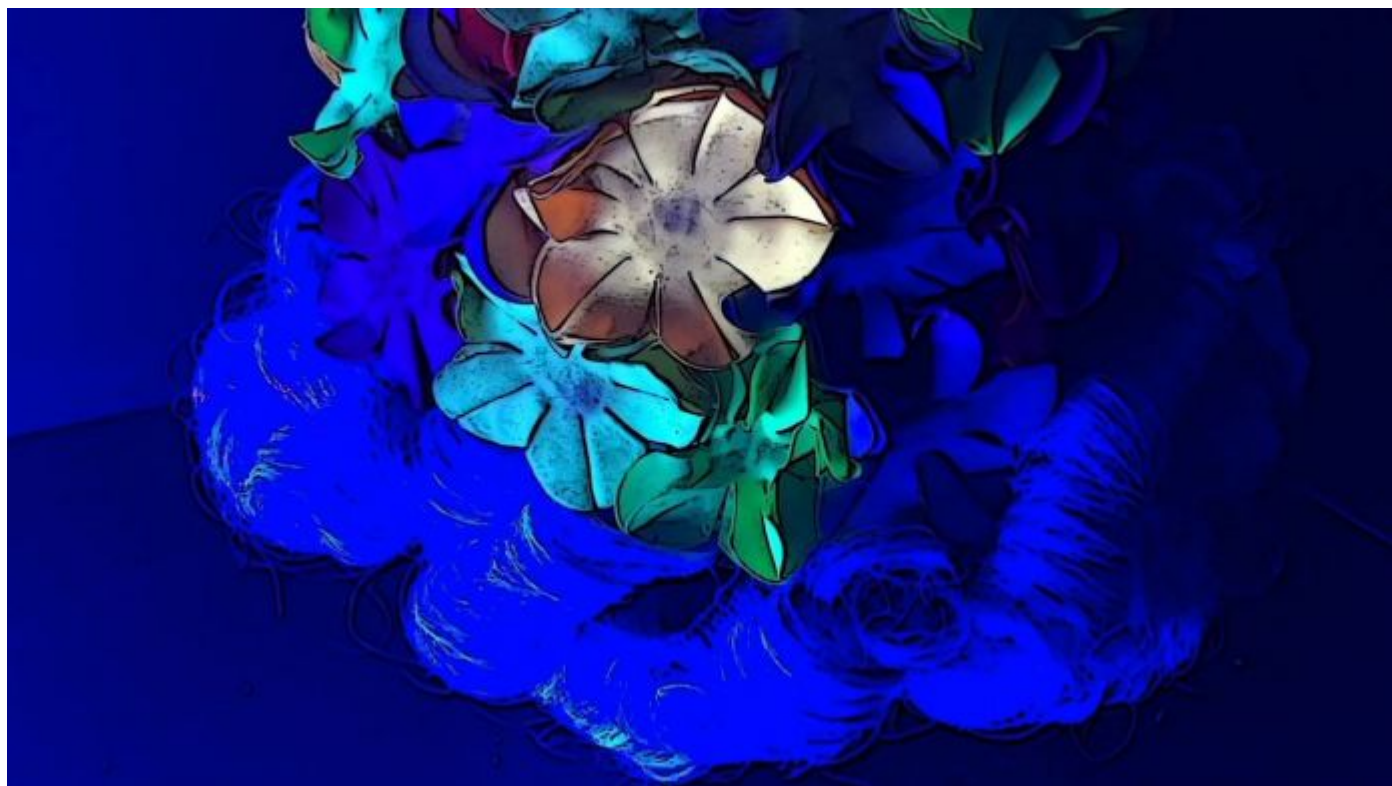


# Love New York. Interview with the artist Beatrice Scaccia

By **Maurita Cardone** - June 23, 2021

The protagonist of the exhibition set up at the Katonah Museum of Art, Beatrice Scaccia, who has been in New York for ten years, retraces the evolution of her career and her style in the Big Apple.



*Bea Scaccia, My Hope Chest, 2020, stop motion animation frame*

Life is a stage, said Shakespeare and, a few centuries later, Pirandello. This is how the artist **Beatrice Scaccia** (Veroli, 1978) also sees it , who fills that stage with creatures that are costume before body, puppets embedded in the representation of oneself, fetishes of a role that clashes v  a genre and a humanity. uncertain. In his works, Scaccia alternates **drawing, painting,**

**animation** and the continuous search for techniques with a high degree of craftsmanship. For ten years she has lived in New York, a city she loves with a mature love. Here, just over an hour by train from Manhattan, the Katonah Museum of Art hosts a site-specific installation until June 27 in which Scaccia creates an environment around one of his work in stop motion. A work that marks a passage in his practice and that is part of a path that has a pandemic in the way. We interviewed her to tell us about the exhibition at Katonah, the recent evolutions of her work and the reflections born when 2020 forced us all to define what home is.

