

Sara Basta

Portfolio

«Starting from oneself in order to get  
out of oneself, entering one's own body  
and letting one's own body enter the  
story so that it can become a collective  
body.»

*Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau*

My artistic practice is developed in relationship. I work on collective projects that investigate ways of being together through a common 'doing' capable of activating processes of exchange. I am interested in breaking the fixity of roles, overcoming the dichotomy between theory and practice, between public and artwork, questioning the subtle power systems that regulate relationships. I question the different imaginaries related to care, education, intergenerational relations. During the workshops I use the tools of language and memory, listening and translation, with which I deconstruct and reconstruct narratives that start from the personal experiences of the participants. Over the last few years I have been exploring the experience of motherhood, trying to dissect its complexity and ambivalent aspects, in order to compose narratives that are not univocal and dissimilar to the sweetened and stereotyped imagery with which it is told. At the moment, water is the material and symbolic element that accompanies my research. Formally, I am exploring the possibilities of performance as a space of mutual care, between performer and audience. I am a two-time mother, an artist, an occasional bartender, and an adjunct lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, where I teach in the MFA in art for therapy and with whom I have conducted several workshops. I am part of the artists' collective 'The Glorious Mothers', a research group on critical parenting.

Aquatic painting trials

2023



Liquid painting studies: Waterfall, Mother Spider, Mother Mountain. Beech float ink, river soil, tempera on fabric



Mother Spider 100x90 cm



Mother Ghost, water, river soil, tempera on fabric 200x140 cm

Iuno Tellus

2023



## COMMISSION #6

IUNO\* COMMISSION is an invitation to an artist, permanently or temporarily based in Rome, to develop a work for IUNO, stemming from a reflection on the chthonic and celestial figure of Juno. In the time between solstice and equinox, the work is published on our homepage, occasionally expanding in the form of an installation or a performance in our space.

Sara Basta's Iuno is an organic form with evanescent contours, a fortuitous image that miraculously appeared on an embroidered handkerchief.

Like a shroud, it seems to have been produced by the adhesion of a body to a fabric that absorbs its moods and restores its features and sacredness.

The extreme reduction of the image to a sequence of curved lines, allows it to be viewed both figuratively and aniconically, and to be contextualized as much in the realm of representation as in the material realm of life experience.

The gray color, traces a kind of upside-down orography, reminiscent of the conformation of an animal breast, such as that of a she-wolf, or of a propitiatory pagan iconography such as that of the Artemis Ephesia, clothed in udders.

Almost confirming the allusion, the four curved lines drawn with the brush are extended in slightly paler vertical streams, resembling the residue of a milky substance comparable to maternal nourishment.

The use of liquid paint, blended with soil collected by the artist in proximity to a river, further emphasizes the relationship with nature and, more specifically, with the element of water.

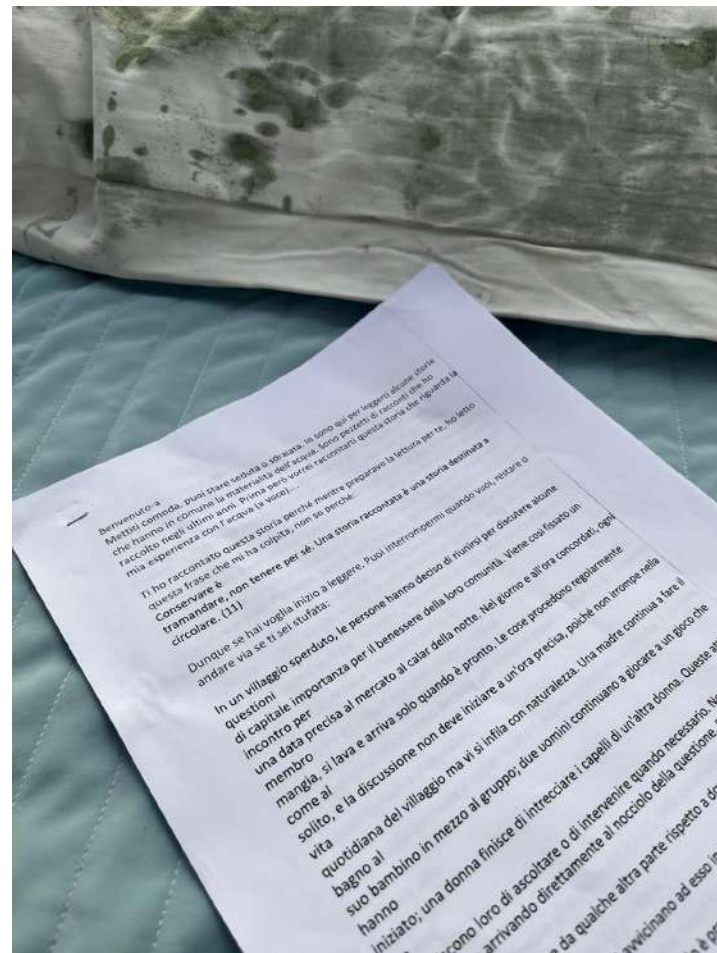
As a matter of fact, in Sara Basta's recent artistic research, water is not only matter incorporated in to the work, but is also a reference for a practice of care based on co-participation and interconnection, between human beings and different species.

