



TEJER UN CUERPO ÚRSULA, SAN CRISTÓBAL

Tejer un cuerpo (Weaving a Body), Úrsula San Cristóbal, Salle Gilbert-Gaillard © Photo: Maelle Skorczynski / VIDEOFORMES

TEJER UN CUERPO (Weaving a Body) ÚRSULA SAN CRISTÓBAL (ESP)

FROM MARCH 16 TO APRIL 2 - SALLE GILBERT-GAILLARD

Multimedia installation, weave, video and sound, 2023.

Weave, video & music by Úrsula San Cristóbal

Text excerpt from « Je suis un monstre qui vous parle : rapport pour une académie de psychanalystes » by Paul B. Preciado (Grasset, 2020)

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How can we live, create, and think about our bodies apart from colonial patriarchy? How can we create a sensitive body that can experience pleasure in ways other than hedonistic? What if we try to undo the rules that have been imposed on our bodies and begin to weave our own subjectivity?

Weaving is a practise that requires time, commitment, and patience—qualities required to form affective bonds with those around us as well as for developing ourselves as beings with our own ideas, feelings, and desires. As a result, weaving can be viewed as a metaphor for the construction of one's own body in affective interaction with others, with the resulting texture evoking the concept of plasticity via haptic sensations.

This installation is inspired by the feminist ideas of Monique Wittig, Paul Preciado, and Catherine Malabou, and it attempts to explore the concept of a body in transformation through weaving and digital textures. Images and music are intended to evoke a body in search of its own affective and erotic expression, confronting its own fragility and discovering its strength in plasticity. A strange and disturbing body at times, but always eager for life.

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Úrsula San Cristóbal is a Barcelona-based interdisciplinary artist and researcher. Her primary mediums of expression are video art, weaving, calligraphy, and experimental music, which she considers as tools for exploring contemporary subjectivity and addressing issues such as gender, fragility, eroticism, and the uncanny. She has been artist in residence at Nau Estruch (Sabadell, Spain) and her video art work has been screened in festivals such as Video art and animation Biennale of Puebla (Mexico), Camagüey International Video Art Festival (Cuba), BIDEODROMO International Experimental Film and Video Festival (Spain), Magmart Video Under Vulcano (Italy), Miami New Media Festival (USA), Festival Les Instants Vidéo (France), Videoformes (France), Traverse Vidéo (France), FILE Electronic Language International Festival (Brazil), Video Art Miden (Greece) and 19th Media Art Biennale WRO 2021 (Poland). Úrsula holds a PhD in Art History and Musicology from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Her dissertation on the role of sound and music in Marina Abramovic and Shirin Neshat's video and performance art works received the Extraordinary PhD Award in 2020.

