



Chantal Spapens
2023

Chantal Spapens, a French/Dutch visual artist, channels her creative expression through performance and sculpture/installation. She is currently pursuing her MFA at the Rome University of Fine Arts (RUFA).

Chantal's artistic narrative unfolds at the intersection of personal experience and societal inquiries, exploring the multifaceted nature of womanhood within the backdrop of a contemporary, capitalist, patriarchal society. Her body of work intricately weaves themes of female agency, body politics, and power relations, delving into the complex layers that define the feminine experience. Through a nuanced lens, Chantal invites viewers to contemplate and engage with the intricate dance between individual stories and broader societal questions in her quest to unravel the essence of womanhood in the contemporary world.



Wax Built Castles

*“How am I to protect my wax-built castles of love
From the devouring heat of your fires?”*

Sayat Nova

In the tradition of Louise Bourgeois’ ‘Femme-Maison’, the utopian/dystopian atmosphere of the domestic will be reconstituted in the exhibition space. Created with black wax-built forms like houses floating in the air in which the public can wander.

During the vernissage, the performance will take place: the artist will melt down the installation of wax houses, uncovering their skeletons one by one, leaving behind a floating graveyard of the houses she once built.

As Alva Gotby argues in her book “They call it Love: the politics of Emotional Life”, in a capitalistic society, reproductive and emotional labor is celebrated through the image of the self-sacrificing mother-wife and through a narrative solely devoted to love, where happiness and self-fulfillment overlay with conjugal romance, a stable and fertile household, and a crowd of well-behaved children.

In practice, these ideals turn out mostly as a zero-sum game with women on the losing end. To change the way we relate to each other will require revolt and a radical restructuring of society.

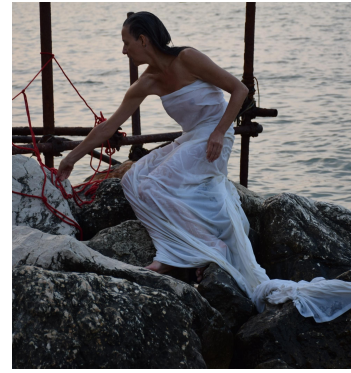
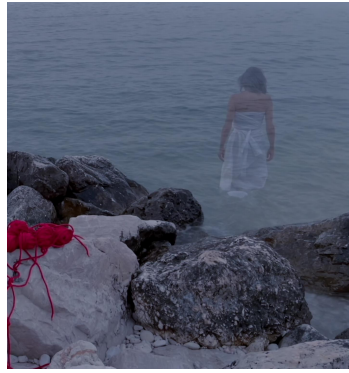
Wax-built Castles
Performance rendering





Mare Nostrum
Performance-based video
2023





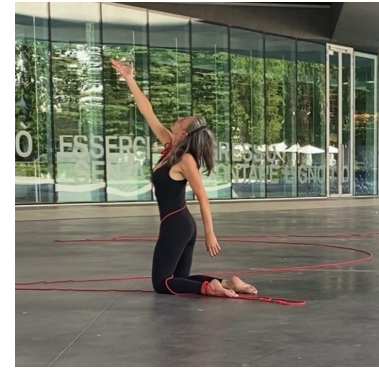
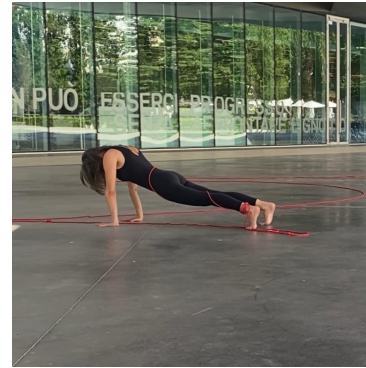
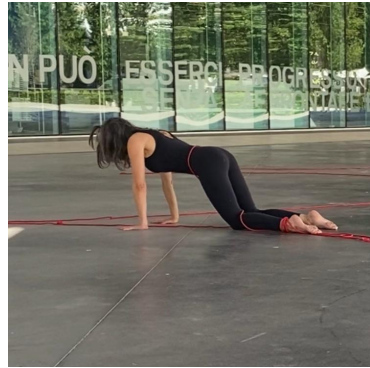
Mare Nostrum/20 minute performance-based video ([link](#))

