

# SAGG NAPOLI

## *Sempre contratta*

November 14, 2024  
– February 14,  
2025

Oftentimes, when I text or call SAGG Napoli, she will reply saying she is at archery training, or on her way to it. Her communication of a boundary of time and space is gentle yet clear. Shooting arrows at a target requires solitary, undivided focus that does not come easy, nor free. In naming it as a threshold she steps into, she gives it a form that others can pay attention to and engage with. For her solo show *Sempre contratta* at Basement Roma, SAGG Napoli builds the architectural dimension and physical apparatus of an exercise area into the gallery. Lilac tones envelope the routines and instruments that make up and inform SAGG's archery preparation – the table to assemble her bow, the storage space where she keeps her arrows, her uniforms, annotations on a whiteboard, and three years of archery competitions award medals.

A new series of artist's portraits in different media punctuates the space. At the back, SAGG's body is drawn over three anatomical maps – *mappe del dolore*, "maps of the pain", as the artist calls them – showing trigger points connected to specific areas of muscular tension. Hanging on the perimeter of the gym, three videos showcase her warmups and archery exercises. Trigger points can feel like knots, I am told. In physiotherapy, pressure is applied to them to reprogram the neuromuscular system and ease the pain. Triggers are an important terminology in mental health too, indicating a stimulus (which could be a memory, word, or people) that causes an adverse emotional reaction of anxiety, panic. Being 'triggered' may lead one to lose control.

SAGG Napoli openly discusses being affected by borderline personality and bipolar disorder, and over last few years has built and publicly shared important language and awareness on this topic through the lens of her personal embodied experience. Some of these reflections have appeared in the form of images and words disseminated via her Instagram account, often centring physical exercise as a method of "consistency over intensity". Much of SAGG's artistic output is deeply intertwined with all aspects of her life, channelling the pursuit of an energy shift through mind and body work. In this spirit, *Sempre contratta* places the accumulation and dispersal of muscular and psychological tension in dialogue with one's broader sense of self-worth, identity and agency.

To a certain extent, the quality of mental focus pursued by SAGG through archery results from emotional transactions which involve giving something up in exchange for something else. So much work goes into figuring this out, addressing what is worth retaining and letting go of, to be able to eventually be and feel a certain way under conditions of pressure. One would think SAGG has excellent eyesight, as she is so good at hitting her targets even at distances as wide as 70m (as seen in her recent performance and installation for Dior's SS25 show in Paris). Yet, truthfully, firing arrows transcends solely physical skills.

"What you see on the target is a reflection of your mind", reads one of her texts on the gallery floor. In contrast with today's attention crisis, her archery provides a fascinating demonstration of unwavering concentration and consistency. Having trained as an archer over the last four years, SAGG has gradually brought this sport into her artistic practice – or perhaps they were never separate, to be fair. From this point of view, *Sempre contratta* offers a glimpse into what SAGG's daily studio practice looks like. As an environment, it reminds of the format of the artist's studio-turned-museum, open for public visit, where one encounters an original atmosphere of references and tools. In place of brushes, palettes and easels, here we find a bow and its stand, strings, arrows, and a target to shoot at.

SAGG Napoli's use of targets recalls some historical precedents such as Jasper Johns's extensive exploration of this device as an enigmatic painterly motif, a both literal and symbolic subject connected to perception. Equally, the image of a woman shooting a weapon brings to mind Niki de Saint Phalle's 'shooting paintings', realised by firing with a rifle at canvasses of ready-made objects and bags of paint. Both SAGG Napoli and Niki de Saint Phalle are interested in the physical legacy of their performances by way of the object-based productions they lead to.

SAGG's full participation with her own body and persona in her works is also closely connected to her use of Instagram. This thematic strand would deserve in itself a whole other essay, and I have for years argued that her incessant production of IG stories could sit on the trajectory

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of Jonas Mekas's 1960s-70s *diary films*, capturing daily life in short bursts. For now, it suffices to say that one cannot, and should not, pick apart the many – at times contradictory – facets that make up SAGG Napoli to develop a taxonomy of her artistic performances VS the athletic competitions, sculptures VS tools, gallery texts VS Instagram captions. Gleefully reconciling it all, SAGG Napoli is more than the sum of these parts, a total work of art in and of herself.

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