

Roberta De Caro

PORTFOLIO 2023



States of Matter, 2023. Glass.

Artist's Statement

The link between materials, processes and meaning is at the heart of my research. In my multi- disciplinary practice, familiar objects and materials are taken out of their usual context to reflect upon their deeper associations: long braided hair to discuss issues of control; a bunch of parsley to deal with reproductive rights and intergenerational trauma; a wall of laundry soap to consider gender role structures; broken glass to portray domestic abuse; etc.

Inspired by Roland Barthes' theory on myths and by the work of Marina Warner, my work aims at unearthing and undoing preconceived ideas about reality through observing the nexus between materiality and meaning from a feminist perspective. Fuelled by personal experiences that relate to broader socio-political issues, my work often deals with patriarchal control, injustice and power. Artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Mona Hatoum, Kathy Wilkes and Doris Salcedo are influential in my practice, promoting the ideas of repair and interconnectedness.

Process is fundamental: casting with the lost wax process, etching, or employing everyday processes such as cooking to create art. I am fascinated by the alchemy of transferring psychological states onto materials through making, transforming the art object into the embodiment of lived experiences and ideas.

I often invite participation in my work, whether in immersive site-specific installations with an active viewer, or by organising socially engaged projects where the work is made or altered by people's participation. As an artist, I aspire to have a direct impact on people's lives, exposing their struggles and offering new perspectives.

An example of my socially engaged practice is my multi award-winning project From the Fragment to the Whole (2020 and ongoing), where glass is explored as a metaphor for surviving domestic abuse.



From the Fragment to the Whole exhibition At Espacio Gallery, London, 2022

This collection of glassworks is the result of a series of workshops with survivors of domestic abuse where we worked from fragments of glass to create artworks that mirror their lived experience.



Image of one of the participants' hands at work.



From the Fragment to the Whole, 2022.



From the Fragment to the Whole, 2022.

In my practice material engagement is a means to reflect on personal, art historical and socio-political issues. The processes I employ often involve glass in combination with the material in focus. Glassmaking allows me to think through materials, 'process through process'. A medium of endless possibilities, alchemical properties and transformative power, glass is a constant in my work, often disguised as different materials from wax to stone, to ceramics, soap or even white chocolate! Glass is at the intersection between life and art as they merge into one process.



Dough, 2021. Glass with medium, powdered glass, ready-made.

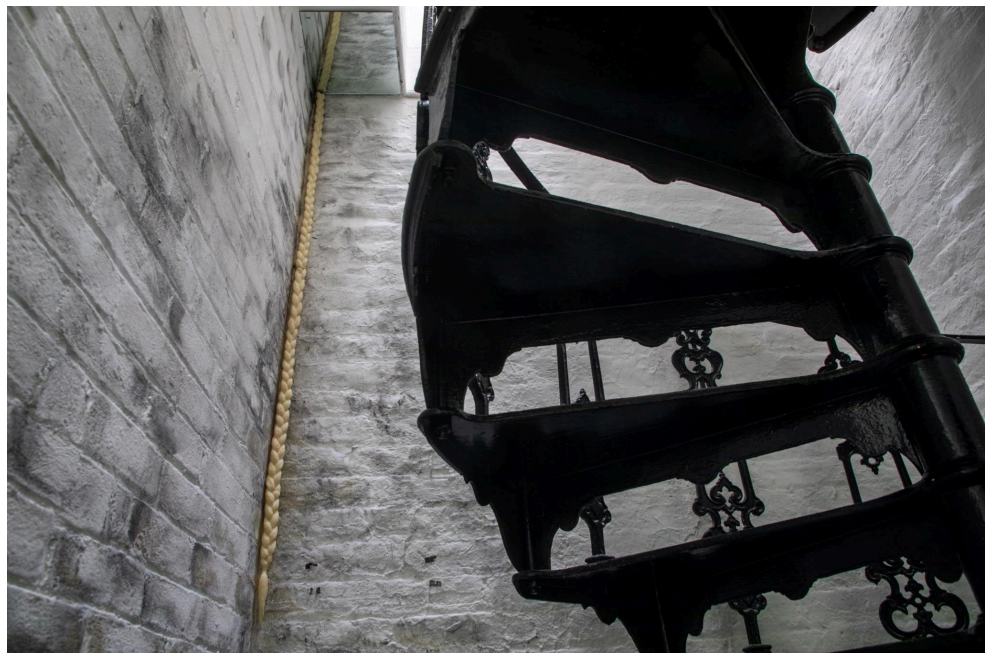
An example of this is my installation 'Mater' where parsley and glass are combined to uncover a complex network of personal, cultural and social histories.