For centuries, the Mediterranean Sea has held a pivotal role in shaping the course of human civilization, serving both as a physical impediment to human mobility and a conduit connecting lands and continents. From the epic journeys of Odysseus navigating its waters to the contemporary reality where it stands as a precarious and tragic space, drawing migrants enticed by the siren song of salvation and sanctuary in Europe—these waters are laden with narratives of both exclusion and inclusion.

The etymology of the word 'siren,' rooted in the Greek words *σειρά* (*seirá*, "rope, cord") and *εἶρω* (*eírō*, "to tie, join, fasten"), unveils its essence as a 'binder' or 'entangler.' In this context, the siren takes center stage, weaving deceptive nets from bloodred ropes on the Mediterranean seashore. The enigmatic aftermath of these knots raises questions: Do they linger to protect or to imprison, offering salvation or paving the path to damnation? Mare Nostrum invites contemplation on the intricate ties between myth, migration, and the haunting allure of the sea.

L'après-midi d'une Nymphe
Performance at MaXXi Museo,
Rome. 2023





L'après-midi d'une Nymphé [\(link\)](#)

Drawing inspiration from Mallarmé's poetry and Nijinsky's ballet, 'l'après-midi d'un Faune', this performance shifts focus to the feminine nymph, a fleeting mythological being embodying masculine fantasy. Departing from the original, where nymphs exist solely to support masculine desire, our rendition places the nymph at the forefront.

Tensions arise as Chantal navigates between postures meant to please herself and those designed for the male gaze. Guided by the red cord of passion, she embarks on a journey towards self-fulfillment, discovering her own pleasure and satisfaction.



Devastate Me, Baby/performance-based video [\(link\)](#)

Created during the residency at Chateau d'Orquevaux in France, this video is inspired by Baudelaire's masterpiece « Les fleurs du mal », a collection of 'cursed poetry', encapsulating the French Decadent movement..

Decadence, in the context of womanhood and feminism, holds relevance in its essence of refusal—an opposition to the norm. This manifests as a rejection of art historical ideologies (such as the use of craft), gendered norms, traditional feminine roles, and discourse around excessive consumption of food, alcohol, and drugs. Chantal purposefully embrace this 'excess' as a deliberate and liberating aesthetic, contemplating the obsessive, violent and addictive nature of desire.

In conclusion, decadence is far from obsolete; we live in undeniably ultra-decadent times. The performance navigates and challenges these decadent complexities, offering a contemplative lens on the refusal of societal norms and the liberation found in embracing excess.

Transfiguration / When Mary lost her Grace
2023





Transfiguration/ When Mary lost her grace [\(link\)](#)

Transfiguration, a revelation of true nature or form. This performance piece, focuses on the deceitful archetypes of motherhood. In a brilliant transfiguration of the Mary with her child, a symbol of maternal grace, Chantal demystifies the sacred images passed down by centuries of painting tradition. So she sits, statuary in the center of an arch, with two baby sized cans of milk, struggling to keep them on her laps while they slowly reverse on her the milk they've been fed. Chantal personification of the Mary has little to do, besides the iconographical context she is placed in, with a Madonna from Bellini: while Chantal's virgin sweats, gasps, shakes pained by the weight of responsibility, the second hides behind a mask of virtuosity, gracefully empty. Her white dress, deceitfully pure, will progressively wetten, revealing the flawed skin laying underneath, the true shades of desires behind the veil of maternal duties.

She knows the weight will grow lighter as the children will grow less and less dependent on her, and so she waits, patiently, restlessly picking them up if fallen, lulling their fears away, for a time where her milk will no longer be needed.

The performance culminates with the emptying of the last milk, showering the Mary, marking a time of rebirth and new beginning.