### **Tell us how the idea for the last exhibition was born.**

It comes from a reflection on the trousseau, which in English is called *hope chest*. Like many Italian girls, my grandmother had made me the trousseau. For us it was normal but, when you change perspective and start thinking about it, a series of reflections emerge. In my case they are reflections also linked to the basic theme of my work, which is that of identity, *gender* and the social role that is linked to *gender*. So I discovered that in some cultures the trousseau was kept in what we call the *hope chest here*, a large trunk that looks a bit like a coffin. The word itself is interesting because it contains the concept of hope, which says a lot about how the woman was viewed. So I decided to play visually with a character who lived inside a *hope chest*.

### **What are you doing in there?**

First he washes the dishes, arranges his clothes, then he combs his hair in a paroxysm, sends kisses, dances with an imaginary character. In the background of the animation I have inserted sentences on the theme of the genre that I have written over the course of about two years and which also contain things that my grandmother told me, for example that the hair must always be in order, that it is your crown, the your power.

### **How did you make the work?**

In stop motion, a technique I started experimenting with during the *Homemade* experience *with Magazzino Italian Art*. It was beautiful but complicated: I took about 30 thousand frames and built everything, the puppet, the set, the trunk, the lights. I created the background with blackboard paint because I needed it to write the title on it, but then it became part of the animation and also the most experimental thing. It was a different, physical experience: up until now I had always done digital animations. At first it was a bit of a game, then I won the Queens Council on the Arts *grant* for presenting the idea and then I had to make it [laughs, *Ed.*].





Beatrice Scaccia. *My Hope Chest*. Exhibition view at Katonah Museum of Art, 2021

## THE EXHIBITION AT THE KATONAH MUSEUM OF ART

**All of this is now part of the show at Katonah. How is the exhibition structured?**

We screened the animation and asked to paint the walls around it. I covered everything with chalkboard paint and spent three days doing wall drawings, created a fake frame around the animation, a wallpaper, and in this way it took on an even more domestic sense. Then I painted

all the elements that are within the animation and with which the character interacts: piles of plates, clothes, hanging hats. Everything has a surreal, suspended rendering.

**This is your first post-pandemic exhibition, but last year, in the midst of the lockdown, you participated in the *Homemade* project by Magazzino Italian Art . Tell us about it?**

Magazzino had impeccable timing and that project was a real salvation: it gave us a focus at a time when we were all tossed about by the news. They left us free to do what we wanted and a beautiful community was created. The basic idea of the project was that, because we were forced to work from home, we were doing something we generally didn't do. I used that stimulus to do a stop motion.

**What came out of it in the end?**

I worked on the idea of *hoarding* , accumulation, inspired by that rush to accumulate products that was taking place due to the pandemic. I played with it from the point of view of the artist, I defined myself as an artist who accumulates. Which is actually something I do. Although I have never been a 3D artist, I have been buying and accumulating plasticine, epoxy, etc. for years, thinking that sooner or later I will use them. So I took advantage of that moment to finally use those materials: I made a bust that, in the course of the animation, accumulates things on itself. The object itself is not a work: it is the process that is the work. Again I used chalk on blackboard paint, illuminated with *black light*. Then in those days I took a lot of walks in the neighborhood, because it was the only thing that could be done, and I discovered many things, for example the trees called *Judas Trees* that have buds everywhere, even on the trunk. And so I added those trees too because they seemed like accumulators too. Another time I saw a courtyard full of abandoned objects and that too ended up in the animation.





*Beat Scaccia in his studio, New York, 2021*

## THE TOPICS ADDRESSED BY BEATRICE SCACCIA

The accumulator bust, the woman who lives in the trunk... in your works there are always these strange characters. For a long time there was the character of Eve , a woman-puppet of an uncertain gender. Where have you been?

I don't know if Eve will be back. It was time to move on. I got tired of that technique: pencil

drawings on paper on which I applied the wax, which I then ironed. It was my technique, but it no longer gave me satisfaction. And then there was the storytelling. When you create a character, that leads you to a certain type of storytelling and I didn't care anymore. With the drawing Eve it came naturally to me, now I'm painting and with painting I no longer see that figure.

