorous, but conveyed in an experiential, immersive and creative way, going beyond the “classic” model of traditional exhibitions.

This positioning has allowed Vertigo to build its own niche, with a loyal audience (thanks also to a newsletter affiliation of over 51,000 contacts), greater digital virality and interest from public and private entities eager to renew their cultural offerings.





VERTIGO SYNDROME

UNA CROCIATA CONTRO L'UGGIA DELLE MOSTRE D'ARTE

**“A crusade against the boredom  
of art exhibitions”**

[www.vertigosyndrome.it](http://www.vertigosyndrome.it)