Inspired by Astrida Neimanis' idea of hydrofeminism, Sara Basta's Iuno presents itself as a kind of manifesto that formulates and aspires for shared ideas, spaces and knowledge.

On the occasion of the Festival des Cabanes at the Villa Medici, the Iuno Tellus was accompanied by the performance Watery Goodnight Readings, realised together with four readers: Greta Bacher, Cristian Greco, Martina Grifoni, Maria Luisa Usai

Text Giulia Gaibisso

\* IUNO is a research center for contemporary art that wishes to leave space and time for encounters between people, spaces and languages. It is directed by Cecilia Canziani and Ilaria Gianni with curatorial coordination by Giulia Gaibisso







Iuno Tellus, soil and tempera on fabric, 40 x 40 cm



Performance: Watery Goodnight Readings, Festival des Cabanes of Villa Medici, Rome

Acquadolce

2023





Acquadolce (freshwater) is Sara Basta's solo exhibition, curated by Cantieri d'Arte, Viterbo. The exhibition presents the outcomes of the collaborative path triggered by the artist with educators and families of the Municipal Nursery School I Cuccioli. The path, which came about during a phase of temporary closure of the nursery, was structured in a series of workshop meetings centred on the theme of caring relationships with others, and in particular with children of infant age. The artist invited people to embroider, paint and question the need to reformulate the ways in which we are together and care for ourselves and others. Starting from a comparison with elements and images from the natural world, the artist creates a device of connection and relationship inspired by water, creating a flow that binds people together.

The exhibition ties together the various stages of research and documentation of collaborative moments, and also presents a suspended installation of textiles reminiscent of a water flow that unravels in space and becomes inhabitable.

Acquadolce habitable installation composed of wearable fabrics/ aprons



Embroideries: preparatory work for the collective writing of a care manifesto



workshop with kindergarten and nursery school children

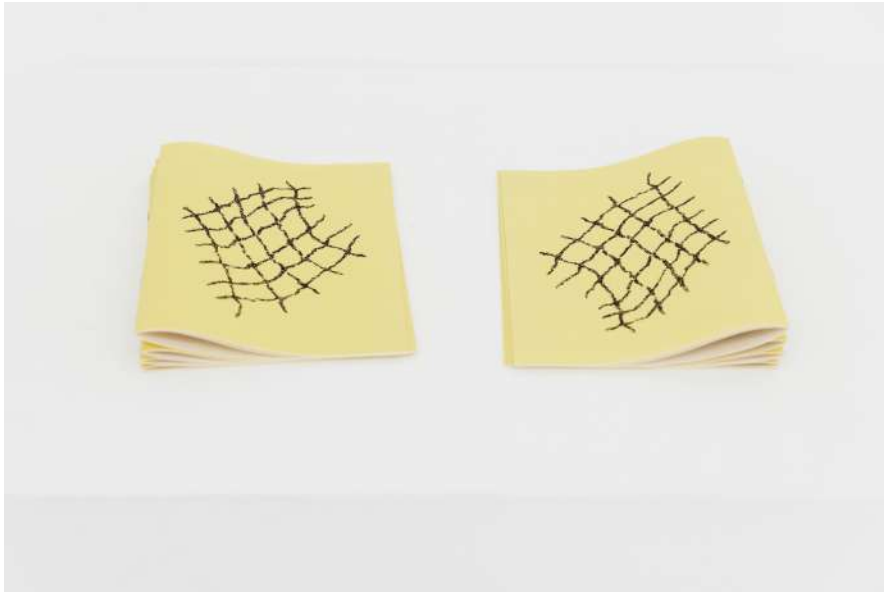


Acquadolce fine arts print 70x100 cm



Archivio degli oggetti Concavi  
(archive of concave objects)

2022



The group exhibition "Il giardino libernautico" at La Fondazione Baruchello curated by artist Elena Bellantoni, in collaboration with Niccolò Giacomazzi and Benedetta Monti, develops around issues that are increasingly urgent to consider: the relationship with nature, the landscape and care as a responsible action towards the ecosystem.

Sara Basta's work focuses on the narrative dimension, deciding to translate Ursula K. Le Guin's text into Italian. Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986), which analyses the history of human evolution, which has always been told in terms of the heroic man, sharp weapons and the materials par excellence of hunting and violence, proposing a different narrative, which has as its main protagonist a bag, a container, a wrapping, carrying and concave, feminine and protective element. The bag is an essential object in the practice of agricultural harvesting to transport and hold seeds, roots, fruit and plants since human beings were gatherers. In Sara Basta's work, the bag becomes a structure to be built, realised with the collaboration of the weaver Valeria Befani, in a process that includes the active presence of the visitor and that only thanks to this can be completed.

At the same time, Sara Basta brings to the exhibition some fabrics configured as writing tests. The study of colouring with natural elements is proposed in these works as the formation of a language based on direct contact with nature. Sara Basta in this case creates her works by obtaining pigment through the beating of blades of grass directly on the fabric.