Mater, 2021. Mixed Media.



Mater, 2021. Mixed Media.



Rapunzel's Mother, 2021. Glass cast. (From *Mater*)

Once considered 'the herb of the dead', parsley was strongly associated with the female body, not only to regulate the menses but also to induce miscarriages. In my search to understand the root of trauma in my life, I learnt that parsley played a crucial role in my family history.



Petrosino, 2021. Glass.(From Mater)

This discovery spurred a year-long research into parsley and its histories, revisited on a personal level as the site of trauma, and explored as a material in my art practice through glass processes. As an artist and a woman, who is also the mother of a young girl, I engage in the creative process as a way of interrupting the cycle of intergenerational trauma.



Petrosino II, 2021. Glass.(From Mater)



Glass is both a material and a process: an ideal means to reflect on the intricate web of interconnected histories that relate to parsley, to its past, and to what it represents currently as a symbol of women's rights, in a time when hard-won abortion rights are increasingly under attack worldwide.

This multi-layered work provides a deeper reflection on our attitudes towards womanhood, making a reference to the narratives that have influenced our thinking. From the depiction of the Virgin Mary to the fairy tale of Rapunzel, the work presents only some of the stories of control over women strongly related to the issue of pregnancy and consent. Through playful engagement with materials, the installation recreates the realm of fairy tales, that turns into a domestic prison, and is finally transformed into the artist's workshop.



Once Upon A Time, 2021. Mixed Media.



Once Upon A Time, 2021. Mixed Media (Detail).

Another example of my work is my installation 'Feminine, Plural', a four metre long wall made of Sole soap bars.



Feminine, Plural, 2019. Soap.

Sole soap has been commonly used in Italian households since the '50s to handwash clothes. The artwork plays on the word Sole, which in the Italian language is usually understood as 'sunshine'. Here it is intended as an adjective: that is to say the feminine, plural of the word 'solo' which means 'alone'.

This work exemplifies the importance in my work of creating immersive and participatory experiences to consider societal problems. The domestic prison is a recurring theme in my practice. Half way through the exhibition the wall is destroyed in a participatory event titled *This is How We Dismantle it* where the public joins the artist in taking down the wall, hence creating a before and after event.



This is How We Dismantle It, 2019. Participatory event.



The wall in ruins after the participatory event.

A series of glass sculptures depicting the wall in ruins was present in the exhibition before the wall came down. These relics played with the timeline.



