Two decades after unification, Italy was characterized by uncertain nationalism and ambivalent internationalism. The generation that grew up in the aftermath of the Risorgimento was filled with hopes followed by disillusionment. The death of Risorgimento hero Giuseppe Garibaldi in 1882 intensified feelings of anxiety about Italy’s future, which were compensated by an unusually large number of highly conventional monuments to the hero erected throughout Italy. Only one young, internationally-minded sculptor, Medardo Rosso (1858-1928), saw through the hollow official rhetoric by rejecting the tradition of heroic mythmaking in sculpture. In this talk, I hope to shed light on unexplored aspects of Rosso’s early political experience and his “counter-monuments”, which intended to revolutionize the concept of the monument in modern times. His far-reaching ideas would only come to fruition a century later, finding sequels in contemporary art.

Sharon Hecker, art historian and curator (B.A. Yale University, M.A. and Ph.D. University of California at Berkeley), is a specialist in modern and contemporary Italian art and a leading international expert on Medardo Rosso. She is the author of A Moment’s Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture (University of California Press, 2017), awarded the Millard Meiss Publication Fund prize, and Postwar Italian Art History Today. Untying “the Knot” (with Marin R. Sullivan, Bloomsbury, 2018). She has curated numerous exhibitions at the Harvard University Art Museums, the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, and, most recently, with Julia Peyton-Jones, Medardo Rosso: Sight Unseen and His Encounters with London (Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac). She lives in Milan and Los Angeles.