Writing tests 2022 series of paintings with blades of grass on fabric 238 x 81 cm



Weaving 2022 embroidery with gold thread on hemp 10x15 cm



Archive of concave objects: the bag 2022 collective weaving

La prima madre  
(the first mother)

2022

*La prima madre*  
2022

*La prima madre* (The First Mother) is a solo exhibition conceived as a journey through the most recent research of Sara Basta, whose work has always focused on the themes of domesticity and corporeity – understood as matrixes of social and emotional relationships – and on the language that translates them. Basta's works often take the form of play and collective work, thus transposing personal events into stories capable of transforming sensations such as pain, amazement or joy into a shared experience.

Drawing, photography, video and sculpture are the means through which the artist depicts the weaving of places and encounters that make up a life: indeed, the fragile beauty of everyday life emerges clearly; even the gestures of cutting, sewing, drawing and photographing, the materials – mostly found fabrics and papers – and the characters that appear in her works – her children, friends, students – evoke a common way of doing things, a small world that, when observed with an attentive, ever-ironic eye, proves full of meaning.

The gestation period of this exhibition was extended by the historical contingency of the pandemic and coincided with the development of a new body of works that has reshaped its boundaries. *La prima madre* is to be understood as an emotional map drawn by the artist's time: from the present, as experienced and broken down in its repetitiveness, to the time of remembrance and research into family memory, through to the cyclical time that stitches together birth and death. The path unravels from this original relationship, thereby exploring the thematic units that characterise the various series of works featured in the exhibition: the artist's body, home as a real and imagined place, and mother-centred genealogies of the feminine, as approached from the dual point of view of one's origin and what one becomes as part of a continuous reconnection with life.

The exhibition ideally opens with two images, namely a black-and-white photograph of the artist's mother, who recently passed away, and a series of watercolour self-portraits made in moments snatched from the altered everyday life of the lockdown period. In these drawings made with closed eyes during sporadic, brief and therefore intense work sessions in the studio, the figure emerges ever-different thanks to the repetition of a gesture that attempts to affirm the personal and intimate reality of the image beyond consciousness.

"I ponder the theme of motherhood, which also includes domesticity and care and also reflects a kind of physicality and emotionality that I investigate by painting with closed eyes through an uncontrolled recording", writes Sara Basta. These works are counterpointed by the *Antenate* series, consisting of two photographs and three sculptures: these masks represent the maternal axis as a continuum; they are portraits composed from memory using imperfect fragments and details. Once worn, they suggest postures and gestures capable of restoring an embodied mnemonic dimension.

In the title of the exhibition, the reference to motherhood as a root indicates on the one hand an original relationship, and on the other an experience that can only be perceived through growth and transformation. It is in this double light that the last three works in the exhibition can be seen, which articulate the link among body-home-language through the rhetorical figures of construction, dissolution and protection.

In *Capanna*, a projection welcomes us inside a fabric shelter, which is a *topos* of many of Basta's works made with the involvement (or the simple observation) of children's games. This imaginary space, which temporarily overlaps and replaces the existing architecture, is echoed by a sound installation in which the artist has documented the crumbling of maternal language as her own child's language is being constructed, a video documenting the last time Sara Basta breastfed her first child – a record of another separation – and the photographic series *Mammacanguro*, a 2013 work that seems to have prefigured the themes explored in the exhibition: "My home is my mother, the first place I lived in".

Sara Basta's works dialogue with the exhibition space while seeking to resonate with its different qualities: a subsoil that corresponds to memory and the primary relationship between the artist as a daughter and an emerged space that restores the present. Like all stories – and like the unconscious –, the narrative is not entirely linear: the works refer to each other and create correspondences between above and below that convey the essence of the exhibition through transmission, circularity and the continuity of a life that is transmitted to another life *ad infinitum*.

Cecilia Canziani and Costanza Meli





The affirmation of physical presence is accomplished in the act of painting a self-portrait. But in this exercise there is a denied element, sight, which drives me to look beyond form. With my eyes closed, I paint by forcing myself. I push my memory to find images imprinted in the body, in the prehistory of me.

Quello che non vedo (what I don't see) 2020 series of drawings made with eyes closed

