

Cleo Fariselli

Selected Portfolio

ARTIST STATEMENT AND SHORT BIO

Artist and performer, Cleo Fariselli's research evokes the suspended realm of the liminal and its imaginative, destabilizing and transformative potential. Her recurring themes include looking and being seen, the body as landscape and instrument, the feminine and water, the relationship between actuality and the unconscious.

Born in Cesenatico (1982), she is based in Turin. Her work has been exhibited in important public and private institutions in Italy and abroad including CAC - Contemporary Art Center (Cincinnati, USA, 2022); Officine Grandi Riparazioni (Turin, 2022); Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Guarene, 2022); Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (Rome, 2021); Palazzo Fortuny (Venice, 2017 and 2018); Centro Pecci (Prato, 2023 and 2017); EACC (Castellò, Spain, 2013); Palazzo Reale (Milan, 2008 and 2011). In 2021-2022 she was awarded the Italian Council production grant.

YOUR STORM OUR DEW

The idea explored as a starting point for this newly produced video work was that of “dilated emergency”. Emergency, now a topos of the contemporary, is a paradigm that marks the present time, established as a new and paradoxical state of normality. This condition has become, even more prominently after the pandemic, part of our everyday life.

The multiple, and often contradictory, voices of the media have contributed to transform the collective perception of an emergency experienced no longer as a condition of acute crisis or danger, but as a constant tension, modulated in peaks of alarm and release. This tension, while based on urgent and real issues, inevitably ends up taking on characteristics of its own, tending to abstract into a feeling of perpetual insecurity: a “dilated emergency” precisely.

Exploring the imaginative power of objectual elements proper to states of emergency, Your Storm Our Dew brings to life a world of its own: a dark universe, dimmed by smoke, hit by the incessant flashing of sirens and inhabited by strange and disturbing creatures who have made this inhospitable habitat their kingdom. Survival mechanisms, carefully orchestrated to restore a distorted naturalness, are removed from their function to create a new emotional, narrative and aesthetic environment, field of an exploration of the contemporary collective unconscious, its fears and its unpredictable component.

The video uses the cliché of the naturalistic documentary genre as a narrative device to draw the viewer into a world that gradually reveals itself to be increasingly disturbing and ambiguous. The reassuring voice of the narrator (almost the archetypal incarnation of the rational) throughout the video proves to be an unreliable element, which leads the viewer towards a dreamlike ending: an allegory of the eye which swallows images and information which, like seeds, take root in the mind.

The staging of the video is inspired by black theater, a particular form of puppet theater, based on the principle of an optical illusion where the human eye does not distinguish the actors from the background, both of which are black. Thanks to specific techniques and lighting cuts, the objects on stage and the costumes of the performers, which transform entirely their physicality, seem to be suspended, giving the impression of moving by themselves and floating in the space.

The video can be seen at this link:
<https://vimeo.com/user6029082/ysod>
Password: taddeus

1.
Your Storm Our Dew poster
- 2., 3., 4., 5.
Backstage photographs by Silvia Mangosio









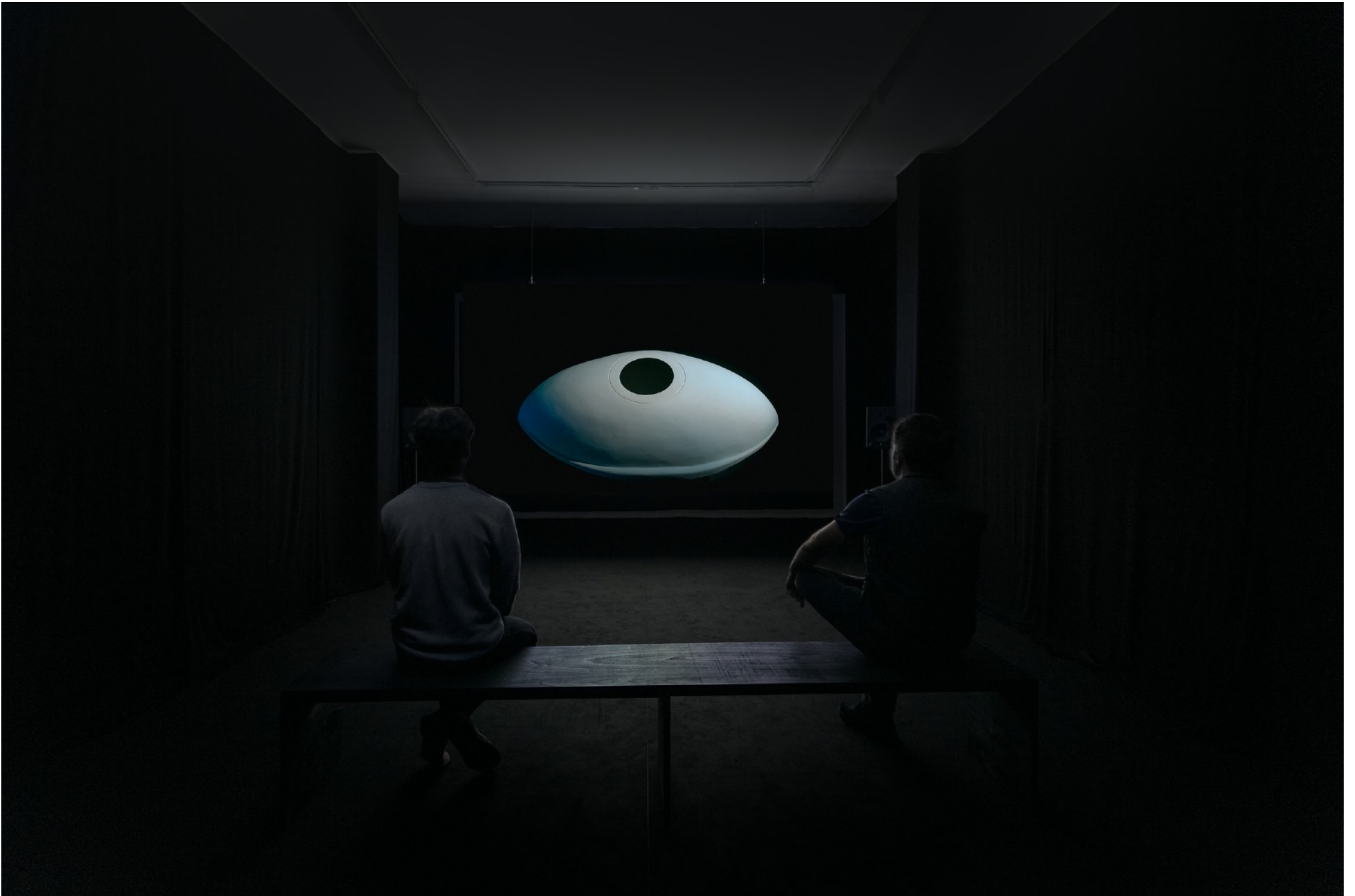


5.