**But those themes are still there in your work.**

Yes, it is the first archetype in my head, a symbol of *gender fluidity*, a little child. At the base of my work there is always this idea that everything is performance. Even *gender* is performative, our role in society is performative, but what's behind what we convince ourselves? Eve perhaps represented a more vulnerable moment in my work. Now I have moved on to something less representative.

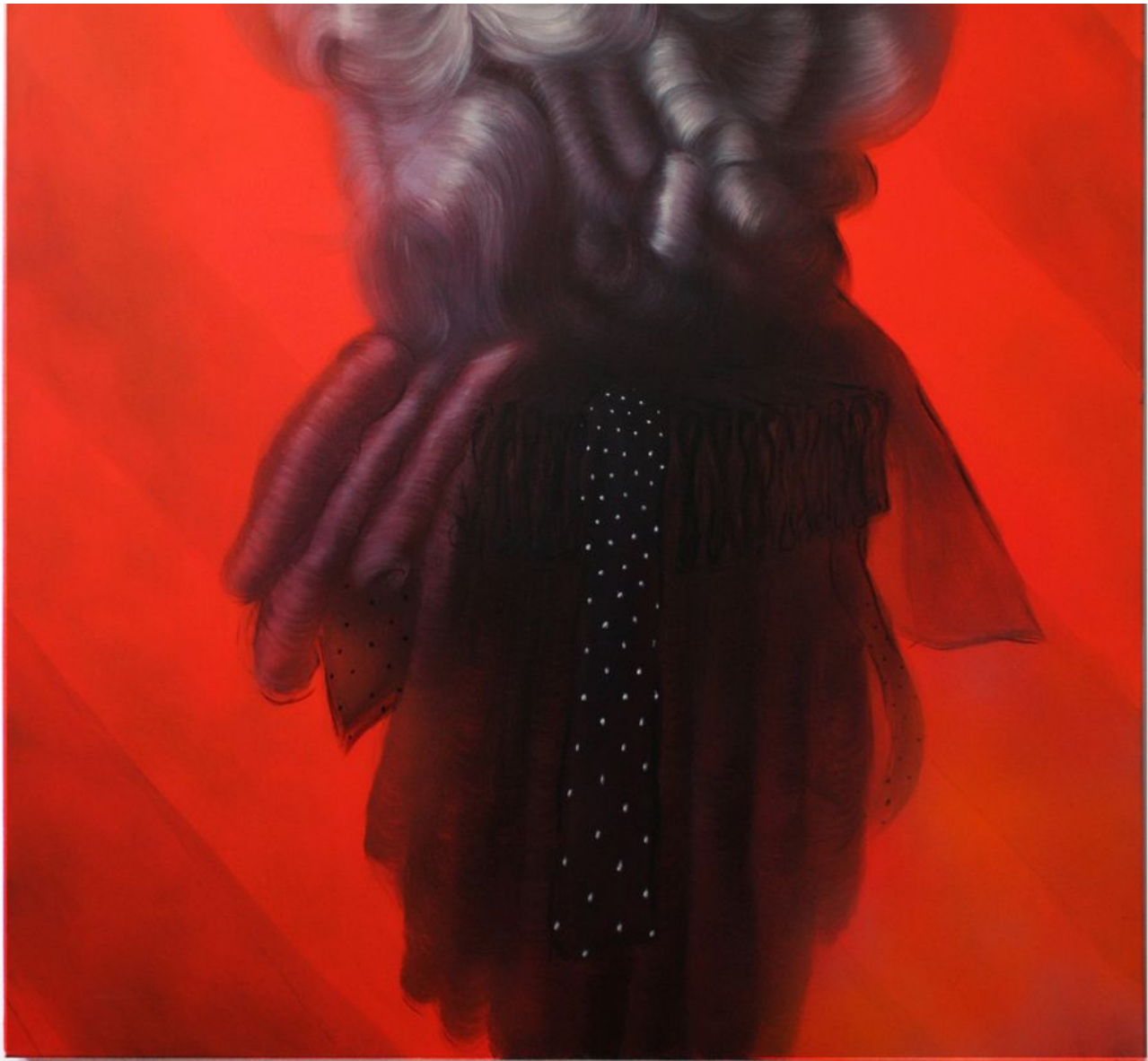
**Was Eve your alter ego?**

Yes, in part. We artists are also practical: instead of asking someone to pose, I start with myself. It is a comfortable choice.