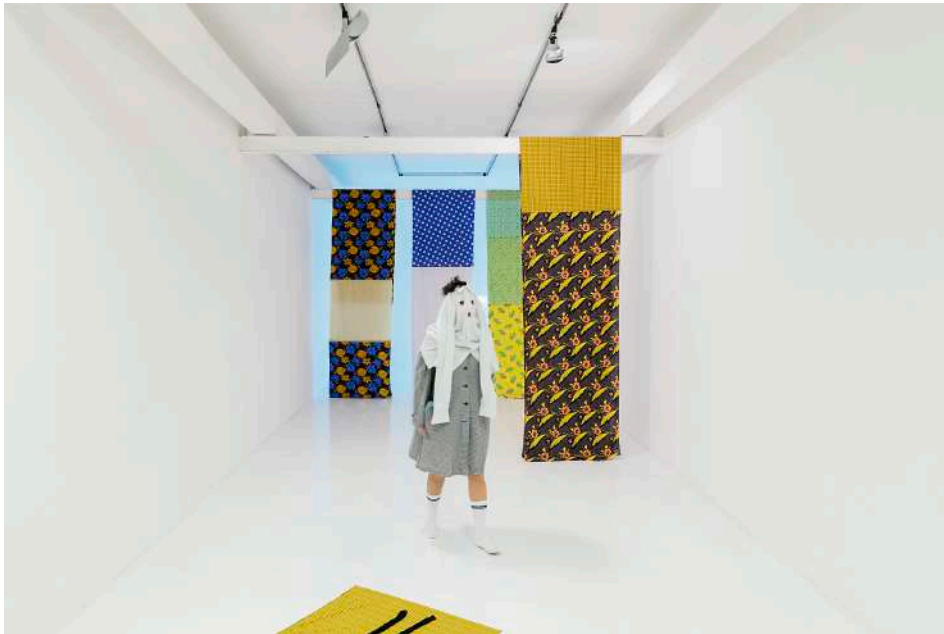


Quello che non vedo 2020 drawing made with eyes closed 150x80 cm

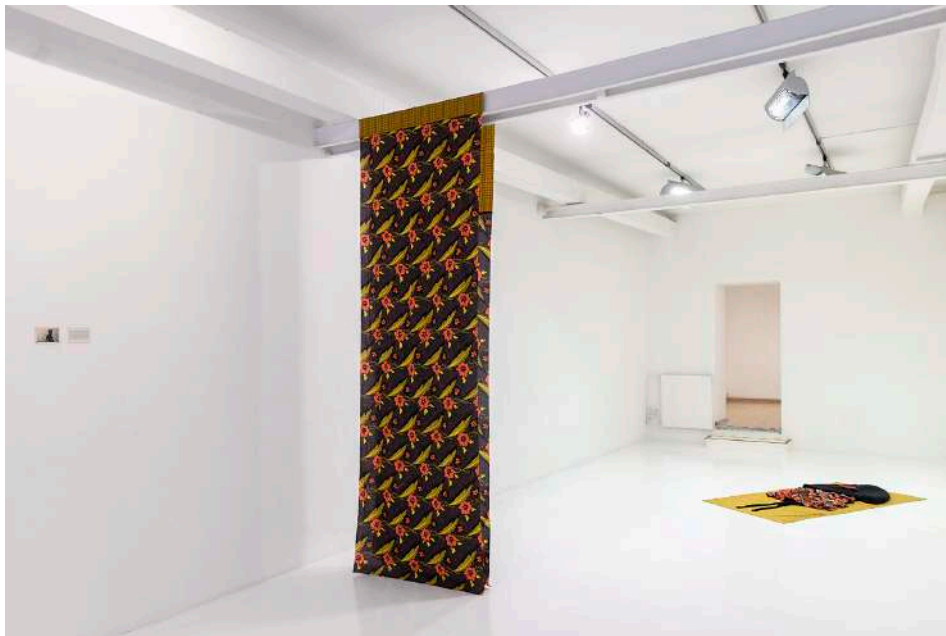


Antenate is a research on masks, used as a tool to activate memory. Through the masks I live the trace and the continuity of emotional ties in the experience of the senses and in the transformations of the body. I wear the masks, which become the medium for crossing restless and as yet unexplored areas in which to compose familiar stories by listening to the voice of memories.