6.
Installation views from Your Storm Our Dew exhibition at Almanac, London,
photos by Henry Mills

7.
Installation views from Your Storm Our Dew exhibition at Almanac, Turin,
photos by Sebastiano Pellion di Persano





VENERI

Veneri (Venuses), 2022, is a series of paintings based on a set of drawings conceived when I was expecting my daughter Teti. Childbirth and motherhood, the starting points of these works, are seen as transformative experiences not only on a bodily and personal level but also conceptually and philosophically. When I was pregnant, I felt the need to live it and communicate my experience in a different light, investigating the emancipatory and empowering aspects of gestation in contrast with the narrative we are used to, which confers a passive and sacrificial aura to women. The paintings evoke propitiatory figures to convey primordial energies during childbirth. Condensations of instinctive sensations and vital impulses echo the imagery and, perhaps, also the function of prehistoric Venus figurines. The series was presented in a solo exhibition at OGR, Torino, in 2022.

«Prehistoric Venus figurines are among the most stimulating and fertile topics of debate in the archaeological field. Over the years countless theories and interpretations have attempted to give an explanation to these enigmatic and fascinating figures. Among the most welcomed theories we find the one that sees the figurines as representations of divine female entities: the archetype of the creative and fertile woman, in touch with lunar cycles and natural forces. Another theory speculates that these figures are an attempt at self-representation by women who, lacking mirrors, portrayed their bodies crushed by perspective distortion. When I was pregnant there was a moment when I felt the need to stop and listen to myself, to tune into what I was experiencing on a deeper level. My Venus figures came forth at that pivotal moment. There are twenty-one of them in total. I made them all during the third trimester of pregnancy, to support myself in my current state but also in preparation for the birth, which I chose to do at home, in their presence.»

Excerpt from a text I wrote for the public programme of the show Veneri at OGR, Turin
The whole text has been published here
<https://www.neroeditions.com/venuses/>

1.

Drawings set up in my home on the day I gave birth

2., 3., 4., 5., 6., 7.

Veneri, 2022, oil on wooden board, 72 x 56 cm

8., 9.

Installation views from the solo show Veneri at OGR, Turin, 2022



1.



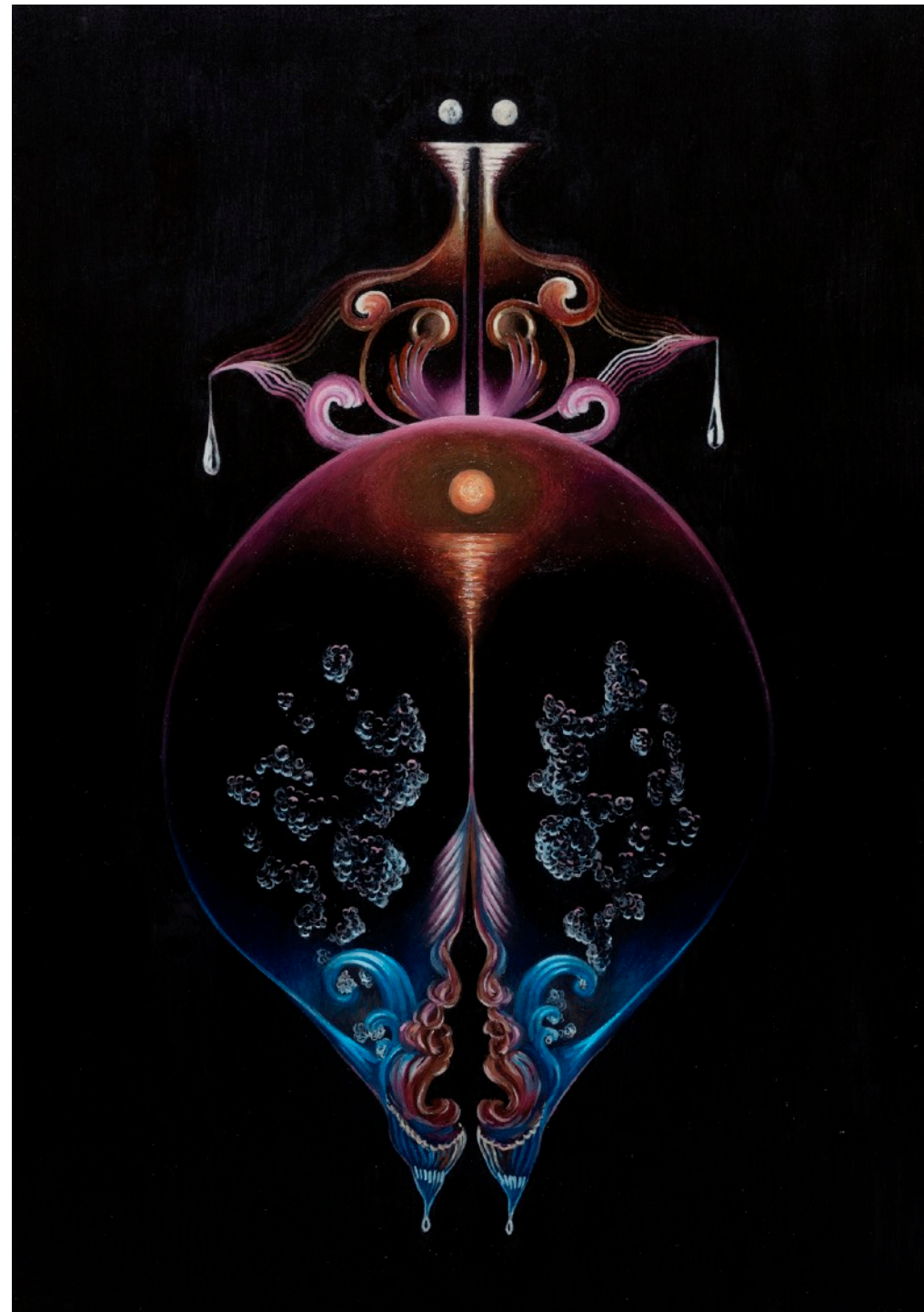
2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.





