

Nicole Colombo
Selected Works

Untitled (Off Shell)

latex, rubber rope, leather, pvc, synthetic hair, copper

121 x 183 x 36 cm

2022



All photo credits to Crates Design





Aphrodite

Plexiglass, synthetic hairs, steel chain, stud, resin

34 x 52 x 6 cm

2022





Hecate

Plexiglass, synthetic hairs, steel chain, stud, resin

34 x 52 x 6 cm

2022





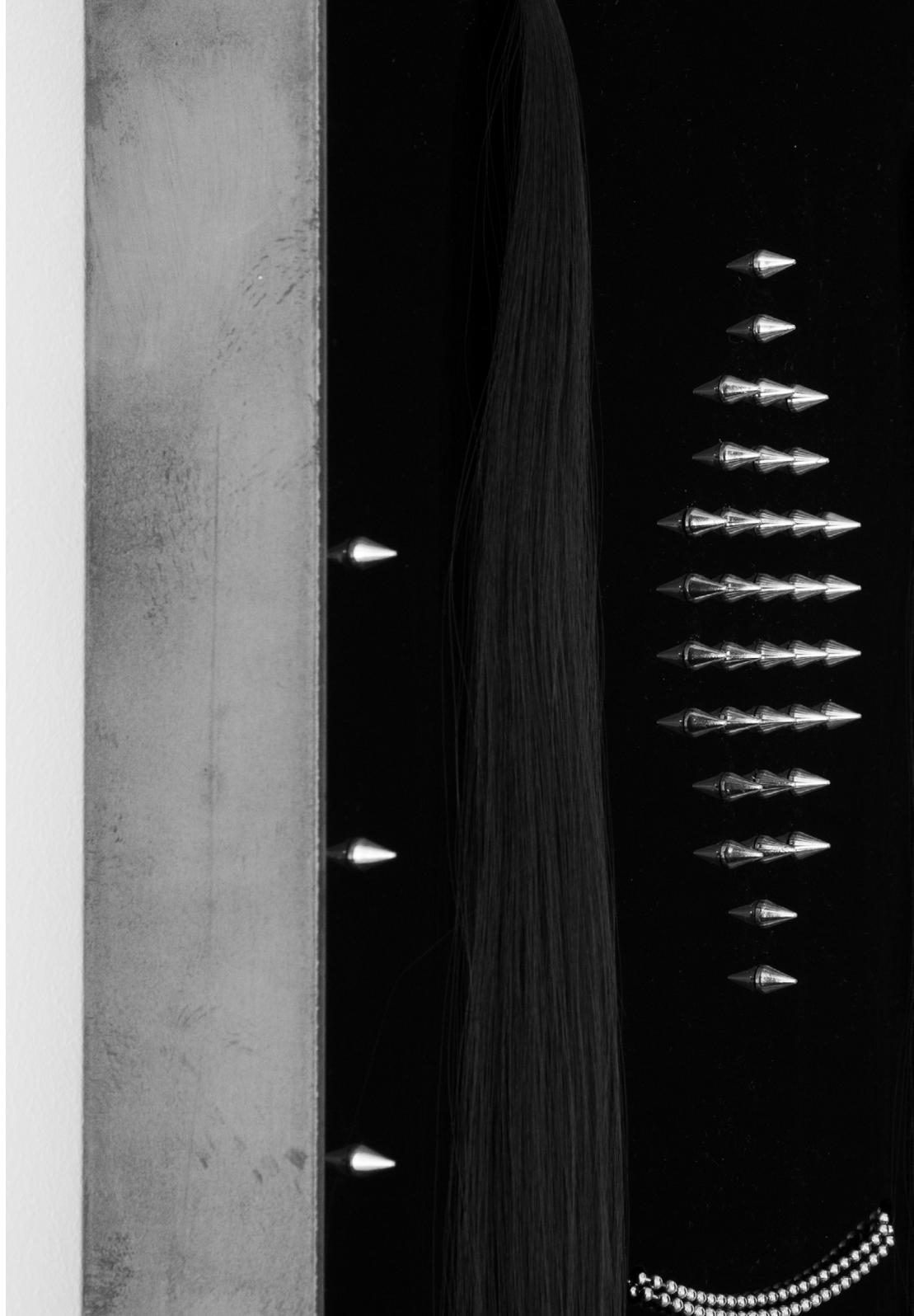
Artemis

Plexiglass, synthetic hairs, steel chain, stud, resin

34 x 52 x 6 cm

2022





Moonchild I, Moonchild II

Plexiglass, synthetic hairs, steel chain, stud
71 x 48 x 6 cm
2022







Lubna

Eco leather, steel hook, steel chain, synthetic hairs

About 90 x 40 cm Ø 2 cm

2022







Nausicaa (closed)