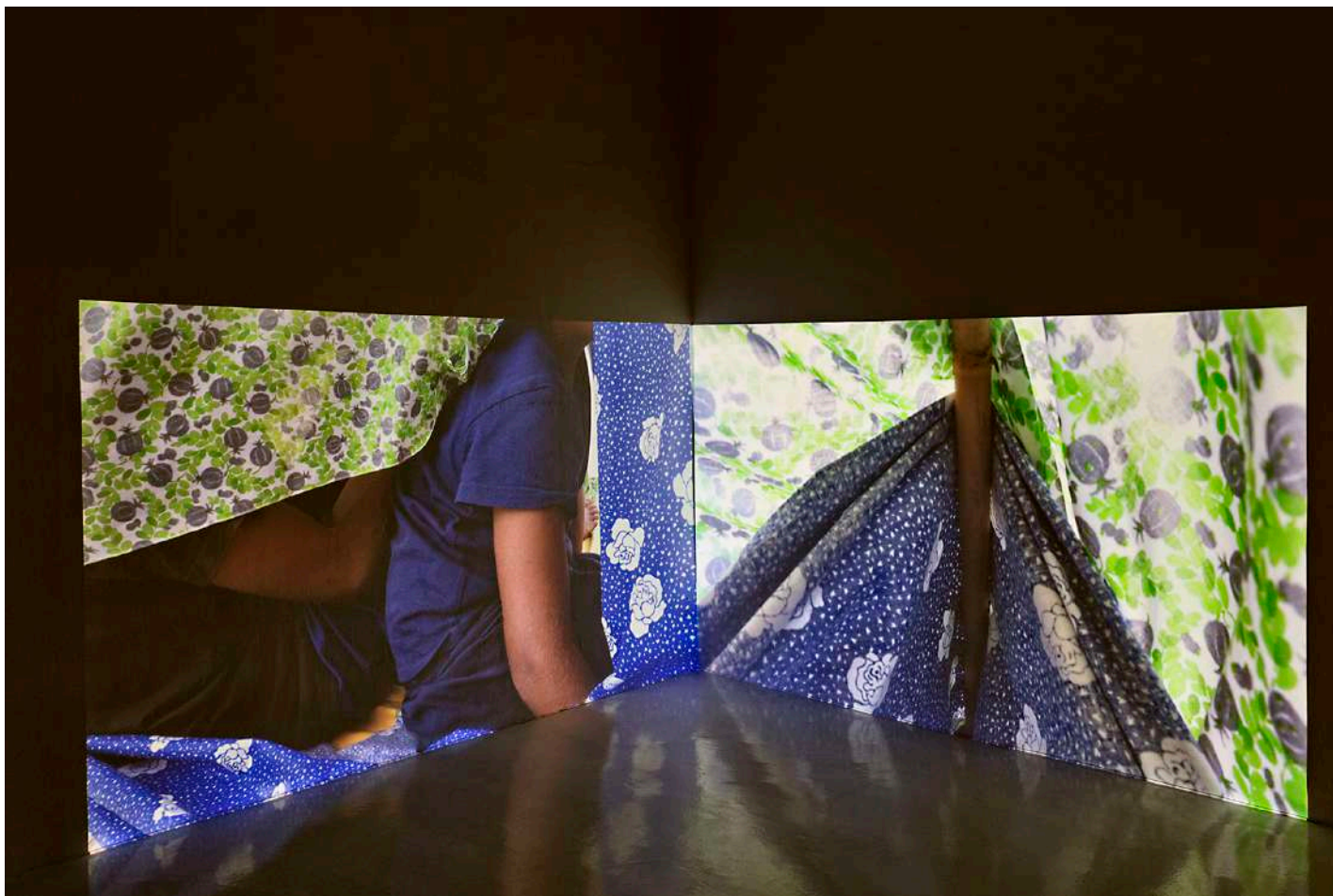
Antenate (Ancestor) 2021 fabric masck 200x90 cm



Antenate 2021 performance, exhibition view ph Carlo Romano. Fondazione Pastificio Cerere