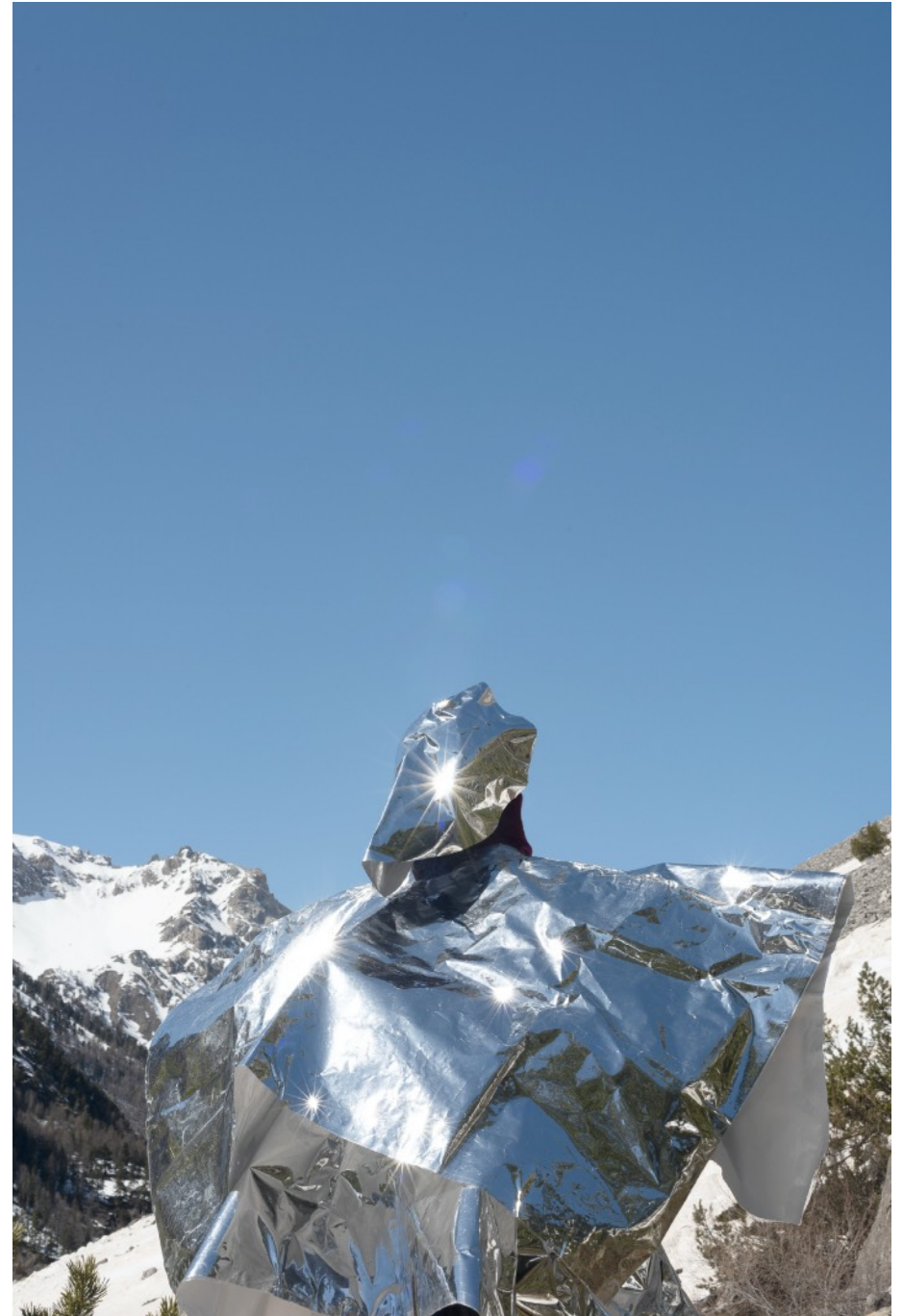
ME AS A STAR

Me as a star is a performance series that I initiated in 2008 on the Generoso Mountain in Switzerland and then repeated in Vallée Étroite in 2021. The action of the performances, set so far in natural mountain locations, consists of dancing wearing a mirrored costume, which reflects the sunlight. The dance takes place at such a distance from the camera that my figure appears as a shimmering star on the horizon, unrecognizable as a human being. The camera is fixed and the framing is carefully chosen: a classically inspired depiction of a landscape in which the only moving parts are the atmospheric elements and, as one of them, the human body transfigured by light. The work aims to question the classic anthropocentric distinction between figure and background, subject and landscape, representing the human being as part of the whole. At the same time, the performance wants to celebrate the feeling of the sublime triggered by the loosening of the ego in the experience of contact with nature.

One minute excerpt from *Me as a star (Vallée Étroite)*
<https://vimeo.com/611706198>

One minute excerpt from *Me as a star (Generoso Mountain)*
<https://vimeo.com/19934442>

1.
Me as a star (Vallée Étroite), backstage photograph
2.
Me as a star (Vallée Étroite), 2021, still from video performance, HD video, 00:16:52
3.
Installation view of *Me as a star (Vallée Étroite)* within the group show *Ecophilia*, National Mountain Museum, Turin, 2021
4.
Installation view of *Me as a star (Generoso Mountain)* within the group show *Intuition*, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, 2017









DANCING

Dancing (2019) is an installation which I created in 2019 as a solo show at Almanac Inn and exhibited again in 2022 in a group show at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo.

The installation investigates light as the premise to the visual existence of the world, its archetypal and imaginative role in defining the relation between subject construction and its projection into outer realities and entities. In the middle of the space, a big mirrorball, composed of sharp irregular fragments, rotates in silence lit by spotlights. Suspended in mid-air, it recalls a kernel or the nucleus of an atom in the centre of an empty volume. The shiny pop nature of this dangerous celestial body is broken by the threat of the blades that compose it. The shattered mirrors that form the globe's surface reflect the beams of the spotlights in irregular compositions, constantly in motion, staging a game of reflections and alterations between inside and outside, scales and perceptions. Through light, it questions the stability of a perspective - of seeing and being seen. With the ambiguity of the shapes and movements reflected by the sphere, the work becomes a device of wonder and astonishment, projecting an outer world like a carousel or magic lantern - acquiring the unknown nature of a constellation or an aurora, while its sharp moving edges question the role of art as a form of entertainment and its submerged violence.

