



OPINION / CHIARA RIMELLA

Ringling the changes

When was the last time you used a telephone booth? As a child of the 1990s I have to dig deep into recollections of holidays spent away from my parents at the Italian seaside to find a memory of punching numbers (learnt by heart) on those silver buttons. From Milan to Rome, the country's red Telecom boxes are now a rarity, as is true in many cities around the world.

In New York City, plans to get rid of all remaining public telephones were announced earlier this year, which might be a reason behind art gallery Kurimanzutto's decision to stage an exhibition across 12 phone kiosks on 6th Avenue in Midtown Manhattan. Over the next 11 weeks, 12 different artists (including Patti Smith and Renée Green) will take over the exterior of the small metal boxes. After that the phone booths' number will be up.

A number of initiatives over recent months have rethought commercial galleries' relationship with the public realm. In Zürich, Karma International put up a number of so-called Storefront Shows during lockdown – exhibitions that were visible to passersby, even if the gallery was closed. In central Italy's Reggio Emilia, a project named Neutro is taking over six noticeboards normally used as advertising space along a thoroughfare.

One obvious advantage of these projects is their ability to engage an audience that wouldn't normally head inside a gallery but they also prompt fresh awareness of features of our streets to which we've become so accustomed that we don't notice them at all. In the case of New York's phone booths it's going to be a bittersweet reckoning: if you're in the city, take a glance before the line goes dead.