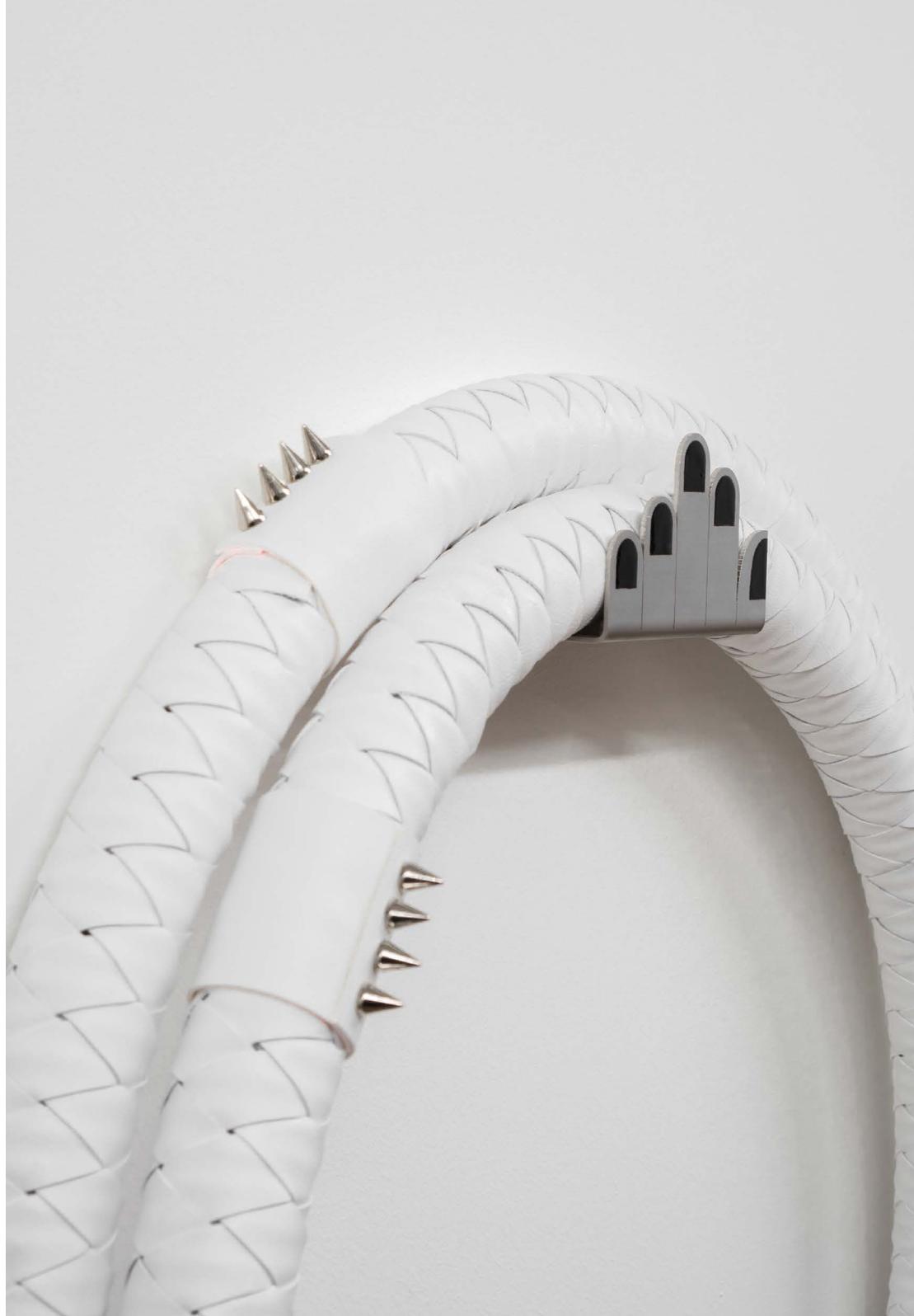
Eco leather, steel hook, stud, synthetic hairs

47 x 110 x 9 cm

2022



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Nausicaa

leather, synthetic hair, stainless steel
variable dimension
2021

“Then he arrived on the island of the Phaeaci and hid his nakedness among the shrubs where Nausicaa, daughter of King Alcinous, was taking her clothes to the river to wash them. Then he crawled out of the fronds and begged her for help. Moved with pity, she gave him a mantle and led him to his father. Alcinous welcomed him with a dignified hospitality, honored him with gifts and sent him to his homeland, Ithaca.”