A video documentation of the work in motion can be seen at:

<https://www.cleofariselli.com/dancing?wix-vod-video-id=754780fae61f42039bfd50610d71c97d&wix-vod-comp-id=comp-ktvd6lc5>

1.
Dancing (2019), broken mirrors, metal net, elastic bands, cable ties, chain, motor, spotlights, diameter ca 1 m., installation view at Almanac Inn, Turin, 2019
2.
Installation view of *Dancing* within the group show *Camminiamo sul ciglio di un istante*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Guarene, 2022





HYDRIA

Hydria (2019) is a solo show I made at Iannaccone Collection, Milan. The exhibition offered a glimpse at my sculptural works and my first approaches to oil painting. The show was constructed on the Leitmotiv of water.

I often dream of water, sometimes as a calm sea, an imminent rain, a rushing river, a dark lake and so on. Over the years I have learnt to interpret its changing appearance as an indicator of the deeper movements of my inner world, and it has always been an object of inspiration, reflection and self-analysis for me. I am interested in exposing this theme not only from an introspective and self-analytical perspective, but also as an aesthetic and metaphorical paradigm of contemporaneity. The contemporary image of water is transparent, crystalline; from the aesthetics of the new technological interfaces that propose seductive representations of it, to the bottled water in the advertisements of a healthy, up-to-date lifestyle, this infallibly limpid, shadowless water, the embodiment of perfect 'clarity', is tamed, purged of all mystery and, ultimately, of all vitality. The conceptual intention of the exhibition was to restore the mutable aspect of water, its generative capacity, its fascinating, mysterious and disturbing side.

The exhibition was accompanied by a text that I wrote as an imaginative guide to invite the viewers to experience the piece within a poetic, immaterial context, superimposed on the physical one. Below and in the following pages are some excerpts:

«Welcome. Perhaps you know who I am, but take my advice: forget about it! A voice in the void resonates much more and, believe me, you will thank me for this foothold once you have a clear idea of the fluctuations surrounding us. You probably know where you are, just as you're bound to know who you are, right? Isn't it strange how a simple question, the most banal of questions, is able to sow the seeds of doubt in your mind? Embrace this slight suspicion as a guest, not as an intruder. Let it settle, and observe it without fear. If it decides to hang around long enough, you will suddenly realize that you know it even without having been introduced, and from then on you will be able to communicate with one another. In my case, it's a long-standing relationship; in fact, I will confess that sometimes it hangs around so long that I suspect it's begun to put down roots. Is it dangerous? In all honesty, I can't rule it out. But let's laugh it off! Worrying is pointless, and since we started chatting away, the ship has set sail. You didn't even notice, did you? Let me say that again. Temporary amnesia is the ideal state in which to face navigation, so relax – you'll be able to take it in all the better if you loosen your grip. And it's with this absent gaze that I invite you to draw up to the first attractions, which you will find to your right..»

1.
Hydria (2019), giclée print on cotton paper, cm 40 x 30
- 2., 3.
Fon Gran Papa III, 2019, dental ceramic plaster, clay sediments, cm 31 x 60 x 26
- 4., 5.
Fon Gran Papa I, 2019, dental ceramic plaster, clay sediments, 28 x 64 x 25





2.

«I managed to capture them by pure chance. It's rare to see them like this – motionless, I mean. Every inch of their body was a movement, and then it became a void. They are shy and short-lived, but I managed to trick them: a rock, once heated to the point of crumbling, helped me understand their volumes, and by the time it began to cool down and return to its mineral state, they were mine. Cruel, you say? Knowledge demands sacrifice, my friend, and without this procedure, you would have never encountered the stony indifference of the blind gaze of two creatures from the depths. Have you ever thought about making a hole in water? It is only possible for a brief moment – think about it the next time you take a dive – but for those interested in forms, it's a pleasure to linger over such fleeting morphologies! And so here they are: upside down, two solid holes, two full-arm submersions, created during a visual apnoea that can last five or six hours before becoming unbearable.»



3.



4.



5.

«You will find yourself in a great hall. It's important for you to see it, as it houses a vital element of the ship: its sail. It's what lets us slide slowly across the water, providing shade at the same time. It is held taut by a head that has been asleep for nearly twenty years. It is a familiar figure to me, a physiognomy I know well. And I'll tell you a secret: only I have explored the internal landscape of that skull! I can't say I've been everywhere in there, but...one thing I do know is that it's only pretending to be asleep. You can figure it out too if you look closely at its expression. Come closer, don't be afraid – it won't move. Does it know it's being observed? Only in a way, and not in its present. But this question only leads to another: have you ever acted like you didn't know you were being watched? I mean, in order to show off, giving an air of animalistic coherence among all your parts. Sometimes I think of beauty in the same way as the artifice of unknowingness. And this brings us back to the sail! Its design is reminiscent of the wings of a certain moth: a creature whose daytime life revolves around concealment. You would be very lucky to find it! You might then marvel at the refined veining of its wings, colored from the inside.»

6., 7., 8.

Hydria, 2019, hand-dyed cotton canvas, sculptural element in scagliola carpigiana, m 10 x 2,7 and cm 23 x 19 x 17,5





7.



8.

«Here you can see earth and its metallic skin transformed by the power of fire. Have I ever worn them myself? I don't recall, but what I do know is that my pressing against them shaped the volumes, as if I were the core and they the pulp; a scorching core that blasted away the rocky pulp before vanishing, leaving only a thin and iridescent skin in its wake. I had to burn in order to obtain what oysters produce effortlessly! Now they are cold, you can come up close and explore them with your gaze. Perhaps they seem strangely familiar to you – often caves have this effect. Where do the confines of the body begin and those of the environment end? As long as we're still alive, the answer seems clear enough! But here is another one of those questions that apparently calls for a standstill in order to be answered. There is no need for you to do so now.»

9.

each - *Untitled (ear)*, 2019, Raku ceramics, ca. cm 12 x c x 8

10.

Untitled (Half Face), 2019, Raku ceramics, cm 26,3 x 14 x 19

11., 12.

