

Sara Basta *La prima madre*

Fondazione Pastificio Cerere, Rome 27 January – 26 March

A small sepia photo shows a child in profile, her body a darkened silhouette against a patterned background. This, we learn, is the mother of Sara Basta. A short text by the Roman multimedia artist accompanies it, reflecting on their relationship: 'I could sense how weary she was of what her being at home meant. Being inside and outside. Not wanting to be either inside or outside. Always being in the wrong space, always making a painful choice.' *Annotazione #2* (2021) parses some of the core issues tackled in *La prima madre* (The first mother), presented on the premises of a former pasta factory. In a deeply personal exhibition, skilfully oscillating between joy and mourning, Basta probes collective themes of identity, motherhood, family relationships and domesticity via videos, paintings and installations.

The Fondazione is not an easy space to exhibit in. The Silos space approximates a white cube, although its irregular layout and hardwood floors suggest a domestic space, while the Spazio Molini retains the raw industrial feel of a multiroom factory basement, with peeling walls and narrow, dark corridors revealing exposed pipes and old machinery. Basta harnesses these qualities to her advantage, reserving the cavernous underground spaces for her more elegiac reflections, while her colourful textile works and paintings concerning the body and domesticity are in the Silos. In *Capanna* (Hut, 2021) colourful patterned textiles are sewn together to create a sheltered space, which welcomes us to a projection of children building fabric dens – a playful yet poignant reflection on our elemental need for protection and shelter.

In the final, dimly lit room of Spazio Molini's basement is the audiowork *Mi Ricordo* (I remember, 2011), the most moving piece in the show. We hear Basta's mother recount two distinct memories of her parents. In a frail voice, she recalls the cherished time her father praised her when she turned six; her mother, instead, demanded she distance herself during an outing as she wasn't dressed up to standard, implicitly revealing the different standards parents are held to by their children. Basta made this work when her mother's language was falling apart and her own child, whom she recorded for other sound pieces, was learning to speak. These quiet explorations of human vulnerability never come across as fetishised or affected – rather, Basta lays bare the fragility of everyday life as an inescapable condition, brief moments of wonder coexisting with sorrow. *Ana Vukadin*



La prima madre, 2022 (installation view).
Photo: Carlo Romano.
Courtesy Fondazione Pastificio Cerere, Rome