(Iginio, Fabulae, 126)

“Don't forget me, because I gave you your life back”

She's a punk punk, a punk rocker
Punk punk, a punk rocker
Punk punk, a punk rocker.
Nausicaa is a punk rocker
Nausicaa is a punk rocker
Nausicaa is a punk rocker now.





The Burned

leather, synthetic hair, stainless steel
variable dimension
2021

The Burned represents the sublimation of a moment, of an encounter between two characters. Thirteen and Nausicaa meet for the first time.





Thirteen

leather, synthetic hair, stainless steel

220 x 95 x 6 cm

2021

Thirteen is a character that is composed and defined through the association between materials and technique of realization. It is a long weave of black eco-leather, made by emulating the technique used for whips, with ends both on one end and on the other with a long lock of black hair; all supported by three stainless steel hand shape hooks. *Thirteen* lives poised between a drive for freedom, fluidity in form and movement and a desire of constraint, the idea of a whip or a leash, of a weave that tightens and immobilizes, anthropomorphized by the presence of hair and hands, both human elements that bring him back to a different and narrative dimension. *Thirteen* introduce itself.





Sleeping is for billionaires

clay, oil essence, iron, burned iron, resin

71 x 132 x 19 cm

30 x 21 x 75 cm

2022







Untitled (Animistic Totem)

burned chestnut wood, stainless steel
66,5 x 49 x 2 cm
2022





Lilith

carbon fiber, resin
90 x 450 x 40 cm
2021

Realized in collaboration with Nord Resine
Courtesy Ultravioletto.art
All photo credits to Lorenzo Mariotti

Thanks to Ultravioletto and Nord Resine I made a smaller sister of Lilith,
the size is 60 x 170 x 20 cm.







Self-awareness as coexistence of opposites. Interview with Nicole Colombo.

Interview and translation by Eleonora Savorelli

*Your artistic practice is based on the coexistence and combination of opposite aspects: erotic and seductive elements are paired with disturbing ones, which provoke, at the same time, attraction and repulsion. A good example is the artwork *The Burned* (2021), shown at the exhibition *Oh Art – Fluid Shapes* curated by YET Art Agency. The work connects the two most representative elements of the above-mentioned dualities, and of your visual repertoire: hair and the whip. Beauty gives way to disgust, and vice versa, while pain and pleasure follow one another. What you want to evoke with the coexistence of these contrasting aspects?*

To understand my never-ending attempt to make dualisms exist side-by-side, it is necessary to start from this premise: I believe that human beings live inside dualisms of opposite elements that are absolutely necessary for their survival. Like it or not, we have all grown in, and therefore we are imbued with, a deeply Catholic culture where there is not so much space for grey liminal areas: all is either black or white, always in contrast and hardly ever in dialogue. On the contrary, ancient cultures already imagined deities in which good and evil always existed together. Those ancient people were already aware of the truest kind of human nature: the one in which dualities dance together, in a constant state of acceptance and search for balance. Starting from this ground, what I try to do is to show how dichotomies can exist in each of us, without inner fights: the key word here is balance. There is no pleasure without pain, or happiness without turmoil. The temporary absence of one makes the other lose its meaning, making us way more aware of the necessary coexistence of the two.

The Burned attempts to portray a moment of epiphany, the meeting between two characters – Thirteen and Nausicaa – of whom we only see an even more abstract form, which emphasises the movement of the two black and white whips, caught in an attempt of mutual approach and departure. The long supporting arms place the artwork in a specific semantic field, just as the long hair do. Each material carries a precise collective imagination, that is the aspect with which I try to play with, attempting to enter in the personal inner-world of every spectator, and pushing them to have a personal relationship with what they are looking at and perceiving. A sinuous but regulated movement conversing with the living body – heavy, emotional, and moving – of the viewer.

*The Ultravioletto Arte+Impresa residency, curated by Sonia Belfiore, was your last commitment. The residency is based on the combination between art and industry, told through contemporary art's methodology. Thanks to this experience, and to the collaboration with Nord Resine, you gave life to *Lilith* (2021), an imposing and sculptural*

lock of black hair made with carbon fiber. How much the contact with these two environments is possible? What do you bring with you from this experience?