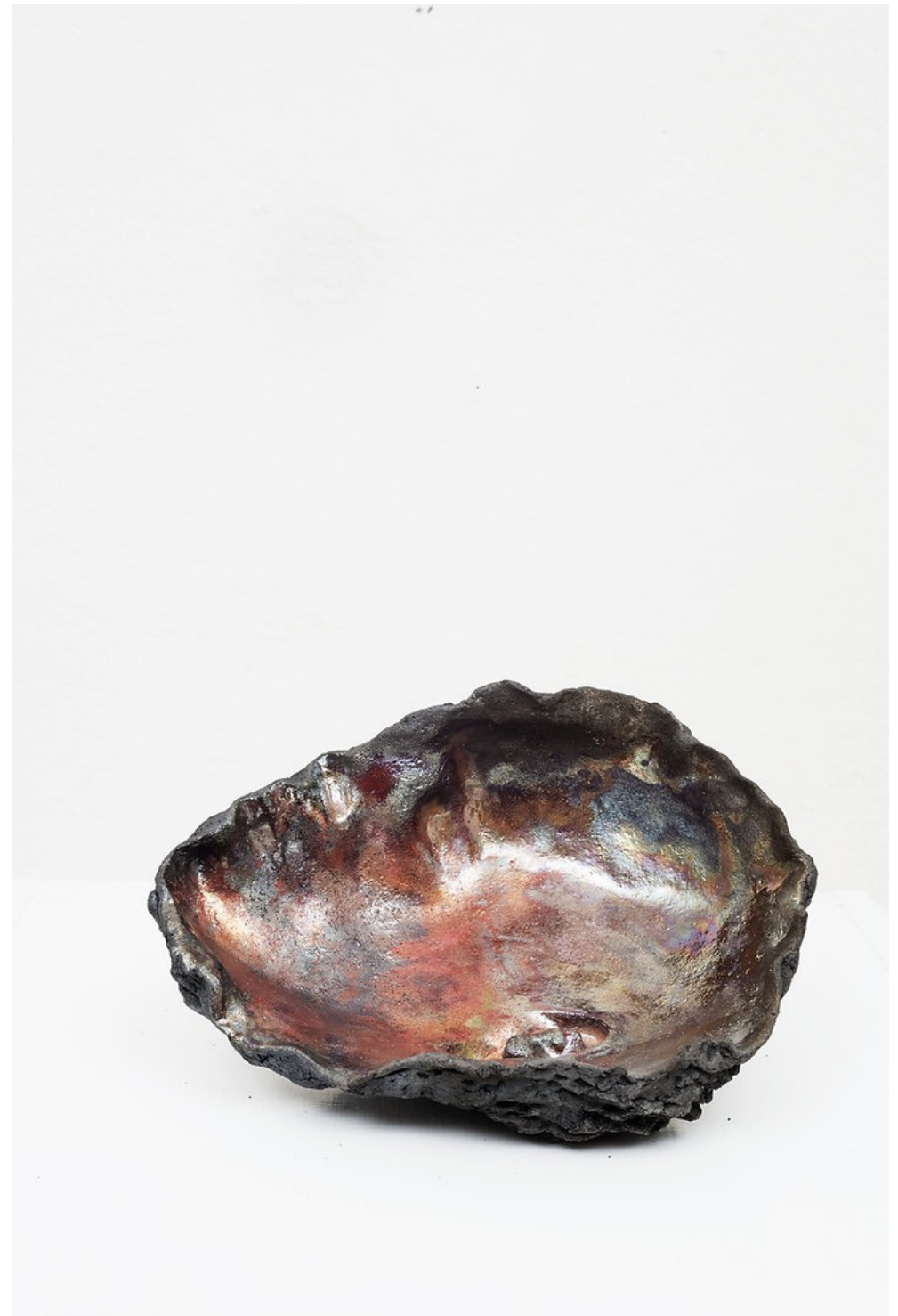
Untitled (Hip), 2019, Raku ceramics, cm 56 x 39 x 30

13., 14.

Untitled (Shoulder), 2019, Raku ceramics, cm 43,5 x 40 x 30



9.



10.



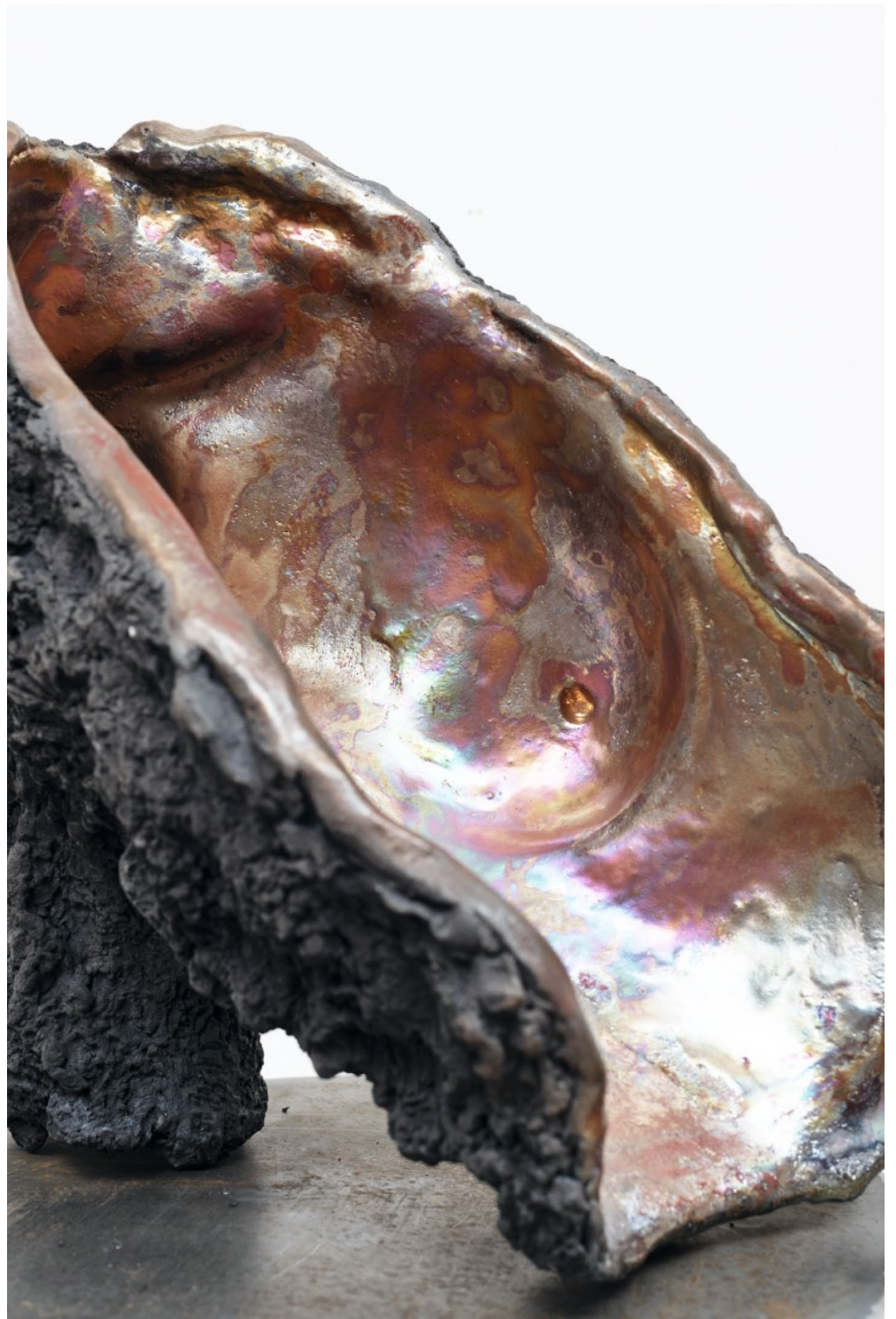
11.