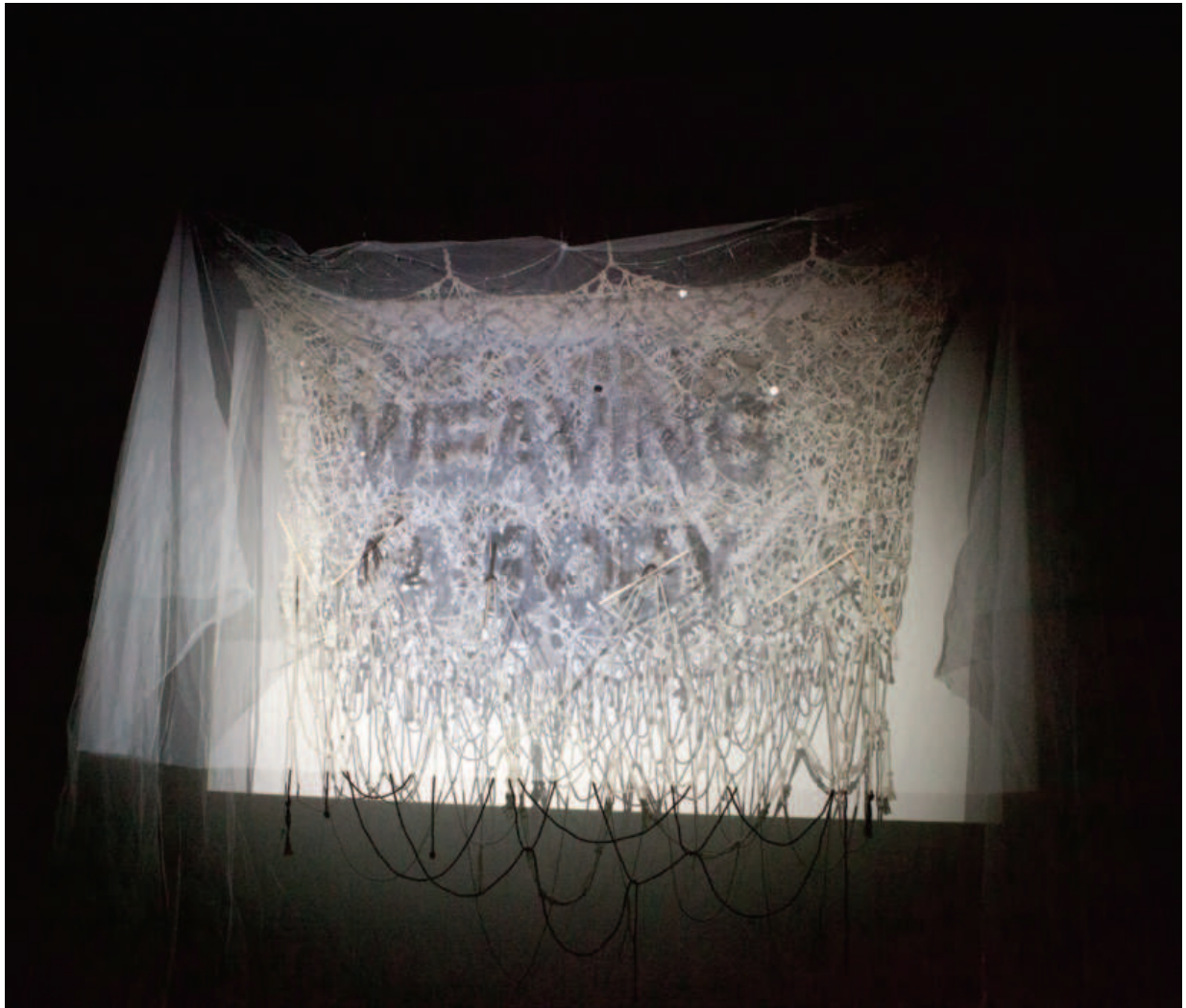
<http://ursulasancristobal.wordpress.com//index.html>

Artist's video portrait:

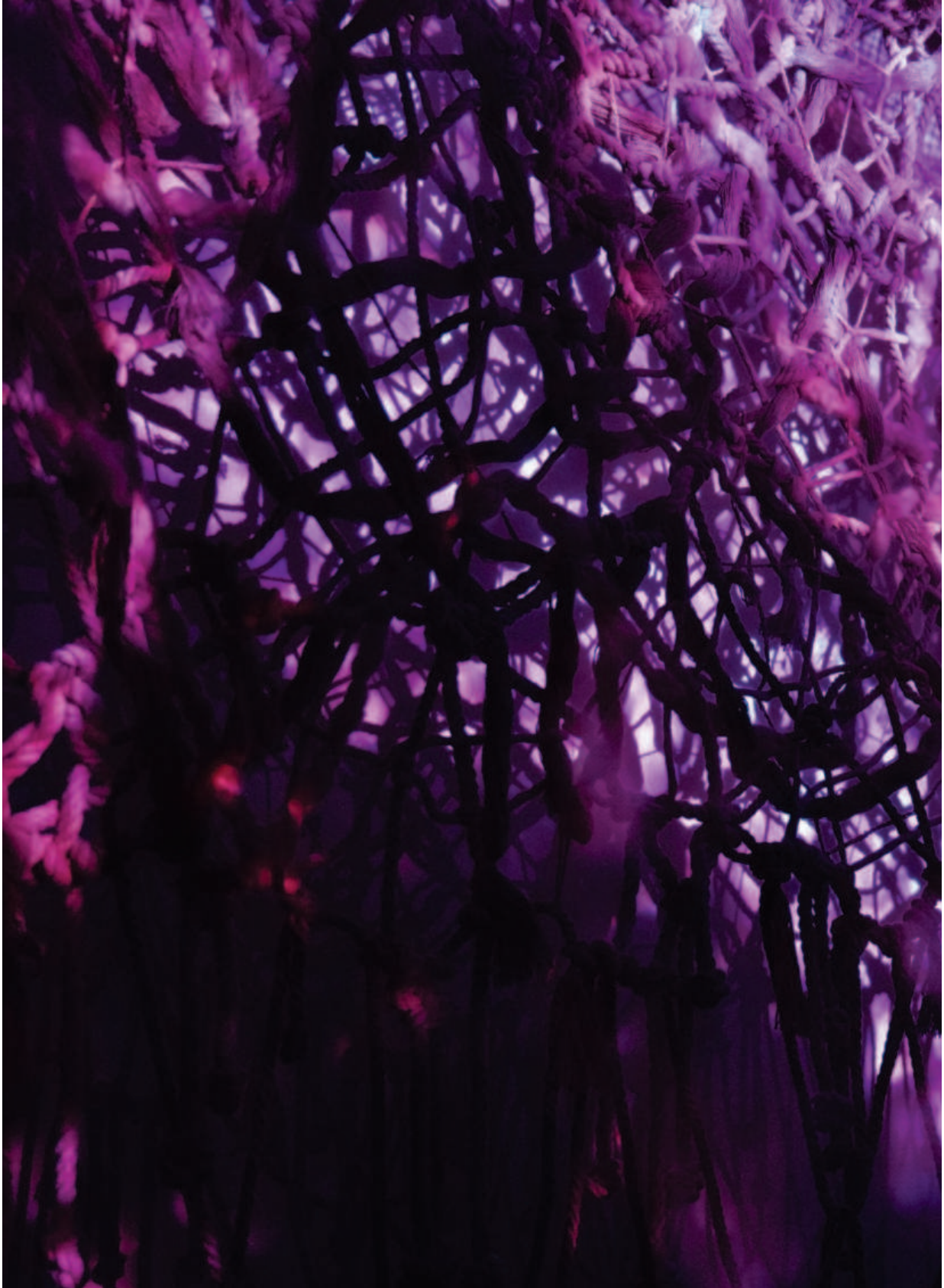
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TEJER UN CUERPO

by Úrsula San Cristóbal

How can we live, create, and think about our bodies apart from colonial patriarchy? How can we create a sensitive body that can experience pleasure in ways other than hedonistic? What if we tried to undo the rules that have been imposed on our bodies and begin to weave our own subjectivity?

These were the starting points for the project *Tejer un cuerpo* (Weaving a Body), in which I attempted to explore ways for the sensory imagination by combining the artisan practise of weaving, the aesthetics of digital video art, and the feminist thought of Catherine Malabou, Paul B. Preciado, and Monique Wittig.

Weaving is a practise that necessarily involves time, commitment, and patience – qualities required to form affective bonds with those around us as well as for developing ourselves as beings with our own ideas, feelings, and desires. As a result, weaving can be interpreted as a metaphor for constructing one's own body through affective interaction with others. The weaving process produces a texture that evokes tactile sensations associated with the skin and its erotic sensations while also implying the body's ongoing construction and transformation. This project emphasises both transformation and eroticism.

Sexuality, body, and mind are not fixed and immutable entities, and the French philosopher Catherine Malabou's concept of plasticity is very helpful in approaching these ideas. Malabou defines plasticity in *L'Avenir de Hegel. Plasticité, Temporalité, Dialectique* (Vrin, 1996) and then in *Que faire de notre cerveau ?* (Bayard, 2004) as the capacity for mutation and transformation inherent in all forms of life. This includes the neuroplasticity of the human brain as well as the dynamics of epigenetics in the genesis of organisms. Furthermore, Malabou's contextualizations of plasticity across disciplines, such as philosophy, art, and neurology, show that plasticity is multiple and hybrid, constantly eluding capture or control by any single discourse, scientific or otherwise. Plasticity describes both transition and resistance to transformation in this way. In other words, our brain and body can both create and receive form, but they also have the ability to rebel; they can refuse to submit to a model.¹ Following Ma-

1 - "La plasticité (tout comme la Plastizität allemande) désigne le caractère de ce qui est plastique, c'est-à-dire de ce qui est susceptible de recevoir comme de donner la forme. [...] Le pays natal de la plasticité est le domaine de l'art. [...] Or, par extension, la plasticité désigne l'aptitude à la formation en général, au modelage par la culture, l'éducation. [...] L'adjectif "plastique" toutefois, s'il s'oppose à "rigide" "fixe", "ossifié", ne signifie pas pour autant "polymorphe" [...] "Plastique" désigne donc ce qui cède à la forme tout en résistant à la déformation." (*L'Avenir de Hegel*, 1996, p. 20-21)