Besides being the last residency that I attended, Ultravioletto was also one of the most interesting, demanding, and enriching I did. This experience is designed to create two artworks, thanks to the support of a specific company: one of the works ends up with the company, the other one is kept by the artist. The fact that the residency provides a company's help for the artistic production is totally awesome; usually, this aspect is problematic and also limiting. Furthermore, the active collaboration of Nord Resine – both from the daily experimentation and discussion points of view – enriched both my artistic practice and myself. Through my work, I always look for a relationship, a constructive debate, a sharing of stories with the viewers and with those who contribute to the creation of the artwork. Sometimes, in order to make this conversation work, it is necessary to find tricks; while, in other occasions, the sharing happens in a totally spontaneous way, as in this case. To spend long days sharing a workplace, intruding upon the worker's daily routine, almost forcing them to adapt to my presence and to the one of a sculpture that was slowly taking a shape and growing under their eyes, pushed them to become curious and to ask questions. It was exactly in that moment that my project was filled with meaning.

I had to create two sculptures, the bigger one was supposed to be acquired by the company that helped me: therefore, filling it with the emotions of those who would have it close every day became fundamental. Lilith is the biggest sculpture I have ever made (almost five metres), and for its making I have to thank – in addition to Sonia Belfiore, who was a fundamental character of this process – all those that have supported and put up with me in the previous months, in this adventure whose finale could not have been foreseen until the last moment.

Lilith's character, main inspiration for the artwork and archetype of the free and erotic woman, has an extremely ancient history. She was created from dust, simultaneously and independently from Adam; since she refused to obey him, she became a demon and a symbol of sin and transgression in the Christian thought. In the late nineteenth century, she embodied one of the symbols of female emancipation. In other settings, she symbolises the dark sides of the human soul, which must be tamed, not to be overwhelmed by them. Given her telluric origin, Lilith is strictly linked to earth and to an ancestral and primitive femininity: instead of being an example of transgression, she is one of resoluteness and self-awareness. How much this figure can say to today's women?

I have thought very deeply about how to answer; the best way seemed to list a series of links about Lilith, so as to leave the reader free to decide if they feel close or not to her. However, after reading your question more thoroughly, you wrote, and

I'm quoting you, "Given her telluric origin, Lilith is strictly linked to earth and to an ancestral and primitive femininity: instead of being an example of transgression, she is one of resoluteness and self-awareness. How much this figure can say to today's women?" I believe that the crucial point lies here, in self-awareness. It would be useless to mention the years of struggles against patriarchy for women's freedom: it would be useless to try to untangle them, with the risk of speaking about them hurriedly. What I want to underline is the inner balance that true self-awareness can provoke, never clashing with something, or someone, external – the male, or whoever it might be – but deeply internalised; a focus on the idea of the "human being" and not on the one of gender; the understanding of each individual's limits and strengths as aspects to cherish, outside of any kind of categorization, which bring further and useless disintegrations. Lilith is a made-up character, an idea, a possibility: she has a female name, but she could inspire everyone, because – and here I take on the risk to take it for granted – feminine, and femininity have nothing to do with gender.

You always deeply reflect on the possibility and potentialities of the materials you use, them being handcrafted or industrial. For instance, in Lilith, you managed to connect the subject of your work with the material: carbon is the main component of life, and Lilith is one of its main symbols, since she is a subject that can generate life. How do you handle the artworks and materials coupling?

I always pay particular attention to the choice of materials. I approach my work considering a variety of elements, and different instruments that create several narrative layers, which in turn are also layers with different meanings. Each chosen material carries a specific narrative, and the ability to make people feel particular emotions, given by the collective imagination that has been created around it. All of that become for me a useful instrument for the making of the artwork: these cultural scenarios feed me, and I use them as changeable alphabets to write my story and to continuously communicate with the public, in this way establishing a link with those who enjoy my work. Leather, iron, clay, resin: each of these materials brings with it a more or less ancient story, composed by different references and ideas, techniques, and uses. It is impossible for me to separate these elements; instead, it becomes fundamental to know and use them in the best way, so to create a dialogue, which finds its meaning in the overlapping of images and cultures.