12.



13.



14.



15.

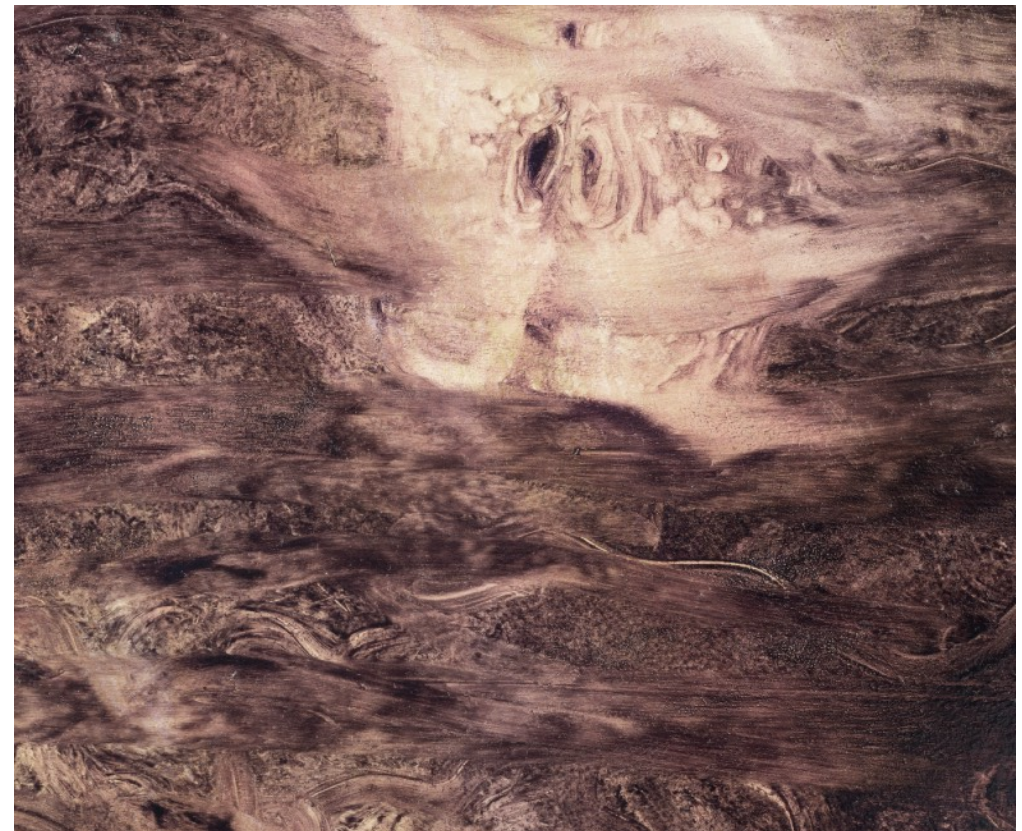
«Follow me, I will show you some painted panels. Through oil, I discovered I could see water through a new gaze. There is an analogy between the transparency of water and the act of seeing, is that what you thought too? Water as visual potential, one made tangible. Maybe also for this reason when it is murky, dark or deep, it provokes that subtle sense of restlessness...you know what I mean. It is when the eye foresees a continuation but, unable to go further, it is forced to remain on the threshold, entranced by its own limits. Only water is able to arouse this most particular ocular tactility! And, as you're sure to have understood, I refer to touch in the broadest possible sense of the word.»

15., 16.

Creek, 2019, oil on wooden board, cm 90 x 60

17., 18.

Water Landscape with Snakes, 2019, cm 120 x 90



16.



17.



18.

«See this instrument? Get closer, expose yourself to it. It contains another room, but not one you can get inside yourself. You may enter with whichever eye you prefer, but there is only one way in. Once inside, you will note a familiar physiognomy: it's an absent presence and a present absence. Little by little, let its waves of unreality draw you towards the sleepy waters within. It will not be me who tells you when to take one of the two exits with your gaze. Embrace these images guided by matter without judgement, and don't worry about letting them flow freely through the meanders of your memory and imagination. The other eye is out focus, you say? Never underestimate the power of a crippled gaze.»

19., 20.

Scopio, 2019, plaster, epoxy resin, micaceous pigment, scagliola carpigiana coating, distilled water, iron base, cm 33 x 25 x 28 and cm 55 x 140 x 55





DY YAYI

Dy Yayi (2018) is a solo show I made at Operativa gallery, Rome. The words Dy Yiayi are the mysterious inscription on the doorbell in the studio where I lived while I was realizing the exhibition. The inscription became an hypnotic, familiar, yet arcane sound, a mantra and a password to access the peculiar space-time of the works. The gallery was transformed into an ideal transposition of these private rooms.

