

GARLAND OF TEARS/CHANTAL SPAPENS

Can pleasure be pulled from our painful experiences? Chantal Spapens continues to explore this concept with her durational performance piece “Garland of Tears” at the MAXXI. People raised as women within a western capitalist society experience unspoken expectations to uphold the domestic sphere, including the nurturing of children, who will become future workers of society. Social reproduction, such as this emotional care, largely falls on women in the form of unpaid labor.

Garland of Tears explores the slow, repetitive destruction of the physical body through this lifetime of labor. The silent power of holding the proverbial house up at all costs, all while maintaining a firm grip on the soul. Considering the habits one picks up in the process that will ultimately shape their destiny within a system that predetermines identity before exiting the womb.

Chantal becomes a sort of religious idol in this performance: meditating over her slow building garland, accepting no interactions and no rest. She is closing a chapter in her life surrounding grief and subordination, moving towards self liberation. Allowing herself the time to process her decisions, a luxury literally not afforded to any body under capitalism. There is a question arising in this process of building: can we all move from a place of self flagellation, inflicting pain as a measure of self fulfillment, can we queer the narrative and be brave enough to structure new visions?

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