"Aujourd'hui, la plasticité est occultée en son sens véritable, on tend en effet à lui substituer constamment son faux ami, la flexibilité. [...] Pourtant, la flexibilité est l'avatar idéologique de la plasticité." (*Que faire de notre cerveau ?*, 2004, p. 55-56)
"On ne se forme qu'à partir d'une résistance à la forme elle-même ; le polymorphisme, ouvert à toutes les formes, capable de revêtir tous les masques, toutes les

labou, I can argue that plasticity shapes our identity and subjectivity: we are not determined and plasticity can be a place of resistance to socially imposed norms.

I think the concept of plasticity can be linked to the exploration of eroticism, particularly through the skin, which appears frequently in the installation. The pleasures of our skin are not solely determined by our biological characteristics; we can construct them, and by doing so, we can say no to forms of sexual violence that operate on our bodies and are frequently concealed behind the mask of romantic love. The transformation of our skin into pleasure can also play an important role in the formation of our own self-awareness. The same Malabou in *Clitoris et Pensée : le plaisir effacé* (Payot et Rivages, 2020), claims that exploring one's own pleasure is a form of self-awareness: to know how we construct our thoughts, we must know how our pleasure works: "Il est en effet impossible de penser par soi-même sans se connaître et de se connaître sans savoir où est, quel est, son plaisir." (p. 67)

Following a similar line of thought but focusing on gender issues, the Spanish transgender philosopher Paul B. Preciado points out in *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle* (Grasset, 2020) that attempting to live outside of colonial patriarchy is something that anyone should be able to allow for. In addition, he insists that the freedom of bodies is not something that someone gives us, but that we have to construct it by ourselves.² This process, I believe, can be expressed through weaving: we warp the threads of our bodies' affective and erotic freedom, then slowly weave them until we create a habitable net. We envision ourselves as sensitive, responsible beings capable of experiencing both horizontal and non-hierarchical affections. To paraphrase Donna Haraway, we weave a web of "tentacular" affections that allow us to ima-

postures, toutes les attitudes, n'engendre que la défaite de l'identité. La flexibilité, qui ne donne à éprouver aucune tension véritable entre maintien et évolution mais les confond au sein d'une pure et simple logique d'imitation et de performance, n'est pas créatrice. Elle est purement reproductrice et normative." (*Que faire de notre cerveau ?*, 2004, p. 166-67)

2 - "La liberté de genre et sexuelle ne peut être en aucun cas une répartition plus équitable de la violence, ni une acceptation plus pop de l'oppression. La liberté est un tunnel qui se creuse avec les mains. La liberté est une porte de sortie. La liberté [...] ça se fabrique." (Grasset, 2020. Kindle).

"N'importe lequel d'entre vous, n'importe qui daignerait plonger dans le kaléidoscope qu'est son propre désir et son propre corps, dans son réservoir de tension nerveuse, dans sa propre mémoire, pourrait trouver en lui une excitation tonique, une énergie libre qui l'amène à vivre autrement, à changer, à être différent, à être, pour ainsi dire, radicalement vivant." (Grasset, 2020. Kindle).