Veiled by a rose-tone filter, the gallery glass entrance turned into a great ideal ajar eyelid. On the inside, a few iconic furniture pieces help creating an ambiguous sense of off-putting domesticity. Such sensation is further nourished by a feminine bathing song, coming from downstairs, which is impossible to enter; dreamy and self-referenced, the audio installation was inspired by the mythical character Melusina.

As in *Hydria*, a written imaginative guide to the show was offered to the visitor:

«I don't know how to tell you the house got flooded. The floor is liquid skin upon God knows what kind of abyss. There's nothing else to do but relax and act accordingly. Action, of course, is just an option among many. If you feel like walking on this surface, then do it without fear.»

1.
Dy Yayi, 2018, invitation card
2.
Dy Yiayi, 2018, exhibition view







3.

«Look around and you will find my pottery, let your gaze linger on each fold or notch I have been steady for so long to achieve them and I have been crossed by so many streams, that your gaze will be but a puff. If you bring something into focus, something else will be out, but you should know that by now.»

3.
Dy Yiayi, 2018, exhibition view

4.
Untitled (shoulder), 2018, Raku ceramics, cm 23 x 45 x 32



4.

«Have you already met Edda? Don't be afraid, she won't take you downstairs; every now and then, she rises to the surface to relax her pupils, contracted by the doom. Not even I know how far she pushes herself. Her iris is intriguing, don't you think? From the same material, I have obtained three heads I once had. They are the anchors that are keeping me here! But even with that heavy weight, they never slip down this skin that's pushing your foot. Perhaps it is better this way.»

5.
Edda, 2018, plaster, scagliola carpigiana, four elements: cm 2 x 27 x 15, cm 17 x 64 x 24, cm 25 x 70 x 20, cm 38 x 79 x 20

6.
Dy Yiayi, 2018, Exhibition view

7.
Cleo, 2018, iridescent tafetà, three elemets in scagliola carpigiana, m 3 x 10 and cm 24 x 22 x 15 each





6.



7.

CALIPSO

Calipso (2016) is a solo show I made at Clima gallery, Milan. In *Calipso*, once again, I created a context around the show: a theatrical space overlaying the gallery environment. This context was a nightclub display, surrounded by exoticism and mystery. Calipso is also the nightclub maîtresse, inspired by the homonym greek sea goddess, from the Greek verb Kalyptein (the one who hides), and she embodies the fertile and imaginative half-light dimension, the partial conscience, the relationship between veiled and manifest, and a mysterious femininity. Fascinating and at the same time disturbing, she makes the objective reality trembles. The setting took shape in the gallery rooms through a series of symbolic elements and props - the specific plinth design, the slightly modified lighting, a specially-made mirror ball - and the original soundtrack composed by sound artist Federico Chiari with the participation of renowned musician, and my father, Patrizio Fariselli. At the show entrance a text, written by me embodying Calipso, guided the visitor drawing from the reading's interior voice, becoming a refined interaction element.

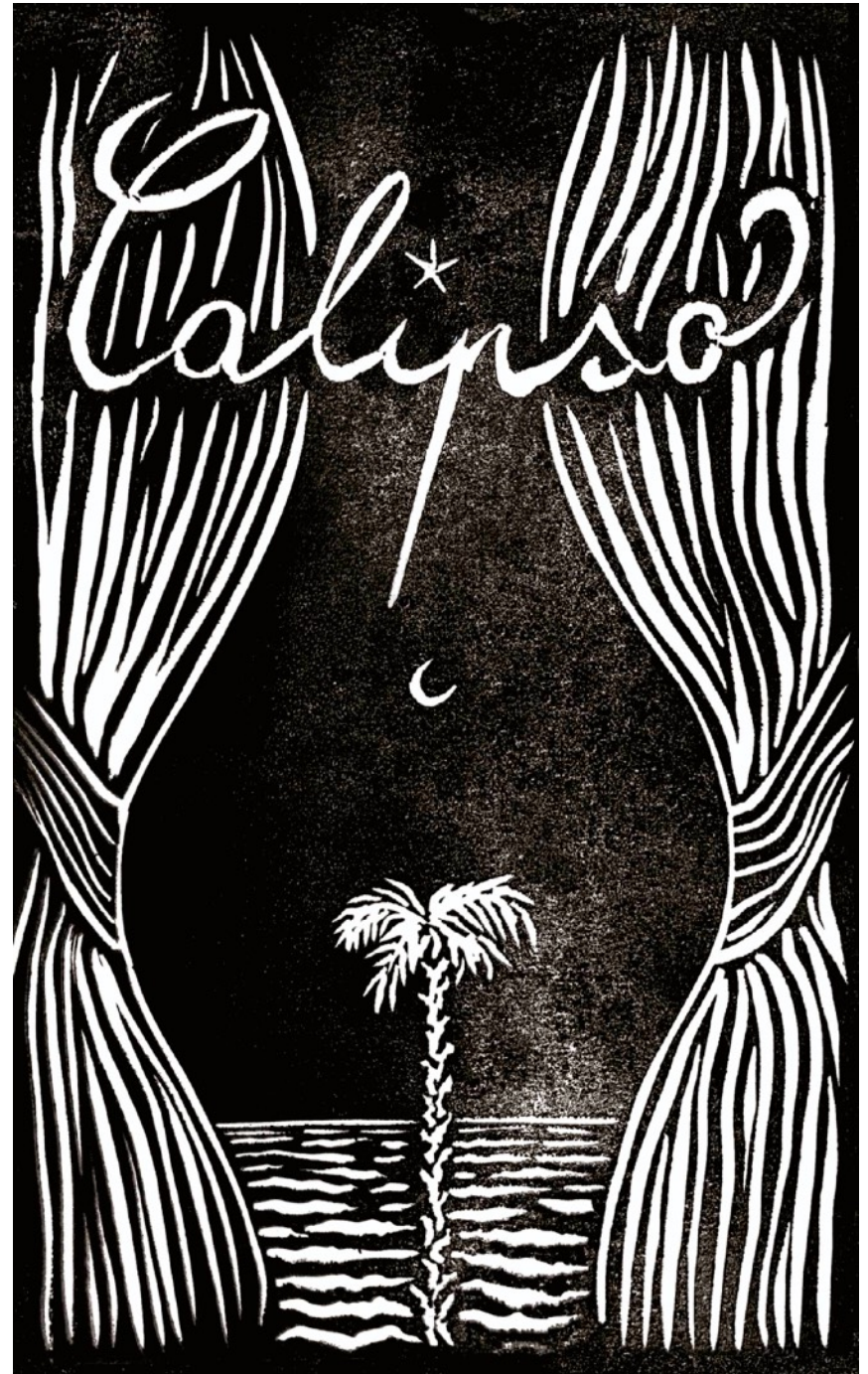
«Dearest, come in, make yourself at home. I want to introduce you to my beloved guests. Do not bother living things, they are totally irrelevant; speak or be silent, stand or wander around the room. I recommend slowing the blink of your lashes as it was the breath of your gaze, feel your eyes wide open behind your closed eyelids.