**In changing the subject you also changed the format. One of your last exhibitions, at Ricco Maresca, was full of small format works, while now you are doing huge things.**

I've always liked the large format. In the case of that exhibition, the choice of the small format was also a bit of Frank [Maresca, *Ed*]: he always says that the gallery owner is an editor and in that case he had chosen small jobs, also for market reasons, and he was right. Compared to drawing, painting certainly brings me to the great. The last canvas is over 180 centimeters and did not go through my studio door, which is why I can't go any further. The small format leads you to be a little more poet, perhaps it is also a matter of physicality, because you work seated, at the table. With the large format it is a more physical thing.





Bea Scaccia, *I have no color*, 2020

## HAIR AND WIGS

**In recent works you are focusing on a particular subject, the hair. Why?**

I once saw a 17th century engraving by William Hogarth in which there are all these wigs that he used to joke about power, making them architectural elements: when I saw it I was heart pounding. Lorna Simpson's *O Wigs* at MoMA: I've been watching it for hours. Or even the works of Domenico Gnoli. At the Egyptian Museum in Turin there is a wig that is three thousand years old, it is a metaphysical thing and I immediately desired it. There is a visual affinity with the subject. Then, on a conceptual level, the wig and the hair represent another mask and therefore I am interested in it as part of that something we build around us.

### And how are you developing it in your work?

I am working on surreal, visionary, suspended wig paintings that have no body, to which I am going to add elements. At the time of Marie Antoinette they wore things they called *sentimental poufs*: women and men added decorative elements to which they were linked on a sentimental level to the wigs. It seems to me such a poetic and absurd thing! I want to make my version of it: I started adding lights, big pearls, a bird to my hair, trying to reconstruct an archetype on that theme.

### You said that the change in format and themes also occurred in relation to the transition from drawing to painting. And the animation?

I like the idea of making the painting animation. And I've always liked animation, even as a form of entertainment. When I started I was doing very short and looping things. I liked to freeze the figure in a single movement, for the rest of its days, and that's something I could only do with animation. But now I have developed the technique more and with animation I like the idea of telling a story.



Bea Scaccia, *She Hoarded Her Intention*, 2020, stop motion animation frame

## BEATRICE SCACCIA AND NEW YORK



### Speaking of storytelling, you're also a bit of a writer.

2020 was the year I also started writing a little bit in English. I published a story about *Ruth*, edited by Manuela Paccella, and then ended up in *Nero Magazine*. I was also selected by Novella Ford of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture for a short story publication. I developed the story as an open letter to my grandmother, the theme was born from reflections on what happened last year: why does an Italian from a working class family move to New York?

### You have been in New York for ten years now and the 10th anniversary comes at a time when the city is going through a particular phase. Is this a new phase also for your relationship with the city?

Before the pandemic, I was a little tired of New York. The pandemic forced us to choose what home was and, when you choose and decide that this is home, many things change. Last year I was very disappointed in myself: when there were the protests of Black Lives Matter I realized that I didn't know much about it. I had to study and I felt superficial: I came here with the naive idea of the *working girl* that will find its path. But knowing the darker side of this city and society ultimately leads me to want to stay today. This is a difficult city, I don't think I can grow old in it. But I get older: ten years have passed, others will pass and who knows if after her I will be relocated. However, after the pandemic and Black Lives Matter, now I love her in a real way.

- *Maurita Cardone*

Katonah // until June 27

*Beatrice Scaccia: My Hope Chest*

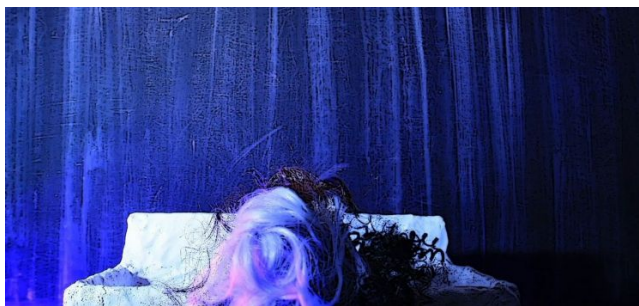
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Scaccia, My Hope Chest, 2020, stop motion animation frame

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**Maurita Cardone**

Freelance journalist, Abruzzese by birth and character, eternal explorer, I have been writing for passion and compulsion for as long as I can remember. I worked for Il Tempo, Il Sole 24 Ore, La Nuova Ecologia, QualEnergia, L'Indro. Since 2011 New York is the place I call home and that feeds my curiosity

relentlessly. Here for four years I co-directed the Italian newspaper La Voce di New York and I was passionate about the carousel of stories that make the wealth of this city.