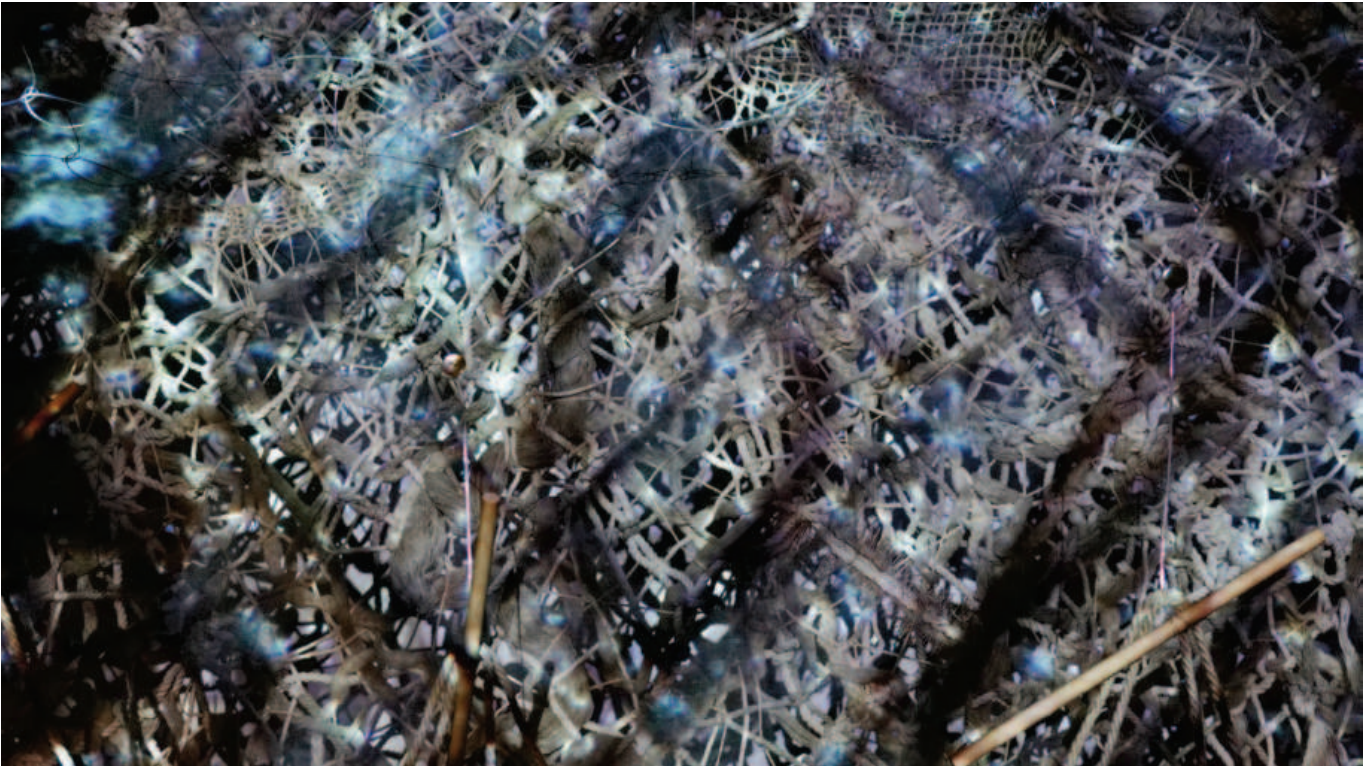
Tejer un cuerpo (Weaving aBody), Úrsula San Cristóbal, Salle Gilbert-Gaillard © Photo: Úrsula San Cristóbal / VIDEOFORMES

gine a different reality outside of the patriarchal-colonial regime.

Another important reference for this project has been *Le corps lesbien* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1973) by the French feminist writer and theorist Monique Wittig, a literary work that proposes a radical exploration of the body's sexuality, its internal anatomy, its pleasures, and its emotions, nourished by references to classical antiquity. It transits between violence, death, fragility and tenderness, presenting the complexity of erotic-affective experiences in a unique way. I consider it to be a text whose expressive force challenges anyone who seeks to radically transform the subjectivity imposed by patriarchy. In this project, I am not trying to capture any passage from the book literally, but to follow the impulse proposed by the author in her radical exploration of the sensory possibilities of a body. What fascinates me about Wittig's text is the depth of aesthetic emotion it elicits when moving between eroticism and abjection. The body and desire manifest as entities that embrace the disturbing and strange in their transformation process, which leads to another relevant reflection: leaving patriarchy's limits implies exploring sensations and ideas that can confront us with the fear of the unknown because they are typically considered taboo in our society. As a result, there

are moments of darkness and restlessness in the project *Tejer un cuerpo*, which are expressed particularly through the sound of the voice and breathing, and which express the need to sink oneself into the abyss of desire in order to build one's own body. Recognizing our plasticity entails embracing the darkness, not to overcome it, but to discover the richness that exists within it.