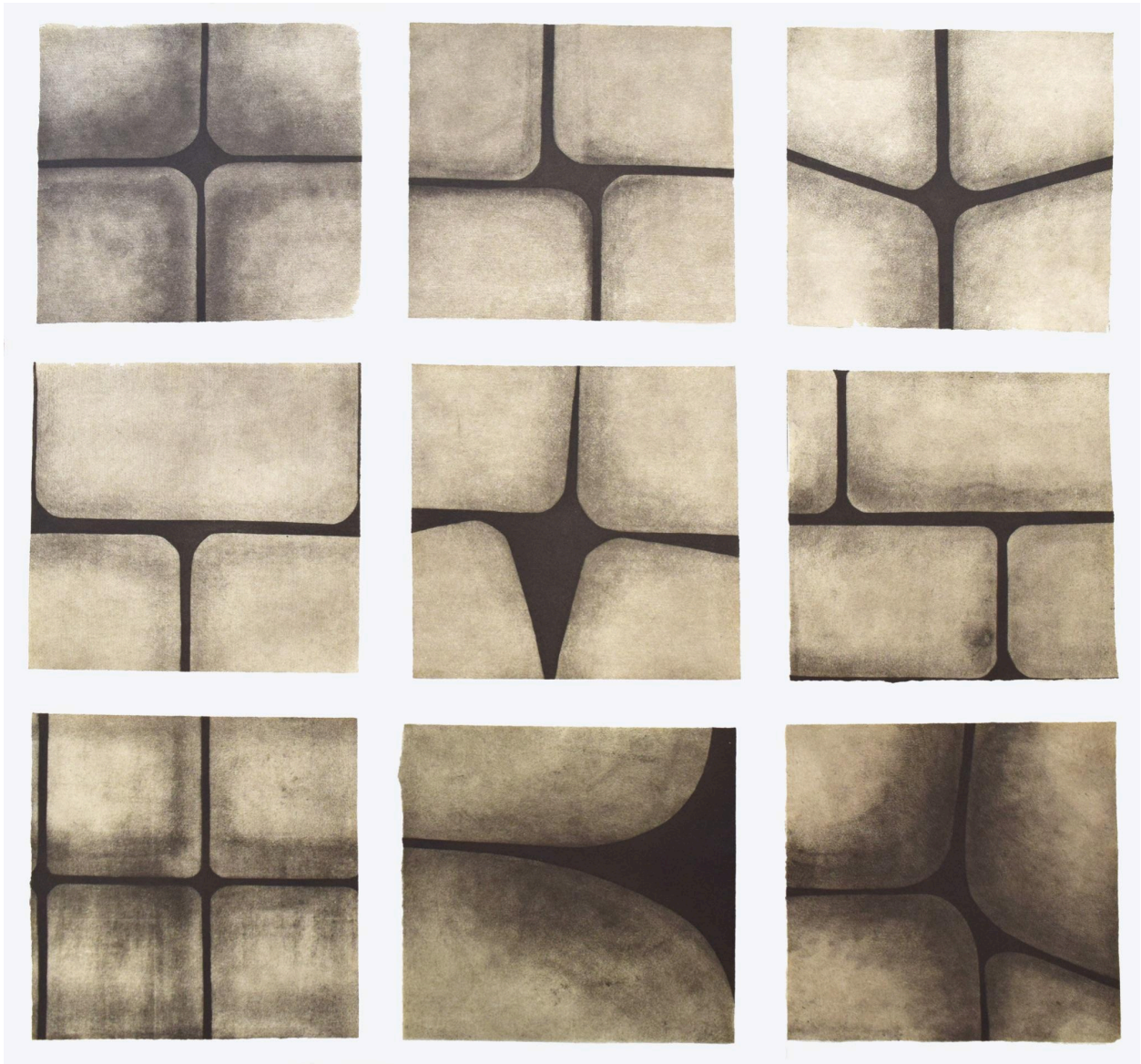
Edifice Dismantled I, 2019. Glass.