I want you to focus on my words, listen to them with your eyes. Choose carefully the sound of my voice and be aware that even if you continue to interpret it with yours, it will be inhabited by me and sound alien.

Sometimes, when I look at someone's behind, the person instinctively moves his hand to the point I am staring at and covers it, as if he were caught by a sudden, localized embarrassment. Has it ever happened to you? It could be a coincidence, yet it always made me think of a tactile quality of the gaze.»

1.
Calipso, 2016, invitation postcard

2.
Calipso, 2016, exhibition view



1.





«But let me introduce you to my ancestors. No, they are not portraits, they are born from the fingers and from the attempt to remember what a head is. If I met them without knowing them, I would think they do not have a personality capable of relativizing the chance of being born from a mother rather than another one. They are as serious as a game, don't you think? Look at them closely, they can not see you. None of my guests can.»

3.

Gran Papa V, 2016, dental ceramic plaster, clay sediments, cm 25 x 30 x 35

4.

Gran Papa III, 2016, dental ceramic plaster, clay sediments, cm 21 x 34 x 26

5.

Gran Papa IV, 2016, dental ceramic plaster, clay sediments, cm 19 x 29 x 29

6.

Calipso, 2016, exhibition view

7.

Calipso, 2016, exhibition view



4.



5.







8.

«Here the windows are veiled, but not completely, and the gap is as substantial as the veil: two fragrances that exalt each other. Each drapery is stretched by the weight of the head of a single, small individual that you can contemplate at various times of his eternal half-sleep. Two long six-headed puppets, eyes clasped by eyelids drapery, tell and cause at the same time a condition of half-light. Move around with no hurry.

Approach now to my last guest. Linger on the elaborate skin and let it take you elsewhere, until the inside of your mind. On the back of the head your eye will encounter a hole, take it with your gaze. In the skull cave you will find at a fork, choose an eye, and out of the corner of your eye look at the other too. It is a lopsided gaze, hanging in the balance between two worlds: one clear and the other nebulous. Choose among these your favourite way out, and move away silently.»

8

Loihi Lihilihi, detail. 2016, fabric, passamenterie, epoxy resin, iron powder, bronze powder, copper powder, m 10 x 1,6

9.

Cleo, detail, 2016, polystyrene, dental ceramic plaster, iron oxyde, acrylic color, cm 16 x 33 x 24



U.

U. is a performance/exhibition conceived and presented for the first time in 2012. Since then, it has been presented in different locations and contexts, updated and reinvented again and again.

The performance is aimed at small groups of spectators at a time, who are led into an immersive and mysterious atmosphere. *U.* features a constantly growing series of objects selected and created by me, including sculptures, object trouvé, assemblages, drawings, paintings, etc. acting as imaginative devices. As the conductor, I firstly present this elements in my hands contextualizing them through my body, using poses, intentions and gestures to highlight traits of them or affect their possible interpretation, before passing them to the participants, that can handle them in their own way and pass them from hand to hand. This dynamic creates a shared interactive experience involving the senses, the body and the imagination of each participant.

Each session is unique and is built according to the dynamics and energies elicited by that specific group of people. The performance generally lasts between 10 and 20 minutes, and involves between 6 and 12 objects. The sequence of objects is "installed" over time, creating a unique phrase.

In an era when the image and the representation has come to paroxysm *U.* was born from the need to create an experiential and shared art context in which to meet the viewers combining objective, conceptual and performative practices. Material and immaterial elements collaborate in creating an immersive environment that investigates the very act of "showing something" and its endless possibilities.

Choosing not to produce video-photographic documentation of *U.* comes from the need to create a space safe from the impact of images and the duty of representation and self-representation in our lives. The testimonies of those who have experienced the performances, backstage photographs and study images that accompany me in the construction phase, are the only existing visual documentation of the project.

Since 2014, thanks to the collaboration with Patrizio Fariselli, the performance has been enriched with a live musical contribution which further enhances the immersiveness of the experience.

1.

Cleo and Patrizio Fariselli portrait by Silvia Mangosio and Luca Vianello on the occasion of *U.* staged at San Pietro in Vincoli Cemetery, Turin

2., 3, 4.

Untitled, 2014, from the series *Handled sculptures*, inkjet print on cotton paper, cm 28 x 42





2.



3.



«The artist asks us to switch off our phones and remain silent, thus creating an imperceptible tension of anticipation. She carefully takes the objects one at a time, gently strips them of their case, revealing sculptures that resemble a nut, or an anatomical organ, or a stone polished by time. I receive from her hands, in mine, the first sculpture. The passage from the artist's hand is fragile, she holds the sculpture as if it were a small bird not to be squeezed too tightly. Thus begins a passage of hands, from mine to the person next to me, from her to the third person who in turn hands the work back to the artist. Each person holds the object as long as they wish, touches it, turns it over, feels its different weight. You don't expect it, but one weighs a lot, another is as light as a feather, another gives off a scent. The surfaces are different to the touch. The slow action of uncovering and then covering the sculptures by the artist is hypnotic. It creates a sense of discovery and anticipation. The performance ends when the last sculpture returns to the artist's hand. We remain in silence, then she breaks it in a whisper. "Thank you for participating". We stand up a little disconcerted, not quite sure what to say, personally the feelings, deep and intense, remain resting in the palms of my hands.»

Excerpt from the review by Amalia Piccinini on the show *Estate*, Marianne Boesky gallery, New York, published on Flash Art, 2012

5., 6., 7., 8.

Backstage photographs by Allegra Martin from the performance at Fonderia Artistica Battaglia, Milan, 2015







www.cleofariselli.com