Finally, it is worth noting that in this project, eroticism is expressed through the skin and haptics rather than sexually explicit images. I am interested in going beyond the commonplace of associating the erotic with pure genitality, so I focus on tactile sensations, which also have had a particular development in the field of video art. Laura Marks' essay "Video Haptics and Erotics" (Screen, Volume 39, Issue 4, 1998) investigates how certain images of video art pieces made on videotape can suggest a relationship between tactility and eroticism. According to the author, "In haptic visuality, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. [...] Because haptic visuality draws upon other senses, the viewer's body is more obviously involved in the process of seeing than is the case with optical visuality." (p. 332) Haptic visuality would not imply identification with or possession of the represented



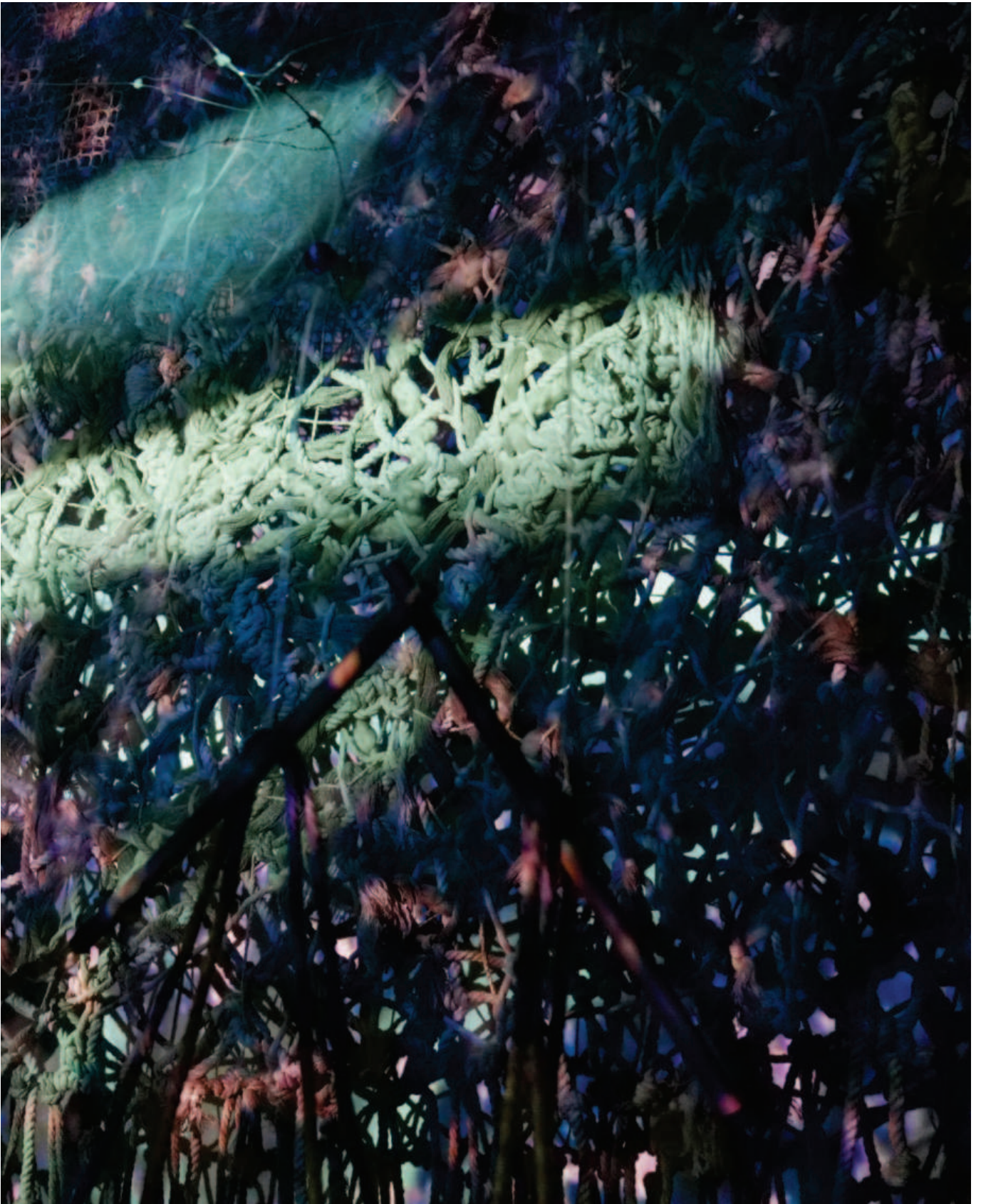
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object, but rather a dynamic subjectivity relationship between the viewer and the image, resulting in an embodied perception: “the viewer responding to the video as to another body, and to the screen as another skin.” (p. 333) I believe that the characteristics mentioned by Marks can be applied equally to digital images, particularly through the use of textures. In the project, I combined digitally generated textures (particles and vectors) with footage of organic textures (viruses, fungi, skin wrinkles) to suggest a dialogue between nature and digital culture. These textures blend with those of the woven projection surface, creating the illusion of a second skin that moves between the artisanal and the digital. The visual textures interact with the musical texture of strings, voices, and electronic sounds to complete the piece’s poetic and evocative atmosphere. Through contemplation, the audience is invited to interact with the haptic sensations.