I believe that it is possible to detect the same care toward womanhood and to its origins, already present in Lilith, in the series (Untitled): in this case as well, the artworks refer to female characters, of whom only the hands, with long and sinuous fingers, are shown. The hands of (Untitled) Esmeralda (2020), (Untitled) Rose (2018) and (Untitled) Bianca (2018) are installed on doors' jambs: they seem to enter in new spaces, gliding on walls, in a constant relationship of absence and presence with domestic spaces. The hands – because of their position – seem to emerge from the void; their fluid shapes remind the

aquatic figure of Tiāmat, the primordial Babylonian goddess of oceans, and embodiment of primigenial chaos. How much these ancient mythological female figures nourish your artistic practice? Moreover, your art is no stranger to such incredible characters, how do you host them inside an artwork?

As I mentioned in the first answer, my practice usually draws from ancient cultures; in those, female figures frequently represent archetypes of which we lost the meaning. Those characters might be re-discovered and re-elaborated – also involuntarily – but in a way that is not as informed as it should be. Tiāmat, whom you mention in your question, is a wonderful example of what I mean. The Babylonian primordial deity lost the battle against Marduk, earthly god and head of the pantheon, and her body was cut; this resulted in the creation of sky and land. According to her descriptions, Tiāmat had two faces, four eyes, and four ears: an androgynous, double being. In this case as well, dichotomies coexist in a unique and inseparable being. To engage with these figures is always extremely difficult and interesting. I am sure they are the product of an outstanding imagination, which was born from the constant and human necessity to explain the universe, and to feel part of a system. It is the possibility to imagine those incredible narratives – which somehow are repeated in very distant cultures, in quite similar ways – that allows me to work with different layers. In this way, I can unravel and tap into a challenging but unique collective imagery. To rediscover, to reimagine, and to give a new shape to these mythological figures allows me to enter an extant narration, using stories that people before me have already absorbed over and over again. As a woman, I feel a deep connection with female figures, I am kind of looking for my own "mother goddess", an ancestral being, to whom I can relate. I think that each of us is constantly looking for their own spirituality, and I – through my practice, which always mentions me, though several escamotages that might be more or less complex, and more or less disguised – carry on this never-ending research by means of images and characters, which I hope will be perceived as travelling companion for those who meet them. For instance, *Nemesi*, one of the first resin sculptures that I have ever done, deals precisely with this topic. I imagined a female figure capable of representing the concepts of evil, mistake, pain, and the dark side of the moon: these elements are caught in an endless attempt of acceptance and celebration of them, which are fundamental to recognize the value of their opposites. It is a small sculpture, a kind of "Venus", a small female bust attached to the dagger's blade; I gave my mother one for her sixtieth birthday. At first, I thought it was necessary for one of these sculptures to exist inside every personal show of mine, as a reminder of my greater closeness to duality than to dichotomy.

Lilith is another figure that you added to your repertoire of characters and "avatars" whom you outline with your artworks, and who acquires details and behaviours through their approach – as happened during your solo show SAM (2020), curated by Greta Scarpa. While Lilith has more precise characteristics, thanks to her long history and

multiple depictions, your other characters are more fluid and open to interpretations, both physical and behavioural. Sam herself (or himself?) is not a defined figure, she/he is fragmented, they avail themselves of this fluidity. How does the character creation happen? Moreover, how does the contact between them and your audience develop?

The use of avatars is a fixed-point in my practice. Since childhood, the search for my identity always went through the identification with main characters of stories and tales: from this attitude came the firm belief that what I am is also the sum of the figures I have met. My work is based on this idea. I started to choose the possible parts of an identity: what we are, what we wish to be, what we will never be, the limits and the endless possibilities. From this research comes the idea of creating different characters: I make them live through situations and narratives, which might become the example of plausible situations. I define my work as a constant anthropological and cultural research that goes through a thick filter, which includes me being a European, white woman, and with which – despite my struggles – I will always have to confront myself too. I gather possible stories at any time: in any walk, bar, underground, restaurant, everywhere. My studio is a basement apartment, some windows overlook a street; usually, during the day, I open those windows and I listen to passers-by's talks, imagining the life of each of them, their joys, disappointments, those problems that seem impossible, and the moments of happiness. All that bring me to the creation of each character, who, as I already mentioned before, manages to create a link with the public through narration; as if each artwork became a main of secondary character of a story, which the viewer is invited to listen, to live, to interpret, and to fill with their own experiences.

The necessary meeting between your artwork and public makes me think that your works cannot be defined as "completed" without a strong contact between them and a viewer who has nothing to do with you and your pieces. How much do your artworks have to get close to those who meet them? Furthermore, the artworks have to solicit personal experiences, they must activate an intimate and private reaction, this being positive or negative. Have you ever feared that this dynamic would get out of hand, and trigger unexpected reactions?

