

#### Text by Brecht Gander

Irene Cattaneo's signature motif is a cloud. What does a cloud look like? Meteorologists have identified ten primary types—but these can be broken down into dozens of "species." Cirrus clouds—thin, wispy, streaklike—are found above 5,000 meters. The Floccus Cirrus is a Cirrus with a ragged, frayed base. Not to be confused with a Castellanus Cirrus, which has a more castle-like formation. When it comes to clouds, even taxonomists get poetic. Most of us, looking skywards, describe clouds in terms of the non-cloudlike things they resemble—creating an abundance of material for Freudian analysis (pipes, dragons, mountains...). Since any given cloud can evolve into any other, they exist in a flux of descending, distending, congealing, reddening, darkening. While clouds appear to be gaseous, they are actually composed of condensation and ice crystals. Just think—above us in the sky—great floating herds of crystals.

The amorphousness, deceptiveness, and molten transformability of clouds make them function, for Irene, as a symbol of her creative practice. Her most si- gnature cloud form is Cumulus—a variety that looks like a fistful of round cotton balls glommed together. Sometimes this form is realized in glass, other times in stone. Glass, like clouds, is difficult to define. Physicists tell us it is not the solid it seems but actually a liquid active on a timespan vaster than human perceptivity. Some millenia from now the glass clouds of Irene's lamps will form a rain as they slowly melt downwards. Perhaps she was thinking of this when she designed a monumental installation, earlier this year at Samaritaine in Paris, of glass clouds and streamers, resembling a colorful downpour.

Irene established her studio in Venice three years ago, after a peripatetic career in fashion design. She chose Venice for its beauty and also to be within easy reach of the quarries, foundries, and Murano glass studios which form the material spine of her practice. Her process is at once intuitive and thoroughly conside- red. In her titling, she places a strong emphasis on double entendres, puns, and wordplay. For instance, Nuvoletto, the title of her headboard, means "little cloud" in Italian but also contains the word "letto," meaning "bed." The reference for Nuvoletto was a headboard Alexander Calder designed for Peggy Guggenheim's Venice residence, just a short distance from Irene's 2024 Venice Biennale installation. This layered approach to meaning building, in which historical reference, natural forms, personal symbology, and verbal play are folded into each other, produces a rich amalgamation of signification. This richness plays against an intuitive, spontaneous energy which can best be illustrated by anecdote: when Irene was designing a floor lamp for a collector she decided to include a central column in the form of a tree. Rather than begin modeling clay or beginning to execute detailed sketches, Irene simply walked into the collector's yard and found a fallen branch from which molds were taken and a bronze casting made.

There is a palpable sincerity and earnestness in Irene's forms. They are striking in the directness of their appeals and the concentrated clarity of their silhouettes, their graphic concision and dramatic compression. These are works that are both desireable and unashamed in wishing to be so. Her work is often imagistic, with a strong delineation of constituent materials and parts.

For instance, in Coup de Foudre, an illuminated travertine thundercloud emits a bronze bolt of lightning which zig-zags down to a basin of polished aluminum, formed to resemble splashing liquid. In this theatrical tripartite design, the stupifying power of lightning is tamed into domestic service—a prop for a heavy, lumi- nous cloud. That the watery metal container functions as a holder for an umbrella adds to the accretion of contradictions. Not only is the cloud heavy and fixed in its form by stone, that most uncloudlike of materials, but it illuminates from within: "I wanted to make a cloud that emitted, rather than blocked it," the artist says.

The opening of her solo exhibition, Meteomorphosis, coincides with the Venice Biennale.





Striped Pink Marble 53x60x86 cm (chair) 60x100x40 cm (large table) 46x59x39 cm (medium table) 50x56x38 cm (small table)

A constellation of islands in pink and grey striped "stratus" marble alludes to the interconnected system which populates the Venetian lagoon. The stratified effect of the marble speaks to the multifaceted history of Venice itself, reflecting upon how each land mass is a microcosm, the layered history of each a key part of their collective identity.