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ÚRSULA SAN CRISTÓBAL

FOR THE YOUTH...○○○

How would you describe this installation? What do we see? What can we hear? What's taking place?

This is a video projected onto two hand-woven surfaces. One is made of fishing line and the other of rope and wool. In the video we see images of the body and skin that begin to merge with organic (viruses, fungi) and digital (particles) textures. These images merge with the surface of the weaves. In parallel we listen to a soundtrack composed of electronic music and vocal interventions that tries to generate an atmosphere oscillating between the erotic and the disturbing.

What is it about?

In this project I start with the idea of weaving as a metaphor for the emotional and erotic construction of one's own body. The freedom of the body is not something that someone gives us, rather we have to build it slowly: we have to "weave" it until we generate a habitable network.

Through weaving and digital textures I try to evoke a body in transformation, in search of its own emotional and erotic expression, confronting its own fragility and discovering its strength in plasticity. A body sometimes strange and disturbing, but always eager for life.

Is this the first time this installation is presented to the public?

This installation was made especially for **VIDEOFORMES 2023**. In this work process, I started to look for possible relationships between some ideas from feminist philosophy and

artistic practice. For me, it is important to propose a dialogue between thought and the materiality of the body. That's why I chose the ideas of authors like Catherine Malabou who reflects on the plasticity of the body, and Paul B. Preciado who talks about the importance of constructing the freedom of bodies to generate alternatives to the patriarchal regime. From these ideas, I began working on weaving in search of a way to express them in metaphorical terms. Weaving is a long process (it took me about 4 months). At the same time I worked on the video and music trying to emphasize the sensory aspects: think of touch, whispers, sighs as part of the experience of the body

Which are the artists (all fields included) or more generally speaking, the artistic forms which nourish your creation, and possibly, the landmarks to which you refer in this installation?

There are several artists whose work I've been fascinated by and studied, but I don't think there are any obvious visual or sonic connections to them in my work. I think it's more of an affinity on a poetic level.

In video art, Laurie Anderson, Shirin Neshat and Pippilotti Rist are artists I've studied a lot. I am interested in the way they combine video, music and performance. The work of the Italian artist Maria Lai also interests me a lot because of the way she relates the practice of weaving and embroidery to poetry.

Literature is also an important influence for me. Authors like Monique Wittig, Marguerite Duras, Forough Farrokhzad and Annie Ernaux have nourished my approach to eroticism.



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What are the problems, constraints and challenges you came across with during its elaboration?

The main difficulty is the time needed to complete each part of the project. I like to do all the creative tasks personally, from weaving to music, and this involves several months of work and different skills. A major challenge is not to lose sight of the main concept of the project. Sometimes, with so many tasks to solve, it's easy to stay in a purely formal realm and leave out the poetic.

Can you give a few keywords that would fit your installation?

Body, weaving, metamorphosis.

A few words on your artistic development? When, in your life, did you first have an interest in digital art? Can you make a living from your art work?

I came to digital art quite late. I started in music and in parallel I was exploring performance art. After finishing my studies at the conservatory, I started to explore video art because it was a medium that allowed me to bring together

sound and the body. In addition, it is one of the mediums that has the most similarities with music because it allows me to work on the notions of temporality and simultaneity.

At the moment I work mainly as a teacher in a music college and in parallel I do my artistic work and also some commissions. Although I cannot currently live solely from my work as an artist, I must say that my teaching work is intimately linked to what I discover in my artistic practice. If I didn't devote myself to creation, I wouldn't have much to teach.

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