Antenate 2021 exhibition view, Fondazione Pastificio Cerere



Capanna (hut) 2021 exhibition view, two wall projections variable dimensions





Fantasmino 2020, still from video, on loop



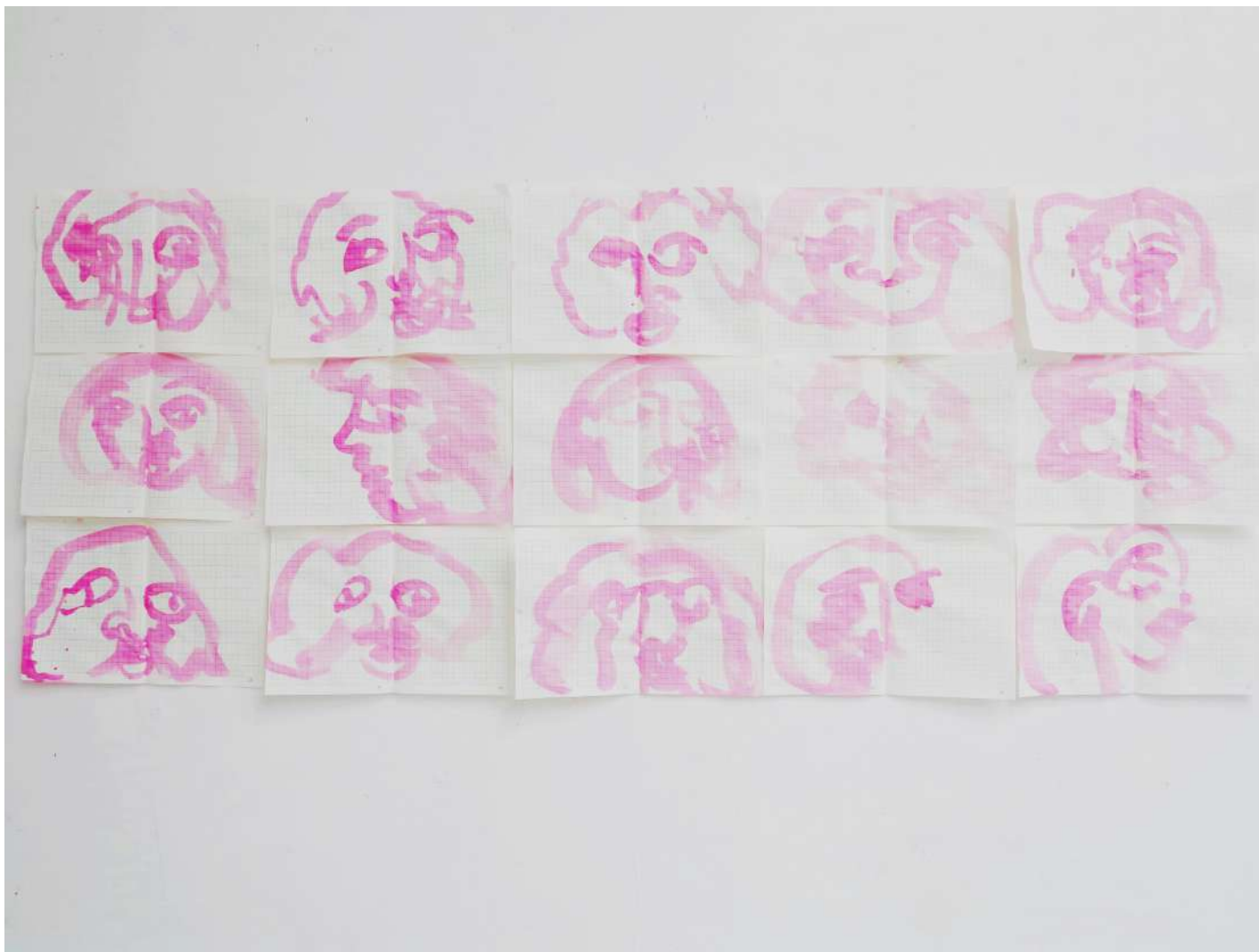


I remember 2011 audio of my mother's voice recounting two memories of her childhood lasting 2 mn  
 La prima Madre 2020 embroidery on silk variable dimensions. Installation view Spazio Molini, Fondazione Pastificio Cerere



Quello che non vedo (What I don't see) 2020 series of watercolours made with my eyes closed 20x30 cm installation view Spazio Molini Fondazione Pastificio Cerere





Quello che non vedo (What I don't see) 2020 series of watercolours made with my eyes closed 20x30 cm



Mammacanguro (Mother Kangaroo) 2013 Installation view Spazio Molini Fondazione Pastificio Cerere





L'ultima volta (last time) 2011 still camera shot of the last time I breastfed my first child. Installation view 2011 Spazio Molini Fondazione Pastificio Cerere

Moto perpetuo combinatorio  
(Combinatorial Perpetual Motion)

2020



In the work *Moto perpetuo combinatorio* (Combinatorial Perpetual Motion), Sara Basta's approach seems to conform to the creative aspect of language use, and by tying language to emotional connection, she creates a combinatorial machine to generate new flows and new relationships. The foundations for this *Moto perpetuo combinatorio*, to use the title of the artist's work, are Rodari's words from the *Grammar of Fantasy*.

The idea of language as a combinatorial machine has inspired many writers, and it appears that Sara wanted to draw on not only Rodari's words, but on ancient technique as well. All of this takes shape in the video: the phrases and words of Rodari, sewn and embroidered during the workshops, mix together individual stories of lived experiences, entwining with one another. The participants do not give voice to their own stories, but appropriate, transform and interpret the stories of the others.

Just as Gulliver's machine (1) recomposed sentences to produce an encyclopaedia of thought, the embroidered words of Rodari, placed in Sara Basta's "combinatorial machine," travelled the streets of the neighbourhood to create a polyphony of multiple stories and new paths of affection. With the same women from the workshop and guided by the same artist, the words, left to act on the streets of the Trullo, came together in the eighth lot courtyard, where our journey into the neighbourhood began. These words mark a moment of rebirth, and also represent a struggle, a constant battle for one's rights, for one's freedom. The words here are shouted, through songs in the folk tradition "And we'll fight for work, education, play and for freedom". *Moto perpetuo combinatorio* turns into song, a rebellious song of unfettered voices (2), that we hope will continue to act and resonate among the colourful streets of the Trullo. "

Benedetta Carpi De Resmini

Excerpt from the text written for the festival La Fantastica, realized at Trullo (Rome) for the third year of Magic Carpets Italia, with the artistic direction of Benedetta Carpi De Resmini curated by Giulia Pardini.

The work *Moto Perpetuo Combinatorio* has been realized in collaboration with: Ludovica Bianco, Ida Bacchini, Ilaria Capanna, Stefania Cianfrocca, Laura Cortini, Marina Cursi, Amandine Ravasi, Adriana Ricucci, Valentina Righetti, Elisabetta Segna.

ph credits : Luis Do Rosario and Mykolas Juodele

1. J. Swift, I viaggi di Gulliver (*Gulliver's travels*), translation di C. Formichi, curated by M. d'Amico, Milano, Mondadori, 1982, p. 393
2. Brancoro is a group of loose voices. Their singing is anti-fascist, anti-clerical, anti-sexist and anti-militarist..