My answer is yes. I will explain myself further. Since my artworks live in a bigger narrative, they can be "extracted", and exist singularly as "still frames": in this way, they analyse and tell just a part of the story. However, it is just when they are seen entirely, as part of a story, that one can see their movements and changes of meaning. There are two main levels of interpretation: the first has to do with the single work, and with the link that this creates with the viewer that, as you said in the question, triggers personal experiences; and where the emotional and imaginative contributions of the viewer become an instrument to ideally complete the work. The second level unites the specific stories of each artwork together, creating a polyphony, a single story that I control. In this case, the viewer is asked to enjoy

my work in a more passive way, observing and listening. The second layer says a lot about me and my research, it is a more inward-looking layer, in which I analyse my personal, past and present, life. Regarding the possibility of losing control of the public's reactions, I am not afraid at all. I want people who experience my works to live them fully and actively, in an emotionally generous way. I like the idea of creating a moment in which someone could feel present, here and now, without using strange and luring tricks, but just using the personal baggage of images and information that our brain keeps collecting and classifying. Thus, there cannot be anything like an unwanted reaction. Everything that the work manages to provoke is welcome, for better or worse. I try to "pour out" my need for control – as a good Virgo – on the second layer of meaning, when I build the work and weave the weft. Afterwards, when I input the piece into the world, it becomes free from my ability to control it, and that is ok. Emotions and any kind of reactions are welcomed, them being positive or negative; but they have to be genuine.

Nicole Colombo (b.1991, Italy). Far from a sort of educated “italian approach”, the artist is imposing an aesthetic that is much closer to that of the two Berlin-based artists Monica Bonvicini and Anne Imhof - both solid starting points of her research and imaginary. From them, Nicole Colombo extrapolates the use of space, the artworks’ staging and the capability to sharply define an original vocabulary through the use of materials.

Nicole Colombo’s domestic and large-scale sculptures and installations create a tension in the space and in the observer as they possess a sort of living energy, while the chosen materials and their combination result to be at the same time libidinal and repulsive. An anthropological approach stands at the core of her research: the artist observes the dichotomies that often characterize the western societies and the difficulty of the human being to accept their co-existence. Leveraging our common imaginary, her attempt gives back to the observer artworks that represent the duality of things, creating abstract characters that portrait each of us.

Leather, aluminum, synthetic hairs, chains, plexiglass, latex and hooks give birth to an impeccable and highly aestheticized vision in order to attract the viewers and introduce them to a wider range of possibilities as a lens to approach reality.

In the border zone between discomfort and comfort, between power dynamics and the power of fragility, between love and lust, pain and vulnerability, libido and repulsion, body and narrative, the artist opens up spaces of freedom and resistance.

Selected Exhibition:

- 2022 *Shifting Balance*, curated by Marta Orsola Sironi, OneRoom Gallery, London
Towards the Pillars of Hercules, presented by Boscolo Collection Art Programme
Curated by BeAdvisors Art Department & Atipografia with the collaboration of Mattia Pozzoni Art Advisory
Presentation of a new and old works inside Greta Scarpa’s office, Milano
The paradise is exactly like where you are right now only much, much better, curated by Marta Orsola Sironi e Virginia Lupo, Palazzo Franzone Spinola di Luccoli, Genova
- 2021 *Ultravioletto*, art residency at Nord Resine, curated by Ultravioletto, Susegana
Fluid Shapes, curated by YetArt Agency in collaboration with Espresso, Tube Culture Hall, Milano
Avalanche, curated by Regatta, at Regatta, Düsseldorf
Over and Above, curated by Nataša Radojević and Jelena Đakonović, in collaboration with Aria Art Gallery (Florence) and Federico Luger Gallery (Milan), at Drina Gallery, Belgrade
KRU, collective exhibition curated by Chiara Guidi and Gloria Amorena, at Palazzo del Medico, Carrara

Leftlovers, curated by Luca Poncetta and Localedue, at Localedue, Bologna

Alla mattina appena alzata, Canale Milva curated by Giada Olivotto and Camilla Paolino, hosted on Lumpen Station, Geneve

2020 *Do you think this is the best way to start*, at MASSIMO , Milano

Sam, BitCorp for Art, solo show curated by Greta Scarpa, Milano

2019 *The Oranges of the Sunrise*, editorial contribution made with Alberta Romano, Media Naranja, Marseille