# Oro-Elogio Sculpture clock Hand blown Murano Glass, Iron 48x48 cm



A classic Italian orologio (clock) is broken down in Cattaneo's surreal timepiece, both as a word and as an object. Split into Oro (gold) and Elogio (hail) she plays on the statement that time is money by taking a simple tool from the furnace that is normally reserved for cradling glass scraps and reimagines the cushion in iron for the base for her time-keeping device. Yet nothing is as it seems: instead of hands glass water drops adorn the clock face, thus threatening to slip away at any second. Rather than numbers the mathematical symbol for DOES NOT EXIST questions the existence of time itself.









### COUP(E) DE FOUDRE

Umbrella Stand Aluminium, Bronze, Silver Travertino 170x45x45 cm

The ethereal nature of love recasts as a thundery cloud. Cattaneo harnesses the electric energy of a lightning strike and reimagines it within a familiar household object, presenting an illuminated travertine thundercloud which balances upon the jagged blade of a bronze lightning zig zag. The weight of emotion and Irene's contrary use of materials infused into an object of supposed weightlessness.



#### NUVOletto Bed Iron, Murano Glass 160x200 cm

Inspired by the famous silver bedhead made by the artist Alexander Calder for the American art collector Peggy Guggenheim Cat- taneo's homage to her favourite foreigner in Venice uses curves of handwelded iron to turn Calder's concept into a cloudy sky with solid Murano glass inserts. The work is titled Nuvoletto which means "little cloud" in Italian, while a capital L emphasises how this word already holds within it letto, the Italian word for bed.





#### Harry's Martini Handblown murano glass

Cattaneo's homage to the iconic Harry's Bar Vodka Martini presents a series of handblown cloud vessels balanced on delicate stems which allude to the shape of water.

#### HAZ(E)ARDOUS

Sculpture Onyx light 47x47x45 cm

Rays of sun caught within a stack of four hollow green rainbow onyx clouds present a play on the hazardous haze which plagues the canals of Venice. This smog is at once a danger and a captivating filter through which a new spectrum of colours come to life in the lagoon: a source of beguiling beauty.





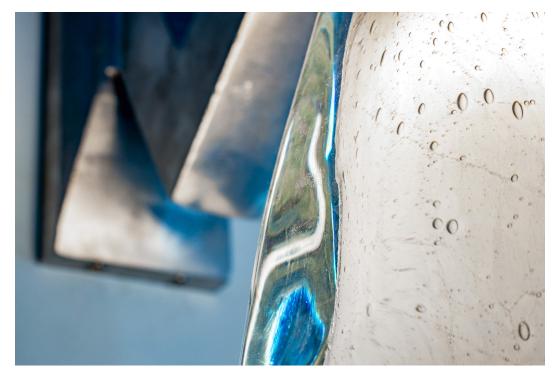
#### TEmpoR(e)ale Console Onyx, bronze 160x45x75 cm

The splintered light of the sun itches to pass through the clouds. A storm can be a measure of time: lightning strikes and thunder fol- lows. In TEmpoR(e) ale Cattaneo presents two golden bronze lightning bolts to keep an illuminated onyx console afloat, a combination that plays on the effect of sunlight struggling to slip past storm clouds. Its title reforms the Italian word Temporale (storm) breaking it down into tempo (time) and reale (royal, real, true).



A silver aluminium thunderbolt zig zags down into a heavy crystal drop of handblown Murano glass in Cattaneo's tribute to Venice's metaphorical and meteorological intensity. Here Irene uses the incamiciato technique to simultaneously treasure the transparency of the glass and at the same time making it impossible to see fully through the water drop.