Moto perpetuo combinatorio 2020 performance: posters of embroidered sheets in the streets of the Trullo



Moto Perpetuo Combinatorio phrases extracted from G. Rodari's Grammar of Fantasy embroidered on fabric together with a group of women from Trullo

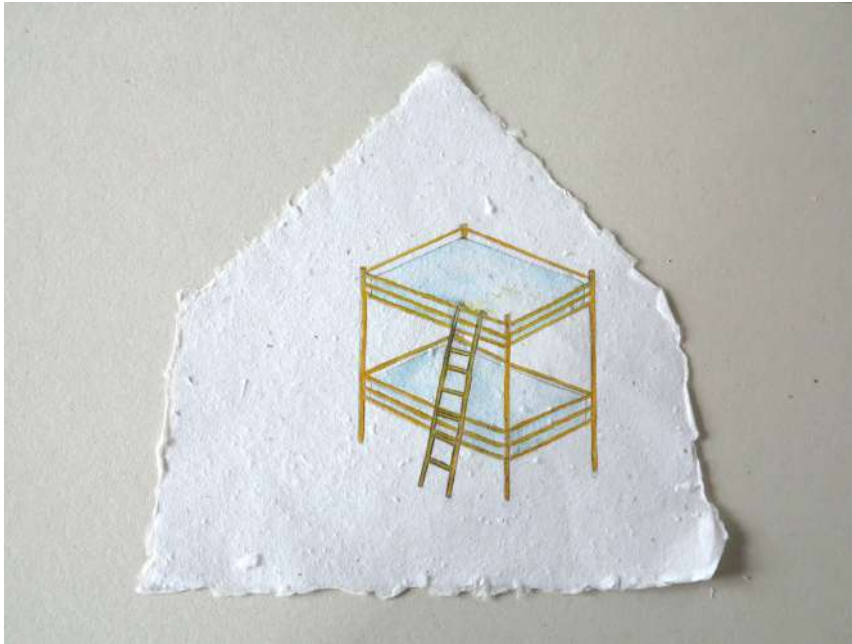




Moto Perpetuo Combinatorio still from video 6'26" ' Video: Daniele Spanò <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/547103996>

La casa dentro  
(the inner home)

2019



What do we call home? A place, an object, a person, a memory, a feeling an invented word? As well as being a physical space, home is a psychic place. We carry our 'home' inside, in every journey and every move, in every place we somehow reconstruct it. This need to recreate a symbolic space of protection and recollection is reflected in childhood, in the game of making one's own shelter/camp. Playing at making a hut, a den, is a childhood need that connects us to the human need to build one's HOME.

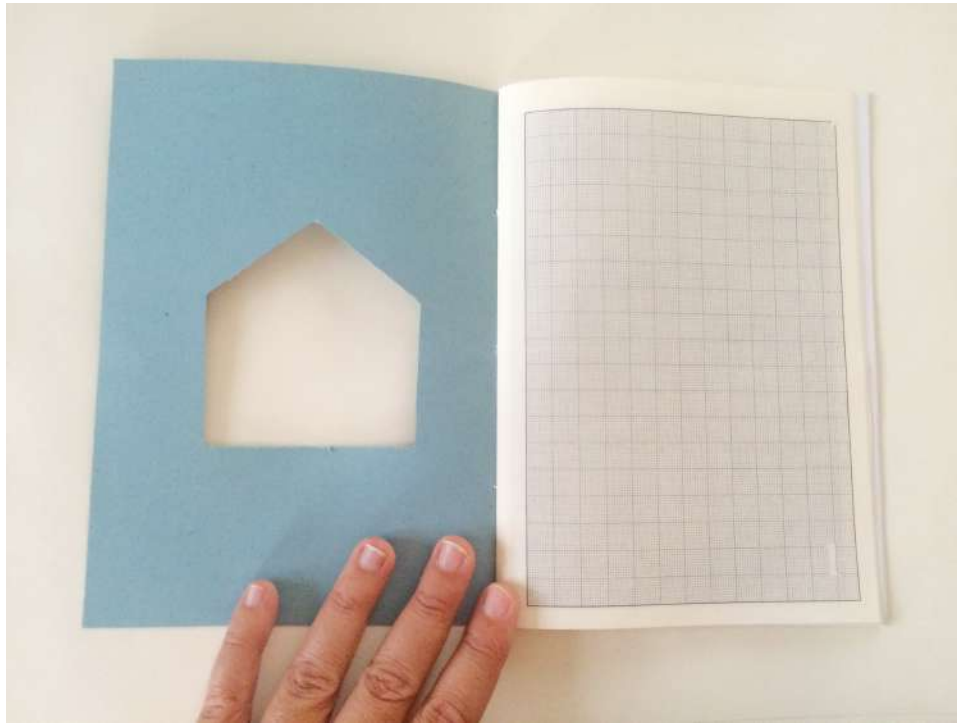
La Casa Dentro is a book realised with the students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, printed with Risograph Ed. Michaelrice 2018

A second book Parole Domestiche, (Domestic Words) was realised with the words embroidered during the workshop meetings at: Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma, Fondazione Di Liegro, Leporello bookshop, Villaggio Globale, L.O.A. Acrobax, Rome printing Risograph Ed. Michaelrice 2019

The house inside painted in watercolours on handmade paper from Silvia Sasso (fine arts student)



My own mother is my home, because she is the first place I lived in. She is a child here, not the adult I know her as. She is lying on the beach, the same way I have been many times, without a towel, touching the sand. She looks very small compared to the immense, completely empty beach. Looking at her makes me feel connected to something ancient, that is, my family's bond with the sea, which I always have with me. I can feel the warmth of the sand while calm and warmth fill my body.



The house inside fanzine, family photograph taken from the book.