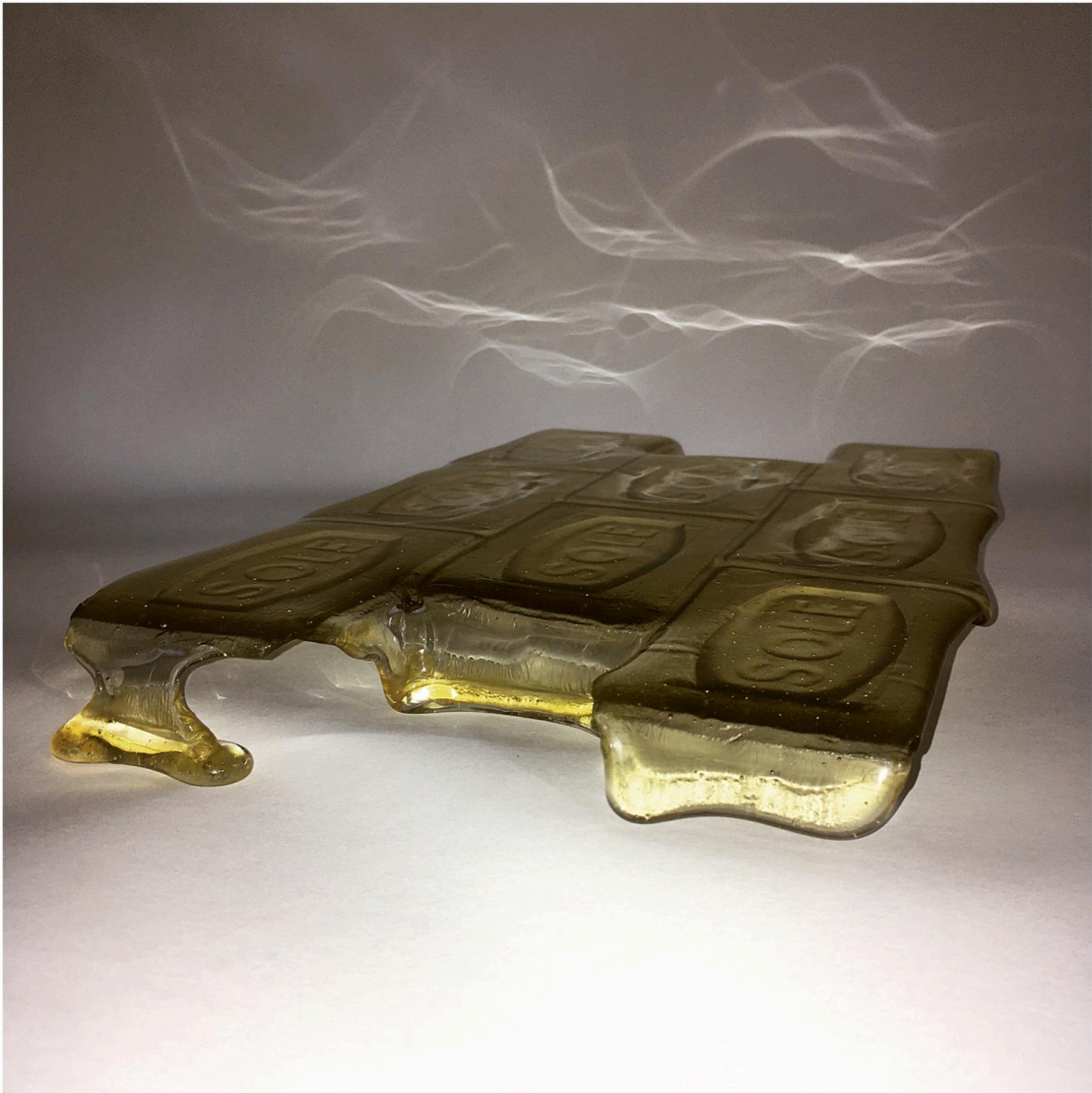
Edifice Dismantled II, 2019. Glass.



Edifice Dismantled III, 2019. Glass.



Interstice (Dark) I- IX, 2019. Aquatint.



Seeping through II, 2019. Glass.



Through the Cracks, 2019. Glass.

The following artworks belong to an earlier body of work titled *You Won't Miss Me When I Am Gone* (2018). The work was made in response to my mother's untimely death, and it is a reflection on patriarchal structures, considering the contrasting forces at play between being controlled and losing control.



You Won't Miss Me When I Am Gone, 2018.



The Tipping Point, 2018. Glass.



The Patriarchy, 2018. Glass.



Me Too, 2018. Etching.

Here is an earlier example of my work made using Pate de Verre. This work was made in response to the personal and social implications of the political changes of 2016 both in Britain with the Brexit referendum and with the beginning of the Trump era in America.



Protection, 2017. Glass, wax.



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