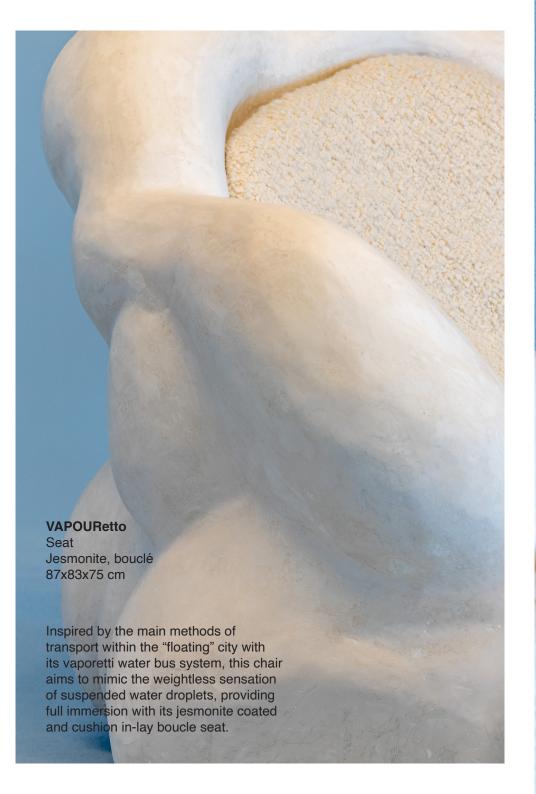




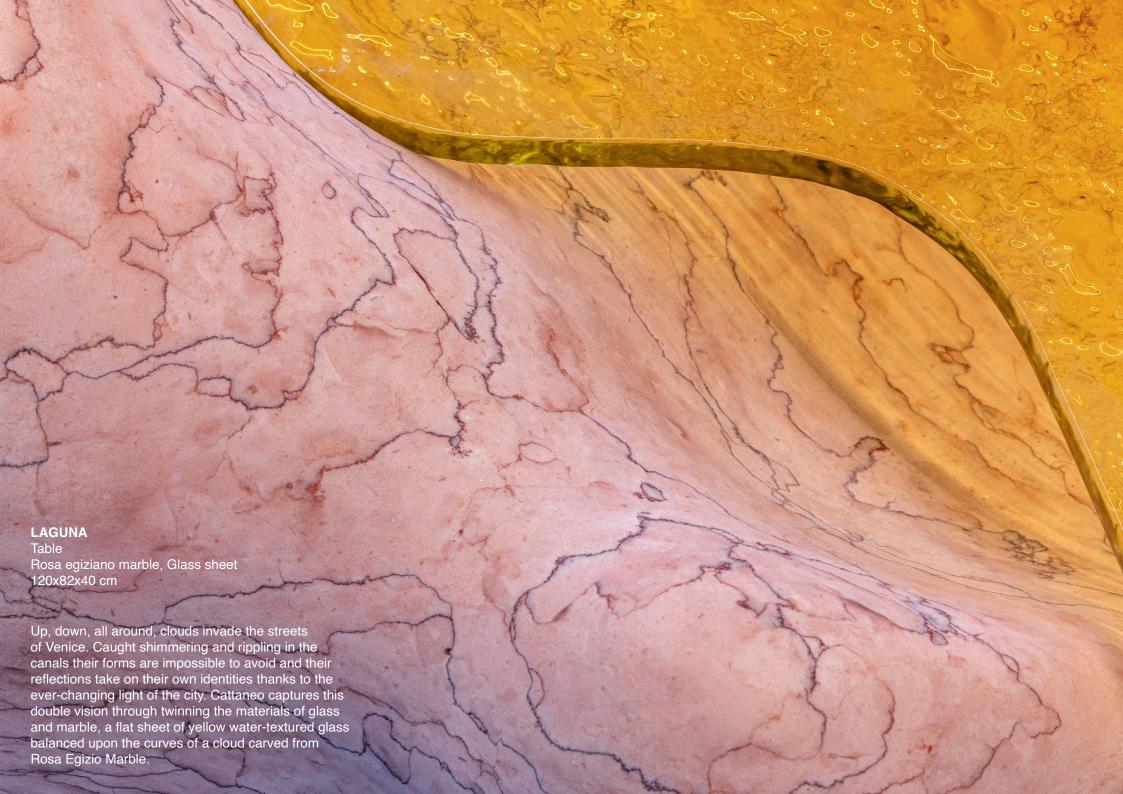




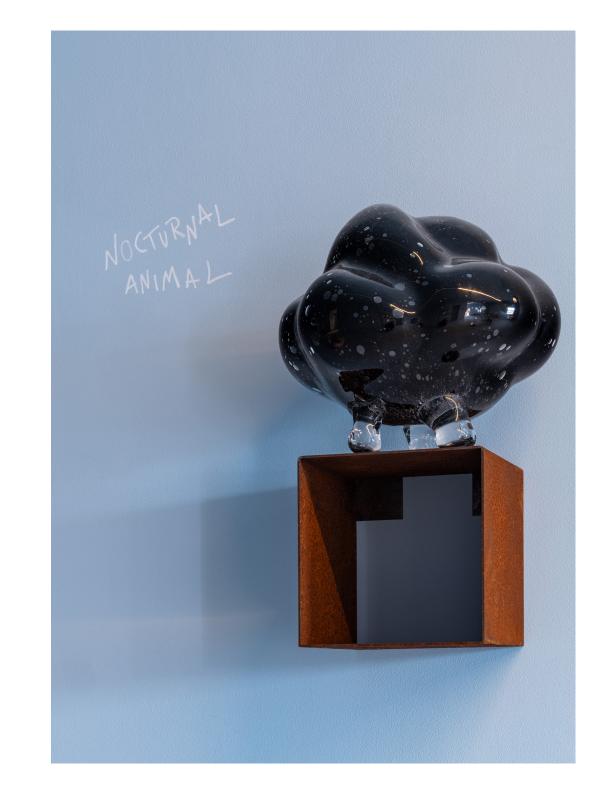












## NOCTURNAL ANIMAL Hand Blown Murano Glass S

Hand Blown Murano Glass Sculpture 40x40x32 cm

A globular cloud of handblown black pulegoso glass sits upon four little clear glass legs in Cattaneo's anthropomorphised "pet". Its's conceived as a nocturnal celestial companion for those aimless night walks through the floating city with its flickering reflections.

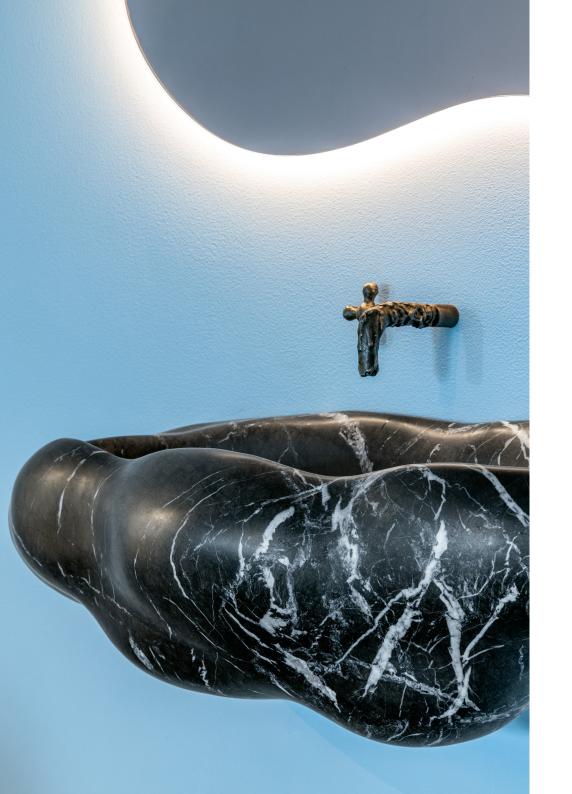




FRIULANE Murano glass scultpure

Fragile footsteps in handblown Murano glass clouds appear to creep across the floor in Cattaneo's inflated play on the classic Venetian shoe.





#### SINK'IN VENICE

Sink Grigio Carnico marble, Bronze 100x34x34.5 cm

Venice is sinking, the weight of the city slowly taking its toll. Cattaneo plays with this concept, she takes the heaviness of Grigio Car- nico Marble to create a floating sink. The structure of the appliance becomes self-referential, the sunken form of the sink's structure almost as if a cloud has evaporated from its core leaving an indelible mark.









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