La casa dentro: installation. A symbolic house that encloses in its form the homes of all the participants in the workshops held between 2018 e 2020





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La Pancia del Monte 2016 performance. Image: Piranesi 1756 engraving of the Sepulchre of Alexander Severus (Mausoleum of Monte del Grano)



La Pancia del Monte 2016 performance



Abito Lo Spazio is a participatory art project conceived by Sara Basta. Through the ancient practice of sewing, Abito Lo Spazio involves a plurality of people, friends and inhabitants of different neighbourhoods, who together give shape to intertwined stories, ties and 'pieces' of lived life. The gift is the driving force behind this collective project, based on a simple gesture, that of sewing, which acquires importance through its very presence in space, here and now, opening up to dialogue and going beyond. The first experiment of Abito Lo Spazio took place at Spazio Y in Rome, at the Quadraro. The entire floor of the space was covered with fabrics sewn together. The fabrics were donated by those who took part in the project. The space was inhabited and 'the dress', understood as an extension of the term habitus, brought with it the sense of sharing a place that was 'dressed', conquering a new identity, thanks to the many hands that slowly and carefully made this experience possible. Text Simona Merra

Subsequently Abito Lo Spazio was realised at:  
 Nanay, an association that deals with birth and maternity  
 Carlo Pisacane Primary School in Rome  
 Fondazione smART in Rome,  
 Educational Department of Manifesta 12, Palermo  
 BIM! Microfestival of Infant Culture, Cesena  
 Beomondo Day Care Centre, Rome

Abito lo spazio is documented by a video made by the educational department of Manifesta12 for the project School in Tandem

<https://vimeo.com/219534209>

and by a video of Hour Interview\*, an interview without an interviewer.

<https://vimeo.com/155326723>



Abito lo spazio collective sewing primary school Carlo Pisacane Rome





Abito lo spazio collective sewing



Lingua mamma (mother tongue) is a project conceived with the artist Mariana Ferratto, curated by Emanuela Termine. It stems from a consideration on language made following our personal experience of learning a foreign language from one's own child (Sara) and teaching Italian to one's parents (Mariana). Starting from this reflection, it was decided to work on accompanying this potential for language transmission, of which the children are the bearers. The project was developed within the Carlo Pisacane primary school, in particular within two first classes, with boys and girls from 11 countries. The aim of the project was to help the potential passage of the Italian language from the boys and girls to their non-Italian-speaking mothers and to share the mother tongue of each child within the class.

During a first phase of meetings, games were played aimed at creating multilingual body vocabularies in which to recognise one's mother tongue, sharing it with the group, bringing one's own private language into the public space of the classroom.

In a second phase, work was done on language exchange, through the use of lullabies from different countries, inviting mothers at school to teach their lullabies to the class.

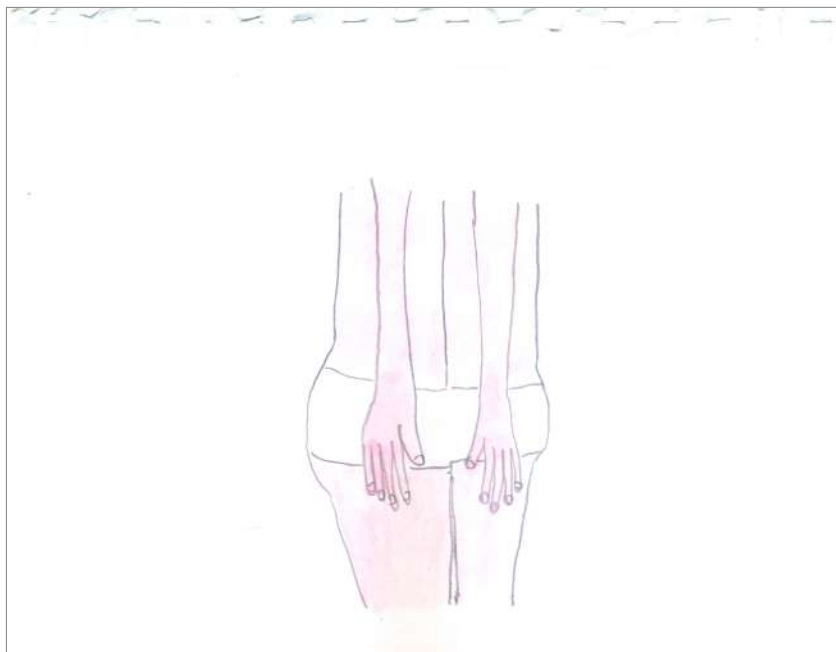
An audio installation and two videos document the process: APO and FAIS DODO.

The Lingua Mamma project won the "Art, Heritage and Human Rights" competition, organised by Connecting Cultures, a research agency for art and territory in partnership with Fondazione ISMU - Patrimonio Intercultura, with the support of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities.





Lingua Mamma Feis Dodò still from video <https://vimeo.com/63925145>



Vestiti per l'amore (Clothes for Love) series of watercolours on paper 15x20 cm

The ambivalence of relationships, which simultaneously unite and bind, is symbolised through clothes sewn together to be worn as a couple



Vestiti per l'amore fine arts print 80 x 100 cm