The milk, with which the dress of the Mary is soaked, transfigured her, revealing a part of herself for too long kept dormant.

The Mary is reborn.

After « La Velata »

Performance at Castello Caraciollo, Sammichele di Bari
2023





After 'La Velata' [\(link\)](#)

This performance draws inspiration from Antonio Corradini's sculpture 'La Vestale Tuccia (La Velata),' crafted around 1752 and currently exhibited at Palazzo Barberini in Rome. Depicting the vestal holding a sieve, the statue tells the tale of her needing to demonstrate her adherence to the vow of chastity by carrying water from the Tiber River in a sieve without spilling it.

In this rendition, two buckets filled with red wine stand in opposition. Cloaked in white, the Vestal Virgin endeavors to transport red wine between the buckets using her bare hands. Despite her efforts, she struggles to avoid spilling any, resulting in her eventual immersion in the spilled wine.

The core theme of this performance delves into the unattainable and absurd standards imposed upon women, the contradictory and sometimes demeaning roles they are expected to fulfill, and the concealed labor necessary for them to be considered successful or acceptable in a patriarchal society. It underscores the rigged nature of the task, illustrating that women, under such circumstances, face an impossible challenge with no chance of success.

A Room of One's Own
2023





A Room of One's Own [\(link to video\)](#)

Chantal's radical act of dismantling the all-red living room serves as a powerful visual metaphor for reclaiming female agency within domestic and societal structures, echoing Virginia Woolf's call for autonomy.

The destruction, from personal tools to a chainsaw, symbolizes the intensity required to visibly assert women's presence and challenge societal norms that often marginalize them. The act is a bold statement, emphasizing the need for women to disrupt traditional spaces and assert their right to exist and take up space in a way that challenges conventional expectations.

In the Name of Love
2023





In the Name of Love ([link](#))

“Tear the fabric of submission to pieces”

Nadia Tolokonnikova, A Pussy Riot Guide to activism

Chantal's compelling performance challenges the conventional narrative of love as a male construct, rooted in obsessive surveillance of the female body. Liberating herself from a harness of pink ribbons, she confronts contemporary notions of romantic love. By meticulously dissecting a life-sized teddy bear, the act questions the inherent possessiveness and violence often associated with love.

The fearless culmination, with Chantal dismantling the teddy bear and emptying it of its stuffing, serves as a powerful metaphor for the urgent need to reinvent love. This thought-provoking performance invites viewers to reconsider societal norms surrounding love, pushing boundaries to prompt reflection on how we can reshape and redefine this complex emotion.



The Places I go in my Head
200 x 50 cm
Paracord, thread, iron wire. 2023





ECSTATIC EXTINCTION

Interactive Installation & Single Channel Video

Foil balloons, spray paint on canvas, disco lights. 2023

Something I can Feel
Oil on canvas
100x100 cm. 2022



Performances and screenings

2023

- « Mare Nostrum », performance-based video screened at Venice International Performance Art Biennale. Curated by Anja Foerschner.
- “Devastate Me, Baby”, performance-based video in the permanent collection of Château d'Orquevaux.
- «After La Velata », performance during AXIA exhibition. Curated by RetroGuard. Sammichele di Bari.
- « L'après-midi d'une Nymphé » performance at MAXXI, Museo Nazionale delle arti del IXX secolo, Rome. Curated by Marta Jovanovic.
- « A Room of One's Own » performance during Performance Cluster. Curated by Marta Jovanovic. RUFA Space, Rome.

Exhibitions

2023

- Group exhibition “Libere...di vivere”. Borgo Pio Gallery. Curator: Giovanna Canu. Rome.

Art Residencies

2023

- ECC Performance Art DiGiLabAir. Co-funded by the European Union.
- Chateau d'Orquevaux, Orquevaux, France. Received the Denis Diderot Grant.

Art Internships

- ECC Performance Art. ECC is an online teaching and research platform dedicated to Performance Art. Communication & project management. 2024.

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